Chapter 6
Workplace Incivility in Schools

Thomas G. Reio Jr.
Florida International University, USA

Stephanie M. Reio
Florida International University, USA

ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to investigate the prevalence of coworker and supervisor incivility in the context of K-12 schools and incivility's possible link to teachers' commitment to the school and turnover intent. The data were collected via survey from 94 middle school teachers in the US. Results indicated that 85% of the teachers experienced coworker incivility over the past year; 71% experienced supervisor incivility. MANOVA results suggested no statistically significant differences in incivility by gender or ethnicity. Hierarchical regression results suggested that supervisor incivility was associated negatively with commitment and positively associated with turnover intent. Coworker incivility was not a significant predictor in the regression equations. Macro- and micro-level human resource strategies were offered as possible tools to lessen the likelihood of uncivil behavior.

INTRODUCTION

Workplace incivility is a growing challenge for all types of organizations (Porath & Pearson, 2010). In recognition of this mounting problem, researchers have investigated its prevalence in a broad range of organizational contexts, yet surprisingly little in K-12 schools. The lack of scholarly inquiry in this area is troubling considering the almost overwhelming difficulties facing the teaching profession (Fox & Stallworth, 2010). For example,

in our current lean economic times, schools are receiving less financial support, yet calls for accountability remain (Fox & Stallworth, 2010). Teachers continue to be under mounting pressure from a variety of sources to increase student learning performance (e.g., through federal and state legislative mandates, demanding parents, society in general), with little obvious relief in sight (Steffgen & Ewen, 2007). Educational policy makers and superintendents, and in-school instructional and administrative (e.g., principal) leaders need

to be aware that these stressful contingencies contribute to a school workplace context that may be less than ideal to work, setting the stage for increasing the likelihood of teachers' uncivil behaviors (Waggoner, 2003).

Andersson and Pearson (1999) define workplace incivility as "low intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect. Uncivil behaviors are characteristically rude, discourteous, displaying a lack of respect for others" (p. 457). Incivility is not necessarily objective, as it is a reflection of an individual's interpretation about how an action made them feel; in other words, it is defined in the eyes of the beholder (Porath & Pearson, 2010). Scholars have cited several antecedents to uncivil behavior such as lack of establishing positive relationships in the organization (i.e., not learning to fit in with coworkers), negative affect (e.g., anxiety, frustration, anger), and demographic dissimilarity (e.g., age, gender) as some of the likely predictors of uncivil behavior in the workplace (Baron & Neuman, 1996; Chen & Eastman, 1997; Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000). Numerous labels have been assigned to uncivil behaviors such as condescending, sarcastic, inconsiderate, rude, and insulting, among others (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Increases in workplace incivility have also been associated with organizational outcomes like reduced organizational commitment and job satisfaction, and increased turnover intentions (Laschinger, Leiter, Day, & Gilin, 2009). Workplace incivility can dampen employee productivity and become an economic drain (Porath & Pearson, 2010), and even ruin an organization's reputation (Fox & Stallworth, 2010; Hutton & Gates, 2008). Because few studies have examined workplace incivility and its possible association with organizational outcomes in the context of a K-12 school, the aim of this research was to investigate the frequency of uncivil behavior among teachers and the influence of workplace incivility on teachers' commitment to the school and turnover intentions. Educational leaders could use new information generated by this research to find ways to reduce the likelihood of uncivil behavior, increase teacher commitment, and decrease turnover intent among teachers at our schools.

BACKGROUND

Review of the Background Literature

In this section, we demonstrate how workplace incivility can be associated with intentional acts of workplace aggression and physical violence (Fox & Stallworth, 2010; Lim et al., 2008; Porath & Pearson, 2010). Second, we link workplace incivility to school outcomes like teacher commitment to the school and turnover intentions.

Workplace Incivility's Link to Aggression and Physical Violence

Workplace incivility is characterized as violating norms of respect, with ambiguous intent to harm, and being of generally low intensity (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Gossiping, ostracizing, passing blame, taking credit inappropriately, ignoring, and teasing are all forms of disrespectful workplace behaviors that can grow rapidly or spiral into more serious forms of aggression (i.e., intentional harm-doing short of physical violence) and physical violence (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Fox & Stallworth, 2010; Lim et al., 2008). Thus, leaders and managers should be concerned about workplace incivility because it can lead to more aggressive forms of behavior (Fox & Stallworth, 2010). In May, 2010, for example, a Transportation Security Administration worker at Miami International Airport was arrested for allegedly assaulting a coworker with a police baton who had had been teasing him about the highly personal results of an inadvertent full body scan at the airport (Hunter, 2010). This incident is emblematic of how seemingly harmless behaviors with

Related Content

Preservice Teachers in Distance Learning: Mitigating the Impact on Social and Emotional Learning

Jessica C. Deckerand Valerie Beltran (2021). *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design (pp. 49-61).*

www.irma-international.org/article/preservice-teachers-in-distance-learning/279101

Game-Based Instruction in a College Classroom

Nancy Sardone, Roberta Devlin-Schererand Joseph Martinelli (2008). *Handbook of Research on Instructional Systems and Technology (pp. 463-475).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/game-based-instruction-college-classroom/20807

Using Social Media to Improve Peer Dialogue in an Online Course About Regional Climate Modeling

Morgan B. Yarkerand Michel D.S. Mesquita (2018). *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design (pp. 1-21).*

www.irma-international.org/article/using-social-media-to-improve-peer-dialogue-in-an-online-course-about-regional-climate-modeling/211152

Promoting U.S. Community Colleges in Sweden: From the Perspective of Swedish Education Agents

Ashley Marie Sansotta (2018). *International Student Mobility and Opportunities for Growth in the Global Marketplace (pp. 261-278).*

www.irma-international.org/chapter/promoting-us-community-colleges-in-sweden/205383

The Effects of 3D Animated Movies and Interactive Applications on the Development of Visual Perception in 60-72-Months-Old Children

Seçil Yücelyiitand Neriman Aral (2013). *International Journal of Online Pedagogy and Course Design (pp. 101-108).*

www.irma-international.org/article/the-effects-of-3d-animated-movies-and-interactive-applications-on-the-development-of-visual-perception-in-60-72-months-old-children/78914