

Leeann Clark

Qualification – Master of Professional Practice

MANAGING CHALLENGING WORKPLACE BEHAVIOURS CONSTRUCTIVELY

Student ID Number 1000025761

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Glenys Forsyth (Academic Mentor) and Trish Franklin (Facilitator)

ATTESTATION OF AUTHORSHIP

“I hereby declare that this submission is my own work and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, it contains no material previously published or written by another person (except where explicitly defined in the acknowledgements), nor material which to a substantial extent has been submitted for the award of any other degree or diploma of an institute of higher learning”.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Leeann Clark". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'L'.

Leeann Clark

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1. INTRODUCTION

In this practitioner thesis I have described the dual development of a work project on managing challenging workplace behaviours constructively and my professional framework of practice as a researcher and as a Human Resource (HR) practitioner. In this first chapter I state my argument which has three contributions; 1. The articulation of the framework of practice, 2. The change in my practice associated with development and adopting that framework, and 3. The impact of the change programme. I start by laying out the flow of the practitioner thesis: first describing my motivations for this work, the context and the methodology. Particular focus is placed on the process that links my work project and my learning journey. The undertaking of a work project is described which illustrates and informs the articulation of my professional framework of practice.

To fully understand my intention behind the completion of this project, please refer to Appendix 3 which is my learning agreement from Course 2 and details all of my project aims, goals, learning outcomes and expected outputs from my study.

Framework of Practice

To be an effective HR practitioner, I have a responsibility to ensure that I understand the range of behaviours that are demonstrated within the workplace, both the good and the bad, and how to deal with them on a professional level. As an HR Advisor (Appendix 9) working across all hierarchical levels from our labourers up to high level management, I need to be confident that the advice and support I provide will contribute to the best possible outcome. It is my primary role to protect the business and to maintain the best outcome for staff whilst remaining empathetic with/to them. Using a best practice framework developed from my learnings and embedding it into my professional practice will enable me to become an HR expert in managing challenging workplace behaviours.

This report explains how I have improved my professional practice by gaining a deeper understanding of what challenging workplace behaviours are, strategies to manage and deal with them, and as a result, how dealing with these behaviours improves employee job satisfaction and productivity in the

workplace. My Master of Professional Practice project is based around a study of 'Managing challenging workplace behaviours constructively'.

My research study, based on auto-ethnographic action research, is focussed on organisational psychology and drills down into organisational behaviour. It is appropriate to start by distinguishing the linkage between these areas of expertise. The study of organisational psychology includes psychological factors or human factors at work. However, organisational behaviour (OB) not only examines human behaviour in an environment but is the application of psychology at a workplace or in an organisation. It examines behaviour at three levels - individual, group and organisational (Quora, 2017). It is the study of what people think, feel and do in and around organisations. It includes the study of employee behaviour, decisions, perceptions and emotional responses and examines how individuals and teams in organisations relate to each other and to their counterparts in other organisations (McShane, Olekalns & Travaglione, 2010).

Organisational behaviour makes a valuable contribution to the practice of HR in that everyone in an organisation needs to work with other people. This knowledge helps to build a high-performance team, motivating co-workers, handling workplace conflicts, influencing the boss and changing employee behaviour are just a few of the areas of knowledge in this area (McShane et al., 2010). Of value to me as an HR practitioner, this study and resulting thesis will also be valuable as a tool for management and other HR practitioners as a best practice framework.

A financial driver in managing challenging workplace behaviours rather than avoiding dealing with them is that it is more cost effective to change behaviours to reduce conflict in the workplace, and performance manage those who aren't performing or are demonstrating bad behaviours, and endeavour to make a high performing, more effective team. Leadership Management Australasia (2019) suggests that the direct and indirect costs associated with employee turnover are estimated to total 100-300% of the employee's salary for managerial staff and 50-120% for operational staff. This is dependent on the level, experience of the individual, and how difficult it is to replace them.

Three key learning outcomes that I focussed on throughout this research were:

- able to identify what challenging workplace behaviours are,

- able to identify the ‘triggers’ for challenging workplace behaviours (e.g. what are the likely causes and scenarios),
- solution focussed on how to deal with and manage challenging workplace behaviours in a constructive way and to implement recommendations and/or change where possible.

Change in my Practice

As an HR practitioner, ‘my’ best practice framework includes that I look at the root cause for poor performance and bad behaviours rather than ‘writing off’ the employee through a disciplinary process and potential dismissal. I look at strategies around non-disciplinary measures to improve performance and behaviours e.g. Performance Improvement Plans (Appendix 6), mentoring and formal training programmes, so that we can better manage and retain the services of the employee. By doing this we improve productivity and morale (as an individual, as a team and as an organisation), we build the capability and potential of the individual (they gain a better understanding of themselves, how others perceive them, the impact they have on their team, and any other issues that they need to work on so that they can better manage themselves and the contribution that they make) and we have better retention (lower staff turnover). Mulholland (2017), on how to prevent total chaos, states “The more you know about how everyone interacts with each other, the success metrics of each team, and how one team affects another, the easier it is to see the bigger picture and account for that when making big decisions. By learning the ins and outs of how the business operates as a whole and how each team affects the others, you can more easily see the cause of each problem and get to the root of it quicker”.

I am the HR expert in managing challenging workplace behaviours within the branches that I manage which includes Palmerston North, two in Feilding, Marton, Taihape, Paraparaumu and Masterton, and are part of the People and Performance team (the national HR team) for Higgins Contractors, a national roading and civil infrastructure company which is a business unit of Fletcher Building. Rather than the siloed one dimensional focus that we have used previously where each division would focus on their own outputs and financial performance rather than focussing on the whole branches performance, I am mentoring management and my colleagues to work within this same best practice framework.

The best practice framework I am referring to is about having a considered and planned approach to dealing with the challenging workplace behaviours such as using the advice that I provide, referring to the 'Guide to Managing Poor Behaviour in the Workplace' handbook in Appendix 10, or the Performance Improvement Plan in Appendix 6, and being more pro-active rather than reactive 'fire-fighting'. I also support the managers through the process as they work with their employees and teams. This provides us with a more systemic view of the whole of the branch, the wider region, and the wider organisation rather than the divisional focus we have been working to (macro view rather than a micro view). This is an important aspect in effective human resource management and in my opinion, my fellow HR practitioners within the national Higgins HR team (my direct team members), national Fletcher Construction HR team, international Fletcher Building HR team, and fellow members of Human Resource Institute of New Zealand (HRINZ), should be following a similar best practice framework based on these same principles and understanding to get the best outcome for the business and the employee.

Impact of my Change Programme

Through this method of enquiry (research and reflection) and by understanding the importance of taking a collaborative and proactive approach to performance management, and developing and using strategies for de-escalating conflict, I am clearer about how to manage and resolve conflict in the workplace. I have achieved this by:

1. Developing more knowledge and a better understanding in this field around areas that are the root cause of 'conflict' (such as bad, poor or toxic behaviours (these behaviours are explained further in Chapter 3)). This has enabled me to get the best out of our employees by using such techniques as 'performance management' (both non-disciplinary and disciplinary procedures) to ensure that we have a more effective and 'productive' workplace. By understanding the behaviours, I can enhance my HR capability within my current and future workplaces.
2. By understanding the true cost of replacing employees. The external candidate pool is getting smaller and smaller with significant competition between key businesses in our sector for key talent. For example, there is a significant risk of losing our employees to the Manawatu Gorge replacement project (among other projects) that is due to start in the next 12 to 18 months.

As we will not be the Project lead or partner, staff retention is more important now than it has ever been. I have noted a significant drop in our turnover rates over the last six months so I would suggest that some of the new initiatives we are using within our company (of which I have shared several throughout this thesis) are improving our retention. Of those that have been leaving, we are finding that they wish to return shortly thereafter. An example of this is a manager who left to go to one of our main competitors in our region on October 2018 and returned in December 2018. He quickly realised that the 'grass isn't greener' with our competitor and that we are a good employer.

In this chapter I have introduced the development of a work project on managing challenging workplace behaviours, and the tightly interwoven development of my professional framework of practice as a researcher and as an HR practitioner. I have introduced the flow of the thesis that leads to the conclusion that dealing with challenging workplace behaviours constructively has a better outcome for both the business and the individual. In the following chapter I describe my motivations for undertaking this adventure/journey.

2. MOTIVATION

In this section I describe what motivated me to undertake this work. This is informed by my reflection on my personal background and experiences as a union delegate, a Manager, and as an HR practitioner. It is written in the present but informed by my writings at the start of this journey. It describes my learning journey and concludes with a review of the organisational change opportunity and initial and aspirational professional framework of practice.

My learning journey in the field of Human Resources started with my appointment as a PSA union delegate for a year while I was working within a government department. This gave me the opportunity to advocate and support my colleagues in the resolution of workplace issues between them and their managers. As part of that journey, I took up the opportunity to attend PSA development training in delegate orientation, problem solving, employment legislation, facilitation skills, difficult situations and bicultural unionism. Although these courses are available to all, few delegates take the opportunity to attend these courses during their first year in the role. However, I was keen to learn as much as I could throughout my time as a PSA union delegate as I found this experience and learning very interesting. Key learnings from my time in this role include gaining exposure to the influence of perception, how communication breakdowns can impact on the workplace and the different ways in which Managers engage with staff with performance or behaviour issues.

Progressing into being responsible for the management of business functions and employees at other organisations, I then continued my learning journey to study towards the New Zealand Diploma in Business and added papers on Employment Relations and Human Resource Management gaining further Diplomas in Management, Small Business and Human Resources. Having completed my studies, I then took over the Human Resource responsibilities within the organisation I was working within at the time, while being supported by an HR team in the wider business. My thirst for knowledge and being able to embed it led me towards a degree in Applied Management majoring in Human Resource Management.

After completing my degree I wanted to focus on people at all levels and how their actions, or lack of actions, impact their workplace. I focussed my project on Organisational Psychology which is the

scientific study of the behaviour and attitudes of people at work and of the psycho-social processes underlying the functioning of organisations. I started my Masters journey in early 2016 completing Course 1 and Course 2 in August 2016, and then resumed my journey from March 2018.

Through various roles in different organisations I have developed a passion for the human element of the workforce and understanding them better through effective management practices, organisational psychology and more specifically organisational behaviour. My desire to research this topic based on how people behave in an organisation (organisational behaviour) is that so many times over my career I have been part of, or witnessed challenging workplace behaviours that haven't been dealt with and/or managed effectively. These behaviours, especially if they are repetitive, can be damaging and destructive within the workplace. They can lead to staff dis-engagement with the potential to affect workplace performance and eventually lead to difficulties with staff recruitment and retention. I wanted to explore underlying causes in an attempt to better manage conflict in the workplace to get the best out of employees, enhance job satisfaction and improve both individual and organisational productivity.

I therefore undertook this research to explore the causes and sources of conflict in the workplace so that I could learn how to manage it better and more effectively to achieve the primary purpose above. I did this by interviewing others who had experience with workplace conflict. I hoped to learn from them how they dealt with conflict, what worked and what didn't in the examples they provided, what strategies were effective and why, and what strategies were ineffective and inappropriate, and why.

Although I am reasonably new to the field of HR (as I wasn't in an HR generalist role when my journey through my Masters started, and I am still relatively new compared to my colleagues with two years generalist experience and over two years in a functional role that incorporated HR responsibilities), I felt that this research study would give me greater insight into being a more effective HR practitioner in a more condensed period of time rather than relying on 'business as usual' learning. As part of a wider HR network, I am also able to influence my colleagues including management and the wider business, business units, and organisation as a whole, and my fellow HR practitioners (as mentioned in the previous chapter).

In this section I have discussed the motivations for this work. I have explored the background to this work, personally, professionally and organisationally. I have identified an opportunity to develop a change of how we do things in our business and to embody that in a model of practice that can and will benefit people beyond my specific work context. In doing so, this will establish me in the role of an HR expert, which I will articulate in a professional framework of practice.

3. LITERATURE AND (WIDER) PRACTICE CONTEXT

Introduction

In the previous section I described my experience of working initially as a union delegate and then as an HR practitioner within a business and wider organisation. This led to a realisation that I could improve my capability (and inform others) by undertaking this research. In this chapter I explore this from a theoretical and wider practice context. I explore the questions related to what is organisational culture and change, how do we define bad behaviour in the workplace, and examine these in a wider school of thought. The intention is to demonstrate awareness of prior knowledge and practice, to provide a firm foundation for a model of managing challenging workplace behaviours and identifying the unknowns that this leads us to.

I will start by defining different types of behaviours. Also defining organisational culture, organisational change, and types of bad workplace behaviours, will help us to understand how to identify bad workplace behaviours and their triggers. I will then discuss how the bad workplace behaviours can impact on, not only the individuals involved directly in the behaviours, but also the workplace as a whole. Finally, I will focus on solutions to deal with the workplace behaviours from an HR perspective and an employer perspective.

Definitions of Behaviours

I have used a variety of terms throughout this thesis and will use this section to define these terms. Although outside of this research there may be subtle nuances with these terms, for the purpose of this research, I have used the terms poor, bad, unacceptable and inappropriate behaviours interchangeably in this thesis as none of these behaviours are acceptable in the workplace, they are all demonstrated in the workplace by behaviours that should not be tolerated, and are discussed in a variety of references using the different terminology. As discussed later in this chapter under 'Types of Bad Workplace Behaviours', these behaviours come in many forms and can be defined as any behaviour that creates or 'may' create a risk to an employee's health, safety and well-being. Examples include bullying, verbal or written abuse, emotional or psychological abuse, physical violence,

coercion, harassment and/or discrimination, aggressive/abusive behaviour, unreasonable demands and undue persistence or disruptive behaviour (iHR Australia, 2019).

Toxic behaviours tend to be the culmination of poor/bad behaviours over a longer period and can be more difficult to deal with as the behaviours may start off as being more subtle and/or may not necessarily break the company's code of conduct or policies directly. These behaviours are discussed further in the next section 'Organisational Culture' and are demonstrated from people who create drama in their lives, try to manipulate or control others, are needy, use others to meet their needs, are extremely critical of themselves and others, are jealous or envious of others bemoaning their bad fortune or others good fortune, abuse substances or harm themselves, and are unwilling or unable to seek help (Tartakovsky, 2018).

Organisational Culture

McShane et al. (2010) provides the definition of organisational culture as the values and assumptions shared within an organisation. This definition describes what is important and unimportant in the company and, consequently, directs everyone in the organisation toward the 'right way' of doing things (or in my opinion, what they consider to be the right way). Another definition by Webfinance (2019) is that organisational culture is the values and behaviours that contribute to the unique social and psychological environment of an organisation. It is based on shared attitudes, beliefs, customs, and written and unwritten rules that have been developed over time and are considered valid. The culture affects the organisation's productivity and performance, and provides guidelines on customer care and service, product quality and safety, attendance and punctuality, and concern for the environment. As part of my research I have explored how values impact on the culture of an organisation and how poor behaviours (attitudes and customs) have developed to create the challenging workplace behaviours that I and management need to deal with.

To help guide a positive organisational culture we need to include strong statements in employment policies, internal communications that bad behaviour will not be tolerated, organisational responses to incidents, values such as respect, equity and accountability are front and centre in decisions and actions, address toxic behaviour at the top (walk the talk), and build self-awareness and self-control.

To understand whether there is a positive organisational culture in place, we need to build channels of reporting through, for example, regular employee surveys. These can address culture, values and risk-taking, forums in which employees are encouraged to express their views constructively, provide feedback on what actions have been taken for complaints, ensure that employees have a mechanism to raise genuine concerns about the conduct of managers, and that they can do so anonymously if needed.

To preserve a positive organisational culture, when setting up robust systems to deal with inappropriate conduct effectively in the workplace, iHR Australia (2019) provides some direction. It suggests creating a comprehensive employee handbook (such as the Higgins one I have mentioned later in this section) that includes policies on behavioural expectations and consequences for breaking those policies and require all employees to review these policies and sign an acknowledgement form that they have read them and agree to them. In all cases, bad behaviour needs to be monitored and documented. If a particular inappropriate behaviour is noticed in several employees, then send an email to all staff members to discourage this behaviour. Individual employees should be addressed privately to bring the inappropriate behaviour to their attention, and work on a plan to correct the behaviour with the employee. If the inappropriate conduct warrants it, follow the disciplinary action plan in the employee handbook. To ensure the disciplinary action and plan for improved behaviour remains effective, continue to monitor the employee's behaviour.

As mentioned above, in any workplace there should be clear standards and expectations that employees need to adhere to that are defined in a handbook and given to employees. At my current workplace, as part of the employment offer, we provide a handbook that outlines the expected standards of Higgins' employees 'Higgins Employment Handbook'. Some examples of the expected standards that are outlined include: honesty, respecting clients and people we work with, conflict of interest, false declarations, and harassment and bullying. It also outlines what happens when there are employment problems such as the disciplinary procedure. We also provide a booklet that outlines the company's 'Values' and 'Expectations' of their employees. If the employee breaches these standards and/or values, they may be subject to a disciplinary procedure depending on the seriousness of the breach.

Without providing such clear expectations for their employees, a workplace could put themselves at risk of poor behaviours being exhibited. Recently there was an article by Bryant-Smith (2018) in the Spring 2018 Human Resources Magazine that explored bullying, racism and sexual harassment in the modern workplace. It discussed a 2016 study which indicated that 14 percent of workers described their workplace environment as 'toxic' and 20 percent had experienced major problems in communication with a co-worker or boss. In 2009 a study stated, in this same article, that throughout New Zealand 18 percent of workers are bullied in the workplace, which is at the high end of reported international prevalence levels. Some four years later in 2013, this statistic is reiterated in a Stuff article by Redmond (2016) where a 1700 person academic survey showed that New Zealand has the second-worst rate of workplace bullying in the developed world with one in five workers affected (17.3 percent said that they experienced bullying within the last six months). We need to ensure that the organisational culture discourages toxic behaviour.

Avoiding or removing a toxic worker from your workplace delivers twice the benefit of adding a superstar/GOAT (Greatest of All Time). Toxic behaviours are demonstrated by people who create drama in their lives, try to manipulate or control others, are needy, use others to meet their needs, are extremely critical of themselves and others, are jealous or envious of others bemoaning their bad fortune or others good fortune, abuse substances or harm themselves, and are unwilling or unable to seek help (Tartakovsky, 2018). My personal experience of employees who demonstrate toxic behaviours is that it can destroy the morale of others around them to a point where the other employees feel that they have no choice but to look for alternative employment. A 2015 Harvard Business School report suggested that the payroll cost of having an employee who exhibits toxic behaviour in an organisation is an additional \$15,169 per year due to the loss of valued team members who can no longer tolerate the negative atmosphere that is created (Bryant-Smith, 2018).

Employers have a responsibility to provide their employees with a work environment that is free of inappropriate conduct, while every employee should be held accountable for their own conduct (iHR Australia, 2019). As stated above, as bad behaviours impact on the whole team, at a personal level, you can suffer negative effects from someone else's bad behaviour, even if you're not the direct target of the bad behaviour. I have worked in organisations where a culture of bad behaviour is not only tolerated at a leadership level, but is demonstrated at the same level and therefore a poor organisational culture becomes entrenched.

Types of Bad Workplace Behaviours

The proliferation of 'bad behaviour' in the workplace has far reaching consequences in that productivity and therefore profitability within the workplace can be severely impacted. Inappropriate or bad behaviours come in many forms and can be defined as any behaviour that creates or 'may' create a risk to an employee's health, safety and well-being. Some examples of unacceptable behaviours include bullying, verbal or written abuse, emotional or psychological abuse, physical violence, coercion, harassment and/or discrimination, aggressive/abusive behaviour, unreasonable demands and undue persistence or disruptive behaviour (iHR Australia, 2019). As mentioned in the section 'Dealing with Bad Behaviours' below, how we deal with the behaviour depends on the seriousness of the behaviour (e.g. physical violence is on the higher end of the spectrum and requires immediate action whereas passive-aggressive behaviours may be on the lower end of the spectrum as it may not be so obvious initially and may require a more considered approach).

Another bad behaviour that isn't explored above but which I have seen in the workplace is favouritism. Employsure (2017) states that there is no doubt that favouritism in the workplace stems from bad management (and therefore bad behaviour) because it opens the door for employee complaints about unfair treatment and discrimination. All employees are entitled to and expect to be treated equally. An example of this can be seen later in chapter 5 'Work Practice' in relation to 'Recruitment Decisions Based on Personal Relationships' where favouritism due to multi-hierarchical relationships can drive poor recruitment decisions.

Mindtools (2019) describes 'Bad Behaviour' as coming not from what an individual person does or doesn't do, but from the overall impact that their behaviour has on the team's mission and on its effectiveness. Almost all work is done by teams, so anything that harms their output (or productivity) is by definition unacceptable. The impact of the behaviours is far greater than just the individual and demonstrates the far-reaching impact of these behaviours. At an organisational level, bad behaviour can harm the team's ability to deliver to its client and have a tangible impact on profitability, damages the cohesion of the team, and/or has an unnecessary adverse impact on one or more individuals within the team. This may result in increased sick days (as team members try to escape the bad behaviour, or are sucked into it) or there may be higher staff turnover (which results in cost and time involved in hiring and training new people), so look for patterns (turnover statistics, absenteeism rates, exit interviews, certain teams or divisions), signs of distractions, disengagement and distress of

employees. I have personally witnessed these patterns in the workplace and have left workplaces due to bad or toxic behaviours exhibited by my colleagues and/or my Manager.

As mentioned earlier, workplace bullying is an example of an unacceptable behaviour and has had a recent increase in media attention although no legislation specifically addresses it. An article by Redmond (2016) published on Stuff.co.nz notes that New Zealand has the second highest rate of workplace bullying in the World. "A 1700-person academic survey showed New Zealand had the second-worst rate of workplace bullying in the developed world with one in five workers affected. Seventy per cent of workplace bullying is top down and it's often difficult for colleagues to help without 'lifting your head too far above the parapet' and becoming a target themselves. Many organisations claim a zero-tolerance policy on workplace bullying but 'the practice doesn't fit with the words'".

In another article on 'What does workplace bullying look like in New Zealand?' Redmond (2016) observes that 17.8 per cent of New Zealanders who participated in a survey in 2013 said they experienced workplace bullying in the last six months. Men are more likely to experience personal attacks such as being yelled at, threatened with violence, ridiculed or publicly humiliated. Women are more likely to be the target of professional sabotage such as unachievable assignments, unwarranted criticism or being excluded from important decisions. Perception and paranoia can be triggers to bad or toxic behaviours. This is explained in more detail in the next section.

The Influence of Perception and Paranoia

Perception is the process of receiving information about and making sense of the world around us. It entails determining which information to notice, how to categorise this information and how to interpret it within the framework of existing knowledge (McShane et al., 2010). As part of my analysis of some of the examples in the interviews, I have noted that the behaviours of some employees can be considered paranoia which falls under the category of perception. In the article '8 Key Traits of Paranoid Thinkers' (Heshmat, 2018) the term paranoia refers to someone who feels excessively suspicious without justification, and/or that others are plotting against them. They read far too much into everything people say and are quick to criticise but they are not open to criticism themselves. Research indicates that many of us, perhaps 15 to 30 percent of us (Heshmat, 2018) will regularly

experience suspicious thoughts. The overall emotional state of a person who is paranoid is a negative one (depressed mood, anxiety, and lowered self-esteem). Paranoia is a disorder of the mind, not a flaw of character. Paranoid individuals tend to have false ideas about the world and people. A particular employee in my current place of work demonstrates these characteristics and perceives that they are the subject of conversations behind their back, or they are being excluded from various activities and/or events and therefore demonstrates poor behaviour as an outcome of the paranoia. As a result of this paranoia and her perception of others, there have been various instances where we have engaged in non-disciplinary processes to try and resolve some of the issues between the employee and her colleagues. Perceptions and paranoia can be demonstrated through toxic behaviours which was discussed in further detail earlier in this chapter under Organisational Culture.

Dealing with Bad Behaviour

The previous sections discuss types of bad behaviour, and how perception and paranoia influence it. Bryant-Smith (2018) discusses how minimising and addressing bad behaviour in the workplace can generate huge savings for employers and there are clear actions that HR can take. Bad behaviour is often hidden from view. Bullies and sexual harassers often work behind the scenes where there are no witnesses. This is illustrated in the media attention around the #metoo movement in 2018, and by continuing media attention around people like Harvey Weinstein (an American Producer) and Bill Cosby (an American Actor). Both used their success and fame to sexually harass/assault others.

There are two main ways to deal with poor/bad behaviour which include non-disciplinary and disciplinary action (Victorian Government, 2016). The aim of non-disciplinary action should be focused on remedying the behaviour, enabling employees to learn from their mistakes, as well as avoiding or resolving tensions in the workplace. A non-disciplinary approach uses various techniques to shape future good behaviour. Some examples of non-disciplinary options include development options (coaching or mentoring, re-training and increased supervision), behaviour options (counselling, mediation, performance improvement plans and strategies) and employment options (changes in shift or duties, or a transfer). The general rule about understanding how serious a suspected behaviour is, is that the more serious the alleged behaviour (whether it breaks a minor rule or policy (e.g. absenteeism) versus a more serious rule or policy (e.g. assault)), the more appropriate it is to use disciplinary approaches over non-disciplinary (e.g. would it justify a formal warning or dismissal of an employee?).

A disciplinary approach imposes sanctions, such as a warning to discourage future poor behaviour and can be used for misconduct, serious misconduct, repeated acts of unsatisfactory performance, and where non-disciplinary action has been tried in the past but failed. The purposes of a formal disciplinary investigation is to examine and evaluate all relevant facts, and to determine whether the alleged behaviour took place. My role as an HR Advisor is to support and advise the decision-maker (generally the employees Manager) in determining the appropriate sanction.

Mindtools (2019) suggests that people often try to rationalize bad behaviour (accommodating), rather than confronting it (avoidance) and therefore it becomes 'the norm'. They pretend that it isn't happening, convince themselves that it's not important, or believe that it will sort itself out. In my experience this is definitely something that I have witnessed within my previous and current workplaces. By giving rapid feedback to someone who's not aware that they're behaving badly, such as through informal discussions between the individual and their manager with HR support, you can 'nip problems in the bud' before they become severe and habitual. While different teams may well have different standards and expectations about behaviour, within a given context you can judge whether behaviour is bad or not, and act appropriately.

Ways for HR to deal with these behaviours include training front line managers to address bad behaviour early and fearlessly and developing skills in managers to identify the early signs of unethical conduct and how to manage disciplinary issues (refer to Appendix 10 as an example of a guide for front line managers). Build accountability in staff to do something about bad behaviour when they become aware of it. Ensure staff are trained in having difficult conversations, how to be an active bystander, and the basics of adverse action, discrimination and bullying. In 2017 a colleague of mine and I presented an Industrial Relations workshop that included role-playing an employee, the Manager, and a narrator to work through a difficult situation that constantly evolves and provides more and more relevant information as the role-play continues. This helps the Manager to understand that there can be more to a situation than initially thought so investigations need to be complete and thorough to gain a full understanding of any situation so that a resolution can be identified and worked through. More detail on how to do this is included in Appendix 10 under sections 4 and 6.

When bad behaviour is entrenched across an organisation, a change manager may be brought in to put in place an organisational change programme.

Organisational Change

When dealing with change over an organisation, Lewin's Force Field Analysis Model (McShane et al., 2010) provides a useful framework for a system-wide change that helps diagnose the forces that drive and restrain proposed organisational change (Figure 1).

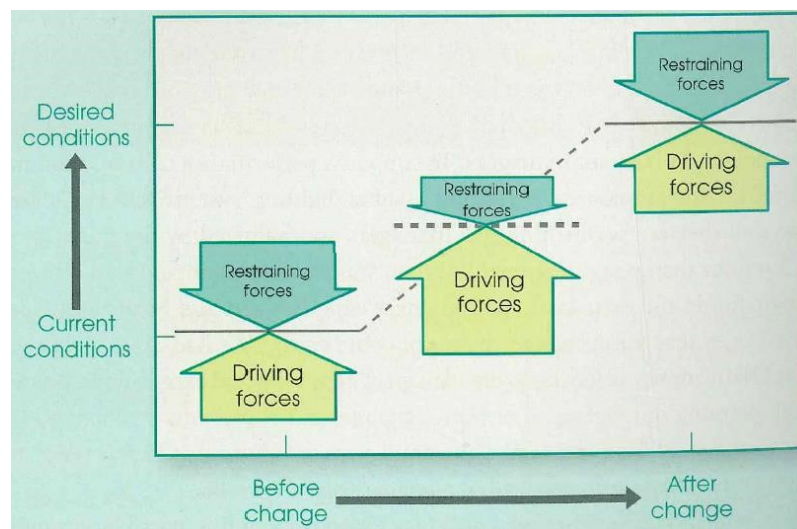


Figure 1: Lewin's Force Field Analysis Model (McShane et al., 2010, p.572)

The model emphasises that by unfreezing the current situation, moving to a desired condition and then refreezing the system so that it remains in the desired state. Unfreezing involves producing disequilibrium between the driving and restraining forces and refreezing occurs when the organisation's systems and conditions are introduced that reinforce and maintain the desired behaviours. They must support and reinforce the new role patterns and prevent the organisation slipping back into the old way of doing things. Employees resist change 'even when they support change in that they typically assume that it is others – not themselves – who need to change' (McShane et al, 2010, p.574-575). In a company where I have worked where there is a poor organisational culture and/or performance, it is not uncommon for a Change Manager to be brought in to ascertain what the current state is, to make recommendations on what changes are necessary for it to improve, to put in place the recommended changes and then to 'refreeze' the state.

Sometimes the consequences of organisational change can also include restructures where there are job movements or losses.

Some strategies for addressing employee resistance to change are communication (show the employee relevant documentation), learning (breaking routines and adapting to new patterns), employee involvement (recommendations or ideas from employees), stress management (discussing employees concerns), negotiation (losing conditions to gain other conditions) and coercion (when strategies are ineffective but change needs to happen quickly). However, sometimes with organisational change, employees prefer to leave an organisation rather than accept the change (McShane et al., 2010).

Summary

In summary, through undertaking this research and reading the above literature, I have been able to identify and discuss what challenging workplace behaviours are (under the categories of bad/poor behaviours and toxic behaviours), some of the triggers (including perception, paranoia, organisational culture and organisational change), and offered potential solutions about how HR and management can deal with these behaviours in the workplace.

In this chapter I have explored the theoretical and practice basis of organisational culture, organisational change, and poor, bad, and toxic behaviours in the workplace. While the questioning I used in this research (such as the objectives in my Learning Agreement and survey questions in my Interview Schedule) were prompted by my desire to change the way I work and were focussed on how to identify and manage bad workplace behaviours constructively, positioning these questions in the context of prior work has enabled me to recast them in the light of previous workplaces where these behaviours have been dealt with poorly or not at all. The context of this work is retrospective, and in this light, the questions I have on how to deal with these behaviours are currently at the forefront of the knowledge in the field. The link between theory and practice is poorly understood at the coal face so my work-based questions are particularly pertinent.

4. METHODOLOGY

In the previous chapter I explored the theoretical and practical basis of organisation culture and change, and of identifying and dealing with bad workplace behaviours. Whilst the field of organisational behaviour is well known, there are significant gaps of knowledge at the point of dealing with bad workplace behaviours constructively and little is understood of how this applies in practice. The Motivation chapter described how my work practice provides a driver for change that aligns with those questions and that the goal of my personal framework of practice is to accelerate my knowledge and skills in the area of being more effective when dealing with challenging workplace behaviours. In this chapter I describe the underlying methodology and the detailed method that has enabled me to undertake this work-based development in a way that aligns with my personal development.

Qualitative Research

The methodology I have used is auto-ethnographic action research. It is a form of self-reflection and writing that explores anecdotal and personal experience and connects this autobiographical story to wider cultural, political, and social meanings and understandings. I used interviews as my primary research method as this is a common qualitative research technique that is used to uncover trends in thought and opinions and dives deeper into the problem. As qualitative research is primarily exploratory and is used to gain an understanding of underlying reasons, opinions, and motivations, the findings are much more meaningful to me. Data is quantitative if it is in numerical form and qualitative if it is not. Qualitative research is multimethod in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter. This means that qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them (McLeod, 2017).

Project Methodology

My project methodology, as outlined in the Learning Agreement in Appendix 3, was 'Critical Chain' project management where consideration is given to available (or potentially available) resources, tasks, prioritising and to create a realistic schedule to meet the set milestones and deadlines including presenting to the assessment panel and meeting the course end date.

A previous manager gave me the book 'Critical Chain' by Goldratt (1997) when we were working on a change piece to improve the workflow throughout our wider team. Critical chain project management is a methodology that puts a primary focus on the resources needed to complete the project's tasks. It helps to identify both resource and task dependencies to complete projects as efficiently as possible. It begins by building a project schedule, then identifying the most crucial tasks that need to be done — the 'Critical Chain' — and reserving resource for these high-priority tasks. It also builds buffers of time around these tasks into the project's schedule, which helps ensure the project meets its deadlines.

With this project methodology in mind, I have identified the most important tasks and broken the project down into smaller manageable pieces, or a work breakdown structure, to help determine what resources I needed for the report. I then considered any resource constraints such as availability of the survey participants, holidays and peak work periods. Then my focus turned to timely task completion and to eliminate multitasking (working on more than one aspect at a time). Once I evaluated how long it would take to do a task, the methodology then suggests that the time required should be halved to push toward a more efficient timeline. However, there should still be buffers for uncertainties or unexpected changes. In summary, the project model should include time estimates, tasks descriptions, resources, time buffers and finish dates.

Prior to the research study, in consultation with my Academic Mentor we agreed that we would have 15 survey participants. We considered that this number would provide a wide enough scope for the research topic as we were focusing on qualitative data rather than quantitative data. As part of my Research Ethics Application, I had identified that suitable participants should have some experience with challenging workplace behaviours (may include: breaches of privacy as a result of multi-hierarchical personal relationships within the business, recruitment decisions based on personal relationships rather than the most suitable candidate for a role, code of conduct issues not being addressed, poor performance and destructive behaviours not being managed) and be able to reflect on the impact of those behaviours on their own practices and of others around them. To ensure that the research results are comprehensive, typical participants are employees at all hierarchical levels of relevant organisations e.g. general managers, team managers, functional managers, advisers and administrators.

In reality the potential participants were employees known to me through personal and professional relationships within two particular organisations I had worked in. They were people that I was confident would have enough experience in being around, involved in or have dealt with the research subject matter and that would be open to providing details on their experiences in my research study. They also came from a variety of hierarchical backgrounds from Administrators through to General Managers and CEO's. I considered this an important element to ensure that I got exposure of a variety of perspectives. Therefore the 'features' I had identified in suitable participants are indeed what I adhered to. After identifying them, they were approached by the Administrator at Otago Polytechnic to participate in the research study and were given the opportunity to agree to take part in the project which would be an interview of approximately 60 minutes. Research interview methods included face-to-face, phone, Skype, Facetime or Viber. They were asked a series of questions related to challenging workplace behaviours and were also given the opportunity to have a discussion and ask questions around the research project (see Appendix 2 for more detail on the process of consent, information for participants, etc).

In my Learning Agreement I included the research milestones as being participant recruitment over months 1 and 2, interviews over months 3 and 4, additional research (including international and further literature) over months 5 and 6, analysis of interviews over month 7, application of relevant theories and methodologies over months 8 and 9 and the report of findings over month 10.

In practice, my project timeline consisted of 'Course 3' being for a period initially from February 2018 to December 2018, then delayed to a start of March 2018 and eventually extended to complete in March 2019. The tasks that needed to be achieved over this period were allowing for survey completion (three months), analysing the data, researching relevant literature to apply to the data and figuring out how to present the findings (three months), writing up of the resulting report and for it to be finalised with my Facilitators/Mentors (three months) and then to allow for the presentation of the findings to the panel (one month). The timeframe is not dissimilar to my initial plan. However, I have lumped activities together based on practicalities such as how the survey analysis and research for the literature review can be done in tandem. Using this project management method (or at least planning out the project tasks against a set timeline) meant that I could foresee issues such as the delay in survey participants completing the surveys and holiday periods well before the completion

date. This allowed me to seek the extension mentioned above to complete the research and report by the end of March 2019. An assessment date has now been set for June 2019.

Conclusion

This thesis tells the story of a work-based project – managing challenging workplace behaviours – and the development of my personal and professional framework of practice, to become an HR expert. These two threads are closely interwoven and this chapter has described the nature of this interweaving. The methodology of the work is auto-ethnographic action research and I have also used Critical Chain project methodology for planning purposes. The detailed method for the work-based change – my work practice within each of the research stages is described in the following chapters. In this chapter I have described in detail my method of undertaking this research and reflective writing that provides the means of development of my professional framework of practice.