Intentions count
Why does your organisation offer sexual harassment training?

A survey of more than 300 HR managers finds that the reasons organisations offer sexual harassment training affect final training outcomes.

Professor Carol Kulik from the School of Management's Centre for Human Resource Management recently completed a research project on sexual harassment training in collaboration with Associate Professor Elissa Perry, Dr Jennifer Bustamante, and Mr Frank Golom from Teachers College, Columbia University, USA. The research team surveyed HR managers at U.S. companies with 100 or more employees. Sexual harassment training was very common; nearly 90% of the HR managers said that their organisations offered sexual harassment training.

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‘But the companies were offering training for two distinctly different reasons’ Professor Kulik said. ‘About half of the organisations were motivated by legal reasons – they were offering training to avoid expensive lawsuits. The other organisations were offering training for strategic reasons. They saw sexual harassment training as a way of improving the organisational culture, or helping their company become an employer of choice.’

The research team asked the HR managers to rate the overall success of their organisations’ training program and to describe their organisations’ pre-training and post-training practices. The pre-training practices included activities like assessing employees’ knowledge about sexual harassment and analysing the organisation’s sexual harassment complaints. The post-training practices included activities like providing follow-up refresher courses or distributing reference materials to help employees remember the training content.

‘These pre- and post-training activities are “best practices” in the workplace training literature’ Professor Kulik clarified. ‘They help organisations to design better training and to ensure that training leads to actual on-the-job behavioural changes. Therefore, we expected that the organisations engaging in more of these pre- and post-training activities would also report better training outcomes.’

The research team, however, found that the pre- and post-training activities were only associated with better training outcomes when the organisation engaged in training for strategic reasons. When the organisation adopted training for legal reasons, the pre- and post-training activities had no association with training success.

‘When an organisation engages in sexual harassment training for legal reasons, just doing the training is more important to management than the quality of the training activities’, Professor Kulik explained. ‘In these organisations, a successful training program is any training program that lets the organisation tick the training box.’

The situation is different for organisations that engage in sexual harassment training for strategic reasons. ‘These organisations are much more concerned about producing real organisational change’ Professor Kulik emphasised. ‘Better pre-training preparation and better post-training follow-up help these organisations design better programs – and so the pre- and post-training activities generate better training outcomes.’

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In Australia, only about 50% of organisations offer sexual harassment training. But Professor Kulik warns that interest in sexual harassment training has spiked due to recent media coverage of one of the largest sexual harassment claims in Australian history, the complaint brought against retail giant David Jones in 2010. ‘More Australian organisations are adopting sexual harassment training now’ she says. ‘But if organisations are only motivated by legal reasons, they might not pay enough attention to the pre- and post-training activities that ensure the training meets the organisation’s needs and changes employee behaviour.’

The research team published their findings in Human Resource Development Quarterly (2010, Vol 21, Issue 2).

If you would like to learn more about the project and its results, contact:

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What is CHRM?
The Centre for Human Resource Management (CHRM) was established in 2008 and is housed in the School of Management on UniSA's City West campus.

CHRM brings together researchers with expertise in human resource management (HRM). CHRM members address major HRM-related challenges in the South Australian and international contexts. The Centre’s primary objective is increasing the quality, quantity and impact of research in HRM and developing industry collaborations.

What’s New at CHRM?
CHRM is pleased to announce that it has recently been awarded ‘University-Supported Research Centre’ status within UniSA. The decision to recognise a research group as a supported research centre is based on UniSA’s assessment of the group’s research performance and the group’s capacity to address a clear set of research questions of national or international importance. Supported Research Centre status will enable CHRM to maintain and expand its initiatives over the next three years – watch this space (and the CHRM website) for details.

CHRM researchers had a strong presence at the Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management (ANZAM) conference held December 2010 in Adelaide, presenting papers on job embeddedness, performance management, international HRM, performance-related pay, retention of migrant workers and emotion work. CHRM also sponsored a Haigh’s Chocolate Table during ANZAM’s afternoon tea breaks, making the conference just a little sweeter for the attendees.

CHRM celebrates the PhD completion of Dr Yin Lu Ng. Dr Ng’s PhD research explores how organisations can design recruitment advertising to attract members of both minority and majority demographic groups (see page 4 for details).

We hope you enjoy reading the CHRM Newsletter. You can learn more about CHRM, its people and its activities at our website: www.unisa.edu.au/chrm

We wish you all the best for 2011!

Professor Carol T. Kulik
Director, Centre for HRM

CHRM forums

Since 2008, CHRM has been the South Australian research partner for ASHRR – the Australian Senior Human Resources Roundtable. ASHRR is a network of senior HR executives whose aim is to facilitate a more effective dialogue between HR practice and research.

The CHRM-ASHRR partnership sponsors forums in which local senior HR practitioners and HR academics can network and debate emerging HR issues. CHRM also sponsors occasional HRM Roundtables, where practitioners and academics gather to discuss a topic of common interest in a friendly informal environment.

At the 17th November CHRM-ASHRR Forum, Dr Christina Scott-Young (CHRM researcher) presented a seminar on ‘Virtual teams in the wild: Mythbusting,’ describing her research on project teams in Fortune 500 companies. Professor Sara Rynes (University of Iowa, USA) led a discussion on ‘Millennials at work: Are they different from previous new workforce entrants?’ at the CHRM Roundtable on the 7th December.

The next CHRM-ASHRR Forum will be held in March 2011 and will focus on HRM’s influence within top management teams – watch this space for details.

If your organisation would like more information about upcoming CHRM events, please contact sanjee.perera@unisa.edu.au

CHRM seminars

The CHRM Practitioner Seminars, coordinated by Dr Gerry Treuren, showcase industry best practice exemplars and provide an opportunity to forge links between practitioners and the CHRM community. The seminars attract students from the undergraduate and postgraduate HRM programs, past students and interested practitioners.

Five seminars were held in 2010. These focused on diverse HR topics including the Baulderstone safety journey (Mr Chris Reynolds, General Manager, HR, Safety & Sustainability, Baulderstone Pty Ltd); developing a talent pool for convenience store managers (Ms Emily Terrington, Human Resources Manager, Peregrine Corporation); and designing and implementing organisational development programs to cultivate high potential leaders (Ms Michelle Holland, Manager, People and Culture, City of Salisbury Council). The most recent seminar featured a discussion on the merger of two South Australian businesses by Ms Alexandrea Cannon (Chair of the Board of Directors, Credit Union SA) and Mr Steve Newman (Human Resources Manager, Credit Union SA).

If you would like to join us at a future seminar, please visit our website for full details and updates www.unisa.edu.au/chrm
I like you because you hire people like me

In a competitive labour market, organisations cannot afford to miss any segments of the labour pool. Given the demographic diversity of the labour market, organisations are increasingly concerned about how to design recruitment advertising that attracts minority applicants – without ‘turning off’ majority applicants.

Dr Yin Lu Ng's recently completed PhD research focused on diversity recruitment. The research was conducted in Malaysia, and examined how minority Chinese and majority Malay job applicants reacted to job advertisements that included testimonials from employees accompanied by employee photos. Dr Ng designed three versions of a job advertisement for the same organisation. One advertisement featured only Malay employees, one featured only Chinese employees, and one featured a mix of Malay and Chinese employees.

In Dr Ng's research, the minority Chinese job applicants were more attracted to the organisation when the advertisement included photos of Chinese employees. Chinese applicants who viewed either the Chinese-only ad or the Malay-Chinese ad were more interested in pursuing the job opportunity than Chinese applicants who viewed the Malay-only ad. But Malay applicants were unaffected by the race composition of the employees featured in the ad. They were interested in pursuing the job opportunity no matter which ad they had viewed.

These findings are good news for organisations hoping to recruit a diverse workforce, because they demonstrate that organisations can design job advertisements that attract minority applicants without discouraging majority applicants. Dr Ng's results suggest that a job advertisement that includes photos of minority employees can simultaneously attract minority and majority job applicants.

If you are interested in learning more about diversity recruitment and other strategies for managing a diverse workforce, contact:

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What CHRM is working on

All in the Family

CHRM researchers Dr Sanjee Perera, Dr Shruti Sardeshmukh and Dr Christina Scott-Young are studying the way family co-workers express (and suppress) emotions.

Emotion expression is part of effective performance in most jobs: a manager nods encouragingly to a new employee; a teacher gives a stern look to an unruly student; and a professional card player wears a ‘poker face’. Sometimes expressing the ‘right’ emotion requires that an employee suppress an authentic emotion and either generate or ‘fake’ the appropriate one. But research suggests that employees who engage in extensive emotion regulation at work experience stress and burnout.

Family businesses create a unique set of emotion regulation challenges because they merge two domains with different emotion rules. It might be acceptable to express strong emotions outside of work – to cheer in a moment of joy or yell in a moment of anger – but work contexts demand more ‘professional’ and controlled behaviour.

Employees usually recover from such emotion regulation by taking a break from their work and their work colleagues. However, family co-workers can’t always escape one another. Since family business co-workers are interacting in both domains, it can be especially difficult for a family business employee to fully separate from the job and recover from its emotional demands.

If you know a family business that would be interested in participating in this research, or if you would like to learn more about how employees deal with emotional demands in the work setting, please contact:

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