

Landmark Study Investigates Arrogance

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Arrogance is not just an unpleasant personality trait — it can also affect an organization's morale and bottom line.

There also appears to be a strong relationship between arrogance and job performance, according to Stan Silverman, dean of The University of Akron's Summit College and co-author of the study, “Arrogance: A Formula for Failure.”

Until now, there has been very little research on arrogance, Silverman says, even though most people have been exposed to it. In fact, after the study was recently presented, audience members were asked if they ever worked with an arrogant person. “Almost everyone in the room raised their hands,” recalls Silverman.

Silverman, Aarti Shyamsunder of Kronos, Inc. and Russell Johnson of the University of South Florida presented their ground-breaking research in New York City at the 22nd annual conference of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology, a division of the American Psychological Association.

“Accounts of arrogant employees abound, but evidence is predominantly anecdotal,” Silverman continues. “There is little systematic research on arrogance within organizations, and sparse empirical data that verify the alleged negative relationship between arrogance and performance.”

In response, he and his colleagues developed the Workplace Arrogance Scale (WARS) to help obtain empirical data. The results? Among other

things, the more arrogant you are, the more self-centered and the less agreeable you're likely to be.

Another portion of the study involved a 360-degree performance feedback survey. As expected, it showed that arrogance was negatively related to performance and cognitive ability.

There might be a competitive advantage in curtailing arrogant behavior in organizations and encouraging positive behaviors such as humility, Silverman says.

Examples are successful entrepreneurs and leaders such as Konosuke Matsushita, founder of Matsushita Electric Industrial Co., the largest manufacturer of consumer electric appliances in the world, and Norberto Odebrecht, who founded Construtora Norberto Odebrecht, a Latin America conglomerate in engineering, construction, chemicals, mining and oil. Both made organization-wide efforts to eradicate arrogance and complacency, showing that humility could be critical to the success of their businesses.

The study also showed that measurements of workplace arrogance could be used by managers and coaches to develop interventions to lessen the harmful effects of arrogance and promote the benefits of performance feedback and action planning.

“This is especially true in light of the ‘disconnect’ we found between self-perceptions and others’ perceptions of behaviors we are calling arrogance,” Silverman says.

“A non-transparent, self-report measure of arrogance might also help us prove — or disprove — the commonly held belief that employees don’t leave organizations, they leave managers.”

Source: University of Akron

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