

Workplace Violence and Terrorism: Best Practices for a New Reality

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WORKPLACE VIOLENCE AND TERRORISM: BEST PRACTICES FOR A NEW REALITY



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The world has seen many incidents of violence in the past few years, and it is becoming increasingly hard to classify them — particularly when the crime scene is a place of work. The San Bernadino shooting in 2015 was initially called an example of workplace violence; later it was classified as an “act of terror.”¹ The verbiage continues to change. Similar reactions can be found for other tragedies, including Charlie Hebdo, Fort Hood and Navy Yard. Are these examples of workplace violence, terrorism or both?

According to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA), each year, nearly 2 million American employees are victims of workplace violence.² Workplace violence is defined as any threat or act of physical or psychological violence intended to cause harm, from harassment and intimidation to sexual assault and murder. The traditional view of workplace violence has identified four types of perpetrators: criminal (someone with no connection to the workplace), customer (or clients, patients), employee (current or former), and personal (someone who has a relationship to an employee).³



Violence that occurs in the workplace has far-reaching negative consequences for employers, employees and the larger society, primarily because of the central role the workplace has in our lives. It is clear that boundaries

are shifting and, at times, disappearing: work and home life, work and health, work and political values are all becoming more closely intertwined. As the workplace continues to touch more elements of our personal lives, we must acknowledge the increased risk of negative spill-over effects, including violence. Along with this shift, the concept and implications of workplace violence are changing to become more encompassing.

This paper explores the “new normal” of workplace violence, particularly the emergence of a fifth type of workplace violence — terrorism. Alongside implications for costs and risk factors, this new understanding also impacts future prevention efforts. The idea of transporting skills and lessons learned from safety and anti-terror disciplines into the workplace, alongside the adoption of an integrated approach transcending departmental functions, constitutes the new reality of workplace violence prevention.

TERRORISM — A NEW CONTEXT FOR WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Many recent media-prominent examples of violence at workplaces (e.g., San Bernadino, Charlie Hebdo, Fort Hood, Navy Yard) have sparked massive discussion about how to label these tragedies. Terrorism is designed to make people change their beliefs or actions and to undermine their sense of safety — a motivation unique from other forms of workplace violence.⁴ Yet the workplace has become a primary target of terrorism, due to the harmful impact work disruption has — not only on citizens and communities, but also on the national economy and infrastructure.

In light of the indistinct line between workplace violence and terrorism and the new challenges terrorism has created,⁵ we may wish to add a new category of workplace violence: terrorism/hate crimes. This type of workplace violence would refer to any violence directed at an organization, its people and/or property for ideological, religious or political reasons.

Terrorist attacks seek to destabilize trust in public institutions and erode people’s sense of safety. Attacks at the workplace disrupt daily life and business, paralyzing our economic, intellectual and social capital.⁶ This clearly has wide psychological ramifications, but it also greatly affects the economy.

One of the most significant examples is the 9/11 attacks in the United States. Economically, the short-term impact of the attacks was tremendous. In the month following the attacks, retail sales fell by \$6 billion (2.1%), new orders for durable goods fell \$11.6 billion, and industrial production fell by 1%. Stock markets were incapacitated and when trading reopened, the S&P and NASDAQ dropped by 7% and 9.9%, respectively. Shopping centers and restaurants across the nation were closed for 24 hours, high-risk office buildings were evacuated, major scheduled flights were cut by 30% and still left unfilled, and hotels experienced a surge in vacancies. Through the end of 2011, the Bureau of Labor Statistics attributed 408 major layoff events (defined as those shedding 50 or more jobs) as either a direct or indirect consequence of the attacks.⁷

Similar calculations can be undertaken for more recent attacks. Current projections of the 2015 [Paris attacks](#) estimate ramifications in the tens, if not hundreds, of billions of dollars. This is primarily due to the impact on the tourism industry, which accounts for 8% of the country's GDP. In the week following the attacks, hotel bookings dropped 30% and stock prices of international travel agencies and airlines took big hits (i.e., Delta DAL -0.48%, Hilton HLT -0.22%).^{8,9}

Historically, these events have also been followed by a short, sharp contraction in either overall consumption or purchases of high-priced consumption goods,¹⁰ which illustrates clearly how extensive the effects of terrorist-related workplace violence can be.

As we acknowledge this new context for workplace violence, there are clear implications for organizational prevention strategies. Security experts can transport lessons and best practices from initiatives targeted at terrorism and hate crimes to the workplace (and vice versa). Before delving into best practices, however, this piece will describe the high cost of workplace violence and important risk factors organizations should be aware of.

THE COST OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

The Bureau of Labor Statistics estimates that between 1.5 and 2 million incidents of workplace violence occur annually, though this is likely to be underreported by as much as 50%. Furthermore, this estimate only refers to incidents of criminal and physical contact; what we still need to consider are the multitude of everyday situations that include arguments, threats, harassment, bullying and intimidation occurring in great numbers but unlikely to be reported.

Nevertheless, what can be said with certainty is that workplace violence takes an enormous toll — not only

on employees, but on employers and society as well. An incident of workplace violence is not just an isolated experience that affects a limited number of employees. There are ripple effects throughout:

- **Employees.** In 2014, more than 31,000 Americans were intentionally injured by another person at their workplace,¹¹ resulting in an estimated 188,280 missed work days and \$25 million in lost wages.¹² Employees who are victims of workplace violence may have the financial burden of meeting immediate and long-term medical costs, as well as harmful psychological consequences, such as post-traumatic stress and the related fear of future violence.¹³
- **Employers.** Direct costs include those stemming from violent acts, such as physical site damage, healthcare costs (both for direct victims and those who are impacted psychologically by witnessing violence), and liability expenses and negligence lawsuits. Indirect organizational costs include diminished employee morale, reduced productivity and greater absenteeism.¹⁴ Workplace violence not only causes employees to lose confidence that they are safe at work, but can cause customers to seek services elsewhere and associated companies to sever ties due to negative publicity.¹⁵ Some estimates propose that up to 40% of businesses affected by either natural or human-caused disaster — including severe manifestations of workplace violence — never reopen.¹⁶
- **Society.** Society also pays a price for workplace violence and terror. Victims of workplace violence are more likely to experience relationship problems. Even those indirectly affected, such as a family member or friend, are at an increased risk for a range of health issues including mental illness, distress and behavioral changes.¹⁷ This adds to an escalation of health care costs in a context where healthcare already accounts for as much as 17.5% of GDP. Workplace violence also negatively impacts culture and values. We have seen the emergence of a culture of fear and mistrust, starting with individuals affected by violence and their acquaintances, and then escalating up to an organization's culture and even politics. Two-thirds of Millennials say that “you can't be too careful” when dealing with people — clearly an attitude that is detrimental to collaboration and innovation in the long term.¹⁸

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

Nearly **70%** of U.S. organizations have **insufficient** or no **programs/policies** to combat workplace violence.

In 2014, workplace violence resulted in an estimated **188,280 missed work days** and **\$25M** in lost wages.

2 million U.S. employees are victims of workplace violence each year.

Cost of reacting to serious workplace violence incidents is **100 times** more than the cost of preventing these incidents in the first place.

Up to **40%** of businesses affected by severe workplace violence never reopen.



For employers who fail to prevent workplace violence, jury awards in liability cases average **\$3.1 MILLION** per person, per incident.



Types of Workplace Violence

RISK FACTORS OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

While it is difficult to anticipate when and where workplace violence may occur, psychological and statistical methods have allowed researchers to identify several risk factors. Certain environmental, organizational, societal and technological factors have been shown to increase the risk of workplace violence (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. Example Risk Factors of Workplace Violence^{19,20}



PREVENTION IS CRITICAL

Most people think that workplace violence occurs elsewhere — at someone else’s job — but no organization is immune. In fact, workplace violence affects more than half of U.S. organizations, but nearly 70% have no or insufficient programs and policies in place to combat it.²¹ The expanding realm of workplace violence calls for a new look at preparedness, response and recovery strategies. In particular, with disappearing distinctions between “terrorism” and other safety hazards, a fully integrated approach is needed to mitigate risks — one that spans organizational departments.

The approach to workplace violence should always be proactive, rather than reactive. The cost of reacting to serious workplace violence incidents is estimated to be 100 times more than the cost of preventing these incidents in the first place.²² For employers who fail to proactively take action to prevent workplace violence, jury awards in liability cases average \$3.1 million per person per incident.²³ Therefore, while it is crucial for every workplace to have procedures and strategies in place for when an incident does occur, future efforts ought to focus on prevention.

WORKPLACE VIOLENCE PREVENTION — BEST PRACTICES MEET A NEW REALITY

There are many existing lists, strategies and action plans surrounding the prevention of workplace violence. Moving forward, employers should augment existing strategies with lessons learned, insights and best practices from tactics utilized for terrorist threats. In particular, **early detection mechanisms and processes** are an essential part of any prevention plan. The table below highlights 10 best practices and steps for workplace violence prevention in the future.

10 Best Practices for Workplace Violence Prevention

Best Practice	Explanation	Leader Actions
1. Lead by Example	Supervisors committed to preventing workplace violence will have the most impact.	Leadership must work to integrate Security, HR, Risk Management, Facility Management and other functions, by creating a shared, collective focus on preventing violence. Cross-functional collaboration at the leadership level shows employees that preventing violence is not an isolated function.
2. Listen to Employees	Employees are a key source of information.	Create a safe haven for employees to speak openly and freely about any concerns. The U.S. Homeland Security has recognized that “it takes a community to protect a community” and established the motto, “If you see something, say something.” Transfer this to the workplace.
3. Identify Threats	Existing and potential threats must be identified if they are to be remedied.	Utilize intelligence analysis and anti-terror tools, adapting them to be workplace appropriate. Review existing security procedures and practice escalating situations to uncover loopholes.
4. Take Corrective Action	Minimize the risk presented by existing potential threats.	Implement physical solutions in line with technological standards (e.g., controlling building access with badges). Support employees with resources, for example, an Employee Assistance Program. Address grievances and risk factors, following anti-terrorism guidelines.
5. Provide Training	Ensure employees have proper and the most up-to-date knowledge and skills through training.	Increasing awareness, not just preparedness, is a key element of any violence prevention campaign, from domestic abuse to terrorism. Recognize the new landscape of training in this field and share new insights on tools and techniques.
6. Communicate Regularly with Employees	Build trust and security by keeping everyone informed.	Employees are rarely informed when an attack was successfully thwarted. Employers should tell employees about any occurrences in order to make them more engaged, and to help them understand the purpose of prevention measures. Ensure that procedures are in place to update and check in with affected employees in case of an event.
7. Evaluate Programs	Review policies and procedures regularly.	Expand the definition of workplace violence. Integrate new tools. Form new interdisciplinary teams to evaluate existing measures.
8. Seek Technical Expertise	Objectively identify gaps in procedures and awareness.	Not every company has technical security expertise. Acknowledge if resources are limited and determine when and where external technical expertise should be brought in for consultation.
9. Inform all End Users	Everyone who enters the workplace is at risk, not just employees.	Make all visitors and end users aware of the plans and procedures in place. Ensure that they have internalized — not simply accepted — the importance of safety features such as registering for the on-site text service for mustering.
10. Collaborate with Other Companies	Violence prevention is not an isolated company-specific effort.	Go beyond reliance on governmental guidelines and form inter-organizational collaborations to share best practices. Engage guest speakers and host informative events with other companies and professional associations.

PREVENTION THROUGH TECHNOLOGY

The foundation of any prevention program is information, and technology unquestionably enables the collection, analysis and sharing of information. Both corporations and national security agencies have adopted technological systems that help them to monitor and predict potential threats.

In the corporate setting thus far, the primary aim of employee-level data analysis has been to improve productivity and to prevent future litigation due to leakage of sensitive information. However, with more advanced technology, the extent to which we can collect and analyze data is rapidly expanding. Counter-terrorism agencies have developed sophisticated processes and systems that send out alerts in response to trigger words, activity “hot-spots” and any suspicious patterns. Many organizations are integrating these types of systems into their existing violence prevention frameworks.

Another important consideration is the integration of technology and communication systems across functions. On a macro scale, we have seen success of integration in the collaborations between homeland security agencies and the corporate sector, including the technology leaders of Silicon Valley, as well as other organizations including marketing and social media.²⁴ On an enterprise level, the same principle could be applied for workplace violence prevention. Involving a cross-functional team can lead to more efficient management of the prevention process, expanded program oversight, and a well-balanced solution approach.²⁵ The best starting point to enable collaboration is to simply link the technological systems of the various functions so that they can more easily share information.

THE NEW NORMAL OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

In political rhetoric, news coverage, and even business messaging, we see a culture of fear. This fear permeates our day-to-day lives, with implications at home and at work. As the boundaries between our personal and work lives continue to disappear and individual values increasingly infuse the workplace, we are seeing new types of violence emerge. Today’s definition of workplace violence is becoming much broader and all-encompassing, to include terrorism and other hate crimes.

Armed with this more comprehensive understanding, employers must adopt and adapt new systems, processes, and technologies from other disciplines in collective prevention efforts. While a direct collaboration between every corporation and homeland security to implement one wide and comprehensive violence prevention initiative is unrealistic, **the idea of transporting certain ideas and lessons learned into the workplace merits consideration.** Employers must also adopt an integrated approach that spans organizational functions.

The workplace as we know it is fundamentally altered, and it will never be the same again. In these challenging times — and with technology requiring fewer face-to-face interactions and an increasing number of employees working virtually — it is essential that employees relearn how to trust one another and build strong relationships with colleagues. In doing so, we all can collectively strive to prevent workplace violence and overcome the “culture of fear” in the workplace. Ultimately, preventing and responding to workplace violence is everyone’s responsibility.

HELPFUL RESOURCES FOR EMPLOYERS AND EMPLOYEES

- Occupational Safety & Health Administration: Safety & Health Topics – Workplace Violence (<https://www.osha.gov/SLTC/workplaceviolence/>)
- U.S. Department of Labor – Workplace Violence Program (<http://www.dol.gov/oasam/hrc/policies/dol-workplace-violence-program.htm>)
- National Institute for the Prevention of Workplace Violence (<http://www.workplaceviolence911.com/>)
- Centers for Disease Control – National Institute for Occupational Safety & Health – Occupational Violence (<http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/topics/violence/>)
- Federal Bureau of Investigation – Workplace Violence: Readiness and Response (<https://leb.fbi.gov/2011/january/workplace-violence-prevention-readiness-and-response>)





KEY INSIGHTS & IMPLICATIONS

- As the workplace continues to touch more elements of our personal lives, there is an increased risk of negative spillover effects, including violence.
- Workplace violence is typically categorized into four types: criminal, customer, employee and personal. In light of the indistinct line between workplace violence and terrorism, terrorism/hate crimes can be added as a fifth category.
- Workplace violence takes an enormous toll on employees, employers and society. Terrorist attacks at the workplace can have an even more extensive impact — by disrupting daily life and business, and paralyzing our economic, intellectual and social capital.
- Certain environmental, organizational, societal and technological factors have been shown to increase the risk of workplace violence. Prevention plays a critical role in mitigating these risks.
- Security experts can transport lessons and best practices from initiatives targeted at terrorism and hate crimes to the workplace.

LINKING TO SODEXO'S QUALITY OF LIFE DIMENSIONS

- **Health & Well-Being:** Workplace violence prevention focuses on preserving the physical and psychological health and well-being of employees and society in general.
- **Physical Environment:** There are multiple physical characteristics of the workplace (e.g., secured entryways) that play an essential role in managing workplace violence risk.
- **Ease & Efficiency:** Victims of workplace violence may cope with harmful physical and psychological consequences for years that unquestionably affects their ability to work with ease and efficiency. For all employees, minimizing the risk of workplace violence increases productivity and morale.



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