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The Organizational Model for Workplace Security

Thomas K. Capozzoli*

ABSTRACT

This Article addresses the issue of workplace violence, focusing on the United States and potential terrorist actions in the workplace. The Author begins with an organizational model for workplace security, describing the types of workplace violence, and the factors that may trigger violence. The Article continues with a description of the common behavior traits that violent workers possess, and also describes the "cycle" ultimately leading to workplace violence. In looking more closely at the common types of workplace violence and the characteristics of those who commit workplace violence, the Author provides an organizational model for reducing or preventing workplace violence. The Article concludes that until the workplace has both trust and participation, workers must be prepared for violence.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

I.	THE ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL FOR WORKPLACE SECURITY	782
A.	<i>Types of Workplace Violence</i>	782
B.	<i>Organizational Factors that may Trigger Workplace Violence</i>	782
C.	<i>Behavior "Typologies" of Potentially Violent Employees</i>	783
D.	<i>The Cycle of Violence</i>	784
II.	THE ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL FOR REDUCING OR PREVENTING VIOLENCE.....	785
III.	CONCLUSION.....	786

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I. THE ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL FOR WORKPLACE SECURITY

Workplace violence is a growing concern in the United States and even in other countries. Workplace violence is any act of harassment (including sexual harassment), intimidation, threat, rape, assault, or homicide that takes place at the victim's place of employment.¹ Any act of destruction of property can also be considered an act of violence.² According to the U.S. Department of Justice, homicide is the second leading cause of fatalities in the workplace, and murder is the number one cause of death for females in the workplace.³ Each year, there are approximately 1.5 million physical assaults, more than 7 million threats, and more than 20 million cases of harassment in the workplace.⁴ These numbers may be low because of underreporting by organizations.

A. *Types of Workplace Violence*

There are three types of workplace violence:

- Type One—the violent situation originates in the workplace and the violence occurs in the workplace.⁵
- Type Two—the violent situation originates in the workplace but the violence occurs outside the workplace.⁶
- Type Three—the violent situation originates outside the workplace but the violence occurs in the workplace.⁷

B. *Organizational Factors that may Trigger Workplace Violence*

There are several factors that may trigger violence in the workplace:

- Autocratic Management—In this enlightened time, management has done several things to attempt to decrease autocratic management, but the fact remains that there are still autocratic managers.⁸ There are also management practices that employees still perceive to be autocratic when, in fact, they are

1. U.S. Dep't of Justice, *National Victim Assistance Academy: Chapter 22 Special Topics*, sec. 5, Workplace Violence, at http://www.ojp.gov/ovc/assist/nvaa/chapter22_5.html (last visited Feb. 19, 2002) [hereinafter Dept. of Justice Report].

2. *Id.*

3. *Id.*

4. *Id.*

5. THOMAS CAPOZZOLI & STEVE MCVEY, MANAGING VIOLENCE IN THE WORKPLACE 28-26 (1996).

6. *Id.* at 26.

7. *Id.* at 26-27.

8. *Id.* at 32-34.

- not.⁹ Personality factors also enter into this factor when conflicts between employees and managers exist.¹⁰
- Disciplinary Action by Management—Discipline in organizations is necessary at times. However, if an employee perceives that the discipline is unjust or unfair, they may react in a negative manner.
 - A Negative Appraisal—Evaluation of employees is a necessary function of management, but often the evaluation is perceived to be unfair. Many times managers are not taught the proper manner in which to evaluate employees or to deliver the appraisal in a manner that will not be offensive to an employee even if it is a negative appraisal.¹¹
 - Lack of Support from an Employee's Superior or Workgroup—Often employees feel as if they are an island in the workplace, and that the person they report to is not supportive of their efforts or results. Often this extends to an employee's workgroup when they isolate the employee from the group.
 - Change—Change is a fact of life in organizations. However, change may be difficult for some employees and often the change is not handled well by management. Employees often feel they are victims of change rather than change being beneficial for them.
 - Downsizing—Organizations often feel that the way to get costs back in line is to reduce the workplace. Downsizing, or rightsizing as it is sometimes called, is nothing more than termination of an employee or group of employees.¹² Employees, particularly long-term employees, have difficulty facing the fact the organization is not loyal to them and will perceive the termination to be punishment.¹³

C. Behavior "Typologies" of Potentially Violent Employees

Although there are no characteristics common to all violent people, there are certain traits and behaviors that are typical among perpetrators of workplace violence:

- They tend to be white males from 30 to 50 years of age.¹⁴ Other ethnic groups do commit workplace violence—as do women—but white males seem to be the dominant group.¹⁵
- Hypersensitive to criticism.¹⁶ People who commit workplace violence do not take criticism well and they tend to respond negatively to it.

9. *Id.* at 35-79.

10. *Id.* at 35.

11. *Id.* at 75-77, 106-11, 127.

12. *Id.* at 81.

13. See *id.* at 82-84 (discussing employees' emotional reactions to downsizing announcements).

14. *Id.* at 50.

15. *Id.*

- Overvalue power and control.¹⁷ They want control of their own destiny and they tend to want to control every situation. Losing control of a situation may make them very angry to the point they cannot control themselves.
- May depend on symbols of power.¹⁸ Many workplace violence perpetrators collect guns or some other power symbol, and they will probably brag about the collection they have.
- They highly value their job.¹⁹ Often, they over-identify with their job and if they are loners, the job becomes the single most important thing in their life. If the job is threatened or lost they become highly upset.
- A violent past.²⁰ Most, but not all, workplace violence perpetrators have some violence in their past. Domestic violence or being cruel to animals are some of the ways this violence has been demonstrated.
- Believes his fate is in the hands of others.²¹ Workplace violence perpetrators feel they have no control over their lives and they want to get their revenge because others have controlled them.

D. *The Cycle of Violence*

Before the perpetrator decides to commit the ultimate act, whatever it may be, they go through the following cycle:

- The “trigger” event.²² There are usually several events that lead up to the violent act. The employee may complain about these events without acting on any one of them, but does allow them to accumulate. Then there is the final “trigger” event, the one that may put the employee over the edge.
- The reaction.²³ After the final “trigger” event occurs, the employee will have certain kinds of thoughts that have been predisposed by his personality.
- The emotional response.²⁴ The employee will react with anger, hate, or blame.
- The behavior.²⁵ Most employees will do nothing because they have the emotional stability to control their behavior. There are

16. *Id.* at 51.

17. *Id.* at 55.

18. See *id.* (describing certain employee warning signs such as the collecting of firearms).

19. *Id.* at 54.

20. *Id.* at 55-56.

21. *Id.* at 56.

22. *Id.* at 23-24; see also *id.* at 51-52 (describing propensity of “asocial type” to internalize series of events; *id.* at 69-70 (offering similar discussion with regard to substance abusers).

23. See generally *id.* at 49-71 (discussing typologies and their varying reactions to trigger events).

24. *Id.* at 23-29.

25. *Id.* at 49, 70-71.

some who will react violently because they do not have the ability to control themselves.

II. THE ORGANIZATIONAL MODEL FOR REDUCING OR PREVENTING VIOLENCE

Not all violence can or will be prevented. If we knew how to prevent violence, we would have done so in society long ago. There are no absolutes when it comes to violence, but there are ways that organizations can reduce, and in some cases prevent, a violent situation from happening:

- Review hiring procedures. Most employees are hired by interview, which is probably the worst way to hire people.²⁶ The interview should not be the sole method used to hire people. If it is the only method used, train the personnel being used for the interviewing with the proper procedures and methods to conduct an effective interview. Never utilize low-paid, untrained personnel to interview prospective employees.
- Screen potential employees.²⁷ When it is appropriate, testing should be done. Do a drug screen and do a background check. An interesting statistic is that almost one in five potential employees lie about criminal records among other things.²⁸
- Review all layoff and termination procedures.²⁹ Be sure all personnel who may have the authority to terminate employees are trained in the procedure. If employees are terminated, a policy on retraining or outplacement may be warranted.
- Create a crisis management team.³⁰ All organizations should have a team of individuals including the top manager, security manager, human resource manager, general counsel, maintenance personnel, and other designated persons to function as the crisis management team.
- The crisis management team will be responsible for creating a crisis-management plan.³¹ This plan should include the responsibility capability of the organization to a violent situation; a plan to contain a violent situation; evacuation plans; plans for liaison with law enforcement; and plans for the post-event.

26. See *id.* at 100-02 (discussing the popularity of interviewing as hiring methodology and its many disadvantages with respect to preventing workplace violence).

27. *Id.* at 98-99.

28. *Work Safety is a Priority*, P.R. NEWSWIRE, Oct. 15, 2001, at LEXIS, News Library, News Group File (indicating that 19% of applicants lied about their criminal records).

29. CAPOZZOLI & MCVEY, *supra* note 5, at 103-06.

30. *Id.* at 113-16.

31. *Id.*

- The crisis management team will also be responsible for creating a threat-reporting system that includes a company policy on threats as well as a process for threat investigation.³²
- All managers and supervisors should be trained in how to de-escalate a potentially violent situation, and they should know what their responsibilities are when a violent situation happens.³³ They should have interpersonal relationship training in such things as conflict management, communication, change management, counseling and disciplining employees, addressing harassment of employees, and performance appraisals.
- A process should be put in place for dealing with the threat of domestic violence in the workplace.³⁴ All employees should be made aware of the signs of domestic violence and what should be done in reporting it. Victims of domestic violence should be made aware of the steps that the organization will take to protect them, as well as the steps they can take to protect themselves.

III. CONCLUSION

One of the first statements heard from people who have been involved in a workplace violence situation is, ‘I didn’t think it would happen here.’³⁵ Workplace violence can and will happen to any organization—none are immune. All organizations must take steps to prevent workplace violence situations from happening. Whether it is harassment, homicide, or anything inbetween, organizations are responsible for taking the appropriate steps to make sure it doesn’t happen.

32. *Id.* at 113-14, 119-22.

33. *Id.* at 127-29; *see also id.* at 116-19 (discussing the importance of hostage behavior training); *id.* at 122-23 (discussing the importance of dispute resolution training for managers).

34. Dep’t of Justice Report, *supra* note 1.

35. *Id.*