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Subtheme: Organizing and Organizations of Death

“They Killed My Friend!”: The Impact of Death in Organization Identification

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How does the killing of a colleague impact on the identification of organizational members that daily deal with deaths? In this paper, I will try to address such research question by analyzing a tragic event that happened with homicide crime scene detectives. In particular, I will explore an extreme event (Eisenhardt, 1989) when criminals executed one of the homicide crime scene detectives in front of his family. The data for this paper is part of a 4-year ethnography (Spradley, 1980; Van Maanen, 1979) that I have been carrying out with detectives in one of the largest metropolis of the world.

My data from observations of the real-time aftermath of the events and a detectives’ “Whats Up” discussion group suggests that the killing of a colleague generates a process that eventually reinforces workers organizational identification. When the death happens, workers are first chocked. Then, they evaluate if the victim was a “real” member of the organization (“was he a ‘true police?’”). Subsequently, workers identify themselves with the victim (“it could have been me”) at the same time that they disidentify themselves from the organization (“the police does not care about us”). As a result of this disidentification, workers figure out individual reactions to protect themselves (“what can I do to avoid being killed?”) to later re-identify themselves with the organization (“we are police”). Finally, workers reinforce their identification with the organization (“together we are stronger”).

This paper contributes to the literature about death in organizations (Bell & Taylor, 2011; 2016), on how traumatic events impacts on organizational identification (Pratt, 1998; Kimberley et al., 2001; Riketta, 2005; Ashforth, 2008)

a theme that has been neglected by the literature and also on police studies where studies about police deaths are scant.

References

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