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**Pandemic fears, family interference with work, and organizational citizenship behavior:
Buffering role of work-related goal congruence**

Abstract

Pandemic fears are nearly inescapable, with likely effects on organizational citizenship behavior. This article considers the potential mediating influence that arises if employees experience family interference in their work, as well as the potential buffering role of work-related goal congruence, in this relationship. Survey data were collected from employees who work in the IT consulting sector in Portugal. The research hypotheses were tested with a bootstrapping approach, based on the Process macro, which enables the simultaneous assessment of mediation and moderation effects. The empirical results show that employees' ruminations about the coronavirus diminish their voluntary work behaviors, because their family-related stress interferes with their work. Such harmful outcomes are less prominent among employees who perceive work-related problems as mutually shared. This study accordingly reveals how organizations can limit the detrimental effects of the COVID-19 pandemic by aligning the work-related goals of their employee bases.

Keywords: pandemic fears; organizational citizenship behavior; family interference with work; work-related goal congruence; conservation of resources theory

Introduction

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, fear has become an omnipresent feature of daily life for most people, adding to the stresses of work and caring for their families (Caligiuri *et al.*, 2020; Hite and McDonald, 2020). Such fear can manifest in various ways; for employees for example, keeping the threat of COVID-19 out of their minds so they can focus on work is difficult, especially because the nature of the crisis indicates there is little that they can do to avoid contamination risks completely, and the virus has had such negative impacts on people around the world (Ahorsu *et al.*, 2020; Snell, 2020). Distracting ruminations about the pandemic likely interfere with employees' work functioning, such that these ruminations may generate exhaustion (Lin *et al.*, 2021), withdrawal behaviors (Chong *et al.*, 2020), diminished work engagement (Liu *et al.*, 2021), or plans to quit the organization (Vaziri *et al.*, 2020). To contribute to research into such implications, we consider another, possibly critical, negative behavioral outcome of the pandemic and the fears it raises: diminished organizational citizenship behaviors (OCB), or the extent to which employees halt work activities that are not formally required by their job descriptions (Özçelik and Uyargil, 2019; Weikamp and Görizt, 2016).

In particular, we focus on *how* and *when* pandemic fears may escalate into a reluctance to engage in OCB. First, ruminations about the coronavirus might steer employees away from work-related voluntarism if those ruminations initiate in the family domain and spill over to the work domain (Ballesteros Leiva *et al.*, 2018; Singh *et al.*, 2018). Such *family interference with work* tends to deplete people's positive work-related energy resources, in which case family obligations can hinder work activities (Bagger *et al.*, 2008; Bordia *et al.*, 2017).¹ Consistent with

¹ Prior research distinguishes family interference with work, which occurs when employees' work functioning is undermined by pressures that originate from the private sphere (Agrawal and Mahajan, 2021; Rajadhyaksha, 2020), from work interference with family, or the extent to which work obligations compromise the quality of private lives

the logic of conservation of resources (COR) theory (Hobfoll, 2001; Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018), when employees suffer from resource-draining life situations, they seek to preserve any remaining resources rather than expend them on formally unnecessary tasks. That is, if they are suffering pandemic fears, employees may decrease their OCB, because their resources already are drained by their experience of family-to-work conflict (De Clercq *et al.*, 2019b; Quinn *et al.*, 2012).

Also in line with COR theory, we propose that individual negative reactions to pandemic fears vary, according to whether employees have access to pertinent relational work-related resources (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000). In particular, employees' work-related *goal congruence*—defined as the extent to which they perceive work problems as mutually shared with colleagues and hold similar views about where the organization should be heading (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998)—may protect against the depletion of their positive work energy, as occurs when ruminations about the coronavirus spill over into the work realm (Chong *et al.*, 2020; Hite and McDonald, 2020). This relational resource similarly should diminish the probability that employees' experience of family interference with work translates into a reluctance to perform extra-role work activities. Work-related goal congruence provides valuable peer support, which employees can leverage to deal with their resource-draining pandemic fears and the negative effects of family stress on their work functioning. Formally, when employees share a common mindset, the negative relationship of their suffering from pandemic fears and their OCB, through their experience of family interference with work, should be subdued.

In testing these predictions, we seek to make several contributions to extant research. First, we pinpoint how the hardships associated with the COVID-19 pandemic can affect work

(Islam *et al.*, 2020; Rajadhyaksha, 2020). Our theoretical focus on the former type of interference speaks to our interest in how employees' experience of a pandemic crisis in their personal lives could spill over into the work domain and generate hardships in the course of doing their jobs.

performance. Specifically, pandemic fears turn employees away from energy-consuming, extra-role work activities, linked to their experience of resource-draining family-to-work conflict (Bordia *et al.*, 2017). Prior research on terrorism similarly reveals that employees who are very afraid for their lives are less likely to exhibit productive work behaviors, because they feel anxious about their jobs (Bader and Berg, 2014; De Clercq *et al.*, 2017), have a hard time sleeping (Toker *et al.*, 2015), or suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder (Mushtaq and Rehman, 2016). By detailing the draining influence of family-related stress on their work, as a critical conduit through which pandemic fears steer them away from voluntary OCB (Carlson *et al.*, 2019; Wang *et al.*, 2017), we pinpoint detailed harms associated with family interference. Employees already are upset about the dangers invoked by the pandemic, but a propensity to do only what is strictly required, in response to those fears, could damage their careers, if organizational leaders judge their unwillingness to engage in OCB negatively, thereby creating even more stress (Russo *et al.*, 2014).

Second, we respond to calls to apply contingency approaches to the study of employees' reactions to life-threatening events (Chong *et al.*, 2020; Haq *et al.*, 2019; Junaid and Haar, 2015; Lin *et al.*, 2021), by providing expanded understanding of how the chances of diminished OCB, in response to ruminations about a pandemic, may be curtailed if employees share work-related goals with their peers (Santos *et al.*, 2012). Such relational resources help employees deal with experienced hardships, so they should be less likely to develop negative responses to pandemic fears (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000). Prior studies note other mitigating effects, such as religiousness (De Clercq *et al.*, 2017) or passion for work (Haq *et al.*, 2019), that can protect employees against the hardships of terrorism; they also cite beneficial roles of organizational adaptive practices (Lin *et al.*, 2021) and telework task support (Chong *et al.*, 2020) in response to

a pandemic crisis specifically. To build on such insights, we theorize that the sense that work-related challenges are mutually shared can *buffer* the mediating effect by which family interference with work connects pandemic fears to lower work-related voluntarism. We also complement prior research that cites the beneficial roles of shared work-related goals for employees with excessive workloads (Chan and Lam, 2011) or for leveraging positive work features such as group cohesiveness (Chen *et al.*, 2005). Taken together, these considerations help reveal a way that organizations might shield themselves against the risk of diminished voluntarism in their ranks, even amidst a crisis, by ensuring that their employees share common views with respect to work.

Theoretical background and hypotheses

COR theory

The arguments for the proposed mediating role of family interference with work and moderating role of work-related goal congruence are anchored in COR theory (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018).² This theory predicts that employees' work-related thoughts and actions are largely informed by their desire to protect their existing resource reservoirs and avoid additional resource losses when they face resource-depleting conditions, whether these conditions originate from inside or outside the workplace (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000). This logic in turn sets the stage for two key principles. First, the threat of resource drainage, instigated by challenging experiences, directs employees toward behaviors that enable them to cope with hardships (De Clercq *et al.*, 2019a). Second, certain organizational factors can mitigate this process, especially

² Even if alternative theories, such as the job demands–resources model (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007) or attribution theory (Martinko *et al.*, 2006), could be used to explain certain elements of the proposed conceptual framework (e.g., family interference with work may be perceived as a demanding job condition, to which employees respond by attributing the condition to the dysfunctional ways in which their organization operates), we draw from COR theory because it provides a comprehensive framework that is relevant for each of the proposed relationships.

those that render it less likely that the experienced hardships actually undermine the quality of employees' organizational functioning (Garcia *et al.*, 2017).

The conceptualization of resources is relatively broad in COR theory, such that they include any “objects, personal characteristics, conditions, or energies that are valued in their own right, or that are valued because they act as conduits to the achievement or protection of valued resources” (Hobfoll, 2001: p. 339). Two important, related resources also have especially great value for employees (Hobfoll, 2001): their stamina and time for work, which together reflect the extent to which employees can devote significant energy to work duties. Ruminations about a pandemic crisis are likely threats to employees' work-related energy that spur their desire to save or *conserve* their residual energy when choosing where to focus their work efforts (Chong *et al.*, 2020). In their comprehensive review of COR theory, Hobfoll and colleagues (2018: p. 104) similarly indicate that employees exposed to resource-depleting circumstances tend to “enter a defensive mode to preserve the self.” In line with the first COR principle, we accordingly postulate that employees' experience of family interference with work and reluctance to undertake voluntary work activities are logical responses to their pandemic fears, conveying their desire to protect their residual resource bases (i.e., work-related energy) (Quinn *et al.*, 2012). These responses function as coping tactics that allow them to express their concerns about the negative influence that an excruciating health crisis is having on their work functioning (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000; Liu *et al.*, 2021).

Consistent with the second COR principle, the likelihood that employees who suffer from pandemic fears rely on these coping tactics should be lower when they can draw from valuable work-related resources that make their self-protective responses appear less necessary (De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia, 2020; Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). In particular, we propose that if

employees share similar work goals with their organizational peers (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998), it may decrease the extent to which the pandemic-related challenges that they experience in the private sphere negatively interfere with their capability to perform work tasks. In turn, this relational resource should diminish the probability that their depleted work-related energy, due to negative spillovers from the family domain, escalates into lower voluntary work efforts (Quinn *et al.*, 2012). In summary, their sense of being on the same page with others, in terms of where the organization should be heading, instills employees with positive energy, which they can leverage to cope with resource-draining pandemic fears and family interference with work (Chan and Lam, 2011; Singh *et al.*, 2018). When they experience work-related goal congruence, the translation of pandemic fears into tarnished voluntarism at work, through the influence of family-related stress on their work, is subdued.

The proposed conceptual model is summarized in Figure 1. The experience of pandemic fears spurs a sense of family interference with work, which curtails OCB. That is, the sense that their work quality is being compromised by family demands is a mediator, and the process is buffered by work-related goal congruence, such that the escalation of pandemic fears into diminished OCB, through family interference with work, becomes less likely when employees share a common goal set.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

Hypotheses

Mediating role of family interference with work

Extant research indicates that the hardships that employees experience in one domain, such as their private lives, can spill over and adversely affect their experiences in another domain, such as work (Anand *et al.*, 2015; Witt and Carlson, 2006). Prior applications of COR

theory to the specific case of terrorism threats show, for example, that employees' fear of terror spurs job burnout (Toker *et al.*, 2015) and diminishes job performance (De Clercq *et al.*, 2017). We similarly expect a positive relationship between employees' pandemic fears and their experience of family interference with work. When employees cannot get the risk of the coronavirus out of their minds, they may find it so challenging to pay sufficient attention to their work tasks (Chong *et al.*, 2020; Hite and McDonald, 2020) that the associated frustrations create a sense that their family lives are compromising the quality of their work functioning (Mansour and Tremblay, 2018). That is, when they feel upset about the hardships that a pandemic evokes in their personal lives, they fear for their ability to meet work responsibilities (Liu *et al.*, 2021), to which they respond with beliefs about the negative inference of family with work. They experience a significant drainage in their positive work energy reservoirs and seek to cope with this negative experience by relating it to the hardships that they encounter in their private lives (Anand *et al.*, 2015). Conversely, if they have a more relaxed posture toward the pandemic, and do not let their thoughts be overwhelmed by it, employees should experience more positive feelings with respect to the family–work interface, because they may be better able to combine their family demands with work responsibilities successfully (Swaminathan and Mishra, 2020). To the extent that employees are able to ban negative thoughts about the coronavirus from their minds, they likely regard their work situation in more positive terms and experience less family-related hardships in the course of their work.

Hypothesis 1: There is a positive relationship between employees' pandemic fears and their experience of family interference with work.

We in turn theorize a negative relationship between employees' experience of family interference with work and their OCB, as informed by both ability and motivation arguments. When employees are convinced that their work situation is compromised by family demands,

they may feel concerned about their capability to fulfill their regular job duties (Netemeyer *et al.*, 2005; Nohe *et al.*, 2014). According to COR theory, these concerns diminish the probability that they will allocate energy resources to extra-role activities, which represent an expansion of those work duties (De Clercq *et al.*, 2019b). That is, if it already is challenging to meet formal, explicit job requirements due to pressing family demands, employees likely want to conserve their existing resource bases and focus solely on those requirements, leaving less room for discretionary work behaviors that require substantial energy (Carlson *et al.*, 2019). Employees who suffer from family interference with work simply do not possess that level of energy (Quinn *et al.*, 2012; Wang *et al.*, 2017). In contrast, if family stress does not spill over into their work domain, employees should be more confident that they can fulfill their job duties, so voluntary work activities are unlikely to seem like distractions they want to avoid (Choi *et al.*, 2018). Devoting resources to OCBs that help their organization lies within their reach.

In addition to this ability-based argument, there might also be motivational elements to the way in which family interference with work curtails OCB. As previous studies reveal, employees feel less excitement about dedicating personal energy to their organization's success when they are convinced that the organization inflicts unreasonable pressures on them, in light of other demands in their lives (Anand *et al.*, 2015; Singh *et al.*, 2018). From this perspective, family-to-work conflict may be interpreted by employees as a signal that organizational decision makers are not concerned about their professional well-being, so they come to believe that their organization is not *worthy* of their extra work efforts, beyond their formal job duties (De Clercq *et al.*, 2019b). That is, their tarnished work motivation, due to the negative interference of family demands with their jobs, compromises employees' motivation to help their employer with efforts that go beyond the call of duty (Mercado and Dilchert, 2017). In contrast, if employees feel that

they can successfully balance family with work demands, they likely perceive more organizational consideration for their professional functioning, so their willingness to stretch themselves with voluntary work behaviors should be higher (Carlson *et al.*, 2008). We accordingly hypothesize:

Hypothesis 2: There is a negative relationship between employees' experience of family interference with work and their organizational citizenship behavior.

The combination of these arguments suggests a mediating effect of family interference with work. This effect extends Hypotheses 1–2 by pinpointing the critical role of employees' beliefs that their work functioning is hampered by family obligations as a critical conduit *through* which their pandemic fears escalate into diminished OCB. The translation of their pandemic fears into diminished work voluntarism can be explained by employees' sense that their work functioning is undermined by hardships in the private sphere (Anand *et al.*, 2015; Bordia *et al.*, 2017). If they continuously worry about the coronavirus, employees likely avoid dedicated efforts that otherwise could add to organizational effectiveness, *because* they already cannot keep their personal worries from compromising the quality of their work functioning. Extant research has demonstrated similar mediating roles of family-to-work conflict in linking stress factors, such as Internet addiction among employees' children (Venkatesh *et al.*, 2019) or limited family support from supervisors (Greenhaus *et al.*, 2012), with negative work outcomes. We add to this research line by proposing:

Hypothesis 3: Employees' experience of family interference with work mediates the relationship between their pandemic fears and their organizational citizenship behavior.

Moderating role of work-related goal congruence

We also hypothesize a moderating effect of employees' work-related goal congruence on the relationships between their pandemic fears and experienced family interference with work

(Hypothesis 1) and between such interference and their OCB (Hypothesis 2). According to the tenets of COR theory, the resource-draining effect of adverse life or work experiences is mitigated to the extent that employees have access to valuable relational resources that compensate for resource losses (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000). Similarly, when colleagues share congruent goals, they likely can better protect themselves against the hardships that arise from ruminating on the pandemic, as well as the subsequent damage to their work quality due to pressing family demands.

When they sense work-related goal congruence, employees feel free to speak with colleagues about their work challenges, including those due to ruminating about the coronavirus (Weber and Avey, 2019). That is, if employees share compatible work-related goals, they should be more forthcoming and reach out to likeminded colleagues, asking for advice on how to keep their family-related hardships, caused by the coronavirus, from negatively affecting their work (Nahapiet and Ghoshal, 1998; Swaminathan and Mishra, 2020). In turn, perceptions of work-related goal congruence may make employees more *receptive* to peer advice for dealing with pandemic fears, without worrying about the risk of exploitation or opportunism (Chan and Lam, 2011; Tsai and Ghosal, 1998). Through such interactions, employees increase their ability to perform their work tasks, despite the family-related hardships they experience due to the pandemic. Deeper communication sparked by a shared goal set (De Clercq *et al.*, 2013) also can increase employees' sense that they are not the only ones suffering. Therefore, their corresponding sense of group solidarity (Chen *et al.*, 2005) can generate positive work-related energy that may diminish the probability that resource-draining pandemic fears enhance perceptions of family interference with work (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000).

Hypothesis 4: The positive relationship between employees' pandemic fears and their experience of family interference with work is moderated by their work-related goal

congruence, such that this relationship is weaker at higher levels of work-related goal congruence.

Similarly, the risk that employees' experience of family interference with work translates into diminished OCB should be mitigated by shared work goals. According to COR theory, the resource-depleting effect of adverse work situations is subdued when employees have access to supportive peer relationships (Hobfoll, 2001). When employees share a common work-related goal set with colleagues, it increases the chances that they receive valuable insights from likeminded colleagues regarding how they can voluntarily support the organizational collective, despite experiencing family interference with work (Bouckenoghe and Menguç, 2018). The common goals they share enhance their ability to combine in-role with extra-role work activities, even in the presence of family-to-work conflict (Rich *et al.*, 2010). Moreover, the sense that they are on the same page, with respect to where the organization should be heading, might make employees more motivated to *help* their colleagues through their own work activities that go beyond the call of duty (Chen *et al.*, 2005; Zoghbi-Manrique, 2008). In contrast, employees who experience low levels of work-related goal congruence with colleagues might be more likely to use the challenge of resource-draining family interference with work as an excuse to stay away from OCB (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000; Rich *et al.*, 2010). These employees feel more isolated from their peers (De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia, 2017) and prefer not to "waste" their valuable time and resources on activities beyond their formal job duties, if they already are stressed by how their family-related pressures interfere with their required work tasks.

Hypothesis 5: The negative relationship between employees' experience of family interference with work and their organizational citizenship behavior is moderated by their work-related goal congruence, such that this relationship is weaker at higher levels of work-related goal congruence.

Finally, the integration of the preceding arguments points to a moderated mediation dynamic (Preacher *et al.*, 2007). Work-related goal congruence serves as an important

contingency factor of the *indirect* relationship between employees' pandemic fears and OCB, through family interference with work. This moderated mediation effect implies that for employees who enjoy compatible work-related goals with peers, the spillover of stress from family to work, as a factor that underpins the escalation of pandemic fears into diminished work-related voluntarism, is weaker (Chan and Lam, 2011). This relational resource provides critical protection against the hardships that arise with ruminations about the coronavirus (Ahorsu *et al.*, 2020; Hite and McDonald, 2020), which enables employees to maintain a certain level of voluntary work effort, because of their enhanced ability to prevent family hardships from interfering with their work (Choi *et al.*, 2018; Wang *et al.*, 2017). Conversely, when employees cannot draw from a common mindset with organizational peers, family interference with work represents a highly salient factor for explaining why dwelling on the threat of the coronavirus diminishes their voluntary work activities.

Hypothesis 6: The indirect relationship between employees' pandemic fears and organizational citizenship behavior, through their experience of family interference with work, is moderated by work-related goal congruence, such that this indirect relationship is weaker at higher levels of work-related goal congruence.

Research method

Sample and data collection

To test the research hypotheses, we collected survey data from an IT consulting organization that operates in Portugal. This organization sells a variety of professional services, with a particular focus on business information systems. The survey was administered in June 2020, when the COVID-19 pandemic crisis was intense in Portugal, marked by a 29% national increase in the number of confirmed new cases and a 10% increase in the death toll, relative to the previous month (Direção-Geral da Saúde, 2020). On March 18, strict lockdown measures had been enforced, forcing all non-essential businesses to operate remotely, with employees working

from home. Although these restrictions started to lift gradually as of June 1 (Conselho de Ministros, 2020), most people in non-retail businesses, such as IT consulting, continued to work from home, concerned by ongoing infections and warnings of a “second wave” of the pandemic. Reflecting its Latin culture, people in Portugal tend to be strongly occupied by family-related issues, such that being confined at home and receiving constant flows of news about the life-threatening virus likely had substantial negative effects on employees’ work functioning (Oliveira and Fernandes, 2020).

We applied a translation–back-translation process to develop a survey for this population (Brislin, 1986). The original English version was translated into Portuguese by a bilingual translator, which was then back-translated into English by a different bilingual translator. After some small discrepancies were fixed, the final survey was administered in Portuguese. The online administration relied on an institutional license for Microsoft Forms software, held by the institution of one of the authors; employees of the organization were highly familiar with this survey tool and found it easy to use. The tool also complies with ethical standards with respect to confidential data collection and storage. Several additional precautions were taken to protect the rights of the participants. In the invitation statement that accompanied the survey, the text clearly stated that participants could rely on complete confidentiality, because the researchers’ interest was in observing general patterns in the aggregate data, so no research reports or output would feature any individual-level data. The invitation statement also emphasized that there were no correct or incorrect responses, that the answers to specific questions should vary across respondents, and that it was very important for the validity of the results that they answer the questions as honestly as possible. These specifications reduce concerns about acquiescence or social desirability bias (Spector, 2006).

After obtaining research approval from the organization's top management, we randomly selected 200 people from an employee list. Each person was fully employed by the organization at the time of data collection, and most of them worked from home, either partially or completely. Of the 200 administered surveys, we received 124 completed surveys, for a response rate of 62%. Among the participants, 44% were women, 22% had worked for their organization for more than five years, and 65% had at least some management responsibilities. A comparison of early and late respondents indicated no significant differences in the values of the focal constructs, which mitigates concerns about non-response bias (Armstrong and Overton, 1977; Rao and Pennington, 2013).

Measures

The measures of the four focal constructs applied seven-point Likert anchors that ranged from 1 ("strongly disagree") to 7 ("strongly agree"). An overview of the measurement items— together with the factor loadings and t-values obtained from a confirmatory factor analysis, as reported in the Results section—is provided in Table 1.

[Insert Table 1 about here]

Perceived pandemic fears. To measure employees' ruminations about the coronavirus, we adapted an established 13-item scale of fear of terror (Haq *et al.*, 2019; Sinclair and LoCicero, 2007) to the context of the COVID-19 pandemic. Two example items were "I have difficulty keeping the threat of COVID19 out of my mind" and "I worry that COVID19 will only get worse as time passes" (Cronbach's alpha = .94).

Family interference with work. To assess the extent to which employees believed that their work functioning was compromised by family demands, we relied on a five-item scale of family-to-work conflict (De Clercq *et al.*, 2019b; Netemeyer *et al.*, 1996). For example, the

respondents indicated whether “Family-related strain interferes with my ability to perform job-related duties” and “The demands of my family interfere with work-related activities” (Cronbach’s alpha = .91).

Organizational citizenship behavior. To assess the extent to which employees undertook voluntary work efforts, we applied a four-item scale of OCB (De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia, 2021; De Cremer *et al.*, 2009). Two example items were “I undertake voluntary action to protect the organization from potential problems” and “If necessary, I am prepared to work overtime” (Cronbach’s alpha = .89). Our reliance on self-ratings is consistent with prior research (e.g., Testa *et al.*, 2020; Velasquez *et al.*, 2020) and aligns with the argument that other raters, such as peers or supervisors, might not possess detailed knowledge about the actual efforts that employees invest in OCB, because some behaviors are visible to or target only certain members of the organization (Chan, 2009). Previous meta-analytic studies also find close correspondence between self- and other-rated assessments of voluntary work behaviors (Carpenter *et al.*, 2014).

Work-related goal congruence. To measure the degree to which employees perceived that they share work-related goals with colleagues, we applied a four-item scale of goal congruence (De Clercq *et al.*, 2013; De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia, 2017). The respondents indicated, for example, whether “My colleagues and I perceive our work-related problems as mutual problems” and “My colleagues and I share a similar vision regarding the organization's future” (Cronbach’s alpha = .87).

Control variables. The statistical analyses included three demographic characteristics: gender (1 = female), organizational tenure (1 = 0–5 years, 2 = 6–10 years, 3 = 11–15 years, 4 = 16–20 years, 5 = more than 20 years), and job level (1 = no management responsibilities, 2 = single-team management responsibilities, 3 = multi-team management responsibilities, 4 =

department or division management responsibilities). Female employees tend to undertake more voluntary work activities (Belansky and Boggiano, 1994), and employees who have worked in their organization for longer or in higher positions may be more knowledgeable about how they can contribute effectively to organizational well-being with their voluntary efforts (Ng and Feldman, 2013).

Statistical technique

We tested the hypotheses with the Process macro, developed for SPSS (Hayes *et al.*, 2017). In addition to estimating individual paths, this approach offers an encompassing assessment of mediation and moderated mediation effects; increasing numbers of studies that propose moderated mediation models thus rely on this procedure (e.g., Priesemuth and Taylor, 2016; Tresi and Michelič, 2018). The Process macro approach is superior to its traditional Sobel (1982) counterpart, because it works in scenarios in which the estimated indirect and conditionally indirect effects are skewed and do not follow the normal distribution. It is based on a bootstrapping procedure (MacKinnon *et al.*, 2004).

To assess the presence of mediation, we estimated the indirect relationship between pandemic fears and OCB through family interference with work, along with the corresponding confidence interval (CI), with Model 4 in the Process macro. With this first step, we also assessed the signs and significance of the constitutive direct paths between pandemic fears and family interference with work and between family interference with work and OCB. Next, to check for the presence of moderated mediation, we calculated the CIs for the conditional indirect effects of pandemic fears at different values of work-related goal congruence. As explicated in the Process macro, we thus determine the effect at three levels of the moderator: one standard deviation (SD) below its mean, equal to its mean, and one SD above its mean. Consistent with

our proposed theoretical framework, the macro estimated the moderating effect of work-related goal congruence on the relationships of pandemic fears and family interference with work *and* of family interference with work and OCB (Model 58 in the Process macro). This second step also reveals the moderating effect of work-related goal congruence on the individual paths.

Results

Preliminary analysis

A preliminary analysis of the data indicated no missing values, no outliers according to the Mahalanobis distance, data that followed a normal distribution, and no multicollinearity issues, because the highest bivariate correlation (.63) was much lower than .85 (Islam *et al.*, 2021a, 2021b; Tabachnick and Fidell, 2007). We also assessed the validity of the study's focal constructs by performing a confirmatory factor analysis on a four-factor measurement model (Hair *et al.*, 2010). The fit of the model ($\chi^2(251) = 774.15$, confirmatory fit index = .85, incremental fit index = .86, root mean squared error of approximation = .02) was acceptable (Hu and Bentler, 1999) and in line with previous research on pandemic threats in the relatively unexplored country of Portugal (De Clercq and Pereira, 2021a). As reported in Table 1, the convergent validity of the constructs was evident in the strongly significant factor loadings of each of the measurement items on their associated factors ($p < .001$; Table 1; Gerbing and Anderson, 1988) and in the average variance extracted (AVE) values, which exceeded the benchmark of .50 (Bagozzi and Yi, 1988)—except pandemic fears, for which the value (.48) was only slightly lower than this benchmark.³ We also found evidence of the presence of discriminant validity, because each of the AVE values was greater than the squared correlations between the corresponding construct pairs (Fornell and Larcker, 1981). Furthermore, the fit of

³ In novel research settings, AVE values below .50 but above .40 are acceptable and not uncommon (e.g., De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia, 2020; De Clercq *et al.*, 2021; Kashif *et al.*, 2017).

six models that included unconstrained construct pairs (correlations between constructs could vary freely) was significantly better than the fit of the corresponding, constrained models ($\Delta\chi^2_{(1)} > 3.84, p < .05$; Anderson and Gerbing, 1988; Hair *et al.*, 2010).

Because the focal constructs were all captured with the same survey instrument, we checked for common method bias, with two statistical tests. First, we applied Harman's one-factor test (Huang *et al.*, 2020; Islam *et al.*, 2021a, 2021b), based on an exploratory factor analysis, to assess whether a single factor accounted for the majority of the total variance in the data. The first extracted factor represented only 37% of the total data variance, which mitigated concerns about common method bias. Second, we compared the fit of the aforementioned four-factor measurement model with that of a one-factor model in which each of the items loaded on one and the same factor. The first model generated a fit that was significantly better than the fit of the second model ($\chi^2(6) = 475.95, p < .001$), which further alleviated concerns about common method bias (Hair *et al.*, 2010). Finally, from a theoretical angle, the risk of such bias tends to be significantly lower when testing conceptual models that include one or more moderating effects, because participants cannot easily guess the nature of the hypothesized relationships that constitute these models or adjust their assessments according to their beliefs about what constitute "reasonable" responses (Simons and Peterson, 2000).

Main analysis

Table 2 contains the zero-order correlations and descriptive statistics, and Table 3 reports the mediation results obtained from the Process macro. Pandemic fears enhanced family interference with work ($\beta = .524, p < .001$, Hypothesis 1), which diminished OCB ($\beta = -.356, p < .001$, Hypothesis 2). The test for mediation revealed an effect size of $-.187$ for the indirect

relationship between pandemic fears and OCB, through family interference with work. Its CI does not include 0 [-.342, -.028], which affirmed the presence of mediation (Hypothesis 3).

[Insert Tables 2 and 3 about here]

The results in Table 4 indicate a negative, significant effect of the pandemic fears \times work-related goal congruence interaction term ($\beta = -.160, p < .01$, Hypothesis 4) for predicting family interference with work, as well as a positive, significant effect of the family interference with work \times work-related goal congruence interaction term ($\beta = .166, p < .001$, Hypothesis 5) for predicting OCB. These signs signal mitigating effects in both relationships. In particular, according to the Process macro results, the relationship between pandemic fears and family interference with work was weaker at higher levels of work-related goal congruence (.718 at one SD below the mean, .498 at the mean, .278 at one SD above). Similarly, we found diminishing effect sizes for the relationship between family interference with work and OCB as the level of work-related goal congruence increased (-.558 at one SD below, -.330 at the mean, -.102 at one SD above).

[Insert Table 4 about here].

To formally evaluate the presence of moderated mediation, we compared the strength of the conditional indirect relationship between pandemic fears and OCB through family interference with work at different levels of work-related goal congruence. The findings in Table 4 reveal diminishing effect sizes at increasing levels of the moderator: from -.401 at one SD below the mean, to -.164 at the mean, to -.028 at one SD above the mean. Notably, the CIs did not include zero at the two lowest levels of the moderator ([-.625; -.062] and [-.271; -.034], respectively), but the CI did include zero at its high level ([-.107; .024]). These results affirmed that work-related goal congruence mitigated the negative indirect relationship between pandemic

fears and OCB through family interference with work, in support of Hypothesis 6 and our overall framework.

Post hoc analysis

Considering the relatively small sample size in this study, we undertook a power analysis with the G*Power software (Faul *et al.*, 2007). In particular, we assessed whether it was appropriate to run statistical analyses with a sample of 124 employees. To obtain a standard statistical power level of .90 for a model that includes five predictors—gender, organizational tenure, job level, pandemic fears, and work-related goal congruence in the left-side path of the mediation model reported in Table 3, for example—in combination with an effect size of Cohen’s $f^2 = .894$ (which corresponds with the obtained R^2 value of .472 in that model), the required sample size is 25. This study’s sample size of 124 far exceeds that threshold, as well as the similar required sample sizes for the right-side path in the mediation model in Table 3 (26), the left-side path in the moderated mediation model in Table 4 (24), and the right-side path in the moderated mediation in Table 4 (24). Therefore, the sample is large enough to support meaningful predictions (De Clercq, 2021; Lattin *et al.*, 2003). Finally, smaller sample sizes have the advantage of enabling more *conservative* tests of research hypotheses, particularly for theoretical frameworks that entail moderating effects (Bouckennooghe *et al.*, 2014). If statistical models generate significant findings for the predicted relationships, despite a smaller sample size, they provide additional evidence for the validity of the frameworks (Hair *et al.*, 2010).

Discussion

Theoretical implications

This study is timely, in light of the significant hardships that the COVID-19 pandemic is imposing on organizations and their members. But beyond the immediate crisis, it also

contributes to extant research by explicating the risk that stress, such as that created by employees' pandemic fears, can constrain discretionary work behaviors, such as OCB, as well as pertinent factors that influence these effects. Researchers have acknowledged that ruminations about COVID-19 can elicit negative work outcomes (Hite and McDonald, 2020; Liu *et al.*, 2021; Snell, 2020; Swaminathan and Mishra, 2020) but not yet conducted empirical research into how and why persistent worries about the global virus may translate into lower OCB, depending on organizational circumstances. Therefore, we have leveraged COR theory (Hobfoll and Shirom, 2000) to theorize that (1) the propensity to halt voluntary work activities, in response to a sense of fear about a life-threatening virus, may arise because employees suffer from family-to-work conflict, and (2) their work-related goal congruence contains this negative dynamic. The empirical results affirm these conceptual predictions.

A first theoretical implication that arises from this study is the valuable insight that suffering from persistent negative thoughts about a pandemic can lead to work-related complacency, in the form of a reluctance to take on tasks that would extend formal job duties. Following the logic of COR theory, employees react to this resource-draining personal situation by seeking to conserve their existing reservoirs of energy resources (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018). This reaction may seem highly justified from the viewpoint of employees, because their ability to allocate personal energy to extra-role work activities has been strongly compromised (De Clercq *et al.*, 2019b; Quinn *et al.*, 2012). Moreover, their diminished OCB may serve as means to vent their frustrations about an employer who seemingly is not concerned about how the pandemic crisis has generated significant challenges for them at the family–work interface (Hite and McDonald, 2020). What makes this finding interesting from a theoretical angle is that it pinpoints the possibility of a downward spiral that employees may not realize but are *complicit*

in. Employees arguably could benefit from being a good corporate citizen in times of crisis, allowing them to leave a good impression on organizational leaders (Jain *et al.*, 2011) and enjoy a sense of personal accomplishment by making a positive difference during difficult times (Lemoine *et al.*, 2015). But as we reveal, their pandemic fears turn them into “sluggards” who stay away from voluntary work behaviors, guided by the negative spillover of family stress into their work domain. Even if these “lazy” responses are not malicious, they could undermine employees’ work stature, which then might evoke even more hardships in their professional and personal lives (Podsakoff *et al.*, 2009; Russo *et al.*, 2014).

A second important theoretical implication is that this negative spiral can be *disrupted* by work-related goal congruence. As we predicted, family interference with work functions is a *less* potent channel through which resource-draining pandemic fears escalate into diminished OCB among employees who enjoy compatible work-related goals with their colleagues (Chen *et al.*, 2015). According to COR theory, the depleting effect of unfavorable situations is subdued to the extent that employees can draw from valuable resources that help them cope with experienced hardships (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018), and in this sense, we show that the probability that employees suffer from negative spillovers of family stress into the work domain, and thus limit their dedicated, voluntary work activities, is lower if they share a common mindset with other organizational members (Chan and Lam, 2011). By willingly talking about pertinent challenges with like-minded colleagues who have similar views about the organization’s future prospects, employees limit the escalation of their pandemic fears into negative work-related behaviors. A common goal set provides valuable peer support and insights (Bouckenooghe and Menguç, 2018; Weber and Avey, 2019), so even if employees cannot help but ruminate on their concerns, they are more likely to share those concerns, rather than allow them to manifest in negative

behaviors. Then pandemic fears seem less intrusive, giving them the ability to keep their family-related hardships from negatively affecting their work. Ultimately, they can commit to enhancing their organization's success by adopting extra-role work behaviors.

In summary, this study provides deeper understanding of *why* and *how* organizations can maintain a certain level of voluntarism within their ranks, even in the face of a true global crisis. This contribution to research into the organizational impacts of COVID-19 details (1) how work-related resource depletion due to pressing family demands serves as a conduit through which a prevalent source of personal stress (pandemic fears) relates to diminished OCB, as well as (2) how sharing work-related goals mitigates this process. Notably, the latter finding complements prior investigations of the *direct* beneficial effects of work-related goal congruence on positive employee outcomes, such as psychological well-being (Santos *et al.*, 2012), creativity (Bouckenooghe and Menguç, 2018), or job performance (Bouckenooghe *et al.*, 2015). We show uniquely how the detrimental effect of family interference with work, in response to pandemic fears, can be contained by work relationships marked by a common goal set. In revealing this buffering role of work-related goal congruence, in combination with the harmful effect of family interference with work on OCB, we provide management scholars with novel insights into how organizational decision makers can contain the risk that one source of personal hardship (pandemic fears) begets another (negative repercussions when acting as an organizational laggard). They can stop the counterproductive process through which ruminations about a global health crisis escalate into diminished voluntarism, if they are able to direct their employee bases toward a common goal set with respect to work (De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia, 2017).

Limitations and future research

This research entails some limitations, which point the way to additional research avenues. First, with our cross-sectional design, we cannot completely rule out the presence of reverse causality. If employees experience positive energy because they believe their voluntary work behaviors offer positive contributions to their company, they might generate more optimistic perceptions about their work functioning, which may help them contain their pandemic fears. The direction of the tested relationships reflects the well-established COR framework—in which adverse life situations generate resource-draining work experiences, which in turn prompt the desire to conserve energy when deciding which work activities to undertake (Hobfoll *et al.*, 2018; Toker *et al.*, 2005)—but future research could apply longitudinal designs to assess the focal constructs at different points in time. Beyond these directional considerations, additional research might apply direct measures as further tests of our theorizing that the negative connection between family interference with work and OCB can be explained by a diminished ability or motivation to fulfill formally prescribed job duties.

Second, our focus on work-related goal congruence as a specific boundary condition is informed by evidence of the critical role that such a shared mindset plays in helping employees cope with work-related hardships (Chan and Lam, 2011). Continued studies might complement this focus by examining potential buffering roles of other pertinent factors. For example, intra-organizational social capital also stems from peer relationships marked by high levels of trust and social interaction (Prieto-Pastor *et al.*, 2018). Relevant contextual factors might include organizational embeddedness (Ahmad and Islam, 2019), organizational identification (De Clercq and Pereira, 2021b), or person–job fit (Islam *et al.*, 2019). Certain resource-boosting *personal* resources might function as buffers too, such as employees’ learning goal orientation (Islam *et al.*, 2021a), passion for work (Hao *et al.*, 2018), optimism (Agrawal and Mahajan, 2021), or

ability to segment family and work demands (Islam *et al.*, 2020). It would be interesting to compare the relative potency of these alternative resources in protecting employees against the stresses that come with pandemic fears, as well as how the buffering effect of work-related goal congruence shapes up in the presence of these other resources.

Practical implications

This study offers useful implications for management practitioners. Employees' inability to contain their pandemic fears is highly likely to have adverse work-related outcomes, for themselves and their employers, who lose access to discretionary energy resources held by their workforces. Employees who feel vulnerable to the life-threatening virus understandably experience significant worry about the quality of their private and professional lives, and the associated energy depletion may turn them away from work activities that go beyond the call of duty. From both a socially responsible and a performance point of view then, organizations must do all they can to help employees cope with the hardships and stresses associated with an exceptional crisis such as COVID-19 (Dirani *et al.*, 2020; Lin *et al.*, 2021). Such efforts may be difficult though if employees hesitate to admit their fears, whether because they worry about the appropriateness of complaining when many others are suffering more (e.g., job losses, active illness, mortality) or because the uncertain employment environment causes them to avoid giving their employer any reason to eliminate their job. Organizational leaders accordingly should be proactive in discussing the coronavirus, offering transparent and timely updates about its effects on the company, acknowledging that nearly everyone suffers fears about it, installing open discussion forums (perhaps online) dedicated to sharing hardships, and offering psychological counseling for employees as needed (Caligiuri *et al.*, 2020; Swaminathan and Mishra, 2020).

In addition to this broad recommendation that firms, in addition to policy makers and national leaders, need to take action to diminish or contain people's pandemic fears, our study provides some particular recommendations for organizations that are more exposed to the threats associated with the unpredictable virus (e.g., essential service providers), such that limiting pandemic fears among employees is an unrealistic expectation (Ahorsu *et al.*, 2020; Snell, 2020). Notably, these worried employees should be able to turn to peers who share similar work-related goals, because this supportive resource can diminish work-related hardships across the organizational collective. A sense that everyone is on the same page, in terms of where the organization should be heading, despite the uncertainty created by the pandemic, may provide some peace of mind to employees and help them at least alleviate concerns about their current work performance or future career prospects (Hite and McDonald, 2020). With the relatively greater positive work energy they thus achieve, they should feel more motivated to help their employer, such as by investing voluntarily in OCB that are not formally expected or rewarded. To establish such beneficial common goal sets, the organization should offer clear communication about broad values and objectives that bind all members, as well as specify the different ways in which employees, cohesively as a group, can realize positive outcomes.

Conclusion

The contributions of this study stem from both its specific consideration of the effect of employees' pandemic fears and a broader explication of how such stresses can affect positive work behaviors, such as OCB. We clarify the role of family interference with work and work-related goal congruence as well. Negative experiences at the family-work interface represent a critical reason that pandemic fears lead employees to avoid stretching themselves to go beyond the call of duty and help their organization voluntarily. The power of this explanatory factor is

contingent on the extent to which they share similar work-related goals with other organizational members. With these broader insights, attained in the specific setting of the COVID-19 pandemic, this study suggest options for continued investigations into why and when employees may be reluctant to go beyond their formal job duties, especially when they suffer from unavoidable, globally impactful, external events that fundamentally influence nearly every aspect of their private and professional lives.

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Figure 1: Conceptual model

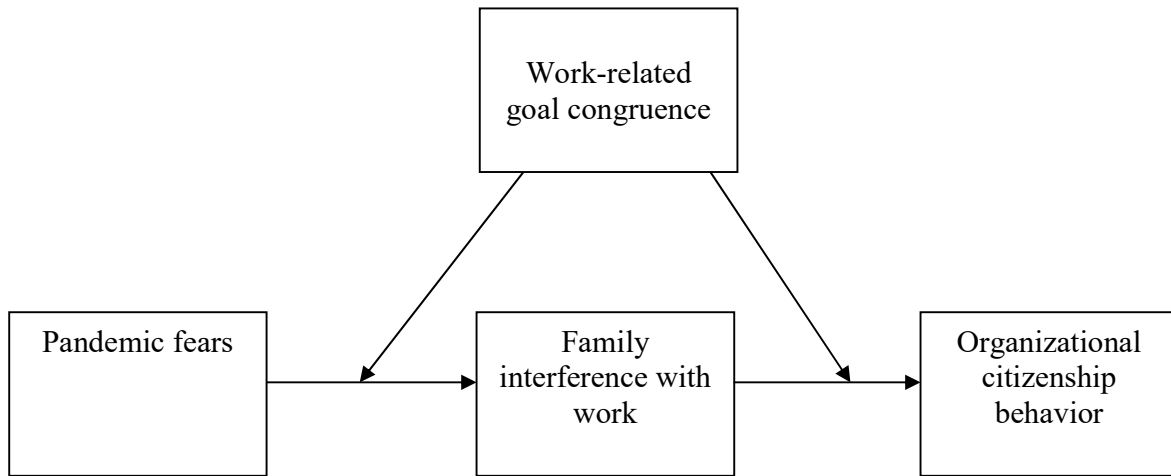


Table 1. Constructs and measurement items

	Factor Loading	t-Value
Perceived pandemic fears ($\alpha = .94$; CR = .93; AVE = .48)		
[Haq <i>et al.</i> , 2019; Sinclair and LoCicero, 2007]		
I have difficulty keeping the threat of COVID19 out of my mind.	.655	6.472***
There is little I can do to protect myself from COVID19.	.656	8.305***
I frequently think about the threat of COVID19.	.720	6.876***
There is nothing I can do to defend myself from future COVID19 threats.	.715	8.557***
The threat of COVID19 often enters my mind.	.844	8.116***
I worry that COVID19 will only get worse as time passes.	.611	5.715***
I think that I am completely helpless in protecting myself from COVID19 in the future.	.706	11.005***
I worry that the threat of COVID19 will never end.	.814	7.921***
I often dwell on the threat of COVID19.	.798	7.757***
I believe the future is dark with respect to the threat of COVID19.	.849	8.195***
I do not have a lot of power in keeping myself safe from COVID19.	.599	8.565***
I frequently find myself preoccupied with thinking about COVID19.	.644	6.474***
I lack control in defending myself and my loved ones against COVID19. ^a	.663	--
Family interference with work ($\alpha = .91$; CR = .91; AVE = .67)		
[De Clercq <i>et al.</i> , 2019b; Netemeyer <i>et al.</i> , 1996]		
Family-related strain interferes with my ability to perform job-related duties.	.620	7.279***
I have to put off doing things at work because of demands on my time at home.	.848	10.638***
My home life interferes with my responsibilities at work such as getting to work on time, accomplishing daily tasks, and working overtime.	.871	10.939***
Things I want to do at work don't get done because of the demands of my family or spouse/partner.	.864	87.414***
The demands of my family interfere with work-related activities. ^a	.872	--
Organizational citizenship behavior ($\alpha = .89$; CR = .85; AVE = .59)		
[De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia, 2021; De Cremer <i>et al.</i> , 2009]		
I undertake voluntary action to protect the organization from potential problems. ^a	.762	--
I have a cooperative relationship with my boss and others in the organization.	.779	7.866***
If necessary, I am prepared to work overtime.	.646	6.452***
I develop the necessary skills and knowledge that are of benefit to my organization.	.867	8.82***
Work-related goal congruence ($\alpha = .87$; CR = .87; AVE = .62)		
[De Clercq <i>et al.</i> , 2013; De Clercq and Belausteguigoitia, 2017]		
My colleagues and I share a similar vision regarding the organization's future. ^a	.896	--
My colleagues and I think alike on most issues with respect to the organization	.751	10.112***
Most of my work objectives are fully aligned with those of my colleagues.	.817	11.586***
My colleagues and I perceive our work-related problems as mutual problems.	.664	8.414***

Notes: n = 124. α = Cronbach's alpha; CR = composite reliability; AVE = average variance extracted.

^a Initial loading was fixed to 1 to set the scale of the construct.

*** $p < .001$.

Table 2. Correlation table and descriptive statistics

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Pandemic fears							
2. Family inference with work	.581**						
3. Organizational citizenship behavior	.142	.032					
4. Work-related goal congruence	.194*	.318**	.633**				
5. Gender (1 = female)	.063	-.061	-.083	-.031			
6. Organizational tenure	.062	-.070	.016	-.085	.273**		
7. Job level	.081	.352**	.099	.047	-.273**	-.173	
Mean	3.549	2.395	5.637	4.641	.435	1.556	1.927
Standard deviation	1.255	1.262	1.206	1.236	.498	1.251	.903

Notes: n = 124.

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table 3. Mediation results (Process macro Model 4)

	Family inference with work		Organizational citizenship behavior	
Gender (1 = female)		.006		-.178
Organizational tenure		-.036		.085
Job level		.412***		.233*
Pandemic fears		.524***		.198*
Work-related goal congruence		.204**		.691***
Family inference with work				-.356***
	R ²	.472		.491
	Effect size	Bootstrap SE	LLCI	ULCI
Indirect effect	-.187	.080	-.342	-.028

Notes: n = 124; SE = standard error; LLCI = lower limit confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit confidence interval.

+ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.

Table 4. Moderated mediation results (Process macro Model 58)

	Family inference with work	Organizational citizenship behavior		
Gender (1 = female)	.069	-.319 ⁺		
Organizational tenure	-.021	.084		
Job level	.392***	.180 ⁺		
Pandemic fears	.510***	.267***		
Work-related goal congruence	.279***	.552***		
Pandemic fears × Work-related goal congruence	-.160**			
Family inference with work		-.342***		
Family inference with work × Work-related goal congruence		.166***		
R ²	.511	.551		
Conditional <i>direct</i> effect of pandemic fears on family inference with work				
	Effect size	Bootstrap SE	LLCI	ULCI
-1 SD	.718	.093	.535	.902
Mean	.498	.068	.365	.632
+1SD	.278	.105	.070	.486
Conditional <i>direct</i> effect of family inference with work on organizational citizenship behavior				
	Effect size	Bootstrap SE	LLCI	ULCI
-1 SD	-.558	.096	-.748	-.367
Mean	-.330	.082	-.492	-.167
+1SD	-.102	.104	-.308	.105
Conditional <i>indirect</i> effect of pandemic fears on organizational citizenship behavior				
	Effect size	Bootstrap SE	LLCI	ULCI
-1 SD	-.401	.139	-.625	-.062
Mean	-.164	.060	-.271	-.034
+1SD	-.028	.033	-.107	.024

Notes: n = 124; SE = standard error; LLCI = lower limit confidence interval; ULCI = upper limit confidence interval.

⁺ $p < .10$; * $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$; *** $p < .001$.