

## Examining Relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Counterproductive Work Behavior: A Moderated Mediated Model

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### Abstract

*Despite various attempts to know the relationship between emotional intelligence (EI) and counterproductive work behavior (CWB), the findings are inconsistent and offer a varying degree of associations. The present study examines the underlying mechanism by hypothesizing impression management (IM) as a mediator to address the element of equivocality in the subject matter. Furthermore, it tests the moderating role of self-esteem (SE) on the impression management to counterproductive work behavior relationship. A representative sample of 398 employees was collected from different organizations of Pakistan. The results confirmed the intervening role of impression management between emotional intelligence and counterproductive work behavior. Furthermore, the employees high on self-esteem showed lesser tendencies to involve in counterproductive work behavior. Theoretical and practical implications have also been discussed.*

**Keywords:** counterproductive work behavior, emotional intelligence, impression management, Pakistan, self-esteem

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## 1. Introduction

Counterproductive work behavior (CWB) by workforce is a common conduct in most of the organizations (Vatankhah, Javid, & Raoofi, [2017](#)) and it results in billions of dollars loss every year (Bennett & Robinson, [2000](#); Miao, Humphrey, & Qian, [2017b](#); Vatankhah et al., [2017](#)). CWB is commonly viewed deleterious for employees and organizational health both financially and otherwise (Spector, [2011](#)). It ranges from simple absenteeism, inappropriate verbal actions, stealing to major property damages (Marcus et al., [2016](#)). Counterproductive activities make it difficult to impart task and contextual performance (Carpenter & Berry, [2017](#); Greenidge, Devonish, & Alleyne, [2014](#); Sackett & DeVore, [2002](#)). Consequently, employees involved in unproductive activities are rated low in performance appraisal (Aleassa, [2014](#)) and they lack psychological wellbeing (Aubé, Rousseau, Mama, & Morin, [2009](#)). The deplorable outcomes motivated various researchers to understand the major causes of CWB. Various organizational, job and personal factors have been identified as antecedents to CWB such as leadership styles (Schyns & Schilling, [2013](#)), organizational culture (Ehrhart & Raver, [2014](#)), job stressors (Fida et al., [2015](#)), transparency concerns (Holtz & Harold, [2013](#)), and personality attributes (Grijalva & Newman, [2015](#)).

Emotional intelligence (EI) of workforce is among the key causes to CWB (Farrastama, Asmony, & Hermanto, [2019](#); Raman, et al., [2016](#)) and the relationship has been investigated quite a number of times. Emotional intelligence refers to “the ability to understand and manage own emotions and the emotions of others” (Mayer, Roberts, & Barsade, [2008](#)). Emotionally intelligent employees understand the situational clues and follow the behaviors aligned with the standard norms (Jafri, Dem, & Choden, [2016](#); Rexhepi & Berisha, [2017](#)). However, researches examining EI-CWB relationships have shown varying degree of relationships (Farrastama et al., [2019](#); Kluemper, DeGroot, & Choi, [2013](#); Winkel, et al., [2011](#)). The inconclusive nature of association calls the attention to explore the underlying mechanism and boundary conditions that change the nature and strength of relationship (Miao et al., [2017b](#); Moeller & Kwantes, [2015](#)).

According to conservation of resources (COR) theory, employees strive to develop, protect, utilize and foster their resources pool that provides shield against emotional, psychological and physical harm. The theory further accentuates the process individuals employ to gain resources that help them in engaging appropriate behaviors (Hobfoll, 2004). Emotional intelligence is considered as a key resource that helps to understand the situational clues and engaging into situational appropriate behavior. An individual may perform positive or negative behavior while perceiving the situation favorable and in control (Côté, et al., 2011). In industrial psychology, controlling situation and favorable attitude is operationalized as impression management, where employees present themselves in a way that enhances likeability and develop positive attitude of the perceiver. Extant literature shows various studies highlighting positive outcomes of emotional intelligence. However, the studies examining organizationally undesirable outcomes of emotional intelligence are sparse (Grant, 2014; Hyde, et al., 2020; Robinson, Hull, & Petrides, 2020). Hence our study has examined impression management as underlying factor to bridge the link between EI and CWB. By utilizing EI as a resource pool, employees manage to establish favorable impression (Cole & Rozell, 2011; Pelt, van der Linden, & Born, 2018) which provides an opportunity to engage in discretionary behavior. The resultant extra role behavior can be workplace deviance or organizational citizenship behavior, depending upon personality, motivation and belief system (Bolino, Varela, Bande, & Turnley, 2006; Klotz et al., 2018).

The researches within the ambit of industrial psychology are striving to know the boundary conditions that limit individuals within positive organizational behavior (Heinitz, et al., 2018). Following the axiom of self-consistency theory, employees seek to align behavior with attitude. Individuals with positive self-concept follow behavior that help to protect self-respect (Korman, 1970) and refrain from any conduct challenging group norms. Hence, it is plausible to assume that individuals' high on self-esteem would avoid involving in any work related deviance.

Overall, this study is an attempt to re-validate EI to IM and IM to CWB relationships. Secondly, it also attempts to examine the inconclusive relationship between EI and CWB by examining IM as

potential mediator. Lastly, the moderating role of self-esteem on IM to CWB relationship is also investigated to know if the association is weak for employees high on self-esteem.

## **2. Theory & Hypothesis Formation**

### **2.1. Emotional Intelligence (EI)**

Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined emotional intelligence as a way to observe others and one's own feelings and use this information to direct one's actions. The influential work of (Goleman, 1995) divided emotional intelligence into self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy, and relationship management. According to Goleman (1995), emotionally intelligent employees are high on self and social competence. They have the ability to understand and manage own emotions as well of others. People who cannot organize some control over their emotional life, face internal conflicts that harm their aptitude for dedicated work and clear thoughts (Goleman, 1995). Mayer, Caruso, and Salovey (1999) referred emotional intelligence as an ability to identify the meanings of emotions and effectively manage to control situations. Emotionally intelligent personnel has sound conception of organizational customs and rules, so EI has significant impact on employee retention and performance (Prentice, et al., 2019). Emotionally intelligent individuals are more attuned to the well-being of others and organization. Therefore, employees having high EI are more satisfied (Miao, Humphrey, & Qian, 2017a) and strive for performance (MacCann et al., 2020). Winkel et al. (2011) found emotionally intelligent people are good in assessment of emotions therefore use this capability in their own interest.

### **2.2. Impression Management**

Impression management is a technique used by employees (termed as actors) to control and manipulate others (boss, peers, customers, subordinates etc.) perceptions (Bozeman & Kacmar, 1997; Rosenfeld, Giacalone, & Riordan, 1995). Impression management, also called self-presentation, entails a process to create, maintain and protect the positive and favorable attitude (Rosenfeld et al., 1995). Impression management as a technique helps in recruitment process, performance appraisal, career growth and in other employees' important outcomes (Bolino, et al., 2008;

Bozbayindir, [2020](#); Brosy, Bangerter, & Sieber, [2020](#)). As a result, various models and approaches have been listed. In comparison, the taxonomy prescribed by Jones and Pittman ([1982](#)) has received empirical validation in different settings. Following the contention of Jones and Pittman ([1982](#)), individuals may exercise five strategies to manage impression; (1) Ingratiation, whereby employees attempt to enhance likeability by doing favor or flattery behavior (2) Self-promotion, a way to portray a competent and highly accomplished person; (3) Exemplification, where an employee goes above and beyond his regular assignment to show his dedication; (4) Supplication, whereby employees show their limitation and weakness to appear needy; (5) Intimidation, a way to threaten others through bullying or other influencing tactics to gain acceptance.

### **2.3. Counterproductive work behavior (CWB) Behaviors**

Counterproductive work behavior (CWB) represents the deliberate conduct by employees that harms an organization, its associates, or both (Spector et al., [2006](#)). CWB is a distinct voluntary action that disrupts substantial organizational rules and well-being of organization, employees or both (Gruys & Sackett, [2003](#); Robinson & Bennett, [1995](#); Skarlicki & Folger, [1997](#)). Literature shows various other conceptualization for counterproductive behavior (De Bruin & Barber, [2020](#)) such as counterwork behavior (Furnham & Siegel, [2011](#)), delinquency (Godinet & Vakalahi, [2009](#)), antisocial behavior (Burt, [2012](#)), organizational aggression (LeBlanc & Barling, [2004](#)), mobbing/bullying (Sperry, [2009](#)), deviant behaviors (Cheung, Wong, & Chan, [2020](#)), noncompliant behavior (Kleinsinger, [2003](#)), workplace retaliation (Solano & Kleiner, [2003](#)), and revenge (Bies & Tripp, [2005](#)). Counterproductive work behavior's severity ranges from making fun of someone and absenteeism (Spector et al., [2006](#)) to theft and fraud (Wimbush & Dalton, [1997](#)). Nasir and Bashir ([2012](#)) found diverse form of CWB like theft, scam, leg pulling, verbal abuse, nepotism and corruption in organization. CWB results in low determination, reduced productivity, legal expenditures, and impaired property (Demir, [2011](#); O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin, & Glew, [1996](#)); however, individual high in guilt proneness would be less inclined to CWB (Cohen, Panter, & Turan, [2013](#)). Recent studies

emphasize on to know the latest conceptualization and causes of CWB (Seriki, Nath, Ingene, & Evans, [2020](#)).

#### **2.4. Self-Esteem**

Self-esteem refers to the respect, worth and value of oneself. It exemplifies the overall satisfaction with the self-concept (Branden & Archibald, [1982](#)). Self-concept is the individual's perception about himself and how other views him (Calhoun & Morse, [1977](#)). Early childhood happenings and experiences play a role in shaping self-esteem. Individual's successes over life span have strong bearing on his perception made about himself (Geukens et al., [2020](#)). It ultimately shapes what he can or cannot do in relation with others (Orth & Robins, [2014](#)). Hence, innate abilities and achievements during course of life help to enhance self-esteem. Individuals with strong self-esteem has positive attitude towards life. Researchers have shown strong link between self-esteem and physical health, status, earning (Orth, Robins, & Widaman, [2012](#)), emotional self-efficacy, happiness (Dogan, Totan, & Sapmaz, [2013](#)), achievement motivation (Tessler & Schwartz, [1972](#)) and wellbeing (Neff, [2011](#)).

#### **2.5. Conservation of Resources (COR)**

Conservation of resources (COR) theory provided foundation to support our model. COR theory posits that employees strive to acquire, retain, guard and use resources. Resource loss or the likelihood of loss results into stress and frustration. Hence acquisition and conservation of resources are at the core of the theory eliciting motivational behavioral paradigm. Resources include emotional, cognitive and physical reservoirs valued in different situations that help to avoid psychological strains. COR is primarily based on key corollaries; higher resources further lead to gain in resources and vice versa; initial resource loss causes further resource loss in future and initial resource gains result into further gains; lack of resources generates defensive approach to protect existing resources.

According to Neuman and Baron ([2005](#)), counterproductive activities are triggered by hostile intentions or by instrumental intentions. The former is reactive whereas later is proactive. Our tenet for the current study is based on gain spiral called "resource

investment principle” that entails individual motivation to invest in resources to gain more resources or avoid and recover resource loss.

Emotional intelligence has emerged as a key psychological reservoir to help employees in various deleterious situations. Following COR framework, employees would strive to protect, capitalize and use EI to not only diffuse stressful situation but also to gain more resources. Impression management and CWB instrumentally help to gain more resources and deal with stress. For example, employees find complaining and defaming organization as a way to build and protect social network. Punctuality and absenteeism are the means to address family commitments. Purposefully wasting office material and supplies may also be a way to retaliate against discriminatory workplace practices and diffuse stress. In sum, employees may find CWB instrumental to achieve personal goals (resources) and cope with stress (resource loss).

Taken together and consistent with COR theory, these findings suggest that employees may leverage CWB to conserve and gain resources. CWB is a way to reduce exhaustion, to obtain information, assistance, or other needed resources from associates. In other words, CWB may be instrumentally directed to achieve work goals and/or to reduce psychological strain.

## **2.6. Emotional Intelligence (EI) to Impression Management (IM)**

Emotions play an important role in making impression (Bourdage, Wiltshire, & Lee, [2015](#); Mote et al., [2012](#)). Self-presentation theory introduced by Goffman ([1959](#)) posits that capable actor effectively employs verbal and non-verbal ways to manage impression. Later, Fox and Spector ([2000](#)) contended that emotionally intelligent employees exercise strategically aligned impressions during interview. Research supports the notion pertaining to the role of emotional intelligence towards self-monitoring behavior (Priyadharshini and Kannadasan, [2011](#)) and social adaptability (Kunnanatt, 2008; Mayer et al., [2008](#)). Recent empirical and theoretical evidences also support the role of EI towards impression management (Cole & Rozell, [2011](#)), self-presentation (Fiori, [2015](#)) and ingratiation and political behavior (Jain, [2012](#)). Foregoing helped to hypothesize;

*H<sub>1</sub>*: An employee's emotional intelligence is positively related to impression management.

## **2.7. Impression Management and Counterproductive Work Behavior**

To create favorable image and gain approval, an individual adopts various IM strategies in daily interactions. In industrial psychology, IM moves are considered to be dishonest, immoral and deceitful actions (Rosenfeld, Edwards, & Thomas, [2015](#)). However, IM behavior may also result as defensive strategy. For example in a recent study, Corgnet, Hernán-Gonzalez, & Rassenti ([2015](#)) found employees attempting to impress the boss by displaying more but producing less while perceiving firing threat. One of the exciting study carried out by Oh et al. ([2014](#)) regarding chameleonic self-monitoring (the act of controlling and assessing the image during interactions) showed that self-monitor incorporates IM tactics during interaction to impress target. Various evidences have shown a direct positive link between different IM strategies to counterproductive work behavior (Phipps, Prieto, & Deis, [2015](#)), workplace deviance (Klotz et al., 2018; Smith et al., [2016](#)) and incivility (Yun, Allgayer, & Park, [2020](#)). Hence following hypothesis is developed:

*H<sub>2</sub>*: An employee impression management is positively related to counterproductive work behavior.

## **2.8. Self-Esteem and Counterproductive Work Behavior**

The empirical and experimental studies are consistent about the role of self-esteem to buffer negative emotions, such as fear (Cheng, Zhang, & Ding, [2015](#)), depression and anxiety (Sowislo & Orth, [2013](#)). Self-esteem has also emerged as a factor to flourish various positive job related attitudes (Moksnes & Espnes, [2013](#)) and behaviors (Haider et al., [2019](#)). Researchers have put forward several reasons to support this notion as self-esteem build the self-confidence and high expectations of success (O'Leary et al., [1990](#)). Self-esteem also promotes goal-oriented behavior (Robins & Pals, [2002](#)) and make people resilient to face adversities (Veselska et al., [2009](#)). Individuals with low self-esteem may follow the negative paths that can be destructive for them and society (Mier & Ladny,



[2018](#); Schulte-Braucks et al., [2019](#)). The study of Donnellan et al., (2005) found that high self-esteem is negatively related to aggressive beliefs, thoughts and conducts like bullying, fighting, disobedience, antisocial and varying nature of crimes. One's integrity level serves as a predictor of self-discipline (Maxwell, [1989](#)) therefore, employees with low self-esteem demonstrate deviant behaviors and in turn harmful for the organizational wellbeing. In sum, self-esteem in different settings have proved to be controlling factor for different types of counterproductive and deviant behaviors (Bai, Lin, & Wang, [2016](#); Schulte-Braucks et al., [2019](#); Whelpley & McDaniel, [2016](#)). Therefore, we suggest,

*H<sub>3</sub>*: Employee's self-esteem is negatively related to counterproductive work behavior.

## **2.9. Impression Management as Mediator**

As highlighted in the preceding parts, EI may result into IM strategies (Kluemper, McLarty, Bishop, & Sen, [2015](#); Vohs, Baumeister, & Ciarocco, [2005](#)). Studies have also shown a link between IM to CWB (Klotz et al., [2018](#); Phipps et al., [2015](#); Smith et al., [2016](#)). Hence, it can reasonably be assumed that IM may mediate the relationship between EI and CWB. Individuals with state or trait emotional intelligence are apt in influencing people through making impression. IM has already emerged as a bridging factor between different competencies and behavioral outcomes (De Cuyper & De Witte, [2010](#)). Emotionally intelligent employees are socially astute to manage impressions (Kluemper et al., [2015](#)). With control and influence on others' perceptions, employees may take advantage and involve in unwanted and harmful activities (Klotz et al., [2018](#)). A deep insight into IM yielded that frequent use of IM tactics increase the likelihood of employee's tendency to engage in counterproductive work behavior (Bolino & Klotz, [2015](#); Oh et al., [2014](#)). Hence, we assume impression management as a tactical move by the source that may mediate the EI-CWB relationship.

*H<sub>4</sub>*: Impression management mediates the relationship between Emotional Intelligence and Counterproductive Work Behavior.

## **2.10. Self-esteem as Moderator**

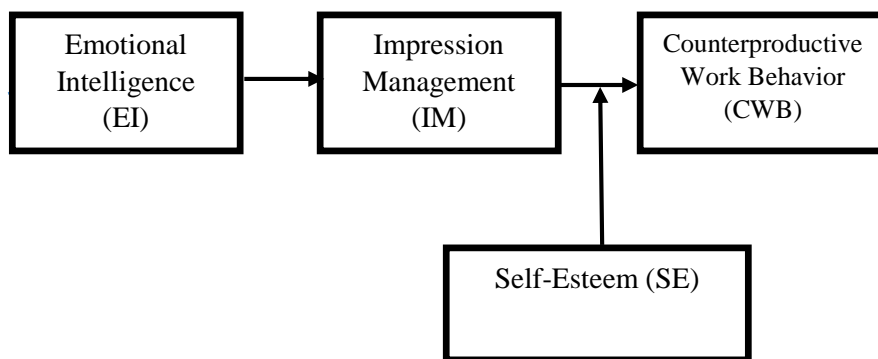
Self-esteem has emerged as a factor to keep individuals away from socially undesirable behavior (Harpin et al., [2016](#)). Self-esteem stimulates pro-social (Fu, Padilla-Walker, & Brown, [2017](#))

and helping behaviors (Briggs, Landry, & Wood, 2007) among employees as well as enhances self-discipline in social interactions (Kariuki, 2019). A recent study has also found a strong link between self-esteem and knowledge sharing behavior (Takhsha et al., 2020). According to self-consistency theory (Korman, 1968) individuals avoid dissonance and follow the behavior consistent with their attitude. Positive attitude leads toward positive behavior. Hence, self-satisfied individuals avoid anything going against situational and organizational norms.

Counterproductive behavior varies in nature but generally labeled as harmful conduct for employees or organization as a whole. Unproductive tactics or moves may result into negative outcomes that may range from simple verbal censure to categorical disciplinary action. The resultant outcome whether verbal or nonverbal hits the self-respect which if made known to employees, keeps them away from any of the workplace deviance. Recent systematic review has also shown strong negative relationship between different types of self-esteem with counterproductive behaviors (Whelpley & McDaniel, 2016). Various other studies have also shown negative relationship between self-esteem and workplace deviance and different types of unproductive activities (Ferris et al., 2009; Ferris et al., 2012). The behavior of high self-esteem individuals are generally aligned with organizational policies and practices (Keller, 1983; Smelser, 1989).

Nearly same contention is also made in the behavioral plasticity theory which suggest that environmental conditions or exposure to new stimuli result into behavior modification (Mery & Burns, 2010). However, people with high self-esteem are less susceptible to external and social influences comparing individuals with low self-esteem. High self-esteem employees are behaviorally less plastic on account of the feel of self-fulfillment and positive self-concept. In sum, it is reasonable to assume self-esteem creating boundaries and avoid involving in unsanctioned behaviors, even when situation allows. Foregoing helped to hypothesize;

*H<sub>5</sub>*: Self-esteem positively moderates the relationship between impression management to counterproductive work behavior in such a way that the relationship becomes weak when SE is high.



*Figure 1.* Research Model.

### 3. Research Methodology

#### 3.1. Sample and Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected from different public and private sector organizations of Islamabad and Rawalpindi areas to observe maximum variance. An effort was made to collect responses from the employees with at least one year working experience in their respective organizations. The research model could have been generalized to employees regardless of hierarchical positions; therefore, employees working at different levels were targeted if they had good English comprehension skills. During the data collection phase, the researchers did not observe any visible happening that could distort perception of the respondents.

The data were collected in a three months' time. Eight hundred (800) questionnaires were distributed, along with return envelopes, through postal and courier services. Initially the response rate was low. A reminder letter was sent to all respondents after a lapse of 15 days. Finally, 410 questionnaires were received back. After screening, 398 questionnaires were sorted out to take into analysis stage using SPSS 20.0. Hence the response rate remained approximately 49%.

Keeping in view the nature of study variables, the responses could have been affected by social desirability response (SDT) and common method variance (CMV). We followed standard procedures to mitigate the effects (Jo, [2000](#); Larson, [2019](#); Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, [2003](#)). For example, the research instrument contained detailed explanation of the purpose,

academic nature and measures to uphold anonymity of responses. Respondents could take part at their will and even leave at any stage if they felt uncomfortable or indifferent. A detailed profile of principal investigator along with key members was also mentioned to contact in case of ambiguity or concerns.

To examine the effect of common method variance (CMV), standard statistical tests were applied (Williams & McGonagle, 2016). Following the recommendations of Podsakoff et al. (2003), Harman's single-factor test was conducted by calculating the total variance. All measures were taken as one factor without rotation. Total variance was reported below than the threshold of 50% ensuring results free from CMV. In addition, exploratory factor analysis (EFA) was also performed with maximum likelihood estimation. Three factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were emerged without any dominating factor explaining the covariance among independent and dependent variables in the sample. Lastly, common latent factor analysis also revealed acceptable level of common variance. We concluded that the sample used in this study was not seriously tainted by common method bias.

Among the 398 respondents, 70.4% of population were males and 29.6% were females. In the age category 1.8% were between 21-25 years, 15.6% were between 26-30 years, 35.9% were between 31-35 years, 19.8% were between 36-40 years and 26.9% were 41 years and above. The result showed 1.8% employees were earning 50,000 or below (PKR), 12.1% were earning between 51,000-100,000 (PKR), most of employees 53.3% were earning between income category 101,000-150,000 (PKR) and 32.9% employees were earning between 150,000 or above (PKR). While specifying the level of position, 11% claimed them in junior level group; 77.4% in middle level group; and 11.6% were working in senior level group. 2% had less than a year of working experience; 28.4% had 1-5 years; 27.1% had 6-10 years; and 42.5% had 11 or above years of working experience. In education category 6.3% had bachelor's degree, 71.9% had master's degree and 21.9% had higher level of education.

### **3.2. Measures**

All measures were adopted from already tested sources. Five-point likert-type scale was used to tap responses with anchors 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neutral, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree. Details in this regard are as follows;

### **3.2.1. Counterproductive work behavior (CWB)**

To measure counterproductive work behavior a 10-items shorter version of counterproductive work behavior checklist (CWB-C) was employed from Spector et al., (2006). Sample items included “Came to work late without permission.” Yang and Treadway (2018) and Al Ghazo, Suifan, & Alnuaimi, (2019) reported reliability ( $\alpha$ ) as 0.97 & 0.72 respectively.

### **3.2.2. Emotional Intelligence (EI)**

Emotional Intelligence was measured by 16 item scale (EIS) developed by Wong & Law, (2002) on four dimensions of Mayer et al. (1997) as self-emotion appraisal (SEA), other emotions appraisal (OEA), use of emotion (UOE) and regulation of emotion (ROE). Example encompassed “I always tell myself I am a competent person.” Al Ghazo et al. (2019) reported reliability ( $\alpha$ ) as 0.84.

### **3.3.3. Impression Management**

Impression Management was measured with the help of 25-items scale adopted from the study of Bolino and Turnley (1999). The scale is established on five tactics of IM based on Jones and Pittman (1982) classification termed as self-promotion (SPROM), ingratiation (INGRT), exemplification (EXEMP), intimidation (INTIM) and supplication (SUPP). Examples involve “Arrive at work early in order to look dedicated.” Bourdage et al. (2015) reported reliability as ( $\alpha$ ) 0.82.

### **3.3.4. Self-esteem**

Self-esteem was measured with 10-items scale developed by Rosenberg (1965) to measure individual’s positive self-image. Example include “I take a positive attitude toward myself”. Whelpley and McDaniel (2016) reported reliability ( $\alpha$ ) as 0.91.

## **3.2. Control Variables**

Conferring from Spector (2011) study, blind inclusion of control variables make statistical results inconsistent and biased effects on variables and on their relationships. Therefore, the

possible control variables were examined. A one-way ANOVA comparing counterproductive work behavior and impression management across age, gender, qualification, income, designation and experience revealed insignificant differences in criterion variables across organizations.

## **4. Results**

### **4.1. Confirmatory Factor Analysis:**

Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) allows the test of fit between observed data and prior theoretically based model that specifies the hypothesis of causal relation between latent variables (Gerbing & Hamilton, [1996](#)). This proposed research model conducted CFA to assess the uniqueness of the measurement model through factor structure. CFA included maximum likelihood estimates to perform a four-factor CFA on emotional intelligence, impression management, self-esteem and counterproductive work behavior to confirm that measurement model is acceptable fit to data.

### **4.2. Construct Validity & Reliability**

Reliability of constructs was estimated by Cronbach  $\alpha$  which is related to the degree to which measurement items have internal consistency (Cooper & Schindler, [2013](#), p. 260). Reliabilities of all measures were found greater than 0.90 far above the threshold value of 0.7 (Nunnally & Bernstein, [1994](#)). Construct validity concerns with accuracy of measurement scale or average variance extracted (AVE). Discriminant validity and factor loadings were measured with the help of AMOS 0.23 and SPSS 20.0 respectively. Factor loadings ranged from 0.50 to 0.85. The proposed model has excluded 4 items from impression management scale (IM22, IM23, IM24, and IM25) counting loadings below than 0.3. According to Fornell and Larcker ([1981](#)) construct validity takes account;

1. For convergent validity, AVE (Average Variance Expected)  $> 0.5$  (latent variables account of 50% of variance)
2. For discriminant validity, AVE  $>$  MSV (Maximum Shared Variance)

The construct validities and reliabilities of the constructs were above and beyond the acceptable range as given in the table 1.

### **Table 1**

***Discriminant Validity of Variables***

<b>Variables</b>	<b>CR</b>	<b>AVE</b>	<b>MSV</b>
Emotional Intelligence	0.96	0.62	0.27
Impression Management	0.97	0.59	0.27
Counterproductive Work Behavior	0.96	0.70	0.20
Self-Esteem	0.97	0.76	0.19

*CR = Composite Reliability; AVE=Average Variance Extracted; MSV=Maximum Shared Variance*

By ensuring convergent and discriminant validities, we further examined the fit indices of measurement model which yielded satisfactory results for key indices i.e.  $\chi^2/df$  is 2.4, CFI=0.91; TLI = 0.90; RMSEA=0.05, SRMR=.06, PNF=0.81 and PCFI=0.86 (Hair, 2006). Hence, overall requirement for model fitness was achieved to move further for hypothesis testing.

**Table 2*****Descriptive Statistics and Correlation among Variables***

<b>Variables</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>SD</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>2</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4</b>
<b>1 EI</b>	2.75	0.82	(0.96)			
<b>2 IM</b>	2.73	0.63	0.49**	(0.97)		
<b>3 CWB</b>	3.01	0.91	0.38**	0.39**	(0.96)	
<b>4 SE</b>	2.81	1.24	-0.23**	-0.24**	-0.41**	(0.97)

*EI = Emotional Intelligence; IM = Impression Management; SE= Self-Esteem; CWB= Counterproductive Work Behavior*  
*N= 398; Reliability estimates in parentheses; \* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ .*

Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted (Table 2) to analyze the direction and strength of the relationship between variables. There was significant positive relationship between EI and IM ( $r = .49$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), IM and CWB ( $r = .39$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) as well as between EI and CWB ( $r = .38$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). Whereas, SE showed strong negative relationship with CWB ( $r = -.41$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

**4.3. Tests of Hypotheses**

We used multiple linear regression to test all main effects (table 3). Results showed significant positive effect of EI to IM ( $\beta = 0.49$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and of IM to CWB ( $\beta = 0.56$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ). SE also showed strong

positive effects on CWB ( $\beta=-0.41$ ,  $p<0.01$ ). These results render support to hypotheses 1, 2 and 3.

**Table 3**  
*Linear Regression Analysis*

Predictor	Criterion Variable	B	R <sup>2</sup>	Adj R <sup>2</sup>
EI	IM	0.49**	0.24	0.238
IM	CWB	0.56**	0.151	0.149
SE	CWB	-0.41**	0.172	0.17

*EI = Emotional Intelligence; IM = Impression Management; SE = Self-Esteem; CWB = Counterproductive Work Behavior*  
*N = 398; \* $p < 0.05$ . \*\* $p < 0.01$ .*

#### 4.4. Mediation and Moderation Analysis

We used Preachers & Hayes Bootstrap method to test the mediation and moderation effects. The model-14 was employed with 95 % of 5,000 bootstrap re-samples (Hayes, 2015) to test indirect effect of EI on CWB through IM where SE moderates the relationship between IM to CWB. Moderation and mediation are accepted if zero does not lie between lower and upper CIs.

**Table 4**  
*Mediation Model: Indirect Effect of Emotional Intelligence and Counterproductive Work Behavior through Impression Management*

Indirect Effect of Emotional Intelligence on CWB				
Mediator	Effect	Boot SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
IM	0.1424	0.0349	0.0806	0.2179

*Note. Bootstrap Resample = 5000; SE = Standard Error; CI = Confidence Interval.*



**Table 5**  
***Interaction Effect***

	$\beta$	SE	<i>t</i>	<i>P</i>	LLCI	ULCI
<b>Constant</b>	4.1504	0.5197	7.9862	0.0000	3.1287	5.1722
<b>IM</b>	-0.3744	0.1759	-2.1286	0.0339	-0.7202	-0.0286
<b>EI</b>	0.2131	0.0538	3.9618	0.0001	0.1073	0.3188
<b>SE</b>	-0.8273	0.145	-5.7045	0.0000	-1.1124	-0.5422
<b>Int (SE x IM)</b>	0.2162	0.0515	4.2015	0.0000	0.1151	0.3174

*Outcome Variable: Counterproductive Work Behavior (CWB)*

*EI = Emotional Intelligence; IM = Impression Management; SE= Self-Esteem*

As highlighted in the Table 4, analysis supports the mediating hypothesis (the indirect effect = 0.1424, SE = 0.0349, 95% CI = [0.0806, 0.2179], with un-standardized indirect effects and their corresponding significance. PROCESS macro further provides the details about moderating effect of self-esteem on mean centered products of IM and CWB. The moderation of SE given in table 5 was also supported ( $\beta$  for SExIM = 0.2162,  $p < 0.001$ ) between IM and CWB. The analysis also provides change in  $R^2$  with the inclusion of SE as moderator ( $R^2 = 0.33$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ). Hence, the results provided support to H4 and H5.

**Table 6**  
***Moderation Mediation Model: Indirect Effect of Emotional Intelligence on CWB through Impression Management Moderating by Self-Esteem***

Conditional indirect effect(s) of Self-Esteem					
	Moderator	Effect	SE	Boot LLCI	Boot ULCI
<b>Impression Management</b>	Low	-0.01	0.0396	-0.0929	0.0636
	Medium	0.08	0.0314	0.0315	0.1554
	High	0.18	0.0442	0.1192	0.2977

*Note. Bootstrap resample = 5,000; Conditions for moderator (Self-Esteem) are the mean and plus/minus one standard deviation; SE = standard error; CI = confidence interval.*

## 5. Discussion

Emotional intelligence (EI) and counterproductive behaviors (CWB) are among the widely researched factors considering their importance for the contemporary organizational and social settings. Various attempts have also been made to know the relationship between emotional intelligence and different types of counterproductive and deviant behaviors. However, results are inconsistent and varying in nature. Researchers generally found negative relationship between EI and CWB (Greenidge et al., [2014](#); Jung & Yoon, [2012](#)). But the studies have also shown insignificant (Farrastama et al., [2019](#); Kluemper et al., [2013](#)) and even positive relationship (Winkel et al., [2011](#)) between two. It stimulated a need to explore the underlying factors and boundary conditions (Deshpande, Joseph, & Shu, [2005](#); Evans, [2017](#)). Following the axiom of conservation of resource theory (COR), we examined impression management as a mediator between EI and CWB, and self-esteem as a moderator between EI to CWB relationship.

Results supported the direct relationship between EI to CWB as well as between EI to IM. Likewise, IM emerged as a mediator between EI and CWB. Employees may engage in counterproductive activities during and after working hours (Anwar, Sarwar, Awan, & Arif, [2011](#)) for different reasons. Examples include arriving late, complaining, gossiping, fail to report at work, slowing down and damaging official equipment (Ünal, [2013](#)). All these behaviors are possible only when employees feel empowered and having control over situation (Eze, Omeje, Okonkwo, Ike, & Ugwu, [2019](#)). In doing so employees may portray an impression ranging from exemplification to self-promotion (Klotz et al., [2018](#)). The false and daunting perception control the voicing behavior of others to speak out anything going against the norms and set standards (Whiting, Maynes, & Podsakoff, [2012](#)). Emotional intelligence as a skill or ability helps to understand the situational clues and emotional concerns of seniors and colleagues (Valente, Monteiro, & Lourenço, [2019](#)). By effectively gauging the situational dynamics, employees present the impression to take advantage of situation. That may range from simple self-promotion to intimidating or aggressive behavior, known as impression management. By creating an influence, employees follow the behavior deemed most appropriate

in the situation that turn out to be illegitimate and harmful for the organization (Jain, [2012](#)) and known as counterproductive behavior.

Despite the cogent linear process among emotional intelligence, impression management and counterproductive behavior, self-esteem emerged as a factor to buffer the relationship. For example, employees with positive self-concept and confidence about their abilities never follow any unethical path to take leverage (Judge & Bono, [2001](#); Wang & Wang, [2016](#)). More importantly, absenteeism and punctuality issues are taken seriously in contemporary era. Even warnings and censure directly hit the self-respect of individuals high on self-esteem. Hence, incumbents avoid involving in any activity or behavior that may result in compromising self-esteem.

In nutshell, the findings of the study are consistent with some of the previous studies. Firstly, emotional intelligence is directly associated to different types of impression management and self-presentation tactics (Cole & Rozell, [2011](#); Fiori, [2015](#); Jain, [2012](#)). Moreover, impression management may lead towards various types and intensity of counterproductive work behavior that comprises making fun of someone at work to drastic obstructive behaviors (Klotz et al., [2018](#); Phipps et al., [2015](#); Smith et al., [2016](#)). Secondly, impression management has mediated various previous relationships (De Cuyper & De Witte, [2010](#); Weng & Chang, [2015](#)). In this study, impression management mediated the relationship between emotional intelligence and counterproductive work behavior such that emotionally intelligent employees use self-promotion, ingratiation, exemplification and intimidation that help them to involve in antisocial behavior.

Thirdly, these findings are in line with other researches as individual with self-esteem are used to be more self-justifying and insecure about their self-worth (Holland, Meertens, & Van Vugt, [2002](#)). It keeps them away from any unethical and unlawful behavior (Ferris et al., [2009](#); Whelpley & McDaniel, [2016](#)). Conversely individual with high self-esteem irrespective of impression they hold, are unlikely to engage in counterproductive work behavior.

### **5.1. Theoretical Implications**

The findings support the notion of conservation of resources (COR). COR explains individual's motivation to acquire, retain, guard and use resources. Resource acquisition and conservation are at the core of the theory. Our framework followed the theoretical corollary whereby individuals' resources gain may cause to gain more resources. According to Neuman & Baron, (2005) counterproductive activities result on account of hostile or instrumental intentions. Findings of our study found instrumental intentions of employees engaging in counterproductive activities in a way that emotional resource (i.e. EI), further motivates them to acquire more resources. CWB instrumentally provides basis to enjoy more free time, family life, social networking and other tangible and intangible resources. Theoretically, our process model comprising emotional intelligence to counterproductive behavior, is mediated by impression management.

Support is also found for the moderating effects of self-esteem between IM to CWB, complementing the self-consistency theory. Self-esteem refers to satisfaction with self-concept also known as self-respect. Conforming to self-consistency theory, individuals seek to follow consistency between attitude and behavior, therefore the positive attitude about oneself is a prime drive to follow positive behavior. Resultantly, self-esteem mitigated the positive relationship between IM and CWB.

### **5.2. Practical Implications**

The study offers various practical implications. First, organizations should pay attention to their hiring system. Employees with high self-esteem should be preferred during induction. In addition, already employed incumbents may also be groomed through trainings and counseling sessions to help them in developing positive self-concept. Secondly, emotionally intelligent candidates should also be preferred during hiring process. However, emotional intelligence may lead towards positive or negative outcomes therefore, managers should pay attention to employees' behavior if their EI is resulting into organizationally desired behaviors. Lastly, impression management is found as a way to manipulate work affairs. Employees, particularly managers, should be given training and a detailed orientation about the various

impression management techniques, employees may use to create fake impression. The understanding would go a long way to discourage harmful behaviors for the organization.

### **5.3. Limitations and Future Research**

This study was cross sectional in nature and the reactions may change over time. The model may be replicated in longitudinal research design. In addition, the model may be tested in various other settings to validate its generalizability. We took various measures to control common method variance, but self-report measures are always susceptible to different biases. Our study concluded self-esteem as a neutralizer even when situation allows deviance. Other positive attitudes and psychological factors such as GRIT (Guts Resilience Initiative and Tenacity), psychological capital and positive work beliefs, may also be tested as moderators.

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