



Risk and Protective Factors for Retaliation

What are risk factors for retaliation?

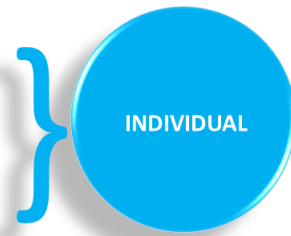
Risk factors for retaliation are variables which increase the likelihood of retaliation to occur. There are several risk factors for retaliation that can be present at individual levels (Service members and leaders) and the organizational level.

Some retaliatory-like behaviors may not meet the definition for retaliation according to the Department of Defense. However, negative behaviors that do not meet this definition can still be counterproductive to the working environment. Counterproductive work behaviors can be defined as any behaviors exhibited in the workplace between personnel that can be harmful to an individual, team member, or overall mission ready state of the organization by impacting factors such as communication, morale, and team/unit cohesion.

Individual level:

- Certain personality traits such as low honesty and humility (Lee & Ashton, 2012), or narcissistic traits (Syed et al., 2022) can indicate that an individual is more likely to participate in retaliatory or counterproductive work behaviors directed at a target who makes a protected communication.
- Negative emotional states can also increase this likelihood (Skarlicki et al., 1999).
- Identity threats - leaders who experience threats to their identity as a leader or are under high amounts of stress in uncertain or unknown working environments may be more likely to engage in retaliation against subordinates (Kakarika et al., 2022).

- Personality Traits (e.g., low humility or narcissistic traits)
- Negative emotional state
- Past or present experience as a retaliation victim or bystander



Organizational level:

- A hostile culture that promotes bullying and focuses heavily on competition between workers by prioritizing individual accomplishments over collective goals may also increase the likelihood of retaliation within the organization (Kartolo and Kwantes, 2019). These behaviors can further lead to fear of retaliation (Melgar et al., 2021; Meyer & Zelin, 2019; Yanchus et al., 2014) among peers, or bystanders, who might otherwise intervene to stop negative behaviors.



Risk and Protective Factors

- Whistleblowers, or those who report misconduct in the workplace, are often the targets of peer and supervisor bullying (Park et al., 2020).
- A work culture that fails to create safe and supportive measures to address and discourage retaliatory behaviors increases the likelihood of retaliation at the organizational level.



What are protective factors for retaliation?

Protective factors for retaliation are variables which can help to prevent counterproductive work behaviors.

Individual level:

- Personality traits such as extraversion, forgiveness, and agreeableness can lead to less likelihood of engaging in retaliatory behaviors (Berry et al., 2005; Kaleta & Mróz, 2019).
- Leaders that show concern and support for followers foster psychologically safe environments that can result in better communication (Yanchus et al., 2014) and higher quality supervisory relationships (Brimhall et al., 2014). This decreases the risk of retaliatory behaviors from supervisors and their subordinates (Dardis et al., 2018).





Organizational level:

- A work climate that encourages intervention and reporting can reduce the fear of retaliation. This can promote accountability for enforcing workplace rules and expectations across all levels, including the inhibition of retaliatory behaviors (Bergman et al., 2002; Meyer & Zelin, 2019).
- Positive leadership styles, such as transformational leadership, which emphasize trust and employee development, can have positive impacts on employee wellbeing and reduce the risk of retaliatory behaviors (Jacobs et al., 2013).
- Organizations that foster protective factors can facilitate safe and supportive environments that reduce the likelihood of retaliatory behaviors in the workplace.





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