

Governing Energy

A Fool's Errand

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Every year on April 1st, pranksters emerge often producing funny consequences and on occasion mayhem. Crossing this line is sometimes not clear to certain participants. One individual's mindless prank can cause another's crisis.

How many of us have seen what appears to be a harmless office joke illicit tears from the recipient? Quickly noting that it was not funny, most protagonists shrink from the scene. On occasion, a bully once tasting the victim's proverbial blood continues to prod.

Unfortunately, the term "going postal" has become a colloquial term for workplace violence often directed against coworkers and managers.ⁱ Office stresses leading to violence can result from a poor performance appraisal, firing / demotion, the taunting from coworkers or CHANGE.

While there is no excuse for this individual behavior, the RBC model can provide insight into organizational cultures that may foster destructive performance. Readers of this series are familiar with the author's perspective on the RELATIONSHIPS, BEHAVIORS, and CONDITIONS (RBC) model that was originally developed to address issues around cross cultural (international) negotiation processes.ⁱⁱ

More recently, the RBC model has been extended to focus on the Management of Change (MOC) process unfolding in many industry sectors. As a fundamental model of the human experience, RBC enables management to develop a perspective that here to for was the domain of psychologists.

Does this approach demand that management now become "shrinks?" Not hardly, but it does suggest that organizations have a responsibility to categorize the pranksters versus the true malcontents. Moreover, true team building pranks need to be tempered within specific boundaries.

Change for some individuals is hard, even threatening. These people may not have an outlet for their frustrations within acceptable societal norms. They may act upon these exasperations in ways most would not even envision.

Destructive performance does not have to manifest itself as a visible malcontent. More often, it is an insidious behavior that consciously or unconsciously seeks to undermine the very corporate entity that spawned it. Like a cancer, it seeks to destroy the host organization.

In today's extended firm, the term employee is also defined as those employed by supply chain partners and their vendors. These individuals may not have strong ties to the success of the firm. Some may even deliberately seek to cause harm and disruption.

According to Google, a Fool's Errand is defined as "A task or activity that has no hope of success."ⁱⁱⁱ
Hypothesis: there is no room for a fool's errand in today's organizations.

Malcontents can be deadly or at very least detract from shareholder value. This issue is no longer just a Human Resources concern but now one of governance in today's changing environment.

Is your organization on a Fool's Errand when addressing employee malcontents?

About the Author

Dr. [Scott M. Shemwell](#) has over 30 years technical and executive management experience primarily in the energy sector. He is the author of two books and has written extensively about the field of operations management. Shemwell is also the CEO of Knowledge Ops, Inc.; a firm that focuses on providing its customers with solutions enabling operations excellence and regulatory compliance management.

End Notes

ⁱ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Going_postal

ⁱⁱ http://www.therrinstitute.com/uploads/The_Blast_Heard_Around_the_World_-_January_2011.pdf