Forgiveness in the workplace: Exploring the impact on burnout, job satisfaction and task performance

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Abstract

This dissertation examines the relationship between workplace trait forgiveness and job satisfaction, job performance and employee burnout. Guided by social exchange theory and resource conservation theory, it was assumed that (a) higher levels of forgiveness would be associated with beneficial outcomes, and (b) that these relations would be mediated by the quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace. The mediating role of the existence of a forgiving organizational culture in the relation between forgiveness and work relationships is also taken into account. Finally, this study examines the role of the forgiver's status and how it may influence this process. In total there were 86 participants (38 males, 47 females and 1 non-binary), mainly working in the Netherlands. Partly confirming the hypotheses, the results of this study show a positive association between forgiveness and job satisfaction and an inverse association with burnout. The mediating effect of forgiveness culture was significant between forgiveness and interpersonal relationships, and specifically promoted the quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace. Overall, this thesis provides insight into the benefits of utilizing forgiveness in the workplace and suggests ways that organizations could put into practice in order to foster a culture of forgiveness and promote job satisfaction among their employees.

Introduction

Due to Covid-19, many firms have adjusted their attendance policies for employees, which may have impacted the workplace climate during the last few years. Working remotely and combining both types of work already gained popularity before becoming a necessity to a number of employees. The workplace remains an environment in which the employees have the opportunity to engage with each other socially, making meaningful interactions (Peeters et al., 2014). Interpersonal interactions can promote security, social support, and companionship, which makes them mandatory for a well-orchestrated organization and to advance employee performance (Carmeli et al., 2009). This also means that one of the major challenges in the workplace is how people handle transgressions. A transgression is the violation of a law, a moral principle, or a duty. Conflicts can be common in a workplace, as individuals in the organizations may differentiate significantly.

Organizational psychology has examined workplace transgressions, but mainly with an emphasis on retaliation, revenge, et cetera. Emphasizing the value of *forgiveness* is a novel approach to how employees should handle conflicts at work. Forgiveness is being defined in previous studies as the process of multiple motivational changes whereby one becomes less motivated to retaliate against an offender, less motivated to keep distance from an offender, and more motivated to act in ways that benefit an offender (Forster et al., 2020; McCullough et al., 1997).

Previous research has revealed that forgiveness can reduce burnout and job dissatisfaction and can increase performance, but it can also lead to improved relationships, characterized by trust and effective communication. Utilizing forgiveness, organizations could create a culture that promotes cooperation and trust, thus create a productive work environment (Cao, Van der Wal & Taris, 2021).

In this study, the work outcomes that are being examined are task performance, job satisfaction and burnout. Task performance refers to the ability of the employee to fulfill the assigned duties, responsibilities and tasks that the employee has within the organization, while maintaining an expected quality of work (Borman & Motowidlo, 1997). A positive impact of forgiveness on performance could mean that a person who possess high forgiveness could focus more on task responsibilities, dealing better with effectively resolving conflicts and maintaining positive sustainable relationships. Additionally, job satisfaction refers to the perception of an individual towards their job and work environment, specifically, how

fulfilled, happy and content someone feels in their work (Locke, 1976). Burnout is a state of emotional, physical and mental exhaustion as a result of chronic work-related stress (Locke, 1976). By forgiving someone after a transgression, could initiate the creation of positives emotions and promote well-being, thus mitigate burnout.

This study is important as it focuses on forgiveness as an element that can be used for the benefit of the individual, the group, and the organisation. The analysis of forgiveness in the workplace in combination with forgiver status and the quality of the organization's culture has not been studied before, therefore, this study will focus on trait forgiveness, also known as "dispositional forgiveness". In Figure 1 the process model of this study is depicted, with forgiveness as the independent variable, as the primarily purpose of this study is to highlight how forgiveness associates with work outcomes. The presence of a forgiving culture and the quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace are examined as mediators between forgiveness and the work outcomes. Forgiving culture refers to the extent to which forgiveness is valued within the organizations (Fehr & Gelfand, 2012). The quality of interpersonal interactions indicates how the employees interact within the organization, with high quality relationships being characterized by cooperation and effective communication, and low quality with the opposing values (Szostek, 2020). Performance, job satisfaction and burnout are the dependent variables, and finally status of the forgiver is the moderator between forgiveness and forgiving culture, in order to investigate how the individual's position within the organization's structure buffer forgiving cultures.

Theoretical background

Forgiveness. Forgiveness is defined by Brown (2003) as a tendency or general disposition to forgive interpersonal transgressions over time and across situations that is stable in a person. Research has shown that forgiveness is a coping mechanism for dealing with workplace transgressions, and that it is related with positive work outcomes, such as better psychological and physical well-being (Karremans et al., 2003), job satisfaction (Stackhouse, 2019), and lower levels of stress and higher work performance (Toussaint et al, 2018). Portraying forgiveness instead of aggression could benefit organizations and be an effective strategy of dealing with transgression in the workplace, as it facilitates positivity (Bobocel, 2013). Forgiveness could also be beneficial for the victim and the offender, as they

continue to work together after a transgression (Toussaint et al., 2016). Therefore, gain cycles are created.

Conservation of resources theory. According to the Conservation of Resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), people are motivated to protect their personal resources when they are in a stressful situation, including job-related resources and well-being. Because it is a coping technique that seeks to reduce unpleasant emotions while promoting growth and personal development, forgiveness can be seen as a personal resource. In particular, low forgiveness can lead to emotional exhaustion and poor performance, while high forgiveness tends to make people more resilient to stress and adaptable (Costa & Neves, 2017). Overall, the Conservation of resources theory focuses on preventing losing resources and strives to protect the already acquired resources. Also, it provides an explanation of how forgiveness can be used as a resource to increase job satisfaction, performance and decrease burnout.

According to the Conservation of resources model (Hobfoll, 1989), when these resource investments deliver a positive return and goals are achieved, individuals perceive it as a gain that expands the resource pool and increases the likelihood of acquiring additional resources in the future. On the contrary, although aggression and retaliation can provide short-term gratification, on the long-term they result in damaging outcomes for individuals and organizations, affecting interpersonal trust and work relationship satisfaction (Han et al., 2022). These negative loss spirals, infused with aggression, are not beneficial for the individual nor the organization, as they encourage negative responses and behaviors and normalize the repetition and reciprocity of inappropriate demeanors in the workplace (Hobfoll, 1989). Replacing aggression and retaliation with forgiveness could facilitate a creation of a positive climate. COR theory is discussed in the following paragraph.

Forgiveness culture: What it is and how it works. Forgiveness in the workplace can facilitate a change in organizational culture and create a forgiving organizational culture (Fehr & Gelfand, 2012). Organizational cultures can be characterized as more or less forgiving, depending on how much forgiveness is appreciated, valued, promoted, and practiced as a resource in an organization. This culture perceives that conflicts and mistakes are unavoidable in a workplace, thus it promotes forgiveness as a coping mechanism, which

is being utilized by all the employees regardless their hierarchy. That way, it fosters the creation of an empathetic work environment.

Specifically, forgiving organizational cultures promote cooperation, communication, and trust among employees, which results in tighter intraorganizational connections (Cameron et al., 2012). Fehr and Gelfand (2012) argue that a forgiving culture shares similarities with justice and psychological safety climates. Specifically, a psychological safety climate refers to the shared employee perception about organizational practices and procedures, that aim to protect the mental and physical health of the individuals (Fattori et al, 2022). A justice organizational climate refers to a work environment were the employees feel that they are treated fairly, and it is build based on fairness, equity and transparency (Greenberg, 1990). Fehr and Gelfand (2012) also highlight that forgiving climates on an organizational level can be differentiated from justice climates to the offender's behavior, as offenders adopt an apologetic stance.

A necessity for creating and maintaining a culture of forgiveness in an organization is that the company has a strong foundation of core cultural values, namely justice, temperance, and compassion (Fehr & Gerlfand, 2012). Thus, organizations that succeed in building a climate of forgiveness simultaneously succeed in building a forgiving perception. For example, when a conflict occurs, the perpetrator engages in reconciliation practices with the victim, as this empathetic pro-social behavior is commonly seen and used in the work environment. Empathetic responses in transgressions, as well as taking perspective and reducing anger, are encouraged in forgiving cultures, thus transforming the relationship between offender and victim into a mutual process of learning and mutual acceptance. A key element in cultivating and reproducing forgiving behaviors in organizations is the involvement of leaders. Leaders are role models for employees, therefore employees through social learning imitate the values and actions of their leaders (Fehr & Gerlfand, 2012).

Social exchange theory. Social exchange theory can explain how forgiveness operates in the workplace. According to social exchange theory (SET), relationships are reciprocal; for instance, when someone acts in a way that benefits an individual, that person would then strive to return the favor and provide assistance in order to keep the connection stable (Blau, 1964). In line with the social exchange theory, when an organization has a forgiving culture, tolerance and understanding are some of its basic principles. As a result, in

that environment, employees will use mutual understanding while working and develop their communication and collaboration abilities. (Cao, van der Wal & Taris, 2021). According to Cropanzano and Mitchell (2005), forgiveness is a type of social exchange in which the victim absolves the other of guilt and the offender reciprocates by choosing to act more positively in future interactions. Thus, this shows that forgiveness could be beneficial for the organization and the individual, enhancing job satisfaction and in general the quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace.

Quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace. The quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace also affects positively or negatively workplace outcomes. Szostek (2020) argues that there are high- and low-quality interpersonal relationships at work, suggesting that high-quality ones are characterized by positive emotions, satisfaction and greater frequency; low-quality relationships are characterized by poor communication and negative behavior such as conflict. Specifically, when workplace relationships are characterized by social support, the social support theory suggests social support can improve well-being, reduce stress, and mitigate burnout (Lakey & Cohen, 2000). Conversely, bad-quality interpersonal relationships lack social support and could potentially damage employee well-being, and therefore can result in lower job satisfaction (Szostek, 2020). Given that both financial and social survival are on the line, forgiveness is a crucial component in resolving transgressions in workplace interpersonal relationships (Aquino et al., 2006).

Forgiveness and position of the victim. It is important to take into account that not all expressions of forgiveness have the same impact; how they are interpreted depends on the hierarchical position of the victim-offender relationship (Zheng & Dijke, 2020). Therefore, the status of the forgiver must be taken under consideration. Research reveals that the effectivity of the restoration process after a transgression is highly affected by the status of the forgiver/victim (Zheng & Dijke, 2020). Supporting evidence also indicates that status of the forgiver (victim) is a significant factor, as higher or lower status may affect the response a victim may receive from the offender after a transgression (Aquino, 2006). For example, in case of a transgression, a victim who holds lower status than the offender will find it more beneficial to reconciliate and sustain a relationship, than to seek revenge (Aquino, 2006).

Moreover, lower status victims are more likely to choose forgiveness as a coping mechanism, as it relieves them from psychological distress, due to their incapability of choosing revenge (Aquino, 2006). This behavior can also lead them to receive further advantages if it is appreciated by the high-status offender.

Alternatively, when the victim holds high status in a conflict, they may proceed with aggressive reactions, as the victim might find even demining to be disrespected by a low-status employee (Aquino, 2006). High-ranking individuals, because of their leadership position, often interact with lower-ranking employees, which could lead them to seek revenge in order not to show weakness and prevent future confrontations (Aquino, 2006). Lastly, high status leaders are most likely to forgive lower status individuals, if a forgiving culture is present in the organization (Aquino, 2006).

This study investigates the moderating effect of status of the forgiver between trait forgiveness and forgiving cultures. Previous research supports that those value and prioritize status and hierarchy tend to be less forgiving (Kashima, Bratanova & Peters, 2018). Thus, organizational cultures that place a high value on status could hinder the development of forgiveness and contribute to a less forgiving climate.

The present study: Hypotheses and model

This research focuses on forgiveness in the workplace and its association with job satisfaction, performance, and burnout, while considering quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace as mediator. Also, the mediating effect of forgiveness culture in the workplace between forgiveness and quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace is taken into account, because having a forgiving culture in the corporation could facilitate interpersonal relationships based on the same values. Lastly, we investigate the moderating effect of the status of the forgiver, between forgiveness and forgiving cultures, as high or low status could mitigate the creation of forgiving cultures. In this study we aim to address three questions.

- The first question is: *"Does forgiveness in the workplace influence job satisfaction, burnout, and performance? Are these associations mediated by the quality of interpersonal relationships?"*

- The second question is: *"Does forgiveness culture of an organization mediate the association between forgiveness and the quality of interpersonal relationships?"*
- The third question is: *"What role does the status of the forgiver play in these relationships?"*

Based on the overview of theories and findings presented above, the following hypotheses will be tested (cf. Figure 1):

Hypothesis 1: Forgiveness is positively associated with positive work outcomes: job satisfaction (H1a), performance (H1b); and negatively associated with burnout (H1c).

Hypothesis 2: The associations mentioned in H1 are mediated by the quality of interpersonal relationships (H2a: job satisfaction, H2b: performance, H2c: burnout).

Hypothesis 3: High (low) forgiveness is associated with high (low) quality of interpersonal relationships (social companionship, perceived coworker social support), when (a) forgiveness culture (trust and co-operation) mediates this relationship and it is high (low) (H3a), and (b) status/power of the forgiver moderates the relationship between forgiveness and forgiving culture, and it is low(high) (H3b).
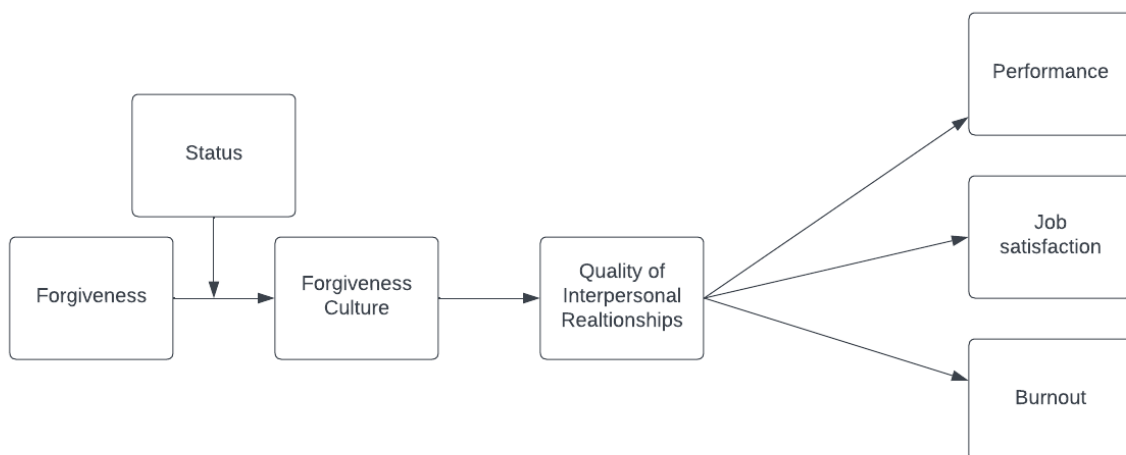
Figure 1: Proposed model of the relationship between forgiveness in the workplace, quality of interpersonal relationships, productivity, job satisfaction, burnout, forgiveness culture and status of the forgiver.

Method

Ethical approval. The study was approved by the ethical committee of the faculty of social sciences of Utrecht University, number 23-0977.

Participants, design and procedure

The participants of this research were working people, mostly from organizations across the Netherlands. This study included employees who were working full-time, part-time, or they were interns. The participants were recruited through social media platforms, such as LinkedIn and Facebook. In total, the participants in this study were 111 people. Around twenty participants did not finish the questionnaire, the majority due to lack of time, thus they were excluded from the data. Moreover, tests were conducted for outliers using Mahalanobis, Leverage and Cook's distance, in order to ensure the reliability and integrity of the data, which led to deleting two more participants. The remaining participants were 86, which was a sufficient sample, as the G power test (Faul et al, 2007) indicated that an adequate sample for the analysis of my hypothesis was 77 people.

For this study, the data were collected using a software program named Qualtrics (Qualtrics, Provo, UT, 2020). Participants received a link to the online questionnaire. Before entering the survey, the participants were informed about the purpose of the study, the future manipulation of their data and had the option to give their consent, in order to continue with the questionnaire. Were they to have any questions, they could find in the information letter (Appendix A) the personal details of the creators of the questionnaire, in order to receive further clarification. Also, in the information letter the participants were informed about the ethical aspects of the study. Although the study mainly focuses on forgiveness in the workplace, and specifically the tendency to forgive, the questionnaire also collected data on burnout, job satisfaction, work performance, quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace, status of the forgiver and forgiveness culture. The items were presented in a sequence, and it was mandatory to answer every question to continue. Participants were

allowed to quit the survey at any point, with the possibility to return to finish it later. Overall, the time to fill in the questionnaire was around 12 minutes.

Demographics. This survey included as demographics the age, gender, tenure with the organization of the employee and educational level. The tenure with the organization was divided into three types, which were: 1-3 years, 4-7 years and 7+ years. The age was also divided into three sections, 18-24 years old, 25-44 years old and 45 or over. Of these 86 participants, 38 were male, 47 were female and 1 was non-binary. Regarding the tenure with the organisation, 67 people were 1-3 years in the organisation, 9 people were 4-7 years in the organisation and 10 people were 10+ years in the organisation. Their educational level was 14 people high school, 4 people vocational education, 30 people bachelor's degree and 38 people master's degree. Lastly, the age of the participants for 27 people was 18-24 years, for 46 people was 25-44 years old, and for 13 people was 45 and over years old.

Measures

In the following section discusses the content of the survey. The full questionnaire can be found in Appendix B.

Trait Forgiveness. The trait forgiveness of the participants was measured with items of the Tendency to Forgive Scale (TFF; Brown, 2003). Responses were given on 7- point Likert-type scale, with 1- Strongly disagree and 7- Strongly agree. An item that was used was "If someone wrongs me, I often think about it a lot afterward." The Cronbach alpha of Forgiveness was .63.

Burnout. Burnout was measured with the emotional exhaustion scale of the Burnout Assessment Tool (BAT) (Schaufeli, De Witte & Desart, 2019). The first eight statements from the core symptoms segment were used to assess the amount of exhaustion/burnout that the participants experienced, including "After a day at work, I find it hard to recover my energy." (1- Never, 5- Always). Cronbach's alpha was .83, which is satisfactory

Job Satisfaction. A three-item subscale of the Michigan Organizational Assessment Questionnaire was used to measure job satisfaction (Cammann et al, 1979). Participants were asked to rate their agreement with six answers ranging from 1- Disagree very much to 6- Agree very much. For example, "In general, I like working here." The reliability was .84.

Work Performance. Work Performance was measured with the Individual Work Performance Questionnaire (IWP), which was implemented on Dutch employees (Koopmans et al, 2013). This questionnaire is divided to three categories, the task performance scale, the contextual performance scale and the counterproductive work behavior scale. For the purposes of this study, only the task performance scale was used. All items had a recall period of 3 months and a five-point rating scale from 1- Seldom to 5- Always. An example is "I was able to perform my work well with minimal time and effort. Collaboration with others was very productive." Cronbach alpha was .66.

Quality of Interpersonal Relationships in the Workplace. Quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace was measured by two questionnaires. Firstly, 4 items were used from the social support scale designed by O'Driscoll (2000), specifically from the perceived co-worker support section. Answers were given on a 5- point Likert scale, 0- Never and 4- Always. An example is "My colleagues give me helpful information or advice."

Secondly, 7 items from the social companionship scale by Wright et al (2006) were used and calculated in a 7- point Likert scale, with 1- Strongly disagree and 7- Strongly agree. For example, "There is someone at work I can talk to about my day-to-day work problems." The reliability of this scale was .85.

Status of the forgiver. In order to determine the status of the participants, the Workplace Status Scale (Djurdjevic, 2017) was used, with a 7- point Likert scale ranging from 1- Strogly disagree to 7- Strongly agree. This questionnaire has 5 items, an example is "I have a great deal of prestige in my organization." Cronbach's alpha was .92.

Forgiveness Culture in the Workplace. For estimating the forgiveness culture in the workplace, the items from the Attitudes toward forgiveness scale (ATF; Brown, 2003) were adapted, in order for them to refer to the organization/team. Specifically, this section of the questionnaire started with the statement "In my organization/team we…" followed by the item, so the people who filled in the questionnaire could understand that they needed to answer these questions when having in mind their work environment. Answers were given on a 7- point Likert scale, with 1- Strongly disagree and 7- Strongly agree. An example of that is "In my organization/team we have no problem at all with people staying mad at those who hurt them", which was reversed to denote forgiveness. The reliability of this scale was .65.

Statistical analysis

The dataset collected with the questionnaires was analyzed by SPSS. Cronbach's alpha was examined to evaluate internal consistency and descriptive statistics were used. The scores were normally distributed, and the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity were also met. A bivariate correlation analysis was conducted between all variables (Table 1). After that, a mediation analysis was carried out to estimate whether quality of interpersonal relationships mediates the relationship between trait forgiveness and job satisfaction, burnout and task performance. The PROCESS model from Hayes (Hayes, 2017), an extension in SPSS, was used as an extra tool for the mediation and moderation analysis. The interaction variables were computed manually and checked by PROCESS, as it runs regression models. Model 4 from PROCESS was used 3 times separately for each dependent variable, with bootstrapping at 5,000 samples and 95% confidence interval. Lastly, the moderation effect of status of the forgiver between forgiveness and forgiving culture was tested by model 1 from PROCESS, and for the mediating effect of forgiving culture between forgiveness and quality of interpersonal relationship model 4 for PROCESS was used, with bootstrapping at 5,000 samples for both.

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations and Intercorrelations for All Variables

		Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1	Forgiveness	39.7	1.04							
2	Burnout	26.6	0.64	-22*						
3	JobSatisfaction	47.7	1.15	.23*	-.48**					
4	Performance	38.6	.48	.05	-.37**	.27**				
5	Status	40.4	1.53	.17	.04	.26*	.13			
6	Forg Culture	45.1	.67	.37**	-.36**	.25*	.16	.16		
7	Quality	47.1	.85	.21*	-.33**	.53**	.33**	.15	.32**	

*Note. N=86. *p<.05; **p<.01*

Results

Correlation Matrix

The means, standard deviations and intercorrelations between the variables of the study can be found in Table 1. First, the correlations regarding forgiveness will be discussed. Results of the Pearson correlation indicated that there was a negative relationship between forgiveness and burnout ($r = -.22$, $p < .05$). This implies that a high score on forgiveness is associated with a lower score on burnout. Results also showed a moderate positive association between forgiveness and job satisfaction ($r = .23$, $p < .05$), forgiveness and forgiving culture ($r = .37$, $p < .01$) forgiveness and quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace ($r = .21$, $p < .05$). This indicates that high scores of forgiveness associate with the scores of job satisfaction, forgiving culture and quality of interpersonal relationships. Forgiveness was not significantly correlated with performance and status.

As for burnout, it was found that it was negatively correlated with all the variables, namely job satisfaction ($r = -.48$, $p < .01$), performance ($r = -.37$, $p < .01$), forgiving culture ($r =- .36$, $p < .01$) and quality of interpersonal relationships ($r = -21$, $p < .05$). This implies that high scores of burnout associate with job satisfaction, performance, the forgiving culture of an organization and the quality of interpersonal relationships in a workplace. Burnout was not significantly correlated with status.

Regarding job satisfaction, it was positively correlated with performance ($r = .27$, $p < .01$), status ($r = .26$, $p < .05$), forgiving culture ($r = .25$, $p < .05$) and quality of interpersonal relationships ($r = .53$, $p < .01$). This means that higher level of job satisfaction has a positive association with performance, status of the forgiver, forgiving organizational culture and quality of interpersonal relationships. Regarding performance, was also positively associated with quality of interpersonal relationships, but there was no significant correlation between performance and status, and performance and forgiving culture.

Lastly, forgiving culture was positively correlated with quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace ($r = .32$, $p < .01$), indicating that higher forgiving culture associate with the quality of interpersonal interactions. Status had only one significant positive correlation with job satisfaction, and the rest of the associations were $p > .05$.

The first hypothesis was that trait forgiveness would show positive correlations with job satisfaction and performance and negative correlations with burnout. Results mostly supported this hypothesis, showing that forgiveness is associated with higher job satisfaction

($r = .23$, $p <.05$), (F (1,84) = 4.85, $p <.05$, $R^2 = .05$) and lower burnout ($r = -.22$, $p <.05$), (F (1,84) = 4.25, $p <.05$, $R^2 = .05$). Regarding in role performance, forgiveness was not significantly correlated with this variable ($r = .05$, $p >.05$), (F (1,84) = .24, $p >.05$, $R^2 = .002$).

Mediation analysis of H2

To test hypothesis 2, a mediation analysis was conducted to test whether quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace mediates the relationship between trait forgiveness and the variables job satisfaction (H2a), performance (H2b) and burnout (H2c). Model 4 from PROCESS was used to perform this analysis in SPSS.

Regarding H2a, results indicated that the mediation was not significant. The direct association between forgiveness and quality of interpersonal relationships was significant [F (1,84) = 4.05, $p <.05$, $R^2 = .04$, $b = .17$, t (84) = 2.01, $p <.05$]. The direct effect between the mediator and job satisfaction was also significant ($b = .68$, t (83) = 5.4, $p <.01$). The direct effect of forgiveness on job satisfaction was significant (F (1,84) = 4.85, $p <.05$, $R^2 = .05$). However, when looking for the mediation effect, quality of interpersonal relationships did not mediate forgiveness and job satisfaction, $b = .12$, 95% CI [-.0062, .2562].

Regarding H2b, results indicated that the mediation was not significant. The direct effect of forgiveness on quality of interpersonal relationships was significant [F (1,84) = 4.05, $p <.05$, $R^2 = .05$, $b = .17$, t (84) = 2.01, $p <.05$]. The direct effect between the moderator and performance was also significant ($b = .19$, t (83) = 3.18, $p <.01$). The direct effect of forgiveness on task performance was not significant (F (1,84) = .24, $p >.05$, $R^2 = .002$). When looking for the mediation effect, quality of interpersonal relationships did not mediate forgiveness and performance, $b = .03$, 95% CI [-.0027, .0761].

Regarding H2c, results indicated that the mediation was not significant. The direct effect of forgiveness on quality of interpersonal relationships was significant [F (1,84) = 4.05, $p <.05$, $R^2 = .04$, $b = .17$, t (84) = 2.01, $p <.05$]. The direct effect between the moderator and burnout was also significant ($b = -.22$, t (83) = -2.82, $p <.01$). The direct effect of forgiveness on burnout was significant (F (1,84) = 4.25, $p <.05$, $R^2 = .05$). When looking for the mediation effect, quality of interpersonal relationships did not mediate forgiveness and burnout, $b = -.03$, 95% CI [-.0976, .0029].

Mediation and moderation analysis of H3

To test hypothesis 3, a mediation analysis was conducted to test whether (a) forgiving culture mediates the relationship between forgiveness and quality of interpersonal relationships, and (b) a moderation analysis to test whether status moderates the relationship between forgiveness and forgiving culture. This hypothesis was partially supported. The mediation was significant, as the results showed that zero was not included in the confidence interval, $b = .08$, 95% CI [.01, .17]. For a graphic representation of the results, see Figure 2.
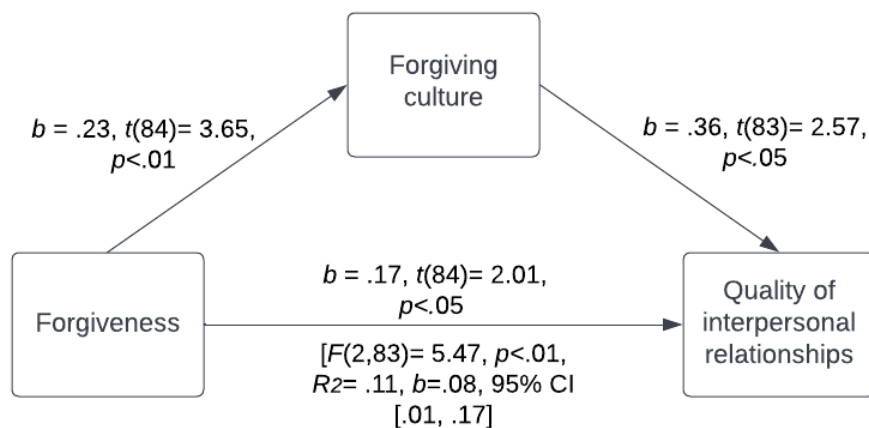

Figure 2: Mediation effect of forgiveness between forgiveness and quality of interpersonal relationships. Note: the numbers including F indicate the effect of the predictor variable on the criterion variable with the mediator in the model.

The moderation analysis was for H3b was tested with model 1 from PROCESS, and it was not significant. Hypothesis 3b stated that status of the forgiver moderates forgiveness and forgiving culture. Process showed that the moderation was not significant, therefore rejecting H3b. Specifically, the direct effect of status on forgiving culture was significant ($b = -.10$, $t(82) = -2.00$, $p < .05$). The direct effect of forgiveness on forgiving culture was also significant ($b = .26$, $t(82) = 3.40$, $p < .01$). When looking for the moderation effect, status of the forgiver did not moderate forgiveness and forgiving culture, $b = -.01$, $t(82) = -.34$, $p = .73$.

Discussion

The purpose of this study was to understand whether responding in a forgiving manner after a workplace conflict is associated with improved work outcomes and to uncover potential mediators and facilitators. A complex model was built with several variables, i.e., trait forgiveness, status of the forgiver, forgiving organizational culture, quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace, job satisfaction, in role performance, and burnout, in order to examine the correlations between them and decipher how forgiveness could be incorporated in the everyday life in a work environment and be beneficial for the organization and the employees.

Forgiveness and work outcomes

The first interesting finding of this study is that forgiveness is positively related to job satisfaction, negatively to burnout, but not to in role/job performance. This means that an employee who responds to an infraction with forgiveness might experience increased job satisfaction and happiness, i.e., job satisfaction. At the same time, this employee might experience less negativity after the misconduct and less burnout. The results showed that individuals with higher level of forgiveness tend to experience lower levels of burnout. In terms of task performance, forgiveness does not appear to affect how employees perform the tasks, responsibilities and duties assigned to them within the organization. Previous studies support these findings, saying that forgiveness is more related to how employees feel about their work and less to how they perform at it (Cao, Van der Wal & Taris, 2021). In sum, forgiveness is able to advance work outcomes that are based on emotions and possibly lead to well-being, but it is not able to increase or decrease task performance. Organization could use forgiveness to mitigate burnout.

Effect of forgiveness on work relationships

The second interesting finding of this study was that although quality of interpersonal relationships did not mediate the relationship between forgiveness and work outcomes, forgiveness was associated with higher quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace. This implies that forgiveness is associated with stronger relationships and could restore damaged interpersonal relationships in the workplace. Higher quality relationships could lead to improved teamwork, communication and collaboration. Previous research

suggests that when one presents forgiveness as an act of reconciliation, it is going to lead to the restoration of the damaged relationship and help to maintain a better social relationship in the future (Faldetta, 2022).

       Regarding the non-significant mediation of interpersonal relationship quality in the workplace, despite the significant direct effect of forgiveness on relationships and between relationships and outcome variables, this suggests that other factors may have a more important role in this mediating process. Future research should further explore this interesting mediation.

Mediating role of forgiving culture

       The third important finding of this study was that forgiving organizational culture mediates the relationships between forgiveness and the quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace. This means that to be able to practice forgiveness in the workplace and promote the quality of social relationships in the workplace, you must first value, appreciate, promote, foster a forgiving culture in the organization that promotes forgiving acts. Previous research has shown that the existence of a forgiving organizational culture promotes cooperation, communication and trust among employees, which leads to closer intra-organizational relationships (Cameron et al., 2012). The current study contributes to previous research by providing evidence that when individuals work in an environment that promotes forgiveness and understanding, they are more likely to engage in positive interactions, build strong relationships, and contribute to a supportive and harmonious work environment. Social exchange theory can explain this correlation.

       Organizations could develop a forgiving organizational culture in the workplace in several ways. One effective way is by having organizational leaders as role models who promote the principles of forgiveness, portray forgiveness in the workplace, and generally promote a sense of collective purpose and identity. Moreover, organizations could implement interventions such as team building and communication skill building (Toussaint et al, 2016).

Direct effect of status

       Lastly, status was not significantly moderating the relationship between forgiveness and forgiving culture, but it was found that that high status of the forgiver has a direct negative effect on forgiving culture. This finding aligns with previous research demonstrating

that when the forgiver has high status, is it more likely that they will engage in demeaning and unfair treatments towards others (Zheng & Dijke 2020), which reduces the trust within the organization and in general a culture that promotes forgiveness. This also suggests that organizational cultures that prioritize status may inhibit the development of forgiveness and contribute to a less forgiving work environment.

In sum, two out of three hypotheses were partially supported. Although the second hypothesis that quality of interpersonal relationships in the workplace mediates the relationships between forgiveness and work outcomes was not accepted, it provided a new insight in forgiveness in the workplace and possible external variables that could affect the relationship between trait forgiveness and work outcomes. This study adds to our understanding of forgiveness in the workplace.

According to the findings, forgiveness improves job satisfaction, minimizes burnout, and promotes higher quality interpersonal interactions. A forgiving organisational culture's mediating function emphasizes the need of organisations creating an environment that values forgiveness and encourages understanding. The direct detrimental influence of high-status individuals on forgiving culture, on the other hand, underlines the possible difficulties in encouraging forgiveness within hierarchical organisational structures.

Theoretical and practical implications

In terms of theoretical implications, this study highlights the distinction between the effect of forgiveness on performance and the effect of forgiveness on emotional experiences at work, i.e., job satisfaction and burnout. Therefore, when examining forgiveness in the workplace, both the affective and cognitive dimensions of forgiveness should be considered.

Furthermore, this study adds to the literature on the role of interpersonal relationships in the workplace. It was found that forgiveness is positively associated with high quality of social relationships, suggesting that it can be used to restore and strengthen workplace relationships.

The major finding of this study was the mediating role of forgiveness culture. Forgiving organizational cultures facilitate forgiveness and foster workplace relationships, thereby creating positive social dynamics (gain spirals). This highlights the need for organisations to use forgiveness as a core organisational value.

In terms of practical implications, organisations could implement interventions that promote forgiveness and encourage open communication and empathy among employees. For example, trainings on conflict resolution based on the value of forgiveness could benefit both the organisation and employees. In addition, team-building interventions can strengthen workplace relationships and help employees build stronger relationships.

Organisations should also be mindful of the impact of status on cultures of forgiveness and how this hinders its development. In particular, creating an inclusive and egalitarian work environment is essential in order to protect forgiveness from the negative and rigid hierarchical structures of the regime.

Finally, leaders should act as role models of forgiveness and demonstrate forgiveness and emphasize its importance. Creating a supportive environment could foster a culture of forgiveness and, therefore, promote emotional work outcomes.

Limitations and future research

This study has some limitations. First of all, the data were based on self-report measures. The low reliability of some of the self-report measures used here could affect the reliability of the study and imbue it with common method bias. Participants may have provided socially sympathetic responses rather than their own beliefs and experiences. Future research could collect data using more objective methods, such as observer ratings, to ensure reliability and trustworthiness. Thus, a deeper understanding of these complex relationships would surface and make the results generalizable.

Second, this study employed a cross-sectional design, which limits the ability to establish causality of the relationships. Future longitudinal or experimental analysis would be beneficial as it would provide insight into how forgiveness evolves over time and establish stronger causality.

Furthermore, the present study was conducted with a small sample, mainly of working individuals from the Netherlands. In order to strengthen the external validity and generalizability of this study, future research could replicate this study design with a larger, more diverse sample. This limitation could have affected the second hypothesis of this study, as the bootstrap was not significant by a small margin. Also, the third hypothesis was only partially supported, but a larger sample may be needed in order to examine these complex correlations.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this thesis aimed to understand the role of forgiveness in the workplace and its impact on work outcomes. The findings of this study provide additional insight in three areas of understanding. This thesis showed that forgiveness can be an important asset in the workplace that is related to job satisfaction, prevention of burnout and beneficial organizational climate. Therefore, organizations should attempt to promote levels of forgiveness among their employees. Overall, workplace conflict negatively affects organizational life and an effective way to mitigate these effects is to cultivate a forgiving work environment that encourages employees to use forgiveness as a coping mechanism. Organisations should put this knowledge into practice in order to improve employee job satisfaction and show that they actively care about their mental health.

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Appendix A: Information letter

Utrecht, March 2023
Information Letter UU Research on Forgiveness in the Workplace

Thank you for your interest in our study.
In this study we focus on how the social relationships that people have at work relate to how they feel and behave at work. Moreover, understanding the relationship between these variables and the quality of interpersonal relationships at work may help explain some organizational behaviors and provide a better understanding of the mechanisms of forgiveness.

You can participate if you:
-Are over 18 years old.
-Work in an organisation for at least 12 hours per week.

In this study we ask you to complete a number of questions about these topics. We ask whether you agree or disagree with these statements. What matters is your own, honest opinion regarding these statements; there are no correct or incorrect answers. We expect that this study will take about 15 minutes to complete. That is all we ask from you. Your answers will be treated confidentially and will be analysed and stored anonymously. Only the researchers have access to your data. The data we collect will be stored for at least 10 years. This is in accordance with the guidelines of the Universities of the Netherlands and subject to European and UK privacy regulations.
Your participation is voluntary. You can end your participation in the study at any time, without any explanation and without any negative consequences. If you end your participation, we will use the data collected up to that point, unless you explicitly inform us otherwise.
If you have any questions or comments about the study, please contact t.w.taris@uu.nl and a.dimitriou2@students.uu.nl .If you have a complaint about this study, please contact our university's complaints officer at klachtenfunctionaris-fetcsocwet@uu.nl.
If, after reading this information letter, you decide to take part in this study, we kindly ask you to click the box on the bottom of this page. By clicking this box you agree to participate

in the study, and that you allow us to use your answers for scientific purposes (specifically, writing and publishing a scientific report).

Thank you,
Agapi Dimitriou

Utrecht University, Department of Psychology - Social, Health and Organisational Psychology

Consent statement:

I hereby declare that I have read the information letter about the "Forgiveness in the workplace" study and agree to participate in the study.

( ) I agree to participate in the study.
( ) I do not agree to participate in the study.

Appendix B: Questionnaire

Demographics

- First, we would like to have some background information about you. What is your gender?

  Male /Female /Non- binary/ Prefer not to say

- How old are you?

  18-24/ 25-44/ 45 or over

- For how long how you been working with this organisation?

  1-3 years/ 4-7 years/ 7+ years

- What is the highest level of education that you have completed?

High school/ Vocational education/ Bachelor's Degree/ Master's Degree/ PhD-

Doctorare/ No degree or diploma obtained

Burnout

Answers are given on a 5-point Likert scale (1= Never, 2=Rarely, 3= Sometimes, 4= Often, 4= Always).

1. At work, I feel mentally exhausted
2. Everything I do at work requires a great deal of effort
3. After a day at work, I find it hard to recover my energy
4. At work, I feel physically exhausted
5. When I get up in the morning, I lack the energy to start a new day at work
6. I want to be active at work, but somehow I am unable to manage
7. When I exert myself at work, I quickly get tired
8. At the end of my working day, I feel mentally exhausted and drained

Job satisfaction

Answers are given on a 6 -point Likert scale (1= Disagree very much, 2= Disagree moderately, 3= Disagree slightly, 4= Agree slightly, 5= Agree moderately, 6= Agree very much)

1. In general, I don't like my job
2. All in all, I am satisfied with my job.
3. In general, l like working here

Task performance

All items had a recall period of 3 months and a five-point Likert scale (1= Never, 2=Rarely, 3= Sometimes, 4= Often, 4= Always).

In the past 3 months

1. I managed to plan my work so that it was done on time.
2. My planning was optimal.

3. I kept in mind the results that I had to achieve in my work.
4. I was able to separate main issues from side issues at work.
5. I knew how to set the right priorities.
6. I was able to perform my work well with minimal time and effort. Collaboration with others was very productive.

Forgiveness

Answers are given on 7-point Likert-type scales (1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Somewhat Disagree, 4= Neither agree nor disagree, 5= Somewhat agree, 6= Agree, 7= Strongly agree).

Tendency to Forgive (TTF)

1. I tend to get over it quickly when someone hurts my feelings.
2. If someone wrongs me, I often think about it a lot after- ward. (reversed)
3. I have a tendency to harbor grudges. (reversed)
4. When people wrong me, my approach is just to forgive and forget.

Workplace Status

Answers are given on 7-point Likert-type scales (1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Somewhat Disagree, 4= Neither agree nor disagree, 5= Somewhat agree, 6= Agree, 7= Strongly agree).

1. I have a great deal of prestige in my organization.
2. I possess high status in my organization.
3. I occupy a respected position in my organization.
4. I have a position of prestige in my organization.
5. I possess a high level of prominence in my organization.

Perceived co-worker support

How would you describe your relationship with your coworkers?

Answers are given on a 5-point Likert scale (0= Never, 1=Sometimes, 2= Often, 3= Very Often, 4= Always).

1. My colleagues give me helpful information or advice.
2. My colleagues are sympathetic and give me advice.
3. My colleagues give me clear and helpful feedback.
4. My colleagues give me practical assistance.

Forgiveness culture in the office

Answers are given on 7-point Likert-type scales (1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Somewhat Disagree, 4= Neither agree nor disagree, 5= Somewhat agree, 6= Agree, 7= Strongly agree).

In my organization/team, we:

- tend to get over it quickly when someone hurts somebody else's feelings.
- have a tendency to harbor grudges. (reversed)
- forgive and forget if somebody wrongs somebody else
- often think a lot about it afterward if someone wrongs somebody else
- believe that forgiveness is a moral virtue.
- feel that justice is more important than mercy. (reversed)
- consider it admirable to be a forgiving person.
- have no problem at all with people staying mad at those who hurt them. (reversed)
- believe that forgiveness is a sign of weakness. (reversed)
- feel that people should work harder than they do to let go of the wrongs they have suffered.

Social companionship

Answers are given on 7-point Likert-type scales (1= Strongly disagree, 2= Disagree, 3= Somewhat Disagree, 4= Neither agree nor disagree, 5= Somewhat agree, 6= Agree, 7= Strongly agree).

1. I have social companionship/fellowship at work.
2. I feel included in the social aspects of work.
3. There is someone at work I can talk to about me day to day work problems if I need to.
4. There is no-one at work I can share personal thoughts with if I want to. (reversed).
5. I have someone at work I can spend time with on my breaks if I want to.
6. I feel part of a group of friends at work.
7. There are people at work who take the trouble to listen to me.