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Respect, bullying, and public sector work outcomes in Vietnam

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ABSTRACT
This article examines empirical links between a subordinate's felt recognition respect
from his/her supervisor, the subordinate's appraisal respect for that supervisor, and
bullying, work engagement, and organizational citizenship behaviour in Vietnam's
public sector. Data from 274 employees in six branches of a public sector agency
were used to test the hypothesized model. Within Vietnam's public sector, the
followers who receive recognition respect from the leaders have greater appraisal
respect for their leaders, experience less bullying, and reveal higher work engage-
ment and organizational citizenship behaviour. This article theoretically and empiri-
cally contributes to the respect literature developed in the Western context.

KEYWORDS Respect; bullying; engagement; organizational citizenship behaviour; public sector

Introduction

In contemporary life, work situations establish key grounds on which people are
respected or not as respected. This communicates worth and belongingness, the
importance of which lies at the core of human existence and basic psychological
needs (Decker and Van Quaquebeke 2015; Rogers and Ashforth 2017). Nowhere is
this more important than in the public sector, which is marked by leaders who are
not always trained to create a supportive environment that cares for the followers'
wellbeing to ultimately reinforce public service motivation, which is the core deter-
minant of job satisfaction, work engagement, and organizational citizenship beha-
viour (Christensen, Paarlberg, and Perry 2017; Cowell, Downe, and Morgan 2014; Ko
and Hur 2014). However, scholars have only recently begun to examine the feeling of
being respected and holding respect for the leader generally. Emerging research (e.g.
Clarke and Mahadi 2017; Decker and Van Quaquebeke 2015) argues for further
empirical examination of the consequences of respect in the workplace.

There have not been many empirical studies which examine how the feeling of
being respected by one's boss interrelates with having respect for the boss (with the
exception of Decker and Van Quaquebeke 2015). In a recent study conducted in

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Europe, Decker and Van Quaquebeke found that when bosses (supervisors) treated their followers (subordinates) with respect, it would lead to job satisfaction, because it meets one's self-determination needs, especially belongingness and relatedness. In addition, the ego self-enhancement associated with self-determination is much stronger when the messages of respect come from a valued source. According to Decker and Van Quaquebeke (2015), these relationships can be interpreted within the boundaries of contexts with similar cultural values while other scholars (e.g. Grover 2014; Rogers and Ashforth 2017) have argued that respect can be further differentiated by its direction in the supervisory relationship. In fact, the notion of respect could be different in Asia due to differences in managerial values and leadership styles (Hayward, Freeman, and Tickner 2017; PWC 2016). Therefore, this study questions how the interrelationships of respect work together in a cultural context different from that conducted by Decker and Van Quaquebeke (2015). Such will be the main aim of the present study.

The present study contributes to the understanding of the importance of leader–follower respect in Vietnam. Vietnam was chosen as the research context because of the dominance of collectivism, power distance and Confucianism in the society. These three factors influence how subordinates 'respect' their leaders in the society (see PWC 2016; Weng 2017). In a collective culture, leaders and subordinates are expected to be group-oriented and as a result, positive and supportive interpersonal relationships are developed to eliminate the prevalence of negative workplace behaviours (Thang et al. 2007). On the other hand, in a high power distance society, it is a challenge for the creation of supportive relationship with subordinates as the powerless subordinates often experience and accept unfair work treatment as part of obeying the commands from their leader (Hofstede Insights 2018). Such treatment often leads to employee silence, especially when there is no trust towards the leader (Weng 2017) or they may be too frightened to report negative workplace behaviours (Kwan, Tuckey, and Dollard 2014). Individuals in Confucian work environment are also expected to respect their leaders' authority and seniority; which may result in a tolerance of workplace mistreatments. In such instances, the subordinates are likely to tolerate and accept workplace bullying situation as bullying could be used by the supervisors as a means to maintain hierarchy and order (Kwan, Tuckey, and Dollard 2014).

Indeed, leaders must embrace 'respect' as the guiding principle for fair treatment of subordinates (Liu and Stening 2016; Pellegrini and Scandura 2008). As a result, it is expected that public sector subordinates in Vietnam will reciprocate their respect and loyalty for their leaders/supervisors (PWC 2016; Quang and Vuong 2002). An import aspect of the leader–follower relationship lies in how followers perceive the respect by their leaders. However, little is known about how respect is associated with negative workplace behaviours in a collectivist culture. Most of the researches on respect are being examined in the Western society (see Omari and Paull 2015) that found that a lack of respect tends to be the cause of negative workplace experience in the public sector. Given the importance of a respectful workplace culture (Omari and Paull 2015), the second contribution in our study is to examine how respect diminishes the occurrences of negative workplace behaviours in order to enhance positive employee work outcomes. Negative workplace behaviours are associated with leaders not listening to the voices of their subordinates, or not recognizing the employees' needs (Cowell, Downe, and Morgan 2014). Therefore, treating people with respect and not bullying them are core ethical values of government service
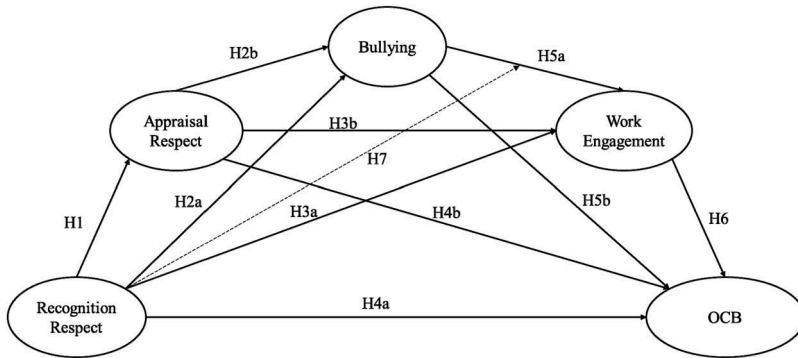
Figure 1. Proposed model of the study.

(Omari and Paull 2015). It is predicted that bullying acts can be prevented as the followers experience positive and respectful behaviours from their leaders, and the associated respect for their leaders are reciprocated. This reduction in bullying results in a more positive work experience as indicated by high engagement in work and organizational citizenship behaviour (OCB) because the leader sets up a respectful standard for organizational behaviours. A large body of research on OCB shows that job satisfaction, perceived fairness, and personality dimensions are most frequently found in Western countries, while little is known about the determinants and consequences of OCB in non-Western economies with the exception of Farh, Earley, and Lin (1997, 2002, 2004) and Lam et al.'s (2015) studies in China, noted by Organ (2018). Thus, the third and last contribution in our study is a response to the call for further evidence of additional precursors of OCB in a non-Western context where respect is the central value in interpersonal relationships. This study therefore incorporates social identity theory (SIT), social exchange theory (SET), and motivated cognition theory (MCT) to propose the interrelationship of these concepts, as illustrated in Figure 1.

Theoretical framework and hypotheses

Respect in organizations

Being respected is one of the basic psychological needs of humans (Christensen, Paarlberg, and Perry 2017; Magee and Frasier 2014). In this study, respect[1] is defined as 'the manifestation of believing another person has value and can be differentiated between appraisal and recognition respect. Appraisal respect is the approbation from work performance and recognition respect is the quality of interpersonal treatment' (Grover 2014, 35). This concept is vital for the public sector as respect is accorded to individuals' care for others (i.e. having others' interests in mind) and professional competence (i.e. having skills and knowledge to help others achieve their goals) (Fiske 2010; Magee and Frasier 2014). These two elements of respect are important in the public sector context to stimulate public service motivation of public servants as respect reflects the self-recognition and strong ties between the organization and employee values and goals (Christensen, Paarlberg, and Perry 2017; Magee and

Frasier 2014). For this reason, the relationships between the leader and the subordinates are integral to understand how respect influences the followers' work perceptions and outcomes in the public sector.

SIT states that every man has a desire for self-definition (i.e. personal identity) and self-recognition (i.e. social identity) in a social group to which they belong (Ashforth and Mael 1989; Hitlin 2003). Thus, individuals tend to engage in cohesive, cooperative, and altruistic behaviours and symbolic interactions with their group members to define themselves and increase an awareness of their status within their group (McKay et al. 2007). A key idea that has emerged from the SIT is that people's tendency to reciprocate how they are treated would depend on the extent to which they identify with their group (Tavares, van Knippenberg, and van Dick 2016). This social identity would lead individuals to view their relationships with the group less in social exchange terms, and thus the association between perceptions of the quality of exchange relationship would deteriorate (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005; Parzefall and Salin 2010). The present paper examines this idea by examining the outcomes of a reciprocal respectful relationship between the leader and the followers.

SET focuses on how an organizational management system shapes social connections and interactions between people (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005; Parzefall and Salin 2010). The central assumption of SET is built on the exchange of employees' effort and loyalty for the benefits they receive, such as recognition and support (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005; Parzefall and Salin 2010). In high quality connections, positive interdependent relationships generate the obligations and commitment due to a bidirectional transaction that shows what is given and what is returned in mutual, respectful, and complementary activities (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005; Cropanzano, Dasborough, and Weiss 2017). These interdependent relationships will inspire positive energy and encourage a supportive workplace atmosphere and collaboration among organizational members (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005; Cropanzano, Dasborough, and Weiss 2017). On the other hand, individuals tend to adjust their attitudes and behaviours downwards in response to perceived unfavourable treatment (Parzefall and Salin 2010).

Drawing from SIT, recognition respect shows leaders' willingness to listen attentively and collaborate ethically with employees due to their acceptance of employees' rights, worth, and humanity as fully fledged colleagues (Van Quaquebeke and Eckloff 2010). Showing recognition respect to the followers reflects the leader's duty to support humankind and sustain high quality interpersonal interactions. The feelings of recognition respect connote being included in one's identity group and treated in a respectful manner that leads to the feeling of being worthy (Decker and Van Quaquebeke 2015). This is true in a positive social exchange situation between the leader and the followers highlighted by the SET. Clarke and Mahadi (2017) found that mutual recognition respect associates positively with wellbeing. This is because when the leaders have positive and respectful behaviours directed towards the followers, they will inspire the feelings of obligation in the followers to reciprocate in beneficial and positive ways. Thus, the followers who are led by the respectful supervisors are motivated to believe that they receive leaders' trust and respectful treatment (Clarke and Mahadi 2017).

Felt recognition respect facilitates relational information processing, which creates a more positive impression of their supervisors (Grover 2014). The followers treated in a positive fashion are placed in a positive state that enables appreciation for the leader

because of the leader's abilities, knowledge, and skills in performing relevant supervisory tasks and work-related components (Grover 2014). Within the Confucian regime, the subordinates are likely to show respect towards their leaders due to the leaders' power, formal authority, and hierarchical positions (PWC 2016; Weng 2017). The subordinates' respect for the leaders may be strengthened when leaders are likely to be sensitive to the needs of their followers and endeavour to assist them through acting selflessly and with unveiling sympathy and kindness (Han, Kakabadse, and Kakabadse 2010; Liu and Stening 2016). Such leaders are expected to behave honourably, to treat their subordinates well, and protect them in order for their followers to return loyalty (Pellegrini and Scandura 2008). In a social exchange process, subordinates show their appropriate level of respect and loyalty for status, authority, higher ranks, and legitimate hierarchical commands (PWC 2016; Quang and Vuong 2002). As a result, the followers are more likely to concentrate on recognition respect to develop appraisal respect for leaders because they emphasize a leader's moral duty to provide subordinates with an opportunity to contribute effectively (Liu and Stening 2016).

Hypothesis 1: *Followers' perceived recognition respect positively relates to appraisal respect toward the leader.*

Respect and employee outcomes

According to MCT, learning behaviours from others help people to modify personal attitudes and actions through the development of personal standards of conduct that are a source of behavioural motivation (Baumeister 1996; Wood and Bandura 1989). Specifically, individuals are encouraged to behave like successful members of the organization who are similar to themselves, but they tend to be discouraged from following behaviours that they see often result in unfavourable consequences (Baumeister 1996; Wood and Bandura 1989). Linking to the respect literature, learning the respectful behaviours of the leader increases the subordinates' positive self-concept because the leader establishes and applies the rules and strategies for treating his/her followers in a mutual and respectful manner that engenders the development of a sense of self-worth and positive self-assessment (Clarke and Mahadi 2017; Decker and Van Quaquebeke 2015).

Respect at work can also be explained using SIT. People evaluate themselves in comparison to their standing with groups and therefore respect stimulates self-esteem that grounds a person's willingness to conform to the organization's rules and regulations and to express positive workplace behaviours when interacting with other constituents (Ellemers et al. 2013; Grover 2014). Despite the empirical evidence of the impact of respect on employee outcomes such as OCB, questions remain about the consequences of recognition and appraisal respect related to exchange relationships between the leader and the subordinates (Decker and Van Quaquebeke 2015; Grover 2014).

Bullying is defined as negative behaviour such as ignorance, social isolation, or being humiliated, or intimidated frequently and repeatedly, and which happens to a target in the workplace over a period of at least 6 months (Agervold and Mikkelsen 2004). Organizational members frequently direct workplace bullying towards the target or at the target's tasks or work environment (Harvey et al. 2009). Zapf et al. (2011) noted that bullying frequently occurs in the public sector. For instance, Salin (2001) and Piirainen et al. (2000) found that social and health workers, public

administration, and education staff frequently reported incidents of being bullied at work. In the UK, one in five public workers claimed to have been a victim of bullying at work (Lewis and Gunn 2007). Bullying is an example of unethical behaviours in the public sector that have to be eliminated because public sector employees tend to report more incidents of bullying and suffer severe psychological effects compared to those in the private sector (e.g. Cowell, Downe, and Morgan 2014; Hoel, Faragher, and Cooper 2004). According to Fevre et al. (2012, 4), public sector workers 'are particularly at risk of both incivility and disrespect and violence and injury' and this situation is more serious than the private sector. Research also shows that bullying victims are generally unable to defend themselves or to react in kind due to unequal power distribution (Einarsen, Hoel, and Notelaers 2009). Thus, high power distance and bureaucracy in the public sector enforce further barriers to the reports of bullying incidents because the subordinates tend to accept what they are told by leaders, and this dynamic legitimizes bullying behaviours (Samnani 2013).

Workplace bullying has been argued to be prevalent in society with Confucian and high power distance values as workplace bullying is explicitly or implicitly supported by senior managers (Samnani 2013). Empirical studies from Pakistan, India, Taiwan, and China found that workplace bullying is commonly accepted by the subordinates in organizations with tall hierarchy and autocratic relationships between managers and employees, and imbalanced power distribution (Ahmer et al. 2009; Bairy et al. 2007; Ma, Wang, and Chen 2011; McCormack et al. 2009). Therefore, the employees in Confucian and high power distance contexts are expected to respond positively to workplace bullying compared to those from low power cultures such as Australia (Loh, Restubog, and Zagenczyk 2010). Accordingly, we argue that the work environment characteristics in Vietnam could potentially lead to more workplace bullying among the public sector subordinates.

Based on MCT, leaders who respect their followers are likely to create a mutual and respectful environment and rules for a collective treatment that encourages the perceptions of person-person fit and the psychological growth of self-esteem, self-worth, and positive self-validation (Baumeister 1996; Decker and Van Quaquebeke 2015). As individuals' needs of self-recognition are met, trust and the shared respectful environment inspire and strengthen social ties or a positive workplace atmosphere, and collaborative behaviours (Clarke and Mahadi 2017; Brunetto et al. 2016). These positive exchange relationships thus reduce incidents of negative behaviours such as bullying because employees frequently receive care, support, and resources from their leaders (Hoel et al. 2010; Skogstad et al. 2011). Other research in public sector organizations (e.g. Brunetto et al. 2016; Cowell, Downe, and Morgan 2011) showed that the care, trust, and mutual respect of the public sector leaders for their subordinates stimulate the development and maintenance of good standards for ethical and acceptable behaviours and interactions among organizational members.

Having appraisal respect towards the leader is a form of openness to influence, tantamount to having positive attitudes towards the experience of work, especially when it is operationalized as the absence of negative bullying acts (Decker and Van Quaquebeke 2015; Van Quaquebeke, Van Knippenberg, and Brodbeck 2011). Engaging with respected leaders reduces the amount of energy that one devotes to the supervisor–subordinate relationship and to navigating the intricacies and difficulties of organizational life. In other words, having a talented and competent leader improves organizational life because one's life is easier and one can devote energy, or resources, to organizational demands (Decker and Van Quaquebeke 2015; Grover 2014).

In Vietnam's public service culture, negative workplace behaviours are not allowed, as leaders from Confucian and collectivist culture are committed to care for and protect their subordinates (Quang and Vuong 2002). Accordingly, the values of Confucianism and collectivism exposed throughout all the organizations in Vietnam highlight the perceptions of belonging to a group/organization, sharing common goals, caring, and supporting each other (Dickson, Den Hartog, and Mitchelson 2003; Thang et al. 2007). The leader is expected to be group-orientated, take care of his/her members, and put others' interests above his/her personal needs. Such caring, helping, and supporting behaviours are seen to be barriers for the prevalence of negative behaviours that could harm individuals and the group, for which s/he is responsible. On the other hand, the followers are expected to work hard and remain loyal to their managers when they receive love and care from the leaders (Vo and Hannif 2013). When one party neglects the roles in a reciprocal relationship, hostility and disappointment are guaranteed (Pellegrini and Scandura 2008). Additionally, respect is most imperative in Vietnamese work settings as it significantly influences work communication within leader–follower–co-worker relationships (Weng 2017). Without the reciprocal respectful relationships between the leader and the followers, organizational members remain silent about raising and solving organizational problems due to a lack of trust towards the management (Weng 2017). Leck and Galperin (2006) found that the culture of collectivism has helped targets of bullying receive collective outward support from their peers, including supervisor and co-workers, to report bullying acts or has enabled peers to tell the perpetrator to stop the bullying behaviour. Omari and Paull (2015) also supported the literature with the evidence that management neglect of responsibility for developing a respectful culture is the main factor leading to the prevalence of bullying in the public sector. The following are thus hypothesized:

Hypothesis 2a: *Followers' perceived recognition respect negatively relates to bullying.*

Hypothesis 2b: *Appraisal respect toward the leader negatively relates to workplace bullying.*

It is argued that positive interpersonal interactions between leaders and subordinates are able to reduce negative behaviours and enhance positive outcomes such as work engagement (Hakanen, Schaufeli, and Ahola 2008; Law et al. 2011). Work engagement is defined as 'a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption' (Schaufeli and Bakker 2004, 295). Highly engaged employees tend to perform their jobs happily and enthusiastically, and maintain positive perceptions of dedication and satisfaction with given tasks (Schaufeli and Bakker 2004). Therefore, all managers have to consider the factors which would negatively affect the work engagement of their employees (Einarsen et al. 2016). Work engagement requires a positive work environment with trustworthiness, humility, collaboration and appreciation (Einarsen et al. 2016). Thus, to engender engagement, it is important to establish interpersonal interactions that highlight compassion, loyalty, honesty, and respect (Brunetto et al. 2016; Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005).

OCB is defined as 'individual behavior that is discretionary, not directly or explicitly recognized by the formal reward system, and in the aggregate, promotes the efficient and effective functioning of the organization' (Organ 1988, 4). In public management research, it has been argued that OCB is seen to be an important tool in enhancing organizational effectiveness. Accordingly, this concept provokes voluntary contributions

by employees, indicating the fact that employees with OCB are unlikely to perform their work with the aim to achieve immediate rewards or avoid punishment (Shore and Wayne 1993; Vigoda and Cohen 2003). The literature highlights that employee attitudes and leadership appear to be more strongly associated with OCB than other precursors (Podsakoff et al. 2014). According to SET, in high quality connections between employees and their supervisors, when leaders show their willingness to help subordinates complete jobs, employees are likely to increase their OCB because they are discretionary (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005; Podsakoff et al. 2014). This assumption is evident from empirical studies (e.g. Campbell, Lee, and Im 2016; Yeo et al. 2015) showing that high quality of leader–member exchange relationship in the public sector is likely to significantly increase the subordinates' willingness to help others.

Recent research (Grover 2014; Rogers and Ashforth 2017) has argued that respect reduces bullying and facilitates work engagement and OCB. Recognition and appraisal respect increase the desire to invest time and energy in groups that enhance engagement and OCB. Disrespect leads to disengagement that 'eventually may reduce involvement in interaction, less sharing of information, and reluctance to make long-term commitments' (Sleebos, Ellemers, and de Gilder 2007, 338). Decker and Van Quaquebeke (2015) and Grover (2014) argued that recognition and appraisal respect affects individuals' self-esteem, and higher esteem facilitates positive job evaluations that eventually may result in the increase of OCB (Organ and Ryan 1995; Podsakoff et al. 2014). This study therefore hypothesizes the following:

Hypothesis 3a: *Followers' perceived recognition respect positively relates to work engagement.*

Hypothesis 3b: *Appraisal respect toward the leader positively relates to work engagement.*

Hypothesis 4a: *Followers' perceived recognition respect positively relates to OCB.*

Hypothesis 4b: *Appraisal respect toward the leader positively relates to OCB.*

Engaged employees tend to have a sense of energetic and effective connection with their work, and be less likely to experience burnout (Schaufeli et al. 2002). If bullying behaviours exist in the organization, organizational members tend to avoid emotional engagement with their jobs because employees who view their jobs negatively have little incentive to invest energy to obtain self-reward and satisfaction (Bakker et al. 2008; Idris, Dollard, and Winefield 2010). Einarsen, Hoel, and Notelaers (2009) argued that bullying victims are unlikely to protect themselves or find it difficult to cope with this occurrence, and so bullying is perceived to be part of hindrance demands negatively affecting the positive psychological wellbeing (Crawford, LePine, and Rich 2010; Einarsen et al. 2016). For instance, empirical studies have shown that bullying causes high levels of post-traumatic stress and anxiety, low self-esteem, or job dissatisfaction (Agervold and Mikkelsen 2004; Bond, Tuckey, and Dollard 2010). A great number of empirical studies (e.g. Einarsen et al. 2016; Law et al. 2011; Rodríguez-Muñoz et al. 2009) also confirmed the negative association between bullying and work engagement.

Bullying acts happen due to imbalances of power, work frustration, or high internal competitions among organizational members (Agervold and Mikkelsen 2004; Tybur and

Griskevicius 2013). These behaviours increase a high level of stress and negative feelings of work because the experience of being bullied can result in the feeling of being rejected, devalued, and disrespected (e.g. Power et al. 2013; Skogstad et al. 2011). Omari and Paull (2015) supported this notion in the public sector context, indicating that disrespectful culture in the public sector can fertilize workplace bullying that results in disengagement and job dissatisfaction. Nguyen et al. (2017) consistently found that bullying reduces work engagement among Vietnamese public sector employees.

Hypothesis 5a: *Bullying negatively relates to work engagement.*

In recent years, the consequences of workplace bullying have received much attention from scholars, practitioners, and policy makers. Emerging meta-analytic research (Bowling and Beehr 2006; Nielsen and Einarsen 2012) provided a large body of evidence of the negative impact of workplace bullying on job performance and job satisfaction while showing its positive relationship with turnover intentions. Although other studies did not measure directly the relationships between bullying and OCB, their empirical evidence showed that a high level of perceived and experienced negative impacts of other negative behaviours, such as abusive supervision (Liu and Wang 2013; Zellars, Tepper, and Duffy 2002), predicted a low level of OCB. It appears that the relationship between workplace bullying and OCB is still under-addressed with the exception of Devonish's (2013) study. An understanding of the association between bullying and OCB is important in the public sector of Vietnam, which is characterized by the collective and high power orientation. As bullying behaviours consist of exclusion, ignorance, and intimidation toward the victims, the literature notes that targets of bullying are likely to engender the feelings of being silent, unconfident, worthless, disrespected, and devalued compared to any other member in the group (Omari and Paull 2015; Samnani and Singh 2016; Strandmark and Hallberg 2007). Thus it is argued that those individuals who do not identify with the group are unlikely to implicitly develop the feeling of disengagement after experiencing bullying behaviours as they lose the motivation to interact with others (Law et al. 2011; Mitchell and Ambrose 2007; Strandmark and Hallberg 2007). In social identity and social exchange processes, these negative feelings may relatively dampen their OCB (Farmer and Van Dyne 2017).

Hypothesis 5b: *Bullying negatively relates to OCB*

Some studies (Liu and Wang 2013; Zellars, Tepper, and Duffy 2002) focused on the relationship between negative workplace behaviours such as deviance or abusive supervision and OCB. In seminal review work on OCB in the last 30 years (e.g. Dalal 2005; Organ 2018; Podsakoff et al. 2000, 2014), job satisfaction, perceived fairness, and personality dimensions are the most precursors to OCB found in Western countries. It has been recently argued that the literature on OCB needs to be extended with a further holistic understanding of additional precursors and consequences in non-Western economies (Organ 2018).

OCB in our study is conceptualized as the voluntary helping behaviours toward the others and the organization to improve performance effectiveness (Kehoe and Wright 2013; Organ 1988). As prior studies (e.g. González-Romá et al. 2006; Schaufeli et al. 2002) argued that burnout reduces OCB, work engagement as the

opposite of burnout can increase OCB. As predicted by SET, employees involved in respectful and trusting relationships with the leader and co-workers, are likely to report more positive attitudes and intentions toward the organization (Cropanzano and Mitchell 2005; Parzefall and Salin 2010). Other research (e.g. Hakanen, Schaufeli, and Ahola 2008; Kehoe and Wright 2013; Organ 2018; Podsakoff et al. 2014) argued that work engagement increases organizational commitment, and organizational commitment is a precursor of OCB. Therefore, the engagement of employees in constructive and positive attitudes and behaviours that are repeated frequently enough creates a climate that stimulates OCB (Hakanen, Schaufeli, and Ahola 2008; Podsakoff et al. 2014; Saks 2006). This study hence suggests that:

Hypothesis 6: *Work engagement positively* public sector *relates to OCB.*

Being respected becomes particularly important when bad things happen. This is important in the context of bullying. Scholars (e.g. Einarsen et al. 2016; Power et al. 2013) argued that subordinates are likely to feel excluded, ignored, disregarded and disrespected in low quality leader–follower–co-worker relationships if they experience bullying. As bullying is part of hindrance demands, the victims try to look for coping strategies, yet they are often passive and this negatively reduces work engagement (Crawford, LePine, and Rich 2010). Therefore, it is argued that a high level of supportive environment such as climate for conflict management (Einarsen et al. 2016) or psychological safety climate (Law et al. 2011) buffers the negative effect of bullying on work engagement. It is also argued that the prevalence of exchanged respectful relationships between the leader and the followers is part of a supportive climate that could handle negative interpersonal relationships at work. In fact, subordinates tend to interact with their supervisors when bullying occurs because they look for the care and support provided by their supervisors. This interaction reduces the negative impact of workplace bullying on work engagement by relying on supervisors' respectful treatment (Grover 2014). Despite the incidence of bullying, subordinates are still willing to invest and dedicate time and energy in their work because of their leaders' ethical collaboration, willingness to listen, and the acceptance of employees' rights and worth (Grover 2014). Therefore, recognition respect is suggested to buffer the negative relationship between bullying and work engagement.

Hypothesis 7: *Recognition respect moderates the relationship between bullying and work engagement.*

Method

Sampling and data collection

A self-complete and anonymous survey in non-identifiable envelopes was directly distributed to full-time employees who were not involved in any supervisory role, in six branches of a public sector organization located in Ho Chi Minh City in Vietnam. The data were collected from May to August 2015, with considerable efforts made to present the ethical issues and the academic purpose of the study to develop trust between researchers and directors, and in handling concerns over admission and transparency issues (Bartram, Stanton, and Thomas 2009). Respondents were advised

about the assurance of confidentiality, anonymity, and the minimization of risk and discomfort, in the participant information letter attached to the survey. In total, 274 completed and usable responses were returned in sealed envelopes directly collected by the co-author in Vietnam (response rate of 42 per cent). Over half of the respondents were female (57.7 per cent) and 44.2 per cent identified as being aged between 31 and 40. The majority had more than 3 years' experience in their current branch (82.8 per cent) and in their current job (74.9 per cent). Forty-six per cent of participants were working in large branches that had over 250 employees. Eighty-four per cent of respondents held undergraduate degree qualifications.

Measures

This study adopted Brislin's (1970) back-translation process to ensure the content and face validity of the scales with the involvement of one of the authors, an additional bilingual native Vietnamese and English scholar, and two independent HRM and OB practitioners from Vietnam. A pre-test of the translated survey was then carried out with 50 part-time postgraduate students at business universities in Ho Chi Minh City, Vietnam.

Participants were asked to indicate whether they had experience with any bullying behaviour in the last 6 months using a five-point Likert scale from '1' = never to '5' = daily. The remaining items used seven-point Likert scales, with each item's degree of agreement ranging from '1' = strongly disagree to '7' = strongly agree. Table 1 shows the results of the discriminant validity test. Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics of the scales (including mean, standard deviation [SD], composite coefficient reliability [CR], and average variance extracted [AVE] value). CR values of the five constructs ranged from 0.91 to 0.94, indicating reliability. The AVE values of the five measures ranged from 0.62 to 0.81, indicating convergent validity (Byrne 2009).

Recognition and appraisal respect

This study adopted 10 items of 2 respect scales from Vogt et al. (2017), which validated the original scales from Van Quaquebeke and Eckloff (2010). The five-item scale to measure recognition respect includes the following sample item: 'My leader unconditionally respects me as a person'. To assess subordinates' appraisal respect for leaders, a five-item scale was used, with sample item: 'I trust my leader's judgment'.

Workplace bullying

A nine-item short form of the Negative Acts Questionnaire from Notelaers and Einarsen (2008) was used to measure the respondents' experience of workplace bullying. Sample items included 'Devaluing of your work and efforts'.

Work engagement

This study adopted the nine-item Utrecht Work Engagement scale by Schaufeli and Bakker (2003). Sample items included 'I am enthusiastic about my job'.

Table 1. Comparison of fit indices between hypothesized and alternative models.

		χ^2	df	χ^2/df	CFI	TLI	RMSEA	SRMR	$\Delta\chi^2$(df)
Model 1	Preferred model	529.04	272	1.95	0.96	0.96	0.06	0.037	–
Model 2a	4-factor model (recognition appraisal respect,bullying,engagement,OCB)	662.13	276	2.40	0.94	0.93	0.07	0.038	$\Delta\chi^2$(4) = 133.09, $p < 0.001$
Model 2b	4-factor model (recognition respect,appraisal respect,bullying,engagement+OCB)	614.28	276	2.23	0.95	0.94	0.07	0.044	$\Delta\chi^2$(4) = 85.24, $p < 0.001$
Model 2c	4-factor model (recognition respect+engagement,appraisal respect,bullying,OCB)	902.61	276	3.27	0.91	0.89	0.09	0.084	$\Delta\chi^2$(4) = 373.57, $p < 0.001$
Model 2d	4-factor model (recognition respect+OCB,appraisal respect,bullying,engagement)	864.20	276	3.13	0.92	0.90	0.09	0.073	$\Delta\chi^2$(4) = 335.16, $p < 0.001$
Model 2e	4-factor model (recognition respect,appraisal respect+engagement,bullying,OCB)	902.57	276	3.27	0.91	0.89	0.90	0.082	$\Delta\chi^2$(4) = 373.53, $p < 0.001$
Model 2f	4-factor model (recognition respect,appraisal respect+OCB,bullying,engagement)	870.17	276	3.15	0.91	0.90	0.90	0.064	$\Delta\chi^2$(4) = 341.13, $p < 0.001$
Model 3a	3-factor model (recognition+appraisal respect+engagement,bullying,OCB)	1,026.86	279	3.68	0.89	0.87	0.10	0.087	$\Delta\chi^2$(7) = 497.82, $p < 0.001$
Model 3b	3-factor model (recognition+appraisal respect+OCB,bullying,engagement)	993.24	279	3.56	0.90	0.88	0.10	0.077	$\Delta\chi^2$(7) = 464.20, $p < 0.001$
Model 3c	3-factor model (recognition+appraisal respect,bullying,engagement+OCB)	748.42	279	2.68	0.93	0.92	0.08	0.045	$\Delta\chi^2$(7) = 219.38, $p < 0.001$
Model 3d	3-factor model (recognition respect+engagement+OCB,appraisal respect,bullying)	1,078.92	279	3.87	0.88	0.87	0.10	0.072	$\Delta\chi^2$(7) = 549.88, $p < 0.001$
Model 3e	3-factor model (recognition respect,bullying,appraisal respect+engagement+OCB)	1,048.94	279	3.76	0.89	0.87	0.10	0.070	$\Delta\chi^2$(7) = 519.90, $p < 0.001$
Model 4a	2-factor model (recognition+appraisal respect+bullying,engagement+OCB)	1,393.28	281	4.96	0.84	0.81	0.12	0.136	$\Delta\chi^2$(9) = 864.24, $p < 0.001$
Model 4b	2-factor model (recognition+appraisal respect+engagement+ OCB,bullying)	1,226.88	281	4.37	0.86	0.84	0.11	0.084	$\Delta\chi^2$(9) = 697.84, $p < 0.001$
Model 5	Single factor model	1,838.78	282	6.52	0.77	0.74	0.14	0.140	$\Delta\chi^2$(10) = 1,309.74, $p < 0.001$

Table 2. Descriptive statistics, composite reliability, AVE, and internal correlations.

	M	SD	CR	AVE	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Gender	1.58	0.05	–	–	1										
2. Age	2.88	0.90	–	–	-0.07	1									
3. Firm size	4.24	0.89	–	–	0.01	-0.01	1								
4. Positional tenure	3.30	1.08	–	–	-0.08	0.39***	-0.06	1							
5. Organizational tenure	3.65	1.09	–	–	-0.07	0.52***	-0.05	0.67***	1						
6. Educational level	4.99	0.47	–	–	-0.04	0.10	0.06	0.08	0.04	1					
7. Recognition Respect	4.84	1.33	0.94	0.81	0.05	-0.05	-0.05	0.12*	0.10	0.02	*0.90*				
8. Appraisal Respect	5.01	1.27	0.93	0.76	0.08	0.01	-0.06	0.12*	0.09	0.03	0.82***	*0.87*			
9. Bullying	2.16	0.93	0.94	0.66	-0.06	0.04	0.04	0.01	-0.03	-0.05	-0.38***	-0.38***	*0.81*		
10. Work Engagement	5.06	1.17	0.91	0.62	0.03	0.06	0.01	0.18**	0.14*	-0.03	0.56***	0.54***	-0.35***	*0.79*	
11. OCB	5.12	1.22	0.91	0.71	0.03	0.04	-0.04	0.16**	0.14*	0.01	0.67***	0.63***	-0.44***	0.75***	*0.84*

Note: $N = 274$, M: mean; SD: standard deviation; CR: composite coefficient reliability; AVE: average variance of extracted, $*p < 0.05$, $**p < 0.01$, $***p < 0.001$

Organizational citizenship behaviour

Our research used a six-item scale from Kehoe and Wright (2013) to measure subordinates' OCB. Sample items included 'I encourage others to try new and effective ways of doing their job'.

Control variables

Control variables included gender, age, and education levels because they have been found to have relationships with bullying (Hoel et al. 2010). The present study also controlled for total number of full-time employees in a branch, positional tenure, and organizational tenure. An Independent-Samples T-Test and ANOVA analysis showed that there was no difference between males and females, age groups, education levels, and positional tenure in relation to all the constructs. An ANOVA test also showed that there were differences between participants who had 3–5 years and those with 6–10 years of organizational tenure in that they had different levels of appraisal respect (Mean difference = −0.58, $p < 0.05$) and bullying (Mean difference = 0.36, $p < 0.05$).

SPSS ver24 was utilized to produce descriptive statistics, correlations, and to run exploratory factor analyses. Following Byrne (2009), AMOS ver24 was used to test the convergent and discriminant validity of the scales, and to test the hypotheses. The moderation effect of recognition respect was tested with Hayes (2013, model 1) Process macro.

Model estimates

This study followed Anderson and Gerbing (1988) two-step approach. The convergent validity of each construct was established because the fit indices of each scale in a series of confirmatory factor analyses (CFA) met the cut-off values (Byrne 2009). Chi-square difference values between a single-factor model and a two-factor model of recognition respect and appraisal respect showed that the two-factor model was better fit to the data (χ^2/df = 2.02, CFI = 0.99, TLI = 0.99, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.02). As Decker and Van Quaquebeke (2015) argued for the differences between two types of respect, the test therefore affirmed the discriminant validity of recognition respect and appraisal respect.

The fit indices of the five-factor model were satisfactory in accordance with the usual conventions (χ^2/df = 1.95, CFI = 0.96, TLI = 0.96, RMSEA = 0.06, SRMR = 0.04). There was also comparison of the hypothesized model with other alternative combined models to ensure the discriminant validity of the scales through a series of Chi-square difference tests. Table 1 reports the comparison results, showing that the hypothesized model was more satisfactory than the alternative ones. In addition, the square root of the AVE value for each construct was much larger than its correlation with any other construct (Fornell and Larcker 1981) (see Table 2). These results confirmed the discriminant validity of the five constructs in our study.

Common method variance

Prior to the data collection, this study followed the procedural remedies suggested by Chang, Van Witteloostuijn, and Eden (2010), Jakobsen and Jensen (2015) and Podsakoff, MacKenzie, and Podsakoff (2012) to check for common method variance (CMV). The

present research then utilized Harman's single factor test, and showing four factors emerged with eigenvalues of greater than 1.0, accounting for 69.76 per cent of the variance in the exogenous and endogenous constructs. The CFA of a single factor model also showed it was highly unsatisfactory (χ^2/df = 6.52, CFI = 0.77, TLI = 0.74, RMSEA = 0.14, SRMR = 0.14). Second, a common latent variable test showed that the effects of a common latent factor on items' standardized factor loadings were less than 0.20 (Chin 1998). Finally, the difference of correlations of the five constructs before and after, including 'social desirability' as the marker variable, was 0.008, indicating the marker variable did not account for the correlations between exogenous constructs and the endogenous variables (Lindell and Whitney 2001). A t-test of mean difference to compare the correlations of the two models (i.e. models with and without the marker variable) showed that there was no difference between the two models (p = 0.994). Altogether, these tests provided us with assurance that CMV was not a major issue.

Results

As reported in Table 2, the mean score of participants' experience of workplace bullying was approximately 2.16 (SD = 0.93), indicating a remarkable prevalence of bullying incidents in Vietnam's public sector. Half of the participants reported to have been a target of bullying (rated from '2' – now and then to '5' – daily) and the highest reported behaviour was 'devaluing of your work and efforts' (M = 2.31, SD = 1.09). Approximately 16 per cent of respondents reported to be 'now and then' targets of bullying during the last 6 months. This response rate falls within the range of 11 per cent to 18 per cent, which is the standard for international research on workplace bullying (see Nielsen, Matthiesen, and Einarsen 2010).

The hypotheses were tested in a structural model that included control variables. There were insignificant relationships between control variables and bullying as opposed to Hoel et al. (2010). Age was positively related to appraisal respect (β = 0.07, p < 0.05), indicating older subordinates showed higher appraisal respect for the leaders than did younger employees. Respondent gender was found to be negatively associated with recognition respect (β = −0.16, p < 0.05), that is, male respondents perceived higher recognition respect from their leaders than female subordinates did. Gender was also positively related to appraisal respect (β = 0.10, p < 0.01), indicating female subordinates had higher respect for their leaders than did male respondents. More experienced subordinates receive higher recognition respect than less experienced subordinates (β = 0.18, p < 0.05).

The findings in Figure 2 showed a positive relationship between recognition respect and appraisal respect (β = 0.90, p < 0.001), supporting hypothesis 1. Appraisal respect was found to be negatively associated with bullying (β = −0.43, p < 0.05), supporting hypothesis 2b. As expected in hypotheses 3a and 4a, recognition respect had a positive influence on work engagement (β = 0.55, p < 0.001) and OCB (β = 0.31, p < 0.001). In addition, hypotheses 5a and 5b were supported by the evidence of negative impacts of bullying on work engagement (β = −0.19, p < 0.01) and OCB (β = −0.11, p < 0.05). Finally, work engagement was found to be positively associated with OCB (β = 0.61, p < 0.001), supporting hypothesis 6.

The result of the moderation hypothesis testing supported hypothesis 7. Figure 3 shows that recognition respect reduced the negative relationship of bullying to work engagement (interaction effect = −0.11, p < 0.05). The result means that victims of

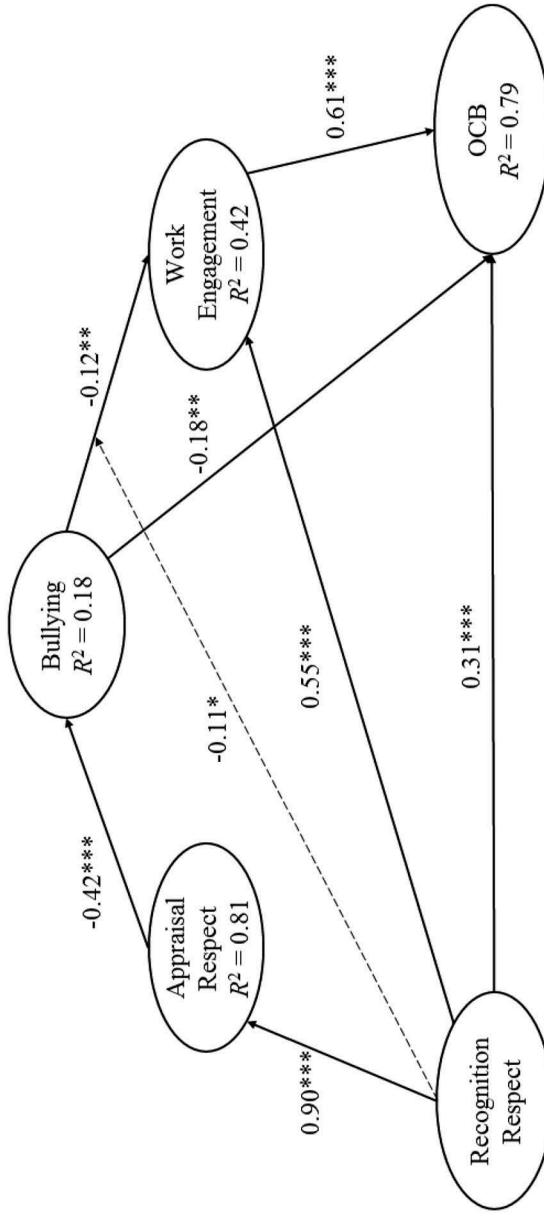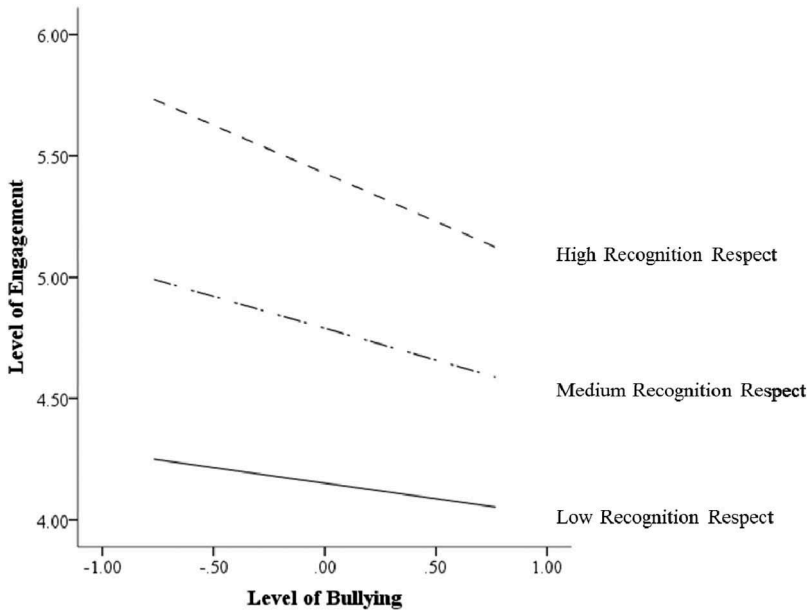**Figure 2.** Results of the structural model.

Note: $N = 274$, **$p < 0.01$, ***$p < 0.001$

Figure 3. Moderation effect of recognition respect on the relationship between bullying and work engagement.

bullying are likely to experience higher work engagement when they perceive higher recognition respect from their leaders compared to those who receive less recognition respect when bullying is extreme.

Discussion

The public sector work environment has been shown to be a challenging context as employees reported a prevalence of workplace bullying (e.g. Fevre et al. 2012; Lewis and Gunn 2007) and lack of respect tends to be the cause of this negative workplace experience (e.g. Omari and Paull 2015). The aim of this study was to examine if respect plays a part in minimizing the experience of workplace bullying in Vietnam, a country characterized by its Confucian influences. Drawing from SIT, SET, and MCT, our study found that followers' experience of feeling recognition respect from their leaders was positively related to having positive attitudes in terms of appraisal respect towards leaders. These positive attitudes were negatively associated with the perceptions of being bullied at work, which in turn negatively relate to engagement and OCB. Furthermore, respect was found to moderate the relationship of workplace bullying on work engagement. The findings from a Confucian-collective influenced leadership culture pose some differences and similarities to the Western model of respect.

Theoretical implications

Our study and the research by Decker and Van Quaquebeke (2015) are among the only studies showing how recognition respect and appraisal respect work together. The difference between these two sets of studies subtly illuminates differences in the

Western versus Eastern leadership culture. Decker and Van Quaquebeke (2015) found that appraisal respect for one's leader moderates the impact of felt recognition respect on positive outcomes. In contrast, our study finds that felt recognition respect directly relates to positive respect for one's leader's ability (that is, appraisal respect). The reason for this subtle difference is that the leaders in Vietnam's public sector are expected to care for followers and in return the followers offer their dedication and respect for seniority, authority, legitimate hierarchical ranks, and status (Quang and Vuong 2002; Vo and Hannif 2013). Therefore, these public sector workers have more positive attitudes toward their leaders' competence when they have received that basic recognition respect as one of basic psychological needs of humans. This is consistent with the assumptions in the integration of SIT and SET (Clarke and Mahadi 2017; Tavares, van Knippenberg, and van Dick 2016).

Our study further contributes to the literature by showing that the two-way respect combination in Vietnam aligns with less bullying and more engagement and therefore resulting in positive work behaviour (i.e. OCB). One of the reasons is that the subordinates in Confucian society like Vietnam are more likely to respect their leaders due to power, authority, hierarchy, and order of the leaders. Therefore, they will report less bullying as they understand that they need to comply with the dominant culture in the organization when the leaders could use and motivate bullying to maintain their power and status (Kwan, Tuckey, and Dollard 2014). While they potentially understand workplace bullying is an example of unethical workplace behaviour; however, they are powerless to voice their concern as they have less power (Kwan, Tuckey, and Dollard 2014).

Our study provides additional understanding of workplace bullying that in a context of Confucian and high power distance context like Vietnam the leaders' help and guidance plays an important role in quietening the impact of the negative act by reacting to, addressing, and thereby dissipating bullying (Grover 2014). In addition, appraisal respect is a form of openness to influence (Van Quaquebeke, Van Knippenberg, and Brodbeck 2011). When public sector employees show appraisal respect toward their leaders, they are more willing to be influenced and controlled by leaders. Subsequently, this would result in a reduction of potential bullying incidents when the followers accept and comply with rules for collective treatment in a respectful environment. These findings are consistent with and broaden recent work by Clarke and Mahadi (2017) that found a positive outcome of a two-way congruence of leader–follower respect on employees' job satisfaction and wellbeing. The findings also support Omari and Paull (2015) study by addressing the fact that a mutual respectful environment as a motivational mechanism for public service motivation is critically important in the public sector to eliminate workplace bullying because the public sector is highly characterized by unequal power distribution and bureaucracy that could silence the voices of employees. In addition, the findings support the assumption of the perspective of leader–member exchange relationships arguing that high quality of exchange relationships between the leader and subordinates, results in positive individual outcomes such as the reduction of negative behaviours (Brunetto et al. 2016) or the willingness behaviours to help other counterparts (Campbell, Lee, and Im 2016; Yeo et al. 2015).

The present findings speak to the primacy of felt recognition respect as this feeling has profoundly positive outcomes in terms of work engagement and OCB through bullying, while research on these relationships has still been scant (Devonish 2013; Organ 2018). The results suggest that it is not enough to be simply treated well as a valued being human being. The nature of the relationships with leaders is important. Our study found that

bullying is an outcome of lack of respect and a precursor of work engagement and OCB. This inclusive sequence brings together a comprehensive picture of the workplace situations and treatment. As such, it draws on some research in justice – concerning how people are treated with respect, bullying literature, and positive organizational scholarship. Altogether, our study and previous research show that recognition and appraisal respect combine to (a) promote basic motivational needs toward a positive work experience, and (b) deplete feelings concerning negative acts in the workplace represented by bullying, again pointing toward positive outcomes of work engagement and OCB.

As recently argued by Decker and Van Quaquebeke (2015), the interaction of different types of respect on employee outcomes requires further investigation. The present study answers this recommendation by contributing to the extant literature evidence of the moderating effect of recognition respect in a public sector where there is an inherent level of power distance and bureaucracy, such as in Vietnam. Power distance and bureaucracy in the public sector show a clear supervisor–subordinate relationship and the acceptance of what subordinates are told that can be a source for the emergence of workplace bullying. The finding means that employees receiving strong respect from the leader will increase their trust towards the management to perform actively and constructively in situations of bullying and, at the same time, the followers will feel more confident to address the issues with the leader, hence reducing the negative experience of work in a bullying situation. Thus, the present finding suggests that the feeling of being respected by the leaders is an important mechanism for public sector subordinates – to ground positive relationships between leaders and subordinates, and maintain their work engagement when negative acts are prevalent.

Managerial implications

Similar to research conducted in the public sector organizations in Western countries, our study identified the prevalence of workplace bullying in Vietnam and that it is associated with the lack of respect. Our study contributes clear evidence of the global phenomenon of public sector workers reporting high levels of negative experience of work behaviours, which damages the positive experience of work (Fevre et al. 2012; Lewis and Gunn 2007; Zapf et al. 2011). This finding is more important in the context of public sector in developing economies, such as Vietnam, which is characterized by a high degree of bureaucracy, power distance, and a dearth of leadership and management skills (Quang and Vuong 2002; Vo and Hannif 2013). As noted by Dickson, Den Hartog, and Mitchelson (2003) and Weng (2017), it is important for public sector organizations in Vietnam to provide comprehensive and close support to the public servants. As a part of ethical values (Clarke and Mahadi 2017), respect plays an important role in encouraging the employees to stay, to engage in, and deliver a quality public service (Omari and Paull 2015). It is therefore essential for public sector organizations in Vietnam to focus on providing an environment in which employee needs for being respected are met. This requires the improvement of managerial skills such as genuinely smiling at the followers, sitting near and leaning towards them, communicating and listening to their thoughts and opinions, and caring for others' interests in order to reduce the impersonal nature of the bureaucratic public sector setting (Magee and Frasier 2014; Zapf et al. 2003).

As employees accept power distance, close supervision, less freedom and delegation, and a lack of decision-making participation, giving feedback on leadership style is difficult in Vietnam (Quang and Vuong 2002). However, an awareness and evaluation of leadership

styles incorporating the attribute of respect is essential (Decker and Van Quaquebeke 2015; Van Quaquebeke, Zenker, and Eckloff 2009). Therefore, public sector organizations should consider a frequent examination of employees' perceptions of whether they have been treated with respect. This fundamental management practice turns out to be extremely important in making people feel happy and excited and wanting to engage more (i.e. public service motivation and work engagement).

Previous studies also show the negative consequences of having disrespectful leadership. For instance, disrespectful behaviours toward subordinates can lead to low levels of dedication, effort disbursement, and commitment (e.g. Sleebos, Ellemers, and de Gilder 2007). Our study shows that recognition respect is key to increasing appraisal respect for leaders, work engagement, and OCB, while appraisal respect can inhibit bullying incidents. Those relationships are occurring in the integration of social identity, social exchange, and motivated cognition processes. Importantly, this study showed the moderating role of recognition respect in maintaining subordinates' work engagement when bullying occurs. The findings suggest that leaders in the public sector should be trained to be respectful, honourable, and protective of their subordinates in order to enhance their standing with those subordinates. On the other hand, in such a context as Vietnam, recognition respect from the leaders is important for subordinates to choose the leaders they should follow and adjust their behaviours in accordance with what they perceive (Samnani 2013). Working with leaders who respect followers and are worthy of respect may enhance the positive work experiences of subordinates.

The last suggestion that emerged from the present findings is related to organizations' awareness and observation of bullying behaviours. It is important for public sector organizations to develop policies, practices, and mechanisms to prevent workplace bullying together with the enhancement of management skills and capacity to deal with such negative acts. As bullying was found to negatively affect work engagement and OCB, it is suggested that public sector organizations should consider an effective communication and response system in which employees are safe to report bullying incidents.

Limitations and future research

Despite the procedural remedies to reduce CMV applied in this study, there is an awareness that a single source of respondents at one time may be a potential limitation to the research. As argued by Chang, Van Witteloostuijn, and Eden (2010), the moderating effects together with other tests for CMV showed that common method bias was not a major issue. It is acknowledged that it is not easy to achieve good data in the form of feedback on leadership style in Vietnam's public sector organizations due to the suspicions of public sector managers concerning this type of research (Bartram, Stanton, and Thomas 2009; Quang and Vuong 2002). However, future studies could use different sources of respondents over multiple time points, or a longitudinal research design in conjunction with objective measures, to strengthen the causal direction and generalize the present findings (Jakobsen and Jensen 2015).

The mean value of OCB in this research suggests that future studies may examine other associated outcomes such as intention to leave (Kim 2018) or job embeddedness theory that have been found in previous empirical studies (see Lee, Burch, and Mitchell 2014). Additionally, future studies may consider the examination on specific types of leadership behaviours such as paternalistic leadership prevalent in a similar context like Vietnam in the relationships of respect, public service motivation, and work behaviours.

The prevalence of these two types respects found in this study might imply high quality LMX in this particular public sector organization in Vietnam. Future research should broaden the findings from the current research by incorporating leader–member exchange interactions on employee outcomes in the public sector as high quality LMX could have an impact on employee work outcomes. Furthermore, as respondents were from six branches of a public sector organization, the branch contextual conditions such as branch culture or work climate may result in variances in perceptions of leader–subordinate relationships. Therefore, future studies are encouraged to extend other contextual characteristics of specific branches to validate the research findings.

Conclusion

This study draws from SIT, SET, and MCT to show that public sector leaders are respected when they show their respect to subordinates in a Confucian environment. The present findings are important for Vietnam's public sector organizations as high power distance and bureaucracy negatively affected the balanced exchange relationships between leaders and subordinates. Overall, respect is a clearly delineated two-way street and, applied in the public sector, increases positive work outcomes for the employees. As bullying is prevalent in Vietnam, it is important for organizations to develop training programmes on leadership and managerial skills for the leaders to enhance their capacity to deal with negative work-place behaviours and improve the followers' psychological wellbeing.

Note

1. The present paper uses the terms 'appraisal and recognition' respect, which have a long history in philosophy (Darwall 1977). Decker and Van Quaquebeke (2015) adopted the terms 'vertical and horizontal' respect to identify the same concepts, and Rogers and Ashforth (2017) created the terms 'particularized and generalized' respect. These terms are not significantly differentiated, and the present article adopts the more established terms and offers this footnote for clarity.

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Disclosure statement

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