


# Sexual Harassment Training Focused Solely on Protecting Organizations From Lawsuits Won't Change a Toxic Culture for Women to an Inclusive One


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## ABSTRACT

The location where workplace sexual harassment occurs points to the importance of workplace structures and practices for the precipitation of sexual harassment. In fact, some of the current theoretical explanations of sexual harassment focus primarily on organizational features that may facilitate sexual harassment, such as hierarchies and organizational cultures. Organizational literature suggests that in recent decades there has been a trend toward increased use of organizational practices that might empower workers, make organizations more inclusive, and constructively change organizational cultures through interventions. Assumptions about men and women contained in hegemonic gender beliefs can become embedded in organizational structures, authority lines, job classifications, institutional rules, and employee interactions. This paper explores these notions through a case study of an organizational intervention and a content analysis of the literature.

## KEYWORDS

Cultural Change, Gender, Sexual Harassment, Toxic Work Culture

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## INTRODUCTION

The U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC) provides a clear explanation of what to report about acts of sexual harassment (Equal Employment Opportunity, 2019). According to the EEOC (2019), it is unlawful to harass a person (an applicant or employee) because of that person's sex. Harassment can include "sexual harassment" or unwelcome sexual advances, requests for sexual favors, and other verbal or physical harassment of a sexual nature (EEOC, 2019). Harassment does not have to be of a sexual nature, however, and can include offensive remarks about a person's sex. For example, it is illegal to harass a woman by making offensive comments about women in general (EEOC, 2019). Sexual harassment and sex-based claims are a variation of types of unacceptable behaviors. It is a misconception that the majority of sexual and sex-based harassment is aggressive, forceful, and acts of violent behavior. Many of these claims are inappropriate verbal occurrences of name-calling or written statements or actions that may be physically threatening (Blum, 2019).

Organizations have seen alarming statistics in sexual harassment and sex-based EEOC claims. In 2017, approximately 27,000 workplace harassment claims filed with the EEOC. With those workplace harassment claims, over half were sex-based claims and approximately, 6,800 were sexual harassment cases (U.S. EEOC, 2018). The majority of sexual harassment and sex-based claims are from women. Nonetheless, males make up 20% of sexual harassment and sex-based claims (U.S. EEOC, 2018). Alarming statistics depict African American women filing the majority of sexual harassment claims (15.3 charges per 100,000 workers), and 1 in 17 sexual harassment charges filed with the EEOC also alleged racial discrimination (Rossie, Tucker, and Patrick 2018). These allegations are from victims that were determined to report their experience of abuse, ill treatment, and offense based on their gender or were sexually victimized. Understandably, these cases addressed were able to move into EEOC investigations. The aggregate number of claims filed that dropped or mediated outside of EEOC guidelines cannot be determined. Inarguably, U.S EEOC advised that with the unsurmountable claims that are processed annually, approximately, 75% of victims still do not come forth to file a complaint (Patel, 2018). Most victims find that filing a claim or complaint will result in retaliation, hostile work environment, further harassment from their accuser or embarrassment and humiliation from peers (Patel, 2018). Unfortunately, there are negative consequences associated with filing sexual harassment or sex-based claims that most victims prefer to avoid bringing light to the incident. Moreover, having such experiences does not quite go unnoticed. Most victims find themselves losing focus at their job, experiencing lack of motivation or trying to transition into another position or company (Patel, 2018). Quid pro quo and a hostile work environment are legal definitions of sexual harassment (Boyer, 2018). Quid pro quo refers to behaviors by a superior who promotes or demotes an employee contingent upon sexual favors in the workplace (Boyer, 2018).

## Research Approach

The research approach is an organizational development case study action research.

According to Coghlan (2015) "Organizational development action research is problem-centered, client-centered, and action-oriented. It helps involve the client system in a diagnostic, active-learning, problem-finding, and problem-solving process. Further, action research requires change agents, who act as the conduits for delegation and feedback, to take on pivotal responsibilities and information to effectively communicate data. The client and the change agent then collaborate in identifying and ranking specific problems, in devising methods for finding their real causes, and in developing plans for coping with them both realistically and practically."

This case study represents a Human Resources IT firm where several senior male managers sexually harassed female employees at work and on-line through their social media accounts. The result was a series of sexual harassment lawsuits that were settled and resulted in several male vice presidents being removed from the company. As a result of the fallout from the increased complaints and high female employee turnover, the organization has changed a significant amount of its leadership

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