ORGANIZATIONAL PARANOIA AND THE CONSEQUENT DYSFUNCTION

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Abstract: Modern organizations work in an atmosphere of mutual trust, cooperation and respect. It is true that the consequences of distrust and non cooperative attitudes in an organization are very disruptive. In today's fast paced of organizations, they have to work like greased lightning! But the most important and critical factor is to recognize the signs of such disruption. The interaction between individuals and teams in an organization must evoke mutual trust, cooperation give and take. Though by nature humans are prone to trust their fellow beings, the environmental stress and organization pressures to perform and the competitive nature of individuals and organizational postures make it difficult to practice trust which leads to organizational dysfunction. There is the classic question whether the organizational dysfunction leads to paranoia or the reverse! The results and consequences of dysfunction need no reiteration. The theme of this research paper is how organizations cope with this and make way for a functional organization. Building organizations of tomorrow, needs a clear understanding of this phenomenon and effective orientation towards building functional organizations. Managers have a big role to play in overcoming paranoid outlook and developing an organizational culture

Keywords: Organizational Paranoia, dysfunction, building functional organizations, role of distrust and suspicion in organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Social scientists have conceptualized distrust as an active psychological state characterized by a specific circumstance of expectations and beliefs about the lack or loss of trustworthiness of other persons, groups, or institutions. Organizational problems of distrust and suspicion in the work place lead to a lack of cohesion in the efforts of organization in achieving its stated objectives. It has been postulated that such lack of trust among the groups of people working together for a common cause (that characterizes an organization in the classical definition) leads to many problems ultimately resulting in the decay of the organization. A principal aim of this research-paper is to summarize some of what we know about the origins and dysfunctional consequences of severe distrust and suspicion in the workplace. To approach these two important issues i.e. Dysfunction and distrust; we look at a framework for conceptualizing high degree of distrust and suspicion in the workplace. The framework derives from recent social cognitive theories and research on paranoid cognition.

Diverse streams of research suggest the formative role that social histories play in the emergence of trust and distrust, these models imply that individuals' judgments about another's trustworthiness or lack of trustworthiness are anchored, at least in part, on their a prior expectations about the other's behavior and the extent to which subsequent experience affirms or

discredits those expectations. The conception of paranoid cognition developed in the current research-paper proceeds largely from a social information processing perspective on organizational behavior. According to this perspective, a complete understanding of paranoid cognition—or any form of social judgment in organizations —requires recognition of the organizational context within which such judgments are developed. All human beings are members of multiple social groups. As a result, people can categorize themselves—and be categorized by others—in a variety of different ways. These include categorizations based upon physical attributes (such as age, race, or gender), as well as categorizations based upon social attributes such as religion, social class, and organizational affiliations.

Indeed, much of what makes life pleasant and efficient comes from the salutary effects of trust. When we feel we can't trust the people around us, we're forced to foreclose on many opportunities for mutually beneficial exchanges. As we fret over office politics, our decision making becomes distorted, and the whole organization suffers. When we start fearing and avoiding (rather than trusting and cooperating with) people we work and compete with, we enter a world of impoverished zero-sum games and escalating arms races. It is seen from the above remarks that paranoia is inherent in human nature and further developed by the environment that organizations provide for people working together to attain a common goal. Distrust and suspicion are common and recurring problems within many organizations.

Our understanding of the antecedents and consequences of such distrust and suspicion, however, remains to be improved. Drawing on recent developments on social psychological theory and research, the present paper identifies social cognitive processes that that are significant in understanding the phenomenon of organizational paranoia. The paper would also deal with suggestive solutions to the problems.

OBJECTIVES AND METHODOLOGY

Sometimes we are aware that there is something wrong with the organizations as we discern form the signs of slowing down; but many times we are not aware that organizations which we have built fondly or working or longtime are on the decline. One of the causes is the paranoia that spreads in the organizations. Unless we detect such happenings it may be too late for us to prevent organizations from decay. This is a deep rooted disease of the organization and unless we detect it early and take corrective actions in rebuilding the organizations we would be lost forever. With this in view following Objectives have been identified for the current research paper.

1. An overview of current business environment and the challenges there of.
2. Understanding and early detection of organizational paranoia.
3. Analyzing cause of Paranoia and prevention of its spreading
4. An overview of how organizations cope with the phenomenon.

5. How organizations can prevent such virus from spreading

The above Objectives have been identified to understand this phenomenon and take corrective actions to prevent organizations slipping from their chosen path. A Questionnaire survey was initially but had to be given up due to the difficulty of finding suitable respondents within an organization and their willingness and time to respond! In the meantime while doing the literature survey it was found that the amount of writings and research work in this area is enormous. What it needed was a careful study of writings in Psychological topics impacting Management of organizations and the organizational behavior. With detailed search it was not difficult to find related work, which I would say was impressive and abundant, leading to several organizational theories. The author has tried to classify, summarize the various research works in this area and arrived at conclusions which would be helpful in focusing further research. Conclusions and recommendations have been given at the end of the paper.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Paranoia is a state of mind in which a person believes that others are trying to harm him. It could be a feeling of being watched, followed or monitored in some way. It might be a belief that there is some kind of conspiracy operating against him. Paranoid people sometimes have an increased sense of self-importance, believing that many others are watching them when it is not true. In extremes, paranoia poisons almost every aspect of the workplace. People spend enormous amounts of time trying to figure out how to decode what's really being said (or left unsaid).Rumor and gossip become preferred routes of communication, resulting in arid meetings during which nothing gets resolved because nothing is ever openly analyzed or discussed. The result is an organization run by a series of covert operations. Social scientists have long recognized the deleterious role distrust and suspicion play within organizations (Fox, 1974). More recent treatments suggest the problem continues to be an important and ongoing concern (Hardin, 2004). Despite the enduring importance of the problem, conceptual frameworks that systematically articulate the antecedents and consequences of intra-organizational distrust and suspicion remain in short supply.

Figure 1: Paranoia – attention seeking behavior

Organizational Paranoia is a kind of distrustful behavior by the employees arising out of suspicions and distorted cognitions of organizational intentions. It is a problem of organizational behavior and needs to be tackled with care and understanding of the situation. In order to understand organizational behavior, it is essential to examine the "informational and social environment within which behavior occurs and to which it adapts" (Salancik & Pfeffer 1978, p. 226). One reason for context be so consequential, is that it selectively directs individuals' attention to certain information, making that information more salient and thereby increasing its effect on their expectations about and interpretations of others' behavior.

Paranoid cognitions constitute perhaps the prototypic example of such irrational distrust and suspicion. Colby (1981) defined paranoid cognition as "persecutory delusions and false beliefs whose propositional content clusters around ideas of being harassed, threatened, harmed, subjugated, persecuted, accused, mistreated, wronged, tormented, disparaged, vilified, and so on, by malevolent others, either specific individuals or groups" (p. 518). In trying to understand these rather peculiar, and in many respects striking cognitions, theorists have turned most often to psychodynamic constructs. Colby (1981), for example, described paranoid cognitions as the end products of a "causal chain of strategies for dealing with distress induced by the affect of shame-humiliation" (p. 518). The strategy of blaming others for one's difficulties functions "to repudiate the belief that the self is to blame for an inadequacy" (p. 518). The presumption

behind such clinical accounts is that paranoid cognitions are reflections or manifestations of an acute intra-psychic disturbance. Such conceptions thus locate the cause of paranoid cognitions "inside the head" of the social perceiver, rather than viewing them as causally connected to the social context within which such cognitions are embedded and to which they might reflect some sort of intended adaptation.

According to this perspective, what one sees depends literally on where one is placed in the organization. From a social information processing perspective, situational factors trigger paranoid cognitions within organizations that bring on states of dysphonic self-consciousness, which is an aversive psychological state. People are motivated to make sense of whatever they perceive as inducing it and adaptively respond to it. These sense-making efforts promote a hyper vigilant and ruminative mode of social information processing. Hyper vigilance and rumination enjoy a circular causal relationship: The hyper vigilant appraisal of social information tends to generate more raw data about which the paranoid perceiver ruminates, and rumination in turn helps generate additional paranoid-like hypotheses, prompting more vigilant scrutiny of the situation, and especially of others' behavior.

The prudently paranoid are often the most reluctant to act on and share their knowledge; mainly because paranoia unpleasant information about people and organizations as such, inviting suspicions and similar reactions. So many such paranoid individuals know that it's sensible to lay low, be discreet,

and double-check the facts before taking action. It is generally an admirable rule to proceed prudently, but it can also lead to what can be described as "paranoia paralysis." Full of suspicion—and yet unwilling to really believe what they fear to be true—paralyzed individuals in organizations become unable to act in order to protect themselves from the effects of paranoia. As a result, they remain trapped in vicious cycles of self-questioning and self-doubt.

The prudently paranoid are most vulnerable when all the hard evidence seems to contradict their nagging suspicions. Clever enemies are often very careful to appear to be opposite of what they really are; they do this by creating what looks like hard data to counter others' intuitive fears and reservations. Because the evidence seems more credible than the paranoia, the unwary are lulled into a false sense of security. Indeed, the harder the data look and the more compelling the conclusions seem, the more distrustful we should be. Back in December 6,

1941, the day before the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor, an American naval attaché in Tokyo telegraphed Washington to say that he did not believe the Japanese military was preparing an attack; for proof, he cited the compelling evidence that large crowds of Japanese sailors could be seen casually strolling the streets of Tokyo. Without sailors, the aircraft carriers obviously could not have left port. Unfortunately in this case, believing really *was* seeing. What the attaché did not consider—indeed, could not even imagine—was the possibility that these "sailors" were not sailors at all. In fact, they were soldiers who had been ordered to pose as sailors in order to conceal the fact that the Japanese fleet had already taken off for Pearl Harbor. As history has duly recorded, the deception worked brilliantly. But from the perspective of U.S. intelligence, the incident provides a powerful cautionary tale regarding the perils of insufficient paranoia. It is often when we are most trusting of our senses that we become most susceptible to deceit.
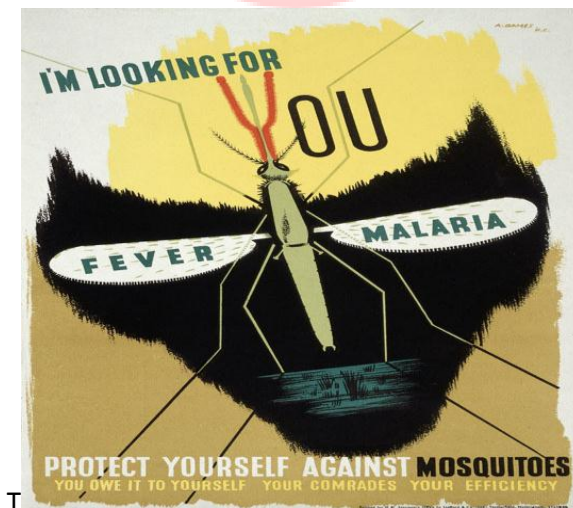

Figure 2: A reaction to Mosquitoes menace!

Tropical diseases have mystified and terrified humans for centuries, inducing cross-continental paranoia at even the thought of a mosquito bite. While the very recent and devastating Ebola outbreak in West Africa has brought global health fears to new heights, a new exhibition at Lisbon, Portugal's Instituto de Higiene e Medicina Tropical, is proving the world has a rather colorful record of publicly campaigning against the ailments that terrorize populations across the globe. Recently the spread of Dingus fever in Tamil Nadu (a state in the Union territory of India) has become the fodder for the media and the politicians. (See Figure1)."Picturing Tropical Diseases" outlines a "Visual

History" of health campaigns targeted at malaria, leprosy, Guinea worm disease, kala azar, sleeping sickness, Chagas disease, river blindness, tropical disease vectors and more. Gathering together images archived by institutions like the World Health Organization, the exhibition showcases an array of artifacts, from documentary photographs to the disease management posters that became a staple of public health in the 20th century.

Figure 3: Self-Awareness & Consciousness

Many studies have documented an association between self-consciousness and a tendency toward the excessive personalized view of social interactions. Fenigstein (1984) postulated the existence of a general over perception of self as target bias. He argues that self-consciousness increases the extent to which individuals' see others' behavior in self-referential terms (i.e., as intentionally focused on, or directed toward, them). The results of his studies provide evidence that self-consciousness contributes to the onset of paranoid social cognition. They also suggest that a consequence of such self-consciousness is a spontaneous attribution search aimed at helping individuals make sense of

their dysphonic (the feeling that one is subjected to constant examination) experiences. When individuals become self-conscious, they look for reasons why they are self-conscious. Self-consciousness acts as a cue stimulating attribution search: If one is self-conscious, then someone must be watching. And if someone is watching, then something might be amiss. These results also invite the question of what kinds of social situations are likely to trigger such self-consciousness.

Because their social uncertainty and the motivation to reduce it are both high, newcomers to a group should, all else equal, be fairly vigilant and proactive when seeking diagnostic information about their standing. They will find salient and actively process information about how they are treated during their interactions and exchanges with other members as clues to their group standing. Such information is "communicated both by interpersonal aspects of treatment—politeness and/or respect—and by the attention paid to a person as a full group member" (Tyler, 1993, p. 148). The harmful effect of paranoid cognition on judgments about distrust and suspicion of others in the workplace can be viewed from two vantage points. First, they can be approached from the perspective of how they affect perceivers' presumptive trust in other coworkers (i.e., their a priori expectations about others' trustworthiness). Second, they can be approached from the perspective of how they affect the attributions they make about others' observed behavior. Research has investigated several specific manifestations of these two forms of social misjudgment. The sinister attribution error or bias refers to the tendency for social perceivers to over attribute lack of trustworthiness to others (Kramer, 1994). The sinister attribution bias is associated with the tendency to be overly suspicious of others' intentions and motives (i.e., to "go beyond" available data when making such inferences). A second judgmental bias associated with paranoid cognition is the tendency for paranoid perceivers to view others' actions in unrealistically self-referential terms. As Colby (1981) noted in his discussion of clinical paranoia: "Around the central core of persecutory delusions [that preoccupy the paranoid perceiver] there exists a number of attendant properties such as suspiciousness, hypersensitivity, hostility, fearfulness, and self-reference that lead such individuals to interpret events that have nothing to do with them as bearing on them personally" (p. 518). Because of this overly personal construal of social interaction, paranoid perceivers overestimate the extent to which they are the target of others' thoughts and actions. Many studies described earlier show some ways heightened self-consciousness and the perception of being under evaluative scrutiny by others contributes to this tendency.

Figure 4: Signs of paranoid presence in organizations

Organizational behavior and leadership research has traditionally been deeply influenced by positive psychology and appreciative inquiry. Yet, in recent times, a wave of corporate scandals and spectacular organizational failures has forced management and organizational theorists to rethink this approach. Unethical CEO behavior, white collar crime, property deviance, employee grievances and lawsuits, organizational terrorism, and workplace violence have all provided the impetus for an examination of the darker side of leadership. In Destructive Leaders and Dysfunctional Organizations, Alan Goldman draws on his extensive experience as a management consultant and executive coach to provide a fascinating behind-closed-doors account of troubled leaders and the effect they have on their organizations. Featuring clinical case studies, ranging from the fashion industry to an aeronautical engineering corporation, the book explores the damaging effects of destructive leadership on organizations and provides the tools necessary for early recognition, assessment, and treatment.

The results of these studies converge on several conclusions. First, situational cues that trigger forms of self-consciousness are likely to promote paranoid-like mis-interpretations of social interactions. Second, they suggest how ordinary cognitive strategies for coping with such implicit social threats contribute to the emergence of paranoid cogitation. They also suggest that paranoid perceivers tend to categorize and interpret more of others' behaviors as diagnostic of their standing. They are more likely to engage in intense thoughts about such behaviors compared to their less paranoid counterparts. While it is obvious that low trust and paranoid cognition are far from equal constructs, these findings suggest that people with low expectations about others' trustworthiness are more vigilant and perceptually prepared to find evidence of others' lack of trustworthiness. As Colby (1975) noted, the state of the paranoid perceiver is not unlike that of a spy in a dangerous foreign country:

Exaggerated perceptions of conspiracy are another form of paranoid social cognition. Conspiracy perceptions are

complex cognitions and have been the subject of much study by social scientists from a variety of disciplines. From the standpoint of the theory of organizational paranoid cognition developed here, conspiracy perceptions can be viewed as the end result of an intentional rational effort by social perceivers to make sense out of their seemingly recurring disturbing experiences. This research-paper has described some antecedents and dysfunctional consequences of workplace paranoia. Certain structural positions within an organizational system may more likely promote patterns of misattribution than other locations in social systems.

In making this point, it is crucial not to misconstrue such cognitive errors as judgmental errors in a more existential sense. As a large body of social cognitive research has shown, many of these cognitive processes help people make sense of themselves and other people as they navigate through various social situations. Social cogitation may be constructive, but it is also intentionally adaptive. In many social situations, the costs associated with misplaced trust may be substantial and, in some instances, outweigh the costs associated with misplaced distrust. For example, in highly competitive or political organizations, a propensity toward vigilance with respect to detecting others' lack of trustworthiness may be prudent and adaptive. In such environments, it may be far better to be safe than sorry. Such arguments prompt consideration of other potentially adaptive functions that paranoid cognitions play in organizational settings. While the arguments here have emphasized the maladaptive cognitive and behavioral results of paranoid cognition, there are several ways in which the cognitive processes associated with paranoid perception (i.e., heightened vigilance and rumination) may have adaptive consequences, especially for individuals who are relatively disadvantaged with respect to their power or status in an organizational system. First, as just noted, distrust is not always irrational. Although individuals' fears and suspicions may sometimes be exaggerated, this does not mean that their distrust is necessarily without foundation or basically misplaced. When viewed from this perspective, psychological states such as vigilance and rumination may be useful. For example, vigilant appraisal and mindfulness are enormously important cognitive orientations that not only help individuals make sense of their social situations, but also help them determine the right forms of behavior for those situations.

Figure 5: Absence of Paranoid in organizations

Paranoid cognitions may also play an important role in the maintenance of an individual's motivation and persistence in such situations. In much the same way that defensive pessimism enhances individuals' motivation to engage in effective preemptive failure avoidant behavior, so might paranoid cognitions help individuals maintain their motivation to overcome perceived dangers and obstacles even in situations where those dangers and obstacles, from the perspective of a more neutral observer, might seem grossly exaggerated. Because they are so willing to expend considerable cognitive resources, including the willingness to maintain vigilance and to think at length about other's intentions, motives, and plans, such people might detect patterns of threat that others fail to see. By maintaining a heightened, even if exaggerated, sensitivity to interpersonal dangers that surround them, paranoid perceivers maintain their alertness and focus.

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Business environment is always challenging. Organizations continuously review the happenings n the environment and face the changes squarely. Recent research on social psychology and paranoid cognition has shown that when individuals are self-conscious or feel under scrutiny for evaluation, they tend to overestimate the extent to which they are the target of others' attention. As a result, they make wrong or excessive personal attributions about others' behavior. These personal attributions, in turn, foster a pattern of heightened distrust and suspicion regarding others' motives and intentions. This has negative consequences to

organizational morale, stability and functioning.

Early detection of Organizational paranoia comes in the form of decreased motivation and performance of employees. This can be due to a variety of causes. After eliminating the usual causes, which can be rectified through intervention strategies, one needs to identify and detect signs of depression among employees and a loss of commitment and enthusiasm. Sometimes these are caused by rumor mongers, but at other times, you may detect a paranoia which will not take much time to spread though out the organization. One has to carefully review individuals and groups who suffer from bouts of paranoia which many times can be cured by simple interventions and informal counseling to see the light of the day. But if serious, detailed intervention strategy has to be charted out!

Paranoia is inherent in human nature and it is a psychological problem which is hidden and comes out in certain circumstances. This is due to the individuals feeling of inadequacy, insecurity, and lack of confidence, fear and a host of other complex feelings while working in an organization. This can be due to individual's incompetency, lack of supervision or managerial intervention. Several factors such as inadequate training, unsuitability for job, lack of timely intervention, changes in working environment, changes in technology, lack of adaptability to changes or simply an organization failure to understand and correct. In the present age of digital technologies individuals are more concerned about themselves and do not interact or help each other in a work situation. The so called knowledge workers are welcome but consequent changes in organizational culture and the way of working has to be given due attention.

Presently organizations cope with this through training in sensitivity, new technologies and how teamwork and cooperation can be cultivated. It is the responsibility of organizations to create an atmosphere of teamwork, cooperation and give and take without which much of the organization objectives remain short of achievement. Organizations try to cope with the situation right from recruiting the motivated and suitable employees and continuous training and development of employees to the new challenges.

Long term solution lies in reinventing the organizational culture that creates an environment of trust and cooperation. It is no doubt difficult, but there are no shortcuts. The first step in all this is recognizing the fact that paranoia can be a problem and create suitable solutions. Intrinsic organizational factors and external environmental factors need to be continuously analyzed for evolving a solution.

RECOMMENDATION

One of the most difficult personality types to deal with is the person who always seems distrustful of others. Sometimes, it is really a manifestation of some dysfunctional personality issue. We probably won't find too many severe cases in our workplace where the person is actually so paranoid that he is dissociated from reality. Psychologists sometimes diagnose this mental illness

as paranoid schizophrenia, which may require medications and intensive therapy to manage. Eccentric behavior is not in and of itself a reason to suspect that someone suffers from mental illness, but sometimes the behavior and personality of a coworker may be so extreme that it impacts other people's ability to work. The best organizations consider the needs of their employees and try to provide a workplace that is conducive to success and productivity. Even in the best organizations, you may encounter difficult personalities. These situations are never easy and your best approach is to try to communicate effectively; if possible you should understand his position while explaining your needs, too. The workplace must be free of hostile and disruptive behavior from both a legal and business perspective. The best work environments are both productive and respectful of their employees and, with good communication; you should be able to navigate successfully even when confronted with some difficult personalities.

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