

Tilburg University

Dynamic and multi-party approaches to interpersonal workplace mistreatment research

Vranjes, Ivana; Griep, Yannick; Fortin, Marion; Notelaers, Guy

Published in:
Group & Organization Management

DOI:
[10.1177/10596011231162498](https://doi.org/10.1177/10596011231162498)

Publication date:
2023

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

[Link to publication in Tilburg University Research Portal](#)

Citation for published version (APA):
Vranjes, I., Griep, Y., Fortin, M., & Notelaers, G. (2023). Dynamic and multi-party approaches to interpersonal workplace mistreatment research. *Group & Organization Management*, 48(4), 995-1013.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/10596011231162498>

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

Dynamic and Multi-Party Approaches to Interpersonal Workplace Mistreatment Research

Group & Organization Management
2023, Vol. 48(4) 995–1013

© The Author(s) 2023

Article reuse guidelines:

sagepub.com/journals-permissions

DOI: 10.1177/10596011231162498

journals.sagepub.com/home/gom



When employees share and compete for resources through their daily interactions, friction is likely to occur. Such friction can become a breeding ground for interpersonal workplace mistreatment, which is characterized by interpersonal actions that cause severe harm to persons who are motivated to avoid such harm (Pearson, Andersson, & Wegner 2001). Most employees encounter some manifestations of workplace mistreatment throughout their career (Barling, Dupré, & Kelloway 2009), and this mistreatment carries tremendous costs for individuals as well as the organization, including increased stress and reduced performance (for a review, see Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019). It is therefore not surprising that scholars have increasingly become interested in interpersonal mistreatment topics spanning across multiple disciplines and covering an array of constructs, including incivility (e.g., Cortina, Hershcovis, & Clancy 2022), injustice and unfairness (e.g., Fortin, Cropanzano, Cugueró-Escofet, Nadisic, & Van Wagoner 2020), bullying (e.g., Notelaers et al., 2019b), cyberbullying (Vranjes, Baillien, Erreygers, Vandebosch, & De Witte 2021), harassment (e.g., Hershcovis, Vranjes, Berdahl, & Cortina 2021), and organizational and interpersonal deviance (Griep & Vantilborgh, 2018).

The proliferation of interpersonal workplace mistreatment research has helped us to better understand individual and contextual antecedents as well as consequences of workplace mistreatment. For instance, previous research found that a stressful work environment leads to mistreatment (for a meta-analysis, see Bowling & Beehr, 2006), especially for people who lack self-regulatory capabilities (McAllister & Perrewe, 2018). This in turn can lead to a plethora of negative outcomes, including reduced employee and organizational wellbeing and performance (for a review, see Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019).

Corresponding Author:

Ivana Vranjes, Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, Department of Social Psychology, Tilburg University, Warandelaan 2, 5037 AB Tilburg, The Netherlands.

Email: I.Vranjes@tilburguniversity.edu

Notwithstanding the great body of work that has shed light on many relevant processes contributing to interpersonal workplace mistreatment, we also see an important gap in this line of work: To understand mistreatment as it evolves in daily life, we need to better understand the dynamics between different parties involved in this process. More specifically, we need to better understand how employees make sense of their work environment and how these appraisals and interpretations contribute to interpersonal mistreatment. As such, more research is needed that extends beyond the static focus on employee perceptions in the workplace and answers questions such as: What parties are involved and how does each party's reaction influence further mistreatment?, What role do individual, interpersonal, and organizational resources play in preventing mistreatment?, and How long does it take for interpersonal mistreatment to evolve, escalate, and de-escalate? In response, this Special Issue aims to elicit novel approaches and evidence for understanding the mistreatment dynamics, including different parties involved, their interactions, and the timeframe of their actions and reactions. In what follows, we discuss general implications coming from different articles included in this Special Issue, identify some relevant ways forward, and propose a model that summarizes some main findings and invites further research into this domain.

Workplace Mistreatment Dynamics

The interpersonal workplace mistreatment process involves interactions between at least two parties: the “perpetrator” and the “target.” While a plethora of research illustrates the negative effects of perceived mistreatment on targets, more work is needed to elucidate how the mistreatment process starts and evolves within and between these two parties. Below, we explore some relevant issues, such as (1) what the motives of interpersonal mistreatment are that can involve target and perpetrator roles becoming possibly blurred, (2) how this is influenced by the interplay between factors on individual, interpersonal, and organizational levels, and (3) the timeframe within which mistreatment evolves.

Motives for Interpersonal Mistreatment

Workplace aggression and mistreatment researchers have identified a variety of factors that contribute to people's misbehavior in the workplace. Notably, a lot of these efforts taken the perspective of the recipient of mistreatment, often labeled as the “target.” On the other hand, the understanding of the motives behind mistreatment from the perspective of the “perpetrator”—the

one who is seen as the instigator of negative behavior—has been lacking. The advancement in the knowledge on perpetrator-driven processes has been slow due to obvious challenges associated with the reluctance of people to acknowledge engagement in aggressive behavior. Yet, an understanding of evolving perpetrator motives and attitudes is imperative for understanding mistreatment dynamics.

There are several articles in this Special Issue that offer insights as to *when* and *why* people may choose to engage in different types of aggressive behavior or communication. In their article rooted in Appraisal Theory (Lazarus, 1991), Henle and colleagues (2022) present a conceptual model of people's motives to ostracize others at work. Integrating views from fields of management and social and applied psychology, they propose that intentional ostracism is a consequence of a person perceiving someone else either as threat to oneself or one's group. As such, this article illustrates that from the ostracizer's perspective, ostracism can be seen as an act aimed at preserving a positive individual or group functioning, highlighting the possible instrumental use of workplace ostracism.

The idea that interpersonal workplace mistreatment may be (selfishly) instrumentally motivated is also indirectly supported by some of the empirical articles in this Special Issue. Follmer, Geiger, Beatty, and Follmer (2022) find that people may become aggressive when they anticipate discrimination towards themselves. Similarly, the article by Paciello, Fida, Skovgaard-Smith, Barbaranelli, and Caprara (2022) finds that people act out when they are on the receiving end of mistreatment. Both articles discuss the possibility that counterproductive work behavior can be a consequence of a perceived moral transgression towards oneself, suggesting a social exchange or tit-for-tat motivation behind different types of interpersonal workplace mistreatment.

Yet, other articles in this Special Issue find that interpersonal workplace mistreatment can also be the consequence of observing misbehavior directed at others. The motives underlying this process are less clear and likely less narrowly self-interested. For instance, the article by Kim and colleagues (2023) shows that people may behave aggressively towards others who commit transgressive acts towards the organizations (e.g., sabotage) or towards colleagues (e.g., interpersonal mistreatment). Moreover, Vranjes et al., (2022a) find that people who bully others are more likely to become bullied themselves, suggesting that people may gradually take action against bullies. These two articles raise interesting research questions regarding additional motives underlying workplace mistreatment. First, some types of workplace mistreatment may have a broader instrumental motive by trying to protect organizational functioning, while other types of workplace mistreatment might have a relational motive by trying to protect one's group. The findings

however also open the possibility of a deontic type of aggressive response evoked through the perception that an injustice has been done to someone else, whereby in some people's mind, tit-for-tat aggression could be seen as a justified act of retribution in response to a perceived injustice (Okimoto, Wenzel, & Feather 2009). It is unclear, yet both theoretically and practically interesting, how other bystanders in turn interpret the motives underlying the punitive aggression responses of fellow bystanders.

In sum, the above articles suggest that different types of interpersonal workplace mistreatment can be a direct consequence of perceived wrongdoing towards oneself or others. As such, this Special Issue questions the strict perpetrator/target dichotomy and invites researchers to consider the role of perpetrator/targets as highly dynamic and evolving. It also welcomes some degree of moral relativism when it comes to workplace mistreatment. That is, while people rarely self-label as perpetrators of aggression (Nielsen, Finne, Parveen, & Einarsen 2022), aggressive behavior seems to be a common—but unfortunate—response to perceived wrongdoing. In practice, it may be unclear “who started it,” with the roots of escalating spirals potentially going back to misunderstandings or almost invisible micro-aggressions. As such, to halt workplace mistreatment, an organizational approach is needed (such as policies, rules of conduct, and strong leadership) that highlights the inappropriateness of these behaviors, even when one believes not to be the person who struck the first blow.

Intertwining and Nested Levels of Analyses

Mistreatment researchers have moved passed the “bad apple” perspective of trying to uncover target and perpetrator personality profiles, and the “bad barrel” perspective of assuming a uniform effect of contextual cues on people's behavior, to acknowledge the interplay between personal and contextual factors in shaping the evolution of interpersonal workplace mistreatment. For instance, past research suggests that aggression and workplace mistreatment is likely to occur when job demands are present (for instance, high workload, role conflict, role ambiguity) and job resources are lacking (for instance, autonomy, support from colleagues, and leadership support) (e.g., Baillien & De Witte, 2009; Balducci, Fraccaroli, & Schaufeli 2011; Notelaers, Baillien, De Witte, Einarsen, & Vermunt 2013; Notelaers et al., 2019a; Bowling, Alarcon, Bragg, & Hartman 2015; Bowling & Beehr, 2006). Recent research finds that the work environment not only determines the general levels of mistreatment in that context, but that it can also impact other factors known to elicit mistreatment. (e.g., Glambek, Einarsen, & Notelaers et al. 2020; Vranjes et al., 2022b; Plimmer, Nguyen, Teo, & Tuckey 2022; Tuckey

et al., 2022). Although most of the articles in this Special Issue focus on individual perceptions of, and reactions to, workplace mistreatment, the ensemble of articles provide rich illustrations for how mistreatment may develop and reverberate inside groups, organizations, and societies.

First, this Special Issue illustrates the spillover effect of workplace mistreatment within groups. Indeed, Klonek et al., (2002) find that mistreatment from another group can, under some circumstances, deteriorate relationships inside the mistreated group through verbal mimicry effects. Notably, this effect was the strongest when aggression was enacted by a smaller group towards a larger group, illustrating a tendency for people to perceive antagonistic behavior from groups with low power and status as less normatively permissible than that of groups with high power and status (i.e., David and Goliath principle; Jeffries et al., 2012). Similarly, it is possible that the negative emotion and desire for retaliation resulting from mistreatment in one work relationship can result in displaced aggression in another work relationship (Zhou, Meier, & Spector, 2019), thus further reverberating mistreatment across levels and groups. Insights into the mechanisms of how and when workplace mistreatment travels across groups and levels are particularly important for the development of organizational interventions.

Second, the articles in this Special Issue contribute insights into how the motivation to engage in interpersonal workplace mistreatment may result from an interplay of both contextual and individual factors. For example, the finding that perceived threats to self or one's group can trigger mistreatment responses (Henle, Shore, Morton, & Conroy 2022) implies that organizational contexts that heighten individual feelings of uncertainty and powerlessness may be fertile breeding grounds for acts of workplace mistreatment. Such heightened uncertainty can, for example, be triggered by unstable employment, variable pay, and excessive competition between employees. In addition, Follmer et al. (2022) highlight how the cultural context will interact with personal factors; they find that mistreatment can be triggered by anticipated discrimination. Such anticipations are likely based on indirect and direct past experiences of discrimination in the given organizational and cultural context, heightening the importance of a system perspective to address workplace mistreatment.

Similarly, the articles in this Special Issue suggest that the group, organizational, and cultural context may determine how individuals will react to workplace mistreatment, and whether mistreatment will result in lasting spirals or patterns. Specifically, two of the articles highlight that individuals may engage in workplace mistreatment as retaliation (Kim et al., 2023; Vranjes et al., 2022a). If indeed workplace mistreatment can be triggered by a motive to punish perpetrators, then organizational systems that are perceived

as effective and trustworthy in providing recourse mechanisms, sanctioning perpetrators, and in restoring justice could make individual mistreatment reactions obsolete or at least less likely. In a similar vein, the article by [Paciello et al. \(2022\)](#) suggests that moral disengagement makes routinization of counterproductive work behavior more likely. Group and organizational context have a key role to play in providing moral disengagement narratives (e.g., derogating victims, comparing with worse cases rather than with aspirational standards, etc.), thereby providing another mechanism through which organizational culture will affect the dynamics (and specifically durability) of workplace mistreatment over time.

In sum, findings from different studies in this Special Issue highlight spillover effects of mistreatment and the potential of organizational systems and cultures to shape the mistreatment process. While organizations can hardly completely prevent or mitigate stressors with the potential to trigger interpersonal mistreatment, the above findings suggest that nurturing perceptions of interpersonal justice, effectiveness, and trustworthiness could potentially mitigate the occurrence of workplace mistreatment spirals. As direct supervisors are often the most visible figures with formal authority that can impact these processes, they likely have an important role to play in the prevention of workplace mistreatment ([Leymann, 1996](#); [Hoel & Einarsen, 2020](#); [Woodrow & Guest, 2017](#)).

Temporal Dynamics of Mistreatment

A notable trend in the field of workplace mistreatment and aggression is the move towards more repeated measurement designs and the investigation of the dynamic nature of this interpersonal behavior. This trend is not unique to this field of course and has sparked a considerable amount of debate regarding the appropriate time-lags between measurements that allow researchers to observe effects of interest (e.g., [Cole & Maxwell, 2003](#); [Mitchell & James, 2001](#)). An important point of criticism in this, and related fields, has been the often a-theoretically selected time-lags varying from 6 months to a few years. Authors like [Griep, Vranjes, Kraak, Dudda, & Li \(2021\)](#), [Griep and Zacher \(2021\)](#) have therefore urged researchers to explicitly address and incorporate temporal dynamics into theory regarding organizational phenomena. Others, like the late Robert Roe call for more experimentation with (shorter) time-lags to uncover when and how psychological phenomena change over time. This Special Issue furthers this new direction as it incorporates studies that measure different types of workplace mistreatment within various timeframes, illustrating how different types of workplace mistreatment evolve over time and how their evolution is associated with outcomes over different time spans.

The article by [Klonek et al., \(2002\)](#) suggests that aggression can affect group functioning in a matter of minutes through its negative effect on people's in-group verbal mimicry (i.e., convergence between group members with respect to their language styles). As such, it shows just how fast and subtle the outcomes of interpersonal aggression can spread and affect those confronted with it. The article by [Kim and colleagues \(2023\)](#) corroborates the fast-paced nature of mistreatment/aggression spirals by showing that the reciprocal relationship between people's mistreatment and counterproductive work behavior experiences at work can be observed in a timeframe of 1 week. They further find that such spirals are hard to extinguish as they can live on for a period of at least 12 weeks (the total length of the study) without much change in their strength. However, workplace mistreatment can also manifest itself over longer timespans. [Paciello et al. \(2022\)](#) and [Follmer et al. \(2022\)](#) illustrate that the relationship between perceived and enacted aggression can be found across a time lag of 1-month and can be explained by people's lack of moral and emotional resources, respectively. Finally, the study by [Vranjes et al., \(2022a\)](#) suggests that when it comes to bullying, the time-lag needed to observe the effect might be even longer. In their study, people engaging in bullying became exposed to such behavior themselves a year and a half later. One possible explanation is that this might be due to the power-imbalance often present in an instance of workplace bullying, when the perpetrator possesses more resources and decision-making power than the target. As such, longer time-periods might be needed to flip the switch on the advantages a perpetrator has. More generally, the reputational effects of the bully and collective opposition against the bully might need some time to build up.

Taken together, the articles of this Special Issue shed light on the time-frames within which workplace aggression evolves, showing that some outcomes of aggression might be noticeable immediately (e.g., verbal mimicry), while others may take shorter (e.g., individual counter aggression) or longer (e.g., bullies become bullied) periods of time to evolve. We are confident that the articles in this Special Issue contribute to our knowledge on the appropriate time-lags needed to observe different effects preceding and resulting from different types of workplace mistreatment, especially considering the highly dynamic nature of these behaviors. When in doubt, a good strategy may be to choose the shortest time frame possible within which the phenomenon of interest may occur ([Griep et al., 2021](#)).

Future Research regarding the Mistreatment Dynamic

The findings from this Special Issue offer relevant and novel insights regarding the workplace mistreatment dynamic. However, they also highlight

some important lacunae in our understanding of this process at the individual (i.e., coping responses), group (i.e., bystander involvement) and organizational (i.e., organizational prevention strategies) levels. While these are in no means the only relevant issues to address in this field of research, we specifically focus on these three lacunae as they are most closely related to the findings from this Special Issue. Based on our combined focus on coping responses, bystander involvement and organizational prevention strategies, we propose a brief model of interpersonal mistreatment dynamics (see [Figure 1](#)) to further describe what we believe to be interesting avenues for future research endeavors.

As [Figure 1](#) highlights, an instance of interpersonal workplace mistreatment emerges following a trigger from the environment that evokes an appraisal and an attribution process. For instance, Person A observes at work that Person B belittles their ideas during a team meeting. Person A perceives this as an interpersonal offense that makes them look bad in the eyes of others. As such, Person A feels mistreated by Person B. They can now respond to this mistreatment, for instance, by excluding Person B in future interactions (mistreatment), by trying to directly address the comment and improve their relationship with person B (restoration), or by feeling helpless and doing nothing (withdrawal response). Person B on the other hand may believe that Person A's ideas directly undermined their previous suggestions during the meeting. As such, they may themselves feel mistreated by Person A and may have similar responses towards Person A at their disposal. Person A's behavior after the meeting will greatly shape Person's B response in the future and vice versa and may also shape future appraisal and attribution processes. Furthermore, these processes can happen right away (e.g., an instantaneous reaction towards the other person) or after a shorter (e.g., after having contemplated about what happened) or longer (e.g., following repeated negative interactions with this person in the following year) period of time. To fully grasp what the ultimate response displayed will be and how the temporal dynamic of this interaction will evolve, we need to understand (a) what coping strategies these individuals have at their disposal, (b) whether there are third parties present in this interaction (e.g., other colleagues, their supervisor or clients), and finally (c) what the organizational context is. We discuss some ideas for future research regarding these issues below.

Coping Responses. As discussed previously, workplace mistreatment is a highly subjective process, in which the initial instigators of mistreatment can feel justified in their actions and may even perceive their actions as virtuous or moral. Specifically, individuals who respond to the mistreatment of others in the same currency may feel their actions as morally justified. Yet,

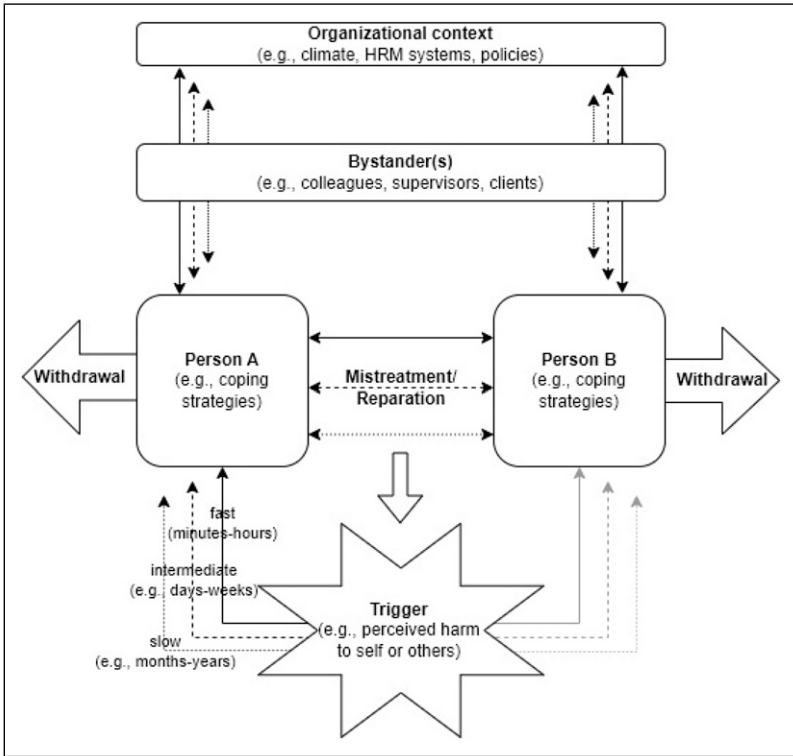


Figure 1. A model of interpersonal mistreatment dynamic.

mistreatment of another person can rarely be justified considering that there are usually other constructive coping response options (e.g., reappraisal, seeking emotional support, constructive dialogue, mediation, restorative justice, formal appeals etc.) that can replace more aggressive responses such as retaliation. While there has been an increasing number of studies that look at people’s coping strategies and how they relate to workplace mistreatment (e.g., Cortina & Magley, 2009; Meral et al., 2022; Salin et al., 2014; Vranjes et al., 2021, 2022; Wang & Wang, 2017), these studies have generally focused on between-person differences in coping strategies and thus have adopted a trait-like approach to coping as an individual difference variable. Yet, people apply a variety of coping strategies throughout a day (Tennen et al., 2000), and have been found to alter their coping strategies based on how successful these strategies are in helping them mitigate their daily stressors (Blaxton & Bergeman, 2017).

This raises an important question as to how different coping strategies impact interpersonal workplace mistreatment and vice versa, and what strategies work best under what conditions. For instance, while coping with humor may work in instances of workplace incivility, this strategy is unlikely to be helpful for mitigating antecedents or outcomes of instrumental aggression. Moreover, while negotiation and mediation may work in instances where the involved parties possess equal power, such coping strategies may not be as effective when one of the involved parties do not possess many formal or informal resources. Finally, more can be done to aid our understanding of how people's mistreatment coping strategies change over time, for instance as a consequence of factors on the individual (e.g., personality), interpersonal (e.g., presence of supportive or non-supportive bystanders), and organizational (e.g., climate of mistreatment) level and how these changes the course of the mistreatment process. These issues tie to our discussion on the mistreatment motives and the possible blurred lines between perpetration and victimization, as reacting to provocation with action focused, tit-for-tat coping, may seem justified, yet in many cases is unlikely to lead to beneficial outcomes for different parties involved. These issues also relate back to the different levels of analysis as individual coping responses are likely to be impacted by individual traits, group dynamics and the organizational context. Finally, these issues are inherently tied to the notion of time as coping responses can vary throughout the day but can also reflect a general tendency to respond to work stressors.

Bystanders. Studies on workplace mistreatment are increasingly acknowledging the role bystanders play in the workplace mistreatment process. "Perpetrators" and "targets" are not the only parties involved in interpersonal mistreatment; Bystanders, observers, or third parties often directly (seeing the mistreatment unfold) or indirectly (hearing about the mistreatment) witness incidents of workplace mistreatment. Bystanders are not merely passive witnesses, but display a range of responses (e.g., challenging the perpetrator, comforting the target, doing nothing), which can significantly influence the dynamics of workplace mistreatment. Importantly, any one incident of mistreatment can affect numerous bystanders, directly and indirectly, thus spreading and amplifying the effects throughout an organization and even beyond. Consequently, bystander research is a promising avenue to better understand the dynamic of workplace mistreatment (Dhanani & LaPalme, 2019; Vranjes & Lyubkyh, 2021).

So far, studies on bystander reactions have highlighted that bystanders often do not act when witnessing workplace mistreatment (Latané & Darley, 1970; Hershcovis & Bhatnagar 2017), despite the fact that their involvement

can be beneficial both for the target (Ng, Niven, & Notelaers, 2022) and for themselves (Nielsen et al., 2021; Rosander & Nielsen 2021). Earlier models of workplace mistreatment suggest that the lack of bystander involvement can be attributed either to the lack of clarity whether their involvement is necessary (e.g., perceived ambiguity of mistreatment; Ryan & Wessel, 2012), a negative cost/benefit analysis regarding their involvement (e.g., perceived risks; Skarlicki & Kulik 2004) or the lack of sympathy for the target (e.g., victim blaming, schadenfreude or target deservingness; Mitchell et al., 2015; Li, McAllister, Ilies, & Gloor 2019). This latter issue also relates back to our previous discussion about the possible blurred lines between perpetration and victimization of workplace mistreatment. On the other hand, research also shows that in some cases, bystanders are willing to punish perpetrators even when this punishment comes at a cost to themselves and will not lead to any social rewards because it is anonymous and part of a one-off interaction (Turillo, Folger, Lavelle, Umphress, & Gee 2002).

These discrepancies highlight that more research is needed on when and why bystanders stand back versus stand up. There is still a lack of empirical research into different considerations that bystanders make and how they relate to, and compete with, one another. As such, many important questions remain to be investigated. For example: Do bystanders react differently toward targets and/or perpetrators depending on constellations of age, gender, or occupational status of the different parties involved (to name a few)? Who are the intervening bystanders and what is their relationship with the target and/or the perpetrator? How does bystander involvement change the instance of mistreatment and its outcomes? How can bystanders be encouraged to intervene effectively? And finally, what interventions are effective and what factors determine their effectiveness?

We see the role of bystanders in the workplace mistreatment literature as a promising avenue for future research and believe that it can significantly improve our understanding of the mistreatment dynamic. Namely, bystander involvement will not only depend on the attribution of workplace mistreatment motives (e.g., perceived justifiability of aggression), but it also has the capacity to change mistreatment motives by signaling to the involved parties what others in their environment think of their behavior. Specifically, an intervening bystander can signal to the perpetrator that no matter their motive, workplace mistreatment will not be tolerated with the organization, thereby contributing to a climate of civility (Walsh et al., 2012)—especially if the bystander is a person in the position of power (Vranjes et al., 2020). Next, bystanders may become a direct party to the mistreatment dynamic if they become a target themselves, if they join the perpetrator in mistreating the victim, or if they decide to mistreat the perpetrator in response to the observed

workplace mistreatment. As such, bystanders also have the power to alter the organizational culture and systems that either sustain or suppress mistreatment spirals. Finally, bystanders can also shape the temporal dynamic of workplace mistreatment processes by shortening (e.g., when they confront the perpetrator) or prolonging (e.g., when they side with the perpetrator) the negative interaction between the involved parties.

Organizational Prevention Strategies. Organizations use different processes, resources, and practices to guide and influence behavior and as such determine the acceptability of certain behaviors such as aggression and mistreatment in the workplace (Pheko, Monteiro, & Segopolo 2017). We know from previous work that workplace mistreatment is more likely to emerge in certain organizational contexts, such as those characterized by a climate of mistreatment (Yang, Caughlin, Gazica, Truxillo, & Spector 2014) and the presence of environmental stressors (Hershcovis et al., 2007). It is less likely to emerge in groups and departments and organizations embracing and working for a high psychosocial safety climate (Dollard et al., 2017; Bond et al., 2010). Knowing that social identification processes play a key role in excluding and bullying organizational members (Escartin et al., 2013), attachment to norms against interpersonal mistreatment, may even protect the odd one out (Glambek, Einarsen, & Notelaers 2020). There has also been an increased interest in the role that human resource management strategies play in the emergence and mitigation of interpersonal workplace mistreatment (e.g., Vranjes et al., 2022c). Although the idea that the organizational context plays a crucial role in interpersonal workplace mistreatment is widely accepted and has received some support in the last years, research on the contextual factors of workplace mistreatment remains limited and is most often investigated from an individual perspective.

The mistreatment literature could benefit from more research that considers context in a more holistic way, for instance using multilevel approaches, while also investigating the dynamics between different layers of the organization. This can be particularly relevant when investigating organizational prevention strategies and addressing questions such as: What role do organizational policies, culture, norms, and values, leader-member interactions, and HRM practices play in preventing or mitigating mistreatment? How do the micro (e.g., individuals), meso (e.g., teams), and macro (e.g., organizations, cultural contexts) levels interact, and what effect does this have on how mistreatment plays out and is experienced?

Furthermore, there is a need for more multilevel studies that capture certain objective characteristics of the environment (e.g., record data regarding existing policies, frequency of training, or level of hierarchy) and how they relate

to employee experiences of the mistreatment process. This is particularly relevant as individual perceptions of organizational context, even when measured by an aggregation of individual perceptions to obtain a shared perspective, is highly colored by people's subjective evaluations of their context rather than reflecting the actual reality of practices that exist within their environment (Fischer & Sitkin, 2022). To better understand the organizational context and the existing organizational prevention strategies is to better understand the mistreatment motives and the interplay between different organizational levels. Undoubtedly, people are likely to engage in interpersonal mistreatment in an organizational context which is characterized by interpersonal competition and lack of accountability due to an absence of formal punitive systems. Organizational contexts can also influence people's reactions in the short-term through learned behavior as well as in the long-term through the establishment of group norms and climates. As such, we see the investigation of organizational prevention strategies as inherently tied to issues raised in this Special Issue that help us develop a full understanding of workplace mistreatment dynamics.

Conclusion

With this Special Issue, we contribute to a better understanding of interpersonal workplace mistreatment dynamics by offering novel insights regarding people's motives for interpersonal aggression, how these motives emerge due to an interaction between factors at different levels of analyses (i.e., individual, interpersonal, and organizational), and the timeframes within which these processes can occur. We further supplement these views with a discussion on additional individual (i.e., coping strategies), interpersonal (i.e., bystanders), and organizational factors (i.e., organizational systems and climate) that may be worth exploring to extend our understanding of mistreatment at work. We hope this Special Issue elicits further exploration of relevant processes in interpersonal workplace mistreatment dynamics.

Ivana Vranjes,
Tilburg University, Tilburg, The Netherlands
Yannick Griep,
Radboud University, Nijmegen, The Netherlands
Stockholm University, Stockholm, Sweden
Marion Fortin,
University Toulouse Capitole, Toulouse, France
Guy Notelaers,
University of Bergen, Bergen, Norway

Author's Note

Yannick Griep, one of the Special Issue Editors, is also Editor-in-Chief of *Group & Organization Management*. Dr. Griep was not involved in the decision to accept this Special Issue proposal (which was submitted prior to his term as Editor-in-Chief) and/or editorial for publication, nor in any aspect of its peer review process or revision.

References

- Baillien, E., & De Witte, H. (2009). Why is organizational change related to workplace bullying? Role conflict and job insecurity as mediators. *Economic and Industrial Democracy, 30*(3), 348–371. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0143831X09336557>
- Balducci, C., Fraccaroli, F., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2011). Workplace bullying and its relation with work characteristics, personality, and post-traumatic stress symptoms: An integrated model. *Anxiety, Stress & Coping, 24*(5), 499–513. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10615806.2011.555533>
- Barling, J., Dupré, K. E., & Kelloway, E. K. (2009). Predicting workplace aggression and violence. *Annual Review of Psychology, 60*, 671–692. <https://doi.org/10.1146/annurev.psych.60.110707.163629>
- Blaxton, J. M., & Bergeman, C. S. (2017). A process-oriented perspective examining the relationships among daily coping, stress, and affect. *Personality and Individual Differences, 104*, 357–361. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.paid.2016.08.041>
- Bond, S. A., Tuckey, M. R., & Dollard, M. F. (2010). Psychosocial safety climate, workplace bullying, and symptoms of posttraumatic stress. *Organization Development Journal, 28*(1), 37–56.
- Bowling, N. A., Alarcon, G. M., Bragg, C. B., & Hartman, M. J. (2015). A meta-analytic examination of the potential correlates and consequences of workload. *Work & Stress, 29*(2), 95–113. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2015.1033037>
- Bowling, N. A., & Beehr, T. A. (2006). Workplace harassment from the victim's perspective: a theoretical model and meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 91*(5), 998–1012. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.91.5.998>
- Cole, D. A., & Maxwell, S. E. (2003). Testing mediational models with longitudinal data: questions and tips in the use of structural equation modeling. *Journal of Abnormal Psychology, 112*(4), 558–577. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-843X.112.4.558>
- Cortina, L. M., Hershcovis, M. S., & Clancy, K. B. (2022). The embodiment of insult: A theory of biobehavioral response to workplace incivility. *Journal of Management, 48*(3), 738–763. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206321989798>
- Cortina, L. M., & Magley, V. J. (2009). Patterns and profiles of response to incivility in the workplace. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 14*(3), 272–288. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0014934>
- Dhanani, L. Y., & LaPalme, M. L. (2019). It's not personal: A review and theoretical integration of research on vicarious workplace mistreatment. *Journal of Management, 45*(6), 2322–2351. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0149206318816162>

- Dollard, M. F., Dormann, C., Tuckey, M. R., & Escartín, J. (2017). Psychosocial safety climate (PSC) and enacted PSC for workplace bullying and psychological health problem reduction. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 26*(6), 844–857.
- Escartín, J., Ullrich, J., Zapf, D., Schlüter, E., & van Dick, R. (2013). Individual- and group-level effects of social identification on workplace bullying. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 22*(2), 182–193.
- Fischer, T., & Sitkin, S. B. (2022). Leadership styles: A comprehensive assessment and way forward. *Academy of Management Annals, 17*(1), 331–372. <https://doi.org/10.5465/annals.2020.0340>
- Follmer, K. B., Geiger, M., Beatty, J. E., & Follmer, D. J. (2022). The consequences of not being me: Longitudinal examination of the relations among anticipated discrimination, authenticity, and counterproductive work behaviors. *Group & Organization Management, First Online*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10596011221107720>
- Fortin, M., Cropanzano, R., Cugueró-Escofet, N., Nadisic, T., & Van Wagoner, H. (2020). How do people judge fairness in supervisor and peer relationships? Another assessment of the dimensions of justice. *Human Relations, 73*(12), 1632–1663. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726719875497>
- Glabek, M., Einarsen, S. V., & Notelaers, G. (2020). Workplace bullying as predicted by non-prototypicality, group identification and norms: a self-categorisation perspective. *Work & Stress, 1*–21.
- Griep, Y., & Vantilborgh, T. (2018). Reciprocal effects of psychological contract breach on counterproductive and organizational citizenship behaviors: The role of time. *Journal of Vocational Behavior, 104*, 141–153. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.jvb.2017.10.013>
- Griep, Y., Vranjes, I., Kraak, J. M., Dudda, L., & Li, Y. (2021). Start small, not random: Why does justifying your time-lag matter? *The Spanish Journal of Psychology, 24*, e45. <https://doi.org/10.1017/SJP.2021.42>
- Griep, Y., & Zacher, H. (2021). Temporal dynamics in organizational psychology. In *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Psychology*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190236557.013.32>
- Henle, C. A., Shore, L. M., Morton, J. W., & Conroy, S. A. (2022). Putting a spotlight on the ostracizer: Intentional workplace ostracism motives. *Group & Organization Management, First Online*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10596011221092863>
- Hershcovis, M. S., & Bhatnagar, N. (2017). When fellow customers behave badly: Witness reactions to employee aggression by customers. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 102*(11), 1528–1544. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000249>
- Hershcovis, M. S., Turner, N., Barling, J., Arnold, K. A., Dupré, K. E., Inness, M., & Sivanathan, N. (2007). Predicting workplace aggression: A meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 92*(1), 228–238. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0021-9010.92.1.228>
- Hershcovis, M. S., Vranjes, I., Berdahl, J. L., & Cortina, L. M. (2021). See no evil, hear no evil, speak no evil: Theorizing network silence around sexual harassment. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 106*(12), 1834–1847. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000861>

- Hoel, H., & Einarsen, S. (2020). Investigating complaints of bullying and harassment. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf, & C. Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and harassment in the workplace: Developments in theory, research, and practice* (pp.541–562).
- Jeffries, C. H., Hornsey, M. J., Sutton, R. M., Douglas, K. M., & Bain, P. G. (2012). The David and Goliath principle: Cultural, ideological, and attitudinal underpinnings of the normative protection of low-status groups from criticism. *Personality and Social Psychology Bulletin*, 38(8), 1053–1065. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0146167212444454>
- Kim, Y., Cohen, T. R., & Panter, A. T. (2023). Workplace mistreatment and employee deviance: An investigation of the reciprocal relationship between hostile work environments and harmful work behaviors. *Group & Organization Management, First Online*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10596011231151747>
- Klonek, F. E., Gerpott, F. H., & Handke, L. (2022). When groups of different sizes collide: Effects of targeted verbal aggression on intragroup functioning. *Group & Organization Management, First Online*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10596011221134426>
- Latané, B., & Darley, J. M. (1970). *The unresponsive bystander: Why doesn't he help?* Appleton-Century-Crofts.
- Lazarus, R. S. (1991). Progress on a cognitive–motivational–relational theory of emotion. *American Psychologist*, 46, 819–834.
- Leymann, H. (1996). The content and development of mobbing at work. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 5, 165–184.
- Li, X., McAllister, D. J., Ilies, R., & Gloor, J. L. (2019). Schadenfreude: A counternormative observer response to workplace mistreatment. *Academy of Management Review*, 44(2), 360–376. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2016.0134>
- McAllister, C. P., & Perrewé, P. L. (2018). About to burst: How state self-regulation affects the enactment of bullying behaviors. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 153, 877–888. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-016-3424-z>
- Meral, E. O., Vranjes, I., van Osch, Y., Ren, D., van Dijk, E., & van Beest, I. (2022). Intensity, intent, and ambiguity: Appraisals of workplace ostracism and coping responses. *Aggressive Behavior*, 49(2), 127–140. <https://doi.org/10.1002/ab.22060>
- Mitchell, T. R., & James, L. R. (2001). Building better theory: Time and the specification of when things happen. *Academy of Management Review*, 26(4), 530–547. <https://doi.org/10.5465/amr.2001.5393889>
- Mitchell, M. S., Vogel, R. M., & Folger, R. (2015). Third parties' reactions to the abusive supervision of coworkers. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 100(4), 1040–1055. <https://doi.org/10.1037/apl0000002>
- Ng, K., Niven, K., & Notelaers, G. (2022). Does bystander behavior make a difference? How passive and active bystanders in the group moderate the effects of bullying exposure. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 27(1), 119. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000296>
- Nielsen, M. B., Finne, L. B., Parveen, S., & Einarsen, S. V. (2022). Assessing workplace bullying and its outcomes: The paradoxical role of perceived power imbalance between target and perpetrator. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 3436. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2022.907204>

- Nielsen, M. B., Rosander, M., Blomberg, S., & Einarsen, S. V. (2021). Killing two birds with one stone: How intervening when witnessing bullying at the workplace may help both target and the acting observer. *International Archives of Occupational and Environmental Health*, 94, 261–273. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00420-020-01575-w>
- Notelaers, G., Baillien, E., De Witte, H., Einarsen, S., & Vermunt, J. K. (2013). Testing the strain hypothesis of the Demand Control Model to explain severe bullying at work. *Economic and Industrial Democracy*, 34(1), 69–87.
- Notelaers, G., Törnroos, M., & Salin, D. (2019a). Effort-Reward Imbalance: A Risk Factor for Exposure to Workplace Bullying [Brief Research Report]. *Frontiers in Psychology*, 10(386). <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00386>
- Notelaers, G., Van der Heijden, B., Hoel, H., & Einarsen, S. (2019b). Measuring bullying at work with the short-negative acts questionnaire: Identification of targets and criterion validity. *Work & Stress*, 33(1), 58–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2018.1457736>
- Okimoto, T. G., Wenzel, M., & Feather, N. T. (2009). Beyond retribution: Conceptualizing restorative justice and exploring its determinants. *Social Justice Research*, 22, 156–180. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11211-009-0092-5>
- Paciello, M., Fida, R., Skovgaard-Smith, I., Barbaranelli, C., & Caprara, G. V. (2022). Withstanding moral disengagement: Moral self-efficacy as moderator in counterproductive behavior routinization. *Group & Organization Management, Online First*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10596011221078665>
- Pearson, C. M., Andersson, L. M., & Wegner, J. W. (2001). When workers flout convention: A study of workplace incivility. *Human Relations*, 54(11), 1387–1419. <http://doi.org/10.1177/00187267015411001>
- Pheko, M. M., Monteiro, N. M., & Segopolo, M. T. (2017). When work hurts: A conceptual framework explaining how organizational culture may perpetuate workplace bullying. *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment*, 27(6), 571–588. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10911359.2017.1300973>
- Plimmer, G., Nguyen, D., Teo, S., & Tuckey, M. R. (2022). Workplace bullying as an organisational issue: Aligning climate and leadership. *Work & Stress*, 36(2), 202–227. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2021.1969479>
- Rosander, M., & Nielsen, M. B. (2021). Witnessing bullying at work: Inactivity and the risk of becoming the next target. *Psychology of Violence*, 13(1), 34–42. <https://doi.org/10.1037/vio0000406>
- Ryan, A. M., & Wessel, J. L. (2012). Sexual orientation harassment in the workplace: When do observers intervene? *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 33(4), 488–509. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.765>
- Salin, D., Tenhiälä, A., Roberge, M. É., & Berdahl, J. L. (2014). ‘I wish I had...’: target reflections on responses to workplace mistreatment. *Human Relations*, 67(10), 1189–1211. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0018726713516375>
- Skarlicki, D. P., & Kulik, C. T. (2004). Third-party reactions to employee (mis) treatment: A justice perspective. *Research in Organizational Behavior*, 26, 183–229. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-3085\(04\)26005-1](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0191-3085(04)26005-1)

- Tennen, H., Affleck, G., Armeli, S., & Carney, M. A. (2000). A daily process approach to coping: Linking theory, research, and practice. *American Psychologist*, 55(6), 626–636. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.6.626>
- Tuckey, M. R., Li, Y., Neall, A. M., Chen, P. Y., Dollard, M. F., McLinton, S. S., Rogers, A., & Mattiske, J. (2022). Workplace bullying as an organizational problem: Spotlight on people management practices. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 27(6), 544–565. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000335>
- Turillo, C. J., Folger, R., Lavelle, J. J., Umphress, E., & Gee, J. (2002). Is virtue its own reward? Self-sacrificial decisions for the sake of fairness. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decisions Processes*, 89, 839–865. [https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-5978\(02\)00032-8](https://doi.org/10.1016/S0749-5978(02)00032-8)
- Vranjes, I., Baillien, E., Erreygers, S., Vandebosch, H., & De Witte, H. (2021). You wouldn't like me when I'm angry: A daily diary study of displaced online aggression in dual earner couples. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 70(4), 1463–1491. <https://doi.org/10.1111/apps.12283>
- Vranjes, I., Elst, T. V., Griep, Y., De Witte, H., & Baillien, E. (2022a). What goes around comes around: How perpetrators of workplace bullying become targets themselves. *Group & Organization Management, Online First*. <https://doi.org/10.1177/10596011221143263>
- Vranjes, I., & Lyubkyh, Z. (2021). Workplace mistreatment: A review and agenda for research. *Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Business and Management*. <https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190224851.013.119>
- Vranjes, I., Lyubkyh, Z., & Hershcovis, S. (2020a). When good intentions go bad: Reactions to an assertive bystander intervention in the context of workplace harassment. *Academy of Management Proceedings*, 2020(1). <https://doi.org/10.5465/AMBPP.2020.12296symposium>
- Vranjes, I., Salin, D., & Baillien, E. (2022b). Being the bigger person: Investigating the relationship between workplace bullying exposure and enactment and the role of coping in ending the bullying spiral. *Work & Stress*, 36(2), 183–201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678373.2021.1969477>
- Vranjes, I., Notelaer, G., & Salin, D. (2022c). Putting workplace bullying in context: The role of high-involvement work practices in the relationship between job demands, job resources, and bullying exposure. *Journal of occupational health psychology*, 27(1), 136–151.
- Walsh, B. M., Magley, V. J., Reeves, D. W., Davies-Schriks, K. A., Marmet, M. D., & Gallus, J. A. (2012). Assessing workgroup norms for civility: The development of the Civility Norms Questionnaire-Brief. *Journal of business and psychology*, 27, 407–420.
- Wang, X., & Wang, H. (2017). How to survive mistreatment by customers: Employees' work withdrawal and their coping resources. *International Journal of Conflict Management*, 28(4), 464–482. <https://doi.org/10.1108/IJCM-11-2016-0089>
- Woodrow, C., & Guest, D. E. (2017). Leadership and approaches to the management of workplace bullying. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 26(2), 221–233.

- Yang, L. Q., Caughlin, D. E., Gazica, M. W., Truxillo, D. M., & Spector, P. E. (2014). Workplace mistreatment climate and potential employee and organizational outcomes: A meta-analytic review from the target's perspective. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 19*(3), 315–335. <https://doi.org/10.1037/a0036905>
- Zhou, Z. E., Meier, L. L., & Spector, P. E. (2019). The spillover effects of coworker, supervisor, and outsider workplace incivility on work to family conflict: A weekly diary design. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 40*(9-10), 1000–1012. <https://doi.org/10.1002/job.2401>

Submitted Date: February 22, 2023

Acceptance Date: February 22, 2023

Author Biographies

Ivana Vranjes is an Assistant Professor at the Tilburg School of Social and Behavioral Sciences, the Netherlands. Her research encompasses various topics, such as workplace aggression and employee digital wellbeing (of which she insists only the latter can be considered “mesearch”). Although she loves doing quantitative research, the limitations of her research budget often leave her resorting to writing conceptual papers instead.

Yannick Griep is an Associate Professor at the Behavioural Science Institute, Radboud University, The Netherlands. Armed with a PhD in Organizational Psychology, Dr. Griep has spent his career helping people become better leaders, one passive-aggressive email at a time. When not busy cracking the whip and delivering inspiring speeches, he enjoys micromanaging his family and friends, and delegating all household tasks to his cats.

Marion Fortin is a professor at the Toulouse School of Management, University Toulouse Capitole in France. Since her PhD (Trinity College Dublin), the red thread running through her research projects and community service involvement is a healthy obsession with fairness and justice in organizations and society.

Guy Notelaers is professor in Work and Organizational Psychology at the Faculty of Psychology, University of Bergen – The rain capital of Europe. No wonder that his interest into grim workplace behavior. But when the sun sheds her light and transforms Bergen to the pearl of the North, Guy is highly engaged to take another view on people's data to improve their work for the better – and making their lives more miserable. Except for the evening and weekends, of course, these are reserved for his family.