Acknowledgment

Special thanks to my parents, Roland and Earline Castex, who have always been my greatest supporters. I love you both very much.

Kyev, if we could walk across the stage together, it would be appropriate. You encouraged me when I needed it most. Thanks for being a great husband.

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Violence in the Workplace: An Assessment of HEB Distribution
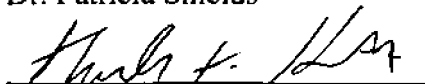Center's Security Procedures

by

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AN APPLIED RESEARCH PROJECT (POLITICAL SCIENCE 5397) SUBMITTED TO
THE DEPARTMENT OF POLITICAL SCIENCE
SOUTHWEST TEXAS STATE UNIVERSITY
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT
FOR THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

MASTER OF PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION

SPRING 1997

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Chapter 1

Introduction and Statement of Research Purpose

Introduction

July 19, 1995, in Los Angeles, CA, a city electrician with a twelve year work history shot and killed four of his supervisors when he learned he was facing possible dismissal for poor work performance. On October 7, 1995, San Jose, CA, a young accountant, only on the job for six weeks, shot and killed his female supervisor, then committed suicide with the same gun. This incident occurred one day after receiving his first performance counseling session. On February 9, 1996, in Fort Lauderdale, FL, shouting "everyone is going to die," a fired maintenance employee walked into a meeting of his former co-workers and began shooting. He killed five employees and then turned the gun on himself. The violent employee was terminated in 1994 after testing positive for drugs and threatening co-workers. On April 19, 1995, around 9:03 a.m., just after parents dropped their children off at the day care at the Murrah Federal Building in downtown Oklahoma City, the unthinkable happened. A massive bomb inside a rental truck exploded, blowing half the nine story building into oblivion. A stunned nation watched as the bodies of men, women and children were pulled from the rubble for two weeks. When the smoke cleared and the rescue workers left, 168 people were dead in the worst terrorist attack on U.S. soil.[1]

Workplace violence is a reality. Television news is dominated by stories of violence, often drug related, in the streets of our cities and neighborhoods. Still, one place people have traditionally felt safe is their workplace. This feeling of safety may be misplaced.

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[1] Incidents of occupational homicide from "New Arena for Violence" 1996 (Internet- Mikekell@crl.com)

Violence in the workplace is a reflection of American society- the most violent in the industrial world. Endemic stress, access to deadly weapons, a glorification of violence in the media and popular entertainment, coupled with the "downsizing" of organizations who were once seen as offering secure employment, all contribute to a climate where hostility can flourish (Broderick, 1995:2). The frequency of incidents and subsequent cost of each incident is high enough to warrant serious attention. The U.S. Department of Labor's figure of 1,063 workplace deaths[2] a year translates to an average of three people dying at the workplace each and every day. This figure does not account for the innocent bystanders that may be caught in the middle. It is decidedly troublesome that at least several hundred non-involved people are killed every year as well (Byxbe, 1996:3). Persuading even one person not to incite violence on the job is worth a concerted effort.

Statement of Research Purpose

According to Labig (1995:19) workplace violence is not well understood or researched for two reasons. First, it is a fairly recent phenomenon, and most incidents have not provided definitive conclusions about causes, predictions or solutions. Second, many organizations that have experienced workplace violence are involved in related litigation for up to a decade after the event. This situation makes them unwilling to share much information about what happened and thus limits how much companies can learn from one another. Charles Labig's Company Self-Assessment Exercise represents an attempt to demonstrate what can be done to make company workplaces safer for all employees. Labig's exercise is the best assessment tool available. By completing the exercise a company can

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[2] Workplace deaths that are due to violence

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determine how well they have taken the necessary steps to prevent workplace violence and work that still needs to be done. Workplace violence is a workforce issue facing both public and private sectors.

The purpose of this research is two fold. First, the security procedures at HEB Distribution Center are assessed using Charles Labig's Company Self-Assessment Exercise. The shooting incident at HEB Distribution Center in October of 1993 got the attention of many employees. Changes were made to the security procedures, and stricter policies were implemented. Although these changes were a step in the right direction, they were not made in a systematic fashion. This research will reveal changes and gaps in the security procedures. Secondly, based on the findings, recommendations to improve HEB's security procedures are developed. The purpose of this study is understanding, and provides insights to workplace violence preparedness that organizations may often overlook.

Chapter Summaries

The literature review -Chapter 2 will provide the foundation for the conceptual framework, which is used to organize the empirical portion of the research. Chapter 2 includes literature on identifying causes of violence, statistics pertaining to workplace violence, sources of workplace violence, women in the workplace, characteristics of a potentially violent employee, myths of workplace violence, costs of workplace violence, and a review of Charles Labig's Company Self Assessment Exercise.

Chapter 3 provides the setting for the case study. This chapter will include information about HEB Distribution Center in general. Chapter 3 includes an interview with an hourly employee from the Frozen Food Warehouse and with a Human Resource Manager.

The interviews will provide information that led to the shooting , and information about what took place after the shooting occurred. Chapter 3 will also include some of HEB's current policies that relate to violence in the workplace.

Chapter 4 includes the case study methodology using structured interviews, document analysis and information about Charles Labig's Company Self-Assessment Exercise. Chapter 5 discusses the findings for the case study. This chapter includes the testing of the implicit working hypotheses from each of the categories in Labig's Self-Assessment Exercise, in narrative and table form. Chapter 6 summarizes the applied research project findings and offers conclusions and recommendations. This chapter will also entail a restatement of the research purpose, and a discussion of the study limitations.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature on violence in general and also violence in the workplace. This chapter will provide the foundation for the conceptual framework, which is used to organize the empirical portion of the paper. In order to take into account the various definitions of workplace violence, a diverse literature is reviewed. It includes literature on identifying causes of violence, statistics pertaining to workplace violence, sources of workplace violence, women in the workplace, characteristics of a potentially violent employee, myths of workplace violence, costs of workplace violence, and a review of Charles Labig's Company Self-Assessment Exercise. Labig's exercise lays a foundation for understanding the assessment process and provides a resource for developing security recommendations.

Violence

There is little doubt that violence is becoming a serious public health problem, spread far beyond "bad" neighborhoods. Violence has penetrated our workplaces, schools, universities, hospitals, clinics, government offices, courts, libraries and parks.

John Langone defines violence as the use of physical force to abuse, injure or kill. There are very strong differences of opinions about the roles played in violent behavior. Scientists know what lies behind the fury of a tornado, the eruption of a volcano, and the explosion of a hydrogen bomb, but are still not able to agree about what causes human

violence. Violent actions cannot be explained simply by drawing attention to single causes. The conditions must be just right before one behaves violently (Langone, 1985:13).

Identifying the causes of violence can be difficult, if not at times, impossible. However, some understanding of theories of violent behavior may help in our observations. Intra-individual theories[3] consider aggression and violence to come from within a person in these ways:

Psychopathology - A small number of people with emotional disorders act violently. The disorders include some forms of schizophrenia, acute psychosis, and psychopathic personalities.

Alcohol and drug induced violence - When these substances are abused, a person may exhibit aggressive behavior due to lack of impulse control, poor judgment, and emotional instability.

Genetic, instinctual or biological explanations - Violence occurs because of an inherited biological factor or physical impairment.

Emotional transfer - Feelings of fear, anxiety, sexual excitement and feelings from vigorous exercise or an over-stimulating environment may influence a person's disposition to aggression. These feelings would in effect be transferred to violent actions.

Social psychological theories[4] consider that social interactions may lead to aggression and violence:

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[3]According to CARE Services for Faculty and Staff, University Health Service, University of Calif., Berkeley, CA, intra-individual theories are theories that consider aggression and violence to come from within a person.
[4]According to CARE Services for Faculty and Staff, University Health Service, University of Calif., Berkely, CA, social psychological theories deal with the social interactions of an individual and may lead to aggression and violence.

Social learning - A person may learn to act violently by observing, participating in, or fantasizing about the aggressive behaviors of family, peers, or those in the media.

Frustration-aggression - A person may learn that when frustrated, aggressive behavior may cause a reduction in the frustration.

Self-attention - Some people may use violence to boost self-esteem. For example, when behaving violently the person gets attention from people s/he admires.

Boredom and thrill-seeking - A person may act aggressively to gain excitement or to respond to a dare.

Workplace Violence

As violence continues to permeate through our society, workplace violence has also begun to rise. Violence in the workplace is a reflection of American society - the most violent in the industrial world. Endemic stress, access to deadly weapons, a glorification of violence in the media and popular entertainment, coupled with the "downsizing" of organizations who were once seen as offering secure employment, all contribute to a climate where hostility can flourish (Broderick, 1995:2). The statistics on the frequency and seriousness of workplace violence are frightening. Workplace violence is the fastest growing type of murder in the United States, and it is increasing at an alarming rate (Labig, 1995:2).

Statistics of workplace violence are as follows:[5]

1. In 1994, the rate of workplace homicides climbed more than 50% above the 1993 tally and passed highway fatalities as the major cause of on-the-job death.

2. Workplace violence has become one of the top causes of death in the workplace. It is the number one cause of death for women in the workplace.

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[5]Statistics of workplace violence provided by 1996 Employment Law Symposium by Akin et.al, 1996, p D1

3. Homicides constituted twenty-nine percent (29%) of the fatal occupational injuries in Dallas, Texas in 1992.

4. Violent incidents in the workplace include fist fights, shooting, sexual assaults and stabbings.

5. Violent acts are usually committed by one employee to another employee or by an employee to a supervisor, or by a customer against an employee.

6. A U.S. Department of Justice study found that, as a result of workplace violence, more than 500,000 employees miss 1,800,000 days of work annually, resulting in more than $55,000,000 in lost wages, not including days covered by sick and annual leave.

7. Since 1983, violent crime in the workplace has increased forty- one percent (41%).

8. More than seventy-five (75) individuals annually are killed by someone they currently or used to work with.

9. Although robbery remains the motive in most workplace homicides, murderous sprees by disgruntled employees, former employees and clients have increased by 200%-300% in the past decade.

Statistics, however, cannot begin to convey the level of human suffering and the damage inflicted by workplace violence on the affected company's workforce and on its public image. The workplace no longer provides a safe haven in a violent world.

There are several factors that make workplace violence a national phenomenon that must be addressed. For example, many workers can no longer expect to make economic progress in their lives. Much of the workforce has not experienced real income growth for almost two decades. As the 20th century ends, Americans are experiencing the first generation in more than half-century where primary breadwinners of the current generation are not likely to exceed the wealth of their parents (Kinney, 1995:xv).

A worker who loses a job and is in financial jeopardy is often also at risk of losing their house, car and more. For many members of the Baby Boom generation, the painful reality that they will not surpass their parents in wealth or social status creates an acute

feeling of frustration and failure. This is especially true for men who have carried rifles in battle (Kinney, 1995:xv).

Sources of Workplace Violence

According to Labig, (1995:33) there are six common sources of violence on the job. Strangers, who typically are involved in the commission of a crime, such as robbery, or who have a grudge against the business, current or past customers, current and former co-workers who commit murders, current and former co-workers who threaten and assault, spouses or lovers involved in domestic disputes and those infatuated with or who stalk employees.

Akin, et. al (1996:D5) have divided workplace violence into five categories. These categories refer to the reasons why employees are harmed. 1) Employees are injured or killed while other crimes such as robberies, are being committed, 2) employees are injured by people they must deal with as part of their jobs, (for example, a police officer who is killed while trying to arrest someone), 3) employees are injured or murdered by a co-worker, 4) employees are injured or murdered by someone they know from outside the workplace, and finally, 5) employees are harmed during labor violence.

A study done by the Society for Human Resource Management, found the most frequently cited causes of workplace violence are personality conflicts (62%), family/marital problems (27%), work related stress also (27%), emotional problems or mental illness (25%), drug or alcohol abuse (16%), and firings also (16 %) (Littlefield, 1996:12).[6]

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[6] Percentages add up to more than 100% due to individuals citing more than one reason as a cause of workplace violence.

The Center for Disease Control reports 15 people are murdered at work each week. Homicide was the third leading cause of death in the workplace between 1980 and 1989; in 1992, it was the leading cause. Most deaths occurred in connection with robberies, but nearly 13% occurred in an office or factory, the result of work disputes between workers, customers, and clients. About 4% of the time workplace violence is the result of personal disputes, typically involving a female worker's current or former husband (Taylor, 1996).

The employer most likely to be victimized by workplace homicide is the government - Local, State or Federal. Government workplace violent incidents account for 38% of the cases. The Federal Government is still the largest employer in the United States, but with only 15% of the country's workforce, Federal employees are involved disproportionately in workplace violence. The Post Office has had the worst experiences. Non-governmental occupations, factories and production facilities accounted for 18% of the incidents, which may be due to the disproportionate number of male workers, as in the postal service (Duncan, 1995:2).

OSHA representatives have found that violent, abusive or threatening behavior at work may occur for different reasons, for example:

- random, with no clear intent, such as from a disturbed person or patient, or from someone under the influence of alcohol or other drugs.

- intimidation, used to achieve a desired end, such as faster service.

- the expression of uncontrolled irritation, such as dissatisfaction with poor service or prolonged discomfort.

- related to criminal activity

- thrill-seeking or revenge

- related to cultural or religious differences between subgroups in society.

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According to a study by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, the riskiest occupations and workplaces for violence in order of risk are:

Occupations	Workplaces
Taxi Cab drivers and Chauffeurs	Taxi Cab Establishments
Law Enforcement Officers	Liquor Stores
Hotel Clerks	Gas Stations
Gas Station Attendants	Protective Services
Security Guards	Justice/Courts, Police Stations
Stock Handlers/Baggers	Grocery Stores
Stock Owners/Managers	Jewelry Stores
Bartenders	Restaurants and Bars
	Hotels and Motels

(Akin, et. al, 1996:D2)

Factors that increase risk of a person's being killed in the workplace by a stranger are: exchanging money with the public, working alone or with only a few others, working late-night or early morning hours, working in high-crime areas, guarding valuable property or possessions, and working in community settings. By far, the vast majority of murders on the job are committed by strangers. Of the 1,063 homicides on the job in 1993, most were committed by strangers (Labig, 1995:33).

Women in the Workplace

Women are being murdered at work with increasing frequency. While only one out of five people murdered at work is a woman, more women who die on the job will die from homicide than from any other cause. In the U.S., slightly more than 10% of the men killed at work are murdered; for women the statistic exceeds 40 percent. Men are more likely to die

from electrocution, crushing blows of heavy equipment, or from industrial accidents; women are more likely to die from workplace homicide (Kinney, 1995:109).

About twenty women were killed on the job in 1993 by current or former boyfriends or husbands. Domestic disputes have become the third major source of conflict leading to homicide in the workplace. The effects of the recession of the early to mid-1990s increasingly are spilling into the workplace as husbands threaten wives at work, where they can locate and confront them. The Justice Department says that in 1993 there were more than 13,000 nonfatal acts of worksite violence committed against women by domestic partners (Labig, 1995:45).

There are many ways that women are injured and abused in the workplace. Some forms of injury and abuse suffered by women are found in Table 2.1:

TABLE 2.1

EXAMPLES OF INJURY AND ABUSE SUFFERED BY WOMEN
AS A RESULT OF WORKPLACE VIOLENCE

* Homicide
* Rape
* Physical beatings (battery)
* Sexual assault and abuse
* Strangulation
* Gun shot wounds
* Stabbing
* Psychological trauma
* Sexual harassment
* Verbal abuse

SOURCE: National Safe Workplace Institute

Women face as much danger as men from violent attacks at work, with nurses and teachers among those most at risk. Homicide is the leading cause of death of women on the

job, and women in health care. The center for Women in Government at the State University

of New York at Albany, concluded education and social services face the highest risk of

violence at work (Wheeler, et.al, 1994:122).

About 260,000 women annually are victims of workplace rapes, beatings and other

forms of violence. According to a report commissioned by the American Federation of State,

County and Municipal Employees using 1993 data from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics:

- Female government employees are several times more likely to be
  attacked than private sector employees.

- The rate of nonfatal assaults against black women at work is twice the
  rate for white women.

- Nurse's aides, nurses, police officers and secondary school teachers
  ranked among the most dangerous jobs for women.

- Female food service workers, hotel workers, cashiers and taxi drivers
  were among those most likely to be killed on the job. (Weiss, 1996:1)

Characteristics of a Potentially Violent Employee

A popular psychological view of the potentially violent employee involves a three-

part, profile that defines (1) general characteristics, (2) characteristics specific to a non-lethal

employee, and (3) characteristics specific to a lethal employee. In general a profile of a

typical violent worker would be a white male, age 25 to 50, who demonstrates low self-

esteem, is considered a loner, and has a fascination with weapons (Kinney, 1995: 223).

Typical characteristics of a "non-lethal" violent worker are somewhat different. This

employee may be under 30 years of age, have a history of prior violent activity, and may

abuse drugs or alcohol. A worker who may commit "lethal" violent crime is generally over

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the age of 30, indicates no history of violence or substance abuse, show indications of paranoia, or delusions, and is unable to appropriately release frustration.

Dr. M. Mantell (1994) assistant clinical professor of psychiatry for the School of Medicine at the University of California - San Diego offers a lengthy detailed list of characteristics of the potentially violent employee. Although Dr. Mantell agrees with the characteristics cited by Kinney, his list focuses primarily upon attitudes and behavior.

Dr. Mantell states the individual exhibits a disgruntled attitude regarding perceived injustices in the workplace, and is likely to be socially isolated -- a loner. This person is likely to exhibit poor self-esteem and "cries for help of some kind." The individual demonstrates a fascination with military or paramilitary subjects and may be a gun or weapon collector. The employee may demonstrate temper-control difficulties and may have made threats against coworkers, supervisors or the organization. The individual demonstrates few, if any, healthy outlets for rage, demonstrates excessive interest in media reports of violence, especially in the workplace, and may have an unstable family life. This person may cause fear or unrest among coworkers and supervisors; he/she may have been involved in chronic labor-management disputes; he/she may exhibit numerous unresolved physical or emotional injuries or have a history of numerous unresolved physical or emotional claims against the organization. The individual may complain regularly about poor working conditions or an unsatisfactory working environment; or may complain of heightened stress at work. The person may be a male between the ages of 30 and 40 years, and may demonstrate a migratory job history. The individual may demonstrate drug and/or alcohol abuse; and may exhibit psychiatric impairment.

Dr. Mantell has expanded upon other profiles and provided more finite characteristics to identify potentially violent employees. A profile offered by National Traumas Services identified the typical violent worker as (1) white, (2) male, (3) middle-aged, (4) a user of unusual weapons, and (5) a "religious or political proselyte" (Mantell, 1994:3).

The leading American researcher into workplace violence is S. Anthony Baron, Ph.D., (1993) Chief Executive Officer of the Scripps Center for Quality Management, Inc., in San Diego. His profile of the employee most likely to commit murder in the workplace includes these characteristics:

- a male, aged 25 to 40 years,
- has a history of violence,
- tends to be a loner,
- owns several weapons,
- has requested some form of assistance in the past,
- exhibits frequent anger,
- has a history of conflict with others,
- has a history of family or marital problems,
- after periods of verbalizing anger will become withdrawn,
- is paranoid, and
- exhibits self-destructive behavior such as drug or alcohol abuse.

Scholars in workplace violence caution that there are a number of exceptions to this profile. Despite the fact that this profile is the most acceptable of those reviewed, one should not assume that the absence of a characteristic or two indicates that an individual is incapable of murder. The profile is generally accurate so long as it is not taken too literally. Many tragic workplace homicides clearly indicate that a profile that is too specific, or interpreted too rigidly, can be misleading.

Many experts[7] agree that the general profile of a potentially violent employee is a white male, between 25 and 50 years of age, without a family, who tends to be a loner and is

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[7]Akin, Gump, Strauss, Hauer & Feld agree on the general profile of a potentially violent employee.

under stress. He may be fascinated with the military and weapons. However, employers should be cautious in relying on the general profile as a certain predictor of violence. There is no definite profile of a potentially violent employee and there are always exceptions to any generalizations (Akin, et al., 1996:D4).

While no employer can predict the future, there are certain indications that an employee may be prone to violence in the workplace. The following are generally accepted indicators of potentially violent employees according to Akin, et. al (1996: D9):

1. History of violent behavior before or after becoming employed.

2. Extreme interest or obsession with weapons.

3. Carries a weapon.

4. Intimidates or instills fear in co-workers or supervisors.

5. Obsessive involvement with the job and the workplace as the sole interest and source of identity.

6. A loner except may have an intense, unwelcome romantic interest in a co-worker.

7. Paranoid and perceives that the whole world is against him or her.

8. Makes verbal threats of harm or predicts bad things will happen to a co-worker or supervisor.

9. Holds a grudge, usually against a supervisor, and often verbalizes a desire for something to happen to this person.

10. Extremely desperate over a recent personal problem.

11. Fascinated with other recent incidents of violence in the workplace.

12. Disregards the safety of co-workers and pushes the limits of normal conduct.

Each of these profiles are valuable. They provide information that can lead to early identification of a potentially violent employee and, thereby, enhance the possibilities of

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intervention. Some common characteristics of a violent employee provided by experts include white male, history of violence, owns weapons, and has a history of conflict with others. Unfortunately, each of the profiles is incomplete. Workplace violence has been on the rise, but has not benefited from a widespread comprehensive program of research which would address issues of motivation and behavior. Knowledge of workplace violence has been gathered informally from actual incidents, which may or may not be reported with great accuracy. Of primary importance in recognizing potential violence is the test of common sense.[8]

Myths of Workplace Violence

Some experts believe workplace violence is not on the rise, but publicized more by the media. Experts also have not come to a clear consensus of what workplace violence entails (Friel, 1996:19). Workplace violence can include many incidents such as stalking a co-worker, damaging property, touching co-workers in an unwelcomed way, shouting or intimidating others, and tampering with an organizations products or equipment.

More and more employers are worried about violence on the job. Their concern has been motivated by the co-worker homicides publicized in the media, and in part by numerous articles published in practitioner journals that highlight workplace violence and provide solutions. Although this communication is well intended, some experts say the information has been largely based an anecdotal evidence and simplistic approaches to a complex problem that is not fully understood. The validity of factual information available about workplace violence, such as the number of homicides and assaults on employees in various

[8] Internet (Mikell@crl.com, 1996)

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occupations, ranges from very good to suspect, depending on the types of violence being
investigated, who collected the information, and when and how it was collected (Myers, 1996:31).

The complexity of the problem is due to such variables as different motivations of
perpetrators, the multitude of scenarios in which violence is perpetrated, and the many
strategies needed to adequately address the problem. Thus, a paucity of information on
workplace violence, the suspect nature of some of it, and the perception that the limited data
available are overstated have led researchers to conclude that the magnitude of the problem
is not as serious as it is represented. A series of myths has emerged from this controversy
(Myers,1996:31-36).

Myth #1: All researchers on the subject of workplace violence define a workplace in the same way.

Unfortunately there is no uniform definition of a workplace among those who
research violence.

Myth #2: Research data on workplace violence include all physical acts of violence against employees; such as homicide and rape, as well as against property, such as arson, robbery or sabotage.

The data are comprehensive in that they contain analyses in various formats,
including occupation, industry, and a number of demographic variables.

Myth #3: Researchers generally agree on what is meant by the term "violence."

Researchers do not have the same definitions of the word, even when it pertains to the
same act. Thus, there is no general agreement among researchers concerning what acts
constitute workplace violence.

Myth #4: All workplace violence is reported by the victims.

The Department of Justice found that more than 50 percent of the employees who were victimized at work did not report the incident to the police. Forty percent of those who did not report the incident said it was either too minor or too personal to report.

Myth #5: Statistics include employees who are off-duty and non-employees, such as customers.

Data on workplace violence reported by the Department of Labor and the Department of Justice do not include employers who are off-duty or non-employees who are victimized in the workplace. The net result is that the data on workplace violence reported by these two agencies significantly understate the total effect of violence on the job because they only include victims who were employed at the time.

Myth #6: The major perpetrators of workplace violence are employees.

The most extreme form, homicide, is perpetrated mainly by strangers. Three-fourths of these homicides are committed during robberies or other crimes.

Myth #7: Workplace violence is increasing.

The fact is that no one really knows for certain. Except for homicides, there is no regular stream of information being accumulated and distributed to the public.

Myth #8: There is a general profile of a violence-prone individual.

Identifying people with violence-prone profiles may even be beyond the solution of providing training. Some researchers contend there is not one but several profiles, depending on the type of violence committed.

Myth #9: The most dangerous occupation from a workplace violence perspective is law enforcement.

Although law enforcement is dangerous, the occupations with the highest risk of work-related homicides are taxi drivers and chauffeurs.

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Myth #10: The magnitude of the problem of workplace violence is being distorted.

Some researchers believe that, intentionally or otherwise, the problem of workplace violence is being exaggerated. Larson (1994), found that workplace homicide occurred only at the rate of one out of every 114,000 people in the labor force during 1993. Based on this finding, as well as on his differences with some conclusions other researchers had made about the data involving workplace violence, Larson concluded that all the concern about workplace violence is causing a "false crisis" (as quoted in Myers, 1996:35).

Costs of Workplace Violence

Is there a "false crisis?" The following are some facts about violent acts in the workplace that are not in dispute. Work-related homicide is the major cause of death at work among women and the second among men. According to results obtained from the National Crime Victimization Survey conducted by the U.S. Department of Justice, sixteen percent of all assaults in the U.S. during the period 1987 through 1992 occurred at work. Seven percent of all rapes, eight percent of all robberies, and fifteen percent of all violent criminal acts in the U.S. occur in the workplace. More specifically, 20 employees are the victims of work-related homicide each week, and four additional employees die each week of self-inflicted injuries that occur at work. About 16,900 assaults of employees occur each week while the employees are working or on duty; 2,600 of these result in employee injuries, some of which require the victim to miss work. In 1992, about 22,400 assaults occurred on the job requiring an average of five work days for the victim to recuperate. Two hundred fifty female employees are raped each week while working or on duty; about one-fourth of these rapes

result in injury, while some even result in violent deaths. Approximately 1,520 workplace robberies occur each week, 344 of which end in employees being injured or murdered. Workplaces can indeed be violent. Perhaps the biggest myth of all is that there is a "false crisis" in the concern of workplace violence (Myers, 1996:35).

Crime victimizations occurring in the workplace cost about half a million employees (7,751,100) days of work each year, an average of 3.5 days per crime. This missed work resulted in over $55 million in lost wages annually, not including days covered by sick and annual leave. Among those persons injured by a crime victimization at work, an estimated 876,800 workdays were lost annually, costing employees over $16 million in wages, not including days covered by sick and annual leave (Bachman, 1994).

The total cost to employers for workplace violence in the United States was $42 billion, according to the National Safe Workplace Institute. Violence in the workplace can have devastating effects on the productivity of organizations and on the quality of life of employees.

The Workplace Violence Research Institute in Newport Beach, CA, states, "the cost of workplace violence in the U.S. is more than $36 billion annually. This is an 850 percent increase from the previously estimated $4.2 billion based on industry research." This increase is due to a broadened definition of workplace violence that now includes homicides, physical attacks, rapes, aggravated and other assaults, threats, intimidations, coercion and all forms of harassment and any other act that creates a hostile work environment (Byxbe, 1996).

Workplace violence also has significant legal consequences. An employer law firm, Littler, Mendelson, Fastiff, Tichy & Mathiason, has 30 attorneys advising and representing

clients on workplace violence issues alone. Garry Mathiason, who manages this growing practice for the firm, claims "Companies have no real choice but to be proactive and strive to prevent violence." Mathiason, whose firm has written a lengthy treatise on this subject concludes: "Companies must have sound procedures that identify what will be done in specific circumstances. Those that fail to take even simple steps are exposing their companies to regulatory compliance problems and the possibility of litigation." (as quoted in Kinney, 1995:199).

The legal issues relating to workplace violence have increased in number and complexity as courts have mandated the employer's duty to provide a safe workplace for their employees. The duty of an employer to provide a reasonably safe workplace may arise from a variety of federal or state statutes, regulations, or judicial decisions. Employers seeking to avoid liability for acts of workplace violence should become familiar with the legal requirements.

At both common law and under the Occupational Safety and Health Act, employers are required to provide a reasonably safe workplace for their employees. While there are no specific regulations for preventing occupational homicide, OSHA has begun issuing citations under its general duty clause - which requires provisions of a workplace free from recognized serious hazards - to employers who fail to protect their workers from being assaulted. The threat of citations exposes employers to monetary penalties and government-ordered abatement requirements (Taylor, 1996:1).

At the hiring stage, an employer has a fundamental duty to investigate the background of applicants. At minimum, employers should confirm dates and locations of previous employment and education.

While the courts are establishing that the employer has a duty to conduct a reasonable investigation of its applicants, what constitutes such a reasonable investigation is a more problematic question. The scope of the employer's duty to inquire into an applicant's background depends upon the position. Courts adjudicating the issue of negligent hiring generally have imposed a heightened duty of inquiry upon employers in cases where jobs involve control of weapons, substantial public contact, and supervision of children (Kinney, 1995:200).

Government's duty may be greater than that of a public employer. A public sector employer may be required to conduct an independent investigation instead of merely relying upon an applicant's statements (Kinney, 1995:218).

In conducting a background check, a potential employer may encounter several obstacles in ascertaining whether the applicant is a safe and suitable candidate for the position. Previous employers may be reluctant to discuss these issues because they fear a defamation suit by the employee (Kinney, 1995:201).

Equal employment opportunity laws such as Title VII can also provide a basis for liability. An employer's failure to take appropriate steps to protect employees from racial or sexual harassment could subject it to discrimination claims (Taylor, 1996).

The failure to address workplace safety concerns could lead employees to seek union protection. According to Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs, safety is a fundamental concern. If this need is not being met, among other things, an employer may find its employees turning to outside sources, including unions, for help (Taylor, 1996).

Unfortunately, it is probably impossible to eliminate all violence from the workplace. By recognizing the possibility of violence, and taking proactive steps, employers may reduce their potential liability due to incidents of workplace violence.

Preventing Violence in the Workplace

Charles E. Labig, Ph.D. (1995) has provided a scheme to assess workplace violence issues and concerns in his book, *Preventing Violence in the Workplace.*[9] In order to be able to understand the assessment scheme (conceptual framework), he developed it is important to recognize the role of emotions in his theory. Labig emphasizes that an organization must face one major challenge- dealing with emotions. Workplace violence is an emotional topic. Most people have strong emotional reactions to the subject of violence at work, and dealing with these reactions is an essential element in prevention.

Violence is the result of an escalating process, rather than a sudden event. The cost of denying the possibility of violence within a company grows daily as corporations continue to lose civil lawsuits that expand the range and limits of their liability and as juries hold companies and their executives liable for larger and larger financial settlements (Labig, 1995:16).

The purpose of Labig's book is to get beyond denial. Labig has identified many policies and procedures that can be implemented to lower the probability of violence within a company.

Labig's Company Self-Assessment Exercise provides an organization with an assessment tool. This tool should help a company determine whether it has taken the

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[9] Labig is considered a leading expert in the area of workplace violence.

necessary steps to prevent workplace violence. The Self-Assessment exercise also can be used to determine what work still needs to be done.

The assessment exercise is divided into six categories: Employee Hiring, Supervisory Skill and Attitudes, Violence Preparedness and Training, Policies and Procedures, Organizational Culture, and Physical Facilities/Building Security.

Charles Labig's Company Self-Assessment Exercise- Conceptual Framework

Charles Labig's Company Self-Assessment Exercise provides for the empirical portion of this project, six categories and forty-eight questions that are used as the conceptual framework. Each of the questions are implicit hypotheses, and will be used to collect evidence to assess the security procedures at Central Texas, HEB Distribution Center. In addition, Labig is proposing an "ideal security system." The research will utilize Labig's "ideal security system" as a standard frame of reference when assessing HEB's security procedures.

Company Self- Assessment Exercise
Employee Hiring[10]

Employers are unable to predict with certainty, whether employees will eventually become violent. The best time to assess an employee's potential for acting violently is during the hiring process. Screening for hiring offers a natural opportunity to evaluate a person's likelihood of becoming violent later on the job.

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[10]See Labig, 1995 pp 51 to 56.

One of the goals of an employment application procedure should be to screen out individuals who have violent histories. The weight of bad hiring decisions can be heavy. Undoing poor decisions can be expensive both in terms of dollars and morale. Bad employees are often entitled to severance pay or are protected by laws of grievance procedures (Kinney, 1995:128).

During the hiring process there are several methods to help an employer predict a possibly violent employee. Interviewing to assess risk of violence is perfectly legal and appropriate. By asking questions and listening as candidates describe themselves and their behaviors, an employer can learn how the applicant will act and how they will deal with different situations on the job. Reference checks or background checks are other screening mechanisms that employers can use.

Labig translates the major **employee hiring**[11] issues into a useful series of questions:

- Do your **job descriptions** include requirements for **interpersonal behavior** (including nonviolence) that are job related?

- Do you do basic **screening** for appropriate **interpersonal behavior** in initial interviews and performance reviews?

- Do you **find out** how **applicants resolve conflict** and their beliefs about violence?

- Do you do an adequate job **checking references** with attention to **emotional stability**?

- Do **hiring practices** include **background checks**, with attention to gaps in employment and to police records?

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[11] Bold terms in this section will carry over to (Chapt. 5) Research Methodology and (Chapt. 6) Findings

Supervisory Skill and Attitude[12]

An unskilled supervisor can cause a marginal employee to go over the edge. A skilled supervisor could spot problem employees and direct them toward counseling, or deal with a problem in a way that eases tensions rather than inflames passions and resentments.

Selecting supervisors during a period when supervisors and front-line managers are expected to do far more with less is a critical function. When poor supervisor selections are made, line employees often pay a price. Supervisors are a bridge between management and line workers, so they should be chosen with care.

An employer can use steps such as psychometric testing and psychological interviews to select supervisors. Other methods include peer reviews, interviews by current supervisors and skill tests if appropriate.

A key group in any organization- public or private, large or small- is comprised of supervisors and front-line managers. Unfortunately supervisors are frequently the source of the problem because they are too often thoughtlessly chosen, and poorly trained for the mission at hand (Kinney, 1995:117). Two keys to good supervision involve thoughtful selection criteria and good training. If you do not choose supervisors well, it will be difficult to train them properly.

Labig offers selection and training tips through the **supervisory skill** and attitude series of questions:

- Do you offer **management training** for front line leadership on how to deal with **emotional behavior**?

- Do your **supervisors provide** for **dignity and choices** for your workforce?

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[12]See Labig, 1995 pp 62 to 65.

- Is there supervisory **training** in effective **performance review** and **problem identification**?

- Are **performance issues** confronted in a **timely** manner?

- Are **performance issues** handled **fairly, constructively, positively**, and with **respect**?

- Do **supervisors** have and know how to **assess resources available** to them and to employees (e.g., employee assistance programs, consultation about problem employees, drug and alcohol training programs)?

- Do they use these resources?

Violence Preparedness[13]

Employers have a duty to their employees to provide a safe work environment.

Providing a safe workplace means being prepared if a violent incident should occur.

Supervisors and front-line managers play a key role in this area also. Management

employees should be trained on how to spot potentially violent employees and how to

respond appropriately to potentially violent situations.

The Occupational Safety and Health Administration has issued new voluntary

guidelines for preventing workplace violence. According to the guidelines, a company

should make managers responsible for preventing workplace violence, analyze the

worksite to uncover existing or potential hazards, prevent hazards by designing

workplaces to create barriers between employees and possible hazards, and educate all

employees about potential security hazards (Lewis, 1996:19).

Labig's series of questions pertaining to **violence preparedness** offer other

suggestions:

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[13]See Labig, 1995 pp 83 to 98.

- Are your supervisors and managers **trained** to **recognize the warning signs** of potential violence?

- Are your supervisors and managers **trained** to deal with **performance problems** (one of early signs of possible instability in a worker)?

- Do you have **access** to **internal and expert resources**, including EAP, medical staff, forensic and risk evaluators, and security personnel, in order to do fitness-for-duty and risk assessment?

- Do you have a **written assessment plan** outlining how to deal with threatening situations?

- Do you have a **threat management team** in place to **assess risk** in a given situation, to keep the company prepared for crisis management, and to provide ongoing training to managers?

- Is there an effective **communication channel** in place when a problem or potential problem is identified?

Policies and Procedures[14]

Good policy manuals spell out the rules of the company. They define how people are expected to behave with co-workers and with customers. This is key to violence prevention. Good policies also define the procedures for responding to problematic situations that can escalate into violence, allowing all employees to be trained and prepared for resolving conflicts before violence occurs. An essential part of any company violence prevention program is the development of policies and procedures that can keep situations from escalating into violence. The policies and procedures can also break down the denial of employees who see signs that an individual's behavior may lead to violence but fail to take them serious (Labig, 1995:83).

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[14]See Labig, 1995 pp 83 to 98.

Companies that do a good job of preventing violence tend to have strong policies against harassment, effective grievance procedures, good security programs, a supportive work environment that gives employees adequate control over their work, open and trusting communication, and training in resolving conflicts through team building and negotiating skills. These companies have specific policies that clearly outline the rules of behavior that provide the foundation for the corporate environment.

Labig offers more information on **policies and procedures** in the next series of questions:

- Do you have clear policies about **intimidation, harassment, threats of violence, violent or destructive behavior, and the use of drugs or alcohol**?

- Does your company have clear policies and procedures **regarding violence**?

- Do your policies regarding **problem resolution** ensure that the **procedures are fair**, perceived as fair, and **timely**?

- Do you have sufficient **mental health resources**, whether internal or external, to deal with postviolence trauma to employees and to the victim's family?

- Do you have a **communication plan** for dealing with the media should there be a violent incident?

- Do you offer **health promotion and education programs** on personal safety, sexual harassment, employee assistance, and stress management?

- Do your policies require a **review of the human or personal elements** before people are let go or disciplined?

- Are necessary **layoffs or terminations** done in a **humane manner** with adequate support services?

- Do displacement **strategies** include elements that **preserve dignity**, including outplacement resources?

Organization Culture[15]

Many companies are learning from the Post Office,[16] and moving toward a participative culture. The Postal Service is trying to rid itself of its paramilitary management practices and to free itself of its authoritarian, hierarchical culture (Labig, 1995:131).

Organization culture plays a vital role in preventing workplace violence. It is easy to see how a top-down, highly authoritarian environment increases rebelliousness, polarizes work environments, and creates a breeding ground for violence. In such a context, it is easier for an employee to view violence as an acceptable response to being wronged or mistreated by supervisors s/he does not trust, to policies that are unfair, and to grievance procedures that are rigged (Labig, 1995:131).

Labig offers ways companies can develop **modern business practices** and evaluate their own **organization culture** through the following questions:

- Do **employees believe** that they will be **treated fairly** and with **respect**?

- Are there **systems** of communication that **allow employees to air concerns** and grievances constructively?

- Do **people know one another** well enough to know and **care** if someone is under severe stress?

- Is it socially **acceptable** to **seek help** from **Human Resources** or an **Employee Assistance Program?**

- Is **poor performance** dealt with **directly, constructively, and quickly** rather than ignored and tolerated?

- Does an organizational **environment** exist in which **employees feel fairly treated, respected, allowed to have input?** Is communication honest, encouraged, and aboveboard?

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[15]See Labig, 1995 pp 129 to 151.
[16]Since 1983, thirty four people have been killed and twenty wounded in post-office related shootings. The postal service is now using an outside firm to check applicants' military, criminal, employment, and driving records.

Physical Facilities/Environmental Design, Building Security[17]

Physical security devices can play a constructive role in preventing violence at work. For example, cameras can often be effectively be deployed to identify theft and sabotage by angry employees working in remote warehouses and other facilities. Interactive video systems have also proven their worth in deterring robberies and theft in convenience establishments. Such systems effectively extend the resources and capacity of security personnel (Kinney, 1995:181).

Organizations should strive to make their company less attractive to robbery by reducing the cash, maximizing the take/risk ratio, and training employees in not resisting. Labig offers other information about **building security** through the next series of questions:

- Have you **assessed physical security systems**?

- Do you have a **backup communication** system in case phones are damaged or jammed.

- Can you **communicate quickly** to large numbers of employees after an incident to reduce anxiety and rumors?

- Is there a system to **control public access to work areas**?

- Have you **limited exposure of employees** where possible?

- Is the **room** where **grievance meetings** are held secure?

- Are **security precautions taken** at grievance or other special meetings?

- Do you have **panic buttons** on desks of particularly vulnerable staff?

- Do you have a **system** that **controls access of former employees** to work areas?

- Have you evaluated the amount of **employee contact with strangers** and **customers**?

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[17]See Labig, 1995 pp 94 to 95.

- Do you provide **key cards** or some form of **identification?**

- Does your **product or service antagonize** some **groups of people?**

- If you use an external security firm:
- How much training does the security company offer?
- Do security personnel get out and meet employees, know what is happening, and make themselves visible and approachable?

Once the Company Assessment Exercise is completed, an organization should be able to tell how well it is prepared to prevent violence in the workplace. By going back to all of the questions where the answer is no, the company can then make a list of these items and develop action plans to address these issues.

Conclusion

Preventing violence in the workplace is a complex challenge. No company and no employee is safe any more from the threat of harm posed by workplace violence. Because violence can arise from so many sources, there are no simple answers. However, there are several things a company can do to lower the probability of violence. If people can understand who commits violence, the circumstances that lead them to it, and the preventive measures that can be taken, the growing epidemic of workplace violence can be controlled (Labig 1995: 17).

Labig's framework is used to assess HEB's workplace violence policies and preparedness. A 1993, shooting incident is used as a backdrop for the analysis. The following chapter, (Chapter 3- Research Setting) describes HEB and the shooting incident.

Chapter 3
Research Setting

Introduction

The previous chapter reviewed the literature on violence in general, and violence in the workplace. Chapter Two also established the need for violence preparedness within organizations.

The purpose of this chapter is to establish the research setting at a Central Texas, HEB Distribution Center. This chapter also discusses incidents that led to the shooting in the Frozen Food Warehouse in October of 1993. Chapter Three includes an interview with an hourly employee and a Human Resource Manager. These interviews give insight on what actually happened the day of the shooting and what action was taken after the shooting occurred. Chapter Three also includes current policies at HEB that relate to violence in the workplace.

HEB Grocery Company/HEB Distribution Centers

HEB Grocery Company was founded on a $60 investment in Kerrville, Texas, in 1905. The Grocery Chain has surpassed 6 billion in sales in 1996. HEB currently ranks as the 13th largest independently owned supermarket retailing company in the United States and stands as a well-respected regional leader. Nearly five million customers shop in HEB stores every week, for a total of two and a half billion customers each year. HEB Grocery Company currently employs over 42,000 employees.

HEB's Distribution and Manufacturing facilities include two retail support centers. The San Antonio Retail Support Center (SARSC) occupies over 75 acres and includes warehouses for produce, dry groceries, and frozen foods. The Houston Retail Support Center, which opened in 1994, covers over 127 acres and features nine separate facilities, including a dry grocery warehouse, perishables warehouse, salvage warehouse, and maintenance facility. HEB also has additional centers in Corpus Christi, San Marcos, Harlingen and Waco. The Distribution division delivers, receives, selects, and ships product to all HEB retail operations.

The shooting incident which happened in October of 1993, took place in the Frozen Food Warehouse in San Antonio, Texas. The Frozen Food Warehouse employs approximately 150 employees. Most of the employees employed at the Frozen Food Warehouse are males between the age of 18 and 30.

Interview with an Hourly Employee from Frozen Food Warehouse

The following was transcribed from a taped interview with a Frozen Food Warehouse order selector, who worked with the individuals involved in the shooting incident on October 17, 1993.[18] The interview will provide the partner's[19] account of what happened. It validates much of the literature, and reiterates how valuable violence preparedness is for any organization.

Interviewer: Are you familiar with the shooting incident that happened in the Frozen Food Warehouse?

Partner: Yes, I knew the guys who were involved.

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[18]Personal communication, interview, February 21, 1997
[19]Employees are referred to as "partners" at HEB Grocery Company

Interviewer: Can you explain what happened the day of the shooting?

Partner: Well, from what I understand, some guys were making fun of Jack[20] and he snapped. They were saying bad things about his wife, and he retaliated.

Interviewer: Can you give an account of what happened once Jack entered the premises?

Partner: Of course this is not for sure, but from what I hear, he came through the partner entrance gate, but the gate guards did not know he was carrying a gun. His wife evidently was coming in behind him, and she told the gate guard that he had a gun and he was going to shoot someone. However, by the time the guard called inside the warehouse to let management know what was going on, Jack had already been inside the warehouse and shot one of the guys who was making fun of his wife.

Interviewer: What affect do you think this incident has had on the other partners in the warehouses?

Partner: I think they will stop playing around. You never know how someone will respond to things you say to them. I'm sure this incident has scared some people into thinking before they speak.

Interviewer: Was there any employee assistance offered to the partners who worked in the Frozen Food warehouse at the time of the shooting?

Partner: Yes, there were several HR Managers here, and there were also people from Partner Care Plus[21] here to give advice or counseling to any partners who were disturbed by the incident. Everyone was very concerned about the partners.

Interviewer: What do you think could have been done to avoid the shooting incident?

Partner: Well, if Jack had gone to his supervisors and let them know that the guys were giving him a hard time about his wife, I'm sure they would have said something to the guys or even issued some type of discipline to them. But he probably didn't want to look like a wimp or a tattle-tail to the guys in the warehouse.

Interviewer: Do you think HEB security procedures have improved since the shooting in 1993?

Partner: Yes, I know they have. Partners aren't allowed to enter the premises without their gate pass, or having to sign in at the guard gate now. There are no exceptions. If you don't have your gate pass, the guard has to call inside the warehouse to see if you are scheduled to work, or confirm your reason for being on the premises. There have also been memos posted about making threats and being terminated on the first offense. Again, I think partners will

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[20]Name has been changed to protect partner's identity

[21]HEB's Employee Assistance Program

think before they speak, because they don't want to lose their job over something that could have easily been avoided.

Interviewer: Have you noticed a decline in partners joking around in the warehouse since the shooting?

Partner: A lot of the people who worked here when it happened don't work here anymore, but I think the ones who were here are extra sensitive to other partner's feelings. The new people usually are careful about what they say also. They go over some of the rules of conduct in training. Of course you still have your typical guy talk, but it's nothing serious.

Interview with the Human Resource Manager

The following was transcribed from a taped interview with the Human Resource

Manager at the Distribution Center.[22] The interview provides a management perspective of

what happened in the Frozen Food Warehouse. The interview also validates points made by

experts in the literature.

Interviewer: Can you tell me what happened on October 17, 1993 in the Frozen Food Warehouse?

HRM: A lot of the information is confidential, but I can tell you that a partner entered the warehouse with a weapon and shot another partner. The specifics behind the incident have been unclear. We interviewed several partners when it happened, but we ended up with different accounts of what actually happened.

Interviewer: What can you tell me about the partner who did the shooting?

HRM: I'm afraid I can't go into specifics about the partners involved.

Interviewer: What action did management take while the shooting was going on?

HRM: Once security was made aware of the partner having a weapon, they immediately phoned San Antonio Police Department. All other locations at the distribution center were told to close and lock all doors until further notice. Unfortunately, we were not able to stop Jack from shooting the other individual. He was taken away by SAPD after the incident.

Interviewer: Was there any action taken after the incident, such as counseling or time off for partners who worked in that particular warehouse?

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[22]Personal communication, interview, February 21, 1997

HRM: Yes, we did have trained professionals from our Employee Assistance Program to come to the warehouse and talk to partners who witnessed or just wanted to talk about the incident. Each case was handled individually, but for the most part, I think the partners handled the situation very well.

Interviewer: What new policies were implemented after the shooting incident?

HRM: We already had a couple of emergency action plans in place. Our gate guards are trained to handle these type of situations. However, as far as new policies, the Vice President of the Distribution Center immediately sent out a memo outlining a "No Tolerance for Threats" in the warehouse. The policy states if partners make threats of any kind about harming another partner or family member, they will be terminated on the first offense. The gate guards have also tightened up the security at the entrance. Partners must have their gate pass or sign in at the gate guard desk in order to enter the premises.

Interviewer: What impact do you think the new policies have had on partners?

HRM: I think they respect each other a lot more. This situation opened a lot of eyes. The partners realize that something that may seem funny to one person may be taken seriously and offend someone else. Hopefully the partners as well as the management teams have learned from this incident, and we can continue to take steps to avoid this type of episode from happening again.

Interviewer: Have managers been trained on what to do if something like this occurs again?

HRM: Hopefully, this won't ever happen again, but we have raised the level of awareness with our managers. Some of the managers have attended training sessions that included workplace violence as a topic for discussion. We have also included a section in our 1996 Handbook about workplace violence. Our interviewing has also changed. We are doing more in-depth interviewing and making sure we obtain references on all candidates. We have taken several measures to avoid something like this from happening again.

Both interviews touch on several issues discussed in the literature. Labig (1995) stated one of the reasons workplace violence is not well understood is because organizations that have experienced workplace violence are unwilling to share information about what happened. I experienced this in my interview with the Human Resource Manager due to some confidentiality reasons. However, the information provided has helped to establish the research setting.

HEB Policies

Many of the policies that HEB implements are confidential and for partner knowledge only. The policies the researcher can disclose include Guideline No.:5.2 from the 1996 HEB Policies and Procedures Guide, HEB's policy on sexual harassment- which is another form of workplace violence, and a copy of the Standards of Conduct section of the Partner Guide.

Conclusion

The shooting incident exposed HEB's vulnerability to workplace violence, subsequently HEB instigated new policies aimed at preventing workplace violence and reducing the negative consequences. The methodology used to discuss the new policies is examined in Chapter Three. The research methodology chapter discusses how direct observation, interviews and document analysis is used to apply Labig's Self-Assessment Exercise to HEB's workplace violence policies.

Chapter 4
Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter explains the basic research design used for this case study. The research

methodology chapter also outlines the data collection methods utilized by the researcher.

Strengths and weaknesses of the methodology are also discussed.

Case Study

According to Yin (1994:13) a case study is an empirical inquiry that investigates a

contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries

between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident. Earl Babbie (1992:286) states case

study research is especially appropriate for topics for which "attitudes and behaviors can best

be understood within their natural setting." The objectives and design for a case study are

based on these propositions or hypotheses (Yin, 1994:103). Administration of a case study

research at HEB Distribution Center applies to the criteria suggested by Yin and Babbie, thus

making it appropriate to assess the security procedures.

Babbie (1992:306) notes that case study research has a number of weaknesses. One

weakness is that it is often qualitative rather than quantitative. The qualitative nature of case

study research makes the research less precise when describing attributes about a large

population. Conclusions drawn from qualitative research are often regarded as suggestive

rather than definitive (Babbie, 1992:306). Other weaknesses of case studies are their

perceived lack of rigor and inclusion of bias(Yin, 1994:9-10). To strengthen case study

research Yin supports using triangulation methods such as surveys, interviews and research to strengthen the data collection and findings or conclusions. Therefore, direct observation, interviews and document analysis are used to support the case study.

Direct Observation

Direct observation, also referred to as participant observation differs from other models of observation in that it is not only a data-collecting activity. Participant observation typically is a theory-generating activity as well. A field researcher attempts to make sense out of an ongoing process that cannot be predicted in advance- making initial observations, developing tentative general conclusions that suggest particular types of further observations, making those observations and thereby revising your conclusion (Babbie, 1995:280).

Direct observation is an appropriate method to use to support this case study. The researcher has been employed with HEB Distribution center for four years, and is currently working in the Human Resources department. Through the researchers employment in the distribution setting, the field research revealed information that would not otherwise be apparent.

One of the key strengths of field research is the comprehensiveness of perspective it gives the researcher. Field research is especially appropriate to the study of those topics for which attitudes and behaviors can best be understood within their natural setting. Finally, field research is especially appropriate to the study of processes over time (Babbie, 1995:281).

Field research is also relatively inexpensive. The nature of the research usually will determine the amount of money needed to undertake the direct observations. Flexibility is

another advantage of field research. In this method you may modify your research design at any time (Babbie, 1995:300).

There are also disadvantages associated with field research. Being qualitative rather than quantitative, seldom yields precise descriptive statements about a large population. The conclusions drawn from field research are often regarded as suggestive rather than definitive. These disadvantages had no affect on the researchers observations.

Interview Research

Interview research is an "essential source of case study evidence because most case studies are about human affairs" (Yin, 1994:85). This research incorporated two interviews. These interviews were used to obtain information for the setting chapter and to provide evidence for the case study.

The interview instrument for the hourly employee was made up of seven questions designed to gather information about the shooting incident that took place in the Frozen Food Warehouse. The interview instrument for the Human Resource Manager was made up of seven questions as well. Although prepared questions made the interview seem structured, both respondents were encouraged by the researcher to engage in open-ended communication. The responses to the interviews were recorded for transcription. The transcribed interviews are found in Chapter 3- The Research Setting.

In this research project, the interviews are used in combination with direct observation and document analysis to strengthen the case study and to increase validity. Yin states that interviews can be targeted on the topic of research. He also adds that interviews are

insightful because they provide perceived casual inferences. Interviews are essential sources of case study information.

One weakness which is inherent in interview research is bias of the interviewer or bias (negative feelings) toward the interviewer. Also, the lack of respondent anonymity to potentially sensitive issues can lead to respondent bias (Babbie, 1992:282). Interviews can also be biases due to poorly constructed questions.

Babbie (1992) suggests the researchers use caution when developing interview questions in order to ensure the meaning is interpreted the same by all persons interviewed. The interviewer should ask the same questions to all those persons interviewed, ask the questions exactly as worded in the standardized format, and record responses exactly as stated. However, the researcher interviewed two partners who gave two perspectives of the shooting incident, so the interview questions were not the same.

Document Analysis

Document analysis research is appropriate for studying past communications of an organization. The exactness of document analysis- that of names, dates and facts, provides strength to the research (Yin:1994:80). Babbie (1992:312) suggests that document analysis is an unobtrusive method of research. It is often useful when studying trends or comparing past records (Babbie, 199:343). Therefore document analysis is appropriate for use in this case study.

Document analysis has both strengths and weaknesses. Babbie (1992:328) states that perhaps the most important advantage of document analysis is its economy both in terms of time and money. Also, it offers a degree of safety. If some part of the research should

become invalid, it would not require costly or time consuming elements of the research to be repeated. The use of document analysis in this study was very cost effective, because it required only the cost of photocopying information needed.

Yin (1994:80) cited several advantages of documentation of archival records. This type of analysis is stable, meaning can be reviewed repeatedly; unobtrusive, meaning it contains exact names, references and details of an event; provides broad coverage and is precise and quantitative.

Yin also suggests several weaknesses of document analysis- archival records. The retrievability can be low. If collection is incomplete, document analysis may be bias. Access to documentation may be deliberately blocked. Accessibility due to privacy reasons may also hinder document analysis. The weaknesses cited by Yin were major obstacles in this research project. Many of the documents the researcher wanted to include were not retrievable due to confidentiality reasons.

Charles Labig's Company Self-Assessment Exercise

The researcher has adopted Labig's Company Self-Assessment Exercise as an "ideal security system." Each of the forty-eight questions can be considered implicit hypotheses. The questions included in the Assessment Exercise are found in Chapter Two. In order to test the implicit hypotheses, three partners from HEB's Distribution Center answered the questions according to their knowledge of HEB. The answers to the forty-eight questions are used by the researcher to formulate recommendations for improving HEB's security procedures. The answers provided by the researcher,[23]the Human Resource Manager, and the hourly employee are found in Chapter Five- Findings.

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[23]Researcher has been employed with HEB Dist. Center for four years

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Operationalization of Hypotheses

The first hypothesis and sub-hypotheses of this applied research project deal with policies pertaining to employee hiring. Table 4.1 displays the sub-hypotheses and the sources of evidence.[24]

Table 4.1

WH₁   There are adequate policies dealing with **Employee Hiring**.

Sub Hypotheses	Sources of Evidence
1ₐ **Job descriptions** include requirements for **interpersonal behavior**.	Career Opportunity Listings
1ᵦ Basic **screening** for appropriate **interpersonal behavior** in initial interviews and performance reviews is in place.	Interview with Quick Screener Performance Evaluation Form
1ᵨ **Information** about how **applicants resolve conflict** and their beliefs about violence.	Interview with Quick Screener
1ᵨ **Check references** with attention to **emotional stability**.	Reference Check Form Interview with former employer
1ₑ **Hiring practices** include **background checks**, with attention to gaps in employment and police records.	Application questions Interview with Quick Screener Reference Check Form

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[24]Sources of evidence are provided through researcher's knowledge of company programs and procedures

The second hypothesis and set of sub-hypotheses pertain to supervisory skill and

attitude. Table 4.2 displays the sub-hypotheses and the sources of evidence.

Table 4.2

WH$_2$ **Supervisory skill** and attitude are used as selection criteria.

Sub Hypotheses	Sources of Evidence
2$_a$ **Management training** is offered on how to deal with **emotional behavior.**	Training Budget for each partner Required training courses for all management
2$_b$ Supervisors **provide dignity** and **choices** for workforce.	Partner Climate Survey
2$_c$ **Training** in effective **performance review** and **problem identification**.	Performance Evaluation Training Class Leadership Series Training Class
2$_d$ **Performance issues** are confronted in a **timely** manner.	Turn around time for discipline is 48 hours
2$_e$ **Performance issues** are handled **fairly, constructively, positively** and with **respect.**	Partners are evaluated using same criteria Leadership Series Class- Human Relations
2$_f$ Supervisors have and know how to **assess resources available.**	Partner Care Plus is available to all partners Human Resources Department available
2$_g$ These resources are used.	Partner Climate Surveys indicate so

Hypothesis three and the sub-hypotheses deal with HEB Distribution Center's policies dealing with violence preparedness. Table 4.3 displays the sub-hypotheses and the sources of evidence.

Table 4.3

WH$_3$ There are adequate policies pertaining to **violence preparedness.**

Sub Hypotheses	Sources of Evidence
3$_a$ Managers are **trained** to **recognize the warning signs** of potential violence.	Leadership Series Class- Workplace Violence
3$_b$ Managers are **trained** to deal with **performance problems**.	Leadership Series Training Class Various Management Seminars
3$_c$ There is **access** to **internal and expert resources** in order to do risk assessment.	Partner Care Plus is available 24 hours
3$_d$ **Written assessment plans** outline how to deal with threatening situations.	No formal written assessment plan
3$_e$ **Threat management teams assess risk** in given situations.	No formal threat management teams
3$_f$ Effective **communication channels** are in place when a problem is identified.	Chain of command is established Human Resource Manger assigned to each work location

The fourth hypothesis and set of sub-hypotheses of this applied research project deal

with the policies and procedures. Table 4.4 displays the sub-hypotheses and the sources of

evidence.

Table 4.4

WH₄ **Policies and procedures** clearly define the procedures for responding to problematic
situations.

Sub Hypotheses	Sources of Evidence
4_a Clear policies about **intimidation, harassment, threats of violence**, violent or destructive behavior, and the use of drug and alcohol exist.	Partner Handbook Sexual Harassment Policy Threat Memo from Vice President
4_b Clear policies and procedures **regarding violence.**	Partner Handbook Threat Memo from Vice President
4_c **Problem resolution** policies ensure that procedures are **fair** and **timely.**	Partner Handbook
4_d Sufficient **mental health resources** to deal with post-violence trauma.	Partner Care Plus is available
4_e **Communication plan** for dealing with the **media** should a violent incident occur.	Not known to researcher
4_f **Health promotion** and **education programs** on personal safety, sexual harassment and stress management.	Not offered
4_g Policies require a **review of the human or personal elements** before people are let go or disciplined.	Human Resource Managers must review termination prior to partner dismissal. Leadership Series Training Class- Effective Discipline
4_h **Layoffs** or **terminations** are done in a **humane manner** with adequate support services.	HEB does not lay partners off, they are placed in other departments if the need arises.

Sub Hypotheses (cont.)	Sources of Evidence (cont.)
4$_i$ **Displacement strategies** include elements that **preserve dignity**, including outplacement services.	Human Resource Mangers work with partners and Employment Office to find alternative jobs if the need arises.

The fifth hypothesis and set of sub-hypotheses pertain to the organization culture.

Table 4.5 displays the sub-hypotheses and the sources of evidence.

Table 4.5

WH$_5$ **Organization culture** has a positive effect on partners.

Sub Hypotheses	Sources of Evidence
5$_a$ **Employees believe** they will be **treated fairly** and with **respect**.	Partner Climate Surveys
5$_b$ **Systems** of communication **allow employees to air concerns** and grievances constructively.	Established chain of command for grievances Partner Climate Surveys
5$_c$ **People know** one another well enough to know and **care** if someone is stressed.	Jobs involve a lot of partner interaction throughout the shift
5$_d$ It is **socially acceptable to seek help** from Human Resources or an Employee Assistance Program.	Partners are encouraged to seek help from Partner Care Plus or Human Resources
5$_e$ **Poor performance** is **dealt with directly**, constructively, and quickly, rather than tolerated.	Turn around time for discipline is 48 hours Leadership Series Training Class
5$_f$ An organizational **environment exist** in which **employees feel fairly treated**, respected and allowed to have input.	Partner Climate Surveys Researchers experiences

The sixth hypothesis and set of sub-hypotheses deal with the actual facilities and building maintenance. Table 4.6 displays the sub-hypotheses and the sources of evidence.

Table 4.6

WH$_6$ **Physical facilities** and **building maintenance** plays a constructive role in preventing workplace violence.

Sub Hypotheses	Sources of Evidence
6$_a$ **Physical security systems** are **assessed**	Part of security partner's job duties
6$_b$ **Back up communication systems** are in place in case phones are damaged.	System Radios are available Warehouse speaker system is available
6$_c$ Able to **communicate quickly** to large numbers of employees after an incident.	Warehouse speaker system
6$_d$ **Public access** to work areas are **controlled.**	Partners must use security badge to enter facility Security gates are placed in front of all warehouse facilities
6$_e$ **Limited exposure** of employees where possible.	All visitors must check in at the security gate before entering facility.
6$_f$ Room where **grievance meetings** are held is **secure.**	Usually held in conference rooms, security is on premises
6$_g$ **Security precautions** are taken at grievance or other **special meetings.**	There are always at least two managers present for special meetings
6$_h$ **Panic buttons** are on desks of particularly vulnerable staff.	Panic buttons are in place in vulnerable areas
6$_i$ A **system** that **controls** access of **former employees** exists.	Security badges are turned in once partner is terminated Former employees must check in at the security gate until clearance is received

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Sub Hypotheses (cont.)	Sources of Evidence (cont.)
6_j **Employee contact** with strangers and customers has been **evaluated**.	Limited exposure or contact with strangers
6_k **Key cards** or some form of identification is **provided**.	Security badges are issued to all partners for facility entrance
6_l **Product or services antagonize** some groups of **people.**	Not to researchers knowledge
6_m External security firm is used.	Security is done in-house

Conclusion

Chapter Four describes the basic research design used for this case study. The strengths and weaknesses of a case study, interviews and document analysis are also presented in this chapter. The reader is also informed about Labig's Company Self-Assessment Exercise.

Chapter Five will discuss the findings for the case study. This chapter will include the testing of the implicit working hypotheses from the six categories in Labig's Exercise. Chapter Five will also include an analysis of company documents that were retrievable and cleared for the researchers use.

Chapter 5
Findings

Introduction

The findings of this case study are presented and analyzed in this chapter. The implicit working hypotheses are tested and provided in text and table form.

The researcher, the Human Resource Manager, and the hourly employee all completed Labig's Company Self-Assessment Exercise. By looking at each question to which the answer is no, the researcher will determine how well HEB is prepared to prevent violence. The results of the Company Self-Assessment Exercise will aid the researcher in formulating recommendations to improve HEB's security procedures.

Results and Analysis by Categories

The following results and analyses are provided by category. Tables will be used to display results. Each question from Labig's Exercise is a working hypothesis.

Employee Hiring

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Table 5.1
Summary of Employee Hiring

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WH₁   There are adequate policies dealing with **Employee Hiring**.

Sub Hypothesis	Direct Observation	HRM	Hourly Partner
1ₐ **Job descriptions** include requirements for **interpersonal behavior**.	No	No	No
1ᵦ Basic **screening** for appropriate **interpersonal behavior** in initial interviews and performance reviews is in place.	Yes	Yes	NA
1ᵨ **Information** about how **applicants resolve conflict** and their beliefs about violence.	Yes	Yes	NA
1ᵤ **Check references** with attention to **emotional stability**.	No	No	NA
1ₑ **Hiring practices** include **background checks**, with attention to gaps in employment and police records.	Yes	Yes	Yes

Evidence displayed in Table 5.1 indicates employee hiring has several opportunities.

Providing job descriptions, which include requirements for interpersonal behavior are not

utilized. When checking references, the reference checker does not ask questions that pertain

to emotional stability.

Supervisory Skill and Attitude

Table 5.2
Summary of Supervisory Skills and Attitudes

WH_2 **Supervisory skill** and attitude are used as selection criteria.

Sub Hypotheses	Direct Observation	HRM	Hourly Partner
2_a **Management training** is offered on how to deal with **emotional behavior.**	Yes	Yes	NA
2_b Supervisors **provide dignity** and **choices** for workforce.	Yes	Yes	Yes
2_c **Training** in effective **performance review** and **problem identification.**	Yes	Yes	NA
2_d **Performance issues** are confronted in a **timely** manner.	Yes	Yes	Yes
2_e **Performance issues** are handled **fairly, constructively, positively** and with **respect.**	Yes	Yes	Yes
2_f Supervisors have and know how to **assess resources available.**	Yes	Yes	Yes
2_g These resources are used.	Yes	Yes	Yes

Evidence displayed in Table 5.2 indicates HEB does an adequate job of preventing violence in this category. The evidence supports the implicit hypotheses in this area.

Table 5.3
Summary of Violence Preparedness and Training

WH$_3$ There are adequate policies pertaining to **violence preparedness.**

Sub Hypotheses	Direct Observation	HRM	Hourly Partner
3$_a$ Managers are **trained to recognize the warning signs** of potential violence.	Yes	Yes	NA
3$_b$ Managers are **trained** to deal with **performance problems.**	Yes	Yes	NA
3$_c$ There is **access to internal and expert resources** in order to do risk assessment.	Yes	Yes	Yes
3$_d$ **Written assessment plans** outline how to deal with threatening situations.	No	Yes	No
3$_e$ **Threat management teams assess risk** in given situations.	No	No	No
3$_f$ Effective **communication channels** are in place when a problem is identified.	Yes	Yes	Yes

Evidence displayed in Table 5.3 indicates HEB has two major opportunities for improvement in this category. There is no written assessment plan outlining how to deal with threatening situations. HEB Distribution Center also does not have a threat management team in place to assess risk in a given situation, to keep the company prepared for crisis management, or to provide ongoing training to managers.

Policies and Procedures

Table 5.4

Table 5.4
Summary of Policies and Procedures

WH$_4$ **Policies and procedures** clearly define the steps for responding to problematic situations.

Sub Hypotheses	Direct Observation	HRM	Hourly Partner
4$_a$ Clear policies about **intimidation, harassment, threats of violence,** violent or destructive behavior, and the use of drug and alcohol exist.	Yes	Yes	Yes
4$_b$ Clear policies and procedures **regarding violence.**	Yes	Yes	Yes
4$_c$ **Problem resolution** policies ensure that procedures are **fair** and **timely.**	Yes	Yes	Yes
4$_d$ Sufficient **mental health resources** to deal with post- violence trauma.	Yes	Yes	Yes
4$_e$ **Communication plan** for dealing with the **media** should a violent incident occur.	No	Yes	No
4$_f$ **Health promotion** and **education programs** on personal safety, sexual harassment and stress management.	No	No	No
4$_g$ Policies require a **review of the human or personal elements** before people are let go or disciplined.	Yes	Yes	Yes
4$_h$ **Layoffs** or **terminations** are done in a **humane manner** with adequate support services.	NA	NA	NA
4$_i$ **Displacement strategies** include elements that **preserve dignity,** including outplacement services.	Yes	Yes	Yes

Evidence displayed in Table 5.4 indicates Policies and Procedures are not known to all levels of employees. The Human Resource Manager was aware of a communication plan for dealing with the media should a violent incident occur, but the other two respondents were

not. HEB Distribution center does not offer health promotion and education programs on personal safety, sexual harassment, employee assistance, and stress management.

Organization Culture

Table 5.5
Summary of Organization Culture

WH$_5$ **Organization culture** has a positive effect on partners.

Sub Hypotheses	Direct Observation	HRM	Hourly Partner
5$_a$ **Employees believe they will be treated fairly** and with **respect**.	Yes	Yes	Yes
5$_b$ **Systems** of communication **allow employees to air concerns** and grievances constructively.	Yes	Yes	Yes
5$_c$ **People know** one another well enough to know and **care** if someone is stressed.	Yes	Yes	Yes
5$_d$ It is **socially acceptable to seek help** from Human Resources or an Employee Assistance Program.	Yes	Yes	Yes
5$_e$ **Poor performance** is **dealt with directly**, constructively, and quickly, rather than tolerated.	Yes	Yes	Yes
5$_f$ An organizational **environment exist** in which **employees feel fairly treated**, respected and allowed to have input.	No	Yes	No

The evidence in Table 5.5 shows support for most of the implicit hypotheses in this category. However, implicit hypothesis 1$_f$ is not supported by the researcher or the hourly employee. Both partners feel the organizational environment is not one in which employees feel fairly treated, respected and allowed to have input.

Physical Facilities and Building Design

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Table 5.6
Summary of Physical Facilities and Building Design

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WH$_6$ **Physical facilities** and **building maintenance** plays a constructive role in preventing workplace violence.

Sub Hypotheses	Direct Observation	HRM	Hourly Partner
6$_a$ **Physical security systems** are **assessed**	Yes	Yes	Yes
6$_b$ **Back up communication systems** are in place in case phones are damaged.	Yes	Yes	Yes
6$_c$ Able to **communicate quickly** to large numbers of employees after an incident.	Yes	Yes	Yes
6$_d$ **Public access** to work areas are **controlled.**	Yes	Yes	Yes
6$_e$ **Limited exposure** of employees where possible.	Yes	Yes	Yes
6$_f$ Room where **grievance meetings** are held is **secure.**	Yes	Yes	Yes
6$_g$ **Security precautions** are taken at grievance or other **special meetings**.	Yes	Yes	Yes
6$_h$ **Panic buttons** are on desks of particularly vulnerable staff.	Yes	Yes	Yes
6$_j$ **Employee contact** with strangers and customers has been **evaluated**.	Yes	Yes	Yes
6$_k$ **Key cards** or some form of identification is **provided**.	Yes	Yes	Yes
6$_l$ **Product or services antagonize** some groups of **people.**	NA	NA	NA
6$_m$ External security firm is used.	NA	NA	NA

Evidence in Table 5.6 indicates HEB Distribution Center does an adequate job of

preventing violence in this category. The implicit hypotheses are supported in this area.

Summary of Findings

According to the responses provided to Labig's Company Self-Assessment Exercise,

HEB Distribution Center does a fair job of preventing violence. However, there are a few

opportunities for improvement. Table 5.7 summarizes the findings and notes specific areas

that need improvement.

Table 5.7
Summary of Findings

Hypotheses	Evidence	Need to Improve
H_1 Employee Hiring	Limited Support	1) job description requirements 2) check references for emotional stability
H_2 Supervisory Skill and Attitude	Support	
H_3 Violence Preparedness	Limited Support	1) a written assessment plan outlining how to deal with threatening situations should be developed 2) a threat management team should be enacted to assess risk and keep the company prepared for crisis management
H_4 Policies and Procedures	Limited Support	1) communicate policies to all partners with a need to know upon employment 2) offer health promotion education programs on personal safety, sexual harassment, and stress management
H_5 Organization Culture	Limited Support	1) administer climate survey more often 2) engage in more open dialogue with partners 3) develop trust building programs
H_6 Physical Facilities	Support	

Conclusion

Responses to Charles Labig's Company Self-Assessment Exercise indicate HEB's Distribution Center has a couple of opportunities to address in order to be prepared to prevent further violent incidents from occurring in the workplace. According to the three respondents' answers HEB is fairly prepared to preventing violence in the workplace. Although no organization can be 100% prepared for a violent incident, there are actions that can be taken.

Chapter Five has provided an analysis of the responses given by the three partners who are employed at HEB Distribution Center. The analysis provides knowledge of the areas HEB Distribution Center is strong in violence preparedness, as well as the areas where further action needs to be taken.

Chapter Six assimilates these findings and the researcher will provide recommendations to improve HEB's current security procedures.

Chapter 6

Summary and Conclusion

Introduction

This chapter will summarize the applied research project methodology and results in light

of the implicit hypotheses provided by Charles Labig's Company Self-Assessment Exercise.

Conclusions will be drawn from the findings, and recommendations for further action to

improve HEB Distribution Center's security procedures will be made.

Restatement of Research Purpose

The purpose of this case study research is first to assess the security procedures at HEB

Distribution Center using Labig's Company Self-Assessment exercise. Secondly, based on

the findings, recommendations to improve the security procedures will be developed.

The researcher interviewed two partners from HEB Distribution Center to establish the

case study setting. This information provides information about the shooting incident that

occurred in the Frozen Food Warehouse in October of 1993.

The responses provide were used to determine how well HEB Distribution Center is

prepared for possible violence in the workplace.

Recommendations

Through this research, HEB Distribution Center will be able to improve their security procedures by taking actions to improve their violence preparedness. The following recommendations are drawn from Table 5.7.

- Improve current job descriptions. The current job description does not include requirements for interpersonal behavior (Including non-violence) that are job related.

- Develop and distribute to managers a written·assessment plan outlining how to deal with threatening situations.

- Develop a threat management team to assess risk and keep the company prepared for crisis management, and to provide ongoing training to managers.

- Make sure policies are communicated to everyone with a need to know upon employment.

- Offer health promotion and education programs on personal safety, sexual harassment, employee assistance, and stress management.

- Administer more climate surveys and have more open dialogue with the partners in order to get their input on decisions that will affect them.

- Programs need to be designed to develop trust between partners and the management at HEB.

The recommendations are formulated from the responses given by the three employees from HEB Distribution Center. Action plans to address each of these recommendations will improve HEB Distribution Center's current security procedures and improve the violence preparedness in the organization.

Discussion of Limitations of the Study

A weakness of any case study is that it is regarded as "suggestive rather than definitive" (Babbie, 1992:306). This suggestive nature involved reliability issues when doing case study research.

Another limitation of the study is the confidentiality concerns by the Human resource Manager interviewed. The management at HEB is very hesitant to talk about the shooting incident due to the nature of the incident and the good image the grocery chain wants to continue to portray.

A third limitation is the retrievability of documents. The researcher is aware of other documents such as memos and policies that could have enhanced the document analysis and the research, but due to company policies regarding private documents, they were not available for use.

Also, since workplace violence is a fairly recent phenomenon, most incidents have not provided definitive conclusions about causes, predictions or solutions. Finally, many organizations that have experienced workplace violence are involved in related litigation for decades up to and after the event. This situation makes them unwilling to share much information about what happened and thus limits how much companies can learn from one another.

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