

## ANTECEDENTS OF INCIVILITY IN WORKPLACE EMAIL EXCHANGES: EXPERIMENTAL INVESTIGATIONS

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Workplace incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999) is the focus of a rapidly growing scientific literature (e.g. Lim & Cortina, 2005; Martin & Hine, 2005; Pearson, et al., 2001). The prevalence of incivility in workplaces is high (Cortina et al., 2001) and its consequences can be severe. Targets or witnesses of incivility may suffer negative outcomes, including impaired concentration (Pearson et al., 2001), reduced psychological well-being (Martin & Hine, 2005), and diminished organizational trust and commitment (Spreitzer, 1995). However, few studies have focused on the potential causes of incivility. Using experimental manipulations embedded in organizational simulations we examined 3 potential antecedents of incivility in workplace email communication.

In study 1 we examined whether the civility of the treatment targets receive from others and their workload affect their perceptions and perpetration of incivility. Participants ( $N = 172$ ) were randomly assigned to workload condition (high vs. low) and responded to 2 emails varying in civility (civil vs. uncivil). Participants perpetrated more incivility (as assessed by independent raters) in response to the uncivil e-mail than to the civil e-mail. Although perceptions of incivility in the stimulus emails were not influenced by workload, response emails from those in the high workload condition were independently rated as more uncivil than were responses from those in the low workload condition. A workload by civility of the stimulus email interaction was also evident. There was a larger disparity in the civility of the responses to civil and uncivil stimuli in the high, relative to the low, workload condition. Finally, participants' self-ratings of the incivility of their responses were significantly lower than ratings assigned by the raters.

In study 2 we examined whether the hierarchical relationship between the individuals involved in an email exchange influences incivility perception and perpetration. In design similar to Study 1, participants ( $N=36$ ) received and responded to uncivil emails from a supervisor, peer, and a subordinate. Participants' perceived more incivility in similar messages sent from subordinates than in those from peers or superiors. Furthermore, independent raters detected more incivility in responses to subordinates relative to superiors. One unpredicted result was that the amount of incivility in responses to peers did not differ from that in responses to subordinates.

The results of these 2 studies will be discussed in terms of their implications for the research literature on workplace incivility and organizational interventions on workplace incivility and aggression. Potential limitations of the studies, as well as future research directions will also be presented.