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MAKING INCIVILITY COUNT: A ARGUMENT FOR THE INCLUSION OF INCVILITY IN PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

Danylle Kunkel, Radford University
Dan Davidson, Radford University

ABSTRACT

This qualitative research study examines the concept of incivility as a sanctionable act in the workplace. We propose that while there is much discussion by both practitioners and researchers concerning the topics of such behaviors as incivility, mutual respect, and collegiality, seldom do we find the issue of incivility included as part of performance reviews. We suggest that specific measures of incivility should be included in workplace performance assessments to prevent incivil behavior from continuing to be ambiguous and unsanctionable for many industries.

INTRODUCTION

Incivility in the workplace is more than bad manners or boorish behavior. It affects the bottom line of the business. Incivility is one of the factors causing stress in the workplace, and stress in the workplace costs U.S. businesses an estimated $300 billion per year (Porath and Pearson, 2012). Despite a growing body of evidence showing the impact of incivility in the workplace and its impact on morale and performance, current performance appraisal measurements typically do not measure incivil behavior. Performance management systems are designed to encourage, and thus to increase, specific behaviors which lead to completion of organizational objectives. It can be contended that these behaviors are actually behavioral norms directly embedded in the culture. The majority of organizations measure these behaviors through the use of performance appraisals. It has been noted that the ratings on performance appraisals are directly linked to both organizational reward systems and to the imposition of sanctions or acts of discipline, even to the point of failed promotion and dismissal. However, if incivil behavior is typically not measured, one must question the validity of an organization's performance appraisals.

The goal of this paper is to shed light on the types of behaviors that are being included in contemporary performance appraisals. We will examine the types of behavior, civil and incivil, being measured as part of performance management systems. The incivility construct has gained a great deal of traction. Given its high prevalence and the undesirable outcomes with which it is associated, organizations need to assess this behavior and address the problems presented by incivility. Researchers have attempted to expose the topic through outcomes, antecedents, construct parameters and distinction; however no research known to date has addressed the issue of sanctionability of incivility. This research does a review of extant performance appraisals to show that there are some concerns in the measurement of undesirable incivil behavior in organizations, as opposed to the inclusion of civil behaviors. A framework was developed upon which to analyze and review the various performance appraisals. It is the authors' belief that despite the clear organizational impact of incivil behaviors, many organizations do not include these as part of their performance appraisals. Ramifications of such an omission will be discussed, along with some exciting possibilities for future research.

PERFORMANCE APPRAISALS

Performance appraisal can be defined as the appraisal rating of individuals' work performance and their behaviors by management, covering a specific time period, applied to all employees or specific groups of employees whose participation is typically mandatory or alternatively motivated by access to extrinsic reward, and where results in the form of ratings are stored by the organization to be used for purposes that require differentiation of employees (Coens & Jenkins, 2002). These appraisal systems are designed to show what specific behavior is desired in the workplace from the employees. Further, the behavior desired within a performance management system and measured through a performance appraisal can become part of the culture and therefore institutionalized as expected behavior from employees.

The system of performance management itself should be aligned and linked with all aspects of human resource planning (staffing, talent management, succession planning, and leadership development). In addition, and most important to our study, is the idea that performance management, based on the measures of performance appraisals are directly connected to the reward and remuneration systems within an organization (Armstrong, 2000; Phelps, 2005; Spangenberg & Theron, 2001; Williams, 2002), as well as the development and discipline systems.

BACKGROUND ON INCIVILITY

Workplace incivility is defined in part as deviant behaviors that are low in intensity (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Low intensity, however, does not mean that incivility is of minor consequence and can safely be overlooked in organizations.

Examples of incivil behaviors include writing nasty and demeaning notes or emails, undermining a colleague's credibility, treating another like a child, berating one for an action in which he or she played no part, giving people the silent treatment, publicly reprimanding someone, making unfounded accusations, and spreading gossip (Johnson & Indvik, 2001;

Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000). Workplace incivility is generally verbal, passive, indirect and subtle as opposed to physical, active, direct, and overt (Baron & Neuman, 1996). Physical, active, direct, and/or overt behavior is more easily recognized as bullying and is more easily sanctioned by the organization. The very nature of incivility makes it less obvious, more difficult to recognize, and therefore more difficult to sanction or even to address.

METHODS

In this qualitative analysis we selected employee performance appraisal forms from multiple industries. These forms were coded for inclusion of incivility and in what capacity.

We limited our search to actual employee performance appraisal forms, rather than appraisal guidelines, or sample documents. Key words were used to search published performance review forms across diverse industries. We limited our coding to performance appraisal forms in which we were able to indicate an organization and position where it was being utilized. This resulted in a final sample size of 132 appraisal forms. The sample represented three industries: education, government, and private industry.

On each review form we classified and coded the behavioral items on whether civility or incivility was measured; how it was measured; and how it was weighted by number of questions. We were able to analyze each question for examples of civility and incivility. Researchers analyzed question content in five broad themes: (1) communication, (2) interpersonal relationships, (3) attitudes, (4) teamwork, and (5) cooperation. Each of these themes was analyzed overall and by industry.

RESULTS

The number of articles addressing how incivility is handled in organizations has been scant. Incivility has been examined from antecedents and outcomes, however, to date there are no known studies that examine how organizations address this behavior displayed by its employees. This review of employee performance appraisal forms illustrates the current state of evaluations from a variety of organizations for the inclusion of both civility and incivility.

Inclusion of Civility and Incivility

Figure 1 addresses the number of organizations that have included questions regarding the themes we coded, and the number of questions overall representing civility or incivility. Of all educational institutions, only 73 include questions representing civil or incivil behavior. A total of 98 questions are used across those 73 organizations. Six government agencies included questions of civility or incivility. Across those six organizations, a total of seven questions were used. In our analysis of private industry five organizations asked a total of 9 questions representing the coded behavior.

Perhaps most interesting in these findings is the weight of importance for this type of behavior across industries. We note that in this sample only 66% of the educational institutions ask questions concerning civil or incivil behavior. And of those there are only 1.34 questions asked addressing the behavior of the employee. Only a third of the government agencies included this kind of behavior on their employee performance appraisals. And of those, only 1.16 questions were used. However, in our private industry sample, 100% of the employee appraisal forms included questions regarding civil or incivil behavior. And the private industry asked 1.8 questions per employee appraisal form to assess civil and incivil behaviors.

Figure 2 shows the number of questions representing each category of behavior by industry. In education, the most questions were asked concerning cooperation, with interpersonal relationships also high. The least amount of questions concerning these behaviors in all education employee appraisal forms was asked about employee attitude. While all these behaviors included would be considered important, it seems as if the education industry looks for employees to display strong cooperation, representing civil behavior. Across government agencies, teamwork and cooperation were asked most often with four questions each, while attitude and communication were asked about least with only one question each. Finally, when we look at private industry, we see that the behavior asked about most often on an employee appraisal form is interpersonal relationships, while communication is non-existent in our sample. It is most interesting to note that each industry finds a different civil behavior to be most important and includes more questions on an appraisal. While attitude and communication are consistently the lowest behaviors in terms of numbers of questions asked across our sample of employee appraisal forms.

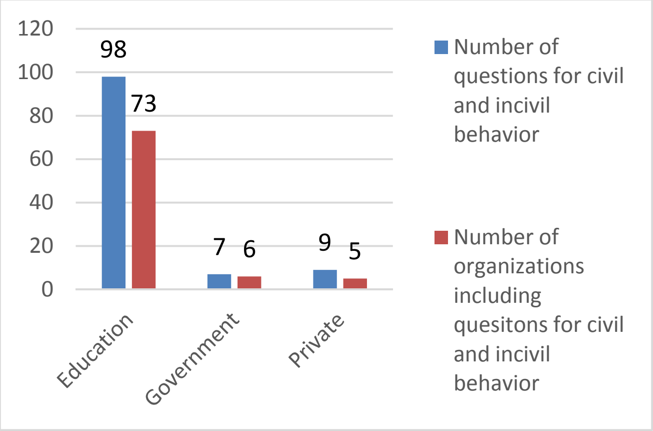

Figure 1. Number of Organizations and Number of Questions Regarding Civil and Incivil Behavior By Industry.

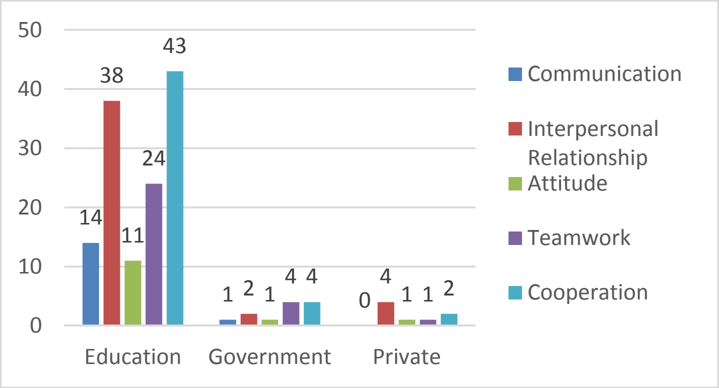

Figure 2: Number of Questions Representing Each Category of Behavior by Industry

Finally, we looked at the inclusion of questions that were specifically designed to address incivil behavior. Our findings were disappointing, albeit expected. Out of a sample of 132, only 2 performance appraisal forms included questions assessing incivility. This represents only .015 of the organizations in the sample. Both of these organizations were educational institutions. One organization had questions assessing cooperation and attitude. The other organization included questions that assessed an employee's teamwork, attitude and communication. Examples of questions from each include, "Has a very few problems interacting with other," "Consistently causes friction and is uncooperative," and "Often tactless and quarrelsome."

CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Based on this research, the authors believe opportunities for future research could be identified in codifying other behavior in organizations to see where incivility is being discussed. By examining codes of conduct, employee handbooks, behavioral creeds, and the like, researchers would be able to detail the codification of the acceptance of incivil behavior in an organization's culture.

In a similar vein, we suggest inclusion of specific incivility items on the performance reviews. It is likely that civil behavior has an incremental positive impact on individual and team performance, while displays of incivility actually incrementally deter individuals and teams from reaching organizational objectives. To what extent we do not know. This line of research would allow us to understand the complexity of actual behaviors contributing to and inhibiting organizations reaching their objectives.

REFERENCES AVAILABLE ON REQUEST

THE ROLES OF POSITIVE AND NEGATIVE EXEMPLARS IN INFORMATION SECURITY STRATEGY

Richard G. Taylor, Texas Southern University
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ABSTRACT

The strategic approach used to manage organizational security is strongly influenced by management's perception of risk. These perceptions often lead executives to focus on the use of technology based solutions. Such solutions, aimed primarily at keeping data safe from outsiders, overlook the potential that more severe security breaches may be perpetrated by trusted insiders. Behavioral concepts such as ethnocentrism, group membership and intergroup bias, form the basis of an investigation that is aimed at developing our understanding of information security as a social issue. This paper considers the influence of in-group trust and out-group distrust, and the potential impact that positive and negative exemplars have on information security strategies.

Keywords: Information security, ethnocentrism, intergroup bias, exemplars

IMPACT OF SELF-REPORTED LISTENING PREFERENCES OF BUSINESS COMMUNICATION STUDENTS ON CHOICE OF COLLEGE MAJOR

Virginia Hemby, Middle Tennessee State University

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to determine the potential relationship between listening preferences and choice of college major of Business Communication students from two regions of the United States. Listening preference was defined by the Listening Styles Profile as being one (or more) of four orientations: People, Content, Action, and Time (Watson & Barker, 1995). The examination of listening preference(s) was important to this study because the researcher hoped to identify characteristics and factors contributing to significant differences in individual participants' choice of college major. An examination of 484 business communication students' self-reported preferred listening styles and their selection of college major revealed the dominant listening preference of students—regardless of major—to be people-oriented listening.

DOES COHESION POSITIVELY CORRELATE TO PERFORMANCE IN ALL STAGES OF A GROUP'S LIFE CYCLE?

Troy Hall, Regent University

ABSTRACT

Existing research has provided evidence that group cohesion impacts the task performance of the group, which validates the need to understand the concept of group cohesion, but it does not specify whether the correlation occurs in all stages of a group's life cycle. This research intends to bridge the gap in the literature by accepting the hypothesis that group cohesion positively correlates to group performance and exists within the various stages of a group's life cycle or development.

Using the questions from three validated scale measurements, the model tests the correlation of group cohesion based a scale developed by Dobbins and Zacarro (1986) to a scale measuring group performance by Carmeli and Waldman (2010). The results are then applied to the categorical defined stages of a group's life cycle as presented by Tuckman (1965) to test the research hypothesis. The following tests were performed: a) Box's test of equality of covariance matrices, b) Levene's test, c) Wilks' Lambda, d) Between-subjects effects, e) effect size, and f) multivariate normality.

AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT AS AN ANTECEDENT TO BECOMING A LEARNING ORGANIZATION

Jamie Brownlee Turgeon, Brandman University

ABSTRACT

Although there is extensive literature on learning organization, extensive research has yet to be done on antecedents necessary to become a learning organization. Through conducting a literature review on companies becoming a learning organization, themes emerged that suggest affective commitment as an antecedent. Because there are a variety of theorists that explain learning organization, this study focuses on the definition provided by Garvin, Edmonson, and Gino (2008) on learning organization which includes three variables: a supportive learning environment, concrete learning processes and practices, and leadership that reinforces learning. Breaking the supportive learning variable down even further, provides us with the variable appreciation of differences of which is addressed in this study. The study evaluates the level of affective commitment as an antecedent to appreciation of differences and leadership that reinforces learning. The research utilizes Meyer and Allen (1997) measurement scale on affective commitment in order to determine high or low levels in participants toward their organization. Furthermore, the appreciation of differences and leadership reinforcing learning instrument (Garvin et al, 2008) is used to determine the levels of learning organization attributes. The convenient and snowball sampling method includes 125 participants with a respondent rate of 58% and an alpha error level of 5%. The data analysis method is a Pearson product moment correlation that will demonstrate the relationship between variables along with simple regression using the standard error of the estimate and F test. All four hypotheses are supported.

CULTURAL NORMS THAT FACILITATE ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGE IN A TIRE MOLD FACILITY

Cheri Hampton-Farmer, The University of Findlay

ABSTRACT

Organizational members at a tire mold manufacturer motivated by a suggestion box hanging outside the break room realized leadership potential and influenced organizational change by identifying ineffective practices and recommending strategies for change. The norm for bottom up communication rewarded organizational members for their initiative through public praise and tangible rewards while implemented suggestions garnered the organization hundreds of thousands of dollars in savings and profits. Potential leaders or change agents are those most likely to influence others to adapt to new ways of doing things when the organizational norms invite and reward participation. This study examined an organizational culture that supported leadership norms and cultivated an environment conducive to change. Relying on the analysis of narratives, observation and text, findings suggest that practices and norms in organizations that created opportunities for organizational members to initiate ideas and realize leadership potential reinforce norms that produce organizational change.

Five keywords for online searchability: Norms, Organizational Communication, Culture, Change, Leadership

THE MEDIATING ROLE OF FAIRNESS IN PAY OF THE INFLUENCE OF PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT ON AFFECTIVE COMMITMENT

Duky Charles, Regent University

ABSTRACT

This is a research paper demonstrating that the influence of perceived organizational support on employees' affective commitment can be mediated by fairness in pay. This paper builds from previous studies in organizational leadership relating to employee commitment, organizational support and fairness in pay to conduct a research on affective commitment. The study examines how perceived organizational support and perception of employee on fairness in pay can be combined to influence subordinates affective commitment to organizations. It employs a cross-sectional survey from a combination of three questionnaires: (a) Perceived Organizational Support questionnaire designed by Eisenberger, Huntington, Hutchinson, and Sowa (1986), (b) Pay Satisfaction Questionnaire created by Heneman, and Schwab (1985), and (c) the section related to Affective Commitment of Affective, Normative, and Continuance Commitment questionnaire designed Allen and Meyer (1997), to analyze data from eighty four employees working in three organizations of the Baptist Convention of Haiti. The regression tests via SPSS indicate that employees with Perceived Organizational Support are more likely to believe that their salary is fair, and therefore exhibit affective commitment as proposed in the two hypotheses. Further research may reproduce the same study with more accurate samples. Other studies may also investigate the influence of perceived organizational support on affective commitment with the meditating role of interactional justice, notably dignity and respect with which an organization treats its employees.

Keywords: organizational support, affective commitment, fairness, pay

Author's Note:

Duky Charles is a second-year student in the PhD program of the School of Business & Leadership at Regent University.
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