Handbook of Managerial Behavior and Occupational Health

EDITED BY
ALEXANDER-STAMATIOS G. ANTONIOU
CARY L. COOPER
GEORGE P. CHROUSOS
CHARLES D. SPIELBERGER
MICHAEL WILLIAM EYSENCK

NEW HORIZONS IN MANAGEMENT

Series Editor: Cary L. Cooper

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Edited by

Alexander-Stamatios G. Antoniou

Lecturer in Psychology, University of Athens, Greece and Consultant in Organizational Psychology and Behavior

Cary L. Cooper, CBE

Distinguished Professor of Organizational Psychology and Health, Lancaster University, UK

George P. Chrousos

Professor of Pediatrics and Chairman, First Department of Pediatrics, University of Athens Medical School, Greece

Charles D. Spielberger

Distinguished Research Professor of Psychology and Director, Center for Research in Behavioral Medicine and Health Psychology, University of South Florida, USA

Michael William Eysenck

Professor, Psychology Department, Royal Holloway, University of London, UK

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11 'Unhealthy' relationships at work and emerging ethical issues
Alexander-Stamatios G. Antoniou

Introduction

Work is considered to be an institution that permits each individual to create and develop relations with his or her economic, social and cultural environment. Work also has an important impact on a person's mental and emotional well-being. McGregor's (1960) 'Theory Y' and 'Theory X' offer two different ways of viewing this institution. According to Theory Y, work creates feelings of pleasure and self-fulfillment for the individual, and thus it becomes a source of satisfaction. Furthermore, Theory Y states that the objectives of the organization can be achieved not only through external control measures and the threat of punishment, but also by the satisfaction of the individual's ego and self-actualization.

According to Theory X, work's basic characteristic is to cause pain to the person. Thus work brings satisfaction not to the individual, but to the manager or the organization in general, which leads to the development in the individual of a feeling of inherent dislike and subsequently a need to avoid working. But since the individual is a member of a working group or an organization, and since that group or organization has specific objectives to be achieved, the next stage will involve coercive and control measures, imperative or compulsory directives and threats of punishment (Benton, 1972).

From these two theories the more general conclusion can be derived that in the context of an organization, there are certain relationships that are developed between individuals (that is, workers and managers). On the one hand, those relationships may be based on concordant cooperation that leads to the creation of feelings of satisfaction. On the other, they may be based on coercion and threats. The ethical and psychological analysis of healthy or unhealthy relationships between individuals (workers and managers) in an organization, is the aim of this chapter. But we shall begin by underling a few main points.

First, we must stress the significance of the psychological contract that is made between the individual and the organization. The psychological contract is defined as an implicit agreement that specifies what each is expected to give and to receive in that relationship. Individuals expect to receive a salary, status, advancement and opportunities. Organizations expect to receive loyalty, energy, talents and hard work in order to achieve their objectives. The contract is made with the entry of the worker into the firm and it is modified as the individual proceeds through his/her career (Gibson et al., 2000; Nelson & Quick, 2006).

According to Gibson et al., the psychological contract is violated when people believe that the firm has failed to fulfill its obligations towards them. Consequently, there are major emotional disturbances in their feelings of goodwill and trust towards the organization. In that case, the bond between the employer and the employee is weakened and the person feels disappointment. According to Jean Jacques Rousseau, the intensity of such feelings can result in moral outrage.

It is made explicit that through the psychological contract, there are certain human relationships which are created and developed between the individual and the organization and which are based on expectations between the two parties. Such relationships (and the consequent expectations), depend on the diversity of each individual's personality and on his/her psychological variables. That thought leads to the second main point of this introduction, which is the differences that exist between individuals concerning their character and psychology.

An individual's personality is a relatively stable set of characteristics, tendencies and temperaments that have been significantly formed by inheritance and by social, cultural and environmental factors. This set of variables determines the commonalities and differences in the behavior of the individual. In other words, it refers to a stable set of characteristics and tendencies that determine the common and different traits in people's behavior. Some basic factors determine the form that an individual's personality will take: (i) locus of control; (ii) self-efficacy; (iii) Machiavellianism; and (iv) creativity.

Apart from the special personality traits that create differences among individuals, there are also individual psychological variables that lead to the same point: the diversity between personalities, that is, 'perception', 'attribution', 'attitudes' and 'values'. In this chapter we shall emphasize 'perception', since this includes stereotypes which are defined as overgeneralized, oversimplified and self-perpetuating beliefs about people's personal characteristics. Stereotypes thus, are considered to be a cause of discrimination in the workplace that constitute problematic or unhealthy relations. 'Perception' is the process by which an individual gives meaning to the environment. It involves interpreting various stimuli and organizing them into a psychological experience. So, a stereotype is a form of perception that is related to how a person views others and how he/she categorizes them. The negative effect of stereotyping (on age, race, gender, ethnicity and lifestyle), can result in unfair programs of promotion, motivation, job design or performance evaluation. It can also lead to the rejection of the best person for a position (Gray & Starke, 1980; Rollinson, 1997; Gibson et al., 2000; Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001).

Our third main point refers to the rights of employees and specifically to the right of privacy which is related to cases of organizational invasion into a person's private life and the release of confidential information about a person, causing him/her emotional harm or suffering (Davis & Newstrom, 1989). This situation, apart from the psychological issues, also raises ethical ones that will be addressed later on in this chapter and which concern alcoholism, drug abuse and AIDS.

Unhealthy situations and ethical–psychological issues

Job satisfaction versus job dissatisfaction
According to Edwin Locke (1976), 'job satisfaction' is a pleasurable feeling that 'results from the perception that a person's job fulfills his important job values'. Three different conclusions emerge from that definition: (i) job satisfaction is a function of values, that is, satisfaction is strongly connected to 'what a person consciously or unconsciously desires to obtain'; (ii) different employees have different views concerning which values are important to them and which are not; and (iii) people's 'perception' of their present state is related to their values. The important issue in relation to stress in that case is that people's 'perception' of things does not depend on reality, which means that our perceptions

may not be an accurate reflection of reality. Consequently, people have different views of the same situation (Noe et al., 1997).

Job satisfaction can be attained if certain factors exist:

- *Mentally challenging work*   It is generally argued that people have a preference for jobs that give them the opportunity to use their skills and to fulfill diverse tasks. They also prefer jobs that offer them freedom of action and positive feedback. If those factors are present, then the job is defined as mentally challenging. On the contrary, if a job is described by the employee as being boring or causing feelings of failure and frustration, then either the job is not challenging enough or it is too challenging. If employees can obtain a moderate level of challenge, then they will experience feelings of pleasure and satisfaction.
- *Equitable rewards*   One way of creating satisfaction in the workforce of an organization is the implementation of a fair pay and promotion system that is in concordance with employees' expectations. Promotion, especially, provides opportunities for personal development, greater responsibilities and increased social status, leading to the creation of a feeling of satisfaction for the employee.
- *Supportive working conditions*   A working environment that provides employees with personal comfort and facilitating conditions can lead to job satisfaction. Studies have shown that employees have a preference for a safe and comfortable environment under normal conditions (temperature, light, noise).
- *Supportive colleagues*   In the field of work, apart from professional relationships, there are also social relationships, or social interactions. Employees will be more satisfied if they experience friendly and supportive relations with their co-workers and managers. According to some studies, the satisfaction that workers get from their job, is greatly increased if they are supervised by an understanding and amicable manager.
- *The job fits the personality of the worker*   According to Holland's (1997) 'personality–job fit theory', if there is strong agreement between employees' personality and occupation, then their behavior is characterized by satisfaction. Subsequently, they will reveal the whole range of their skills and talents and, thus, will be successful. This success results in the achievement of various feelings, such as happiness and satisfaction.
- *Genetic factor*   It has been argued that 30% of an individual's satisfaction is caused by hereditary elements, which leads to the conclusion that a significant portion of such satisfaction can be determined by genes. In other words, a person's general attitude is partly established by his/her genetic makeup (Robbins, 1998; Kreitner & Kinicki, 2001).

Note, however, that a person's attitude towards life is determined not only by genes, but also by his/her present lifestyle. Job satisfaction is only one part of life satisfaction. People's lifestyle outside of work has an important influence on their feelings about their job. Likewise, since work constitutes an important part of an individual's life, then the satisfaction that derives from work influences that person's satisfaction generally. This situation is defined as the 'spillover effect', which occurs in both directions between job and life satisfaction (Davis & Newstrom, 1989).

Another issue that is closely related to job satisfaction is its effects on employee performance. In other words, what we are interested in studying here is the impact of job satisfaction on an individual's performance in the workplace. According to Gibson et al. (2000), there are three views concerning the relationship between satisfaction and performance. The first argues that job satisfaction affects job performance, since a satisfied worker is more productive. According to the second view, job satisfaction is caused by job performance since the more productive worker is the one who experiences high levels of satisfaction. And finally, the third view asserts that there is no specific relationship between job satisfaction and job performance. According to Robbins (1998), job satisfaction has an important impact on employee productivity, absenteeism and turnover. Recent research has shown that there is a significant relation between satisfaction and productivity. If we examine the productivity factor not on the individual level, but on the whole organizational level, then we can draw the following conclusion: Organizations with more-satisfied employees tend to be more effective than organizations with less-satisfied employees.

Satisfaction is negatively related to absenteeism and turnover. In the case of absenteeism, it is argued that workers who are satisfied with their workplace conditions, performance and expectations do not feel the urge to avoid going to work. In the case of turnover, evidence indicates that an important moderator of this relationship is the employee's level of performance. Superior performers are generally satisfied by their job and they are less likely to leave. Organizations make considerable efforts to retain such high-level performers, for example, by offering pay rises, recognition and promotion.

Job dissatisfaction can be caused by many different factors:

- *The physical environment*   Extreme physical environments (temperature, lighting, lack of hygiene, noise), can affect both the individual's psychology and his/her job performance.
- *The social environment*   The social environment of the employee includes co-workers and supervisors. Three factors are involved in the feeling of satisfaction that derives from relationships with co-workers and supervisors: (i) sharing the same values and attitudes with co-workers and supervisors; (ii) the social support received from co-workers and supervisors, including sympathy and care; and (iii) the help that co-workers and supervisors can provide in helping the individual to clarify his/her goals and make the right choices. If these factors do not exist, then the immediate result will be dissatisfaction, disappointment and frustration, since the person is not supported by his/her social environment at work.
- *Behavioral settings*   Two important aspects of behavioral settings are: (i) social density (the number of people in an area divided by the number of square feet) and (ii) privacy (freedom from external observation). According to research, job satisfaction decreases as social density increases. Also, when the number of people at work increases, then the level of privacy decreases. Consequently, dissatisfaction and turnover increase.
- *Characteristics of the person*   Research shows that there are numerous differences in people's satisfaction. Those who have high levels of negative affectivity (that is, a basic characteristic of their personality and psychology), express more frequent feelings of dissatisfaction, anger, contempt, guilt, nervousness and fear,

both in and out of the workplace. They also focus more on the negative aspects of themselves and others than on the positive, both in and out of work. That general feeling, which is intrinsic in a person's psychology, is transferred from everyday life, to work life. So, people who have low levels of affectivity feel more satisfied in their job than those with high levels. Finally, dissatisfaction from other parts of a person's life can spill over into the workplace. General dissatisfaction can cause clinical depression that can become evident at work. Signs of such depression are: persistent sadness or anxiety, sleeping or eating disorders, lapses in concentration or in memory, irritability or excessive emotional displays, decreased performance, high absenteeism, apparent drug or alcohol abuse and apparent psychological disorders (Cartwright and Whatmore, 2005).

● *Organizational tasks*   The three main aspects of tasks that affect job satisfaction are: (i) their complexity; (ii) the degree of physical effort and exertion; and (iii) the value that the employee puts on those tasks. First, with regard to task complexity, there is a strong positive relationship between complexity and satisfaction. Simple and repetitive jobs that do not challenge the worker and that cause boredom, lead to high levels of frustration and dissatisfaction. Second, physical effort is nowadays considered to be less, as a result of technological automation. Third, the value factor is very important and concerns the psychological state of mind that workers have about their job. For example, even if their job is low in complexity and high in physical effort, people with low-paying occupations tend to believe that the value of their job is of paramount importance to them.

● *Organizational roles*   The person's role is defined as the set of expected behaviors that exists for that person in his/her job. Organizational roles can be influenced by: (i) role ambiguity, that is, the level of uncertainty about a person's organizational role. Employees need to know quite precisely what they are expected to do. When this is uncertain, then dissatisfaction arises; (ii) role conflict, which is characterized by the existence of contradictory demands on the person who occupies the role; and (iii) role overload, which is the state in which there are too many expectations placed on a person and this leads to job stress and dissatisfaction.

So far, we have examined in some detail the two 'rivals': job satisfaction and job dissatisfaction. Both conditions of human psychology form the source from where diverse and multiple feelings emerge. In the case of satisfaction, people continue to work as they did before or even harder, but in the case of dissatisfaction, apart from facing the risk of becoming depressed and frustrated, people also face the possibility of job withdrawal. According to Hulin (1991), job withdrawal is 'a set of behaviors that dissatisfied individuals enact in order to avoid the work situation'. Job withdrawal behavior takes four different forms. First, there may be a behavior change, that is, the effort made by individuals to change the conditions that cause their dissatisfaction. The immediate result, however, may be a supervisor–subordinate confrontation or conflict due to the fact that the employee is trying to make changes to organizational policies or in upper-level personnel. Second, there may be a physical withdrawal which largely involves either the employee's resignation or even frequent absenteeism if the person would prefer to resign, but does not have another employment opportunity. Another form of physical withdrawal is arriving late at work. Third, there may be psychological job withdrawal when

the dissatisfied employee decides to remain at work physically, but psychologically and mentally, 'is disengaged'. This psychological disengagement can take different forms, for example, a low level of job involvement or organizational commitment. Fourth, if there is no psychological disengagement, the person may have health problems due to stress. According to research, there is a strong relation between stress and mental disorders. Stress-related mental disorders constitute a specific category of illnesses that are defined as occupational diseases. Stress is also connected to physical diseases such as coronary heart disease (CHD), hypertension and ulcers (Davis & Newstrom, 1989; Harris, 1997; Noe et al., 1997; Robbins, 1998; Spielberger & Reheiser, 2005; Zeidner, 2005).

According to Selye's theory (1956, 1974, 1982), stress is the 'non-specific response to the demands placed upon the body that leads to physical degeneration'. This is the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) theory, which asserts that stress is manifested in the whole body and it proceeds in three stages: the alarm reaction, the stage of resistance and the stage of exhaustion (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1996; Gordon, 2002; Miguel-Tobal & González-Ordi, 2005; Miller & Travers, 2005).

Workaholism is a basic factor of job stress since it is 'an irrational commitment to excessive work' (Cherrington quoted in Burke, 2005, p. 367). Workaholics devote more time and thoughts to their work than is demanded and gradually become emotionally crippled and addicted to control and power in order to gain approval and success (Burke, 2005). People trying to succeed make the mistake of relating job satisfaction and happiness to their work in an abnormal and excessive way.

Occupational stress can result in job burnout, which is defined as the prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors in the job, and is characterized by physical and emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and inefficacy (Davis & Newstrom, 1989; Bratton & Gold, 1999; Dessler, 2000; Kenny & McIntyre, 2005; Leiter & Maslach, 2005). Some of the consequences of burnout on the organizational level are turnover, absenteeism, low organizational commitment and use of violence. On a psychological level, there may be suicidal intentions, depression and anxiety (Shirom & Melamed, 2005).

Scapegoating
The phenomenon of scapegoating is based on an attitude of hostility towards one or more persons by the rest of a group or a company. The person who suffers the side-effects of such treatment is ceremonially and emotionally cast out of the group or the company with the charge of being unworthy of membership. As a phenomenon, scapegoating usually makes its appearance after an extremely difficult period or situation for the company when there is a harsh, but fair, assessment of responsibilities. What actually takes place is that only one person, or very few persons, take upon themselves all the blame for the problem. That person takes on all the guilt of the others who successfully avoid any unfair treatment and any charges. This occurs when all the workers are united against one single person who, as a scapegoat, becomes the target of hostility. The scapegoat is usually presented in stereotypic negative form in order to reassure the rest of the group or the company that he/she was basically a wicked person who was using deceitful or inappropriate methods to accomplish his or her own ends (Gabriel et al., 2000).

This phenomenon gives rise to two kinds of issues: ethical and psychological. With regard to the former, it is totally unethical to charge only one person with the wrongs

and errors of a whole company (that is, a group of many people who work towards the same end). When only one worker is the scapegoat for a whole department, the ethical question is: 'Why only one person? Why only one subordinate and not the whole department including the manager?'.

When only the manager is charged with failure, the situation is different, since he/she is considered to be the 'head' of the department or the company and is in charge of making the right choices and taking the best decisions for the benefit of the firm. So, when the manager fails, it is widely felt that 'his/her head must fall'. But why? Supposing that the manager's action was not deliberate, and that the actions taken were considered to be in the company's best interests and according to the information that was available. No one can be perfect or have absolute knowledge, and thus, human nature is inherently imperfect. What we do throughout our life is to try to improve ourselves through the knowledge that we gain from our mistakes. So, in the case of the manager, it would be more ethical to conduct a detailed 'benefit–cost analysis' to assess why the failure occurred and what the manager should do to avoid such a situation in the future. Thus the manager, and also his/her subordinates, will gain important knowledge that will be useful to them at a later date.

With regard to the psychological issues, these can cause serious psychological disorders such as stress or depression. In this event, the person suffers from a psychological illness that may also have negative consequences for his/her physical health. As noted earlier, psychological stress can cause serious heart disease.

Fear: a way to motivate a worker or a psychologically stressful tactic?
The main target of a company is always profit, benefit, money. In order to succeed in its objectives, a firm has to raise its productivity and sales, and at the same time reduce its costs. To achieve this level of sure profit, many companies take unethical measures against their employees.

One of these measures, according to Dubrin (1981), is to create an atmosphere of fear, or else to threaten and terrorize the individual. This tactic is frequently applied against managers, that is, presidents of many firms threaten and terrorize their subordinate managers in order to make them do their best, usually through fear of losing their job. This strategy may be effective concerning the manager's performance, but only in a short time perspective. In the long run, the side-effects of such strategies become apparent.

Apart from the disadvantages that are evident in the workplace and which can cause serious economic harm to the company (since a manager who is threatened and fearful does not feel free to act, and does not dare to make decisions), there is also a more serious side-effect: the offense against human dignity and self-worth (ibid.). This situation is contrary to the Kantian perspective, which asserts that we should use others not only as means, but also as ends. People have the right to be respected as autonomous and responsible. Their value is more than mere economic profit. People live autonomously, they are responsible for their own actions and they can govern themselves. So they are capable of ethical judgments and, according to Kant, the immediate consequence is that simultaneously they have dignity and they must be treated with respect (Boylan, 1995; French, 1995; Bowie, 1999).

The psychological harm to a person's feelings and self-esteem can lead to an act of revenge, that is, sabotage. In such a case, the person may join another company and pass

on to the new employer information regarding any secrets or innovation programs or the economic situation of the person's previous company (Dubrin, 1981). Indeed, such behavior is totally unethical and egoistic. We cannot of course characterize as unethical people who no longer wish to remain in a company where they are treated badly, but the ethical order is severely damaged if those people disclose all their company's secrets. The unethical issue is that there can be severe economic losses to the former company that will consequently lead to workers' dissatisfaction or even job loss. So, how ethical are people who cause harm to their former co-workers? Now, they are the ones who are not treating their co-workers with respect, but are using them merely as a means to their own end: to severely damage their former company without taking into consideration the fact that the company consists of a human workforce that may end without a job.

One reason why fear may be an effective motivator is that most people have an intrinsic psychological need for job security. However, according to Daniel Yankelovich's research (2007), fear is no longer considered to be a job motivator because people are less worried about unemployment (ibid.).

The 'clique': the company's guardian angel or the source of unethical planning?
The clique is defined as a group whose members are dispersed throughout a large part of the formal organization. The driving force of that specific group is the common purpose of its members. That is, people agree to take part because they feel that they all have something in common: their 'cause', which usually involves sharing the same belief about a certain policy (Benton, 1972).

The issue here is how ethical or unethical is this common shared 'cause'?. Does the group's policy coincide with company policy? Does the clique's objectives and actions constitute a harmonizing force or a highly disruptive one?

According to Benton, the manager has to observe very closely which way the wind blows – if the clique's influence and practices are harming the company's interests, then the manager will be compelled to break it up. On the contrary, if the group's actions aim at profiting the organization, then the manager should encourage it. Within the context of a firm, cliques use different methods to improve their position and promote their own plans. Their aims as well as their methods can be either detrimental to the company's interests or not. If it is decided by the firm that the group's efforts are compatible with company goals, then it is possible that the company's plans may require adjusting in order to be consistent with the group's aims, thereby gaining more profit (ibid.).

Discipline and punishment in the workplace
Discipline is an important factor of stability in the context of an organization which shows that each individual is not absolutely free to do whatever he/she wishes, but that there are certain rules that need to be followed in order to achieve a healthy working environment.

According to Davis and Newstrom (1989), there are two types of discipline: preventive and corrective. Preventive discipline is the action that a company takes in order to implement in the workforce certain standards and rules to be followed so that infractions do not occur. The main purpose of this kind of discipline is to encourage self-discipline in the employees. Corrective discipline is the action taken by the management after the infraction has occurred and aims at decreasing the possibility of other infractions so

that future acts will be in compliance with standards. It is the disciplinary action taken in order to apply a penalty against an individual who has broken the rules and aims at: (i) reforming the offender, (ii) deterring others from similar actions and (iii) maintaining consistent and effective group standards.

Punishment is a form of corrective discipline that raises ethical and psychological issues. According to Gibson et al. (2000), punishment is an undesirable consequence of a particular behavior and serves as a message to a person not to do something. It is widely used as a method of changing behavior, despite its disadvantages.

According to Gray and Starke (1980), punishment is related to a number of disadvantages:

- *Punishment does not induce the desired response*   Punishment decreases or extinguishes the undesirable response but it does not stimulate or impose the desirable one.
- *Surveillance by the manager is necessary*   Punishment is considered to be an inefficient form of control because the physical presence of the manager is required.
- *Punishment leads to punishment*   Punishment leads only to temporary change and not to the acquisition of a more permanent character or behavior improvement.
- *Punishment has emotional consequences*   People who feel that they are punished unjustly may tend to express their feelings through non-productive actions such as direct sabotage. Another psychological problem is related to the dislike against the punisher (the manager) and future dysfunctional or problematic professional relations.
- *Punishment can cause behavior inflexibility*   The learning that arises from a particular punishment may be so permanent that it is overgeneralized and connected to every similar future situation. For example, an employee is punished by his/her manager because of an innovative process he/she had advanced. In the future, the same employee, due to overgeneralization, will not dare to make any effort towards any kind of innovation.
- *Punishment may have reinforcing consequences*   Punishment may itself be reinforcing and it can lead to more problems.

Since punishment has so many disadvantages, why is it meted out by managers? The answer to that question is that the act of punishing is reinforcing to the punisher him/herself, which means that the extinction of the problematic behavior is not the first and most important aim of the punisher.

Violence in the workplace

Violence is a workplace safety issue; it is the second most common cause of death among (usually female) employees (Fisher et al., 1999). Of all women who die at work, 39% are the victims of assault whereas only 18% of males who die at work were murdered. Fatal workplace violence against women is founded on three factors: (i) the assailant is unknown to the victim, (ii) the woman's employment involves serving the public and (iii) she works in order to survive (Dessler, 2000).

In order to reduce workplace violence, certain measures must be taken. One of these is more careful pre-employment screening, that is, the company should obtain a detailed

employment application containing an applicant's employment history, educational background and references. This should also include a personal interview, personality testing and verification of all information provided by the applicant. Special attention should be paid when there is incomplete or false information in the application or reference, a criminal history, a history of depression or a history of drug and alcohol abuse (Fisher et al., 1999; Dessler, 2000).

A related method is the enhanced attention paid to retaining employees, which endorses avoidance of acts of violence, defensive, obsessive or paranoid tendencies, antisocial behavior, sexually aggressive behavior, overreactions to criticism, possession of weapons, violation of privacy rights of others and a retributory attitude (Dessler, 2000).

These two methods give rise to certain ethical issues that primarily concern two aspects. First, we are dealing with an invasion of a person's privacy since the main aim of the company is to know as much as possible about the employee. Of course, since this action has a preventive–defensive character, it cannot be defined as highly unethical in itself but is in its ultimate end, which is absolute knowledge of a person and the consequent prediction of his/her behavior. Further, if a company knows everything about its employees and if it can predict their movements, it can also prevent them from behaving in a certain way or even modify their actions through the application of preventive discipline. This would result in the total subjection of the person to the firm.

Second, it can be argued that the enhanced attention paid to the need to retain employees can lead to a kind of discrimination since those who are thought to have violent tendencies will not be hired. If that happens, the manager makes a double mistake: on the one hand, there is the assumption that such people fall into the category of existing stereotypes whereby those with attitude problems are rejected, which is unethical, and on the other, this leads to psychological irritation or feelings of frustration in the rejected person. It is quite possible that such feelings of frustration will become feelings of anger and revenge, leading to violent or even homicidal actions.

Conflict

Conflict is the process by which a party has the perception that a second party has negatively affected something that is important to the first (Robbins, 1998; Gordon, 2002). The issue of conflict has become the subject of intense interest and analysis and, consequently there are diverse views on its origins and basic character. According to the 'traditional' view, conflict is a dysfunctional consequence of: (i) poor communication, (ii) lack of openness and trust between people and (iii) the manager's failure to respond to the needs of his/her employees. Thus, conflict is considered to be a negative part of human relations: it is inherently bad and harmful and it should be avoided. According to the 'human relations' view, conflict is a natural and inevitable outcome that derives from the interaction, communication and cooperation among people who are members of a particular group. Finally, according to the 'interactionist' view, conflict can be a positive aspect of a group and sometimes its presence is necessary in order to motivate the members of the group to perform more effectively (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1996; Buchanan & Huczynski, 1997; Robbins, 1998).

Different kinds of conflict are based on the number of people involved. First, an 'intra-individual' conflict refers to the conflict within an individual about which activities to perform. This internal conflict may be caused when: (i) there is diversity between

the person's morality and that of the instructions given to the person. In other words, the person believes that the action he/she is compelled to perform, is not morally 'right'; (ii) two different supervisors give contradictory instructions; and (iii) a certain activity will help the person, but at the expense of his/her co-workers. This inner type of conflict can cause serious psychological side-effects (apart from ethical dilemmas), such as stress. Second, an 'inter-individual' conflict refers to the conflict between two individuals. It is interesting from a psychological perspective to examine why an individual puts obstacles in the way of the goal achievement of his/her co-worker. One aspect of this issue is the basic character of a person, that is, if a worker has an absolute view about how things should be done and if he/she insists on imposing his/her own views about the goal-achievement process, then it is natural for the other individual (manager or co-worker who disagrees) to block the way and cause a conflict situation. Third, an 'individual–group conflict' which occurs when: (i) the individual is violating the group norms and (ii) the subordinates disagree with the manager's views and, consequently, try to change his/her attitude. Finally, a 'conflict between groups or intergroup conflict' is basically a conflict between different departments within the context of a firm (Gray & Starke, 1980; Nelson & Quick, 2006).

In this chapter, we emphasize 'intergroup' conflict, which can be 'functional' or 'dysfunctional'. Functional conflict has a positive meaning; it is defined as a healthy and constructive disagreement among individuals which results in a better relationship between the co-workers, and also in the achievement of self-knowledge. Since the major result of such conflict is the improvement in the relationships between co-workers, the next stage is the positive and innovative change within the organization. In contrast, dysfunctional conflict is an unhealthy and destructive disagreement between individuals. Its origin is usually emotional or behavioral, for example anger against a specific person. In other words, the main target of anger is not the problematic ideas or views or processes that a particular person recommends or even tries to impose, but rather that person's personality or character or psychology. This action also involves threats, deception and verbal abuse (Ivancevich & Matteson, 1996; Buchanan & Huczynski, 1997; Robbins, 1998; Gibson et al., 2000; Gordon, 2002; Nelson & Quick, 2006).

Intergroup conflict can be identified with the theory of ethical egoism. According to this teleological theory, what is right and wrong is determined according to the potential consequences for those who decide to act according to their own interest (Green, 1994). The 'ethical egoist', who is involved in a dysfunctional conflict, tries to harm another person not because of that person's ideas or choices but because of who he/she is and because of his/her character or spiritual beliefs. Thus the offender egoist is trying to harm the other person in order to reap the advantages of being the most successful or the best employee in the firm. According to this theory, the unethical behavior of the egoist is admissible.

Dysfunctional conflict is contrary to the beliefs of utilitarianism and deontology. Utilitarianism holds that one action is ethical if it results in the benefit for the greatest possible number of people (ibid.). But this kind of conflict does not benefit anyone, since it causes harm and drains the energy (of the people) that could be used in a more productive way. It also leads to psychological instability since a number of people are psychologically taxed.

Deontology holds that every person has to be respected by all the others and no

one should be used as a means toward the achievement of a particular goal (ibid.). Dysfunctional conflict rejects the show of respect toward the other person since its basic characteristic is to harm that self-same person to whom respect must be shown.

The causes of conflict can be either structural or personal. Structural causes involve the following:

● *Specialization*   When jobs are highly specialized, the result is that some employees are experts on certain subjects. Conflict can arise because the others do not have the necessary knowledge to understand how those experts work.
● *Interdependence*   Different people and groups depend on each other in certain areas of work in order to achieve the goals of the firm, so if there are problems with or malfunctions of the processes, each party blames the other for behaving irresponsibly.
● *Common resources*   All the departments of the firm must share the available resources and if those sources are relatively scarce, then conflict may arise.
● *Goal differences*   This can arise when each department has no knowledge of the other departments' objectives. Each one sets different tasks, with the result that there is a lack of shared values and goals.
● *Authority relationships*   The manager issues the orders and the directives and this is not always tolerated by everyone.
● *Status inconsistencies*   Managers, due to their superior position, enjoy advantages such as flexible schedules or longer lunch breaks. These benefits are not available to the lower-level workers, and this can cause resentment and conflict.
● *Jurisdictional ambiguities*   The existence of unclear lines of responsibility can lead to misunderstandings and insufficient communication within the organization.

Personal factors consist of the following:

● *Skills and abilities*   There is a diversity of skills and abilities among the workforce. A highly skilled worker and an unskilled recruit may find it difficult to work together.
● *Personalities*   An organization employs groups of people who are very different, with diverse personality traits and characters. Those diversities may cause conflict, especially if they are based on abrasive critical feelings and behaviors.
● *Perceptions*   People hold different views about various issues and situations that arise in the context of an organization.
● *Values and ethics*   Each person has his/her own set of values and ethics which can be at odds with the different set of values and ethics held by another person.
● *Emotions*   The emotions of each person differ from those of another. Emotional problems that have their source in an out-of-work factor can spill over into the workplace, leading to conflict.
● *Communication barriers*   Physical separation and language, for example, can cause distortions in messages and consequently can lead to conflict.
● *Cultural differences*   These are strongly related to the lack of understanding of another culture (Gray & Starke, 1980; Dubrin, 1981; Ivancevich & Matteson, 1996; Gibson et al., 2000; Nelson & Quick, 2006).

According to Nelson & Quick, in the case of a conflict, the person involved usually feels frustrated, especially if he/she is criticized and is the target of negative feedback. In that case, the person develops defense mechanisms. There are three kinds of defense mechanisms: (i) aggressive (persistent and non-adjustive reaction, redirection of negative emotions toward the others, active or passive resistance); (ii) compromise (dedication to a particular pursuit, enhancement of self-esteem and rationalization of inconsistent or undesirable behavior); and (iii) withdrawal (abandonment, emotional conflicts expressed, bodily imaginative activity in order to escape from reality). According to Kenny and McIntyre (2005), interpersonal conflict in the context of work is a basic contributor to the onset of occupational stress and inability to do the job.

Conflicts of interest

According to Bowie (1983), a conflict of interest occurs when a person has two or more interests, such that if both are pursued, there might be an unjustifiable effect on another individual. According to Velasquez (1998), a conflict of interest arises when an employee is engaged in carrying out a task on behalf of the company and the employee has a private interest in the outcome of the task that is incompatible with the best interests of the company. In other words, a conflict of interest arises when the self-interest of employees in a position of trust, leads them to ignore the seriousness of their responsibilities and to act in a way that may not benefit the firm. A well-known situation is when employees of one company hold another job or consulting position in another (usually competitive) firm.

The ethical issue here is that such people not only give their energy and knowledge to two different parties, but they also pass on to one party the secrets and innovative or investment plans of the other. This action is considered to be highly unethical because these employees serve not their firm's interests firm (that is, a number of people or co-workers whose professional survival depends on them), but only their own. Accordingly, they are acting as 'ethical egoists' and not as 'utilitarians', since this particular action does not bring happiness to the larger possible number of people, but only to themselves. They cannot be characterized as 'ethical deontologists', since they show no respect for the other human beings who depend on them. In neither situation are they acting for the benefit of others, but rather they are harming the others. With regard to the ethical theory of egoism, Macklin's (1983) view is that 'ethical egoism' is not a moral basis of ethical behavior since it does not provide moral reasons for acting. Consequently, if a person's self-interest conflicts with both the interests of the organization and the society, then it cannot be defined as moral.

This view accords with McGuire's (1983, p. 50) concept of how a conflict of interest may be defined: 'a conflict of interest exists when a subsystem deliberately attempts to enhance its own interests or those of an alien system to the detriment of the larger system of which it is a part'. A subsystem is basically a person, and an alien system is another firm or person that is not an integral part of the larger system. This implies that both the system and the subsystem have different and totally opposed values which lead to harmful actions of one against another. And thus, if the subsystem wishes to profit, it will cause harm to the system.

Finally, there is a difference between the actual and potential conflicts of interest. An actual conflict occurs when people harm their firm out of self-interest. A potential conflict

occurs when people are pressurized, tempted or motivated by self-interest to act against the firm's interest. Actual conflicts are unethical because they contravene and violate the professional contract that a worker establishes with one firm and according to which the employee has to advance the goal achievement and the profit of the firm (Velasquez, 1998).

Discrimination
This term is associated with a large number of wrongful acts that frequently occur in the occupational field of an individual and it is used to define the case where a person is deprived of some benefit or opportunity due to his/her membership of a particular group toward which there is substantial prejudice. Discrimination can take place under all the conditions of employment that directly affect the economic interests of employees, such as hiring (preferential hiring), promotion, payment or fringe benefits. The basic feature of such adverse treatment is that people are marked because of their race, gender, age or health (Velasquez, 1998; Treviño & Nelson, 1999; Boatright, 2000).

How can this treatment be explained psychologically? In order to answer that question, we need to describe the intentions of those who discriminate. The basic feature of discrimination is adverse treatment of a person due to his/her membership of a certain group, and the main intention in such cases is to treat all members of certain groups differently. Employers who refuse to hire, for example, black people or women, usually defend their choices by connecting race or gender to the job. They admit their intent to treat some people differently on the basis of a characteristic, but they refuse to admit that their behavior is racist or sexist. They claim that their behavior is based on business considerations (Boatright, 2000).

Thus, discrimination in employment must involve three elements: first, it concerns a decision that affects a person in a negative way which is not due to his/her ability to perform a certain task; second, such treatment derives from racial or sexual prejudice or from stereotypes; and third, the decision harms the individual's interests (e.g., loss of job or promotion) (Velasquez, 1998).

The ethical arguments against any form of discrimination are divided into three main categories. The first is the utilitarian view that is based on the idea that society's productivity will be optimized if every job is awarded according to a person's competency. In order to accomplish maximally productive jobs, every job should be assigned to those whose skills and personality traits fit the job. The second is the Kantian perspective, which holds that human beings should be treated not merely as means but as ends as well. It is a principle that refers to an individual's moral right to be treated as free and equal to other persons. Discrimination violates this principle in two ways. First, the main belief is that one group is inferior to others (black people, women). Racial or sexual discrimination is based on stereotypes that see minorities as 'lazy' or 'shiftless' and women as 'emotional' or 'weak'. Consequently, those persons' self-esteem is undermined and their right to be treated equally is violated. Second, the members of certain groups are placed in lower economic and social positions, that is, women and minorities have fewer job opportunities than men and they also have lower salaries, which leads to the conclusion that, again, their right to equal treatment is violated.

From the point of view of the offender, the Kantian perspective of the categorical imperative adds that those who actually discriminate would not want to see their action

universalized because they would not want others to suffer. Consequently, it is morally wrong for offenders to discriminate.

The third ethical argument against discrimination, is from the point of view of justice. John Rawls refers to the 'principle of equal opportunity', and asserts that 'social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity' (Rawls, 1999, p. 28). Discrimination violates this principle by preventing minorities from having equal opportunities to acquire high-level positions (Velasquez, 1998; Boatright, 2000).

There are different kinds of discrimination in the workplace. In this chapter, we shall refer to only two cases: women, and people who suffer from addictions. The first and best-known form of discrimination against women is two-pronged: either it puts barriers in the way of their career advancement or it involves sexual harassment. Regarding the first issue, a well-known phenomenon is the 'glass ceiling', that is, an invisible barrier preventing women from advancing to higher levels within an organization (Harris, 1997; Drafke & Kossen, 1998; Gordon, 2002). Today the barriers are less harsh because certain social and economic factors are fueling the elevation of women into leadership or managerial positions. One of these is the 'women's movement', which promoted a more expanded role in society for women. Another is civil rights legislation, which forced companies to reverse their aggressiveness toward women. And finally, the unrelenting inflation has also led to the development of the need for a family to be supported economically by two salaries rather than only one. Nevertheless, the problem of discrimination still exists (Dubrin, 1981).

One explanation for this is that men do not take women seriously because women do not correspond to the 'instrumental innovative role' stereotype which is attributed to men. In other words, men cannot perceive and accept the concept of a woman who brings new ideas and special skills into company. Furthermore, even when a woman is recognized as having done a good job, her performance will not be attributed to her abilities but to other factors, and in addition there will not be any future expectation of a similar performance by her.

Conversely, an unsuccessful performance by a male will be attributed to bad luck and not to low qualifications or lack of ability. Finally, in the case of hiring a woman, a very frequent phenomenon is the devaluation or undervaluation of her qualifications. Often, women are more highly qualified than they appear to be or than others present them to be (Purdy, 1995).

The second form of discrimination against women is sexual harassment. This is considered to be an abuse of power, since it is a way of exerting power over a weaker person (Robbins, 1998; Gordon, 2002). The concept of power in the workplace should be taken seriously, since the idea of unequal power exists from the very beginning of the occupational relation between employer and employee. Supervisors decide, reward and coerce, and this gives them supervisory power which they may unethically abuse (Robbins, 1998; Bratton & Gold, 1999).

The psychological condition in a man who harasses is based on a feeling of victory, or on an inner need to be the center of attention or on the feeling that women are inferior and do not belong in the workplace (Gordon, 2002). On the other hand, serious psychological damage can be identified in the harassed person that leads to the development of stress (Bratton & Gold, 1999).

Sexual harassment is defined as

> unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors and other verbal or physical conduct of a sexual nature that takes place under any of the following conditions:
>
> 1.   Submission to such conduct is made either explicitly or implicitly a term or condition of an individual's employment.
> 2.   Submission or rejection of such conduct by an individual is used as the basis for employment decisions affecting such an individual.
> 3.   Such conduct has the purpose or effect of unreasonably interfering with an individual's work performance or creating an intimidating, hostile, or offensive work environment. (Velasquez, 1998; Boatright, 2000; Dessler, 2000)

Accordingly, there are two types of sexual harassment: the 'quid pro quo harassment' (which occurs when superiors use their power to grant or deny employment benefits to exact sexual favors from a subordinate) and the 'hostile working environment harassment' (which is the sexual nature of the conduct of co-workers that causes a woman to feel uncomfortable) (Harris, 1997; Bratton & Gold, 1999; Treviño & Nelson, 1999; Boatright, 2000; Dessler, 2000). Both cases concern the stereotypes that prevail outside the working environment where some men view women as sex objects. The conditions for stereotyping thus permit 'sex role spill over', in which women's roles outside of employment 'spill over' into the workplace where other roles related to job performance should prevail (Boatright, 2000).

The second kind of discrimination in the workplace is related to (i) addictions, such as smoking, alcohol and drugs, and (ii) HIV illness. These deficiencies in the workplace are closely related to the right to privacy and the right to maintain good health (in the case of non-smokers). In most working environments, strict discrimination against these people takes place which is characterized on the one hand as unethical, and on the other as psychologically harmful.

Smoking is a habit that harms health, so in most workplaces, either it is prohibited or the band of smokers are restricted to designated smoking areas within the company. In the case of hiring, an employer may reject a smoker (without of course admitting that the reason for the rejection is that specific habit) (Dessler, 2000). But how ethical is this discrimination? Smokers, unwillingly, are basically alienated by their co-workers, that is, they are not treated with the proper respect. But it would be highly unethical if smokers continued to work and smoke among the rest of the group who are non-smokers. Their habit could cause harm to the others' health, which means that the smokers are now the ones who are disrespectful of the others. On the other hand, this alienation of smokers could lead to serious psychological problems including frustration, depression and resentment.

The possibility of addiction to alcohol or drugs is addressed by the companies through a series of tests that employees are obliged to undergo (Davis & Newstrom, 1989; Harris, 1997; Fisher et al., 1999; Dessler, 2000). According to Kupfer (1995), employees are obliged to submit to drug testing. The ensuing debate concerns the privacy rights of individuals as opposed to the responsibility of the employers to have drug-free employees. Managers believe that drug-abusing workers cost the firm a lot of money in productivity, absenteeism and medical expenses (ibid.). This gives rise to the ethical question: 'Does a firm have the right to force people to do something against

their will?'. We could answer, no, but since drug (or alcohol) abuse causes serious problems for the other workers in the firm and their general happiness, according to utilitarianism, drug testing could be ethical. But is the coerced person affected psychologically? Probably, to a certain extent, but many companies have special supportive programs to help such people.

The same problems arise in the case of those who are HIV positive. Some companies insist that their personnel undergo HIV testing. In Canada, this is considered to be an intrusion of individual rights, and employers are prohibited from subjecting their applicants to the procedure (Bratton & Gold, 1999). In the case of already hired employees who are infected, the employer should provide them with all the necessary support in order to help them deal with the problem (ibid.; Dessler, 2000; Nelson & Quick, 2006). There are also situations where those who are infected do not want to reveal their situation because they are afraid of being stigmatized (Nelson & Quick, 2006).

But what happens if the infected person is, say, a surgeon in a hospital? How ethical or right is it to remain in the job by keeping the condition a secret? And consequently, how ethical is it for the manager to intervene? People have the right to privacy, which means that, theoretically, they can conceal their condition. But from the point of view of ethics, a surgeon may become a danger to his (or her) patients: if during an operation he is cut, it is quite possible that he may infect the patient, which means that he is causing harm to another person without respecting that person's rights to health and well-being.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have analyzed situations that can negatively affect the healthy character of human and professional relations in the working environment of a company. Every situation is strongly related to ethical issues, as well as to psychological ones, since we are dealing with relationships between different kinds of people. Each individual has his/her own character, personality traits and psychological variables. An important aspect of the situations dealt with is the existence of stereotypes which impose a certain view and behavior. For example, the stereotype of 'female mental and physical weakness' causes problems in the communicative process between people in a company, and accordingly creates a permanent unhealthy working environment.

Generally speaking, problematic relations between co-workers or between superiors and subordinates are caused by the appearance, development and domination of certain 'models' that determine what is right and what is wrong. There is also a strong connection with the inequality of the relationship between workers and their managers that normally exists and that may lead to unhealthy relations at work.

The general conclusion is that in order to avoid the development of unhealthy relations, people should try to understand and accept the diversity between them. Such diversity can be at the level of race, gender, age or mental and physical condition, but it can also be at the level of culture, social status and economic background. As Gordon (2002) suggests, it is very important for a company's well-being that the management takes into account the uniqueness of each employee through developing effective relationships among people with different abilities, experiences and aspirations. Understanding the ways people differ, is a first step in dealing with diversity.

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Alexander-Stamatios G. Antoniou is Lecturer in Psychology at the University of Athens, Greece and Consultant in Organizational Psychology and Behavior, **Cary L. Cooper, CBE,** is Distinguished Professor of Organizational Psychology and Health at Lancaster University, UK, **George P. Chrousos** is Professor of Pediatrics and Chairman of the First Department of Pediatrics at the University of Athens Medical School, Greece, **Charles D. Spielberger** is Distinguished Research Professor of Psychology and Director of the Center for Research in Behavioral Medicine and Health Psychology at the University of South Florida, USA and **Michael William Eysenck** is Professor in the Psychology Department at Royal Holloway, the University of London, UK.