Chapter 1
Grieving Organizations and Other Work–Related Pathologies:
Examples From Academia

Cynthia Maria Montaudon-Tomas
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-2595-6960
UPAEP Universidad, Mexico

Ivonne Margarita Montaudon-Tomas
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-5794-7762
UPAEP Universidad, Mexico

Ingrid Nineth Pinto-López
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1580-1375
UPAEP Universidad, Mexico

Yvonne Lomas-Montaudon
https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6793-8330
Universidad Iberoamericana Puebla, Mexico

ABSTRACT

The only constant in life and organizations is change. Change can come in a variety of forms, affecting the way people perform and feel at work, and can sometimes result in grief. This chapter defines grieving organizations and other pathologies that affect organizational health, identifying particular traits that are visible in the way in which work is performed. Different comparisons are made in order to pinpoint key elements and events that can affect the wellbeing of employees. An example from academia is presented: A private Business School in Puebla has faced numerous changes that affect the emotional wellbeing of its members. Changes in leadership, organizational procedures and policies, layouts, early retirement, and even the death of a colleague have substantially affected staff performance. Establishing the right courses of action is essential to develop leadership and promote an organizational climate that is supportive of its employees.

INTRODUCTION

In recent years there has been a keen interest in understanding organizational health and well-being. Since the beginning of the 20th century, awareness surrounding the psychiatric impact of specific stressors on

an individual's ability to function effectively in both personal and professional environments has been spreading steadily (Rick, Perryman, Young, Guppy & Hillage, 1998).

Grief and loss are inevitable parts of life. These topics have been randomly analyzed as part of organizational literature, even though, very much like individuals, organizations grieve at some point in time. When employees are confronted with grief, it gets transferred into the workplace (Moss, 2017).

The workplace is not immune to the problems, pressures, and challenges presented by experiences of loss and the trauma and the grief reactions they produce (Thompson, 2009). Grief is commonly found in people and organizations, especially when analyzing the human dimension of business. Even if it is not desirable, loss will come to work (Perreault, 2011), and after death touches a workplace, nothing will be the same. Discussion about death is taboo in American society and other regions, and it is often not expressed, leaving much to be learned about this phenomenon (Chapple, Ziebland, & Hawton, 2015).

Grief is best represented when death occurs. In working environments, it affects numerous people who might experience sorrow over the person who passed. Still, it can also be triggered by the trauma of death itself, and, as a result, people have to deal with a certain degree of anxiety as they work (Davidson & Doka, 1999). Anxiety develops because people see their coworkers more often than they do their close friends and extended family. Coworkers are perhaps the groups with which people spend most of their time. They are part of the daily routine beyond working, as well. These connections comprise laughing, complaining, experiencing successes and failures together, and, in many cases, having meals together. Coworkers represent day to day relationships in which a sense of camaraderie, as well as shared understanding, develops; they become friendly acquaintances (Davidson & Doka, 1999).

Coworkers are sometimes considered friends and even family. However, when experiencing the death of a coworker, employees do not feel they have permission to grieve as they would a friend or family member. Coping with workplace death is rarely discussed in literature. There is a lack of materials about how to deal with loss in working environments.

Death of a team member might not be a common occurrence, but suffering in organizations is (Baron, Hassard, Cheetham & Sharifi, 2018). Death in the workplace can have devastating effects on an organization, its employees, and the family of the deceased worker (Lee, 1994). Loss, grief, and bereavement for such an event often negatively interfere with the organization's effectiveness, obstruct interpersonal relationships, and increase negative cognitive responses (Vivona & Ty, 2011).

Grief affects the organizational climate. The organizational climate seems to be a concept that appears elusive as it is difficult to pinpoint precisely the different elements that are included, or how the concept can be operationalized and adequately measured. There are as many different categories, values, and dimensions as there are theorists, and as many types of climates as there are leadership styles (Novak & Bratanov, 2014). Early works on climate referred to the living space (Lewin, 1951), and later on started to focus on specific dimensions and their relationships to different outcomes, both individual and organizational, as a manifestation of organizational culture (Schein, 1990) connected to thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of members (Bock, Zmud, Kim & Lee, 2005).

Ashkanasy, Wilderom & Peterson (2009) suggest a continuum of six types of organizational climate: Open, autonomous, controlled, familiar, parental and closed, while Elo, Leppänen, & Jahkola (2008), proposed climates that are relaxed and friendly; encouraging and supportive of new ideas; prejudicial and clinging to old ways; strained and quarrelsome; tense and competitive, and defensive, in which people are looking for their interests.

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