



# FACILITATING A SAFE AND RESPECTFUL WORKPLACE

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*"TO SOLVE OUR MOST DIFFICULT PROBLEMS,  
WE MUST RADICALLY CHANGE OUR THINKING."*

— STEPHEN COVEY

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## Introduction

The prevalence of harassment, sexual harassment and violence in Canadian workplaces has been underscored by the growing evidence of the negative impacts of these behaviours on employees' mental and physical health and safety.

This recognition has spawned a trend across Canada to enact and enforce anti-harassment laws, and to provide more robust support to impacted employees.<sup>1</sup>

Generally, it is accepted that harassment and violence have destructive impacts on employee health, workplace morale and organizational productivity. However, despite the compelling evidence, not all employers are fully engaged in the prevention of harassment (including bullying and sexual harassment) and violence.

Even among those that are engaged, there is no globally accepted and evidence-based preventive solution.

One factor that can predict the degree of risk and prevalence of harassment and violence in any workplace is incivility. And while incivility plays a role in predicting the occurrence of harassment and violence, the benefits of creating strategies and programs focused on curbing incivility have been given less attention.

This white paper provides human resources professionals with an expanded frame of reference for what a respectful workplace is, and why and how to reduce the risk of respectful workplace violations, including acts of incivility.

### Respect in the workplace today

Anecdotally, many employers are not satisfied with their employees' demonstrations of respect in their workplaces, and are motivated to explore ideas for reducing the potential for incivility, harassment and



violence. Sadly, many workplaces focused on preventing respectful workplace violations are experiencing higher than acceptable levels.

About 34 per cent of employees have concerns about workplace incivility, harassment and violence, according to research<sup>2</sup> and data collected from organizations that have used Morneau Shepell's Total Health Index (THI).

For the purpose of this paper, a "respectful workplace" is defined as one in which all stakeholders combine organizational regulation and self-regulation regarding interpersonal conduct to maximize respect and civility experiences, and to both minimize and constructively address incivility, harassment and violence.

In that context, a respectful workplace covers a range of behaviours on an interactional continuum. For this analysis, Figure 1 presents a 10-factor escalation model of behaviours that have been presented in disrespectful workplaces, which is similar to Gary Namie's incivility-violence continuum.<sup>3</sup>

**Figure 1. Escalation of workplace incivility, bullying and harassment to violence**

Respectful Workplace Continuum	Misunderstandings	Incivility	Conflict	Covert psychological bullying	Overt psychological bullying	Physically bullying	Racial discrimination	Psychological sexual harassment	Physical sexual harassment	Physical violence
	Miscommunication that results in a person feeling wronged	Act of rudeness to a peer	Verbal or written argument between two workers	Omission of a peer from activities	Name calling in-person or online, known as cyber bullying	Physically preventing a person from moving	Use of racial pejorative terms to describe a peer	Making comments to a person about their body	Touching a person in a sexual, non-consensual way	Throwing an object at another person

The seriousness of disrespectful conduct escalates from left to right in Figure 1. This may appear to be obvious when examples of employee interpersonal misconduct are compared. For example, an employee who is simply rude to a peer — compared to one who brings a gun to work with an intention to injure or kill co-workers — is at less risk of causing permanent injury to himself and others, having criminal charges laid against him or losing his employment.

However, an employee can be at risk of experiencing a mental injury due to exposure to misconduct that falls anywhere on the Figure 1 continuum. The severity of the injury<sup>4</sup> can vary from low to severe, and the more severe the injury, the greater the impact on the employee's ability to function.

Employees who experience bullying in the workplace present higher levels of work-related stress, less commitment to their organization and higher levels of anxiety and anger than those experiencing sexual harassment.<sup>5,6</sup> Ultimately, any of the misconduct referenced in Figure 1 can result in a victimized employee quitting her job or requiring a disability leave.

## The size and scope of incivility, harassment and violence

Two of the most formidable challenges on the respectful workplace continuum are incivility and bullying. Non-sexual harassment and bullying are far more prevalent in today's workplace than sexual harassment and racial discrimination.<sup>7</sup> Over the last 14 years, 98 per cent of respondents to a survey experienced uncivil behaviour within the workplace, according to the *Harvard Business Review*.<sup>8</sup>

Further, 80 per cent of lost work time is caused by incivility, according to one of the study's authors, Christine Porath.<sup>9</sup>

While there is no uniform definition of workplace harassment, there appears to be a consensus that it involves a pattern of improper, aggressive or intimidating behaviours directed at an individual or group, which can be committed by one or more persons.<sup>10</sup>

A complicating factor in the identification of harassment is that it typically involves a subjective element of either the perpetrator's intent or the victim's interpretation of the behaviour.<sup>11</sup> In fact, even victims of bullying struggle to describe their experiences.<sup>12</sup>

For our purposes, "harassment" is defined as persistent, malicious, insulting or exclusionary intentional or non-intentional behaviours that an employee perceives as intentional efforts to harm, control or drive them from the workplace.<sup>13</sup> Research indicates that harassment not only increases the risk of psychological injury and illness, but also escalation to physical violence.<sup>14</sup>

Incivility has been distinguished from harassment and bullying by its relative low intensity and ambiguous intent to harm.<sup>15</sup> Examples include patronizing and condescending communication, demeaning comments, interruptions and refusing to listen to another person's point of view.<sup>16</sup>

At the lowest end of disrespect in workplaces, incivility is estimated to cost companies \$14,000 per employee due to lost productivity and work time.<sup>17</sup> Additionally, for employees experiencing disrespectful behaviour, 53 per cent of them lost work time worrying about the incident or future interactions, and 12 per cent quit their job, according to a 2008 study.<sup>18</sup>

Workplace harassment is widespread in Canada and many other countries,<sup>19</sup> and it has a variety of negative effects on victims and their wider workplaces.<sup>20</sup> Forty-five per cent of Canadian workers report they have been harassed or bullied on the job, according to a 2014 survey,<sup>21</sup> with the number of employees who have been indirectly impacted much higher.

*Forty-five per cent of Canadian workers report they have been harassed or bullied on the job, according to a 2014 survey, with the number of employees who have been indirectly impacted even higher.*

The consequences of harassment and bullying are significant. Employees who report experiencing workplace bullying have a higher risk of distress, anxiety, panic attacks, difficulty sleeping, high blood pressure, ulcers, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD),<sup>22</sup> depression and loss of memory.<sup>23</sup> Harassment has also been linked to anxiety, tension, sadness and low self-esteem.<sup>24</sup>

One study found that 80 per cent of employees exposed to prolonged bullying have debilitating anxiety, 52 per cent experience panic attacks, 49 per cent have clinical depression and 30 per cent suffer from PTSD.<sup>25</sup> Additionally, the Canadian Mental Health Association has reported that 45 per cent of people who are targeted by bullies suffer from stress-related health problems.<sup>26</sup> These wide-reaching mental issues are estimated to cost billions of dollars each year in Canada and the United States alone.<sup>27</sup>

Interestingly, the long-term impact of harassment and bullying appears to differ for men and women. Women who experienced bullying reported two times more sick-related absences and increased use of anti-depressants than those who did not. While men did not report the same levels of absences or prescription use, those who experienced bullying reported increased presenteeism, and said they were two

times more likely to leave their company than those who were not bullied.<sup>28</sup>

Workplace incivility, harassment and bullying can also impact workplace culture. They can result in reduced trust, communication and cohesion; increased fear and interpersonal conflict; and foster tolerance for more harassment.<sup>29</sup>

The prevalence of these behaviours can result in a significant drain on the emotional resources of employees, impacting their ability to perform their assigned daily workplace tasks. The *Harvard Business Review* reported the following negative impacts among workers experiencing incivility<sup>30</sup>:

- 48 per cent intentionally decreased their work effort.
- 47 per cent intentionally decreased their time spent at work.
- 38 per cent intentionally decreased the quality of their work.
- 63 per cent lost work time avoiding the offender.
- 66 per cent said their performance declined.
- 78 per cent said their commitment to the organization declined.
- 25 per cent admitted to taking their frustration out on customers.

While these impacts may be foreseeable, the impact of workplace incivility, harassment and bullying on bystanders has been less than predictable,<sup>31</sup> suggesting that not only victims but also bystanders can be negatively impacted, as well.

## Barriers to a solution

Given the proliferation of incivility, harassment and bullying in Canadian workplaces, there is a high level of interest in solving the problem. Yet, several factors make the establishment of respectful workplaces challenging.

Harassment can happen to anyone. Within the workplace, it can be in the form of peer to peer, leader to peer, peer to leader and customer or supplier to employee.

However, several prevalent themes are identifiable. On average, women experience more harassment than men. As well, those with higher resiliency and coping skills, a greater amount of trust leadership and more effective direct managers tend to be at lower risk for workplace issues.<sup>32</sup>

On this latter point, a 2008 report by Porath found that 60 per cent of disrespectful behaviour comes from those in a leadership position,<sup>33</sup> compared to 20 per cent from peer to peer and 20 per cent from peer to leader. This suggests leadership has a significant role to play in building and role modelling a respectful workplace.

Some of the common mistakes leaders make that can result in diminished trust or increased perception of disrespect are<sup>34</sup>:

- underappreciated efforts
- a lack of recognition and respect
- constant criticism
- expecting employees to be similar to them

- hypocrisy
- delegating too much or not enough
- micromanagement
- manipulation
- not valuing employees.

Fundamentally, respect amongst employees and other stakeholders requires a commitment to organizational values over individual interests and ambitions, and that is not always achievable. Even if employers could select individual stakeholder personalities based on subscription to the respect objective, organizational stresses might still strain and fracture workplace relationships.

## Common law responses to workplace incivility, harassment and violence

In addition to legislation that requires the implementation of anti-harassment and violence policies and programs governing workplace conduct, the common law and arbitral jurisprudence have evolved in a manner that discourages these behaviours, while influencing HR leaders and organizations to curb them.

A landmark court decision regarding workplace harassment and bullying was made in *Boucher v. Wal-Mart Canada Corp.*, 2014 ONCA 419 (CanLII). In that case, a female employee was victimized by a course of non-sexual harassment by her manager. Even after receiving a complaint from the victim, the employer deflected blame for the misconduct toward her and did nothing to rectify the issue. The employee suffered serious physical and psychological impacts because of the bullying and was initially awarded 20 weeks of salary and \$1.45 million in damages, the latter of which was reduced to \$410,000 on appeal. Interestingly, the manager who perpetrated the harassment was found to be personally liable for \$110,000 in damages.



Similarly, in the unionized context, the arbitration case of *Corporation of the City of Calgary v. Canadian Union of Public Employees, Local 37*, 2018 CanLII 53482 (AB GAA) provides an example of the liability risk faced by employers that fail to protect employees from harassment. The female employee in the case was subjected to a litany of harassing behaviours, from sexually charged comments to overly aggressive and humiliating criticisms of her work. Although the employer had implemented a respectful workplace policy, the woman's supervisors were involved in the mistreatment and, when the employee mustered up the courage to complain, the employer conducted an initial investigation that essentially blamed her for causing the harassment. The woman was awarded three years' worth of wages and an additional sum of \$75,000 in general damages for pain and suffering.



Recognition of workplace harassment and bullying as a source of liability outside the occupational health and safety context is developing, and poses a greater risk to employers today than 10 years ago. As a result, the common law now operates in conjunction with legislative enactments to help discourage workplace misconduct and an employer's failure to thoroughly address it. The outcome of *Boucher v. Wal-Mart* incents harassed employees not only to advance common law claims against their employers<sup>36</sup> but against the individual perpetrators of the harassment.

Employers in several Canadian provinces are now required by law to implement behavioural policies that are intended to eliminate, or at least reduce, workplace misconduct such as harassment. Yet, in some cases, the policies are founded on a legalistic model that encourages binary, win-lose outcomes that may not encourage or may actually discourage open communication for effective intra-workplace dispute resolution.

Additionally, managers are left to apply these policies, and sometimes do so, in unintended ways that create liability risks. In *Boucher*, the Ontario Court of Appeal made this observation regarding Wal-Mart's policies:

"According to the evidence at trial, Wal-Mart holds itself out as a business that regards its employees highly. It has a number of workplace policies intended to reflect its concern for its employees. One policy that figured prominently in this trial was Wal-Mart's Open Door Communication Policy: Wal-Mart encourages its employees to report on a confidential basis concerns about how its stores are operated or its employees treated.

Wal-Mart also has a Prevention of Violence in the Workplace Policy. It undertakes to take all employee reports of incidents seriously and to protect an employee making a complaint from acts of retaliation. Finally, Wal-Mart has a Harassment and Discrimination Policy. The purpose of this policy is to protect employees from unwelcome conduct that offends a person's feelings. Wal-Mart requires all of its employees to treat each other with dignity and respect.

*Boucher's* evidence was that Wal-Mart paid lip service to its policies. It did not enforce them. And when *Boucher* sought the protection of these policies, she was threatened that she would be held accountable if her complaints proved unwarranted."<sup>35</sup>

The challenge for employers, even if legalistic policies are to be used, is to do more than simply pay lip service to them. Aside from the liability risks associated with improper enforcement, employers are also at risk of workforce distrust if rules are applied unfairly.

Further, the effectiveness of policies that encourage an adversarial approach to employee misconduct issues such as harassment should be questioned, as the requirement for one employee to be proven right and another wrong presents challenges at several stages of the process, including fear of reprisal at the time of potential complaint-making and disincentives against truthfulness in investigation.<sup>36</sup>



## Solving the problem

Key components of a respectful workplace include diversity, safe and effective conflict resolution, clear and realistic expectations, as well as intolerance for disrespectful, hostile or bullying behaviour. The end goal is to prevent incidents and be prepared to intervene in a fair and consistent manner, protecting the rights of the accused and accuser.

There are many techniques and models for building a respectful workplace, from training and interpersonal skills development to formal policies and procedures. One common challenge with these tactics is that organizational commitment often declines after one usage.

Essentially, in some organizations, respectful workplace development efforts appear to be an administrative “check-the-box” process versus a focused and committed approach incorporating measurement and confirmation of adult learning, synthesis of information and confirmation of employees’ core competencies to adhere to required policies.

As an example, most respectful workplace policies recommend that a person who perceives herself as a victim of unwanted behaviour should tell the offending person to stop the misconduct. This approach is founded on the flawed assumption that every employee in such a situation has the required resiliency to overcome the emotional, psychological and physical effects of her experiences and needed skills to self-advocate.

Data collected through Morneau Shepell’s THI indicate that employees who report a higher THI score — which, in essence, is a resiliency index — are less likely to be victims of respectful workplace violations.<sup>37</sup>

Here are some of the more common steps organizations can take regarding respect in their workplaces, from the perspectives of employers, supervisors and employees.<sup>38,39,40</sup>

### Employers

The employer’s role is to set the ground rules (policy development), create accountability, support conflict resolution, report incidents and provide skill-building opportunities when necessary.

The primary objective of a policy is to define the standard, prevent negative behaviours and provide guidance on how harassment will be managed. The motivation for some policies may be driven by legislative requirements for an employer to have a respectful workplace policy.

This does not mean senior leaders are committed to eliminating respectful workplace issues. It only suggests the employer is compliant to a minimal standard.

Policies will not have their intended impact unless senior leaders are committed to promoting their importance in the culture and expect to see reports on incidents and interventions.

Finally, it is beneficial for leaders to focus on this issue until the culture adopts a social conformity standard that zero tolerance is the norm for all, and all employees are committed to enforce this norm.

The goal of policies is to provide employees with guidance on the expectation for prosocial behaviours and what constitutes acceptable and non-acceptable behaviours, and consequences if an employee moves outside the standard.

When writing a policy, it is beneficial to consider the following factors:

- Who does the policy apply to: There needs to be a clear statement as to who falls under the policy (for example, employees, officers, board members, contractors).
- What is a respectful workplace as defined by your organization (for example, harassment, gossip, discrimination, bullying, violence)?
- A clear statement as to the guiding principles and behaviours to be maintained by each employee.
- The dates on which the policy is applicable and when it will be reviewed.
- The reporting process for violations of the policy.
- A clear statement regarding the consequences of violating the policy.
- A signature place for employees to consent to reviewing and understanding the policy.
- A training process for educating and re-educating employees.
- An audit process to evaluate the impact of the policy with respect to whether it is working (for example, the investigation process, training, communications).

## Supervisors

In addition to having a comprehensive, respectful workplace policy, it is paramount for organizations to train supervisors on building a respectful workplace, and their role in it. Supervisors set the tone within a company.

Cross-functional product teams have shown that when leaders treat their direct reports in a respectful way, they are more productive individually and as a team, according to a study by Porath (2017)<sup>41</sup>. Employees are also more likely to go above and beyond in their job requirements.

The study found that those who felt respected by their leader reported 92 per cent greater focus and prioritization, 55 per cent greater engagement, 56 per cent better health and well-being, 1.72 times more trust and safety, and 89 per cent greater enjoyment and satisfaction with their jobs.

This highlights the importance of providing effective training for a supervisor's role within a respectful workplace. Some organizations use webinars or in-person workshops to orient managers in understanding respect in the workplace, aspects of the applicable policy and their responsibilities in respect of role modeling and facilitating accountability.

## Employees

Employees are expected to self-advocate and be willing to protect others by reporting acts of incivility such as sexual harassment. The #MeToo movement has underscored a new expectation that all employees are expected to oppose unwanted behaviours, and this has now been codified as a legal requirement in many jurisdictions.

Further, employers are expected to take all reports of unwanted behaviour seriously, whether reported directly by a victim or through a second-hand source. This duty encourages more employees to self-advocate or report instances of incivility.

Since employees are being emboldened to report workplace misconduct, it is important to provide them with tools for, and insight into, how they can reduce their risks of being perceived as exhibiting unwanted behaviours. From an employee perspective, the goal is to build empathy, compassion and understanding for coworkers.

The factors to consider are: the tools and techniques needed, employees experiencing loss or disappointment, email communication, meetings and employee onboarding.

Strategies that can help employees develop their civility skills and reduce their risk are<sup>42</sup>:

Facilitating relationship building and prosocial interactions:

- Using coworkers' names when speaking to them.
- Smiling at workers.
- Listening to others and asking probing questions.
- Including those who are different from you (such as a different race, religion or disability)
- Learning about the customs of those on your team if you are on a diverse team.
- Showing respect even when others aren't in the room (for example, praising a job well done or avoiding negative gossip)
- Apologizing for a lapse in behaviour.

Supporting peers in loss or disappointment situations:

- Reaching out and offering support.
- Not being overbearing, allowing peers to open up when ready.
- Validating their experience.

Prosocial email communications recommendations:

- Avoiding extreme language in emails.
- Avoiding assuming intent of the sender.
- Asking clarifying questions or repeating your understanding of the message.
- If there is a misunderstanding, talking in-person or over the phone.

Prosocial meetings:

- Smiling and greeting team members.
- Including those who are quiet or introverted in the conversation.
- Turning off cellphones.
- Not checking email.
- Embracing respectful debate.

## Employee onboarding

Onboarding new employees is another key area to focus on for training regarding the respectful workplace policy. For new employees, there typically is an orientation to the policy during onboarding, direction where to find the policy online and a sign-off from the employee that he has read and understand the policy.

The intent of a workplace policy, as well as supervisor and employee training, is outlining expectations, as well as educating leaders and employees on how they can foster a respectful workplace. The challenge, however, is that workshops or formal policies can result in employees forgetting key aspects,

along with an overload of information and inability to understand how to apply what was learned in the “real setting” of day-to-day work.

Additionally, these traditional approaches often have a high level of focus on the mechanisms for restricting or punishing unwarranted behaviour, and do not consider the skills individuals need to safely and effectively self-advocate.

## Using an integrated approach to motivate respectful workplaces

A fundamental question that some employers seem to overlook relates to the purpose of workplace behavioural policies. If the intent behind these documents is only to establish mechanisms for restricting and punishing employee harassment and violence, then the typical models may suffice.

However, if employers intend to promote and model respect and civility in their workplaces, then a different procedure is likely warranted. In this regard, there are two aspects of respectful workplace development that are not afforded due attention:

- Employee education, training and collaboration with respect to the benefits of civil conduct and the detriments of incivility, harassment and violence.
- Discipline policies and processes that use restorative justice concepts.

It is beneficial for organizations to integrate a respectful workplace strategy with a mental health strategy and OHS to ensure maximum integration and the promotion and the prevention of mental injuries.

*Although the investigation of harassment and violence is organizationally crucial and, for many employers, a legal requirement, how to investigate — and how to respond to that investigation — is a source of uncertainty.*

### Education, training and collaboration

In a study of employees who had been uncivil at work, 25 per cent blamed their misconduct on an organizational failure to provide necessary interpersonal skills training.<sup>43</sup> In this context, it has been recommended that employers should provide training in a variety of subjects to reduce workplace incivility, including education in respect of the definitions of incivility and harassment, the individual and organizational consequences and costs of the misconduct, the expectation of appropriate conduct and mechanisms and communication skills for addressing misconduct.<sup>44</sup>

Further, it has been demonstrated that the civility climate of a workplace must be considered in order to assess the training motivations of employees.<sup>45</sup> The positive relationship of tailored, in-depth civility training to civil conduct in workplaces supports the use of the intervention.

A related issue is employee education through leadership modelling of acceptable behaviour. The presence of charismatic and ethical leadership styles in workplaces has been found to be both negatively related to the presence of undesirable conduct and positively related to civility.<sup>46</sup>

Additionally, the teaching and development of charismatic<sup>47</sup> and ethical<sup>48</sup> leadership skills have proven



to be effective, suggesting that organizations can enhance their broad-based workplace civility and respect programs by investing in leadership training for managers.<sup>49</sup>

Another proven means of civility enhancement is collaboration training, as reflected in the Civility, Respect and Engagement in the Workplace (CREW) model.<sup>50</sup> CREW interventions have been found to improve workplace civility and reduce distress. Such improvements appear to follow the Augmentation Model, with continued growth even after the intervention ends.<sup>51</sup>

Policies are typically designed to restrict particular workplace behaviours, and to confirm an employer's entitlement to discipline workers who violate behavioural requirements. While playing an important and now legally mandated role in many Canadian workplaces, policies alone are insufficient to maximize civility and respectful behaviour.<sup>52</sup> Supplementation with employee training, education and collaborative interaction are also crucial to the advancement of employer behavioural expectations.

It's also recommended employers actively promote the benefits of employees developing their resiliency. Such training would highlight:

- how resiliency can support employees to better cope and manage unwanted stress
- how coping skills can assist in problem-solving and self-advocating
- the link between mental health and respectful workplace (positive versus toxic cultures) to assist employees to understand why it is important to be accountable for their health and to know when to ask for help.



## Correcting incivility and harassment

In addition to proactive, education-based approaches for establishing civil and respectful workplaces, employers require a disciplinary model for addressing misconduct. On this point, the occupational health and safety legislation that sets out the requirements for employer monitoring of, and response to, harassment and violence does not generally prescribe comprehensive programs for discipline and, further, does not address incivility that falls short of, but sometimes leads to,<sup>53</sup> harassment.

As a result, many employers are legislatively mandated to investigate and correct harassment and violence but have no guidance for how to do so, and seem to gravitate toward formal, legalistic frameworks that are sometimes ill-suited to the organization's needs and capacity. Although the investigation of harassment and violence is organizationally crucial and, for many employers, a legal requirement, how to investigate and then how to respond to the investigation findings is a source of uncertainty.

Many employers adopt an investigation and discipline model that focuses on guilt or innocence, and imposes a technical process,<sup>54</sup> overlooking the benefit of informal procedures in correcting some forms of misconduct.<sup>55</sup> As an example, a study of hospital nursing unit managers suggests that effective means

of reducing workplace incivility and bullying are: managerial presence, the establishment and reinforcement of behavioural norms, observing and calling attention to unacceptable behavior, and reducing stressors from work environments.<sup>56</sup>

Further, organizational responses to workplace misconduct should be seen as “swift and effective,”<sup>57</sup> which are difficult objectives to achieve in some legalistic models that are procedurally intense and time-consuming. On this point, it has been recommended that workplace discipline policies should contain both formal and informal processes to properly address contextual factors, including the nature and gravity of employee misconduct.<sup>58</sup>

A corrective model that has perhaps received less-than-appropriate attention in respect of workplace behaviour modification is that contemplated in restorative practices and justice. Modern restorative justice (RJ) first emerged in Ontario's 1974 *Elmira Case*,<sup>59</sup> which resulted in a probation officer and the Mennonite Central Committee advocating for the implementation of a victim-offender reconciliation process in response to a vandalism offence.

Now, RJ has been used with success not only in criminal law across the Western world but also in other contexts, including education. It has been found that RJ is successful in the criminal law field for achieving victim and offender satisfaction in resolution of wrongdoing, providing high restitution compliance and lowering recidivism.<sup>60</sup> Further, RJ has demonstrated impressive results in education settings,<sup>61</sup> inviting consideration of the model in workplace behaviour regulation.

Since RJ focuses on relational enhancement, on its face, it appears to offer employers an opportunity to benefit from expedient, informal resolutions to incivility-based conflicts.

## **Integrating respectful workplace strategy with mental health strategy and OHS programs**

Many organizations are looking to curb mental health risk by adopting strategies that focus on the prevention of mental health injuries (such as those caused by bullying) and mental illness. As more employees are educated and normalize mental health and what they and employers can do to support it, there will be less stigma and more openings for employees to seek the help and support they need.

Too many people are experiencing acts of incivility, and when these incidents are left unchecked, they can be stressful or even traumatic, negatively influencing mental health. Organizations that align initiatives will be better positioned to communicate to employees in a consistent way how they are committed to employees' psychological safety.

One mechanism that can help an employer manage a respectful workplace approach is to integrate HR (which typically owns the policy and training) and OHS (which has a management system in place). By integrating HR and OHS to administer and oversee respectful workplace positions, an organization can provide HR best practices on policies and programs to employees, and put in place a continuous improvement, reporting and auditing framework.

*“The National Standard for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace is the gold standard for guiding an evidence-based mental harm prevention strategy and framework. The standard encourages organizations to focus on mental harm prevention in the same context as how OHS focuses on physical harm prevention, while utilizing a management system approach.” — Andrew Harkness, strategy advisor for organizational health initiatives at Workplace Safety and Prevention Services and member of the technical committee that developed the national standard*

The National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace<sup>62</sup> is the gold standard for guiding an evidence-based mental health strategy. It provides coaching and insight on why civility matters and how employers can measure the degree of incivility within an organization.

When implementing a psychological health and safety management system (PHSMS) that is aligned to an organization's OHS framework, an excellent tool to get a baseline on the degree of risk within a culture is the standard's 13 Psychological Health and Safety Factors<sup>63</sup> that measures how the different factors are positively and negatively impacting the workforce's psychological health.

The Rapid Psychological Health and Safety Gap Analysis<sup>64</sup> created by Howatt and Jones can be used by employers to do a rapid audit. This tool assesses the degree of risk within a culture to determine if the foundation is in place to implement a successful respectful workplace framework. The free tool enables users to easily evaluate an organization's psychological safety practices.

A key for promoting civility and respect in the workplace is creating a culture that is psychologically safe, which is why more organizations are looking to the psychological standard as a guide to create a road map for how they can evolve.

## Conclusion

In addition to workplace culture and citizenship losses, many employers now face legal liability risks arising from workplace harassment and violence. At least some of this misconduct can be precipitated by incivility, making a comprehensive workplace behavioural program that incorporates preventative, corrective and punitive elements a necessity.

In this regard, a workplace behavioural policy is not only recommended but, given legislative requirements in several jurisdictions, a necessity.

But employers have more options than simply adopting the legalistic policy models that are common today. It's recommended that workplaces conduct a review of their culture to better understand the existing social norms, as well as employee behaviours and attitudes.

Then, a policy that contemplates both corrective and punitive approaches can be prepared, incorporating an informal RJ-based process to address incivility issues when appropriate, as well as more formalized punitive steps to address harassment and violence.

Training is a key component of any successful workplace respect and civility program, as it informs and educates employees as to the deleterious impacts of incivility, harassment and violence at work. Finally, focusing on creating a psychologically safe workplace by leveraging the National Standard of Canada for Psychological Health and Safety in the Workplace is yet another consideration when looking to convert respectful workplace policies, processes and programs into reality.

*“Violence, harassment and bullying behaviours are symptoms of a psychologically unsafe workplace. To create a safe and supportive workplace, free of harassment and bullying behaviours, we must address the underlying causes. The 13+ workplace factors (i.e. civility and respect, organizational culture and psychological protection) become the foundation of building programs that respond to conflicts within the workplace.”*  
— Andrew Harkness

## Footnotes

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