# JOB STANDARDIZATION AND DEVIANT WORKPLACE BEHAVIOR

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***Abstract:*** *Facing fiercely competitive global environments, organizations use widespread mass production of goods and services for lower cost and larger market shares for survival and growth. Thus, a job design and characteristic of standardization has long been adopted and recognized to be essential for the competitiveness of organizations by sustaining output consistency, effectiveness and efficiency. However, Keeley (1988) maintained that organizations have a fundamental tension between the goal of efficiency and the goal of morality and struggle for a delicate balance between these competing objectives. This tension elicits the question whether job standardization relates to deviant workplace behavior (DWB), which is immoral, pervasive in the workplace and harmful to organizational competitiveness. Using conservation of resources theory as an underlying explanation, this study developed an interesting theoretical model that specified how and why job standardization enhances DWB directed at the organization (DWB-O) and attenuates DWB directed at organizational members/individuals (DWB-I). Three-wave panel survey data were collected from 283 employees with various occupations. Empirical results found job standardization evokes employee boredom, which, in turn, translates into increased DWB-O and decreased DWB-I, suggesting employees' concern for workplace relationships. With job design of standardization, organizations can use the influence of coworkers to stifle DWB-O. This study extends and shifts the understanding of job standardization consequences from the side of employee positive behavior to the side of negative behavior. DWB literature on situational antecedents, focusing on the organizational systems/social context and theory, is enriched by invoking a job perspective of standardization and resource theory.*

***Keywords:*** *Job standardization, deviant workplace behavior, employee boredom, conservation of resources.*

***JEL Classification:*** *M12, M54.*

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## Introduction

Businesses today are facing fiercely competitive global environments and firms use widespread mass production of goods and services for lower cost and larger market shares to sustain their survival and growth (Shalley & Gilson, 2017). Therefore, a job design and characteristic of standardization has long been adopted to stifle production variation by individual employees and to maintain output consistency, effectiveness and efficiency (Koval et al., 2019; Luoh et al., 2014; Shalley & Gilson, 2017). Job standardization has long been recognized and shown to be essential for production efficiency and best-practice reasons (Shalley & Gilson, 2017). However, Keeley (1988) maintained that organizations have a fundamental tension between the goal of efficiency and the goal of morality and struggle for a delicate balance between these competing objectives. Because an important way of achieving the efficiency goal is the practice of job standardization and the morality goal is to promote employee behaviors expected by organizations, this tension elicits our curiosity whether job standardization relates to deviant workplace behavior (DWB;

Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara & Sharifiatashgah, 2019). This curiosity is noteworthy because DWB is pervasive in work organizations (Marasi et al., 2018), and threatening to organizational effectiveness (Zhang et al., 2018).

DWB refers to employees' voluntary behavior that violates organizational norms and threatens the well-being of the organization, its members or both (Zhang et al., 2018). Like other workplace behaviors, DWB is a product of the human being and the contextual factors in organizations (Houdek & Koblovský, 2017; Marasi et al., 2018; Vveinhardt & Štreimikienė, 2017; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara & Sharifiatashgah, 2019). Despite the lack of studies that directly explore the link between job standardization and DWB, literature suggests that they can be related. For example, employees in organizations with a characteristic of formalization, which is similar to job standardization in terms of written rules, and procedures (Juillerat, 2010), reported less DWB (Pulich & Tourigny, 2004). Less conclusive results have been shown that employees in bureaucratic organizations, in which the jobs are more often standardized, reported more DWB (Zimmerman, 2001). Not only the literature implies a job-standardization-DWB link and presents a discrepancy, but will be unable to understand how job standardization is related to DWB.

Specifically, standardization represents the extent to which a work activity is accomplished in a uniform manner (Kasiri et al., 2017; Koval et al., 2019; Shalley & Gilson, 2017; Sulphey et al., 2021), namely, the way in which work processes/methods are performed according to prescribed steps and rules (De Treville et al., 2005; Koval et al., 2019; Krištofík et al., 2016), while formalization represents the extent of official definition and written documentation on organizational information and operations (Juillerat, 2010). It is likely, for example, policies, systems, and job descriptions are formalized, i.e., officially defined and written, but the way of performing a job are not standardized (i.e., not specific, clear or visible to the worker), and vice versa. Similarly, with the sole data of general bureaucracy employees perceived at work, previous assessment of bureaucracy effect on employee deviance will be unable to generalize to job standardization effect. This is because although bureaucracy includes a system of rules used to govern organizational procedures (Jelinek & Ahearne, 2006), this does not necessarily require a standardized way of doing a job. Bureaucracy consists of multiple dimensions, while job standardization only concerns the way of job accomplishment (Kasiri et al., 2017; Krištofík et al., 2016; Sulphey et al., 2021). Thus, employees who perceive greater bureaucracy in the organization can have a job with low requirement of job standardization.

With the inconsistency in arguments and lack of findings in extant research, the purpose of this study was therefore to address the unanswered questions about "Is job standardization related to DWB?" and "If so, why?" This study bridges the two important fields – job design and characteristic of standardization and DWB – of human resource management together, both of which are valued and influential for organizational performance (De Treville et al., 2005; Hsieh & Hsieh, 2003; Koval et al., 2019; Zhang et al., 2018), and which are primarily considered and studied separately before. Following the research effort on DWB, I broaden the understanding by examining both a plausible antecedent and a underlying mechanism that leads to DWB (e.g., Mayer et al., 2012; Neves & Champion, 2015; Zhang et al., 2018; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara & Sharifiatashgah, 2019). Thus, a second challenge in this study is to analyze why the relationship between job standardization and DWB can occur. Prior research indicates that the way situational factors can exert influence on DWB is not direct and may involve the mediators of employees' negative affects (Mulki et al., 2006; Mayer et al., 2012; Neves & Champion, 2015). With the prescribed procedures/methods/rules for employees to comply with, job standardization can induce a monotonous environment, which lacks variance and thus may trigger employees' negative affect of boredom at work (Zakay, 2014). This study uses boredom at work as the mediator of the job standardization-DWB relationship.

This study enriches the literature on DWB by highlighting job characteristic of standardization as a potential antecedent of DWB. In the past decades, DWB has been a popular topic among organizational researchers (e.g., Mayer et al., 2012; Neves & Champion, 2015; Zhang et al., 2018) because the majority of employees have engaged in such behavior (Marasi et al., 2018); it often cannot be easily eliminated, and is an

incessant, costly problem for organizations (Zheng et al., 2019) and managers must understand its antecedents to minimize its prevalence (Chullen et al., 2010). Researchers have identified the antecedent factors that affect DWB and are broadly classified as individual, interpersonal or contextual/situational in nature, such as demographics, attitudes, or personality (e.g., Marasi et al., 2018; Neves & Champion, 2015), injustice, abusive supervision, or leadership (Mayer et al., 2012; Neves & Champion, 2015; Velez & Neves, 2016), and bureaucracy, corporate values, ethical climate, or organizational structures (Jelinek & Ahearne, 2006; Marasi et al., 2018; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara & Sharifiatashgah, 2019).

Notably, this research on the contextual antecedents of DWB focuses on macrolevel variables, as indicated above, and seems to pay little attention to the stance of job characteristics, which more directly and continuously relate to employees throughout their course of job completion, and have long been documented to be an important stance to understand employee behaviors at work (Ohly et al., 2006). By examining a job characteristic of standardization requirement at work I propose a job perspective on and extend the literature on DWB antecedents. This study is in alignment with the call of much prior research for continuing enhancement of the understanding of DWB (e.g., Mayer et al., 2012; Neves & Champion, 2015; Velez & Neves, 2016). I follow those scholars to broaden the research focus on both examining a potential factor, i.e., job standardization, which extends the scope of DWB antecedents beyond work attitudes, leadership and ethical contexts (Kish-Gephart et al., 2010), and investigating the underlying process, i.e., employee boredom, that leads to deviant behaviors in organizational settings.

On the other hand, with the long-term prevalence and importance of job design of standardization for organizational productivity and performance (Koval et al., 2019; Krištofík et al., 2016; Luoh et al., 2014; Madsen, 2011), much academic attention has paid to examining the influences of job standardization on employees. The positive influences include, for example, increased work performance, decreased perception of uncertainty, increased behavior of coordination and citizenship, and the negative influences include, for example, increased perception of burnout, strain and stress, decreased behavior of creativity and innovation (Chen et al., 2009; De Treville et al., 2005; Hsieh & Hsieh, 2003; Luoh et al., 2014; Humphrey et al., 2007; Madsen, 2011). Job standardization has been shown to increase employees' positive behaviors toward their organization such as citizenship and toward other workers such as coordination, and decrease positive behaviors toward organization such as creativity and innovation. This elicits a curiosity that how job standardization relates to employees' negative behaviors toward their organization and other workers, which are consistent with the concept of DWB (Marasi et al., 2018). Organizations design or redesign jobs with standardization to facilitate productivity and performance, can job standardization itself discount that facilitation by enhancing employee DWB? The answer is noteworthy for organizations to more effectively use job design of standardization and retrain its detrimental effect, if any.

In addition to the aforementioned contribution to DWB literature, another contribution of this study is that it aims to fill a void in the job standardization literature by specifically examining how and why job standardization relates to employees' DWB. The aim is to extend and shift the understanding of the job standardization influences on employees from positive behavior perspective to negative behavior perspective. Furthermore, few studies examined the mediating mechanisms of the job standardization effect (some exceptions include: Hsieh & Hsieh, 2003; Karatepe et al., 2004; Luoh et al., 2014; Madsen, 2011) and, as stated earlier, I highlight the role of employee boredom as a plausible underlying mediator. Identifying this mechanism can shed light on the theoretical rationale for why job standardization affects DWB. Taken together, this study will provide a new direction for organizational interventions in the dysfunctions of job standardization and advance our understanding of how to reduce the negative costs, i.e., employee DWB, of job standardization.

## 1. Theoretical Background and Hypotheses Development

In literature on management and organization, job aspects of standardization (Madsen, 2011) and autonomy (Ng et al., 2008) are related constructs, yet distinguishable. Job

standardization refers to work activity being accomplished in a uniform manner, i.e., with prescribed procedures/methods and rules (Kasiri et al., 2017). Job autonomy reflects the extent to which a worker can make their own decision without being controlled by anyone else (Ng et al., 2008). It is possible that a worker makes decisions about what tasks to perform, however how the tasks are to be done is standardized, and how work exceptions are to be handled is a decision to be make. It is also possible that the prescribed procedures/ methods involve deciding among alternatives. Thus, job standardization and job autonomy are distinct from each other. A construct that seems to be similar to job standardization is job routinization, which reflects the degree to which a job is repetitive (Ohly et al., 2006). An employee may perform the same set of tasks every day but the way the tasks are performed is not standardized, or an employee must follow the required standardization to do his/her job but the set of tasks varies every day. This study focuses on the degree to which employees comply with prescribed and exact procedures/ methods and rules for job accomplishment. Therefore, job standardization is the variable that this study examines.

DWB is commonly divided into two dimensions: organizational (DWB-O) and interpersonal (DWB-I) (Mulki et al., 2006; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara & Sharifiatashgah, 2019). DWB-O is directed at the organization (e.g., withdrawal of effort, decrease of productivity, and use of company resources for personal purposes) and are less visible behaviors that can be difficult to prove (Mulki et al., 2006; Spector et al., 2005). On the other hand, DWB-I is directed at members of the organization (e.g., gossiping, blaming or rudely treating peers) and are more visible and easier to prove (Mulki et al., 2006; Jelinek & Ahearne, 2006). With their distinctions, DWB-O and DWB-I can be motivated by different factors (Neves & Champion, 2015), i.e., the same factors may affect them differently (Jelinek & Ahearne, 2006; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara & Sharifiatashgah, 2019). Hence, this study examines how and why job standardization relates to DWB-O and DWB-I, respectively.

I introduce conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002) to understand the relationship between job standardization and DWB. According to COR theory, employees have limited resources at their disposal, helping them meet demands in the work environment (Hobfoll, 1989). Thus, the loss of resources is stressful and employees strive to gather and retain those resources (Ng & Feldman, 2012). COR theory defines resources as "those objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued by the individual or that serve as a means for attainment of these objects" (Hobfoll, 1989, p. 516).

I propose that job standardization entails decreased freedom of working behavior, which is valued and perceived by employees as a resource at work. Specifically, job standardization requires employees to perform and comply with the prescribed procedures/ steps, rules and methods to accomplish jobs and fulfill responsibilities (DeTraville et al., 2005; Koval et al., 2019; Krištofík et al., 2016; Madsen, 2011). That is, job standardization accurately, clearly, and detailedly describes the way that workers should behave in a given operation to complete a task (DeTraville et al., 2005; Koval et al., 2019) and thus can clarify expectations of workers' actions. It constrains workers to follow established rules/routines, giving workers few opportunities to freely choose a course of action and display their behavior, and having clear guidelines for them to behave and spend time in organizationally desired ways. Taken together, we propose that job standardization embeds the loss of freedom of working behavior.

People are intuitively happy to embrace freedom and more freedom is better (Andersson et al., 2019). Namely, freedom is a fundamental need of individuals and employees would rather originate their own behavior than pawns of others (Chullen et al., 2010). Employees are pleased to have the freedom to choose a particular course of action and therefore are more motivated to have a higher performance (Andersson et al., 2019). Taken together, employees value the freedom of working behavior and according to COR theory, it is a resource at work for employees.

Thus, job standardization embeds the resource loss of freedom of working behavior. Drawing on COR theory, when resource of freedom of working behavior is threatened or lost, the negative feelings of stress occurs. Resultantly, employees may engage in DWB to release and vent their negative feelings and to retaliate against the organization (Zhang et al.,

2018). According to COR theory, resource loss of freedom of working behavior can encourage employees to take actions to obtain and maintain their resource of freedom. Resultantly, employees are likely to have DWB to obtain personal gains of freedom and compensate for their losses of freedom at work (Spector & Fox, 2005) because it is the employees' freedom to choose DWB.

Drawing on reactance theory (Brehm, 1966; Marasi et al., 2018), we argue that the DWB encouraged by job standardization will be DWB-O rather than DWB-I. Reactance theory assumes that when people's behavioral freedom is threatened/lost, they will engage in reactance to those things/objects/persons that cause the threat/loss in order to restore their freedom. For example, they may have a prohibited act to deliberately taunt the authority that prohibits it, regardless of the utility or disutility of that act. As noted earlier, job standardization embeds threat/loss of freedom of working behavior. It is the organization that creates and maintains the standardized procedures/steps/routines, methods and rules of the job and that requires employees to comply with such standardization and to behave accordingly for job accomplishment and responsibility fulfillment. In other words, the organization is the origin of job standardization and the ensuing threat/loss of freedom of working behavior. Therefore, according to reactance theory, the encouraged DWB by job standardization are likely to be directed toward the organization rather than individuals.

On the other hand, we argue that job standardization will be associated with decreased DWB-I. First, as aforementioned, based on reactance theory, DWB will not be directed toward organizational members because they are not the origin of prescribed standardization at work. Second, literature has evidenced that DWB-I decreases with less interpersonal conflict (Eschleman et al., 2015). We propose that job standardization will be associated with reduced interpersonal conflict. Specifically, job standardization sets up clear and detailed descriptions of the way (procedures/steps, methods, rules and scheduling) that a worker is demanded to perform in a given operation. Therefore, job standardization reduces (1) the ambiguity and uncertainty of a job (Chen et al., 2009; Krištofík et al., 2016); (2) inconsistent perceptions of work-related issues; and (3) resultant errors in the message transfer. Besides, job standardization reflects process constraints at work. Literature on process constraints shows that standard procedures and explicit rules provide guidelines for interaction with peers, facilitates communication, coordination and collaboration across tasks and functions to reduce uncertainty and conflict and increase trust among employees (Moenaert & Soulder, 1990). Taken together, job standardization facilitates workplace interactions of employees, rendering less interpersonal conflict at work, which has been shown to decrease DWB-I (Eschleman et al., 2015). In sum, we propose that:

*H1a: Job standardization is positively associated that DWB-O.*

*H1b: Job standardization is negatively associated that DWB-I.*

A second challenge in this study is to analyze why the relationship between job standardization and DWB can occur. Drawing on COR theory, we consider an intervening process – a negative affective state of boredom – through which job standardization relates to DWB-O and DWB-I. Concerning the negative affect at work, COR theory suggests that the loss of resources valued by employees makes them experience negative affective states (Hobfoll, 1989, 2002) and similarly a thwarted needs perspective (e.g., Mayer et al., 2012) indicates that employees who are denied fundamental needs experience negative affective states. As noted earlier, freedom of working behavior is a fundamental need of employees and a valued resource of theirs. The loss of employees' valued need of freedom of working behavior, which job standardization entails, will induce negative affective state of employees.

I propose that the embedded loss of freedom of working behavior will cause employees to experience a negative affective state of boredom at work, which is defined as workers feel a pervasive lack of interest in their current activities and is conceptualized as an affective reaction to workplace conditions, including job characteristics (Velasco, 2017). Specifically, job standardization provides accurate, clear and detailed description of the way (procedures/steps/routines, methods and rules) that the worker needs to perform in given operations of a task. The worker needs

minimal thought in executing job activities and his/her working behavior/action is required and constrained to follow established rules/routines. The worker need not develop new performance strategies and different approaches for the job. This lack of freedom of working behavior will conceivably lead to experiencing the job as dull, uninteresting, unchallenging, and uninspiring. Taken together, the induced suggestion is that the worker will experience prolonged exposure to monotonous stimulation, a decrease in arousal and physical, mental or intellectual stimulation. Such decrease produces boredom at work (Gkorezis & Kastritsi, 2017; Oprea et al., 2019; Tsai, 2016) because boredom at work is an unpleasant experience of low arousal, caused by a work situation that does not offer adequate stimulation (Harju & Hakanen, 2016).

Boredom represents a decrease/loss of stimulation at work. Based on COR theory, employees' perception of loss of stimulation resource, which is work motivation of and valued by employees (Tsai, 2016), can encourage them to take action to obtain and maintain this resource (Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara & Sharifiatashgah, 2019). DWB is not under prescribed rules of and considered unacceptable by organizations. It is the worker's freedom and discretion to have DWB, increasing the amount and variety of stimulation at work (Biolcati & Mancini, 2018). Accordingly, bored employees will engage in DWB, which represents ways to cope with the search for additional stimulate (Biolcati & Mancini, 2018).

However, we argue that the DWB induced by boredom at work will be DWB-O rather than DWB-I for three reasons. First, as noted earlier, the origin of boredom at work is the job standardization regulated by the organization. Therefore, according to reactance theory, the encouraged DWB out of boredom at work is likely to be directed toward the organization (DWB-O) rather than individuals (DWB-I).

Second, DWB violates organizational norms and is not approved by organizations, and employees will desire their DWB being unseen by the organization to avoid hindering their survival and development in the organization. In contrast to DWB-O, DWB-I is more visible, more active and easy to prove. Thus, DWB encouraged by boredom at work will tend to be DWB-O rather than DWB-I. Third, the experience of boredom as an unpleasant affect and a decrease/loss of stimulation will induce efforts to alleviate boredom (Loukidou et al., 2009). Good relationship at work has been evidenced to reduce boredom (Loukidou et al., 2009). For example, the behavior of helping other employees is found to be a way of seeking additional stimulation to cope with boredom at work (Game, 2007). Both game activities played by workers and the behavior of humor at work can bring positive affective states and have been reported to be mechanisms for relief from boredom (Taylor & Bain, 2003). Taken together, those behaviors and activities reflect good relationship with other employees and it is reasonable to expect that boredom at work will attenuate DWB-I. To sum up, we propose that:

*H2a: Boredom at work mediates the positive relationship between job standardization and DWB-O such that job standardization is positively related to boredom at work and, in turn, to DWB-O.*

*H2b: Boredom at work mediates the negative relationship between job standardization and DWB-I such that job standardization is positively related to boredom at work and, in turn, negatively related to DWB-I.*

## 2. Methodology

Because the four concepts studied (job standardization, boredom at work, DWB-O, DWB-I) and the control variable indicated below are perceptual measures that are, by definition, self-reported (Wong et al., 2007), questionnaires with self-reports were used. A pretest was completed by thirty full-time employees attending evening classes at a university in Taiwan to provide the comments and suggestions for the presentation of the questionnaire, in which the statements of questions were accordingly reworded for more clarity and understandability. In light of previous research (Morgeson & Humphrey, 2005), a relatively simple response scale was used because more complex response scales in the job design area (including design of standardization) have been shown to elevate construct-irrelevant variance to substantial amounts (Harvey et al., 1985). Thus, the responses for all items were scored on a simple five-point Likert scale that ranged from (1) 'strongly disagree' to (5) 'strongly agree'. Higher total scores indicated higher degrees of the variables measured.

Using a time lag between the measurement of the predictor and criterion variables is

proposed to create a temporal separation to control the common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003). Accordingly, this study used a three-wave panel survey design over a five-week period (from November 4 to December 9 in 2019) to be less subject to the common method bias caused by self-reported measures. In the first week of the period (from November 4 to 10 in 2019), respondents completed the items measuring job standardization and the control variable indicated below. In the third and fifth weeks of the period (from November 18 to 24 and December 2 to 8 in 2019, respectively), respondents completed the items measuring their boredom at work and the items measuring their DWB-O and DWB-I, respectively. Respondents anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed to decrease the biases of social desirability and leniency. Respondents received a gift upon completing the third questionnaire to raise their willingness to participate.

Data were collected from 500 full-time employees with various occupations who were attending evening classes at a university in Taiwan. A total of 316 employees completed the three questionnaires, and 283 employees provided complete answers, yielding a final response rate of 56.6%. These participants had a mean age of 35.12 years, and among them 54.4% were female. Their average organizational tenure was 7.59 years. A profile of the 283 participants in the sample is shown in Tab. 1.

## 2.1 Measurements

### Job Standardization

A 5-item scale of Hsieh and Hsieh (2003) was adapted to measure the degree of job standardization in a respondent's job. This scale was used to measure the overall degree of job standardization in a respondent's company, while this study focused on the degree of job standardization in a respondent's own job. Hence, one item of the scale which referred to the automation of a respondent's company was deleted and the words of another 4 items were replaced to clearly refer to a respondent's own job. All 4 items qualified with the factor loadings higher than the acceptable value of 0.50 (ranging from 0.55 to 0.82). Sample items

**Tab. 1: Characteristics of the sample**

| Variable | | (N = 283) n | % | Mean | SD |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Gender | Male | 129 | 45.6% | | |
| | Female | 154 | 54.4% | | |
| Age | | | | 35.12 | 8.64 |
| | Under 30 | 92 | 32.5% | | |
| | 30–39 | 112 | 39.6% | | |
| | 40–49 | 49 | 17.3% | | |
| | 50–58 | 30 | 10.6% | | |
| Education | High school diploma | 58 | 20.5% | | |
| | College degree | 165 | 58.3% | | |
| | Graduate degree | 60 | 21.2% | | |
| Organizational tenure | | | | 7.59 | 6.86 |
| | Less than 5 year | 131 | 46.2% | | |
| | Less than 15 year | 110 | 38.9% | | |
| | Less than 25 year | 31 | 11.0% | | |
| | 25 years and over | 11 | 3.9% | | |

Source: own

were: “I am to follow strict operating procedures at all times” and “Whatever situatioxn arises, I have procedures to follow in dealing with it”. The internal consistency coefficient and the average totaled value of these 4 items was 0.81 and 11.01 (SD = 3.58), respectively.

**Boredom at Work**

A 5-item scale of Gkorezis and Kastritsi (2017) was used to measure the employee boredom at work. All 5 items except one qualified with the factor loadings higher than the acceptable value of 0.50 (ranging from 0.63 to 0.79). The unqualified one was removed, resulting in a 4 item scale. Sample items were: “I often get bored with my work.”, and “The time seems to go by slowly when I’m at work.”. The internal consistency coefficient and the average totaled value of these 4 items was 0.84 and 9.77 (SD = 2.72), respectively.

**DWB-O**

A 6-item scale of Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara and Sharifiatashgah (2019) was used to measure employee DWB-O. All six items had the factor loadings higher than the acceptable value of 0.50 (ranging from 0.62 to 0.81). Sample items were “Intentionally worked slower than I could have” and “Spend too much time fantasizing or daydreaming instead of working”. The internal consistency coefficient and the average totaled value of these 6 items was 0.85 and 16.8 (SD = 4.36), respectively.

**DWB-I**

A 4-item scale of Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara and Sharifiatashgah (2019) was used to measure employee DWB-O. All four items had the factor loadings higher than the acceptable value of 0.50 (ranging from 0.65 to 0.77). Sample items were “Acted rudely toward coworkers at work” and “Made fun of coworkers at work”. The internal consistency coefficient and the average totaled value of these 4-items was 0.80 and 12.27 (SD = 2.71), respectively.

**Control Variable**

Having been found to influence their DWB (Jelinek & Ahearne, 2006), organizational justice perceived by employees was included as a control variable and measured with a 6-item scale of Jelinek and Ahearne (2006). All 6-items had the factor loadings higher than the acceptable value of 0.50 (ranging from 0.50 to 0.78). Sample items were “I am fairly paid or rewarded considering my job responsibilities” and “When decisions are made about my job, my supervisor shows concern for my rights as an employee”. The internal consistency coefficient and the average totaled value of these 6 items was 0.83 and 17.59 (SD = 3.75), respectively.

## 2.2 Data Analyses

In addition to the three-wave panel survey design, statistical control is the other primary way to control for common method bias (Podsakoff et al., 2003), of which the possibility was tested using Harman’s one-factor test. A principal component factor analysis of the items measured (the four variables studied and the control variable) yielded five factors with eigenvalues greater than 1.0 and accounted for 63.4% of the variance. Five factors, rather than one factor, were identified, and the first factor did not account for a large percentage of the variance (15.0%). Thus, common method bias did not appear to be a serious threat to the findings of this study. Additionally, I used AMOS and completed a confirmatory factor analysis to test the fit of a one-factor model (all items were loaded on a common factor) and a five-factor model. The data showed that the five-factor model had a better fit ($X^2$/df = 3.39; PGFI = 0.67; PNFI = 0.67; PCFI = 0.73; RMSEA = 0.09 [CI = 0.085; 0.099]) than the one-factor model ($X^2$/df = 9.07; PGFI = 0.45; PNFI = 0.27; PCFI = 0.28; RMSEA = 0.17 [CI = 0.163; 0.176]), indicating a low probability of common method problems.

As indicated above, the factor loadings for all items exceeded the acceptable value of 0.50. The composite reliabilities (shown in Appendix Tab. A1) for the scales of the 5 constructs examined exceeded the threshold value of 0.60 (Fornell, 1982) (ranging from 0.80 to 0.86). The average variances extracted (shown in Appendix Tab. A1) for those scales exceeded the benchmark of 0.50 (Fornell, 1982) (ranging from 0.67 to 0.76) and thus were acceptable. Altogether, the scales used in measuring those constructs were deemed to have satisfactory convergence reliability. The squared correlations among constructs (from 0.00 to 0.11) were less than the average variances extracted by the constructs (from 0.67 to 0.76) (shown in Appendix Tab. A1). This showed that the constructs were empirically distinct (Fornell,

1982). Thus, the convergent and discriminant validity measures were satisfactory.

Model fit of the proposed models from the hypotheses was accessed with structural equation modeling (SEM). The indices and significance tests were calculated with an SEM software, i.e., IBM SPSS Amos 25.0. The indices included the chi-squared test, TLI, CFI, PGFI, PNFI, PCFI, RMSEA, and SRMR. Models with the chi-squared test less than 5, TLI and CFI values in the 0.80s and 0.90s or higher, and PGFI, PNFI, and PCFI values in the 0.50s or higher indicate an acceptable fit, and SRMR and RMSEA having values up to 0.10 indicate a reasonable fit (Wu, 2009). Smaller chi-squared goodness-of-fit values indicate a better model fit to the data, and larger values indicate a lack of model fit (Wu, 2009).

## 3. Results

Intercorrelations among the variables studied appear in Tab. 2. It shows that job standardization was related to more boredom at work, more DWB-O and less DWB-I. Boredom at work was related to more DWB-O and less DWB-I. Organizational justice was related to less DWB-I, which is consistent with previous finding (Skarlicki et al., 1999).

Because we did not predict whether employee boredom at work partially or fully mediate the effect of job standardization on DWB-O and DWB-I, we tested two competing

**Tab. 2: Intercorrelations of job standardization, boredom at work, organizational justice, DWB-Os, and DWB-Is**

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Job standardization | | | | |
| 2. Boredom at work | 0.25** | | | |
| 3. Organizational justice | 0.02 | 0.04 | | |
| 4. DWB-Os | 0.35** | 0.34** | −0.04 | |
| 5. DWB-Is | −0.33** | −0.29** | −0.19** | −0.24** |

Source: own

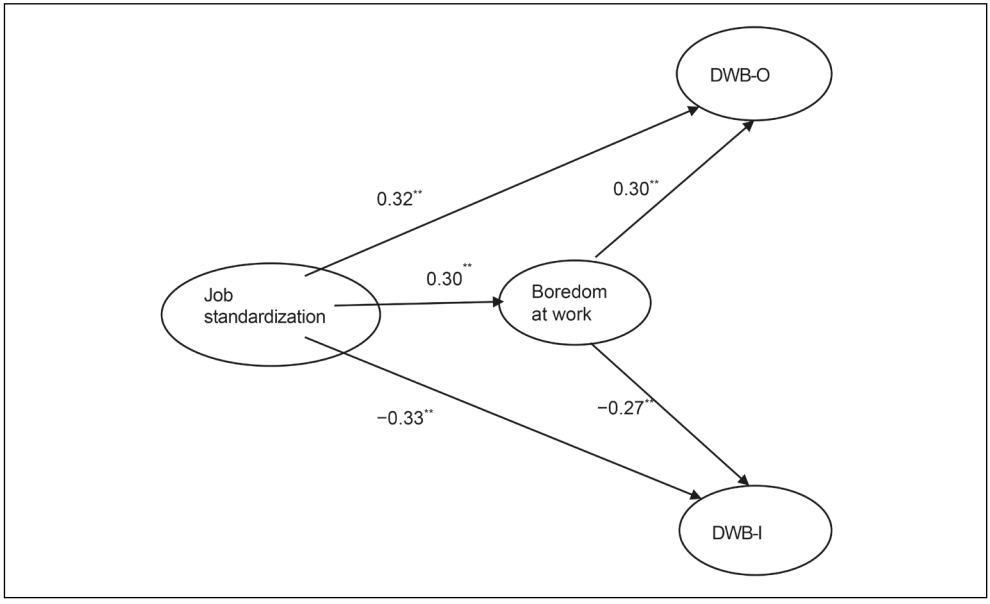
Note: *p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.

models: a fully mediated model (Model 1) and a partially mediated model (Model 2). Model 2 differed from Model 1 in two direct path from job standardization to DWB-O and DWB-I, respectively. Both Models included the control variable: organizational justice. The results indicated that Model 2 (X2[245] = 719.156; X2/df = 2.935; TLI = 0.820; CFI = 0.841; PGFI = 0.672; PNFI = 0.691; PCFI = 0.746; SRMR = 0.073; RMSEA = 0.083) had a better fit, ΔX2[2] = 40.58; p < 0.01, than Model 1 (X2[247] = 759.736; X2/df = 3.076; TLI = 0.807; CFI = 0.828; PGFI = 0.671; PNFI = 0.686; PCFI = 0.741; SRMR = 0.091; RMSEA = 0.086). Accordingly, we retained Model 2 the partially mediated model, as the preferable model. We presented Model 2, the partially mediated model with control variables included, and used it to examine the proposed hypotheses.

As shown in Fig. 1, the standardized path coefficients from job standardization to DWB-O, DWB-I, employee boredom at work, and from the latter variable to DWB-O, DWB-I, were 0.32 (p < 0.01), −0.33 (p < 0.01); 0.30 (p < 0.01), and 0.30 (p < 0.01); −0.27 (p < 0.01), respectively. These paths accounted for approximately 25.1% and 26.4% of the observed variance in DWB-O and DWB-I, respectively. The total, direct, and indirect effects of job standardization on DWB-O had the statistically significant coefficients of 0.41 [p < 0.01; 95%CI = (0.268; 0.539)]; 0.32 [p < 0.01; 95%CI = (0.173; 0.460)]; and 0.09 [p < 0.01; 95%CI = (0.036; 0.147)], respectively. The total, direct, and indirect effects of job standardization on DWB-I had the statistically significant coefficients of −0.41 [p < 0.01; 95%CI = (−0.552; −0.265)]; −0.33 [p < 0.01; 95%CI = (−0.480; −0.176)]; and −0.08 [p < 0.01; 95%CI = (−0.135; −0.034)] respectively. Accordingly, the empirical results indicate that the relationship between job standardization and DWB-O is partially

mediated by employee boredom at work, and offered support for *H1a* and *H2a*. Namely, job standardization increases employee boredom at work, and thereby increases DWB-O. The empirical results indicate that the relationship between job standardization and DWB-I is partially mediated by employee boredom at work, and offered support for *H1b* and *H2b*. Namely, job standardization increases employee boredom at work, and thereby decreases DWB-I.

**Fig. 1: Standardized path coefficients for the final model**




Source: own

Note: The model included a control variable, which was not shown in the figure.
*p < 0.05; **p < 0.01.

## 4. Discussion

We developed and tested a theoretical model that specified how and why job standardization is associated with bad behaviors of employees in the form of DWB-O and DWB-I. We found that job standardization evokes boredom at work, which, in turn, translates into increased DWB-O and decreased DWB-I. The use of multi-wave design strengthens the validity of the conclusions that we draw.

### 4.1 Theoretical Contributions

One contribution of this study lies in accounting for a job characteristic of standardization in theory that aims to explain the effect of job design/characteristics in organizations (e.g., Juillerat, 2010; Ohly et al., 2006). Job standardization has been linked, as stated earlier, to desirable and undesirable individual-level outcomes, which focus much on employees' positive rather than negative behavior towards organization and other workers. In developing relevant theory, we invoke the perspective of employees' bad behavior that a job characteristic of standardization influences two kinds of DWB differently. This study provided interesting evidence that employee DWB can be added to both the positive and negative correlates of job standardization; specifically, employee DWB-O increases and DWB-I decreases with job standardization. Our study supports for the

thesis that job standardization can have effects on employees, but those effects need not to be counterproductive.

A noteworthy feature of our model and results is the specification of a mechanism, boredom at work, which explains how job standardization relates differently to two types of responses of DWB. Much literature has investigated the effect of job standardization on employees. Few studies have examined the mediating mechanisms of that effect and identified psychological factors (psychological empowerment, role stress components; satisfaction; Hsieh & Hsieh, 2003; Karatepe et al., 2004; Luoh et al., 2014). Specifying mediation models is an important issue because it is essential to the advancement of particular research domains (Mathieu et al., 2008). Our study addresses this issue by invoking a resource-loss view of job standardization, which posits that job standardization evokes negative affective state of employees. Consistent with that perspective, we found evidence that boredom at work is a proximal consequences of job standardization that, in turn, explains employees' adaptive responses of DWB. Job standardization evokes employees' boredom at work that motivates employees to relieve that negative affective state of boredom at work and thus enhances DWB-O and attenuates DWB-I.

This study contributes to literature that aims to explain the bad behavior of employees. Numerous studies have been conducted with the goal of understanding why employees engage in DWB (e.g., Marasi et al., 2018; Neves & Champion, 2015; Zoghbi-Manrique-de-Lara & Sharifiatashgah, 2019). Most of the work on explaining DWB through situational factors suggests that DWB seeks to address a perceived injustice or imbalance to achieve fairness (Neves & Champion, 2015). While much of that work involves negative situational factors of the organizational systems or social context (Thau et al., 2009; Skarlicki et al., 1999), this study enriches the understanding of DWB by invoking a situational factor of job perspective of standardization and uses resource theory to explain the effect of job standardization on DWB.

Another contribution of this study concerns uncertainty management theory (UMT). With prescribed procedures/steps, rules and methods for job accomplishment and responsibility fulfillment, job standardization can bring less uncertainty at work and our findings can suggest that less uncertainty is associated with more DWB-O. Our findings seem to be inconsistent with the past studies showing that when employees experience uncertainty, they are more likely to engage in deviance (Thau et al., 2007, 2009). Because employees encounter various uncertainties in organizations (e.g., Hogg & Mullin, 1999), it is noted that prior studies investigated employee DWB under the uncertainties regarding self-concept (Colquitt et al., 2006; Thau et al., 2007) and management style (Thau et al., 2009). In other words, extant literature has shown the personal and situational sources of uncertainty. This study complements the research on application of UMT to explain harmful employee behaviors by adding a new situational source of uncertainty regarding the job. While prior studies have shown that increased uncertainties of personal source and a situational source of managers are associated with more DWB-O (Thau et al., 2007, 2009), this study indicates that decreased uncertainty of situational source of the job is associated with more DWB-O. Accordingly, this study also complements UMT by adding a new viewpoint that uncertainties need not to promote DWB and this depends on the sources of the uncertainties.

With affective events theory positing that workplace factors generate affective reactions (e.g., negative emotions) (Weiss & Cropanzano, 1996), this study consists with prior studies on that uncertainty is associated with negative affect, which in prior studies is worry (Tangirala & Alge, 2006) ensued from the uncertainty regarding a personal source and a situational source of managers, while our study indicates the negative affect of boredom at work ensued from the uncertainty regarding the jobs. This study enriches the understanding of UMT by proposing the perspective that the influence of uncertainties employees encounter in organizations on their behaviors will not be constantly negative and rely on the types of the negative affect induced. In addition, addressing deviance in relation to job characteristics is consistent with an emphasis in the behavioral ethics literature on exploring actionable ways of dealing with misbehavior in the presence of negative situational forces (Moore & Gino, 2015). We extend this literature by investigating a situational force of job perspective of

standardization and adding a new viewpoint that this situational force can be both negative and positive with its different influences on different kinds of employee bad behavior at work.

## 4.2 Limitations and Future Directions

This research has limitations that provide implications for future studies. First, we assessed the mechanism of boredom at work in the indirect relationship between job standardization and DWB. Our focus on boredom at work is consistent with extant literature that focus on its mediating effect (e.g., Gkorezis & Kastritsi, 2017; Gkorezis & Vatou, 2018; Kim et al., 2019). Our findings show that boredom at work partially mediated the relationship between job standardization and DWB. Future studies may test other mechanisms for the relationship studied, such as positive/negative affectivity or stress, which are related to job standardization (Hsieh & Hsieh, 2003; Karatepe et al., 2004).

Second, this study explains how the job characteristic of standardization leads to employee responses of DWB ranging from aggravating (i.e., DWB-O) to attenuating (i.e., DWB-I). A critical step in understanding a phenomenon and advancing future research and theory building is to move from main effect to moderation types of explanations (Fiske, 2004). Future studies can examine contingency factors that explain when employees are more likely to have aggravated DWB-O or attenuated DWB-I.

Third, recent literature suggests the relevance of distinguishing interpersonal deviance based on specific targets of the behaviors, i.e., supervisors, coworkers (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007). Supervisors can be organizational embodiment and are natural surrogates for organizations (Eisenberger et al., 2014) because employees receive organizational demands, resources, rewards and discipline primarily from their supervisors, who have a duty to achieve organizational goals. Also, supervisors are often considered to be legitimate representatives of organizations (Ogunfowora, 2013), which reinforces their surrogate image. Job standardization is required and regulated by the organization, which is embodied and represented by supervisors. It is speculated that the encouraged DWB by job standardization is directed toward not only the organization, but also supervisors. This needs future research to complement the understanding of DWB and is consistent with the call for more examination of deviant behavior directed toward supervisor (Mitchell & Ambrose, 2007).

Finally, with the acceptable response rate, no attempt was made to establish the representativeness of the sample, and sample size of 283 respondents may affect the possibility of generalizing the findings. In addition, the sample of this study consisted only of employees in Taiwan. Future studies using samples with larger sample size and from other countries or cultures would likely provide a more robust test of the hypotheses because cultural differences affect employee perceptions at work (Wu & Xu, 2012). Taiwanese people tend to have Chinese cultural values (Mao & Hsieh, 2013). These values are oriented toward strong authority and are more likely to respond positively to authoritarianism, and in turn organizational regulations and rules (Wu & Xu, 2012). This may lead employees to more accept job standardization required of them and in turn less feel resource loss at work, which would weaken the relationship between job standardization and DWB. Hence, the Taiwanese context may decrease, rather than increase, the effect sizes. It is unlikely that cultural influences in Taiwan compromised the validity of the results.

## 4.3 Managerial Implication

When employees are required to comply with job standardization, they are more likely to exhibit behaviors that harm the organization. On the other hand, they are less likely to exhibit behaviors that harm its members, suggesting that they are concerned about interpersonal relationships at work. These findings give rise to specific prescriptions for managers to prevent or minimize the frequency of deviant behavior in the workplace. To decrease the DWB-O of employees whose jobs are in need of standardization, organizations should (1) impart the benefit and necessity of job standardization; and (2) use the influence of coworkers in view of those employees' concern for workplace relationships.

As posited earlier, job standardization induces resource loss at work and in turn increase DWB-O. The COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989) asserts that those with more resources are less vulnerable to resource loss, and a gain

in resources will help offset a loss. Accordingly, since job standardization is a characteristic of jobs (Kasiri et al., 2017), organizations may optimize other job characteristics to engender resources accruing to employees and offsetting the resource loss out of standardization, which will reduce the ensuing DWB-O. The other characteristics include job autonomy, skill variety, task significance, task identity, and feedback (Juillerat, 2010). They lead to positive outcomes at work, are valued by employees (Li et al., 2020) and thus are resources employees can retain.

Furthermore, job standardization is a job design (Shalley & Gilson, 2017), which employees' quality of work life involves (QWL; Brooks & Anderson, 2005). Much literature has shown that QWL minimizes negative perception and behavior of employees (e.g., Kim et al., 2018). Thus, approaches to improving the negative effect of job standardization can take a wider perspective, and focus attention on a broader organizational approach of QWL. Specifically, resources valued by employees are also provided in other aspects of QWL, such as the interface between the work and home life of employees, the work context of practice settings, management, co-workers, growth opportunities, and work world of broad societal influences and changes on the practice of the job (Brooks & Anderson, 2005). According to COR theory, organizations can use the approach of QWL to reducing the ensuing DWB-O out of the job design of standardization.

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# Appendix

**Tab. A1: Discriminant validity of job standardization, boredom at work, organizational justice, DWB-Os, and DWB-Is**

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 1. Job standardization | (0.82)<br>0.71 | | | | |
| 2. Boredom at work | 0.05 | (0.84)<br>0.75 | | | |
| 3. Organizational justice | 0.00 | 0.00 | (0.84)<br>0.71 | | |
| 4. DWB-Os | 0.05 | 0.08 | 0.05 | (0.86)<br>0.76 | |
| 5. DWB-Is | 0.07 | 0.11 | 0.00 | 0.02 | (0.80)<br>0.67 |

Source: own

Note: Diagonals with parentheses display the composite reliabilities, and diagonals without parentheses display the average variances extracted, while the other matrix entries display the squared correlations.

## Construct items

### Job Standardization

1. I am to follow strict operating procedures at all times.
2. Whatever situation arises, I have procedures to follow in dealing with it.
3. I have specific operating procedures to follow.
4. There are no standard operating procedures in my job (reverse coded).

### Boredom at Work

1. I think my work is boring.
2. There are long periods of boredom on my job.
3. I often get bored with my work.
4. The time seems to go by slowly when I'm at work.

### DWB-O

1. Put little effort into my work.
2. Intentionally worked slower than I could have.
3. Take an additional or longer break than is acceptable at my workplace.
4. Spend too much time fantasizing or daydreaming instead of working.
5. Neglect to follow my boss' instructions.
6. Come in late to work without giving prior notice.

### DWB-I

1. Acted rudely toward coworkers at work.
2. Cursed at coworkers at work.
3. Made fun of coworkers at work.
4. Mistreated coworkers at work.

### Organizational Justice

1. I am fairly paid or rewarded considering my job responsibilities.
2. I am fairly paid or rewarded considering the stresses and strains of my job.
3. My organization has procedures designed to provide opportunities to appeal or challenge a decision.
4. My organization has procedures designed to allow for requests for clarification or additional information about a decision.
5. When decisions are made about my job, my supervisor treats me with kindness and consideration.
6. When decisions are made about my job, my supervisor shows concern for my rights as an employee.