# Workplace Incivility: Worker and Organizational Antecedents and Outcomes

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Unresolved workplace conflicts represent the largest reducible costs to an organization (Keenan & Newton, 1985). As incivility increases (Buhler, 2003; Pearson, Andersson, & Wegner, 2001; Pearson & Porath, 2005) more research is being conducted (Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006; Vickers, 2006). This review examined antecedents (variables that enable, motivate, and/or trigger workplace incivility) and outcomes (variables that describe the impact incivility has had on the worker, work environment, and/or organization) of workplace incivility.

Keywords: Workplace Incivility, Conflict, Integrative Review

Andersson and Pearson (1999) stated that workplace incivility is evident in behaviors that demonstrate lack of regard for others in the workplace, behaviors that are described as rude or discourteous. Workplace incivility has been describe as "...low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect" (Andersson & Pearson, 1999, p. 457). This specific definition has been utilized widely by a number of researchers (Pearson, Andersson, and Wegner, 2001, p. 1397; Blau & Andersson, 2005, p. 596; Cortina et. al, 2001, p. 64). Much of the research on workplace incivility discusses the spiraling effect. (Blau & Andersson, 2005; Fox & Stallworth, 2003; Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000). The spiraling effect describes "how incivility can potential spiral into increasingly intense behaviors with a starting point and tipping points" (p. 452). In this regard, some outcomes can become antecedents to continue the cycle of incivility. For example, stress can cause an individual to be uncivil; consequences of being uncivil can elicit more stress, which then can trigger further uncivil behaviors.

Incivility has been stated as being toward the bottom of the continuum of abuse (Vickers, 2006) and displaying low intensity counterproductive work behavior (CWB), however Vickers (2006) stated that "low intensity" should not be confused with being a "minor" problem. Martin & Hine (2005) stated that less research attention has been paid to minor incivility behavior, however preliminary studies have shown minor incivility affects workers. Pearson, Andersson, & Porath (2000) studied mild forms of incivility. Some researchers have found that incivility includes a wide range of behaviors from as simple as not returning a smile to purposefully hurting ones feelings (Ambrose, Huston & Normon, 2005; Brown & Sumner, 2006; Indvik, 2001), however workplace incivility has also been found to be a precursor that can lead to more aggressive violent behaviors (Buhler, 2003; Glendinning, 2001; Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000; Pearson, Anderson, and Wegner, 2001; Tiberius & Flak, 1999).

### Significance and Need for Review

As incivility in the workplace becomes an increasing problem (Buhler, 2003; Pearson, Andersson, and Wegner, 2001; Pearson & Porath, 2005) more research is being conducted on workplace incivility (Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006; Vickers, 2006). The increase in workplace incivility has cost organizations by negatively impacting human capital and organizations' bottom line (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Brown & Sumner, 2006). Keenan and Newton (1985) stated that unresolved workplace conflicts represent the largest costs to an organization that are reducible. With this increasing interest in researching workplace incivility, detrimental affects on human capital, and the negative impacts on organizations cost (Fox & Stallworth, 2003; Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Glendinning, 2001; Pearson & Porath, 2005) a thorough analysis of the literature is needed. The importance of studying incivility is further supported by Cortina et. al (2001) who claimed "workplace incivility merits serious research and organizational attention because of its theoretically harmful effect on organizations and individuals alike" (p. 65).

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With workplace incivility incidents rising (Buhler, 2003 and Pearson, Andersson, Wegner, 2001; Pearson & Porath, 2005) and the negative impact of incivility on organizations, many more areas within incivility need to be researched (Pearson, Andersson, and Wegner, 2001). For example, in order to more effectively address potential solutions for workplace incivility it is crucial to understand the causes and outcomes. This integrative review focuses on antecedents and outcomes of workplace incivility in order to develop a list of antecedents (variables that enable, motivate and/or trigger incivility) and outcome variables (descriptors of the impact of incivility) with the intention of understanding possible causes and impacts of workplace civility.

# **Problem Statement**

Workplace incivility is increasing (Buhler, 2003; Pearson, Andersson, and Wegner, 2001; Pearson & Porath, 2005) and its effects are costing organizations unnecessary money (Keenan & Newton, 1985) and time (Gardner & Johnson, 2001). In order to investigate further issues and possible resolutions for workplace incivility it is crucial that the antecedents and outcomes are first examined. This study of literature and previous research completed on workplace incivility attempts to examine the antecedents and outcomes of workplace incivility.

### **Research Questions**

RQ1: What are the antecedents (variables that describe possible causes) of workplace incivility for workers?

RQ2: What are the outcomes of workplace incivility for workers?

RQ3: What are the antecedents (variables that describe possible causes) of workplace incivility for organizations?

RQ4: What are the outcomes of workplace incivility for organizations?

### **Research Methods**

The methods used for this article will include the selection of literature, key words used to search, databases used, criteria for retaining and discarding literature, how the literature was reviewed and how the main ideas were organized.

Literature was selected by scanning the articles' abstracts to see if workplace incivility might be addressed within the full text of the article. The process of finding and selecting articles for this integrative literature review strengthens my support for the promotion of the use of structured abstracts by Mostellar, Nave, & Miech (2004) and Miech, Nave, & Mosteller (2005). A structured abstract is a "...formal and compact summary of an article's main features and findings" (Mostellar, Nave, & Miech, 2004, p. 29). When searching through many databases of articles, structured abstracts decrease time spent by helping researchers bypass articles that do not apply to their research agenda and increases access by allowing researchers to find relevant articles that might have been bypassed by looking at the title or shorter abstract alone. Keywords searched within the databases used included: workplace incivility, incivility, civility, bullying, and counterproductive work behavior (CWB). Many databases were searched to find relevant articles on workplace incivility including: JSTOR, Business Source Premier, Google Scholar, Expanded Academic, Academic Search Premier, EBSCO Host, and ProQuest – Dissertations & Thesis

To align with the purpose of this integrative literature review it was important to examine articles that contributed knowledge concerning the antecedents and outcomes of workplace incivility. Of the forty-five articles reviewed, eighteen were eliminated, one article that failed to examine the outcomes was kept because it examined antecedents, and twenty-six articles looked at both antecedents and outcomes of workplace incivility. Of the eighteen articles that were eliminated, eight were eliminated because they addressed antecedents and outcomes in other areas other than the workplace; such as community college communities (Boggs, 2003), civility toward humankind (Carroll, 1998), courtrooms (Cortina et. al, 2002), customer aggression (Grandey, Dickter, & Sin, 2004), neighborhoods (Markowitz, Bellair, Liska, & Liu, 2001), society (Miles, Dagley, & Yau, 2002), and everday life and crime (Phillips & Smith, 2004a; Phillips & Smith, 2004b). Nine articles were eliminated because they did not address antecedents or outcomes (Bray & Del Favero, 2004; Liao, Joshi, & Chuang, 2004; Luparell, 2004; Penney & Spector, 2005; The Senate Forum, 2005; Sias & Perry, 2004; Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert, 2006; Tiberius & Flak, 1999; Vigoda, 2002). One study was eliminated because the authors' definition of workplace incivility did not align with the definition set forth with this study (Namie, 2003). It is important to note that the eliminated articles were read in their entirety and other information that did align with the integrative review was utilized in

strengthening this study. The term elimination only specifies that the fore-mentioned articles did not aid in furthering knowledge about antecedents and outcomes of workplace incivility, however their contribution to furthering knowledge in other important areas concerning incivility were drawn upon.

Each article listed in the reference section was read in their entirety, excluding the dissertation from Shernoff (2003) in which only the second and third chapter was read. A database of all articles was constructed. Every article was read in its entirety to get an overall idea of the authors focus for their study. Secondly each article was reviewed to look at antecedents, outcomes, and other important knowledge concerning workplace incivility. This information was entered into tables in order to organize the information. The information was then able to be studied for commonalities as well as distinctive differences. Antecedents and outcomes were listed in the dataset. Once all articles were reviewed, a list of the antecedent variable and outcome variables was created. The list of variables was then categorized by themes. Those themes were placed into a model that shows the relationship between the categories.

### **Comprehensive Synthesis**

Torraco (2005) stated there are four forms of synthesis used in integrative literature reviews; a research agenda, taxonomy or other conceptual classification of constructs, alternative models or conceptual frameworks, and metatheory (p. 363). The form of synthesis used in this integrative literature review is a conceptual classification of constructs. Four constructs were classified from the reviewed literature; outcomes for organization(s) (OO), outcomes for worker(s) (OW), antecedents for organization(s) (AO), and antecedents for worker(s) (AW). Conceptual reasoning for selecting this type of synthesis came from Doty & Glick (1994) who stated that the conceptual classification is a method to classify constructs within research.

# Literature Review

Literature was reviewed and variables that fit each of the four areas, AO, AW, OO, and OW were listed in four separate lists. The variables from each list were categorized and discussed in detail. The review of literature investigated workplace incivility from a systems perspective including antecedents, processes, and outcomes that impact the worker and the organization. In terms of the workplace, the inputs for the system include the antecedents (causes or triggers). From the organizational perspective inputs for the system include structural, environment, and outlying variables such as media and technology. In terms of the individual perspective antecedents include variables such as influence (power of job/boss), lack of assertiveness, personality, and response to anger. The processes include acts of workplace incivility including interpersonal relationships. Outcomes of workplace incivility that impact individuals include productivity, health, relationships, and attitudes toward work and the outcomes to the organization include financial, administrative, and environmental impacts. *Antecedents for Workers* 

Antecedents are variables that facilitate workplace incivility. These variables can be categorized as enablers, motivators, and triggers. According to Salin (2003) enablers are "...factors that provide fertile soil..." for behavior that is not civil (p. 1218). Motivators are "...circumstances that can actually make it rewarding to harass others in the workplace" (Salin, 2003, p. 1222). Triggers are sometimes referred to as precipitating processes and are "...typically related to changes of the status quo..." (p. 1224). These have been classified as enablers, motivators, and triggers.

Enablers can be actions and roles of the instigator. Actions can include response to rage, fear, and anger (Gardner & Johnson, 2001). Roles can include status, role requirements, workload, and pressures for productivity (Ferriss, 2002). Triggers and motivating factors provide fuel to enable incivility. Both actions and roles can directly enable acts of workplace incivility. The two major categories of motivators include beliefs and personality. Beliefs include expected benefits, perceived job insecurity, dissatisfaction, attitudes about aggression, and low perceived cost for inappropriate behaviors (Salin, 2003). Personality is also a motivator for incivility. Type A personality, trait aggression, hostility, power, ego, and internal competition are all personality traits that can motivate incivil behavior (Cortina et al., 2001; Glendinning, 2001; Hornstein, 2003; Salin, 2003). Additionally, lack of assertiveness of leaders has been shown to be a motivator of incivil behaviors (Alexander-Snow, 2004). While actions impact enabling, they also are triggers of incivil behaviors. Response to rage, fear, and anger are all actions that can be viewed as triggers. In contrast, lack of communications is another action that triggers uncivil behavior. Other triggers identified in the literature include the ability, environment, and demographics. Leaders who are less competent or lack knowledge can be a trigger to enable uncivil behavior. Additionally, when an individual was viewed as less competent, incivility increases (i.e. they are more likely to be picked on) (Berger, 2000).

#### **Outcomes for Workers**

Outcomes of incivility on workers can be viewed in terms of the individual, interpersonal relationships, and productivity. In terms of the individual, attitudes toward work, effort, and health will be presented. Interpersonal relationships will present a discussion of subordinates, peers, supervisors, and overall employee engagement. Productivity will include the constructs of job performance, innovation\creativity, and learning. Finally, job loss and income loss will be presented as a consequence of lowered productivity. These have been classified as attitudes toward work, health, interpersonal outcomes, and productivity.

Job satisfaction, organizational commitment, career salience, motivation, poor attitude, morale, lower confidence, and lower self-efficacy are all attitudes that have been shown to relate to work and impact incivility. One of the most widely cited constructs was job satisfaction (Alexander-Snow, 2004; Ambrose, Huston, & Norman, 2005; Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Blau & Andersson, 2005; Cortina et. al., 2001; Hine, 2005; Pearson & Porath, 2005; Salin, 2003, Settles, Cortina, Malley, & Stewart, 2006). As incivility rose, job satisfaction declined (Cortina et. al, 2001). Career salience is "The importance that an individual places on the role of work and career, compared to that of other life roles" (Maranzano, Raskin, Orlando, & Omyma, 2001). As a result of incivility, individuals placed less importance on the role of work and more importance on other roles in their life (Corinta et al., 2001). The effort the employees puts forth, or the lack thereof, can be viewed in terms of job withdrawal, willingness to work, absenteeism, and loss of time on the job. Withdrawal is specifically cited in numerous articles as an outcome of incivility in the workplace (Buhler, 2003; Cortina et. al.; 2001, Martin & Hine, 2005; Pearson, Andersson, & Wegner, 2001). Buhler (2003) stated "half of the victims of workplace incivility responded by decreasing their efforts on the job" (p.6). The workers mental and physical health has been shown to be impacted from incivility (Cortina et. al., 2001; Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Glendinning, 2001; Indvik, 2001: Hine, 2005; Salin, 2003). Gardner and Johnson (2001) stated that consequences of incivility include anxiety, disrupted sleep, loss of concentration, excessive worry, stress, and depression. Salin (2003) stated that incivility can actually cause physical illness. Co-worker relations, supervisor relations, and employee engagement all examine how individuals interact in the workplace. Incivility has been shown to decrease co-worker satisfaction. Specifically, Martin and Hine (2005) stated that "co-worker satisfaction was significantly negatively associated with exclusionary behavior and gossip" (p. 485), both which are considered uncivil behaviors. While these behaviors can impact all individuals in an organization, Martin and Hine stated "...our findings suggest that being the target is associated with lower satisfaction with coworkers..." (p. 488). With the increased amount of collaboration in the workplace, incivility is very critical because these actions have been shown to negatively impact teamwork and even destroy work teams. In addition to the co-workers, supervisors' satisfaction can be negatively impacted from incivility. An even more drastic impact on relationships can be viewed by disengagement of the employee. Hornstein (2003) stated that "incivility increases employees alienation and, as alienation increases, showing up for work is not accompanied by any sense of belonging" (p. 3). Pearson, Andersson, and Wegner (2001) stated that incivility can cause that alienation and "the effect was characterized as demoralizing and isolating" (p. 1339). This type of behavior can lead to physical avoidance (Hornstein, 2003; Pearson, Andersson, & Wegner, 2001).

One of the most widely cited variables, impacted by workplace incivility, is a decrease in productivity (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Buhler, 2003, Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Glendinning, 2001; Hornstein, 2003; Indvik, 2001; McCune, 2000; Muir, 2000; Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000; Pearson & Porath, 2005; Salin, 2003; Settles, Cortina, Malley, & Stewart, 2006; Vickers, 2006). Productivity decreased consistently in studies examining incivility. The significance of gender on workplace incivility was cited differently among researchers. Cortina et al. (2001) stated that women encountered more incivility acts; however both men and women were equally negatively impacted by the acts. Ferriss (2002) found that gender was not significant. Pearson, Andersson, & Porath (2000) found that men are seven times form likely to instigate incivility on someone of lower status. Pearson & Porath (2005) found that men and women are equally likely to be targets, but men are more likely to be instigators. *Antecedents for Organizations* 

The antecedents for organizations have been classified as structural environmental, and outlying. The most cited organizational antecedent for workplace incivility is downsizing (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Blau & Andersson, 2005; Brown & Sumner, 2006; Buhler, 2003; Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Indvik, 2001; Salin, 2003, & Vickers, 2006). Downsizing has increased the pressure on employees to be more productive (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Gardner & Johnson, 2001). Downsizing has also been attributed to decreasing perceived job security which has been shown to increase incivility (Blau & Andersson, 2005). Other structural antecedents for organizations found in the literature were reengineering (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), hierarchical structuring (Muir, 2000), use of part time employment (Andersson & Person, 1999; Vickers, 2006), organizational change (Salin, 2003; Vickers, 2006), and globalization (Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Muir, 2000). Environmental antecedents for organizations included autocratic work environments, difficult working conditions, and an anxiety ridden workplace (work

atmosphere) (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Indvik, 2001; Muir, 2000;Rau-Foster, 2004). In an autocratic work environment the supervisor is the only person with authority and can create an environment that supports incivility. Difficult working conditions and poor work atmosphere also provide an environment that is conducive to workplace incivility. Within an organization, financial impacts in the literature are viewed more in terms of outcomes than antecedents. However, budget cuts (Andersson & Pearson, 1999) and stagnant wages (Gardner & Johnson, 2001) have been shown to be variables that lead to workplace incivility. A few researchers cited the casual work atmosphere as aiding incivility behavior (Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Indvik, 2001; Muir, 2000; Rau-Foster, 2004). Another outlying variable cited is the media (Buhler, 2003; Rau-Foster, 2004; Buhler (2003) stated "Some experts even suggest that television and movies provide models for rude behavior as the norm" (p. 20). A third variable sited for impacting incivility is technology (Buhler, 2003; Garnder, 2001; Muir, 2000; Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000; Vickers, 2006). Specifically, Buhler (2003) and Vickers (2006) found that technology use made employees feel they never get a break from work and are constantly reachable. Garnder (2001), Muir (2000), and Vickers (2006) found that technology provided asynchronous communications that was quick and lacked face-to-face communication which could promote responses that would not have otherwise been stated. *Outcomes for Organizations* 

The outcomes are classified as financial impact, administrative, and environmental. One costly variable that was cited often in research is turnover (Ambrose, Huston, & Norman, 2005; Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et. al, 2001; Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Glendinning, 2001; Muir, 2000; Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000; Pearson & Porath, 2005; Salin, 2003; ). Cortina et. al (2001) stated that as incivility became more frequent, turnover intentions increased. Glendinning (2001) found that 66 percent of employees experience incivility, 50 percent consider leaving, and 12 percent actually leave the organization. Ambrose, Huston, & Norman (2005) stated that 14 out of 33 employees left due to incivility. Gardner and Johnson (2001) found that "Almost 30% of targets lost work time simply by trying to avoid the bully" (p.28). The American Institute of Stress estimated that nearly one million United States workers miss work every day because of stress, costing businesses approximately "...300 billion" each year (Gardner & Johnson, 2001, p. 28). Another reported cost for organizations is the amount of time that management spends away from typical duties to attend to incivility issues. Pearson & Porath (2005) stated that "....as much as 13 percent of their executives' time..." or nearly 6.5-7 weeks a year is spent on mediating and consoling incivility issues (p. 8). Other organizational financial outcomes from incivility included loss of profits (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Brown & Sumner, 2006; Gardner & Johnson, 2001) and increases in disability claims, medical costs, lawsuits, and worker compensations claims (Gardner & Johnson, 2001). As previously mentioned turnover was highly cited. Retention (Glendinning, 2001; Rau-Foster, 2004; ), recruiting issues, and succession issues are also organizational outcomes impacted by workplace incivility (Glendinning, 2001). Negative work climate was cited often as an organizational outcome of incivility. Researchers cited an unpleasant office environment as an outcome for the organization (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Pearson, Andersson, & Wegner, 2001). Berger (2000) stated that incivility could create an emotionally unsafe work environment. Gardner and Johnson (2001) made a stronger statement that incivility destroys morale and can cause an emotionally corrosive environment leading to an increase in medical costs. Porath (2005) stated that incivility negatively affected organizational culture.

# **Interpretation of Integrated Literature Review Results**

To interpret the results, this study builds upon Salin's (2003) concept of enabling, motivating, and precipitating structures that contribute to bullying. This new model extends the concept by examining the antecedents and outcomes of workplace incivility reported in the reviewed articles. The antecedents of workplace incivility can be viewed in relationship to motivating, triggering, and enabling factors. Workplace incivility was shown to negatively impact both productivity and health. While the literature did not empirically provide evidence it was suggested that loss of income and loss of employment were impacted from incivility in the workplace. When productivity was decreased, it impacted future raises and promotions. Furthermore, it was suggested that individuals would resign as a result of incivility in the workplace.

#### **Propositions and Implications for Future Research**

Proposition 1: Organizations that do not provide an environment that allows/promotes incivility will cause instigators to minimize their incivil behaviors significantly.

Not only does the instigator need to have the desire to be incivil they also need to have the ability. A workplace that does not promote or allow incivility can produce a work environment where instigator(s) are isolated rather than the target(s) being isolated.

Proposition 2: Workshops that teach leaders how to handle incivility will show targets the organization is working toward an emotionally safe working environment which will decrease turnover (caused by incivility) and decrease the number of incivility incidents.

Workshops on sexual harassment have been put in place in most organizations in order to address the important issue that negatively affects many workers and organizations. Due to the financial costs to organizations and the potentially lasting emotional impact of incivility, workshops should be constructed dealing with workplace incivility as well. Workshops, based on existing and future research, could help leaders handle incivility, targets overcome, prevent, and deal with (in the moment) incivility. Workshops designed for potential instigators could also benefit by resolving the deeper issues that enabled the behaviors and possibly decreasing incivility incidents. For example, a workshop helping employees dealing with the increased pressures of productivity caused by downsizing or a seminar on proper asynchronous communication might help reduce workplace incivility.

# Conclusions

Workplace incivility has definite impacts on workers in terms of productivity, health, attitudes, and relationships. Finance, environment, structure, and administration are categories of variables at the organizational level that are affected by acts of workplace incivility. This review adds value to the knowledge base on incivility by categorizing variables to show how antecedents impact incivility and how incivility impacts the worker. Previous literature has many of the individual variables but, does not provide a clear view of how all the variable integrate within workplace incivility. With workplace incivility being on the rise (Pearson & Porath, 2005) this article will help better understand how all variables relate and can provide a framework to research incivility. This framework can be used in a wide variety of workplace settings including classrooms, higher education, and business. This framework can be expanded to other disciplines such as criminal justice, health care, and education.

# Contributes to New Knowledge in HRD

The HRD literature does not have an integrative review of incivility in the workplace. While there was a substantial amount of research found on incivility in the area of healthcare as well as other business settings, an integrative review was not found in healthcare or other disciplines. This integrative review adds to the area of human resource development from multiple perspectives. First, incivility is a major concern in workplace settings. This project has provided a comprehensive view of workplace incivility and has provided a comprehensive list of constructs to examine when studying the topic. Second, workplace incivility is a topic that impacts the human resource of an organization. From this perspective a variety of training and development programs could be examined to impact workplace incivility and impact the outcomes of incivility in manners that could possible increase productivity. Providing this comprehensive perspective gives key areas to address in training and development. Thirdly, the article provides a base to examine workplace incivility from a process and systems perspective.

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