CIVILITY IN THE WORKPLACE:
CREATING HEALTHY AND SAFE WORK ENVIRONMENTS

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Integrated Studies Project
submitted to Dr. Raphael Foshay
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts – Integrated Studies

Athabasca, Alberta
April 2009
Abstract

As a result of a number of violent rampage incidents that have occurred in educational institutions in Canada and the United States, the researcher began to question why these incidents appear to be happening more frequently as a workplace threat. The question to guiding this project asks if there has been a decrease in civility that is causing an increase in violent incidents in workplaces in general that result from declining civility. Civility for this project is defined as being constantly aware of others by positively relating to them, cultivating reciprocal respect with them, building relationships with them, and identifying with them as well as demonstrating a healthy concern for the community and for the planet. Is lack of concern for others in the community resulting in increased violence? After a literature review and small survey (39 respondents), it has been concluded that civility is declining, and to address this situation, organizations need to ensure they have systems and structures in place to prevent and minimize potential risks for violence. This will require concerted efforts in terms of time and resources by organizations to ensure that they are creating healthy, safe work environments through focused civility programs.
Acknowledgements

The author wishes to express sincere appreciation to Dr. Nina Erfani and Dr. Raphael Foshay for their support in completing this project. Thanks to my mother, Monica for her constant support and encouragement, Dave Landolt for his constant words of wisdom, and my family, friends, and co-workers for their valuable input and/or emotional support in completing the MAIS program and this project. In addition, special thanks to John Guigon whose familiarity with the program and friendship were helpful during the development of this project even though he thinks his contributions were minimal.
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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction & Background

It’s 9:00 AM on a sunny Thursday morning in August as I sip on my coffee enjoying the last couple of days of vacation. Suddenly through the wood framing of my duplex, I hear the pounding bass of a stereo. There is a considerable lack of consideration by my neighbours who have been made aware of the disturbance their music causes me on my side of our duplex. Their lack of courtesy is not only affecting my quiet enjoyment of my home, I am getting angry—angry enough to want to go next door and hit them in the head. My adrenalin starts pumping, my mood has been altered, and they are causing me to resent and even hate them.

It probably does not help that for some reason I turned on my work Blackberry at 8:00 AM. I was greeted with a flurry of emails that reflect narrow-minded thinking of some of my co-workers—emails bordering on rudeness that reflect these individuals have failed to plan and prepare for changes needed within their departments. They accuse the organization of not cooperating with them because it is failing to look after their needs. Because of their lack of ability they are passing blame for their mistakes to the next most available person in accusatory emails copied to the next higher level. This just escalates matters beyond the players involved requiring the higher ups to have to read another email in their 300 emails a day pile, and to have to provide direction on matters that did not require their participation.

Lack of self-awareness in the people around me has now soured my day. So early in the morning, if I didn’t have a level of awareness of my mood and attitude or good mental health, I could go out into the world annoyed with the human species. Fortunately, my common sense, good mental health, and—well, honestly—lack of access to a gun will prevent me from taking my frustrations out on some unknowing victim. I have learned to manage my frustrations. I go for a walk or a caramel blended beverage at the local coffee shop, or call a friend who will let me
vent and then will make me laugh. But the frustration builds, lingering in my mind. And had this been a day where my emotions got the best of me, would I now be the subject of a feature on the national news?

Some people might argue that the way people act today has not changed from 10 or even 50 years ago. They might argue that what has changed is the speed, availability, and volume in which news and information is communicated. Electronic devices also keep us available to our employers 24/7, or computers in the home through which we can access email and work files have people giving up much of their free time to respond to demands of bosses and co-workers alike. This does not change the fact that it seems as though every time the news is on, the public is hearing of more gun violence, not just on the streets but also in schools and workplaces. It becomes humour for some people to hear of someone who “goes postal” one day, as neighbours describe the individual as ‘quiet’ or that ‘they kept to themselves.’

A few authors such as P.M Forni and Giovinella Gonthier write about civility, hearkening back to a time where people were pious and proper — when civility, manners, and common courtesy were a way of life. This paper is not an expectation for a return to days gone by but rather setting an expectation for behaviours in the 21st century workplace...an expectation of returned phone calls or emails, that one’s lunch is not stolen from the office refrigerator, and that people demonstrate respectful, even thoughtful treatment of others. Perhaps this paper is about creating a culture of professionalism regardless of the type of occupation, organization, or industry. The research question for this project asks if there has been a societal shift in how people treat each other that is resulting in increasing illness and violence in the workplace. My hypothesis is to determine whether there has been a decline in civility that has seen a rise in violent incidents in the work environment, and therefore what can be done to address the issue.
Operational Definition

In his book *Choosing Civility: The Twenty-five Rules for Considerate Conduct*, P. M. Forni (2002) has prepared a fairly extensive and inclusive definition of civility. For the purposes of this project, I will refer to Forni’s (2002) definition:

Courtesy, politeness, manners, and civility are all, in essence, forms of awareness. Being civil means being constantly aware of others and weaving restraint, respect, and consideration into the very fabric of this awareness. Civility is a form of goodness: it is gracious goodness. But it is not just an attitude of benevolent and thoughtful relating to other individuals; it also entails an active interest in the well-being of our communities and even a concern for health of the planet in which we live (p. 9).

In her book *Rude Awakenings: Overcoming the Civility Crisis in the Workplace*, Giovinella Gonthier (2002) describes civility as having less to do with the “formal rules of etiquette than with an overall concern about treating others in a sensible, understanding manner” (p. 24). Gonthier (2002) goes on to say “workplace civility in particular is behaviour that helps to set and preserve standards. It consists of workers positively relating to one another, cultivating reciprocal respect, building relationships, and learning to identify with their colleagues” (p. 24).

The Collins Essential English Dictionary describes civility as polite or courteous behaviour. Most dictionaries do not stray far from this same definition. The Oxford Canadian Dictionary (2006) defines it as politeness. Merriam-Webster (2000) however, first defines civility as *archaic*: training in the humanities then as 2 a: civilized conduct; *especially*: COURTESY, POLITENESS b: a polite act or expression.

I would summarize that a definition of civility in the workplace appropriate for my investigation would be the following:
Civility means being constantly aware of others by positively relating to them, cultivating reciprocal respect with them, building relationships with them, and identifying with them as well as demonstrating a healthy concern for the community and for the planet.

**Background**

The world has changed and continues to change (Forni, 2002). Employment contracts have changed (Bridges, 1994), yet most employers in North America are screaming that there is a shortage of labour even as economies boom and bust. Meanwhile, the cost of living goes up and companies raise prices to be able to afford the salaries and wages of the employees they are able to retain. The demands of rising living costs make work a necessary evil. Whether it is in the trades or an office tower, people are busy working. Additionally, with the shortages of skilled labour, the employees that remain in some workplaces are that much busier, increasing levels of stress at work and at home.

Changes to health care systems and shortages of people resources make accessing public systems for help difficult. Changing employment contracts minimize access to employee assistance programs. Those without employer benefits are left to fend for themselves in a world with rising costs and cutbacks to government programs for assistance. However, in a report “Terror Nine to Five: Guns in the American Workplace, 1994-2003” findings suggest that:

- About half of those who commit workplace shootings had experienced a “negative change in employment,” such as firing, demotion, suspension, and involvement in disputes.
- Nearly a third of the workplace shootings occur in white-collar job settings.
- More than 90 percent of the shooters in these incidents are male.
This seems to have become an increasingly recurring item in journals such as the *International Nursing Review* and *Workforce* and in newspapers such as the *New York Times* and *USA Today*. Trying to maintain work/life balance, doing more with less, shortages of labour, road rage, and going postal seem to have become common catchphrases of the 21st century among business people and academics. The questions become how much of a reality is this situation, and is it a reality for North America and around the world, and, finally, at what cost?

**Research Question**

At what costs are people sacrificing to keep businesses productive or to make ends meet? What toll does this take on the individual? Has society become so wrapped in individual needs that society is starting to see breakdowns in our concerns for each other, the community, and the planet? These are just a few of the questions that need to be reviewed to answer the research question for this project. *Has there been a societal shift in the way in how people treat each other that is resulting in decreased civility and increased violence in the workplace? If so, why has this occurred, and what can be done to address this decline in civility?*

**Purpose**

The intent for this project is to conduct a literature review to grasp current knowledge related to my research question, to create and conduct a survey to explore the perceptions of people from different workplaces related to the question, and to complete analysis of the survey results, applying theoretical concepts to those perceptions regarding civility. I will present a case to support my hypothesis that there has been a decline in civility that has seen a rise in violent incidents in the work environment. At the end of the project I will make recommendations that
could be applied generally in workplaces to facilitate greater civility through informing policy and practice related to social conduct, as well as make recommendations for future research in this area.

One of the intended outcomes of this project is primarily to determine whether my hypothesis is correct. Is there is a problem with civility in the workplace, or is this just my perception? The other outcome will be to determine civility strategies that could be implemented generally in organizations that would support the creation of healthy work environments. This would be accomplished with recommendations for policies and policy changes within organizations, as well as for creation of benefit programs that support healthy and safe work environments. Both avenues set expectations of behaviours and treatment of people in organizations. Recommendations for further research will also be offered.

The learning objectives of this project are

1) To generate a modern working definition of civility
2) To analyze differing theories on civility and workplace safety
3) To create a coherent and methodologically appropriate survey to explore my interest
4) To analyze perceptions and attitudes of survey participants relating to civility in the workplace
5) To apply theoretical concepts to analysis of practical participant responses
6) To make recommendations for future research, and to contribute to reducing gaps in civility in the workplace by making recommendations to leaders, social scientists, and policy makers.
Interdisciplinary Approach

The interdisciplinary nature of this project consists of trying to construct a fuller understanding of my topic through connecting and taking into account the contributions of a variety of disciplines. The contributions that various disciplines such as psychology, religion, or management theory offer to a review of civility in the workplace allow for a broader understanding of the possible root of the problem, as well as possible creative solutions that may not have been expected (Dillon, 2008). The core goal in trying to take a cross-disciplinary approach to this topic is related to the belief that within a variety of disciplines we will find common structures and values (Dillon, 2008). For example, both psychology and religion attempt to assist patients/clients/parishioners to live healthy, productive lives even though their methods may in some respects overlap and in others diverge from one another. Meanwhile, management practices and literature are often focused on profit and performance, yet a large percentage of literature and new practice is now focused on employee engagement, recruiting and retaining, and employee motivation. This can be seen in the shift away from scientific management and classical management theory, with its narrow, authoritarian and dehumanizing perspective of work and employees (Morgan, 2006).

Interdisciplinarity can mean different things to different people. For the purposes of this project it reflects a transfer of methods from one discipline to another through a dialogue, and with the expectation that it will be transformative, “producing new forms of knowledge” (Dillon, 2008, pp. 256-257). How the various disciplines will support this research project include considering the ways in which the various disciplines begin to discuss and review human issues in and out of the workplace. Additionally, looking at the topic of civility in the workplace...
through only one lens would provide a narrow perspective on the roots of the problem, as well as narrow solutions to addressing it (Dillon, 2008).

As noted above, part of the intent of completing this project is to review literature regarding civility, workplace safety, and safety incidents with regard to violence in the workplace, bullying, and harassment. Contemporary thought from leadership and management, sociology, applied social psychology, psychotherapy, organizational theory, and religion will be used, as I anticipate that their combined views will offer insights into

- how managers and leaders view their ethical duties in creating policies to ensure civility in the workplace
- the general societal patterns related to my question (e.g. not discussing or noticing distress and how that, over time, may lead to workplace violence)
- the psychological dynamics involved in cumulative lack of civility that may lead to violence in the workplace
- how religion—its moral codes—underpins understandings of civility

The insights of these disciplines provide frameworks for understanding societal perceptions around change and the impact change is having on the workplace. In turn, this helps to reveal if the workplace has become less civil, and therefore, increasing the chances of violence.
CHAPTER TWO

Review of the Literature

The interdisciplinary nature of this project requires assessing the nature of civility. This means considering literature from religion, psychology, discourses on violence in the workplace, and human resource management, as well as on civility itself. Within the formal fields of religion, psychology, and human resource management, the frameworks submitted by scholars seek to achieve and identify understanding of self and others. Religion and psychology, human resources management and business practices will ultimately want to support healthy individuals and groups for the purposes of maintaining healthy operations. While the methods and outcomes may be very different, understanding human needs and wants through these lenses will better allow us to create work environments that are healthy and safe.

The Erosion of Trust

The voice over tagline on the 1996 movie version of Romeo and Juliet announced, “This is not your father’s Shakespeare.” The same can be said about the world in which we live. Society is no longer operating “out of limited knowledge of the world” (Spong, 2001, p. 24) making concerted efforts to understand and learn about what is happening in the world so as not to fall victim to fraud or scandal. With more cautious and educated approaches to how we view and operate within the world, there has also been a loss of faith in authority, which includes loss of faith in the church (Spong, 2001). A variety of public scandals in businesses, the public sector, not-for-profit organizations, and the church have changed how people view and interact with the world. These scandals lead to distrust in authority.

While some might argue that they have never trusted private enterprise, the Enron case is currently the largest corporate bankruptcy case in US History (www.cbsnews.com;
www.cnn.com) and has been described by a member of the Enron task force as “the 9/11 of the financial markets” (Thomas, Fulton, Grossman, & Kingsbury, 2006, n.p.). At the end of a detailed investigation, in June 2006, Kenneth Lay, Chief Executive Officer, was convicted on 10 out of 10 conspiracy and fraud changes while Jeff Skilling, Chief Operating Officer, was convicted on 19 out of 28 charges (Sloan, 2006). Andrew Fastow, Chief Financial Officer, was charged with 98 charges but made a plea bargain and pled guilty to two counts of wire and securities fraud. In exchange, Fastow received a 10-year sentence without the opportunity for parole, agreed to cooperate with authorities to identify all of the players involved in Enron’s fraudulent activities, and to surrender $23.8 million (http://enron/usafastow11404plea.pdf; Sloan, 2006; Rogers, 2004).

A documentary called The Smartest Guys in the Room, suggests that there was great potential for Enron, yet these stars of industry were corruptible, losing money that was due to employees and investors. These types of events cause society to be more cautious of their investments and more leery of individuals running corporations.

These types of scandals are not reserved for the private sector. Within Canada’s federal government, Mr. Justice John H. Gomery was able to establish that there had been partisan political involvement in the administration of a Sponsorship Program; insufficient oversight by senior public servants; deliberate actions taken to avoid compliance with federal legislation and policies; a culture of entitlement among political officials and public servants involved with Sponsorship initiatives; and the refusal of Ministers, senior officials in the Prime Minister’s Office and public servants to acknowledge any responsibility for the mismanagement that had occurred (Gomery, 2006).

The details of this case have been far less sensationalized than that of Enron but it garnered significant attention in public and political circles in Canada. It could be because the spending associated with the Sponsorship Program from 1994 to 2003 totalled $332 million (Gomery,
And of that money, $147 million was spent on commissions and fees to a select group of advertising agencies (Gomery, 2006).

Again, society, in this case Canadian society, begins to or further distrusts politics and politicians. Society is taxed to support government activities. To find out that the government, whom we have elected to power is inappropriately using tax payer money again, makes society question who it can trust. This erosion of the public’s trust forces individuals to question what has been deemed an “authority” and creates a fear based system in which individuals must look out only for themselves.

Although one might trust those in the not-for-profit sector as altruistic humanitarians, the individuals that run these organizations are still human. The United Way has seen its share of fraudulent activity in a number of its US locations, and at the highest level, including the President of the United Way of America. In a case against Oral Suer who ran the United Way of the National Capital Area (UWNCA) in Washington, DC for 27 years until his retirement in 2001, auditors were able to determine was that Suer had received payments totalling approximately $786,300 from 1974 to 2002 in addition to his salary for the same period of $1,747,500 (Wolverton, 2003).

Suer was found guilty of fraud and sentenced to 27 months in jail and ordered to pay $497,000 in restitution (Wolverton, 2004). Charles Anderson, the UWNCA chief executive states that an audit in August 2003 suggests that Suer actually received $2.4 million dollars more than his approved compensation and paid back less than half (Wolverton, 2004). In this case, the public donates funds in an effort to help the less fortunate only to discover that those we have trusted in altruistic positions are defrauding the charities of funds. Many in our society are left feeling isolated and alone.
Business leaders, church leaders, teachers, and police officers are all individuals seen as holding some position of power and trust, real or perceived, in our communities, organizations, or countries (Malandro, 2003). If the people we were taught to trust and respect fall under public scrutiny—particularly those who were thought to be there “for the people,” such as teachers, priests, and police officers—this can cause individuals to question what they were previously taught. Even though it may only be a handful of individuals who are involved in scandalous activity, entire groups will be painted with the same brush. Respect for authority wanes and the “crisis of authority” results as individuals make more effort to further their knowledge of the world (Forni, 2002, pp. 167-8).

The Breakdown in Community

Scandals cause those of us in society to decide it is no longer appropriate to blindly go along showing “unquestioning deference not only to established power but also to established values in general” (Forni, 2002, p. 168). Deference and respect disappear as individuals start to question authority and values. Values that have been handed down from church and state are called into question. Society sees leaders in all walks of life participating in acts that would be wrong based on what they have been taught. Values such as ‘do not steal’ or ‘do not commit adultery’ become difficult to accept when those in whom we have placed our trust are violating those values. Society begins to shift because it no longer holds traditional values dear (Gonthier, 2002).

While traditional values have become obsolete, developing new ones is a daunting task (Forni, 2002). Values must be present as it is through shared values that societies can define what is appropriate in how we as people are to treat each other. Without shared values, civility declines. Civility means being constantly aware of others by positively relating to them, cultivating
reciprocal respect with them, building relationships with them, and identifying with them as well as demonstrating a healthy concern for the community and for the planet. This requires a shared set of values that provides guidelines for how people should treat each other.

The question would also be whose task is it to create this new set of values? People stop going to church, thereby losing a sense of one kind of community, but they also question what has been passed on to them by their elders. The crisis of authority not only separates individuals from what they understand about how to operate in the world, but also causes them to question their identity. Identity issues can stem from feelings of isolation and alienation—we start turning away from the community and looking for answers within ourselves. Self-reliance is not a bad thing; however, “group membership is one of the most powerful factors in our emotional lives” (Ben-Ze’ev, 2001). It requires similarity between persons in the group and interdependence between members. However, if society and individuals are veering away from traditional forms of authority and values, the membership starts to lose their shared norms (Ben-Ze’ev, 2001). We look to our group for similarities and comparison. Groups can include the individual’s economic class, ethnic group, religious group, political party, or workplace group (Ben-Ze’ev, 2001).

Forni (2002) discusses that greater emphasis on self-esteem is reducing levels of civility in society—that higher levels of self-esteem then cause individuals to be less concerned about the welfare of others. In early development, children are being taught to believe that they are special, but at the same time, they are not being taught that everyone else is special too (Gonthier, 2002). Forni (2002, p. 24) suggests that the self-esteem that is being developed lacks an understanding for self-control and then results in narcissism and self-absorption. Focus on the self, independent of external variables, can have several effects. If society has moved toward the
questioning of authority and lost its connection with the community, this just further facilitates a lack of concern for the welfare of others.

Within Adlerian Psychology or Individual Psychology, the cognitive maps that each person will develop include an image of self, understanding of who each person is, each persons perceptions of the external world, and awareness of distinctions between right and wrong (Mosak, 2000). Using these maps, the individuals “facilitates their movement through life. This permits them to evaluate, understand, experience, predict, and control experience” (Mosak, 2000, p. 67). Understanding of the self is greatly influenced by parents, guardians, teachers, and siblings. How each person is raised, and their resulting perception of the world, is then carried into the workplace.

*Isolation and the Search for Meaning*

Loss of faith in authority and a sense of disconnection from core values in general nevertheless leaves each individual searching for meaning and purpose. The raison d’être for both religion and psychology as disciplines is to speak to and explore the longing to understand the drive for meaning, and for connection to something greater or more powerful than the self, e.g. ‘what is my purpose in life?’ Both religion and psychology are forms of knowing (Serrano, 2006). Society, individuals, seek deeper meaning and a “desire for there to be a Something Else calling the shots and running the show” (Shermer, 2000, p. 34). Both psychology and religion assist clients and parishioners to find patterns in life and nature (Shermer, 2000). This search for patterns, real or not, has been found to be hardwired in human brains (Shermer, 2000). “We seek and find patterns because we prefer to view the world as orderly instead of chaotic” (Shermer, 2000, p. 62).
In the search for understanding and meaning in life, the individual may reach out to the church or a therapist for help. Addressing issues of violence, stress, worry, addictions, or the host of other challenges that will arise in a person’s life can all be guided within either a therapeutic or a religious context. While the methodologies will vary, in both cases the patient / parishioner will seek tools to deal with his/her conflicts and alleviate the pressure so that s/he may live a healthy life – mentally, emotionally, or physically. Furthermore, both religion and psychology provide guidance to help individuals and society live their lives in the present and in recognition of the importance of interpersonal relationships. Group counselling and church services can be integral to developing and maintaining a sense of community as well as a sense of identity through affiliation to a group.

However, group counselling may not always be a prescribed means of treatment and lack of trust in the church has reduced attendance in church services (Spong, 2001). So in the search for meaning, individuals may feel isolated from the communities in which they live, from communities, or cultural or religious groups. This then eliminates any outlet that an individual may have to develop ability to thoughtfully relate to and be aware of others. The result is greater self-reliance in how we relate to the world, which can result in less concern for others and thereby reduced civility.

*Impact on the Workplace*

Trying to self-manage can leave a person feeling lost, desperate, and isolated (Denenberg & Braverman, 1999). Individuals then go to work with all of their dysfunctions or preconceptions intact. In 1999, Falkenburg, Stone, and Meltz wrote that a growing area in employee benefits was employee assistance programs (EAP). These programs focused on alcoholism but expanded to include problems with drugs and psychosocial issues (Falkenburg,
The program was to include counselling and other forms of assistance for a variety of problems or topics, but was part of a larger focus on wellness programs to promote good health among workers (Falkenburg et al., 1999). Organizations perhaps were starting to recognize that employees did not leave their dysfunctions at home when they came to work, and that principles of scientific management are no longer useful tools for managing the workplace (Morgan, 2006). Principles of scientific management, to observe and measure work to achieve optimum modes of performance (Morgan, 2006), fail to take into consideration the employee as a human being.

The changing work environment and recognition of the employee as a human being challenged organizations to focus greater attention on managing their people resources. Yet the transition has not been smooth and has not kept pace with the rate of change occurring in the world. Technology and demographic changes are just examples of the changes in society and the workplace that have not been addressed in every organization or in a timely fashion (Gonthier, 2002; Denenberg & Braverman, 1999). The challenge this presents is that issues within the workplace can be left to fester, which can cause workplaces to become toxic or uncivil. Problems in the workplace can then escalate into violence in the workplace.

Characteristics of Violence Prone Organizations

Denenberg & Braverman (1999, pp. 19-30) identify several factors that contribute to “violence-prone” workplaces. This includes competitive pressures, loss of personal autonomy, surveillance, cumulative physical and mental reactions (such as high blood pressure and depression), fatigue, and changing workplace demographics (e.g. ethnicity, gender) as contributors. “Violence expresses an overwhelming sense of desperation and isolation and growing conviction that nothing I can do will help or change my situation” (Denenberg &
Braverman, 1999, p. 19). When an individual reaches this breaking point in an organization that does not or refuses to recognize warning signs and has no systems in place to address the stress being placed on employees, the potential for violence can be created.

Individuals who feel lost and alone, struggling with their own identity, feeling divided from the world, then feel the stress of a workplace environment. Perhaps the work environment is not itself unhealthy, but the individual’s response to the pressures will be a result of patterns of behaviour and past responses (Watson & Tharp, 2002). This is the premise behind behavioural-based interview techniques employed by most human resources departments. Assuming that the best predictor of future performance is past performance, human resources professionals try to identify a variety of aspects about an individual’s personality, e.g. how the individual deals with stress, how s/he has demonstrated leadership skills, and how s/he works with conflict or in a team environment. However, it may be very difficult to determine an individual’s ongoing mental state or ability to communicate and interact with others outside of the interview process.

That said, organizations can put in their best efforts in terms of job analysis, attracting, recruiting, selecting and orientating of employees; however, the culture within an organization can then have detrimental effects on this investment of time and money. Edgar Schein (2004) describes culture with a greater emphasis on the impact culture can have on an organization by saying organizational culture is

...a pattern of shared basic assumptions that the group learned as it solved its problems of external adaptation and internal integration, that has worked well enough to be considered valid and, therefore, to be taught to new members as the correct way you perceive, think, and feel in relation to those problems (p. 17).

From organizational culture the organization’s values are formed. Values are the beliefs and ideas about the appropriate kinds of standard behaviours employees should use to achieve
goals (Hill & Jones, 2001). From the values norms will arise, which are the guidelines and/or expectations that prescribe the appropriate behaviours in particular situations and controls the behaviour of an employee toward another (Hill & Jones, 2001). This is important to note when looking at the culture of an organization if terms like ‘eat or be eaten,’ ‘sink or swim’ or ‘we beat the happiness out of our employees in about two years’ become commonly used phrases. This language and therefore the associated behaviour have been deemed appropriate because no effort is made to correct these attitudes.

If a culture of an organization differs from espoused values, for instance “people first” this can erode respect of the organization. In place of the desired values will come cynicism and bitterness by employees about how they are treated. This perpetuates a negative culture that exists, as new employees are taught this is the way people are treated. In this way, incivility is taught to new employees. But the effects on the culture of the organization and organizational health is just one issue when we consider the way employees treat each other. As I review the Virginia Tech website, I am struck by the fact that they don’t seem to have any stated values. There is information about the prevention of sexual harassment and violence and equality, but no statements on providing a safe work and learning environment for employees and students—no statements about employees and students at all even in the mission and purpose statement.

**Challenges of Incivility**

Reduced civility is not just a consequence of a toxic organizational culture. Even though toxic cultures can create an umbrella of expected or tolerated behaviour, there are other pressures on employees in the workplace that negatively impact the employees’ ability to cope and manage stress. The vicious cycle is that employees get more stressed and continue to treat each other badly. The work environment becomes more and more uncivil. The question remains: have
workplaces become less civil and why? Increased stress seems like an easy target, but we must understand how this might be different than what has historically been associated with work or life.

“Doing more with less causes unchecked incivility” (Gonthier, 2002, p. 20). A complaint often heard by Gonthier (2002) in her workshops is that people are wearing too many hats. The economy has shifted from industrialization to knowledge work, and principles of scientific management and general management theory have shifted to describe white-collar workers as people who are expected to produce a machine-like style of work with the requisite efficiency and continued normal functioning (Denenberg & Braverman, 1999). In this added stress, a new disorder has been identified—Information Fatigue Syndrome—due to the overwhelming level of job-related data being received (Denenberg & Braverman, 1999). The symptoms include “paralysis of analytical capability, increased anxiety, and self-doubt, and a tendency to blame others” (Denenberg & Braverman, 1999, p. 21). This stress leads to shoving, yelling, and phone slamming because when people feel disrespected it can trigger rage (Gonthier, 2002). Employees feel disrespected because a cycle of poor performance and reduced autonomy and accountability can result. It begins a downward spiral in the level of organization’s trust in an employee and an employee’s lack of confidence in themselves.

Competitive pressures can also be an issue in adding to stress levels (Denenberg & Braverman, 1999). Having a sense of personal economic security is just a basic human need (Morgan, 2006); yet, due to a shifting economy, there is an unprecedented level of personal economic insecurity (Denenberg & Braverman, 1999). At the most basic level, humans need to feel certain that each person can afford food, clothing, and shelter (Morgan, 2006). Economic strife threatens this basic level, which then threatens the high order needs, including safety,
belonging, and self-esteem (Morgan, 2006). This type of insecurity can cause symptoms that resemble the psychological effects of trauma, such as irritability, mood swings, anger, hostile behaviour, mistrust, depression, and withdrawal from family and social supports (Denenberg & Braverman, 1999). In the workplace, these symptoms can create an uncivil environment.

We’re tired. Society is becoming more sleep deprived (Gonthier, 2002; Denenberg & Braverman, 1999). People are spending more time at work to keep up and in the process reducing the amount of hours they are sleeping (Gonthier, 2002). With globalization and more businesses operating 24/7, time zones have lost meaning, and people are disrupting their body’s natural alarm clocks (Denenberg & Braverman, 1999) to try to ensure the employee is performing and protecting his or her position within the organization. The challenge is that attempts to combat fatigue can lead to reliance on chemical substances such as alcohol, illegal drugs, prescription drugs, and over the counter drugs (Denenberg & Braverman, 1999). Substance abuse can alter an individual’s moods and personality, as well as contribute to or worsen sleep problems, and therefore can be dangerous in the workplace. Even the smallest of alterations to sleeping habits can cause anxiety, depression, and stress further leading to irritability in the workplace (Gonthier, 2002).

The diversity of the workplace has also changed over the past 30+ years. In 2006, I attended a presentation by Sylvie Geneau, Assistant to the Vice-President, Artistic Products and Director, Special Projects for Cirque du Soleil Inc. Geneau highlighted that at that time Cirque du Soleil had 3,000 employees, which included 800 artists (performers), 40 nationalities, and more than 25 spoken languages. Cirque du Soleil has also performed in over 100 cities on 4 different continents. The culture of such an organization is significantly different than most, but is just one example of the diversity that can exist in a workplace. “Even a modest-sized
company may have dozens of nationalities... on the payroll” (Denenberg & Braverman, 1999, p. 28). This diversity has happened in the workplace without the inclusion of integrating forces such as programs to promote positive attitudes toward diversity (Denenberg & Braverman, 1999). “The result is dangerous misunderstandings, particularly when there are linguistic differences” (Denenberg & Braverman, 1999, p. 29).

However, language is not the only thing in workplace that can result in miscommunication and misunderstanding. The inclusion of technology in the workplace has created a new language for employees to learn. Making use of the technology at our disposal has changed the way people work and communicate with each other (Malandro, 2003). The technology emerged quickly, yet there has not been enough time to evaluate properly the limitations of its use, such as sending emotionally charged messages (Malandro, 2003). “Speaking with consideration and kindness is at the heart of civil behaviour. To speak kindly you need to be aware constantly that you are speaking to living, breathing, vulnerable human beings” (Forni, 2002, p. 60). The inclusion of technology in the workplace provides a variety of vehicles for communicating; however, technology has also removed the presence of the living, breathing, vulnerable human being. Email and voice mail are not the best tools for dealing with sensitive issues, and even when the sender thinks s/he is communicating well, the receiver may be detecting “criticism, judgement, and reaction” regardless of the medium being used (Malandro, 2003, p. 159). “Negative emotions and technology do not mix” (Malandro, 2003, pg. 159) and the speed at which technology has been integrated into the workplace has not allowed for organizations to reflect on the implications of technology in the workplace.
While most fatal incidents are occurring in America, this does not mean Canada is safe from risk. Several fatal incidents in Canada indicate Canadians, while perhaps to a limited extent, have access to weapons and are resorting to violence as their only means of dealing with their problems. What is absent in the search for literature on violence or civility in the workplace is the existence of materials regarding Canada. However, the Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) within the Canadian federal government has a website on workplace violence – [http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/violence.html](http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/violence.html). As well, another group, the Canadian Initiative on Workplace Violence (CIWV), has established an organization focused on studying and eliminating workplace aggression. The CIWV provides advice to employees, employers, students, health & safety organizations, mental health professionals, policy makers, unions, and anyone else interested in the welfare of the Canadian employee ([http://www.workplaceviolence.ca/home.html](http://www.workplaceviolence.ca/home.html)).

These resources would not exist if there were not a need for them in Canadian society. In defining workplace violence, it becomes apparent that these resources exist as a proactive approach to minimizing the escalation of incidents from verbal abuse to physical attacks. The notion of violence in the workplace may carry with it connotations of guns and fatalities; however, the OHS defines workplace violence, ranging from what could be considered incivility to physical violence. The definition reads:

- **threatening behaviour** - such as shaking fists, destroying property or throwing objects.
- **verbal or written threats** - any expression of an intent to inflict harm.
- **harassment** - any behaviour that demeans, embarrasses, humiliates, annoys, alarmed or verbally abuses a person and that is known or would be expected to be unwelcome. This includes words, gestures, intimidation, bullying, or other inappropriate activities.
- **verbal abuse** - swearing, insults or condescending language.
• **physical attacks** - hitting, shoving, pushing or kicking ([http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/violence.html](http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/violence.html)).

The OHS continues to describe the range of incidents they have deemed as being related to workplace violence.

Rumours, swearing, verbal abuse, pranks, arguments, property damage, vandalism, sabotage, pushing, theft, physical assaults, psychological trauma, anger-related incidents, rape, arson and murder are all examples of workplace violence.

They also offer thoughts on contexts for workplace violence.

Workplace violence is not limited to incidents that occur within a traditional workplace. Work-related violence can occur at off-site business-related functions (conferences, trade shows), at social events related to work, in clients' homes or away from work but resulting from work (a threatening telephone call to your home from a client) ([http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/violence.html](http://www.ccohs.ca/oshanswers/psychosocial/violence.html)).

Given the expanse of what “violence in the workplace” can include, a more appropriate term might be workplace aggression. However, as Gonthier (2002) and Denenberg & Braverman (1999) have highlighted, it can be the workplace pressures that result in increased incivility. These pressures and aggression left unaddressed can then escalate to responses that are more violent in nature. If we start to look at this as workplace aggression, establishing the parameters for investigating changes in violence, it is not to say that more information about Canadian statistics will now be more readily available.

In an article for the Canadian Traumatic Stress Network operating out of the University of British Columbia, Stephen Kennedy (2000) highlights that there is no consistency of reporting regarding workplace aggression. The tendency for most is to focus on the extreme acts of violence, but workplace aggression includes “any act against an employee that creates a hostile work environment and negatively affects the employee, either physically or psychologically.”
This means that aggression can be emotional, verbal (i.e., insults, swearing, shouting) and physical (i.e., biting, pushing, kicking and assault)” (Kennedy, 2000, ¶7). That said, it is difficult to draw a conclusion as to the level of workplace aggression in any aggregate and therefore national sense, as each provincial Workers’ Compensation Board (WCB) collects and analyzes information differently (Kennedy, 2000, ¶3) based on their own working definitions of workplace aggression.

There have been a few fatal incidents in Canada, but at this time, without further investigation of workplace and WCB records, it would be impossible to make a statement about the level of aggression occurring in the workplace. Given that workplace aggression can stem from insults, swearing and shouting, that in my own experience are becoming more and more common in work environments, I would surmise that many of these types of incidents go unreported and unnoticed by management, human resources, or health representatives within organizations. Again, to Denenberg & Braverman’s (1999) point, aggression is then left to fester and goes unaddressed because organizations and its leadership have failed to develop and implement the mechanisms to deal with violence prone workplaces. The result can be an escalation of the events to the level of physical violence, biting, pushing, kicking, and assault. If employees start to feel that there is nothing left to do that can help their situation, they may leave the organization (Denenberg & Braverman, 1999; Gonthier, 2002). Otherwise, employees unable to properly cope with the stressors and toxic environment may resort to violent and fatal actions.

Jean Twenge, a psychology professor from San Diego State University providing comment to CTV.ca, feels that there are fewer shootings in Canada than in the US because Canada has better gun control (CTV.ca, 2006). This does not provide much solace that Canadian
employees are not under the same levels of stress. This statement just indicates, as I did in my introduction, that perhaps fewer people are “snapping” purely due to lack of availability of weapons. Fatal or potentially fatal violence is still a risk in any organization anywhere.

**Violence as Pinnacle of Incivility**

While most workplace shootings seem be centred in the United States (Appendix B) there are a number of incidents that have occurred in Canada and elsewhere in the world. Some Americans argue that it is the availability of guns that is causing increases in the number of workplace shootings; however, the Director of the Washington National Rifle Association affiliate suggests, “guns are just a tool” (Weisler, 2004. n.p.). While I am not necessarily an advocate of the American constitution and the right to bear arms, I would agree that guns are just a tool. The question in my mind is why would any individual get to a point in which his/her only recourse to deal with frustration and anger in the workplace is to take up a weapon and kill co-workers or employers. Contrary to popular opinion, such incidents are not random and senseless but, according to Morgan (2006), typically result from conflict that has been allowed to fester and go unaddressed.

To my dismay, I discovered a website while researching sources for this project. The site is called How to Survive a School or Workplace Shooting (http://www.wikihow.com/Survive-a-School-or-Workplace-Shooting). This ‘how to’ wiki website, whether factually correct or not, exists because it has unfortunately become a reality for many. The most recent incident on April 16, 2007 is the shooting that occurred at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg VA. It is described as the deadliest school shooting in US history with 33 dead (including the shooter) and 20 wounded (MSNBC, 2007). The Columbine High School shooting in Littleton, CO that occurred on April 20, 1999 left 15 dead and 23 wounded (MSNBC, 2007).
During a course offered by Calgary Police Service, I learned that police departments across Canada are on alert for copycat incidents following the Columbine incident. No one would have predicted that the next incident would have been eight days later in Taber, AB at W. R. Myers High School where one was killed and another wounded. “It was the first fatal shooting at a Canadian high school in more than 20 years” (CTV.ca, 2000). The next incident was on September 13, 2006 when a gunman shot and killed one woman and wounded 19 more at Dawson College in Montreal, QC. (CTV.ca, 2006). The common thread I perceive from these incidents is that in all cases a troubled individual has gone unnoticed or unaddressed. I am left wondering if someone had reached out to any of these individuals, would it have been possible to deescalate the levels of their frustrations to prevent these incidents from happening.

These are references to school environments; however, it is important to note that these are also workplaces for employees. The Virginia Tech incident took the lives of five employees (http://www.recovery.vt.edu/). The result of the Virginia Tech incident was to review the procedures employed by campus police and administrators that could have minimized the casualties in this incident or have prevented it in the first place. This would include things such as addressing instructors’ concerns about the perpetrator’s mental health or by locking down the campus after a first incident occurred, rather than letting the school continue on with business as usual the morning. While there is no predicting this type of incident, red flags about the shooter were not necessarily addressed appropriately. As well, the communication process failed to ensure the safety of students and staff at Virginia Tech.

The majority of school shootings are a result of social rejection. Students who commit these shootings are typically described as loners, misfits, and socially awkward (CTV.ca, 2006). This is also a factor in workplace shootings; “Frequently, the perpetrator has been discharged or
suspended and is bent on revenge...” (Denenberg & Braverman, 1999, p. 10). “Montreal has had a workplace-type shooting in an academic institution. In 1992, Dr. Valery Fabrikant killed four of his Concordia University colleagues and wounded another. He blamed them for his not getting tenure and had other complaints about them” (CTV.ca, 2006).

Virginia Tech comes to be illustrative of organizations that don’t’ respond well to crisis regarding the response to violent situations. Organizations that are ill prepared to deal with violent situations typically:

- wait to react to crisis, pay lip service to human issues,
- terminate or punish problem employees,
- executives delegate responsibility down for programs and policies rather than taking on the accountability,
- communication is directed outwardly rather than to the organization,
- takes an adversarial approach to dealing with the organization rather than identifying a better ways to communicate and problem solve (Denenberg & Braverman, 1999, p. 18).

Conversely, the organization that is prepared to address these types of crisis will:

- maintain systems to collect, report, and analyze employee distress at early stages,
- cultivate mutual interest among stakeholders in the organization to deal with problems as they arise,
- have leaders that will develop and disseminate policies,
- support a climate for employees to feel comfortable communicating feelings of distress
- have leadership that feels a responsibility to respond to employee concerns, and
- not deny problems or seek to avoid dealing with them (Denenberg & Braverman, 1999, p. 18).

Summary

The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (OHS) defines that workplace aggression can range from threatening behaviour, to verbal or written threats, to harassment and
finally to physical attacks. This can be the result of or can cause incivility in the workplace. However, the stressors that can cause individuals to demonstrate uncivil behaviour stem from several factors. The overarching premise that has been identified in the literature is due to an erosion of trust in authority as well as disconnects from our communities and from each other. People are treating each other with a reduced level of respect and concern. As a result, people begin to feel more isolated from each other and question their identity because group identity is also missing. How people relate to each other is shifting and coping mechanisms to deal with stress may not be developed in the individual. These individuals then go to work with their dysfunctions in tact.

There appear to be six key areas that are resulting in a decline in civility, which in turn can result in an increase in aggression in the workplace. The key areas include:

- Stress from increased workload and work complexity
- Competitive pressures
- Fatigue and lack of sleep
- Increasing diversity and no organizational response to facilitate adaptation
- Technology and no the mixed psychological messages that come with its increased use
- Communication and its patchiness in the face of all of the above

After reviewing my survey results in light of these areas, I hope to identify that risk factors are present within society; therefore they present risk within organizations—enough risk warranting additional steps by Canadian workplaces to improve systems and structures to support creating or maintaining healthy and safe work environments.
CHAPTER THREE

Methodology

To complete this project, I created and conducted a survey of individuals in my personal contact list not necessarily associated to any particular workplace. The intent of the survey is not to get an understanding of any one workplace, but to get societal perceptions on civility in a variety of industries.

The methodological assumptions that inform my choice of using a survey are these:

- social reality is very much a matter of individual perception, social context, and time—there is no one pre-existing truth for all people, for all time, in all places
- people’s perceptions on a subject like workplace civility will likely have some consensus, since perception of reality is also a social construction
- having people articulate their perceptions and experiences is the closest we can come to truth
- language, even though it is culturally bounded and changes over time, is a strong indicator of reality
- a person can best offer his/her sense of the truth in any aspect of social reality through articulating his/her perception of reality

The survey includes currently included 29 scaled or yes/no items as well as 2 open ended items. The survey items were intended to explore aspects of my hypothesis, that civility is declining which is resulting in increased violence (p. 9-10), and are informed by the literature review. The survey was piloted with a few colleagues to test for ambiguity and interpretation by the individuals. Improvements were made before the survey was sent out.

The request to participate asked respondents to share the survey with friends or colleagues who may also be interested in completing the survey. While the initial contacts (approximately ten members) were comprised of professional contacts to generate participants, the rest came from professional acquaintances within the researcher’s workplace. None are
currently employed by or are receiving services from the researcher. No power relationships— where the researcher is in a position of influence—are involved. Some of these contacts are friends and acquaintances. While part of the same organization, these persons contacted within the researcher’s employment organization are friends and not co-workers. The initial contacts were reminded that their acquaintance with the researcher was intended for sampling purposes only, and that they were under no obligation to participate due to this acquaintance. No personal information was collected except for age, to be able to categorize responses by generations (e.g. veteran, baby boomer, gen X, and gen Y). The industry categories were loosely based on Industry Classification categories.

Data Collection

The primary means of data gathering for analysis was through a confidential online survey that is untraceable (within the realm of my expertise). All survey participants maintained anonymity. My contact information was included within an email message introducing the survey and at the start and end of the survey in the event any of the survey participants had questions regarding the survey and use of their responses.

The anticipated time commitment was approximately 15 – 20 minutes to complete the survey, with perhaps another 15 potential minutes worth of communication time regarding any questions or concerns they might have had.

The research data was collected in an online survey tool called Zoomerang. I purchased a three-month package to Zoomerang (September 19, 2008 – December 19, 2008). This is an American based company so data was stored on a server in the United States until it was downloaded to my computer. Data was only available to the researcher and faculty supervisor (if
required). The survey data was stored on the researcher’s personal computer, which is only accessible by the researcher.

*Data Analysis*

The scaled items in the survey were analyzed using statistical analysis. The open-ended questions were analyzed using content analysis for emerging themes. The data will be destroyed upon completion of the research project and completion of the MAIS701 course.

*Limitations and Delimitations*

This research project was limited in number of responses to maintain a manageable scope for this particular project. The researcher is limited by the participant’s perceptions of reality and the participant’s willingness to share. In particular, within the survey the participants will have asked themselves, “what I am willing to say/what is relevant to me?”. In reviewing and analyzing survey results, I can’t gauge the extent of self-editing that might have gone on compared to if the data was gathered through an interview process. During face to face interviews I would have been able to read some body language as well as to be able to probe deeper on some questions based on how the participant was responding.

Another limitation on this project is that it has been a research review of literature and attitudes. This project did not take an investigative view of statistical data from police agencies, health board, or organizations. Verification of statistical data would be beneficial to determine the extent of issues related to workplace aggression currently happening in Canada.
Lastly, the project was limited in its scope. To ensure a manageable sample, invitations to participate in the survey were sent out with the expectation that there would be approximately a 30 percent response rate.

Some may argue that my personal bias might limit the value of this investigation. This topic is a passion for me; however, another type of researcher may feel dispassion is more advantageous in conducting a research project. I am passionate about providing healthy and safe work environments and so I have applied that energy to reflect on workplace violence which has allowed me to make some recommendations that would facilitate healthier and safer workplaces.
CHAPTER 4

Survey Findings

The research question for this project asks if there has been a societal shift in how people treat each other that is resulting in increasing violence in the workplace. To test perceptions of a small sampling of society based on a selected group of individuals on civility related items, a survey was sent to 96 individuals. There were 38 respondents, representing 39.5 percent response rate to the survey. As this survey samples perceptions within particular workplaces in society regarding civility in the workplace, this provided a sufficient sampling. It is important to note that the largest cluster of responses (34 percent) were from the education sector, as my contact list of friends is mostly in the education sector. This includes both secondary and post-secondary organizations.

The first question asked was whether the respondents’ organization has policies, procedures, or protocols (see Table 1) regarding the following items:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1 - Existing Policies, Procedures, and Protocols</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code of Conduct</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>84%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code of Ethics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>79%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email protocols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harassment (physical, ethnicity)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>82%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet use protocols</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>74%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Harassment / Bullying</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Harassment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The responses indicate that the majority of the respondents’ organizations have policies relating to conduct, ethics, harassment, and violence. However, when asked to what extent are the aforementioned policies, procedures, or protocols (if they exist) enforced (see Table 2), the responses begin to scatter from “a great deal” to “rarely”.

Table 2 - Enforcement of Policies, Procedures, and Protocols

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option.</th>
<th>A great deal</th>
<th>Most of the Time</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Code of Conduct</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Code of Ethics</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>0%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Email protocols</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>24%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Harassment (physical, ethnicity)</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Internet use protocols</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal Harassment / Bullying</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>8%</td>
<td>13%</td>
<td>21%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual Harassment</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Violence in the workplace</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Furthermore, when asked if there are consequences for not adhering to these policies, procedures, or protocols (Table 3), the percentage of favourable responses again dropped off.

| Table 3 - Policies, Procedures, and Protocol Consequences |
|---------------------------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|-----------------|
| Top number is the count of respondents selecting the option. Bottom % is percent of the total respondents selecting the option. | Yes-Strict | Yes-Most of the time | Yes-Occasionally | No-Rarely | Don't know | Not applicable |
| Code of Conduct | 16 | 6 | 4 | 2 | 4 | 5 |
| | 43% | 16% | 11% | 5% | 11% | 14% |
| Code of Ethics | 14 | 7 | 2 | 4 | 3 | 7 |
| | 38% | 19% | 5% | 11% | 8% | 19% |
| Discrimination | 15 | 6 | 3 | 3 | 4 | 6 |
| | 41% | 16% | 8% | 8% | 11% | 16% |
| Email protocols | 4 | 8 | 7 | 4 | 6 | 8 |
| | 11% | 22% | 19% | 11% | 16% | 22% |
| Harassment (physical, ethnicity) | 16 | 7 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 6 |
| | 44% | 19% | 6% | 6% | 8% | 17% |
| Internet use protocols | 9 | 4 | 8 | 5 | 5 | 6 |
| | 24% | 11% | 22% | 14% | 14% | 16% |
| Personal Harassment / Bullying | 15 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 5 | 7 |
| | 41% | 14% | 3% | 11% | 14% | 19% |
| Sexual Harassment | 19 | 5 | 2 | 2 | 2 | 7 |
| | 51% | 14% | 5% | 5% | 5% | 19% |
| Violence in the workplace | 21 | 4 | 1 | 1 | 3 | 7 |
| | 57% | 11% | 3% | 3% | 8% | 19% |

Respondents seem to indicate most of the policies, procedures, or protocols have consequences, with the exception of email protocols. This correlates with a subsequent question in which 70 percent of respondents indicate that they or someone they know have received profane or disparaging emails from a co-worker, subordinate or supervisor.
In the next question (see Table 4), respondents were asked if their organization offered or supported the following items:

**Table 4 - Programs Supported by the Organization**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Program</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
<th>Not applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Workplace Hazardous Materials Information System (WHMIS) training</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>51%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>16%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Safety training</td>
<td>24</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>65%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>14%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee assistance (Counselling)</td>
<td>33</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>89%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Family assistance (Counselling)</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>86%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>First aid / CPR</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>57%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>5%</td>
<td>11%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict training</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>54%</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>11%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The majority of respondents indicate that employee and family assistance was available. However, only 54 percent offered conflict training. This could be the source of stress for some employees. Yet, the majority of respondents indicate that their organization (see Figure 1) or department/workgroup manages conflict (see Figure 2).

![Figure 1](image_url) - Does your organization generally manage conflict?
Conversely, 13 percent of respondents say that their organization does not manage conflict and 16 percent of departments/workgroups do not manage conflict. Again, this raises a red flag about the need to manage human issues to mitigate potential risks.

Question 8 was an open ended question asking for examples of how conflict is managed within the respondent’s organization or workgroup. The majority of responses indicated discussion with parties involved including or not including supervisors. Human Resources (HR) appears in only a few responses. In a few responses, HR serves as the resource or mediator. In other responses, HR is the last resort since the individuals or departments will try to address the problems themselves. Only one response indicated that use of an unbiased third party, but it seemed to suggest that it was still someone internal to the organization.

There were three responses that indicated that conflict is handled poorly, that nothing is done, or that there is avoidance and insincere apologies. There was, however, one respondent who spoke of the culture of his/her organization and the exceptional buy-in to the organization’s values. The respondent describes an environment of self-correction that is collegial, cooperative,
and modeled by many people at all levels. To respond to conflict, the respondent indicated that individuals will discuss issues to come to a better understanding of differing perspectives.

However, in looking at what can contribute to the culture of an organization, a third of respondents indicated having been harshly criticized publicly by a supervisor, e.g., berated in front of peers for making suggestions (see Figure 3). Twenty-nine percent of respondents indicated that a supervisor has harshly criticized them publicly.

![Figure 3 - Have you ever been harshly criticized publicly by a supervisor?](image)

When asked if co-workers use profane or vulgar language that could be considered offensive in the workplace (see Figure 4), the largest percentage of response indicated rarely. Thirteen percent of respondents indicate that offensive language is used frequently.

![Figure 4 - Use of profane or vulgar language at work.](image)
One question related to how people in organizations communicate most of the time (see Figure 5). This was asked to get a sense of how information is shared and disseminated in organizations, as it speaks to the availability and use of technology in workplaces.

![Figure 5 - Forms of communication in organizations](image)

When asked if the respondent’s organization has guidelines around the use of email (see Figure 6), 63 percent responded yes.

![Figure 6 - Do you have guidelines for the use of email?](image)
Yet when asked if they or someone they know has ever received a disparaging or profane email at work from either employees or suppliers/vendors or contractors (see Table 5), 16 of the respondents have received or have knowledge of disparaging or profane emails from co-workers, 4 of the respondents have received or have knowledge of disparaging or profane emails from subordinates, or 6 of respondents have received or have knowledge of disparaging or profane emails from supervisors.

Table 5 - Have you or someone you know received offensive emails from the following?

<p>| | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Co-worker</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>94%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Subordinate</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>24%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervisor</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supplier / vendor</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contractor</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Overall, however, respondents were asked if they have been given clear expectations—either verbally or in written form—for their required behaviours in the workplace (see Figure 9). For two thirds of respondents, it would appear organizations are clearly outlining expectations of behaviour.

Figure 7 – Have you been provided with clear expectation of behaviour?
This is a bit of a disconnect from the fact that people are receiving profane or disparaging email, but indicative of the fact that most respondents indicated that they were not aware of guidelines on the use of email.

Respondents were then asked, to the best of their knowledge, whether those expectations were demonstrated throughout their organization, at all levels (see Figure 10). Almost a third of the respondents indicated that those expectations are not demonstrated at all levels of their organizations.

The next set of questions focused on respect for others in the workplace. In terms of demonstrating respect from individuals in the workplace, question 18 inquired as to whether people walk into the respondent’s office even if they are clearly in a meeting with someone else (see Figure 11). Forty percent of the respondents indicate that this is a common occurrence in their workplace.
Figure 9 – Do people enter your office when you are clearly in a meeting with someone else?

With regard to respecting individual’s time, question 19 inquired as to whether meetings start and end on time. Fifty-three percent of respondents indicate that meetings do not start or end on time (see Figure 12).

Figure 10 - Do meetings start and end on time?

Focusing on basic courtesy, question 20 asked if people in the respondent’s organization say please and thank you. The response was positive with only 19 percent of respondents indicating that this basic courtesy is not occurring in their organization (see Figure 13).
While some may not have ever have given this next item much thought, the question was asked as to whether people take other people’s food from the office refrigerator (see Figure 14). Having worked in an environment in which approximately 65 employees from 7 departments shared a working environment, I know that this became a considerable issue. For 24 percent of the respondents, it would appear that this might happen more than people may have thought.

Lastly, respondents were asked if people take the last cup of coffee without making a fresh pot. The responses were mixed with a third of people indicating that this was a common occurrence in their workplace (see Figure 15).
The next set of questions asked specific questions asked specifically about how various groups are treated by the respondent’s organization (see Table 6), in contrast to the above questions and how individuals treat each other. For the most part responses were favourable, falling into the ‘great deal’ or ‘most of the time’ categories. The question that raises warning bells is that 2 of the 38 respondents indicated that employees in their organization are rarely treated with respect or dignity and another 6 out of the 38 indicating occasionally.

**Table 6 - How are people treated?**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Are employees in your organization treated with respect and dignity (e.g. regardless of age, race, gender, or position)?</th>
<th>Are contractors/vendors/suppliers to your organization treated with respect and dignity (e.g. regardless of age, race, gender, or position)?</th>
<th>Are clients/customers in your organization treated with respect and dignity (e.g. regardless of age, race, gender, or position)?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A great deal 18 47%</td>
<td>A great deal 18 47%</td>
<td>A great deal 24 63%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most of the Time 12 32%</td>
<td>Most of the Time 17 45%</td>
<td>Most of the Time 13 34%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occasionally 6 16%</td>
<td>Occasionally 3 8%</td>
<td>Occasionally 1 3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rarely 2 5%</td>
<td>Rarely 0 0%</td>
<td>Rarely 0 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Applicable 0 0%</td>
<td>Not Applicable 0 0%</td>
<td>Not Applicable 0 0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total 38 100%</td>
<td>Total 38 100%</td>
<td>Total 38 100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
When asked if respondents felt that there has been an increase in violence 84 percent thought that there had been an increase in society, 76 percent thought there had been in increase in schools, but only 32 percent thought there had been in increase in workplaces (see Table 7). Using the survey only method of research does limit the opportunity to probe on how violence is defined by the respondents. Even the researcher was surprised by the Occupational Health and Safety definition of violence.

**Table 7 - Perceived increases of violence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>29</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>76%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplaces</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>32%</td>
<td>55%</td>
<td>13%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>32</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>84%</td>
<td>16%</td>
<td>0%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Yet when asked if they thought that the media (all formats) have just made people more aware of violence that 79 percent thought that was true of society, 68 percent thought it was true of schools, and 58 percent thought it was true of workplaces (see Table 8).

**Table 8 - Media involvement in perceived increases in violence**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don't know</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schools</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>68%</td>
<td>26%</td>
<td>5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Workplaces</td>
<td>22</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>58%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Society</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>79%</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The question was asked regarding the use of social networking tools, such as Facebook or mySpace, to interact with co-workers both from work and from home. This was done to see if there was a correlation between the respondents’ perceptions of the other questions, and to perhaps get a sense of community that may exist if the respondents are using social networking.
tools. Whether from work (see Figure 7) or from home (see Figure 8), there is not a significant usage of social networking tools to communicate with co-workers. Additional research / probing could be done to test the connection between communication tools and group or team dynamics.

Figure 14 – Do you use social networking tools at work to interact with co-workers?

Figure 15 – Do you use social networking tools at home to interact with co-workers?

In addition to considering the internal community of the organization, the question was asked about their organizations’ commitment to environmental concerns (Forni, 2001, p. 9). This reflects an organization’s commitment to the external community. When asked if their organization had a recycling program 18 percent of respondents said no. When asked if their organization had an articulated statement about protecting the environment 47 percent said no.
The scale of this survey was limited to selected individuals within the researcher’s personal access. However, the effort was made to try to segment the age categories in the survey question to roughly reflect generations as they have been identified by Dr. Linda Duxbury from Carleton University (2007). The results of the responses show that the majority of the respondents were either Generation X or Baby Boomers (born approximately between 1961 and 1974 or 1947 and 1964, respectively) (see Figure 16).

![Figure 16 - Age Demographics of the Respondents](image)

The industries of the respondents were as follows (see Figure 17).

![Figure 17 - Industries of the Respondents](image)
The responses that were marked ‘other’ included self-employed, professional practice, a large church, consulting, a legal firm, aerospace, management consulting, business consulting, recruiting, and an electric utility company.

The last question asked was an open ended one designed to provide the respondents with an opportunity to provide any additional comments or feedback that they wanted to share. One individual indicated receipt of a code of conduct and ethical protocols during an orientation to the organization that was less than adequate; but that those policies were not for the individual. This might suggest a breakdown in communication or perhaps an oversight by an organization that may have hired this individual on contract. However, policies and procedures should be written for all potential employees whether they are on salary or on contract.

As discussed within the open-ended question asking for examples of how conflict was addressed, two respondents indicated that the supervisor sets the tone for the work group in terms of behaviour. Another respondent cautioned against setting policies and procedures to manage behaviour as that may indicate to the employees that they are demonstrating child-like behaviours. If employees feel like they are being treated like children, they will continue to act like children. The respondent highlighted that “My experience has been that it is more about how the right behaviours are modelled and the conversations within the organization (showing that you value behaviours that are respectful) than about the written policies. A respectful organization uses the policies as a tool for teaching, learning, and development and not as a backdrop for enforcement and consequences.”

One respondent offered the insight that “The key to ensuring a workplace that treats everyone with dignity and respect is addressing the discrepancies as they appear. If you are a supervisor it is imperative that you live by the rule: ‘pass no fault’.”
Overall, the survey responses suggest that most organizations have some standards in place regarding how employees should treat each other but the respondents’ perceptions about whether those standards are enforced or if there are consequences for non-compliance is less certain. The majority of respondents in this sample also indicate that organizations are providing resources to assist employees and that the organizations and work teams are managing conflict.

Analysis

The literature has identified that there are several factors that are causing a decline in civility in the workplace, such as stress, use of technology, or lack of sleep (Gonthier, 2002; Forni, 2002; Denenberg & Braverman, 1999). Additionally, these indicators can further point to a decline in civility that triggers increases in violence, both in the workplace and society. While incidents have not been as numerous in Canada as they have been in the US, unless concerted efforts are taken to create and implement appropriate systems, future risks continue to exist.

Questions in the survey would indicate that many organizations have some of the policies related to encouraging civil behaviours. The discrepancy based on this sample is in the application and consequences for violating these policies. It should be noted that consequences for not adhering to policies, procedures, or protocols could be interpreted two ways. One is that consequences have been communicated; the other is that they are aware of individuals who have met with those consequences. It should be noted, disciplinary matters should not be public knowledge in an organization, so it may be difficult for employees to note whether there have been consequences for failure to follow procedure.

Another important note from the responses is that developing the culture of an organization should not be based on policies and procedures. Culture starts with the leaders of
an organization and sets the tone for what is expected and acceptable in an organization. After attending several presentations by WestJet executives in 2007 where the active fostering of cultural change was discussed, it can be seen that managing culture requires a concerted effort. Hiring for attitude and training for skills are critical to establishing and maintaining standards of behaviour without having to create policies and procedures.

Answers that indicate that the respondents are unsure whether their organization has policies might suggest that there are risk factors for some organizations that may not be prepared to prevent or manage crisis situations (Denenberg & Braverman, 1999). At a minimum, it suggests some organizations may not have adequately communicated systems and processes that exist for employees. There was only one respondent under “not applicable” in the first question, yet there are several respondents under “not applicable” when asked if policies, procedures, or protocols are enforced. This is again a flag suggestive of organizations who may not be properly addressing human issues (Denenberg & Braverman, 1999).

The responses to the survey indicate that there is strong organizational support for employee and family assistance. As well, only about half of the respondents indicated their organizations are offering WHMIS training, first aid / CPR, or conflict training, and two-thirds have safety training. Providing employees with access to these types of programs can go a long way to providing employees with a sense of being prepared to manage in situations that may arise in the workplace. Providing training to employees may reduce the need for identifying patterns in the environment, if the employees feel they have been provided with some knowledge of how to handle or look out for violent situations.

Conflict training seems to be a critical move in ensuring employees find ways to deal with stressors in the workplace. If problems are left unaddressed and fester, explosive situations
can occur. Another point that will be confidential to Human Resources or Health and Wellness departments is the number of individuals referred to Employee and Family Assistance Program (EFAP), conflict training, or sensitivity training. Much of the coverage of the Virginia Tech incident discussed the breakdown in communication between the school’s counsellors, the city police, the campus police, professors, and the perpetrator’s roommates. Concerns were raised at all these levels about the perpetrator of this incident but no one was able to put the pieces together to clearly identify the potential risks. As with the crisis-prone workplace, not addressing an issue and making it someone else’s problem by either expelling or dismissing an employee or student does nothing to assist the troubled employee or student.

The open ended question regarding examples of conflict in the workplace suggest that the individuals and departments involved are taking the responsibility and accountability to manage conflict where they are happening. This signals an organization that is crisis-prepared (Denenberg & Braverman, 1999). Another respondent indicated that managing conflict needs to be everyone’s responsibility and using an approach where HR isn’t the first line of response to address employee issues is positive. This indicates organizations where there is accountability on the part of the leadership who may be more knowledgeable about issues such as the individuals who are involved in the conflict, pre-existing issues inside or outside of the workplace, or the history associated with the specific conflict at hand.

One respondent spoke very highly of the culture of their organization, indicating that it was collegial and cooperative, working together to demonstrate appropriate behaviours and to problem-solve. This respondent highlighted what might be perceived as an exemplary workplace that would rank highly in civility. This respondent was from the education sector, as were two of the most cynical responses. This represents a disconnect in terms of work
environments within one sector, and seemed unusual when correlating responses to industry, where more problems seemed to exist. The question ran through my mind as to whether this person was a member of a private educational organization where the culture may be very different from a public secondary or post-secondary institution.

As was noted earlier, though, a third of the responses were from the education sector and may have included colleagues of friends who received the survey request directly. That said, the variety of individuals and organizations in the education sector can represent societal opinions and disconnects that can occur across all sectors depending on the workplaces. However, further investigation may be required to identify patterns or disconnects in other sectors and with larger samples.

With that in mind, the results of this survey did directly indicate some discrepancies within organizations. Two-thirds of respondents indicate having been given clear expectations of behaviour in the workplace. This was surprisingly high to me based on my experience in my workplace. This made me very curious about how this information is communicated to employees in different workplaces. What wasn’t surprising was that respondents indicate that just over a half of organizations have those behaviours demonstrated at all levels of organizations.

There isn’t a significant amount of use of social networking tools, even though this percentage is higher from home than in the workplace. Communication in organization seems to be conducted primarily with formal and informal meetings. Given the need for group connection, this demonstrates that employees still use direct contact most. However, the next most used means of communication is formal and informal email. Only 63 percent of respondents have guidelines around the use of email, and society has yet to come to a full
understanding of the limitations of the use of email, so this does open up risk for misunderstanding and miscommunication that can cause conflict. The fact that so many of the respondents have or know of people who have received offensive emails from co-workers, subordinates, or supervisors, would support the idea that guidelines are not in place or are not effective.

As for basic treatment of others, 40 percent of respondents indicated that people walk into other’s offices even though people are clearly in a meeting, yet, there was almost a 50/50 split on whether meetings start and end on time. The basic courtesy of saying please and thank you remain strong but 24 percent indicate that lunches are stolen or that 37 percent don’t make a fresh pot of coffee after draining the pot. This speaks to the level of respect individuals will feel in the workplace. While ‘please’ and ‘thank you’ remain common, respondents indicate that respect and awareness of others is only happening, on average, 50 percent of the time—perhaps reduced concern for others beyond the self and a lack of community manifests in disrespectful treatment of others. I would question, though, if a co-worker in a corporate or academic office cannot afford to eat, yet no one is noticing or considering that an employee might need some help, it would add to the argument that people are becoming more self-involved.

When asked if employees, contractors/vendors/suppliers, and customers/clients are treated with respect and dignity, the responses indicate that customers/clients followed by contractors/vendors/suppliers are treated better by some organizations than are the employees. The response of rarely was only selected twice, both within this question about employees. This raises red flags about the culture of organizations if employees feel they are rarely treated with respect or dignity. If employees are feeling disrespected this can contribute to feelings of stress—perhaps stress that can escalate to workplace aggression issues.
When asked if respondents felt that there has been an increase in violence 84 percent thought that there had been an increase in society, 76 percent thought there had been in increase in schools, but only 32 percent thought there had been in increase in workplaces. Yet when asked if they thought that the media (all formats) has just made people more aware of violence, 79 percent thought that was true of society, 68 percent thought it was true of schools, and 58 percent thought it was true of workplaces.

This raises some interesting questions which may indicate a flaw in the questioning. Is the media perceived as just reporting more about violent issues or are people indicating that they know the violence is there and they are now just more aware of it? If they are just more aware of violence that is occurring, do they feel that this poses as a threat to them in their own workplaces? A point of that needs to be made, though, is that while people think of schools as a place for students, schools are also workplaces.

**Discussion**

The authors speaking of civility seem to be pointing to changes in society and therefore the workplace that may be more a reflection of their own values. Gonthier (2002) critiques how the family structure has changed with more single parent homes, as well as attire in the workplace. While human understanding may be based on values and beliefs, Gonthier (2002) is expressing an opinion about civility that attacks a lifestyle that she may not appreciate or understand. When I read a statement such as “The time pressure alone on single parent households, however, is enormous—there is simply less time to spend with the children teaching them values” (Gonthier, 2002, p. 13), I question what and whose values? It is not to say that her argument does not have merit, but it comes across as discriminatory against single parent homes.
or working parents. Values are not a 24-hour a day discussion nor is it a one time conversation. It should be a constant dialogue within a home and, whether there is one parent or two, the parents need to make a point of having that conversation.

As discussed by both Forni (2002) and Gonthier (2002), the world has lost faith in authority and tradition. The world does not have much room left for tradition. However, nothing in the literature says society or the world has lost its humanity or capacity to care about another human being; what people have lost is an understanding about how we demonstrate humanity and care in a world in which there are no common understandings or shared meanings. Yet, the traditional scientific management model for work is that work is non-emotional so caring is taboo; therefore, issues in the workplace continue to fester until they escalate. I will offer the caveat that this is my bias and value set, but the world has seen much change in terms of technology and globalization. Email, text messaging, voice mail, and social networking tools have changed how we communicate with each other.

While the new generations may be more technically savvy and able to manage the number of devices available to them, they have lost some of the wisdom that may have once been imparted to children. When I say wisdom, I am thinking about how a child would be taught to share and to perhaps look after someone who couldn’t look after themselves. However, adults may forget about these lessons as computer savvy youngsters progress beyond the parents in learning the technology. The children may be technologically savvy and so we forget they are still children requiring interpersonal skills and knowledge about how to navigate in the world. They have lost, however, the ability to connect and empathize with each other in a way that is, unfortunately, reminiscent of days gone by—days when kids played outside in the summer using their imaginations to create games and stories. The basic ability to communicate and connection
with each other then minimizes awareness of each other, which reduces the need to be civil towards each other.

Yet, the other challenge is that the next generation communicates differently. At a presentation by Dr. Linda Duxbury (2007) from Carleton University, Dr. Duxbury identified that the most recent generation of people born between 1975 and 1990 value at-work independence, autonomy, distrust hierarchy and authority, lack loyalty, and are unwilling to commit. I had a young temporary administrative assistant send me an email message using texting language. Not only is this informal for a business environment, the assistant was assuming I would be able to interpret her messages. Again, it is my value set that work communication should be properly formatted as a formal means of communication. More casual forms of communication should be reserved for those among whom there is a more casual relationship.

However, the majority of individuals in leadership roles are Baby Boomers and maybe some Generation X individuals i.e., people over 35 (Duxbury, 2007). While technology has modified communication and communications style, being harshly criticized by a supervisor only sets the tone for incivility among employees. “With power comes responsibility” (Malandro, 2003, p. 59) and the leadership and management will set the tone of the culture of an organization as well as what is acceptable at all levels of the organization. Meanwhile, the employee groups are struggling to communicate with each other. The organization needs to put effort into ensuring that conflict isn’t being left to fester within the organization.

Another question that came to mind about possible future research is whether there have been there are periods throughout history in which societal changes have given rise to periods of turbulence to be able to achieve a level of homeostasis once again. By this I mean that perhaps with all change there are periods where society tries to adjust to the new ways of living in the
world that will see bursts of violent acts, or perhaps change as a result of the violent acts. After a period of adjustment perhaps society establishes a new level of equilibrium. This is the premise behind Linda Duxbury’s (2007) work on the generations—that “watershed” events change the world or how the world has been known in the past. For example, September 11, 2001 (9/11) marks a new period in time in her work. It is how we emerge from those events that changes how we relate and communicate with one another. Perhaps this early part of the 21st century finds society in a period of trying to achieve a new level of equilibrium, where we are disconnected from each and trying to find a place where we can once again connect to our communities at home and at work. Often, individuals need a significant moment of crisis before they can begin to make change in their lives.

Part of the challenge in working through this readjustment period may be that things are changing too quickly to keep pace. While times might be hard in a booming economy, theft of lunch only reflects disregard for the inconvenience this puts on another employee... another living, breathing, vulnerable human being who is part of the same organization who is also living within the same economic context. This can be a signal of organizations not providing outlets or resources to employees who are not coping with the stressors in life or at work or who are under financial burden. If this was theft from the employer directly, it would be treated in a much more serious manner. Disrespect for co-workers, as with my situation at home with my neighbours, can result in resentment and anger that can become explosive. Issues, left unaddressed or permitted to fester can be the number one factor in creating conflict situations (Denenberg & Braverman, 1999).

Keeping pace with change creates stress for all levels of an organization. While Information Fatigue Syndrome may be a new plague on management and leadership (Denenberg
& Braverman, 1999), it is not to say this isn’t a real situation for employees at all levels. Stealing lunches or not making a fresh pot of coffee are as much about disrespect as about stress and distraction. Employees at all levels are asked to wear too many hats (Gonthier, 2002) perhaps to the point where they fail to demonstrate any level of awareness or thoughtfulness about colleagues and co-workers.

Perhaps it is a slippery slope to progress from empty coffee pots to aggression and violence in the workplace caused by petty incivility, but the consequences of disregard of individuals can signal for concern. When individuals start showing little disregard for their co-workers, when they aren’t communicating or are only having miscommunications. Those who lack coping skills, the loners, misfits, socially awkward or narcissists, start to feel that there is nothing left to help their situation. As people become less connected to society and community, busy, fatigued, and irritable, it becomes easy to miss early warning signs or to overlook those individuals who are in distress. While the evidence retrieved in the completion of this project has not identified considerable growth in the number of aggressive or violent events due to incivility (particularly in Canada), I will continue to argue that, left addressed, there is the potential for increasing aggression and violence both in workplaces and in schools.

If individuals who are not socially skilled are being bullied, there is a likelihood that they will retaliate. Even those of sound body and mind can reach a breaking point when faced with a toxic work environment. Reporting of statistics and data on incidents such as pushing, hitting and verbal threats don’t typically make it to the national news. These types of incidents may even go unnoticed by supervisors and management. Furthermore, links between triggers of workplace aggression, such as fatigue, stress or miscommunication, and violence may not be anticipated.
CHAPTER 5

Recommendations

A level of conflict is good in organizations to stimulate new ideas and ways of thinking, but excessive conflict in organizations that evolves from miscommunication, intolerance, or negative attitudes can be destructive and create toxic work environments. In Alberta, a 2005 amendment to the Occupational Health and Safety Act was written to include violence in the workplace. The amendment required that all Alberta workplaces develop a policy and procedures to deal with violence in the workplace. While a healthy organizational culture cannot be fostered or dictated with policies and procedures, organizations have a duty to provide adequate resources in support of healthy work environments.

This is not to say that the only way organizations can prevent violence in the workplace is by creating policies and procedures. To accompany the development of policies and procedures, organizations should develop programs around civility in the workplace. By defining what civility means for an organization, employees, at all levels, will truly be provided with clear expectations of behaviours. Again, while organizations don’t want to encourage childish behaviour by or to treat employees like children, it will be important that management and leadership agree to adhere to the requirements of policies and procedures. Any signs that the organization is just paying lip service to being or becoming a civil workplace will drastically undermine any positive change.

One organization can create a program to address civility, but as employees come and go from other workplaces, it can require a dedicated effort by each organization to ensure civility is a required part of that organization’s culture, especially as workforces are becoming more transient and less permanent. However, the first step would involve a risk assessment of each
workplace (Denenberg & Braverman, 1999). As the survey for this project identified, there are little things in every workplace that will trigger feelings that an organization is uncivil, for example, stealing lunches out of the refrigerator. An organization needs to be ‘in-tune’ with the perceptions of the employees in the workplace. This also includes any current stressors in the organization. The development of a program (Gonthier, 2002) would then address communication of policies and procedures, but would also tackle the key stressors in the workplace.

A program around civility could include:

- Learning to express anger – Bringing awareness to the workforce that tone, volume, and body language are all aspects that convey message the communicator is not intending to send.
- When not to use email – Bringing awareness to the fact that there is a human recipient on the other side of the email. If they wouldn’t say it to the person’s face, perhaps it shouldn’t be put in writing.
- Expectations for the workplace – Awareness of the behaviours and actions that are considered appropriate for the workplace... as well as the ones that are not.
- Resources for employees – Awareness of the programs and services available to employees regarding personal or professional problems including financial counselling or coping with stress.
- Effective listening – Awareness of the human desire to think about what is going to be said next rather than listening to what is being said in the moment by the other person. Learning how to overcome this desire to improve communication within the workplace.
- Cultural integration – Awareness of the differences in cultures in the workplace and learning to accept those differences.
- Dressing for success – Awareness that what a person wears to work also communicates volumes to co-workers, supervisors, and customers. If there is an
expectation of attire for a workplace is must be communicated and maintained consistently throughout an organization.

- Thoughtful awareness – Awareness of others in our lives. Recognizing how actions and behaviours impact on others by reflecting on personal values and finding ways to be mindful of the values of others.
- Accountability and responsibility – Awareness that each person in the organization needs to be responsible and accountable for creating a civil environment by treating others well and correcting individual. Be part of the solution.
- Conflict management – Awareness that not everyone is going to agree, but that we can respect each others perspectives, opinions, and differences (Gonthier, 2002; Denenberg & Braverman, 1999).

This type of program would target specific expectations of behaviours and interpersonal skills for the workplace. This would also require resources and safe processes within organizations to ensure that employees have an outlet to express concerns about situations or regarding employees or employers. Creating culture in which people are free to express themselves without retribution will be challenging. However, if employees feel threatened or uncomfortable in the workplace because of the lack of respect, employees need to know that they have avenues to discuss their concerns as well as a means of helping them to address those concerns.

Furthermore, if there are violence risks being identified within organizations, a network of key individuals will be required. Security, human resources, communications need to have plans in place and a system to ensure that each of these stakeholders are aware of potential risk and structures to allow for monitoring and responding to those potential risks.

With the addition of civility expectations to the workplace, there should also be a civility campaign (Gonthier, 2002). Depending on the climate of the organization, this may be tricky
since it will be important that this campaign and associate policies, procedures and programs are seen as a flash in the pan activity or the current shiny object for leadership. Civility must be carefully woven into the culture of the organization. The risk assessment should identify hot spots for employees in terms of the climate, and the appropriate campaign materials can be developed accordingly. Materials can include brochures, posters, buttons, and even using technology to create screensavers or desktop images.

Implementing a policies and procedures, a program, and campaign will require considerable resources for some organizations. Governments and/or consultants should develop and share programs with smaller organizations or with not-for-profits. This may also require development of skill sets at leadership and management levels to ensure they are able to demonstrate the appropriate behaviours in an organization.

**Future Research**

Future research projects on this topic would need to be expanded to a much larger pool of participants. Expanding the parameters to include complete organizations or industries or both in specific locales or nationally, particularly if a longitudinal approach was taken, would better identify organizations/industries at greater risk or changing societal perceptions regarding civility. Future research on this topic could include organizational statistics on usage of programs like stress management. It is one thing to say that there are programs to assist employees cope with personal or professional issues, but it is another thing if employers are not using these resources.
In completing the review of the survey questions, it became apparent that one question not asked was about civility specifically. Future research on this topic should ask participants how they would evaluate the level of civility for the following:

- Your workgroup or department
- Your organization as a whole
- Your community in which you live
- Society in general

This question would be important to set a context for the participants’ remaining answers about their specific workplaces. In a longitudinal study, this question over time would reflect changes in attitudes toward and changes in the level of civility. Further research is also needed to consider the health and well-being of employees in Canadian organizations as well as Canadian society, in general.
Conclusion

This project set out to determine if workplaces are becoming uncivil, and this is resulting in an increase in aggression and violence in the workplace. The premise for this review is that society has become so self-involved and narcissistic that we have lost compassion and respect for others. The result is a degradation of community and society, one consequence being that individuals respond with violence regardless of whether it is at workplace and school. For conflict to escalate to the level of violence that makes the national news, these incidents would have been able to fester unnoticed or unaddressed. For stress levels to erupt into violent incidents where even one person loses their life is tragic, but I believe by clearly defining workplace violence and aggression, organizations and individuals can help to create healthy and safe work environments.

After reviewing literature and conducting a study on perceptions around civility, I would conclude that several factors are present as triggers for violence. Stress, fatigue, and lack of preparedness are all contributors to aggressive responses from employees in a workplace. Additionally, there appears to be different levels of development and application of policies and procedures to support the development and maintenance of a healthy workplace.

While it will not necessarily be effective to create a healthy environment and culture with the implementation of policies and procedures, communication of expectations of behaviour and resources available in the workplace will go a long way to ensuring employees know what is acceptable and what resources are in place to help them. Additionally, reporting mechanisms need to be in place within organizations and within systems in the country to start to identify if there are problem areas (e.g. organizations) that need some intervention or assistance. Lack of
Civility in the Workplace 69

consistency in reporting and failure to report just further reflects a country and organizations that are unprepared.

The respondents to the project’s survey seem to have a fairly positive attitude regarding about their workplaces, but their responses reveal that the appropriate systems and structures are not in place to manage or mitigate potential risks. People may be tired of hearing that the world is changing but the reality is that how and where people work has indeed changed, which in turn is changing how and when we communicate and connect with others, personally and professionally. This change requires organizations to demonstrate due diligence in creating healthy and safe work environments, which includes educational institutes.

Changes in the world are calling the individuals to attend to the crisis. The crisis, it would seem, requires that we re-evaluate how we treat each other so that we can be constantly aware of others by positively relating to one another, cultivating reciprocal respect, building relationship, learning to identify with colleagues, and demonstrating a healthy concern for communities and the planet. In refocusing our energy on civility, I believe each individual will also live a healthier, happier life.
References


http://www.workplaceviolence.ca/research/addressing_violence.pdf


Sloan, A. (2006). Laying Enron to rest: Convicted felons Ken Lay and Jeff Skilling may be trading pinstripes for prison Stripes. These were the Smartest Guys in the Room? Newsweek (US Edition).


Appendix A

Civility in the Workplace Survey

Intro Email

As I near the completion of my MAIS program, I have to complete a final project. I am interested in comparing the social climate of different workplaces, through the eyes of the people who work there. The topic I have selected is civility in the workplace. By gathering your input, I hope to identify practices that could be seen as connected to the degree of civility in your workplace. My hypothesis for this project is to suggest that through civil work environments we can create healthier safer workplaces.

For the purposes of this project, civility is defined in the following way:
  Courtesy, politeness, manners, and civility are all, in essence, forms of awareness. Being civil means being constantly aware of others and weaving restraint, respect, and consideration into the very fabric of this awareness. Civility is a form of goodness: it is gracious goodness. But it is not just an attitude of benevolent and thoughtful relating to other individuals; it also entails an active interest in the well-being of our communities and even a concern for health of the planet in which we live. (Forni, 2002, p. 9)

As part of this project, I have prepared a brief survey to gather perceptions and opinions about practices in various organizations/industries. Depending on the nature of your occupation some of these questions may seem irrelevant, therefore, I invite you to interpret the survey’s specific questions in light of the social climate you experience in your workplace or industry. This survey will not collect any personal information but will ask for age from a range, and industry. This is not a fault-finding exercise but rather one to create a snapshot of current practices across different industries.

The survey should take no more than 10-15 minutes. If, after completing the survey you feel that some of your colleagues may also be interested in participating, please feel free to share the survey link with them.

If you have any questions, please contact me via email xxxxx or by phone at xxxxx.

I thank you for your participation and support in completing my final master’s project.
Informed Consent Form

Welcome to the Civility in the Workplace research survey site.

The purpose of this survey is to understand opinions and perceptions regarding civility and its presence in a variety of workplaces. By participating in the survey you will help me to identify if there has been a societal shift in how people treat each other that is resulting in increasing illness and violence in the workplace? There are no known risks in participating in this study. A number of individuals who work in a variety of organizational settings across a number of industries have been invited to participate.

You will be asked to complete an anonymous online survey that includes statements that you rate according to your experience in your current or past workplaces. Should you agree to participate, you will not be asked to name yourself or your organization; however, you will be asked to indicate your age range and the industry category in which you work. The survey takes approximately 15 minutes to complete.

Before you can begin the survey, you must provide your consent to participate in this study. Please take the time to read this page carefully. If you want more information, I welcome your questions.

Your participation is completely voluntary, anonymous, and confidential. You can refuse to participate in the study or refuse to answer specific questions without penalty. You are free to discontinue completing the questionnaire at any time. However, once your answers are entered and submitted online, they become part of the study database.

No one except the researcher and research supervisor will see any of the answers. Information will be grouped and summarized for the purpose of disseminating the results. Throughout the research project, the database will be maintained in a password-protected computer file that is only accessible by the researcher. Once the study has been completed, and a final mark has been assigned, the data will be destroyed (approximately March 2009).

You may obtain a summary of the results of the study by sending me an email request. The existence of the research will be listed in an abstract posted online at the Athabasca University Library's Digital Thesis and Project Room; and the final research paper will be publicly available.

Questions or Concerns - If you have any further questions or want clarification regarding this research or your participation, please contact:

Researcher: Delisa Daniel, xxxx, xxxx
Research Supervisor: Dr. Nina Erfani, xxxx, xxxx

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board has approved this research study and may be reached by emailing rebsec@athabascau.ca or calling 1-780-675-6718 if you have questions or comments about your treatment as a participant in this study.

CONSENT - Participating in this study indicates that:

1. You are over the age of 18,
2. You understand to your satisfaction the information provided to you about your participation in this research project, and
3. You agree to inclusion of your data in this study.

You are free to withdraw from this research project until the point at which you submit your answers online. When you click on the "PROCEED TO SURVEY" button below, you are giving your consent to participate in the study.

Prior to proceeding, you are encouraged to print a copy of this page for your records.
Survey Questions

2. Does your organization have policies, procedures, or protocols that are enforced regarding:

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<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
<th>Don’t Know</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
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<td>Code of Conduct</td>
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<td>Violence in the workplace</td>
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3. If so, to what extent are these policies enforced?

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<th>A great deal</th>
<th>Most of the Time</th>
<th>Occasionally</th>
<th>Rarely</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
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4. Are there consequences for not adhering to these policies, procedures, or protocols?

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<th>Yes-Strict</th>
<th>Yes-Most of the time</th>
<th>Yes-Occasionally</th>
<th>No-Rarely</th>
<th>Don’t know</th>
<th>Not Applicable</th>
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5. Does your organization offer / support:

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<td>WHMIS Training</td>
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<tr>
<td>Family Assistance (Counselling)</td>
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<tr>
<td>First Aid / CPR</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conflict training</td>
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6. Does your organization generally manage conflict either formally or informally?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Don’t Know
   - Not Applicable

7. Does your workgroup / department / team manage conflict either formally or informally?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Don’t Know
   - Not Applicable

8. Can you please share an example of how conflict is typically managed organizationally or within your workgroup. As this is a confidential survey, please do not identify yourself or your organization. (Open ended text box)

9. Have you ever been harshly criticized publicly by a supervisor e.g. berated in front of your peers for making suggestions?
   - Yes
   - No
   - Don’t Know
   - Not Applicable

10. Do your co-workers use profane or vulgar language that could be considered offensive in the workplace?
    - Frequently
    - Occasionally
    - Rarely
    - Never
11. Do people in your organization communicate mostly:
   Formal:
     • Meetings
     • One on one meetings
     • Email
     • Blogs
     • Social networking tools
   Informal:
     • Meetings
     • One on one meetings
     • Email
     • Blogs
     • Social networking tools

12. Does your organization have guidelines around the use of email?
   • Yes
   • No
   • Don’t Know
   • Not Applicable

13. Have you or someone you know ever received a disparaging or profane email from a:
   (Check all that apply)
     • Co-worker
     • A subordinate
     • A supervisor
     • A supplier / vendor
     • A contractor

14. Do you use social networking tools (Facebook, mySpace) to interact with co-workers?
   From work
     • Yes
     • No
     • Don’t use
   From home
     • Yes
     • No
     • Don’t use

15. Have you been given clear expectations—either verbally or in written form—for your required
    behaviours in the workplace?
   • Yes
   • No
   • Don’t Know
   • Not Applicable
17. To the best of your knowledge, are those expectations demonstrated throughout your organization, at all levels?
   • Yes
   • No
   • Don’t Know
   • Not Applicable

18. Do people walk into your office even if you are clearly in a meeting with someone else?
   • Yes
   • No
   • Not Applicable

19. Do people start and end meetings on time?
   • Yes
   • No
   • Don’t Know
   • Not Applicable

20. Do people in your organization say please and thank you?
   • Yes
   • No
   • Don’t Know
   • Not Applicable

21. Do people take other people's food from the office refrigerator?
   • Yes
   • No
   • Don’t Know
   • Not Applicable

22. Do people take the last cup of coffee without making a fresh pot?
   • Yes
   • No
   • Don’t Know
   • Not Applicable

23. Does your organization have an active recycling program?
   • Yes
   • No
   • Don’t Know
   • Not Applicable

24. Has your organization articulated a statement about their contributions to protecting the environment?
   • Yes
   • No
   • Don’t Know
   • Not Applicable

25. Are employees in your organization treated with respect and dignity (e.g. regardless of age, race, gender, or position)?
   • A great deal
26. Are contractors/vendors/suppliers to your organization treated with respect and dignity (e.g. regardless of age, race, gender, or position)?
   - A great deal
   - Most of the Time
   - Occasionally
   - Rarely
   - Not Applicable

27. Are clients/customers in your organization treated with respect and dignity (e.g. regardless of age, race, gender, or position)?
   - A great deal
   - Most of the Time
   - Occasionally
   - Rarely
   - Not Applicable

28. Do you feel that there has been an increase in violence in:

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<th></th>
<th>Yes</th>
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<td>Schools</td>
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<td>Society</td>
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29. Do you think that the media (all formats) has just made people more aware of violence that always existed in:

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<td>Society</td>
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30. Please identify your age range
   - 18-24
   - 25-29
   - 30-34
   - 35-44
   - 45-54
   - 55-64
   - 65+

31. Please identify the industry that you work in:
   - Automotive Sales or Service
   - Commerce / Banking
   - Communications / Media
   - Construction
   - Education
   - Emergency Services (Fire, Police, EMS)
- Government (municipal, provincial, federal)
- Information Technologies
- Manufacturing
- Medical / Dental
- Oil and Gas
- Real Estate
- Restaurant / Hospitality
- Retail Sales
- Transportation / Shipping
- Other

32. Please offer any thoughts or insights you’d care to add. As this is a confidential survey, please do not identify yourself or your organization.

(open ended text box)

Thank you very much for taking the time to complete this survey.
Appendix B

Workplace Shootings

1986 August 20th. - USA, Oklahoma, Edmond: A postal worker who was about to be fired, opened fire at a post office, killing 14 people before fatally wounding himself.

1988 February 16th. - USA, California, Sunnyvale: a 40-year-old man, angry that a former co-worker at ESL Corp. had rejected his advances, stormed into the company and killed 7 people with a shotgun before surrendering.

1989 September 14th. - USA, Kentucky, Louisville: a 47-year-old man, on disability for mental illness, killed 8 people and injured 12 others at a printing plant, before killing himself.

1990 June 18th. - USA, Florida: A shooting spree in a General Motors office in Florida; 11 people died, including the assailant, four others were wounded

1993 July 1st. - USA, California, San Francisco: a 55-year-old mentally disturbed man with a grudge against lawyers opened fire in a law office, killing 8 people and then himself.

1993 December 2nd. - USA, California, Oxnard: a 33-year-old unemployed computer engineer opened fire in an unemployment office, killing 3 state workers and injuring 4 others. He later killed a police officer, before being shot dead by police.

1994 March 14th. - USA, California, Santa Fe Springs: a 29-year-old man, recently fired from an electronics factory, shot 3 people to death before killing himself.

1995 April 3rd. - USA, Texas: a former employee at a refinery inspection station shot and killed the owner of the company, his wife and three workers before killing himself.

1995 July 19th. - USA, California, Los Angeles, C. Erwin Piper Technical Center: a 42-year-old city electrician shot 4 supervisors to death

1996 April 24th. - USA, Missouri, Jackson: a 32-year-old firefighter killed his estranged wife as well as 4 superiors at a firehouse.

1997 June 5th. - USA, Santa Fe Springs: a plastics factory employee fatally shot 2 co-workers and wounded 4 others after an argument, before killing himself two hours later.

1997 September 15th. - USA, Aikens part plant: a fired employee went on a shooting spry; 4 people died and 3 were injured.

1997 December 18th. - USA, California, Orange: a former employee of a maintenance yard went on a shooting rampage with an AK-47 rifle; 4 people, including his former boss died; the attacker was shot dead by police.

1998 March 6th. - USA, Connecticut: an accountant involved in a pay dispute shot dead 4 people (the Lottery Corporation's president and three of his supervisors) before killing himself.

1999 April 15th. - USA, Utah, Salt Lake City: an assailant opened fire in the Mormon Family History Library: 2 people died, 4 others were injured. The attacker was shot dead by police.

1999 June 11th. - USA, Michigan: an attacker shot 5 people, including his former psychiatrist before killing himself.
1999 July 29th. - USA, Georgia, Atlanta: a 44-year-old man went on a shooting rampage at two office buildings. 9 people were shot to death, and 12 were injured. The shooter also killed his wife and his two children, and eventually committed suicide.

1999 August 5th. - USA, Alabama, Pelham, Ferguson Enterprises: a delivery truck driver shot 2 co-workers to death at his heating and air conditioning company; afterwards, he drove five miles to Post Airgas Co., his previous employer, and killed a 3rd. person.

1999 November 2nd. - USA, Hawaii, Honolulu, a 40-year-old man killed 7 of his co-workers at a Xerox facility

1999 November 4th. - USA, Seattle, Washington: a gunman opened fire with a 9mm handgun at a commercial building. 2 persons were killed and 2 others wounded.

1999 December 31st. - USA, Florida, Tampa: in another work-place shooting, a 36-year-old hotel employee killed 4 co-workers and injured 3 others. During his attempt to flee, he killed another woman.

2000 March 8th. - USA, Tennessee, Memphis: a firefighter, on leave from the fire department because of emotional problems, killed his wife inside his home and then set the house on fire. Two firefighters and a sheriff's deputy were shot to death when they arrived on the scene. A female bystander was wounded, and the attacker himself was wounded by police.

2000 March 20th. - USA, Texas, Dallas area: a 28-year-old fired employee shot 5 people to death at a car wash.

2000 December 26th. - USA, Massachusetts, Wakefield near Boston, Edgewater Technology Inc.: a 42-year old male went on a shooting rampage at an Internet consulting firm: 7 co-workers died, the suspect, armed with an AK-47 assault rifle, a shotgun and a semiautomatic handgun, was later arrested.

2001 February 5th. - USA, Illinois, Chicago/Melrose Park: A former employee shot at least 8 people at Navistar International Corp., a diesel engine manufacturing plant in a western Chicago suburb before turning the gun on himself. Some 1,400 workers were evacuated from the plant. 4 people, including the gunman, died and 5 were injured.

2001 December 6th. - USA, Indiana, Goshen, Nu-Wood Decorative Millwork plant: A gunman, reportedly a disgruntled employee opened fire; 2 people, including himself died, 6 others were injured.

2002 September 16th. - USA, New York, New York City, near Times Square: An insurance executive called 2 co-workers into his office at Empire Blue Cross and Blue Shield, shot them to death and then killed himself.

2003 February 25th. - USA, Alabama, Huntsville, Labor Ready Inc.: shooting at the temporary employment agency near downtown. 4 people, including the attacker died and 1 person was injured.

2003 May 2nd - Italy, Sicily, town of Aci Castello: 5 people (the mayor of the small town, three other city workers and an elderly bystander) were gunned down by a disgruntled employee. The suspect fled the scene and finally shot himself in a church 60 miles away.

2003 July 2nd. - USA, Missouri, Jefferson City: an employee went on a shooting rampage at a manufacturing plant; 3 co-workers and the assailant died, 5 others were injured.

2003 July 8th. - USA, Mississippi, Lauderdale County, Lockheed Martin plant near Meridian: an employee armed with a shotgun and a semiautomatic rifle went through the entire facility and shot workers randomly rather than targeting individuals; 6 people, including the gunman died, 8 others were injured. The plant was located in an industrial park employs about 100 people and builds structural subassemblies for the C-130J Hercules transport plane and the F-22 Raptor fighter.

Source: http://www.emergency-management.net/workplace_shoot.htm