

Antidote to Workplace Incivility: Insights from Information Technology Sector

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Abstract

Past literature on the nature, antecedents and consequences, and intervention of workplace incivility (WI), although has been vast across the sectors and fields, the health sector has comparatively caught significant attention of researchers. However, intervention studies, especially in the other major service sector of similar work nature such as Information Technology (IT), have been hardly addressed. Therefore, we explored the perspectives of IT employees to seek their insights into enhancing the understanding and effective dealing of workplace incivility. Semi-structured interviews were conducted among eighteen IT employees (N = 18, Males = 12, Females = 6) aged between 21 to 37 years (Mean = 27.72, SD = 4.21), working at various IT organisations in Bengaluru, Karnataka, a South Indian State. The conventional content analysis generated three broader themes representing suitable strategies for minimization of WI. The major themes include: *Appointment of non-team member manager, Enforcing strict action plan, and Human Resource consultations and training*. Further, a total of seven sub-themes emerged for these three major themes. Study findings have theoretical and managerial implications specific to the IT workplace and the service sector at large. Besides, results have been discussed from theoretical and managerial perspectives to indicate theoretical and managerial implications.

Keywords: IT employees, Workplace Incivility, Antidote, Human Resource Counselling, Action Plan, Professionalism.

Introduction

Workplace incivility quite evidently has been widespread across the organizations. For example, the occurrences are reported in manufacturing (Wu, Zhang, Chiu & He, 2013), financial services (Lim & Teo, 2009), hospitality industry (Sharma & Singh, 2016), retailing (Kern and Grandey, 2009), higher education (Cortina & Magley, 2009; Sakauri & Jex, 2012), healthcare (Leiter, 2011; Raaj & Anju, 2019), and many other professions (Schilpzand, Pater, & Erez, 2014). The service sector in specific has received tremendous attention from workplace

incivility researchers. Specifically, the nursing profession has been vastly studied in the past. Mostly so, as the nursing profession is considered to be a violent profession that stands second in the rank of law enforcement related to violent acts taking place in the work setup (Duhtrat, 2001). Although WI distinguishes itself from workplace violence considerably, it however falls under a similar range of negative workplace behaviours. The violent acts in specific are individual-targeted and committed intentionally by an instigator who entered the workplace on purpose. These acts primarily comprise physical assaults and threats (Olszewski, Parks, & Chikotas, 2007). Whereas, WI has been standardly defined as “low-intensity deviant behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect” (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Despite these differences, with continued negative behaviours, intentional acts could eventually advance towards negative directions to take the form of violence. Besides, the spiralling effect of WI further causes varied individual and organizational outcomes of negative nature (Andersson & Pearson, 1999).

Hence, several research studies have attempted to design and examine relevant interventions to minimize the occurrences of varied forms of WI such as *experienced*, *instigated* and *witnessed*. The interventions reported in the literature include the gratitude intervention (Locklear, Taylor & Ambrose, 2020), the review of studies that focused on preventive actions and individual and collective strategies (Bambi, Gauzzint, De Felippis, Lucchini, Rasero, 2017). In addition, the interventions were also of an interactive education nature (Stoddard, 2017), a diary design to track day-level experiences of stress and engagement caused by WI (Beattie & Griffin, 2014). Similarly, expressive-writing intervention (Kirk, Schutte & Hine, 2011), augmentation model for workplace incivility, experienced supervisor incivility and distress (Leiter, Day, Oore and Laschinger, 2012), and a workshop-based training session for civil behaviours (Grantham, 2019) were also few of the relevant intervention research. At the same time, management-focused interventions such as community belonging and values-based leadership (Page, Bishop & Etmanski, 2021) were tested in the past, too. Also,

a sense of coherence as a protective mechanism (Nielsen, Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2008), ethical infrastructure as a handling mechanism (Einarsen, Mykletun, Einarsen, Skogstad & Salin, 2017) were tested as relevant interventions for workplace bullying in specific.

Besides, these and many other relevant interventions have been profession-specific too. For example, nurses (Bambi et al., 2017; Gallant-Roman, 2008; Armstrong, 2018; Lasater, Mood, Buchwach & Diekmann, 2015; Nikstaitis & Smiko, 2014; Abdollahzadeh, Asghari, Ebrahimi, Rahmani & Vahidi, 2017), healthcare workers (Stoddard, 2017), security employees (Beattie & Griffin, 2014), health care providers (Leiter et al., 2012), medical and dental occupations (Grantham, 2019), administrative executives and health care workers (Nielsen et al., 2008), human resource managers and head safety representatives (Einarsen et al., 2017) were the primarily focused professions. Pretty evidently, the nursing profession has been studied the most in the past. Although subscribing to the consideration of the nursing profession as violent with its ranking being second in law enforcement of violent acts (Duhtrat, 2001), other professions of the same sector have been less attended. The similarities, such as the work nature of round the clock functioning, includes the IT sector that has hardly been studied in the literature on WI, especially from an intervention perspective.

Comparatively, the work nature of IT employees is considerably similar to the nursing profession, with shift-wise functioning round the clock. The IT employees are also more likely to experience higher work stress, odd working hours, frequent and unexpected shift changes, which could collectively add to physical and mental health problems (Shwetha & Sudhakar, 2012). Specifically, stress has been higher among them due to their nature of work, targets and workload (Padma, Anand, Gurukul, Javid, Prasad & Arun, 2015). Despite viable options for flexible work arrangements, very minimal employee engagement could be witnessed in the Indian IT sector (Ugarlo & Patrick, 2018). About eighty-one per cent of IT workers indicate their pain and discomfort at the workplace due to poor seating, constant keying, and sitting in the same position for hours and computer setup. Besides, Musculo-

skeletal and ocular disorders and psycho-social problems were some of the critical health problems reported among IT employees (Kesavachandran, Rastogi, Das & Khan, 2006).

The health profile of IT employees has been pretty evidently varying in line with urbanization in particular and are more likely to be at the risk of various non-communicable diseases (Babu, Mahapatra & Detels, 2013). And with the availability of skilled employees at cheaper labour costs, most call handlers at industries such as business process outsourcing work when they generally sleep (Raja & Bhasin, 2016). To add on, about 31% of prevalence of hypertension among IT and Information Technology Enabled Service professionals. Hypertension is specifically associated with autonomy and work environment (Babu et al., 2013). Especially concerning the work environment, past research in WI noted that experiences of uncivil workplace behaviours could be negatively related to employees' psychological and physical health (Lim, Cortina, & Magley, 2008). Apart from the associated health issues, the IT employees who represent the service sector are more likely to feel insecure about their job, especially when they experience co-worker workplace incivility (Shin & Hur, 2019).

Despite considerable similarities between the nursing and IT professions, it is also important to note that specific jobs demand specific requirements and needs (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Interestingly, Fu (2010) argued that the IT careers could be unique due to their distinct patterns and attitudes about career. As compared to non-IT professionals, IT professionals were more likely to experience the threat of professional obsolescence. Hence, the perception, experiences, and attitudes towards WI among IT employees would be comparatively distinct from non-IT employees. Likewise, their perceived strategies and possible mechanism to effectively deal with the prevalence of uncivil workplace behaviours in the IT sector would vary considerably too. Hence, through exploration of insights from IT employees, the present study intends to report the distinct attitudes and opinions of IT employees in effective dealing of incivility at the workplace. Investigating their specific insights would indicate how they stand against

possible organizational odds, such as WI to stick with their career commitments.

Methods

Design

An explorative qualitative research design was used to seek out insights on ways to minimize WI in the IT sector. The semi-structured interviews were conducted to investigate the concept under study. Given (2008) states that “*semi-structured interview is a qualitative data collection strategy in which the researcher asks informant a series of predetermined by open-ended questions. The questions are directly related to the concepts under investigation.*”

Participants

A total of eighteen IT employees (N = 18, Males = 12, Females = 6) aged between 21 to 37 years (Mean = 27.72, SD = 4.21) of IT organisations in Bengaluru, Karnataka were included in the study. The participants' level of education was of under-graduation (N = 11) and post-graduation (N = 7), all residing in urban areas. Besides, their marital status was reported as married (N = 7) and single (N = 11). The study respondents' reported varied range of work experience which was between five months to 7.9 years (Mean = 2.32 years, SD = 1.93). Similarly their designations were of varied range too, which were reported to be ranging from consultant trainee to manager business development.

Procedure

Using purposive sampling method to collect responses from participants, the IT organizations in Bengaluru, Karnataka were approached for this research study. Upon briefing the purpose of the research, they were assured confidentiality of their identity. With the prospective respondents' informed consent, individual semi-structured interviews were conducted which on average lasted for 35 to 40 minutes.

Data analysis

Conventional content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) is used to describe phenomena, and in this case, the WI and the insights that IT employees have in tackling the same. Using the inductive approach, the responses were well-read

repeatedly and carefully studied. It is especially used in cases where limited studies have been reported in the past, which in this case refers to limited intervention studies of WI in the IT sector. Upon careful reading of the data, open coding (Elo & Kyngas, 2008) was done. The labelling of codes was done based on the reflections of the texts.

Consequently, the categories were grouped based on similarities and differences. Researchers further framed major themes, sub-themes and categories through the process of abstraction. Additionally, relevant theories or other research findings have been discussed in the findings of the study.

Results and Discussion

Although many WI intervention studies have been conducted in the past, especially in the nursing profession, investigative efforts to explore the insights from other relevant service sectors of similar work nature such as IT have not been solidly reported. Therefore, through this research, researchers intended to explore the opinion of IT employees that help in effective dealing of incivility at work. Hence, in our results, we highlight the findings and observations evolved through conventional thematic analysis.

Table I: Themes and Sub-themes

Sl. No	Themes	Sub-themes
1	Appointment of non-team member manager	Interdicting dominance of boss
2	Enforcing strict action plan	Enacting ethics and technical skills
		Blending the hard work towards smart work
		<i>Sanṭārakō sājhā bhā?ā</i> (Common language of communication)
		Strict rules
3	HR consultations and training	Peer support
		HR counselling

The intended analysis yielded three broader themes: *Appointment of non-team member manager*, *Enforcing strict action plan*, and *HR consultations and training*. Further, a total of seven sub-themes emerged for these five main themes. The opinion of respondents on how to minimize the WI in the IT sector and through which aforementioned themes and sub-themes emerged are presented and interpreted as follows:

Theme One: Appointment of non-team member manager

Owing to effective dealing of flexible work setup that primarily renders responsibility and flexibility to the workforce by turning employees into Self-Managing Teams (SMTs) is the current organizational trend (Renkema, Bondarouk & Bos-Nehles, 2018). However, creating such relatively permanent groups would depend on several individuals, teams and organizational factors. Especially at the individual level, factors such as individual

human capital, team member attitudes, and perceived workload would be deciding factors (Greets, Bierbooms & Cloudt, 2021). Similarly, the individual elements in this case of respondent PMS indicated that the relatively similar form of self-managed functioning of a team, i.e., one among the team members acting as a manager to deal with team affairs, does not seem to be preferred. Instead, an individual outside of the team is desired to be headed and managed accordingly.

“Team or Organization health spoils because of few uncivilized people. They can be minimized when the team has people manager outside of the current team so that the employees can open up freely on their thought in resolving issues. Since team members are considered to be equal to each other.... the appointed manager is less likely to be obeyed by team members... In such cases, the disobedience, non-professional and organizational deviant behaviours such as being uncivil are more likely to happen at

workplace. Therefore, appointing someone from outside of the said team could resolve this issue very well.” (Respondent PMS, 35).

The prime reason study respondents report for such a preference is that at the outset, the team members are in general equal to each other, which is indistinct to their skills, knowledge and attitudes. Therefore, appointing a team member who is deemed to be equal to all others could instigate a sense of discomfort among fellow team members and lead to non-adherence to the orders and directions of the identified team manager. Consequently, the prolonged non-adherence, which in a sense is believed to be a violation of workplace norms of mutual respect and dignity, could take more negative forms of behaviours such as WI. Thus, the respondents opine that appointing a non-team member leader would solve the issue significantly. Specifically, the opinion shared by the participants in our study highlight this technique of workplace incivility minimization in a sub-theme: a) *Interdicting dominance of boss*.

a) Interdicting dominance of boss

Greets et al. (2021) emphasized the need for a secured structural and cultural change to develop self-managed teams better. Although the respondents, unlike SMTs, preferred to be managed and directed by a manager outside of the team, they seem to desire a similar secured structural and cultural change.

“Some senior employees or colleagues tend to dominate over employees in their early career years... by resorting unnecessary and unasked suggestions every now and then which eventually disturbs the flow and efficiency of a given task. For this to be stopped, they should not act as the boss and give arrogant orders to their colleagues. It also creates as sense among the organizational members that they are equal to each other irrespective of their years of experience. Such a sense could instil a free flow of thoughts and opinion in professional dealings and also helps in collective success.” (PK, 29).

The specific structural change that they seek out is to stand above the hierarchy, especially of a senior-junior nature of employment. Similarly, the exact cultural shift that they seek out is interdicting the dominance of the boss, i.e.,

unlearning the practice of displaying bossism over subordinates at the workplace. With these structural and cultural changes and a sense of equality being created among employees, respondents opine that it could help a collective success in combating negative behaviours at the workplace, such as workplace incivility. It takes something more than a mere stopping of uncivil behaviours (Hanrahan & Lieter, 2014). Consequently, changing a culture in a manner that excludes incivility in favour of civility was recommended in the past (Perason & Porath, 2005). To stop the culture of WI in specific, a platform for open communication among employees at the workplace could be significantly helpful (Khadjehturian, 2012). Similarly, the study respondents opined that through the cultural change, a free flow of thoughts and sharing of one's opinion in an open manner would help in collectively combating WI. Further, this strategy is also in line with Khadjehturian (2012) finding, which was focused on the nursing profession, hence, reflecting the similarities in the nursing and IT professions.

Theme Two: Enforcing strict action plan

Past research has emphasized that workplaces need to design and implement specific plans to minimize and prevent workplace violence (Gallant-Roman, 2008). Similarly, IT employees in the study suggested that a strict action plan has to be enforced to reduce and avoid incivility workplace, especially in the IT sector.

“The management of organization has to create a strict action plan and convey well before about consequences as per plan... It would make things much clear to the employees... It emphasizes the practice of professionalism in interpersonal dealing with colleagues.. Besides, when the consequences of any given deviant behaviours are known and clear to employees, with such avoidance of consequences, employees would be less likely to instigate any uncivil acts at workplace. That way, the workplace incivility could be minimized to certain extent.” (AG, 28).

In the specifications of the intended action plan, Respondent AG majorly stressed the practice of professionalism, especially in interpersonal transactions among organizational members. Although the suggested strategy doesn't clarify the specific aspect of

professionalism related to interpersonal communication, it indicates that apart from designing a strict action plan, the same must be conveyed to employees well before the enforcement. Doing so would brief the employees of their expected behaviours, performances and consequences if they failed. With this clear idea of action plan in mind, employees are less likely to instigate unhealthy practices such as WI. Interestingly, although a strict action plan is warranted against WI in the IT sector, as in line with the findings of Gallat-Roman (2008) of the nursing profession to reflect the similarities of nursing and IT profession, the specific components of the intended action plans are distinct. In the nursing profession, the successful workplace violence prevention programs included: a) evaluate the workplace, b) use a top-down approach, c) institute zero tolerance, d) empower nurses, e) predict high-risk events, and f) provide education (Gallat-Romant, 2008). Whereas the components of an action plan of the current study focused on the IT profession included and represented through four major themes: a) enacting ethics and technical skills, b) blending the hard work towards smart work, c) *Saṅcārakō sājhā bhāṣā* (Common language of communication), and d) Strict rules. These components of suggested enforcement of strict action plan which emerged as sub-themes as presented below, are the significant contributions of the current study in minimizing the workplace incivility at service sector and IT organizations in particular.

a) Enacting ethics and technical skills

Despite zero-tolerance policies towards interpersonal mistreatments at the workplace, the occurrences of violation of ethical code of conduct such as WI continue to rise, and to deal with the same; employees should attempt to model respectful, effective communication and professional codes of conduct (Kroning, 2019). Similarly, IT employees of the present study warrant enacting ethics and technical skills.

"I think even after graduation some lack technical skills and some lack certain ethics... its very serious issue and needs to be addressed through proper action plan that is strict enough to address the lack of technical skills to perform given role and also the lack of professional ethics

while performing those roles.... consider improving the technical skills through appropriate remedies such as training and so on. Whereas for ethics, unfortunately, one can't be taught the same. Instead, has to be learned by oneself. However, specify few relevant ones in the oughts' and nots of organizational culture and climate." (Anonymus respondent, 34).

The suggested action plan primarily focused on addressing the lack of ethics and technical skills among IT employees. Hence, it recommends an action-oriented plan comprising appropriate remedies such as training to deal with a lack of technical skills. Whereas for enacting ethics, the IT employees suggest that the management of the given organization has to put forward the expected behaviours that adhere to ethical endeavours in organizational premises. Accordingly, the same could be imparted in the organizational climate and culture for the larger and longer benefits of the IT organizations. To deal with a lack of technical skills, management has to direct such employees to enhance the same within a time-bound to exhibit the improvement in performance. If the progress doesn't follow, relevant activities such as termination should follow (Johnson & Indvik, 2001). Likewise, management-driven remedies such as training have been recommended by IT employees in the study to enhance technical skills. Whereas for enacting ethics, although the IT employees have not specified strategies for enacting ethics, they have indicated the vital role of management in establishing a conducive culture and climate at the workplace. However, Johnson and Indvik (2001) observations hint at a few strategies for the same. They include offering respectful behaviour classes, discussing appropriate conduct at the workplace, and offering training programs that add etiquettes classes in the module.

b) Blending the hard work towards smart work

Past studies in the practice of smart work in an organizational context have primarily focused on technological and institutional concerns, and limited studies have been done to investigate the employees' attitudes and actual behaviours towards smart work (Emo, Choi & Sung, 2016). Consequently, the current study provides an answer to the same, especially from a service

sector organization, specifically from an IT organizations' point of view. And the answer, as respondent AP shared, is to blend the hard work towards intelligent work.

“Those who tend to be on the hard working side are more likely to perceive or experience the workplace incivility... Vice versa, the smart works are also likely to be taunted by the hard workers for finishing up the work early without much difficulties... Hence, to tackle and yield an efficient outcome, there has to be a proper blend of hard work and smart work... And for that to happen, there has to be proper action plan designed and implemented structurally at various employment levels.” (AP, 29).

With the belief in efficient outcomes, the IT employees suggest the proper blending of hard work and intelligent work. Although an action plan was proposed, the details on the content of the plan are ambiguous. Currently, wherein several organizations of varied sectors and industries attempting to shift towards the establishment of smart work centres, including in government organizations (Emo et al., 2016), a unique perspective of blending hard and smart work is an interesting take of IT employees and also is a significant contribution of the current study to the literature. The blending of the same also indicates the perspective of past research that attempted to examine the uniqueness of the IT profession (Fu, 2010). The findings have a crucial managerial implication in systematically designing and implementing the blended nature of work, i.e., hard work and intelligence at varied levels of employments in IT organizations in specific and service sections at large.

c) Sañcārakō sājhā bhāṣā (Common language of communication)

The concept of WI is considered an issue of organizational climate rather than the between-person phenomena (Aljawarneh & Atan, 2018). Hence, in the past, the occurrences of incivility have been rare in organizations with strict rules of code of conduct and that have retribution measures (Cortina, Kabat-Farr, Leskinen, Huertra & Magley, 2013). In a similar line, the IT employees in the study warrant a common language of communication at the workplace to avoid misunderstandings that could lead to interpersonal mistreatment during interpersonal transactions.

“Interestingly, interpersonal conflicts and discrimination

are due to especially by the language issues. For example, when a group of people speak to themselves in a language that a person at receiving end doesn't understand, it most likely to sound to him or her that they are certainly speaking of him or her. This spiral could keep continuing at workplace to only burst out one day. However, by ensuring that everyone speaks in a common language like English, such interpersonal conflicts and discrimination based on region or language could be minimized to largely.”

For the occurrences of desired behaviours such as dressing appropriately and using proper written and spoken language from employees, such expectations must be defined and communicated to employees in adequate manner. They are well aware of the same (Crampton & Hodge, 2008). Provided that today's organizations are comprised of a diverse workforce and the fact that rudeness could take place in any of the forms. Several forms include cutting people off while they are speaking, listening in on another's phone calls, using demeaning language, or speaking in ones' language that other fellow organizational members do not understand, writing rude emails and many others (Pearson, Andersson & Wegner, 2001; Trudel & Reio Jr, 2011). It is therefore suggested by IT employees to have a common language of communication at the workplace. Besides, the IT employees are also convinced that most of the interpersonal conflicts in organizational setup tend to be due to regionalism and language differences. A misinterpretation of an unaware language terminology could elicit the spiral effect of incivility wherein the receiver could also revert to the sender with an unaware language. However, with the common language of communication, it is expected that several interpersonal conflicts and discriminations that arise out of regional and language differences could be minimized by ensuring a common language is being spoken.

d) Strict rules

The occurrences of incivility were rarely reported in organizations that have strict rules of code of conduct and have set measures of punishment (Cortina et al., 2013). Likewise, the study's IT employees emphasised enforcing strict regulations to deal with negative workplace behaviours such as WI.

“For interpersonal relationships and interactions, there are no hard and fast rules the state how well one has to behave and interpersonally deal with others. Also, interpersonal discrimination are of informal nature and it's hard to establish the rules and regulations. Hence, it's more likely occur at workplace. However, to deal with these kinds of deviant behaviours effectively, it's necessary to make rules again. These rules will monitor and keep such uncivil workplace behaviours under check.” (AD, 21).

Snippets of respondent AD, however, was unsure to what extent strict rules could be enforced for interpersonal matters given the informal nature of interpersonal transactions. Nevertheless, they opined that negative workplace behaviours are more likely to occur in the absence of such strict rules. Furthermore, although the suggestion of rules was ambiguous for the types of rules, it was believed that enforcement of strict rules would monitor and keep WI under check to a more considerable extent. Hence, the strategy of strict rules further supported the consideration that in the presence of stringent regulations, occurrences of uncivil behaviours are minimal (Cortina et al., 2013). Moreover, the much-emphasized idea of a zero-tolerance policy for uncivil behaviours at the organization is another prime example to support the idea of enforcing strict rules.

Theme Three: Human Resource (HR) consultations and training

The third central theme of HR consultation and training indicated the need for adequate consultation and training that focuses on minimizing the occurrences of WI. The consultation in specific was relevant to the victims of WI. The consultation has been suggested to occur from time to time, enabling the victim-employees to overcome the aftermath of experienced uncivil workplace behaviours. At the same time, training and development programs that focus on imparting knowledge and skills to identifying, correcting and preventing uncivil behaviours are needed across all hierarchical levels. The training, especially of interpersonal nature, could enhance employees' abilities to identify and deter incivility even before it begins to spiral (Pearson, Andersson & Porath, 2000). Besides, this theme has further evolved two additional sub-themes: a) peer support and b) HR counselling.

a) Peer support

Past research noted that the efforts to yield a positive outcome would be possible in the presence of conducive environments and relevant policies that support respectful and civil behaviours and adequate social support for civility (Stoddard, 2017). In a similar line of thought, the IT employees opined that seeking out timely peer support would be considerably beneficial to combat WI.

“Taking this out with peers could be much of relief and possibly solve the persisting issues of experiencing workplace incivility. At times, someone of early years of career, is more likely to face it... speaking to colleagues or peers who are bit more experienced in the present organization would be beneficial... they possibly could have been through this phase and experience... they could sort it out by dealing directly with the instigator. This way, the issues could be solved at lower levels, rather than making it complicated by taking it to the notice of higher authorities.” (AK, 27).

Respondent AK specifically highlighted that being in early careers is the period that witnesses maximum experiences of uncivil behaviours. Hence, speaking to a senior colleague and having already experienced such acts in the past could guide and train the junior employees on how to tackle the possible experiences of WI. Provided that the respondents emphasizing the need for peer support is in an attempt to avoid the involvement of higher authorities, it is interesting to note the role of HR managers in such contexts. It is to be inferred that the HR managers could probably deal with the WI occurrences informally, i.e., by referring the victims to experienced senior employees. Such attempts of HR professionals could have possible reasons such as to avoid the criticism by higher authorities on failing to combat WI, to minimize or save the costs of training and development programs or the possibility of considering the WI lightly hence leaving it to the victims themselves to figure out the ways to deal.

b) HR counselling

Apart from the interesting role of assigning a senior employee to assist in dealing with experiences of WI, the role of HR professionals further goes into carrying out HR

counselling to victims of WI in the IT sector in particular. Accordingly, the study participants indicated the need for HR counselling as a possible strategy to deal with the paramount occurrences of WI in IT organizations.

“Could be largely minimized by having a one on one sessions with HR, regular meetings and workshops on POSH... role of HR is quite relevant with a possibility of HR consultations for the victims of from time to time... including counselling etc... Also, HR could conduct workshops in order to provide a platform to address collectively and seek resolution from expert trainers... Training sessions on POSH would address gender-based harassment and related acts of incivility acts at large.” (MS, 25).

Respondent MS particularly highlighted that one-on-one session that comprises adequate and relevant counselling services to the victims portray the vital role of HR professionals in combating WI. Apart from counselling, the role of HR professionals goes further into conducting the training on the Prevention of Sexual Harassment (POSH) at the workplace. Although physical and sexual harassment conceptually falls under the category of workplace aggression, the IT professionals in this context have perceived the same as uncivil behaviour. Therefore, timely conduction of workshops and training sessions from trained experts or trainers is warranted. Apart from addressing gender-based discrimination, such sessions also address the possible mental health issues caused to employees due to experiencing WI.

Past research evidence shows that incivility, especially in the nursing profession, could affect the mental health of nurses and reduce their productivity (Smith, Andrusyszyn & Laschinger, 2010; Warrner, Sommers, Zappa & Thornlow, 2016). Likewise, IT professionals are no different in facing the mental health and work productivity issues caused by WI. They are more likely to experience higher work stress, odd working hours, frequent and unexpected shift changes, which could collectively add to physical and mental health problems (Shwetha & Sudhakar, 2012). Specifically, stress has been higher among them due to their work, targets and workload (Padma et al., 2015). Therefore, HR counselling for the IT employees who experience WI is aptly recommended as a

strategy to tackle uncivil workplace behaviours. In doing so, the health professionals such as trained psychologists and counsellors could offer appropriate counselling and therapy sessions to the employee victims, which consequently could bring in the essential cognitive, behavioural and emotional changes in the response patterns of employees toward the instances of WI.

Overall, HR professionals have a significant role in reducing workplace incivility, particularly in IT organizations and in the IT sector at large. Interestingly, the HR professionals' role has been dispersed in two significant ways: firstly, i.e., attempting to resolve uncivil workplace behaviours by unofficially assigning senior employees to assist junior employees in effectively dealing with uncivil workplace behaviours. Secondly, their role defines the official handling of WI victims by offering timely HR counselling through the help of trained psychologists and counsellors. Furthermore, the three major themes that emerged through deployed analysis and act as possible strategies to tackle workplace incivility are an adequate contribution of the current study.

Conclusion

The qualitative inquiry of IT employees' insights of minimizing workplace incivility phenomena in the IT organizations have primarily yielded three effective strategies: a) Appointment of non-team member manager, Enforcing strict action plan, and Human Resource consultations and training. Concerning a sense of equality among team members of a given team, the IT employees have sought to appoint a non-team member manager to avoid interpersonal conflicts, discrimination and mistreatment at the workplace. Provided that most organisations strive to establish the workplace as self-managing teams, the manager's expectation of not representing the team is an exciting finding. Besides, an action plan that is deemed to be strict is recommended which is the significant contribution mainly for IT organizations. Furthermore, the role of HR professionals in combating the WI has been another vital strategy suggested by IT employees and it includes providing peer support as well as HR counselling services with the help of trained psychologists and counsellors.

Implications

The current study has taken efforts to report the IT employees' insights on strategies to minimize workplace incivility in IT organizations that have theoretical and managerial implications. Theoretically, the findings of the study, amidst dominating explorations of multiple settings within the service sector, yet notably negligence towards IT workplace, have a potential in offering enhanced conceptual understanding in designing intervention tools. Secondly, the managerial implications of the study findings include the role of a non-team member manager in effectively dealing with team members' interpersonal conflicts, discrimination and mistreatment. Also, the managerial professionals could bring a strict action plan to combat the occurrences of WI in IT organizations through enhancing ethics, blending hard work and intelligent work and enforcing strict rules.

Limitations and future directions

With the semi-structured interviews, at times, the specification of certain strategies such as strict rules suggested by the IT employees could not be adequate in effectively discussing the possible thoughts and expectations of the respondents. Hence, future research exploring to seek the insights on combating WI could deploy in-depth interviews. Also, the scope of generalization of the current study's findings is limited to the nature of qualitative research. However, mixed-method research that focuses on statistical design and tests the intervention model based on the insights from the qualitative study would be of outstanding contribution to the literature of WI intervention.

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