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Workplace Incivility: A Quantitative Study of Public University Staff Member Experiences in the Northeast

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Workplace Incivility: A Quantitative Study of
Public University Staff Member Experiences in the Northeast

A thesis

submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements

for the degree of Master of Arts in Leadership Studies

University of Southern Maine

By

Tracy M. St. Pierre

2019

WORKPLACE INCIVILITY: A QUANTITATIVE STUDY

Abstract

Workplace incivility is a construct similar to sexual harassment or bullying in that it is unwanted behavior and can cause negative emotions for those who experience it. However, it lacks the clear definition and legal repercussions that have been established for sexual harassment and bullying. Thus, incivility is able to thrive in the workplace with little intervention, which can create adverse consequences for employees and organizations. Several studies demonstrate that up to 96% of individuals have experienced workplace incivility (Porath & Pearson, 2010, p. 64). Employees who experience workplace incivility have been shown to reduce their work effort for those who have acted uncivilly towards them and have decreased productivity by “venting” to co-workers (Cortina and Magley, 2009, p. 286).

The goal of this study is to explore the incidences of workplace incivility in higher education. The results of this study indicate that workplace incivility exists among full-time staff in higher education. This data, combined with additional results around types of incivility experienced, emotions felt by employees, and hours spent dealing with the aftermath may enlighten managers and human resource personnel to the value of proactively addressing workplace incivility.

Keywords: workplace incivility, higher education, employee impact, organizational impact

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Overview of Workplace Incivility

Much has been written about workplace harassment (such as sexual harassment or bullying) and the negative impact it has on organizations and employees, including within public higher education (Henning, et al., 2017; McDonald, 2012). Definitions of sexual harassment and bullying are similar with both forms of behavior involving an employee intentionally harming another with their words or actions, repeatedly over time. They differ slightly in that sexual harassment involves unwanted actions of a sexual nature, while bullying involves more aggressive, but non-sexual behaviors. Should an employee face sexual harassment or bullying, they have legal options to address these situations (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Branch & Murray, 2015; Henning, et al., 2017; McDonald, 2012). It is acknowledged that sexual harassment and bullying create negative impacts for an organization ranging from employee turnover to legal costs dealing with the complaints. Additionally, employees who experience sexual harassment or bullying can suffer from high stress and lower job satisfaction (McDonald, 2012).

Equally impactful is the related construct of workplace incivility which possesses some similarities to sexual harassment and bullying (Martin & Hine, 2005), but has different qualities. Andersson and Pearson (1999) defined the phenomenon of workplace incivility as, “low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect” (p. 457). Low intensity, ambiguous intent, and violating norms of respect can be manifested as behaviors considered rude or disrespectful, such as not returning emails or phone calls or consistently interrupting colleagues during meetings. Actions (interrupting meetings, making faces), using words (demeaning or derogatory in style), or adopting a tone of voice (righteous or sarcastic) that may leave another employee uncertain about

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the situation or questioning their abilities are considered ambiguous behaviors (Pearson, Andersson, & Wegner, 2001; Clark, 2013). This means an employee may inadvertently engage in these behaviors, but the employee(s) facing such behaviors may perceive them as rude (Andersson, Pearson, & Wegner, 2001). Additional examples of behaviors that fall into the category of workplace incivility include blaming others for one's own mistakes, not providing proper credit for someone else's work, using language that is considered demeaning or negative, or being dismissive of someone's ideas, especially in front of other colleagues. In essence, workplace incivility can cover a wide range of unprofessional behaviors between colleagues (Pearson & Porath, 2010).

Individuals facing workplace incivilities do not have clear or legalized definitions for such behavior nor options for legal actions. Individuals who instigate workplace incivilities also do not face legal ramifications (Pearson & Porath, 2005).

Thus, the critical differences between workplace harassment or bullying and workplace incivility are the presence of intent to harm by the instigator and the ability for employees who are victimized to pursue legal actions.

The Cumulative Effects of Workplace Incivility

Equally important to understanding the construct of workplace incivility is recognition of negative ramifications stemming from continued or repetitive incivility. It's been noted that while a single incident of incivility may not cause much reason for distress, multiples instances over time can lead to a victim experiencing a greater intensity of negative thoughts such as distress, self-doubt, and plans to leave the organization (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Magley, & Nelson, 2017; Cortina, Magley, Williams, & Langhout, 2001; Kern & Grandey, 2009). At the extreme end of incivility is what Andersson and Pearson (1999)

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identified as the “incivility spiral” wherein a party experiencing incivility pushes back at the instigator in a manner that also ignores social norms; if uninterrupted, this “spiral” can continue between colleagues, and head towards more aggressive behavior, even violence (p. 454). These instances can lead to a demoralized workforce.

Moreover, workplace incivility can be just as disruptive to employee productivity as harassment or bullying. For instance, Porath and Pearson (2010) found that after experiencing incivility, over 60% of study participants had a difficult time managing verbal tasks, and, compared to peers who had been treated civilly, they came up with fewer than 50% of creative solutions (p. 65). After experiencing an uncivil encounter with a supervisor or co-worker, the employee’s energy is spent trying to make sense of the encounter, thus taking their attention away from their work. It’s not surprising that employees who experienced incivility at work reported lower work quality, lower performance, less effort and less commitment (Porath & Pearson, 2010). Recognizing the existence of workplace incivility is an important step to understanding the challenges such negative behavior poses for employees and organizations.

Previous studies offer valuable insight into incivility in the workplace. For instance, Reio and Sanders-Reio (2011) studied the frequency of incivility experienced by employees from their supervisors and co-workers in the private sector and Henning, et al., (2017) investigated the extent and forms of harassment within higher education. Kendrig (2013) sought to understand the differences in perceptions between faculty and administrators of incivility within higher education. However, there is no study as of yet identifying the occurrence and experiences of workplace incivility among full-time staff in public universities: comparing campuses in different locations (urban versus rural), supervisors and staff versus between co-workers, or staff with union coverage versus without.

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Purpose Statement

The purpose of this study is to identify factors contributing to workplace incivility by comparing occurrences of workplace incivility within public universities in the Northeast.

This researcher has worked in a supervisory capacity with a public university for eight years, has both witnessed and experienced workplace incivility, and most likely, also unknowingly instigated workplace incivility. In addition, this researcher has spent considerable time counseling employees around issues stemming from workplace incivility. As a graduate student of Leadership Studies, this researcher became intellectually curious as to how pervasive workplace incivility is within public universities and wanted to begin to understand factors that may contribute to it.

Research Questions

It's important to realize that workplace incivility exists in higher education. It has been found that employees with higher titles (or levels) within the institution can be uncivil to employees with lower titles (or levels) but also that workplace incivility can occur within and between different organizational levels throughout a university (Henning, et al., 2017; McDonald, Stockton, & Landrum, 2018). The desire to further understand workplace incivility within a public university has led this researcher to ask the following research questions: (a) does workplace incivility occur in greater numbers at urban or rural universities? (b) does workplace incivility occur in greater numbers between supervisor and staff or between co-workers? and (c) does workplace incivility occur in greater numbers among unionized or non-unionized staff? Undeniably, answering these questions will add to the existing body of knowledge of workplace incivility and possibly lead to further research specific regarding workplace incivility in public higher education.

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Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1:

A greater number of full-time staff at an urban, public university experienced workplace incivility versus those at a rural public university;

Hypothesis 2:

Regardless of campus location, a greater number of full-time staff members experienced workplace incivility from their supervisor versus from their co-workers;

Hypothesis 3: Regardless of campus location, a greater number of full-time, unionized staff members experienced workplace incivility than full-time, non-unionized staff.

Arguably, gaining an understanding of factors that may influence workplace incivilities possibly guide solutions towards reducing the occurrence and negative impacts of workplace incivility among full-time, public university staff members.

Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

The purpose of this literature review is to offer a comprehensive look at the existing research on workplace incivility. The literature review will be organized into four parts: A framework for workplace incivility; what is currently known about the impact of workplace incivility to personnel and to organizations; the importance of understanding workplace incivility in the context of higher education; and lastly, how addressing workplace incivility in public higher education can support the growth of an institution.

Establishing A Framework for Workplace Incivility

The theoretical construct of workplace incivility was introduced in the late 1990s by Andersson and Pearson (1999) who established workplace incivility as consisting of unexpected behavior, low in intensity, with ambiguous intentions of the instigator to cause harm. Since then

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research has advanced, leading to the development of three types of workplace incivilities: experienced—employees who are the actual targets of workplace incivility, witnessed—employees who are bystanders when workplace incivility occurs, and instigated—employees who direct workplace incivility towards a subordinate or peer (Schilpzand, De Pater, & Erez, 2014, pp. 58-59). Workplace incivility has been studied relative to supervisors treating staff member(s) poorly, staff treating co-workers with disrespect, and even customers taking their frustrations out on workers (Gosh, Reio & Bang, 2013; McDonald, Stockton, & Landrum, 2018; Sliter, Sliter, and Jex, 2012, pp 122-23).

Workplace incivility and its impact on employees and organizations

Prior research has shown that workplace incivility exists within business and higher education, in some cases with 98% of employees reporting having experienced uncivil behavior while at work (Henning, et al., 2017; Pearson & Porath, 2005; Reio & Sanders-Reio, 2011). In addition, research has been conducted to understand how workplace incivility is linked to employee behaviors, such as absenteeism or arriving consistently late to work (Sliter, Sliter, & Jex, 2012, pp 122-23). Pearson and Porath (2005), leading researchers on the topic of workplace incivility, conducted surveys in the United States and Canada, and discovered that between 10-25% of employees witness incivility on a daily basis and 20-50% have directly experienced workplace incivility at least weekly (p. 7). This data points to the need for a more in-depth understanding of workplace incivility and its impact.

The costs of workplace incivility can be high to individual employees and the organization as a whole. Cortina, Magley, Williams, and Langhout (2001) proposed that “workplace incivility merits serious research and organizational attention because of its harmful effects on organizations and individuals alike” (p. 65). Employees may experience job

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dissatisfaction, reduce their work effort, lose work time by talking with coworkers about the incivility they experienced, and in some cases, choose to leave the organization (Cortina & Magley, 2009). Pearson, et al. (2001) noted that “relationships at work that are strained by uncivil encounters can make cooperation and collaboration more difficult to achieve” (p. 1403). The following staff responses to previous workplace incivility surveys indicate the extent that employee productivity, and by extension an organization’s ability to succeed, is affected:

- 48% intentionally decreased work effort
- 38% intentionally decreased work quality
- 80% lost work time worrying about the incident
- 63% lost time avoiding the offender
- 12% said they exited the organization as a result of their uncivil treatment (Porath & Pearson, 2010, p. 64).

Such a significant decrease in productivity caused Pearson and Porath (2009) to investigate further, and they discovered that “managers and executives spend as much as 13% of their total work time—seven full weeks per year—mending employee relationships and dealing with the after effects of incivility” (p. 66). In any given organization, multiplying the estimated seven weeks by the weekly salaries of the average manager and executive and again by the number of managers and executives in the organization, one can begin to consider the high costs of incivility. When it comes to turnover, a position lower in the hierarchy of an organization can cost up to 50% of that person’s salary when they leave. Higher level turnover can cost between 150% to 400% of an employees’ annual salary (Porath & Pearson, 2010). In other words, significant resources in an organization can be lost either to resolving – or not resolving – issues around workplace incivility.

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At the same time, a study conducted by Pignata, Boyd, Gillespie, Provis, and Winefield (2016) indicated that staff merely having an awareness that an organization was deploying efforts against workplace incivility scored higher on job satisfaction. Therefore, understanding how widespread workplace incivility is and exploring factors that may contribute to workplace incivility can bring awareness to the issue, possible improvement of job satisfaction for employees, and increases in productivity and success for institutions.

Understanding the impact of workplace incivility in public universities

At public universities, according to McClure and Titus (2018), there has been an increase in “professional staff positions in non-instructional student services and business services” (pp. 964-965). In addition to the faculty who teach and mentor students, staff must work to recruit new students, review and process applications for admittance, orient new students to the university, and work to ensure their academic success. Police and residential staff ensure students’ safety and well-being 24 hours a day, 7 days a week while students are living on campus. In addition, campus buildings and parking facilities need to be maintained, and grounds need to be kept clean and safe. In other words, the operations of a public university are heavily reliant upon staff (Zaback & State Higher Education Officers, 2011). As an example of public university personnel costs, the fiscal year 2018 budget for the University of Maine System (2017) noted “compensation and benefits continue to be the single largest cost driver representing 72% of the E&G [education and general expenses] budget” (p. 31).

At the same time, public funding for state universities and colleges has been greatly reduced over the past few decades; external stakeholders responsible for oversight of public higher education institutions, such as boards and legislatures, have requested cost-cutting measures (Landry & Neubauer, 2016; McDonald, 2013). In addition to increasing financial

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constraints, economic uncertainties have created expectations of greater accountability and efficiencies of operations (Powell, Gilleland, & Pearson, 2012; Zaback & Officers, 2011). As can be seen, the results of workplace incivility are that organizations lose money and people, creating even greater pressures in the face of funding reductions (McDonald, 2013; Porath & Pearson, 2010; Powell, Gilleland & Pearson, 2012). In view of this, addressing incivility can be a method by which public universities can increase productivity and improve their overall financial situation.

Increasing growth by addressing workplace incivility

As noted above, universities and colleges need to contend with doing more with less in terms of budgets and personnel. Workplace incivility can worsen these constraints as it creates its own form of financial loss through employee distractions during working hours and turnover (Bowling & Beehr, 2006; Jawahar & Schreurs, 2018). Those in leadership positions within a public university, including human resources personnel and supervisors, can benefit from understanding factors that may lead to the prevalence of workplace incivility. Gaining knowledge of the potential depth and reach of workplace incivility and knowing how it can inhibit an institution's success becomes a pressing issue to explore (Henning, et al., 2017; Pearson & Porath, 2005).

Arguably, if differences exist in the number of occurrences of workplace incivility between campus locations, staff hierarchy, and unionized versus non-unionized employee status, this information can serve as a starting point for leadership to determine where or how to address workplace incivility. Programs that create awareness and educational training for staff, supervisors, and leadership could be a direction to pursue. Doing so could be a positive step

forward for to undoing the negative effects of workplace incivility experienced by staff members. This, in turn, can lead to increased performance across the university.

Chapter 3: Methods

Introduction

Quantitative research via an online survey provides an opportunity to study and understand the experiences of a sample population and translate the resulting details into data (Creswell, 2014). This method was chosen for this study as it would best address the hypotheses, which contain dependent and independent variables (Creswell, 2014). For instance, an employee who experiences workplace incivility (independent variable) may become distracted at work or distract co-workers (dependent variables).

This research is focused on the number of occurrences of workplace incivility among full-time staff in public universities in the Northeast, specifically between supervisors and staff versus between co-workers. In addition, it explores the number of occurrences of workplace incivility between campuses in different locations (urban versus rural) and between staff with union coverage versus without.

Recruitment of Participants

Creswell (2014) indicated a sample size of around 10% can be used to study a population. Fowler (2009) indicated analyzed data should possess a margin of error in the area of +/-4%. A typical academic survey generates response rates between 20% - 30% (as cited by Creswell, 2014, p. 159).

According to the Census Bureau, the Northeast is a geographic area consisting of nine states: Connecticut, Massachusetts, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York,

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Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont. It's estimated that the number of full-time employees in public universities in the Northeast is at least 45,000.

To establish a level of control for the survey, participants were limited to those who share similar working hours and conditions which meant for this study, full-time staff members both with and without union representation at all levels in a public university. To compare any differences in work settings, universities in urban and rural areas were included in the sampling. Those with or without union coverage were included as well, to compare if union representation impacted experiences of workplace incivility. Five public universities in the Northeast were invited to participate. Two accepted and three did not respond to the invitation. In the interest of time, this researcher proceeded with collecting data from two public universities.

Demographics

The hypotheses developed for this study are considered major variables, but supporting or mediating variables, such as demographics, are typically collected to assess if any patterns exist to support or explain the hypotheses (Creswell, 2014).

Survey questions (Appendix B) were developed to establish specific information about the staff participants, such as and their title, age, and gender. To aid protection of personal data, some questions, such as age or title, provided ranges within the answer options, for example, ages 18 – 25. Demographic questions established quantitative differences in data comparisons. Respondents ranged in age from 18 – 65+ with age ranges 35-45 and 46-55 each representing 30% of the population. The majority of respondents (68%) identified as female, with 21% identifying as male, and 6% who preferred not to answer the question of gender (none answered “other” and 4% did not answer). Respondents overwhelmingly identified as White (89%), with 6% preferring not to answer, and 2% identifying as Asian/Pacific Islander. None identified as

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Hispanic or Latino, Black or African American, or Native American or Indian. The education levels selected by respondents included 9% as having some college, 36% with an Undergraduate degree, 47% with a Master's degree, and 9% with a Ph.D.

Data Collection

Key aspects for quantitative survey data collection include establishing the hypotheses, developing questions in a focused way that will generate data to support the hypotheses, and appropriately recording the data – technically and ethically (Creswell, 2014).

For this study, an online survey developed using the SNAP survey platform was used to reach a large number of possible respondents and to capture data from a specific point in time. Online availability made the survey accessible via desktop, laptop, tablet, or phone – which meant that respondents had greater opportunity and flexibility to participate when and where they were able.

Lastly, this method was suitable to capturing data securely and analyzing it using descriptive statistics. Invitations were sent via email (Appendix A) and invitees were allowed two weeks to complete the survey. A reminder to complete the survey was sent several days prior to the survey close date.

Ethical Considerations

It's been well established that researchers need to value the privacy and wishes of their study subjects. Not doing so may put individuals at risk. (Creswell, 2014). This researcher received approval to conduct an online study from the University of Southern Maine's Office of Research Integrity and Outreach, which verified that this study followed established guidelines for conducting quality research. The list of invitees was obtained via the Human Resources department at each campus. An email invitation (Appendix A) explained the research purpose

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and requested invitees to participate by completing the online survey. Invitees were notified that their involvement would be voluntary and survey questions were designed to have responses be anonymous; no questions requested identifying information about the participants. This method of corresponding allowed respondents to access the survey via one general link (meaning all participants used the same link, further protecting their privacy) directly from the introductory email (versus requesting a survey link from this researcher) which enhanced confidentiality.

Instrument Development

The online survey was created specifically for this study. Prior research informed the development of the research questions and the framework for developing the survey questions. The survey questions were designed to provide specific quantitative information as a means of shedding light on the occurrences of workplace incivility. A test of this survey was conducted among this researcher's professional peers as a means of obtaining feedback around clarity of the questions and organization of the survey. Prior research established the categories of workplace incivility as experienced, witnessed, and instigated (Schilpzand, et al., 2014). This research focuses on experienced. The types or examples differentiating workplace incivility from other forms of bullying or harassing behavior include (but are not limited to) the following: not listening, checking emails during meetings, or using demeaning language (Pearson & Porath, 2009). To provide consistency of language within the realm of workplace incivility the Workplace Incivility Scale, developed by Cortina, et al., (2001) was included in the survey with permission from the researchers.

The Workplace Incivility Scale asked respondents to consider instances of workplace incivility within the "past five years"; this researcher requested respondents consider instances of

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workplace incivility within the past year, or 12 months to reduce the chance that memory lapses would impact responses.

Delimitations and Limitations

Establishing delimitations – limiting the sample population to a single demographic or geographic area – creates clear boundaries for the research (Creswell, 2014). Delimitations of this research are its focus on surveying a population of full-time staff at public universities in the Northeast. Limitations, or deficiencies, of this research include a lower than anticipated response rate and the majority of respondents identifying as white. Obtaining a more diverse pool of candidates would be beneficial to future research.

While limitations and delimitations to this research exist, this study aimed to adequately address them to prevent their adverse effect on a research outcome that pointed to the presence of workplace incivility among full-time staff in higher education.

In addition to addressing the limitations noted above, it's suggested that future researchers conduct a deeper examination of the types of workplace incivility instigated and witnessed which can lead to causes and effects, and development of possible solutions to decreasing workplace incivility.

Chapter 4: Results

This chapter offers an overview of research findings around workplace incivility within public higher education. This researcher began thinking about where within universities might workplace incivility occur and are there any factors - such as one's title, workplace location, or union representation - that may contribute to the occurrence of this phenomenon?

381 full-time staff members at two public universities in the Northeast were invited to participate via email. Invitees were located in either an urban environment or a rural

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environment. Of the 381 invitees, 69 completed the questionnaire. This represents a 18% response rate. It was found that 47 respondents (68%) reported having experienced workplace incivility in the prior 12 months. As this study is about exploring workplace incivility, the following analysis focuses on the results of the 47 respondents.

Hypothesis 1: A greater number of full-time staff at an urban, public university experienced workplace incivility versus those at a rural public university.

Through this research, it was discovered that of the 47 respondents who experienced workplace incivility, 55% (26) reported working in a rural environment versus 19% (9) reporting that they worked in an urban environment. To further protect respondents' personal identification, "suburban" was offered as a choice, which 19% (9) of respondents selected. Three respondents skipped this question (see figure 1).

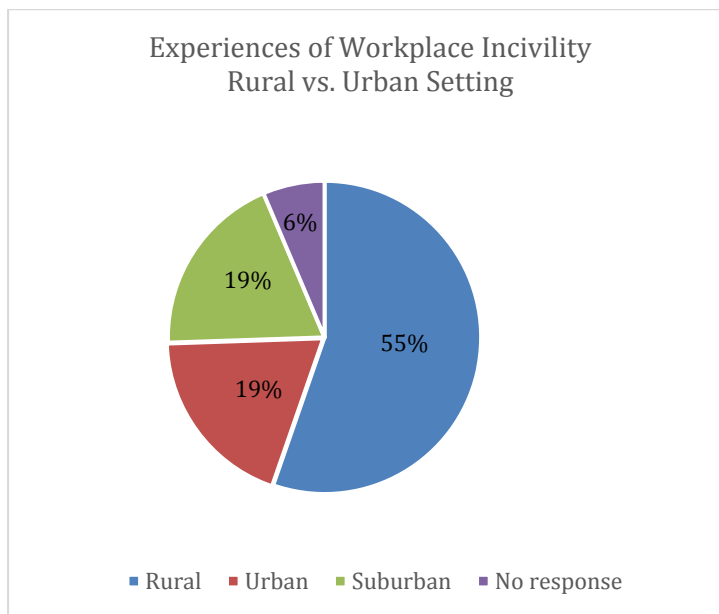


Figure 1: Experiences of workplace incivility by location.

Hypothesis 2: Regardless of campus location, a greater number of full-time staff members experienced workplace incivility from their supervisor versus from their co-workers.

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47% (22) of the respondents reported experiencing workplace incivility from their supervisor and 40% (19) reported experiencing workplace incivility from someone who is a colleague but with a higher title than their own (CH). Colleague to colleague workplace incivility from those with similar or same title as their own was reported by 36% (17) of respondents (C) and 21% (10) reported as experiencing workplace incivility from someone with a lower title than their own (CL) (figure 2). Such high percentages of employees experiencing workplace incivility from those with higher titles than their own (supervisors and colleagues) point to an important leadership gap. As has been noted by an established authority on leadership, the power one holds due to their title is not the same as leadership (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 2012).



Figure 2: Experiences of workplace incivility by staff relationships.

Hypothesis 3: Regardless of campus location, a greater number of full-time, unionized staff members experienced workplace incivility than full-time, non-unionized staff.

72% (34) of respondents who experienced workplace incivility reported as belonging to a union; 38% (13) reported not having union coverage (figure 3).

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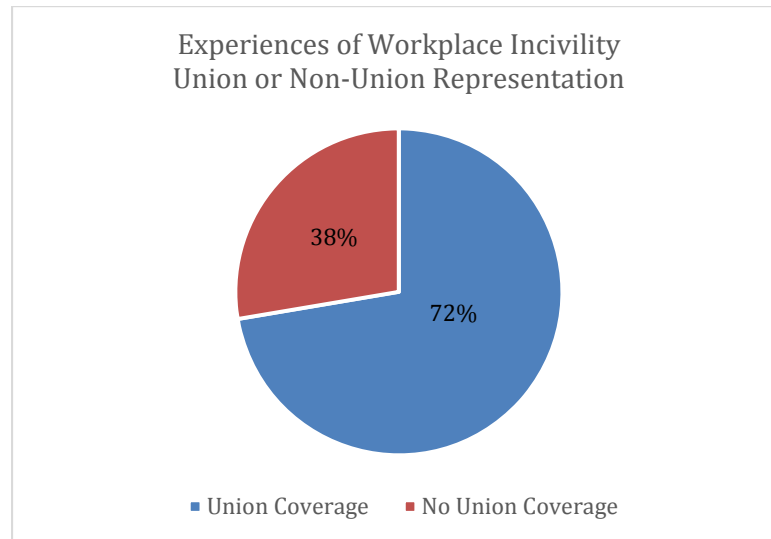


Figure 3: Experiences of workplace incivility by union coverage.

In addition to the results above, types of workplace incivility and emotions experienced by full-time employees were also investigated. Understanding the data around these two variables can provide a foundation for examining any patterns that may exist in the culture of a workplace as well as the severity of disruption to an organization from workplace incivility. Through this, a greater understanding of the impact to performance and productivity can be achieved. Using a rating scale, this researcher asked respondents to select the top three (3) types of workplace incivility they most often experienced in order of frequency: One (1) = greatest in frequency; two (2) = second greatest in frequency, and three (3) = third greatest in frequency. The data was then tabulated based on a rating scale of 90, resulting in the following:

1. "Paid little attention to your statements or showed little interest in your opinions" - 77.
2. "Doubted your judgment on a matter over which you had responsibility" - 62.
3. "Interrupted or "spoke over" you" – 47 (figure 4).

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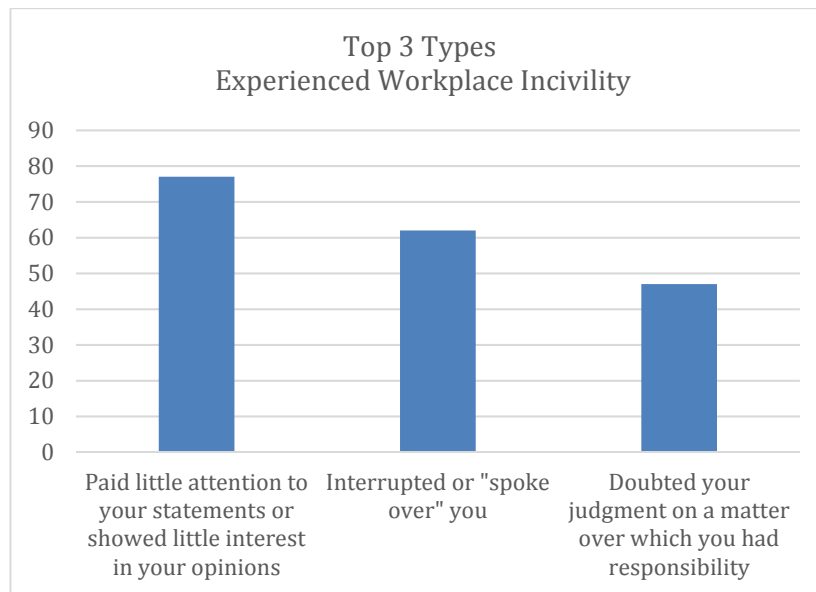


Figure 4: Top three types of experienced workplace incivility.

The question of the top three (3) types of emotions felt after experiencing workplace incivility was also asked. Respondents indicated the following:

1. Frustration, 82%,
2. Self-doubt and anger were tied at 56%,
3. Sadness was felt by 40% of respondents (figure 5).

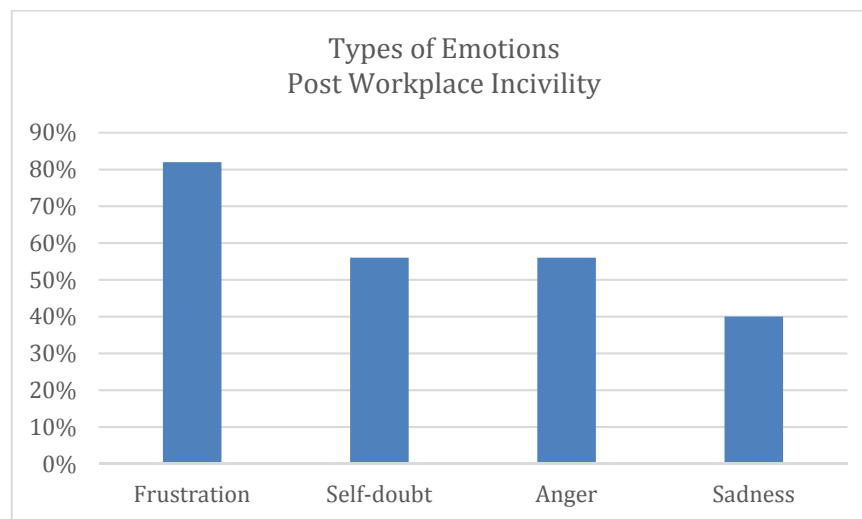


Figure 5: Types of emotions felt after experiences of workplace incivility.

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Within one week after an episode of workplace incivility, nearly half (49%) spent 1-3 hours thinking about the incident and 43% spent an additional 1-3 hours discussing the incident with co-workers (figure 6). 51% indicated they either reduced work effort for the instigator or overall for the organization (figure 7). In comparison, Pearson, et al (2010) found that 80% lost work time worrying about the incident and 38% intentionally decreased work quality after experiencing workplace incivility.

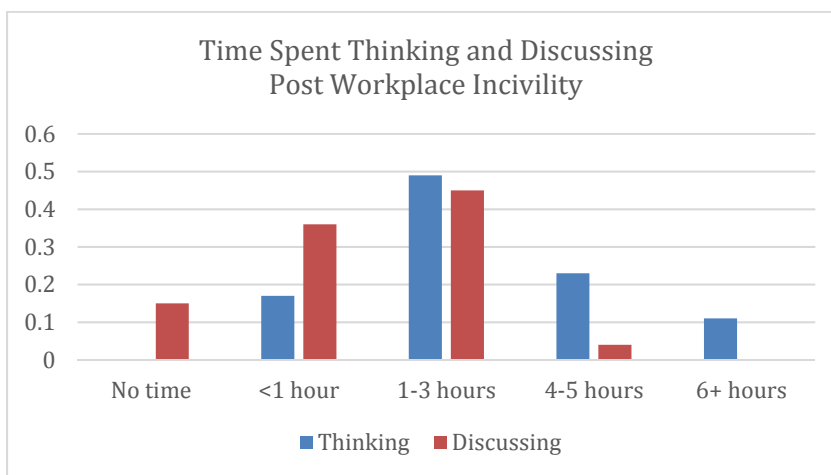


Figure 6: Time spent thinking about and discussing experiences of workplace incivility with co-workers.

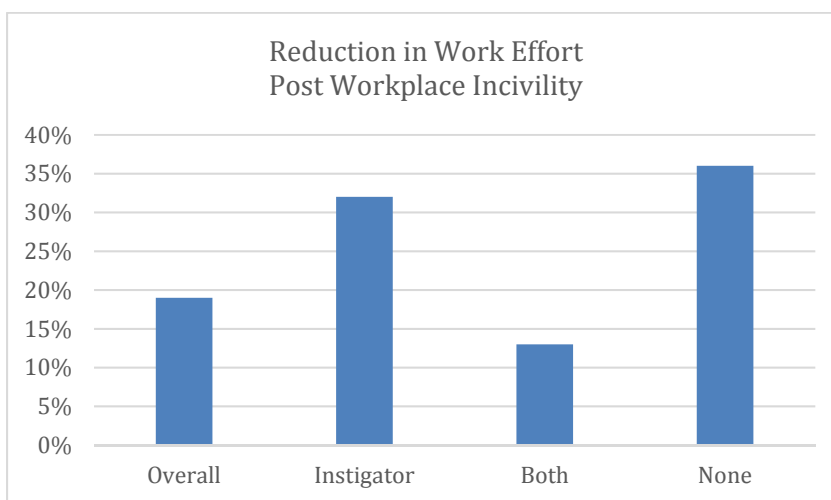


Figure 7: Reduction in work effort after experiencing workplace incivility.

Discussion

This research sought to explore the occurrences of workplace incivility among full-time employees within higher education. The data confirms that workplace incivility does exist within public higher education institutions that were surveyed. Staff at a rural campus reported experiencing workplace incivility in greater numbers than staff at an urban campus. The results confirmed that the majority of respondents faced workplace incivility from their supervisors and/or employees with higher titles than their own. The vast majority of those experiencing workplace incivility possessed union coverage. Showing little value for one's comments or opinions appeared in the top three types of workplace incivility experienced both in this study and the research of Cortina, et al (2001). This indicates that a strong pattern exists across multiple industries of leaders being dismissive of employee ideas or contributions. Furthermore, it was discovered that employees who face dismissive attitudes towards their contributions decrease their work effort – either directly for the employee instigating the incivility, or for the organization as a whole. In either case, the organization suffers.

Suggestions for future research

For researchers interested in the topic of workplace incivility, further exploring a larger segment of higher education would be beneficial. Expanding outreach to include a more diverse participant pool will achieve results that are more representative of the experiences of the total population. This study indicates that patterns may exist with regards to how workplace location affects workplace incivility, further exploring these patterns can be enlightening to researchers, possibly contributing to educational options for reducing workplace incivility. Greater examination around the predominance of workplace incivility being instigated by those with higher titles (such a vice president or

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above), could highlight opportunities for improvement, such as offering interpersonal training to leadership. It may also be beneficial to explore whether or not employees with lower titles have an inclination towards perceiving workplace incivility from those with higher titles. Employees represented by a union reported experiencing greater frequency of workplace incivility than those without union representation. It would benefit future research to understand why this may be so. Protection afforded by unions may reduce the social expectation of being civil to others. Lastly, since this and previous research have shown the existence and negative impact of workplace incivility, it would be beneficial to conduct research among human resources personnel and leadership to understand their perspectives of workplace incivility.

Conclusion

This study furthers research that has previously established the existence of workplace incivility. By surveying full-time employees in public higher education, the types of organizations where instances of workplace incivility have been identified has been expanded. By making use of the Workplace Incivility Scale developed by Cortina, et al. (2001), the identification of a particular type of workplace incivility in public higher education has been exposed – those with higher titles being dismissive to the ideas of those with lower titles in the organization. As has been noted earlier in this paper, employees who experienced workplace incivility decreased their own productivity, either through spending time worrying about the incident or intentionally decreasing their efforts. Additionally, productivity of co-workers was decreased by spending time discussing the incident those who experienced workplace incivility. Given the detrimental impact of workplace incivility, it seems reasonable that Human Resource

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professionals and organizational leaders should put time towards understanding and educating their workforces about workplace incivility.

FINAL APPROVAL FORM

THE UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN MAINE

April 29, 2019

We hereby recommend that the thesis of Tracy M. St. Pierre entitled *Workplace Incivility: A Quantitative Study of Public University Staff Member Experiences in the Northeast* be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Leadership Studies.

_____ Advisor, Dr. Elizabeth Goryunova

_____ Second Reader, M.A. Watson, Associate Vice
President, Human Resources, University of Southern Maine.

Accepted

Director, Leadership Studies Program

Dr. Daniel Jenkins

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APPENDIX A

Email invitation to recruit participants

Hello -

I am a graduate student in Leadership Studies at the University of Southern Maine, as well as an employee. My master's thesis is examining the experiences and impact of workplace incivility within higher education.

To aid my research, I'm asking full-time employees, like yourself, in higher education institutions to complete the [workplace incivility survey](#). The survey is designed to be anonymous and should take less than 10 minutes to complete. Whether you participate or not will have no bearing on your employment. The survey will be available until Friday, January 25 at 5:00pm.

Workplace incivility consists of behaviors such as rudeness, talking over someone, and other similar behaviors and can be found in any organization. Researchers have found that negative impacts of repeated workplace incivility include decreased productivity, decreased morale, and lost time for employees and their managers dealing with the aftermath.

Understanding more about workplace incivility can help organizations and their employees make improvements to their working environments.

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,
Tracy

Tracy M. St. Pierre
Student
Leadership Studies Graduate Program

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APPENDIX B

Online Survey Questions

The Incidence and Impact of Workplace Incivility

Please read this form. Your participation is voluntary.

Workplace incivility, which can be found in any organization, can create negative impact such as decreased productivity, decreased morale, and lost time for employees and their managers dealing with the aftermath of incivility.

Understanding the experiences of workplace incivility, the working relationships in which incivility occurs, and the resultant impact to an organization can help the organization and its employees make improvements to their working environments.

Participants that have been selected to participate in this survey are full-time staff members, either with or without union representation, at public universities in the Northeast. The approximate number of subjects invited is 400. Participants are being asked to complete the online survey as honestly as possible. The survey should take approximately 10 minutes to complete. There are no costs associated with participating in this online survey. This survey and data collection are designed to be anonymous; individual participant data will not be requested or collected in any way within the survey. Please do not include any information anywhere on the survey that may individually identify you or anyone else. There are no reasonably foreseeable risks associated with participation. Participants may indirectly benefit from this research by enabling greater knowledge and understanding of workplace incivility .

The data is kept secure by using the SNAP survey tool and will be exported from SNAP to an appropriate tool for analysis. The server for SNAP is housed on a university campus and secured. The researcher is the only individual with access to the data, though the University's Institutional Review Board may request to review the research records. The data will be kept on a password protected computer and an additional password will be used to protect the data files used for analytic purposes. Participant information will not be shared/sold to a third party. Aggregate results will be shared at the annual Thinking Matters symposium at the University of Southern Maine in Spring of 2019. If you choose not to participate, it will not affect your current or future relations with the University. You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason. The Institutional Review Board (IRB), responsible for protecting the rights and welfare of people involved in research at the University of Southern Maine, has reviewed this research project.

The researcher conducting this survey is Tracy M. St. Pierre. For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact her at tracy.st@maine.edu. This researcher's faculty advisor is Dr. Elizabeth Goryunova. If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call the USM Human Protections Administrator at (207) 228-8434 and/or email usmorio@maine.edu. By clicking "I agree" below. You are indicating that you are at least 18 years of age and agree to participate in this survey.

Q1 Agree

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I Agree

I do not agree

Workplace incivility has been deemed by researchers to be different from Workplace Sexual Harassment or Workplace Bullying. The behaviors used in this survey have been established as being uncivil behaviors in the workplace and are used with permission by researchers Drs. Lilia Cortina, Vicki Magley, Jill Hunter Williams, and Regina Day Langhout. As with any behaviors deemed to cause negative results, workplace incivility must be experienced at least multiples times to be considered problematic.

Q2 Are you a full-time staff member at a public university in the Northeast?

Yes

No

Q3 During the PAST YEAR, were you ever in a situation in which your supervisor or co-workers:

(select all that apply):

1. Paid little attention to your statements or showed little interest in your opinions
2. Doubted your judgment on a matter over which you had responsibility
3. Gave you hostile looks, stares, or sneers
4. Addressed you in unprofessional terms, either publicly or privately
5. Interrupted or "spoke over" you
6. Rated you lower than you deserved on an evaluation
7. Yelled, shouted, or swore at you
8. Made insulting or disrespectful remarks about you
9. Ignored you or failed to speak to you (e.g., gave you the "silent treatment")
10. Accused you of incompetence
11. Targeted you with angry outbursts or "temper tantrums"
12. Made jokes at your expense
13. Other:

Q4 In the PAST YEAR, from whom have you experienced one or more instances of the above behaviors (select all that apply):

- Your supervisor
- A co-worker (or colleague) with a higher job title or level than you
- A co-worker (or colleague) with the same or similar job title or level as you
- A co-worker (or colleague) with a lower job title or level than you

Q5 In the PAST YEAR, how often do you estimate you have experienced any of the behaviors noted above?

- Daily
- Weekly
- Every few months

Q6 Of the behaviors listed below that you have experienced in the PAST YEAR from either your supervisor or co-workers/colleagues, please rate up to three (3) behaviors you have most

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often experienced in order of frequency: One (1) = highest frequency; two (2) = second highest in frequency, and three (3) = third highest in frequency.

1. Paid little attention to your statements or showed little interest in your opinions
2. Doubted your judgment on a matter over which you had responsibility
3. Gave you hostile looks, stares, or sneers
4. Addressed you in unprofessional terms, either publicly or privately
5. Interrupted or "spoke over" you
6. Rated you lower than you deserved on an evaluation
7. Yelled, shouted, or swore at you
8. Made insulting or disrespectful remarks about you
9. Ignored you or failed to speak to you (e.g., gave you the "silent treatment")
10. Accused you of incompetence
11. Targeted you with angry outbursts or "temper tantrums"
12. Made jokes at your expense
13. Other - if an item or items you have experienced with frequency is not listed above, please include it/them below with the appropriate rating of 1, 2, or 3:

Q8 After experiencing any of the behaviors listed above, which of the following emotions did you feel? (select all that apply)

- Sadness
- Confusion
- Nervousness
- Frustration
- Self-doubt
- Impatience
- Anger
- Fear
- Other (any emotion not listed above, or "none"):

Q9 After experiencing any of the behaviors listed above, have you found yourself outwardly expressing any of the following emotions to the point that others have noticed? (select all that apply)

- Sadness
- Confusion
- Nervousness
- Frustration
- Self-doubt
- Impatience
- Anger
- Fear
- I have not outwardly expressed emotions to the point others have noticed.
- Other - If an emotion you have outwardly expressed is not noted in the list above, please make note of it here:

Q10 After experiencing any of the behaviors listed above, have you (select all that apply):

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- Reduced your overall work effort (temporarily or permanently)
- Reduced your work effort specifically for the person or person(s) who treated you in an uncivil manner (temporarily or permanently)

Q11 After experiencing of any of the behaviors listed above, approximately how much time would you estimate you spent thinking on your own about the incident WITHIN ONE WEEK after the occurrence?

- Less than one hour
- 1 - 3 hours
- 4 - 5 hours
- 6+ hours
- I did not spend any time thinking about the incident

Q12 After experiencing of any of the behaviors listed above how much time would you estimate you spent discussing the incident with one or more co-workers or colleagues WITHIN ONE WEEK after the occurrence?

- Less than one hour
- 1 - 3 hours
- 4 - 5 hours
- 6 + hours
- I did not spend any time discussing the incident with co-workers

Q13 Do you believe that learning about incivility in the workplace can help reduce its occurrence?

- Yes
- No

Q14 What is your age?

- 18 - 25
- 26 - 34
- 35 - 45
- 46 - 55
- 56 - 65
- 65 +

Q15 Do you identify as

- Female
- Male
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

Q16 Please specify your race/ethnicity.

- White
- Hispanic or Latino
- Black or African American

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- Native American or America Indian
- Asian/Pacific Islander
- Other
- Prefer not to answer

Q17 Is the location of the university in which you primarily work considered:

- Rural
- Urban
- Suburban

Q18 What is your education level:

- High school
- Some college
- Undergraduate degree
- Master's degree
- Ph.D.

Q19 Do you consider your working environment:

- High stress
- Medium stress
- Low stress

Q20 Which title below best represents your position?

- Administrative 1, 2, or 3
- Manager, Assistant Director, Associate Director, or similar level
- Director, Executive Director, Assistant Vice President, or similar level
- Vice President or above
- Other:

Q21 Is your position represented by a union?

- Yes
- No

#end#