

Study: Don't be in the dark about effects of leaving others out of the loop

April 13 2009, Amy Patterson Neubert

(PhysOrg.com) -- Workplace ostracism hurts employees' feelings, and the impact on job performance can hurt the company's bottom line, according to new research from Purdue University.

"Most of us have been given the silent treatment on occasion, but being out of the loop, especially if it frequently happens at work, may have more negative consequences than we thought," says Kipling D. Williams, a professor of psychological sciences who studies ostracism. "Even when people are included and acknowledged to some extent in a group setting, there is still some damage accruing when they experience periods of being in the dark. And, because this happens more frequently, its effects may be more serious than the cold shoulder."

These out-of-the-loop experiences can occur when co-workers exclude someone from a hallway conversation after a meeting or a human resources manager meets with people from other departments but someone feels left out of a discussion, says Janice R. Kelly, a professor of psychological sciences. Kelly, who studies small-group decision making, said other examples of partial ostracism involve not being told about an important decision, revised deadlines, office gossip or office holiday traditions.

Williams's and Kelly's research findings are published in March's *Group Process and Intergroup Relations*. Purdue doctoral students Eric E. Jones and Adrienne R. Carter-Sowell also are study co-authors.

In the first study, 75 participants visited with their group members in a setting where information was freely exchanged. Later, some participants were excluded from related information during a group task. Compared to those in the loop, the out-of-the-loop participants experienced incompetency, anger and sadness. A second study with 145 participants reaffirmed the results of the first study, and it also showed that people felt incompetent and treated unfairly whether they were intentionally or unintentionally excluded.

"Out-of-the-loop experiences are interesting to study because of their prevalence and subtlety in relationships and social groups, as well as their potential negative implications for groups and organizations," Kelly says. "The psychological consequences of partial ostracism could affect performance outcomes on morale, productivity and interpersonal functioning."

For example, when people feel uninformed they may not perceive themselves as an equal group member, which could have other harmful effects for individuals and the group. Partial ostracism could lead to dislike and feelings of inequity that can lower group cohesion.

"Because of this research, I am more sensitive about being inclusive," Williams says. "Colleagues need to be more aware about including everyone from a group in discussions or updating those who missed a conversation or piece of information."

Provided by Purdue University ([news](#) : [web](#))

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