

exploring workplace behaviours: from bullying to respect

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final report of the workplace behaviours project

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- strengthen the professionalism and adaptability of the public sector; and
- promote high standards of governance, accountability and performance for public entities.

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contents

executive summary	1
introduction and background	5
the spectrum of workplace behaviours	7
respectful behaviour	7
disrespectful behaviour	11
perceptions of bullying	14
defining bullying	14
implying intent	16
context is the key	17
an explanatory model	17
the relationship between behaviour and climate	18
which organisational factors are most important?	19
concluding observations	25
the spectrum of behaviour	25
bullying and perceived intent	25
context matters	25
implications for organisations	27
appendices	29
a1: detailed methodology	30
a2: the spectrum of workplace behaviour	34
a3: building a safety and trust model	40
a4: detailed statistical results	41

executive summary

This report draws out the main themes from a qualitative research project that was conducted by the State Services Authority (SSA) in partnership with two Victorian public sector organisations. The research sought to deepen our understanding of the complex phenomenon of workplace bullying by exploring the range of workplace behaviours that may be labelled as bullying. The research explored perceptions of respectful, disrespectful and potentially bullying behaviours in the context of the two participating organisations.

The research included focus groups, in-depth interviews with senior managers and employees, and a survey. Its qualitative nature means that some care must be taken in making generalisations to the broader population of public sector organisations. Nonetheless, many of the insights are consistent with other research in this area and are likely to be of interest to anyone seeking to build more positive public sector workplaces.

The main findings and insights are:

perceptions of disrespectful and respectful behaviour

respectful behaviour

- Respectful behaviour was much more commonly observed in both participating organisations than disrespectful behaviours. This was the case for both the behaviour of managers and peers and colleagues.
- Respectful behaviours are the small simple things, often described as the basic courtesies of life, such as saying good morning, please and thank you. These may, however be taken for granted as a basic standard of behaviour rather than being seen as necessarily respectful. Statistical analysis suggests that the more frequently these behaviours are observed, the more likely they are to be regarded as respectful – perhaps because this means that the behaviour is more likely to be seen as authentic.
- Being tolerant of cultural, gender and other differences, listening when others are speaking and giving genuine praise and appreciation were the behaviours most likely to be perceived to be very respectful.

disrespectful behaviour

- Examples of disrespectful behaviour were much more likely to be discussed at the focus groups and there was more intensity to the discussions than was the case for respectful behaviour.
- The greater intensity of feeling aroused by disrespectful behaviour appears to give it a more lasting impact. The survey results show that the most extreme forms of disrespectful behaviour (threatening someone with physical harm, making personal derogatory comments, banging fists on the table) were rarely seen and yet discussion in the groups and interviews focussed mainly on disrespectful behaviour.
- The research suggests that even single instances of disrespectful behaviour may undo many instances of respectful behaviour in the workplace.
- When disrespectful behaviour becomes a pattern, it is more likely to be perceived to be bullying. This is particularly so for behaviour that is targeted at particular individuals and has the effect of making people feel excluded.

- Exclusionary behaviour was most likely to diminish a person's sense that the organisation is concerned about their wellbeing. Covert behaviours such as spreading rumours and making personal derogatory comments were also more likely to be perceived to be bullying.

participants' understanding of bullying - implied intent

- The perceived line between disrespectful behaviour and bullying is not as simple as crossing a line from less to more extreme forms of disrespectful behaviour.
- Participants believed that the line was very subjective and different for everyone. The difficulty with measuring the incidence of bullying by survey is that it is impossible to tell where each survey respondent draws the line about what they experience as bullying.
- Participants in the research believed that **intent to cause harm** and **repetition** were important elements of bullying behaviour. This is despite the fact that intent is not an element of the definition of bullying. Many felt that repetition of the behaviour was the best evidence of intention to cause harm.
- Intent appeared to be **implied from the context** in which the behaviour occurred and trust was very important. This was both trust in the relationship with the person and trust in the organisation.

context is the key

All the research pointed towards the importance of context. Both respectful and disrespectful behaviours are interpreted through the lens of the context in which they occur. Levels of trust in the organisation and relationships seemed to be particularly important. This context is created by behaviours that are common in the workplace and by other aspects of the organisation's culture.

- Respectful and neutral behaviours that occur in a high trust environment seemed to reinforce an affirming climate where employees feel safe and that the organisation cares about their wellbeing.
- Disrespectful behaviours that occur in a high trust environment may be more likely to be forgiven and explained as an aberration – we are all human and make mistakes. It may have a shorter term impact.
- Respectful behaviour that occurs in a low trust environment in which employees are not feeling safe may result in cynicism and suspicion. However, if respectful behaviour becomes a norm, the levels of trust may improve.
- Disrespectful behaviour that occurs in a low trust environment will create and reinforce a lack of trust and sense of safety among employees. Such behaviour is more likely to be labelled bullying and to have a long term impact.

Beyond the patterns of behaviour in the workplace, the research identified three aspects of organisational culture that seemed to have the most effect on participants' trust in the organisation. These were:

perceptions of leadership in modelling of the organisation's values

Where the chief executive and other managers were seen as good role models of the organisation's values, there was a greater sense of trust in the organisation and belief in the authenticity of the values. Gaps between what is said and what is done appear to undermine trust in the organisation. This can contribute to negative interpretations of workplace behaviour.

perceptions of grievance and dispute resolution procedures and approaches to conflict resolution

Lack of confidence in formal grievance and dispute procedures contributed to a lack of trust in the organisation generally. Similarly, a belief that it was not safe to make a complaint or 'put your head above the parapet' contributed to a more general sense of distrust. Building all employees' skills and confidence in resolving conflict without having to resort to formal processes was seen as important. One of the organisations had done a significant amount of work in this area and the discussion in the focus groups reflected a greater sense of resilience and ability to take personal responsibility for their own behaviour and to respond to the behaviour of others.

performance management

Confidence in performance management systems also appeared to contribute to the overall climate of the organisation. In particular, the means by which employees and managers are called to account for behaviour that is not consistent with the values seemed to be important to levels of trust in the organisation. Ensuring that managers have the skills to have difficult conversations before things build up and become serious issues was believed to be important. Participants believed that there was a need to embed behaviours into the performance management framework because how things are done is as important as what is done in performance assessment.

implications for organisations

Organisations should consider the following initiatives to improve workplace behaviour and increase employees' trust:

encourage respectful behaviour and discourage disrespectful behaviour

- Monitor both respectful and disrespectful behaviour in the workplace regularly. The SSA will make the survey developed as part of this research available to organisations. This survey allows organisations to monitor both perceptions and frequency of these behaviours.

- Promote respectful behaviour by giving specific examples of the types of behaviour that is considered to be respectful. Emphasise the fact that repetition of these behaviours is important to build a sense of a respectful workplace.

- Discourage disrespectful behaviour and make all staff aware of the negative and lasting impression that even a one off instance of disrespectful behaviour is likely to have.

understand bullying

- Treat survey evidence of bullying as a useful warning indicator. The research has shown that perceptions of bullying are subjective and survey evidence of bullying is likely to need more detailed exploration before action can be taken. Focus groups and in-depth individual interviews can be a good way to gather further information. Be aware that there may be a climate of fear and distrust that will need to be factored into arrangements for gathering this information. Using external facilitators and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity may help overcome this.

- Monitor and address workplace behaviour that may lead people to feel that they are being excluded. Behaviour that leads people to feel excluded from either work or social networks is most likely to undermine trust in the organisation and covert behaviour is more likely to be perceived to be bullying.

- > Understand that behaviour is interpreted through the lens of the context in which it occurs. Behaviour is more likely to be labelled as bullying when there is perceived intent to cause harm to the person. Employees may be more likely to perceive that bullying is occurring where there are low levels of trust in their relationship with the person engaging in the behaviour and in the organisation itself.
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context matters – build employees' trust in relationships and the organisation

- > Model the values. Senior leaders and managers must lead in modelling the behaviours consistent with the organisation's values – authenticity is crucial. Managers play an important role in setting the tone and standard of behaviour.
 - > Review your dispute resolution and grievance handling systems and processes. Do you staff understand how these systems work? Are they confident in using them? (Your *People Matter Survey* results give you information about this.) Are there ways to make them more transparent without compromising confidentiality and anonymity?
 - > Build workforce skills in conflict resolution and resilience. Encourage a sense of individual responsibility for behaviour and for responding to any disrespectful behaviour by others in a proactive, positive way
 - > Ensure that performance management systems reflect the organisation's values. Systems should be explicit about the importance of the 'how' not just the 'what' of performance.
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SSA resources

- > **People Matter Survey** for monitoring employees' perceptions of experience of workplace bullying
- > **Tackling bullying** for responding to immediate incidents of reported or observed bullying
- > **Tackling bullying** and the **Positive Work Environment Toolkit** for exploring the underlying cultural factors and building more positive, respectful work environments
- > **Taking the heat out of workplace issues** and **Developing conflict resilient workplaces** for better managing workplace disputes and developing more positive approaches to conflict in the workplace
- > **Feedback matters** for information about the potential effects and benefits of providing informal and formal feedback
- > **Managing poor behaviour in the workplace** and **Talking performance** for improving processes for managing poor performance and building managers' skill in having conversations about performance with employees

introduction and background

The State Services Authority (SSA) has been monitoring employee experiences of workplace bullying through its annual *People Matter Survey* (the Survey), a climate and culture survey of Victorian public sector organisations, since 2004. The reported levels of workplace bullying across the sector have been remarkably consistent over this period with around one in five respondents reporting having experienced bullying and one in three having witnessed it in their workplace.¹

This is similar to the levels of bullying reported in other research in Victoria² and other jurisdictions across Australia³. However the evidence of the negative effects of bullying on those who experience or even observe it⁴ suggests that the figure is too high. Understanding more about this complex phenomenon and assisting organisations to respond to it has been an important part of the work of the SSA in recent years. The SSA has produced research reports, as well as guides to assist organisations to build more positive working environments, to tackle workplace bullying, to deal with high conflict behaviours⁵ and to assist in building conflict resilient workplaces.⁶

Despite the comprehensive statistical picture developed about workplace bullying in the Victorian public sector, there remain a number of unanswered questions. Organisations receiving their *People Matter Survey* results are often unclear as to what the results are telling them and need more information to assist them to understand and address the problem.

One of the unanswered questions is the apparent discrepancy between the positive and negative responses to the Survey. For most organisations, the results are very positive, with high levels of agreement that the organisation is doing well in applying the public sector values. Most organisations also perform well when measured against employee perceptions of fair and reasonable treatment and other employment principles. However, within this fairly consistent picture of satisfaction, there has been equally consistent reporting of bullying behaviours.

The project sought to avoid the potential trap of focussing only on the negative or bullying behaviour by exploring the spectrum of behaviours that occur in the working environment of an organisation. The objective of exploring these behaviours in context (rather than through a survey) was driven by a desire to understand how context shapes employee perceptions and experience of organisational climate and culture. Hence, the initial emphasis on bullying and other negative behaviours was broadened to include more positive, respectful behaviour. This broader scope was also a response to the needs of the two participating organisations who were very interested in getting a better understanding of the sorts of behaviour that were considered respectful.

1 SSA, *Trends in Bullying in the Victorian Public Sector: People Matter Survey 2004-2010*, 2011

2 WorkSafe Victoria conducts random phone surveys of Victorian workers and has found a similar proportion respond that they have been exposed to bullying. See the *Trends in Bullying* report cited above for details of this research.

3 See *Trends in Bullying* cited above for a summary of this research.

4 See *Trends in Bullying* for a the evidence of negative effects of experiencing and witnessing bullying.

5 SSA, *How Positive is Your Work Environment: the organisational, management and individual perspective on making improvements at work* (2nd Ed.) 2012; SSA, *Tackling Bullying*, 2010; SSA, *Dealing with High Conflict Behaviours*, 2011

6 SSA, *Taking the Heat out of Workplace Issues*, 2009; SSA, *Developing Conflict Resilient Workplace*, 2010

subjectivity and context

Measuring perceptions of bullying through a self-completed questionnaire is common practice by organisations seeking to understand their potential exposure to occupational health and safety claim risks. The SSA⁷ and agencies such as WorkSafe⁸ have done research into respondents' understanding of the definition and the types of behaviours likely to be labelled bullying. However, measuring bullying in this way remains problematic because it relies on subjective interpretation of the behaviour and the definition.

Other qualitative research⁹ has shown that perceptions of bullying are by their nature subjective and even where a definition is given, survey responses of 'yes' to bullying are likely to indicate a range of individual experiences and interpretations of behaviours. The project explored employee perceptions of the spectrum of workplace behaviours to understand better the factors underlying this subjectivity. The project acknowledged the importance of subjectivity because for climate and culture, perception is reality.

The project also explored the organisational context in which the behaviour occurred. There are many aspects of organisational culture and climate that were known to contribute to bullying type behaviours. It was not fully understood, however, how context affects how behaviour is perceived. These contexts cannot be fully captured by instruments like the *People Matter Survey*.

This report contains the major themes that emerged from the research. It has revealed that while there is a fairly clear spectrum of behaviour from respectful to disrespectful, the line between disrespectful behaviour and bullying is blurred and subjective. The study suggests that organisational context is crucial to the interpretation of behaviour, and that some aspects of culture matter more than others.

A major point of methodological difference is that the approach was qualitative. Qualitative research has a number of benefits, the primary one being that it is a valuable way to explore complex phenomena in context. Rather than large surveys and statistical analysis, qualitative research relies on exploring a smaller number of cases in more detail and in context.

The full details of the methodology used in this project are contained in Appendix 1. Briefly, the qualitative methods included focus groups of employees, in-depth interviews with leaders and managers and employees. A survey of employees was also developed based on the themes that emerged from the focus groups. This was designed both to establish a baseline from which to measure progress and to pilot an instrument that could be used by other organisations wishing to explore issues around workplace behaviour in more detail. Analysis of the survey responses has been used in this report as a tool for the preliminary testing of some emerging hypotheses. Consistent with the qualitative approach, no claim is made to generalisation beyond the scope of the participating organisations.

However, many of the themes identified here support the findings of other research. This provides some confidence that the report will be relevant for other public sector organisations grappling with these issues.

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- 7 In 2010, cognitive testing of the People Matter Survey was conducted to explore the extent to which the questions in the Survey were understood. The questions about bullying were tested for understanding and the clarity of the definition. It was found that respondents clearly understood the definition and that the definition was considered to be consistent with their general understanding of the nature of workplace bullying.
 - 8 WorkSafe conducted some unpublished research in 2011 to test people's understanding of the nature of the workplace bullying and in particular the need for behaviour to be repeated to be considered to be bullying which might fit the legal definition of bullying.
 - 9 See for example Omari, M. *Towards Dignity and Respect at Work: An Exploration of Bullying in the Public Sector*, PhD Dissertation, Edith Cowan University, January 2007; and Jenkins, M. *Workplace Bullying: The Perceptions of the Target, the Alleged Perpetrator and the HR Professional: Integrating Stakeholders' Voices to Improve Practice and Outcomes*, Thesis submitted for PhD, School of Psychology, Faculty of Health Sciences, University of Adelaide, February 2011

the spectrum of workplace behaviours

The project sought to identify the spectrum of workplace behaviours from respectful to disrespectful behaviour. It began with an open-ended exploration of workplace behaviour in interviews with executives and in focus groups. Interviewees and participants were asked to talk about the sorts of behaviour that they associated with respect and disrespect. This then moved into a discussion of the line between disrespectful behaviour and bullying. Having identified a large number of behaviours, the project team developed a survey to confirm the identification of behaviours as either respectful or disrespectful. The survey also measured how often these behaviours were being observed within the participating business units – as displayed by managers, peers and colleagues and where relevant, direct reports.

The combination of these different sources of evidence reveals a picture of the spectrum of behaviours from respect to disrespect. Figure 1 shows the spectrum with some examples of behaviours that were identified as respectful, neutral and disrespectful. Appendix 2 has more detailed information about the range of behaviours in the spectrum.

figure 1: the spectrum of workplace behaviour from respectful to disrespectful

Respectful	Neutral	Disrespectful
being tolerant of difference listening to others expressing honest & genuine appreciation expressing expectations clearly	whispering swearing giving work above or below level without explanation not giving clear work direction	threatening with physical harm making personal derogatory comments banging fists/finger pointing excluding people

At either end of the spectrum, there is clear agreement, and there is a range of more neutral behaviours sitting in the middle whose interpretation may be different depending on context. This section of the report will discuss the main findings on the spectrum, exploring respect and disrespect in detail.

respectful behaviour

> *'It's not hard but it makes such a big difference'*

The results of the *People Matter Survey* show that Victorian public sector organisations generally perform well on the application of the value of respect. Employees feel that they are treated with respect, and in turn treat their clients, and stakeholders with respect.¹⁰ This project aimed to explore respect in more detail. The focus groups explored participants' perceptions of the workplace behaviours that made them feel as if they were being treated with respect.

At the positive end of the behavioural spectrum, there are three main observations that can be made:

- Respectful behaviour is inclusive and fairly easily recognised – the basic courtesies of life, such as saying please and thank you.
- There is greater divergence of opinion about respectful behaviours than disrespectful behaviours, and there is less intensity in discussion about these behaviours. Respect was often defined as the absence of disrespect: a respectful environment is one with low levels of disrespectful behaviour.
- Respectful behaviours are more likely to be observed and displayed than disrespectful behaviours.

¹⁰ SSA, *People Matter Survey Main Findings Report*, 2011

respect is the small, simple things, the basic courtesies of life

The behaviours identified as being respectful by focus group participants were often small, simple things. Manners and behaviours displaying basic courtesy were noted: saying good morning, using names correctly, saying please and thank you, and acknowledging people with hello and goodbye.

As one participant put it, 'it is not hard, but it makes a big difference'. Participants discussed the need for professional behaviour as distinguished from social or family behaviour. Some mentioned the making of small talk as being respectful and appropriate workplace behaviour. However, it was clear that what is considered to be respectful and appropriate by some can be seen as too personal by others. Asking about someone's kids might be fine but asking about their love life not so! Similarly most thought talking about sport was okay but others thought it may exclude those who don't follow sporting teams.

respectful communication

Another common theme was respectful communication. Listening, particularly active and engaged listening was viewed as respectful. This included providing opportunities for all to speak up, giving due consideration to what is said and verifying listening with respectful body language.

Beyond listening, respectful communication included sharing information that is necessary and appropriate to share, particularly information that is necessary for a person to do their work. Providing explanations was also considered to be an important part of respectful communication. Behaviours noted here included: explaining the reasons for changes to deadlines, for cancelling or re-scheduling meetings, and for not proceeding with work.

Acknowledging work done and, particularly work done well was also perceived to be respectful. In the words of one participant, it is 'such a simple thing and you don't get anything out of it, but it makes you want to work harder for that person'.

treating others as you would like to be treated, or as they would like to be treated

Treating others as you would like to be treated was often raised as the exemplar of respectful behaviour. However, it was understood that this concept of respectful behaviour assumed that everybody wants to be treated in the same way. As such, it could be difficult to reconcile with the respectful treatment of generational, gender, cultural and language differences. The need to be respectful of different styles – assertive, passive, introvert and extroverted was also recognised. In some groups this led to discussion of how difference can be recognised while treating others as you would like to be treated.

Context is important. What is appropriate and respectful in one setting may not be considered appropriate in another. There was talk of the need to adapt to different audiences or teams. However, it was agreed that the baseline should be very respectful behaviour until more familiar or informal behaviours become the norm for the group.

An example of where things could get confused was discussed in one group. An older man gave a younger woman a kiss on the cheek as a gesture of congratulations on hearing that she was getting married. The woman made a complaint of inappropriate behaviour, believing that a kiss was not appropriate workplace behaviour. The common view in this group was that the man was just behaving as he believed was respectful and appropriate in the circumstances.

No one wanted a workplace in which people had to walk on eggshells and second-guess everything they said and did. The need for highly sensitive individuals to develop a thicker skin was discussed and the value of recent resilience training run by the organisation was highlighted. Assisting people to understand their reactions to particular behaviours was believed to be important in addressing these complex workplace issues.

respectful behaviour is inclusive

Inclusive behaviour that suggests an awareness of other people and their feelings was believed to be respectful. This included sharing work and information as equally as possible, as well as giving due recognition to the skills and experience that others bring to the workplace.

there is less agreement about which behaviours are respectful

To test whether the focus group discussion about respectful behaviours reflected the perceptions of a broader group, a survey was conducted in both organisations.¹¹ The survey included a list of all the behaviours mentioned in the focus groups. Survey respondents were asked to indicate how respectful or disrespectful the behaviours were. The results of this survey reveal lower levels of agreement about which behaviours were 'very respectful' than for behaviours that were 'very disrespectful'.

Only two behaviours (being tolerant of gender, cultural and /or religious differences and listening when others are speaking) were identified by over two thirds of respondents as being 'very respectful' with agreement proportions of 79 and 77 per cent respectively. There are twelve behaviours that are rated by over 50 per cent of respondents as 'very respectful' (Table 1). This compares with much higher levels of agreement for the 12 most disrespectful behaviours, where the range is from 97 per cent to 79 per cent. (See Table 3 in the next section)

This difference may be because employees 'expect' behaviour such as saying please and thank you and so do not necessarily associate it with respect. There is some preliminary evidence for this in the results of exploratory statistical analysis of the survey data. This analysis found that for a small number of respectful behaviours ('saying please and thank you', 'giving honest and genuine praise and appreciation' and 'discussing changes to duties or deadlines') there was a relationship between how frequently a respondent witnessed the behaviour and the likelihood that they would rate it as respectful. This supports the view that these behaviours are not necessarily seen as respectful if observed occasionally. However, when these behaviours are part of a consistent pattern, they become more likely to be seen as evidence of respectful treatment. It appears that the authenticity of the behaviour is established by repetition. It should be noted that this is preliminary analysis that cannot be generalised because of the size of the sample and its resultant lack of statistical power.¹²

It may also be that while employees can accept an absence of respectful behaviours to some degree, they find disrespectful behaviour much less acceptable and more difficult to put up with. The feelings that are provoked by incidents of disrespectful behaviour seem to be more intense. As observed above, groups were more likely to spend time on the disrespectful behaviours and conversations were more animated when discussing disrespectful and bullying behaviours.

That such behaviour has a significant and lasting effect on those experiencing or observing is also supported by the fact that many interviewees for the project wanted to discuss disrespectful or bullying behaviour that had occurred over twelve months ago.

¹¹ See Appendix 1 for full details of the methodology

¹² See details of this analysis in Appendix 3: Detailed Statistical Results

table 1: 12 most respectful behaviours measured by % rating 'very respectful'

Behavioural Item	% rating as 'very respectful'
Being tolerant of gender, cultural and/or religious differences.	79
Listening when others are speaking.	77
Giving honest and genuine praise and/or appreciation.	63
Demonstrating genuine interest in people as people and not just workers.	62
Expressing expectations clearly and transparently.	62
Giving people the opportunity to voice their opinion on decisions that affect them.	58
Interacting in an open and honest way.	58
Adhering to agreements.	57.5
Admitting to own mistakes.	52
Recognising work achievements by praising efforts or giving thanks.	52
Showing empathy for people's problems.	51
Saying please and thank you.	50

but respectful behaviour was more often observed in the workplace

The greater intensity in the focus group discussions about disrespectful behaviour made it appear that there was very little respectful behaviour being observed by participants in their workplaces. Given this, it was somewhat surprising that survey respondents in the participating organisations were much more likely to report regularly observing respectful behaviour by managers, and peers or colleagues.

Table 2 shows the managers' behaviours that were most frequently witnessed – as indicated by the 'witnessed very often' response. All the 12 most frequently witnessed behaviours were behaviours that were considered respectful. (see Table A2-2 in Appendix 2 for the 25 most frequently witnessed behaviours by managers – again, all respectful behaviours.)

Similarly, the 25 most frequently observed behaviours by peers / colleagues were behaviours that had been rated as respectful. (Table A2-3 in Appendix 2). No disrespectful behaviours were among the 25 most frequently witnessed behaviours of either managers or peers/colleagues.

table 2: 12 most frequently witnessed behaviours by direct manager measured by respondents indicating 'witnessed very often'

Behavioural Item	% witnessed very often
Saying please and thank you.	60
Being tolerant of gender, cultural and/or religious differences.	60
Listening when others are speaking.	57
Interacting in an open and honest way.	51.5
Treating people equally.	48.5
Sharing necessary information.	48.5
Using neutral tone and language in written communication (e.g., emails).	47
Giving due consideration to other people's opinions, requests.	46.5
Providing the opportunity for all to speak and be heard.	45
Keeping noise to a minimum.	44
Arriving to meetings prepared and/or on time.	44
Being tolerant of different styles (e.g., introvert, animated, assertive, etc.).	44

disrespectful behaviour

> *'No one should have to put up with that sort of behaviour'*

Moving now towards the other end of the spectrum, this section explores the types of behaviours that were considered to be disrespectful. The types of behaviours considered bullying do not fit neatly at the far end of this spectrum as had originally been hypothesised. The line between disrespectful behaviour and perceived bullying is blurred and context dependent. This is discussed in detail in the next section of this report. For this section, three main observations are:

- Disrespectful behaviours vary from overt and aggressive behaviours such as threatening, yelling and banging fists to the more subtle and covert behaviours of exclusion, manipulation and discrimination
- There were greater levels of agreement and intensity of feeling about disrespectful behaviours than respectful behaviours
- Disrespectful behaviours were less frequently observed in the workplace.

from overt and physically aggressive to covert and exclusionary

The focus group provided a wealth of information about the sorts of behaviour that is identified as being disrespectful.

overt, physically aggressive behaviours

At the most extreme end of the spectrum were behaviours such as screaming, yelling, threatening, banging fists, and other forms of overtly aggressive behaviour. These were commonly mentioned as belonging in the 'disrespectful and should not occur in the workplace – ever' category. These behaviours were certainly not common, although there were focus group participants who had witnessed these types of behaviour in their current workplace.

humiliation and exclusion

Behaviour that belittles and humiliates people was identified as disrespectful. Examples from the focus groups include:

- providing negative feedback in front of others or berating people publicly;
- threatening people with demotion or job loss;
- excluding people from information or meetings that are necessary to their work;
- deliberately not providing appropriate work or providing work at too high or too low a level; and
- making personal derogatory comments about people –either to their faces or behind their back.

making it hard to do your job

Another group of disrespectful behaviours inhibited people's capacity to do their job effectively but were less severe than those behaviours noted above. These were less about belittlement and humiliation and more about thoughtlessness but still considered disrespectful. Behaviours in this group include constant changing of deadlines, work priorities and meeting times without consultation. Focus group participants didn't necessarily want meaningful consultation about every

decision – some observed that managers and the organisation were entitled to make decisions without consultation – they just wanted notification of the change and acknowledgement of the fact that this might mean previous efforts would ‘go to waste’. Behaviours such as changing seating arrangements without consultation and even frequently getting someone’s name wrong were thought to belong to this group of behaviours.

For some, it was the frequency of the lower level disrespectful behaviour that was the issue. Where these sorts of behaviours occur frequently, they create an impression that the person engaging in the behaviour (whether that is a manager or a peer, or even the organisation) is disrespectful. That is, when behaviour that may be on its own relatively benign, becomes part of a pattern, it becomes more likely that it will be construed as disrespectful – and possibly as bullying.

perceptions of what constitutes disrespectful behaviour is less divergent

Disrespectful behaviours were discussed in the focus groups for both organisations. As observed, there was a tendency to jump very quickly from a discussion about respectful behaviour to more meaty tales of disrespect. This may have been because there was more agreement about what constitutes disrespectful behaviour. A list of the behaviours mentioned in the focus groups which was used as the basis for the survey included 48 behaviours which were described (by survey respondents) as disrespectful, 17 as neutral and 24 that were described as respectful. Even allowing for differences between the designation of a particular behaviour as respectful or disrespectful by the focus group participants and the survey respondents, there were many more disrespectful behaviours identified.

The 12 most disrespectful behaviours, measured by those rated as ‘very disrespectful’ by survey respondents are shown in Table 3. The percentage of respondents rating these behaviours as ‘very disrespectful’ ranges from 97 per cent to 79 per cent. As indicated earlier, when compared with the range shown in Table 1 for ‘very respectful’ behaviours, it suggests much higher levels of agreement about what constitutes disrespectful behaviour than respectful behaviour.

table 3: 12 most disrespectful behaviours measured by % respondents rating ‘very disrespectful’

Behavioural Item	% very disrespectful
Threatening someone with physical harm.	97
Making personal derogatory comments about someone.	92
Banging fists on table or pointing at people.	87
Excluding people from information necessary to their work.	86
Trying to turn people against someone.	85
Having public temper tantrums.	83.5
Discriminating against others because of their age, work status, nationality, etc.	82
Spreading gossip and rumours about people.	82
Talking about others negatively in public/in front of others.	81
Lying to/hiding truth from people.	80
Standing over others in an intimidating way.	79
Destroying or taking resources someone needed for their job.	79

disrespectful behaviour is not as commonly observed as respectful behaviour

The propensity of focus groups to discuss and provide examples of disrespectful behaviour created an impression of workplaces in which such behaviour was rife. Pleasingly, the survey shows that this was not the full picture.

The survey shows that there were very few displays of the most disrespectful behaviours by managers or peers. Over 80 per cent of respondents had never witnessed their managers displaying such disrespectful behaviours as ‘yelling at someone’, ‘discriminating against others’ or ‘trying to turn people against someone’. Over 90 per cent had never witnessed their manager ‘threatening people with job loss or demotion’ and nearly all had never witnessed ‘threatening someone with physical harm’. For the organisations involved in the study, it was heartening that the 25 most commonly witnessed behaviours were all respectful and the 25 least commonly witnessed behaviours were all disrespectful behaviours. (see Tables 2 and 4 for the 12 most and least frequently observed behaviours by managers and Tables A2-2, A2-3, A2-5 and A2-6 in Appendix 2 for the full list of the 25 most and least frequently observed behaviours by managers and peers / colleagues.)

table 4: 12 least frequently witnessed direct manager behaviours measured by % respondents indicating ‘never witnessed’

Behavioural Item	% never
Threatening someone with physical harm.	98.5
Threatening people with job loss or demotion.	91
Destroying or taking resources someone needed for their job.	90
Writing or sending accusatory messages.	88
Pressuring people to not claim something they are entitled to (e.g., sick leave, holiday entitlement, travel expenses).	88
Banging fists on table or pointing at people.	87
“Prying”, questioning of one’s health or private life beyond reason.	87
Discriminating against others because of their age, work status, nationality, etc.	86
Trying to turn people against someone.	84
Retaliating against someone who gave negative performance feedback.	83.5
Yelling at someone.	82
Excluding someone from a workplace social event.	82

This is not to say that therefore the focus group discussions were not accurate. There were witnessed examples of disrespectful behaviour by managers and by peers / colleagues. However, the behaviours most likely to be witnessed were respectful and the behaviours least likely to be witnessed were disrespectful, and this was not apparent from the focus group discussions.

At the very least, this suggests that it is important not to rely on single sources of information when trying to explore matters as complex as workplace culture. Survey or focus group evidence alone may not give the full picture of what is happening in a workplace. Drawing on as many different sources of information and as many different perspectives as possible will be the best approach.

perceptions of bullying

> 'It's difficult - everyone draws the line at a different point so it's different for everyone - but you know how you feel'

The project aimed to explore the spectrum of workplace behaviour. The project's general hypothesis was that the spectrum of behaviour was from respectful behaviours to disrespectful behaviour and then more extreme bullying behaviours at the other end. However, the research appears to point toward a different analytical framework in which the spectrum is more appropriately conceived as being from respect to disrespect. The line between disrespectful behaviour and bullying behaviour is not as simple as crossing from less to more extreme forms of disrespectful behaviour. This section will explore the point at which project participants felt the line had been crossed and discuss the implications of these findings for organisations seeking to identify and respond to workplace bullying.

defining bullying

The behaviours identified by focus group participants were fairly consistent in what was considered respectful, and very consistent as to what was considered disrespectful. There was general agreement that disrespectful behaviour was not necessarily bullying. It could be merely oversight, rudeness or busyness. Focus groups participants were asked to identify the point at which disrespectful behaviour crossed a line into bullying.

This line was generally seen to be blurry and subjective. As one participant put it "It's difficult 'everyone draws the line at a different point so it's different for everyone but you know how you feel'". This quote perhaps captures the nub of the problem of quantifying the extent of workplace bullying - when respondents tick a box to say they have been bullied, we cannot know where the line is for them or relative to the definition of bullying.

It was evident that there was fairly wide understanding of the need for the behaviour to be repeated for it to meet the legal definition of bullying. Participants understood that a single incident of bad or disrespectful behaviour could not be considered to be bullying.

Most definitions¹³ include the element of risk of physical or psychological harm to the person. This was another aspect of bullying that appeared to be fairly well understood. Many participants saw that disrespectful behaviour became bullying "when (as one participant put it) it makes you feel insecure or unsafe". The harmful effects of bullying were said to be fairly obvious, even if the actual bullying was not. These included people becoming withdrawn, losing confidence, experiencing depression, anxiety and/ or loss of job satisfaction. Many mentioned the extended effects beyond the person being exposed to bullying - to colleagues and teams and the resultant lowering of morale. Open plan offices, such as are common in the public sector, were seen as a reason for the number of people identifying through the *People Matter Survey* that they had witnessed bullying.¹⁴ What happens to one person may be observed by many. This has the effect of increasing perceptions of bullying in the workplace.

¹³ The definition used in the *People Matter Survey* is consistent with the WorkSafe definition that provides the standard for workplace bullying in Victoria. The definition is: Workplace bullying is repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed to an employee or a group of employees that creates a risk to health and safety. Types of behaviour that could be considered bullying include: verbal abuse, excluding or isolating employees, psychological harassment, intimidation, assigning meaningless tasks unrelated to the job, giving employees impossible assignments, deliberately changing work rosters to inconvenience particular employees, deliberately withholding information that is vital to effective work performance. Bullying should not be confused with legitimate feedback given to staff (including negative comments) on their work performance or work-related behaviour; or other legitimate management decisions and actions undertaken in a reasonable and respectful way.

¹⁴ The 2011 *People Matter Survey* statistic for the proportion of respondents who witnessed bullying was 36% with 20% reporting having experienced bullying (see SSA, *People Matter Survey 2011: Main Findings Report*, 2012)

The issue of the risk of harm (or actual harm) to the individual did generate a significant amount of discussion, despite the clear understanding of the need for it to be present as a component of legally defined bullying. It was unclear to many participants whether the subjective feeling of being bullied is enough to warrant labelling particular patterns of behaviour as bullying. In one of the organisations, groups seemed to be quite aware of the complicating factor of individual levels of sensitivity. There was discussion of the effect of assertive, but appropriate behaviour on ‘hypersensitive’ individuals. The group came to no real conclusion as to the right response in such cases. They agreed that, consistent with respectful treatment of difference, both assertive and hypersensitive individuals should be tolerated. Yet they recognised that such combinations could create difficulties. A reasonable person test was discussed, but people were unclear whether this applied. This discussion revealed how problematic measuring the incidence of bullying by responses to a survey can be.

There is some behaviour that seemed to be more likely to be perceived to be bullying. This may be because these behaviours seem inexplicable unless one assumes they are intended to cause harm.

table 5: disrespectful behaviour and transition into bullying

Disrespectful behaviours		Perceived bullying behaviours	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Threatening with harm ■ Derogatory comments ■ Trying to turn people against ■ Gossip ■ Hiding truth ■ Sending accusatory messages ■ Repeating things said in confidence 	Disrespect crossing the line to bullying depending on the context: Feeling Unsafe/ Intent to cause harm / Repeated / Personal nature/ Targeted	Covert <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Undermining ■ Withholding information ■ Snide remarks ■ Smear campaigns ■ Spreading rumours ■ Ignoring victim ■ Isolating ■ Manipulating emotions ■ Setting people against each other 	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Banging fists on the table ■ Yelling 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Destroying /taking resources ■ Standing over others ■ Blaming for errors 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Taking credit for people’s work 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Excluding from information ■ Not inviting to meetings 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Prying ■ Repeating to others things 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Discriminating 			
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Temper tantrums 			
			Overt <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ■ Public humiliation ■ Threats of harm ■ Intimidating ■ Yelling ■ Banging fists on table ■ Yelling

* Table based on behaviours mentioned in focus group responses to question ‘when does disrespectful behaviour cross the line into bullying?’ in two organisations

In particular, covert behaviour that excluded people – either from social or work networks or from information required for work was often identified as bullying behaviour. Things such as spreading rumours, smear campaigns or manipulating emotions were noted. (See Table 5 above.) Overt behaviours most likely to be mentioned as a bullying included yelling, public humiliation and threats of harm. It should be noted that there were no observed incidents of threats of harm evidenced through the survey.

The identification of exclusionary behaviour as bullying is interesting in light of the association revealed by analysis of the survey data. This shows that of all the behaviours measured in the survey, it was *only* the observation of exclusionary behaviour that affected respondents' perceptions of the extent to which the organisation prioritised their wellbeing. This suggests that it is exclusionary behaviours that have the most significant impact on individuals. Organisations would be well placed to monitor and eradicate them where possible.

implying intent

Where the groups' perceptions and understanding of bullying seemed to diverge from the standard definition of bullying was regarding intent. In most of the groups, intent was seen to be an important element of bullying. People believed that you could be sure that a pattern of behaviour was bullying when the person behaving in that way had been asked to stop but did not. This was seen as evidence of intent. Others mentioned that an awareness of the impact of their behaviour was the factor that turned disrespectful behaviour into bullying. In fact, the standard definition of bullying does not mention intent at all and bullying may be unintentional.

It may even be that there is a link between participants' clear understanding of the need for behaviour to be repeated and the perceived need for intent before behaviour is considered bullying. That is to say, repetition may be the factor that suggests the presence of intent to harm behind the behaviour.

It also appears that intent is implied from the circumstances around the behaviour. The trust that a person has in their relationships with individuals and with the organisation appears to be important to how behaviour is perceived and interpreted. This is discussed in more detail in the next section.

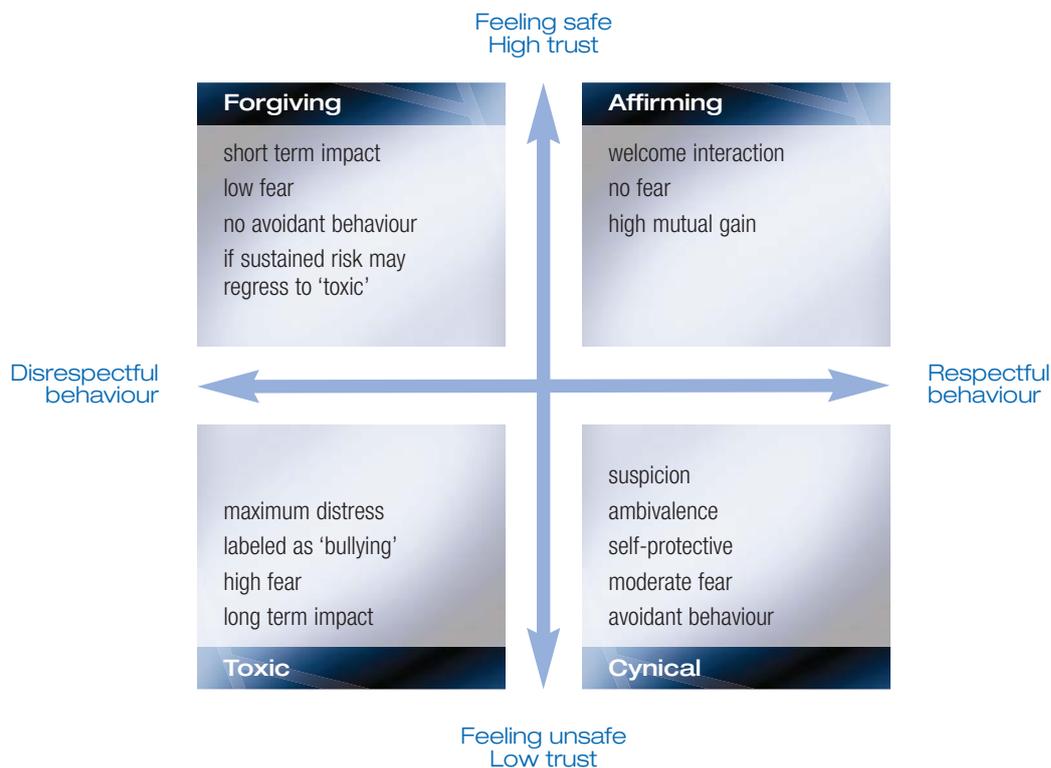
context is the key

What then does this notion of implied intent reveal about perceptions of bullying? It appears that whether particular behaviours are interpreted as having been done with intent to bully will depend on the context in which they occur. The most important aspect of this context appears to be trust: in the individual who is displaying disrespectful behaviours; and in the organisation.

an explanatory model

These two aspects of trust appear to create the filter through which behaviour is interpreted. This relationship between types of behaviour and levels of trust is shown in the model below. This model is an attempt to show the role that the particular organisational context in which behaviour occurs plays in how that behaviour is interpreted, or how its intent is understood. It is offered as a starting point for discussion, analysis and further research, not as a definitive explanation.

figure 2: the relationship between behaviour and trust in shaping employee perceptions of behaviour



Where there are high levels of trust and employees generally feel safe, behaviour will be interpreted through this filter. This may mean that disrespectful behaviour that occurs in such an environment has a different effect than disrespectful behaviour that occurs in an environment with low levels of trust and a lesser sense of safety.

An example of this was apparent in the focus groups. In one of the organisations (A), there seemed to be a very low level of trust in the organisation, particularly in management and key processes for conflict resolution and performance management. This low level of trust was confirmed in the survey

results for that organisation where only one third of respondents believed that the organisation prioritised their emotional wellbeing. In focus group discussion here, disrespectful behaviour seemed more likely to be labelled as bullying and seemed to have resulted in high levels of distress for those exposed to it. A 'climate of fear' was mentioned more than once resulting in people 'not wanting to put their heads above the parapet'. The climate appeared to be closest to the **toxic** quadrant – shown in the bottom left. In this quadrant, disrespectful behaviour will be interpreted through a lens of distrust in key relationships and a heightened sense of fear for wellbeing and career prospects. Disrespectful behaviour may be more likely to be perceived to be bullying in this environment.

In the other organisation (B), there were higher levels of trust in both the organisation and management – again supported by the survey results for that organisation - which showed that two thirds of respondents believed that the organisation prioritises their emotional wellbeing. Here, explanations of disrespectful behaviour along the lines of 'we are all human' and 'everybody makes mistakes, just apologise and move on' were more likely. The climate was more forgiving in other words – and could be situated in the top left quadrant.

In this quadrant, the **forgiving** quadrant, instances of disrespectful behaviour occur in a climate of trust and sense of emotional safety. As is suggested by the focus group discussion, it is more likely that an observer will react with tolerance (we are all human) and may be less likely to be fearful. Such behaviour may be more likely to be seen as an aberration.

The top right quadrant can be described as **affirming**. In this, respectful behaviour is displayed in a context of trust in the organisation and relationships and interpreted accordingly as affirming the observer as being valued and the organisation as having a culture of respect.

Where respectful behaviour occurs in an organisational context of low trust, it may be interpreted through a lens of distrust and cynicism. This is shown in the bottom right quadrant, described as **cynical**. Rather than such behaviour being interpreted positively and being seen as affirming, the authenticity of respectful behaviours may be more likely to be doubted and viewed with suspicion of hidden agendas. If respectful behaviour becomes more commonly observed, the overall climate should change and become more trusting.

It is, of course the case that the relationship between behaviour and trust is dynamic and interrelated. It is not simply that Organisation B has a (static) high trust climate, and that therefore all behaviour is interpreted through this lens and disrespectful behaviour has a lesser impact. The behaviour that occurs can and will affect people's sense of trust in relationships and the organisation. Thus in the model proposed, it is likely that while some instances of disrespectful behaviour in a high trust environment will be forgiven, if such behaviour becomes more common it will begin to affect the level of trust in the organisation.

the relationship between behaviour and climate

The model was developed based mainly on the qualitative material from the focus groups. The survey component of this research provided an opportunity to test the model by exploring the relationship between perceptions of organisational climate and the observation of particular behaviour. The organisational climate statements in the survey were:

- My organisation prioritises the emotional wellbeing of people here
- My organisation prioritises the physical wellbeing of people here
- The dynamics among members of the team are harmonious

Respondents were also asked about their current level of contentment and how that compared with their contentment one year ago.

Interestingly, in both organisations only one type of behaviour was found to have a statistically significant relationship with climate. That behaviour was 'ignoring or excluding others/giving the silent treatment'.¹⁵

In one organisation (A), the relationships were:

- The more often a manager, peer or direct report was observed displaying exclusionary behaviour, the lower the rating given to perceived team harmony.
- The more often a respondent observes a manager displaying exclusionary behaviour, the less likely they were to believe that the organisation prioritises their emotional or physical wellbeing.

In the other organisation (B), the relationships were slightly different:

- The more often peers or colleagues displayed exclusionary behaviour, the lower the rated contentment.
- The more often peers or colleagues displayed exclusionary behaviour, the lower the rating given to perceived team harmony.
- The more often peers or colleagues displayed exclusionary behaviour, the less likely respondents were to believe that the organisation prioritised their physical or emotional wellbeing.

Putting aside the differences between the two organisations (possible explanations for which will be explored in the next section looking at key organisational factors)¹⁶, it is clear that there is a relationship between aspects of climate and particular types of behaviours. It is exclusionary behaviour (ignoring or excluding others / giving the silent treatment) that has the most significant impact.

which organisational factors are most important?

While there is a relationship between types of behaviours and climate, the research reveals that there are also other organisational factors that come into play in setting the tone of the organisation and which contribute to the sense of trust and safety that employees feel.

There were three organisational factors that emerged consistently as the most important:

- Perceptions of leadership, particularly the extent to which leaders model the values
- Confidence in grievance and dispute processes and approach to conflict resolution, and
- Performance management

These are factors that have been found to be important in other research conducted by the SSA. Research has shown that the two key drivers of the perception that 'bullying is not tolerated in my organisation' are: understanding of and confidence in avenues of redress; and perceptions of the integrity of the organisation - particularly the values leadership displayed by senior leaders and managers.¹⁷

Similarly, the importance of values leadership and of establishing effective mechanisms for calling people to account for behaviour inconsistent with organisational values emerged in 2008 qualitative research.¹⁸

15 See Appendix 4: Detailed Statistical Results for this analysis.

16 See Appendix 3 for the model with descriptions of the contextual factors that were revealed by the research.

17 State Services Authority, *Trends in Bullying in the Victorian Public Sector – People Matter Survey 2004 – 2010*, p. 19-20

18 State Services Authority, *The Values Report*, 2008

The SSA's work¹⁹ on creating positive work environments identifies vision and values, leadership and accountability as important strategic elements. It also identifies performance management and workplace dispute systems as operational elements that, among others, needed to be working well if people were to be positive about their working environment. These elements have also been highlighted in this project.

While findings from qualitative research such as this current research cannot necessarily be generalised, the fact that the themes are consistent with other research conducted in this area provides strong support for their validity.

leadership and modelling the values

In one of the rooms in which the focus groups were held, there was a large banner that proclaimed the organisation's (Organisation A) values. The subject of the values came up at one point and someone pointed at the banner, saying 'there they are'. This was met with slightly derisive laughter. The values had recently been re-launched at a large public venue. This fanfare was not, however supported with practical information about how the values were going to be applied within the organisation. There was also a sense that the values had been launched but were not being lived. It was fairly widely believed that there were not enough managers and leaders who modelled the values through their everyday behaviour in the workplace. One participant talked of the apparent contradiction between the way that the organisation tolerated negative workplace behaviour and the demands they made of some of their stakeholder organisations to address such behaviour.

This gap between what was said and what was done created a sense of a lack of authenticity about the values that contributed to a lack of trust in the organisation. The concern about the lack of role modelling seemed to affect both people's trust in managers as well as their trust in the organisation. This lack of trust then becomes part of the context in which individual behaviour is interpreted. Examples of disrespectful behaviour were discussed and there was a fairly high level of intensity around the discussion. It appeared that even relatively mild forms of disrespectful behaviour (such as not saying good morning) had more negative impacts than perhaps would be expected.

This contrasts with the conversations about the values that occurred in focus groups in the other organisation (B). Values were mentioned in nearly every focus group in this organisation and there was a sense that the values were taken seriously. As one participant put it, "I think we can all point to someone who is a good role model – not just at the top but all around the place". Importantly, participants believed that the organisation's senior leaders and managers modelled the values. The CEO was mentioned (in all but one of the focus groups in that organisation) as providing a very good example of 'living the values'. Many participants were aware of the CEO's lack of tolerance of inappropriate workplace behaviour such as bullying and there seemed to be a genuine respect for the work already undertaken to address some of the negative workplace behaviour occurring in the organisation.

This is not to say that there was uniform agreement that the organisation as a whole lived the values. There was still ample discussion about examples of disrespectful and bullying behaviours that had been observed in the workplace. Nonetheless, the tone of the conversation about the values was qualitatively different to that in Organisation A where the poster display of the values was met with laughter.

19 State Services Authority, *How positive is your working environment? The organisational, management and individual perspective on making improvements at work*, 2nd Edition, 2010

There was also less intensity to the discussion of disrespectful behaviour. As discussed above, the phrase 'we are all human' was used and there was a greater feeling of resilience. For example, in both organisations, saying good morning and hello was considered to be respectful and not saying hello was generally considered to be disrespectful. However, compared with the intensity of discussion about a manager not saying good morning that was noted above, here the tone was lighter, it was thought that there might be reasons why someone would not say good morning that might not be disrespectful (such as not wanting to disturb people) and that if someone did not say hello, it was not necessarily personal.

Using the model then, this organisation is higher up the trust axis and therefore behaviour is interpreted through a less fearful, more trusting lens. One of the factors making the difference is the extent to which the leadership team was modelling the organisation's values.

One final point can be made about the importance of leadership and managers' role in setting the behavioural standards for the organisation. Preliminary analysis of the survey shows that there is a very strong, statistically significant correlation between the observed frequency of witnessing behaviours by managers and the reported behaviour of peers and colleagues. This was the case for both respectful and disrespectful but the correlation was strongest in relation to the respectful behaviours.²⁰ This means that the observed behaviour of managers is closely associated with the observed behaviour of peers and colleagues and vice versa. This does not prove a causal relationship and it is not clear that it is the managers that set the tone as the analysis cannot tell us which way the relationship works. However, viewed in light of the other findings on leadership, it is not unreasonable to conclude that managers play an important role in setting the tone and standard of behaviour in these organisations.

grievance and dispute handling and approach to conflict resolution

Another organisational factor that emerged as an important contributor to employees' perceptions of behaviour was grievance and dispute resolution procedures. There were two aspects to this: concern about the formal grievance procedures of the organisation, and concern about the approach to dispute and conflict resolution more broadly. Both of these aspects appeared to play a role in people's overall trust in the organisation and their sense that they could respond to negative behaviour safely.

Perceptions of grievance and dispute resolution procedures

To begin with the formal dispute resolution processes, it was clear that in both organisations, there was concern and suspicion around how, when and whether it was safe to make a complaint about negative behaviours such as bullying. This supports the consistent findings of the *People Matter Survey* that there are relatively low levels of understanding of and confidence in the processes for resolving grievances across the public sector.²¹

There was concern that the processes were not well known and not transparent. Participants indicated that it was hard to know where to make a complaint or get assistance with complaints. It was believed that Employee Assistance Programs were just for personal help, and that going to the union results in being seen to be a troublemaker. There was also some suspicion about the independence of HR and lack of clarity about whether it was part of HR's role to deal with grievances or not.

²⁰ See Appendix 4 for details of this analysis.

²¹ In the 2011 Survey for example, the results for the question 'in my organisation there is confidence in the procedures and processes for resolving grievances' were 67% percentage agreement, and for 'I am confident that if I lodge a grievance I would not suffer any negative consequences' was 64%.

There was a sense that many would be reluctant to make a complaint even if they knew how to do so. Particularly in Organisation A, there were many mentions of a “climate of suspicion” and people were concerned about being seen to make trouble by complaining. There seemed to be a lack of trust in both relationships and the organisation as a whole. As one participant put it, “I had an issue with my manager, but when I asked who I should go to about my problem, the answer seemed to be my manager. I was not comfortable doing this”.

It appears that greater knowledge of, and trust in formal processes would be improved by more transparency around the number and outcome of complaints. Many participants talked of the victim being moved as a common outcome of formal proceedings, and as one put it, “it is so hard to see good people being moved on because they complained”. In many of these discussions, the sense was that the ‘problem’ or person behaving inappropriately would be kept in place while the ‘victim’ was moved. However in one group, there was discussion about how this may actually be an outcome that was wanted by the person complaining, but because proceedings are necessarily confidential, the rest of the team can only go on appearances. There was both a desire for more information about outcomes and an acknowledgement of the need for confidentiality. Finding a balance between these was known to be difficult to achieve.

Apart from the formal grievance and dispute processes, there was a desire for more informal assistance or advice about issues and behaviour. Many participants mentioned the need for mechanisms that assist people with avoiding the initiation of formal proceedings. This could be information or advice but also could extend to coaching or practical assistance in resolving potential conflicts, disputes or responding to bullying behaviours. Participants observed that providing contact officers who can talk through options, or an HR person who can provide coaching would assist in the resolution of conflict without the need to resort to formal processes.

A couple of examples were provided of how such informal processes had been of assistance when made available. One participant felt that he had not been treated fairly during recent performance reviews but was not sure if he was being bullied or not. He had used an online bullying tool that provided information about performance management and bullying. This helped him assess whether or not he had been bullied. It appeared from what the participant said that the situation was a bit more complex and perhaps not so readily able to be ‘decided’ in this way. Nonetheless, he had found it useful to have access to a resource that allowed him to gain information and perspective on his situation.

Another participant gave an example of how targeted assistance to respond to difficult behavioural issues can work to prevent matters escalating. She had been working with her manager for a number of years and said that they had a productive, though often robust working relationship. After a number of incidents in which the manager had behaved inappropriately, and beyond even the robust parameters of their relationship, she felt she needed to address the issue. She was given coaching on having a conversation with her manager and was then confident enough to resolve the issue without recourse to lodging a grievance. In the process of having the conversation, she had gained a greater understanding of the perspective and circumstances of her manager. This approach seemed more likely to sustain the relationship between the two rather than polarising them and leading to further conflict. Participants agreed that it was a shame that the coaching service was no longer available.

Approaches to conflict resolution: resilience and coping skills

This last example shows the outcomes that are possible where the approach to conflict is one of conflict resilience. This approach relies on building the skills of all staff in dealing with their own workplace conflict issues early rather than relying on either formal processes or third parties to resolve them.²²

²² See State Services Authority, *Developing Conflict Resilient Workplaces: A report for public sector leaders*, p. 3

In both organisations, there was a perceived need for the organisation to assist individuals to build emotional intelligence together with resilience and coping skills. In Organisation A, there was thought to be a particularly strong need for managers to improve their people skills. It was believed that managers were generally promoted on the basis of their ability to get the job done rather than on their ability to manage people. There was discussion about the implications of a recent culture survey that found that the culture was very performance oriented. People believed that this exacerbated the lack of people management skills as managers revert to bullying type behaviours when under pressure to deliver.

There was a similar understanding of the need for building resilience and coping skills in discussions in Organisation B. However the emphasis was different. There was less emphasis on the need for managers to build their people management skills and more on the need for all employees to take responsibility for their actions and behaviours. This was consistent with what appeared to be a stronger sense 'we are all human and make mistakes' that was discussed earlier. There was less blame (managers don't have the skills) and greater acceptance of individual responsibility to either address the consequences of their own inappropriate behaviour or to respond if someone else is behaving inappropriately.

This seemed to be a more common attitude in this organisation – perhaps because they had done more work on resilience, had greater awareness of the organisation's values and the leadership team seemed to be providing a higher standard of role modelling. This difference suggests that organisational development strategies of this sort can be very effective, but that change takes time.

performance management

The final organisational processes that emerged as playing a role in people's sense of trust were performance management systems. Focus group discussion revealed that performance management, and the means by which employees are called to account for behaviour inconsistent with the values, is an important part of trust in the organisation and relationships. Again, this supports findings of SSA research on the positive role of feedback, particularly informal feedback.²³

It is commonly said that complaints of bullying are just a response to vigorous performance management. Certainly some of the views of senior managers interviewed for the project reflect this. Other qualitative research has found that there seems to be a close association between performance management and claims of bullying. A study of bullying in the Australian Public Service found that there was a circular relationship between a manager attempting to manage poor performance or behaviour in the workplace that leads to 'reverse' bullying behaviour by the person being managed. The relationship between 'bully' and 'victim' in the context of performance management was more complex than just labelling performance management as bullying.²⁴ Nonetheless, some definitions of bullying (including the definition provided in the *People Matter Survey*) explicitly state that appropriate performance management or negative feedback is not bullying. However, as the example provided above of the online bullying training shows, the situations in which bullying may be associated with performance management are complex.

The strong view in Organisation A (which was not quite as strongly held in Organisation B) was that managers' inability to have difficult conversations about poor performance was a factor in bullying. When things got difficult or when there was increased pressure for performance, managers without effective skills would default to bullying behaviours. As one participant described it, "managers without the right skills tend to say nothing for too long and then things build up, and then boom, bullying".

²³ SSA, *Feedback matters: effective communication is essential*, 2010. Those who receive informal feedback are much more likely to feel positive about the organisation, their managers and their colleagues. Those who received informal feedback were much less likely to believe that they had experienced bullying.

²⁴ Omari M. op cit, p. 122

There was a degree of understanding and sympathy for managers as well. It was recognised that they are under extreme pressure to deliver and are not given time to 'do the people stuff'. In particular, it was felt building managers' skills in having difficult conversations would result in a reduction of the number of cases in which disrespectful behaviours cross the line into bullying incidents. If managers were confident in their ability to deal with poor performances, participants felt there would be fewer issues that escalated, and more that were 'nipped in the bud'. An increased recognition of the importance of people management was believed to be crucial to achieving a more positive workplace.

Senior managers in Organisation A interviewed had a slightly different take on the issue. They felt that the current efforts to improve performance were likely to increase the amount of negative feedback that needed to be provided which in turn may increase perceptions of bullying.

There is the related issue of 'calling to account' for behaviour that is in breach of the values. Bullying and other disrespectful behaviour will usually be a breach of the organisational value of respect. If this type of behaviour goes unchecked, or worse appears to be rewarded by promotion, it raises levels of distrust. The laughter at the banner displaying the values described above exemplifies the damage done where people perceive that others are not being held to account for their behaviour. Participants discussed the need for behaviour to be embedded into the performance management framework so that 'how things are done' is as important in the assessment of performance as 'what is done'.

Each of the organisations had made some progress towards embedding the values into the performance assessment framework, but perceptions of the success of this were mixed.

concluding observations

The project explored many aspects of workplace behaviour in the context of two organisations. The dominant methodological approach was qualitative, which means that the findings of this research are only applicable to participating organisations. However, the themes that emerged from the interviews with senior leaders, focus groups and the survey were sufficiently consistent with other research to suggest that they are worth consideration by anyone interested in understanding more about this complex area.

The explanatory model that has been developed as a result of the research is tentative and intended as a starting point for further discussion and reflection. What follows is a summary of the main observations that can be made on the basis of the research.

the spectrum of behaviour

Respectful behaviours are often simple things like good manners and being tolerant of difference. They are more commonly observed but appear to give rise to less intense feelings. For this reason, focus group and other workplace discussions may understate the extent to which these behaviours are being displayed in the workplace.

Disrespectful behaviours are more varied, may be covert and there is more agreement about what constitutes disrespectful behaviour. They are less commonly observed, but may have a more lasting impact. Behaviour that excludes people may have particularly negative effects.

While organisations that are seeking to embed the value of respect often emphasise the positive end of the spectrum of respectful behaviours, this research suggests that disrespectful behaviour may have a more significant impact.

bullying and perceived intent

Measuring perceptions of bullying through self-completed questionnaires is known to be problematic as it relies on subjective interpretation of both the behaviour and definition. Focus group participants consistently spoke of the line between disrespectful behaviour and bullying behaviour as blurred and subjective. There were some behaviours that appeared to be more likely to be considered to be bullying and these were often covert behaviours that had the effect of making people feel excluded.

However, the line was crossed where the perceived intent of the person engaging in the negative behaviour was to do harm. Given that there is no element of intent in most definitions of bullying, this is an important finding that warrants further exploration. This study suggests that perceptions of intent are interpreted through a lens of trust in the organisation and in the person displaying the behaviour.

context matters

The research affirms the importance of context to perceptions of behaviour, particularly bullying behaviour. Three aspects of organisational context appeared to be important: values leadership, approach to dispute and conflict resolution, and performance management. All of these factors have been identified in other research, lending some weight to the findings of this study.

Values leadership refers to the extent to which the organisation's values are understood and displayed in the everyday behaviour of members of the organisation. This study showed that the positive example set by the senior leadership team in one of organisations had many positive flow-on effects on people's sense of trust in the organisation.

Processes and approaches to conflict resolution are also important and appear to have an impact on trust and confidence in the organisation. Organisations would be well placed to consider undertaking work that builds all employees' skill in responding to conflict. Formal conflict resolution procedures should be a safety net and not the entry point for dealing with workplace conflict.

Finally, performance management systems are important. Effective systems that are tied to the organisation's values have the capacity to enhance trust in the relationship employees have with their managers as well as confidence that disrespectful behaviour will not be tolerated, or worse rewarded. Organisations should consider the ways that they can ensure that the 'how' of performance is rewarded, not just the 'what'.

implications for organisations

Organisations should consider the following initiatives to improve workplace behaviour and increase employees' trust:

encourage respectful behaviour and discourage disrespectful behaviour

- > Monitor both respectful and disrespectful behaviour in the workplace regularly. The SSA will make the survey developed as part of this research available to organisations. This survey allows organisations to monitor both perceptions and frequency of these behaviours.
- > Promote respectful behaviour by giving specific examples of the types of behaviour that is considered to be respectful. Emphasise the fact that repetition of these behaviours is important to build a sense of a respectful workplace.
- > Discourage disrespectful behaviour and make all staff aware of the negative and lasting impression that even a one off instance of disrespectful behaviour is likely to have.

understand bullying

- > Treat survey evidence of bullying as a useful warning indicator. The research has shown that perceptions of bullying are subjective and survey evidence of bullying is likely to need more detailed exploration before action can be taken. Focus groups and in-depth individual interviews can be a good way to gather further information. Be aware that there may be a climate of fear and distrust that will need to be factored into arrangements for gathering this information. Using external facilitators and assurances of confidentiality and anonymity may help overcome this.
- > Monitor and address workplace behaviour that may lead people to feel that they are being excluded. Behaviour that leads people to feel excluded from either work or social networks is most likely to undermine trust in the organisation and covert behaviour is more likely to be perceived to be bullying.
- > Understand that behaviour is interpreted through the lens of the context in which it occurs. Behaviour is more likely to be labelled as bullying when there is perceived intent to cause harm to the person. Employees may be more likely to perceive that bullying is occurring where there are low levels of trust in their relationship with the person engaging in the behaviour and in the organisation itself.

context matters – build employees' trust in relationships and the organisation

- > Model the values. Senior leaders and managers must lead in modelling the behaviours consistent with the organisation's values – authenticity is crucial. Managers play an important role in setting the tone and standard of behaviour.
- > Review your dispute resolution and grievance handling systems and processes. Do you staff understand how these systems work? Are they confident in using them? (Your *People Matter Survey* results give you information about this.) Are there ways to make them more transparent without compromising confidentiality and anonymity?

- > Build workforce skills in conflict resolution and resilience. Encourage a sense of individual responsibility for behaviour and for responding to any disrespectful behaviour by others in a proactive, positive way
 - > Ensure that performance management systems reflect the organisation's values. Systems should be explicit about the importance of the 'how' not just the 'what' of performance.
-

SSA resources

- > **People Matter Survey** for monitoring employees' perceptions of experience of workplace bullying
- > **Tackling bullying** for responding to immediate incidents of reported or observed bullying
- > **Tackling bullying** and the **Positive Work Environment Toolkit** for exploring the underlying cultural factors and building more positive, respectful work environments
- > **Taking the heat out of workplace issues** and **Developing conflict resilient workplaces** for better managing workplace disputes and developing more positive approaches to conflict in the workplace
- > **Feedback matters** for information about the potential effects and benefits of providing informal and formal feedback
- > **Managing poor behaviour in the workplace** and **Talking performance** for improving processes for managing poor performance and building managers' skill in having conversations about performance with employees

appendices

a1: detailed methodology	30
a2: the spectrum of workplace behaviour	34
a3: building a safety and trust model	40
a4: detailed statistical results	41

a1: detailed methodology

project design

The research project was managed by a Project Board comprising the SSA representatives, a representative from each of the organisations and the Consultants.

The project design involved three following phases:

- Phase 1: Overall Project Design and Planning, comprising the development of methodology for collecting data
- Phase 2: Qualitative and Quantitative Data Collection
- Phase 3: Development and Implementation of intervention and response.

This report addresses the outcomes of Phases 1 and 2 and its aim is to commence discussions and resource planning to complete Phase 3 in the second half of 2012.

Phase 1 of the project was completed through the discussion of the Project Board in a series of meetings based on the draft research design developed by the Consultants and on the initial review of the data available from the past surveys.

The research design involved data collection from five sources, summarised in the figure below. The executive interviews and focus groups were used to generate the list of data items for the survey.

figure a1-1: data sources in phase 2 of the project



scope

Each organisation selected business units that would participate in the project. In one of the organisations, three business units were involved and in the other, five. Invitations to participate in the focus groups, survey and individual interviews were extended to all members of these groups.

document review

The project commenced with a brief review of the documentation relating to the organisation's values and principles as well as available data from the past surveys. The results from other culture and climate surveys were reviewed during this step:

executive interviews

Executives of the divisions collaborating in the research project were approached by the organisations' representative on the Project Board to participate in a one-to-one interview with a Consultant.

Eleven executives from one organisation and five from the other participated in face to face, one to one, interviews with Consultants at the interviewee's offices. The interviews were semi-structured, focusing on the following questions:

- Tell me about your experiences of respectful behaviours?
- Tell me about your observations of respectful behaviours?
- What is your response to / interpretation of the staff surveys' reports of bullying behaviours?
- What are your perceptions of bullying behaviours?
- What sorts of behaviours did you observe in other units that could constitute as bullying?
- How does the organisation respond to bullying?

Findings were recorded by the interviewer in a written format, summarised and analysed to identify key themes relevant to workplace culture and perceptions of behaviours .

focus groups

Staff in the selected areas was invited to register an expression of interest to participate in one of the focus groups through an email Human Resources to the heads of each division. There were six focus groups conducted in each organisation during February 2012. Each group was attended by between 12 and 15 participants and was of 2-hour duration.

Each focus group was facilitated by one Consultant and the details of the conversations were recorded in writing by an Organisational Psychologist from the other organisation participating in the research project to maintain the independence of the facilitators.

The focus group structure is presented below:

- Introduction
- What do you perceive as respectful behaviour?
- How does the organisation encourage respectful behaviours
- What do you perceive as disrespectful behaviour?
- What disrespectful behaviours have you seen in the workplace that you think should never occur?
- What is the "line in the sand" between disrespectful behaviours and bullying?
- What are the dominant tactics in bullying?
- How does a person experience the impact of bullying?
- How does the organisation respond to bullying?
- What are some possible interventions for change /what can organisations do better to prevent/address this issue?

The records of each focus group were analysed for recurring themes. A list of behavioural statements along the spectrum of respectful – disrespectful – through to behaviours that "should never occur in the workplace" was generated from the focus groups for inclusion in the survey.

survey design

The survey instrument was designed to quantify the perceptions of various behaviours and their observations in the workplace. It contained the following elements:

- Demographics
- Behavioural statements measuring perceptions along the respect-disrespect scale
- The same behavioural statements measuring the frequency with which they were observed across three employee categories (managers, peers and direct reports, if relevant)
- Organisational climate and engagement questions (listed in Section 5.4.3) to investigate the relationship between organisational climate factors and respectful/disrespectful behaviours.
- Free text questions asking the participants to describe 3 separate interactions they personally experienced or witnessed within the last 12 months in their current organisation. The three questions asked individuals to describe an interaction that exemplified respectful, disrespectful and bullying behaviours in the workplace. There was also opportunity to make any additional comments regarding respectful, disrespectful or bullying behaviours in the workplace. Responses were voluntary, and individuals were provided the option of skipping the questions and moving to the end of the survey.

The behavioural statements included 89 items. For each workplace behaviour item, participants were first asked the extent to which they perceive the behaviour as respectful or disrespectful. Second, they were asked to rate how frequently they have witnessed behaviours: Direct Managers, Peers, and (if relevant) Direct Reports. To reduce response fatigue, the workplace behaviour scale was split into two counterbalanced halves and only one sub-section presented to respondents. A demographic questionnaire was also included.

The link to the web-based survey was distributed to all eligible staff in the selected sample via email. Participants were given time to complete the survey at work. Survey responses were monitored by the University of Queensland researcher, who oversaw the distribution, follow-up, and reminders as well as preliminary data analysis and reporting.

The survey was conducted in March 2012. The participants were given three weeks to complete the survey and one reminder email was sent to all participants.

individual staff interviews

Staff was given an opportunity to share more in-depth perceptions and experiences of behaviours in the workplace in one-to-one interviews with a Consultant with guaranteed independence and confidentiality (outlined in the section below). Staff were invited to participate through a secure appointment scheduling web link which was publicised in the email inviting to complete the survey. The interviews were also publicised in focus groups. Ten interviews were conducted in one of the organisation and five in the other.

confidentiality issues

Confidentiality and anonymity of individual feedback in all the interviews and survey free text responses was assured by the Consultants responsible for data collection through the following commitments provided to the participants:

- individual responses will not be identified or reported on as part of this process.
- the survey will be administered by and from an external, secure and independent website
- data collected will be aggregated before it is analysed (i.e. no analysis of an individual's responses)
- there are strict industry standards governing how information is obtained and managed in surveys such as this to ensure confidentiality of feedback and anonymity of individuals providing the feedback.
- all survey results will be reported to the organisation anonymously. Results for work groups fewer than ten staff will not be reported to ensure there is no possibility of identification of individual staff.

a2: the spectrum of workplace behaviour

table a2-1: 25 most respectful behaviours measured by % rating 'very respectful'

Behavioural Item	% rating as 'very respectful'
Being tolerant of gender, cultural and/or religious differences.	79
Listening when others are speaking.	77
Giving honest and genuine praise and/or appreciation.	63
Demonstrating genuine interest in people as people and not just workers.	62
Expressing expectations clearly and transparently.	62
Giving people the opportunity to voice their opinion on decisions that affect them.	58
Interacting in an open and honest way.	5
Adhering to agreements.	57.5
Admitting to own mistakes.	52
Recognising work achievements by praising efforts or giving thanks.	52
Showing empathy for people's problems.	51
Saying please and thank you.	50
Dealing with interpersonal issues face-to-face.	48.5
Helping people solve difficult tasks on their own.	47
Treating people equally.	47
Providing the required means and resources for people to produce good work.	47
Being tolerant of different styles (e.g., introvert, animated, assertive, etc.).	47
Lending support during times of high workload/demand.	43
Giving due consideration to other people's opinions, requests.	40.5
Providing the opportunity for all to speak and be heard.	39.5
Arriving to meetings prepared and/or on time.	39
Adapting behaviour and language to different audiences/being sensitive to context.	36
Expressing criticism in an objective and constructive way.	36
Giving the opportunity to learn from mistakes and experiences.	33
Discussing changes to duties or deadlines with people.	32

table a2-2: 25 most frequently witnessed behaviours by direct manager measured by respondents indicating 'witnessed very often'

Behavioural Item	% witnessed very often
Saying please and thank you.	60
Being tolerant of gender, cultural and/or religious differences.	60
Listening when others are speaking.	57
Interacting in an open and honest way.	51.5
Treating people equally.	48.5
Sharing necessary information.	48.5
Using neutral tone and language in written communication (e.g., emails).	47
Giving due consideration to other people's opinions, requests.	46.5
Providing the opportunity for all to speak and be heard.	45
Keeping noise to a minimum.	44
Arriving to meetings prepared and/or on time.	44
Being tolerant of different styles (e.g., introvert, animated, assertive, etc.).	44
Using neutral tone and language in verbal communication, e.g. phone, meetings.	43
Expressing criticism in an objective and constructive way.	43
Adhering to agreements.	43
Demonstrating genuine interest in people as people and not just workers.	42
Giving people the opportunity to voice their opinion on decisions that affect them.	42
Behaving predictably so that people always know where they stand.	41
Providing the required means and resources for people to produce good work.	40
Giving honest and genuine praise and/or appreciation.	40
Being mindful of people's availability/capacity.	39.5
Recognising work achievements by praising efforts or giving thanks.	39
Showing empathy for people's problems.	39
Conferring adequate responsibility for work tasks.	39
Adapting behaviour and language to different audiences/being sensitive to context.	39

table a2-3: 25 most frequently witnessed behaviours by peers measured by respondents indicating 'witnessed very often'

Behavioural Item	% witnessed very often
Being tolerant of gender, cultural and/or religious differences.	54.5
Saying please and thank you.	51
Listening when others are speaking.	46
Treating people equally.	41
Using neutral tone and language in written communication (e.g., emails).	39
Providing the opportunity for all to speak and be heard.	35
Expressing criticism in an objective and constructive way.	35
Interacting in an open and honest way.	35
Using neutral tone and language in verbal communication, e.g. phone, meetings.	35
Adhering to agreements.	35
Arriving to meetings prepared and/or on time.	34
Showing empathy for people's problems.	33
Lending support during times of high workload/demand.	32
Giving due consideration to other people's opinions, requests.	32
Sharing necessary information.	32
Demonstrating genuine interest in people as people and not just workers.	31
Being mindful of people's availability/capacity.	30
Discussing changes to duties or deadlines with people.	30
Providing the required means and resources for people to produce good work.	29
Giving people the opportunity to voice their opinion on decisions that affect them.	28
Conferring adequate responsibility for work tasks.	27
Recognising work achievements by praising efforts or giving thanks.	26
Being tolerant of different styles (e.g., introvert, animated, assertive, etc.).	26
Adapting behaviour and language to different audiences/being sensitive to context.	25
Giving honest and genuine praise and/or appreciation.	25

table a2-4: 25 most disrespectful behaviours measured by % respondents rating 'very disrespectful'

Behavioural Item	% very disrespectful
Threatening someone with physical harm.	97
Making personal derogatory comments about someone.	92
Banging fists on table or pointing at people.	87
Excluding people from information necessary to their work.	86
Trying to turn people against someone.	85
Having public temper tantrums.	83.5
Discriminating against others because of their age, work status, nationality, etc.	82
Spreading gossip and rumours about people.	82
Talking about others negatively in public/in front of others.	81
Lying to/hiding truth from people.	80
Standing over others in an intimidating way.	79
Destroying or taking resources someone needed for their job.	79
Blaming people for errors for which they were not responsible.	76
Yelling at someone.	76
Writing or sending accusatory messages.	75
Threatening people with job loss or demotion.	75
Taking the credit for other people's work.	74
Not inviting people to meetings that are relevant to their work.	72
Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment.	71
Making hostile gestures such as eye rolling or glaring at someone.	69.5
"Prying", questioning of one's health or private life beyond reason.	69
Making jokes/innuendos at someone's expense.	69
Retaliating against someone who gave negative performance feedback.	69
Criticising someone's work in public.	67

table a2-5: 25 least frequently witnessed direct manager behaviours measured by % respondents indicating 'never witnessed'

Behavioural Item	% never
Threatening someone with physical harm.	98.5
Threatening people with job loss or demotion.	91
Destroying or taking resources someone needed for their job.	90
Writing or sending accusatory messages.	88
Pressuring people to not claim something they are entitled to (e.g., sick leave, holiday entitlement, travel expenses).	88
Banging fists on table or pointing at people.	87
"Prying", questioning of one's health or private life beyond reason.	87
Discriminating against others because of their age, work status, nationality, etc.	86
Trying to turn people against someone.	84
Retaliating against someone who gave negative performance feedback.	83.5
Yelling at someone.	82
Excluding someone from a workplace social event.	82
Spreading gossip and rumours about people.	79
Standing over others in an intimidating way.	79
Having public temper tantrums.	79
Not respecting the space of others.	77
Taking the credit for other people's work.	75
Lying to/hiding truth from people.	74
Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment.	74
Taking work away without explanation.	74
Making hostile gestures such as eye rolling or glaring at someone.	72
Criticising someone's work performance without providing details of how it fails to meet the required standard.	72
Not offering sufficient learning and development opportunities.	71
Blaming people for errors for which they were not responsible.	71
Criticising someone's work in public.	71

table a2-6: 25 least frequently witnessed peer behaviours measured by % respondents indicating 'never witnessed'

Behavioural Item	% never
Threatening someone with physical harm.	98
Threatening people with job loss or demotion.	92
Pressuring people to not claim something they are entitled to (e.g., sick leave, holiday entitlement, travel expenses).	91
Destroying or taking resources someone needed for their job.	87
Discriminating against others because of their age, work status, nationality, etc.	75
Writing or sending accusatory messages.	75
Taking work away without explanation.	72.5
Yelling at someone.	71
"Prying", questioning of one's health or private life beyond reason.	70
Banging fists on table or pointing at people.	70
Not offering sufficient learning and development opportunities.	69.5
Applying rules and punishments inconsistently.	68
Retaliating against someone who gave negative performance feedback.	68
Standing over others in an intimidating way.	65
Not respecting the space of others.	65
Excluding someone from a workplace social event.	63
Providing work that is above or below level without explanation.	62
Criticising someone's work performance without providing details of how it fails to meet the required standard.	60
Trying to turn people against someone.	60
Constantly cancelling meetings without explanation.	57
Not consulting about matters affecting working lives (e.g., seating arrangements, changes to workload, deadlines).	56
Excluding people from information necessary to their work.	55
Taking the credit for other people's work.	55
Making unreasonable work demands such as impossible deadlines.	55
Lying to/hiding truth from people.	54

a3: building a safety and trust model

elements of culture that may support feeling safe / high trust environment

values leadership

Organisational values are well defined. These values are given expression as behaviours that are modelled by the senior leadership team. Key organisational policies and procedures reflect the values and the organisation is generally perceived to practise the values it preaches both in relation to employees and stakeholders.

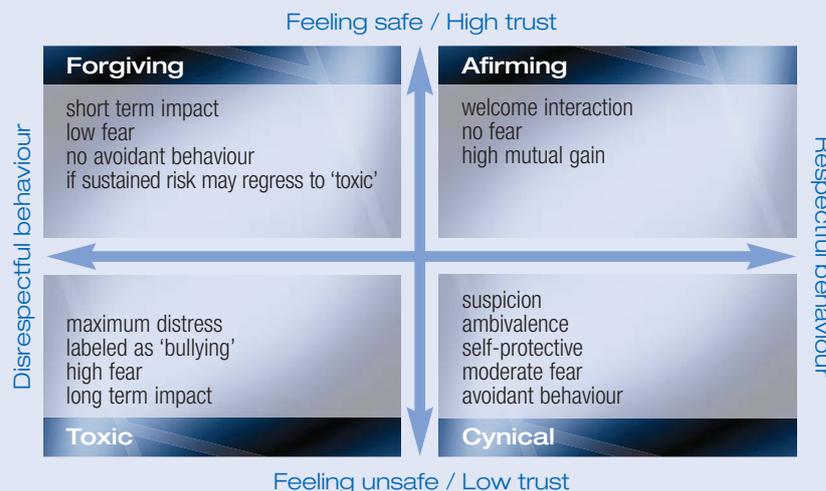
conflict resilience

A conflict resilient workplace will have the following features:

- Integrated model of conflict management where formal processes are seen as an important safety net but are not the entry point. The entry point is some form of triage or intake assessment system for exploring the cause of the conflict and best way forward.
- People are skilled and confident in ability to resolve issues early and not go straight to formal processes.
- Disputes are resolved with a focus on interests and needs as well as rights
- Action is taken at different levels – promoting strong communication; preventing things going wrong and reacting appropriately when things do go wrong.

performance management

Performance management systems are consistent with the values and include mechanisms for assessing the way that work is done as well as the work itself. As with conflict management, the informal mechanisms for managing performance are emphasised – informal feedback about performance and behaviour is a regular part of the communication between the employee and manager. The organisation supports managers in the development of skills, such as having difficult conversations to facilitate this feedback. Formal performance review processes reflect this ongoing communication and feedback.



elements of culture that may result in feeling unsafe / low trust environment

values leadership

Organisational values may be poorly defined and/or not well known. Even if they are well known, there may be a perceived lack of authenticity as they are not given expression through the way things are done and people (particularly leaders and managers) behave in the organisation. Policies and processes, particularly performance and reward systems do not reflect and support the values.

conflict resilience

The approach taken to conflict management relies on formal, rights based approaches. There may be a general lack of understanding of and confidence in conflict management and grievance handling processes. People may avoid making a formal complaint out of fear and yet not feel it is safe to attempt to resolve issues themselves. There is a general sense that people are not skilled at managing conflict and avoid conflict until it becomes very serious and leads to a formal complaint. There is a common perception that the organisation moves 'victims' rather than dealing with inappropriate behaviour.

performance management

Performance management relies on formal processes rather than informal ones. The provision of informal feedback is not emphasised by the organisation and likely to be dependent on the skills and inclination of individual managers. There may be no link between the organisation's values and the assessment of performance. Results are rewarded regardless of how those results are achieved. There may be a sense that arbitrary standards are used to measure performance and that assessments are made based on personal likes or dislikes. Managers may be perceived as lacking the skills necessary for managing people. When under pressure, this leads to aggressive behaviours, labelled as bullying.

a4: detailed statistical results

relationship between climate and observation of behaviour

findings on pages 22-23

table a4-1: correlations between high frequency behaviour and climate measures – organisation A

		Correlations						
		Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment. - Direct Manager	Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment. - Peers & Colleagues	Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment. - Direct Reports (if relevant)	Prioritises the emotional well-being of people here.	Prioritises the physical well-being of people here.	The dynamics among the members of my team are harmonious.	Please indicate which of the following best represents how content people are in your organisation now.
Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment. - Direct Manager	Pearson Correlation n	1	.385**	.350*	.487**	.257*	.525**	.401**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000	.039	.000	.015	.000	.000
	N	91	91	35	89	89	89	89
Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment. - Peers & Colleagues	Pearson Correlation n	.385**	1	.256	.185	.136	.372**	-.340**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000		.138	.083	.204	.000	.001
	N	91	91	35	89	89	89	89
Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment. - Direct Reports (if relevant)	Pearson Correlation n	.350*	.256	1	.145	-.183	.479**	-.114
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.039	.138		.412	.301	.004	.520
	N	35	35	35	34	34	34	34
Prioritises the emotional well-being of people here.	Pearson Correlation n	.487**	.185	.145	1	.611**	.313**	-.440**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.083	.412		.000	.000	.000
	N	89	89	34	186	186	186	186
Prioritises the physical well-being of people here.	Pearson Correlation n	.257*	.136	-.183	.611**	1	.153*	-.268**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.015	.204	.301	.000		.037	.000
	N	89	89	34	186	186	186	186
The dynamics among the members of my team are harmonious.	Pearson Correlation n	.525**	.372**	.479**	.313**	.153*	1	-.422**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.004	.000	.037		.000
	N	89	89	34	186	186	186	186
Please indicate which of the following best represents how content people are in your Organisation now.	Pearson Correlation n	-.401**	-.340**	-.114	-.440**	-.268**	-.422**	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.001	.520	.000	.000	.000	
	N	89	89	34	186	186	186	186

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

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

All the behavioural statements were tested for their correlations with organisational climate variables using Pearson's 2-tailed test. The only behaviour found to have significant relationships was "Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment". The following statistical significant correlations were found:

The observation of "Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment.-Direct Manager" is significantly related to the rated level of contentment of people in the Organisation, such that the lower the rated contentment the higher this behaviour is observed ($r = -.401, p < .001$). This relationship also holds for the reported observation rate of "Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment.-Peers & Colleagues" ($r = -.340, p < .001$).

The observation of "Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment.-Direct Manager" is significantly related to the rated level of "The dynamics among the members of my team are harmonious", such that the lower the rated team harmony the higher this behaviour is observed ($r = .525, p < .001$). This relationship also holds for the reported observation rate of "Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment.-Peers & Colleagues" ($r = .372, p < .001$) and "Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment.-Direct Reports" ($r = .479, p < .001$).

The observation of "Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment.-Direct Manager" is significantly related to the rated level of "(their Organisation" prioritises the physical well-being of people here.", such that the lower the rated emphasis on physical well-being the higher this behaviour is observed ($r = .257, p < .005$). This relationship only was observed on this variable for observing the behaviour in Direct Managers.

For this organisation, the observation of "Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment.-Direct Manager" is significantly related to the rated level of "(their Organisation" prioritises the emotional well-being of people here.", such that the lower the rated emphasis on emotional well-being the higher this behaviour is observed ($r = .487, p < .001$). This relationship was found only for observing the behaviour in Direct Managers.

table a4-2: correlations between high frequency behaviour and climate measures – organisation B

		Correlations						
		Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment. -Direct Manager	Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment. -Peers & Colleagues	Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment. -Direct Reports (if relevant)	Prioritises the emotional well-being of people here.	Prioritises the physical well-being of people here.	The dynamics among the members of my team are harmonious.	Please indicate which of the following best represents how content people are in your organisation now.
Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment. - Direct Manager	Pearson Correlation	1	.300	-.038	.072	.015	.241	-.246
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.067	.884	.666	.931	.144	.137
	N	38	38	17	38	38	38	38
Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment. - Peers & Colleagues	Pearson Correlation	.300	1	-.043	.438**	.407*	.687**	-.457**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.067		.870	.006	.011	.000	.004
	N	38	38	17	38	38	38	38
Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment. - Direct Reports (if relevant)	Pearson Correlation	-.038	-.043	1	-.105	.085	.286	-.229
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.884	.870		.689	.745	.266	.377
	N	17	17	17	17	17	17	17
Prioritises the emotional well-being of people here.	Pearson Correlation	.072	.438**	-.105	1	.788**	.202	-.010
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.666	.006	.689		.000	.074	.933
	N	38	38	17	79	79	79	79
Prioritises the physical well-being of people here.	Pearson Correlation	.015	.407*	.085	.788**	1	.223*	.077
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.931	.011	.745	.000		.048	.503
	N	38	38	17	79	79	79	79
The dynamics among the members of my team are harmonious.	Pearson Correlation	.241	.687**	.286	.202	.223*	1	-.279*
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.144	.000	.266	.074	.048		.013
	N	38	38	17	79	79	79	79
Please indicate which of the following best represents how content people are in your Organisation now.	Pearson Correlation	-.246	-.457**	-.229	-.010	.077	-.279*	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.137	.004	.377	.933	.503	.013	
	N	38	38	17	79	79	79	79

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

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

The observation of “Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment - Peers & Colleagues” is significantly related to the rated level of contentment of people in the Organisation, such that the lower the rated contentment the higher this behaviour is observed ($r = -.457, p < .001$). The non-significant effects for the other targets may be due to the sample size as correlations are above $-.2$.

For this organisation, the observation of “Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment - Peers & Colleagues” is significantly related to the rated level of “The dynamics among the members of my team are harmonious”, such that the lower the rated team harmony the higher this behaviour is observed ($r = .687, p < .001$). The non-significant effects for the other targets may be due to the sample size as correlations are above $.2$.

The observation of “Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment - Peers & Colleagues” is significantly related to the rated level of “their Organisation prioritises the physical well-being of people here”, such that the lower the rated emphasis on physical well-being the higher this behaviour is observed ($r = .407, p < .005$). This relationship only was observed on this variable for observing the behaviour in Peers & Colleagues.

The observation of “Ignoring/excluding others/giving the silent treatment - Peers & Colleagues” is significantly related to the rated level of “their Organisation prioritises the emotional well-being of people here.”, such that the lower the rated emphasis on emotional well-being the higher this behaviour is observed ($r = .438, p < .001$). This relationship only was observed on this variable for observing the behaviour in Peers & Colleagues.

other statistical analysis

findings on page 8

This analysis addresses one of the research questions: Is there a relationship between perception and frequency of observation of behaviour? More specifically:

- are there differences between those who reported observing more respectful/disrespectful behaviour (by either managers, or colleagues) in perceptions of behaviours?

These research questions basically require the identification of statistically significant differences between groups. Two techniques could be used: analysis of variance (ANOVA) or the Kruskal-Wallis test. Selection of the appropriate method depends on the level of measurement of the dependent variable and the ability of the data to meet the assumptions required by the statistical techniques. In summary, the Kruskal-Wallis test, which is a non-parametric test, requires fewer assumptions than ANOVA and is more appropriate when the dependent variable is ordinal rather than continuous, which is the case for the data collected for this study. [Non-parametric methods make fewer assumptions, which make them more robust, and their applicability is much wider than the corresponding parametric methods (such as ANOVA). They are also considered to leave less room for improper use and misunderstanding].

For the Kruskal-Wallis tests the dependent variable was the employee perception of how respectful/disrespectful behaviours were and the independent variable was how frequently they had witnessed those behaviours in the workplace. These tests were conducted for each of the three relevant employee groups: managers, peers and direct reports. For this report, the tests were performed on 10 of the top respectful behaviours and on 10 of the top disrespectful behaviours. Cross tabulations between relevant variables were also conducted (and the Chi-square statistic was calculated. However, for the Chi-square statistic to be valid it requires all expected counts to be greater than 1 and at least 80% of cells having expected counts greater than 5. None of the Chi-square tests shown below meet these criteria, therefore they are not valid).

results

The analysis focussed on assessing whether the extent to which employee perceptions of behaviours as respectful/disrespectful was influenced by how frequently they witnessed those behaviours across three employee groups. From this aggregated level of analysis it was expected to derive more detailed results to address the specific research questions listed above. If no significant differences were identified at this first level, then there would be no need to proceed with further detailed analysis.

A total of 60 Kruskal-Wallis tests were performed to identify statistically significant differences at this first level of aggregation. Only seven of those tests produced statistically significant results (these results are shown below). These were:

- Saying please and thank you: significant results were found for managers, peers, and direct reports;
- Giving honest and genuine praise and/or appreciation: significant results were found for managers and peers;
- Demonstrating genuine interest in people as people and not just workers: significant results were found for direct reports; and
- Discussing changes to duties or deadlines with people: significant results were found for managers.

After achieving such a small number and proportion of significance results, it was decided not to proceed with further detailed analysis, particularly after taking into account that some of these statistically significant results may just be due to chance alone – the chance of obtaining a significant difference from these tests where a difference does not really exist is 5%; thus, out of 60 tests performed we'd expect to get, on average, three statistically significant results where a true difference does not really exist (Type I error).

A number of factors may explain why we did not get statistically significant results. These are:

- A difference may not actually exist. That is, the frequency at which employees witness behaviour may not have an influence on the extent to which employees perceive that behaviour as respectful/disrespectful. This could have been our conclusion if we had enough statistical power in our analysis.
- The analysis lack statistical power to detect statistically significant differences if they actually exist. For the purposes of this study, we can say that the analysis did not have enough statistical power and this was mainly due to:
- The sample size was too small: a statistical power of 80% is usually considered appropriate for detecting statistically significant differences. However, based on the sample size for this study (sample sizes for this study varied between 50 and 135 cases), this study only had at best 75% chance of detecting a moderate effect size and only 17% chance of detecting small effect sizes (note that effect size is the size of the effect of independent variables on the dependent variable). For a study of this type to be able to detect a moderate effect size a total of 52 participants in each group is required, that is, considering we regrouped the categories into three larger groups, a total of 156 participants are required.
- The effect size in this study may only be small (not moderate) and therefore harder to detect. To detect small effect sizes, the study should have at least 322 participants per group or a total of 966 participants.

- Note that to answer the research questions listed above, an appropriate number of participants is required in each of the groups to be compared. Ideally, we should have equal number of participants in each group e.g. 52 participants in each group. Looking at the cross tabulations presented below it can be seen that in the majority of cases some of the groups compared had only a handful or no participants at all in some of the response categories. Thus, this study did definitely lack enough power to address the detailed research questions listed above.

Thus, the overall main conclusion from this analysis is that the results are inconclusive because the study lacks enough power to detect statistically significant differences if they actually existed. The recommendation is then that the study should be repeated with a larger sample.

NPar Tests -Kruskal-Wallis Test

ranks

		SayPlease_thnk_Mngrs	N	Mean rank
Saying please and thank you.	Witnessed occasionally or less		20	51.28
	Witnessed quite often		32	57.23
	Witnessed very often		78	72.54
		Total	130	

test statistics^{a,b}

		Saying please and thank you
Chi-Square		8.801
df		2.000
Asymp. Sig.		0.012

- a. Kruskal Wallis Test
b. Grouping Variable: SayPlease_thnk_Mngrs

Kruskal-Wallis Test

ranks

		SayPlease_thnk_Peers	N	Mean rank
Saying please and thank you.	Witnessed occasionally or less		21	50.79
	Witnessed quite often		43	61.21
	Witnessed very often		66	72.98
		Total	130	

test statistics^{a,b}

		Saying please and thank you
Chi-Square		7.869
df		2.000
Asymp. Sig.		0.020

- a. Kruskal Wallis Test
b. Grouping Variable: SayPlease_thnk_Peers

ranks

		SayPlease_thnk_Rpts	N	Mean rank
Saying please and thank you.	Witnessed occasionally or less		2	12.00
	Witnessed quite often		24	19.83
	Witnessed very often		22	30.73
		Total	48	

test statistics^{a,b}

		Saying please and thank you
Chi-Square		11.369
df		2.000
Asymp. Sig.		0.003

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: SayPlease_thnk_Rpts

ranks

		GivingHonestPraise_Mngrs	N	Mean rank
Giving honest and genuine praise and appreciation.	Never		8	40.00
	Once or occasionally		37	60.42
	Quite often or very often		85	70.11
		Total	130	

test statistics^{a,b}

		Giving honest and genuine praise and appreciation
Chi-Square		7.812
df		2.000
Asymp. Sig.		0.020

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: GivingHonestPraise_Mngrs

ranks

		GivingHonestPraise_Peers	N	Mean rank
Giving honest and genuine praise and appreciation.	Never		7	31.21
	Once or occasionally		44	58.73
	Quite often or very often		76	70.07
		Total	127	

test statistics^{a,b}

		Giving honest and genuine praise and appreciation
Chi-Square		11.725
df		2.000
Asymp. Sig.		0.003

a. Kruskal Wallis Test

b. Grouping Variable: GivingHonestPraise_Peers

ranks

	DemGenuineInterest_Rprts	N	Mean rank
Demonstrating genuine interest in people as people and not just workers.	Never	2	10.25
	Once or occasionally	9	21.22
	Quite often or very often	43	29.62
	Total	54	

test statistics^{a,b}

	Demonstrating genuine interest in people as people and not just workers
Chi-Square	6.120
df	2.000
Asymp. Sig.	0.047

a. Kruskal Wallis Test
b. Grouping Variable: DemGenuineInterest_Rprts

ranks

	DiscussChanges_Mngrs	N	Mean rank
Discussing changes to duties or deadlines with people.	Never	8	36.00
	Once or occasionally	41	61.11
	Quite often or very often	77	67.63
	Total	126	

test statistics^{a,b}

	Discussing changes to duties or deadlines with people
Chi-Square	6.675
df	2.000
Asymp. Sig.	0.036

a. Kruskal Wallis Test
b. Grouping Variable: DiscussChanges_Mngrs

finding on page 27

correlation between managers and peer observed behaviour

Managers / peers behaviour correlation is .907, sig at .01 level for respectful behaviour and .869, sig at .01 level for disrespectful behaviour.

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