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Turning Points in Relationships with Disliked Co-workers

Jon A. Hess

University of Dayton, jhess1@udayton.edu

Becky Lynn Omdahl

Metropolitan State University

Janie M. Harden Fritz

Duquesne University

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Turning Points in Relationships with Disliked Co-workers

Abstract

Although most people begin their employment with the education and on-the-job training to handle the tasks their jobs entail, few long-term employees boast that they feel competent in dealing with all the difficult people they encounter in the workplace. Unpleasant coworkers range from annoying nuisances to major sources of job frustration and career roadblocks. Given that periodic preoccupation with unlovable coworkers is nearly a universal feature of organizational life, it is not surprising that such relationships are given due attention in the media and popular press (e.g., Bramson, 1989; Topchik, 2000). What is surprising is how little scholarly attention has been given to such interactions. Scholars have extensively examined the outcomes of positive work relationships, such as social support and friendship through co-worker relationships and guidance through mentoring (e.g., Bridge & Baxter, 1992; Kram & Isabella, 1985). However, only recently has scholarly attention been focused on identifying troublesome coworkers and documenting outcomes of unpleasant work relationships such as cynicism and reduced job satisfaction and organizational commitment (e.g., Fritz, 2002; Omdahl & Fritz, 2000). This neglect of unpleasant or difficult relationships in the workplace mirrors the more general literature on interpersonal communication. For decades, the focus has been on the development and maintenance of effective relationships, and only recently has research on the “dark side” of personal relationships gained attention (Duck, 1994).

This examination of negative relationships in general and with negative coworkers in particular is long overdue. People spend considerable time and energy navigating difficult relationships, and many working hours are spent in the company of others whom we do not voluntarily seek out and may actively dislike (Hess, 2000). These relationships have many negative effects on employees and organizations. For instance, research has shown that negative relationships detract from a person’s occupational experience through increased stress, workplace cynicism, organizational turnover, and decreased job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and task effectiveness (e.g., Cooper & Cartwright, 1994; Fritz & Omdahl, 1998). Research that increases scholars’ understanding of the causes, nature, and processes of such relationships can offer insight for communication theory and practice.

Disciplines

Critical and Cultural Studies | Interpersonal and Small Group Communication | Organizational Communication | Speech and Rhetorical Studies

Comments

Permission documentation is on file.

Turning Points in Relationships with Disliked Co-workers

Jon A. Hess

Becky L. Omdahl

Janie M. Harden Fritz

Although most people begin their employment with the education and on-the-job training to handle the *tasks* their job entails, few long-term employees boast that they feel competent in dealing with all the difficult *people* they encounter in the workplace. These unpleasant coworkers range from annoying nuisances to major sources of job frustration and career roadblocks. Given that periodic preoccupation with unlovable coworkers is nearly a universal feature of organizational life, it is not surprising that such relationships are given due attention in the media and popular press (e.g., Bramson, 1989; Topchik, 2000). What is surprising is how little scholarly attention has been given to such interactions. Scholars have extensively examined the outcomes of positive work relationships, such as social support and friendship through coworker relationships and guidance through mentoring (e.g., Bridge & Baxter, 1992; Kram & Isabella, 1985). However, only recently has scholarly attention been focused on identifying troublesome coworkers and documenting outcomes of unpleasant work relationships such as cynicism, and reduced job satisfaction and organizational commitment (e.g., Fritz, 2002; Omdahl & Fritz, 2000). This neglect of unpleasant or difficult relationships in the workplace mirrors the more general literature on interpersonal communication. For decades the focus has been on the development and maintenance of effective relationships, and only recently has research on the "dark side" of personal relationships gained attention (Duck, 1994).

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relationships have many negative effects on employees and organizations. For instance, research has shown that negative relationships detract from a person's occupational experience through increased stress, workplace cynicism, and organizational turnover, and decreased job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and task effectiveness (e.g., Cooper & Cartwright, 1994; Fritz & Omdahl, 1998). Research that increases scholars' understanding of the causes, nature, and processes of such relationships can offer insight for communication theory and practice.

Review of Literature

Although "negative relationships" could be construed in many ways, this study focuses on relationships with disliked coworkers that have an affectively negative tone. The requirements of organizational involvement prohibit most employees from avoiding or exiting such relationships with coworkers, customers, or clients who they dislike. Given the non-voluntary status of these relationships, workers continue them in spite of their unpleasant natures.

Research on negative workplace relationships is sparse, but recent studies have begun to examine some important aspects of these relationships. For instance, researchers have identified features of disliked others at work (Sypher & Zorn, 1988), outcomes of negative workplace relationships (Omdahl & Fritz, 2000), and types of negative coworkers (Fritz, 2002). Furthermore, Fritz (1997) and Omdahl, Fritz, and Hess (2004) investigated the likelihood of exit, voice, loyalty and neglect responses to hypothetical situations with bosses, peers, and subordinates, and Monroe, Borzi, and DiSalvo (1992) looked at managerial strategies for dealing with difficult subordinates.

To date, however, researchers have not examined the processes in these relationships—how they begin or turn affectively negative, what cognitive processes are important in these relationships, and what happens throughout the course of these relationships that makes them such a negative experience (but see Sias, Perry, Fix, & Silva, 2000, for an investigation of work relationship deterioration). At present, our understanding of key events in these relationships and how people deal with the challenges they pose is limited.

Turning Points

One approach to the study of personal relationships that has much to offer our understanding of relationships with disliked coworkers is the turning points approach. A turning point is an "event or occurrence that is associated with a change in a relationship" (Baxter & Bullis, 1986, p. 288). The process of relationship development and deterioration can be conceived as a series of turning points. These events provide insight into the forces that impact relational trajectories, that is, they reveal the causes of relational changes. By studying turning points in relationships with disliked coworkers, we can learn about what forces or events prompt relationships to become more negative or more positive.

The examination of turning points has resulted in productive research about many types of personal relationships: courtship (Bolton, 1961); romantic (e.g., Baxter & Bullis, 1986); grandmother-granddaughter (Holladay, et al., 1998); mentoring (Bullis & Bach, 1989); chair-faculty (Barge & Musambira, 1992); post-divorce (Graham, 1997); and individuals-institutions during the organizational socialization process (Bullis & Bach, 1989). Transitions in relationships at work in a positive direction have been examined through methods much akin to turning point analysis (Sias & Cahill, 1998), and Sias et al. (2000) have looked at events that resulted in work friendship deterioration. However, this review of literature resulted in no research on turning points in negative work relationships that permitted examination of both positively- and negatively-valenced turning points. This lack is unfortunate, because the identification of turning points seems important for understanding organizational relational trajectories. Furthermore, it seems important to identify not only turning points that send a relationship into a negative trajectory, but turning points that send negative relationships onto a more positive direction as well. Research on both types of turning points would be useful for both development of theory and intervention.

A significant question that turning points can illuminate is whether negative relationships are good relationships that went awry or relationships that, from the beginning, were characterized by "bad chemistry." That is, are these relationships more commonly positive relationships that turned negative, or were they "bad" from the start? Research has demonstrated that the presence of certain qualities such as physical beauty or attitudinal similarity is one factor that makes a person attractive or unattractive to someone else (e.g., Berscheid &

Walster, 1974; Byrne, 1971). If liking or disliking results from qualities a person perceives in another, then it is reasonable to assume that disliking could be present from two persons' first meeting. On the other hand, Levitt, Silver, and Franco's (1996) research suggested that many troublesome relationships were more positive initially than they were later. Given both options seem possible, is one more common than the other?

The turning points approach to negative work relationships suggests research questions worth investigating:

RQ1: What turning points do people report in negative coworker relationships?

RQ2: Do relationships more commonly start positive and deteriorate, are they more commonly bad from the start, or is either situation equally common?

Method

Participants

The seventy-seven participants were recruited from three universities. Participants were (1) adult students in a baccalaureate program within the division of continuing education in a mid-sized, private, eastern university and coworkers they recruited ($n = 30$); (2) adult students in a baccalaureate program in a mid-sized, mid-western public university ($n = 25$); and (3) family or friends of students in a large, public, mid-western university ($n = 22$). Students received extra credit for participation or for recruiting a participant.

The participants ranged in age from 20 to 57, with a mean age of 39. Thirty-five percent were male, and 65% were female. They reported their race as Caucasian (85%), African-American (8%), Asian (3%), and others, including Hispanic, Arab, and mixed-race (4%). At the time they filled out the survey, 73% of the respondents indicated they were working full-time (40 or more hours a week), 21% indicated they worked between 24 and 38 hours a week, and 6% reported working 20 or fewer hours a week. The participants held a diverse array of occupations and worked for a wide variety of organizations. The most common occupations included manager (20%); doctor or nurse (16%); trainer or teacher (9%); and accountant or purchaser,

administrative assistant, and salesperson or loan officer (7% each). The most common types of industries in which these people worked were health care (31%), manufacturing (19%), education (14%), financial services or insurance (10%), and non-profit or religious organizations (7%).

Instrument

At the outset of the questionnaire, participants were instructed to think of someone at work, either current or past, whom they liked the least. It was specified that the person could be a supervisor/manager, a coworker, or a subordinate. If choosing from multiple disliked others, they were to choose the relationship they could most accurately recall and that was most important to them. Participants were then asked to identify turning points in the relationship, with turning point defined as "an event that led to significant changes in the relationship." They were instructed to draw a timeline beginning with the approximate date the participant first met the person and ending when they no longer interacted with the other or the present date (if the participant still had a relationship with that person). Along this timeline they were told to mark X's at the point at which they recalled turning points. In addition, participants were instructed to indicate the valence (positivity or negativity) of the relationship across the timeline. Participants were to use a vertical axis ranging from +10 (very positive) through 0 (neutral) to -10 (very negative). Thus, the resulting timeline presented a topographical image of the perceived affective tone of the relationship that they subjectively experienced. To facilitate their understanding of this task, a sample timeline was included marked with dates, X's for turning points, and topographical lines. A written explanation followed the sample diagram to make certain that participants could learn how the different markings reflected the subjective experience of the hypothetical relationship.

Participants were then instructed to answer questions about each turning point. For each turning point event, participants were asked to describe the turning point in detail. Specifically, they were told, "Describe the event that you regard to be a turning point (i.e., a significant change in the relationship). Please be as specific as possible in describing the words, actions, and situation involved in the turning point." Next, participants were asked to "Describe the effect the event

had. Specifically, how did it change your feelings and thoughts about the other, yourself, and the working relationship?" In order to make certain that participants offered a clear reason as part of their description they were asked to summarize "What specifically brought about the change in your perception?" Finally, they were asked, "How did you deal with or manage the event?"

With each turning point description, participants were asked to report the degree of distancing they engaged in at that point of the relationship. This was done using an eight-item distance index. Unpublished data (author citation) showed that this index had good reliability ($\alpha = .78$), exhibited stable and meaningful factor structure, and performed well in tests of validity and temporal stability.

The final section consisted of Rubin's nine-item liking scale (Rubin, 1970) and a variety of demographic questions about the participant and the participant's chosen person. These additional questions (other than demographics) were included for an additional study beyond the research questions investigated here.

Procedure

Students were read an announcement in class inviting them either to participate in the study (at two universities) or to recruit someone who could do the survey (at the other university). Participants were given information about the study (which included a consent form at one university that required consent forms, even for "exempt" studies). Each participant was given a copy of the questionnaire. Upon completion, the questionnaire was returned to a member of the research team.

Results

Research Question 1

The first research question asked what types of incidents people saw as turning points in affectively negative workplace relationships. Because participants graphed the turning points, these incidents could be classified as positive or negative turning points. The following sections address each type of turning point: (1) turning points that were identical in nature, whether negative or positive; (2)

negative turning points; and (3) positive turning points.

Table 1
Equivalency Chart

NEGATIVE TURNING POINTS	POSITIVE TURNING POINTS
1. Beginning or End of Relationship	
First met/started job	First met/started job
Left the job/got fired	Left the job/got fired
2. Self (Respondent) or Third Party Was the Cause of the Turning Point	
Structural change (no match)	Structural change
Respondent did something other didn't like	Third party intervention
Heard a rumor (no match)	Respondent did something to improve the situation (no match)
	Sympathy/forgiveness
3. Other Was the Cause of the Turning Point	
3-A Task Issues	
Job ineptitude	Job competence
Threats/unreasonable demands	(no match)
3-B Social/Interpersonal Issues	
<i>Other exhibited bad traits, but not for the purpose of making an attack</i>	
Negative vibes	Positivity/friendliness
<i>Other made an attack on someone</i>	
Face threat	Positivity/friendliness
Malicious treatment	Positivity/friendliness
Mistreated a third party	Treated others well
3-C Combination of Task and Social/Interpersonal Issues	
Conflict	Cooperation/constructive conflict
Closed-minded	Cooperation/constructive conflict
Obstructive/unsupportive	Goal/career support
Poor moral judgment	(no match)

Negative or positive turning points. As Table 1 reveals, turning points fell within three overall categories: beginnings or endings of relationships; self or third party was cause; or other was cause. Within each of the categories, there were specific elicitors. Some of these elicitors appeared in both negative and positive turning point descriptions, while others typified turning points in one direction only. For example, meeting and parting are necessary turning points

in any relationship, and it is not surprising that these events elicited both negative and positive shifts, whereas poor moral judgment was only identified as an other cause of negative turning points.

Negative turning points. Twelve categories of negative turning points were identified. In the vast majority of cases of negative turning points, the respondent saw the turning point as being the result of the other person's behavior. In a few cases, however, the respondent admitted that her or his *own behavior caused the change*. Examples of this type of negative turning point included a person's publishing a coworker's age as part of a trivia contest, and a person's failure to attend a mandatory training session. In both cases, the respondent took responsibility for causing the turning point, rather than attributing it to the other person's reaction. Also, in a few cases, a third party was responsible for the turning point. In these situations, the person reported that they *heard a rumor* about the other, and that led to a negative turn in relations. For instance, when one respondent took a new position, her boss told her that a particular person was difficult and stubborn. For all other types of turning points, however, the respondent identified the source of the downturn as being in the other person's behavior.

Many of the turning points were related solely to the other person's performance of job duties (e.g., task issues). Chief among these was *job ineptitude*, that is, the other person's failure to discharge job duties in the manner in which the respondent felt they should have been done led to a loss of respect for that other person or to unpleasant interactions. One woman asked her boss to protect her from indecent exposure by another coworker, but felt the boss did little to intervene. In another case, an engineer became critical of a new hire who changed a ceramic formula, resulting in poorer performance of the product. *Threats or unreasonable demands* by coworkers also resulted in relations with the respondent taking a turn for the worse. For example, one supervisor asked the respondent to violate company and government regulations; a different supervisor continuously asked his subordinate to do jobs in unreasonably short time periods.

Other turning points were much more personal; in fact, task duties were incidental if even relevant at all (social/interpersonal issues). The least offensive of these was giving off *negative vibes*. In this case, the disliked person exhibited excessive negativity, arrogance, selfishness, abrasive personality characteristics, or

untrustworthiness. Typical examples included a coworker who became extremely negative toward everyone else at work after going through a difficult divorce, or a coworker who was strongly overbearing. While negative vibes were not directed at anyone as an attack, other types of behaviors were. One, identified as *face threat*, happened when the other person made the respondent look bad in front of others. An incidence of face threat happened when a person reprimanded the respondent (who was not the person's subordinate) in a board meeting. A more vicious type of attack was identified as *malicious behavior*. People who acted in this manner made (unprovoked) job or personal attacks, snubbed the respondent, or showed disrespect to the respondent. For instance, one person refused to show sympathy to the respondent after a death in the family, and another person called the respondent a "bitch" in front of customers. In some cases, the disliked person's malice was not directed at the respondent. Instead, these people *mistreated others*. One grocery cashier lost respect for another after she was rude to a customer on welfare, and, after the customer left, made fun of her.

Finally, some turning points involved a mix of task and social issues. *Conflict* was the most common of these turning points. This happened when the two people disagreed or experienced a conflict over some issue, for example, a disagreement over a person's negative review of the respondent or the other's work. In some cases, it was not the conflict but the fact that the other was *closed-minded* and unresponsive to communication that led to the downturn. One respondent said that it was not the disagreement but the fact that the other was not open for discussion that angered her. *Obstructiveness* or *unsupportiveness* was another common turning point. This happened when the other person was obstructive or unsupportive of the respondent's goals; manipulated others for selfish reasons; exerted inappropriate influence; meddled; or made the person feel left out. For example, one person began to notice that she was being left out of decisions directly related to her job. In another case, a person found it hard to access files on a coworker's computer because the coworker kept protecting them with passwords the respondent did not know. Finally, some people were turned off when the other person exhibited *poor moral judgment*. People who acted in this manner made false accusations, abused privileges or benefits, lied, demonstrated bad values, betrayed confidence (especially by gossiping), or devalued friendship. For instance, one respondent felt betrayed when a

coworker leaked personal information to others. In another case, an employee brought charges against management of their ignoring her being "attacked" after she bumped into another employee at the copier. Then said she hurt her back picking up a paper clip, and took extended sick leave. The respondent found this employee's behavior morally problematic.

Positive turning points. Even in such negative relationships, respondents noted plenty of incidents that sent the relationship back on a more positive trajectory. Seven categories of positive turning points were identified. As with the negative turning points, respondents saw most of these as resulting from the other person's behaviors, but did suggest that their own behavior was the cause of a few turning points. In some cases, they noted that through their own behavior, they did *something to improve the situation*. An example of this was a nurse who took the initiative and spoke with a disliked colleague about the problem she (the other) was having with her feet. Some respondents also suggested that their *sympathy or forgiveness* of the other was a turning point in their relationship. Several respondents simply decided to forgive the other, and many others reported that their sympathy for the other's difficulties led to improved relations. Likewise, *third party interventions* often improved relations. One employer reported a disliked peer's harassment to her boss, who took action to eliminate it. For all other turning points, the respondent saw the other's behavior as being the cause of the change.

As with the negative turning points, the positive ones were sometimes work-related, sometimes social, and sometimes a combination of both. The work related ones all boiled down to *job competence*, in which an act of job excellence or mere improvement enhanced relations between the two. In one case a nurse gave a detailed account to the respondent of a difficult time she had with a family and patient, thus making the shift transition easier.

The social incidents that caused turning points were twofold. First, showing *positivity or friendliness* often improved matters. One person reported that when she was going through a personal crisis, a previously disliked coworker was very supportive, which improved relations between them considerably. Another person noted that when a colleague gave her a gift, their relationship got better. Seeing the coworker *treat others well* was the other social event that led to improved relations. A nurse who was compassionate to patients earned back lost respect in the eyes of others (including the

respondent).

The turning points that blended both task and social elements included *cooperation and constructive conflict*. This happened when the other was cooperative or engaged in constructive conflict, was responsive to feedback, or requested reconciliation in some way. For example, one respondent reported that he and a disliked coworker had a brief talk about work, and the conversation was conducted in a civil manner. Another respondent reported that the other person requested that they "bury the hatchet." A second type of turning point that blended task and social elements was *goal or career support*. In this case, the other person did something that was supportive of the respondent's goals or career development, or gave the respondent some positive task feedback or reward. Typical examples included one person who helped the respondent at work, and a boss who gave the respondent an excellent job review.

Research Question Two

The second research question asked whether negative relationships more commonly started good and then went bad, or whether they more commonly were bad from the start. Of the 77 relationships reported, 61 (79%) started positively and went bad, whereas 16 (21%) were bad from the start. Thus, it was much more common in this data set for relationships to go sour over time than to start off on the wrong foot. Interestingly, though, 18 (23%) made positive turns and were considered positive relationships by the time the respondent reported on the relationship (either at the time of completion of the questionnaire or at the time the relationship ended).

Discussion

This study investigated turning points in negative work relationships, with the goal of contributing to a small but emerging literature on the nature and outcomes of negative work relationships. Two research questions guided this study: what types of turning points exist in negative relationships, and what is the nature of the trajectory of such relationships: bad from the outset, or good relationships gone bad? The results of this study offer insights into the nature of turning points in negative relationships and the etiology of such relationships and holds implications for future study of this important topic.

Turning Points in Negative Relationships

The types of turning points reported here contribute to knowledge of similarities and differences between work relationships and those in other contexts. For instance, features of the work context that appear to influence both positive and negative turning points in relationships include structural changes (e.g., being promoted, different job duties) and job skills (ineptitude or competence). The majority of turning points seemed likely to occur in non-work contexts as well as in work contexts (e.g., malicious treatment, conflict). These findings are helpful for theory development in relationship processes, since the extent to which contexts provide unique interactional constraints and resources bounds the applicability of research about relationships across contexts.

Almost four-fifths (79%) of the relationships reported here were positive relationships that turned bad. That so many relationships were not initially negative is a hopeful sign for the possibility of preventive intervention in these cases. It would be important to determine the degree to which various negative turning point events are perceived as preventable. Furthermore, since in most cases the perceived agency for negative turning points was the other party, it seems likely that interventions involving conflict and attribution biases might help parties to negative relationships reframe events in ways that would permit interpersonal "grace" to operate in cases where a coworker is at risk of being "constructed" as a negative or problematic person.

If one arranges the turning point categories in a table, interesting parallelism is apparent (see Table 1). Many of the positive and negative turning points are the mirror image of each other – for instance, the negative turning point of "job ineptitude" has a positive turning point counterpart of "job competence"; the negative category of "obstructive/unsupportive" has a positive counterpart of "goal/career support." The table shows negative and positive instantiations of what are essentially identical categories, but are simply reversed. Only a few categories have no counterpart on the opposite valence. In most of these "unmatched" cases, it is possible to imagine a type of turning point on the other valence that would parallel the identified category, though such instances did not appear in these data. For instance, "immorality" on the negative side might have "exceeding beneficence" on the other side – that is, someone might exhibit a remarkably ethical and "good Samaritan-" or "Mother

Theresa-like" behavior that strikes the respondent as exceptionally laudable or praiseworthy, which might propel the relationship in a positive direction. "Sympathy/forgiveness" might be paralleled by "envy/jealousy," and "threats/unreasonable demands" could be paralleled with "unusual fairness" or "taking on the respondent's/another's burdens." In a larger sample, these proposed parallel categories might surface. The significance of such parallelism lies in its suggestion of underlying structural dimensions along which others at work may be perceived, extending Fritz's (2002) research by suggesting an opposing pole of dimensions for constructing "positive" others (or "nontroublesome" or "beneficent" others) at work. This finding holds implications for the literature on person perception and perception in general, as well. If a limited set of contextually-relevant (or "behavior-in-context"-relevant) dimensions of perception can be identified that persons in various contexts are attuned to, then interventions can be strategically targeted toward those contextual/behavioral areas.

Contributions to Current Research

This research speaks to the growing literature on negative work relationships and work relationship deterioration. The turning points identified in this study have some parallels with the work of Fritz (2002) and Sias (2000) (reported in Sias, et. al., 2000). Fritz's typology identified dimensions along which negative others were perceived for bosses, peers, and subordinates. Although not all of the categories in this study may be appropriately compared, since the Fritz study examined perceptions of others and this study examined turning points, some of the turning points identified as events characterized by the appearance or manifestation of a trait or characteristic of the other seem fruitful for comparison.

Fritz's boss factors of "poor work ethic" and "excessive demands," peer factors of "incompetence" and "hustling" (getting others to do one's work, making unreasonable work demands), and subordinate factor of "incompetence" appear similar to the task-related negative turning point categories of "job ineptitude" and "threats/unreasonable demands" identified in the current study. One of this study's combination categories (task/social) labeled "obstructive/unsupportive" appears to be a stronger and more deliberate version of Fritz's "distracting" and "busybody behavior"

factor found across all three status levels in her research (which addresses meddling and distracting others from work, which could translate to blocking another's goals).

Sias's (2000) research focused on deterioration of work friendships: that is, good relationships that turned bad. She found that events categorized as personality (similar to "negative vibes" here), distracting life events, conflicting expectations ("conflict" here), promotion ("structural change"), and betrayal ("immorality") led to work relationship deterioration. This turning point research confirms and complements Sias's research on work relationship deterioration. The turning points identified here are similar in some ways to the deterioration events she identified and offer the potential clarification of task, social, and mixed categories to that line of research.

Future Research

The results of this research suggest that there are multiple concerns inherent in working relationships, any of which may be a breeding ground for negative relationships. Not only interpersonal or social concerns, but task concerns, too, can result in unpleasant relationships in the work setting. This finding interfaces with research on affect- and cognition-based trust in organizational settings (McAllister, 1995). Cognition-based trust derives from beliefs about peer reliability and dependability. Affect-based trust derives from reciprocated care and concern.

Some of the categories in this turning points research reflect these different aspects of trust. For instance, "job ineptitude" seems to address the issue of cognition based trust: that is, the person is perceived as not doing the job properly. Affect-based trust is addressed in some of these categories - "face attack," "malicious treatment," "immorality," and "negative vibes" - in which a lack of care and concern surfaces. Both cognitive- and affect-based trust may be implicated in the combination categories of "conflict," "closed-minded," and obstructive/unsupportive. The extent to which turning points are characterized as task or social (or a combination) could be explored for their connection to cognition- or affect-based trust and then linked to outcomes such as job satisfaction or individual emotional reactions to work, including cognitive appraisals.

Future research could be conducted on organizational climate, (including communication climate), which is related to organizational

commitment (Guzley, 1992). One aspect of organizational climate is motivational practices, the extent to which work conditions and relationships are conducive to accomplishing tasks (Taylor & Bowers, 1972, cited in Guzley, 1992); communication climate includes the quality of superior-subordinate communication (O'Connell, 1979, cited in Guzley, 1992). Future research should examine the extent to which discourse processes in negative relationships shape perceptions of organizational climate and communication climate and how organizational climate may contribute to the likelihood of different types of turning points in negative relationships.

Future research should identify behaviors used to cope with the appearance of, particularly, negative turning points in work relationships and outcomes associated with negative relationships with different trajectories (i.e., bad from the beginning, good turned bad), and means of creating opportunities for positive turning points in negative relationships. Growing interest in professional civility (Arnett & Fritz, 2001) and incivility in organizational life (Andersson & Pearson, 1999) suggests other avenues for research. For example, the extent to which a focus of attention redirected from self and other and onto a common tasks, permitting space for a wounded relationship to heal, may be efficacious would be one area to explore. Hess's (2000) work on distancing behaviors in relationships with disliked others would be useful as a starting point for such an investigation. Finally, the extent to which interventions such as training in cognitive reframing (for those experiencing negative relationships), conflict management (for both parties), or training in social skills and anger management (for "negative others") may send negative relationships into a positive trajectory again would be a useful area to explore.

Limitations

This turning point study employed a different methodology from that used in previous turning point studies. Instead of face-to-face structured interviews, this study adopted a paper-and-pencil measure accompanied by extensive instructions to respondents. Limitations of a purely paper-and-pencil instrument must be weighed against the time saved from more labor-and time-intensive methods. For exploratory purposes, this truncated method provided a useful initial picture of the process of change in a negative relationship over time,

buying efficiency at the price of enhanced richness and specificity of data available through verbal probes and clarifications.

This study of turning points in negative work relationships provides further evidence for a growing body of literature on unpleasant work relationships, the "dark side" of organizational life. Continued attention to this area offers hope for increased employee and organizational health. In an era of increasing stress and strain, it is heartening to know that organizational communication scholars can engage organizational experience to make institutions more inviting spaces for human thriving.

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