

The deadly cost of workplace rudeness: Study highlight adverse effects on team performance

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Teams from the University of Florida, Indiana University, and other universities across the U.S. and Israel recently conducted five eye-

opening studies about rudeness, uncovering that even mild instances of this behavior can significantly impair employees' performance. This could have potentially life-threatening consequences in critical fields like health care.

The research is [published](#) in the *Journal of Applied Psychology*.

"Many workplaces treat rudeness as a minor interpersonal issue," said Amir Erez, Ph.D., W.A. McGriff, III Professor at the University of Florida Warrington College of Business. "Our research shows that it's a major threat to productivity and even safety. Organizations should treat it as such."

Erez and his fellow researchers evaluated teams in various settings (including a medical simulation) and found that exposure to rude behavior dramatically reduced team functioning. Surprisingly, the impact of rudeness was disproportionate to its intensity. In one study, relatively mild rude comments from an external source accounted for 44% of the variance in medical teams' performance quality.

The studies also discovered that rudeness functions as a social threat, triggering defensive responses in team members. This causes individuals to become less prosocial and more selfish, hindering the cooperation and coordination essential for effective teamwork. Specifically, teams exposed to rudeness showed reduced information sharing and workload sharing, which are two critical components of team performance. In medical settings, this translates to poorer execution of lifesaving procedures.

"Our research helps us understand the effect rudeness can have on team dynamics, especially in urgent, intense situations like in [health care](#)," said Jake Gale, Ph.D., an assistant professor of management at the Indiana University Kelley School of Business Indianapolis.

"By understanding how rudeness triggers self-focused behaviors and impairs communication, we're not just advancing academic knowledge; we're uncovering insights that could save lives. It's a powerful reminder that the way we interact with each other has real-world consequences, especially in critical situations."

While the findings show that rudeness in the medical field could have deadly effects on patients, rudeness can also have severe implications for teams across various industries. Whether the rudeness comes from supervisors, colleagues, or even customers, it degrades team cooperation and coordination, leading to consistently negative impacts on team outcomes.

With this in mind, the researchers recommend that organizations seek to implement solutions that help teams prepare for dealing with perceived threatening situations like [rudeness](#). Training aimed at building team member resilience and mindfulness, for example, may better prepare employees for dealing with these situations.

"As our understanding of workplace dynamics evolves, our research underscores a [critical point](#): in the quest for high-performing teams, sometimes the smallest courtesies can make the biggest difference," Erez said.

More information: Jake Gale et al, Rudeness and team performance: Adverse effects via member social value orientation and coordinative team processes., *Journal of Applied Psychology* (2024). [DOI: 10.1037/apl0001213](#)

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