Normative Influences in Organizations

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In a case study on leadership in a computer consulting firm, one consultant had this to say about the corporate environment:

You had a management which knew what people [employees] could do, which took an interest in them and made demands. There were very strict guidelines during that time. If you had a "conference" that went on half the night, there were no excuses for not arriving at the right time the following morning. If you did not arrive on time you got a public reprimand. You had to be there at 8 o'clock in the morning, in fresh shape. You were allowed to do whatever you wanted until then. . . . (Alvesson, 1992, p. 189)

This example illustrates that in organizations, as in any group, there are rules for behavior that are understood by all group members. These rules may or may not be formal, written rules. There also may be unwritten exceptions to the written rules that govern organizational behavior. When these rules are unwritten, they must be transmitted or taught to new group members. These rules for behavior are called norms. Although they do serve as guidelines for socially appropriate behavior, some norms are explicit rules and some are implied or unspoken. Both kinds of norms are equally important. Members of a group who behave in ways consistent with the normative rules for behavior receive greater acceptance and approval.
from the group than the members who deviate from the group norms (Turner, 1991).

How do people learn which attitudes and behaviors are important in their group? What types of normative rules do people learn? How are norms transmitted to new group members? And, how do these norms change over time? There are a number of means by which group members form, transmit, and learn the rules for appropriate behavior.

Hardin and Higgins (1996) conceived of normative influence in terms of what they called shared reality. They argued that shared reality is formed and sustained for individuals when their experience and sense of reality is shared with others. This formation and transmission of reality occurs through a social verification process, which occurs when individuals receive feedback from other group members on the appropriateness of their view of reality. From this perspective, social interaction is necessary for the establishment of reality for group members. In addition, a perceiver's notion of shared reality helps regulate the self; one's social environment alters one's concept of self. Conversely, one's social environment and the individuals in that environment are affected by one's perception of self. Thus, shared reality and the social verification process provide a mechanism by which individuals define themselves and their social environment and therefore form social norms.

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature on social norms in an attempt to understand more about normative processes that occur in organizations. We start with an overview of the social psychological research on norms. Next, we review the organizational psychology literature on norms and attempt to integrate the two bodies of research. Then, we review certain applications of different types of normative behavior and analyze them in terms of our integrated view of norms. Finally, we conclude with a series of suggestions on ways to modify or establish norms within organizations.

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE ON NORMS

Many of the topics of interest to persuasion researchers are based on social norms—understood rules for accepted and expected behavior (Myers, 1993). Adherence to these rules typically allows one to avoid rejection and gain social approval. In a number of classic experiments, social psychologists have manipulated the presence of a norm and repeatedly found adherence to it when it was salient.

Sherif's (1937) work on conformity is one of the earliest investigations to demonstrate the powerful influence of norms. In this study, participants were seated in a dark room with only a pinpoint of light directed at a wall.

Without a reference point, the light appeared to move slightly and participants were asked how far it moved from its original position. For half of the participants, the first set of trials occurred on an individual basis and a second set of trials was conducted in a group format. The other half of the participants underwent the group conditions first and then the individual conditions. The participants who first experienced the group condition responded with highly consistent estimates within each group; these measurements were stable over the series of group trials. When these participants moved on to the individual trials, the pattern of their responses from the group condition remained in force. Those participants who underwent the individual condition first established more divergent estimates of movement, varying by as much as 7 inches from person to person. But when these participants were then placed in the group context, their responses converged in the first trial and their committed responses continued over the series of group trials. This research demonstrated that under conditions of uncertainty, people incorporate the judgments of others into their own judgments.

Aronson and O'Leary (1982–1983) took advantage of the power of norms in their research to investigate means to reduce water consumption on a university campus. When a large sign reading:

(1) Wet down
(2) Turn water off
(3) Soap up
(4) Rinse off

was hung in the men's shower room, only 6% complied with the request. However, when the sign was removed and an undergraduate confederate modeled the posted routine, 49% followed his lead. When two confederates were employed to model, compliance rose to 67%. This experiment provides further evidence that humans look to the actions of others to learn how to respond in an uncertain situation and the more people demonstrating the same behavior, the more powerful the influence.

Looking to one's social network for information regarding the proper behavior has definite adaptive qualities because the actions of others provide a good indication of what is likely to be approved and effective conduct in the situation (Cialdini, 1993). Festinger (1954) suggested that when what constitutes appropriate behavior is uncertain, people come to rely increasingly more on the social reality. In an ambiguous situation, the actions of surrounding others provide guidelines for behavior. An individual is especially likely to attend to and follow the lead of others when the environment is uncertain, the number of others from whom to gauge what is appropriate is large, and those being observed are similar or successful (Cialdini & Trost, 1998).
Two kinds of social norms have been distinguished: Descriptive norms, which describe what most others do in a situation, and injunctive norms, which describe what most others approve or disapprove there. It is important to distinguish between descriptive and injunctive norms because they differ in their power and strength across situations. We first describe the research on descriptive norms, which are found to influence individuals when it is the only normative information available. Next we examine the research on injunctive norms, which tend to be more powerful motivators of behavior as their influence carries across environments.

**DESCRIPTIVE NORMS**

Cialdini, Kallgren, and Reno (1991) executed a research program to examine the impact of descriptive and injunctive norms. In their first three experiments, they examined the effect of descriptive norms on participants' decisions to litter. In Experiment 1, the researchers manipulated the environment to be either heavily littered (representing a prolittering descriptive norm) or free of litter. In addition, the researchers manipulated the salience of this descriptive information. In the high-norm salience condition, a confederate littered the environment and in the low-norm salience condition, the confederate just walked through the area. The researchers found that participants littered more in the littered environment compared to the clean environment. This supported the hypothesis that individuals will follow the behavior of others in order to determine how to behave. In the high-norm salience conditions, this effect was even stronger: A confederate who littered produced the most littering in the study when the environment was already littered but produced the least littering when the environment started out clean. Thus, bringing attention to the existing norms of the situation spurred participants to follow the norms.

In the second experiment, the researchers found that a single piece of litter in a clean environment could also serve as a norm salience manipulation by prompting the participants to notice the state of the environment. In this case, when the state of the environment was clean except for that single piece of litter, the participants noted the descriptive norm (that most people do not litter) and were especially likely to follow it by failing to litter themselves. Indeed, a single piece of litter lying in an otherwise clean environment generated less littering than did a litter-free environment. This finding attests to the importance of establishing cues that heighten the salience of a desirable norm if organizations wish that norm to be maximally effective.

Experiment 3 was a conceptual replication of Experiment 2 with a few minor changes. Once again, the researchers found an environment that made the antilittering descriptive norm salient (that with a single piece of litter) produced the least amount of littering. These three experiments demonstrated the power of descriptive norms as the participants noted and followed the behavior of others, especially when the norm was made prominent in participants' consciousness.

**INJUNCTIVE NORMS**

Cialdini et al. (1991) continued their program of research with a comparison of the power of descriptive versus injunctive norms (i.e., what is done versus what is approved). In Experiment 4, the researchers used a fully littered environment in which the litter was either scattered throughout the area (representing a prolittering descriptive norm) or swept into piles (representing an antilittering injunctive norm). They predicted that making the prolittering descriptive norm more salient, by having a confederate litter into an environment of scattered litter, would increase littering there. The more important prediction was that making the antilittering injunctive norm salient, by having a confederate litter into an environment of swept litter, would reduce littering there. These predictions were confirmed, suggesting the power of injunctive norm salience. Cialdini et al. concluded that, "shift subjects' focus from descriptive (unswept litter) to injunctive (swept litter) normative cues resulted in differing behavioral tendencies that were nonetheless consistent with the type of normative information on which the participant had been focused" (p. 214).

Experiment 5 examined whether focusing participants on the antilittering injunctive norm through a priming process could reduce littering behavior. According to the notion of spreading activation (Anderson, 1976, 1983; Collins & Loftus, 1975; McClelland & Rumelhart, 1981), if norms are stored in memory in a network system as some evidence suggests (Harvey & Enzle, 1981), then priming norms that are differentially related to a target antilittering injunctive norm should differentially activate the target norm and lead to commensurate levels of littering. Flyers with various messages were tucked under the windshield wipers of cars in a library parking lot. The statements on the flyers were of varying conceptual proximity to the antilittering norm—from a specific "do not litter" appeal to messages of increasing distance from the antilittering norm (encouraging recycling, conserving energy, voting, and a visit to the local art museum). These messages were designed to prime (or activate) the antilittering norm more strongly the more conceptually proximate they were to the norm. The researchers expected the least littering when the antilittering norm was primed directly, with gradual increases in litter as the priming message was progressively distant from the issue of littering. The results supported the hypothesis;
there was a significant decrease in littering as participants became focused on issues that were more similar to the antilittering injunctive norm.

The program of research by Cialdini, Kallgren, and Reno (1991) provides instructive data regarding the power of normative information. Their first three experiments demonstrated that the least littering occurred when participants came on a single piece of litter in an otherwise clean environment. Focusing individuals in this way on the descriptive antilittering norm led to behavior consistent with that norm. Experiments 4 and 5 introduced injunctive information into participants' behavioral decisions and the results indicated that focusing individuals on the injunctive norm against littering led to reduced littering rates, even when the descriptive norm favored littering. This tells us that if an individual is confronted with a descriptive norm favoring undesirable behavior, it may be possible nonetheless to reduce such behavior by making a contradicting, injunctive norm salient.

In a later study, Cialdini, Kallgren, and Reno (1991) compared the power of injunctive versus descriptive information across situations. They found that injunctive information motivated participants' behavior even when it was transmitted in one situation and the participants' responses occurred in a different situation. Descriptive norms were much less powerful in their ability to motivate behavior across situations. The researchers concluded that injunctive social norms are the most widely applicable in their ability to encourage specific behaviors across a variety of situations and target populations.

More recently, research has applied the findings of Cialdini, Kallgren, and Reno (1991) to the development of antilittering public service announcements (Bator, 1997). In this research, antilittering injunctive information that was presented in a televised message successfully motivated antilittering behavior hours later in a different, heavily littered (where the descriptive norm was pro-littering) environment. This finding supports the power of injunctive norms in their ability to direct behavior across situations.

How might normative behavior within organizations be interpreted from this perspective? What are the implications and conclusions for organizations? Although there are normative theories of behavior within organizational psychology, we can also interpret normative behavior in terms of the descriptive and injunctive norms. Before we discuss normative behavior within organizations and the transmission of group norms to new members, let us first review the way organizational researchers view normative behavior in organizations. Then, we look at specific organizational norms and discuss each from an integrated organizational and social psychological perspective.

9. NORMATIVE INFLUENCES

A REVIEW OF ORGANIZATIONAL LITERATURE ON NORMS

Although any group will have a set of established behavioral norms, the content and transmission of these norms will vary greatly from group to group or from organization to organization. As an example of the content and transmission of norms varying across organizations, consider the following two new employee accounts of group dynamics. The first example illustrates fighting between groups:

I was part of a technical team that was supposed to offer product support on a new product. When the roles of everyone were defined, the project group was very adamant about keeping control of their product in their jurisdiction, although they weren't the ones who developed the concept and proved it workable. We were! They refused to compromise and what was stupid was the director of engineering had to intervene. It was it like a bunch of kids fighting.

From this experience, the new employee got evidence that cooperation between groups was not the norm in this organization. A second example illustrates cooperation between groups: “We were meeting in a group to test circuitry. Everyone's idea was shared in the discussion, including mine. Even though I was new, they wanted to know what I thought” (Gundry & Rousseau, 1994, p. 1076). Unlike the first account, this employee got evidence that working together towards a common goal was normative in this organization.

Normative behavior also varies within any one organization (Cooke & Rousseau, 1988). Within one organization, norms may differ depending on the department. For example, a company might have an overall strong norm for high productivity but the content of the norm may differ within the organization (e.g., what an employee needs to do to be extremely productive may vary by his or her position in the company, as well as the specific norms in his or her department). Thus, norms differ across organizations in both their mode of transmission and in their content; norms also differ within organizations, with any one department holding norms that vary from those of another department.

Organizational researchers typically discuss normative behavior within organizations in terms of the climate and culture of the organization. Climate is defined as individuals' perceptions of their organizational group that are influenced by the characteristics of both the organization and the individual (Schneider & Hall, 1972). Climate can also be defined as the perceptions of organizational policies shared by most group members or, simply, "the way
things are around here” (Cooke & Szumal, 1993). As we saw in the statement made by the consultant in the beginning of this chapter, employees in the consulting firm understood that everyone was expected to (and did) work as many hours as needed to get the job done. Thus, organizational climate encompasses the descriptive norms of an organization (Cooke & Szumal, 1993) because climate typifies what people actually do.

Culture is defined as “a set of cognitions shared by members of a social unit” (O’Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991, p. 491). Additionally, culture is a reflection of the common ways of thinking and believing within an organizational group, as well as norms that are common behavioral expectations relevant to all group members (Cooke & Rousseau, 1988). One example of how culture affects behavior is that although employees of the computer consulting firm worked as many hours as needed to complete their projects, they also understood that, to avoid disapproval, they had to arrive promptly at 8 a.m. every morning regardless of how late they had worked the night before. Thus, whereas organizational climate provides more descriptive norm information, organizational culture provides more injunctive norm information (Cooke & Szumal, 1993).

There are two important characteristics of organizations with strong cultures or a strong set of injunctive norms: intensity and presence of crystallization. In an intense culture, group members elicit strong approval and disapproval responses to certain behaviors of individual group members that are central to its set of values. Employees in an intense culture, for example, may be disapproved of by both their supervisor as well as other group members if they arrive to work after 8 a.m. Crystallization refers to an almost unanimous agreement on the content of important values among group members (e.g., everyone in the consulting firm agreed that working long hours was important; Hackman, 1992; O’Reilly et al., 1991).

Factors that influence compliance to group norms include the content of the group norm, individual adherence to or rejection of the norm, and an individual’s role in the group (Hackman, 1992). For example, norms that are highly crystallized and intense are more strictly adhered to by group members than norms that are not. So if there was little agreement regarding the importance of coming in early after working especially late, one would expect lower rates of compliance. Additionally, the greater the overall group cohesiveness, the stronger the compliance to the organizational behavioral norms by group members. In this case, members of a cohesive group would probably inquire with one another regarding the appropriate time to arrive at work after a late night on the job and this group affiliation would provide encouragement to follow through with this act and disapproval if the individual did not arrive for work at 8 a.m. Additionally, it is permissible for high-status group members to deviate from a group norm without sanction, whereas the same behavior would be met with strong disapproval if a low-status member committed the same act (Hackman, 1992). For example, it is unlikely that the president of the consultancy firm would receive a reprimand for failing to arrive for work by 8 a.m.

Because the content of organizational norms differs across organizational groups, researchers have developed quantitative measures of norms within organizations. These include the Organizational Culture Profile (OCP; O’Reilly et al., 1991), which measures person–organization fit, and the Organizational Culture Inventory (OCI; Cooke & Rousseau, 1988), which evaluates the content of organizational norms and categorizes the organizational culture on the basis of the composition of its norms. Organizations in the same industry that are of similar sizes, hierarchical structures, age, and technological sophistication tend to have similar cultures (O’Reilly et al., 1991) as well as similar normative beliefs and values.

The concept of norms is readily applied to organizational contexts. An examination of norms from this perspective reveals that norms differ between organizations in terms of their mode of transmission and their content. Within organizations, norms may differ by department. The climate of an organization primarily describes what most people do (the descriptive norms). The culture of an organization refers more to what is expected or approved (the injunctive norms). One should expect stronger adherence to a norm depending on the intensity and presence of crystallization (unanimous agreement with the norm). Finally, measures have been developed to examine the person–organization fit (OCF) and a means to categorize the culture of an organization depending on the norms of that organization (OCI).

**APPLICATION I: ORGANIZATIONAL DISHONESTY**

What happens when organizations condone or support the use of dishonest business practices; when dishonesty becomes a part of the organizational culture and climate? According Cialdini’s (1996) Triple Tumor of Dishonesty model, organizations that establish dishonest business practices as a socially acceptable behavioral norm stand to lose far more than they stand to gain. Although dishonest business practices usually lead to a short-term increase in profits, the long-term consequences are more costly (Stark, 1993). The three tumors refer to the major long-term detrimental consequences for an organization that engages in dishonest business practices.

The first tumor deals with the decrease in long-term profits due to an organization’s bad reputation and loss of business or clients. For example, a company’s climate might foster approval of its sales team promising to deliver goods to customers sooner than the goods are actually available, provided that this practice increases sales. Although sales will increase for a while, once customers learn that the company cannot keep its end of the bargain, the customers will not do business with the company again.
A good reputation is extremely important in business and deception, such as that previously described, can do much to undermine a company’s reputation for honesty in business deals (Aaker, 1991; Labich, 1992; Steckmest, 1982; Weitz, Castleberry, & Tanner, 1992). Not only will the company lose business with the customers that were deceived but word of their dishonest business practices could tarnish their reputation. This may cause the company to lose business with potential new customers as well. Thus, as the model suggests, dishonest business practices may lead to a short-term increase in profit. However, the probable long-term losses make the acceptance of this norm questionable.

The second tumor of the Triple Tumor of Dishonesty model refers to the way an organizational norm of dishonesty will affect individuals within the organization. If the dishonesty norm does not fit with an employee’s personal values, one of two things may happen: (a) An employee will not change his or her self-concept to be in line with the group norm and will not become accustomed to the organizational dishonesty or (b) an employee will change his or her self-concept to match the group norm and therefore become comfortable with the dishonest policy.

According to the Triple Tumor model, if no self-concept change occurs, the employee will become conflicted. Stress (Dewe, 1993), illness (Cohen, Tyrell, & Smith, 1991), and absenteeism will increase while job satisfaction and productivity decrease (Barnett, Marshall, Raudenbach, & Brennan, 1993). These problems may be exacerbated by an employee’s behavioral compliance with the dishonest policies without a subsequent change in his or her belief system. The conflict experienced by an employee behaving in a way inconsistent with his or her personal beliefs enhances the likelihood that the employee will leave the company. In fact, research suggests that lower job satisfaction increases the probability that an individual will leave a company (Carsten & Spector, 1987). Thus, companies that engage in unethical business practices may have a higher employee turnover rate than companies that support honest business practices.

Conversely, if employees adjust their self-concepts to match the group norm, even stronger negative repercussions are likely. Although these employees are more likely to stay with the company, they may now see themselves as the type of person who engages in dishonest business practices and, as a result, they may see the organization as a place where it is normative to act this way. This suggests that the remaining employees may be more likely to cheat the organization as well as its business partners and clients. Attitudes and behavior such as this lead to increased employee theft and fraud (Brown, 1986; Jones & Terris, 1983; Terris & Jones, 1982).

Employee theft and fraud cost U.S. businesses about $120 billion per year (Buss, 1993) and this figure is expected to rise to $200 billion per year by the turn of the century (Govoni, 1992; Snyder, Blair, & Arndt, 1990). As the numbers illustrate, employee theft has become a serious and costly problem for organizations. Additional research suggests that once theft has become an accepted organizational group norm, the behavior is unlikely to stop (Payne, 1989). However, the norms regulating what and how much an employee can steal will vary by organization (Greenberg & Scott, 1996). Thus, in keeping with the model, since a norm of dishonesty is established in organizations, employees uncomfortable with this norm will leave the company, whereas the remaining employees will accept the norm and start to view themselves as less honest. This self-concept change may then lead to greater employee dishonesty, evidenced by increased employee theft and fraud within the organization as well as increased dishonesty in business deals.

If left untreated, employee theft should continue to be the pervasive social norm, repeatedly transmitted to new employees. So even with a high employee turnover rate, the dishonesty norm can persist (Jacobs & Campbell, 1961; Nielsen & Miller, 1997). Unfortunately, the current methods for dealing with this problem may also have negative repercussions. In fact, the means by which organizations deal with employee dishonesty may actually exacerbate the problem. Organizations often attempt to confront this problem not by changing the dishonesty norm but instead by spending increasing amounts of money on high-tech security and surveillance systems. These high tech systems facilitate the growth of tumor three—the cost of the surveillance of an organization’s employees.

Although costly in monetary terms (Bylinski, 1991; Halpern, 1991), these security measures also may prove costly by giving employees the message that the organization does not trust its employees (Deci, Connell, & Ryan, 1989), decreasing the sense of organizational community. Employees see the organizational management as distrustful of them, which can facilitate a belief that management is the adversary. These beliefs may lead to employee hostility and retaliation (e.g., lack of cooperation among employees, attempts to bypass the security system, etc.), which in turn can generate increased costs in more advanced security and surveillance equipment. In fact, Greenberg and Scott (1996) reported that retaliation against management is one of two possible motives for employee theft. The other motive postulated by Greenberg and Scott is a desire to “even the score” for unfair treatment. This perceived unfair treatment is often an activity that employees view as insulting their sense of identity (Bies & Tripp, 1996).

The organizational management’s expectation that employees will be dishonest and cannot be trusted may actually lead to greater dishonest behavior on the part of the employees (Tenbrunsel & Messick, 1998). The transmission of this expectation of dishonesty may lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy, with the employees acting in a more dishonest manner than usual because they are confirming or living up to management’s expecta-
toward surveillance, unanimous agreement that leadership, employees may attribute honest behavior to the presence of the security systems rather than to an internal sense of honesty. So, in keeping with the Triple Tumor of Dishonesty model, this type of monitoring is likely to support the dishonest self-concept rather than encourage employees to view themselves as honest.

According to Coleman (1985), white-collar crime falls into one of two categories: organizational crime and occupational crime. Organizational crime is defined as crime committed with the approval and encouragement of the organization in order to advance the company. Occupational crime refers to employee theft within the organization for the personal gain of an individual employee. The Triple Tumor of Dishonesty Model suggests that companies that engage in organizational crime foster high levels of occupational crime. Acceptance of one type of crime leads to the growth of the other. Regardless of the type of tumor or the type of crime, once a norm of dishonesty is established, much like a real tumor, the problem grows as employees transmit the norm to one another. If not held accountable for their actions, a few dishonest employees, especially those in positions of leadership, may corrupt a company.

This issue of organizational dishonesty can be interpreted in terms of descriptive and injunctive norms. When organizations condone unethical business practices, it is not usually in the form of written company policy. Instead, the transmission of this injunctive information is more likely to occur by observation of what the supervisor does himself or herself, as well as the supervisor’s approval of the unethical behavior of other employees. In these cases, the supervisor’s behavior provides injunctive information that the organization’s culture condones dishonesty.

In fact, research suggests that a supervisor may encourage employee theft by modeling the behavior or by tacitly approving the behavior on the part of his or her subordinates (Greenberg & Scott, 1996). The descriptive norm or climate favoring unethical behavior is probably transmitted through an examination of what one’s coworkers are doing. If the organization has a strong culture or a strong set of injunctive norms, then one could say there is intensity and presence of crystallization. This means that there is strong approval for the profits associated with cheating one’s clients and unanimous agreement with this goal. However, according to the model, this unethical behavior often leads to cheating within the organization, costly surveillance, a decreased sense of organizational community, and hostility toward the organization. The short-term profits associated with an injunctive and descriptive norm favoring dishonesty can result in serious, long-term loss.

APPLICATION 2: COMMUNICATING GROUP NORMS TO NEWCOMERS

How do newcomers to an organization learn group norms? There are a number of possible ways. A new employee may learn injunctive norms by attending a new employee orientation, by noting the behavior of the supervisor, or by watching how the supervisor responds to the behavior of others. Descriptive norms may be gauged through observation of the behavior of other group members or by a description of behavioral norms as explained by established group members.

According to Gundry and Rousseau (1994), newcomers learn organizational norms through the experience of critical incidents. They defined a critical incident as an event that occurs early in a newcomer’s tenure on the job, where the purpose of the incident and the consequences of the action can be easily understood by the newcomer. Newcomers use these critical events to shape their normative beliefs and their behavior. For example, a new employee learned that reference for authority was important norm within his organizational group:

I was in a meeting held in the Executive conference room when a fellow engineer came in late. Reaching for the nearest chair, he sat down only to be informed that it was the Vice President’s chair (its back was higher than all the others in the room), by the manager of a sister group in our department. This fellow was surprised at the ludicrousness of this comment since the VP wasn’t even at the meeting, until the director of the department told him to find another seat. How absurd. (Gundry & Rousseau, 1994, p. 1075)

From this event, the engineer inferred that sitting in the vice president’s chair is considered inappropriate by his group. If he wants to be accepted by the group, he will make sure that he never sits in the VP’s chair. Thus, there are two components of a critical incident—the description of the event and the message inferred from it (Gundry & Rousseau, 1994).

The transmission of group norms to organizational newcomers usually focuses on two general issues or topics (Hackman, 1992). The first issue deals with information regarding the rewards and punishments available within the organizational environment as well as information on who controls the allocation of these rewards and punishments. The second issue focuses on normative information that provides details regarding the behaviors that lead to rewards as well as the behaviors that lead to avoidance...
of punishment. The following statement from a new employee exemplifies
this:

The company held two parties recently for this project. They were catered
events at nearby restaurants. They were attended by many employees of this
project at all different levels. Their purpose was to promote the application
of hard work being performed by employees. (Gundry & Rousseau, 1994, p.
1075)

From this, a new employee should learn that hard work will lead to parties
and other rewards for the workgroup and that he or she should attempt to
increase productivity to earn future rewards.

If a newcomer wants to be successful and fit in, he or she will pay close
attention to any information on the group norms within the particular
organization leading to rewards and avoiding punishment. Thus, the effort
a newcomer puts into learning group norms has a tremendous impact on
his or her future in the organization. For example, the amount of effort an
individual puts into learning the organizational norms, as measured by
participation in optional organizational social events, is a significant predictor
of job satisfaction (Chatman, 1991). Other factors affecting adherence to
and understanding of organizational norms have to do with the crystal-
lization of the normative structure. For example, the greater the cohesiv-
ness of an organizational group, the more likely group members will conform
to the group norms. Stronger group cohesion also leads to stronger belief
systems that are resistant to modification even when they are outdated or
inaccurate (Hackman, 1992). A strong belief system and a cohesive group
make it easier for a newcomer to learn the normative rules for behavior.

As we saw in the previous application, if organizational dishonesty is one
of the more valued group norms, adoption of this norm will help the
newcomer fit in but it will also lead to negative long-term repercussions
for both the employee and the organization. This is a crucial piece of informa-
tion to consider, especially given that research shows that group norms
persist even after original group members are no longer part of the group
(Nielsen & Miller, 1997).

**SUGGESTIONS FOR HARNESSING NORMATIVE INFORMATION IN ORGANIZATIONS**

How can supervisors take advantage of descriptive and injunctive norms to
create a work environment that fosters honest, productive employees? This
chapter provides some guidelines in this domain. Whereas most organiza-
tions probably do suggest or imply a goal of honesty, our interpretation of

the research indicates that organizations would be wise to make such de-
scriptive and injunctive norms consistently salient. These norms have been
found to be highly influential in motivating employee honesty and organi-
izations should take advantage of this fairly simple yet powerful tactic.
Because injunctive norms have been found to be more powerful than de-
scriptive norms across situations and because injunctive norms are more
dependent on supervisors’ actions, these supervisors are the individuals
who should emphasize the importance of honesty and productivity.

It is important that from the first interview with a prospective employee,
supervisors should stress both injunctive and descriptive norms for hon-
esty and productivity. In terms of injunctive norms for honesty, the inter-
viewer should emphasize that the organization is based on honest business
practices and a strong work ethic. He or she should explain that this
philosophy is apparent not only from official corporate policy but also in
the managers’ behavior and (to include descriptive information) also in the
behavior of the staff at every level of the organization. It is important to
note that such an immediate emphasis of injunctive and descriptive norms
for honesty and productivity should also help screen against employees
who would be a poor fit.

It is especially important that these descriptive and injunctive norms be
evident on the job. Supervisors should provide a strong example of their
goals and messages and memos should attest to this common objective. If
there is ever a problem, such that employees are found to be dishonest or
unproductive, supervisors should refrain from describing the problem as a
regrettably frequent one. Doing so would characterize dishonesty or low
productivity as the descriptive norm. Instead supervisors should express
strong disapproval for this uncommon behavior and employees should be
reminded that most of the staff is honest and hardworking. Supervisors are
urged to intervene in all instances of dishonesty (e.g., even theft of office
supplies). Doing otherwise could lead to the spread of a protheft descriptive
norm among employees, as well as an implied weak antitheft injunctive
norm from the supervisors’ lack of concern for this dishonest behavior.
Again, supervisors are encouraged to express strong disapproval and em-
phasize that this behavior is unusual and unacceptable. Because humans
tend to decide how to behave by looking to those around them, and often
to those in positions of authority, organizations could benefit (in terms of
honesty and productivity, or any other quality deemed desirable) by taking
advantage of the power of descriptive and injunctive norms.

**REFERENCES**

9. NORMATIVE INFLUENCES


