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The Mediation Role of Organizational Identification on Emotional Intimacy and Collaborative Behaviors in Public and Private Organizations

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Abstract: Our study aimed to examine whether the relationship between emotional intimacy and collaborative behaviors (i.e., helping behaviors and counterproductive behaviors) is mediated by organizational identification (cognitive and affective). These relationships were investigated both among public and private sector employees. The research was conducted on a sample of 269 employees (*Mean age = 32.60*), 128 participants from the public sector, and 141 from the private sector, average seniority at work = *64.87 months*. A set of questionnaires was completed online and all participation was voluntary. The study used the convenience sampling method, and participants were recruited through the snowballing technique. The results indicated the mediating role of organizational identification on the relationship between emotional intimacy and collaborative, helping and counterproductive behaviors. Thus, the more people feel comfortable sharing their emotions at work and identify with the organization on a cognitive and/or affective level, the more they engage in helping behaviors directed toward colleagues and the organization, and at the same time, engagement decreases deviant behaviors. We discuss the theoretical and practical implications of the study.

Keywords: *emotional intimacy; cognitive organizational identification; affective organizational identification; counterproductive behaviors; helping behaviors.*

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Introduction

It is necessary for organizations to learn how to understand and how to manage the employees emotional experiences. This would contribute to the well-being of the organization, its better functioning, a higher degree of organizational identification and an increase in helping behaviors among employees. Moreover, by understanding and managing employees' emotions, counterproductive behaviors towards the organization and towards its other members will be reduced (Sguera et al., 2020). Therefore, given the fact that emotional intimacy also occurs in workplace relationships, it would be necessary to study whether this kind of sharing of emotions influences employees' perceptions (organizational identification) and behaviors (helping and counterproductive behaviors).

Emotional intimacy in organizations

Emotional intimacy in organizations was defined as the intimacy perceived by the employee in sharing the thoughts and emotions which represent the causes or consequences of those emotions (Sguera et al., 2020). This can be seen in the stories of individuals, which convey thoughts, feelings and behavioral reactions (Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008; Rimé, 2009). It is important to note that the type of emotion or its valence does not influence the extent of emotional sharing (Rimé, 2009).

Research in this field has highlighted the fact that the genuine expression of emotions, whether positive or negative, is often discouraged within organizations (Huy, 2002, 2011; Martin et al., 1998). Many times, in internal and external interactions, employees need to display certain emotions, regardless of what they feel at the time, just to be consistent with organizational requirements, social and cultural conventions (Williams, 2007). This phenomenon is called emotional labor, which is actually constantly monitoring and reducing the discrepancy between what people actually feel and what the organization requires them to feel (Diefendorff & Gosserand, 2003).

Cognitive and affective organizational identification

Organizational identification refers to the degree to which an employee defines himself using the same attributes that he believes define his organization (Dutton et al., 1994). Individuals can identify both with the organization and with the smaller groups that make up the organization, as well as with their department or work team. Thus, both the organization and

the departments or work teams are important sources of information for defining employees (Kelloway et al., 2010). The reasons why people identify with the organization are represented by the fact that people want to develop and seek self-consistency, want to reduce uncertainty and seek prestige, support or distinctiveness and self-expression (Ashforth et al., 2008; Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000; Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Dutton et al., 1994; Elstak et al., 2015; Xenikou, 2014). Previous research has focused on individual factors as antecedents of employee-organizational relationships, such as an affinity for company characteristics or self-concept orientations (Cooper & Thatcher, 2010; Fiol & O'Connor, 2005).

There are several components necessary to reach the optimal stage of identification that have been highlighted by past research. Among these, two of the most studied components are the cognitive component, i.e., the awareness of belonging to the group, and the emotional/affective component, i.e., the emotional investment in awareness and evaluation, but also the emotional connection between the members of the organization and their organization (Tajfel, 1982).

According to Sguera et al. (2020), the link between emotional intimacy and organizational cognitive identification can be explained by the fact that people can use the information about others 'emotions and thoughts to better understand and interpret their own environment, an effect confirmed by other studies as well (Rosenthal et al., 2020; Van Kleef, 2009). Therefore, sharing emotions with others through emotional intimacy contributes to a better understanding of people's relationships, their work, as well as their organization. Rimé (2009) also claims that the sharing of emotions accompanied by thoughts and feelings can have social-affective functions. Emotional intimacy attracts the attention of others, but also their understanding and sympathy. If the recipient of this sharing of positive emotions responds warmly, this response validates the perception of others' benevolence and improves social bonding (Gable et al., 2004).

Regarding affective identification, the more emotional intimacy is more present among employees, the more affective bonds are formed in the organization (Martin et al., 1998). Self-disclosure involves mutual stimulation of emotions, which contributes to the formation of affective bonds among people (Peters & Kashima, 2007). Thus, emotional intimacy fosters social integration and contributes to the formation of a sense of community through affection, mutual trust and enjoyment (Spoor & Kelly, 2004). The result of this process can emerge through the transfer of affects from relationships with those of a lower order (coworkers) to relationships with those of a higher order (the organization) (Ashforth et al., 2008). On a more general layer, Sluss

& Ashforth (2008) suggest that individuals transfer qualities of relationships with lower-order identities to higher-order identities. Thus, organizational identification can be favored by exchanges between employees. This idea is also supported by research on extended identities, which shows that interactions among small group members ultimately increase identification with the organization (Bagozzi et al., 2012).

Considering all aspects previously revealed, we can conclude that emotional intimacy can shape relationships between individuals and increase positive perceptions associated with the organization and ultimately increase their emotional involvement with it.

Collaborative helping behaviors (interpersonal and organizational)

Interpersonal helping behaviors refer to individual actions that, although not essential to the job or task, contribute to the smooth functioning of the organization. Thus, the good functioning of the organization is ensured by the fact that employees offer their time to help others in solving work-related or non-work-related problems, try to integrate new employees into the organization and provide support to people who have been absent from work for a while. In other words, this category includes behaviors that involve offering help, in different ways, to colleagues at work (Lee & Allen, 2002).

Organizational helping behaviors are those behaviors that directly benefit the organization. Organizational helping behaviors are influenced by what employees think about job characteristics (Lee & Allen, 2002). Employees who show a desire to help the organization, tend to defend the organization when others criticize it, offer different suggestions for the development and improvement of their own organization, and feel pride when they represent the company.

Once emotions are shared in a social setting, they implicitly trigger empathy from the audience and thus helping behaviors emerge (Rimé, 2009). When a person conveys to other people what they felt in a certain situation, this attracts help from others around them. Studies suggest that affective commitment predicts interpersonal helping behavior. In addition, interpersonal helping behaviors are predicted by perceived organizational support and perceived fairness by employees. An important role in engaging individuals in helping behaviors is trust among group members (Choi, 2006).

Organizational counterproductive behaviors

Deviant behaviors at work have been defined as those voluntary behaviors that violate the norms of the organization, and by doing so, they affect the well-being of the organization or its members (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). These voluntary deviant behaviors occur as a result of employees either not being motivated to comply or being motivated to violate these norms (Bennett & Robinson, 2000). Organizational norms refer to basic moral norms as well as rules, formal organizational procedures and information, community standards (Bennett & Robinson, 2000) , and deviant behaviors at work have consequences also for employees in terms of physical and mental health (Brkic & Aleksic, 2016).

Counterproductive organizational behaviors refers to actions directed against the organization that are deviant and violate organizational norms (Bennett & Robinson, 2000).

Kelloway et al. (2010) suggested that counterproductive behaviors are predicted by organizational identification. The aforementioned researchers define counterproductive behaviors as a way for employees to protest against the organization. Thus, a low level of organizational identification would predict organizational counterproductive behaviors, being a sign of protest on the part of employees. Of course, a high level of organizational identification would encourage helping behaviors among the group.

Emotional intimacy should encourage helping behaviors at work by consciously attending to others' emotions and aim to decrease counterproductive behaviors.

The present study

The purpose of the present research is to study whether the relationship between emotional intimacy and collaborative behaviors (helping and counterproductive) is mediated by organizational identification (cognitive and affective). These relationships were tested both in the public sector employees and in the private sector employees.

The novelty of our study consists in the fact that (1) we test the existence of relationships taking into account the type of organization (public sector, private sector); (2) we highlight the importance of fostering emotional sharing at work and organizational identification on the well-being of organizations.

Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1: Organizational identification mediates the relationship between emotional intimacy and helping behaviors, in the case of public sector employees.

Hypothesis 2: Organizational identification mediates the relationship between emotional intimacy and helping behaviors, in case of the private sector employees.

Hypothesis 3: Organizational identification mediates the relationship between emotional intimacy and counterproductive organizational behaviors, in the case of public sector employees.

Hypothesis 4: Organizational identification mediates the relationship between emotional intimacy and counterproductive organizational behaviors, in the case of private sector employees.

Method

Participants and procedure

Two hundred and sixty-nine employees (177 females) aged between 20 and 64 were participants in this research (*M = 32.60; SD = 10.15*), out of which 128 participants were employed in the public sector, and 141 participants in the private sector. In terms of work seniority, participants ranged from one month to 500 months - approximately 41 and a half years (*M = 64.87; SD = 83.99*).

We used convenience sampling with the snowballing technique. Participation in this study was voluntary. Before the actual participation, each subject was invited to read the informed consent form. The only condition to be able to participate in the research was represented by the fact that the people had to be employed. If the subjects did not agree to the terms, they could withdraw from the research at any time. Also, each respondent was offered the necessary support when completing the questionnaire, if it was necessary and requested. In addition, participants were assured of the confidentiality of their responses to all questionnaires.

Measures

Emotional intimacy. We used 3 items adapted from Emotional *Intimacy Scale* (EIS; Sinclair & Dowdy, 2005), which addresses the extent to which employees share their thoughts, emotions, and feelings with people in the organization. Participants answered the three items using a 5-point Likert scale, where 1 – very little and 5 – very much (for example,*"How much of your personal thoughts, emotions, and feelings are you sharing with the coworkers in your*

department?"). The internal consistency analysis found that the scale had an Alpha Cronbach's value = 0.78.

Cognitive organizational identification. To measure organizational cognitive identification, we used two items also employed in past studies on this topic (Bagozzi et al., 2012, Bergami & Bagozzi, 2000). The first item considered the overlapping degree from a graphical point of view between the employee and the organization, using the graphical method of circles (Alpha Cronbach = 0.74).

Affective organizational identification. To measure affective identification, we used two items, to which participants responded using a 7-point Likert scale (1 – not at all attached; 7 – very attached). The items we used were: "*How connected/attached do you feel to your organization as a whole?*"; "*How much do you like the organization you work in?*" (Bagozzi et al., 2012; Bagozzi & Lee, 2002). Following internal consistency analysis, we obtained Alpha Cronbach's value $\alpha = 0.86$.

Interpersonal helping behaviors – Interpersonal Citizenship Behaviors (Lee & Allen, 2002). The instrument that measures the frequency of employees' engagement in interpersonal helping behaviors includes 8 items (item example: *"I willingly invest my time in helping others who have work-related problems.")* Participants must answer the 8 items using a 7-point scale (1 – Never, 7 – Always). Following internal consistency analysis, we obtained Alpha Cronbach's value $\alpha = 0.90$.

Organizational helping behaviors – Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (Lee & Allen, 2002). Organizational helping behaviors were measured by means of an instrument that includes 8 items considering the frequency with which employees manifest this type of behavior (item example: *"I participate in functions that are not required but help the image of the organization.")*. Participants must answer the 8 items using a 7-point scale (1 – Never, 7 – Always). Following internal consistency analysis, we obtained Alpha Cronbach's value $\alpha = 0.92$.

Counterproductive organizational behaviors – Organizational Counterproductive Workplace Behaviors (Robinson & O'Leary-Kelly, 1998). The instrument that measures the frequency of employees engaging in counterproductive organizational behaviors includes 12 items (item example: *" I took assets from work without permission.")*. Participants responded to the 12 items measuring this dimension using a 7-point scale. (1 – Never, 7 – Always). Following internal consistency analysis, we obtained Alpha Cronbach's value $\alpha = 0.82$.

Results

Overview of the Statistical Analysis

We computed the Pearson correlations among the variables in SPSS v. 26. Then, we conducted mediation analyses using the SPSS macro PROCESS – Model 4, with 95% confidence interval (CI) and 5000 bootstrapped samples.

Associations among the main variables

The results of the correlation analyses (see Table 1) indicate significant and positive associations between emotional intimacy and affective organizational identification, cognitive organizational identification, organizational helping behaviors and interpersonal helping behaviors, while the association with counterproductive organizational behaviors was not significant. We also found significant and positive associations between cognitive organizational identification and interpersonal helping behaviors, organizational helping behaviors and a negative association between cognitive organizational identification and counterproductive organizational behaviors. Furthermore, there were significant and positive associations between affective organizational identification and interpersonal helping behaviors, organizational helping behaviors and a negative association between affective organizational identification and counterproductive organizational behaviors.

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and correlations among the main variables

Variables	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Emotional intimacy	8.00	2.99	1					
2. Cognitive identification	8.71	2.32	0.40**	1				
3. Affective identification	9.73	2.75	0.39**	0.77**	1			
4. Interpersonal helping behaviors	45.29	8.40	0.24**	0.35**	0.41**	1		
5. Organizational helping behaviors	42.31	10.22	0.35**	0.56**	0.65**	0.59**	1	

6. Counterproductive organizational behaviors	20.55	8.10	-0.03	-0.27**	-0.24**	-0.27**	-0.30**	1

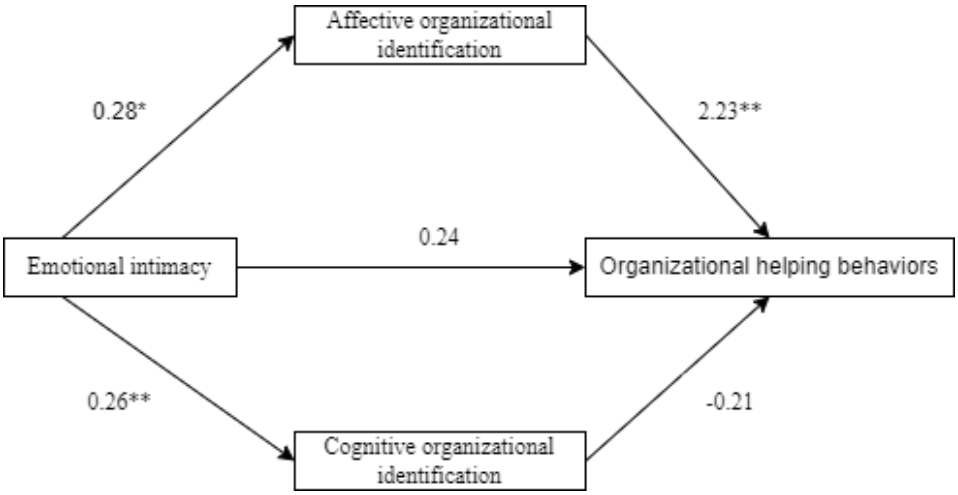
*Note: * $p < 0.05$; ** $p < 0.001$*
Source: Authors' own conception

Hypothesis 1: Organizational identification (affective and cognitive) mediates the relationship between emotional intimacy and helping behaviors (organizational and interpersonal) in the public sector employees.

a) Link between emotional intimacy and organizational helping behaviors.

The results of the analysis of the potential mediating roles of the affective and cognitive organizational identification on the link between emotional intimacy and helping organizational behaviors indicated that the total effect of emotional intimacy and helping organizational behaviors was significant, $b = 0.82$, $SE = 0.27$, $p = 0.003$, 95% CI [0.28; 1.36]. The direct effect was not significant, $b = 0.24$, $SE = 0.23$, $p = 0.29$, 95% CI [-0.21: 0.71]. Affective organizational identification had a significant indirect effect on the relationship between emotional intimacy and organizational helping behaviors, $b = 0.63$, $SE = 0.24$, 95% CI [0.22; 1.18], while the indirect effect via cognitive organizational identification was not significant, $b = -0.05$, $SE = 0.15$, 95% CI [-0.39; 0.23].

Figure 1. The mediating effects of affective and cognitive organizational identification on the relationship between emotional intimacy and organizational helping behaviors (public sector employees)

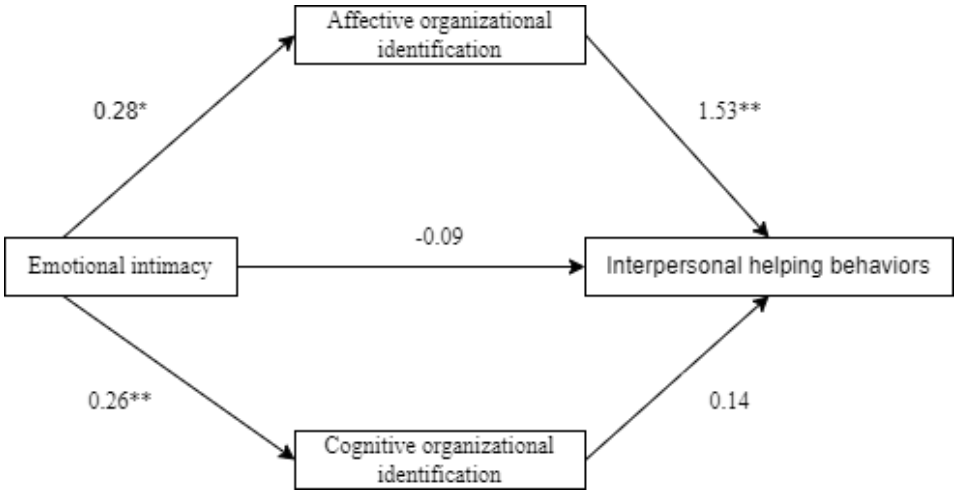


Source: Authors' own conception

b) Link between emotional intimacy is interpersonal helping behaviors.

The results of the analysis of the potential mediating roles of the affective and cognitive organizational identification on the link between emotional intimacy and interpersonal helping behaviors indicated that the total effect of emotional intimacy and interpersonal helping behaviors was not significant, $b = 0.37$, $SE = 0.24$, $p = 0.13$, 95% CI [-0.11; 0.86]. The direct effect was significant, $b = -0.09$, $SE = 0.23$, $p = 0.68$, 95% CI [-0.55: 0.36]. Affective organizational identification had a significant indirect effect on the relationship between emotional intimacy and interpersonal helping behaviors, $b = 0.43$, $SE = 0.18$, 95% CI [0.12; 0.84], while the indirect effect via cognitive organizational identification was not significant $b = 0.03$, $SE = 0.12$, 95% CI [-0.21; 0.30].

Figure 2. The mediating effects of affective and cognitive organizational identification on the relationship between emotional intimacy and interpersonal helping behaviors (public sector employees)



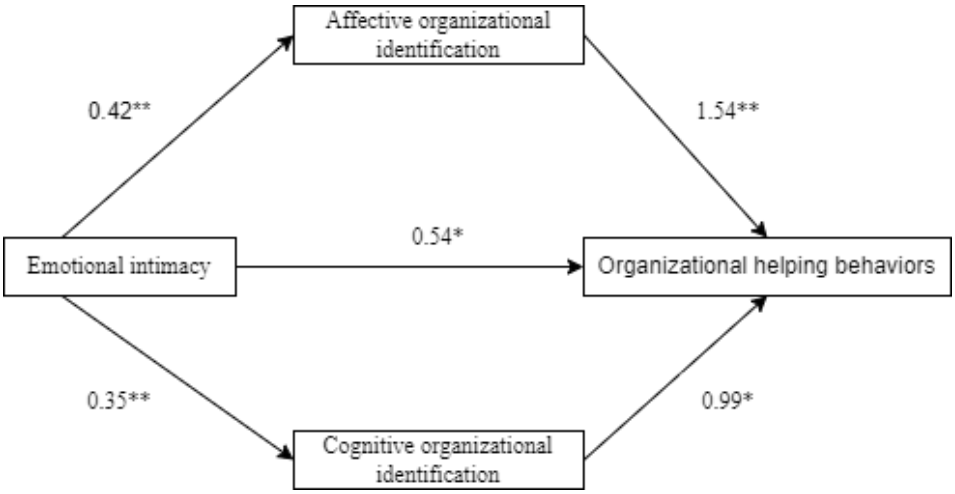
Source: Authors' own conception

Hypothesis 2: Organizational identification mediates the relationship between emotional intimacy and helping behaviors in private sector employees.

a) Link between emotional intimacy and helping organizational behaviors.

The results of the analysis of the potential mediating roles of the affective and cognitive organizational identification on the link between emotional intimacy and helping organizational behaviors indicated that the total effect of emotional intimacy and helping organizational behaviors was significant, $b = 1.56$, $SE = 0.26$, $p = 0.001$, 95% CI [1.04; 2.08]. The direct effect was significant, $b = 0.54$, $SE = 0.25$, $p = 0.03$, 95% CI [-0.21: 0.71]. Affective organizational identification had a significant indirect effect on the relationship between emotional intimacy and organizational helping behaviors, $b = 0.66$, $SE = 0.19$, 95% CI [0.29; 1.06], the indirect effect via cognitive organizational identification was significant, $b = 0.35$, $SE = 0.19$, 95% CI [0.01; 0.77].

Figure 3. The mediating effects of affective and cognitive organizational identification on the relationship between emotional intimacy and organizational helping behaviors (private sector employees)

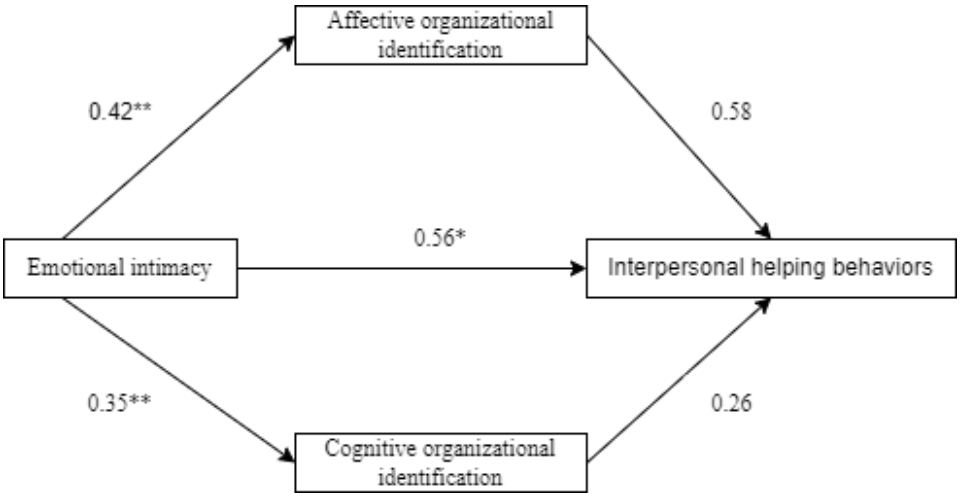


Source: Authors' own conception

b) Link between emotional intimacy is interpersonal helping behaviors.

The results of the analysis of the potential mediating roles of the affective and cognitive organizational identification on the link between emotional intimacy and interpersonal helping behaviors indicated that the total effect of emotional intimacy and interpersonal helping behaviors was significant, $b = 0.91$, $SE = 0.22$, $p = 0.001$, 95% CI [0.47; 1.36]. The direct effect was significant, $b = 0.56$, $SE = 0.25$, $p = 0.02$, 95% CI [0.06: 1.07]. The indirect effect via affective organizational identification was not significant $b = 0.25$, $SE = 0.16$, 95% CI [-0.05; 0.57], the indirect effect via cognitive organizational identification was not significant $b = 0.09$, $SE = 0.17$, 95% CI [-0.22; 0.47].

Figure 4. The mediating effects of affective and cognitive organizational identification on the relationship between emotional intimacy and interpersonal helping behaviors (private sector employees)



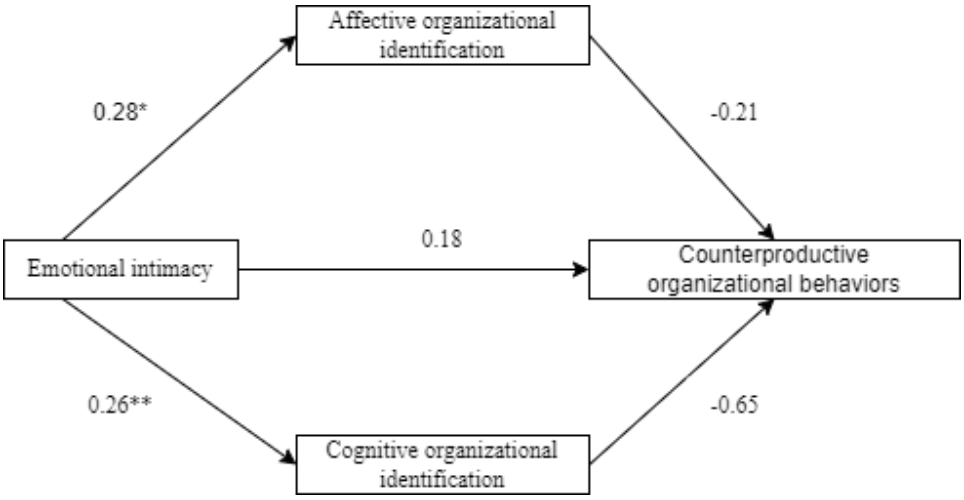
Source: Authors' own conception

Hypothesis 3: Organizational identification mediates the relationship between emotional intimacy and counterproductive organizational behaviors in public sector employees.

a) Link between emotional intimacy and counterproductive organizational behaviors

The results of the analysis of the potential mediating roles of the affective and cognitive organizational identification on the link between emotional intimacy and counterproductive organizational behaviors indicated that the total effect of emotional intimacy and counterproductive organizational behaviors was not significant, *b = -0.05, SE = 0.20, p = 0.79*, 95% CI [-0.46; 0.35]. The direct effect was not significant, *b = 0.18, SE = 0.21, p = 0.37*, 95% CI [-0.23: 0.60]. Affective organizational identification had a significant indirect effect on the relationship between emotional intimacy and counterproductive organizational behaviors, *b = -0.18, SE = 0.11*, 95% CI [-0.44; -0.007], while the indirect effect via cognitive organizational identification was not significant *b = -0.05, SE = 0.09*, 95% CI [-0.25; 0.11].

Figure 5. The mediating effects of affective and cognitive organizational identification on the relationship between emotional intimacy and counterproductive organizational behaviors (public sector employees)



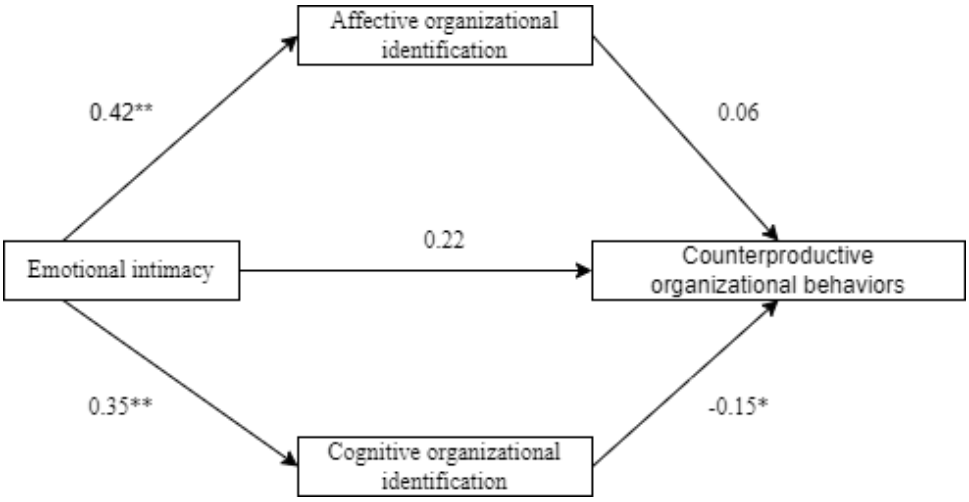
Source: Authors' own conception

Hypothesis 4: Organizational identification mediates the relationship between emotional intimacy and counterproductive organizational behaviors private sector employees.

a) Link between emotional intimacy and counterproductive organizational behaviors

The results of the analysis of the potential mediating roles of the affective and cognitive organizational identification on the link between emotional intimacy and counterproductive organizational behaviors indicated that the total effect of emotional intimacy and counterproductive organizational behaviors was not significant, *b = -0.16, SE = 0.24, p = 0.50*, 95% CI [-0.65; 0.32]. The direct effect was not significant, *b = 0.22, SE = 0.27, p = 0.42*, 95% CI [-0.32: 0.77]. Cognitive organizational identification had a significant indirect effect on the relationship between emotional intimacy and counterproductive organizational behaviors, *b = -0.41, SE = 0.19*, 95% CI [-0.78; -0.01], while the indirect effect via affective organizational identification was not significant *b = 0.02, SE = 0.17*, 95% CI [-0.35; 0.34].

Figure 6. The mediating effects of affective and cognitive organizational identification on the relationship between emotional intimacy and counterproductive organizational behaviors (private sector employees)



Source: Authors' own conception

Discussions

Our findings suggest that affective organizational identification mediates the relationship between emotional intimacy and organizational helping behaviors in both public and private organizations. We note that in the case of private organizations, the relationship is also mediated by cognitive organizational identification. These results can be explained by the fact that when employees share their thoughts and emotions within the organization, this supports the formation of affective bonds and furthermore to more frequent behaviors that help the organization, in order to maintain this positive balance between them and organization (Lee & Allen, 2002). Furthermore, in private organizations, sharing emotions provides information about the work and social environment of the organization to other members, which fosters awareness of organizational membership. People use information about others' emotions and thoughts to better understand their own environment and organization (Rosenthal et al., 1979; Van Kleef, 2009). Thus, sharing the emotions of others contributes to the formation of shared meanings, which leads to cognitive awareness of one's belonging to the organization (Hareli & Rafaeli, 2008).

In addition, our study found that within public organizations, affective organizational identification mediates the relationship between emotional

intimacy and interpersonal helping behaviors, while this relationship did not emerge in the private organizations. Thus, individuals who perceive a high degree of intimacy for sharing emotions and thoughts invest emotionally in the process of realizing organizational belonging and also engage in the display of peer-helping behaviors. Therefore, shared emotions elicit empathy and a sense of emotional communication among individuals, and once empathy is present, individuals are more inclined to help others (Rimé, 2009). At the same time, emotional bonds between employees contribute to the formation of a pleasant sense of community and favor the integration of others into the organization (Peters & Kashima, 2007; Spoor & Kelly, 2004).

Finally, our research found that affective organizational identification mediates the relationship between emotional intimacy and counterproductive organizational behaviors in public organizations, while in private organizations it is cognitive organizational identification that mediates this relationship. These relationships suggest that within private organizations, the higher the identification at the cognitive level, the less people engage in counterproductive behaviors, and within public organizations, the higher the identification at the affective level, the lower the engagement in organizational counterproductive behaviors. Our results are consistent with past research that has shown that the more people are aware of belonging to the organization and invest emotionally in this awareness, the less they will violate the organization's norms (Kelloway et al., 2010).

The current research represents a valuable source of information for the literature and a step forward in studying the influence effect of organizational identification on the relationship between emotional intimacy and collaborative behaviors. First, our research examines this relationship for both private and public sector employees. Second, it highlights the importance of sharing emotions within the organization, which tends to be less encouraged by organizations. Thus, the results could be used in the development of specific human resource management strategies aimed at improving the success of contemporary organizations in both the private and public sectors.

Limits and future research directions

A limitation of our study could be the relatively small number of participants. Future research could study mediating relationships using a larger sample of employees. Also, another limitation would be the method of measuring the variables. Self-report instruments have their well-known limitations, and this can influence research. Another method to measure the

variables considered would provide more accurate results, even more so for the deviant behaviors variable.

Also, even though our results are valuable and can be a good starting point for further research on this topic, it is necessary to study the aspects we have mentioned on a larger scale, considering other international contexts, from different cultures and socio-economic environments, other than the Romanian space.

Implications and conclusions

Most of the time, organizations do not encourage the expression of emotions in the workplace. The results of the present study indicate that the development of certain personnel management strategies aimed at strengthening relations between employees would favor the increase in the degree of identification with the organization, as well as the manifestation of helping behaviors among work colleagues. Ultimately, the organization will benefit if employees perceive intimacy within the organization and help their colleagues. Our findings also highlighted the importance of employees' perceived intimacy for sharing emotions and thoughts and organizational identification on the manifestation of helping behaviors directed towards both colleagues and the organization, in both public and private organizations. Human resources programs could be developed to increase emotional intimacy and organizational identification both on its cognitive and affective facet, which would foster the success of the organization. As our findings suggest, this effect could be both direct, by increasing the prevalence of helping behaviors directed towards the organization, and indirect, through the increased helping behaviors among the members of the organization, which would foster the development of a favorable and supportive environment for employees.

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