

Conflict Versus Abuse

Paul Harvey studies entitlement and abuse in the workplace

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PAUL HARVEY, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR OF MANAGEMENT, STUDIES ENTITLEMENT AND ABUSE IN THE WORKPLACE.

In today's workplace, employees from as many as five generations work side by side. Such diversity furnishes organizations with a deep pool of experience from which to draw but can lead to culture clashes among people with disparate backgrounds, worldviews and expectations.

One conflict involves employee perceptions of abusive supervision. Workplace bullying involves intimidation, passive

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aggression and other behaviors that have received popular and academic attention — usually supporting contentions that workers face a national epidemic of abusive managers and that laws ought to be put in place to protect employees.

“Not so fast!” says Paul Harvey who, with his colleagues, has identified “psychological entitlement” not only as a root cause of perceived abuse but also a serious threat to managerial and organizational performance.

“Entitled employees often see themselves as far more talented, accomplished and thus deserving than the facts support,” Harvey says.

“Has this led them to misread the situation and accuse their supervisors of abuse?”

The answer, he has discovered in studies of dozens of companies representing numerous industries, is “yes.”

To control for the possibility that managers might behave more abusively toward entitled staff, Harvey and his colleagues did something nobody in the field had ever done: employed actors to “play the boss” and conduct performance reviews with real employees who then rated the bosses’ abusiveness.

The findings? “It showed even stronger correlation between entitlement and abuse perception,” Harvey says.

Harvey is now focusing on the best ways to manage entitled employees. The good news is that clearly communicated accountability standards are emerging as the top countermeasure

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to the entitled mindset.

“Our conclusion is that biases thrive in ambiguity,” Harvey says.

“Remove or reduce the ambiguity and you leave less room for bias to thrive.”

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