CIVILITY MATTERS!

AN EVIDENCE-BASED REVIEW ON HOW TO CULTIVATE A RESPECTFUL FEDERAL PUBLIC SERVICE

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APEX | ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL EXECUTIVES OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA

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CONTEXT

For over 30 years, the Association of Professional Executives of the Public Service of Canada (APEX) has played a significant role in fostering leadership excellence within the federal public service. Over its history, APEX has become a credible voice for public service executives and acts proactively to address issues facing these senior leaders.

As part of this commitment, APEX has stayed abreast of trends affecting executive and workplace wellness. Results from the 2012 APEX Executive Work and Health Survey combined with the most recent 2014 Public Service Employee Survey highlight that incivility is on the rise and provides many challenges for the executive cadre and the organizations they lead.

APEX understands that executives play a crucial role in addressing this issue, as they hold significant influence within their respective divisions and directorates. Recognizing this reality, APEX commissioned the following white paper, to provide executives with an evidence-based examination of civility. Rather than share one model or approach, APEX decided to review the available evidence in hopes of giving executives an empirically-based framework and toolkit with which to build a more respectful workplace. The goal is to assist executives in their quest to achieve leadership and organizational excellence while supporting and growing the people and organizations they serve.

INTRODUCTION

"The rising problem of workplace incivility warrants immediate attention because uncivil workplace behavior can affect the entire organization negatively by poisoning workers' psychological and physical wellbeing, learning motivation, and productivity. The unfortunate organizational climate this situation creates can contribute ultimately to an organization's inability to remain competitive." (page 242)[1]

Civility within the federal public service has become an increasingly important issue. Over the last several years, multiple surveys have highlighted that disrespectful behaviours are disturbingly common across all levels of the government[2]. Although the definition and criteria for incivility are evolving, these surveys consistently highlight how both employees and executives report bearing witness to, and being targets of, uncivil words and actions.

In February 2015, results from the triennial federal Public Service Employee Survey (PSES) were released by the Treasury Board Secretariat. Almost three-quarters of the federal public service (71%) responded, which provides extreme confidence in the generalizability of the results.

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1 Reio, T. Jr., & Ghosh, R. (2009). Antecedents and outcomes of workplace incivility: Implications for Human Resource Development Research and Practice. *Human Resource Development Quarterly, 20*, 237-264.

2 The latest results (2015) from the triennial federal Public Service Employee Survey as well as the 2012 APEX Executive Work and Health Survey confirm this.

Overall, 20 percent of employees reported that they experienced harassment in their workplace over the past two years. The most common forms included offensive remarks, unfair treatment and being excluded/ignored. The main perpetrators of these uncivil behaviours were supervisors or peers. In fact, 63% of people who reported being harassed said that people in positions of authority were responsible.

The survey also highlighted a major lack of trust in senior leadership. While three-quarters of respondents (75%) had favourable opinions of immediate supervisors, only half (50%) had the same positive impressions of their top leaders. Less than half of employees (47%) felt that essential information flows effectively from the senior leadership to front-line levels. Perhaps most troubling, less than half of respondents believed that senior management would address the concerns raised in the survey.

Executives report similar challenges. In the latest APEX Executive Work and Health Survey (2012), one in five executives indicated they were verbally harassed in the last 12 months. Ten percent said that their workplaces lacked respect/civility.

Seeing this concerning trend, APEX decided to address this current and future need by sponsoring this white paper, which reviews the current state of the research on civility in the workplace. This paper builds an evidence-based business case as to why fostering and maintaining a respectful workplace is important, as well as highlights the negative impacts when incivility is allowed to fester without intervention.

The paper is divided into three sections. The first looks at the frequency and intensity of disrespectful behaviours. The second section highlights the costs of these disrespectful behaviours on an emotional, behavioural and physical level. Finally, the paper concludes with a series of evidence-based recommendations and strategies, which executives can bring back to their departments and implement as appropriate.

A WORD ON THE FOCUS OF THIS REVIEW

Given the range of definitions used in past surveys, a crucial first step for this white paper is to outline its parameters. One of the challenges in discussing previous PSES results is that the definition of harassment has changed over time. This makes cross-comparison of findings both difficult and methodologically unadvisable.

With that in mind, the present white paper moves beyond harassment and examines incivility/disrespectful behaviours more broadly. This was a conscious decision, as research suggests that these subtler, less 'obvious' words and actions have a similar impact on individuals as more extreme forms of behaviour[3]. Furthermore, expanding the scope of the paper can draw attention to more common, yet equally damaging behaviours that wreak havoc on an organization and its employees.

Uncivil behaviours are much more commonplace, and present an even larger threat to organizational culture, as these actions may be normalized or understood as acceptable conduct. One needs to look no further than the most recent federal Public Service Employee Survey (PSES) where one of the primary reasons respondents did not lodge a formal complaint was because they were unsure whether these incidents warranted such a response.

Lastly, while extensive policies and guidelines exist for how employees should address harassment and discrimination complaints, the same cannot be said when it come to dealing with incivility.

[3] Christine Pearson and Christine Porath (2009). The Cost of Bad Behavior. Portfolio Publishing.

DEFINING INCIVILITY

One of the most widely cited definitions of incivility, which will also be used for this review, was forwarded by Drs. Christine Pearson and Christine Porath, two internationally recognized authorities on the topic. They define incivility as:

> *"The exchange of seemingly inconsequential inconsiderate words and deeds that violate conventional norms of workplace conduct." (page 12)*[4]

An important component of the above definition is the phrase "seemingly inconsequential," which highlights how these behaviours may be viewed somewhat ambiguously in terms of their intention and potential for harm. Incivility constitutes rude, insensitive, disrespectful, and thoughtless behavior, which is directed toward individuals.

Surveys examining the level of civility within North American workplaces mirror the results presented within the PSES. Within a 10-year span, the incidence of incivility doubled, with half of all employees across organizations and sectors indicating that they were treated rudely at least once a week at the office. In 2011, 50% percent of employees divulged that they were treated rudely at least once a week, a number which doubled from 1998[5].

Experts have proposed several potential causes for this rising tide of incivility. These include downsizing, reengineering, budget cuts, pressure for improved productivity, and working in an autocratic work environment[6]. Each of these potentially contributing factors can be connected to recent and/or past changes that have affected the federal public service.

Recent research[7] has expanded our practical understanding of incivility by identifying concrete behaviours, which people deem disrespectful. It should be noted that this insight was obtained from observations made by both supervisors and front-line employees. The most frequently occurring forms of incivility include:

- Neglecting to turn off cellphones
- Talking behind someone's back
- Doubting someone's judgment
- Paying little or no attention to an expressed opinion
- Taking credit for someone else's work or ideas
- Making demeaning remarks.

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[4] Pearson, C., & Porath, C. (2009). *The cost of bad behavior.* Portfolio Publishing.

[5] See Pearson, C., & Porath, C. (2009). *The cost of bad behavior* and Porath, C., & Pearson, C. (2013). The price of incivility. *Harvard Business Review* for more information.

[6] Please see Baron, R.A., & Neuman, J.H. (1996). Workplace violence and workplace aggression: Evidence on their relative frequency and potential causes. *Aggressive Behavior, 22*, 161-173 and Pearson, C., & Porath, C. (2009). The Cost of Bad Behavior. Portfolio Publishing.

[7] Reio, T.G., & Sanders-Reio, J. (2011). Thinking About Workplace Engagement: Does Supervisor and Coworker Incivility Really Matter? *Advances in Developing Human Resources, 13*, 462-478.

Anecdotal research[8] provides even more examples of these negative behaviours:

- Blaming others rather than accepting responsibility
- Checking email or texting messages during a meeting
- Using email to send a difficult message to avoid facing the individual
- Not saying "please" or "thank you"
- Not listening during a meeting or conversation
- Talking over/down to someone

COSTS OF INCIVILITY

Although the examples given above may appear to be low intensity and perhaps even commonplace, as we are about to see, research shows that these behaviours have profound and far-reaching negative impacts on an individual, team, and organizational level.

First, past research indicates that individuals who feel they have been treated disrespectfully seek justice against the perpetrator[9]. In fact, 94% of people who experience uncivil behaviour get even with the offenders in some way (e.g., 'forgetting' to forward an email or pass along an urgent telephone message). This highlights how important it is for individuals to be mindful of the impacts of their actions on others.

What is most fascinating about this research is that a similar number of targets report a desire to get even with the organization (88%). This demonstrates that when we are on the receiving end of disrespectful behaviour, we tend not to distinguish between the offender and the organization; both are seen as equally culpable. In essence, the organization is viewed as a willing accomplice. Organizations that do nothing to curb incivility are at risk of suffering the consequences of their employees' actions.

Despite the moral arguments for creating and sustaining a respectful workplace, research shows that individuals who work in environments that foster incivility suffer tremendous emotional, physical, and behavioural costs. The following outlines a summary of the research to date.

IMPACTS ON PERFORMANCE

Considerable applied research suggests that incivility affects individual, team, and organizational performance in various ways. Approximately two-thirds of employees report that their performance declined as a result of being treated uncivilly. Similarly, almost half (48%) of employees who were exposed to co-worker incivility were significantly more likely to decrease their work effort[10].

Thirty-eight percent also noted that they intentionally decreased the quality of their work. The key word here is intentional, as it indicates it was a conscious decision on the part of employees.

Other research highlights the more wide-ranging and specific performance-related impacts of incivility.

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[8] Pearson, C., & Porath, C. (2009). *The cost of bad behavior.* Portfolio Publishing.

[9] Pearson, C., & Porath, C. (2009). *The cost of bad behavior*. Portfolio Publishing.

[10] Porath, C., & Pearson, C. (2013). The price of incivility. Harvard Business Review. It should be noted that other researchers have found a similar relationship, including Sakurai, K., & Jex, K.M. (2012). Coworker incivility and incivility targets' work effort and Counterproductive Work Behaviors: The moderating role of supervisor social support. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 17*, 150–161.

Lost Time

Time is an invaluable and non-renewable resource, which directly impacts our ability to fulfill our personal and professional commitments. In today's public service, time is at a premium, as employees lament the challenges of being increasingly called upon to do more with less. The most recent PSES results suggested that 48 percent of respondents identified this as a major challenge.

Uncivil behaviour causes various drains on our time. First and foremost, 47% of individuals report that they intentionally decreased the amount of time spent at the office as a result of an uncivil incident. Less time at the office means less time spent on completing assigned work.

Even when these individuals are physically present at work, complications ensue. Eighty percent of employees reported losing work time because they were worrying about the incident. Almost two-thirds of individuals said that they lost time due to concerns about avoiding the offender.

Research conducted by the website badbossology.com found that most employees spend 10 or more hours of work time per month complaining, or listening to others complain, about their supervisors. Almost one-third spend 20 hours or more per month on this activity. This lost time decreases workplace morale and ultimately productivity suffers as well.

A final statistic is particularly relevant to federal public service executives. Previous research has shown that Fortune 1000 executives spend an average of seven weeks each year resolving employee related conflicts. Given the link between disrespectful behaviour and conflict, identifying pathways to increase the level of civility within the federal public service brings tremendous potential gains to our calendars as well as to employee morale.

Creativity

Christine Porath and Amir Erez constructed a series of brilliant experiments to examine how incivility affects our levels of creativity[11]. In one case, participants were treated rudely by a 'stranger' (who was in fact, a member of the research team) while on their way to the study. In another trial, recruits observed a fellow 'participant' (who was, once again a confederate) being berated for being late.

Interestingly, creativity declined regardless of whether the participant was a target of, or witness to, disrespectful behaviour. In the first case, participants came up with 39% fewer creative ideas than those who did not witness this incivility. In the latter, when they observed incivility immediately pre-task, their creativity decreased by 50%.

Another powerful finding relates to the ideas the participants did come up with: these were much less original. For example, when asked to identify possible uses for a brick, participants in the uncivil condition offered suggestions such as "build a house," "build a wall," or "build a school." Participants who were treated respectfully exercised far more creative thought, yielding ideas such as "selling the brick on eBay," "using it as a goalpost for a street soccer game," or "decorating it like a pet and giving it to a kid as a present."

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[11] Please refer to Porath, C.L., & Erez, A. (2007). Does rudeness matter? The effects of rude behavior on task performance and helpfulness. *Academy of Management Journal*, *50*, 1181-1197 as well as Porath, C.L., & Erez, A. (2009). Overlooked but not untouched: How incivility reduces onlookers' performance on routine and creative tasks. *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes* for further details.

Helpfulness

In the same experiments cited above, the researchers were also curious as to whether witnessing or experiencing incivility affected the participants' tendency to help one another. Specifically, they wanted to see whether participants would help a 'stranger' (e.g., an actor hired by the research team) who had 'accidentally' dropped something.

Once again, participants who witnessed or were a direct target of incivility were significantly less likely to offer assistance to a person in need when compared to their civilly treated counterparts. What is particularly fascinating about these findings is that the person who needed help had no direct connection to the person who engaged in the uncivil behavior. Yet participants who had experienced incivility decided not to help. This demonstrates how rudeness begets rudeness and can set up a vicious cycle of paying negative behaviour forward.

Final Comment on Performance

One of the key findings from this research is that the negative impacts of incivility are essentially the same, regardless of whether the individual was a witness or target of the behaviour. This has tremendous implications, as it suggests that any occurrences of these behaviours extend far beyond the individuals who are directly involved.

IMPACTS ON TEAMS

Incivility also has profound implications on the level of energy, emotional engagement, and performance of work teams. When comparing the most civil work teams with the least civil, the following gains have been recognized[12].

Respectful teams:

- Possess 26% more energy.
- Are 30% more likely to feel motivated and enthusiastic about acquiring new skills and being exposed to new ideas.
- Experience a 30% increase in feelings of vitality.
- Express 36% more satisfaction with their jobs and are 44% more committed to their organizations.
- Have members who are rated as having significantly higher performances (e.g., 20% improvement by their supervisors when compared to individuals who are part of the least civil teams in the organization.

One final point should be made about the effects of incivility on teams. As mentioned in the last section, considerable work time is lost, as affected employees decrease the amount and quality of time spent at the office. This leaves the rest of their team members to pick up the slack. Decreases in work performance and engagement are likely within teams where this occurs.

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[12] Pearson, C., & Porath, C. (2009). *The cost of bad behavior*. Portfolio Publishing.

IMPACTS ON PHYSICAL HEALTH

The impacts of incivility stretch far beyond performance. Several recent studies highlight how negative supervisory relationships lead to damaging effects on our physical health.

Although some research showed that workplace incivility decreased employees' perceived physical health[13], other studies have made more direct linkages[14].

In one study, a team of British researchers surveyed a group of employees who worked for two different supervisors on alternate days[15]. In this scenario, the employees had a positive relationship with one supervisor and a negative relationship with another.

To test the impacts that these different supervisors had on employees' physical health, the research team measured their blood pressure. On days when the employees worked with the "bad boss", their blood pressure significantly increased. Given the various problems associated with high blood pressure such as heart disease, stroke, and kidney failure, the health implications of this study are profound.

This innovative work was extended in another study that explored the longer-term effects of exposure to a toxic leader[16]. In this case, employees were followed over a 15-year period to examine the link between the quality of supervisory relationship and coronary heart disease (CHD). Employees who had a difficult relationship with their boss (e.g., lack of emotional support) were 30 percent more likely to develop CHD. What was especially powerful about this relationship was that it was maintained even after controlling for major risk factors including perceived workload, activity level, education, social class, income and supervisory status.

IMPACTS ON CUSTOMERS

Government departments routinely interact with each other as well as other 'clients' in the performance of their duties. Civility research shows that these stakeholder relationships are also negatively affected by disrespectful behaviour. Specifically, one-quarter of individuals who were targets of incivility admitted to taking out their frustrations on clients[17]. Once again, this highlights the insidious nature of disrespectful behaviour and its ripple effect on other areas and individuals far beyond the immediate incident.

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[13] Reio, T. Jr., & Ghosh, R. (2009). Antecedents and outcomes of workplace incivility: Implications for Human Resource Development Research and Practice. *Human Resource Development Quarterly, 20*, 237-264.

[14] Lim, S., Cortina, L.M., & Magley, V.J. (2008). Personal and workgroup incivility: Impact on work and health. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 93*, 95-107.

[15] Wager, N., Fieldman, G., & Hussey, T. (2003). The effect on ambulatory blood pressure of working under favourably and unfavourably perceived supervisors. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 60*, 468-474

[16] Nyberg, A., Alfredsson, L., Theorell, T., Westerlund, H., Vahtera, J., & Kivimaki, M. (2008). Managerial leadership and ischaemic heart disease among employees: the Swedish WOLF study. *Occupational and Environmental Medicine, 66*, 51-55.

[17] Porath, C., & Pearson, C. (2013). The price of incivility. Harvard Business Review.

IMPACTS ON COMMITMENT/ENGAGEMENT

Incivility also has an impact on the interest and willingness of employees to stay with their organizations. Seventy-eight percent of participants indicated that their commitment to the organization declined following uncivil treatment[18]. Previous research has also reported that targets of incivility tend to report lower levels of job satisfaction[19] and a higher intent to quit their job[20] when exposed to such behaviour. In fact, 12% leave as a result[21].

Given the above, if the federal public service wishes to become an employer of choice for top talent, taking steps to build a respectful culture should yield tremendous dividends, as individuals who are exposed to uncivil treatment are a significantly higher flight risk.

In terms of engagement, previous work[22] revealed that high levels of face-to-face incivility results in considerable reductions in employee engagement. A recent intervention focused on enhancing civility found that reduced incidences of incivility were linked with increased engagement[23].

Incivility also affects employee engagement by diminishing organizational citizenship behaviours (OCBs). As the name suggests, OCBs are highly valued extra-role behaviours which extend above and beyond the call of duty. Research has discovered that workplace incivility reduces OCBs because the affective commitment (i.e., emotional attachment) employees' feel towards their employer declines following such an incident[24].

Another important finding from this research is that individuals who are high in conscientiousness are especially susceptible to the negative effects of incivility. This suggests many high-potential employees (i.e., those who have a heightened level of concern with doing a job well, thoroughly, and vigilantly) suffer these effects more strongly.

A NOTE ON ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION

Our ever-increasing reliance on electronic communication creates a high potential risk for miscommunication. Past research[25] has shown that the lack of instant feedback combined with the absence of nonverbal cues (e.g., tone of voice and body language) leads to the possibility that employees may interpret benign messages in a negative light. Without this vital contextual information, messages may be perceived as rude or hurtful in nature.

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[18] Porath, C., & Pearson, C. (2013). The price of incivility. *Harvard Business Review*.

[19] Penney, L., & Spector, P. (2005). Job stress, incivility, and counterproductive work behavior (CWB): The moderating role of negative affectivity. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 26*, 777-796.

[20] Lim, S., Cortina, L.M., & Magley, V.J. (2008). Personal and workgroup incivility: Impact on work and health. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 93*, 95-107

[21] Porath, C., & Pearson, C. (2013). The price of incivility. *Harvard Business Review*.

[22] Reio, T.G., & Sanders-Reio, J. (2011). Thinking About Workplace Engagement: Does Supervisor and Coworker Incivility Really Matter? *Advances in Developing Human Resources, 13*, 462-478.

[23] Osatuke, K., Moore, S.C., Ward, C., Dyrenforth, S.R., & Belton, L. (2009). Civility, Respect, Engagement in the Workforce (CREW): Nationwide organization development intervention at Veterans Health Administration. *The Journal of Applied Behavioral Science, 45*, 384-410.

[24] Taylor, S.G., Bedeian, A.G., & Kluemper, D.H. (2012). Linking workplace incivility to citizenship performance: The combined effects of affective commitment and conscientiousness. *Journal of Organizational Behavior, 33*, 878-893.

[25] Byron, K. (2008). Carrying too heavy a load? The communication and miscommunication of emotion by email. *Academy of Management Review, 33*, 309-327.

Another challenge is that people tend to say and do things online that they would not do in person; otherwise known as the "online disinhibition effect[26]". This is due to the fact that normal behavioural constraints are much less salient online, which increases the risk of people acting uncivilly.

Research has started to explore whether the negative effects of incivility extend beyond interpersonal interactions. A recent study[27] confirmed that the effects of rudeness occur via this forum as well. Participants were recruited to complete a series of problem-solving tasks where the instructions and feedback were transmitted solely via email. At different times, the 'supervisor' communicated in either a supportive manner (e.g., "I definitely appreciate your help on these tasks;" "I really appreciate your efforts on these tasks") or uncivil manner (e.g., "I couldn't be less confident in your ability, but here is the next set anyway" and "Try these next tasks, genius").

Results revealed that the unsupportive supervisor prompted lower levels of energy and higher levels of negative affect when compared to supportive supervisors. More importantly, disrespectful interactions also contributed to significant performance and engagement declines. This suggests that civility experienced through electronic mediums has the same detrimental impact as those experienced in person.

As noted by the research team, this effect was generated with a very limited exposure to uncivil treatment (e.g., 15 minutes). It is reasonable to assume that prolonged treatment might engender even greater energy, engagement and performance deficits.

Given the increased use of other social media platforms, such as Twitter, where brevity is key, the implications for perceived rudeness may be even more prevalent.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The preceding review highlighted the far-reaching and damaging effects for workplaces in which disrespectful behaviour occurs. Even short-term exposure can create troubling impacts. This final section provides numerous evidence-informed strategies and action steps that executives can leverage at an individual and organizational level to foster a respectful workplace.

One caveat is important to note here. These recommendations are not presumed to be prescriptive. Differences in departmental cultures and operational frameworks/policies may make the adoption of certain strategies difficult or unfeasible. Further, it should be noted that it is neither expected, nor realistic, that

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[26] Suler, J. (2004). The online disinhibition effect. *Cyberpsychology and Behavior, 7*, 321-326.

[27] Giumetti, G.W., Hatfield, A.L., Scisco, J.L., Schroeder, A.N., Muth, E.R., & Kowalski, R.M. (2013). What a Rude E-Mail! Examining the Differential Effects of Incivility Versus Support on Mood, Energy, Engagement, and Performance in an Online Context. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 18*, 297–309.

leaders can implement all of these ideas. Rather, the goal of this section is to provide possible tactics that may fit well within the current culture of the division/department. In cases where there is not a strong fit, the hope is that the spirit of these ideas may germinate other possibilities that could be successfully adopted.

Recommendations in this section are divided into two categories. The first section addresses the behaviours and initiatives that could be actioned at an individual level. Other suggestions are provided for the team/divisional/departmental level.

MANAGING OURSELVES — What steps can executives within the federal public service take to ensure that they model respectful words and actions to their employees?

Model Positive Behavior

BE THE CHANGE YOU WANT TO SEE IN THE WORLD – The Russian novelist Leo Tolstoy famously wrote, "Everyone thinks of changing the world, but no one thinks of changing himself." Evidence suggests that following Tolstoy's proclamation can bring tremendous benefits to leaders and organizations, which extend into the civility arena. Based on their experience and research, McKinsey & Company estimated that half of all organizational transformation efforts fall short either because senior leaders fail to act as role models for change or because people in the organization are allowed to defend the status quo[28].

Another recent study documented the power of positive role models on behaviour. In this experiment, female participants were asked to come in and deliver a speech to an audience. In one condition, there was a portrait of a well-known, high-ranking female leader on the back wall (e.g., Hilary Clinton). In the control condition, no portrait was used. Researchers found that the female participants who were exposed to the gender-specific role model spoke for significantly longer. More importantly, audience members rated their speeches as more impactful in terms of body language and fluency compared to their counterparts without photos. The team suggested that these results demonstrate how even viewing female role models can inspire the exhibition of stronger leadership behaviours within women leaders[29].

The idea that the disrespectful behaviour of senior leaders can and does encourage the expression of similar behaviours in their direct reports was supported by recent research, which showed that one-quarter of managers who admitted to engaging in disrespectful behaviour noted that they acted in this way because their own supervisors treated their employees in a similar manner[30]. Given this relationship, the power of being a positive role model cannot be underestimated.

Employees look to senior leaders for guidance as to 'how things work around here.' Individuals who aspire to take on more responsibility (e.g., become leaders themselves) view their immediate supervisor and senior leaders as role models for advancement. Frontline employees may assume that their leadership cadre were successful in attaining their positions by engaging in certain behaviours. By emulating these observed behaviours, frontline employees may feel they can also join the higher ranks.

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[28] Keller, S. & Price, C. (2011). Organizational health: The ultimate competitive advantage. *McKinsey Quarterly, June*.

[29] Latu, I., Mast, M., Lammers, J., and Bombari, D. (2013). Successful female leaders empower women's behavior in leadership tasks. *Journal of Experimental Social Psychology, 49*, 444-448.

[30] Porath, C., & Pearson, C. (2013). The price of incivility. *Harvard Business Revlew*.

WATCH YOUR LANGUAGE – Although it is a common phrase uttered by parents, evidence suggests that the applicability of this statement extends well beyond our childhood. Considerable research highlights how the words we use to describe situations and people can have profound impacts on our experience. This priming effect can also impact our level of civility.

In one simple, yet powerful experiment[31], John Bargh and his colleagues divided participants into two groups to complete a task - to create a sentence out of a group of words presented out of order (e.g., 'rule, respect, golden, the' turns into 'respect the golden rule'). Participants were unaware that this task was essentially a diversion, which served as a means to present words that may influence or prime the subject's behaviour, thoughts, or capabilities.

In this study, participants were assigned to one of two groups. One group was tasked with scrambled sentences with words relating to incivility such as "intrude," "bother," "rude," and "infringe." In the other group, the scrambles included words relating to kindness/politeness, such as "patiently," "appreciate," and "courteous."

Following the completion of the word scramble, participants were told they needed to walk down the hall to receive their next set of instructions. When they arrived at the location, another 'participant' (who was actually a member of the research team) was engaging in a lengthy discussion with the lead experimenter. The purpose of this 'delay' was to test whether the types of word scrambles would impact how quickly participants would jump in and interrupt.

Bargh and his team discovered that those primed with 'rude' words interrupted significantly faster than those who were presented with scrambled words associated with 'politeness.' In fact, while the 'rude' group tended to interrupt after about 5 minutes, the vast majority of the 'polite' group did not interrupt at all (i.e., after the 10 minute imposed maximum).

PUT AWAY YOUR "SMARTPHONE" – The use of cellphones constitutes an important and frequently occurring form of disrespectful behaviour within our workplaces. Leaders can benefit from putting away their technology when meeting with their team members, either individually or collectively. This can elevate the level of civility within your immediate sphere of influence. Better yet, instill 'smartphone' free meetings and encourage others to follow suit.

Recent research suggests that smartphones undermine our capacity to connect with other people. In a fascinating study[32], researchers were interested to see how the mere presence of a smartphone affected the conversational and relational dynamics between two individuals. To test this idea, two conditions were created. In one group, participants engaged in a 15-minute conversation at an empty table. In the second, an electronic communication device was placed in plain view.

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[31] Bargh, J.A., Chen, M., & Burrows, L. (1996). Automaticity of social behaviour: Direct effects of trait construct and stereotype-activation on action. *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology, 71*, 230-244.

[32] Przybylski, A.K., & Weinstein, N. (2012). Can you connect with me now? How the presence of mobile communication technology influences face-to-face conversation quality, 1–10.

The results revealed that the mere presence of a mobile device negatively affected the level of trust between parties. The quality of the relationship was also rated significantly lower when a cellphone was present. An especially important finding was that the impacts of the cellphone were particularly pronounced when the individuals were engaged in meaningful/deeper conversation as opposed to casual conversation.

BE MINDFUL OF THE PERILS OF ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION – Transmitting messages through electronic means compromises our ability to leverage vital interpretation sources, such as body language and tone of voice, which sets the stage for miscommunication. If executives are at all unsure of how a message will be interpreted, it is highly recommended that he or she pick up the phone or, better yet, set up an in-person meeting. While it may require a larger time commitment in the short-term, it is worth the long-term time savings associated with avoiding a potentially intense future conflict.

REINFORCE EXPECTATIONS REGARDING CIVILITY FOR NEW MEMBERS OF YOUR TEAM/ORGANIZATION – Make sure expectations around civility are extensively referenced during the recruitment, hiring, and orientation processes. Individuals who prefer a more aggressive or abrasive style may recognize that they are not a good fit for the organizational culture and subsequently seek an opportunity elsewhere.

ENCOURAGE FEELINGS OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY – Psychological safety is the degree to which employees feel that there are repercussions for taking an interpersonal risk at work[33]. When employees feel safe, they provide open and honest feedback without fear of consequences. Employees are also more willing to speak up when mistakes occur. Past research has shown that psychological safety leads to significant gains in learning and on-the-job performance[34], employee engagement[35], and creativity[36].

A lack of psychological safety may be one of the reasons why there was such a high and troubling percentage of PSES respondents who did not come forward to report incidents of harassment.

One way in which individual leaders and senior executives can promote psychological safety within their teams and organizations is by suspending judging and approaching situations and people with a learning mindset. In other words, rather than looking for problems or assigning blame, leaders should seek to understand other perspectives. Engaging in a consultative style (i.e., asking for input and suggestions) can also maximize trust between employees and organizational leadership[37]. Demonstrating our interest and openness to hearing others' views maximizes the chances they will be shared.

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Gather Feedback

SOLICIT FEEDBACK – Research suggests that we can be woefully unaware of how we are perceived by others[38]. Our gaps in self-awareness are further compounded by our tendency to view the world in a way that reinforces our capability and competence while diminishing our personal contributions for our setbacks[39]. This self-serving bias makes it difficult for us to receive both critical and constructive performance feedback, which could enhance our overall success.

Given the above, taking the time to ask others for their honest appraisal of our words and actions can be critical to our development. A key element in achieving this goal is to provide safe and responsive feedback mechanisms. Executives within the federal public service would be well-served to ensure several different mechanisms exist to access this invaluable information.

360-Feedback

360-Feedback processes provide an effective mechanism through which leaders receive performance feedback from their team members, peers, and supervisors. This exercise can be invaluable, as evidence suggests that leaders with higher levels of self-awareness achieve higher levels of performance in their jobs[40].

To maximize the value of a 360-Feedback assessment, the executive and sponsoring organization need to be aware of some important elements. Fortunately, research provides some guidance in this regard[41]. First and foremost, it is important to clearly communicate the purpose of the review. 360s should also be positioned as a developmental tool that will assist the leader's professional growth. Labelling the process in this way maximizes the openness of the individual receiving the feedback while also reassuring the audience giving it.

Instructions should also be provided to the raters around the optimal ways to position their feedback. If the tool allows for open-ended comments (an industry best practice), it is important to guide respondents around the importance of keeping their comments constructive. Feedback should highlight observable behaviour rather than pass personal judgment. This ensures the integrity of the process and maximizes its effectiveness, while potentially avoiding major problems and/or conflicts in the future.

Leaders could include specific questions relating to their level of civility at work. Using the recommendations included within this report to provide a behavioural framework for exploration could be a valuable exercise.

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TRACK YOUR PROGRESS – Receiving feedback should be an on-going, rather than singular event. Regular feedback allows the progress of individuals and/or organizations to be accurately tracked. Ideally, executives could compare their performance across time to understand where there are gains and/or losses. In addition, links can be made to civility levels (captured within the PSES or elsewhere) to directly observe how their behaviours contribute to a respectful workplace.

The importance of progress should not be underestimated. A few years ago, the Harvard Business Review reported that managers and leaders who made progress were significantly more engaged than their counterparts who did not feel a similar sense of forward momentum[42].

Take action

TAKE IMMEDIATE, CORRECTIVE ACTION WHEN WARRANTED – Rude and disrespectful behaviours can emerge quickly and, sometimes, without warning. This creates a critical decision point, as leaders need to respond in the moment. In many cases, people miss the opportunity and 'move on,' hoping that ignoring the incident will make it go away or that it will eventually be forgotten.

Without an immediate response, however, the credibility of your leadership along with the credibility of the broader organization will likely be seriously questioned. Not addressing this situation right away may send the unintended message to the offender, the target, and the rest of the team that this behaviour is tolerable, or even acceptable.

The delay also diminishes the power of the feedback. The longer it takes to provide the response, the further away from the incident the offender will be and the less precise his or her recollection will be. Previous meta-analytic research[43], which summarized the results of 53 independent studies, showed that "…..to delay feedback is to hinder learning" (page 94).

Another issue with delaying action is that it sends mixed messages to the offender as well as to the entire organization more broadly. If civility and respect are truly core values within an organization, their expression should be met with an immediate and decisive response. Without such certainty, people wonder whether these values are as important as advertised, since there is observed hesitation around their enforcement.

Finally, leaders should follow-up with both the offender and the target to outline the response and expectations moving forward. The consequences for the offender for failing to live up to these standards should also be clearly articulated. This ensures that the offender not only understands the unacceptability of their actions and what they are accountable for, but also shows them the desired roadmap for future behaviour. Employees also see the accountability attached to following these core values. This increases the likelihood that these incidents will be reported to the organization and its leadership in the future.

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TAKE ALL COMPLAINTS SERIOUSLY – Leaders should recognize that there is tremendous pressure on individuals to not report incidents of incivility. The latest PSES results highlight this fact, as almost one-quarter of respondents reported that they were unsure about whether they should mention the occurrence. There are numerous reasons why employees are concerned about coming forward, not the least of which is the fear of retaliation by the offender or potentially suffering serious career setbacks.

If leaders do not take action, it significantly lowers the chances that people will step forward in the future. This does not mean that all complaints require disciplinary action against the 'perpetrator.' In some cases, the problem may be related to other issues (e.g., performance management). What the above does suggest, however, is that some form of action is required to better understand the situational and interpersonal dynamics.

MANAGING OUR TEAMS/DEPARTMENTS

– There are also numerous actions that executives can take to safeguard their teams and organizations more broadly.

Gather Feedback

DEFINE CIVILITY WITHIN YOUR TEAM/ORGANIZATION – Even when individuals are highly motivated to treat each other with respect, considerable variation may exist in terms of their level of understanding about what this means in practice. Consequently, executives in the federal public service may benefit from engaging in proactive conversations with their team and organization around when and where these types of incidents tend to occur. Executives could use various outreach methods (e.g., focus groups, surveys, etc.) to gather this information and communicate these results back to the organization.

Bringing these issues into the open allows for a more transparent and productive dialogue and heightens sensitivities surrounding individual differences in this domain. Most importantly, these conversations provide a roadmap, which outlines behavioural expectations moving forward. This shared understanding allows individuals to more closely monitor their own behaviour while also being aware of what incidents should be reported.

Another benefit of this consultative process is that it increases employee accountability, since they directly contribute to crafting these guidelines and operating principles.

Once these behaviours have been identified, it is important to ensure that the managers within your area clearly understand what they mean in practice. Although most managers may understand more extreme forms of negative behaviour such as bullying or harassment/discrimination, they may miss subtler forms. Also, providing coaching and mentoring around the appropriate steps managers should take if they are unsure of a particular situation is key.

SOLICIT FEEDBACK – Above and beyond soliciting feedback at an individual level, it is also important to institute other mechanisms for feedback at a team and even departmental level. One potential data gathering vehicle would be through the use of on-line, anonymous feedback boxes. Rather than rely on the triennial survey, employees could provide real-time feedback on what is happening within the organization.

In addition, executives could conduct periodic 'audits' of the degree of civility within their organization. These 'pulse' surveys could highlight how well things are going and identify any potential problem areas that need immediate attention.

Skip-level meeting

Other upward feedback mechanisms, such as skip-level meetings, may be used to gather insight into the level of civility within a division/department. In a typical meeting, a senior leader within the organization bypasses a middle manager to talk directly to a front-line employee. Generally, the purpose of these skip-level meetings is for the senior leader to obtain a deeper understanding of what is truly happening within the organization.

There are several keys to orchestrating a successful and positive skip-level meeting. A crucial first step is to plan the meeting. What information are you interested in obtaining? Although this may seem obvious, it is crucial to consider the intended outcomes of this meeting in order to successfully obtain the necessary information.

One valuable strategy is to think about the types of questions you will ask during the session. The key here is to ensure these questions are open-ended, which allows the individual to answer in whatever direction he or she chooses. It is also important to balance the types of questions being asked. If questions are too specific and entirely negative in orientation, participants may wonder whether something covert is going on (i.e., are you looking to find a problem or do you already have your suspicions about an issue?). Finally, leaders need to be aware not to rush to judgement in these cases. The perspective being shared is just that; one view on an issue. Taking the time to gather additional information and remaining curious while speaking with other employees maximize the chances of accurately portraying the situation.

CONDUCT EXIT INTERVIEWS – Employees who are leaving their respective departments/areas provide a wonderful opportunity for organizational leaders to gather information regarding whether incivility played a role in their decision to leave, as the fear of reprisal in these circumstances is lessened. Furthermore, asking departing individuals about the level of civility they encountered provides yet another measuring stick for the level of civility within your team/organization.

It is important to note that these conversations must be handled with an extremely high level of sensitivity and care. First and foremost, the process should be confidential. Strategic questions should be formulated in advance, which allows the questioner to access the information of interest, without coming across as too intrusive. It may also be beneficial to share with the individual why this type of information is being sought in the first place (i.e., to promote and foster a positive culture to protect and maximize employee well-being moving forward).

Other Recommendations

RAISE AWARENESS OF THE EFFECTS OF INCIVILITY WITHIN THE WORKPLACE – Research suggests that when targets report negative behaviours to their supervisors, only 18% of leaders take positive steps to address the situation. More commonly, the supervisor does nothing (40%) or their actions make the situation worse (42%)[44]. The relatively high number of federal public service employees who do not report incidents of harassment may speak to similar concerns. In fact, the lack of confidence expressed in senior leaders to address the issues raised in the most recent survey reinforces this possibility.

This represents a tremendous opportunity to have conversations within the executive cadre about how to deal effectively with such situations. First, departments could openly share the resources available to both leaders and front-line employees for addressing these incidents. In addition, leaders could work with a coach who specializes in dealing with such situations. A critical part of this process would be empowering the leader so he or she would be more comfortable taking action rather than feeling lost or being unsure of a way forward, which tends to foster inaction. Fostering a community approach to this issue can inspire positive change within the organization and shed light on an increasingly common occurrence.

Another essential topic that could be broached within these broader discussions is the importance for leaders to effectively handle expressions of vulnerability and interpersonal risk-taking by their team members[45]. In cases where someone demonstrates the courage to openly express personal feelings and observations, it is crucial that this exchange take place in an emotionally supportive environment. Successfully navigating these complex and powerful moments is a major challenge for even the most trained and experienced professional. Allowing executives to share their experiences and best practices may yield positive dividends for their teams as well as their organizations.

OPEN FORUMS WOULD ALSO ENABLE LEADERS AND EMPLOYEES TO DISCUSS APPROPRIATE BEHAVIOURS RELATED TO ELECTRONIC COMMUNICATION/SOCIAL MEDIA – Once again, by openly sharing their experiences and integrating these with the latest research, executives and employees could brainstorm about how best to navigate this environment.

One final point should be made. If an organization decided to take a more structured approach, civility training could be provided to executives and employees alike. Recent evidence suggests that civility training can be highly effective[46]. Executives within the public service could partner with expert facilitators to build a customized program, taking their organization's specific culture and needs into consideration.

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HIRE WITH CIVILITY IN MIND – Although most hiring processes tend to focus on the technical skills/required competencies for the role, surprisingly few assess intangible characteristics, particularly around core values/civility. Dedicating time to this important activity can yield tremendous benefits for the overall functioning of the organization.

One recommendation is to extend the reference check process beyond the immediate supervisor. Evidence suggests that toxic individuals engage in 'kissing up and kicking down' behaviours[47]. Taking time to talk with peers and direct reports provides a more comprehensive analysis of the candidate.

Another action step that could be taken when conducting reference checks is to ask pointed and specific questions with regards to the candidate's level of civility. Research suggests that broader questions generally lead to vague, high-level answers[48]. If civility is a key concern, drill down further and explain the types of behaviours that you seek within your organization. This will be time well spent.

It is also recommended that leaders and organizations explain to the individuals providing references the purpose behind these questions. Reinforce the importance of complete transparency, as this information will be crucial to the hiring decision. Explicitly asking references to provide candid responses maximizes the chances of receiving accurate information.

DEVELOP WORKPLACE CIVILITY POLICIES – While the federal public service has clear policies and procedures when it comes to harassment and discrimination, such guidelines are not as prevalent for incivility. Ideally, senior departmental leaders should explore the possibility of incorporating respectful workplace policies, which highlight the consequences of failing to follow these positive behaviours. This would normalize and institutionalize appropriate behaviours within the organization and maximize their sustainability.

It should be noted that APEX made a similar recommendation in its 2013-2014 annual report on the Advisory Service for Executives. The report recommended that this new policy on civility should be accompanied with a guide that provided practices to promote civility in the workplace. It also suggested that specific processes to deal with incivility needed to be developed and implemented across the federal Public Service. The argument was made that such actions would not only reduce incivility and harassment in the workplace, but would lead to a reduction in interpersonal conflict, particularly between executives and their supervisors, and result in higher levels of commitment and engagement.[49]

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USE ORGANIZATIONAL DATA TO IDENTIFY PROBLEM AREAS AND SUCCESSES

– Departments across the federal public service have access to incredible amounts of data. Senior leaders can analyze and track this information to identify potential problem areas.

If senior leaders observe high turnover levels in one area of their department or division, further exploration may be warranted. Additional surveys and/or feedback mechanisms could be put in place to understand the trend. Although it would not be prudent to assume the worst, framing this exploration from a learning rather than judging mindset would likely minimize resistance and maximize acceptance and understanding.

A side benefit of this type of analytical approach is that areas of positive deviance could also be explored. Specifically, where high levels of engagement or low levels of turnover exist, follow-ups could be conducted to identify what factors and best practices may be contributing to these success stories. Taking the time to learn from our successes is a powerful engagement strategy, as leaders and organizations can build around what is working rather than focusing solely on problems.

CONCLUSION

Civility within the federal public service continues to be an important issue. While more extreme forms of behaviour such as bullying, harassment, and discrimination receive most of the attention, subtler forms of disrespectful behaviour exact tremendous costs on individuals, teams, and organizations.

Raising our level of awareness about these potential impacts and utilizing evidence-informed strategies to foster and sustain a respectful workplace maximizes the possibility of positioning the federal public service to successfully navigate the workplace demands, both now and in the future. It will also contribute to improving the physical and mental health of executives and making the federal public service an employer of choice, a key consideration in this increasingly competitive labour market.

The federal public service will have an opportunity to assess progress on this front in the next APEX Survey on Executive Work and Health which will be conducted in 2017. APEX will continue to work with departments and central agencies to foster the development of a quality public service by strengthening leadership excellence, promoting the health and well-being of executives and their working environments and supporting executives in their quest for high performance, productivity and professional growth, the mission it has been pursuing for more than thirty years.

APEX | ASSOCIATION OF PROFESSIONAL EXECUTIVES OF THE PUBLIC SERVICE OF CANADA

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