Workplace Incivility Training: A Model of Training Effectiveness

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University of Connecticut, 2011

Workplace incivility is widespread and toxic as it has deleterious implications for employee and organizational functioning. Accordingly, researchers and practitioners emphasize that organizations should take proactive steps to combat incivility. Employee training is suggested as an important component of such efforts, but no research has examined the factors that influence the effectiveness of workplace incivility training.

The present study addresses this need through the development and test of a multilevel model of workplace incivility training effectiveness. The central aim of the model was to address how conditions within a work group influence attitudes about incivility training and motivation to learn. Distal predictors of motivation to learn were posited to include psychological and work group climate for civility, as well as personal and ambient experiences of workplace incivility. These predictors were hypothesized to drive both positive (training discrepancy) and negative (training skepticism) pre-training attitudes, which in turn were expected to influence motivation to learn. Motivation to learn was positioned as a predictor of training outcomes. Finally, individual differences were hypothesized as moderators of individual-level effects on motivation to learn.

Data collected via baseline surveys were used to test relationships between the predictors and motivation to learn. To examine effects of motivation to learn, a second data collection was carried out in which employees completed surveys before and after participating in a training session on workplace incivility. Hierarchical linear modeling was used to test the hypothesized relationships.

Results suggest that the influence of climate for civility and incivility experiences on motivation to learn is largely indirect via pre-training attitudes. Training skepticism and training discrepancy have conflicting influences on motivation to learn, and in turn, motivation to learn has positive effects on training outcomes. Although training discrepancy is affected by contextual influences, training skepticism is influenced exclusively by individual-level predictors. No support was found for the hypothesized interactions. Findings from the present study will be valuable for practitioners as they seek to maximize trainee motivation to learn prior to administering training. In addition to elaborating on these practical implications, the strengths and limitations of the study and directions for future research are discussed.

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A Dissertation

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the

Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

at the

University of Connecticut

2011

APPROVAL PAGE

Doctor of Philosophy Dissertation

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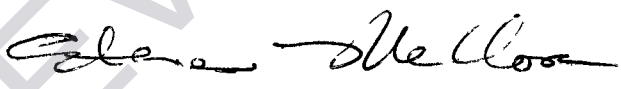
Associate Advisor 

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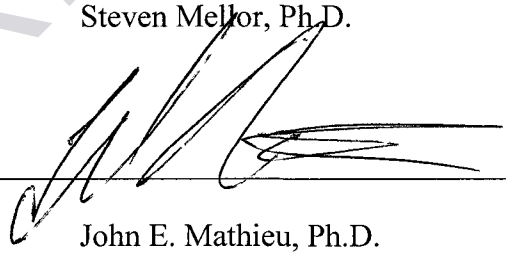
Associate Advisor 

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2011

Acknowledgments

I would not have been able to complete my dissertation and graduate training had it not been for the assistance, encouragement, and support of numerous individuals. First and foremost, I want to thank my advisor, Vicki Magley. As the primary investigator on the Civility Among Healthcare Professionals (CAHP) project – my dissertation data source – and my advisor for the past five years, no other individual has had a greater influence on my development as an industrial/organizational psychologist, and for that I will be forever grateful. I also want to thank the other members of the CAHP research team for all of their help with the project, including Curtis Walker, Daniel Herres, Jenna Shapiro, Katelyn LaTorra, Meghan Scanlon, and Jared Quinn.

In addition, this project would not have been possible without the input of my dissertation committee members and examiners, Stephen Mellor, John Mathieu, Janet Barnes-Farrell, Nick Warren, and Rob Henning, who offered extremely useful feedback throughout the project.

Finally, I want to thank my wife, Abby, for all of her support throughout this project. I simply would not have been able to complete my graduate work had it not been for her love, support, and friendship.

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Interpersonal workplace mistreatment is widespread and has deleterious implications for employees' work-related attitudes, behaviors, psychological and physical health, and performance (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Caza & Cortina, 2007; Porath & Erez, 2007, 2009; Walsh & Magley, 2009a, 2009b). Consequently, organizations need to be proactive in their efforts to combat such toxic behavior and build a workplace climate which instead supports and rewards civility among employees (Ferris, 2009; Keashly & Neuman, 2009; Martin, 2008; Namie & Namie, 2009; Olender-Russo, 2009). Training on topics related to civility and/or incivility is suggested as a critical component of such efforts (Fox & Stallworth, 2009; Schat & Kelloway, 2006), but there remains a need for research designed to understand factors that affect the efficacy of such training interventions. Recent work suggests that organizational interventions can enhance employee civility (e.g., Osatuke, Moore, Ward, Dyrenforth, & Belton, 2009) and reduce the perpetration of mistreatment (e.g., Keashly & Neuman, 2009; Kirk, Schutte, & Hine, 2011); this research is informative as it provides evidence that such interventions can create beneficial change. However, studies of this form are evaluative in nature. They differ from investigations into effectiveness which instead seek to understand why an intervention or training program does or does not achieve its objectives (Alvarez, Salas, & Garofano, 2004).

The principal aim of this dissertation is to examine factors impacting workplace incivility training effectiveness. Briefly, w*orkplace incivility training* is conceptualized as a form of social skills training (Kozlowski & Salas, 1997) that focuses on educating

employees about incivility and civility in the workplace. Incivility training has short-term goals including building awareness about workplace incivility such as its nature, antecedents, and consequences. Long-term objectives of incivility training include enhancing the level of civility among employees and minimizing the occurrence of uncivil behavior. A central focus of the present study is on clarifying common pre-training attitudes about workplace incivility training. I postulate that trainees are likely to hold both positive and negative pre-training attitudes that have conflicting influences on motivation and, hence, training effectiveness. These positive and negative pre-training attitudes are hypothesized to be shaped by extant characteristics of the work environment as reflected by two classes of variables: work group climate for civility (perceptions of practices supporting respect over disrespect in the work group; Walsh et al., 2011) and experiences of incivility among work group members. The relevance of climate for civility and incivility experiences for understanding pre-training attitudes and overall incivility training effectiveness is intuitive given their connection to training content (Kozlowski, Brown, Weissbein, Cannon-Bowers, & Salas, 2000). Nevertheless, research into their effects has not been conducted.

To address this research need, I test a conceptual model of workplace incivility training effectiveness in an organization that is implementing incivility training for the first time. In developing the model, I draw from several literatures including research on psychological and organizational climate, workplace incivility and other forms of mistreatment, training effectiveness, readiness and resistance to organizational change,

and attitudinal ambivalence. In the following sections, I define workplace incivility and discuss recommendations for curtailing its occurrence, including the role of workplace incivility training in this process. Then I describe the theory behind the conceptual model and the hypothesized relationships.

Workplace Incivility Training: Previous Research and Needs

Researchers have introduced many conceptually similar constructs that center on destructive interpersonal workplace behaviors over the past few decades. These constructs include workplace incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), workplace harassment (Rospenda & Richman, 2004), workplace aggression (Neuman & Baron, 1998), abusive supervision (Tepper, 2000), and workplace bullying (Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper, 2002), among others. The focus of the present study is on one subset of these behaviors, *workplace incivility*, which includes low-intensity disrespectful work behaviors such as being yelled or swore at, ignored or excluded, belittled, ridiculed, insulted, and teased (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina & Magley, 2009; Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001). Incivility is considered the opposite of *workplace civility* (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Gill & Sypher, 2009; Walsh et al., 2011). Civil behaviors convey concern for others' welfare, and include treating others with respect, being considerate, and acting with restraint in the workplace (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Gill & Sypher, 2009; Pearson, Andersson & Porath, 2000; Pearson, Andersson, & Porath, 2005; Sypher, 2004).

Researchers suggest that organizations should be proactive in their attempts to minimize forms of workplace mistreatment including incivility (Pearson et al., 2000; Pearson & Porath, 2005; Porath & Pearson, 2010). A recurring theme in these recommendations is the need for employee training (Ferris, 2009; Fox & Stallworth, 2009; Keashly & Neuman, 2009; Martin, 2008; Pearson & Porath, 2005; Porath & Pearson, 2010; Schat & Kelloway, 2006). For example, Porath and Pearson (2010) note that employees should be trained on a host of topics to help reduce uncivil behavior, such as the costs of incivility for organizational effectiveness. Martin (2008) outlined several actions that hospitals can take to minimize disruptive workplace behavior, including outlining a code-of-conduct to delineate appropriate and expected employee behavior, using selection techniques to identify and avoid selecting prospective employees who are likely to mistreat others, and training disruptive professionals to modify their problematic behavior.

Similarly, Ferris (2009) described what a consulting psychologist can do to help organizations reduce workplace bullying. Ferris' suggestions include helping organizations to develop anti-bullying policies, implementing training for leaders, human resources personnel, and other employees on bullying, and utilizing one-on-one coaching for leaders. Schat and Kelloway (2006) also recommend using training to help minimize instances of workplace aggression. Research suggests that organizational interventions which include educational components can facilitate civility (Osatuke et al., 2009) and reduce uncivil behavior (Keashly & Neuman, 2009; Kirk et al., 2011; Kowalski, Harmon,

Yorks, & Kowalski, 2003; Yorks, Neuman, Kowalski, & Kowalski, 2007). However, research on variables that influence training effectiveness is absent from the literature.

The Present Study

The conceptual model presented in Figure 1 provides a general representation of the relationships that will be tested in the present study. The model conveys effects of climate for civility, incivility experiences, pre-training attitudes, individual differences, and motivation to learn on the short-term effectiveness of workplace incivility training. I postulate that climate for civility and experiences of incivility drive positive and negative pre-training attitudes at the individual level and the work group level. In the present study, I focus on two attitudes in particular: the first is training skepticism, a negative attitude which reflects doubts that the incivility training will be effective, and the second is training discrepancy, a positive attitude that reflects the extent to which one perceives a need for incivility training. Two individual difference variables are hypothesized to play an important role in the model: trait pessimism and sensitivity to interpersonal treatment. These individual difference variables are expected to modify the strength of the individual-level associations of psychological climate for civility and personal incivility experiences with training skepticism and training discrepancy. Finally, motivation to learn is expected to drive more positive short-term workplace incivility training outcomes including affective and utility reactions to the training, attitudes toward workplace incivility, and acquisition of knowledge about incivility. Findings from this investigation will be especially helpful for practitioners who need to understand how to maximize

motivation for workplace incivility training in both civil and uncivil work environments. The constructs and relationships outlined in the model are discussed in greater detail in the following sections, beginning first with a central construct in the model, motivation to learn.

Motivation to Learn and Training Effectiveness

A key underlying factor driving training effectiveness is trainee motivation, including motivation prior to, during, and after training (Beier & Kanfer, 2009; Bauer, Orvis, & Ely, 2011; Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000). In the present study, I focus on effects of pre-training variables, so a key construct in this study is trainee motivation to learn prior to workplace incivility training. Motivation to learn is "a specific desire on the part of the trainee to learn the content of the training program" (Noe & Schmitt, 1986, p. 501). Research has generally supported Noe's (1986) and Noe and Schmitt's (1986) assertions of the critical role of motivation to learn in training and development effectiveness (e.g., Bauer et al., 2011; Colquitt et al., 2000; Facteau, Dobbins, Russell, Ladd, & Kudisch, 1995; Liao & Tai, 2006; Major, Turner, & Fletcher, 2006; Noe & Wilk, 1993; Quiñones, 1995; Tharenou, 2001). In a quantitative summation of the literature, Colquitt et al. (2000) developed an integrative theory of training motivation and used meta-analytic path analysis to examine predictors and outcomes of motivation to learn. Motivation to learn was directly associated with more positive reactions to training, higher levels of post-training self-efficacy, greater skill acquisition, and declarative knowledge (Colquitt et al., 2000). Bauer et al. (2011) found similar results in

their meta-analysis in which the differential validities of various forms of training motivation were considered. Motivation to learn was the most consistent predictor of training outcomes among the types of motivation studied (Bauer et al., 2011).

Colquitt et al.'s (2000) theory of training motivation asserts that both individual (e.g., attitudes, personality) and contextual factors (e.g., organizational climate, situational constraints) impact trainees' motivation to learn and the broader efficacy of training, and other researchers acknowledge these general factors as well (e.g., Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Cannon-Bowers, Salas, Tannenbaum, & Mathieu, 1995; Kozlowski et al., 2000; Kozlowski & Salas, 1997; Mathieu & Martineau, 1997; Mathieu, Tannenbaum, & Salas, 1992; Mathieu & Tesluk, 2009; Noe & Colquitt, 2002; Quiñones, 1997). Colquitt et al. (2000) asserted that research is needed to elucidate additional predictors of motivation to learn, given that identifying drivers and inhibitors of motivation to learn is critical for understanding training effectiveness. These predictors may be contingent on the nature of the training program, with variables that are directly associated with training content having a meaningful influence on motivation and other dimensions of effectiveness for particular training programs (Kozlowski et al., 2000). In the following section, I begin to outline these variables, starting by conceptualizing pre-training attitudes about workplace incivility training.

Pre-Training Attitudes about Workplace Incivility Training

It is plausible that employees will have both positive and negative attitudes about incivility training, consistent with conceptualizations of attitudinal ambivalence.

Ambivalence occurs when an individual holds both positive and negative attitudes about a particular object (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993; Larsen, 2007; Thompson, Zanna, & Griffin, 1995). Attitudes have cognitive, emotional, and behavioral components (Ajzen, 1984) and ambivalence can occur either within or between these components (Piderit, 2000). For instance, positive and negative affect reflect separate dimensions (Watson, Clark, & Tellegen, 1988), suggesting that individuals can experience both simultaneously. Moreover, Larsen, McGraw, and Cacioppo (2001) found that people who watched a particular film, undergraduates graduating from college, and undergraduates moving out of residence halls reported feeling both positive (i.e., happy) and negative (i.e., sad) emotions at the same point in time.

Organizational researchers have suggested that ambivalence may occur within the context of organizational change. Distinctions are made between readiness for change, which implies a willingness to accept and support change (Holt, Armenakis, Harris, & Field, 2007), and resistance to change, which is "a restraining force moving in the direction of maintaining the status quo" (Piderit, 2000, p. 784). Readiness is traditionally seen as a precursor to resistance, such that if individuals are ready for change then resistance is expected to be minimal (Armenakis, Harris, & Mossholder, 1993). More recently, however, researchers have acknowledged that employees may simultaneously hold both positive and negative feelings toward change (Piderit, 2000; Ford, Ford, & D'Amelio, 2008; Knowles & Linn, 2004). This view of change attitudes is consistent with frameworks including Cacioppo and Berntson's (1994) evaluative space model and

Knowles and Linn's (2004) approach-avoidance model (also see Knowles, Butler, & Linn, 2001). These models suggest that some forces may promote readiness (positive attitudes or approach forces) whereas others promote resistance (negative attitudes or avoidance forces) and that these forces can operate simultaneously. If approach or motivating forces are greater then readiness will be high, but if avoidance forces are greater then it is resistance that will be evident (Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994; Knowles & Linn, 2004).

This scholarship supports the notion that trainees may have contemporaneous positive and negative pre-training attitudes. Such discrepant attitudes are probable given that ambivalence is more likely to occur in atypical circumstances, such as college graduation (Larsen et al., 2001), organizational change (Piderit, 2000), or in this case, the implementation of workplace incivility training for the first time. Piderit also notes that ambivalence is likely to occur following introduction to an organizational change, or early on in its implementation. A comparable stage in organizational training is prior to its administration, which further suggests that pre-training attitudes about incivility training are likely to be ambivalent in nature. In the present study, I focus on skepticism about training effectiveness (training skepticism) and the perceived need for incivility training (training discrepancy) as exemplars of negative and positive pre-training attitudes, respectively. I describe these pre-training attitudes in greater detail below.

Training skepticism. Training skepticism is a negative attitude which implies that it is an avoidance force that may reduce motivation (Knowles & Linn, 2004).

Skepticism differs from cynicism which is a related albeit different construct (Kanter & Mirvis, 1989; Mirvis & Kanter, 1989; Reichers, Wanous, & Austin, 1997; Stanley, Meyer, & Topolnytsky, 2005). Stanley et al. (2005) defined change-specific cynicism as "a disbelief of management's stated or implied motives for a specific organizational change" whereas change-specific skepticism is defined as "doubt about the viability of a change for the attainment of its stated objective" (p. 436). Thus, cynicism has more to do with mistrust (Dean, Brandes, & Dharwadkar, 1998) whereas skepticism pertains to doubts about effectiveness (Stanley et al., 2005).

Despite this difference, Stanley et al. (2005) point out that skepticism is reflected in conceptualizations of one form of cynicism, cynicism about organizational change (CAOC; Reichers et al., 1997; Wanous, Reichers, & Austin, 2000). CAOC refers to employee feelings that change efforts are likely to be ineffective due to management's incompetence and/or lack of motivation for the change (Reichers et al., 1997; Wanous et al., 2000). Apparent in the definition of CAOC is a focus on pessimistic expectancies, and it is this characteristic that motivated Stanley et al. (2005) to draw comparisons between CAOC and change-specific skepticism. However, the constructs differ in their specificity; CAOC pertains to change in general whereas change-specific skepticism is, by definition, specific to particular change efforts.

Researchers have tended to treat skepticism as being less harmful than cynicism. For example, Reichers et al. (1997) state that "Skeptics doubt the likelihood of success, but are still reasonably hopeful that positive change will occur" (p. 48), and Kanter and

Mirvis (1989) posit that "Skepticism is healthy, probing, and often creative and is of value to an organization…" (p. 301). Despite these suggestions, recent research conflicts with the notion that such negative expectations are harmless. Stanley et al. (2005) found that both change-specific cynicism and skepticism contributed uniquely to employees' intent to resist change. Likewise, Walsh, Bauerle, and Magley (2010) examined the effects of pessimism on motivation to learn in sexual harassment training. The measure of pessimism differed from Stanley et al.'s (2005) change-specific skepticism, but it was similar in that items focused on the extent to which company efforts to reduce sexual harassment were likely to fail. Importantly, pessimism was significantly and negatively associated with motivation to learn. Finally, Kath (2005) studied predictors and effects of CAOC on sexual harassment training effectiveness, and given its similarities to skepticism (Stanley et al., 2005), research on CAOC is relevant to the current discussion. Importantly, higher levels of CAOC were associated with lower motivation to learn in sexual harassment training (Kath, 2005). This research suggests that skepticism and other comparable negative expectations about effectiveness have the potential to impair intervention success.

Given that change-specific skepticism plays a role in the effectiveness of broader change efforts (Stanley et al., 2005) and more general negative expectations are known to influence training effectiveness (Walsh et al., 2010; Kath, 2005), skepticism likely has an impact on incivility training effectiveness. However, to date no research has studied change-specific skepticism within the context of such training, so work is needed to

understand its antecedents and consequences as a pre-training attitude. I define training skepticism in a manner similar to Stanley et al.'s (2005) definition of change-specific skepticism, as individual employee doubts about the extent to which workplace incivility training will be effective. I conceptualize effectiveness in terms of the degree to which training transfer is expected among coworkers, including whether training is expected to improve the quality of the social work environment by enhancing civility and reducing incivility. Training transfer occurs when trainees use the knowledge and skills acquired in training when they return to the job (Burke & Hutchins, 2007), and it is regarded as central to training effectiveness (Aguinis & Kraiger, 2009). Trainees may learn the knowledge and skills that are the focus of the training, but if the training is not generalized to the job setting then ultimately it is ineffective (Blume, Ford, Baldwin, & Huang, 2010). In the case of workplace incivility training, a lack of transfer would preclude long-term changes in levels of civility and incivility, which are central objectives of such training and indicators of effectiveness.

Training discrepancy. Whereas training skepticism is a negative attitude, training discrepancy is a positive attitude and approach force that may enhance motivation (Knowles & Linn, 2004). Fundamentally, a discrepancy suggests that some sort of need exists, and various literatures suggest that perceived discrepancies have significant motivating potential. For example, the readiness to change literature suggests that demonstrating that a discrepancy exists between current and desired organizational conditions is essential for fostering readiness in recipients of organizational change

(Armenakis et al., 1993; Armenakis, Bernerth, Pitts, & Walker, 2007; Armenakis & Harris, 2002; Holt, Armenakis, Feild, & Harris, 2007; Holt et al., 2007b; Weiner, 2009). The assumption is that if change recipients do not feel that a need for change exists, then readiness for the change will be limited.

Another theoretical perspective that underscores the importance of realizing when a need for change exists is the transtheoretical model of change. This model has been applied to individual change involving problematic behaviors (e.g., quitting smoking; Prochaska et al., 1994) and organizational change (Prochaska, Prochaska, & Levesque, 2001). The transtheoretical model conceptualizes change as proceeding through a series of five stages: precontemplation, contemplation, preparation, action, and maintenance (Prochaska et al., 1994; Prochaska, DiClemente, & Norcross, 1992). The first two stages of the model are directly relevant to a discussion of perceived discrepancy. Precontemplation is the stage at which individuals are unaware that change is needed. Once individuals become aware of the need to change they are said to have transitioned to the second stage, contemplation (Prochaska et al., 1992; Prochaska & DiClemente, 1982), which is the stage in which change is initiated. Thus, change really only begins when the need to change is recognized.

Discrepancy is also discussed somewhat within the training and development literature, but the focus here is on recognition that individual knowledge and/or skills are in need of improvement. For example, Ford and Noe (1987) and Guthrie and Schwoerer (1994) investigated predictors of self-assessed needs for training, while others have

theorized and studied outcomes associated with the construct. Maurer and Tarulli (1994) and Maurer, Weiss, and Barbeite (2003) researched self-perceived need for skill development and found that it was positively related to participation in development activities. Noe (1986) and Noe and Schmitt (1986) suggested that individuals who perceive that the needs assessment accurately identified their strengths and limitations should be more motivated for training. Thus, the research reviewed above consistently supports the notion that a perceived discrepancy has positive implications for readiness and motivation. In the present study, I conceptualize training discrepancy as the extent to which individual employees perceive there is a need for workplace incivility training.

Predictors of Training Skepticism and Training Discrepancy

Climate for civility. Climate is defined generally as employee perceptions of features of the work environment including the policies, practices, and procedures that support and sustain work-related behavior (Reichers & Schneider, 1990). A focused approach to climate research was suggested by Schneider and Reichers (1983) who posited that the climate construct has meaning only when it is tied to specific behavioral domains. Accordingly, climate constructs are commonly tied to various aspects of work behavior such as safety (e.g., Zohar, 1980), service (e.g., Schneider, White, & Paul, 1998), and training (e.g., Rouiller & Goldstein, 1993; Tracey, Tannenbaum, & Kavanagh, 1995; Tracey & Tews, 2005).

An important distinction is made between individual perceptions of the work environment (i.e., psychological climate) and shared perceptions (i.e., work group or