

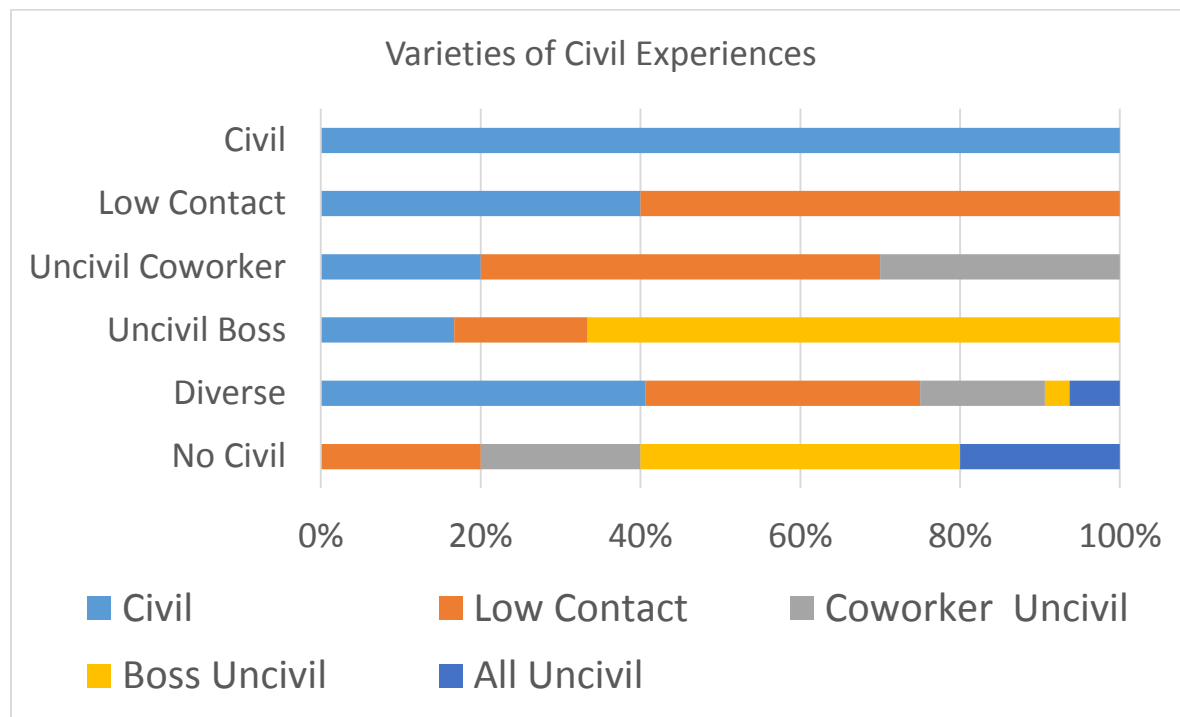
Section 1.00: Introduction

Readiness for CARAWay

Workgroups can improve their level of civility and respect, but it requires an effort. This document describes conditions and perspectives that indicate readiness to participate in the process.

Do not wait for a consensus

People disagree about their workgroup's culture. Our surveys have identified five patterns. One pattern describes the workgroup as being a model of civility and respect while another contends that people rarely talk to one another at all. Still others report frequent incivility from colleagues, from the manager, or from both.



This graph, based on data from 6 workgroups from a sample of 60 actual workgroups, shows how views vary among colleagues. The Diverse group has all 5 patterns while other groups have mixes of 2, 3, or 4 patterns. Consensus only occurs with a small percentage of workgroups in which all experience civility. The other groups cannot even agree on what kinds of incivility they experience.

Workgroups have complex structures. Some individuals get along well with the boss; others in the same workgroup have chronic tensions with supervision. Some individuals become popular opinion leaders; other individuals become outcasts or scapegoats. In-groups and out-groups form with civil relations within their borders and tense exchanges across the boundaries.

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The Bottom Line: the fact that some or even most workgroup members see no problem with civility does not negate the minority who do report incivility and disrespect.

Accountability: Willingness to Act

Active, explicit commitment to improve civility provides a necessary infrastructure for implementing CARAWay. Workgroups implement CARAWay; they do not simply endure or tolerate CARAWay. Passive audience members make slow progress.

A group process to improve civility requires commitment from:

- The workgroup manager,
- A core group of workgroup members (but not necessarily all),
- One or two potential facilitators, and
- Organizational leaders.

Indicators of Commitment:

- **Workgroup Manager:** meeting with the mentor and agreeing to participate.
- **Workgroup Members:** completing the survey and attending initial meetings.
- **Facilitators:** volunteering to facilitate, meeting with the mentor and agreeing to participate.
- **Leaders:** committing to contract to implement CARAWay. Recognizing facilitation activities as a part of the facilitators' job responsibilities.

Falling short on any of these indicators signals the need for additional effort to develop agreement on the program.

Policy Infrastructure

CARAWay groups build civility but they do not provide solutions to all problematic social behaviour. Participating organizations need to have in place relevant policies on workplace behaviour and effective channels for reporting abusive encounters. CARAWay meetings may help workgroups to understand and access those policies more effectively, but they do not replace them. Similarly, the CARAWay does not divert processes stipulated under collective agreements.

Incivility rather than Bullying or Aggression

The group process of CARAWay addresses most effectively incivility: low intensity rude behaviour. Incivility has a wide scope, encompassing insults, rejection, teasing, and gossiping. Incivility includes anything that refuses to acknowledge another's identity or autonomy. Incivility need not be intentional, such as acting in an inconsiderate way, taking advantage of someone, or refusing to acknowledge a colleague's contribution to the work. In that way, the

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observer or recipient of the behaviour tags it as uncivil. The actor may not have intended loud conversations, leaving messes, or off-color humor to offend anyone. The problem arises from not bothering to reflect on how these actions may affect other people.

Incivility tends to be reciprocal. People who experience rudeness from others usually acknowledge that they behave rudely as well, although perhaps not as frequently. Some of this correspondence reflects tit-for-tat responses; some of it comes from co-existing in an uncivil workgroup.

In contrast, bullying, aggression, and abuse (physical, sexual, emotional) reflect differences in power: formal authority, physical strength, popularity, etc. A collaborative process has much more difficulty gaining traction in these contexts. Bullying, aggression, and abuse reflect misuses of power. A workgroup process has a limited capacity to correct such dynamics, but they often require definitive action from senior management.

Uncivil workgroups characterized by reciprocal rudeness or simply a lack of explicit civility towards one another have a greater potential to recognize that they share a problem and share responsibility for addressing that problem. That shared accountability provides a foundation for improving civility.

An important caveat: People mix up these types of bad behaviour. Sometimes people refer to any behaviour they dislike as bullying. Employees may label as bullying the pressure they experience from a poor performance review or colleagues insisting on punctuality. It may be that such encounters would benefit from improved civility but do not reflect abuses of power.

A Workgroup Perspective

CARAWay takes a workgroup perspective on collegial problems, such as workplace incivility. However, situations often appear as arising from one or two problematic individuals. Beyond those few individuals, other members of the workgroup have constructive relationships. The well-functioning members have little inclination to reflect on their behaviour. They do not feel accountable for the poor relationships. Instead one or two individuals disrupt the community.

An individual perspective has validity. Some individuals have poor social skills, poor emotional regulation, or ill will towards colleagues. Even when the root of the problem lies within one or two individuals, a workgroup perspective continues to have merit.

In our experience working with strained workgroups we have found that most people do get along well with others at work. Poorly functioning workgroups need not have had the misfortune of a bumper crop of social misfits. Most of the time, problems originate from one or two strained relationships that dominate the workgroup culture. So, the fact that most people in the group get along well with one another does not negate a workplace perspective.

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- A workgroup perspective can improve the group's capacity to live with the problem. First, the problem may persist a long time. Most of the time, the disruptive individuals remain part of the workgroup. Rarely does the behaviour constitute such a serious violation of norms to prompt dismissal.
- Second, individual therapeutic interventions of such problems have modest success records. No one can be certain that therapy will solve the problem.
- Even if the problem individuals' stopped their problematic behaviour, the history of strained interactions would make universal civility unlikely. People hold onto resentments and past wrongs.
- Through a workgroup perspective, members of the workgroup may improve their response to the problematic behaviour. It could be that the current way of responding contributes to perpetuating the problem. People currently may be responding in ways that actually increase the probability of more such behaviour.
- In the event that the problematic behaviour continues, a workgroup perspective can help colleagues respond to that behaviour in ways that produce a less emotionally distressing experience for them.
- A concerted effort to respond constructively to all instances of the problematic behaviour could reduce its frequency.
- As a side benefit, a workgroup perspective can help all employees to improve their level of civility in their social encounters at work.