



Reprisal Focus Group Questions

Note: The questions below have been developed to assist leaders in identifying and understanding the impact of reprisal within the organization. Select those that fit to your situation and modify or add to them as desired.

Facilitator Note: Within the scope of the Department of Defense (DoD), there is a defining difference between retaliation and reprisal. Specifically, reprisal is taking or threatening to take an unfavorable personnel action, or to withhold a favorable personnel action as a consequential response to making a protected communication. In short, the line between retaliation and reprisal, per DoD definition, is that retaliation is defined by a broader list of behaviors as a negative response to protected communication. Reprisal, on the other hand, can be a retaliatory response but is very specific to negative actions that can directly impact an individual professionally. When discussing reprisal, it is important to keep the distinction between retaliation and reprisal clear. It is also important to understand the definition of “protected communication. A summary definition is provided here, but the full definition can be found Department of Defense Directive 7050.06 (linked in the references).

A protected communication includes:

- **any** communication made to a member of Congress or an IG or
- many types of reports that are made through one’s chain of command, to an audit agency, law enforcement, etc. including:
 - Reporting of evidence of a violation of law or regulation (including sexual harassment assault, discrimination, etc.).
 - Whistleblowing (includes reporting gross mismanagement of funds, abuse of authority, a danger to public health or safety, etc.)

Introduction:

Facilitator Note: A gap in understanding and/or perception may exist between a more broadly accepted understanding of reprisal and reprisal as the DoD defines it. Specifically, “reprisal” is often used interchangeably with “retaliation,” and it is not necessarily associated with a protected communication). Though not all reprisal-like behaviors meet the criteria for reprisal in the DoD, such behaviors are still damaging to individuals, teams, and the overall organization and should be addressed proactively.

- How would you define protected communication?
- How would you define reprisal?
- How does your understanding of reprisal compare with the DoD’s definition of reprisal?
- How does this understanding differ from the DoD’s definition of reprisal?
- How would you describe the difference between retaliation and reprisal?
- How is reprisal different than other imposed disciplinary consequences or actions?





- Who can be affected by reprisal?
- How would you describe the influence your organization's culture has on the fear of reprisal?
- What factors do you think might make someone fearful to report reprisal?
- How could fear of reprisal inhibit others from reporting criminal or harassment activity?
- What kind of behaviors do you think could be considered reprisal?
- How do you approach expressing concerns about behaviors within your organization that could potentially lead to reprisal?
- What signs do you observe that indicate whether others might fear reprisal from leaders within your organization?
- How does your organization hold leaders accountable for reprisal behavior?
- What does it mean to hold leaders accountable regarding reprisal prevention?

Risk Factors:

***Facilitator Note:** An organization that promotes a competitiveness between peers without a regard for individual improvement is an environment where retaliatory behaviors are likely to occur (Melgar et al., 2021; Meyer & Zelin, 2019). Additionally, leaders who experience uncertain or high-stress environments are more likely to exhibit negative emotions toward subordinates (Kakarika et al., 2022). Reprisal is a type of retaliatory behavior that entails withholding privileges, promotions, and other job-related opportunities or taking or threatening to take unfavorable personnel actions as a response to a protected communication having been made.*

- How does your working environment or your supervisor influence the level of competitiveness between peers in your opinion?
- How does your working environment or your supervisor promotes personal and professional growth and development for individuals?
- How would you describe the effectiveness of your work environment in managing high stress levels?
- How does your leader respond?
- How comfortable are you turning to your leader for support?
- How does your supervisor or leader promote a working environment, where professional opportunities are distributed fairly?
- How would you describe the approach of your supervisor or leader towards creating a working environment where constructive feedback and disciplinary action are handled appropriately, taking into account the severity of mistakes, misconduct, or policy violations?

Individual Experiences:

- Share a specific example of when you felt you were the target of reprisal or observed someone else being the target of reprisal?
 - What behaviors did you notice?
 - How was the situation addressed?





- How have you ever refrained from reporting an issue for fear of reprisal?
- Please share a time when you felt you experienced retaliation in your workplace.
 - How did your experience affect your job or work environment?
- How do you reflect on instances where you've felt pressured or compelled to participate in retaliatory behaviors against a peer or subordinate within your workplace?
- If so, what factors influenced this feeling or perception?
 - What did that look like?
 - How did you abstain? Did you experience any negative feedback or consequences for not participating?
 - Describe how you managed to abstain from participating in retaliatory behaviors? Did you face any negative feedback or consequences for choosing not to participate?

Impacts:

Facilitator Note: *Retaliatory behavior, such as reprisal, impacts the workplace by critically undermining trust, job satisfaction, and productivity through counterproductive work behaviors. Counterproductive work behaviors are intentional actions contrary to the organization's interests and often emerge as a direct consequence of retaliatory practices (Gruys & Sackett, 2003). A leader's role in either endorsing or failing to address retaliatory behaviors—including reprisal—can determine an organizational climate that either condones or discourages retaliation (Kartolo & Kwantes, 2019).*

- What counterproductive behaviors exist, if any?
 - How are these behaviors retaliatory?
 - How does this affect productivity?
 - How does this affect team cohesion?
- How have you taken part in counterproductive work behaviors?
 - What motivated you to engage in those behaviors?
- How do leaders endorse retaliatory actions or are there expectations of retaliatory actions through your organization's culture?
 - What specific ways does your leader convey these expectations for retaliation?
 - What specific leader behaviors show support for retaliation in the workplace?
- How comfortable going to your leader about disagreements or concerns in the workplace?
 - How does the leader do to make you feel comfortable?
 - What specific behaviors or actions does your leader display that may make you feel uncomfortable?
- How comfortable going to your peers about concerns or differences in perspectives?
 - How do your peers offer support?
 - What specific behaviors or actions do your peers display to may make you feel unsupported?





Additional Factors:

- What are your thoughts on the safety of reporting reprisal within your organization?
- What can leaders do to help foster a safe reporting environment?
- What are your organizations policies on reprisal/where to go to report?
- How effective are your current policies and procedures?
- How is reprisal affecting your organization?
- How do leaders support and encourage others to report retaliatory behaviors?
 - How do they show support?
 - How do they not show support?





References

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