

Maximizing the Passive-Aggressive Employees' Performance

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Abstract. Passive-aggressive is a kind of self-defense mechanism, especially when the individual has to face the superior figure i.e. his / her leader, spouse, or colleagues. In labor force, the figure is perceived negatively and hostile by the passive-aggressive employees. However, they are unassertive in front of the leader. At first they are passive (always agree to accomplish tasks), but they refuse aggressively to execute the tasks when the leader left. It is a kind of sabotage toward organization. They are aggressive since they have to release their anger. They intend to take revenge toward the leader through neglecting the organization tasks. It seems that the leader's bewilderment because of the neglected tasks is their contentment. In order to cover their procrastination and neglecting habits, they raise logic reasons. The leader does not have strong reason to fire them since they always agree to accomplish the task in front of leader. There are three strategies for leader to overcome those spoil employees, even maximizing their work performance. Firstly, leader should be aware and not being trapped by the employees' spoiling game. Secondly, leader should discuss assertively to those employees in person about the impact of passive-aggressive behavior towards organization. The discussion should be based on documents about the employees' failure in completing tasks. Thirdly, leader should also introspect whether he/she also behaves passive-aggressively. When the first person in organization behaves passive-aggressively, employees are more likely to copy their model. This is common in the passive-aggressive organization.

Keywords: Passive-aggressive, introspection, communication

Introduction

Passive-aggressive is a kind of self-defense mechanism, especially when the individual has to face the superior figure i.e. his / her leader, spouse, or colleagues. In labor force, the figure is perceived negatively and hostile by the passive-aggressive employees. However, they behave unassertively in front of the leader. At first they are passive (always agree to accomplish tasks), but they refuse aggressively to execute the tasks when the leader left (Gaines, 1996). It is a kind of sabotage toward organization. They are aggressive since they have to release their anger. They intend to take revenge toward the leader through neglecting the organization tasks. It seems that the leader's bewilderment because of the neglected tasks is their contentment. In order to cover their procrastination and neglecting habits, they cleverly raise logic reasons such as completing the tasks is not their job description or nobody gives them accurate information about those tasks (Whitson, 2010).

This passive-aggressive behavior is employees' unassertive strategy to face the undesired leader. In organization, visible aggressive behavior is punished. On the other hand, covered aggressive behavior is less likely to cause punishment, especially when the actor at first agrees to accomplish the leader's instruction.

The relevant problem is that leader is likely to be upset when facing the passive-aggressive employees. The passive-aggressive behavior is categorized as deviance behavior since it can harm organization i.e. sabotage, low morale among employees, delaying production schedule, increasing employee absenteeism (Dranitsaris, 2016, Whitson, 2010). A research revealed that 23.4% of 395 university students reported that the passive-aggressive behavior caused emotional exhaustion (Liu & Rolof, 2015). Even employees' passive-aggressive behavior has influenced 30% organizational failure (Appelbaum & Roy-Girard, 2007).

What is the significance of this passive-aggressive behavior discussion? The toxic behaviors – including this passive-aggressive behavior – in organization are more likely to increase lately (Appelbaum & Shapiro, 2006). Employees develop the passive-aggressive behavior as their defense toward prolonged

working stress and therefore their work performance is inefficient. When majority employees, including the top managers, are behaving passive-aggressively, their organization is identified as the passive-aggressive organization.

A research in India with 84 NGO (Non Government Organization) employees revealed that the organizational stress variable has influenced 20.8% self-helplessness variable (Shah & Pethe, 2006). The self-helplessness is the main characteristic of the passive-aggressive behavior. Besides that, this passive-aggressive behavior also raises because of the increasing service occupations, dislike to labor union existence, and the more ethnic heterogeneous employees because of transportation (Lambercht, 2010). The next reason for this essay significance relates with the Booz Allen Hamilton, Inc research on 30,000 employees. It is revealed that the passive-aggressive organization becomes the first rank (27%) among other unhealthy organizations (Neilson, Pasternack & Van Nuys, 2005).

Characteristic of Passive-Aggressive Employee

What characteristic is the passive-aggressive behavior?

- The first characteristic is always having perception as victims (Kets de Vries, 2012). This perception is called as self-handicapping or self-helplessness, and it is from social learning (Fogle, 1978; Shah & Pethe, 2006). The self-helplessness person believes that his/her fate is always lack of success for whole life. Because of having unfortunate life, the person always blames others. In order to recover his/her life, therefore others (external factor) have to be changed whilst he/she is stagnant.
- The second characteristic is refusing to be assisted although his / her work performance is awful because of procrastination (Kets de Vries, 2012). In order to save his/her self-esteem, the person always blames leader for his/her unsatisfactory performance, or tell a lie. In front of colleagues the person is able to dramatize that the leader is ruthless and he/she is the miserable victim. In fact the person puts his/her work status in danger. On the other hand, other normal employees take pains to protect their work status.
- The third characteristic is always withholding important information (Gaines, 1996). This is very dangerous, especially when the person has important position in an organization. When the organization is nearly bankrupt, the person surely blames the leader. Organization bankruptcy is not his/her responsibility.
- The fourth characteristic is that the person frequently unable to meet leader's expectation on accomplishing tasks. At first, the person agrees to accomplish the task especially in front of the leader, but as soon as the leader left then the task is abandoned. The person attacks the leader indirectly through neglecting tasks and disappointing the leader. In order to enhance the self-esteem and also to cover laziness, the person create a seemingly logic story i.e. blaming others for the failure tasks. When the leader upset and colleagues are miserable, the passive-aggressive employee feels he/she is able to control situation and become satisfied. Indeed he/she is a spoiled employee (Dranitsaris, 2013).
- The fifth characteristic is that the person always behind the schedule either in completing tasks and often being late at meetings with leader (Unterberg, 2003). He/she is the real procrastinator. The person even has heart to inform his/her absence several minutes before the deadline. The frequent boring excuse for that tardiness or absence is computer damage. It is amazing that his/her computer is always more frequently crashed compared with others' computer. Actually the person has reputation as the inefficient employee in organization.
- The sixth characteristic is having annoying habits such as sullen and being sulky when his/her urges are ignored. Because of this ignorance the person always grumbles unassertively and blaming the leader. The person also complains everyday about his/her unfortunate working fate in organization. This is likely the spoiled child syndrome (Bredehoft, Mennicke, Potter & Clarke, 1998).
- The seventh characteristic is a habit of giving envious comment toward successful colleagues (Unterberg, 2003). According to his/her opinion, other's achievement is significant evidence about leader's unfairness.

- The eighth characteristic is the habit of forgetting many things, apologizing, and then promising for better preparation. However, it is only an empty promise with no intention to be fulfilled (Dranitsaris, 2016). Promising is only a way to save his/her pride.
- The ninth characteristic is the gossiping habit. The person is always has free time gossiping the leader's unfairness. This gossiping arena is used as a moment for revenge unobtrusively toward leader. This social arena is also good evidence that the passive-aggressive employee has extrovert personality. Therefore this passive-aggressive behavior is really dangerous since the actor will spread those unhealthy habits to other employees, and therefore the organization will also has passive-aggressive characteristic.

Reasons of Passive-Aggressive Behavior

What are the reasons for this passive-aggressive behavior? The figure below will demonstrate the reasons behind the deviance behavior in organization, and the passive-aggressive is also sort out of deviance behavior (Robinson & Bennet, 1995).



Figure 1. Typology of negative deviant workplace behavior

Figure 1 shows that deviance behavior has two dimensions i.e. organizational vs. interpersonal, and has serious impact vs. minor impact. At the first quadrant, those property deviance behaviors induce serious damage on organization level. Those behaviors are sabotaging equipment, accepting kickbacks, lying about hours work, and stealing from company. Those behaviors are really dangerous since they are classified as corruption. At the second quadrant, the production deviance behaviors induce minor damage on organization level. Those behaviors are leaving early, taking prolonged breaks, intentionally work slowly, and wasting resources. In this quadrant, employees work inefficiently. The passive-aggressive behavior is likely in this quadrant. When majority employees work inefficiently, then it is a signal that the organization is also classified as passive-aggressive.

At the third quadrant, the political deviance behavior damages the interpersonal relationship among employees, although the damage is likely minor. Those behaviors are showing favoritism, gossiping about co-workers, blaming co-workers, and having disadvantageous competition with co-workers. Showing favoritism tends to envy others. Examples of disadvantageous competition behavior are competing on glamour working costumes, luxurious working transportation, and other working attributes. At the fourth quadrant, the personal aggression deviance behavior damage interpersonal relationship among employees, and they are seriously harmful. Those behaviors are sexual harassment, verbal abuse, stealing from co-workers, and endangering co-workers. The serious harmful of this behavior may have consequence with law, and therefore will surely damage the organization. It is a kind of black campaign for organization, and those behaviors move toward the first quadrant.

In all quadrants, all deviant behaviors in workplace are basically caused by either external or internal factors. The external factor contributes to the deviant behavior occur through the organization culture, leadership, organization policies and rules. The internal factor contributes to the deviant behavior occur through the individual's life experience and hereditary (Wood, 1998). The hereditary elements consist of three aspects i.e. physical, emotional, and mental. For example, an autistic employee has to be treated distinctively since he/she has to be prevented from carrying out duties or using instrumental when there is no valid reason to do so (Booth, 2014). The life experience element also influences the deviant behavior occurrence through inconvenient life experience. For example, sad moment in adolescence period that were not adequately supported will predict the angry and deviant behaviors (Myers, 2000). The hereditary and life experience elements are the root of personality (Wood, 1998). Therefore all deviant behaviors in workplace should be surmounted through either personality or organizational factors consideration.

Overcoming Passive-Aggressive Behavior in Workplace

What should a leader do to face the passive-aggressive employees? There are three suggested strategies for leaders to change the employees' annoying behavior in order to increase the organizational function (Wood, 1998). The first principle is that people always perceive any situation (including behavior changing) based on their own benefit. If changing behavior is perceived beneficial (such as receiving many rewards), people are more likely to change their behavior. On the other hand, when changing behavior is perceived disadvantageous (such as harmful), people are discouraged to change. The second principle, the change should be commenced from the person. We cannot change people otherwise they want to be changed. The reward-punishment system is also able to change behavior but only temporary. The third principle, leader has to change first and becomes a good model for employees. Leader could motivate employees through his/her ability to change.

Based on those three principles, leader can arrange some strategies to free organization from the passive-aggressive behavior among employees. Here are some suggestions:

1. Leader should be aware and not be trapped by this spoiled employee power. Really this is a kind of power struggle between leader and employee. Employee behaves passive-aggressive because he/she wants to take revenge and to control workplace situation (Lambrecht, 2010).
2. Leader should document the employee's failures in accomplishing tasks accurately. These documents are really important in order to interview the employee assertively. Therefore employees will not be able to eschew or try to find excuse to cover laziness / procrastination (Unterberg, 2003). Leader should not be trapped on argumentative debates but focus on the evidence. These documents also useful for leader to give constructive feedback that the passive-aggressive behavior is really damaging to organization. Besides that, leader can also set down appropriate treatments for that employee, whether he/she should be rotated to another division or should take probation status.
3. Leader should make adequate time to discuss with the employee in person. This is a strategy to avoid the person being humiliated in front of others. This is crucial since the passive-aggressive usually is extrovert and has numerous supporters. This is obvious mostly in weak organizations. In this discussion, leader has to obtain employee's commitment to accomplish task on time, and commitment not to sabotage organization.
4. Leader should also be able to discover employee's hidden potencies in order to boost self-esteem. This can be obtained through monitoring closely his/her accomplishment, although the tasks are simple. It is because the employee usually has low self-efficacy.
5. Leaders should be introspective, since leader may also have passive-aggressive behavior. Passive-aggressive leader is often found in a passive-aggressive organization (Bolton & Grawitch, 2011; Booz Allen Hamilton, 2004). Therefore leader should be encouraged to become a good model for employees at whole.
6. Leader should also ensure that every employee understands his/her job description. Therefore there will not throw responsibility among employees. Field employees and line managers should receive adequate information in order to make quick and accurate decisions. The employee performance appraisal should also differentiate the employees' best, middle, and low working achievement (Booz Allen Hamilton, 2004).

Discussion

The existence of passive-aggressive employees in organization, in fact, is not by chance. When they still survive in an organization, it means that the actor has passed two kinds of work selection i.e. job selection and ability to survive selection. Actually they have good work quality. They develop passive-aggressive

behavior because they are under work stress (Unterberg, 2003) and also work in passive-aggressive organization (Bolton & Grawitch, 2011; Booz Allen Hamilton, 2004; Lambrecht, 2010). Therefore leader has to develop organization through exposing good organizational behavior. Leader should be an excellent model.

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