
The Impact of Reason for Training on the Relationship Between “Best Practices” and Sexual Harassment Training Effectiveness

Elissa L. Perry, Carol T. Kulik, Jennifer Bustamante,
Frank D. Golom

The current study explored the use of best training practices on human resources managers' perceptions of sexual harassment training success and frequency of sexual harassment complaints. Results revealed no main effects of best training practices on sexual harassment training success. However, effects of best training practices on sexual harassment training success differed as a function of the organization's reason (legal vs. strategic) for implementing sexual harassment training. Additionally, one best training practice, posttraining activities, was significantly and negatively related to frequency of sexual harassment complaints.

A survey conducted by the journal *Training* confirmed what many human resources (HR) professionals already suspected: Sexual harassment training is ubiquitous, with over 90% of all businesses conducting some form of sexual harassment training (Dolezalek, 2005). These high levels of training activity might be cause for celebration if we were confident that sexual harassment training was effective in achieving organizational goals. Unfortunately, we know surprisingly little about the circumstances under which sexual harassment training creates positive change (Antecol & Cobb-Clark, 2003; Newman, Jackson, & Baker, 2003). Bingham and Scherer (2001) identified only nine published reports that systematically evaluated a sexual harassment training

program in a workplace or educational setting. As a result, it is unclear if the sexual harassment training programs organizations implement actually deliver their intended outcomes. Identifying the factors that contribute to training success is essential because organizations are unlikely to continue investing in training efforts that do not accomplish their objectives.

In contrast to the dearth of research on the effectiveness of sexual harassment training, there has been a significant increase in general training-related research (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001; Salas, Wilson, Priest, & Guthrie, 2006). A substantial body of research has identified the factors that consistently influence training effectiveness (Alvarez, Salas, & Garafano, 2004; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001; Salas et al., 2006). As a result, we are now in a position to identify certain “best training practices” operating before, during, and after training that lead to positive training outcomes across situational contexts. One purpose of this research is to explore the impact of pretraining, training design and delivery, and posttraining factors on the effectiveness of sexual harassment training. Specifically, we wish to determine whether the “best practices” identified in the general training literature have their desired effect on outcomes relevant to the sexual harassment training domain: HR managers’ perceptions of training success and the frequency of sexual harassment complaints.

Training researchers note that organizational characteristics (e.g., organizational climate, policies, and procedures) are likely to play a role in training effectiveness, but that we have relatively little knowledge about how they may operate (e.g., Alvarez et al., 2004; Salas et al., 2006). The current study considers the role that one organizational contextual factor (the organization’s reason for implementing sexual harassment training) may play in the relationship between best training practices and training effectiveness. Organizations have different reasons for implementing human resource activities, including training (Konrad, Yang, & Maurer, 2006). Some organizations may undertake sexual harassment training to enhance their legitimacy and minimize threats of liability. Sitkin and Bies (1994) noted that “. . .organizational decision making and procedures have become increasingly concerned with assuring legal acceptability for the organization. . .” (p. 20). Alternatively, some organizations may adopt sexual harassment training for strategic reasons, to create competitive advantage and ultimately achieve performance goals (Konrad et al., 2006). We explore the possibility that the use of best training practices may have different implications for sexual harassment training outcomes depending on the organization’s reason for implementing the training.

Training Literature and Theory. Salas and his colleagues have written at length about factors that are likely to influence training effectiveness (Alvarez et al., 2003, 2004; Salas, Cannon-Bowers, Rhodenizer, & Bowers, 1999; Tannenbaum, Cannon-Bowers, Salas, and Mathieu, 1993). An extensive review of the literature suggests that there is a good deal of consensus regarding the importance of these factors. We discuss some of these factors next.

Pretraining Factors. Pretraining factors include individual characteristics, needs assessments, and motivational characteristics that exist prior to training and that can impact training effectiveness (Salas et al., 1999). Training research and theory emphasize the importance of conducting a pretraining needs assessment at the individual, job, and/or organizational level (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001; Salas et al., 2006). Information from a needs assessment is used to determine who needs to be trained, the method of training, and the content of training. Training cannot be effective unless it meets the needs (e.g., individual, organizational) identified by the needs assessment (Alvarez et al., 2003). Pretraining needs assessment can identify characteristics of individuals, jobs, and the organization that might influence whether training will be effective. For example, individual characteristics (previous experience with training, abilities, attitudes, self-efficacy, and motivation) have been found to play a role in training effectiveness (Alvarez et al., 2004; Kraiger, McLinden, & Casper, 2004; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001; Salas et al., 2006). An individual needs assessment can provide organizations with information that can be used to ensure that training is effective for all individuals. The literature suggests that the greater the scope of pretraining activities (e.g., assessment of individuals' attitudes, knowledge, skills; organizational needs assessment), the more effective the training will be.

HYPOTHESIS 1: *The more extensive the pretraining needs assessment, the more positive the training outcomes (more positive perceptions of training success and lower perceived frequency of sexual harassment complaints).*

Training Design and Delivery Factors. Instructional strategies and methods have important implications for training effectiveness (Salas et al., 1999). The effectiveness of different methods (e.g., lectures, role plays) may depend on what is being trained (Alvarez et al., 2004; Arthur, Bennett, Edens, & Bell, 2003). For example, role-play simulations may be particularly effective for training interpersonal skills (Salas et al., 1999). There is little research that indicates which methods are most effective in the context of sexual harassment training. The majority of studies assessing the impact of sexual harassment training has employed videos alone or in combination with other methods (e.g., discussion, case studies) (see Beauvais, 1986; Blakely, Blakely, & Moorman, 1998; Kearney, Rochlen, & King, 2004; Moyer & Nath, 1998; Perry, Kulik, & Schmidtke, 1998; Robb & Doverspike, 2001) and has not directly addressed the relative effectiveness of different training methods. Where the objective of sexual harassment training is the development of human relations skills (e.g., recognizing sexual harassment and responding to it), experiential methods (e.g., role play) may be particularly appropriate (Kleiman, 1997). However, where the objective of sexual harassment training is knowledge acquisition (e.g., understanding the legal definition of harassment), lectures or other passive learning methods may be effective. Therefore, the use of active as well as

passive training methods is likely to affect employees' knowledge of sexual harassment training and their sexual harassment training related skills simultaneously, which together can contribute to greater overall training effectiveness. Further, there is some agreement that more traditional, passive training methods (e.g., lectures, videos) are less able to change employee attitudes and behaviors (Sogunro, 2004). Therefore, the use of more active and experiential training methods should be relatively more effective than passive training methods in lowering the incidence of sexual harassment behavior and subsequently the number of complaints lodged.

HYPOTHESIS 2A: The greater the use of both active and passive training methods, the more positive perceptions of training success.

HYPOTHESIS 2B: The greater the use of active training methods, the lower the perceived frequency of sexual harassment complaints. The use of passive training methods also will be negatively related to the perceived frequency of sexual harassment complaints, but less strongly than the use of active training methods.

Posttraining Factors. Individual characteristics (abilities, attitudes such as organizational commitment, self-efficacy regarding the ability to use new skills), climate for transfer (Do supervisors reinforce appropriate behaviors?), motivation to transfer (Do trainees receive support to practice what they have learned?) and maintenance interventions (Is refresher training provided?) are likely to influence training effectiveness (Alvarez et al., 2004; Salas et al., 1999; Salas et al., 2006). For example, transfer climate and supervisor support have been found to affect motivation to transfer what is learned in training (Salas et al., 2006; Tannenbaum et al., 1993). Supervisory support includes reinforcement activities and modeling of trained behaviors (Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Salas et al., 2006). A lack of reinforcement (e.g., provision of rewards and consequences) may reduce trainees' motivation to apply what has been learned in training (e.g., Alvarez et al., 2003; Baldwin & Ford, 1988; Salas et al., 1999; Tannenbaum et al., 1993). There is also evidence that intervention strategies (e.g., maintenance interventions such as the provision of refresher training) can improve the probability of training transfer (Alvarez et al., 2004; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001; Tannenbaum et al., 1993). Training may be effective in the short run, but posttraining activities ensure that training is transferred back to the job.

HYPOTHESIS 3: The more posttraining activities in which the organization engages, the more positive the training outcomes (more positive perceptions of training success and lower perceived frequency of sexual harassment complaints).

Organizational Reasons for Sexual Harassment Training. Sexual harassment training occurs in a larger organizational context. We consider the role

that an organization's reason for implementing sexual harassment training plays in training effectiveness. Organizations do not always implement training to train their employees (Salas et al., 1999). Legal considerations are receiving more attention and emphasis in organizations (Roehling & Wright, 2006; Sitkin & Bies, 1993). Consistent with this, in the diversity domain, Thomas and Ely (1996) have suggested that a predominant approach to managing diversity in organizations is to focus on compliance with federal mandates. The authors refer to this approach as the discrimination and fairness paradigm. Judges have looked favorably on organizations that offer sexual harassment training in legal cases of sexual harassment (Bisom-Rapp, 2001) and federal guidelines encourage sexual harassment training (e.g., Martucci & Lu, 2005), but only a few states (California, Connecticut, and Maine) actually mandate training for supervisors (Kearns, 2005; Martucci & Lu, 2005). Consistent with Institutionalization and Legal Environment theories (e.g., Edelman, 1990), organizations may implement sexual harassment training to limit their legal liability. Training implemented for legal reasons may serve a symbolic purpose, be designed to secure the legitimacy of the organization, and may not necessarily be effective (Edelman, 1990, 1992; Sitkin & Bies, 1994). Organizations often have the ability to respond to law in ways that serve their own interests (Edelman, 1992). For example, Kelly (2003) found that in response to a change in tax law, employers adopted the least expensive child-care program that still signaled "family friendliness." Programs that serve management interests (e.g., those based on cost considerations) are not necessarily those that are most valued by employees or most effective.

Alternatively, organizations may implement human resource practices for strategic reasons to achieve performance goals (Konrad et al., 2006). For example, Konrad et al. (2006) noted that training can help organizations leverage the value of their human assets and positively impact the organization's capabilities, thereby creating competitive advantage. Thomas and Ely (1996) suggested that an alternative to the discrimination and fairness paradigm to managing diversity is the learning and effectiveness paradigm. Organizations taking the latter approach attempt to leverage diversity, resulting in improved organizational performance. Organizations adopting the learning and effectiveness paradigm do not measure diversity progress against quantitative demographic goals. Instead, they assess whether employees are able to use their personal assets and draw on their diverse perspectives to do their work more effectively. Consequently, organizations implementing training for strategic reasons will develop and provide training that is believed to make real and positive changes.

We suggest that the impact of best training practices on training effectiveness may differ as a function of the organization's reason for training. The use of best training practices is most likely to have a positive impact on perceived training success when the organization implements training for strategic reasons to effect positive change. If, on the other hand, the reason for sexual

harassment training is legal, the use of best practices may be less important; the mere existence of the training (i.e., compliance) may be sufficient for the training to be perceived as successful. Therefore, we hypothesize the following.

HYPOTHESIS 4A: When the primary reason for organizational training is strategic, the effect of best practices (number of pretraining activities, number of active and passive training methods used, and number of posttraining activities) on training success will be significant and positive.

HYPOTHESIS 4B: When the primary reason for training is legal, there will be no significant relationship between these best practices and training success.

If training effectiveness is assessed by the perceived frequency of sexual harassment complaints, the use of best practices is likely to effect positive change in the form of reduced harassment and consequently less frequent sexual harassment complaints. In this case, reason for training should not operate as a moderator. Consequently, we do not predict an interaction between reason for training and best practices on perceived frequency of sexual harassment complaints.

Methods

Sample and Data Collection. We obtained the names and mailing addresses of 5,000 human resource and personnel directors from Dun and Bradstreet, a provider of business information and mailing lists. The mailing list included individuals who were employed in U.S. company headquarters with 100 or more employees. Surveys were mailed in the summer of 2004 and accompanied by a personalized cover letter. The initial survey was followed 2–3 weeks later by a reminder letter. Both letters indicated that respondents could complete and return the hard copy of the survey or participate in the same survey on-line.

Completed surveys were obtained for 321 respondents. The majority of respondents worked directly in the HR function (90%) and were managers or directors (68%). Respondents were employed on average 7.15 ($SD = 6.80$) years in their current position and 9.38 ($SD = 7.73$) years in their organizations. Respondents were employed across a range of industries (e.g., manufacturing, health care, finance). Analyses focused on the 288 respondents who reported that their company had sexual harassment training. The survey items used to create four of the predictor variables (number of pretraining activities, number of active training methods, number of passive training methods, and number of posttraining activities) can be found in the Appendix.

Outcome Measures. The focus of this study was on the effect of best training practices on sexual harassment training effectiveness.

Training Effectiveness. Two single-item questions were used to assess training outcomes. Training success was assessed by an item that asked respondents “All things considered, how would you evaluate the success of your organization’s sexual harassment training efforts?” (1 = *extremely unsuccessful*; 5 = *extremely successful*). Frequency of complaints was assessed by an item that asked respondents the extent to which they agreed that “The number of sexual harassment complaints in my organization is unacceptably high” (1 = *strongly disagree*; 5 = *strongly agree*).

Predictor Variables. Predictor variables were developed based on a thorough review of the factors identified in training research and theory as impacting training effectiveness (e.g., Alvarez et al., 2004; Salas et al., 2006).

Number of Pretraining Activities. Respondents were asked to indicate (yes or no) whether the organization engaged in each of seven needs-assessment activities prior to sexual harassment training (e.g., assess employees’ knowledge about sexual harassment issues; assess the need for training by analyzing organizational-level outcomes). We summed “yes” responses across activities so that higher scores indicate that the organization engaged in more pretraining needs-assessment activities.

Number of Active Training Methods. Respondents were asked to indicate (yes or no) whether they used each of four active training methods (interactive discussions, small-group exercises, role-plays, opportunities to practice skills covered in the training). We summed “yes” responses across these methods so that higher scores indicate that more active training methods were included in the organization’s sexual harassment training.

Number of Passive Training Methods. Respondents were asked to indicate (yes or no) whether they used each of six passive training methods (videos, computer-based instruction, reading material, lectures, specific examples, illustrative legal decisions). We summed “yes” responses across these methods so that higher scores indicate that more passive training methods were included in the organization’s sexual harassment training.

Number of Posttraining Activities. Respondents were asked to indicate (yes or no) whether they engaged in each of four posttraining activities (e.g., Does your organization provide performance aids and/or reference materials to assist in knowledge retention?). We summed “yes” responses across activities so that higher scores indicate that the organization engaged in more posttraining activities.

Reason for Training. Respondents were asked “What would top management in your organization say is the primary reason to offer sexual harassment training?” The work of Konrad et al. (2006) suggests that HR activities may be undertaken for legitimacy/legal reasons or strategic reasons. Respondents were asked to select only one of five reasons provided. Respondents who selected “to meet legal requirements” received a value of 1 (legal compliance). Respondents who selected “to improve the quality of work life in your organization”, “to reduce employee complaints”, or “to be an employer of choice” received a value of 0 (strategic motivation). A focus on improving quality of work life and

reducing complaints is consistent with a strategic orientation of effecting positive change and facilitating employee participation so that the organization can leverage all of its employee assets. Further, to be an employer of choice reflects a concern with gaining competitive advantage consistent with a strategic orientation. The fifth reason, "to do what competitors do," was not selected by any of our respondents.

Control Variables. We included three control variables (size, manufacturing, and source) that we thought might influence training effectiveness. One item asked respondents to indicate the size of their organization (1 = *less than 100 employees*; 8 = *more than 20,000 employees*). Larger organizations are likely to have more formalized training and HR staff dedicated to planning and directing training (Rynes & Rosen, 1995; Saari, Johnson, McLaughlin, & Zimmerle, 1988). This may have implications for training effectiveness. A second question asked respondents to indicate the industry in which their organization operated, as industry is likely to influence human resource practices (Bennett, Ketchen, & Schultz, 1998). Manufacturing was the most frequently indicated industry in our sample, and similar to Bennett et al. (1998), we converted responses into a dummy variable indicating whether the organization operated in the manufacturing industry (1) or other industry (0). Finally, we included a dummy variable indicating whether the respondent had completed a hard copy of the survey (0) or the on-line version (1). Although research suggests that responses should be consistent across the two data-collection formats (Cole, Bedeian, & Feild, 2006; Lonsdale, Hodge, & Rose, 2006), we thought it was important to control for potential differences.

Results

We report the correlations and descriptive statistics for all study variables in Table 1. Hierarchical multiple regression was used to test the hypotheses. Hypotheses 1–3 were tested by examining the main effect of number of pretraining activities, number of active and passive training methods, and number of posttraining activities on training success and frequency of complaints. Hypothesis 4 was tested by examining the interaction of these variables with reason for training. Following the advice of Aiken and West (1991), we centered the values for our continuous predictors and created interaction terms by multiplying the centered variables by reason for training. Results for training success are reported in Table 2, and results for frequency of complaints are reported in Table 3.

Training Success. Results from Model 1 (control variables) reveal that none of the control variables had a significant effect on training success. Results from Model 2 (predictor variables) revealed no significant main effects of number of pretraining activities (Hypothesis 1), number of active or passive training methods (Hypothesis 2a), or number of posttraining activities (Hypothesis 3) on training success. However, results from Model 3 (interactions) indicated that

Table 1. Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations^a

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
1. Training success	3.97	0.99									
2. Frequency of complaints	1.56	0.75	-0.20**								
3. Size	3.69	1.15	-0.05	0.23**							
4. Manufacturing	0.24	0.43	0.07	-0.07	-0.24**						
5. Source	0.27	0.45	0.09	-0.04	0.10	0.01					
6. Number pretraining activities	1.73	1.92	0.02	0.08	0.06	0.07	-0.06				
7. Number of active training methods	1.70	1.28	-0.05	0.02	0.09	-0.02	-0.06	0.30**			
8. Number of passive training methods	3.96	1.31	-0.01	0.03	0.13*	-0.08	-0.04	0.20**	0.36**		
9. Number of posttraining activities	1.93	1.09	0.05	-0.11	0.09	0.06	-0.10	0.24**	0.29**	0.29**	
10. Reason for training	0.47	0.50	-0.06	0.10	-0.09	-0.01	0.01	-0.05	-0.08	-0.03	-0.09

^aN = 271–288, depending on missing data.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

Table 2. Regression Analyses on Sexual Harassment Training Success^a

Variables	Model 1b ^b	Model 2b	Model 3b
Control variables			
Size	-0.04	-0.05	-0.06
Manufacturing	0.16	0.13	0.10
Source	0.20	0.21	0.14
Predictor variables			
No. of pretraining activities		0.02	0.10*
No. of active training methods		-0.06	-0.12
No. of passive training methods		0.00	-0.10
No. of posttraining activities		0.05	0.16
Reason for training		-0.10	-0.10
Interactions			
Reason × No. of Pretraining Activities			-0.20**
Reason × No. of Active Methods			0.22
Reason × No. of Passive Methods			0.21
Reason × No. of Posttraining Activities			-0.29
Total R ²	0.02	0.02	0.08*
R ² change		0.00	0.06**
Overall model F	1.30	0.78	1.95

^aN = 258.

^bTable entries are unstandardized regression coefficients.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

the interactions between these four training factors and reason for training accounted for an additional 6% of the variance in training success. Two interaction terms were significant: Reason × Number of Pretraining Activities ($b = -0.20$, $p < 0.01$) and Reason × Number of Posttraining Activities ($b = -0.29$, $p < 0.05$).

To understand the significant interactions better, we plotted the overall regression equations with procedures recommended by Aiken and West (1991). The plots are shown in Figures 1 and 2. We plotted separate regression lines for each reason (legal vs. strategic). For pretraining activities, the number of activities had a significant and positive effect when the reason was strategic ($b = 0.10$, $p < 0.05$), and no significant effect when the reason was legal ($b = -0.10$, $p = ns$). For posttraining activities, the number of activities had a significant and positive effect when the reason was strategic ($b = 0.16$, $p < 0.05$) but no significant effect when the reason was legal ($b = -0.12$, $p = ns$). The positive effects of pre- and posttraining activities when the reason for training was strategic are consistent with Hypothesis 4. However, contrary to prediction, the interactions between number of active training methods

Table 3. Regression Analyses on Frequency of Complaints^a

Variables	Model 1b ^b	Model 2b	Model 3b
Control variables			
Size	0.16**	0.17**	0.18**
Manufacturing	-0.03	-0.02	-0.01
Source	-0.11	-0.13	-0.12
Predictor variables			
No. of pretraining activities		0.05	0.02
No. of active training methods		0.00	-0.05
No. of passive training methods		0.00	0.02
No. of posttraining activities		-0.11*	-0.15*
Reason for training		0.16	0.16
Interactions			
Reason × No. of Pretraining Activities			0.06
Reason × No. of Active Methods			0.08
Reason × No. of Passive Methods			-0.03
Reason × No. of Posttraining Activities			0.06
Total R ²	-0.06**	0.10**	0.12**
R ² change		0.04*	0.02
Overall model F	5.58	3.66	2.81

^aN = 264.

^bTable entries are unstandardized regression coefficients.

* $p < 0.05$.

** $p < 0.01$.

and reason for training ($b = 0.22$, $p = ns$) and number of passive training methods and reason for training ($b = 0.21$, $p = ns$) were not significant.

Frequency of Complaints. The regression analyses exploring the effects of best training practices on frequency of complaints are reported in Table 3. Results from Model 1 (control variables) reveal that only one control variable, size ($b = 0.16$, $p < 0.01$), had a significant effect on frequency of complaints, indicating that larger organizations reported more sexual harassment complaints. The inclusion of the predictor variables in Model 2 accounted for an additional 4% of the variance in frequency of complaints. Contrary to Hypotheses 1 and 2, there were no significant effects of number of pretraining activities, number of active training methods, and number of passive training methods on frequency of complaints. In addition, there was no support for Hypothesis 2b, that the use of passive training methods was less strongly related to the perceived frequency of sexual harassment complaints than the use of active training methods. However, consistent with Hypothesis 3, Model 2 revealed a significant and negative effect of number of posttraining activities ($b = -0.11$, $p < 0.05$) on frequency of complaints. The more posttraining activities the organization engaged

Figure 1. Interaction Between Reason for Training and Number of Pretraining Activities

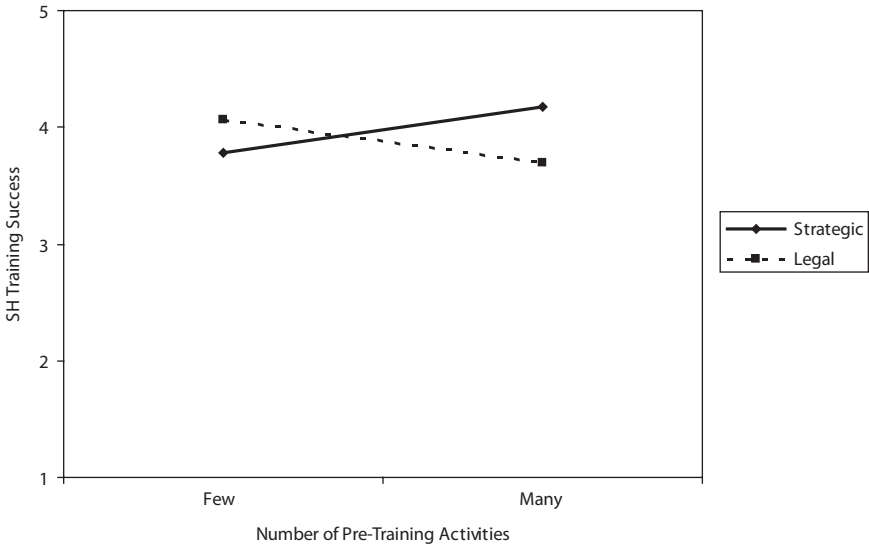
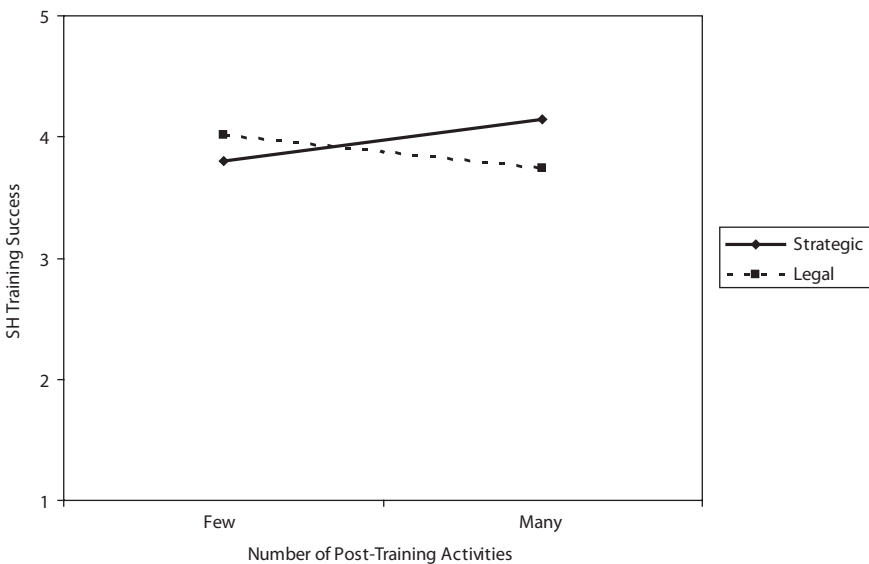


Figure 2. Interaction Between Reason for Training and Number of Posttraining Activities



in, the lower the perceived frequency of sexual harassment complaints. Finally, as expected, the addition of the interaction effects between reason for training and the four training factors did not account for a significant amount of additional variance in the perceived frequency of sexual harassment complaints (Model 3).

Discussion

The current study found little evidence that best training practices had positive implications for training effectiveness across situations. Contrary to hypotheses, there was no evidence that more pretraining activities, active and passive training methods, and posttraining activities employed resulted in greater perceived sexual harassment training success. In addition, the number of pretraining activities, and active and passive training methods had no significant effect on perceived frequency of complaints contrary to expectations. However, there was some evidence that the use of more posttraining activities resulted in lower perceived frequency of sexual harassment complaints. This latter pattern of results is somewhat consistent with research finding that pre- and posttraining activities are more strongly related to training transfer than activities during training (Saks & Belcourt, 2006).

Although there was minimal support for main effects of best practices on training success, study results indicated that effects of best practices on perceived training success varied as a function of the organizational context (the organization's reason for implementing training) in which the training occurred. Our findings are consistent with the research finding that training outcomes vary across organizations as a function of the organizational context (Saks & Belcourt, 2006). We hypothesized that the use of best practices would have no effect on training success when training was implemented for legal compliance purposes. Our results were consistent with this expectation. In organizations that implement sexual harassment training for legal reasons, the existence of the training may be more important to its perceived success than the nature of the training provided. To the extent that reducing legal liability is the objective of sexual harassment training, the use of best training practices may be of secondary importance or perhaps even irrelevant.

However, when the reason for sexual harassment training is strategic, training success is significantly greater when organizations engage in more pretraining and posttraining activities, consistent with general training theory. When organizations engage in a wide range of needs-assessment activities, they can accurately identify training needs. This may allow organizations to choose appropriate training content and methods to address the identified needs. Additionally, the implementation of a wide range of posttraining activities can ensure that what is learned in training will be transferred back to the job. Contrary to prediction, the use of neither more active nor more passive training methods contributed to the perceived success of the training or reduced the

perceived frequency of complaints. This finding is consistent with the Saks and Belcourt (2006) research finding that pre- and posttraining activities are more predictive of training transfer than activities that occur during training. It is also quite possible that it is the appropriateness and quality of training methods implemented, rather than the number of methods employed, that has the greatest bearing on training effectiveness. In other words, the use of a smaller but more appropriate set of methods may be more important to training success than the use of a large number of training methods.

Implications for Practice. Organizations that engage in more posttraining activities that ensure the transfer of sexual harassment training may be more successful and experience less frequent sexual harassment complaints following training. An implication of this finding is that organizations that only focus on activities prior to and during training may not experience the full benefits that sexual harassment training can provide. It is therefore important to engage in a wide variety of posttraining activities (e.g., maintenance interventions) in order to ensure training effectiveness. If what individuals learn in training is to be of any value, it must be generalized to the job and maintained over time. As a result, organizations may want to conduct a “transfer of training audit” (Saks & Belcourt, 2006) to determine which training activities are in place before, during, and after the training. This will allow organizations to determine accurately where their training efforts are concentrated and to reallocate their resources where necessary.

Study results also suggest that training success is defined differently in organizations with different training motivations. When the objective is to effect positive change, the use of some best practices (pre- and posttraining activities) is important. It is noteworthy that posttraining activities were found both to reduce the frequency of sexual harassment complaints and to increase perceptions of the success of sexual harassment training (when the reason for the training was strategic). As noted earlier, study results suggest that greater attention should be focused on posttraining activities, including the provision of refresher training and rewards for applying what is learned in training to the job. However, when the objective of training is legal compliance, the *existence* of the training rather than the *nature* of the training or how it is implemented may be most relevant for influencing perceived training success. Sitkin and Bies (1993, 1994) noted that organizations’ increasing concerns with legalistic issues can have negative implications for the people the legalistic procedures and structures are designed to protect. When decisions are dominated by liability concerns, they may not make sense organizationally or interpersonally. As a result, when organizations implement sexual harassment training for legal reasons, there may be more attention paid to complying with the letter of the law rather than its spirit, and consequently less concern that training actually effects positive change. Ironically, these legalistic concerns could result in sexual harassment training that undermines social goals of justice and fairness (Sitkin & Bies, 1993). Organizations that take a legalistic approach to training

may devalue research-recommended pre- and posttraining activities. These choices may unintentionally minimize the effectiveness of the training, undermine employee trust in the training, and increase the possibility that employees will take a more legalistic stance toward workplace grievances (Roehling & Wright, 2006). As more states mandate sexual harassment training and offer training guidelines, there may be greater scrutiny of the training that is provided. Employers may increasingly be compelled to evaluate their training and provide training that is demonstrated to be effective (i.e., to effect positive change). This suggests that organizations should proactively diagnose the training transfer system (including organizational-level factors such as reason for training) to identify barriers to training transfer that exist so that these barriers can be removed or their negative effects mitigated (Saks & Belcourt, 2006).

Implications for Research. The current study extends previous research on sexual harassment training by applying training theory to understand the factors that contribute to effective sexual harassment training. Relatively little research has assessed sexual harassment training to date (Bingham & Scherer, 2001). This study also contributes to general training theory by suggesting that best training practices may have different implications for training effectiveness depending on the organizational context (e.g., the organization's reason for training) in which the training is implemented. Although the general training literature suggests that it is important to explore the larger organizational context in which training occurs, relatively little research has done so (Alvarez et al., 2004). More specifically, we are not aware of training research or theory that has considered the organization's reason for training as a potential moderator of the impact of best training practices on training effectiveness. Future research should continue to explore the role of organizational context (e.g., climate, culture) on sexual harassment training effectiveness at both the individual trainee and organizational levels.

Study results suggest that pre- and posttraining activities may be particularly important for training effectiveness. The current study focused on the scope of pre- and posttraining activities. Future research is necessary to determine the relative impact of the specific activities on training effectiveness. Additionally, the current study found a different pattern of results for training effectiveness and perceived number of complaints. Future research should explore the impact of training activities on a broader and alternative set of outcome variables (e.g., training transfer).

The current study used a different research paradigm to examine sexual harassment training effectiveness. Previous research has primarily focused on trainees' (most typically undergraduate students') attitudes about and perceptions of sexual harassment (e.g., Beauvais, 1986; Kearney et al., 2004; Moyer & Nath, 1998) following an experimental training intervention (e.g., Bingham & Scherer, 2001; Blakely et al., 1998; Moyer & Nath, 1998; Perry et al., 1998), using relatively small samples (e.g., Beauvais, 1986; Perry et al., 1998; Robb & Doverspike, 2001) in a single setting, usually an educational institution

(e.g., Bonate & Jessell, 1996; Kearney et al., 2004; Moyer & Nath, 1998). In contrast, we examined naturally occurring variations in sexual harassment training programs operating across a wide variety of organizations in a broad range of industries. We focused on perceptions of sexual harassment training effectiveness from the perspective of HR managers who are most often responsible for managing these training programs. Unlike previous approaches, our research methodology permitted us to explore how best training practices impact training effectiveness, taking into consideration the organizational context (the organization's reason for sexual harassment training) in which they are implemented. Despite the contributions that the current study provides, there are also some important limitations to consider.

Limitations. Our response rate was quite low despite our use of techniques recommended in the literature to maximize response rates (Dillman, 2000; Rogelberg & Stanton, 2007; Roth & BeVier, 1998). Based on best practices, we attempted to increase response rates through the use of several means. First, we provided a personalized cover letter explaining who the researchers were and why respondents' participation was important. Second, we provided an incentive to participate in the form of offering respondents a research report that they could use to benchmark their own training practices; the report was available to all respondents upon completion of the research. Third, we used reminders to encourage participation. Finally, we gave participants the option of completing a hard copy or on-line version of the questionnaire, therefore allowing participants to use the data-collection method most convenient for them.

Our sample was larger than many samples employed in empirical studies of sexual harassment training (e.g., Beauvais, 1986; Kearney et al., 2004; Perry et al., 1998; Robb & Doverspike, 2001) and provided sufficient power for the analyses based on recommendations that there be at least 15 subjects per predictor (Stevens, 1996). Mail surveys are increasingly associated with low response rates (Becker & Huselid, 1998) and this is particularly true for surveys targeting respondents across organizations (Roth & BeVier, 1998) and organizational representatives (Baruch, 1999). These challenges converged in the present study, where we invited HR directors from 5,000 organizations to participate in a mail survey. Many survey design "good practices" are less effective with samples of highly placed organizational decision makers (Baruch, 1999; Cycyota & Harrison, 2006) and recent publications focusing on HR managers regularly report response rates in the teens and single digits (e.g., Lawler & Mohrman, 2003; Ordiz-Fuertes & Fernandez-Sanchez, 2003; Rynes, Colbert, & Brown, 2002). Our response rate, although a challenge to generalizability, is within the range (4–84%) of response rates reported in published research examining the implications of HRM practices for organizational outcomes more generally (Wall & Wood, 2005). Low response rates can raise questions about sample bias, but research has found that the relationship between predictor and outcome variables is similar for respondents compared with the original sample (Goldberg, 2003). Further, sample bias is less likely to

be a problem when the responding sample is diverse (Blair & Zinkhan, 2006). Future research should investigate the kinds of incentives that might be able to attract large and diverse samples of HR managers to participate in HR research. In addition, greater attention should be given to assessing the extent to which nonresponse bias may operate. In light of the fact that we are unable to provide evidence regarding the extent of nonresponse bias in the current study, it may be best to consider our research exploratory in nature and to interpret our results with caution.

The current study used a cross-sectional design. As a result, we cannot state conclusively that the organization's reason for training interacted with best training practices to cause the current level of training effectiveness. However, there is support in training research and theory (e.g., Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001) that training practices influence training success, and we are aware of no evidence suggesting reverse causality—that successful training results in the implementation of best training practices. Moreover, if one assumes that an organization's reason for providing training is relatively stable, it seems more likely that reason for training will influence training success than the reverse. Future research should use study designs that are better able to demonstrate the causal relationships suggested here (Wright, Gardner, Moynihan, & Allen, 2005).

The current study employed two single-item outcome measures. As a result, we cannot assess the reliability of either measure. However, single-item measures are not inherently less desirable than scale measures, particularly when they capture simple homogeneous constructs (Loo, 2002), and they may in fact be preferable in certain situations (e.g., where there are practical limitations to including multiple items; when respondents may resent being asked questions that appear repetitious) (Wanous, Reichers, & Hudy, 1997). Further, the reliability of a conceptually similar effectiveness measure has been established (Wanous & Hudy, 2001) and a single-item measure similar to our training effectiveness outcome measure has been used in related research exploring the impact of training activities on training transfer (Saks & Belcourt, 2006).

Another potential limitation in this study is common method variance (Lindell & Whitney, 2001). Common method variance can inflate correlations among variables when the same respondents complete predictor and outcome measures at the same time. In our research, HR managers may have been motivated by a need for consistency or social desirability, contributing to a common source bias in survey results (Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee, & Podsakoff, 2003). Several factors mitigate concerns about common method bias in our research. First, as recommended by Podsakoff et al. (2003), we used different response formats for our predictor and outcome variables. Second, although some of our variables were perceptual or attitudinal, others were very objective, asking HR managers whether a particular practice was or was not used. Relationships involving objective measures are less likely to be influenced by common method variance than those involving measures that are perceptual or attitudinal in nature (Crampton & Wagner, 1994). Third, and finally,

although common method variance may influence main effect results, it is unlikely to affect interaction terms (Evans, 1985). Therefore, the key results of this study are unlikely to be attributable to common method variance.

Conclusions

Although our conclusions should be tempered by our relatively low response rate, the current research suggests that there is merit in exploring the role of organizational context in sexual harassment training effectiveness. Training activities occurring before and after training may have differential effects in different organizational contexts. Thus the context in which training occurs may have more important implications for training effectiveness than what occurs during the training. Specifically, in the current research, we found that pre- and posttraining activities may have a greater positive impact in organizations that implement sexual harassment training for strategic reasons compared to legal reasons. Moreover, posttraining activities may play an important role in the frequency of sexually harassing behaviors.

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Elissa L. Perry is with Teachers College, Columbia University.

Carol T. Kulik is with the School of Management, City West Campus, University of South Australia.

Jennifer Bustamante and Frank D. Golom are with Teachers College, Columbia University.



Appendix: Sexual Harassment Training Survey Questions

Pretraining activities

Before conducting sexual harassment training, does your organization:

1. Assess employees' attitudes toward sexual harassment training?
2. Assess employees' knowledge about sexual harassment issues?
3. Assess employees' skills in managing sexual harassment?
4. Assess employees' behaviors (e.g., reporting, sexually harassing)?
5. Assess employees' reactions to previous sexual harassment training experiences?
6. Assess employees' motivation to participate and learn in the training?
7. Assess the need for training by analyzing organizational-level outcomes (e.g., number of complaints, employee turnover)?

Training methods

What methods are used in your sexual harassment training?

Active training methods

1. Interactive discussions
2. Small-group exercises
3. Role plays
4. Opportunities to practice skills covered in the training

Passive training methods

5. Videos on sexual harassment
6. Computer-based on-line instruction
7. Reading material (that can be taken home)
8. Lectures
9. Specific examples of sexual harassment
10. Illustrative legal decisions in sexual harassment cases

Posttraining activities

Following the completion of sexual harassment training:

1. Are trainees explicitly rewarded (e.g., on performance appraisals) for applying their training to the job?
 2. Do trainees experience negative outcomes (e.g., lower performance ratings, disciplinary action) when they do not apply their training to the job?
 3. Does your organization provide performance aids and/or reference materials to assist in knowledge retention?
 4. Does your organization follow up the training with refresher courses?
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