

Blue Betrayal: Social Undermining in Police Organizations

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The phone rings, the mail comes

- “Don’t let him in the next class”
- “Don’t trust him”
 - Two in one day
 - Anonymous
 - Substantial effort
 - What is going on here?



Organizational life

- Organizations are in part social systems
- Work life matters
 - Happy workers are:
 - More productive
 - Disengages workers are
 - Bad to work with, don't add value
- McKee 2014



Work-Place Aggression

- Much focus on work-place violence.
- Larger numbers of workers are victims of lesser forms of aggression.
 - Verbal Aggression
 - Obstructionism (passive)
 - more common than violence
- Baron and Neuman 1998; Baron, Neuman, and Geddes 1999; Freemont 2005; Geddes and Baron 1997

Organizational Stress and Employee Performance

- Stress saps cognitive and emotional resources of employees.
 - Ruminates
- Focus energy on preventing, reducing, avoiding continued aggression.
- Harms performance of target and potentially those around target.
 - Hershcovis and Barling 2010

Impact of toxic colleagues

- Targets of negative behavior change
 - Response to rudeness at work
 - 48% decreased their work effort
 - 47% decreased their time at work
 - 38% decreased their work quality
 - 66% said their performance declined
 - 80% lost work time worrying about the incident
 - 63% lost time avoiding the offender
 - 78% said their commitment to the organization declined
 - Porath and Pearson 2009



Social Undermining

- “Behavior intended to hinder, over time, a worker’s ability to establish and maintain positive interpersonal relationships, work-related success and favorable reputation”.
 - Duffy, Ganster, and Pagon (2002).
- Assumes intent , perpetrated by an insider and has specific outcomes related to:
 - Relationships
 - Reputation
 - Work-related success
 - Hershcovis 2011

Social Undermining happens everywhere

- **Fredo Corleone**
- **Lando Calrissian**



- One study of work locations in three states found that more than 50% of workers admitted to committing acts of non-physical aggression toward coworkers
- Neuman 1998

Examples of social undermining

- May be passive or active
 - Intentionally making another feel incompetent
 - Withholding important or required information
 - Giving another the silent treatment.
 - Talking behind another's back.
 - Spreading of rumors.



Impact of social undermining

- Potential negative impacts on:
 - Organization
 - Productivity
 - Turnover
 - Individual Workers
 - Attitude
 - Health
 - Behavior
 - Malone and Hayes, 2012

Who is the perpetrator?

- Workplace aggression has negative impacts for workers.
- “Supervisor aggression has the strongest negative relationship with workplace attitudes (i.e. job satisfaction, affective commitment, intentions to quit) and behaviors (i.e. organizational deviance)”.
- Supervisor aggression was also related to lower levels of performance than was coworker aggression.
- Supervisors most damaging, then coworkers, then outsider.
 - Hershcovis and Barling 2010

Methods

- Survey
 - Open and closed ended questions
- Convenience Sample of Police mid-level managers from around the United States
 - Enrolled in five, three month residential management and leadership courses.
 - Voluntary, Confidential
 - Total enrolled 240



Sample

- n=210 (87.5%)
- Gender
 - Male- 93.8%; Female- 6.3%
- Race
 - White (Non Hispanic) 90.9%; African American 5.8%; American Indian/Alaska Native 2.4%; Latino .5%; Asian .5%
- Age
 - Range from 29-63 with mean age of 44.24.
- Valid Percent



How many total years of experience do you have in law enforcement?

• 0 to five years	.5%
• 5 to ten years	1.4%
• 10 to fifteen years	17.3%
• 15 to twenty years	47.1%
• 20 to twenty five years	23.1%
• 25 to thirty years	6.7%
• More than 30 years	3.8%
• Valid Percent	

Agency Representation

- At what type of law enforcement agency are you employed?
- Municipal/City 68.6%
- County Sheriff/Police 18.1%
- University police 5.2%
- State Police 7.6%
- Highway Patrol .5%
- Valid percent



How many sworn personnel are in your agency?

- 1-20 10.5%
- 21-50 31.9%
- 51-75 13.8%
- 76-100 2.9%
- 101-125 8.6%
- 126-150 3.3%
- 151-175 2.9%
- 176-200 .5%
- Over 200 sworn personnel 25.7%
- Valid percent



Rank of Respondents

- What is your current rank?
- Sergeant 20.2%
- Lieutenant or Captain 68.8%
- Major, Lt. Colonel 10.6%
- Chief of Police .5%
- Valid percent



Education

• High School	5.7%
• Some College, less than one year	10.0%
• 1 or more year of college (no degree)	19.5%
• Associates Degree	9.5%
• Bachelor's Degree	28.1%
• Master's Degree	15.7%
• Doctorate	.5%
• Missing	11.0%



Findings

- Have you ever witnesses backstabbing at work?
 - Yes- 67.6%
 - No-31.4%



- Have you ever been the recipient of backstabbing at work?
 - Yes- 68.1%
 - No-21.9%
 - Don't Know 10.0%



Recipient by agency type

- 66.7% of municipal officer responded that they were the recipient of backstabbing. 10.4% reported they did not know. 22.9% reported they were not a recipient of backstabbing.
- 65.8% of county sheriff/police officer respondents reported being the recipient of backstabbing. 7.9% reported they did not know. 26.3% reported they were not the recipient of backstabbing.
- 93.7% of state police officer respondents reported being the recipient of backstabbing. 0.0% reported not knowing. 6.3% reported they were not the recipient of backstabbing.

Perpetrator's Gender

- Male 78.8%
- Female 6.3%
- Both 15%
- Valid percentage



Gender of victim and gender of perpetrator

- For male victims 79.9% of their perpetrators were male, 6.7% female, and 13.4% both male and female.
- For female victims 60.0% of their perpetrators were reportedly male, 0.0% were reportedly female, and 40.0% were both male and female.
- Small cell size

Direction of Backstabbing

- Top to bottom 37.7%
- Bottom to top 6.2%
- Lateral 38.5%
- Mixed 6.9%
- Unknown 10.8%
- Valid percent



Direction of backstabbing by agency type

- For county sheriff/police about 35% of the direction of back stabbing was top down as compared to 26.6% for municipal agencies.
- For municipal agencies 37.5% of backstabbing was reported to be lateral while 20% was reported to be lateral for county sheriff/police
 - Small cell size for county sheriff/police



When did backstabbing begin in your career?

- Academy .7%
- Officer 36.8%
- Detective 6.3%
- First line supervision 35.4%
- Middle Management 17.4%
- Staff officer 2.8%
- Chief Executive .7%
- Valid percent



Perceived increase in backstabbing as rank increased?

- Increased 32.2%
- Somewhat Increased 23.1%
- Remained the Same 13.3%
- Somewhat decreased 2.8%
- Decreased 15.4%
- Don't know 13.3%
- Valid percent



Response to backstabbing



- Direct confrontation 30.8%
- Avoid 48.5%
- Using higher authority-informal 13.8%
- Official complaint 5.4%
- Mixed 1.5%
- Valid percent

Response to backstabbing and gender

- Directly confront and avoid were the most popular categories for both males and females (small cell size) accounting for 79.1%



Perceived Reason for Backstabbing

• Power Struggle	10.0%
• Self Advancement	26.9%
• Character Flaw	10.0%
• Threatened or Jealousy	18.5%
• Revenge	7.7%
• Prejudice	6.9%
• Work avoidance-protecting self	9.2%
• Favoritism	10.8%
• Valid percent	



Backstabbing Method

- Disparaging comments 32.6%
- Exploitation 8.7%
- Stealing credit 2.4%
- Rumor Mongering 38.6%
- Disadvantage in career 13.4%
- Media involvement (external) .8%
- Valid percent



Discussion

- Much top down-the most damaging type.
- State police organizations seem higher incidence.
- No female to female only undermining reported.
- More top down reported in sheriff's offices than municipal police.
- Seems to happen once you hit the street or at first level of promotion not in academy (level of supervision).
- Report it has increased over career.

Future Research

- Larger random sample needed.
- Stratified for female and minority officers.
- Ethnographic study of incidents, tactics and situations (generate case studies for future police leaders/trainers).
- Social network analysis-is there flow to back stabbing? Can we map out those who do it to understand position in network and thus impact on organization?

What may cause backstabbing?

- Scarce resources and weak people
- Lack of organizational accountability
 - Stephenson 1998
- “Changes occurring in work settings are related to the incidence of workplace aggression”.
 - “Shifts involving social change (e.g., increased diversity) and job insecurity (e.g., increased use of part-time help) were significantly related to all three forms of workplace aggression while cost-cutting (e.g., down sizing, layoffs), and organizational change (e.g., restructuring, re engineering) were significantly related only to verbal aggression and obstructionism”.
 - Baron and Neuman 1998:459

If these are true...

- Police leaders need to be concerned
- More lean times ahead for police agencies-fewer resources.
- Changes coming in terms of people entering policing, how long they stay and what the public will demand of them (high change environment)
- If these are the causes and trends, police leaders should expect more undermining and greater drain on organization (just when they need a better performing one).

Dealing with it

- Firm confrontation
- Private and calmly
- Mentor outside-things cannot be used against you
 - Google-Emails referencing another are forwarded to the target-get with them and resolve the issue.

Thank you

- Questions at the end.