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Workplace civility training: understanding drivers of motivation to learn

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ABSTRACT

Training is recommended as an important human resource management (HRM) practice to prevent mistreatment and enhance civility, but little is known about what influences the effectiveness of civility training. The central aim of this study was to address how workgroup conditions influence employees' attitudes about civility training and motivation to learn, which previous research shows is a predictor of training outcomes. Predictors were posited to include psychological and workgroup climate for civility, and personal and ambient mistreatment experiences. These predictors were hypothesized to drive positive (training discrepancy) and negative (training skepticism) pre-training attitudes, which in turn were expected to influence motivation to learn. Results suggest the influence of climate for civility and mistreatment experiences on motivation to learn is largely indirect via pre-training attitudes. Training skepticism and training discrepancy have conflicting influences on motivation to learn. Findings provide an empirical basis for HRM professionals to maximize employee motivation to learn in their own civility interventions.

KEYWORDS

Workplace civility; workplace incivility; workplace mistreatment; motivation to learn; training

Researchers have accumulated evidence that workplace incivility is widespread and has deleterious implications for employees' work-related attitudes, behaviors, psychological and physical health, and performance (Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Magley, & Nelson, 2017). Workplace incivility includes disrespectful work behaviors such as being yelled or swore at, ignored or excluded, belittled, ridiculed, and teased (Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001). These behaviors stand in contrast with workplace civility, where employees convey concern for others, treat others with respect, and act with restraint (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Whereas incivility is harmful, civility benefits individuals and organizations (e.g. Leiter, Day, Oore, & Laschinger, 2012).

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Given the destructive impact of incivility, researchers encourage human resource management (HRM) professionals to be proactive in attempts to minimize disrespectful behavior and create a respectful work environment (Porath & Pearson, 2010). A recurring recommendation is for employee training to help prevent workplace incivility (e.g. Pearson & Porath, 2005; Porath & Pearson, 2010). For example, Porath and Pearson (2010) note that HRM professionals should train on a host of topics to help reduce uncivil behavior, such as the costs of incivility for organizations. The general public agrees; 67% of 1,000 respondents to an online survey believe there is a need for workplace civility training (Civility in America, 2011).

Although limited, evaluation research suggests that interventions can nurture civility and reduce incivility (e.g. Leiter et al., 2012). This research is informative as it provides evidence that civility interventions can create change, but studies of this form are evaluative in nature. They differ from effectiveness-oriented investigations which instead seek to understand *why* interventions achieve their objectives (Alvarez, Salas, & Garofano, 2004). For example, training effectiveness research may identify antecedents to trainee motivation to learn, which is a well-supported predictor of positive training outcomes and training transfer (Colquitt, LePine, & Noe, 2000), whereas a training evaluation study would seek to understand the outcomes (e.g. knowledge) of a training program.

Examples of civility training effectiveness research is particularly absent from the literature. Important questions such as what factors impact employee readiness and motivation to learn in civility interventions remain unaddressed to date. Consequently, HRM professionals have little guidance from empirical research to use to ensure trainees are motivated within their own civility interventions. The present study discusses the development and test of a model of workplace civility training motivation to learn in an organization that was implementing civility training for the first time, in order to develop an understanding of the drivers of trainee motivation to learn in the context of civility training. Motivation to learn plays an important role before, during, and after training (Beier & Kanfer, 2009). The model in the present study addresses the pre-training context to understand drivers of motivation to learn before civility training. By drawing on the training, organizational change, and workplace mistreatment literatures and explicating key variables influencing civility training motivation to learn, the present study contributes to the HRM literature in two ways. First, the model sheds light on variables that explain why civility interventions may or may not succeed, by focusing on antecedents of motivation to learn. Second, findings provide an empirical basis for HRM professionals to determine how

to best develop and implement their own civility interventions, with special attention to the pre-training conditions that shape motivation to learn (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001).

Theoretical framework

The multilevel model shown in Figure 1 was guided by Colquitt et al.'s (2000) theory of training motivation, which highlights the critical role of motivation to learn in training effectiveness, a feature which is now widely recognized by training scholars (Sitzmann & Weinhardt, 2018). Motivation to learn entails 'a specific desire on the part of the trainee to learn the content of the training program' (Noe & Schmitt, 1986, p. 501). Meta-analysis supports Noe's (1986) assertion of the important role of motivation to learn in training effectiveness, such that higher motivation to learn before training leads to more positive training outcomes (Colquitt et al., 2000).

Colquitt et al.'s (2000) theory of training motivation posits that both individual and environmental factors impact trainees' motivation to learn and, hence, the broader efficacy of training, and other models also acknowledge these factors (e.g. Facteau, Dobbins, Russell, Ladd, & Kudisch, 1995; Kozlowski & Salas, 1997). Moreover, Kozlowski, Brown, Weissbein, Cannon-Bowers, and Salas (2000) emphasize that predictors

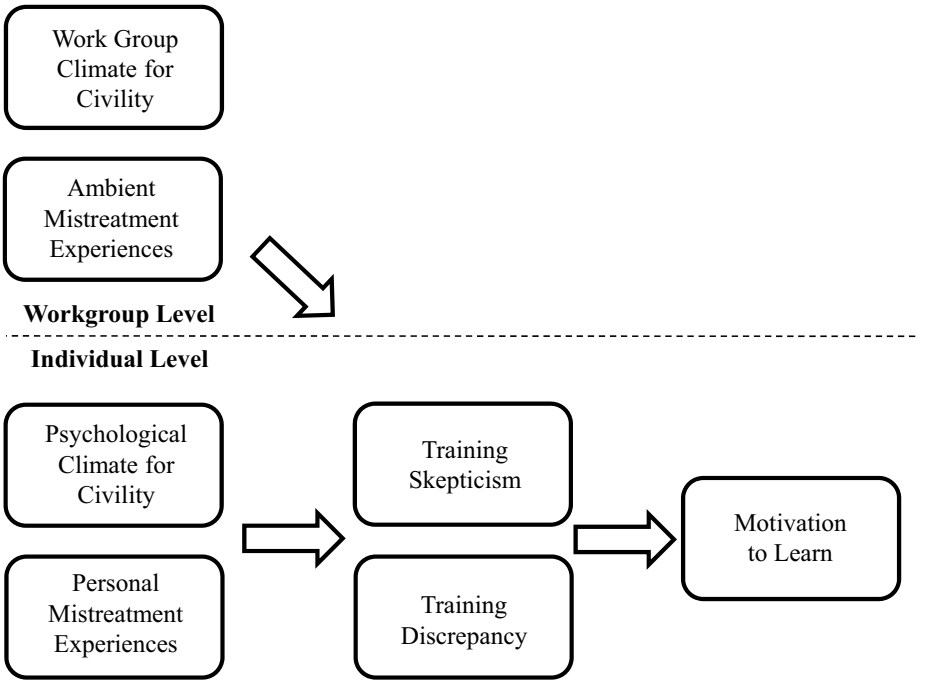

Figure 1. Multilevel model of civility training motivation to learn.

of training effectiveness may be contingent on the nature of the program. This work suggests the importance of tailoring predictors of motivation to learn to the nature of the training program under consideration; civility training in this case. These propositions guided selection of variables driving civility training motivation to learn in the present study.

The present study focused on an organization that had not had civility training previously. Given its novelty, it was anticipated that trainees would hold both positive and negative attitudes about civility training that have proximal and conflicting influences on motivation to learn. Indeed, employees may see a need for civility training (training discrepancy), but at the same time hold significant doubts about whether training would be effective (training skepticism). In addition, given Kozlowski et al.'s (2000) assertion, it was proposed that pre-training attitudes would be shaped by more general and extant features of the work environment that are closely tied to training content; namely, workgroup climate for civility and experiences of mistreatment among workgroup members. Thus the pre-training attitudes were proposed to mediate the influence of climate for civility and mistreatment experiences on motivation to learn. The model is outlined next, beginning with a discussion of pre-training attitudes.

Attitudes about civility training

Discrepant attitudes are theorized to develop during times of organizational change (Oreg & Sverdlik, 2011), such as the implementation of workplace civility training for the first time, and are consistent with conceptualizations of attitudinal ambivalence (Thompson, Zanna, & Griffin, 1995) such as Cacioppo and Berntson's (1994) evaluative space model and Knowles and Linn's (2004) approach-avoidance model. These models suggest that some forces promote readiness whereas others promote resistance, and such forces can operate concurrently. Accordingly, two discrepant, pre-training attitudes – training skepticism and training discrepancy – are positioned as negative and positive pre-training attitudes that will be particularly relevant antecedents to civility training motivation to learn.

Training skepticism is conceptualized as a negative attitude that may reduce trainee motivation to learn. Stanley, Meyer, and Topolnytsky (2005) defined change-specific skepticism as 'doubt about the viability of a change for the attainment of its stated objective' (p. 436). Stanley et al. (2005) point out that skepticism is reflected in cynicism about organizational change (CAOC; Wanous, Reichers, & Austin, 2000) – the belief that change efforts will be ineffective due to management's incompetence

and/or lack of motivation – yet they found that both cynicism and skepticism contributed uniquely to employees' intent to resist change. Similarly, Kath (2005) found that higher levels of CAOC were associated with lower motivation to learn in sexual harassment training. Given this evidence, skepticism was proposed to harm civility training motivation to learn. Training skepticism was defined akin to Stanley et al.'s (2005) definition of change-specific skepticism, as doubts about the extent to which civility training will be effective within one's workgroup. Based on the above research, it was hypothesized (Hypothesis 1) that training skepticism is negatively related to motivation to learn.

Whereas training skepticism is a negative attitude, training discrepancy is a positive attitude that may enhance motivation to learn. A discrepancy suggests that a need exists, and various literatures point to the motivating potential of perceived discrepancies. At an organizational level, demonstrating that a discrepancy exists between current and desired organizational conditions is essential for fostering readiness among change recipients (Holt, Armenakis, Feild, & Harris, 2007a; Holt, Armenakis, Harris, & Feild, 2007b). At the individual level, need for skill development – i.e. training discrepancy – is positively related to participation in development activities (Maurer, Weiss, & Barbeite, 2003) and motivation to learn (Noe, 1986). Thus, training discrepancy was conceptualized as the extent to which employees perceive there is a need for civility training within their workgroup. Based on the reviewed literature, it was hypothesized (Hypothesis 2) that training discrepancy is positively related to motivation to learn.

Predictors of pre-training attitudes about civility training

The effects of climate for civility and mistreatment experiences on pre-training attitudes were examined due to their salient link to the content of civility training (Kozlowski et al., 2000). First, climate for civility is defined as perceptions of the degree to which one's workgroup ensures that mutual respect is the norm, centering largely on the extent to which employees perceive the existence of undesired consequences for engaging in disrespectful behavior (Walsh et al., 2012). Theories of organizational climate (Naylor, Pritchard, & Ilgen, 1980; Schneider, 1990) suggest that climate constrains behavior to be consistent with the climate. Modifying the work climate is difficult to do; put simply, it is a reflection of 'how we do things around here' (Schneider, Macey, & Young, 2006, p. 117). Perceptions that respectful treatment is the norm can occur individually (i.e. *psychological climate)* or can be shared among workgroup members (i.e. *workgroup climate*; James et al., 2008). For both levels of climate,

ambient stimuli (Hackman, 1992) communicate to employees that the social work context is positive. Under such conditions, individuals should have positive expectations about civility training. This includes expectations about use of the knowledge and skills taught in training by one's coworkers (i.e. anticipated training transfer) because the training is focused on content that is consistent with existing practices (Kozlowski & Salas, 1997), which suggests that doubts about effectiveness of such training should be minimized. Hence, it was hypothesized that psychological (Hypothesis 3a) and workgroup (Hypothesis 3b) climate for civility are negatively related to training skepticism.

Mistreatment experiences also act as an important indicator of the quality of the psychosocial work environment, and mistreatment can be studied at the individual and collective levels in a similar vein as civility climate. Personal mistreatment experiences reflect one's individual experiences of destructive behaviors, whereas collective levels of mistreatment experiences of workgroup members may be characterized as ambient mistreatment (cf., Glomb et al., 1997). Ambient harassment has a significant influence on worker attitudes and health (Glomb et al., 1997), and research on workgroup levels of nonsexual mistreatment demonstrates that they have similar destructive effects (e.g. Griffin, 2010).

In the present study, it is proposed that high levels of mistreatment are potentially the clearest indication to prospective trainees that their work environment is unlikely to support the use of civility training given that such training conflicts with existing behavioral norms. This is consistent with Kozlowski and colleagues' (Kozlowski, Chao, & Jensen, 2009; Kozlowski & Salas, 1997) application of congruence to training, which suggests that the work environment must align with training content for successful training transfer. Targets of mistreatment are likely to doubt the ability of their workgroup members to assimilate the civility training given that these coworkers are likely to be perpetrators of the uncivil behavior. As such, it was hypothesized that personal (Hypothesis 4a) and ambient (Hypothesis 4b) mistreatment experiences are positively related to training skepticism.

Belongingness theory (Baumeister & Leary, 1995) provides the rationale for suspecting direct relationships between civility climate and mistreatment experiences with training discrepancy. Baumeister and Leary (1995) assert that people have a fundamental need to belong which is characterized by 'a need to form and maintain at least a minimum quantity of interpersonal relationships' (p. 499). People are said to need regular, positive interactions with others, and 'it is mainly important that the majority be free from conflict and negative affect' (Baumeister & Leary, 1995, p. 500). Individuals with more positive psychological civility

climate perceptions believe that workgroup members are respectful of one another, and being a member of a workgroup with shared positive civility climate perceptions suggests that the context is one in which positive interactions are the norm. Employees' need to belong is more likely to be satisfied in such positive environments, and civility training may be seen as unnecessary. Thus, it was hypothesized that psychological (Hypothesis 5a) and workgroup (Hypothesis 5b) climate for civility are negatively related to training discrepancy.

Conversely, personal and ambient mistreatment experiences are likely to harm one's need to belong. This is consistent with research showing that both personal and workgroup mistreatment experiences have deleterious effects on individual work attitudes and well-being (e.g. Cortina et al., 2001; Griffin, 2010). Employees working in such toxic social environments – as demonstrated from both their personal experiences and those they have witnessed happening to their coworkers – may see civility training as a catalyst for sorely needed change. Indeed, civility interventions can build a more civil workplace and reduce incivility (Hodgins, MacCurtain, & Mannix-McNamara, 2014; Leiter et al., 2012). Thus, workplace civility training has the potential to foster more positive workplace interactions, which could help fulfill the need to belong. Thus, it was hypothesized that personal (Hypothesis 6a) and ambient (Hypothesis 6b) mistreatment experiences are positively related to training discrepancy.

Method

Project overview

Data were collected as part of the Civility Among Healthcare Professionals (CAHP) Project, which aimed to enhance the quality of the social work environment by implementing small-group civility workshops. The CAHP Project was implemented within a prison healthcare provider in the northeast United States.

Employees were located within each prison, a central office, and a pharmacy, and they worked in either medical/dental or mental health disciplines, as well as supporting clerical employees.[1]

Procedure

Participants responded to either a web-based or paper-and-pencil survey. The survey took no more than 30 min and could be completed during work. Participants were recruited via information about the CAHP Project in the organizational newsletter, as well as by CAHP Project researchers during staff meetings, where they discussed the project focus

and goals in detail and answered questions. CAHP Project researchers handed out surveys and letters of support (signed by members of the CAHP Project research team, the executive director, and union leaders) during these same meetings. These methods ensured that employees were informed about the focus and goals of the project, thereby making civility training motivation to learn a meaningful criterion in the present study. Additionally, the online survey link was emailed to all employees, and six reminder emails were sent.

Participants

Data were collected from 264 of 796 employees (33.2% response rate). The final sample for hypothesis testing included 211 participants in 38 workgroups ($M_{\text{Group Size}} = 5.55$, $SD = 3.66$). Participants were removed from the sample if they did not complete measures of interest, were outliers, or were not retained within a workgroup. Most respondents were female (69.6%) and Caucasian (70.1%). Approximately 58% of the sample was between 43 and 60 years old. The sample was highly educated as 46.5% had completed a graduate or professional degree. Participants were primarily medical/ dental (51.9%) and mental health employees (33.8%) and the majority worked 1st shift (73.0%). Participants worked for the organization for a mean of 7.6 years ($SD = 5.3$) and their current positions for 7.7 years ($SD = 6.2$). Results showed that the sex ($\chi^2[1] = 1.53$, $p > .05$, $\varphi = .09$) and age ($\chi^2[6] = 5.38$, $p > .05$, $\varphi = .16$) distributions in the sample were not significantly different from the overall organization.

Measures

Internal consistency reliability estimates based on individual-level data are reported for all measures, but internal consistency estimates based on workgroup-level data are reported only for civility climate and mistreatment experiences which were conceptualized at both levels. Statistics including ICC(1) (between-group variability) and $r_{WG(J)}$ (within-group agreement; LeBreton & Senter, 2008) are also reported for civility climate and mistreatment experiences to justify aggregation. Unless otherwise noted, measures were captured on 7-point Likert scales ranging from '1' *(strongly disagree)* to '7' *(strongly agree)*, with higher scores equating to higher levels of each variable.[2]

Climate for civility. Climate for civility was assessed with a 7-item version of the Civility Norms Questionnaire – Brief (CNQ-B; Walsh et al., 2012). An example item reads, 'We make sure everyone in our workgroup is treated with respect.' The CNQ-B demonstrated good

internal consistency at both the individual level ($\alpha = .92$) and workgroup level ($\alpha = .93$). ICC(1) was .12 and median $r_{WG(J)}$ was .84, which suggests that aggregation to the group level was warranted.

Mistreatment experiences. Mistreatment experiences in the previous year were assessed with an 11-item version of the Workplace Incivility Scale (WIS; Cortina et al., 2001). Example items include 'Yelled, shouted, or swore at you' and 'Made jokes at your expense.' The WIS is scored on a frequency scale ranging from '1' *(never)* to '5' *(many times)*. The WIS was internally consistent at the individual ($\alpha = .95$) and workgroup levels ($\alpha = .96$). ICC(1) was .09 and median $r_{WG(J)}$ was .88 which both supported aggregation to the group level.

Training skepticism. Training skepticism was measured with six items developed for the study that were grounded in Stanley et al.'s (2005) definition of change-specific skepticism, assessing the extent to which respondents had negative expectations about the effectiveness of the civility workshops in their workgroup ($\alpha = .95$). Example items include 'I question whether anyone in my workgroup would use the knowledge and skills taught in civility workshops' and 'I doubt that the workshops will enhance the level of civility in my workgroup.'

Training discrepancy. Training discrepancy was assessed with four items modified from Holt et al.'s (2007a) measure of readiness for organizational change ($\alpha = .96$). Items assessed whether respondents believe there is a need for civility workshops in their workgroup. Example items include 'Workshops on workplace civility are clearly needed in my workgroup' and 'There are legitimate reasons for having civility workshops in my workgroup.'

Motivation to learn. Motivation to learn was assessed with four items from Noe and Schmitt's (1986) measure, modified to focus specifically on motivation to learn in the civility workshops ($\alpha = .96$). An example item used in this study is 'I will try to learn as much as I can from the civility workshops.'

Covariates. Four covariates were included at the individual level in tests of hypotheses because of their anticipated relationships with pre-training attitudes and motivation to learn. The first was a 3-item measure of *affective organizational commitment*. Two of the three items were derived from Meyer, Allen, and Smith's (1993) measure, and the third item was drawn from O'Reilly and Chatman's (1986) measure ($\alpha = .92$). Participants completed a 4-item measure of *cynicism about change* drawn and modified from Wanous et al.'s (2000) measure of CAOC ($\alpha = .85$). The items were modified to reflect general cynicism about change within the workgroup rather than the broader organization. *Trait pessimism* was measured with three items from the revised Life Orientation Test (LOT-R; Scheier, Carver, & Bridges, 1994; $\alpha = .85$). The LOT-R measures

generalized expectations about both negative and positive outcomes. The LOT-R is evaluated on a 5-point scale ranging from '1' *(I disagree a lot)* to '5' *(I agree a lot). Sensitivity to interpersonal treatment* (SIT) was measured with the scale developed by Bunk and Magley (2011; $\alpha = .78$). The 8-item scale assesses the extent to which respondents are aware of and react strongly to interpersonal treatment.

Employee workgroups

Workgroups reflect groups of employees likely to have similar perceptions due to social interaction, interdependent work, and a shared focus on providing healthcare to prisoners (Kozlowski & Ilgen, 2006). Workgroups with at least two individuals were retained for analysis, which aligns with Kozlowski and Ilgen's (2006) conceptualization of a work team. Workgroups were created by splitting employees by facility, shift (1st shift, 2nd shift, 3rd shift), and discipline (medical/ dental, mental health, clerical), based on qualitative feedback solicited in focus groups and during site visits to two facilities. However, there were some caveats. First, employees working in smaller facilities on the same shift were more likely to interact across disciplines and, as such, were classified within the same workgroup. Also, employees who reported 'clerical' or 'other' were retained in workgroups that were split only by shift (i.e. within smaller facilities), or if they provided information on the discipline they interacted with most frequently. At this point any workgroups with only one employee were removed, leaving 38 workgroups.

Results

Data screening

Data were screened for errors, univariate and multivariate outliers, normality, and missing data. Bivariate scatter plots were also screened to assess potential nonlinear relationships. In examining individual-level data, the relationship between personal mistreatment experiences and training discrepancy appeared to be quadratic such that a positive relationship between personal mistreatment experiences and training discrepancy was less pronounced at higher levels of personal mistreatment. A similar relationship was observed at the workgroup-level. As such, we included quadratic terms when training discrepancy was a criterion.

Descriptive statistics

Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations among variables and covariates are presented in Table 1. The association between training

Table 1. Descriptive statistics and zero-order correlations.

Variable	*M*	*SD*	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Psychological climate for civility[a]	4.16	1.51	–										
2. Personal mistreatment experiences[a]	2.24	1.05	−.62**	–									
3. Training discrepancy[a]	5.25	1.52	−.57**	.50**	–								
4. Training skepticism[a]	3.94	1.39	−.49**	.31**	.06	–							
5. Motivation to learn[a]	5.57	1.12	.03	.02	.38**	−.43**	–						
6. Trait pessimism[a]	2.06	1.08	−.11	.22**	.08	.27**	−.18**	–					
7. Sensitivity to interpersonal treatment[a]	5.93	.70	.09	−.03	.00	−.12	.26**	−.01	–				
8. Affective commitment[a]	3.24	1.75	.39**	−.36**	−.14*	−.36**	.28**	−.15*	.10	–			
9. Cynicism about change[a]	3.83	1.42	−.60**	.47**	.32**	49**	−.22**	.22**	−.13	−.40**	–		
10. Workgroup climate for civility[b]	4.10	.89	.52**	−.35**	−.46**	−.11	−.02	−.06	.11	.12	−.31**	–	
11. Ambient mistreatment experiences[b]	2.28	.61	−.36**	.50**	.38**	.15*	.07	.19**	−.01	−.18**	.28**	−.68**	–

Cross-level correlations were computed by assigning mean workgroup scores to each member and they are not adjusted for nonindependence. Workgroup-level correlations between variables 10–11 are based on $n = 38$.

[a] $n = 211$.

[b] $n = 38$.

*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$.

skepticism and training discrepancy was close to zero ($r = .06$, $p > .05$), which indicates that they are largely independent attitudes despite the hypothesized common predictors. Moreover, climate for civility and mistreatment experiences were not significantly associated with motivation to learn in individual-level or cross-level correlations, suggesting the importance of indirect relations through pre-training attitudes. The inclusion of the four covariates was justified because the covariates were correlated with several variables in the hypothesized model.

Analysis plan

All predictor variables were standardized based on the full data-set ($n = 211$). Workgroup means were calculated next for each standardized variable, and group-mean centered terms were computed by subtracting the corresponding workgroup means from each individual's standardized score on the relevant variables. Next, a second data-set was created which included only workgroup-level variables ($n = 38$), and these workgroup-level variables were standardized again based on the workgroup-level distribution.

Hierarchical linear modeling (HLM) with HLM v6.06 (Raudenbush, Bryk, Cheong, Congdon, & du Toit, 2004) was used to test hypotheses. Random intercepts were specified, but all slopes were fixed. Full maximum likelihood estimation was used. Pseudo R^2 estimates were calculated using formulas developed by Kreft and de Leeuw (1998) and Singer (1998). The procedure developed by Zhang, Zyphur, and Preacher (2009) was followed in model testing. In Zhang et al.'s (2009) strategy, the group means of lower-level mediators (i.e. training skepticism, training discrepancy) are included in model testing to disentangle crosslevel (between-group) indirect effects from lower-level (within-group) indirect effects. Psychological climate for civility and personal mistreatment experiences were group-mean centered in all analyses, and their respective workgroup means reflecting workgroup climate for civility and ambient mistreatment experiences were predictors at the workgroup level. In the model where training discrepancy and training skepticism were predictors, these variables were also group-mean centered and their respective group means were included at the higher level (Zhang et al., 2009). For covariates, standardized scores were entered in each model, which is akin to controlling for their influence. Selig and Preacher's (2008) tool was used to assess the significance of indirect effects on motivation to learn implied in Figure 1.

Null models

As recommended by Mathieu and Taylor (2007), covariates were included as predictors and ICC(1) values were calculated to determine

the percent of between-group variability in each criterion. Motivation to learn did not vary significantly across groups (χ^2 [37] = 49.02, $p > .05$, ICC[1] = .03). Training skepticism did not vary significantly across groups (χ^2 [37] = 43.61, $p > .05$, ICC[1] = .02), however, training discrepancy varied significantly across groups (χ^2 [37] = 90.42, $p < .001$, ICC[1] = .20). The ICC(1) for training discrepancy indicates that 20% of the variability was between-group variability.

Hypothesis testing

Table 2 presents results from all model tests. Model 1 provided a direct test of the hypothesized relationships between training skepticism, training discrepancy and motivation to learn, while also examining potential direct effects of civility climate and mistreatment experiences. Hypothesis 1 was supported based on the significant negative relationship between training skepticism and motivation to learn at the individual level ($\gamma = -.39$, $p < .001$). At the individual level, training discrepancy had a significant positive association with motivation to learn ($\gamma = .57$, $p < .001$), which supported Hypothesis 2. In this model, ambient mistreatment experiences ($\gamma = .25$, $p < .05$) and the workgroup mean of training skepticism ($\gamma = -.25$, $p < .05$) also had statistically significant influences on motivation to learn. However, caution must be taken in

Table 2. Results from hierarchical linear modeling.

	Model and dependent variable		
Predictor	Model 1: motivation to learn	Model 2: training skepticism	Model 3: training discrepancy
Individual-level[a]			
Affective commitment	.20 (.07)**	−.16 (.09)	.19 (.09)*
Cynicism about change[c]	−.14 (.08)	.33 (.10)**	−.04 (.11)
Sensitivity to interpersonal treatment[c]	.19 (.06)**	−.09 (.08)	.06 (.08)
Trait pessimism[c]	−.10 (.06)	.24 (.08)**	.01 (.09)
Climate for civility	−.17 (.11)	−.64 (.12)***	−.56 (.13)***
Mistreatment experiences	−.08 (.08)	−.19 (.11)	.42 (.12)***
Training skepticism	−.39 (.08)***		
Training discrepancy	.57 (.08)***		
Mistreatment experiences^2			−.06 (.08)
Workgroup-level[b]			
Climate for civility	.13 (.12)	.04 (.12)	−.61 (.15)***
Mistreatment experiences	.25 (.10)*	.08 (.13)	.34 (.16)*
Training skepticism	−.25 (.10)*		
Training discrepancy	.18 (.12)		
Mistreatment experiences^2			−.09 (.09)
Total R^2	.47	.38	.40

[a] $n = 211$.
[b] $n = 38$.
[c] Covariate.
*$p < .05$; **$p < .01$; ***$p < .001$.
Values in cells are parameter estimates and standard errors are in parentheses.

interpreting these findings because there was not a statistically significant level of between-group variability in motivation to learn, and training skepticism did not vary significantly between groups. Overall, the predictors accounted for 47% of the variability in motivation to learn.

Model 2 tested effects on training skepticism. Hypothesis 3a was supported as there was a significant negative relationship between psychological climate for civility and training skepticism ($\gamma = -.64$, $p < .001$), but Hypothesis 3b was not supported as there was no effect of workgroup climate for civility ($\gamma = .04$, $p > .05$). Hypothesis 4a was not supported as personal mistreatment experiences were not significantly related to training skepticism ($\gamma = -.19$, $p > .05$), and Hypothesis 4b concerning the effect of ambient mistreatment was also not supported ($\gamma = .08$, $p > .05$). The predictors accounted for 38% of the variability in training skepticism.

Model 3 tested effects on training discrepancy. As noted earlier, included in this model were quadratic terms for personal and ambient mistreatment experiences to control for potential nonlinear relationships. Hypotheses 5a and 5b were supported because psychological ($\gamma = -.56$, $p < .001$) and workgroup climate for civility ($\gamma = -.61$, $p < .001$) were negatively related to training discrepancy. Hypotheses 6a and 6b were also supported as personal ($\gamma = .42$, $p < .001$) and ambient mistreatment experiences ($\gamma = .34$, $p < .05$) were positively associated with training discrepancy. The predictors accounted for 40% of the variability in training discrepancy.

Table 3 presents indirect effects of the focal predictors on motivation to learn via training discrepancy and training skepticism. Although there

Table 3. Indirect effects on motivation to learn.

Predictor	Mediator	Path *'a'*	Path *'b'*	Indirect effect estimate ('ab')	95% Confidence interval
Workgroup climate for civility	Training discrepancy	−.61 (.15)***	.18 (.12)	−.11	−.28; .03
Psychological climate for civility		−.56 (.13)***	.57 (.08)***	−.32*	−.50; −.16
Ambient mistreatment experiences		.34 (.16)*	.18 (.12)	.06	−.02; .19
Personal mistreatment experiences		.42 (.12)***	.57 (.08)***	.24*	.10; .40
Workgroup climate for civility	Training skepticism	.04 (.12)	−.25 (.10)*	−.01	−.08; .05
Psychological climate for civility		−.64 (.12)***	−.39 (.08)***	.25*	.13; .40
Ambient mistreatment experiences		.08 (.13)	−.25 (.10)*	−.02	−.10; .05
Personal mistreatment experiences		−.19 (.11)	−.39 (.08)***	.07	−.01; .17

*p < .05; **p < .01; ***p < .001.

were no statistically significant cross-level indirect effects, there were several statistically significant lower-level indirect effects on motivation to learn. Psychological climate for civility had a significant negative indirect effect via training discrepancy ($ab = -.32$, 95% CI = −.50, −.16) and a significant positive indirect effect via training skepticism ($ab = .25$, 95% CI = .13, .40). In addition, personal mistreatment experiences had a significant positive indirect effect through training discrepancy ($ab = .24$, 95% CI = .10, .40), but the indirect effect through training skepticism was nonsignificant ($ab = .07$, 95% CI = −.01, .17).

Discussion

The overarching goal of the present study was to develop a model of civility training motivation to learn, to assist in the development of knowledge regarding factors impacting the effectiveness of workplace civility training. Below the implications of the findings for theory, research and practice are considered.

Theoretical contributions and research implications

Findings from the present study offer insight into the variables which impact employees' pre-training attitudes about civility training. Relationships between central predictors and pre-training attitudes were hypothesized to exist above and beyond the effects of several covariates. However, psychological climate for civility was the only statistically significant predictor of training skepticism. As expected, employees were less skeptical about training effectiveness when they believed that their workgroup already had positive norms for civility. This finding is consistent with work by Kozlowski and Salas (1997) who suggest that training will be effective if its content is aligned with existing practices. The variable with the second strongest relation with training skepticism was the covariate cynicism about change. Thus, employees with general cynicism about change are more likely to doubt the effectiveness of a specific civility training, regardless of personal or ambient mistreatment experiences or the workgroup climate for civility. Conversely, both psychological and workgroup climate for civility were negatively related to training discrepancy, and personal and ambient mistreatment experiences were positively associated with training discrepancy. Put simply, in more positive work environments where civility is the norm, employees are less likely to see a need for training, whereas the opposite holds within more negative work environments.

The present study also contributes to the literature by identifying two pre-training attitudes with significant influences on civility training motivation to learn. As hypothesized, the pre-training attitudes had conflicting influences on motivation to learn. Training skepticism negatively affected motivation to learn, a finding that aligns with research on effects of change-specific skepticism (Stanley et al., 2005), and more general theory pertaining to demotivating effects of negative outcome expectations (e.g. expectancy theory; Vroom, 1964). Conversely, training discrepancy had a significant positive effect on motivation to learn. These results are in line with the assertion that a perceived discrepancy helps to create readiness to support change (Holt et al., 2007a, 2007b). Given these results, and the fact that such effects were observed above and beyond several covariates, training skepticism and discrepancy should be a focus for researchers studying civility interventions, a point to which we return below.

Indirect effects were also examined in the present study. Although there were no statistically significant cross-level indirect relationships, several lower-level indirect effects emerged. Psychological climate for civility had a negative indirect effect on motivation to learn via training discrepancy, but this was counteracted by a positive indirect effect via training skepticism. Conversely, personal mistreatment experiences had a positive indirect effect on motivation to learn via training discrepancy. These results are consistent with research suggesting that environmental factors shape employee motivation to learn (Colquitt et al., 2000). Yet they also reinforce the need to pay attention to individual perceptions and experiences, rather than just the collective reports of the workgroup, since it is largely the individual perceptions and experiences of employees that shaped motivation to learn. In addition, these relationships exemplify a difference in the effects of psychological climate for civility and personal mistreatment experiences. Higher levels of psychological climate for civility led to a state of *indifference* about civility training among employees, which is to say that they had lower levels of positive (training discrepancy) and negative (training skepticism) pre-training attitudes (Cacioppo, Gardner, & Berntson, 1999). On the other hand, lower levels of psychological climate for civility led to a state of internal conflict characterized by *ambivalence* (Cacioppo et al., 1999), which was reflected in the higher levels of training discrepancy and training skepticism observed for such individuals. In either situation, the counteracting nature of the indirect effects resulted in essentially no influence of psychological climate for civility on motivation to learn. Conversely, the indirect effect of personal mistreatment experiences was exclusively positive in nature. Targets of mistreatment were not indifferent or ambivalent about civility training; they saw the need and were motivated to learn as a result.

Results also contribute to scholars' understanding of the influence of workplace mistreatment climates (cf., Yang, Caughlin, Gazica, Truxillo, & Spector, 2014). Yang et al.'s (2014) model of mistreatment climate posits that such climate constructs, including civility climate, impact various outcomes such as experiences of mistreatment and well-being. The present study builds on Yang et al.'s (2014) model by expanding the variables to which mistreatment climate is linked, including the pre-training attitudes of training discrepancy and training skepticism, variables that the present study suggests are associated with the effectiveness of mistreatment interventions. Although these findings are intriguing, continued research is needed to further develop our understanding of the impact of civility climate and other mistreatment climate constructs.

There are several additional direction for future research which extend from the present study, especially as they relate to the pre-training attitudes. First, there could be value in explicitly modeling ambivalence as a construct. We sought to focus on a single positive and negative attitude to understand their drivers, their impact on motivation to learn, and their overall relevance to civility training effectiveness. Ambivalence was not necessarily incorporated into the model, but Thompson et al. (1995) provide a method for directly assessing ambivalence that involves considering positive and negative attitudes in combination. This method has been used in other studies of ambivalence in the context of organizational change (e.g. Oreg & Sverdlik, 2011). It may also be useful to focus on the nature of the relationship between training skepticism and training discrepancy, to see whether their interaction accounts for unique variance in motivation to learn beyond their main effects. High levels of positive and negative attitudes imply that both motivating and demotivating forces are high, which would suggest that training skepticism might reduce the impact of training discrepancy on motivation to learn, and vice versa. In addition, ambivalence is often temporary (Cacioppo & Berntson, 1994), so individuals' training skepticism and discrepancy will likely change over time. Research is needed to examine how these attitudes change over time, and the implications of change for motivation and training effectiveness.

More generally, an additional future research possibility is to examine the degree to which the model cross-validates to other forms of social skills training. For example, researchers have acknowledged the similarities between sexual harassment and workplace incivility, including the fact that these forms of mistreatment tend to co-occur and can result in similar consequences (e.g. Lim & Cortina, 2005). Likewise, both sexual harassment and civility training are focused, at a general level, on educating employees about appropriate and inappropriate interpersonal interactions. Magley, Bauerle, and Walsh (2010) assert that there have been few studies on factors that impact the effectiveness of sexual

harassment training, a point reiterated by Roehling and Huang (2018). With some modifications (e.g. considering experiences of sexual harassment rather than general mistreatment), the model could be beneficial for understanding sexual harassment training effectiveness.

Practical implications

Results from the present study should prove useful to HRM professionals implementing civility interventions. There were no direct relationships between all but one predictor and motivation to learn; the pre-training attitudes have the most proximal influence. This suggests that those leading civility interventions should focus their attention on understanding employees' pre-training attitudes, and then work to modify pre-training attitudes to maximize motivation to learn. Doing so should also assist HRM professionals because by helping to create motivation to learn, they can also facilitate the transfer of training. HRM professionals will want to focus their pre-training efforts on training skepticism and training discrepancy, working to minimize the former and maximize the latter. However, differences in between-group variability indicate that the kinds of efforts used to modify the attitudes should vary depending on the attitude in consideration. Training skepticism did not vary significantly across groups. This suggests that any attempts by HRM professionals to reduce training skepticism cannot be group specific; variability in training skepticism is almost entirely individual-level variability so efforts to reduce skepticism should apply to all employees.

Training discrepancy, on the other hand, does vary significantly across groups. This indicates that HRM professionals can take a group-specific approach to working to maximize perceptions that there is indeed a need for civility training. Fortunately, results show that mistreatment targets and those who simply work in uncivil workgroups are likely to see a need for training and be more motivated to learn. Efforts to maximize training discrepancy should focus instead on groups that would already be characterized as *civil*. One might wonder why such groups would even have to go through such training. We argue that it is important not to single out any particular groups for civility training, as such a practice could lead to resentment. In addition, because behavioral norms for how employees treat one another can change (Hackman, 1992), it is important that all employees receive civility training. HRM professionals could try communicating to prospective trainees that norms can shift from civil to uncivil over time, because this basic knowledge may prove effective for increasing perceptions that there is value in implementing civility training.

Findings on the influence of the pre-training attitudes on motivation to learn can also inform the design of civility training. The importance of motivation does not end prior to training, as was our focus; motivation also plays a critical role during (and after) training (Beier & Kanfer, 2009). Training discrepancy had a positive effect on motivation to learn, which suggests that civility training should incorporate content which highlights the need for civility training, especially at the beginning of the sessions. HRM professionals might emphasize content such as the negative effects of mistreatment, as such information may help to make salient the need for training. Such a strategy could help to keep trainees motivated, which should help to maximize gains made through training.

Study limitations

As with all research, there were several limitations with the present study. First, although participants were healthcare workers, the sample was drawn from employees in correctional institutions, which are unique work environments. Thus, the generalizability of these findings to different work environments is somewhat questionable. Future research is needed to cross-validate the findings observed in the present study within other contexts. A second limitation also relates to the fact that data were collected from a single organization at a single time. The degree of between-group variability in constructs may have been restricted in the present study due to the single organization sampling frame. Additional research with data collected across multiple organizations could be valuable for cross-validating the model, and for determining whether training skepticism and motivation to learn have greater between-group variability.

Conclusion

Workplace civility training represents a tool to help minimize the occurrence of mistreatment and improve interpersonal relationships. When implementing civility training, HRM professionals need to be cognizant of how pre-training conditions including the climate for civility and mistreatment experiences shape employees' pre-training attitudes, due to the significant influence of such pre-training attitudes on motivation to learn. Practitioners can use this insight to reduce skepticism and increase discrepancy perceptions among employees to maximize trainee motivation. It is our hope that HRM professionals and researchers alike will draw on findings from the present study to more effectively implement and study civility training in organizations.

Notes

1. Given the focus on understanding antecedents to civility training motivation to learn and manuscript length constraints, we do not present information on the evaluation of the civility workshops.
2. A list of all items included in survey measures used in the study is available from the corresponding author upon request.

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