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Concept exploration of workplace incivility: Its Implication to HRD

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore concept workplace incivility. This paper provides the reason why HRD should pay attention to the workplace incivility by introducing the definition, examples, causes and consequences of workplace incivility. Workplace incivility characterized as disrespect or rudeness ruins interpersonal relationship and eventually, it hinders various HRD functions. Thus, workplace incivility should be concerned seriously in the field of HRD.
Concept Exploration of Incivility and Its implication to Human Resource Development

The high financial cost of workplace violence is reported to be as high as 4.2 billion dollars a year (Duhart, 2001). Newspapers and journals are reporting workplace violence, crime and homicide. National governments are spending money on surveying workplace violence. These phenomena reflect current interest in workplace interpersonal violence. Interpersonal violence is presented in organizations in the form of mistreatment, aggression, bullying, tyranny, harassment, sexual harassment, deviance, and injustice depends on the severity of the behavior. Research studies have been conducted on behaviors which produce huge negative effects. Some interpersonal violence in workplaces resulted in mental and physical harm (Lim & Cortina, 2005; Cotina & Magley, 2003; Miner-Rubio & Cortina, 2007). Hutchinson, Wilkes, and Vickers (2008) found that nurses who experienced workplace mistreatment showed harmful, fearful and extremely unpleasant emotions and they reported problems of hurt, fear, loss of self-esteem, anxiety, sleeplessness, depression, demoralization, elevated blood pressure, panic attacks, feelings of vulnerability, and suicide of colleagues. Since the action and consequence of workplace violence is so vivid, there are plenty of studies on severe types of workplace violence.

Previous studies focused on workplace violence behavior which had an obvious intention to harm. On the other hand, less research studies have focused on mistreatment with less apparent intentionality and milder forms of psychological mistreatment (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001). However, there are urgent needs for research studies of less intense forms of mistreatment, and uncivil behavior in the workplace because of following reasons: First, there is a view that the frequency and degree of severe types of workplace violence is exaggerated (Baron & Neuman, 1998). Contrary to media reports or national surveys, most violence in workplace is not a form of direct and physical assault; rather, it is a form of subtle and indirect action. Since direct and physical assaults are easily noticed and the punishment is strong, instigators generally take actions that are effective to harm the target while causing little danger to them (Bjorkqvist, Osterman, & Hjelt-Back, 1994). A survey of 178 employees revealed that the majority of workplace mistreatment is of a less intense form of mistreatment rather than violence, aggression or deviant forms of mistreatment (Baron & Neuman, 1996). This survey result implies that previous research studies focused on very visible and capturable phenomena so that they overlooked invisible and less intense mistreatments which occurred more frequently in workplaces. Second, although the form of workplace incivility is relatively weak and subtle, the consequences of workplace incivility can be as strong as the consequences of workplace violence. Therefore, more study should be conducted in workplace incivility. According to Andersson and Pearson (1999), workplace incivility potentially spirals into increasingly intense aggressive behavior. Empirically, Spratlen (1994) showed how workplace mistreatment became workplace violence in the health care industry. If an organization fails to notice uncivil behavior in the workplace or ignore the behavior due to its negligibility, the organization can soon become insensitive to those behaviors and more serious forms of mistreatment behaviors will prevail in the workplace (Miner-Rubino & Cortina, 2007). Since workplace incivility can be a precursor to more severe and covert workplace violence, workplace incivility deserves more scholarly attention.

For the conceptual exploration, studies conducted mainly in the area of management, nursing, occupational psychology and applied psychology are cited in this study. Although it is premature to conclude that the concept of incivility is most actively discussed in management, this paper assumes that the concept of incivility is actively discussed and studied in management since this paper aims to explore the concept of ‘workplace incivility’ and most researchers in incivility employ the working definition of workplace incivility suggested by Andersson and Pearson (1999). This paper explores the concept of workplace incivility for its better application in Human Resource Development. In the beginning, this paper provides the definition of workplace incivility. Then it will provide examples, causes and consequences of incivility. Additionally it will
provide theoretical background for conceptualizing workplace incivility and discuss key previous research studies before the implication of Human Resource Development is discussed.

**Concept Exploration**

**Definition of Workplace Incivility**

According to Gonthier (2002), civility is not the formal rules of etiquette but an overall concern about treating others in a sensible, understanding manner. Therefore, workplace civility serves to set and preserve standards of interpersonal relationships. Positive relationships with other workers, cultivating reciprocal respect, building good relationships and preserve them, and learning to identify with colleagues are examples of civil workplace behaviors. Thus, sensitivity is an important component of civility which makes others comfortable, and shows respect others. Andersson and Pearson (1999) asserted that civility has been considered as a source of power in American culture. It holds moral implications and love and respect for others are based on civility (Carter, 1998). When members of organizations interact with each other with love and respect and try to sacrifice for others, those behaviors are witnessed and eventually placed in the members’ mind as moral standards. Thus, civility, as a moral standard, can be considered a virtue that should be pursued in organization by the participants (Andersson & Pearson, 1999).

In contrast, incivility is bad behavior characterized by rudeness and disregard toward others, and implies a lack of consideration toward others.

According to Andersson and Pearson (1999) incivility in workplace can be defined as follows:

Workplace incivility is low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect. Uncivil behaviors are characteristically rude and discourteous, displaying a lack of regard of others. (p.457)

The definition of workplace incivility informs several important aspects of incivility. The term ‘low-intensity deviant behavior’ implies that there are various forms of deviant behaviors that depend on the severity of the behaviors, such as workplace violence (Neuman & Baron, 1998; Jackson, Clare, & Mannix, 2002; LeBlanc & Kelloway, 2002), workplace aggression (Neuman & Baron, 1998; Glomb, 2002), workplace bullying (Liefteoghe & Davey, 2001), tyranny (Ashforth, 1994), and workplace harassment (Spry, 1998; Rospenda, 2002). Andersson and Pearson (1999) conducted an intensive literature review on all the possible forms of mistreatment in organizations and compared them to incivility to develop a working definition of incivility. They illustrated how incivility differs from and overlaps with other forms of mistreatment in organizations based on the existence of overt intentionality and actions which constitute each workplace mistreatment. In the illustration suggested by the authors, incivility takes the very small but very core position defined as low intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intention to harm. Aggression is defined as defiant behavior with intent to harm; workplace violence refers to high intensity and physically aggressive behavior. Deviant behavior refers to the antisocial behavior that violates norms and antisocial behavior includes all the forms of workplace behavior and is defined as behavior that harms the organization and its members. Thus, all other forms of workplace mistreatment are subsets of antisocial behavior.

Also, the definition implies the existence of instigator and target. Simply, the instigator refers to the one who conducts the uncivil behavior and target refers to the victim of the uncivil behavior. To prevent or manage uncivil behavior in workplaces, previous researchers conducted studies on personal traits of instigators and targets. Pearson (1999) found that instigators are three times more likely to be in higher positions than their targets; men are seven times more likely to be rude or insensitive to underlings than to superiors; women, however, are equally rude to superiors and subordinates. It implies possible power issues in incidents of workplace incivility, as they do with other aggressive workplace behaviors (Vickers, 2006). To the instigators, there is no intensive research to find out the personal traits of targets or victims of uncivil
behavior in workplace. Generally, some people who lack positional power become targets of incivility. Aquino and Byron (2002) found that some people exhibit characteristics that make them appear as vulnerable to or deserving of mistreatment. In Aquino, Grover, Bradfield, and Allen (1999)’s study, they explained the exhibition of vulnerability using self-determination. They found that people who are low in self-determination felt powerless and consequently may assume the role of helpless victims. Also, according to Aquino et al. (1999), people high in negative affectivity are more likely to express negative behaviors such as hostility, cynicism, anxiety, and distress so that they might appear to be potential victims in the mind of potential aggressors.

More detailed discussion about the concept of workplace incivility appears in a work by Lim, Cortina, and Magley (2008). They argued that there are three important features that differentiate incivility from other forms of workplace mistreatment. Those are: violation of workplace norm of respect, less intensity and ambiguous intention to harm.

Although it is not documented, mutual respect and cooperation is considered a norm of workplaces because norms are implicit rules of behavior that define appropriate and inappropriate actions (Russell & Russell, 1992). Even though there are little differences in the norms among organizations, mutual respect and consideration toward each other have been considered as common organizational norms (Anderson & Pearson, 1999). Although norms are different from each organization so that what is considered as uncivil in one organization may not be considered as uncivil in other organizations, the very basic idea of incivility is the behavior that violates implicit mutual respect in the organization (Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008). Uncivil people violate norms of mutual respect in workplaces by treating others with rudeness and disrespect and expressing thoughtlessness, lack of consideration, and cooperation (Pearson, Andersson & Porath, 2000).

The second important feature of incivility is its low intensity. Workplace incivility tends to be considered as being on the lower end of the continuum of workplace mistreatment. Since incivility refers to low intensity, incivility is not limited to verbal abuse, but nonverbal and all sorts of disrespectful behaviors such as glaring at, ignoring, or excluding colleagues (Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008). While workplace incivility represents low intensity behavior, it should not be considered as harmless or not serious. No matter how low the intensity, workplace incivility can take on a wide variety of nuanced behavior and possibly cause discomfort and anxiety for those targeted (Vickers, 2006). However, because of its low intensity, it is hard to notice and easy to ignore and these tendencies allow incivility in workplaces to develop into more severe types of workplace mistreatment.

The third important feature of incivility is its ambiguous intention to harm. It is the most important aspect of uncivil behavior in workplaces because incivility brings out potential problems in the workplace. While other workplace mistreatment behaviors include a clear intention to harm others, the intention to harm is ambiguous in uncivil behavior. As long as the intention remains ambiguous, then it can be called uncivil behavior and the intention of workplace incivility is subjected to varying interpretations by instigators, targets, or observers (Pearson, Anderson, & Wegner, 2001). Therefore, when the harmful acts are observed and the instigators are being accused, the instigators can make an excuse that the acts were accident, they didn’t intend to do it, and others are too sensitive to see the acts as harmful (Vickers, 2006). Consequently, the targets of incivility could experience significant stress due to difficulty in making sense of the situation, indecisiveness about whether or how to respond, and uncertainty about what could happen next (Lim, Cortina & Magley). Additionally, due to the ambiguous intention to harm, incivility can be abused by instigators of more aggressive forms of mistreatment in workplace. Since workplace bullying involves repeated and numerous events, and multiple individuals, workplace incivility can be used another form of bulling towards others with their intention disguised by the ambiguity inherent in these actions (Vickers, 2006). The ambiguous intention, ultimately, allows the instigators to behave uncivilly while disguising their intentions.

Examples of Incivility in the Workplace
Since incivility includes low intensity behaviors some of the examples are understandable but some of them are hard to believe. No matter how the examples are understandable, all of them violate basic norms of mutual respect. Various uncivil behaviors have been reported in previous research studies and surveys. Robinson and Bennett (1995) categorized workplace incivility into two types: interpersonal and organizational incivility. When the behaviors are directed towards other employees, they are considered as interpersonal incivility, and when the behaviors are related to work and affect to work and performance, they are considered as organizational incivility.

Not turning off mobile phones in meetings, leaving a jammed printer (Johnson & Indvik, 2001), sending a nasty and demeaning note, making accusations about a lack of knowledge or undermining an employee’s credibility in front of others and shouting (Pearson, 1999), talking loudly on the phone about personal matters during work hours, answering the phone in casual way, responding to coworkers in somewhat too casual way, using voice mail to screen calls (Martin, 1996), and not sharing information (Hutton, 2006) are all considered as interpersonal incivility. Gossiping and snapping at coworkers to arrest other’s attention (Johnson & Indvik, 2001), not brewing coffee for a next pot, standing uninvited but impatiently over the desk of someone engaging in a telephone conversation, dropping trash on the floor and leaving, are other examples of interpersonal uncivil behaviors (Martin, 1996). Using others’ office supplies without permission and excluding people from unit-based social activities are also included as examples of operationalized workplace incivility (Hutton, 2006). Some of other examples of incivility, such as bringing pets to the workplace, letting the untrained pets to play in the office, and brushing teeth in the drinking fountain were also reported in the work of Lee (1999). These examples are the interpersonal uncivil behaviors that are not directly related to work but can be considered very rude, thoughtless, and disrespectful toward others. These are considered as interpersonal incivility because these behaviors are directed towards other employees and they possibly destroy interpersonal relationships in workplace.

Absenteism, lateness, tardiness, and sabotage are examples of organizational incivility. All the low intensity withdrawal behaviors that do not affect interpersonal relationships but affect organizational performance are considered organizational incivility (Robinson & Bennett, 1995).

*Cause of Workplace Incivility*

In a modern society with more complexity and more frequent interaction, the demand for civility increases the need for better communication and cooperation. However, due to prevailing thoughtlessness and rudeness, the informality of society is reflected in the workplace and consequently, acknowledged civility in the workplace is decreasing (Anderson & Pearson, 1999). Scholars in management have tried to find factors affecting the spread of incivility. The revealed factors can be categorized into two areas, social and organizational changes.

Gonthier (2002) suggested various sociological changes that cause rudeness in society. The term ‘affluenza’ was first selected as one of the reasons that caused rudeness in the society. Affluenza can be characterized by an addiction to consumption or a need to make more and more money. Under affluenza, one’s worth is intrinsically tied to one’s income and success is always almost equated with money. This trend created an attitude of “whatever I want, I will get.” The recklessness derived from the affluenza leads to incivility. Gonthier also pointed to the chaotic era of the 1960s as a reason for prevailing incivility. During the turbulent 1960s, the society threw out the good things along with the bad things. Younger generations lost respect for tradition and were disappointed with a government caught up in lies. When these young generations become parents and raised their children while still angry about the society, rudeness became more serious. The next generation grew up without learning about manners, formal rules of etiquette and civility. Additionally, he suggested diversity as a source of incivility. Changing roles of minorities and women and increasing immigration affected people who were angry about losing their prestige or standing which they once had. Some in the feminist movement in the 1970s rejected all kinds of manners as signs of weakness, and
this also contributed the incivility. Growing population and decline in family life and community also accelerated the spread of uncivil behavior. Social factors that cause incivility should be considered as important as organizational factors causing incivility because changes in norms outside the workplace seep into offices and factories (Pearson, Anderrson, & Porath, 2000).

Other researchers such as Baron and Neuman (1996) and Johnson and Indvik (2001) asserted that organizational change caused workplace incivility. Baron and Neuman (1996) suggested that recent organizational changes such as downsizing or increased workplace diversity are accelerating the spread of incivility. Johnson and Indvik (2001) conducted very rigorous research to find out causes of incivility in workplaces. Various causes such as anger, stress, lack of communication, increased workload, job insecurity, organizational change, and poor work organization were suggested in their study. These are also found in the work of Pearson, Andersson and Porath (2000). Participants of their study reported that improved technologies such as voice mail, e-mail, and teleconferencing facilitate the complexity and fragmentation of workplace relationships. Participants added that due to overwhelming workloads, there is no time to be nice to coworkers, colleagues, and subordinates. Reengineering, downsizing, budget cuts, and pressure for productivity force employees work more with less money and resources. Additionally, increased part time and temporary employees are viewed as a potential cause for the increase in uncivile workplace behaviors. In their study, participants reported that increased use of part time and temporary workers creates weaker connections to the organization and facilitates workplace rudeness and discourtesy. More importantly, changes in organizational structure are pointed in their study. Flattened organizational structures, aiming at faster decision making and efficient communication have led organizations to become too casual. Consequently, what constitutes proper business behavior disappeared and the too casual atmosphere fosters disrespect and discourtesy among employees. Since these organizational changes are happening in organizations very commonly, it is expected that more and more organizations will notice various degrees of incivility.

**Consequences of Incivility**

Prevailing incivility first destroys meaningful interaction among people and it can create organizational disasters. Coworkers slowly but surely don't feel the need for cooperation and cohesiveness. Disrespect, distrust and dissatisfaction will prevail in the organizational culture and workers will get used to very unfriendly and unforgiving organizational cultures. Good people who cannot adjust to the aggressive culture will leave the organization and those remaining will be unhappy and unsatisfied (Johnson & Invik, 2001). For business, this culture or condition is harmful and destructive (Hallowell, 1999). Thus, while workplace incivility tends to be characterized as a less intense form of harm, the outcomes for organization and individuals can be very serious.

For organizations, incivility can contaminate organizational culture by creating an unfriendly, rude, paranoid, cliquish and stressful work climate (Vickers, 2006). In Pearson’s (1999) study, 53 percent of the participants reported that they lost work time worrying about the incident and future interactions, 12 percent actually changed jobs to avoid the instigators, and 37 percent of employees reported declined organizational commitment. Increased absenteeism, reduced commitment, and decreased productivity were also found as results of incivility (Pearson, Anderrson & Porath, 2000).

For individuals, the consequences of incivility vary from the psychological to the physical. It is suggested by Vickers (2006) that incivility can reinforce feelings of isolation and alienation while reducing cooperation and mutual understanding. Cortina (2001) found a correlation between incivility and poor health in the workplace. Victims of incivility experienced feelings of hurt, anxiety, depression, nervousness, sadness, moodiness, worrying, and increased colds and flu were reported. Cortina’s results are very important because she also showed the effect of personal wellbeing on performance and profit. This shows that the effect of incivility doesn't remain on the individual level, but diminishes the effectiveness of the entire organization.
Theoretical Background for Conceptualizing Workplace Incivility

Previous research studies about various types of workplace mistreatment such as aggression, antisocial behavior and workplace deviance used social learning theory (Greenberg & Barling, 1999), social exchange theory (Andersson & Pearson, 1998; Glomb & Liao, 2003), the Attraction-Selection-Attribution model (ASA) (Robinson & O'Leary-Kelly, 1998), the Affect Events Theory (AET) (Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008), and personal trait (Blau, 1985; Aquino, Grover, Bradfield, Allen, 1999) to explain how various types of workplace mistreatments develop. Although other types of workplace mistreatments are different from workplace incivility in terms of intensity and intention, those theories are also applicable to explaining incivility in workplaces. In this study, Robinson and O'Leary-Kelly's (1998) theoretical model of workplace antisocial behavior of work group members is used to build theoretical background of interpersonal incivility in the workplace. They suggest that the antisocial behavior of workgroup members influences an individual employee’s antisocial behavior. Additionally, works by Andersson and Pearson (1998) Glomb and Liao (2003) will be used to develop the theoretical framework of workplace incivility.

The theories of social learning theory by Bandura (1977), reciprocity (Bandura, 1973; Becker, 1956) and social exchange (Blau, 1964) explain how incivility in workplaces becomes prevailing (Robinson & O'Leary-Kelly, 1998; Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Glomb & Liao, 2003). Robinson and O‘Leary-Kelly adopted the concept of social learning theory to explain the development of antisocial behavior in the workplace. Social learning theory suggests that individual behavior is influenced by role models for behavior (Bandura, 1977). New members of an organization become a part of the organization by learning the values and assumptions of the organization through observing other members. Since incivility is a subset of antisocial behavior (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), social learning theory can be employed to explain the spread of workplace incivility. If an individual observes others’ uncivil behaviors and their consequences, the individual acquires a repertoire of uncivil behaviors. Thus, social learning theory can explain how incivility begets incivility among members of a work group.

Second, the theories of social exchange and reciprocal aggression support the importance of studying incivility. Andersson and Pearson (1999) and Glomb and Liao (2003) adopted the theories of social exchange and reciprocity to explain interpersonal aggression and incivility in the workplace. According to Blau (1964), social exchange theory is a social psychological perspective that explains social change as a process of exchanges between parties. When two parties yield reciprocal activities from each party through a series of mutual exchanges, social exchange relationships are developed. When one party expresses aggression or incivility to another party, social exchange process allows two parties in the process to exchange mutual aggression or incivility. Exchanged aggression or incivility is also very instinctual because aggression is naturally responded to by assaulting or threatening another (Bandura, 1973). Thus, the reciprocal aggression to causes the target of aggression elicit a like or a more serious response. Based on social exchange theory and reciprocal aggression, Andersson and Pearson (1999) suggested theoretical evidence of an escalating and reciprocal nature of uncivil behavior using a tit-for-tat pattern.

In summary, social exchange theory offers keys to an understanding of how incivility is exchanged among employees. Social learning theory explains how incivility becomes prevailing in the organization. Thus, Social learning theory, reciprocity, and social exchange theory provide the theoretical framework for how witnessing or experiencing incivility leads organizational members to use uncivil words and actions in workplaces.

Discussion

Implication in HRD
Although there is no previous study conducted in HRD about incivility, incivility should be investigated and considered seriously in HRD. Incivility should be carefully observed and managed in HRD because incivility ruins interpersonal relationship by provoking retaliatory spirit in organizations. Interpersonal relationships are an important feature in every organization. Interaction between people and its consequences is a systemic foundation of an organization (Weinberger, 2002). Thus, interpersonal relationships should be managed in a desired way; otherwise undesired negative interpersonal relationships can develop as an impairment to good organizational foundation. Moreover, distorted interpersonal relationships can impair the foundation of HRD. As one of the theoretical foundations of HRD, psychological theory informs HRD practitioners to design which practice revolves around the mental processes of humans and the determinants of human behavior (Swanson & Holton, 2001). Thus, not only HRD but also entire organizations should care deliberately about interpersonal relationships.

Incivility and interpersonal relationships. Before discussing how incivility interferes in HRD functions, it is important to discuss how incivility ruins interpersonal relationships first. Slowly but surely, the verbal uncivil behavior distorts interpersonal relationships directly. Arnett and Arneson (1999) pointed to the importance of dialogic civility in communication, which assumes mutual respect. They argued that when there is a lack of civility in communication, it can develop into cynicism and it eventually ruins human connection and interpersonal relationships.

Likewise, incivility can ruin interpersonal relationships by leading to revenge and negative emotions toward other organizational members. Previous studies on revenge showed how mistreatment can cause retaliatory behaviors. Terminologically, revenge or vengeance is an individual’s reciprocation of unfavorable treatment (Eisenberger, Lynch, Aselage & Rohdieck, 2004). Yoshimura (2007) asserted that revenge is an expression of disempowerment and feelings of unjust treatment, and is human nature and important part of social interaction. Through revenge, the offended individual can maintain his or her relational equilibrium. Thus, revenge is a natural consequence of workplace uncivil behaviors. Additionally, Yoshimura (2007) pointed that revenge takes place when people see the presence of a perceived experience or some wrongful offense. Furthermore, revenge takes place when people perceive the intention to harm and the perception depends on individual interpretation. Since incivility assumes ambiguous intention to harm, unintended mere rudeness or thoughtlessness can be perceived as incivility depends on the victims’ interpretation. Consequently, the victims’ reactive revenge might take place when they perceive the uncivil behavior as intentional. This consequence can ruin interpersonal relationships in workplaces because individuals will be involved in relationships of reciprocal revenge. Furthermore, revenge may produce barriers to interpersonal relationships when the participants’ negative emotions are expressed. Yoshimura (2007)’s empirical research examined emotional outcome of revenge and discovered that people experience strong feelings of remorsefulness, anger, and anxious fear after enacting revenge. Expected positive emotions after accomplishing the goal of retaliation was slight. Lazarus (2006) described how those feelings presented after revenge can damage interpersonal relationships. Anger defeats affections and leads to the next retaliation. Anxiety can undermine the resolve to accomplish something or to assert oneself, and shame (which can come with remorsefulness) leads to anger or to the concealment of the truth. Therefore, from what has been discussed above, it can be concluded that incivility is a critical factor that distorts interpersonal relationships.

Incivility’s negative effect on HRD. Because of its negative effect on interpersonal relationships, incivility should be considered critically in HRD because incivility can interfere with HRD functions. The negative effect of incivility on interpersonal relationships implies possible negative relationships not only between peers but also in leader-member and member-organization relationships (Gonthier, 2002). When incivility prevails, the negative interpersonal relationships between peers can affect knowledge sharing, because knowledge sharing is affected by member’s interpersonal relationships (Ipe, 2003), motivation to share (Stenmark, 2001), and intimacy (Szulanski, 1996; O’Dell & Grayson, 1998). When incivility is
prevailing in organizations, members will have bad interpersonal relationships and low intimacy, so the motivation to share knowledge in organization will be negatively affected. Also, other actions which acquire cooperation would be negatively affected because incivility harms cooperation among employees (Penney & Spector, 2005).

Additionally, negative “leader to member” relationships can affect various critical areas of organization. Gonthier (2002) suggested that when leaders and members have negative relationships, an employee’s growth can be affected. Tierney, Farmer and Graen (1999) empirically found the importance of relationships between leaders and members in employee creativity. Furthermore, a negative “leader to member” relationship can hinder training transfer because one of the important factors affecting training transfer is supervisor or leader support (Gregoire, Propp & Poertner, 1998). When leaders and members don’t have a good relationship, it is hard to expect a leader’s support in the member’s training transfer. Moreover, negative interpersonal relationships between leaders and members will bring suspicion about the leader’s ability and efficiency of leadership development programs. Because building and maintaining good interpersonal relationships is a critical skill or ability of leaders (Gardner, 1993), and developing and using interpersonal competency has been emphasized in leadership development (Day, 2000). Prevailing incivility can ruin interpersonal relationships between leaders and members, and consequently it can cause secondary problems to various critical areas in an organization.

Finally, negative interpersonal relationships eventually affect “member to organization” relationships. According to Penney and Spector (2005), incivility causes its members to harm an organization through counterproductive workplace behavior. Counterproductive workplace behaviors include all negative workplace actions such as theft, sabotage, verbal abuse, withholding of effort, lying, refusing to cooperate, and physical assault (Spector & Fox, 2002).

Incivility and HRD

Besides the negative effect of incivility on interpersonal relationships, there is another reason that incivility should be considered and researched seriously in the HRD field: training. Pearson, Andersson, and Porath (2000) asserted the importance of setting expectations by defining the organization’s standards for interpersonal interaction, the importance of civil relationships and their internal and external benefit. HRD can provide orientation about this issue and lead employees to understand and acknowledge the importance of civil, mutual respect and positive interpersonal relationships.

Johnson and Indvik (2001) asserted that when uncivil behaviors are appropriately intervened in by managers, the spread of incivility in the workplace can be prevented. The most serious problem in workplace incivility is that incivility is hard to notice because of its low intensity and incivility is easily ignored because of a lack of acknowledgment about its potential escalating seriousness. Thus, through orientation sessions, HRD can inform managers about uncivil behavior and its serious consequences. After the training, the warned managers would notice the uncivil behavior more easily and intervene in the behavior when they return to work.

Additionally, more direct forms of training can be provided by HRD such as anger management or conflict management to the employees to prevent uncivil behaviors in workplace. The causes of incivility such as downsizing, increasing diversity (Baron & Neuman, 1996), increased workload, job insecurity and organizational change (Johnson & Indvik, 2001) are expected to increase in the workplace and in turn, they will increase employees’ anger and stress. Before employee anger and stress are expressed in the form of uncivil behavior, HRD should provide anger management programs and training in conflict management skills so that employees can manage their stress and anger and keep mutual respect toward each other.

In addition, HRD can provide intensive training in Emotional Intelligence (EI) to decrease rudeness and disrespect in organizations by increasing employee ability to read, appraise and understand others and their emotions accurately. By offering EI training, companies can increase the newly required ability of employees
(George, 2000) and decrease workplace incivility at the same time. EI training also increases managers’ EI, therefore the managers would be more sensitive to their subordinates’ feelings and could catch uncomfortable climates among them and intervene the uncivil behavior more effectively. Moreover, for global companies more active diversity training and communication skill training are suggested along side other types of training (suggested above) because diversity and difference in cultural norms are the rising factors that foster miscommunication and rudeness in workplace (Pearson & Porath, 2005).

More importantly, it was reported that three-fourth of the targets of workplace incivility were dissatisfied with the ways that their organizations handled the uncivil behaviors. (Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000). It implies either an organization’s lack of formal processes to punish the instigators or the managers’ lack of knowledge on handling the problem, instigators and victims. This dissatisfaction causes another problem in organizations: the departure of good people who cannot adjust to the aggressive culture and a negative working environment, and remaining people will be working unhappy and unsatisfied with the organizations (Johnson & Invik, 2001). Additionally, many of employees who experienced or witnessed the uncivil behavior never officially reported the incident to their organizations (Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000). To curtail and correct workplace incivility, official reports from victims are crucial. To gather the accurate and official report, organization need to build appropriate incivility reporting systems and at the same time HRD should provide orientation to encourage victims to report what they experienced. As noted above, due to its ambiguous intention to harm, instigators can deceive supervisors or other employees when they are being accused. A 360 degree feedback system can resolve that problem because it can capture the full nature and impact of an individual’s behavior and interpersonal interactions (Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2000). In sum, organizations should build formal procedures to handle the process and inform the employees of the existence of punishment of uncivil behavior. This will help an organization to create a consistent attitude toward incivility.

Conclusion

Through this paper, the concept of incivility was fully explored and its negative effect on interpersonal relationships and implications in HRD were discussed. Researchers who conducted studies on workplace incivility showed the possible severe consequences of workplace incivility when the uncivil behavior is not intervened in properly. When workplace incivility is not managed appropriately, it ruins interpersonal relationships among employees, and develops into more severe types of workplace violence. As a result, companies could lose lots of money due to decreased productivity, job dissatisfaction, increased healthcare costs (Bjorkqvist et al., 1994; Lim & Cortina, 2005) and legal costs (Johnson & Indvik, 1994). These consequences are fatal threats to HRD because collapsed interpersonal relationships due to workplace incivility affect negatively on various HRD functions. However, organizations can either prevent uncivil behavior and its spread or intervene in uncivil behavior through HRD interventions such as orientation and training. To perform this important role in organizations, HRD should be more aware of workplace incivility and rigorously investigate it in various ways. Simply, researchers in the HRD field can search for other causes and consequences of workplace uncivil behavior beside the ones discussed above. Furthermore, HRD researchers can conduct deliberate research studies to find out the effect of HRD interventions in workplace incivility. The effect of workplace incivility on other organizational dynamics such as workplace learning, knowledge sharing, and performance appraisal can be conducted as well. By doing this, HRD can contribute to building and maintaining friendly organizational climates and healthy interpersonal relationships among employees.
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