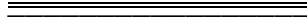
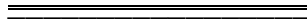


**The Bill Blackwood
Law Enforcement Management Institute of Texas**



**The Difficult Employee:
Causes and Effects of Bad Behavior**



**An Administrative Research Paper
Submitted in Partial Fulfillment
Required for Graduation from the
Leadership Command College**



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ABSTRACT

How a law enforcement agency manages its employees is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because the lack of proper direction can set the tone for a department, both from within and outside the agency. If not handled properly and efficiently, a problem employee has the ability to affect other employees from within their own department as well as project a negative image of their department to others they come in contact with. The purpose of this research is to assist supervisors in identifying employees that need intervention and also guide them in the proper handling, through counseling and documentation, and identifying what the consequences may be if not managed appropriately and efficiently.

The method of inquiry and ideas expressed herein are developed through the review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, and journals. A survey was distributed to 50 participants, and two personal interviews were conducted, one with a psychologist and the other a polygraph examiner, both specializing in law enforcement pre-employment evaluations. A law enforcement agency that understands the need for proper pre-employment measures and manages employees with a proactive approach on employee behaviors can develop an environment that is both effective and productive for its employees and the agency.

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INTRODUCTION

Many organizations struggle with difficult employees and the causes of the negativity they breed within an organization. A problem employee is usually identified by those behaviors that are not productive and are against the normal culture of their workgroup. According to Penny and Spector (2002), behaviors that are intended to harm the organization and their members are classified as counterproductive work behaviors. The issue to be examined by this research is whether there are identifiable personality traits within employees who participate in actions classified as counterproductive, why an employee becomes negative and disgruntled, and what effects the problem employee has on others in the work group and on the organization.

Law enforcement personnel are expected to work closely together and must be able to depend on each other to accomplish their primary objective: to protect and serve the public. This issue is critical to contemporary law enforcement organizations because, at times, officers' lives may depend on the mutual cooperation and understanding of others on their team as well as others within the organization. George (2002) noted that "work groups are a basic building block of organizations" (p. 183). When there are factors threatening the working dynamics of a group in a negative manner, those involved may be reluctant to follow orders, assist each other, or complete required tasks as necessary to the overall function of an organization. These actions may be done or not done with the intent to sabotage the overall mission of the group or the department. According to Giacalone and Rosenfeld (1987), sabotage is behavior intended to cause a loss for a specific person or organization and may stem from a

number of motivations. These motivations could be related to anything from personal issues to retaliation against the organization for disciplinary actions imposed.

Pellegrini (2008) wrote, "In business (and life), a person's attitude is everything – and that attitude is surprisingly contagious" (p. 61). A continually negative employee will, over time, influence and affect those that work around them with potentially damaging results. The purpose of this research is to evaluate what personality traits are most common in disgruntled employees, what actions can manifest due to those factors, what effect those actions have on others in a work group, and what should be done to prevent further damage to the entire organization. The secondary purpose is to determine proper management techniques that may extinguish the problems before they have the opportunity to manifest and grow.

The research questions to be examined focuses on what behaviors by an individual are deemed negative and problematic for an organization and whether there are common personality traits among those problem employees. As Benjamin (2008) noted, that there are a number of actions and attitudes that make up a problem employee. His list of characteristics includes: "disrespectful, abusive, vulgar, or rude language toward co-workers, managers, and/or customers, as well as poor attitude toward the company and/or co-workers" (Benjamin, 2008, p.11). How these behaviors impact others within a workgroup and what steps must be taken to correct the situation before all respect for supervisors and the organization is lost is also a main focus. The intended method of inquiry to be used by this researcher will include the gathering of data through the review of articles, internet sites, periodicals, journals, books and case studies, as well as a survey and personal interviews.

Weitzel (2004) explained that these individuals can have a considerable effect on a department and the community they serve, and systematic intervention by supervisors to address such problems quickly before the situation escalates out of control is critical. It is anticipated that further research will show that some of these problem employees share certain personality traits, and they intentionally and unintentionally pass on their negativity to other employees in a manner that can be detrimental to the overall goals of an organization.

This is a preliminary investigation into what can be a major issue for management personnel, and the field of law enforcement can benefit from any further research that provides “explanations for counterproductive workplace behaviors” (Martinko, Gundlach, & Douglas, 2002, p. 36). Conclusions that provide insight into these behaviors, their effects on others, and what should be done to prevent the spread of these negative influences may prove beneficial to those supervising this type of employee.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Law enforcement employs people with a variety of personalities, and employers must use a variety of approaches to deal with their employees due to those differing personality traits. There are a number of studies that have been conducted in an attempt to determine the causes of employee behavioral problems and what measures should be taken by an employer to maintain control of these time-consuming personnel issues. There are many theories that attempt to explain the causes and effects of counterproductive work behavior.

According to Martinko, Gundlach, and Douglas (2002), "Over the past decade, there has been an increase in attention to counterproductive workplace behaviors including violence, stealing, dishonesty, volitional absenteeism, drug and alcohol abuse, and aggression" (p. 36). In their article, they attempted to combine a variety of perspectives dealing with counterproductive work behaviors called paradigms. The three primary paradigms used were social learning theory (Bandura, 1977), reinforcement theory (Skinner, 1957), and expectancy theory (Vroom, 1964). The results allowed a comparison of many of the major theories based on their similarities and differences. This type of review does not give specifics on personality issues; however, it tries to explain how the relationship between individuals and their environment drives their actions.

Spector (1996) examined a model that demonstrated how issues or situations at work can lead to frustration and what role that frustration will have on the employee's behavior. Spector (1996) labeled situations that interfere with one's personal goals a "frustrator" (p. 3). These goals may be short or long term goals and may be anything from getting off work on time to being promoted, etc. These types of experienced frustrations manifest differently in different people. But, according to this model, the employee's reaction to the frustrator can result in anything from fear to hostility to social insensitivity.

Konrath, Bushman and Campbell (2006) explained and compared the findings of two studies they conducted relating to egotism, threat, and aggression. Study one used online responses to questions to measure traits of self-esteem and narcissistic entitlement. A variable was introduced in one group of participants, same birthdays, to

determine if the results would show a variance. The results showed that in the group with the differing birthdays from their partners, there was a greater relationship between narcissistic entitlement and aggression than in the group with like birthdays. In the second study, the test used a different manipulation to determine if aggression increased only with ego-threatening feedback. Again, following the ego threat, the tests showed an increased relationship between narcissism and aggression (Konrath, Bushman, & Campbell, 2006). This research suggested that there is a relationship between narcissism and aggression when there is a threat to one's ego.

Though none of the prior studies deal directly with law enforcement personnel, the studies attempt to prove or disprove relationships between people and their actions. People's actions are driven by various influences; however, each person's actions or reactions are different. In the Clay-Yates Study, explained by Robinette (1982), a questionnaire was provided to a national sample of police supervisors. The purpose of the study questions was to gather insight into marginal and unsatisfactory law enforcement employees. This study was conducted in 1981, and much can still be applied today from the conclusions drawn by the researchers.

First, Robinette (1982) explained, researchers concluded that law enforcement employee's behavior and attitude seemed to change based on tenure in the business. Second, results appeared to show that there was a bigger concentration of problem employees in certain age brackets, and it showed the primary factor leading to the problem employees. The study results showed that there was a larger concentration of problem employees between the ages of 30 and 34 and that most had been employed in law enforcement for between six to ten years. In the study's diagram, labeled Primary

Cause of Employee Problem Area, the category labeled “Employee,” which the article explained to mean “external influences, i.e., factors away from the job environment,” showed to be another primary factor.

Robinette (1982) used these results, along with his own research, and surmised that employee expectations and motivations drive these patterns. Basically, he stated that “needs change; therefore, behavior changes” (Robinette, 1982, p. 14). Robinette called this the “Expectation Curve” (p. 15). His study explained that when a person is young and in the early stages of a career, the person has high expectations of achievement, success, and personal goals. They want more and when one’s desires are not met, frustrations begin to set in. This age bracket falls in the early 20s to early 30s. Employees in this bracket are usually more tolerable of work conditions and their surroundings, but any obstacles that would potentially restrict their opportunities and advancement is met with resistance leading to problems with the employee (Robinette, 1982).

The midlife phase sets in when the employee adjusts their expectations. There is a change in motivations and expectations, and they are more resistant to change. Employees that fall into this phase are more tolerant of rules and procedures as long as they stay constant. They react negatively to things that interfere with their schedule, seniority, or other perks. Employees in this group measure success in terms of making it through the day or the task at hand. The data explained that employees in this group have usually been employed for eight to 16 years and are usually in their mid to late 30s through their 40s. Advancement is no longer the primary tool used to measure their

success or personal worth, and they begin to do just enough to get by (Robinette, 1982).

Employees that fall into both groups can become marginal or low performing when they perceive their needs are not being met and they become frustrated. This article by Robinette and the studies contained within it provide information that may be used by managers to provide understanding into their employee's actions. This article gave similar explanations as to why employees become frustrated as did in Spector's (1996) article. Both conclude that when situations at work interfere with one's personal goals or what is important to an employee, they become frustrated, and this frustration guides their actions, often negatively.

Dr. Greg Reide, who conducts pre-employment psychological evaluations for police applicants, explained that he looks for a variety of indicators when he tests and interviews an applicant. He believes the best indicator to someone's future behavior is their past behavior. When he provides a report back to an agency after testing an applicant, he details information about truthfulness, self-control, prior anger or use of force incidents, and personal restraint issues. When asked whether he believes, based on training and experience, that future problem employees share a common trait such as narcissism, he explained that there is not any one characteristic or trait but a combination of traits that is more prevalent in certain applicants and future employees, with narcissism being one of them (G. Reide, personal communication, September 1, 2009).

As with each of the situations detailed above, the outcome is determined by the variables used in the tests performed. There appears to be no one standout predictor of

who will become a problem employee, only a blending of circumstances that, combined with the characteristics of the employee, may lead to potential problems. This is the primary reason that law enforcement agencies should, and many do, utilize a variety of pre-employment tests. They provide information to future employers about the prospective employee. Kelly Hendrix performs polygraph examinations on prospective police applicants for various agencies. He explained that he, too, attempts to determine what kind of employee a person will be based on their past. He advised that he looks at a variety of areas, including truthfulness/deceptiveness, violent tendencies, involvement with drugs and alcohol, as well as theft when testing an applicant. He explained that he is hired to provide details to the prospective employer about an individual, and they are to use this information, along with other information obtained during the background investigation, to determine if this is a viable candidate (K. Hendrix, personal communication, September 23, 2009). The most common variable involved in the case studies and interviews listed is that a person's actions seem to be driven by the situation.

The review of these articles, studies, and personal conversations reinforces the need for continual management training. It is important for employers to not only understand how to identify personnel with issues but also to know how to handle the situations in an attempt to deter future problems. The challenge for agencies is to determine the best way to handle their employees to either prevent or ease the damage that can result from a disgruntled, unhappy, marginal employee.

METHODOLOGY

The research questions to be examined considers whether or not employees with certain personality traits are more commonly classified as a problem employee and what other factors are involved that lead to an employee's bad behavior. Also, when issues with an employee are identified and proper management techniques are utilized to address a disgruntled employee, many believe the employee can be salvaged and become an asset to an organization. The researcher hypothesizes that research will show there are certain traits that are more common among problem employees, and with early detection and proper management techniques, employee strengths can be redirected and utilized in such a way that both the employer and the employee can benefit.

The method of inquiry will include a review of articles, Internet sites, periodicals, journals, a survey, and two personal interviews. Prior studies relating to personalities and workplace concerns will be reviewed and compared to determine current views on personality types as they relate to employment issues. The instrument that will be used to measure the researcher's findings regarding the subject of problem employees will include a survey and personal interviews. The size of the survey will consist of 12 questions, distributed to 50 survey participants from various agencies across the state of Texas. Personal interviews were conducted with two professionals with background and experience in law enforcement issues as it related to law enforcement hiring practices.

The response rate to the survey instrument resulted in 38 surveys being returned. The information obtained from the surveys will be analyzed by comparing the

participant's answers to the various questions asked to gather a broad view from persons in the industry. Their responses will also be compared, in related areas, to findings of the studies reviewed.

FINDINGS

According to Benjamin (2008), "management is wise to quickly address a difficult employee with a bad attitude" because, "negativism is contagious and can quickly impact an entire office" (p. 11). Of the eight studies and 16 articles reviewed, three studies and eight articles dealt with human behavioral issues in the work environment. These articles expressed the belief that management in any career field can benefit from training in strategies in dealing with problem employees. Efficient intervention is the key to prevent further problems with any employee.

Of the surveys returned, 24 noted that they were ranked as a lieutenant or higher, and the other 14 showed to be all sergeants, with one being a corporal. The responses show that the minimum number of employees supervised was four. The maximum number was 30, and the average number of employees being supervised was 8. One showed to have no employees routinely supervised. The information obtained demonstrates that respondents had knowledge and experience in management duties, including management of employees. Further questions were asked relating to department guidelines on required documentation when counseling with subordinates. Thirty-four respondents in the survey noted that their agency did require supervisors to document all counseling sessions with subordinates. All 34 also noted that they believed this was an effective tool, and it made a positive difference in the overall performance and attitude of the employees. The four that answered no when

asked if their agency required documentation all noted that the lack of documentation prevented their agency from adequately handling problem employees.

Participants in the survey were also asked questions relating to psychological exams. Though the state of Texas requires psychological exams for most new hires, 28 of the participants responded that they believe that having psychological exams as part of the hiring process was an effective tool in weeding out some potential future problems. Six of those that disagreed noted that they believed there were too many candidates that slipped through and later had serious employment issues. Some responses included comments about the psychological test only being a liability tool for the agency, i.e. the psych test looks for mental imbalances not good values, and there are many problem employees out there in the police field despite having had to take a psychological exam.

Finally, questions were asked about common personality traits displayed by difficult employees. Twenty-six respondents noted that they believe there were certain traits that were more common among co-workers classified as a problem. Traits listed as examples by respondents include controlling, insubordinate, defiant, disrespectful, rude, stubborn, and inflated egos. Twelve did not believe there were common traits shared among problem employees, and one noted that anyone has the potential to become a problem employee under the right circumstances.

DISCUSSION/CONCLUSIONS

The problem or issue examined by the researcher considered whether or not certain personality traits are more prevalent in someone classified as a problem employee and what an employer can do to manage a marginal, low performing, difficult

employee. The purpose of this research was to determine how to identify a difficult employee, recognize the causes and effects of their behavior, and understand how, with proper management techniques, the employees actions can be redirected to possibly minimize the damage caused by their behavior. The research question that was examined focused on behaviors of employees that are problematic to an organization and what personality traits are more common among individuals classified as a difficult employee. It was determined that it is usually a combination of personality traits combined with other factors that lead an employee to act out, not just one.

The researcher hypothesized that research would show there were certain personality traits that were more common among difficult employees, and their negativity influences other employees as well as the general public those employees come into contact with. As stated above, it is believed to be a combination of traits or characteristics that lead an employee to become disgruntled. Disgruntled employees, as stated in some of the studies reviewed, will affect others they work with, and if the actions and attitudes are not dealt with in an effective and timely manner, this will result in moral issues and an increase in problems with other employees.

The researcher concluded from the findings that there is not any one personality trait that is more prevalent in individuals classified as problem employees; however, employees with a strong narcissistic personality, combined with certain triggers, are more likely to act out in a manner that can be negative and damaging to others in the workplace as well as the employer. The findings of the research did support the hypothesis; however, with limited studies on the exact issues, there was limited conclusive evidence that a narcissistic personality is more commonly found in problem

employees. The studies reviewed supported that an individual with a higher narcissistic personality have more frequent anger issues than others, and it can be inferred that this would also occur in the workplace (Konrath, Bushman, & Campbell, 2006; Penny & Spector, 2002; Spector, 1996). The studies reviewed that looked specifically at personality traits in employees could not narrow the scope down conclusively. Most studies on the topic identified a combination of traits or personalities that were influenced by other factors. The influence of the other factors seemed to be the trigger for the negative behaviors (Martinko, Dundlach, & Douglas, 2002; Robinette, 1982).

Limitations that might have hindered this study resulted because many of the studies reviewed dealing with problem employees looked at influences at work unrelated to personality trait, and others looked at personality traits that were not all conducted in relation to a person's employment. The studies were general enough, though, that they can be used to train employees in management positions to have a better understanding of how personalities combined with other influences will react differently and how to handle employees with these stronger personality types better. Other limitations that further hindered this study would include the small group of survey respondents and the fact that they were all from one geographical region. Results may have been different with a larger sampling of law enforcement officials and from varying geographical areas.

The study of difficult employees is relevant to contemporary law enforcement because there are a large number of police personnel with strong or dominant personality types. Law enforcement employees, in turn, must deal with each other and the general public every day. They are put in positions where they may be verbally or

physically abused, they deal with traumatic situations, and moral issues among their fellow employees can add to the pressure. Police personnel, at every level, stands to benefit from the results of this research because understanding one's own personality traits as well as the characteristics of others can ensure their actions will not escalate a situation. This is true for management personnel as well.

Understanding difficult people makes it less frustrating when dealing with them and effectively handling difficult employees is the key to being a successful manager. Information obtained through the review of numerous articles and studies supported the belief that employers need a system in place that allows a good working environment for employees and proactive response when issues arise that threaten the cohesive working environment of any group.

Law enforcement agencies need to ensure they have a clear and understandable policy manual that defines what is considered acceptable and unacceptable behavior from its employees, and it must be reviewed with all employees upon hiring. Supervisory staff should be knowledgeable of the policy manual and have formal training on the steps needed to correct any actions that are defined as unacceptable in the policy manual. Most importantly, both supervisors and staff must believe that they will be supported by the chain of command when actions are taken to correct any problems that arise.

Many employers conduct annual performance evaluations; however, according to Benjamin (2008), a study developed by the Aberdeen Group revealed that "only eleven percent indicate that they are very satisfied with the current process" (p. 12). During annual evaluations, supervisors tasked with this process must have proper training.

Annual evaluations must be fair and understandable and should include situations that have been discussed since the last evaluation. They, too, should provide attainable goals and set timelines to be followed up on. Supervisors must have an understanding of the different job descriptions and clearly define that job performance as it pertains to each subordinate. It is hard to remove the human element from this process, but employees must believe that they are going to receive a fair and accurate account of their job performance without personal feelings being involved.

Dealing with difficult employees in the workplace is a relevant topic to law enforcement. Law enforcement employs people from all walks of life who bring various backgrounds and views with them. Though there is no pre-test that conclusively determines who will become a problem employee, there are indicators and clues that, when trained, can assist management in identifying potential problems. Most of the studies reviewed concluded that there is no one personality trait that is predominant in difficult employees, but there is a blending of traits that, when combined with other triggers, lead to problems with some employees. Police in general tend to have strong personalities and law enforcement training only reinforces the need for control. With all these factors combined, it is critical that management ensure that their supervisory staff be properly trained in understanding personalities, identifying counterproductive behaviors, and utilizing proper counseling techniques. Poor moral and hostile working conditions must be controlled and managed to ensure that a department's mission can be achieved: to protect and serve.

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APPENDIX 1

The Bill Blackwood Law Enforcement Institute of Texas ARP Survey

Topic – Dealing With Problem Employees

1. What is your rank within your department? _____
2. Do you directly supervise other employees? Yes or No
3. How many employees do you directly supervise? _____
4. How many years experience do you have in a supervisory capacity?

5. Does your department require a psychological evaluation as part of your pre-employment hiring process? Yes or No
6. Do you believe this is an effective tool of weeding out potential problem employees? Yes or No
7. If you answered No on question 6 above, please explain.

8. Does your department require supervisors, as part of their duties, to complete detailed documentation when dealing with and counseling subordinates?
Yes or No
9. If you answered No on question 8 above, do you believe this lack of documentation has prevented your agency from adequately handling problem employees? Yes or No

10. If you answered Yes on question 8 above, do you believe documenting problems/issues with subordinates makes a difference in the overall performance and attitude of the employees? Yes or No

11. Do you believe that certain personality traits are more common in employees that are considered habitual problem employees? Yes or No

12. If you answered Yes on question 11 above, what would some of those traits be?

Additional comments or ideals:

Thank you for your participation in this survey.

Please return your survey to:
Melinda Bradshaw
Humble Police Department