

Employees behaving badly: Social liabilities at work

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The impact that negative or distracting others (social liabilities) have on individuals in the workplace should not be underestimated. The purpose of this research was to develop a broad, theoretically derived measure of Employee Social Liability (ESL).

Three linked studies were conducted to 1. generate a pool of potential items to measure the ESL construct, 2. systematically reduce this item pool, and 3. analyse the factor structure and provide a nomological network for ESLs. We provide empirical evidence that ESL represents a higher-order construct incorporating four categories of employee behavior in the domains of 1) distrust, 2) lack of cooperation, 3) increased social demands, and 4) negative relationships at work. Psychometric support is provided for a new survey measure designed to assess both the four ESL facets and the higher level construct. These sub-scales were found to have internal reliabilities ranging from .82 to .94. Finally we provide a nomological network for the ESL construct, demonstrating both discriminant validity and convergent validity with i) one's own bad workplace behaviors, ii) emotional intelligence, and iii) having supportive managers and work friends. Limitations and practical implications conclude the article.

The influence of other people in an employees' social networks has long been the subject of research interest from an organisational and psychological perspective. Under the umbrella of positive psychology, there is a rich body of research on positive, pro-social organisational behaviour which generally aims to identify situations that enable optimal human flourishing (Fredrickson & Losada, 2005; McDonald & O'Callaghan, 2008; Roberts, 2006). Positive psychology at work focuses on areas such as organizational citizenship (Bolino, Turnley, & Bloodgood, 2002; Wat & Shaffer, 2004), well-being (Arnold, Turner, Barling, Kelloway, & McKee, 2007; Keyes, Shmotkin, & Ryff, 2002) and creativity (Appelbaum, Iaconi, & Matousek, 2007). However, while there is a large and ever growing body of research on positive and pro-social organisational behaviour, the last two decades have also seen an explosion of research on negative workplace behaviours. This includes (among others) workplace deviance (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Lee & Allen, 2002), bullying and harassment (Einarsen, 1999; Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996), social undermining (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002; Duffy, Scott, Shaw, Tepper, & Aquino, 2012), incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Hutton, 2006; Pearson, Anderson, & Wegner, 2001), and aggression and abuse (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Neuman & Baron, 2005). While studies using such constructs typically go to some lengths to

conceptually define and measure them, there is, nonetheless, a conceptual overlap and redundancy in their definition and measurement. This has led to calls for construct synthesis and reintegration when studying the impact that co-workers have on each other (Chiaburu & Harrison, 2008), as well as “*an empirical assessment of whether various mistreatment measures in fact tap a common construct*” (Hershcovis, 2011; p. 500).

In answering this call, we draw on the notion of social capital (Adler & Kwon, 2002) as a theoretical framework with which to consider the many and varied ways employee’s impact one another, both positively and negatively. The term social capital is a broad, multilevel term and, as such, has been described as an attribute of communities (Jacobs, 1961; Putnam, 1995), organizations (Leana & VanBuren, 1999) and individuals (Coleman, 1990a; Coleman, 1990b; Kouvonen et al., 2006; Labianca & Brass, 2006; Portes, 1998). Generally it refers the benefits that an individual accrues from their network of social relationships (Bourdieu, 1986). In spite of this large body of research, evidence remains sparse on social capital as it pertains to the work context specifically and to the social capital of employees. While there has been some recent work in this space (e.g., Ellinger, Baş, Ellinger, Wang, & Bachrach, 2011; Zahra, 2010), given the amount of time that people spend at work, as opposed to interacting with neighbours or friends, the relative lack of research on *employee* social capital is an important gap (Suzuki et al., 2010).

While social capital represents the benefits an individual accrues from their social network and the *positive* relationships they have with others (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992), we propose that employees also have social liabilities which imply increased constraints or demands on resources in order to manage negative, taxing, or distracting relationships at work. We build upon Labianca and Brass (2006), who defined liabilities in terms of individual negative relationships (or ties), as “*the linear combination of strength, reciprocity, cognition, and social distance of each negative tie, summed across all negative ties.*” (p. 599). Further, Labianca and Brass suggested that negative relationships are relatively rare (comprising only 1 to 8 percent of organizational relationships). We extend this to define employee social liabilities in terms of workplace and individual outcomes; as relationships that hinder functioning at work, detract from achieving goals, and which negatively impact on health and well-being. Importantly, these relationships may or may not be ‘negative ties’ per se. inasmuch as a distracting, time consuming but otherwise friendly colleague could be a liability, and so too could a close friend whom most others in a social network despise. Further, we focus specifically on organizational relationships (comprised of other employees, colleagues, clients, supervisors, etc.) and propose that an employee’s experience of, and

exposure to, negative or unhelpful workplace behaviours or individuals will contribute to the acquisition of social liabilities.

We also propose that having social liabilities, is qualitatively different from simply having “low social capital”. Though the two constructs are no doubt related, it is not simply a lack of benefits or resources at work that define employee social liabilities (as in the case of low social capital), but rather the presence of hindrances and constraints in the form of negative or unhelpful social relationships. Employee social liabilities are therefore a higher-order latent construct that may be measured by combining a number of conceptually distinct but related constructs representing forms of employee ‘bad behaviour’ that impact negatively on others (Griffin & Lopez, 2005; Robinson, Wang, & Kiewitz, 2014).

Why then might the presence of social liabilities matter? Conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2001) suggests we will strive to protect and accumulate resources; this becomes significantly more difficult when social liabilities in one’s network consume these resources. Furthermore, the job demands-resources (JD-R) model proposed by Bakker and Demerouti (2007) would suggest that, as social liabilities increase so too will demands on the individual, thereby consuming resources to manage these demands. The resulting imbalance will lead to negative well-being outcomes for individuals such as increased stress. Negative interpersonal interactions and bad behaviour at work are a persistent and costly problem (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). Even a single workplace “enemy” can have a profound impact on an individuals’ experience of work (Duffy et al., 2002; Duffy, Ganster, Shaw, Johnson, & Pagon, 2006; Moerbeek & Need, 2003; Morrison, 2008; Morrison & Nolan, 2007) and negative relationships also have an influence on individual performance, and well-being (Morrison, 2008; Morrison & Nolan, 2007). The resulting conflict has been shown to result in lowered commitment and attachment to colleagues (Jehn, 1995) as well as lowered productivity and the resulting costs at the departmental and organisational level (Ayoko, 2003).

The Structure of Employee Social Liabilities

Our starting point is that employee social liabilities (ESLs) may arise from a range of social and work related ties. Some may be temporary, giving rise to transient social liabilities, while others are more endemic and serve as a more sustained source of demand on resources. ESLs can arise from several sources; they can stem from having relationships characterised by conflict or negative interactions (Labianca & Brass, 2006), or from a lack of cooperation and reciprocity from others that, in turn, engenders distrust (Deutsch, 1960; McAllister, 1995). In addition, possibly friendly and pleasant colleagues who serve as distractions from one’s tasks

or who consume resources such as time and energy during interactions may also be liabilities (Berman, West, & Richter, 2002; Bridge & Baxter, 1992). Thus, a social network can be (or become) dysfunctional in many ways. We propose that social networks with any or all of these features, instead of adding to an individual's positive social capital, act as a source of ESL. Furthermore, we propose that ESL is a higher level construct made up of four components; namely distrust and suspicion of one's colleagues, lack of reciprocity and cooperation from colleagues, exposure to negative relationships and interactions at work, and high social demands and distractions. Each component is outlined more fully below.

1. Distrust

Trust is a central component of social capital. It is both an input to and an outcome of relationships and, as Kramer (1999) points out, it is an important precursor to increased cooperation, altruism and extra-role behaviours between organisational members. Trust develops when the actions of others are expected to be beneficial, or at least not harmful, to one's own interests (Robinson, 1996). Trust also invokes conceptions of benevolence, predictability and fairness (Cunningham & MacGregor, 2000).

We draw on the work of Deutsch (1960) to differentiate between trust (as a source of social capital) and distrust (as a source of social liabilities). Deutsch viewed distrust as not simply a lack of trust, but rather as actual suspicion; confidence about a relationship partner's undesirable behaviour. Distrust therefore *"entails a state of perceived vulnerability or risk that is derived from individuals' uncertainty regarding the motives, intentions, and prospective actions of others on whom they depend"* (Kramer, 1999, p.517). Distrust is a belief that others will *not* act in one's best interests, and further, may even engage in injurious behaviour (Govier, 1994).

Social liabilities therefore arise when we perceive the behaviour of others in our workplace social network as: threatening or increasing a sense of vulnerability; harmful to our self-interests; undermining our efforts and competency to do the job; and as unfair, self-serving, and unsupportive.

2. Lack of reciprocity and low cooperation

Together with trust, reciprocity is the other key component of social capital, measured by items such as, "would you say that most of the time people in your company try to be helpful, or that they are mostly just looking out for themselves?" (Suzuki et al., 2010). People evaluate relationships in terms of investments (such as time spent, effort, and support offered) and outcomes (such as support received and favours granted). A central proposition of equity theory (Adams, 1965; Blau, 1964) is that people have a tendency to seek reciprocity in

relationships and will be depressed or distressed if they perceive the relationship to be inequitable. Reciprocity exists when a person's investments and outcomes in a given relationship are proportional to the investments and outcomes of the other person (Bakker et al., 2000).

We propose therefore, that the presence of others in a workplace social network who do not reciprocate, and or who act uncooperatively, will contribute to an employee's social liability.

3. Exposure to negative relationships and behaviours

Negative social relationships detract from work and well-being, and are characterized by the intensity of dislike an employee has towards, or perceives from, others (Labianca & Brass, 2006). Of note here also is the work of Duffy and others showing that supportive and friendly relationships can also be undermining; that people can experience both support and conflict or undermining from the same person (Duffy et al., 2002; Duffy et al., 2012; Gottlieb & Wagner, 1991). Such inconsistencies lead to perceptions of relational insecurity as well as a lack of control, trust, and predictability in workplace relationships (Duffy et al., 2002). Being undermined can be hugely upsetting and is a major source of stress; when the underminer is also at other times supportive, the negative impacts of such ambivalent relationships are exacerbated (Duffy et al., 2012). Perhaps unsurprisingly, ambivalent workplace relationships (frenemies) that are characterised by both positivity and negativity, are among the most stressful to manage (Duffy et al., 2002; Uchino, Holt-Lunstad, Smith, & Bloor, 2004; Uchino, Holt-Lunstad, Uno, & Flinders, 2001). As Duffy et al. (2012) state, "*...it takes more emotional energy and coping resources to deal with individuals who are inconsistent in their provision of support and undermining behaviours.*" (p. 337). We suggest therefore that both negative (Labianca & Brass, 2006) and ambivalent (Duffy et al., 2002) relationships require resource expenditures to manage, and therefore add to an employee's social liabilities.

4. Social distractions and demands

Demands on employee resources can arise from the social network itself. For example, it has long been recognized that work groups and teams have social process losses that arise from the need to maintain the social integrity of the group itself, particularly so for diverse groups (Watson, Johnson, Kumar, & Critelli, 1998). Task distractions also arise for individuals perceived as the "thought leaders" and "experts" who people turn to for advice and information (Oldroyd & Morris, 2012). For example Oldroyd and Morris cite Grove (1983; p. 67), who describes the constant request for information and advice received by managers as "*the plague of managerial work.*" Similarly, Perlow (1999) observed that frequent coworker

interruptions ultimately led to a ‘time famine’ where too many information requests adversely impacted on job performance. Another source of social demand is from individuals who might be characterized as ‘time wasters, chatters and attention seekers’. In one study of managerial attitudes to workplace friendships, 17% of managers felt that these relationships resulted in distraction from work and over half believed that they caused or contributed to gossip (Berman et al., 2002).

Social demands in a workplace social network can arise from relationships that are both distal and proximal to the self. A distal relationship is one that is either geographically distant, as in the case of virtual teams, or socially distant such as in the case of an indirect connection (e.g., the enemy of a colleague), while a proximal relationship might involve face-to-face communication or be with a fellow team member. More proximal interpersonal interactions would logically be more difficult to manage and therefore more demanding on resources (Labianca & Brass, 2006; Wasserman & Faust, 1994). Social networks also vary, ranging from those of people who have few relationships with others (isolates) to those with numerous and cohesive sets of interpersonal ties (Newman, Hanges, Duan, & Ramesh, 2008). It is feasible therefore that workplace designs that allow for, or indeed encourage or force, interpersonal interactions, such as ‘hot-desking’ and open plan offices, will increase employee task distraction, create demands on employees to engage in such interactions, wanted or otherwise, and thereby create employee social liabilities. Maintaining the demands of interpersonal relationships in these contexts potentially generates social process loss at the expense of job task achievement.

While the above four categories or clusters of negative experiences arising from workplace social networks are, to varying degrees conceptually discrete, our central proposition is that they have a connection that links them together to form a higher-order, multi-dimensional construct of employee social liabilities (ESL), and that it is “*theoretically meaningful and parsimonious to use this overall abstraction as a representation of the dimensions*” (Law, Wong, & Mobley, 1998; p. 741).

Hypothesis 1: Employee social liabilities (ESLs) are a reflective higher-order latent construct comprised of i) distrust, ii) lack of reciprocity and cooperation among co-workers, iii) exposure to negative behaviours from others, and iv) social distractions.

The Nomological Network

In order to clarify the nomological network surrounding the hypothesised ESL construct, we examine its relationships with variables that are potential antecedents and covariates in order to place it within a framework of workplace, collegial and individual difference variables.

This section briefly defines and reviews these variables, describing commonalities and potential conceptual links with ESL.

Potential antecedents to the acquisition of social liabilities include individual attributes relating to the ability or propensity to develop positive interpersonal relationships within a social network. We include four that we see as relevant to the acquisition of social liabilities: personality (particularly narcissism and agreeableness), emotional intelligence, personally deviant workplace behaviour and supportive others at work. Each is described below.

1. Personality

The “big five” personality dimensions (openness, conscientiousness, extraversion, agreeableness and emotional stability) predict how we operate within relationships, both in and out of the workplace. Agreeable people have been found to be relatively more considerate, forgiving, nurturing, and tolerant; while disagreeable people are more likely to be inconsiderate, vengeful, argumentative, and uncooperative (Colbert, Mount, Harter, Witt, & Barrick, 2004). It seems likely that disagreeable or antagonistic individuals will be more likely to engage negatively with others in the workplace, exhibit interpersonally deviant behaviour and, as a result, acquire social liabilities (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Mount, Barrick, & Stewart, 1998). In addition, agreeableness is thought to play a role in emotional regulation in both interpersonal and workplace settings (Larsen, 2000; Salovey & Mayer, 1990). Extraversion and neuroticism have been found to influence the likelihood that individuals will experience negative emotions, with those scoring as both introverted and high in neuroticism being more likely to have negative relationships with others (Larsen, 2000; Larsen & Ketelaar, 1989; Larsen & Ketelaar, 1991).

The recent literature on maladaptive personality in both clinical (Krueger, Derringer, Markon, Watson, & Skodol, 2012) and workplace (Guenole, 2014) settings also informs our hypothesis. Given that maladaptive personality reflects the very extremes of normal-range personality constructs, it may occur too infrequently to be of use in predicting ESL widely, nonetheless it gives weight to our proposition regarding the relationship between the Big 5 and a failure to create and maintain high quality relationships (Dilchert, Ones, & Krueger, 2014).

Hypothesis 2: Those with higher neuroticism (negative affect), lower extraversion (detachment), and lower agreeableness (antagonism), will report higher levels of ESL.

2. Emotional Intelligence

Relevant to the acquisition of social liabilities are those attributes which are likely to influence the initiation, management, and maintenance of relationships. Social and emotional

competence are related to these abilities. The theory of emotional intelligence proposed by Salovey and Mayer (1990) provides a framework to examine these competencies. Emotional intelligence has been found to be related to increased pro-social behaviour and positive peer relationships (Mayer, 1998; Salovey, Mayer, Caruso, & Lopes, 2001), and to negatively predict poor relations with friends, maladjustment, and negative behaviour (Brackett, Mayer, & Warner, 2004). Consequently we expect to find emotional intelligence to be negatively related to ESLs.

Hypothesis 3: Lower emotional intelligence will be associated with higher levels of employee social liabilities.

3. Deviant behaviour

Deviant behaviour in the workplace has received a great deal of attention from scholars in recent years (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Griffin & Lopez, 2005; Lee & Allen, 2002; Robinson & Bennett, 1995) and is defined as “...*voluntary behaviour that violates significant organizational norms and in so doing threatens the well-being of an organization, its members, or both*” (Robinson & Bennett, 1995; p. 556). It includes being verbally abusive and quarrelsome (Albert & Moskowitz, 2014; Moskowitz, 2010), aggressive towards others (Herscovis & Barling, 2010; Neuman & Baron, 2005), engaging in favouritism and gossip, withholding work effort, physical violence, bullying (Einarsen, 1999; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Gardner et al., 2013), sexual harassment, and sabotage (Griffin & O’Leary-Kelly, 2004).

While there is considerable research demonstrating the negative impact that deviant behaviour has on both individuals and the organisation (Appelbaum et al., 2007; Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Robinson et al., 2014), what is less clear is how other employees react to, and subsequently treat, those engaging in deviant organisational behaviour. We propose that individuals engaging in workplace deviance will acquire relatively more social liabilities in their networks (through the negative perceptions their colleagues would have of their behaviour, retaliatory responses, distrust, and social exclusion through lack of cooperation).

Hypothesis 4: Personal workplace deviance will be positively associated with employee social liabilities.

4. Supportive relationships at work

As discussed previously it is possible that having close, reciprocal friendships at work might, in some contexts, serve to increase social demands (Berman et al., 2002; Perlow, 1999) thereby creating liabilities. However friends at work can also provide support when dealing with workplace stressors, acting as a ‘resource’ (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) to counter

increases in demand (including negative relationships, bullies, and uncooperative co-workers) (Agervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Bolger, Zuckerman, & Kessler, 2000; Gottlieb & Wagner, 1991; Sapp, Kawachi, Sorensen, LaMontagne, & Subramanian, 2010). A workplace with supportive manager relationships would be one where a manager acts as a resource to help with negative interactions; monitoring and supporting staff in times of need, or even removing negative others from the environment. Similarly, having close friends at work may serve as a buffer or resource to help manage negative relationships.

Hypothesis 5: Having more supportive relationships will be associated with lower ESL

Methods

To develop the measure of employee social liability, a series of linked studies were conducted that are, in varying degrees, qualitative or quantitative in nature, with the overall research design using a mixed-methods research methodology (Creswell, 2013). Study 1 focused on generating a pool of potential items to measure the theorised four dimensions of the ESL construct, with Study 2 then systematically reducing this item pool by excluding those that did not relate well to other items or theorised dimensions, or which were likely to have insufficient variance to allow discrimination between individuals on the construct. Study 3 refined this reduced pool of items further by analysing the factor structure and other psychometric properties of the items. This final study also tested the hypotheses and examined the nomological network of the ESL construct; assessing its relationship with other, related variables including manager support, friendships at work, personality, deviant behaviour, and emotional intelligence.

Study 1: Item Generation

The purpose of this study was to generate an initial pool of items reflective of an employee's social liabilities in their workplace. This included an analysis of the prior literature on social capital at the individual level, including social support (Cohen & Wills, 1985; Hill, Bahniuk, Dobos, & Rouner, 1989; Sarason, Sarason, Shearin, & Pierce, 1987), interpersonal trust and reciprocity (Cummings & Bromiley, 1996; Kouvonen et al., 2008; McAllister, 1995; Sapp et al., 2010; Suzuki et al., 2010), relationship quality and satisfaction (Bridge & Baxter, 1992; Crosby, Evans, & Cowles, 1990; White, Campbell, & Kacmar, 2012), and workplace friendliness (Morrison, 2004; Nielsen, Jex, & Adams, 2000). In addition, aspects of negative interpersonal behaviour at work were examined, including undermining (Duffy et al., 2002; Duffy et al., 2006; Duffy et al., 2012), bullying (Einarsen, 1999; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996), jealousy and envy (Vecchio, 2000), and workplace deviance (Bennett & Robinson, 2000).

Focus groups were also run to generate additional items. The first focus group comprised six highly work experienced and organizationally senior men and women; all of whom were either MBA students or alumni, which lasted just over an hour. They were asked to discuss whether they had been sabotaged in their career, or prevented or distracted in some way from doing their job by people they worked with, and also if they had competed with, or worked against, others at work. Participants were also asked to discuss the situations they had experienced, and what the outcomes of these interactions were. The second focus group sessions comprised 28 professionals from a variety of industries who were broken into five groups clustered on round tables. Participants were asked to discuss and describe their experiences (in a career / workplace context) of both the benefits and negative outcomes of being part of social networks, of accessing their social capital and of being hindered by social liabilities in their working environments. These terms had been explained to them in a short presentation by one of the researchers prior to the group discussions. In both the first and second group sessions, group discussions were taped, transcribed and then thematically analysed for potential items. In some cases, verbatim comments made by participants were used as items because of they were indicative of emergent themes from the conversations. From these sources, an initial pool of 85 items was generated. Both researchers then independently used a manual Q-sort procedure; sorting items into piles with similar meanings. The objective of this was to eliminate doubling up of items (where wording was too similar to others), and to determine if there were sufficient items measuring the four social liability sub-constructs. After reviewing areas of agreement and disagreement in the sorted items, deletions for item redundancies left 54 for use in the second study. The wording of some items was altered slightly to reduce ambiguity.

Study 2: Item Review

A total of 32 participants, including workplace researchers and work experienced employees, were recruited using opportunity sampling. The main selection requirement was that participants had a workplace social network from which they might acquire social capital and or liabilities. Most were permanent full time employees (n=23), with the balance either being part time or on temporary agreements. Ten had their own offices but most (n=16) worked in an open plan office. The balance were either based at clients' workplaces or were mobile. Sixteen worked both on their own and with others (at different times), seven usually worked in a team environment, and the balance tended to work independently of others on their tasks. Participants engaged in an online Q-sort activity where they were asked to sort the 54 items provided into pre-labelled categories: two relating to social capital (emotional support;

friendships at work) and the remaining four relating to the social liability categories. Another category was left blank for those items participants were unable to categorize. Q-sorts, where participants are asked to combine statements into meaningful clusters, are a useful qualitative method to test if statements previously generated represent a construct (Grey, 2014).

In addition, to identify items unlikely to have sufficient variance to differentiate between people, respondents were asked to indicate the extent to which they agreed or disagreed that each item described their own workplace social network (5-point Likert-scale scored 1 'Strongly Disagree' to 5 'Strongly Agree'). Twenty-six of the 32 respondents completed this second task.

For an item to be retained, more than 50% of the respondents needed to agree the item belonged to a particular category. In addition, items were dropped for having insufficient variance to discriminate between respondents if more than 80% disagreed or strongly disagreed that the item described their workplace social network. From these analyses, 42 items retained. Conceptually, participants were clearly able to differentiate between items that pertained to social distraction and negative behaviours (social liability), from those that were more indicative of receiving emotional support and cooperation from others. The cluster of items pertaining to friendships at work was more ambiguous in terms of social liability or capital. Three items clustered into this dimension were descriptive of a workplace social network containing positive relationships, another three items were negative in tone and indicative of friendships at work as undesirable and imposing additional demands on personal resources friendships (i.e., social liabilities). So while friendships at work might be thought to (and indeed do) enhance social capital, in other contexts they may also contribute to social liability. The 42 items that remained were those used in Study 3. While that study focused on identifying items measuring the social liability construct and its components, the items pertaining to supportive relationships in the workplace were retained for convergent and discriminant validity purposes and to test Hypothesis 5.

Study 3: Instrument Refinement

Participants and Procedure

A total of 1000 Australian participants in permanent employment, aged 18 and over were recruited using a Qualtrics survey panel of individuals who had voluntarily agreed to participate in research studies. Participants are compensated for their time, either by cash incentives or redeemable points they can use towards flights, discounted hotel stays, or products. The respondent sample was diverse (see Table 1 for demographic details). Gender was fairly evenly represented among the respondents and most were employed full time. The

average age of the respondents was just under 47. While the standard deviation appears high relative to the mean, an examination of the age distribution shows it approximates a normal distribution bounded with a range from 18 to 77 years. However, as is typical for such variables, years with current employer, in the current role and current career are positively skewed. A diverse range of 695 distinct occupations were stated by respondents.

Participants completed an online questionnaire containing the 42 items retained from the previous two studies. These questions were placed at the beginning of questionnaire, directly after demographic questions and those relating to aspects of their working arrangements (see Table 1), but before items measuring the constructs of personality, emotional intelligence, and personal deviance. Means, standard deviations and Cronbach’s coefficient alpha for each of these measures, together with their intercorrelations, are shown in Table 4. In each case, scale scores were the simple averages of the items.

Table 1: Respondent Characteristics

Sample Characteristic	N=1000
Male	45.0%
Female	55.0%
Full-time employed	64.7%
Part-time employed	35.3%
Usually works with others in a team	40.4%
Usually works independent of others	24.4%
Works sometimes in a team or on own	35.2%
Has own office	16.0%
Shares office with one or two others	11.2%
Works in open-plan office with own workstation	40.2%
Works in open-plan office and hotdesks	9.2%
Works mainly at clients in whatever space given	9.9%
Works mainly at home or on-the-road	9.3%
Other arrangement	4.2%
Age in Years	Mean = 46.84 SD = 12.67
Years tenure with current employer	Mdn = 6.29 range 0.8 - 50
Years in current role	Mdn = 5.17 range 0.8 - 50
Years in current career	Mdn = 12.50 range 0.8 - 56

Other measures

Personal *workplace deviance* was measured using the 24 items Bennett and Robinson (2000) identified as measuring the construct, together with their original response scale ranging from *never* (1) to *daily* (7). Higher scores on the measure indicate more frequent norm violation, and therefore higher personal deviance, in the workplace. The original study also identified a two factor structure for the items, with one factor labelled *Organizational Deviance*; containing personal behaviours harmful to the organization itself, (e.g., “*taken property from work without permission*”), and the other labelled *Interpersonal Deviance*; containing behaviours seen as harmful to other people in the organization (e.g., “*Acted rudely toward someone at work*”) (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). While the present study was unable to exactly replicate the item structure of the original, principal axis factor analysis with oblique rotation found the same two factor structure with the eight interpersonal deviance items loading on one factor (coefficient alpha = .83) and another eight items (half of the original 16) loading on an organizational deviance factor (coefficient alpha = .83). The obtained KMO of .89 is indicative that the sample in the present study was more than adequate for this analysis, and the correlation between the two deviance measures ($r = .52, p < .001$) validates the notion that the two are interrelated rather than independent.

Personality was measured using Rammstedt and John’s (2007) short version of the Big Five Inventory, where respondents are asked to describe themselves using a 5-point Likert ‘Disagree-Agree’ response scale. Negatively phrased items were reverse scored so that higher scores reflect higher Neuroticism (*is relaxed and handles stress well* (R); *gets nervous easily*; $r = .43, p < .001$), Extroversion (*is reserved* (R), *is outgoing and sociable*; $r = .48, p < .001$), and Conscientiousness (*tends to be lazy* (R); *does a thorough job*; $r = .41, p < .001$). However, because we could not fully replicate the original five factor structure for the items, the traits of Openness and Agreeableness were dropped from further analysis.

Emotional Intelligence, was measured using the 31 item concise version of the Genos Emotional Intelligence Inventory (Palmer, Stough, Harmer, & Gignac, 2009). Responses were obtained using the original 5 point response scale ranging from *Almost Never* (1) to *Almost Always* (5) and with 12 negatively phrased items reverse scored so higher scores are indicative of higher emotional intelligence (coefficient alpha = .92). Example items include “*I fail to recognise how my feelings drive my behaviour at work*” (R) and “*I express how I feel at the appropriate time*”.

Because the data for all variables in Study 3 were collected at the same time using the same method, there is potential for the methodological artefact of common method variance to exist. To reduce this possibility we followed the advice of Conway and Lance (2010). As described above, the questionnaire was designed so that our ESL items (the dependent variable) were presented prior to the potential nomological or antecedent variables, thereby reducing the likelihood of social desirability contributing to common-method variance (Kline, Sulsky, & Rever-Moriyama, 2000). In addition, we included multiple reverse-phrased items to reduce response biases due to inattention and response acquiescence (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, & Podsakoff, 2012). We also made use of a Qualtrix feature for online questionnaires that includes random questions requiring participants to make a specified response. This reduces the potential for participants to endorse all items using the same response option. Such procedural steps go some way to obviating common-method concerns. And finally, a Harmon's single factor test for common method variance was performed and found a forced factor containing all the scale items used in Study 3 accounted for 25.1% of the variance; well short of indicating the presence of common method variance bias in these data.

Results

Phase 1: Exploratory Factor Analysis and Item Selection

A principal axis factor analysis was conducted using IMP SPSS Statistics (V22) to analyse the interrelationships between items, to verify that they loaded on factors with other similar items that measured the ESL sub-constructs, and to identify additional items for deletion. A two-step process was used with the first analysis including all 42 items from Study 2, with the aim of determining if the social liability items did indeed load onto the expected four ESL categories and were independent of those seen as measuring friendships and manager support. Because our guiding theory suggests that the four components of the social liability construct are positively related to each other, the direct oblimin method of oblique rotation was used, allowing the factors to correlate. The rotated pattern matrix shows six clear factors explaining a total of 61.94% of the variance (see Table 2).

Factor 1 contains 10 items with a loading above .4. These items correspond closely with those that the Study 2 participants had placed in the Q-sort category labelled Negative Behaviours and so form the social liability construct relating to *negative relationships and behaviours* at work. All corrected item-total correlations were above .6 (range .68 to .87) and coefficient alpha for the scale was .95.

Factor 4 has three items with factor loadings above .4. These relate to the social liability sub-construct of *distrust*. Coefficient alpha was .82 and item-total correlations ranged from .58 to .74.

Factor 5 in Table 2 contains six items with factor loadings above .4; all relate to the notion that others in a workplace social network can serve as distractions from work and make demands on us. These six items measure the ESL sub-construct of *social demands* with coefficient alpha of .84 and item-total correlations ranging from .53 to .72.

The final employee social liability dimension is measured by the six items loading above .4 on Factor 6 (see Table 2). These items represent a *lack of cooperation or reciprocity* from members of one’s workplace social network. People who disagree with these items indicate the presence of people in their networks who do not cooperate, are not helpful, don’t keep each other informed and do not work collectively. These items have been reverse scored to reflect this, so that higher scores indicate low reciprocity and cooperation (and therefore higher social liabilities) for that individual. Coefficient alpha for the six item measure was .90 and the inter-item correlation ranged from .68 to .80, indicating strong internal item consistency.

The two other factors in Table 2 deal more with the friendships and level of managerial support present in an employee’s workplace social network. Factor 2 contains 7 items loading at .4 or above that relate to having supportive friends in the workplace. A coefficient alpha of .89 and an inter-item correlation range from .61 to .78 suggest good internal reliability for this *friendships* measure. Factor 3 contains five items that appear indicative of degree to which an employee has a *supportive manager or supervisor* at work. These five items have an inter-item correlation ranging from .80 to .90 and a coefficient alpha of .95. In contrast to the Q-sort participants in Study 2, it would seem that the larger group of participants in Study 3 are drawing a sharper distinction between supportive friendships and supportive managerial relationships. Both of these variables have been retained for the nomological analyses reported next, and to test Hypothesis 5.

Table 2: Principal Axis factor Analysis with Oblique Rotation Pattern Matrix

With reference to your place of work and the relationships you have with others who work there, please indicate the extent to which you agree or disagree with the statements below.(R = reverse scored)	1	2	3	4	5	6
Some people I work with have insulted me	.918					
Some people I work with have talked down to me	.918					
Some people I work with made me feel incompetent	.902					

Some people I work with have hurt my feelings	.879	
Some people I work with have undermined my efforts to be successful on the job	.804	
Some people I work with criticize the way I handle things on the job in a way that is not helpful	.658	
People at work have spread of gossip and rumours about me	.636	
Some people I work with try to make me look bad in front of others	.506	.238
Some people I work with have not given as much help as they promised	.435	
People I work with succeed by stepping on other people	.422	.338
Some co-workers are not above "bending the facts" to create the impression they want	.388	.291
I have formed strong friendships at work	.838	
I socialise with co-workers outside the workplace	.753	
R I do not feel that anyone I work with is a true friend	.734	
The people I work with are friends as well as co-workers	.710	
I can count on my workmates to really care about me, regardless of what is happening	.450	-.274
I can talk freely to others at work about difficulties I am having and know that they will want to listen	.401	-.331
I can count on my workmates to help me feel more relaxed when I am under pressure or tense	.400	-.351
R Things would be a lot easier if people were only friends or only work associates instead of trying to be both	.372	.272
My manager treats me with kindness and consideration	.983	
My managers shows concern for my rights as an employee	.961	
I can trust my supervisor	.856	
In our interactions, my supervisor considers my feelings	.827	
We have a 'we are together' attitude	.619	-.304
People I work with cannot be trusted to do as they say	.564	
People I work with are mostly just looking out for themselves	.550	
I can't be too careful in dealing with the people I work with	.414	
I suspect that people I work with are actively working against me (for example sabotage, withholding information)	.279	.374
My workmates sometimes take up time I would rather spend on my job		-.858
My friends at work often keep me from my job requirements		-.774
I often wish I could get on with my work without having to interact so much with my peers		-.644
I am often distracted by others at work		-.534
Some of the people I work with expect me to prioritize our friendship relationship over my work commitments		-.517

Some of the people I work with are very needy, demanding a great deal of my attention			-0.481
It requires extra effort to maintain both the friendship side and the work side of my relationships in this organization			-0.365
R Most people I work with cooperate with each other			.757
R Most of the time, people I work with try to be helpful			.706
R Most people I work with can be trusted		.320	.585
R My co-workers and I assist each other in accomplishing assigned tasks	-0.249		.544
R I am able to work with my co-workers to collectively solve problems			.533
R People keep each other informed about work-related issues in the work unit		-0.364	.432
R My co-workers can be relied upon to keep their promises			.363

Note: For clarity, factor loadings below 2 are not shown.

Phase 2: ESL Measure Validation

While the analyses presented above demonstrate that employee bad behaviour can be measured in four distinct categories corresponding to the theorised ESL dimensions of distrust, social demands, negative interactions and behaviours, and low cooperation, they do not demonstrate that they can be combined into a single measure. Examining the matrix of factor correlations indicated a moderate degree of association between the factors (mean $r = .45$; range $-.58$ to $-.28$), although not always strong and, in the case of social demands, not in the expected direction.

We therefore further tested Hypothesis 1 concerning the dimensionality of the social liability items by estimating a series confirmatory factor analysis models using AMOS (V22). First we tested a 1-factor model that forced all 25 items to load onto a single latent variable. Second, a 4-factor first-order model was tested that forced the items onto each of the four latent variable ESL dimensions as shown in Table 2. This was followed by a further 4-factor CFA first-order model, but with three items on the Negative Relationships subscale, that were found to have high standardised residual covariances, deleted (*Some people I work with try to make me look bad in front of others; Some people I work with have not given as much help as they promised; People I work with succeed by stepping on other people*). Coefficient alpha for this revised scale was .94. Finally, a model was tested which comprised the remaining 22 items in four first-order factors, forced onto a second-order latent variable, representing overall Employee Social Liabilities (ESL). Coefficient alpha for this 22 item Employee Social Liability measure was also .94. Table 3 reports the fit indices for each of these models. For each model, the Chi-square is significant ($p < .001$), although this is to be expected with large samples (Iacobucci, 2010; Byrne, 2013). More informative is the Chi-square adjusted

by its degrees of freedom, which for Models 3 and 4 both fall below the criteria of 3.0 as indicating reasonable fit. The adjusted goodness-of-fit (AGFI) for models 3 and 4 both indicate that these fit better than no model at all. The comparative fit index (CFI) for models 3 and 4 are both above .95, indicating that these are well-fitting models compared to the independence null model, as are the Tucker-Lewis (TLI) indices which are useful for large samples. RMSEA is also below .05 for models 3 and 4, as are the upper end of the RMSEA confidence intervals. In addition, the narrow range of the 90% confidence intervals suggests that both models represent a good degree of precision for RMSEA. So, while the single factor Model 1 clearly has poor fit, and the hypothesised four factor Model 2 mediocre fit, models 3 and 4 both represent a good fit for these data. Furthermore, while the second-order model 4 appears to have slightly poorer fit than the first-order model 3, this slight decrement, as Moore et al. (2012) points out, is to be mathematically expected and therefore does not necessarily have any practical significance. We interpret the second-order CFA model 4 as therefore the best test of hypothesis 1. Thus we have both theoretical rationale and empirical evidence that Employee Social Liability does indeed represent a higher-order construct incorporating four different categories of employee bad behaviour in the domains of distrust, lack of cooperation, increased social demands, and negative relationships at work.

Table 3: Summary fit indices for the CFA Models

CFA Model	χ^2	df	χ^2 / df	RMSEA	Confidence Interval	AGFI	CFI	TLI
Model 1 25 items on 1 factor	6286.31	275	22.86	.148	.145 to .151	.502	.653	.622
Model 2 25 items on 4 factors	1800.12	269	6.69	.075	.072 to .079	.828	.915	.906
Model 3 22 items on 4 factors	509.44	187	2.72	.042	.037 to .046	.939	.979	.974
Model 4 22 items on 4 factors on 1 second-order	525.94	184	2.86	.043	.039 to .047	.935	.978	.972

The ESL nomological network

The examination of scale reliabilities, factor structure and goodness-of-fit statistics alone is insufficient to determine the adequacy of our measurement model for ESL. For the model to be useful, we also need to show discriminant validity from constructs ESL is theoretically different from, as well as convergent validity with similar constructs (Hypotheses 2 to 5). Discriminant validity has, in part, been demonstrated in Table 2, with the four social liability components clearly differentiated from the workplace friendships and managerial support constructs. Extending this analysis, Table 4 shows the correlation matrix of ESL with the other variables of interest.

First, strong negative relationships were found between ESL and both Friendships and Supportive Managers, with those having more friends at work and/or managers who provided support, also likely to have lower levels of ESL in their workplace social networks (lending support to Hypothesis 5). A negative relationship was also found with Emotional Intelligence, suggesting those with lower EI also tend to report higher levels of social liabilities (supporting Hypothesis 3). Emotional intelligence is negatively associated with all four ESL components and positively associated with Friendships and Manager Support, suggesting that those with higher EI are better able to create and maintain positive relationships with co-workers and their managers, while also reducing any liabilities arising from other (perhaps more problematic) workplace relationships.

Table 4: Nomological Analysis Correlations

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13
1 ESL – 25 item	3.09	1.09	.94												
2 Negative Relationships	3.31	1.62	.91	.94											
3 Distrust	3.44	1.45	.81	.63	.82										
4 Social Distractions	3.18	1.19	.78	.59	.55	.84									
5 Cooperation (lack of)	2.53	1.01	.79	.59	.67	.43	.90								
6 Neuroticism	2.62	1.02	.31	.29	.22	.25	.22	-							
7 Extraversion	3.08	1.03	-.15	-.13	-.12	-.15	-.11	-.33	-						
8 Conscientiousness	4.38	0.70	-.12	-.10	-.07	-.14	-.08	-.20	.11	-					
9 Emotional Intelligence	3.68	0.48	-.40	-.34	-.32	-.30	-.37	-.53	.33	.40	.92				
10 Organisational Deviance	2.10	0.97	.29	.26	.21	.28	.17	.14	-.04	-.39	-.29	.83			
11 Interpersonal Deviance	1.68	0.82	.27	.28	.19	.22	.17	.05	.04	-.24	-.24	.52	.83		
12 Friends at work	4.59	1.26	-.53	-.44	-.50	-.26	-.64	-.18	.25	.04	.31	-.11	-.06	.89	
13 Manager Support	4.97	1.47	-.66	-.57	-.57	-.37	-.70	-.17	.10	.05	.30	-.19	-.17	.56	.95

Note: All correlations greater than .10 significant at $p < .01$ (1-tailed). Correlations .07 to .10 are significant at $p < .05$ (1-tailed). $N = 1000$. Coefficient alphas are shown in bold on the diagonal

Consistent with Hypothesis 4, Table 4 shows that ESLs were positively associated with Organisational Deviance and Interpersonal Deviance; higher levels of personal deviance are associated with increased ESL. The relationship is weak however, indicating that, while engaging in deviant behaviour harmful to the organisation and to others at work does attract higher social liabilities, workplace deviance is also conceptually different from ESL (ESL being the perception of others' behaviour towards the self, and deviance being a measure of the respondents' own behaviour). Similarly, the Big 5 personality traits that we were able to measure were in the direction hypothesised, with higher ESL associated both with higher Neuroticism and lower Extraversion (see Table 4). These correlations, while statically significant, were weak, however.

Ordinary Least Squares multiple regression was used to examine the relative explanatory power the nomological variables have with ESL, and to further test Hypotheses 2 to 5. Included in this analysis were the demographic and participant variables; age, gender and the logs of career, role and employer tenure. Overall, the regression model explained 56% of the variance in ESL (adjusted $R^2 = .56$; $F(13,985) = 99.81$; $p < .001$). The standardised beta for Manager Support was the largest in the model and negative in direction ($B = -.44$, $t = -9.59$, $p < .001$), followed by Friendships at Work ($B = -.26$, $t = -8.61$, $p < .001$). These findings are consistent with, and support, Hypothesis 5.

Of the two deviance variables, Interpersonal Deviance ($B = .13$, $t = 5.15$, $p < .001$) has the stronger influence, when compared to Organizational Deviance ($B = .06$, $t = 2.31$, $p < .05$). Both are in the direction predicted by Hypothesis 4, with higher levels of personal deviance associated with an employee also having acquired more social liabilities.

Of the personality variables, only Neuroticism reached statistical significance ($B = .12$, $t = 4.44$, $p < .001$) lending only partial support to Hypothesis 2. And while Emotional Intelligence contributes relatively little to the regression model ($B = -.09$, $t = -2.99$, $p < .01$), the relationship is statistically significant and in the direction predicted by Hypothesis 3.

Of the participant variables that reached statistical significance, the strongest influence was age ($B = -.14$, $t = -5.71$, $p < .001$), followed by the log of tenure with current employer ($B = .08$, $t = 2.69$, $p < .01$) and gender ($B = -.07$, $t = -3.14$, $p < .01$). Younger workers, those who had worked in their firms longer, and female employees tend to also have higher levels of social liabilities.

VIF statistics for the regression model were 2 or below, while tolerance statistics ranged from .46 to .84, with the poorest values found for the three tenure variables rather than the scale measures of interest. Overall, this suggests that collinearity was unlikely to be a problem in this analysis. Furthermore an examination of the histogram for the standardised residual shows a normal distribution, and the P-P plot shows no departure from the expected. Thus the assumptions of regression analyses have been met.

Overall these analyses provide support for the discriminant validity of ESL and the other constructs used in the analysis. In addition, the observed relationships between ESL and the related social capital dimensions of friendships at work and manager support are indicative of some degree of convergent validity. Placing the ESL construct within this preliminary nomological net has also helped to establish its construct validity.

Discussion

The impact negative or distracting others have on individuals in the workplace cannot be underestimated. While a workplace “enemy” may be comparatively rare (Labianca & Brass, 2006) we find that almost all workplace networks contain an element of liability within them. This study goes some way toward both addressing the relative gap in the literature on social capital and liabilities in a workplace context, and also towards empirically assessing whether the various aspects of “bad” behaviour, interactions, or relationships create a common construct.

The purpose of these studies was to identify items which tap into the ESL construct and to provide initial psychometric evidence for the ESL measure. Factor analysis provided support for the 22 item ESL measure and, further, model comparisons indicated that ESL can be represented as a higher order factor with four sub-factors or facets. In addition, the third study also provides evidence of nomological validity.

As Bennett and Robinson (2000) note, validating a construct can never really be complete and no measure can be said to be validated in an absolute sense. In time, and with use in future studies, we hope that evidence will lean toward supporting this new measure. Our results are a first step and do indeed provide support for the construct validity of these scales.

Limitations

One limitation in this research is the cross-sectional research design in study three. One issue inherent in such research designs is that, because of methodological artefacts such as common method variance, the relationships between the variables may be artificially increased. However, within our analysis we tested this, and believe that the impact of CMV would be minimal at best. A future longitudinal research design could confirm this in future.

A second limitation of this study is that, in our efforts to create a scale that would potentially be useful in a wide range of organisations and occupations, we included items and behaviours that can be found across many different contexts. In fact, in our second study, we intentionally eliminated items that the majority of our respondents indicated would be unlikely to occur. Like the workplace deviance scale devised by Bennett and Robinson (2000), the ESL scale would not, perhaps measure ESLs specific to a particular, idiosyncratic context or occupation.

A final limitation is that our data is predominantly self-report. There is considerable evidence that self-reports do, in general, do yield valid data (Bennett & Robinson, 2000; Spector, 1992), and self-report has even been found to provide accurate assessments of bad behaviours specifically (Akers, Massey, Clarke, & Lauer, 1983; Lee, 1993; Ones, Viswesvaran, & Schmidt, 1993). However various critiques of this methodology do exist; mainly related to social desirability biases, i.e., that respondents may try to 'fake good,' and invalidate the results. However in their meta-analysis of integrity measures, Ones et al. (1993) suggests that self-report criteria actually tended to result in higher estimates of validity than external measures (possibly because many deviant behaviours are not noticed by others or caught). They claim that the correlation between actual behaviour and self-reported behaviour is very high, particularly when respondents are assured anonymity (as they were in the current study).

Implications and Conclusion

The main theoretical contribution of this study is the support for ESL as a higher-order construct indicated by each of the four sub-factors: distrust, low cooperation / reciprocity, negative relationships / interactions, and social distraction. We add to previous research on bad behaviour, providing a compact framework within which to consider many of the various forms that this behaviour may take.

Having a valid measure of ESL opens up the possibility of, not only being able to measure this construct, but being able to assess the relationship ESL may have with a variety of organisationally relevant outcomes. Future research should investigate if ESL predicts well-being, engagement, intention to leave the organisation, career commitment and so on. And perhaps even more importantly, could begin to tease out antecedents so that workplaces that structurally or culturally 'encourage' the development of liabilities could be identified. The relatively weak link between personality dimensions and ESL suggests that it is a person's environment and behaviour, rather than personality per se. that influences whether or not they acquire liabilities. The profound impact that negative relationships and experiences at work

can have, suggests that any way the impact of ESLs could be prevented or ameliorated would be of use, both at an individual and departmental / organisational level.

In conclusion, these studies provide initial evidence that negative relational constructs such as distrust, lack of reciprocity, negative interactions and distraction have a common core that we have labelled Employee Social Liabilities. Further we have provided evidence that ESL can be measured and that it is related to one's own bad workplace behaviours, to low emotional intelligence and inversely to having supportive managers and friends. We anticipate that this measure will prove useful to the study of behaviour at work, and will facilitate further empirical research into this important area of enquiry.

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