Assessing the Efficacy of Northern Health's Respect in the Workplace Program

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ABSTRACT

Northern Health implemented a Respect in the Workplace policy and program in April of 2005. This project assesses the effectiveness of that program in meeting its written intentions. A survey was conducted to query employee perceptions of the efficacy of the program. The survey was constructed to ascertain both employees’ awareness of the policy as well as their experiences in regard to incidents of discrimination, harassment and disrespect within the workplace. Findings suggest that though employees are aware of the program and policy and what it stands for, mistreatment in the workplace continues to be fairly prevalent.

Disrespect in the workplace is emphasized as an area of increasing interest both within the research community as well as an identified area of concern for Northern Health. The role of management is also explored along with the concept of employee voice. Results are discussed in light of research conducted on the implications of mistreatment in the workplace. Recommendations are given including creating an action plan to mitigate risks to employees’ mental health and well-being. As well, suggestions for future research are included.
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INTRODUCTION

The Northern Health Authority is one of five Health Authorities in British Columbia whose purpose is to administrate the health care system, facilities and infrastructure in their defined region. Northern Health (NH) provides health care service to northern BC; its health service delivery area extends from the Queen Charlotte Islands in the west to Valemount in the east, from Fort Nelson in the north to Quesnel in the south. NH employs over 7,000 people and has the largest geographic region of all the provincial health authorities covering close to 2/3 of the province in area (Figure 1).

![Figure 1: Area of Northern British Columbia serviced by NH](image)

The rurality of many of the NH facilities creates unique challenges in the delivery of health care (see Appendix 1). The vastness of the region can impact working relationships which can surface in various ways. These unique challenges faced by NH are coupled with the expected labour shortage (Bagshaw, 2004), the
beginnings of which are being felt in many industries across the province and various occupations within NH. This compounding of conditions creates an environment where the fulfillment of the NH vision “To be a model of excellence in rural health care”\textsuperscript{1} becomes somewhat onerous. Attracting and retaining the necessary workforce to provide needed services, in alignment with this vision, can be a challenge. Northern Health’s commitment to its stakeholders is evident in its mission statement, which articulates that “Northern Health will build and strengthen the health of communities, relationships, and all people of Northern British Columbia”. The day to day fulfillment of this mission lies in the hands of NH employees among others. In order for NH to be an attractive workplace for current and potential employees it is in the best interest of the organization to advocate for healthy interactions among employees. An organizational culture marked by the acceptance and inclusion of all people groups as well as clear expectations in regards to interpersonal conduct can be an important attractant for employees both current and future.

NH, in an effort to continue to improve the culture and relationships within the organization, has instituted a “Respect in the Workplace” program. This is a policy based program which incorporates training and education on respectful interactions and sets a standard of conduct for all. The Respect in the Workplace Policy outlines that “NH is committed to providing a work and service environment that is characterized by respect and freedom from discrimination and harassment”. Further the policy explains that “Respectful behaviour is courteous, considerate and

\textsuperscript{1} From the Northern Health Strategic Plan 2004-2008
http://www.northernhealth.ca/About/Financial_Accountability/documents/1307-StrategicPlan.pdf
compassionate. It supports and recognizes the value of all people and affirms personal worth”. An integral component of the Respect in the Workplace (RITW) program is training for all to whom the policy applies. The training program is conducted across the region and is required and relevant for all employees, managers, medical staff, students, volunteers and contractors.

Within this policy, there exists a mechanism for both informal and formal complaints. Staff who feel they have experienced treatment that is against the Respect in the Workplace Policy can choose to file a formal complaint or alternatively they can deal informally with the matter between the offending party and either management or designated HR staff. Mediation services are also available through the Human Resources department to staff who require advice or development in conflict resolution.

The RITW policy was established in April 2005. The policy states:

“NH promotes and supports behaviour that results in understanding and mutual respect in the workplace and prevents and stops disrespectful or discriminatory conduct. NH will consider any incident resulting in disrespectful behaviour or any incident resulting in discrimination very seriously and will take whatever steps necessary to ensure a respectful, discrimination and harassment free workplace.”
The British Columbia Office of the Auditor General (BCOAG), in the 2004/05 report, 'In Sickness and Health: Healthy Workplaces for British Columbia’s Health Care Workers’ recommended that the Health Authorities: 1) Ensure that the health of the work environment be included in the performance appraisal of managers and frontline supervisors, 2) Demonstrate in word and action that employee health and well-being are important to organizational success, 3) Gather data on work environment conditions.

This report highlighted the need for the Health Authorities in BC to focus more attention on creating a healthy work environment for their employees. In the follow-up report published in 2007 based on information gathered in 2006, NH had substantially implemented 5 of 15 recommendations made in the original report.

Specific follow-up recommendations to NH include 1 and 2 above as well as:

1. Ensure that their actions are consistent with their communications to staff
2. Review the extent of managers’ control and ensure that it is not beyond a limit to be effective.
3. Assess the work environment for risks to staffs’ mental health and develop an action plan to mitigate the risks.
4. Consider ways to promote a healthy lifestyle among their employees
5. Assess the work environment for risk of violence to staff safety and security and develop an action plan to mitigate the risk.
This project is a portion of a larger research project, the purpose of which was to assess the effectiveness of NH’s RITW policy. The larger project is a joint collaboration between Northern Health and UNBC. The author has been involved in all aspects of the research design and instrumental in receiving ethics approval from both the UNBC Research Ethics Board as well as the NH Research Committee.

The purpose of this project was to compare the RITW policy against employee perceptions of respect within the work environment of NH in direct relation to the RITW policy thereby ascertaining the effectiveness of the policy since its implementation 2 years ago. This research pays special attention to the responsibility of management in cultivating a climate of respect in the workplace and any potential implications for NH as it lives out the tenets of the RITW policy day to day. This research is of great importance to NH as it will provide a baseline against which future studies can be compared. This research is also another step in fulfilling the recommendations made by the BCOAG, to assess the work environment, to gather data and to ensure that words and actions are consistent.
Health care provides a unique backdrop for the discussion on respect in the workplace as there exists a dynamic interaction between numerous players, the goal of which is to provide excellent patient care. Health care delivery is marked by complexity and often ambiguity (Porter-O'Grady, 2004). This combination of factors: complexity, ambiguity and diversity of roles, has the great potential to create an environment rife with negative relations (Porter-O'Grady, 2004).

Human activity determines the character and behavior of social systems (Masuch, 1985) but norms can be defined by organizations through diversity training programs (Valentine and Fleischman, 2002). As such, diversity management becomes an important element in the cohesive functioning of the organization (Glover and Carrington, 2005; Bagshaw, 2004). In terms of the Respect in the Workplace program, the normative reference point, the desired state, is a respectful workplace.

The literature regarding respect in the workplace is rooted in numerous subjects, including organizational development and culture. The NH Respect in the Workplace policy outlines three domains for consideration: discrimination, harassment and disrespect. This literature review will include a discussion of diversity management and will centre around these three areas with special emphasis on disrespect as an area of growing interest in the research community as well as one with latent ability to cause pervasive strife within an organization.
Diversity Training, Conflict and Diversity Self-Efficacy

Diversity training offered in the workplace has become more commonplace as have policies outlining the expected conduct of employees (Roberson, Kulik and Pepper, 2001; Valentine and Fleischman, 2002; Egodigwe, 2005). The intent of such training is to heighten the awareness of employees to both similarities and differences in those that they work with and to provide an arena for the acceptance of all people (Hostager and De Meuse, 2002). The efficacy of diversity training within the context of the workplace has been the subject of many studies (Hostager et al, 2002; Kalev et al, 2006; Ely et al, 2006; Bagshaw, 2004). However, the assessment by organizations of their own diversity training programs has not kept pace with the proliferation of such diversity training programs (Roberson, Kulik and Pepper, 2001).

The global, pluralistic society of the 21st century (Combs, 2002) calls for organizations to measure success relationally as well as financially. As Combs (2002) states, “The diversity challenge for organization leadership is to facilitate a work environment that allows and encourages appreciation for diverse individual characteristics and dimension”. This is no less true in publicly funded health care than it is for a large private multi-national company. The evolution of diversity training has included a reliance on affective response which is a necessary but not sufficient outcome for an organization to sustain the effective management of workforce diversity (Combs, 2002). Diversity self-efficacy (DSE) is required for effective and sustained change (Combs, 2002).
DSE is based on an individual’s confidence in their ability to acquire skills necessary to work effectively and positively in a diverse workforce (Combs, 2002). The key to DSE lies in the ability of the employee to successfully transfer the learning received in training to the actual work environment. A culture of continuous learning will help encourage and facilitate this transfer (Tracey, Tannenbaum and Kavanagh, 1995). The efficacy-performance relationship is an important component as performance affects self-efficacy which affects performance (Lindsley, Brass and Thomas, 1995) creating a feedback loop (Masuch, 1985). An individual’s performance in treating others with respect in agreement with workplace norms can create greater confidence in their self-efficacy which informs their performance in future interactions and the efficacy-performance cycle is in force.

However, the impact of leadership should not be forgotten. Management should also be responsible for developing acceptance of diversity in the workplace (Combs, 2002). The management of diversity is an essential role of leadership and is modeled on a daily basis through the interactions that employees’ have with their supervisors. This modeling contributes to employees’ own DSE. The front line managers in the organization must be able to develop diversity skills in their employees (Combs, 2002). The successful application of skills learned in training sessions is correlated with managerial support (Tracey et al, 1995). The effective management of diversity at a base level within the organization can minimize detrimental effects (Combs, 2002) such as escalation of conflict and spiraling vicious circles (Masuch, 1985). Further, an organization-wide message that acceptance is
important and that learning to value each other is a priority will aid in the retention of skills acquired in training and the successful transfer of these skills to the work environment (Tracey et al, 1995).

It must be noted that the effective management of diversity does not insinuate the absence of conflict. According to Porter-O’Grady (2004) “All human interaction is fundamentally based on conflict”. Conflict is the expression of differences which forces the recognition of diversity that can ultimately lead to a more positive and proactive way of interacting (Porter-O’Grady, 2004). A person’s response to conflict informs the end result of a variance in opinion. The recognition that one’s own reactions: emotional, mental and physical, contribute to how and if a conflict is successfully resolved is the beginning of learning to mitigate negative outcomes in the face of conflict. An organizational commitment, at every level in the organization, to healthy conflict resolution complemented with training in the requisite skills and awareness of personal actions and reactions in the face of conflict aids in the creation of an atmosphere that embraces diversity. Cultivating DSE at all levels of the organization, empowering employees to be change agents, may be the bridge required between diversity training and individual performance (Combs, 2002). Further, fostering DSE within diversity training sessions can aid in the transfer of skills to the work environment (Combs, 2002).

It is the intent of the RITW training to increase employee self-efficacy so that the standard of conduct presented in training will translate to the appropriate awareness and behaviour in the work environment.
Hypothesis 1: It is hypothesized that awareness in regard to the RITW policy will be high. Additionally, that the effectiveness of the RITW training in cultivating DSE in NH employees can be ascertained by comparing responses on the self-assessment questions regarding awareness and behaviour in the workplace of those who have received training against those who have not.

Discrimination and Harassment

Much study has been conducted on harassment over the past 20 years as well as discrimination. History has shown that poor diversity management on the part of organizations can result in an inability to prevent discrimination leading to discrimination lawsuits and negative effects for stakeholders (Wooten and James, 2004).

Laws within BC provide protection to employees who have experienced harassment or discrimination that is rooted in one or more of the protected group characteristics covered in human rights legislation. The Human Rights Code of BC (BCHRC) outlines protection from discrimination and harassment in employment related to race, colour, ancestry, place of origin, political belief, religion, marital status, family status, physical or mental disability, sex, sexual orientation or age of a person as well as conviction of a summary offence that is unrelated to their employment. This provides parameters that organizations are required to comply with in their treatment of staff as well as a minimum level of conduct expected from staff in their interactions with each other.
Phomphakdy and Kleiner (1999) articulate the impact of discrimination as follows: “Discrimination diminishes human capital while creating a hostile work environment for the employer and employees.” Suggestions for eliminating discrimination in the workplace include: leadership modeling, having a top-down approach, instituting a zero-tolerance policy and committing to a plan of action (Phomphakdy and Kleiner, 1999).

Harassment can be segmented into personal harassment and discriminatory harassment. Discriminatory harassment is covered under the BCHRC and is based in one or more of the group characteristics listed. Personal harassment is harassment that is not rooted in one of the protected areas and so is not covered under the BCHRC (BC Human Rights Coalition, 2005). Many organizations establish policies covering personal harassment.

The implications of harassment in the workplace can be severe. Spratlen (1994) found that behaviors perceived as interpersonal harassment by staff at a university led to compromised productivity and interpersonal communication as well as low morale. Workplace policies can be effective, however, as they enable employees to recognize harassment (Sramcik, 2006).

Hypothesis 2: It is hypothesized that there will be very low incidence of discrimination and harassment in the past 6 months as well as effective resolution for those who report this behaviour.
Conduct that rises to the level of harassment or discrimination can more clearly be recognized and addressed, however subtle forms of disrespect are often much more difficult to detect and therefore to provide resolution to (Pearson, Andersson and Wegner, 2001).

**Disrespect in the Workplace**

In recent years topics such as incivility in the workplace and workplace bullying have gained a great deal of attention among researchers. Andersson and Pearson (1999) define workplace civility as “a behavior that helps to preserve the norms for mutual respect in the workplace” and further that “Civility reflects concern for others”. Generally, then, workplace incivility can be thought of as behavior that disrupts mutual respect in the workplace (Andersson and Pearson, 1999). Specifically, Andersson and Pearson (1999) defined workplace incivility as “low-intensity behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect”. Low intensity refers to acts that are generally verbal rather than physical, indirect rather than direct and passive rather than active (Baron and Neuman, 1996).

Incivility in the workplace is a social interaction between two or more parties which can be interpreted differently by the various parties (Pearson, Andersson and Porath, 2000). Zauderer (2002) stated “Incivility in organizations is evidenced by disrespectful behaviour that undermines the dignity and self-esteem of employees and creates unnecessary suffering. In general, behaviours of incivility indicate a lack of
concern for the well-being of others and are contrary to how individuals expect to be treated”. As Zauderer (2002) points out, “people expect, want and need to be treated with respect”. Pearson et al (2001) in their extensive study on workplace incivility found that incivility is divisive, anti-social, deviant behaviour that harms, isolates and demoralizes people.

Disrespect in the workplace has increasingly recognized implications. A work climate that is rude, disrespectful or uncivil can make workers miserable and can result in low productivity, high turnover and decreased cooperation and collaboration (Pearson, Andersson & Wegner, 2001). Additionally, research is clear that mistreatment, even less intense forms of mistreatment can be a precursor of aggression and violence (Baron and Neuman, 1996; Pearson, Andersson and Wegner, 2001). Spratlen (1994) found that forms of workplace mistreatment were perceived as interpersonal abuse. Significant organizational conflict can be precipitated by seemingly minor interpersonal mistreatment (Cortina et al, 2001). Cortina et al (2001) further explain “low-level, interpersonal mistreatment can engender organizational violence and damage individual psychosomatic functioning.” Uncivil interactions can be viewed as attacks on the target and therefore culminate in retaliatory acts (Pearson et al, 2001). This can then lead to escalating spirals of incivility which can lead to circles of violence (Andersson and Pearson, 1999; Masuch, 1985; Pearson et al, 2001).

A singular human act is made up of: the actor, the situation, the actor’s purpose and the activity itself (Masuch, 1985). This singular act (unit act) causes a
chain of activities that can re-create the original situation, culminating in an "action loop" or feedback loop. Feedback loops can be positive (deviation-amplifying) or negative (deviation-counteracting), the definition of which depends on whether the loop moves away from or towards the desired state (Masuch, 1985). Vicious circles are positive feedback loops as they escalate and more specifically they are defined by Masuch (1985) as deviation-amplifying loops as they escalate but move away from a predefined reference point. As the reference point for NH in terms of the RITW policy is a respectful workplace, this type of activity will lead the organization away from that desired state.

When an uncivil encounter occurs in the workplace, the instigator(s), the target(s), the observer(s) are all contributing to and are being affected by the encounter (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). In a poll of nearly 800 US employees, Pearson and Porath (2005) found that 10% witness incivility on a daily basis and that 20% experienced incivility at least once per week. A study conducted by Graydon, Kasta and Khan (1994) found that 33% of nurses in Toronto area hospitals had experienced verbal abuse in their last 5 days of work. The damage done by incivility in the workplace may be individual or collective (Pearson et al, 2001). Individually, those who experience frequent acts of incivility are less satisfied with their employment situation, have increased intent to leave the organization and have greater psychological distress (Cortina et al, 2001). Collectively, the department and entire organization suffers due to decreased creativity and collaboration as well as substantial costs in sick leave and turnover (Andersson and Pearson, 1999; Pearson,
Andersson and Wegner, 2001; Vickers, 2006). Incivility creates a ripple effect which has the potential to pollute the entire organization (Johnson and Indvik, 2001) leading to a toxic work environment and a pervasive culture of toxicity (Appelbaum and Roy-Girard, 2007). Acts of incivility create distrust, low commitment and low morale, so when organizations or departments within the organization do not perform as expected it may be due to a lack of respect rather than budget constraints, workload or the skill base of employees (Zauderer, 2002).

Individuals of lower status are at more risk of experiencing workplace incivility especially from those that use this tactic as a means of asserting power (Cortina et al, 2001). Additionally, targets often do not report incivility for fear of jeopardizing their career or because they feel it will have no effect (Johnson and Indvik, 2001).

**Hypothesis 3:** It is hypothesized that experiences of disrespect will be high and that a majority of employees who have an affirmative response to the experience of disrespect in the workplace will have also identified themselves as frontline or other staff member.

**Hypothesis 4:** It is hypothesized that many employees will choose not to pursue the matter and of those who make this choice, it is expected that for the majority this will be the only method of resolution indicated.
The Role of Management

Managers often do not know how to deal with incivility and estimates are that up to 13% of management time is spent on resolving issues related to incivility in the workplace (Pearson and Porath, 2005). In other cases, managers dismiss uncivil incidents as personal matters or merely interpersonal conflict that they do not need to deal with (Pearson and Porath, 2005). It has been found though that appropriate intervention by managers when norms for respect in the workplace are violated can be very effective in preventing further incivility (Johnson and Indvik, 2001).

Unfortunately, however, supervisors have been found to be the greatest source of interpersonal mistreatment, as they often have control over resources and have the power to block employee performance by withholding needed resources, support or access to others (Harlos & Axelrod, 2005). According to Pearson et al (2000), the instigator of incivility is three times more likely to be in a higher status position in relation to the target. The instigator is also much more likely to be male (70% vs. 30%) and men are seven times more likely to be uncivil to those in lower status positions than to those in higher status positions. Interestingly though women are equally likely to behave uncivilly towards superiors as subordinates but are much less likely to act in an uncivil manner towards peers (Pearson et al, 2000).

Pearson et al (2000) found that occasionally instigators were thought of as having unique talents required by the organization and three out of four respondents in their study indicated that instigators were particularly skilled at “kissing up”. The instigator would significantly modify their behaviour for superiors, many tended to be
very ‘cunning’ never showing their poor treatment of subordinates when superiors were around. Due to these types of behaviours, toxic managers can be hard to spot (Johnson and Indvik, 2001) but those that work directly under the manager have the best vantage point for identifying them (Appelbaum and Roy-Girard, 2007).

A toxic leader is a key component in the creation and perpetuation of a toxic work environment; they are characterized as being motivated by self-interest and visible short-term accomplishments (Appelbaum and Roy-Girard, 2007). Toxic managers tend to cause an environment that stifles communication, where employees are prone to have low morale as well as feelings of anger and depression (Appelbaum and Roy-Girard, 2007).

In a study of 125 hospital administrators (defined as hospital executives, managers and clerical staff), Harlos and Axelrod (2005) found that context support (perceived organizational support) can be a mitigating factor on the effects of workplace mistreatment. However, this study also found context support has little impact on the employee’s intent to leave the organization when they feel emotionally neglected or verbally abused. Additionally, organizations with practices that ignore employee socio-emotional needs as well as individuals with an abusive interpersonal style have significant potential to prompt employees to leave the organization.

Alternatively, employees may choose to retaliate due to their perceived mistreatment. Employee deviance is behaviour that has the potential to harm the “well-being of the organization, its members or both” (Robinson and Bennet, 1995). As Fortado (2001) explains, “subordinates often attempt to ‘settle the score’ with
their managerial antagonists by using informal sub-cultural means”. A study conducted by Skarlicki and Folger (1997) focusing on the 3-way interaction of distributive, procedural and interactional justice on organization retaliatory behaviors (ORB) found that when fair procedures are in place within an organization, they have the effect of moderating an individual’s retaliatory behaviour even in the face of low levels of interactional and distributive justice. Further, they found that high levels of interactional justice mitigated ORB. This strongly suggests that when supervisors treat employees with respect and dignity, perceived inequity in pay (low distributive justice) and unfair procedures (low procedural justice) are more tolerable and ORB is reduced. Levinson (1965) made the argument that to the employee, the supervisor is a personification of the organization. The supervisor’s goodwill can make up for deficiencies in other areas. Skarlicki & Folger (1997) felt their findings suggested the possibility of interactional and procedural justice acting as substitutes for each other. For NH this implies that a RITW policy and program that employees perceive as fair and effective can potentially mitigate poor interpersonal skills on the part of supervisors and managers. Alternatively, this also implies that supervisors with high competency in regard to their people skills; respect and regard for employees, can in part make up for ineffective RITW processes. However, to couple relationally skilled supervisors (interactional justice) with an effective policy (procedural justice) would be ideal.
Hypothesis 5: It is hypothesized that qualitative data will identify the role of management as a key determinant in the efficacy of resolving an incident of discrimination, harassment or disrespect in the workplace.

Employee Voice

Voice is defined by Hirchman (1970) as “any attempt at all to change, rather than to escape from, an objectionable state of affairs....through appeal to a higher authority”. Within a work setting, employee voice is used as a means of ‘active resistance to mistreatment’ (Cortina and Magley, 2003). Voice as stated by Hirchman (1970) “implies articulation of one’s critical opinions”.

According to Harlos (2001), research has primarily been focused on the design of employee voice systems rather than on the effectiveness of those systems, the perceptions and use of the system by employees. In her study of employees’ perceptions of organizational response to mistreatment, Harlos (2001) found that three systems, namely, open-door policies, suggestion boxes and employee assistance programs were associated with a perceived failure to respond. Open-door policies were found to be the most prevalent informal system used within organizations as well as the most ineffective.

An informal system is by definition unstructured, thereby having more procedural variation and therefore a higher possibility of not providing appropriate resolution to employees’ concerns. Informal systems allow for greater variation in outcomes in large part because of differences in the managers’ handling of
complaints. The informal process of speaking with management regarding an experience of harassment or disrespect, if handled inappropriately by the manager, can further exacerbate the employees’ feelings of inequity or injustice. As one employee in Harlos’ study (2001) put it “You were told that the door was open, but God help you if you walked through it”. Krefting and Powers (1998) found that management may perceive employee voice as an affront and rather than seek resolution for the employee, may instead personalize the matter. In this case, instead of managing the issue, the authority figure manages the individual (Krefting and Powers, 1998) which can lead to further victimization for the target rather than resolution (Cortina and Magley, 2003).

Failure on the part of the organization to respond appropriately to employees’ voicing of mistreatment lead to frustration effects, defined as an increased sense of injustice due to speaking out. Organizational inaction in the face of mistreatment complaints can foster employee silence (Harlos, 2001). Research shows that ‘deaf-ear syndrome’, inaction to employee voice, can result in decreased productivity and turnover. Further, deaf-ear syndrome on the part of the organization compounds the perception of injustice felt by employees in relation to the mistreatment. Approximately one-third of participants in Harlos’ study (2001) were significantly disillusioned by the open-door policy in their organizations finding that it was available in theory but not in practice. Despite this, Harlos found that paradoxically, employees are optimistic regarding open-door policies. When handled skillfully, an informal open-door policy can prove very effective. One-third of participants felt the
open-door policy had both the most and the least potential to provide appropriate resolution to employee complaints. The key is in the expectations of employees. Employees expect that open-door policies should be effective. They expect confidentiality, to be valued, listened to and respected when they bring an issue forward to management. When expectations are thwarted, cynicism is the result.

**Hypothesis 6:** It is hypothesized that the qualitative data will show that those who choose not to pursue (or continue to pursue) resolution to an incident of discrimination, harassment or disrespect do so out of fear or an expectation of inaction on the part of the organization or agents thereof.

**Hypothesis 7:** It is hypothesized that the effectiveness of the resolution process to an incident of discrimination, harassment or disrespect will be positively correlated to employees’ perceptions of RITW program effectiveness and organizational commitment to the RITW program.
METHODOLOGY

As the purpose of the research project was to assess the perceived effectiveness of the RITW program, a paper-based survey tool (Appendix 2) was utilized to query staff members on their experiences and beliefs regarding the RITW program. The expectation was to receive data which would provide insight into the attitudes and experiences of NH staff in relation to the RITW program.

Sample

The survey was distributed to all employees of NH. In all, 7,989 surveys were distributed. This included full-time, part-time and casual staff members in each community and at every facility within NH. The number of employees’ who actually received a survey is not verifiable as some staff members may have been on vacation or leave at the time of distribution. The distribution was organized with the intent of including as many staff as possible so that each employee of NH had the opportunity to provide feedback about the RITW program.

The distribution of the surveys was coordinated by DocuSource, the NH document experts. An envelope labeled Respect in the Workplace Survey was delivered to employees across NH beginning on March 16, 2007 with completion on March 23, 2007. The envelope contained: the survey, a memo from the NH Vice President of Human Resources (Appendix 3) as well as a postage paid envelope that was routed through BC Mail to Rick Tallman, Assistant Professor at the University of Northern British Columbia. Employees were given the opportunity to participate by
filling in the survey and returning it; although completion and return of the survey was entirely voluntary. There was no formalized structure put in place whereby employees had time set aside during work to complete the survey, therefore employees were free to choose to either fill out the survey during work hours or to take it home with them to complete at their leisure. Employees who participated were requested to complete the survey and then return it in the included postage paid envelope.

The survey was confidential and anonymous. This, it was felt, provided the freedom for employees’ to answer the questions honestly without fear of reprisal. All employees received a letter outlining the purpose of the survey in the form of a memo from the Vice President of Human Resources at Northern Health to explain the organization’s commitment to providing a healthy and respectful workplace and how this research will aid in that goal.

**Research Tool: The Survey**

The survey was created in collaboration between the parties involved in the overall research project. The author was involved in all aspects of the survey creation and was active in the determination of the methodology used. The survey was constructed to provide both quantitative and qualitative data.
The survey was divided into 6 sections:

1. General Information
2. Communication of the Policy
3. Impact of the RITW Policy
4. Resolving a RITW Issue
5. Program Effectiveness and Organizational Commitment
6. Final Comments and Suggestions

The General Information section was primarily demographic in nature asking participants to select their broad job category, the region in which they work, their age category, sex and whether or not they are aware of the RITW policy and have received training. The Communication section focused on participants’ knowledge of the policy and the awareness of access to pertinent resources. Answers provided were ‘Yes’, ‘No’ and ‘Not Sure’.

The Impact section asked 15 questions regarding the NH environment as it relates to the RITW program, before and after implementation. The answers were provided in a Likert Scale ranging from ‘1’ being Strongly Disagree to ‘5’ being Strongly Agree. Also included was an ‘NA’ category for employees who began their employment after April 2005.

The Resolving a RITW Issue section queried participants on their experience within the work environment at NH in relation to situations of discrimination, harassment and disrespect. Within this section, employees were asked to provide feedback on methods of resolution for any experiences of discrimination, harassment and disrespect and to rate the effectiveness of the chosen method or methods.
Comment sections were included to allow employees to provide context for their answers.

The Program Effectiveness section contained 4 questions with answers given in a Likert scale ranging from ‘1’ being Strongly Disagree to ‘5’ being Strongly Agree. This was to provide measures regarding perception by employees of the RITW program, its effectiveness and NH’s commitment to it.

The Final Comments and Suggestions section was included in order to give employees the opportunity to provide thoughts and opinions in a free text format to gain some qualitative data regarding the program.

Surveys were received very shortly after distribution. Due to a time constraint, this research project is based on the first 200 completed surveys received. Once received, survey responses were compiled and entered into a custom Access database. Quantitative analysis was conducted utilizing Microsoft Excel and SPSS for Windows. Qualitative data was categorized based on the content of participant comments.
RESULTS

Demographics and General Information

The first 200 surveys received were used as the sample for this research project. Of these, 88% were female, 10% were male and 2% declined to respond to this question. In terms of job categories, 84% were denoted as either frontline staff or other staff member while 16% were either a supervisor or manager.

The representation from the three Health Service Delivery Areas (HSDA’s) is depicted in Figure 2. Respondents from the Northern Interior (NI) HSDA totaled 64%. Those from the Northwest (NW) HSDA were 23% and those from the Northeast (NE) HSDA were 13%. The actual breakdown of NH employees’ by HSDA is 53% in the NI, 28% in the NW and 19% in the NE. The sample is fairly representative of the existing employee population.

Figure 2: Proportion of Respondents by HSDA
The proportional age of respondents is shown in Figure 3 below. The age categories were 12% for 20-29 year olds, 24% for 30-39 year olds, 38% for 40-49 year olds, 24% for 50-59 year olds and 3% of respondents were over 60 years old.

![Breakdown by Age](image)

**Figure 3: Percentage of Respondents by Age**

Awareness of the RITW program is high with 196 respondents, or 98% indicating that 'Yes' they were aware of the policy. 93% knew that the policy addressed how employees are expected to behave with each other at work. 73% or 146 employees stated that they had received the training with 20% having received training within the past 6 months, 45% having received training within the past year and 55% having received training between April 2005 and April 2006. The majority of staff indicated that they knew where to get information about the RITW policy and procedures, with an aggregate percentage of 77%, which when segmented by job category revealed that 74% of frontline or other staff and 90% of supervisors or managers know where to obtain information on the policy when needed. These results provide support for Hypothesis 1.
Impact of the RITW Program

Findings for questions pertaining to the work environment before the RITW policy was implemented are as follows:

- 40% felt that disrespectful behaviour was a problem, 38% did not
- 54.3% felt that staff members worked well together and treated each other with respect, 22.1% feel they do not
- 84.4% agreed or strongly agreed that they were aware of the need to be respectful at work
- 43.4% felt that they were inclined to address disrespectful behaviour

Results for questions pertaining to employee perceptions since the RITW policy was instituted are as follows:

- 35% agree or strongly agree that disrespect continues to be a problem in the workplace, 47.2% feel it is not a problem
- 59.2% feel that staff members work well together and treat each other with respect, 16.8% feel they do not
- 59.6% agree or strongly agree that they are more aware of the need to be respectful
- 50.3% agree or strongly agree that they are more inclined to address disrespectful behaviour
- 26.3% have not noticed a positive change in the behaviour of staff whereas 21.1% have
- 44.1% disagree and 39.5% agree with the statement that disrespectful behaviour has not been a problem in their workplace
- 67.4% are more aware of the importance of a respectful working environment
RITW Training and Self-Efficacy

The Mann-Whitney non-parametric test was utilized to compare those who have taken training and those who have not with the self-assessment of their own behaviour in the workplace (Table 1). Those who have taken training responded more positively to the questions regarding their behaviour in the workplace then those who had not taken training. Specifically for Q#19, 20, 22, 23 and 24 the findings are significant with \( p < .05 \). This provides support for Hypothesis 1.

The findings for Q#21 are not significant with \( p > .05 \). This may be due to the fact that 35.2\% of respondents answered this question with a rating of 3 or Neutral/Neither Agree nor Disagree.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Impact of Training on Self-Efficacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Q19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mann-Whitney U</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wilcoxon W</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grouping Variable: Attended Training
Discrimination, Harassment and Disrespect

Employees were asked in separate questions whether they had experienced a situation of discrimination (Question 25), harassment (Question 28) or disrespect (Question 31) in the past 6 months. Out of the 200 surveys, 21.3% of respondents stated that they had experienced a situation of discrimination, 16.3% stated they had experienced a situation of harassment and 43.1% stated they had experienced a situation of disrespect. In total, of the 200 respondents, 96 had experienced discrimination, harassment or disrespect or some combination thereof.

The results provide support for Hypothesis 3 but not for Hypothesis 2.

Figure 4 depicts the number of staff by job category who have experienced a situation of either discrimination, harassment or disrespect in the past 6 months.
Figure 5 represents the percentage by broad job category of those that stated they had experienced a situation of discrimination, harassment or disrespect. Staff Member includes frontline and other staff member and Manager includes supervisor and manager.

These findings do not support Hypothesis 2 as a rate of over 20% for experiences of discrimination and over 15% for situations of harassment is not considered a very low rate of incidence.

The results provide support for Hypothesis 3 as the proportion of those who have experienced situations of disrespect is much higher for those that designated themselves as frontline or other staff member.
Resolving a RITW Issue

Of the 42 people who stated that they had experienced a situation of discrimination, the methods of resolution were as follows:

- 18 spoke directly with the other party involved, 9 or 50% of participants reported that this provided effective resolution to the situation
- 20 involved a supervisor, manager or union representative, only 6 found this method effective
- 6 attended a meeting facilitated by HR, 3 found this provided resolution
- 2 requested mediation, neither participant felt this was effective
- 16 decided not to pursue the matter and only 1 felt this was effective

The following pie chart (Figure 6) shows the proportion of answers to the effectiveness of the situation of discrimination experienced by the employee.

![Pie Chart](image)

Figure 6: Resolution to Discrimination

Hypothesis 2 is not supported due to only a 29% rate of successful resolution.
Of the 32 people who stated that they had experienced a situation of harassment, the methods of resolution were as follows:

- 13 spoke directly with the other party involved, 3 of the participants reported that this provided effective resolution to the situation.
- 14 involved a supervisor, manager or union representative, only 6 found this method effective representing 21%.
- 4 attended a meeting facilitated by HR, 1 found this provided resolution.
- 1 requested mediation, the participant did not feel this was effective.
- 13 decided not to pursue the matter and only 1 felt this was effective.

The following pie chart (Figure 7) shows the proportion of answers to the effectiveness of the situation of harassment experienced by the employee.

![Figure 7: Resolution to Harassment](image)

Hypothesis 2 is not supported based on only a 19% rate of successful resolution.
Of the 84 people who stated that they had experienced a situation of disrespect, the methods of resolution were as follows:

- 47 spoke directly with the other party involved, 23 of the participants reported that this provided effective resolution to the situation.
- 28 involved a supervisor, manager or union representative, only 7 found this method effective representing 25%.
- 7 attended a meeting facilitated by HR, 3 found this provided effective resolution.
- 4 requested mediation, no participants felt this was effective.
- 3 filed a grievance and all participants responded 'Strongly Disagree' in response to the effectiveness of this resolution method.
- 29 decided not to pursue the matter and only 2 felt this was effective.

The following pie chart (Figure 8) shows the proportion of answers to the effectiveness of the situation of disrespect experienced by the employee.
Many employees used a combination of efforts to resolve their issue of discrimination, harassment or disrespect. 38% of those that experienced a situation of discrimination utilized more than one resolution method, 62% used only one. 53% of those that experienced a situation of harassment used more than one method of resolution, 47% used only one. In total, 22% chose not to pursue the matter of harassment as their only method of resolution.

67% of respondents who had experienced a situation of disrespect used only one method of resolution, 33% used more than one method. 25% used ‘Choosing not to pursue the matter’ as their sole method. These findings provide support for Hypothesis 4 as 35% of respondents chose not to pursue the matter as one of their methods of resolution and of those 86% chose this as their only method.

Of those who responded that they had experienced a situation of discrimination only 12 agreed or strongly agreed that the process or processes used were effective in resolving it. For situations of harassment, of the 32 affirmative responses only 6 agreed or strongly agreed that the methods used were effective. Situations of disrespect were resolved successfully in 25 of the 84 situations reported.

Respondents who were satisfied with the resolution of a situation of discrimination, harassment or disrespect most frequently discussed the matter directly with the other party. Other methods that provided satisfaction were: involving a manager, supervisor or union representative, attending a meeting facilitated by HR and in 5 cases, deciding not to pursue the matter. The methods that provided the least satisfaction were: filing a grievance and requesting mediation. Neither of these
methods was used as the sole means of seeking resolution. Methods that were not
used by respondents were: filing a formal complaint and filing a complaint with the
BC Human Rights Commission.

Comments were requested for questions related to the experience and
resolution of situations of discrimination, harassment and disrespect. Comments
provided for each area are as follows:

| Table 2: Count of Comments by Category of Experience |
|---------------------------------------------|-------------------|
| **Category of Experience**                  | **Comments**      |
| Discrimination                              |                   |
| Resolution method used                      | 20                |
| Effectiveness of process                    | 22                |
| Harassment                                  |                   |
| Resolution method used                      | 19                |
| Effectiveness of process                    | 21                |
| Disrespect                                  |                   |
| Resolution method used                      | 37                |
| Effectiveness of process                    | 39                |

Of those that provided comments with regard to the effectiveness of their
chosen method of resolution, 26 mentioned management as at least partial reason for
the lack of success and 4 respondents specifically made mention of their supervisor or
manager being instrumental in the successful resolution of the incident. Comments
pinpointing management, including upper management, as the source of disrespect,
harassment or discrimination numbered 18. These results provide support for
Hypothesis 5.
4 issues were resolved by the exit of one or more parties to the incident, either from the department or from the organization and 1 specifically commented on their intent to leave due to the disrespectful work environment. 18 respondents cited some form of fear, avoidance or lack of support as their reason for no resolution. All 18 of these respondents also chose not to pursue the matter, though for some this was not the only method of resolution they tried. These results provide support for Hypothesis 6.
**RITW Program Effectiveness and Organizational Commitment**

Employees’ perception of the effectiveness of the RITW program and the commitment of NH to the policy and program are as follows:

- 52.1% agree or strongly agree that the RITW program is an effective way to improve workplace relations; 17.9% disagree or strongly disagree and 30% are neutral/ neither agree nor disagree

- 44.4% agree or strongly agree that the RITW program is effective in reducing disrespectful behaviour, harassment and discrimination; 17.3% disagree or strongly disagree; 38.3% neither agree nor disagree

- 64.1% agree or strongly agree that NH is committed to creating a respectful workplace for its employees; 11.7% disagree and 24.2% neither agree nor disagree

- 52.3% agree or strongly agree that NH is committed to the resolution of respectful workplace concerns in a timely and supportive manner; 13.7% disagree or strongly disagree; 34% neither agree nor disagree

The effective resolution to an experience of discrimination was found not to be significantly correlated with employees’ perception of program effectiveness or organizational commitment to the RITW program and policies (Table 3).

Effective resolution to an experience of harassment was found to have a significant medium positive correlation ($r = .470, p = .013$) to the employees’ perception of RITW program effectiveness in improving workplace relations and a
significant large positive correlation \((r = .576, p = .002)\) to the RITW program's effectiveness in reducing disrespectful behaviour, discrimination and harassment. Organizational commitment to the RITW program and policies was found not to be significantly correlated with the effective resolution of an experience of harassment.

### Table 3: Correlation of Resolution to Organizational Commitment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Q35</th>
<th>Q36</th>
<th>Q37</th>
<th>Q38</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Discrimination</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.178</td>
<td>.155</td>
<td>.256</td>
<td>.318</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.0293</td>
<td>.0354</td>
<td>.121</td>
<td>.052</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>38</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Harassment</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.470(*)</td>
<td>.576(**)</td>
<td>.279</td>
<td>.326</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.013</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>.158</td>
<td>.097</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Disrespect</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pearson Correlation</td>
<td>.330(**)</td>
<td>.333(**)</td>
<td>.354(**)</td>
<td>.429(**)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.005</td>
<td>.002</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>70</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).
** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Effective resolution to an experience of disrespect was found to have a significant medium positive correlation \((r = .330, p = .005)\) to the employees' perception of RITW program effectiveness in improving workplace relations and a significant medium positive correlation \((r = .333, p = .005)\) to the RITW program's effectiveness in reducing disrespectful behaviour, discrimination and harassment. Perceptions of organizational commitment to creating a respectful workplace for employees was also significantly positively correlated \((r = .354, p = .002)\) to the effective resolution of experiences of disrespect. Perceptions of NH commitment to timely and supportive resolution of respectful workplace concerns was found to have
an extremely significant medium positive correlation \( r = .429, p < .0001 \) with the effective resolution of experiences of disrespect.

These findings provide partial support for Hypothesis 7.

**Final Comments and Suggestions**

The final section of the survey asked for comments and suggestions regarding the RITW program. Ninety-three respondents included comments in this section. Comments ran the gamut from “This program is useless” to “This program is great” and many variations in between.

**Summary of Hypotheses**

Hypothesis 1 states that awareness in regard to the policy will be high. Additionally, the effectiveness of the RITW training in cultivating DSE in NH employees will be shown by higher positive responses on the self-assessment questions regarding the employee’s own awareness and behaviour in the workplace after receiving training. Based on the results, Hypothesis 1 is supported.

Hypothesis 2 states that there will be very low incidence of discrimination and harassment in the past 6 months as well as effective resolution for those who report this behaviour. Based on the results, Hypothesis 2 is not supported.

Hypothesis 3 states that experiences of disrespect will be high and that a majority of employees who have an affirmative response to the experience of disrespect in the workplace will have also identified themselves as frontline or other staff member. Based on the results Hypothesis 3 is supported.
Hypothesis 4 states that many employees will choose not to pursue the matter and of those who make this choice, it is expected that for the majority this will be the only method of resolution indicated. Based on the results Hypothesis 4 is supported.

Hypothesis 5 states that qualitative data will identify the role of management as a key determinant in the efficacy of resolving an incident of discrimination, harassment or disrespect in the workplace. Hypothesis 5 is supported.

Hypothesis 6 states that based on the qualitative data it will be found that those who choose not to pursue (or continue to pursue) resolution to an incident of discrimination, harassment or disrespect do so out of fear or an expectation of inaction on the part of the organization or agents thereof. Hypothesis 6 is supported.

Hypothesis 7 states that the effectiveness of the resolution process to an incident of discrimination, harassment or disrespect will be positively correlated to employees’ perceptions of RITW program effectiveness and organizational commitment to the RITW program. Hypothesis 7 is supported for situations of harassment in terms of perceptions of program effectiveness but not supported in relation to perceptions of organizational commitment. Hypothesis 7 is not supported for situations of discrimination but is supported for situations of disrespect in terms of both program effectiveness and organizational commitment.
DISCUSSION

Diversity Training, Conflict and Diversity Self-Efficacy

NH's RITW program communicates an organization-wide message from 'the top' which is an essential step in creating and sustaining a respectful and diversity-friendly organizational culture.

The majority of respondents had attended a RITW training session which provided a good sample with which to assess the program's effectiveness. Employees are aware of the RITW policy, regardless of having attended a training session or not. This indicates that NH has been successful in communicating the existence of this policy. Another indication of this awareness is that the great majority of respondents also knew what the policy stood for, that it sets a standard of conduct within the workplace. It is clear that there exists a measure of organization-wide awareness. As Tracey et al (1995) explain this will help participants successfully transfer knowledge and skills learned in the training sessions to the work environment.

The results from the section covering the impact of the RITW program show a difference in the perception of the work environment pre and post RITW. In general, statements that could be directly compared were answered more positively in the post-RITW section then in the pre-RITW section. For example, comparing the responses for Question 11 against Question 18 shows a 5% increase in positive response for how well staff members work together and treat each other. Likewise,
there is a 5% reduction in positive response for the statement ‘Disrespectful behaviour by staff continues to be a problem in my workplace’. Also, close to 60% felt that they were more aware of the need to be respectful at work. This would indicate that the RITW policy has had a positive affect on the organization.

The Mann-Whitney test confirms that those who have attended training responded more positively to most questions assessing their awareness and behaviour in the workplace. It is curious that the statement ‘I have changed my behaviour’ (Question 19) was found to be significant ($p < .05$) and yet the statement ‘I act with more respect to my co-workers’ (Question 21) was not significant ($p > .05$). Over 1/3 of employees provided a neutral response (3) to this question. This may indicate that respondents feel that they are no more respectful to co-workers now than they were before the RITW program began though they are certainly more aware of the need to be respectful.

Diversity self-efficacy is based on the individual’s judgment of their abilities to facilitate appropriate responses in a climate of diversity (Combs, 2002). The results signify that employees are more confident in their ability to function appropriately in the workplace after the RITW training, though perhaps their performance does not always align with their beliefs. The efficacy-performance cycle will be important in converting knowledge and confidence into action. Collective efficacy impacts self-efficacy (Lindsley et al, 1995) so as organizational expectations are permeated throughout NH and departments collectively continue to
treat each other with respect; individual effectiveness and the living out of respectful behaviour day to day will become more commonplace.

**Discrimination and Harassment**

The finding that 48% of respondents (96 out of 200) feel they have experienced some form of discrimination, harassment or disrespect in the workplace over the past 6 months is staggering and indicates that there is still much work to be done to improve the work environment for NH employees.

The illegality of discrimination as well as the increase in awareness of both discrimination and harassment issues in the workplace over the past decade led to the expectation that the frequency of incidents of discrimination would be low. It was the researcher’s expectation that should these incidents occur, they would be minimal and would be appropriately resolved to avoid the risk of, among other things, legal action. Though the incidence of discrimination and harassment are far less than the occurrence of disrespect, it is felt that the prevalence of these behaviours is still quite high and present an eminent risk for NH. It is possible that respondents are not utilizing the appropriate definition of discrimination in answering the question; nonetheless it is clear that a fair number feel this term describes their experience. Phomphakdy and Kleiner (1999) make the point that when the workplace is “freed from the effects of discrimination” it becomes an environment with the “potential to successfully grow”.
The rates of situations of harassment are less than discrimination, however at close to 17%, this frequency is still too high. Though these events are occurring in the workplace, the resolution of these incidents is the key determinant of the potential effect that these circumstances could have over time, to both the employee and the organization. The warning here is that 22% are not bringing forward concerns and instead choosing not to pursue that matter at all. This might be acceptable if the person has been able to reconcile the event in their mind and carry on in the work environment without affect. From the comments provided, this seems not to be the case. Instead, employees express feelings of powerlessness. Bjorkqvist, Osterman and Lagerspetz (1994) state that “Work harassment is a serious problem”, the effects of which can be severe and can even lead to suicide. One respondent specifically commented about her concerns that a co-worker committed suicide due to workplace abuse. Employees need to bring forward issues of harassment but they first need to believe that they will receive support by the organization when they do.

In three cases, employees participated in mediation and in all three cases the employees found this to be an ineffective method for resolving the issue. Attending a meeting facilitated by HR had slightly more positive results with resolution purported to be effective in 4 of the 10 cases where this method was utilized. The effectiveness of the methods of resolution deserves further research and reflection.
Disrespect in the Workplace

The results on disrespect in the workplace are disturbing with over 40% of respondents having experienced a situation of disrespect. Couple this statistic with the finding that 35% of employees feel that disrespect continues to be a problem in the workplace and evidently disrespect is an area in need of attention.

The results show that across all categories: discrimination, harassment and disrespect, those that identify themselves as frontline or other staff member are more likely to have experienced this behaviour in the workplace than those that identify themselves as either a supervisor or manager. 33% of all respondents (65 out of 200) identified themselves as a frontline staff or other staff member who had experienced disrespect in the workplace in the past 6 months.

Methods for resolving situations of disrespect most often included: confronting the offending party, involving a supervisor, manager or union representative or deciding not to pursue the matter. Very low satisfaction in the resolution of the situation was found for all methods of resolution. The method that provided the highest rate of satisfactory resolution was confrontation and that rate was still under 50%. Methods that incorporated the use of organizational resources such as management, HR and mediation showed far less favourable results. Consistent with the findings of Pearson and Porath (2005), only 25% of respondents were satisfied with the resolution received by involving a supervisor, manager or union representative. These results both quantitatively and qualitatively spotlight an area of risk for NH. The mental well-being of employees is being eroded as these
incidents are not resolved satisfactorily. Pearson and Porath (2005) provide this caution, "Incivility ignored can fester. Incivility condoned can spawn additional incivility".

Incivility has the effect of reducing cooperation and mutual understanding (Vickers, 2006), decreasing productivity as targets spend time worrying about the current incident or anticipating future ones (Pearson, Andersson and Porath, 2000) and decreasing job satisfaction (Cortina et al, 2001). These sentiments were echoed in some of the comments received.

Consistent with the findings of Cortina et al (2001), the data showed that those in higher status positions were more apt to behave in disrespectful ways to others. This is based on the qualitative data received via the comments sections throughout the survey.

The Role of Management

Management was found to be a recurring theme throughout the comment sections. Many employees felt that bringing forward concerns would jeopardize them in some way. A number of comments reflected a lack of confidence that anything would be done to resolve the issue. On the other hand, there were comments received that indicated the supervisor or manager provided great support and facilitated the successful resolution to the problem. Some comments stated that overall the work environment was respectful but that an authority figure (supervisor, manager, senior manager or executive) was the source of disrespect.
Mistreatment, especially ongoing mistreatment, by a person in authority can sometimes be referred to as petty tyranny, defined by Ashforth (1994) as someone who ‘lords his or her power over others’. The behaviours associated with a tyrant include: a tendency to over-control subordinates, failure to consult with others or keep them informed, taking credit for others’ work as well as blaming others for mistakes, obstructing the development of subordinates and deterring initiative. The term petty refers to the frivolousness of the actions, indicating behaviours that are arbitrary and small-minded (Ashforth, 1994). The term petty tyrant conjures up quite an image and the effect that such a person can have on individuals and groups is important to note. The petty tyrant can have the effect of lowering self-esteem and performance, creating a feeling of helplessness and an environment of stress as well as disrupting cohesion within work units or departments (Ashforth, 1994).

It is essential that the role of management in cultivating a respectful environment, or conversely in the degradation of the work environment, be clearly understood. Respectful behaviour must be modeled by managers in their interactions with employees. Managers must also be held accountable for their actions and behaviour. Fortado notes that “Many supervisors resent any perceived defiance of their authority. They seldom consider the possibility that they could have contributed to the problem”. Andersson and Pearson (1999) suggest that managers evaluate how their behaviours contribute to incivility in the workplace. Managers should be, as Bennis (1995) puts it, ‘reflective practitioners’, meaning that they have knowledge
about themselves, their strengths and weaknesses, and also about how they affect other people.

A few of the comments questioned whether managers had taken the RITW training. The survey results showed that 28% of the managers who responded to the survey had not attended RITW training. As it has been shown that taking the RITW training does increase awareness to the need to be more respectful, it would follow that manager's awareness would be heightened by taking the training. Managers who do not participate by going to training send the message that the RITW program and policy are not important. The RITW program will be significantly undermined without managers living by the tenets of the RITW policy and being an example to others. In addition, it is the manager that employees need to rely on when they encounter incivility in the workplace. If the manager is not fully informed and invested in the vision of a respectful work environment and has not received the training, how can employees count on him or her to provide appropriate guidance in their hour of need?

Employee Voice

The RITW policy outlines formal and informal methods of resolution. The informal process relies on staff to either voice their concerns to the offending party or to speak with a manager, union representative or HR staff member in resolving the issue. Based on the survey results, the informal process of resolution is the most prevalent approach used by employees. As there were no respondents who filed a
formal complaint, it is not possible to comment on the efficacy of this method of resolution.

The most effective method utilized was speaking with the offending party directly. This is usually a good first step and many times will resolve the issue without further action required. Certain comments revealed that speaking directly with the person involved can provide information to the offending party that they had previously been unaware of. Some comments were that the instigator “had never been told it was unacceptable” or “didn’t realize it happened”. In these cases, this method was very effective as both parties seemed interested in continuing their working relationship in a respectful way. In order for this method to be successful there must be self-awareness (Ely et al, 2006). When both sides of the matter can evaluate their own actions and reactions, motives and behaviour, the probability of success increases. The degree of self-efficacy and respect for others is evident in both the target’s pursuit of resolution and the instigator’s openness to the target’s point of view. This requires both parties to carefully and respectfully assess their own contribution to the incident.

There are times, however, when an employee may feel unable to speak with the person directly and may require further assistance in resolving the issue. At other times, this may have been the first step in attempting to resolve the issue but it was not considered successful. In these cases, the open door method of involving a manager or supervisor is an appropriate avenue for seeking resolution. This was used by employees in 62 of the situations divulged. However, only 16 of these cases were
found to be effectively resolved when employees utilized this method. Additionally, the fact that many employees never brought forward incidents for resolution even when those situations were causing distress is reason for concern. Unresolved issues, especially ongoing, chronic incidents occurring without being resolved is what can lead up to aggression and violence in the workplace. Alternatively, this type of persistent problem can lead to detrimental effects for the target. Depression, low morale, loss of creativity and thoughts of helplessness can be the result for those who feel there is no way to resolve their situation.
RECOMMENDATIONS

NH has drawn a line in the sand; they have stated their strategic intent with respect to their organizational culture. However, without the action to back this strategic intent, employees will not believe in the organizational commitment to this intent. NH has created a vision for a respectful work environment. Failure to follow through on this vision will create disillusionment among employees. Warren Bennis, in his co-authored book “Reinventing Leadership” (1995) articulates it this way “Vision alone can not only be meaningless but can create cynicism and doubt. At worst, a vision combined with mixed messages can lead to organizational paralysis.” Further he states, “every single announcement or pronouncement or edict always has to be sustained by organizational action. Without that, the words are empty and meaningless”.

The RITW program is an essential step in creating a work environment marked by dignity and respect. The RITW program to date has been effective in increasing the awareness of employees to the standard set within NH. Currently, the training required for all employees is a half day session. This is important in order to introduce staff to the policy and the structure of the program. Other programs are offered on a voluntary basis such as conflict resolution courses. However, a greater variety of courses need to be offered to employees for the notion of respect to become an ingrained construct in the minds of staff members and management.
Ellis and Sonnenfeld (1994) in their study of diversity management articulate that training in regard to respect and diversity should not be planned in one session offerings only. They must be accompanied by follow-up sessions to allow participants the opportunity to reflect on the information presented and then to further discuss thoughts or concerns that may materialize upon further rumination. This allows employees to build trust, vent frustrations and feelings of injustice. A coordinated series of sessions was found to be more effective in the transfer of expected conduct to the workplace. Even with an “orchestrated seminar series”, on-going monitoring of the work environment and corporate culture is imperative. It is recommended that the RITW program be extended to provide more in-depth interaction with employees and that on-going assessment of all initiatives be incorporated into the strategic plan of the NH Human Resources department.

Deadrick et al (1996) admonish “if organizations truly want to extinguish harassment in the workplace, they need to change the way they approach the problem”. A significant area for attention is the role of management. Management selection is critical. It is recommended that a stringent process be in place for selecting supervisors and managers, especially those that have direct reports. Warren Bennis (1995) provides a succinct warning based on his years of leadership experience, “Don’t give power to people who can’t live without it”. Frequent performance evaluations should be a requirement for new managers or supervisors. Anyone new to supervision or management should be evaluated on an on-going, regular basis to ensure success for all involved (the manager, direct reports and the
organization as a whole). 360 degree evaluations are important as well so that the perspective of direct reports is considered in the evaluation of management performance. Often the subordinate viewpoint is the only vantage point in which to see behaviour that can be labeled petty tyranny. Too often, those who suffer under this type of person are never consulted and so these managers continue in their position causing harm to those who report to them. To further justify this recommendation, when employees feel mistreated, they turn to various coping strategies (Zauderer, 2002). Coping strategies can include:

1. Rationalization
2. Withholding Full Commitment
3. Seeking Change
4. Retribution
5. Emulating Incivility
6. Exiting the Situation

All of these coping strategies can have serious ramifications for the organization. As an example of the impact of withholding full commitment, in the words of one employee in Zauderer’s study (2002), “I’ve learned how to meet the basic expectations of the organization. No one can say that I’m not doing my job but what they don’t know is that I could be giving them 30% more creative effort”. Though this may seem minor, when viewed collectively, if even a portion of the respondents in this study use this as a coping strategy, NH is on the losing end as it misses out on countless hours of productivity as well as much needed employee contributions.
This can all be very costly so it is imperative that organizations provide clear guidelines when it comes to discrimination, harassment and disrespect. The implications of ignoring such incidents can be quite detrimental to the success of the organization. Incidentally, an abnormally high turnover rate could be a trailing indicator of a problem area within the organization and the manager may be at the root of this expensive difficulty. As recommended by the BCOAG, NH should assess managerial control to ensure it is being used in an effective manner.

Another reason for the rigorous evaluation of managers is that they have power, both positional and political power, over their employees. The effectiveness of the voice system (i.e. an open door policy) oftentimes lies in the hands of the manager. Employee voice can sometimes lead to retaliation or sanctions on the employee (Krefting and Powers, 1998; Cortina and Magley, 2003). Cortina and Magley (2003) outline two forms of retaliation, namely, work retaliation victimization (WRV) and social retaliation victimization (SRV). WRV is defined as “adverse work-related actions that have the purpose or effect of negatively altering the target’s job”. SRV is defined as “antisocial behaviours that have the purpose or effect of negatively altering the target’s interpersonal relations with other organizational members”. Cortina and Magley (2003), in their study of over 1,000 employees, found “greater SRV and WRV experienced by lower status victims voicing against higher power wrongdoers”. If employees are fearful of retaliation, they may choose to remain silent and the mistreatment then remains hidden and unresolved.
Finally, when dealing with incivility in the workplace, the affects are cumulative. They build up over time and create a hostile working environment for the target. The time limit of 6 months for incidents of discrimination in agreement with the BCHRC is reasonable but setting a limit of 6 months to bring forward a concern or specific situation of disrespect is not reasonable due to the nature of this type of behaviour. Those who are silently being bullied and targeted by their co-workers or managers are very likely coping with it over extended periods of time, perhaps months or even years. They may never come forward; because of fear, because they are not confident in the process and especially because it can be very difficult to try and explain to someone what the incidents are, how they have accumulated over time and the affect that the whole situation has had on them. Many times, employees are convinced that they will reap negative repercussions for coming forward, that they will be labeled a ‘troublemaker’ (as one employee put it). The affect is then compounded as the target finds no support and no way to resolve the issue. This type of work environment may be tolerated for a period of time but eventually the target will be worn down and will bide their time until they can find a way out. This may mean a move to another department, away from the instigator or could ultimately lead to the voluntary exit of the employee from the organization.

Implementing a policy and providing resources to conduct a program aimed at promoting respect in the workplace is only the beginning of the process. The effectiveness of this program is crucial to the health of the organization. As the BCOAG suggest, the work environment must be assessed for risks to the mental
health of staff and also for risk of violence to staff. This research provides the first step in this assessment. An action plan must now be constructed and implemented that will provide a response to the very real concerns raised. This initial survey should be used as a baseline against which further initiatives and assessments can be conducted. It will be critical for NH to follow-up and take action in response to the results of this survey otherwise employees may perceive this inaction as "evidence of a pervasive hostile environment" (Deadrick, McAfee and Champagne, 1996).

**Direction for Future Research**

This project focused on the effectiveness of the RITW program as it relates to employees. The effects of discrimination, harassment and disrespect have been outlined but the business of NH is health care, so it seems quite pertinent to ask; what of the patient? How does a work environment marked by these types of behaviours impact patient care? This would be an important concept to research especially as the demography in Canada changes, with the expected result being increased stress on our health care system. The time to be assessing the implications of the work environment on patient care and affecting positive change is now.

Additionally, it will be important to build on this research by conducting some more in-depth assessments to determine why these behaviours are occurring. This will be needed in order to create a plan of action to eradicate pockets of incivility in the NH work environment.
CONCLUSION

Health care is indeed made up of various players and numerous roles that must interact in cohesion to live out the NH mandate. Work environment plays a critical function in how well employees thrive in their position within the organization. The experience of each individual combines and ultimately creates a collective culture in which each player must operate.

The fact that NH has approved and provided support for this project shows their interest in assessing how effective the RITW program has been. It is also a sign of the commitment that exists to the continuous improvement of the NH work environment.

The NH RITW program has been successful in increasing awareness and contributing to employees' expectations in regard to the culture of the organization. The policy has set a standard that employees are aware of and believe in. It is imperative, however to move beyond simply stating a standard exists, to upholding that standard. This will entail a coordinated strategic plan that includes a measurable goal of effective resolution to situations of discrimination, harassment and disrespect for all parties involved, individually and collectively. This requires a stakeholder view of the incident in order to take into consideration all those that may be affected by the situation and the outcome.
The RITW policy states:

“NH promotes and supports behaviour that results in understanding and mutual respect in the workplace and prevents and stops disrespectful or discriminatory conduct. NH will consider any incident resulting in disrespectful behaviour or any incident resulting in discrimination very seriously and will take whatever steps necessary to ensure a respectful, discrimination and harassment free workplace.”

This research was intended to measure the effectiveness of the Respect in the Workplace program and policy against its own intentions. The data gathered confirm that Northern Health has been effective in promoting mutual respect in the workplace. It is now time to aggressively pursue the goal of preventing and stopping disrespectful and discriminatory conduct.

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APPENDICES

Appendix One: Regional Site Map of Northern Health
Appendix Two: Respect in the Workplace Survey

Northern Health introduced the Respect in the Workplace Policy in April 2005. The purpose of the policy is to encourage a healthy workplace that recognizes the right of all employees to be treated with dignity and respect.

This survey will help Northern Health measure policy success. The information you provide will be used to develop strategies that increase policy effectiveness and awareness. Please take a few minutes to answer the questions below. No identifying information will be collected and your responses and comments will remain anonymous.

A. General Information

This section asks you to provide general information about yourself. This information will help us determine if any groups of people are experiencing different outcomes or experiences than the majority of staff. Please choose the word or phrase that most closely describes you.

1. I am a: Frontline Staff Member □ Other Staff Member □ Supervisor □ Manager □
2. I work in the: Northeast □ Northwest □ Northern Interior □
3. I am: Female □ Male □
4. My age is: < 20 □ 20-29 □ 30-39 □ 40-49 □ 50-59 □ 60+ □
5. I am aware of NH's Respect in the Workplace Policy. Yes □ No □
6. I have attended a Respect in the Workplace training session.
   Yes ______ months ago No □
B. Communication of the Policy

This section asks about your awareness of the Policy and availability of information. Please check the most appropriate response for you.

7. I know about the Respect in the Workplace Policy and that it addresses how my co-workers and I are expected to behave at work.
   Yes □   No □   Not Sure □

8. I know where to get information about the Respect in the Workplace Policy and procedures if I need them.
   Yes □   No □   Not Sure □

9. I know about the following Respect in the Workplace resources and know where to get them if needed.
   Posters    Yes □   No □   Not Sure □
   Pamphlet   Yes □   No □   Not Sure □
   Human Resources Intranet Website Yes □   No □   Not Sure □
C. Impact of the Respect in the Workplace Policy

This section asks about the impact of the Respect in the Workplace Policy on the behaviour of yourself and others. Please keep in mind the policy relates to your work relationships with co-workers, supervisors, managers, physicians, students, contractors and volunteers only. We will refer to those to whom the policy relates as staff, even though not all are employees of Northern Health. Please circle the number that best represents your perceptions of staff behaviour.

1 = Strongly Disagree,  2 = Disagree,  3 = Neither Agree or Disagree, Not Sure,  
4 = Agree,  5 = Strongly Agree  NA = Not Applicable

| Before the Respect in the Workplace Policy was introduced in April 2005..... | SD D N A SA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 10. Disrespectful behaviour by staff was a problem in my workplace. | 1 2 3 4 5 NA |
| 11. Staff members worked well together and treated each other with courtesy and respect. | 1 2 3 4 5 NA |
| 12. I was aware of the need to be respectful at work. | 1 2 3 4 5 NA |
| 13. I was inclined to address disrespectful behaviour. | 1 2 3 4 5 NA |

| Since the Respect in the Workplace Policy was introduced ..... | SD D N A SA |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 14. I have noticed a positive change in the behavior of staff in my workplace. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 15. Disrespectful behaviour by staff continues to be a problem in my workplace. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 16. Staff members are more respectful to one another. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 17. Disrespectful behaviour by staff has not been a problem in my workplace. | 1 2 3 4 5 |
18. Staff members work well together and treat each other with courtesy and respect

19. I have changed my behaviour.

20. I am more aware of the need to be respectful at work.

21. I act with more respect to my co-workers.

22. I am courteous and respectful when I want to be.

23. I am more aware of the importance of a respectful working environment

24. I am now more inclined to address disrespectful behaviour than in the past

D. Resolving a Respect in the Workplace Issue

The Respect in the Workplace Policy provides a number of options to resolve issues involving disrespect, harassment and discrimination. The following section measures the effectiveness of those options. Please indicate the best response for you.

25. I have experienced a situation(s) of discrimination in my workplace in the past 6 months.

Yes □ (Please proceed to the next question)  No □ (Please skip to question 28)

26. I chose to address this situation(s) by: (Please check all that apply)

☐ Discussing the matter directly with the other party(ies)
☐ Involving a supervisor, manager, and/or union representative
☐ Attending a meeting facilitated by Human Resources staff
☐ Requesting mediation
☐ Filing a grievance
☐ Filing a formal complaint under the Respect in the Workplace Policy
☐ Filing a complaint with the BC Human Rights Commission
☐ Choosing not to pursue the matter (Please give your reasons in the space below)
27. The process(s) that I used to resolve this issue(s) was effective

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In the space below, please indicate why each process used was or was not effective. Please attach an additional page if more space is required.

28. I have experienced a situation(s) of harassment in my workplace in the past 6 months.

Yes □ (Please proceed to the next question) No □ (Please skip to question 31)

29. I chose to address this situation(s) by: (Please check all that apply)

- □ Discussing the matter directly with the other party(ies)
- □ Involving a supervisor, manager, and/or union representative
- □ Attending a meeting facilitated by Human Resources staff
- □ Requesting mediation
- □ Filing a grievance
- □ Filing a formal complaint under the Respect in the Workplace Policy
- □ Filing a complaint with the BC Human Rights Commission
- □ Choosing not to pursue the matter (Please give your reasons in the space below)
30. The process(s) that I used to resolve this issue(s) was effective

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In the space below, please indicate why each process used was or was not effective. Please attach an additional page if more space is required.

31. I have experienced a situation(s) of disrespect in my workplace in the past 6 months.

Yes ☐ (Please proceed to the next question)  No ☐ (Please skip to question 34)

32. I chose to address this situation(s) by: (Please check all that apply)

☐ Discussing the matter directly with the other party(ies)
☐ Involving a supervisor, manager, and/or union representative
☐ Attending a meeting facilitated by Human Resources staff
☐ Requesting mediation
☐ Filing a grievance
☐ Filing a formal complaint under the Respect in the Workplace Policy
☐ Filing a complaint with the BC Human Rights Commission
☐ Choosing not to pursue the matter (Please give your reasons in the space below)
33. The process(s) that I used to resolve this issue(s) was effective

In the space below, please indicate why each process used was or was not effective. Please attach an additional page if more space is required.

34. Supervisors, managers, and Human Resources staff provided me with timely information about the policy and dispute resolution resources in response to my questions and concerns.

Yes ☐ No ☐ I did not ask or bring forward concerns. ☐

E. Program Effectiveness and Organizational Commitment

This section assesses your beliefs about the effectiveness of and Northern Health's commitment to the Respect in the Workplace Policy. In response to the statements below, please choose a rating that most closely reflects your opinion.

| 35. The Respect in the Workplace program is an effective way to improve workplace relations | 1 2 3 4 5 |
| 36. The Respect in the Workplace program is effective in reducing disrespectful behaviour, harassment and discrimination | 1 2 3 4 5 |
37. Northern Health is committed to creating a respectful workplace for its employees

38. Northern Health is committed to the resolution of respectful workplace concerns in a supportive and timely manner

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F. Final Comments or Suggestions

Lastly, we would like your comments or suggestions on how to make Northern Health’s Respect in the Workplace program more effective.
MEMO

Date: March 16, 2007
To: All Northern Health Employees
From: Les Waldie, Vice-President Human Resources
Re: Evaluation of the Respect in the Workplace Program

In May of 2005, Northern Health launched the Respect in the Workplace Program. Since that time, 2,741 unionized and management employees have attended policy training sessions. In order to assess the effectiveness of the Respect in the Workplace program and to make plans for its improvement, NH has partnered with UNBC to undertake a thorough program evaluation. Part of this evaluation is a survey that assesses employee perceptions of the program and its effectiveness.

The attached survey contains questions regarding basic demographic information and your knowledge, perceptions, and experiences of the Respect in the Workplace program and its effectiveness. You will also find a postage paid envelope addressed to Rick Tallman, Assistant Professor, UNBC. Please complete the survey and mail it in the enclosed envelope by March 31, 2007. Completing and returning this survey implies your consent to participate in the research.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary and you can refuse to participate without any adverse effects by not completing the questionnaire. There are no risks to you as we only want your thoughts on the program. Please be assured that your answers are anonymous as no identifying information is requested on the survey. Once you have completed and mailed the survey, the only persons who will see it are Rick Tallman, Sage Goudsward (an MBA student and NH employee), and a research assistant. The surveys will be destroyed once all the data has been recorded. NH will be given a copy of the data file for purposes of program analysis and improvement.

If you have any questions regarding this survey, please contact Rick Tallman, UNBC at 960-5404 (if local) or 1-800-960-5404 (if out of town) or by e-mail at tallmanr@unbc.ca or Peter Martin, NH at (250) 565-2101 or by e-mail at Peter.Martin@northernhealth.ca. If you have any complaints about this survey, please contact the Office of Research at UNBC by e-mail at rab@unbc.ca or contact myself, Les Waldie at (250) 565-2116 or at Les.Waldie@northernhealth.ca.

Thank you in advance for completing this survey and helping NH improve the effectiveness of the Respect in the Workplace program.