Bullying Versus Creativity: Mutually Exclusive Workplace Behaviors

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ABSTRACT

Applied creativity relies on workers who trust the environment and feel confident in making uncustomary strides to solve everyday problems. However, when employees face workplace bullying, the opportunity for true creativity is compromised as the brain is thrown into a flight or fight response, instead of a state that allows for creativity. Hence, this essay will discuss the behavioral response and brain damage experienced by the targets of workplace bullying. Recent studies show that true damage to the brain occurs for those dealing with intense stress on the job; in addition, damage to the organization occurs as well. Therefore, this essay reflects on how the creative process, which is needed in tough economic times, is truly compromised by workplace bullying.

Keywords: Workplace bullying, health issues, applied creativity

INTRODUCTION

When one considers team dynamics and leadership, one should consider the dynamics required for successful productivity.   Lencioni (2006) commented that building trust and managing conflict are required to build effective teams. It is plausible that more transactional or authoritative leadership styles may be required in different settings such and forward military areas, or even fast-paced urban environments, (Bernard, 2017; Wade, 2017), yet a fear of conflict within teams or absence of trust within teams erodes team productivity.

Nonetheless, followers and leaders should strive to be equitable and fair regardless of the environment (Hollis, 1998). Autocratic leadership may cut through the time required to generate a quorum or even consensus; yet such autocratic styles, which are faster, may save lives. But even when working with such styles, leaders need to be fair, which supports employees' trust and commitment, conditions needed for creativity. Without equity, fairness, and collegiality, even in forward areas, creativity is dissipated; people will refuse to follow and will lack inspiration to serve the organization (Bjugstad, et al. 2006).

In regard to creative and innovative behaviors, the mutual respect, trust, and commitment discussed by Lencioni (2006), leads to cultivation of a solid human resource, a resource that can operate in teams to yield innovation:
In cooperation, people perceive their goals to be positively related so that as one person moves toward goal attainment, others move towards reaching their goals as well. They understand that one's goal attainment helps others reach their goals; as one succeeds, others succeed. (Tjosvold, 2002. p 390):
 Such cooperation and goal attainment are steeped in respectful civility (Hollis, 2016c), a dynamic critical to success regardless of the environment, sector or activity.

WHAT IS CREATIVITY?

Mumford and Gastafson (1998) posit that creativity and innovation are required for organizations to thrive. This is similar to writings from Ted Levitt (1986) who remarked that creative ideas are needed for success, especially in particularly demanding organizations or sectors of the economy. While there are several researchers who have reflected on creativity, the following excerpt from Titus (2007) offers a summary of thoughts regarding creativity.

Ciardi (1956) defined creativity as the "imaginatively gifted recombination of known elements into something new." As stated earlier, researchers have repeatedly viewed creativity as an activity designed to solve challenging problems in a novel manner… Amabile (1983) suggested that creative ideas or solutions should be useful, novel, and appropriate to the task at hand. The theoretical perspective of creativity adopted here is consistent with past marketing research that has viewed creativity as a problem-solving activity (Anderson, 2006; Lunsford, 1990; Titus, 2000) (Excerpt from Titus, 2007).

Other researchers of various disciplines also comment that creativity is typically the result of inspiring work environment. For example, Marciano (2010) commented that employees are motivated to engage in respectful environments. Reward systems and bonuses only work for a period of time. Once that reward is spent, such as a bonus, the employee needs another external motivation (Marciano, 2010). However, true motivation comes from within, in the midst empowerment, supportive feedback and partnership. Motivation comes from within, from that inspiration. Further, similar to Lencioni (2006), Mariciano (2010) also posited that trust is a vital component for organizational success. Barczak (2010) stated that an innovative culture with partnerships and collaboration requires trust. Trust is a precursor to creativity and team building. With trust comes the confidence to try new ideas or solutions. Without trust, few will take the risk required in innovation.

In converse, Hollis (2016) noted that those facing disrespectful environments disengage. Disengagement can be mental when people mentally "check out;" or the disengagement can be physical when people literally take more sick time from toxic environments (Hollis, 2016). This problem becomes more complex for employees of color and women employees. Other underrepresented groups such as gender and sexual minorities also are more likely to be subject to disrespect and bullying on the job (Hollis, 2016b). Further, still this dynamic is increasingly complex when the talented person embodies the intersection of several underrepresented groups (Jaymes, 2017). This is complicated further as Fapohunda (2014) stated, "women tend to be more workplace bullies than men and have greater risks of becoming targets" (p. 39). This cultural trend to suppress the talent of underrepresented groups is not prudent in a world with dwindling resources. The creativity of the organization is then threatened and often left stagnating when even underrepresented populations are treated unfairly.

WORKPLACE BULLYING AND CREATIVITY?

The aforementioned researchers and passages reflect on the need for partnership, trust, collaboration, and respect to build creative and innovative environments. Whether in pharmaceutical sectors, higher education, business, or even government, creativity and innovative thought is at the nexus of problem solving. Organizational productivity can stall without such creativity and innovation.

However, consider bullying behaviors. If one has ever worked with a bully, one would recall that the bully did not have the trust or even the respect of the targets. Those bystanders watching the bully also failed to respect or trust that bully. Collaboration was probably

strained and people in such toxic environments retreated mentally and physically to a more psychological safe space.

For example, Tsuno, et al. (2017) found the workplace bullying hurts team dynamics, and "associated with lower workgroup civility, lower supervisor and coworker support, higher workplace bullying, higher psychological distress, higher intention to leave, and lower work engagement" (p. 237). Further, researchers showed that not only does workplace bullying erode trust and collaboration; such behavior from leadership can lead to workplace deviance. Peng et al. (2016) studied 262 caregivers in Taiwan to reveal that workplace bullying positively and significantly influenced workplace deviance (p. 755). Therefore, bullied workers not only disengage, there is a relationship between workplace bullying and the likelihood that bullied workers will engage in behavior that is detrimental to the organization (Peng et al., 2016). Interestingly, there is some rationale behind such deviance as this employee behavior is an attempt to dissipate the disparity in power between the bully and target (Hollis, 2016). Those who are abused seek some type of justice for enduring the unfair hurt and anguish (Hollis, 2016c). While this disruptive behavior may be the target's small way of exacting some sort of justice instead of facing the shame associated with bullying (Hollis, 2016d), the cost of such behavior is also considered in other studies, which reflect on the explicit harm organization face in employee turnover and departure (Bliss, 2012; Jurnak, 2010). Such costs whether explicitly through departure, or internally through deviant behavior, can be mitigated with mediation or other inventions, which give employees a safe place to complain about bullying without the fear of retaliation (Hollis, 2016a).

BRAIN DAMAGE AND BULLYING

It is common knowledge that stress can lead to heart conditions, high blood pressure and other stress related ailments. However, recent studies have confirmed a link between stress and brain damage. As vast and powerful as the brain is, stress can damage brain neurons. The stress hormone, corticosterone, brings chemicals to the brain that interferes with processing and destroys brain cells (Bates, 2015; Burke & Miczek, 2014). Dr. Klaus Miczek, a psychologist at Tufts University, reported on tests with laboratory rats that bullying hurts the brain. In his study, he took a larger adult rat and allowed it to abuse and bully the younger rats in a confined environment. The abuse included physical aggression and consuming all the food. After several incidents, Miczek examined the brains of the juvenile rats. The brain damage was visible through these tests. Further, rats that experienced stress and the subsequent depression were also more likely to use cocaine and alcohol if it were available (Bates, 2015; Burke & Miczek, 2014). Conclusively, the young rats facing bullying, sought substance abusive to curtail the stress.

Arguably, bullying of younger people is particularly harmful to younger brains. Further, the findings from Einarsen and Nielsen, 2015; Hodgins, et al., 2014; and Rousseau, et al., 2014, show that targets of workplace bullying are not just bullied four or five times, as the rats in the Miczek study, they often face months or even years of abuse (Hollis, 2016). During such abuse, the stress hormone is consistently poured into the brain, killing brain neurons. This reaction to stress and subsequent stress on the brain occurs regardless of the age of the target.

Dr. Miczek's clinical findings reinforce what Scandinavians (Eriksen, et al., 2014; Nielsen, et al. 2016; Hoel, et al., 2010) who have been claiming, that workplace bullying truly is a health and safety issue. Targets of workplace bullying take more sick time, experience more apathy and depression as noted by targets' response to self-isolate from the organization and

peers. Consequently, Miczek's findings can support an argument for how workers have rights to avoid such health hazards such as a bullying boss, or aggressive peers.

CONCLUSION

Critical thinking and creative problem solving are requirements for innovation in a variety of sectors, whether business, education, or science. However, a variety of researchers have confirmed that workplace bullying hurts emotional health, psychological health, and even organizational objectives. With the proliferation of research on the topic, one is left wondering why workplace bullying is allowed to flourish in any environment when it has been proven time and again that such leadership is so destructive to employees and their organizations. Nonetheless, for leaders looking to further inspire employees, consider the leadership's ability to infuse trust and respect into the environment. Without such trust and respect, employees often disengage. For employees who find that a work environment is lackluster at best, reflect on the organization's record for creating collaborative environments. Such organizations, which lack the ability to develop respectful partnerships and collaborations, may actually just be worth leaving.

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