Beyond Diversity: Civility in the Workplace

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Incivility: A Definition

- **Incivility**: Low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, *in violation of norms for mutual respect* (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; italics added for emphasis)
Incivility Characteristics

- Ambiguous Intent
  - Incivility is not necessarily intentional on behalf of instigator
  - Interpretation of ambiguous behavior determines degree of incivility (if any)
Incivility Characteristics

- Violation of Local Norms
  - no universal standards of uncivil behavior
  - incivility defined at local level; what may be uncivil in one environment may be completely civil in a different situation
Incivility Characteristics

• Downward Spiral
  • uncivil behavior is thought to encourage additional uncivil behavior, resulting in a continuous downward spiral
  • hence, should curtail uncivil behavior as quickly as possible
Examples of Incivility

- Yelling at Someone
- Ignoring Someone
- Making Demeaning Comments About Others
- Addressing Someone in Unprofessional Terms
- Eye-Rolling
Perspectives of Incivility

- Targets or Victims
  - most of the research on recipients of incivility
  - impact on targets related to a number of negative outcomes (e.g., turnover, absenteeism, lower performance, etc.)
Perspectives of Incivility

• Instigators or Perpetrators
  • those or engage in uncivil behavior
  • surprisingly, many readily admit to engaging in uncivil behavior
  • oftentimes a reaction to dissatisfaction or perceptions of unfairness
  • outcomes are same as victims of incivility
Natural Biases: Similar-to-Me

- Fact: We Like Others Who Are Similar to Us
  - often, that similarity is based on gender, race, or religion
  - many diversity programs focus on these external markers and create opposing groups (Similar and Different)
Natural Biases: Similar-to-Me

• But, We Have Many Things in Common With Each Other
  • Likely have similar tastes in food, music, sports, fitness, TV shows, etc. with “different” others
  • Also likely to have dissimilar tastes with “similar” others
Natural Biases: Similar-to-Me

• **Point:** We likely share similar interests with others REGARDLESS of external markers or group membership

• So, need to focus on getting to know the PERSON

• This Takes Time and Effort!
Cognitive Efficiency

- Unfortunately, it is natural to engage in ‘Cognitive Efficiency’
- It is easier to categorize someone based on an external marker or group affiliation than to get to know them
Cognitive Efficiency

• To Achieve Mutual Respect, We Have to:
  • recognize this natural tendency
  • fight that mental shortcut
  • take the time to get to know others on a personal level
  • This, Again, Takes Effort
Civility: A Definition

- **Civility**: “Demonstrating sensibility of concern and regard, treating others with respect. Workplace civility is behavior that helps to preserve norms for mutual respect at work; it comprises behaviors that are fundamental to positively connecting with another, building relationships and empathizing” (Pearson, Andersson & Porath, 2000).
Civility Correlates

- Civility is positively related to:
  - Performance Indicators (e.g., patient perceptions of healthcare)
  - Procedural Justice (fairness in the procedures used to make decisions)
Civility Correlates

- Civility is Negatively Related to:
  - Absenteeism
  - EEO complaints
  - Turnover
  - Perceived Exclusionary Behavior (e.g., unanswered emails, exclusion from important meetings; gossip)
  - Verbal Abuse
  - Physical Abuse
Monetary Outcomes of Civility

- EEO Formal Complaint Costs *Per Hospital*
  - High vs. Medium Civility: $38,264 difference
  - High vs. Low Civility: Nearly $61,000 difference

- Sick Leave Costs *Per Employee*
  - High vs. Low Civility
    - Patient Care Sick Leave: $240 difference
    - Administrative Sick Leave: $130 difference
    - Manual Labor Sick Leave: $120 difference
Civility vs. Incivility

- Although negatively related to incivility, civility is NOT the opposite of incivility
- Research on Organizational Citizenship Behaviors (OCBs): Behaviors outside normal job duties that benefit the organization
  - Civility positively related to OCBs
  - Incivility not related at all (i.e., not negatively related) to OCBs
Focus on Civility: Step 1

- Identify Workgroups of Interest
  - VHA Measure of Civility
    - 8 items
    - Overall Civility
  - Assessment of Workplace Civility
    - 33 Items
    - Five Dimensions (individual, coworker, supervisor, organization, general)
  - Reports of Workgroup Problems
Focus on Civility: Step 2

- Workgroup Meets Several Times
  - May need several meetings (e.g., monthly)

- Workgroup Defines Civility
  - Each workgroup must define what civility means to them

- Understand and Encourage Civility
  - Once defined, group must carry that understanding forward in their interactions
  - Agree to "police" themselves
Modeling Civility

- Zero-Tolerance Expectations
  - the Department will simply not tolerate disrespect
  - part of your student training is to be professional, and that includes treating others with respect

- Look in the Mirror
  - constantly examine how you behave
  - it may not be new, but adhere to the Golden Rule: Treat others the way you would like to be treated
Stopping Incivility

• Listen Carefully
  • The Department encourages you to report uncivil behavior
  • by reporting, we can detect patterns of incivility and address problem areas

• Hammer It When It Happens
  • we (the Department) cannot always address uncivil behavior; we need your help
  • engage in some peer pressure: openly discourage uncivil behavior
No One Gets a Free Pass

• Don’t Excuse Powerful Instigators
  • *everyone* is accountable – students, faculty, and staff
  • those who are popular or in higher positions do not get a “free pass”
Local Examples of ‘Civility’?

- Example 1
- Example 2
- Example 3
Positive Outcomes of Civility Focus

• Emphasis on what to do, NOT what to avoid
• Workgroup understands what is appropriate behavior
• Workgroup has better understanding of others’ roles in workgroup
• Respect among workgroup members enhanced