Capitolo 11

Case Study 1

In the workplace it's better to be harassed than ignored

Bullying and exclusion are not just childish schoolyard phenomena, they happen in the workplace among adults as well. Recent research by O'Reilly, Robinson, Berdahl, and Banki (2014) [DOI:] examined the perception of bullying vs. exclusion in workplaces across the US and Canada as well as the effects of such treatment on employees' sense of belonging, well-being, and turnover.

In their first study, O'Reilly and her colleagues (2014) presented employees from across the US with a list of behaviors that represented different kinds of harassment (e.g., taunting, bullying, and derogating) and different forms of ostracism (e.g., ignoring and excluding) that might occur in the workplace. The participants were then asked to rate the extent to which each behavior was perceived as socially inappropriate, psychologically harmful, and the likelihood that that behavior would be punished in their workplace. The results of this study showed that employees perceived ostracism to be less psychologically harmful, less socially inappropriate, and less likely to be punished than harassment. After all, wouldn't being the target of bullying be more harmful than simply being ignored by your coworkers? The goal of their next two studies was to examine the consequences of being harassed versus ostracized.

In studies 2 and 3, employees throughout both the US and Canada completed surveys that assessed the number of times that they had experienced ostracism and harassment at work, and completed measures of their personal well-being, sense of belonging and work-related attitudes. In Study 3, the researchers also determined the 3-year turnover rate among employees at a Canadian university. The results showed that the participants had experienced ostracism more often than harassment at their jobs and that experiences of ostracism led to lower self-esteem, greater psychological withdrawal, lower job satisfaction, and an increased likelihood of job turnover. Further analyses revealed that ostracism decreased people's sense of belonging and those feelings explained the relationship between experiences of ostracism and lowered self-esteem.

So, employees' perceptions that harassment is more common in the workplace than ostracism is wrong. Ostracism is, in fact, a common occurrence and it has more harmful effects on employees than does harassment. Why might this be? Why is it so hurtful to be ignored? Some researchers have suggested that the need to belong is a primary motivation of human beings. When we feel like others are excluding us and we don't belong it is almost as if we are so small and insignificant that

we don't even matter. It's as if people are refusing to acknowledge our most basic existence. At least when people are rude to our faces or make fun of us, we still have some sense that we are part of something and that our existence is being acknowledged.

In addition to uncovering the very negative consequences of ostracism in the workplace, the authors also describe the implications of their findings for employers. Because it involves overt behavior, harassment is often easier to detect than ostracism. It is perhaps for that reason that employees think it is more common and that workplaces all over the world enact strict anti-harassment training and rules. This study suggests that employers should also be on the look-out for employees who are being excluded. Because ignoring and refusing to include others doesn't just happen on the playground—it's a common and hurtful experience in our boardrooms, offices, and sales floors as well. Being aware of the negative effects of ostracism can improve employee well-being and decrease turnover rates on the job.

Reference

- O'Reilly, J., Robinson, S.L., Berdahl, J. L., & Banki, S. (2014). Is negative attention better than no attention? The comparative effects of ostracism and harassment at work. *Organization Science*, doi: 10.1287/orsc.2014.0900

Case Study 2

The Köhler effect: When the weakest link isn't so weak anymore

Research on social loafing has shown that people tend to slack off and do less work in groups than when they perform the same task alone. So does every group member decrease effort, or do large groups in fact give some group members a reason to shine? The text describes how, in certain group contexts, the weakest group members actually rise to the occasion and work harder in groups than they do alone. This is called the Köhler effect (named after Otto Köhler who discovered the effect in the 1920s).

In two studies, Osborn, Irwin, Skogsbert, and Feltz (2012) [DOI: 10.1037/a0026887] examined the performance of collegiate swimmers who competed in a four-person relay event (Study 1) and track athletes competing in three-person discus and shot-put events (Study 2). For each sporting event, they compared the performances of each individual when they competed alone vs. when they competed in a team. The authors hypothesized that the weakest member individually would rise to the challenge and show greater motivational games (i.e. a better performance as a teammate than as an individual) than the strongest team member (who would show signs of social loafing).

The results of Study 1 showed that the athletes swam faster during their relay races than during their individual swims. Do you want to know which team member was the most responsible for the faster

team time? The weakest link! Those swimmers who were the slowest during their individual races actually swam much faster when they were swimming the relay race with their teammates. These results were then conceptually replicated at track and field meets among the shot put and discus teams. The weakest athlete again showed better performance in the team setting, as opposed to in the individual competition. In contrast, the authors found a slight trend for the strongest athletes not to perform as well in team relays, although those findings were not significant.

How can these findings be explained? The authors suggest that, in team relays, each athlete perceives him- or herself as an indispensable member of the team. If each athlete does not perform their best, then they will let the team down and the team will fail. In addition, via social comparison processes, weaker athletes might use the performance of stronger athletes as a motivation to up their game.

These findings suggest that people don't always loaf while in groups. In fact, the group or team setting might provide the perfect opportunity for the much-aligned weakest links to break free and shine.

Reference

- Osborn, K. A., Irwin, B. C., Skogsberg, N. J., & Feltz, D. L. (2012). [DOI: 10.1037/a0026887]. The Köhler effect: Motivation gains and losses in real sports groups. *Sport, Exercise, and Performance Psychology*, *1*, 242–253.

Case Study 3

Cures for group performance losses

Ellemers, de Gilder, and Haslam (2004) state that there is no best way to solve problems of motivation. However, they argue that understanding of self-categorization and social identity processes is important in understanding work motivation. More specifically, understanding of motivation may be enhanced when considering that the self can be defined in different ways (see chapter 4).

People may be motivated to behave in ways that support the role they play, or the social identity that is shared with others in that current situation. When, for instance, a situation activates the "individual" self, one should look at instrumental considerations of individuals, because workers will be motivated to attain individual goals. When the situation activates the "collective" self, however, workers will be motivated to enhance this collective self by pursuing shared goals, or by behaving according to this identity.

Regarding group performance, these authors have argued that collective identity should be enhanced to avoid social loafing and, as a result, improve collective performance.

Reference

- Ellemers, N., de Gilder, D., & Haslam, S. A. (2004). Motivating individuals and groups at work: A social identity perspective on leadership and group performance. *Academy of Management Review*, *29*, 459–478.

Case Study 4

The glass cliff: Why are women chosen to lead during times of crisis?

According to the text, women are preferred as leaders during times of threat or crisis. This preference is known as the *glass cliff effect* and it is endorsed by both men and women regardless of their level of sexism. As you were reading this section of the text, you may have wondered why people prefer female leaders at times such as these. Research on the glass cliff effect has shown that people do not prefer female leaders during times of crisis because they want to set them up to fail, or because those are perceived to be the only positions open to them (Ryan, Haslam, & Postmes, 2007).

Instead, Bruckmüller and Branscombe (2010) [DOI: 10.1348/014466609X466594] proposed that the previous leadership history of a company as well as people's gender stereotypes may both influence people's preference for females as opposed to males during times of crisis. Specifically, if a company has a long history of male leadership, then when times are good there is no reason to change the type of leadership. In contrast, during times of threat, the company may be motivated to make a change at the leadership level and hire a female instead. In addition, stereotypes of males as competitive and assertive may be perceived as less desirable during times of threat, whereas the stereotype that females are supportive and aware of others' feelings may be considered more appropriate and valuable characteristics during such times. These propositions led Bruckmüller and Branscombe to predict that the glass cliff effect will be more likely to occur in companies with a history of male leadership.

In their first study Bruckmüller and Branscombe (2010) asked participants to read about a company whose president was about to step down. They also learned that the company was either successful or was going through a time of crisis, and had a history of male leaders or a history of female leaders. The participants then read about a male and a female candidate and were asked which one they would select as the next president. The results showed that, when the company was experiencing a crisis, the female candidate was selected more often than the male candidate, but only when the company had a history of male leadership. In addition, during times of success in the historically male-led company, the male candidate was more likely to be selected as the next leader. In contrast, when the company had a history of female leadership, the male and female candidates

were equally likely to be selected during a time of crisis and during a period of relative success. These results argue against the idea that, during times of crisis, people prefer to select leaders of different genders. If that were the case, then the male candidate should be preferred in the historically female-led company. Instead, these results suggest that, for companies with a history of male leadership, a female leader is being selected for some other reason, perhaps because of the stereotypes people hold about females. Study 2 was designed to dig deeper into this issue.

In this study, participants again read about a company that was successful or that was in a period of crisis and whose president was about to step down. The participants then read about a male and a female candidate and rated each candidate on the extent to which they possessed a number of stereotypically female and stereotypically male traits. Finally, the participants rated how suitable each candidate would be for the position and then selected which candidate they felt would make the best president.

The results showed that, during times of crisis, the female candidate was more often selected to be leader than the male candidate. Intriguingly though, the participants did not select the female candidate for this position because she was perceived as better suited for the job. Instead analyses revealed that participants perceived males to be *less* suited for the leadership position when the company was in a time of crisis because they were believed to possess fewer stereotypically female characteristics (e.g., compared to women, men are perceived to have less skill in communicating and less ability to encourage others). So, because males don't measure up in this domain, the participants selected the female candidate during the time of crisis. In contrast, during times of success, the male candidate is perceived to possess a number of stereotypically male characteristics (e.g., competitive, striving for power) that are perceived to be beneficial, therefore he is perceived as more suited for the job and more likely to be selected as president.

What are the implications of these findings? The authors sum it up best by saying:

Our findings indicate that women find themselves in precarious leadership positions not because they are singled out for them, but because men no longer seem to fit. There is, of course, a double irony here. When women get to enjoy the spoils of leadership (a) it is not because they are seen to deserve them, but because men no longer do, and (b) this only occurs when, and because, there are fewer spoils to enjoy.

(Bruckmüller and Branscombe, 2010, p. 449)

References

- Bruckmüller, S., & Branscombe, N. (2010). [DOI: 10.1348/014466609X466594]. The glass cliff: When and why women are selected as leaders in crisis contexts. *British Journal of Social Psychology, 49*, 433–451.

- Ryan, M. K., Haslam, S. A., & Postmes, T. (2007). Reactions to the glass cliff: Gender differences in the explanations for the precariousness of women's leadership positions. *Journal of Organizational Change Management, 20*, 182–197.