

## Triggers of Anger and How to Manage them in Organisations

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### ABSTRACT

The paper examined the triggers and management of anger in contemporary organizations. The working relationship in organisations is getting worse by the day because workers are less productive as a result of dissatisfaction. They are also frustrated when it is difficult to cope with the assumed mischief of either the boss or co-workers. This is making the work place more unfriendly and chaotic which in turn seems to affect work productivity. Anger is a menace in the workplace. Employers, managers or supervisors must not handle it trivially so that it does not have negative impact on workers and the organisation itself. However, adopting the highlighted strategies and recommendations, will ameliorate the problems of anger in organisations.

**Keywords:** Triggers; Anger; Organisation; Workplace; Management

### INTRODUCTION

Anger is common among workers in the work place. It has also remained a social emotional problem as people usually find it difficult to cope with the assumed mischief of either the boss or colleagues in any work situation. Anger is a negative social behaviour that wrecks great havoc if it is not quickly abated or properly managed. It can create an unhealthy situation that is likely to make working environment boring and capable of destabilizing both the aggressor and the aggrieved. No wonder, Ingram (2003) says that anger like obesity is every where, but not good for anybody. Much of the problem of anger is created because of the way people feel about themselves, the work, their co-workers and about life, Anger makes people to be insensitive to co-operating with co-workers.

### UNDERSTANDING ANGER

The fury of an aggrieved man could be fierce but it does not mean that he is a madman. It is human to be angry. Man is born with the innate structure that produces anger, when he is distressed or discontented. Anger manifests when one's ego or self-esteem, integrity, peace of mind, security and safety on the job are threatened and when one's coping ability breaks down.

It is also one of the ways man reacts to stress related problems. There are different types of

stress; they include frustration, conflict, change and pressure. We respond differently to stress depending on our perception of the stress and how threatening the situation could be. This is because what could be stressful to one individual might not be to another. While some respond violently or aggressively others are either not likely to at all or the response could be very subtle. But the basic thing is that it affects individuals at several levels. One basic fact is that, when an individual is angry, aggression is inevitable. Aggression is a type of behaviour that is likely to hurt the other person (Franzoi, 2000).

Hence, any angry man is sad, bitter, malicious, hostile, aggressive, wicked, embattled, distracted, insubordinate, unruly and vindictive. Such a person is also full of resentment, hatred and evil. He is willing to do anything to prove his worth so as to protect his ego, stabilize himself and to abate his anger.

Gibson and Calister (2010) define anger as a "fuzzy concept" that people know when they see and when they feel it. Ekman (1992) suggests that anger is a more fundamental concept that is related to the concepts of aggression, revenge or hostility. It tends to be a response to the actions of others and directed towards others (Averill 1982). Conceptually, anger is likened to an individual's blame of another person for perceived wrongdoing (Clare and Ortony, 1991).

Anger is said to be feeling mad in response to frustration or injury to one's ego, when you do not like what has happened and usually you would like to revenge any one who does what you do not like or stand in your way. Anger then becomes the hurt of our pride when we do have our ways or expect people to behave in the way expected of them. Outside getting our ways it is used to blame others for our own shortcomings, to justify oppressing others, to boost our own sagging egos, to conceal other feelings and to handle other emotion.

This paper explains that there are two major types of anger, the physical and indirect anger. The physical anger is an aggressive outburst of anger, which includes furious expression of anger, verbal aggression and physical injury. This category of individuals is ready to explode at the slightest provocation and they are usually hostile, confrontational and ready to do anything to manifest anger. This category of persons do not only hurt others, but can also hurt themselves, commit suicide and can also lash out anger to a safer and defenseless targets such as children, pet or subordinates in the office. Berkowitz (1993), opines that once an individual manifest outburst of anger, cues in the environment such as guns, knives, broken bottles, inflammatory lyrics and the likes are sufficient to produce aggression. This kind of anger triggers hostile aggression with the aim of causing injury or death to the victim, because they can respond impulsively and irrationally and this is due to their high temper getting out of hand.

Boure (1995) and Martin (1993) assert that men are more prone to manifesting this type of anger than women. This is evident in the fight that took place at the National House of Representatives in June, 2010 between Hon. Bankole's (the Speaker of the House) men and the other faction of the House. It was also an impulsive and irrational response to anger. Such people tend to use "reactive force" in a highly emotional and impulsive manner (Bushman, 1996). This also affects bosses and those higher in authority than their subordinates and those who feel they have what it takes to influence others. Bower (1997) goes further to explain that the emotional outburst of women is controlled and curtailed by cultural norm, as society frowns at women who are unable to control their emotions.

Indirect aggression is a contrast to the physical aggression. Such aggrieved people are angry but

are able to conceal their burning emotion within them without a face to face confrontation and without hurting another person. They are able to retain and disguise feelings of anger. This type of anger is also referred to as "passive aggressiveness". Such people pretend to be insensitive, unresponsive, tired, physically ill and deny anger as if nothing is wrong. They are also observed to be clumsy at work, frequently late to work, always procrastinating, socially withdrawn and very argumentative. Other behavioral traits include, rumour peddling, gossiping, teaching others not to associate with the aggressor, revealing secrets of the other person, passing indirect speeches that insinuate insult and highly malicious. Researchers have found that this seem to affect women more than men. Biorkqvist and Niemela (1992).

### GENERAL ANGER TRIGGERS IN INDIVIDUALS

The most common cause of anger is frustration. Frustration comes from unexpected barrier stopping us from delivering our target and goals. It is also any external condition that prevents you from obtaining the pleasures you had expected to enjoy, the promotion or position you were denied. Frustrated people are desperate and desperate people are likely to do anything unwanted and unacceptable. They always feel that an outburst will break or stop such limitations.

Therefore, any situation that frustrates us, especially when we think someone else is to blame for our loss, is a potential trigger for anger and aggression. When we are intentionally hurt, insulted, cheated, deceived and mocked, all these things arouse anger and aggression (Bryne 1981).

Berkowitz (1993) explains in his pain — Aggression theory that if two animals are hurt, when close to each other, they frequently fight each other. According to him, this is common and occurs across so many species. He suggests that all kinds of unpleasant stimuli lumped together, not just pain or frustration could give rise to impulsively aggressive tendencies in humans. That variety of events seems to increase our anger. For example, unpleasant interactions with others, merely thinking about punishing someone, encountering people you do not like, foul odour, extreme high room temperature, cigarette smoke, disgusting scene and other forms of discomfort can trigger anger.

Berkowitz also affirms that we are inclined to be indiscriminately aggressive when we experience feelings of marginalization pain, depression and deprivation. According to him all these unpleasant events can make us more hostile and they can cause negative effects. He says it is this negative effect and not frustration itself that stimulates anger. The stronger the negative effect, the greater the anger. However, increased awareness of our irrationality will prevent us from being impulsive and will help us to control our actions and thought.

It is already known that anger is a strong emotional response and this is why most people do not even know that it is physiologically aroused from the brain. This type of reaction is known as “fight-or-flight” response. It is a physiological reaction to threat in which the Autonomic Nervous System is mobilized for attacking (fight) or fleeing (flight) by an aggressor. The Autonomic Nervous System, (ANS) controls the blood vessels, smooth muscles such as the heart, lungs, kidney and glands. The fight or flight response is however controlled by the sympathetic division of the Autonomic Nervous System. It mobilizes the body for emergencies and when you find it difficult to control your emotions. This physiological — response explanation only emphasizes that anger is an emotion that is not learned, but that man is born with an innate ability to exhibit anger because it is chemically aroused from within. This is why 3 years old children can throw temper tantrum without any formal training or without being taught or without observing anyone on how to do so.

Anger comes as a reflex action to some incidence or some sort of happenings which may not relate to us and they obviously would not be due to our frustrated expectations. Anger is triggered as a result of some silly and funny things which we do not like. We get angry when someone does something just to irritate us. Some of such wrong doings before our eyes can result into anger.

Research has found that anger is inherited and that family background plays a role in anger. People who are easily angry come from families that are disruptive, chaotic and not skilled at emotional communications (Miley and Carey, 1997). Though inheritance is seen to contribute to aggression, its degree and influence is still unknown (Plomm, Nitz and Rowe, 1990).

Freud (1920) explains in his unresolved conflict from childhood that anger is the result of

childhood experiences emanating from inborn impulses, the Id, Ego and Super-Ego. The Id is present at birth but the Ego and Super-Ego appear in man later in infancy. He however explains that the Id is primitive and a gratification impulse. While the Ego is the “real self” or “real you”, the super-Ego is the moral self and comes into being as a result of socializing experiences. It makes its appearance depending on the parenting style. It therefore will not develop adequately with an ineffective parenting. In such a case, the Id has too much influence on the adult personality and expresses itself too readily.

Invariably, Sigmund Freud explains that an individual who manifests anger is seen in psychoanalysis as one who had a deficient emotional development. Such a person’s emotional needs were not sufficiently satisfied or met at infancy and toddlerhood. This affects the individual to suffer from an underlying condition called “basic anxiety”. This personality is evidenced in familiar common-sense statements such as “He is just a big baby”, “I wish she’d grow up” or “she’s just a brat”. Freud is only saying that anyone who experiences chronic anger is yet to grow up; he/she is immature. Anger in this case becomes a defence against basic anxiety, emotional insecurity and threatening situations.

Bandura (1979) explains in his Social Learning Theory that the social environment can trigger anger. He explains that in families where adults use violence to bring up children, directly or indirectly they unconsciously pass this behaviour on to the children. Thus, they in turn begin to understand that it is a life-style. Bandura explains that people in the course of interaction and socialization learn when and how to aggress and against whom to show aggression.

Finally, Bruno (1994) says that anger, to a large extent, is self-induced. It is not a reaction to a situation, but rather, it is a voluntary action. A person creates anger by his or her evaluations and choices and thus needs to take responsibility for the anger.

### HOW ANGER CAN BE MANAGED IN ORGANIZATIONS

Most angry people are confrontational and unable to control their emotion. Anger, as it is, can make the work place not conducive to work in because there will always be rift and conflict

among workers. This mostly happens if the conflict not quickly resolved and better managed.

Medical science has proven that anger is like a pressure cooker, if allowed to explode, it can wreck great havoc on our health. It can prevent the body from discharging toxic material from the liver and gall bladder. It can also cause other internal sickness like head ache, high blood pressure, heart attack, cancer and even stroke. Sick workers obviously cannot work, so there is need to adopt strategies that will help workers manage anger issues without allowing such issues to affect them physiologically or psychologically. Strategies that can be adopted in managing the expression of anger in the workplace are stated as follows:

### RELAXATION TIPS

When fury is very fierce, workers are advised to relax and take in a very deep breath and breathe out slowly. While doing that, call your name and tell yourself to relax and take it easy. Then, ask yourself a question, such as “what do I tell a friend who is in a similar situation?” If the response is, “take it easy or forget”, then tell yourself the same thing.

### A CHANGE OF LOCATION

When workers are trapped in an irritable environment and encounter problems that provoke anger, the best thing is to have a change of location either temporarily or permanently. This strategy when adopted, takes the individual from the environment that could further frustrate him/her

### BEING MATURE/TURNING ANGER TO HUMOUR

Freud (1920), in his psychoanalytic explanation to anger, says that only immature adults exhibit anger. A mature man is known by his words actions and decisions. The anger of a mature man does not last for too long. He is a man with a large heart for tolerance, to accommodate pains, disappointment as well as the lapses and excesses of others. This does not allow him to behave irrationally. A mature man therefore will always overlook and accept situations that make him aggrieved, as one of those ‘usuals’ that emanate during interaction. By this, you will be able to turn insult to humour. As it becomes a joke for you to laugh over, humour becomes a tool to appease fury and unknot a tense situation.

### ADOPT A DEFENCE MECHANISM

Defence mechanism will help to strengthen a worker’s coping abilities. This is done by either denying or pretending over the situation as if it never happened or the individual putting the whole problem behind him/her.

Another form of it is rationalization. This speaks of reasoning. Most angry people are usually rash in their behaviour. An aggressed worker should learn to slow down such tendencies and learn to be a good listener. Such a worker should learn to replace those thoughts with more rational ones and learn to encourage himself or herself in a better way to think and talk. This will create room for optimism rather than pessimism. Logic defeats anger because even when the anger is justified, logic quickly proves it irrational, Delay is not denial. An aggressed worker should learn to adopt a coping strategy. Copying strategy will help workers to cope with their frustration on the job and inadequacies of co-workers for forever.

### EVALUATING ANGER IN ORGANIZATIONS

As said in the context of the paper, anger is inherent in man but there are also other triggers of anger. As such, when work environment becomes intolerable and frustrating, the only way man expresses dissatisfaction and disapproval in the workplace is anger. Asley (2008) noted in a study that most employees experience work related anger in organisations as a result of one challenge or the other. “Worker-on-Worker” violence is not uncommon in the workplace. Most times interactions emanating from working to project the organisation and make it more productive and effective in goal attainment breed rancour among workers. There is an outburst of anger resulting from accumulated conflicts, work stress, boss hostility, oppressive employment and frustrating promotion criteria. Furthermore, situations such as salaries being deliberately delayed or not paid at all, unhealthy work environment such as working without the supply of electricity, workers being denied equal opportunities and access to basic necessities all produce anger in the workplace. Sometimes, being treated unjustly, being ignored or maligned by others could provoke anger and other inappropriate behaviour.

Anger is expressed in organisations in various ways and it causes problems in the organisations to the extent that it can affect productivity, loss of man-hour and organisational commitment on

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the part of the workers. Passive aggressive behaviour is one of the ways workers manifest anger (Kirwan – Taylor, 2003). It can be manifested by deliberate procrastination and incompetence to frustrate organisational goals. Such anger progresses from the manifestation of inappropriate behaviour to more fierce and violent fits.

Anger is a menace in the workplace and must not be allowed room to have negative impact on workers and the organisation itself. Employers must therefore understand that anger is a threat to organisational effectiveness and the problem emanating from it must be addressed before it causes chaos and disintegration in the workplace.

### **A WAKE UP CALL TO EMPLOYERS, MANAGERS AND SUPERVISORS IN ORGANISATIONS ON ANGER RELATED ISSUES**

Most people can personally handle their anger issues with colleagues while others are unable to do so. A person's control over anger depends on the intensity of the violence/aggression and the anger profile of the individual. Irrespective of an employee's anger profile, there is the need for its Management so that it does not pose a major threat to the achievement of organizational goals. Angry workers are unproductive and lack commitment to work.

There is the need to recognize that both the organization and workers should be protected from this danger. The Management needs to help workers deal with all forms of anger triggers. They also need to know that workers should be rescued from automatic reactions to angry behaviours emanating from accumulated experiences. Managers and supervisors in the work place should understand that workers are emotional beings and they must be careful in handling their emotional outburst or aggressive responses to grievances.

As emotional beings, workers should be trained to be sensitive to their own responses to anger so as to be committed and effective in managing aggressions. By this, workers will be able to put up appropriate behaviour and more effectively react to inappropriate violent behaviour.

The ability of Management to recognize workplace violence can adequately handle anger related problems among workers in the organisation. With the prevalence of anger in

organizations, Management should develop adequate measures that will inhibit inappropriate anger expressions in the work place and make workers accommodate more effective ways of handling anger – provoking situations and angry colleagues.

### **CONCLUSION**

It is obvious that anger in the workplace emanates from work related problems. The paper has been able to show that anger and inappropriate behaviour emanating from anger can be managed. Furthermore, workers can tolerate one another and make the work place a peaceful environment for interaction that will provoke job satisfaction, empower workers, towards commitment and productivity and make the organization more goal-oriented.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Against this backdrop, the following recommendations are hereby made:

- Management and supervisors should be conscious of workers' responses to anger and evolve strategies to resolve conflicts;
- Workers must be made to understand Management strategies for managing anger;
- The working conditions of workers that could trigger anger should be adequately looked into and improved;
- Worker-to-worker violence/conflict should be discouraged and workers encouraged to tolerate one another;
- Management and workers should have a good working relationship, so much so that workers are given opportunities to express their grievances;
- Suggestion boxes should be strategically positioned where workers can drop the expression of their grievances rather than allowing them bottleup their pains. This will definitely prevent future occurrences of violence and confrontational situations.

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**Citation:** Akpotor Julie, "Triggers of Anger and How to Manage them in Organisations". *International Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Studies*, 5(5), pp.61-67

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