Anti-harassment training programmes in the RCMP: Is organizational transformative learning possible?

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ANTI-HARASSMENT TRAINING PROGRAMMES IN THE RCMP, IS ORGANIZATIONAL TRANSFORMATIVE LEARNING POSSIBLE?

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ABSTRACT

Examining a complex hierarchical law enforcement organization mandated anti-harassment (AH) training programmes. A sample of the RCMP revealed bullying negative behaviours occurring at 19% across study group (n=237). Mix-method approach using Kirkpatrick Evaluation, OCAI and NAQ-R provided insights into the correlation of training to organizational stated culture goals. More males reported being bullying (25%) No overt bullying reported by female respondents however, subtle bullying remains. All training materials aligned with organizational mission, vision and strategic goals. Curricula was clear however a gap exists between formal training and applied learning as evidenced by quantitative assessments. The NAQ-R (Cronbach alpha 0.777) indicates the presence of bullying but not at toxic levels. The OCAI highlights an overly hierarchical quadrant fulfilling market needs at the expense of clan and adhocracy quadrants. These findings support previous qualitative studies and employee engagement results. The leadership has choices to move forward and strengthen its AH training efforts.

INTRODUCTION

Researchers and practitioners have long struggled with evaluating programme effectiveness, especially concerning transformative learning within organizations. The RCMP anti-harassment (AH) programmes began in 1994 with successive reactionary revisions following external reviews, formal complaints and legal settlements (Fraser, 2017; McKay, 2016; Merlo-Davisson, 2017). Current training metrics omit the influence of transformational learning or longitudinal culture shifts within the organization. Evaluation of mandatory anti-harassment programmes has been considered redundant beyond attendance or immediate knowledge testing to satisfy external regulatory bodies. Document analysis indicates correlation with specific negative behaviour of bullying, and organizational culture states providing indicators of shifts in behaviours through action learning (Brooks, 2005). Action learning and culture shift demonstrate if organization transformational learning is occurring (Yorks & Marsick, 2000). Practitioners remain curious as to the efficacy of AH training given the resources and priority mandatory training receive. Is there a measurable shift in organizational culture as a result of AH training?

DEFINITIONS AND GAPS

Workplace bullying literature is replete with qualitative research composed of narrative studies seeking an understanding of traits or perspectives: the bully, the bullied or the bystander. (Bikos, 2017; Karatuna, 2015) Alternatively, quantitative studies isolating single factors causing power discrepancy bullying or leader character traits dominant the research (Bykov, 2014; Hoel, Einerson & Notelar, 2009). Large scale studies have employed specific instruments to measure the negative behaviour of bullying within and among organizations (Hoel & Cooper, 2010). The absence of bullying terminology in most policies or case law obfuscates the distinction between harassment and bullying, minimizing the effects bullying

behaviours create among employees and on organizational disruption (Van Fleet et al. 2018). AH training programmes often experience a gap at the implementation, applied or evaluation stages resulting in mixed organizational messages.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Mezirow's (1991) theory premise of meaning-making based on learner values, beliefs and experiences creating transformative learning (TL). Many scholars criticized this approach. Brookfield (2005) suggests the evaluation of TL at the organizational level viewed through the lens of social location and dialogic discussion, encourages critical reflective conversation. Intentional steps to change are necessary, facilitated by change leaders who become key mechanisms of sustained organizational change (Watkins, Marsick, & Faller, 2012).

METHODOLOGY

A mixed-methods approach to action research allowed understanding how anti-harassment training impacts an organization. An analysis of organizational documents (mission, vision, values, attrition rates and previous organizational reports) and training curricula using the Kirkpatrick Evaluation Model level 4 lens (Kirkpatrick, 1994). The NAQ-R (Hoel, Einerson & Noteler, 2009) and OCAI (Cameron & Quinn, 2006) instruments measure bullying behaviours and the organizational culture respectively. Collectively, the data provide a clearer picture regarding the alignment among anti-harassment training programmes, culture, document materials, the organizational goals, and measure of bullying experienced by employees.

The study was conducted April-May 2019 within the RCMP, K Division-Central Alberta District, Canada. Before the survey, the District Chief Superintendent communicated the intent of the study to all employees via email: voluntary and part of a doctoral study by an external researcher. Participants included two employee groups: RCMP Members and Public Servants as they operate under the same employment laws. Excluded civilians in the individual municipalities and tribes because they each required separate permissions, logistically unrealistic given the study timeframe. Numerically coded surveys contained no identifying data, such as name, rank/ classification level, or geographic location to preserve anonymity. Participants had up to 30-days following the last day of the survey to withdraw from the survey. None withdrew. The data for both NAQ-R and OCAI were analyzed using SPSS v17 maintained on the University of Liverpool server following EU electronic security guidelines.

Training data requests from ATIP (Access to Information and Privacy) based in RCMP headquarters, Ottawa began August 2018 and fulfilled May 2019. Additional external reports, programme content and evaluation data were supplied online or by local training coordinators, facilitators or District Administration March-July 2019. Local employees' attempts to access training data proved challenging due to limited system access and resulted in piecemeal data. Inconsistent training evaluation instruments among AH programmes ranged from none to level-one Kirkpatrick. Numerous committee reports, review boards, the 2018 employee engagement surveys, internal and external panels have recommended harassment training focusing on sexual harassment training with only the recent Intermittent Review Advisory Board naming bullying as a target area to address (Leuprecht, 2017). AH programmes remain an evolving entity.

RESULTS

The overall response rate of 27.4% (n=237), male Officers representing 70.9% of the respondents, female Officers 20.3% and female Public Servants 8.4%. These results replicate male-dominated law enforcement organizations (Broderick, 2016; Hoel & Cooper,2010). Most respondents have occupied their current position 1-4 years (51%). A sharp decline in years of service follows 15+ service years, despite employees incurring reduced pension payouts. The overall organization has sustained 17% attrition rates since 2016. The RCMP reports attrition by classification: Officers (4.5%), Public Servants (7.8%) and civilians (5.0%). Typically, organization attrition rates above 10% signal an unsettling work environment given the associated costs. The RCMP rising trend of 'double-dipping': receiving a full pension after 20 service years then working externally for another employer (Boucher, 2019). The constant reconfiguration of work teams due to employee movement creates challenges, new team dynamics and operating baselines with members (Ghazzawi, El Shoughari & El Osta, 2017).

The rush for the RCMP to demonstrate AH compliance externally lessened evaluation priorities at higher levels and devoid of the impact training contributes at successive employee levels. Questions of, how or if the mandatory AH training is positively influencing organizational culture. Command-and-control teams benefit from a well-trained formal team leader who supports, guides and manages the team. Supporting optional applied AH training programmes is well received by Officers, however, the data suggests a noticeable lack of participation by Commanding Officers (K Division Facilitator, 2019).

Senior leaders shared that the scarcity of offerings, and lack of strategic rollout forces leaders to prioritize participation in training programmes. The allocation of limited resources is often to develop lower-ranking leaders and staff rather than leaders retake current programmes. However, consistent training ensures that key organizational training messages are shared: the same language and the same tools at all levels remains a goal for a cohesive culture shift.

Moving from classroom to 3-hour computer-based programmes for mandatory AH training diminishes learner value, eliminates dialogue, reflection and perspective-taking (Peterson, & McCleery, 2014) Training evaluations occur at level 1 Kirkpatrick if at all, compounded by significant feedback delays among the organization's national learning management system, (AGORA) and frontline practitioners. Redundancy of feedback due to the feedback time lag leaves programme coordinators unable to address learner time-sensitive issues as many may have long since relocated to different positions, transferred detachments or regional divisions. Intentional or unintentional organizational feedback holdup communicates that even mandatory AH training programmes are a low organizational priority. (Samnani & Singh, 2016)

External reviews repeatedly highlights systemic organizational issues related to sexual harassment and harassment within the Force: complicated complaint process, dysfunctional culture, lack of trained leadership, different work units responsible for designing, implementing and delivering anti-harassment training all lacking accountability (Lang & Dallaire, 2013; Deschamps, 2015; McPhail, 2017). Since 2007 271 recommendations for change within the Force, 51 relevant to AH, investigation process, training for leaders, investigators and employees. A further 20 recommendations addressing organizational culture items, for example, creating a centralized harassment investigations database. The lengthy investigations disrupt the workplace and cause unnecessary emotional, physical and psychological harm to all parties. (McPhail, 2017) The complaint process, while communicated

in the AH training, provides false hope to complainants. Employees experience a cumbersome, time-consuming process with low accountability of even egregious bullies. (Merlo Davison, 2018) Identifying key personnel or departments responsible or accountable for specific changes remains elusive organizationally. National HQ pronouncements assigned to individual Divisions often with little guidance account for further tardiness and inconsistent implementation of recommended AH changes.

SURVEY SAID

Demographics

This study group scored on the lower end of the NAQ-R instrument, 36 out of a possible 110; by definition, this is not a toxic organization (Cameron & Quinn, 2014). The majority of respondents (85%) indicate never experiencing workplace bullying, suggesting the RCMP mandatory anti-harassment training has been impactful. Zero females reported experiencing any overt bullying suggests the programmes curtail overt bullying acts such as physical violence or suggesting a person quit the job. Contrary to the literature, this study found that males reported higher incidents of bullying (25%) compared to females (19%). Examining bullying three-ways: personal, intimidation and work-related bullying revealed subtle bullying acts continue. Subtle bullying acts are more likely to occur away from others in 1:1 situation.

NAQ-R

Acts of intimidation-related bullying are prevalent among peers (Table 1) indicate that most respondents are encouraged not to claim entitled benefits, such as overtime. Intimidation behaviours are often carried out by peers and condoned by the senior leadership.

Table 1: Personal Related Bullying by Rank

ITEM	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
Excessive monitoring	237	1.65	1.058	1
Opinions ignored	237	1.92	1.030	2
Being Humiliated	237	1.73	1.001	3
Being Ignored	237	1.85	.995	4
Persistent criticism	237	1.51	.946	5
Hostile reaction	237	1.57	.939	6
Gossip	236	1.70	.916	7
Insults	236	1.62	.894	8
Shouted	237	1.43	.776	9

Cronbach Alpha .909

Table 2: Intimidation-Related Bullying

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ITEM	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Rank
Not to claim entitled benefits	237	1.59	.919	1
Practical jokes	236	1.30	.645	2
Finger-Pointing	236	1.24	.637	3
Hints or signals to quit	237	1.20	.605	4
Threats of physical violence	237	1.15	.498	5

Cronbach Alpha .777

Table 2 highlights work-related bullying overseen by the immediate supervisor, such as unmanageable workloads and working below one's knowledge or ability level. These acts induce unnecessary stress in the workplace, which over time, leads to frustration, demotivation and presenteeism, each associated with hard and soft costs.

Table 3: Work-Related Bullying

ITEM	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Unmanageable workload	237	2.46	1.418
Working Below Level of Competency	236	1.94	1.143
Responsibilities removed	237	1.93	1.112
Withholding key Information for work	237	2.09	1.070

Cronbach Alpha .777

The total mean OCAI scores reveal gaps of ten or more points in all but adhocracy quadrants between current and future states. Insights into perceptions of organizational culture in the two states of 'now' and 'preferred' reveal tension areas identifying potential barriers (Table 4). Cameron and Quinn (2011) suggest this score differential is significant, communicating an area for further examination ensuring a shared vision and goals (Fig. 4a).

Table 4. Total Mean OCAI Score

TOTAL	Now	Preferred
Clan	30.4	46.2
Adhocracy	21.5	32.6
Market	40.6	29.6
Hierarchy	54.2	37.2
Dominant	Hierarchy	Clan

What holds this organization together? Respondents report significant gaps in all but the market quadrant (Table 5). Organizational leaders need to demonstrate a significant degree of adaptability and flexibility to achieve positive culture shifts by balancing first the competing quadrants of hierarchy and adhocracy, then clan and market Fig 5a.

Table 5. Organizational Glue.

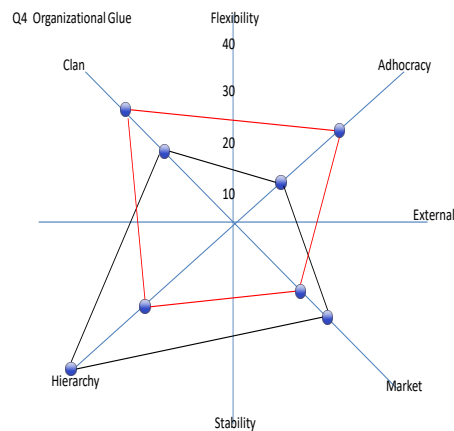| Q4	Now	Preferred
Clan	17.6	32.7
Adhocracy	12.4	24.4
Market	25.8	17.7
Hierarchy	44.2	24.2
Dominant	Hierarchy	Clan

Fig. 5a Organizational Glue

Respondents see the RCMP as a no-nonsense leadership organization, aggressive, and results driven. Operations are dependent on adherence to numerous processes for information flow. Generally, the leadership exemplifies mentoring, facilitating, and employee development. The leadership remains challenged to entrepreneurship, innovation, and risk-taking (Fig 6).

The discrepancy of significance occurs within market organizational leadership (-17.5 points) indicates focus on external stakeholders and markets. Respondents would prefer the market quadrant pulled back to balance the other quadrants. No other culture quadrants exceed ten-points. Identifying the criteria for organizational culture success reinforces the respondent's clear sign of preferring far less hierarchy and increasing clan behaviour. The OCAI findings target and prioritize areas for the next action steps by the leadership.

Table 6: Organizational Leadership

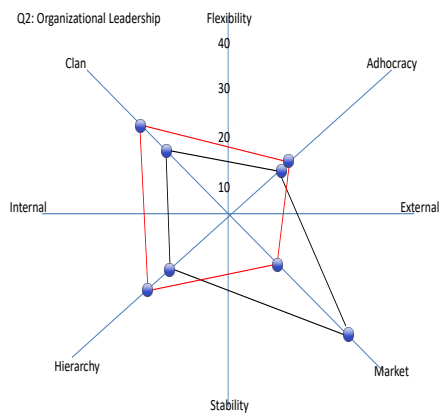|	Now	Preferred
Clan	21.1	30.6
Adhocracy	17.0	20.3
Market	37.4	19.9
Hierarchy	24.5	29.2
DOMINANT	Market	Clan

Fig. 6a Organizational Leadership

Respondents consistently identify shifting to greater quadrant balance for overall criteria for success (Table 7 & Fig. 7a).

Table 7. Criteria for Success

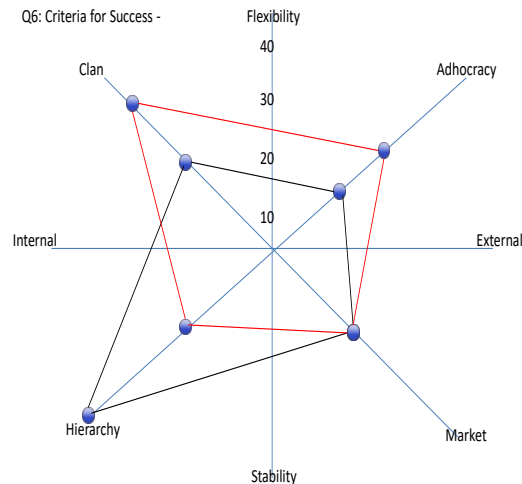| Q6	Now	Preferred
Clan	23.7	36.6
Adhocracy	12.7	21.1
Market	18.6	18.6
Hierarchy	45.0	23.7
Dominant	Hierarchy	Clan

Fig 7a. Criteria for Success

Message Received

K Division Senior Management Team (SMT) agreed with the findings in January 2020. The findings align with other internal studies by considering data from the AH training programmes focusing workplace bullying and organizational culture perspective. Training programmes do represent the overall organizational vision, culture and leadership priority. The hierarchical complexity within the RCMP reinforces rigidity and fear of overstepping positional authority. Intentional engagement of leaders remains critical to successful organizational transformative learning as set the conditions for sustained organizational learning outside formal training.

Study Recommendations:

- Time for action: Unswerving leadership commitment to continue embedding zero tolerance of workplace bullying. Improve leader skills to manage conflict, resolve complaints faster and at lower levels in the complaint process. Increase leaders accountable for the management of complaints, compliance and healthy workplace culture via annual performance reviews.
- Name it! Streamline the complaint process and define the term bullying using plain language to increase accessibility to employees, potentially resolve bullying issues sooner.
- Enhance programme design: intentionally incorporate skill-building both within the classroom and in the work unit, offer safe learning space for employees to improve applied skills. Create shorter learning activities (5-15 minutes) to instill behaviour changes
- Evaluate and align training programmes: implement consistent metrics among direct and indirect AH training programmes. Continued alignment of learning objectives and outcomes to support broader organizational goals.
- Workforce Planning Strategy: address the demographics to understand retention data and implications to training offerings, maintain institutional knowledge and organizational culture.

- Create the Culture: Implement an onboarding programme for all new employees regardless of rank or classification clarifying the value and culture expectations of District and Divisional leadership, a safe workplace devoid of bullying. Ensure immediate supervisors actively engaged in the onboarding process with an accountability component into the annual performance plan.
- Solution partners: Create learning resource materials, programmes and policies to address the role and responsibility of bystanders. Establishing safe whistleblowing processes will allow the management of negative behaviours, given the number of bystanders always outweighs the number of bullies.
- Increase communication to all levels regarding culture shift: Recognize and celebrate employees demonstrating positive workplace behaviours. Adopt inclusive culture champions to promote greater employee engagement of all employees. Embed desired culture behaviours as a regular part of doing business rather than reserving the topic of workplace bullying for strategic conversations or within training programmes.

The District Management Team expressed concerns regarding the ownership of anti-harassment processes and programmes. In any complex hierarchical organization, uncoordinated ownership, responsibility or accountability results in slow change management. (Samuel, 2018) The sense of urgency in tackling workplace bullying has not risen to a level of action; therefore, frontline employees continue to see little change in their work environment despite repeated studies reporting consistent findings citing the need for culture change. AH programmes remain an important vehicle for culture change.

IMPLICATIONS

The use of a mixed-methods study provided a richer understanding of AH programme efficacy within the RCMP. A systemic avoidance to include the term 'workplace bullying' in its anti-harassment training, policy or complaint process has created a gap and confusion in how the Force addresses this negative behaviour. Given the organization's focus on mitigating sexual harassment, the organizational barriers for leaders to address bullying leaves impacted employees vulnerable. Despite alignment among written training curricula outcomes and organizational documents, inconsistent training evaluation has resulted in piecemeal data gathering reliant on individual facilitators. Coordinating efforts within business and operating strategies will demonstrate the value of AH training efforts within the organization. Prioritizing applied learning as critical, equipping more employees with concrete skills and techniques to address workplace bullying situations will positively support a culture shift. Intentionally tooling employees from the perspective of being bystanders is a key first line of defense and resolving bullying sooner. The complaint process requires further refining: defining bullying, triaging, speeding up investigations and establishing safer whistleblower complaint processes. Respondents indicate bullying occurs in more subtle forms; implementing mechanisms to address bullying earlier is essential.

Transformational leaders possess vision, motivate and lead with integrity and conviction (Tichy & Cardwell, 2004). It takes leadership courage to grant an outside researcher permission to survey bullying workplace behaviour. The Chief Superintendent of Central Alberta District was generous in giving his time and administrative support. Equally, the SMT

participated by asking clarifying and meaningful questions of the study findings. These are indications of senior leadership wanting to understand the issue of bullying and move forward. The realities faced by the District Management Team speak to the push-pull among systemic hierarchy, political forces and the operational level. Balancing the need for national consistency over innovative micro pilots is what delays change at the Divisional or District level. Further support to Divisional leadership from National HQ and Depot to try new ideas, approaches or programmes will go a long way.

Actions must replace words to attain the desired culture movement towards zero tolerance for workplace bullying. (Aktas et al. 2011) Demonstrating more explicit alignment to the organization's stated positions, viewing mandatory training programmes from a larger, more complex view of reality within hierarchical law enforcement agencies occurs when embraced by the leadership. All organizations experience negative situations; the management of them becomes the legacy of both its leaders and the organization. For example, BP Deepwater Horizon had disastrous consequences for its CEO and senior leaders, whereas drug tampering at Johnson & Johnson resulted in high public praise for its leaders and retained market share (De Wolf & Mohamed, 2013; Rehak, 2002). The RCMP has an opportunity to address workplace bullying through actionable steps, visible to all ranks by demonstrable leadership befitting this long-standing Canadian iconic organization. The country is watching and hoping the time is right, a tipping point has been reached to finally address workplace bullying.

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