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WORKPLACE TOXIC ONLINE DISINHIBITION: CAUSES AND EFFECTS

CAPSTONE REPORT

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Abstract

Although the prevalence of information and communication has enabled collaboration within geographically distributed organizations, the prevalence of toxic online disinhibition within these new technologies also poses novel intrapersonal problems to front line managers and people leaders. This annotated bibliography consists of peer reviewed literature published between 2005 and 2015. Literature has been selected and reviewed with the intent of exploring the causes and repercussions of toxic online disinhibition in the workplace.

Keywords: toxic online disinhibition, cyber bullying, cyber incivility, information and communication technologies, organizational culture

Table of Contents

Introduction

Problem Description

Although research has been conducted on the causes of workplace bullying and incivility (Fox & Spector, 2005; Penney & Spector, 2005; Sliter, Jex, Wolford, & McInnerney, 2010), less focus has been given to its manifestation in digital office environments. Within the workplace, bullying is traditionally defined as repeated exposure to negative acts like abuse, offensive remarks, social exclusion, and ridicule by coworkers, supervisors, and subordinates (Einarsen, 2000). Furthermore, workplace incivility is defined as lower intensity deviant acts such as discourteous verbal and non-verbal behavior with ambiguous intent to harm (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). As behaviors that undermine mutual respect and cooperation, bullying and incivility are believed to directly inhibit productivity through employee absenteeism, withdrawal, and turnover (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008). Recipients of bullying and incivility also experience diminished mental and emotional resources, which leaves workers less capable of performing their job duties (Sliter et al., 2010).

Assessing the causes of incivility and bullying takes on new significance when viewed within the context of the changing use of workplace technology. Rising Internet adoption at work increases the likelihood that employees will engage in bullying and incivility through information and communication technologies (Fox & Spector, 2005). Like their occurrence within the physical workplace, incivility and bullying also result in similar outcomes when manifested online (Lim & Teo, 2009). Even when these behaviors are not intentional, unique qualities of online communication can lead to the perception

and outcomes of intentionality (Kruger, Epley, & Parker, 2005). This is because physical cues such as tone of voice, body language, and posture that are intrinsic to interpersonal communication are not present (Byron, 2008), leading to a higher potential for misinterpretation and conflict (Privitera & Campbell, 2009). In addition, information and communication technologies are generally text based, and allow correspondence to become fragmented through copying and redistribution (Giumetti, McKibben, Hatfield, Schroeder, & Kowalski, 2012; Privitera & Campbell, 2009).

Abusive behavior in digital environments is generally considered to be an effect of *online disinhibition*, which is a phenomenon whereby users become socially uninhibited when communicating through digital mediums (Suler, 2004). Although online disinhibition can facilitate positive outcomes, such as increased participation amongst less socially inclined workers, it can also lead others to act discourteously and aggressively (Suler, 2004). In this latter form, online disinhibition is more specifically known as "toxic online disinhibition" (Suler, 2004). Toxic online disinhibition is the product of perceived anonymity and obfuscated face-to-face social cues, such as facial expressions, tone of voice, and body language (Giumetti et al., 2012). In this abstracted condition, the absence of direct confrontation is thought to remove the fear of retaliation while simultaneously lowering the attacker's ability to empathize with his or her victim. Ultimately, this combination leads individuals to act out in negative ways, since consequences appear less apparent (Giumetti et al., 2012). As businesses continue migrating to geographically distributed and digitally enhanced organizational structures, identifying and mitigating cyber incivility and bullying becomes crucial to maintaining productive work environments. Intrinsic to that understanding is consideration of the

technologies and managerial protocols used to prevent and inhibit toxic online disinhibition.

Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to identify research sources that describe the causes of toxic online disinhibition, as well as the tools and techniques used to identify and prevent it from occurring. Specifically, this study targets research to examine the impacts of cyber bullying and cyber incivility as they relate to toxic online disinhibition within the workplace. For the purpose of this study, the phenomenon of toxic online disinhibition is defined as behaviors that include using rude language, making harsh criticisms, experiencing feelings of anger and hatred, and making threats, where these behaviors are caused by the dissociative anonymity, invisibility, and asynchronicity present within online systems (Suler, 2004). This study explores the unique characteristics of information and communication technologies that facilitate toxic online disinhibition, as well as the effects of toxic online disinhibition on target individuals in the workplace. This study also reports on the organizational impact of toxic online disinhibition and how the proper combination of communication technologies and managerial protocols can inhibit its manifestation.

Excluding seminal works, delimiters for this study's reference material include peer-reviewed research published within the last decade. Seminal works include articles that define the terms *online disinhibition* and *toxic online disinhibition*, and describe the effects of these conditions. Additional research delimiters explicitly exclude tangential topics, such as conventional incivility and bullying, as these topics do not relate to the use

of information and communication technologies in the workplace. The emphasis on information and communication technologies acknowledges that cyber incivility and bullying, as they relate to toxic online disinhibition, occur because of unique properties intrinsic to digital communication. Subsequently, technologies and techniques for identifying and managing toxic online disinhibition are framed for people managers and leaders of digitally connected but geographically dispersed teams. For this reason, research delimiters do not exclude otherwise suitable material published outside the United States.

Research Questions

       Main question. As the phenomenon of toxic online disinhibition increases within the workplace due to the growing geographical dispersion of employees and technology adoption, which tools and techniques are most effective at identifying and preventing related negative behaviors such as cyber incivility and cyber bullying?

       Sub-questions. What is toxic online disinhibition and why does it occur? What is the impact of toxic online disinhibition on employees' ability to fulfill their assigned roles and responsibilities? What are the repercussions of toxic online disinhibition to the organization at-large?

Audience

       The audience for this study encompasses leaders and people managers within large geographically distributed office environments. This group principally includes front line managers, as well as team leads, product and project managers, and other

individuals who supervise primarily team-based, distributed employees. Each of these roles is responsible for establishing the culture of participation and expectations of engagement within an organization (Yilmaz & Ergun, 2008). These stakeholders are also accountable for managing conflict between employees when it occurs (Yilmaz & Ergun, 2008). Subsequently, both managers and team leads can benefit from the ability to identify and prevent cyber bullying and cyber incivility, as byproducts of toxic online disinhibition, before these behaviors occur in the workplace. Accomplishing this goal implies they understand why toxic online disinhibition occurs, what type of online environments are more likely to propagate it, and how it correlates to employee performance outcomes. By facilitating the adoption of more effective policies and tools for online communication, this knowledge will allow managers of team-based distributed employees to avoid the consequences of cyber bullying and cyber incivility, and thus guide their teams to superior outcomes, such as better fulfillment of project timelines and improved overall deliverables (Sliter et al., 2010).

Search Report

      Search strategy. When locating suitable reference material, the principle search strategy involves identifying and channeling relevant keyword strings through the University of Oregon's One Search website. Since the One Search platform combs broadly over databases and indexes connected to the University of Oregon library, it is most appropriate for a topic like *toxic online disinhibition*, which encompasses several disparate disciplines of study including sociology and information systems.

Databases included under the One Search umbrella include:

- Academic Search Premier

- JSTOR

- Project Muse

- Web of Science

Keyword strings include:

- Online disinhibition effect

- Online disinhibition

- Toxic disinhibition

- Toxic disinhibition effect

- Cyberbullying / cyber bullying

- Cyberbullying / cyber bullying office

- Cyberbullying / cyber bullying workplace

- Cyberbullying / cyber bullying anonymity

- Cyberbullying / cyber bullying virtual communication

- Online professionalism

- Online disinhibition participation

- Online disinhibition professionalism

- Online disinhibition virtual communication

- Cyber incivility

- Cyberbullying / cyber bullying research

- Cyber victimization

- Workplace incivility

- Workplace bullying

Although this method of searching is highly effective, using categorical search provides fewer relevant results even when using the same keyword strings to enforce consistency between search techniques. The aforementioned search categories and their underlying databases include:

Communication Disorders

- MEDLINE

- Linguistics and Language Behavior Abstracts

- PsycNET

- ERIC

- WorldCat

Computer Science

- ArXiv.org

- Web of Science

- Computer Source

- PubMed

- Health Source: Nursing/Academic Edition

- SPORTDiscus

- Academic Search Premier

Sociology

- Sociological Abstracts

- Web of Science

- JSTOR

- PRISMA

- ProQuest Sociology

- ProQuest Social Science Journals

- ASSIA: Applied Social Sciences Index and Abstracts

- IBSS: International Bibliography of the Social Sciences

- ProQuest Criminal Justice Periodicals

Data collection. Reference material is recorded as structured data within a Microsoft Excel document and in full-text as a PDF document. Specifically, full-text is the complete article as retrieved from its host database. The structured data includes fields for category, publication date, author(s), title, parent publication title, index location within the parent publication, and the search technique used to acquire the reference. This structured data facilitates quick generation of APA formatted citations and a scalable method for dynamically sorting and searching aggregate reference material. Furthermore, this method also provides useful meta-data regarding the correlation of search techniques to reference material relevancy, thus providing a useful tool for actively refining search techniques to provide superior future results.

Evaluation criteria. Using the framework established by Bell and Frantz (2014),

all search results are sorted by currency, quality, and relevancy, and later by the authority and objectivity of the authors.

Currency. Currency is defined as publications less than ten years old. Within the last decade, organizational attitudes towards the adoption of information and communication technology have become increasingly more favorable (Alqahtani, Watson, & Partridge, 2014), and have definitively affected organizational culture and structure across a broad range of industry and global sectors (Holtgrewe, 2014; Jones, Simmons, Packham, Beynon-Davies, & Pickernell, 2014).   For this reason, a ten-year publication date delimiter ensures that reference material can provide an accurate perspective to the discussion of toxic online disinhibition in the contemporary workplace.

Quality. Evaluation criteria for quality include the logical structure and concise presentation of the reference material's argument, which must necessarily be supported by credible and scholarly research. Also considered when assessing the quality of a source is the reference material's demonstration of grammatical accuracy and clear articulation (Bell & Frantz, 2014).

Relevancy. The concept of relevancy that is applied when sorting results includes overlapping keyword usage and a positive relationship to research questions posed by this study. Also implicit to evaluation by relevancy is the reference material's status as a scholarly primary or secondary published source (Bell & Frantz, 2014). This approach ensures that reference material is more than tangential to this paper's research question and favorably positioned within its academic discipline.

Authority. As defined by Bell and Frantz (2014), authority delimiters include the authors' affiliations and credentials relative to the research topic, the authors' reputations

within their peer groups, and the authors' institutional affiliations. These parameters are validated using Google Scholar's cross-citation examination tool as well as Google to retrieve biographical data about the authors and their affiliations. Emphasis is placed on authors who are cited by related scholarly research and whose credentials include accredited educational institutions.

Objectivity. All reference material is individually assessed by the authors' abilities to articulate their research goals, the level of emergent bias in the authors' writing, and the authors' abilities to support their conclusions with authoritative sources (Bell & Frantz, 2014). These parameters are validated by assessing facts and figures for accuracy, examining citations for reputation and objectivity, and skimming for the presence of inflammatory language or conclusions not grounded by the data presented within the publication (Bell & Frantz, 2014).

Annotated Bibliography

Included within this annotated bibliography are 15 scholarly references covering the topic of toxic online disinhibition as defined by Suler (2004). Specifically, these references cover the manifestation of toxic online disinhibition as cyber incivility and cyber bullying within the contemporary workplace. References are selected to educate front line managers within global or geographically dispersed organizations on the causes, characteristics, and repercussions of toxic online disinhibition within the workplace. To aid in the discussion of these topics, the following references have been divided into categories encompassing (a) the unique characteristics of information and communication technologies that facilitate toxic online disinhibition, (b) the tools and techniques used for identifying and preventing negative behaviors such as cyber incivility and cyber bullying, and (c) the effects of toxic online disinhibition on target individuals in the workplace. The abstracts that are included are either as published or modified for brevity and relevancy. The summaries are written to support the context of their respective category, and singularly represent the ideas of the author(s) of each respective reference.

Category A – The unique characteristics of information and communication technologies that facilitate toxic online disinhibition

Byron, K. (2008). Carrying too heavy a load? The communication and miscommunication of emotion by email. *Academy of Management Review, 33*(2), 309-327. doi: 10.5465/AMR.2008.31193163

Abstract. Despite advice to avoid doing so, email senders intentionally and unintentionally communicate emotion. Drawing on the computer-mediated and nonverbal communication, emotion, and perception literature, this study introduces a theoretical framework describing what factors make miscommunication most likely, how emotional miscommunication affects organizations, and how employees can improve the accuracy of emotional communication in emails.

Summary. Byron (2008) identifies the facilitating factors for effectively conveying emotion in asynchronous email communication. The most significant emotional cues for successfully communicating emotion were response time, message length, presence or lack of a greeting, the degree of formality, and the use of emoticons (Byron, 2008). When in sufficient quantity, these factors ameliorate the likelihood of email misinterpretation, which subsequently reduce the amount of reported cyber bullying and cyber incivility. Furthermore, Byron (2008) discovered that irrespective of emotional cues within email, users generally overestimated their ability to both convey and interpret the emotional sentiment within email correspondence. When email was misinterpreted, it was almost always interpreted negatively rather than positively or neutrally. This generally resulted in increased social distance between the affected employees. Based on this research, front line managers and team leaders should foster a culture that emphasizes cognizant review of these facilitating factors to promote workplace collaboration, while understanding that interpersonal problems

between employees may be related to email misunderstanding or inadequate usage of the aforementioned facilitating factors for communicating emotion in email.

Kruger, J., Epley, N., & Parker, J. (2005) Egocentrism over e-mail: Can we communicate as well as we think? *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 89, 925–936. doi:10.1037/0022-3514.89.6.925

Abstract. Without the benefit of paralinguistic cues such as gesture, emphasis, and intonation, it can be difficult to convey emotion and tone over e-mail. Five experiments suggest that this limitation is often underappreciated, such that people tend to believe that they can communicate over e-mail more effectively than they actually can. Studies suggest that this overconfidence is born of egocentrism, the inherent difficulty of detaching oneself from one's own perspective when evaluating the perspective of someone else. Because e-mail communicators "hear" a statement differently depending on whether they intend to be, say, sarcastic or funny, it can be difficult to appreciate that their electronic audience may not.

Summary. Kruger, Epley, and Parker(2005) posit that people convey meaning not only with what they say, but also with paralinguistic cues such as gesture, voice, expression, and context. These cues help disambiguate otherwise ambiguous messages. Through five studies, each emphasizing different aspects in

traditional communication, Kruger et al. (2005) confirmed that individuals have limited positive-negative perception of subtle forms of communication such as sarcasm and humor. They also found that the disassociation present in email made communicators largely unaware of this limitation. Furthermore, Kruger et al. (2005) observed that as people tried to anticipate the reaction of their email recipients, they would paradoxically focus excessively on their own experience in lieu of their audience's perspective and further compound existing miscommunication. These findings imply that differing personal overarching life experiences between email communicators can significantly impede effective communication through information and communication technologies.

Lapidot-Lefler, N., & Barak, A. (2012). Effects of anonymity, invisibility, and lack of eye-contact on toxic online disinhibition. *Computers in Human Behavior, 28*(2), 434-443. doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2011.10.014

Abstract. The present research studied the impact of three typical online communication factors on inducing the toxic online disinhibition effect: anonymity, invisibility, and lack of eye-contact. The findings are explained in the context of an online sense of un-identifiability, which apparently requires a more refined view of the components that create a personal sense of anonymity.

Summary. Lapidot-Lefler and Barak (2012) identify several key factors leading to the presentation of toxic online disinhibition, which include anonymity,

invisibility, asynchronicity, and textuality. By experimentally modulating the occurrence of one or more of these factors within information and communication technologies, Lapidot-Lefler and Barak (2012) deduced that the absence of eye contact is the largest triggering behavior for toxic online disinhibition. Conversely, anonymity was found to have less correlation with toxic online disinhibition. Lapidot-Lefler and Barak (2012) note that eye contact is likely the most important nonverbal cue within interpersonal communication. However, Lapidot-Lefler and Barak (2012) contend that more research should be conducted on other nonverbal cues within information and communication technologies, such as physical gestures, posture, and oral and tactile information, as these cues were not thoroughly studied in their experiments. Ultimately, Lapidot-Lefler and Barak (2012) conclude that future developments in information and communication must necessarily include more nonverbal cue mimicry so that the occurrence of online disinhibition is reduced.

Privitera, C., & Campbell, M. (2009). Cyberbullying: The new face of workplace bullying? *CyberPsychology & Behavior, 12*, 395–400. doi: 10.1089/cpb.2009.0025

Abstract. While the subject of cyberbullying of children and adolescents has begun to be addressed, less attention and research have focused on cyberbullying in the workplace. Male-dominated workplaces such as manufacturing settings are found to have an increased risk of workplace bullying, but the prevalence of

cyberbullying in this sector is not known. This exploratory study investigated the prevalence and methods of face-to-face bullying and cyberbullying of males at work.

Summary. In their research, Privitera and Campbell (2009) reveal that workplace adoption of information and communication technologies has been accompanied by a significant rise in workplace cyber bullying. Privitera and Campbell (2009) defined workplace cyber bullying as "repeated behavior that offends, humiliates, sabotages, intimidates, or negatively affects someone's work when there is an imbalance of power" (p. 396). As front line managers and other organizational leaders act to promote positive and productive organizational cultures, they must be cognizant of email and text messaging as novel conduits for abuse irrespective of organizational size and hierarchy.   Front line managers must also understand that toxic online disinhibition typically occurs in conjunction with face-to-face bullying, and subsequently reflects an extension of that behavior. As a practical implication, organizational policies regarding employee wellbeing must facilitate the reporting and mitigation needs in response to abuse through information and communication technologies, as these deleterious behaviors may be indicative of other types of workplace interpersonal misconduct.

Category B – Tools and techniques for identifying and preventing negative online behaviors

Francis, L., Holmvall, C., & O'Brien, L. (2015). The influence of workload and civility of treatment on the perpetration of email incivility. *Computers in Human Behavior, 46*, 191-201. doi: 10.1016/j.chb.2014.12.044

Abstract. Using an experimental design, this study investigated the causal effects of workload (high vs. low) and civility of initial treatment (civil vs. uncivil) on the perpetration of incivility in emails. Given the prevalence of e-mail as a form of communication in office environments, and the high possibility of misattributions of sender intent through this medium, it is important to understand how incivility might manifest and be perpetrated through email. The outcome measure of interest was the independently rated civility of response emails.

Summary. By experimentally studying incivility within the context of email, Francis et al. (2015) identified two major contributing factors to the presentation of workplace cyber incivility. For the purpose of this study, Francis et al. (2015) defined uncivil behavior as vague or missing subject line entry, lack of an appropriate salutation, use of entirely lower case letters, inappropriate punctuation and spacing, poor spelling and grammar, inappropriate closing, and improper use of acronyms or shortened words. When users were initially presented with a combination of this uncivil behavior, the tenor of the email conversation would generally negatively escalate. However, if the uncivil behavior occurred later within the email conversation, the interaction tenor would not always worsen.

Furthermore, Francis (2015) found that as employees' workloads increased, the presence of incivility within emails also increased.

Haugh, M. (2010). When is an email really offensive? Argumentativity and variability in evaluations of impoliteness. *Journal of Politeness Research: Language, Behavior, Culture, 6*(1) 7-31. doi: 10.1515/JPLR.2010.002

Abstract. The analysis in this paper centers on an email exchange between a lecturer and a student at the University of Auckland, which resulted in the dismissal of that lecturer. This dismissal gave rise to significant controversy, both off and online, as to whether the email itself was simply "intemperate" and "angry", or more seriously "offensive" and "racist". Through a close analysis of the interpretations of the emails by the lecturer and student, as well as online evaluations made on blogs and discussion boards, it becomes apparent that the inherent discursivity of evaluations of impoliteness arises not only from different perceptions of norms, but also from the ways in which commentators position themselves vis-à-vis these evaluations.

Summary. Third party analysis of impoliteness within digital mediums generally occurs asynchronously to the evaluative moment. In this case study, Haugh (2010) highlights the importance of the evaluative moment, especially as it pertains to variances in empirical norms and moral norms, whereby empirical norms are defined as expectations based on life experiences and moral norms are defined as appropriateness based on appeals to shared values (Haugh, 2010). Subsequently, the

author states that when evaluating digital correspondence for the presence of toxic

online disinhibition, the evaluator must understand that perceived politeness is

variable and be open to negotiation and dispute. Front line managers and people

leaders must therefore be empathetic to the lived experiences of all communication

participants when assigning blame in situations involving cyber incivility and cyber

bullying.

Hong, J., Chien-Hou, L., Hwang, M., Hu, R., & Chen, Y. (2014). Positive affect

predicting worker psychological response to cyber-bullying in the high-tech

industry in northern Taiwan. *Computers in Human Behavior, 30*, 307-314. doi:

10.1016/j.chb.2013.09.011

Abstract. To understand individual dispositions and the organizational factors

that effect online cyber-bullying, this study investigates the relationship among

positive affect, the perceived organizational innovation climate, and psychological

responses to cyber-bullying. The research samples for this study are staff

members from the high-tech manufacturing industry in Northern Taiwan.

Summary. Hong et al. (2014) experimentally demonstrate that workers'

extraversion, physical well-being, and adaptive coping, as measured by workplace

engagement and perceived contribution to their employers' products and services,

strongly correlates with the prevalence of cyber bullying. Furthermore, Hong et

al. (2014) also found that these measures of emotional temperament and an

employees' likelihood to cyber bully also correlated to the innovation status of

their employer, Specifically, Hong et al. (2014) argue that "people with a strong

work ethic in a competitive work environment, such as the high-tech industry,

become the targets of jealousy, and may experience intense bullying" (p. 307).

This is because competitive employees have strong emotional interplay between

the status of their employer, their own self-evaluation and the evaluation of other

coworkers. Subsequently, individuals with varying degrees of organizational

innovation climate perception have emotional interplay, which implies that a

company's culture and internal presentation of success may affect the reported

occurrence of cyber bullying in the workplace. Given the variable and disputable

nature of toxic online disinhibition, front line managers and team leaders must

therefore be cognizant of how their organizations' market positions and the

organizational roles of individual employees can affect the perception of cyber

bullying and cyber incivility within the workplace.

Suler, J. (2004). The online disinhibition effect. *CyberPsychology & Behavior, 7*(3),

321-326. doi: 10.1002/aps.42.

Abstract. While online, some people self-disclose or act out more frequently or

intensely than they would in person. This article explores six factors that interact

with each other in creating this online disinhibition effect: dissociative anonymity,

invisibility, asynchronicity, solipsistic introjection, dissociative imagination, and

minimization of authority. Personality variables also will influence the extent of

this disinhibition. Rather than thinking of disinhibition as the revealing of an underlying "true self," we can conceptualize it as a shift to a constellation within self-structure, involving clusters of affect and cognition that differ from the in-person constellation.

Summary. Suler (2004) explores the modalities of information and communication technologies relative to the perception of self and the expression of toxic online disinhibition. Suler (2004) found that email, online chat, and video conferencing all facilitated deleterious behaviors in different ways by augmenting the user's self-identity away from his or her physical self-representation. Front line managers and other organization leaders should therefore be cognizant of these varying manifestations of cyber bullying and cyber incivility, and must take care to cognitively connect information and communication technologies to employees' representation of self in the physical office environment to prevent toxic online disinhibition from occurring. This assertion is supported by Suler (2004), whom indicated that organizational culture can be used to channel the rules and norms of the physical office environment to information and communication technologies as a method for inhibiting toxic online disinhibition.

Category C – The effects of toxic online disinhibition on target individuals in the workplace

Farley, S., Coyne, I., Sprigg, C., Axtell, C., & Subramanian, G. (2015). Exploring the

impact of workplace cyberbullying on trainee doctors. *Medical Education, 49*(4),

436-443. doi: 10.1111/medu.12666

Abstract. Objectives Workplace bullying is an occupational hazard for trainee

doctors. However, little is known about their experiences of cyberbullying at

work. This study examines the impact of cyberbullying among trainee doctors,

and how attributions of blame for cyberbullying influence individual and work-

related outcomes.

Summary. Farley, Coyne, Sprigg, Axtell, and Subramanian (2015) surveyed

trainee doctors regarding their experiences with cyber bullying. The survey

contained measures of cyberbullying, blame attribution, negative emotion, job

satisfaction, interactional justice and mental strain (Farley et al., 2015).

Ultimately, the survey results revealed that cyberbullying had been experienced

by nearly half of the sample during the 6-month survey period and cyber bullying

was found to significantly relate to ill health and job dissatisfaction (Farley et al.,

2015). A positive relationship between self-blame, negative affect and mental

strain was also discovered. Subsequently, Farley et al. (2015) postulate that

individuals who tend to attribute blame internally are at greater risk of developing

ill health. Farley et al. (2015) conclude that the deleterious impact of

cyberbullying should be addressed through workplace policies, as it can have a

tangible impact on employee retention and performance.

Giumetti, G., Hatfield, A., Scisco, J., Schroeder, A., & Muth, E. (2013). What a rude e-mail! Examining the differential effects of incivility versus support on mood, energy, engagement, and performance in an online context. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, *18*(3), 297-309. doi: 10.1037/a0032851

Abstract. The current study presents a within-subjects experiment wherein incivility and support were manipulated in a laboratory-based simulated workplace setting. Eighty-four participants completed a series of math tasks while interacting with either an uncivil or a supportive supervisor via e-mail. Data were collected on energy, cardiac activity, mood, task performance, and engagement.

Summary. To elucidate the impact of cyber incivility on workplace productivity, Giumetti, Hatfield, Scisco, Schroeder, and Muth (2013) asked 84 participants to complete a series of math tasks while interacting with either an uncivil or a supportive supervisor via information and communication technologies. Giumetti et al. (2013) found that participants reported higher levels of negative affect and lower levels of energy after working with a supervisor behaving uncivilly within email. Additionally, participants performed markedly worse on assigned tasks and reported lower engagement when working with an uncivil supervisor (Giumetti et al., 2013). Cardiac activity was unaffected by the presence of an uncivil supervisor. Based on cyber incivility's measured deleterious impact

to employee performance, Giumetti et al. (2013) recommend that organizations implement online etiquette training for employees to curb such behavior.

Giumetti, G., McKibben, E., Hatfield, A., Schroeder, A., & Kowalski, R. (2012). Cyber incivility @ work: The new age of interpersonal deviance. CyberPsychology, *Behavior & Social Networking, 15*(3), 148-154. doi: 10.1089/cyber.2011.0336

Abstract. The current study was designed to extend the interpersonal deviance literature into the online domain by examining the incidence and impact of supervisor cyber incivility and neuroticism on employee outcomes at work. Conservation of Resources (COR) theory was used as the guiding framework because cyber incivility is thought to deplete energetic resources in much the same way that other stressors do, ultimately leading to negative outcomes like burnout.

Summary. Giumetti et al. (2012) found that social interactions between supervisors and subordinates through information and communication technologies can directly impact the performance outcomes of subordinates. Specifically, Giumetti et al. (2012) discovered that markers of cyber incivility irrespective of negative intentionality predicted burnout, absenteeism, and turnover intentions in subordinate employees. The authors note that these findings highlight the importance of information and communication technologies

as a facilitator for incivility and bullying behaviors. As a practical implication, front line managers and team leaders should consider implementing online etiquette policies to raise awareness about the potential for miscommunication online (Giumetti et al., 2012).

King, J. (2013). Stress caused by abusive virtual supervision (as measured by cortisol) and the moderating effect of emotional intelligence. In *APSEW 2013: 8th Asia-Pacific Symposium on Emotions in Work life (pp. 20-20)*. Melbourne Business School.

Abstract. This study seeks to quantify via cortisol secretion whether the level of trustworthiness felt by an employee towards a manager, increases or decreases the amount of anger experienced after an abusive interaction through cyber-communication. This study also evaluates how an individual's emotional intelligence relates to their propensity to trust and subsequently moderates their stress reaction.

Summary. King (2013) found that the pre-existing manager-subordinate relationship, measured by the manager-employee relational dynamic, was a predictor of employees' emotional cortisol reaction to uncivil behaviors in information and communication technologies. Repeated exposure to similar uncivil behaviors degraded this trust construct and subsequently exacerbated the measured stress response in employees. King (2013) also found that employees'

ability to implement emotional regulation also played a significant role in

suppressing cortisol response to cyber incivility, especially in the presence of

increased communication latency. Emotional regulation is defined as the

expression, suppression, reappraisal, and control of emotions. King (2013)

concludes that protocols for effective employee management through information

and communication technologies could reduce subordinate stress and that

emotional regulation as a learned skill could be also be applied to mediate

employees' stress response.

Lim, V. & Chin J. (2006) Cyber incivility at the workplace: What has

Supervisor's sex got to do with it? *Pacific Asia conference on information*

systems. Marina Bay Sands, Singapore.

Abstract. This study examined the prevalence of cyber incivility as perpetrated

by supervisors, its impact on individuals and the organization. Specifically, this

study examines whether working adults in Singapore experience cyber incivility

when interacting with their supervisors via emails at the workplace. It also

examines the impact of receiving uncivil emails from supervisors on employees'

work and organizational attitudes. The effect of a supervisor's gender on types of

cyber uncivil behaviors was also investigated.

Summary. Lim and Chin (2006) found that although male and female supervisors

engaged in similar rates of cyber incivility, gender had an influencing role on the

types of uncivil behavior. Specifically, men usually engaged in more active forms of cyber incivility such as uncivil email behaviors that are directly and openly targeted at victims. Women typically acted in indirect manners that indicate a lack of respect, such as not replying to emails or using emails for time-sensitive messages such as cancelling or scheduling a meeting on short notice (Lim & Chin, 2006). Irrespective of gender, cyber incivility and cyber bullying were found to influence employees' intention to quit and organizational commitment. Based on these findings, Lim and Chin (2006) recommend that email senders should be cognizant of the implied emotional tone within the email, as well as the time sensitivity of the message's content.   Subsequently, these changes should be enforced using explicit policies and expectations surrounding electronic communication within the workplace (Lim & Chin, 2006).

Lim, V. & Teo T. (2009) Mind your E-manners: Impact of cyber incivility on employees' work attitude and behavior. *Information & Management, 46*, 419-425. doi:10.1016/j.im.2009.06.006

Abstract. This study examines cyber incivility in the workplace of Singapore and also examines its impact on employee job satisfaction, organizational commitment, quit intention, and workplace deviance. Using a survey, data was collected from 192 employees regarding the regularity of cyber incivility, job satisfaction, organizational commitment, intention to quit, and workplace deviant behaviors.

Summary. The survey results gathered by Lim and Teo (2009) showed that male supervisors engaged in active forms of cyber incivility while female supervisors engaged in passive cyber incivility (Lim & Teo, 2009). The top measured forms of passive cyber incivility were using emails to deliver time sensitive information, using emails to deliver information most suitable for face-to-face interactions, did not acknowledge receipt of emails even when a acknowledge receipt was specifically requested, and did not reply to emails (Lim & Teo, 2009). The top measured forms of active cyber incivility were condescending or demeaning remarks within emails, aggressively hurtful remarks within emails, and remarks that the sender would never say in person (Lim & Teo, 2009). Further analyses by Lim and Teo (2009) correlated cyber incivility to employees' job satisfaction and organizational commitment. Lim and Teo (2009) also found that employees who were experiencing cyber incivility had a greater propensity to quit their jobs and engage in "workplace deviant behaviors that may harm the organization"(p.424) Lim and Teo (2009) conclude that organizations must implement educational policies to discourage cyber incivility amongst their employees. Policy suggestions include establishing an online platform where employees can discuss any difficulties that they face when communicating via emails, encouraging human resource employees to actively address reports of email incivility, and educating employees how to effectively communicate via email despite the lack of contextual and social cues (Lim & Teo, 2009).

Park, Y., Fritz, C., & Jex, S. M. (2015). Daily cyber incivility and distress: The moderating roles of resources at work and home. *Journal of Management*, 0149206315576796. doi: 10.1177/0149206315576796

Abstract. Given that many employees use e-mail for work communication on a daily basis, this study examined within-person relationships between day-level incivility via work e-mail (cyber incivility) and employee outcomes. Using resource-based theories, this study examined two resources (i.e., job control, psychological detachment from work) that may alleviate the effects of cyber incivility on distress.

Summary. Park, Fritz, and Jex (2015) collected daily survey data over 4 consecutive workdays from 96 employees. Survey results showed that on days when employees experienced cyber incivility, they also reported higher affective and physical distress at the end of the workday (Park et al., 2015). Subsequently, employees also experienced higher distress the next morning. Park et al. (2015) conclude that cyber incivility is a daily stressor for many employees and can negatively impact workplace performance by increasing intention to quit and truancy. Park et al. (2015) emphasize the role of work and home resources to reduce the incivility-related stress process. Specifically, Park et al. (2015) observed that strong interpersonal relationships outside of the office weakened the delayed correlation between end-of-workday distresses and distress the following morning.

Conclusion

Common themes and concepts are identified within the summary analyses of each peer-reviewed source comprising the annotated bibliography of this study. These key concepts have been chosen in context of front line managers and people leaders within geographically distributed organizations, individuals who regularly oversee employees who collaborate through information and communication technologies. These key concepts have also been organized to reflect the content categorization within the annotated bibliography. Subsequently, studies have been divided into the following sections: (a) the unique characteristics of information and communication technologies that facilitate toxic online disinhibition, (b) tools and techniques used for identifying and preventing negative behaviors such as cyber incivility and cyber bullying, and (c) the effects of toxic online disinhibition on target individuals in the workplace.

The unique characteristics of information and communication technologies that facilitate toxic online disinhibition

The principal underlying cause for toxic online disinhibition within information and communication technologies is the lack of paralinguistic cues common to most interpersonal interactions. Inside and outside the workplace, people universally enhance verbal communication with paralinguistic cues such as eye contact, gesture, voice, expression, and context (Kruger, Epley, & Parker, 2005). Research suggests that paralinguistic cues help disambiguate linguistic messages that would otherwise be confounded by incomplete or informal wording, pronunciation, and other cultural and social differences (Kruger, Epley, & Parker, 2005). Digital communication methods that

lack eye contact are particularly vulnerable to misinterpretation or interpersonal abuse, however any medium with degraded social cues will have an increased propensity towards promoting cyber incivility and cyber bullying (Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012). The absence of these paralinguistic cues also influences how messages are perceived when intent is ambiguous rather than clearly malicious. For instance, when communication is misinterpreted, it is almost always interpreted negatively rather than positively or neutrally (Byron, 2008). Even harmless remarks are affected (Byron, 2008). Research by Kruger et al. (2005) found that the positive-negative perception of subtle forms of communication such as sarcasm and humor are significantly impeded within information and communication technologies.

Tools and techniques for identifying and preventing negative online behaviors

Due to its variable and subjective nature, the tools and techniques used for identifying toxic online disinhibition in the workplace must necessarily rely on individual human assessment rather than automation and strict procedure alone (Haugh, 2010). This is because individual perception of politeness is dependent on a variety of intrinsic and extrinsic factors relative to those corresponding through information and communication technologies (Haugh, 2010). These factors include the cultural and social norms of each communication participant (Haugh, 2010), as well as each individual's role, his or her perceived contribution at the employer, and the employer's marketplace performance (Hong et al., 2014). The interplay between these disparate elements can affect an employee's likelihood of experiencing cyber incivility or cyber bullying by increasing employee sensitivity to said behaviors (Hong et al., 2014). Reflected in this complex

relationship is an employee's perception of self, which can also be modulated by the anonymity and disassociateive properties of online environments (Suler, 2004). Specifically, information and communication technologies unintentionally break employees' connection to real world values and norms, which in turn increases their likelihood to act out in uncivil ways (Suler, 2004).

These findings suggest that toxic online disinhibition is just as complex as the rich interpersonal relationships that suffer from its presence in the physical workplace (Haugh, 2010). Front line managers and team leaders within workplaces dependent on information and communication technologies must therefore implement policies and procedures for thoroughly assessing reports of cyber incivility before assigning blame and corrective action (Haugh, 2010). Other than censuring the involved employees, front line managers and team leaders should also reflect on how the marketplace performance of their organizations and the diversity of individual life experiences within their teams could be influencing the manifestation of negative online behaviors in the workplace (Haugh, 2010). Addressing these contributing issues at a macro level, rather than only addressing situations of cyber incivility and cyber bullying as they occur, assures that on-going causes of toxic online disinhibition are prevented across the whole organization (Hong et al., 2014).

To address impediments to effective communication, front line managers and team leaders should principally select information and communication technologies that promote paralinguistic cues when possible (Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012). For example, video conferencing software is more effective than teleconferencing software because it shares eye contact and other forms of body language (Lapidot-Lefler & Barak, 2012).

Managers can also address the inherent limitations of information and communication

technologies through employee policies and trainings that emphasize attention to key

emotional cues in written correspondence – such as response time, message length,

presence or lack of a greeting, the degree of formality, and the use of emoticons in email

(Byron, 2008). These policies should also address the grammatical causes for

miscommunication such as use of entirely lower case letters, inappropriate punctuation

and spacing, poor spelling, and improper use of acronyms or shortened words (Francis et

al., 2015).

The effects of toxic online disinhibition on target individuals in the workplace

Addressing the unique characteristics of information and communication technologies

that contribute to cyber incivility and cyber bullying will have tangible effects on the

workplace by reducing burnout, absenteeism, and turnover (Giumetti et al., 2012). In

addition to affecting individual job performance, research also indicates that regularly

experiencing workplace toxic online disinhibition is significantly correlated to ill health

(Farley et al., 2015). This is likely a result of increased cortisol, a hormone associated

with extrinsic stress, which is secreted in response to uncivil behaviors (King, 2013).

Research indicates that recurrent exposure to cyber incivility and cyber bullying leads to

a heightened stress response that carries over from day to day, leading to a degraded

physical condition and worsening peer relationships in the workplace (Park et al., 2015).

Consequently, overall workplace suffers as individual employees become progressively

more affected by stress induced by behaviors caused by toxic online disinhibition. For

instance, organizational commitment and the propensity to act out using deviant

behaviors all correspond to the prevalence of cyber incivility and cyber bullying in the workplace (Lim & Chin, 2006; Lim & Teo, 2009).

In summary, the references cited in this study indicate that toxic online disinhibition as defined by Suler (2004) commonly manifests itself in the contemporary workplace and deleteriously impacts organizational and employee performance if left unaddressed. Understanding why information and communication technologies inadvertently promote these types of harmful behaviors can help front line managers and team leaders within geographically distributed workplaces cogently select collaboration systems and organizational policies to enhance communication. More specifically, policies should seek to address the common mistakes employees make during communication through information and communication technologies that consequently lead to cyber incivility and cyber bullying (Kruger et al., 2005). These policies should also provide front line managers with the most effective tools for addressing toxic online disinhibition when it inevitably occurs within their workplaces. These approaches will allow organizations to reduce employee disengagement, turnover, and deviant behaviors aimed at harming the productivity of the organization and fellow employees (Lim & Teo, 2009).

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