

**COMMENTS ON “THERE’S A POLICY FOR THAT”:
INTERDISCIPLINARY ANALYSES OF HOSTILE WORK ENVIRONMENTS**

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The article “There’s a Policy for That: A Comparison of the Organizational Culture of Workplaces Reporting Incidents of Sexual Harassment” (Hertzog, Wright, & Beat, 2008, this volume) explores organizational variables related to reports of sexual harassment and other negative behaviors in organizations. The paper considers relatively new ground for behavior analysts in terms of broad organizational assessment and exploratory analyses of work contexts. Extending and integrating these analyses of organizational contexts with behavior analyses would be interesting, challenging, and provocative. Behavior analysis rests on accurate measurement of *individual’s* behavior and experimental analysis of environmental variables that determine functional relationships between behavior and environments. A few key concepts such as reinforcement and stimulus control are elaborated to explain a great deal of behavior. Behavior analysis has shown in multiple replications that all sorts of targeted behaviors in organizations can be altered by practical adjustments of reinforcement contingencies and contextual variables (Daniels & Daniels, 2006). A general observation is that behavior is as complex as the contexts that generate and maintain it. A methodology for very large scale organizational assessment is under-developed in behavior analysis and the complexities of organizational environments are perhaps limited in scope to evaluations of features of the individual’s local environment and learning history. Possible connections across levels of inquiry from broad surveys of organizational climate and the types of more molecular organizational behavior analyses conducted within behavior analysis may show interplay and enhance both methodologies.

Exploration of the National Organization Survey (NOS) provides an interesting high altitude window into organizational settings, and Hertzog and colleagues provide and describe a molar level perspective on organizational climate that might influence behaviors such as sexual harassment and incivility. These are important topics not often addressed by behavior analysts although work is beginning in this area. No direct observations of organizational variables or dependent variables are reported so the extent to which the reported measures match actual events is undetermined. Correspondence between what people say

and do is not high. Additional analyses to improve confidence in the relations suggested by the survey methods are needed. Hertzog et al. consider broad organizational variables such as size of workforce, gender ratios, power, and training programs and suggests variables, some of which can be manipulated, that might inform interventions to prevent or reduce interpersonal problem behaviors. This research holds value for those interested in more molecular-level organizational assessment and intervention development. Sometimes high-level analyses pay scant attention to other levels of analyses in terms of changing organizational culture and improving relations among organizational members. Exploring linkages of these assessments of organizational dimensions with a natural science of behavior should be explored.

Hertzog et al. seek to explore ‘underlying mechanisms’ that perpetuate uncivil and threatening behaviors in organizations. Their level of analysis, alone, will not reveal sources of behavioral variability but does point to possibilities. Coupling their analyses with more molecular measures of environments and observation of behavior within longer time frames may reveal how such behavior is acquired and maintained. They note the importance of measuring behaviors collateral to sexual harassment that may also be problematic in hostile work environments. This is an important point and organizational behavior analysts are advancing in their work on systems analysis and broad-scale performance improvement. Assessing how performance improvement initiatives like feedback protocols and incentive systems affect productivity should also consider negative collateral effects such as increased competition and uncivil behaviors.

As a related example, safety climate surveys examine how employees at different levels of an organization experience management of their safety. The surveys probe opinions and provide a general sketch of how an organization operates in terms of hazard identification and control. Or, at least how people perceive these operations control risks and hazards. These climate surveys are valuable as they inform efforts to improve communication networks, adjust management practices, and ultimately improve occupational safety. Safety intervention effectiveness is measured not only by opinion surveys but also by both observing changes in organizational behavior and measuring changes in the incidence rate of injuries and illnesses. In some cases, the effects of safety interventions on productivity are also measured to give a more complete picture of the impact of safety initiatives on companies’ bottom lines. It is important to recognize that the opinions of organizational members provide input to the design and evaluation of more effective organizational systems. A functional approach (Hawkins, 1991) to social validity measures adds value to survey methodology that relies solely on verbal reports. Extending safety climate analyses to include

the problem of organizational environments that promote or tolerate sexual harassment and incivility is an interesting idea that is suggested by this manuscript.

Hertzog and colleagues also consider the role of training to promote reporting of harassment and reduce its occurrence. The types and quality of trainings offered in the target companies is worth exploring as so much training in organizations is provided without assessing its efficacy (Goldstein & Ford, 2002). Effective training may improve the knowledge, but also the skills and abilities (KSA) of trainees. Certainly rules are a critical dimension of organizations that control much behavior. But other features of the organizations such as composition of the work force, types of work structures, and management systems are powerful too. What KSA's are relevant to controlling sexual harassment and what training methods are effective in establishing these? It would seem that knowledge of policies plays a part as do interpersonal skills and the ability to appreciate or at least tolerate diversity. Data on these may be available from other sources and can add focus to evaluation of the trainings related to harassment behaviors. The psychological wellbeing of organizational members is related to a variety of contextual variables including the policies that can define how people view and talk about their work. Experimental analyses of verbal behavior offer guidance for understanding uncivil and hostile behavior at work and inform interventions to establish cooperative and tolerant work places (Dixon, Dymond, Rehfeldt, Roche, & Zlomke, 2003; Hayes, Bunting, Herbst, Bond, & Barnes-Holmes, 2006; Weinstein, Wilson, Drake, & Kellum, 2008). How training interacts with management practices in broader organizational systems (e.g., disciplinary procedures, incentive systems, performance appraisal, etc.) is also unexplored. Industrial/Organizational psychology explores dimensions of work such as job satisfaction, burnout, stress, communication networks and other complex features of organizational behavior. Analyses of rule governed behavior as a function of the complex verbal networks established in organizations is an area of research that benefits from collaboration among behavior analysts and other disciplines exploring characteristics of organizations (Stewart, Barnes-Holmes, Barnes-Holmes, Bond, & Hayes, 2006). These system issues are important for generalization and maintenance of behavior and sustained organizational culture. Consideration of them may be forthcoming as systems analyses extend the reach of traditional organizational behavior management beyond productivity and profit driven interventions (e.g., Wilk-Brackstich, 2000) into analyses of the psychology of work and culture (e.g., Biglan, 1995).

The measures of the extent of problem behaviors used by Hertzog et al. are through self-report and the gradients used to assess severity seem quite coarse

(e.g., none, small amount, moderate, etc.). Likewise, features of organizations are measured imprecisely. Is it possible to determine incidence rates of reports of harassment (say incidents per 200,000 hours of work) and find more meaningful interactions between rates of behavior and organizational variables that can be managed? This may require development of tools and observation systems not yet used in organizational behavior management to track more subtle but frequent uncivil precursors of vivid harassment activity.

There are other points of contact between behavior analysis and the work presented by Hertzog and colleagues. Some of the others are referenced in my comments and consideration of these is interesting as they explore connections among different disciplines exploring extremely important features of organizations. There could be quite an extended discussion with reference to a growing number of theoretical and empirical reports. Hertzog and her colleagues provide a service to readers of *Behavior and Social Issues* by calling attention to an important set of behaviors within organizations (incivility & sexual harassment) that vary across organizations. Perhaps these can be reduced through empirically driven design of the next generation of initiatives in organizational behavior management.

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