

Winning-at-all-costs in the workplace: Short-term gains could spell long-term disaster

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Dr. Gabi Eissa, professor of management, San Diego State University Credit: San Diego State University

Organizations endorsing a win-at-all-costs environment may find this management style good for the bottom-line, but it could come a price. Teamwork and civility between co-workers are severely compromised which can lead to major issues down the road (remember Enron?).

So says Dr. Gabi Eissa, management professor at the Fowler College of Business at San Diego State University, who's recently published his research in *Human Resources Management Journal*. Eissa found that employees with Machiavellian personalities (defined as those who prioritize their [personal goals](#) above all else) tend to be successful in these environments even if it means sabotaging the work of their colleagues. "Employees with Machiavellian personalities tend to not trust others; show a willingness to engage in amoral [behavior](#); and exhibit a desire to maintain interpersonal control," noted Eissa. "They tend to believe that a coworker's success is risky, so they become motivated to see others lose. Often times, they feel that when co-workers lose, they win."

Eissa points to the Enron meltdown and subprime mortgage crisis of 2008 as examples of workplace cultures where management and employees neglected ethics and focused on the bottom-line, resulting in disastrous consequences. "In fact," said Eissa "previous research indicated that Enron's [employee](#) environment had been described as 'aggressive'."

To test his hypotheses, Eissa and researchers from the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and the T.A. Pai Management Institute sampled 500 English-speaking full-time employees and their supervisors in India, as well as 196 employees in a number of organizations in the United States. Specifically, the team of researchers assessed participants' responses for perceived bottom-line mentality in their organizations, workplace behaviors and [job satisfaction](#).

The results of two studies indicated that Machiavellian employees tend to develop a bottom-line mentality more strongly when they perceive their management endorses bottom-line outcomes. In addition, the researchers found Machiavellian employees who developed a bottom-line mentality were found to be less willing to cooperate with their co-workers and were more likely to deviate from organizational norms,

rules and practices.

"Overall, we found that employees focused on the bottom-line are more likely driven to see others lose and less likely to engage in behaviors that may help others succeed," said Eissa. "Clearly, when bottom-line outcomes are valued over everything else, employees may be encouraged to act in their own self-interest, even if it means engaging in unethical behaviors. If the examples set by Enron and the mortgage industry are considered, this behavior can have dire consequences in the long-term if left unchecked."

More information: Gabi Eissa et al, Winning at all costs: An exploration of bottom-line mentality, Machiavellianism, and organisational citizenship behaviour, *Human Resource Management Journal* (2019). [DOI: 10.1111/1748-8583.12241](https://doi.org/10.1111/1748-8583.12241)

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