

Insidious  
Workplace  
Behavior

Jerald Greenberg

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CHAPTER**

ROUTLEDGE 

# Insidious Workplace Behavior

Jerald Greenberg

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# Preface

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As a longtime Buckeye, the legend of Coach Woody Hayes is part of my heritage—mine and millions of other college football fans, especially in Ohio. With three national titles and 13 Big 10 championships to his credit during his 28-year reign as head football coach at The Ohio State University (OSU), there's little question about Hayes's proud legacy. But there's a dark side to it as well. Although basically kind-hearted and generous, Coach Hayes was a strict disciplinarian who was not reticent about using his volatile temper to express his disappointment with any player's poor performance. In the locker room he was a great teacher, albeit tyrannical. One day, the coach instructed one of his players to remove his helmet and then hit him in the head with it. Apparently, he demonstrated on a regular basis what today we call "tough love." As word got out about Coach Hayes's antics, most just brushed them off. After all, a football team is supposed to be tough and nobody was getting hurt—seriously, at least. Besides, Hayes's impressive record suggested that he knew what he was doing and no one wanted to argue with success.

Then one day—December 29, 1978, to be exact—Hayes went too far. In the Gator Bowl against Clemson, Coach Hayes's temper got the better of him. Late in the game, OSU's quarterback Art Schlichter was advancing the ball down the field hoping to erase a two-point deficit when Clemson's nose guard Charlie Bauman intercepted Schlichter's errant pass. As Bauman raced down the field along the OSU sideline, he came within inches of a frustrated Coach Hayes. Realizing that this meant his team's certain defeat, Hayes couldn't stand it. In a rage, he reached out and punched Bauman in the throat before also turning on one of his own players, Ken Fritz, who attempted to intervene. Outraged by this display of inappropriate behavior, Athletic Director Hugh Hindman relieved Coach Hayes of his duties the next morning.

As much as it makes me uncomfortable to recount the tarnishing of a widely admired coach's reputation, what it illustrates about the topic of this book, *insidious workplace behavior* (IWB), is just too perfect to ignore. For a long time, Hayes engaged in behavior that would have been considered completely inappropriate had it been more extreme in magnitude.

But, it wasn't. Yes, Hayes belittled his players. Yes, he screamed at them and he even hit them on occasion. These acts occurred repeatedly, characterizing his tough style, but no one thing was so egregious as to cross the line into blatantly inappropriate territory. In other words, Coach Hayes consistently flew under the radar. But his impunity ended abruptly when his aggressive behavior crossed the line separating acceptable from unacceptable behavior.

To the extent that we can characterize Woody Hayes's ongoing behavior before "the punch," as it is known in Columbus, as *intentionally harmful workplace behavior that is legal, subtle, and low level (rather than severe), repeated over time, and directed at individuals or organizations*, it is precisely what I mean by insidious workplace behavior. Dictionaries define *insidious* as "working harmfully in a subtle or stealthy manner." Indeed, this is what the coach did: The harm he brought to his players was delivered not in one big package but in many little ones delivered on a regular basis. My colleagues to whom I have described insidious workplace behavior have characterized it more colorfully as "death by a thousand paper cuts" and "being nibbled to death by guppies." These depictions, in keeping with the meaning of insidious, suggest that an actor is harming his or her victims. And we cannot say that Hayes's players did not feel his wrath in harmful ways. They simply accepted it given the small doses and the underlying belief that "it was good for me" and that "I deserved it."

Thus far, I have been talking about one individual, but as my accounts suggest insidious workplace behavior is inclined to occur all the time. Its stealthy nature, however, is unlikely to bring it to the forefront and uncertainties about its appropriateness (or lack thereof) may leave such acts unreported. As a result, we know little about this form of behavior. In fact, few are aware of its existence at all. This is potentially problematic to the extent that the adverse effects on a cumulative basis may be harmful to victims physically, emotionally, or both. Beyond individuals, insidious workplace behavior also may contribute to an organizational culture in which some forms of aggressive behavior are condoned, potentially interfering with cooperation required for organizations to function effectively.

The bottom line is clear: Some people on the job may be engaging in potentially harmful actions that go unrecognized. It is with the intent of shedding light on such behaviors that I have invited a cast of experts to chronicle the potential causes and consequences of various forms of insidious workplace behavior, along with suggestions about how to manage it

now and how to research it in the future. This book reflects the fruits of their labor.

To begin, in Chapter 1, Marissa Edwards and I address a question that is fundamental to this book: What is insidious workplace behavior? To aid readers, we offer a detailed definition of IWB and then juxtapose IWB with other forms of inappropriate behavior that have been studied in the workplace.

Using this as a launching point, Chapter 2 begins our foray into various types of IWB with Joel Neuman and Loreleigh Keashly's analysis of workplace aggression. These authors contrast insidious acts of aggressive behavior with larger, more extreme forms that make headlines. As a heuristic for organizing their points, they introduce a framework in which various behaviors are differentiated in terms of means, motive, and opportunity. They then present the results of original research showing how these factors help explain insidious forms of aggression in the workplace.

In Chapter 3, Mark Seabright, Maureen Ambrose, and Marshall Schminke examine workplace sabotage as a form of IWB directed at organizations. These authors argue that in addition to the usual conceptualization of sabotage as being motivated toward harming organizations, it also can occur as a result of workers' desires to exercise control in the workplace. This latter form is usually insidious in nature, they claim, and as a result, has different antecedents and consequences. They explore these factors as part of their broader conceptualization of motives for workplace sabotage.

Revenge as a form of IWB is the focus of David Jones's contribution in Chapter 4. Specifically, he examines an important question: Why do some people refrain from striking back in response to IWB whereas others do not? In part, the answer he proposes rests on people's past experiences with being victims, which influences the likelihood of making the kind of hostile attributions about mistreatment that trigger revenge. Jones supports his notion by reporting new research findings, and he summarizes his conceptualization by proposing an organizing framework that specifies breaking points that trigger revenge.

Christine Pearson addresses the topic of incivility in Chapter 5. After describing its basic nature, she describes conceptual foundations for the study of incivility and reviews major research findings bearing on this concept. Pearson's emphasis is on the experiences of victims, such as their emotional and behavioral responses. With an eye toward mitigating these negative reactions, she discusses practical issues, such as ways for victims

to cope. Finally, she offers suggestions for future research that promises to enhance our understanding of incivility.

Chapter 6 addresses an important issue that has received little attention by organizational scientists—sexist humor in the workplace. Christie Fitzgerald Boxer and Thomas Ford conceptualize this behavior as a subtle form of sexual harassment. In so doing, they examine why men engage in sexist humor and chronicle its consequences, both for individual targets and the broad culture of organizations. As an aid to practicing managers, Boxer and Ford conclude by offering specific suggestions for reducing sexist humor in their workplaces.

Lying may be insidious in nature, as Steven Grover chronicles in Chapter 7. We see this, he suggests, in white lies, lies made in difficult situations, lies used as negotiation tactics, and lies used to promote self-esteem. Grover examines the causes, consequences, and prevalence of these kinds of lies told to different audiences, such as subordinates, colleagues, and business customers. Arguing that lies are an inevitable fact of organizational life, Grover concludes by offering suggestions for coping with lies in the workplace.

Chapters 8 and 9 introduce methodological issues to our conversation. In Chapter 8, Steve Jex, Jennifer Geimer, Olga Clark, Ashley Guidroz, and Jennifer Yugo examine the challenges associated with measuring incivility. They focus on challenges from victims' perspectives (e.g., recall bias, recency effects) and from perpetrators' perspectives (e.g., causes of uncivil behavior). To help advance future research on incivility—and potentially all forms of IWB—they conclude by offering recommendations for improving the measurement of incivility.

Following up on this theme, Paul Spector and Ozgun Rodopman examine general methodological issues germane to studying IWB in Chapter 9. Their discussion focuses on ethical issues (e.g., identity protection), special considerations for institutional review boards, and considerations in accessing research participants (e.g., the special sampling techniques that should be used). They also offer suggestions for research techniques that are particularly useful in studying IWB (e.g., stress-incident records, designs, diaries, focus groups, and others). The authors conclude by discussing general research strategies to be used when studying IWB.

Finally, in Chapter 10, Marissa Edwards and I conclude this book with an integrative chapter. We discuss key issues that have arisen about IWB in this book and various challenges that confront future researchers.

Throughout, we offer some recommendations for scholars to take that will enable the study of IWB to advance beyond its infancy.

The contributions to this book make it ideal for use by professors and graduate-level management students as well as those from the parent disciplines from which the work is based—psychology (particularly, organizational psychology and social psychology), sociology, and communications. It promises to be excellent reading material in seminars and as a reference for professionals in these fields.

Given the relatively early stage of our understanding of insidious workplace behavior, the present work is of necessity scholarly in nature. However, practitioners also will find the topic fascinating—and all too real—and will pick up many good suggestions about how to recognize and manage insidious workplace behavior. Fortunately, contributors to this book have taken the first step toward making their work approachable to practitioners by discussing its implied implications. I thank them for reaching out in this way because it encourages the kind of rapprochement between academics and practitioners that will benefit both parties in their efforts to understand and contain insidious workplace behavior.

In closing, I wish to thank my editor, Anne Duffy, for her support and guidance—not to mention the patience of Job—over the years it took to bring this book to fruition. And, of course, I extend my heartfelt thanks to the various contributors to this book who have worked so diligently on their chapters as they drew upon what we already know to extrapolate into uncharted territory. All met the challenge brilliantly and rose to the occasion to create what I believe will be seminal contributions to a fledgling field of inquiry. I could not have asked for a more professional, talented, and kind group of scientists with whom to work. I am indebted to them for their contributions to this book. Finally, I thank my many students and colleagues on three continents with whom I have worked over the years and who have inspired me to undertake this project—not by any insidious acts on their part, but rather, by virtue of their rich intellectual support and stimulation.

**Jerald Greenberg**

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# Contributors

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**Maureen L. Ambrose** is professor of management in the College of Business at the University of Central Florida. She received her PhD from the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign. Her research interests include organizational justice, employee deviance, and ethics. Her work has appeared in the *Academy of Management Journal*, *Academy of Management Review*, *Administrative Sciences Quarterly*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Management*, and *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*. She is an Academy of Management fellow, a Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology fellow, and a member of the Society for Organizational Behavior. She served as associate editor for the *Academy of Management Journal* and was coeditor of a special issue on organizational justice called *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*. She has served on editorial boards for the *Academy of Management Journal*, *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Management*, *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*, *Human Resource Management Review*, and *Journal of Managerial Issues*. She recently completed a five-year term in the division chair track for the Organizational Behavior Division, the largest division of the Academy of Management. She has also served on a variety of Academy of Management committees and as representative-at-large for the Organizational Behavior Division.

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**Marissa S. Edwards** is a PhD candidate at UQ Business School, University of Queensland. She holds a bachelor of psychological science with honors from the University of Queensland. Her research interests include emotions, decision making, employee silence, whistle-blowing, and workplace deviance. She coedited *Voice and Silence in Organizations* (with Jerald Greenberg) and has coauthored papers and chaired symposia at the annual meetings of the Academy of Management, the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, and the Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management.

**Thomas E. Ford** is professor of psychology at Western Carolina University. He received his PhD in social psychology from University of Maryland in 1992. His research interests include disparaging humor and discrimination, humor and coping with stress, the relationship between religion and prejudice, and unintentional racism and stereotype threat in educational settings.

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**David A. Jones** obtained his PhD in industrial and organizational psychology in 2004 from the University of Calgary and is now associate professor in the School of Business Administration, University of Vermont. His primary research area is organizational justice, focusing on how justice perceptions form and how employees respond to fair and unfair treatment through organizational citizenship behavior, turnover, desires for revenge, and counterproductive work behavior. He also conducts research aimed at illuminating why job seekers and incumbent employees respond positively to socially responsible business practices. Reports of Jones's research have been published in journals including the *Journal of Applied Psychology, the Journal of Organizational Behavior, and the Journal of Management*.

**Loraleigh Keashly** is associate professor in the Department of Communication at Wayne State University, Detroit. Her research and consulting focuses on conflict and conflict resolution at the interpersonal, group, and intergroup levels. Her current research focus is the nature and personal and organizational effects of emotionally abusive and bullying behaviors in the workplace with a particular interest in the role of organizational structure and culture in the facilitation or prevention and management of these behaviors. Her work has appeared in *Work & Stress*, *Journal of Emotional Abuse*, *Violence and Victims*, *Employee Rights and Employment Policy Journal*, *Journal of Management and Organizations*, and *Journal of Healthcare Management*. Her book chapters have appeared in *Bullying and Emotional Abuse in the Workplace* (Taylor & Francis), *Counterproductive Work Behavior* (American Psychological Association), *Handbook of Workplace Violence* (Sage), and *The Destructive Side of Organizational Communication* (Routledge/LEA).

**Joel H. Neuman** is associate professor of management and organizational behavior and director of the Center for Applied Management in the School of Business at the State University of New York at New Paltz. His research and consulting activities focus on workplace aggression and violence, workplace bullying, and the use of collaborative inquiry within the action research process. His research in these areas has appeared in publications such as the *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, *Journal of Management*, *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, *Public Administration Quarterly*, *Employee Rights and Employment Policy Journal*, *Aggressive Behavior*, and the *Journal of Healthcare Management*. His book chapters, related to workplace aggression and bullying, have appeared in *Antisocial Behavior in Organizations* (Sage), *Bullying and Emotional Abuse in the Workplace: International Perspectives in Research and Practice* (Taylor & Francis), *The Dark Side of Organizational Behavior* (Jossey-Bass), *Counterproductive Work Behavior: Investigations of Actors and Targets* (American Psychological Association), and *The Destructive Side of Organizational Communication* (Routledge/LEA).

**Christine Pearson**, professor of management at Thunderbird School of Global Management, has focused her career on strategic preparation in heading off workplace crises. She has studied and developed causation theories as well as solutions with regard to problems that can escalate

into disastrous individual and organizational losses, whether from faulty decision making, inattentiveness, or incivility and aggression in the workplace. With more than 20 years experience and faculty appointments in Asia, Europe, South America, and the United States, Pearson has helped numerous organizations plan for, avert, and contain crises from workplace homicide to executive kidnapping, from product tampering to product recalls, aircraft accidents, and consumer fraud. Her most recent book, *The Cost of Bad Behavior: How Incivility is Damaging Your Business and What to Do About It* (with Christine Porath, 2009) confirms the pressing need for leaders to address incivility or suffer the steep financial consequences.

**Ozgun B. Rodopman** is assistant professor in the Management Department at Boğaziçi University, Istanbul, Turkey. She received her doctorate in industrial and organizational psychology from the University of South Florida. She also has a master's degree in management from Harvard University. Her research interests include proactivity, mentoring, justice, citizenship, and counterproductive work behaviors.

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# 1

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## *What Is Insidious Workplace Behavior?*

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*Marissa S. Edwards and Jerald Greenberg*

Headlines regularly chronicle audacious acts of criminal behavior that occur in the workplace. Whether it's a disgruntled ex-employee who fires a gun at his former coworkers (Leavitt, 1995), an investment broker who swindles billions of dollars from his clients (Efrati, Lauricella, & Searcey, 2008), or a governor of a U.S. state who auctions off a vacant Senate seat to the highest bidder (Keen, 2008), accounts of gross misdeeds are all too common. Despite what their prevalence in the news may suggest, such extreme acts are merely the tip of the iceberg of deviant workplace behavior.

Far beneath the surface, however, lays a broad base of deviant behaviors that fail to grab public attention because they are prosaic, sometimes covert, and seemingly benign in nature. Examples include an employee who makes one of her coworkers the target of her daily racial jokes, a coach who shoves one of his players each time he makes a mistake on the field, and an executive who badmouths his assistant whenever he walks away. Greenberg (2004) referred to such subtle but pervasive forms of deviance as *insidious workplace behavior* (IWB).

Given its under-the-radar qualities, it's not surprising that we only rarely hear about IWB, if ever. "Boss teases subordinate" is hardly newsworthy, leaving IWB to receive little attention by either the press or management scholars. Not only doesn't the behavior call attention to itself, but until now, social scientists didn't know to look for it. Yet, to the particular "boss" and "subordinate" involved, the incident may have value, especially when it's part of a repeated pattern. Indeed, as chronicled in this book, because the cumulative impact of IWB, furtive though it may be, is often considerable, taking a toll on victims, it is a potentially important area of study. For this potential to be realized, however, it is essential for IWB to be clearly defined and for its various forms to be identified. We perform these tasks in this chapter.

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## DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS

The word *insidious* has been defined variously as “spreading or developing or acting inconspicuously but with harmful effect” (*Oxford American Dictionary*, 1980, p. 342) and “stealthily treacherous or deceitful; operating or proceeding inconspicuously but with grave effect” (*Macquarie Concise Dictionary*, 1998, p. 584). Abstractions aside, the term’s meaning becomes clearest in context. For example, the political scientist, Samuel P. Huntington (2004) contrasted the imparting of limited or incomplete information with lying, by noting that “partial truths or half-truths are often more insidious than total falsehoods” (p. 37). And in her groundbreaking memoir, *Prozac Nation*, Elizabeth Wurtzel (1994) explained that the challenge of living with clinical depression lies in the fact that its effects are “insidious and compound daily” (p. 191).

Our definition of IWB is in keeping with this general meaning, but narrowed to fit the context of workplace behavior. Specifically, we define insidious workplace behavior as *a form of intentionally harmful workplace behavior that is legal, subtle, and low level (rather than severe), repeated over time, and directed at individuals or organizations*. Importantly, IWB is not a unique behavior in its own right, but rather a particular form of several varieties of deviant behavior. The set of qualifying characteristics is as follows.

- *Intentionally harmful*: Acts that are performed in an effort to bring harm.
- *Legal*: Acts that do not break the law.
- *Low-level severity*: Acts that are subtle and incidental in nature, with minor (sometimes, seemingly unremarkable) effects that may go unnoticed when they occur on an isolated basis.
- *Repetitive*: Acts that are repeated over time (as opposed to single acts) with effects that are cumulative in nature.
- *Individually and organizationally targeted*: The intended victim of harm usually is another individual, although it also may be an organization with which the actor is associated.

This characterization of IWB paints a picture of subtle and stealthy behavior that cumulatively chips away at a worker’s dignity—or, using morbid metaphors, “death by a thousand paper cuts,” or “being nibbled to

death by guppies.” Although some authors have made passing mention to this type of behavior (e.g., Skarlicki & Folger, 1997), to our knowledge, it has not been examined fully to date. To shed further light on the nature of IWB, we now take a closer look at its defining characteristics.

### **Intentionally Harmful**

In keeping with Robinson and Bennett’s (1995) conceptualization of deviant behavior, we contend that the motive underlying IWB is to inflict harm (on either an individual or organization, as we will note later). This is important to note because several of the contributors to the present volume indicate that some acts that appear to be IWB actually may be driven by prosocial motives and can result in constructive outcomes. For example, Grover (Chapter 7, this volume) observes that employees sometimes tell white lies to protect colleagues’ feelings; and Seabright, Ambrose, and Schminke (Chapter 3, this volume) suggest that sabotage is not always intended to be harmful. Appearances may be deceptive in these cases because the behaviors in question are not motivated by the desire to bring harm, and therefore, may not be considered insidious. With this in mind, we caution against labeling any acts as IWB in the absence of knowledge of the actor’s negative intentions.

As Andersson and Pearson (1999) note in their review of incivility, the intention underlying many workplace behaviors is often difficult to detect. In the case of incivility, they suggest that perpetrators can deny all responsibility by arguing that the behavior was not intended to offend, suggesting that the target misinterpreted the behavior or is simply hypersensitive. In similar fashion, Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, and Cooper (2003) state that it is extremely difficult to determine the presence of intent in episodes of workplace bullying and sexual harassment. Neuman and Baron (2005) observe that this is one reason why some researchers have elected to exclude harmful intentions from their conceptualizations of deviance. Although we acknowledge these points, we believe that it is essential to include negative intentions in our definition of IWB because without this criterion, IWB would be indistinguishable from accidental instances of low-level, pervasive negligence. For example, if an employee failed repeatedly to include a colleague in important group discussions via e-mail because he or she forgot that the individual’s e-mail address had changed, this would not represent an example of IWB because the actor did not intend to harm that colleague.

By imposing this condition, we recognize that attributions of intentionality rest on the target's perceptions and interpretations of events, which are, of course, fallible and difficult to assess. We believe, however, that the inherent ambiguity of many subtle and frequently occurring forms of employee behavior underscores the importance of assessing employees' motives for performing the behavior before labeling them as IWB (Conte, 2009). Indeed, most acts we consider to be IWB probably should be referred to as "presumed IWB" or "apparent IWB."

## **Legal**

Generally, discussions of workplace behavior focus on legal acts, but this is not always so. The literature on employee theft (e.g., Greenberg & Scott, 1996), for example, examines acts ranging from pilfering (generally not regarded to be illegal) to grand theft and embezzlement (highly illegal). Likewise, only most extreme acts of workplace violence are illegal (e.g., shooting or physically assaulting someone), although more benign, yet disruptive, forms of workplace aggression (e.g., a minor skirmish characterized by name-calling in raised voices) may be perfectly legal (Baron & Neuman, 1996).

For a behavior to be classified as IWB, it must be legal. This criterion is reasonable insofar as IWB, as will be noted later, involves repeated behavior. And assuming some modicum of law enforcement, it's unlikely that illegal behavior can be repeated too many times without being put to a stop.

Admittedly, the matter of legality is difficult to apply in the case of sexual harassment. In countries in which sexual harassment is illegal under state and national law (e.g., the United States and Australia), mild but pervasive instances of inappropriate touching and sexual comments in an organization may or may not constitute IWB. This ambiguity is based on the fact that laws are often framed using terms such as "unwanted" and "offensive," making the legality of any claims of harassment a matter to be assessed on a case-by-case basis. Thus, some but not all instances of sexual harassment may be considered IWB.

## **Low-Level Severity**

Vardi and Weitz (2004) observe that the severity of misbehavior can be measured in behavioral and attitudinal forms. Behaviorally, severity may be evaluated according to its frequency, in addition to "the centrality of

the violated norm or value ... [and] the degree of premeditation, preoccupation, or planning involved in the misbehavior” (p. 33). Attitudinally, the severity of misbehavior may be measured according to “the strength or intensity of the [individual’s] intention, predisposition or propensity” (p. 33) to engage in the deviant behavior. Extending these foci, we contend that the consequences of the behavior are another critical component of severity. Specifically, in the case of IWB, we suggest that the outcomes of specific acts may not be especially harmful in the short term, although their cumulative detrimental effects over time can be considerable (Schneider, Swan, & Fitzgerald, 1997).

Using this consequence-based approach, acts of IWB, by definition, are low in severity. Each occurrence may be considered a deviant act of low severity, such as when a supervisor embarrasses an employee in front of others. The individual act may be so benign as to be unremarkable although the cumulative impact of many such acts repeated over time—the body of work in its entirety, so to speak—may be severe. As such, those rude and uncivil acts constitute IWB.

Several researchers have noted that deviant acts vary with respect to severity (e.g., Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Skarlicki & Folger, 2004). Bullying/mobbing, a phenomenon described in this book (Neuman & Keashly, Chapter 2), illustrates this variation. Some bullies, for example, terrorize victims through physical violence or verbal threats, whereas others engage in low-level personal campaigns designed to undermine victims’ self-esteem and self-efficacy. Such efforts may take such forms as ostracism (i.e., exclusion and isolation; Lustenberger & Williams, 2009), setting unreasonably high work demands, or being unfairly critical of employees’ performance (Simpson & Cohen, 2004). This same variation is addressed in the more general literature on aggressive behavior. For example, Baron and Neuman (1996) note that whereas some acts of aggression are extreme and overt (e.g., homicide), others are less visible and ambiguous with respect to their underlying aggressive motive (e.g., arriving late for a meeting, ignoring voice mail or e-mail messages). In all these cases of deviant behaviors, the low-severity acts may be considered IWB.

Finally, we note that severity was one of the dimensions used by Robinson and Bennett (1995) in their typology of deviant behavior. Among the most severe behaviors identified in their study were sabotaging equipment, stealing from the company, verbal abuse, and endangering coworkers. Less severe behaviors included blaming coworkers, gossiping about

coworkers, and showing favoritism. Such acts may be considered IWB if they also meet our additional criteria (e.g., they are intentionally harmful and occur repeatedly over time). Robinson and Bennett noted that their “serious–not serious” dimension was related negatively to the covert or overt nature of the behavior in question: Serious acts tend to be overt in nature (because they are difficult to hide), whereas less serious ones tend to be covert (because they are easy to hide or are not even noticeable). This is in keeping with our depiction of IWB as being difficult to detect.

### **Repetitive**

Our fourth defining characteristic of IWB is that it is repetitive. In other words, it occurs frequently and persistently over time. In contrast to a single act of aggression (e.g., a tantrum involving screaming at one’s boss), employees who perpetrate IWB engage in repeated episodes (frequency: how often) over a series of days, weeks, months, or even years (duration: over how long a time).

Our definition may be juxtaposed with those of others who have elected to specify the frequency or duration of various deviant behaviors. Tepper’s (2000) definition of abusive supervision—“subordinates’ perceptions of the extent to which supervisors engage in the sustained display of hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors, excluding physical contact” (p. 178)—is a good example of this because it acknowledges the persistent nature of the behavior in question. Also, we note that almost all definitions of workplace bullying specify that the behavior must occur on a repeated basis—typically at least weekly, over a duration of six months—in order to be classified as bullying (Einarsen et al., 2003). Additionally, Duffy, Ganster, and Pagon (2002) suggest that social undermining in the workplace involves ongoing attempts to hinder positive social interactions, explaining that such behaviors “are insidious, in that they weaken gradually or by degrees” (p. 332).

Keashly and Jagatic (2003) provide an excellent analysis of issues of frequency and duration in their discussion of workplace bullying in the United States. Commenting on the literature, they note that “even seemingly minor behaviors can have significant effects when they occur frequently and over extended time periods” (Keashly & Jagatic, 2003, p. 53). At the same time, they observe that a major limitation of the research thus far is that researchers have investigated discrete instances of bullying almost

exclusively instead of examining the effects of persistent and repetitive behaviors over time. They note further that although some definitions of workplace bullying specify the duration of the behaviors, most researchers have failed to take duration into account when measuring deviance. In this connection, Keashly and Jagatic suggest that scientists would be well served to measure the frequency with which people are exposed to deviant behavior (e.g., in days, weeks, or months) and how they affect their experience and subsequent coping.

In summary, we argue that researchers should assess the number of exposures during each time period (i.e., frequency) when investigating deviant behavior. Greatest impact would be expected under conditions in which a high frequency of deviant acts occurs over long periods of time. In the case of IWB, low-level acts may have the most profound effects when the product of their Duration  $\times$  Frequency is high. This multiplicative assumption is consistent with the notion that if either one of these values is 0, so too will be the effect. Additionally, lacking reason to do otherwise, we give equal weight to duration and frequency, although in practice, these may differ for various forms of behavior. Clearly, this is an issue in need of future research.

### **Individually and Organizationally Targeted**

Some deviant behaviors are directed toward harming organizations (e.g., intentionally working slowly) and others are directed toward individuals (e.g., gossiping). Following the lead of scientists studying organizational citizenship (Organ & Ryan, 1995), who distinguish between acts aimed at organizations (OCB-O) and those aimed at individuals (OCB-I), we refer to these as *IWB-O* and *IWB-I*, respectively. If they otherwise meet the additional criteria, such acts, aimed at either target can be regarded as IWB.

This specification spans the distinction between individually targeted and organizationally targeted forms of deviance made by Robinson and Bennett (1995), and we are not the first to erect such a bridge. For example, Rayner, Hoel, and Cooper (2002) note that acts of bullying can be aimed at individuals, groups, or entire organizations. Their approach and ours are in keeping with Vardi and Wiener's (1996) claim that constructs of workplace deviance should be defined with sufficient breadth to allow for inclusion of several forms of behavior.

This is important because, as Berry, Ones, and Sackett (2007) observed, most instances of interpersonal deviance and organizational deviance are highly correlated. Yet, their meta-analyses revealed that these forms of behavior are also differentially correlated with other variables, suggesting that there are complex relationships between them. With this in mind, we encourage researchers to examine both interpersonally directed IWB and organizationally directed IWB to determine the degree to which differences exist with respect to their motives, antecedents, and outcomes.

### ***More IWB-I Than IWB-O?***

Casual observation leads us to suspect that more IWB is targeted toward individuals than organizations. However, in the absence of large-scale descriptive studies, this is merely speculation. Yet, assuming that such a skew exists, this possibility may be explained in several ways.

First, if we assume that employees are most likely to retaliate against those who have harmed them (Skarlicki & Folger, 1997), the prevalence of IWB-I may reflect a tendency for more harmful acts to be brought by other individuals than by organizations. Given that people usually work in proximity with others, they may be inclined to experience more harmful acts from them and also to suffer their impact sooner than they would experience harm stemming from the policies of an organization (whose effects have to trickle down to them). To the extent that this occurs, we would expect to observe more IWB-I than IWB-O.

Second, following from classic literature on displaced aggression (Dollard, Doob, Miller, Mowrer, & Sears, 1939), even when organizations are believed to be the source of harm, employees may be reluctant to strike back at them, fearing that they may get fired. This would lead employees to target “safer” others associated with the organization, such as individual managers or coworkers. This possibility also is in keeping with the relational model of workplace aggression (Hershcovis & Barling, 2007), according to which the relationship between aggressors and targets determines the aggressors’ behavior. In particular, aggressors are expected to use less extreme forms of aggression when they have low amounts of legitimate power or when their relationships with targets are no longer ongoing.

A third possibility focuses on the nature of the responses rather than their quantity. Specifically, it’s reasonable to assume that employees are harmed in different ways by individuals (e.g., interpersonal harm, such

as a personal insult) than by organizations (e.g., financial harm, such as assignment to an undesirable sales territory), thereby leading them to strike back differently. And the ways they do this are more likely to take insidious forms when striking back at other individuals than at organizations. We base this on the notion that people desiring to harm targets may find it more gratifying to observe the suffering of others who they observe regularly than the organization—an abstract entity whose suffering they may only envision rather than observe directly. This thinking is in line with the socio-philosophical notion of *schadenfreude*, the tendency for people to delight in the suffering of others (Portmann, 2000)—a phenomenon that is now beginning to be examined by organizational scholars (Wiesenfeld, Blader, & Fortin, 2006).

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## FORMS: IWB IS A SUBSET OF ...

Having defined IWB and discussed its key characteristics, we now turn our attention to a key question: What forms does IWB take? This question arises because, as we already noted, IWB is not a unique type of behavior itself but a set of characteristics that may manifest itself in various types of deviant behavior. As such, we now identify major types of deviant workplace behavior (Bennett & Robinson, 2003; Robinson & Greenberg, 1998), subsets of which may take insidious forms.

### Noncompliant Behaviors

Puffer (1987) used the term *noncompliant behaviors* to describe “non-task behaviors that have negative organizational implications” (p. 615) and suggested that these typically involve “breaking rules and norms” (p. 616). She argued that employees may fail to comply with rules and regulations for many reasons, and that noncompliance is likely more “active, deliberate and premeditated” (p. 616) than simply following organizational policies and procedures (i.e., compliance).

Among the noncompliant behaviors she identified in her study of salespeople were (a) being late and taking excessive breaks, (b) complaining about the organization or fellow employees, (c) violating floor rules (e.g., taking sales from other workers), (d) making unrealistic promises to

customers, and (e) failing to do one's fair share of noncommissioned sales promotions (e.g., phoning customers about upcoming sales).

Examining noncompliant behavior more broadly, Warren (2005) argued that it is crucial to distinguish between the various motives responsible for it. Specifically, these are as follows:

- *Ignorance about rules*: Employees violating organizational policies or procedures inadvertently because they are unaware that they exist.
- *Ignorance about rule application*: Employees know the rules but fail to understand how they apply to them in the situations they face.
- *Opportunistic noncompliance*: Employees are aware of organizational rules and expectations about appropriate behavior, but violate them for personal gain.
- *Principled noncompliance*: Employees intentionally break rules to protest rules they believe are wrong or morally corrupt.

All of Puffer's (1987) examples of noncompliant behavior are single acts of varying harmfulness, some of which are potentially severe. In practice, however, several of these acts may be minor in severity and it's possible—indeed, likely—for them to be repeated over time. This would allow them to be considered IWB so long as they are (a) not also focused on positive motives (e.g., principled noncompliance) and outside parties (e.g., making unrealistic promises to customers) and (b) take legal forms. In short, some but not all forms of noncompliant behavior may be considered IWB.

## Workplace Deviance

Robinson and Bennett (1995) defined *workplace deviance* as “voluntary behavior that violates significant organizational norms and in doing so threatens the wellbeing of an organization, its members, or both” (p. 556). Using multidimensional scaling, they created a taxonomy consisting of four forms of deviant behavior:

- *Property deviance*: Serious forms of organizationally harmful behaviors
- *Production deviance*: Minor forms of organizationally harmful behaviors
- *Political deviance*: Minor forms of interpersonally harmful behaviors
- *Personal aggression*: Serious forms of interpersonally harmful behaviors

Like noncompliant behavior, some but not all acts of workplace deviance may manifest themselves as IWB. In particular, these would include only the minor forms of harmful behavior (production deviance and political deviance)—and among these, only those taking legal forms (thereby eliminating, for example, the destruction of equipment). Given the repetitive nature of IWB, an example would be repeatedly sabotaging the sales reports submitted by a coworker by inserting erroneous figures. And given the negative intent criterion, this would have to be motivated by the desire to make the targeted individual look bad (as is likely to be the case).

### Employee Deviance

Warren (2003) defined *employee deviance* as “behavioral departures from the norms of a reference group” (p. 622). These can be either positive (e.g., whistle-blowing) or negative (e.g., lying and stealing) in nature. She distinguishes between behavior that conforms to or deviates from the norms of reference groups (i.e., local norms) and the more globally held norms of society (i.e., hypernorms). Specifically, Warren (2003) identified behavior falling outside both sets of norms (e.g., fraud) as *destructive deviance*, and behavior falling outside reference group norms but within hypernorms (e.g. whistle-blowing) as *constructive deviance*. Warren’s approach highlights the importance of considering the consequences of behavior from organizational and societal perspectives, as well as the standards and norms from which behavior deviates.

Insidious forms of employee deviance would be those negative behaviors that occur repeatedly over time and only ones that are low in severity. Because not all employee deviance may be so described, IWB may be considered a particularly small subset of all employee deviance.

### Organizational Misbehavior

Vardi and Wiener (1996) coined the term *organizational misbehavior* (OMB) to describe “any intentional action by member/s of organization/s which defies and violates (a) shared organizational norms and expectations, and/or (b) core societal values, mores, and standards of proper conduct” (p. 151). Additionally, these theorists classified OMB into three categories based on the intention of the person engaging in the misbehavior:

- *OMB Type S*: Misbehaviors intended to benefit the self (generally occurring inside the organization and target the company or its employees)
- *OMB Type O*: Misbehaviors that are intended to assist the employing organization and are usually directed toward outside targets
- *OMB Type D*: Misbehaviors that are designed to harm or damage the organization or its employees

In subsequent research, Vardi and his associates (2001; Vardi & Weitz, 2002, 2004) argued further that OMB can take the following forms:

- *Intrapersonal misbehavior* (e.g., substance abuse and workaholism)
- *Interpersonal misbehavior* (e.g., bullying and incivility)
- *Production misbehavior* (e.g., rule-breaking and absenteeism)
- *Property misbehavior* (e.g., sabotage and theft)
- *Political misbehavior* (e.g., misuse of power and favoritism)

The only forms of organizational misbehavior that may be regarded to be IWB are those in the category OMD Type D, but not all such behaviors qualify. Eliminated, in particular, would be those acts that are illegal and major in nature (e.g., bringing illegal drugs or weapons into the workplace). Also excluded would be any acts that are not repeated. Therefore, IWB may comprise only a small subset of all forms of organizational misbehavior.

## **Workplace Aggression**

Neuman and Baron (1998) defined workplace aggression as “efforts by individuals to harm others with whom they work, or have worked, or the organizations in which they are presently, or were previously, employed” (p. 395). These authors argued that a distinction should be drawn between the term *workplace violence*, which is used frequently to describe direct instances of physical assault, and *workplace aggression*, which includes a wide range of harmful behaviors directed at individual or organizational targets. Subsequently, they (Baron, 2004; Neuman & Baron, 2005) drew on the classic social psychological work of Buss (1961) by crosscutting three dimensions of aggression in combination: physical or verbal, active or passive, and direct or indirect. The eight resulting forms of workplace aggression are as follows:

- *Physical, active, and direct* (e.g., homicide and assault)
- *Physical, active, and indirect forms of aggression* (e.g., theft)
- *Physical, passive, and direct* (e.g., exclusion and intentional work slowdown)
- *Physical, passive, and indirect* (e.g., denying promotions without good reason)
- *Verbal, active, and direct* (e.g., yelling and making racist remarks)
- *Verbal, active, and indirect* (e.g., spreading rumors and attempting to turn others against the target)
- *Verbal, passive, and direct* (e.g., intentionally failing to return phone calls and giving the silent treatment)
- *Verbal, passive, and indirect* (e.g., failing to refute false rumors about the target and failing to inform the target about important feedback)

Of these acts, those that are physical and active, regardless of whether direct or indirect, are not IWB because they are too serious and likely to be illegal (e.g., theft, homicide and assault). Instead, the passive and verbal forms of aggressive behavior may qualify as IWB so long as they also are repeated over time and intended to bring harm. Indeed, this is likely to be the case for some behaviors noted by Neuman and Baron (1998).

### **Organization-Motivated Aggression**

O’Leary-Kelly, Griffin, and Glew (1996) used the term *organization-motivated aggression* to describe a particular type of aggression in the workplace, and like Neuman and Baron (1998), they distinguished between aggression and violence. Specifically, they defined organization-motivated aggression (OMA) as “attempted injurious or destructive behavior initiated by either an organizational insider or outsider that is instigated by some factor in the organizational context” (p. 229) and organization-motivated violence (OMV) as “significant negative effects on person or property that occur as a result of organization-motivated aggression” (p. 229). With respect to OMA, they make the following key observations:

- OMA does not always lead to OMV because individuals exhibiting aggressive behavior may be stopped before violence occurs.
- OMA may have negative effects even if it is not executed completely (e.g., threatening an employee with a knife or gun).

- OMA is injurious or destructive (i.e., harmful) in nature and is motivated by factors in the organizational setting.
- OMA can be perpetrated by people inside the organization (e.g., employees) or outside the organization (e.g., clients, customers or potential employees).
- OMA may be directed toward an individual or the organization itself.

By definition, the “major” nature of OMV precludes IWB. Furthermore, even many forms of OMA would not be considered IWB. Eliminated, for example, would be acts of violence (instead of aggression) and acts perpetrated by people outside the organization. Also eliminated would be those acts that are so severe as to be illegal (e.g., shooting a gun) and any that occur on only a single occasion. Therefore, IWB may comprise only a small subset of OMA.

## Employee Vice

Moberg (1997) introduced the term *employee vice* to describe an act that betrays the trust of either individuals or the organizational community. He argued that different forms of betrayal exist in organizations, and categorized behaviors according to two dimensions: (1) the level of betrayal (high vs. low, measured according to the degree of organizational resources placed at risk as a result of the behavior); and (2) the beneficiary of the betrayal (the betrayer alone vs. the betrayer and other cobeneficiaries). Crosscutting these two dimensions results in the following forms of behavior:

- Behaviors involving a high level of betrayal that benefit only the betrayer (e.g., failing to disclose facts, lying about facts, self-dealing, insider trading, and embezzlement)
- Behaviors involving a high level of betrayal that benefit the betrayer and others (e.g., treason, espionage, corruption, whistle-blowing, and behaviors that are designed to cover up transgressions)
- Behaviors involving a low level of betrayal that benefit the betrayer only, such as withholding maximum effort while completing work (labeled *shirking*), rigidly complying with organizational policies and procedures to impede performance (labeled *bureaucratic opposition*), using organizational resources for personal expenditures (labeled *padded expense accounts and budget games*), and premature,

unexplained exit from the organization (labeled *untimely or symbolic exit*)

- Behaviors involving a low level of betrayal that benefit the betrayer and others, such as strikes, organized slowdowns (when all employees deliberately work slowly), sick-outs (when employees take sick days simultaneously), and unsanctioned partiality (when work units hoard resources that are supposed to be distributed to the entire organization)

The subset of employee vice that may include IWB is characterized by acts with low levels of betrayal. However, even this half of employee vice acts cannot be presumed to be IWB because whereas employee vice focuses on the benefits to the actor, IWB focuses on harm to another individual or organization, and a correlation between them cannot be assumed. In fact, one of the few “benefits” to be derived from IWB may come in the form of an actor’s enjoyment from making the victim suffer (Portmann, 2000), and this would be difficult to assess (see our discussion of potentially beneficial side effects of IWB in Chapter 10, this volume). Considering this, in addition to overlaying the other criteria of IWB, it’s possible but unlikely that much employee vice also can be considered IWB.

## Organizational Retaliation Behavior

Skarlicki and Folger (1997) used the term *organizational retaliation behavior* (ORB) to describe “adverse reactions to perceived unfairness by disgruntled employees toward their employer” (p. 434). Consistent with our notion of IWB, they noted explicitly that, in contrast to more overt forms of deviance, they were interested in “the numerous subtle and covert forms of retaliation that are not as dramatic but still might have adverse consequences for an organization’s effective functioning” (p. 435). Also consistent with IWB, Skarlicki and Folger (1997) note that ORB may be either direct or indirect and that it may be directed toward individuals or organizations.

Later, however, Skarlicki and Folger (2004) identified particular forms of ORB that in several ways disqualify from consideration as IWB. First, they argued that retaliation sometimes is a rational, measured response to wrongdoing, defying categorization as negative or positive (and only negative acts may be considered IWB). Second, they also contend that one of the reasons why people may retaliate against an organization is to educate it in ways that ultimately contribute to its survival. In his regard, ORB

is similar to Puffer's (1987) notion of principled noncompliance, which also does not qualify as IWB. Third, these theorists also note that ORB can include acts that are unlawful (e.g., engaging in theft) and that they may be very severe acts. Such acts, of course, cannot be considered IWB. In short, as is the case with other forms of deviant behavior, ORB includes only some acts that would qualify as IWB.

## **Interpersonal Mistreatment**

Cortina and Magley (2003) define *interpersonal mistreatment* as “a specific, antisocial variety of organizational deviance, involving a situation in which at least one organizational member takes counternormative negative actions—or terminates normative positive actions—against another member” (p. 247). As the authors observe, this form of deviance encompasses a wide range of behavior, ranging from minor insults to severe instances of harassment and violence. In this respect it shares some similarities with the overall construct of *interpersonal deviance* (Robinson & Bennett, 1995), which can range from minor (political deviance) to severe (personal aggression).

Here, we provide an overview of some of the most common types of interpersonal mistreatment, many of which are addressed in this book: (a) bullying and mobbing, (b) social undermining, (c) emotional abuse, and (d) incivility. We note further, and as emphasized by many other contributors to this volume, considerable overlap exists among these forms of behavior. Since sexual harassment, by definition, involves more specific behaviors, namely, unwelcome advances, requests, or verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature (Cortina & Berdahl, 2008), we have not included it here. However, some instances of sexual harassment may be classified as interpersonal mistreatment that also may be considered IWB-I.

### ***Bullying and Mobbing***

The phenomenon of workplace bullying has attracted considerable attention from organizational researchers. As Einarsen et al. (2003) conceive of it, bullying in the workplace involves a range of negative behaviors, including “harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone’s work tasks” (p. 6). They argue that to label the behaviors or process as bullying the behavior must occur on a regular basis and over a

considerable period of time. Furthermore, they suggest that “bullying is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of negative social acts. A conflict cannot be called bullying if the incident is an isolated event or if two parties of approximately equal strength are in conflict” (p. 6). Others agree that bullying involves a power imbalance between perpetrators and their target(s) and have incorporated this feature into their definitions. Salin (2003), for example, defines bullying as “repeated and persistent negative acts towards one or more individual(s), which involve a perceived power imbalance and create a hostile work environment” (p. 1215).

Extending the concept of bullying, Leymann (1996) introduced the term *mobbing* to describe “hostile and unethical communication, which is directed in a systematic way by one or a few individuals mainly towards one individual who, due to mobbing, is pushed into a hopeless and defenceless position, being held there by continuing mobbing activities” (p. 168). Leymann specified further that the behavior must occur at least once a week and for a minimum duration of 6 months to be classified as mobbing. In their review of the literature, Saunders, Huynh, and Goodman-Delahunty (2007) suggest that differences in terminology have emerged because the nature of bullying varies in different countries. Specifically, European researchers generally use the term “mobbing” because bullying in certain European countries (e.g., Germany) is often perpetrated by groups of people. In the United States and Australia, however, the term “bullying” is used in reference to the behavior of both individuals or groups.

The definitions reviewed here suggest that certain instances of bullying meet the criteria for IWB-I. First, researchers are in agreement that bullying and mobbing involve repeated instances of unwelcome behavior, a key element of IWB. And, as in IWB, some of these behaviors are minor in severity. Although some researchers (e.g., Randall, 1997) note that to constitute bullying the behavior must be deliberate and intended to cause harm, others (e.g., Einarsen et al., 2003; Zapf, 1999) have not included the intention of the perpetrator in their definitions of bullying and mobbing. The legality of workplace bullying has received attention in recent times (e.g., Namie & Namie, 2009), with legislation enacted in certain countries (e.g., Canada, Ireland) and in several Australian states designed to discourage such behavior by punishing perpetrators. Should the behavior in question be considered illegal, it would not be considered IWB. In summary, some forms of bullying and mobbing may be considered IWB.

### **Social Undermining**

Duffy et al. (2002) defined *social undermining* as “behavior intended to hinder, over time, the ability to establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships, work-related success, and favorable reputation” (p. 332). This definition incorporates three key features. First, for a behavior to be classified as undermining, targets must perceive that the behavior is intended to be damaging, thereby excluding accidentally harmful remarks or actions. Second, Duffy et al. emphasize that social undermining involves low-level, pervasive behaviors designed to harm an individual on a gradual basis. Like IWB, social undermining is destructive not because of any immediate and severe acts of deviance, but minor acts whose effects can accumulate to bring harm over time. Third, social undermining can take different forms, manifesting itself in terms of acts of commission (e.g., by making insulting personal comments) or acts of omission (e.g., by failing to share important information). Finally, as is the case for other forms of deviance (e.g., aggression), social undermining includes both verbal behavior (e.g., making hurtful comments) and physical behavior (e.g., deliberately misreporting information to colleagues).

It is apparent that social undermining shares several key characteristics with IWB-I, in that it involves intentionally harmful, low-level, and persistent behavior. Unlike social undermining, however, IWB also incorporates acts aimed at organizations (e.g., badmouthing the company to others)—that is, IWB-O. Furthermore, acts of social undermining may take illegal forms (e.g., theft), whereas such acts would not be considered IWB. In other words, people who engage in IWB may do so without getting into any formal trouble, and this enables them to maintain their ways.

### **Emotional Abuse**

Keashly (1998) uses the term *emotional abuse* to describe “hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors that are not explicitly tied to sexual or racial content yet are directed at gaining compliance from others” (p. 85). Extending this notion, Keashly and Harvey (2005) added that emotional abuse includes “repeated hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviors (excluding physical contact) directed at one or more individuals over a period of time such that the target’s sense of self as a competent worker and person is negatively affected” (p. 205). Examples of behavior in keeping with this

definition include humiliating or mocking an employee in front of others, giving someone the “silent treatment,” name-calling, and deliberately withholding information (Keashly, 2001).

Keashly (1998) suggested emotional abuse incorporates the following defining behavioral features. Specifically, emotional abuse is

- Verbal and nonverbal (not including physical contact)
- Repetitive or part of a pattern of behavior
- Unwanted, unwelcomed, and unsolicited by the target
- A violation of standards of acceptable behavior toward others
- Harmful or causes physical or psychological damage to the target
- Intended to harm or under the control of the perpetrator
- Capable of exploiting the position power of the perpetrator over the target

Some forms of emotional abuse may be considered IWB-I (e.g., repeatedly chastising a coworker). However, emotional abuse may take forms that would not be considered IWB. Specifically, as Keashly and Harvey (2005) note, victims of emotional abuse may suffer lowered perceptions of themselves as competent employees. Indeed, victims’ entire senses of self may be threatened. By contrast, it is not clear that IWB-I will lead to these consequences. Additionally, emotional abuse and IWB may be motivated by different factors. By definition, emotional abuse is motivated by the desire to gain compliance. However, acts of IWB are performed not with an eye toward getting others to behave certain ways, but rather to harm them. Finally, whereas emotional abuse precludes making physical contact with victims, minor forms of negative physical contact (e.g., pushing someone aside) may be labeled IWB.

### ***Incivility***

Andersson and Pearson (1999) introduced the term *incivility* to describe “low-intensity deviant (rude, discourteous) behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect,” adding that “uncivil behaviors are characteristically rude and discourteous, displaying a lack of regard for others” (p. 457). The authors contrasted this behavior with workplace *civility*, which involves treating others with dignity and respect in line with normative standards of

behavior in the organization in question. Further, they suggested that incivility is a particular form of workplace deviance.

Revisiting this concept more recently, Pearson and Porath (2004) observed that incivility differs from past conceptualizations of deviance in the following ways:

- Incivility (like IWB) involves minor, less extreme forms of deviance, such as making a sarcastic remark.
- Incivility (unlike IWB) does not include organizationally directed instances of behavior; it is only concerned with deviance directed at other individuals.
- Incivility (unlike IWB) is not always intentionally harmful and includes cases in which employees may unintentionally harm others through mistakes or oversights

Research (e.g., Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008; Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000) has demonstrated that incivility is a prevalent phenomenon that often has serious adverse psychological and occupational effects on employees.

When acts of incivility are intentional, minor, repeated, and intended to harm individuals or organizations—as some may be—they would be considered IWB. Clearly, many acts of IWB manifest themselves as incivility. However, because incivility excludes organizationally aimed behavior and includes acts that bring harm unintentionally, IWB is only a small subset of uncivil behavior.

## **Counterproductive Work Behavior**

In the past few years, industrial psychologists have described counterproductive work behavior (CWB) broadly as “volitional acts that harm or are intended to harm organizations or people in organizations” (Spector & Fox, 2005, p. 151) and as “any intentional behavior on the part of an organization member viewed by the organization as contrary to its legitimate interests” (Gruys & Sackett, 2003, p. 30). Empirically, 11 distinct forms have been identified: (1) theft and related behavior, (2) destruction of property, (3) misuse of information, (4) misuse of time and resources, (5) unsafe behavior, (6) poor attendance, (7) poor quality work, (8) alcohol

use, (9) drug use, (10) inappropriate verbal actions, and (11) inappropriate physical actions. These vary along the following two dimensions:

- *Interpersonal-organizational*: The extent to which the behavior in question targets individuals or organizations
- *Task relevance*: The extent to which the behavior in question includes tasks completed as part of one's job

CWB, like IWB, includes volitional acts aimed at individuals and organizations. However, IWB differs in that the acts are low in severity and occur repeatedly over time. CWB also includes potentially illegal behavior, such as theft and destruction of company property. Accordingly, IWB is only a subset of CWB.

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## **CONCLUSION: CHALLENGES OF STUDYING IWB**

We have depicted IWB as a particular form of various types of deviant behavior occurring in the workplace. IWB is not another one of these types but instead, a subset of behaviors within each type that conforms to our defining characteristics. Therefore, there may be insidious varieties of each of the types of behavior identified here. As such, IWB is unique relative to other manifestations of the particular type of behavior whose characteristics it takes on. This uniqueness poses two key challenges for studying IWB.

One of the greatest challenges in the study of IWB involves overcoming the fallacious assumption that small behaviors have small effects. Indeed, although individual acts of IWB may be subtle in nature, their cumulative effects can be anything but subtle, taking a toll on the lives of victims and the bottom lines of organizations. Indeed, people who are subjected to even seemingly minor acts of incivility (e.g., name-calling, the effects of which are trivialized in the children's rhyme about "sticks and stones") often show psychiatric morbidity (e.g., anxiety and posttraumatic stress disorder) when these acts occur repeatedly (Evans, 2002; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2004). The pernicious effects of IWB also are found in organizations. We see this, for example, in statistics revealing the devastating

financial impact of repeated employee pilferage on small organizations (for a review, see Greenberg & Scott, 1996).

Taken together, such evidence suggests that it would be worthwhile to assess the pervasiveness of IWB. However, the extent of the damage done by IWB is difficult to gauge for several reasons. First, its inherently stealthy nature makes IWB too far “below the radar” to be salient to people. Second, even if people are aware of being victimized by IWB, they are inclined to consider such behavior too low level to warrant taking any definitive response. And, absent a discernible response, measurement is difficult (on this, see Jex and his associates, Chapter 8, this volume).

The “smallness” of the behavior is not the only reason why people might not respond to IWB. Inherent in IWB resides some ambiguity about its inappropriateness that also may constrain responses. Thus, victims may wonder if the person who keeps chastising them, a superior, for example, is really doing anything wrong. “After all,” they may wonder, “is my boss really so ill intentioned?” Also, they may rationalize by considering that “maybe I deserve it” or that “surely someone would do something about it if it were wrong.” This ambiguity is compounded by the dynamic nature of the behavior. Any given act may be more severe one day and less the next. Additionally, it may not even occur in any patterned way (e.g., following a variable interval schedule). For such combinations of reasons, the inappropriateness of IWB may be open to questioning. And under such ambiguous conditions, victims may be reluctant to risk acting inappropriately by striking back (Solomon, Solomon, & Stone, 1978).

This issue of ambiguity is likely to influence responsiveness in another way as well. Specifically, even if someone is tempted to speak out about being a victim of IWB, he or she may fear counterreactions from the perpetrator, who may hide behind the excuse that his/her insidious acts were, in reality, not worthy of response. In other words, fearing that the perpetrator may accuse the victim of “making something out of nothing,” “being too sensitive,” or “making a mountain out of a molehill,” a victim may be motivated to overlook the offensive behavior despite being acutely aware of its uncomfortable effects. This may be especially so when status differences between the parties leave the lower status person feeling intimidated and wanting to avoid the potential conflict that questioning a supervisor’s behavior may evoke (Moretti & Odgers, 2006), even if done politely and not in a challenging fashion.

Considering these points, both the incentives to manage such behavior and the opportunities to do so are likely to be limited. Together with the presumed assumption—although erroneous, as noted earlier—that IWB is too trivial to warrant attention, it's not surprising that only limited attention is being paid to IWB. We trust that the chapters that lay ahead in this book will go a long way toward turning this around.

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