On Customer Hostility

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Hostility In workplaces ... A lot of Concepts ... 

Anger ... Aggression ... Violence ... Harassment ... Deviance ... Bullying Contempt ... Irritation ... Rudeness ... Incivility

Most Research Within Organizations
Survey Research

- Very High Frequencies
  - ... 70% of employees once a week

Experimental Research

- Reliance on predetermined forms
- Strong Detrimental Effects on Employees

(Rafaeli et al, JAP, 2012; Miron-Spektor et al, JAP, 2011)
Weiss, Cropanzano, Beal: Affective Events are Tasks that Require Work

Baumeister (1998) 
Cookies or Radishes? Self is a limited resource

In Theory: Bad Emotions Can Hamper Behavior

Concealing bad feelings requires resources
Hostility in Customer Contact Center

Customer request

Employee Task: Updating details

## Customers Hostility Manipulation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Polite Customer</th>
<th>Angry – Rude Customer</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>My home phone</strong> number changed. Need to <strong>update</strong> it please. My number is 03-7526654. Thank you very much, George Ashley.</td>
<td>It’s such a nightmare to reach you! Your service is just horrible. <strong>Update my home phone</strong> to 03-7526654. George Ashley</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Hi please note my request to move me **to the weekend deal**. My password is "Friends". Thank you, Josh. | I am sick and tired of your lousy service. Move me **to the weekend deal**. Password is "Friends". Josh. |

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Employee Performance after Hostility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angry Requests</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>0.46</td>
<td>0.10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect Free Requests</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>0.57</td>
<td>0.12</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\[ t = -2.05, \ p < .05 \]

Employee Fatigue after Customer Anger

Reported exhaustion (1-7 scale)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Angry Requests</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>3.52</td>
<td>1.18</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Affect Free Requests</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>2.77</td>
<td>1.13</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

t = 2.71, p < .01

Strong Effects of VERY Subtle Expressions

Experiments Limit our Thinking
What are Hostile Customer Behaviors in Real Life?
Types of Hostility

“Real” Hostility?

Physical  
- Stabbing
- Hitting
- Hitting the wall
- Slamming a door

Verbal  
- Cursing
- Yelling
- Complaining
- Malicious rumors

Direct

Indirect
Cultural Context of Hostility

MDS Dimensions of Hostility:
- USA, Israel: Physical vs. Verbal
- Pakistan: No such Distinction

Pakistan: Social exclusion IS Physical
USA: Social exclusion NOT Physical

Study:
Actual Customer Hostility Events
Hospital Security Reports
(462 events; 4 months)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Severity</th>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Freq.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Staff Support</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Patient Unrest</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>91</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violating Order</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>151</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbal</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Physical Assault</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>54</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emergency Button</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Little About Actual Behaviors

“Low/Moderate Hostility”
Observing Customer Hostility …

• ….. Observations, Interviews, Security Reports, Literature …

• Stores, Banks, Service Stations, Hospitals
Some Insights

- Customer hostility is out there;
- Connected to “Events;”
- In the “air,” not necessarily b/c employees;
- Strong contagion effects between customers;
- Can become a “constant” undertone;
- Imposes costs on employees and organizations;
Interpreting Events into Offense and Hostility Varies by Individual and Collective Self:

Most Offensive Event …

- **USA**: Harm to personal belongings
- **Israel**: Harm to personal network
- **Pakistan**: Social exclusion

“Minor” Hostile Behaviors

- Stand when seats are available;
- Pace (back and forth);
- Frenetic actions (knuckles, drum fingers);
- Complain (directly, into the air);
- Sarcastic comments;
- Swear (directly, into the air);
- Pound (table, wall)
Employee Targeted Behaviors

- Ignoring employee
- Stopping a walking employee
- Demanding a response from employee
- Standing close to employee
- Glaring at employee
- Standing in way of employee
Study: Triggers of Hostility

• 350 Patients and escorts
• Surveys (wait-time, procedural justice, tendency to hostility)
• Factor Analysis:
  -- Minor Hostility
  -- More Serious Hostility
Self-Report of Hostility

- “I currently feel like…” (5 point scale)
- Factor Analysis: Two factors
- Only A has real variance (Alpha=.82)
  (Mean Factor B=1.67, SD=1.26)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&quot;I would currently like to ...&quot;</th>
<th>Hostility A</th>
<th>Hostility B</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stopping a staff person</td>
<td>.691</td>
<td>.075</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Speaking Aggressively</td>
<td>.578</td>
<td>.510</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yelling</td>
<td>.533</td>
<td>.454</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Entering office without being called</td>
<td>.764</td>
<td>.133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slamming a door</td>
<td>.255</td>
<td>.800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pounding on a table</td>
<td>.202</td>
<td>.843</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cursing</td>
<td>-.060</td>
<td>.770</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Results: Waiting Causes Hostility
226 patients / families

$\beta = -0.48, p < 0.005$  

$F = 6.7, P < 0.005, R^2 = 0.17$  

$\beta = -0.31, p < 0.005$  

$\beta = 0.21, p < 0.005 / \beta = 0.03, \text{ns}$
Study: Load, Affect and Hostility

- 226 Patients and families
  - Hospital Load Data
  - Matched with Surveys of Emotion and Hostility
Load Causes NA and Hostility

226 patients / families

Sobel’s Z = 5.52, p<0.005

Hospital Load Data

Negative Affect

Small Scale Hostility

0.003, p<0.005

0.84, p<0.005

0.03, p<0.005 / 0.00
Study: Load, Affect and Hostility

\[ \beta = 0.386^{***} \]
\[ n=92 \]
Full mediation of NA

\[ \beta = 0.519^{***} \]
\[ n=92 \]

\[ \beta = 0.443^{***} \]
\[ n=91 \]

\[ \beta = -0.376^{*} \]
\[ n=41 \]

“I understand what is going on”
Observing Hostility in Context

• Employees oblivious to many “hostile” events (Habituation?);
• “Low-level” hostility taken for granted;
• Only “Real Threats” taken seriously;
Study:
Employee Habituation to Hostility

Employees Read Transcripts of Hostile / Non-Hostile Customers.
### Others’ Hostility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Hostile</th>
<th>Affect-Free</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Customer:</strong>&lt;br&gt;I am having reception problems with my phone.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Employee:</strong>&lt;br&gt;Perhaps you have a problem when you are in an area with no reception?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Customer</strong>&lt;br&gt;It happens all the time! I need to know your problems?&lt;br&gt;I am in all sorts of areas.&lt;br&gt;Your service is so bad!; your technicians are lousy! Every time a new problem pops up?</td>
<td><strong>Customer</strong>&lt;br&gt;I don’t know but I think it happens all the time. I am in all sorts of areas. There should not be such reception problems. It seems to be anywhere I happen to be.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Problem Solving After Hostile Encounters

Raven’s Matrices (8 minutes)
No Hostile Cases Equal to 3 Hostile Cases!

(F(3,140)=19.88, p<.000)

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<tr>
<th></th>
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<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>0 angry calls</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3.83</td>
<td>1.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 angry call</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>5.22</td>
<td>1.74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 angry calls</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>2.44</td>
<td>1.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 angry calls</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>1.40</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Mean Number of Problems Solved

Cognitive Performance vs. Number of Angry Calls

(F(3,140)=19.88, p<.000)
Study:
Reactions of Hospital Staff to Hostility

- Scenarios:
  - Patient / Relative Hostility:
    - Stare, Yell, Pound
    - Older/Younger Man
  - Employee Sense-making?
  - Employee Reactions?
Employees Assess Event

-- Is it actor’s fault ➔ Ignore
-- Is it our fault ➔ Give-in
-- Is it REALLY dangerous ➔ Call security
What Do We Learn?

• Frequent Events of “Minor” Hostility
• Staff Used to … so ignore or attend

→ Where Does This Take the System?

Escalated Hostility
Study: Cutting the Vicious Cycle?

- Information on Service Process
- Posters and leaflets with hospital policies;
- Include average wait time (5 hours!)
Policy Information → Procedural Justice

(F = 3.89, P < 0.05)

P < 0.05

P < 0.05

(F = 3.89, P < 0.05)
Wait Time X Policy Information $\rightarrow$ Mild Hostility

$\beta = 0.25, \ p < 0.05$

$F = 3.55, \ P < 0.005, \ R^2 = 0.12$
Vicious Cycles of Hostility

- Operational factors (load, waiting, service needs)
- Staff ignoring of minor hostility (Habituation? Burnout? Save time)
- Amplifies sense of injustice;
- Aggravates hostility
"Are there any questions?"