Independent Review into Commonwealth Parliamentary Workplaces

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Bullying and harassment has significant consequences for victims, organisations and the broader society. Bullying and harassing behaviours manifest in a variety of ways and despite benefiting very few, has become a rampant phenomenon in Australian workplaces. A review of the academic literature demonstrates that the Australian Parliament has the classic characteristics of a workplace where sexual harassment and bullying is normalised. Particular factors that increase the risk of conflict and misconduct include hierarchical workplaces characterised by stress, long hours and interpersonal competition. Within these workplaces, people are more likely to engage in boundary testing and crossing when employees perceive there are few policies and practices in place, there is no punishment for misconduct and leadership has limited commitment to establishing safe and respectful work environments. Based on the literature, a series of recommendations are offered concerning common interventions for bullying and harassment. Additional recommendations have been tailored to address specific risk factors in Australian Parliament and to improve the professionalism of parliamentarians and their staff. A case study is also presented to demonstrate how a public sector organisation addressed previous concerns relating to diversity as well as the bullying and harassment of employees. The organisation employed top-down and bottom-up approaches and invited the public to keep them accountable for their Corporate Plan for Change. This case study provides encouragement that substantial change can be achieved in a relatively short period of time.

A REVIEW OF THE ACADEMIC LITERATURE ON WORKPLACE BULLYING AND HARASSMENT.

Throughout this submission, workplace bullying and harassment will be used as a broad term to encompass all manifestations of bullying and harassing behaviours. In the academic literature, bullying is understood as the "process of harassing, offending, socially excluding or negatively affecting someone's work tasks."[i] It occurs regularly over an extended period of time. Workplace harassment is the interpersonal aspect of bullying. It is the interpersonal behaviour aimed at intentionally harming another employee in the workplace.[ii] Sexual harassment is a subset of workplace bullying and harassment that has previously been seen as primarily a sexual problem – the idea that sexual harassment consists of unwanted advancements that are stemmed from unrequited sexual desire and romance.[iii] Research has since demonstrated that the most common manifestation of sexual harassment is in fact gendered harassment which has deeply held (sometimes unconscious) contempt at its core.[iv] Central to this contempt is the desire to preserve traditional roles and privilege in male dominated and hierarchical workplaces. As such workplace

aggressions become targeted towards a person's sex (female) or sexuality (LGBTI) because these groups of people are seen as outsiders who deviate from the prevailing workplace culture.[v]

In a snapshot the literature and statistics tell us the following about workplace bullying and harassment:

- Bullying thrives in stressful work environments[vi] and in work environments that have authoritative, hierarchical leadership structures;[vii]
- Poor workplace performance and lack of role clarity are predictors of workplace bullying cultures;[viii]
- Males in senior or management positions are more likely to become perpetrators of bullying,[ix] and,
- In Australia, 1 in 10 workers are exposed to bullying at any one time.[x]

BULLYING AND HARASSMENT IN AUSTRALIAN WORKPLACES

Workplace bullying and harassment has a snowballing effect and without any interventions will continue to escalate. Australia's culture for humour and aversion to questioning workplace norms are possible factors that have led Australian workers to experiencing higher rates of bullying compared to workplaces overseas.[xi] For example, at any one time up to twice as many Australian workers experience bullying compared to employees across Europe.[xii] This suggests that there is a greater tolerance towards poor workplace behaviour in Australian workplaces that is worth examining in closer detail. Bullying and harassment starts through the shifting or blurring of workplace boundaries for acceptable workplace behaviour. A culture of tolerance to harassment builds through small playful behaviours – situations which are cloaked in humour signals, "I was only joking", "don't be so sensitive", "I thought we were both having a bit of fun".[xiii] These behaviours most often occur in work cultures perceived as "dog-eat-dog" and "winner takes all group dynamics".[xiv] In these dynamics risk taking behaviour is often glorified and encouraged in the pursuit of individual success at the cost of group collaboration and team level goals. It occurs in these cultures because more often than not the workplace in question has been designed by men or for certain groups of males to thrive in.[xv] Workplace aggressions go unchecked when employees feel like they need to play along with the behaviour by either ignoring (bystander), participating (becoming a perpetrator), or remaining silent (victim) in order to personally get ahead or for the team to succeed. As this goes on, the behaviour escalates and leads to *cultural entrapment* where the organisation's shared values, norms and assumptions lock in the behaviour and confirm its acceptability.[xvi] The

workplace aggressions can become more frequent, more personal and evolve from inappropriate remarks to more overt and destructive behaviours. Destructive behaviours include (but are not limited to) verbal abuse, workplace exclusion, task sabotage and assault.

SYSTEMIC BULLYING AND HARASSMENT IN AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENT

The work environment in Parliament House conforms to the phenomenon of cultural entrapment. It is a competitive environment for members and senators to be preselected, remain elected and to compete for, or retain a ministry portfolio. Salient examples of a "dog-eat-dog" culture at the top include leadership spills and disclosing unfavourable information (backgrounding) against colleagues to the media with the sole intention of undermining and humiliating competition within their own party.[xvii] [1]At a lower level, there are equally competitive and aggressive power dynamics that are played out amongst staff in electorate and ministerial offices – as they compete for party positions, promotions, and more favourable work tasks. In one media account a female employee was repeatedly undermined by a junior staff member who started adopting the females more senior job title and printing corresponding business cards. [xviii] Other media exposés of male politicians referring to themselves as the "swinging dicks[xix]", videos and images of staff documenting lewd sexual acts[xx] and commentaries such as "I would kill to be sexually harassed"[xxi] point to a systemic culture where inappropriate workplace behaviours have moved from being blurred boundaries to accepted and unchecked workplace behaviours. These behaviours are seemingly allowed to flourish and become intertwined into job expectations. There is a sense of peer pressure to conform to the behaviour modelled and to "lean in" to a work environment that rewards people in a survival of the fittest contest. When boundaries are crossed and lead to injury (mental, physical, or both) whistleblowers and victims are confronted with backlash, denial and/or gaslighting, all of which are bullying behaviours in and of themselves. Examples include victims being told "you're too sensitive", [xxii] "suck it up"[xxiii] or "lying cow".[xxiv] Persistent and confronting media coverage of this phenomenon points to a culture of tolerated workplace aggressions and abuse.[xxv]

PREDICTORS OF WORKPLACE BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

From decades of research on workplace bullying and harassment, researchers have identified a number of risk factors that make incidents of bullying and harassment more likely.[xxvi] The single most

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[1] Note: The media have a strong role to play in setting standards for how journalists respond to backgrounding and keeping Parliament accountable for its behavioural standards.

important predictor (the likelihood it will occur) for bullying and harassment is the *organisational climate*. All other risk factors fall under this umbrella. Organisational climate is a similar (although not the same) concept as culture and is concerned with the organisation as a whole entity. Within the organisation, employees experience a number of institutional pressures and strategic objectives to respond to. Climates describe the shared perceptions of, and the meaning attached to, the workplace policies, practices and procedures that employees experience and the behaviours that they observe being rewarded.[xxvii] It is essentially how employees interpret the organisational values as well as what is accepted or valued by the leadership. Furthermore, organisational climate covers many social aspects (or dimensions) of an organisation. Dimensions relevant to bullying and harassment include *climates for safety* and *climates for tolerance*. These climates can be strong, and they can be weak. A *strong climate for safety* indicates that an employee perceives practices for work, health and safety as important and take steps to ensure compliance with organisational standards and policies. Conversely, when an organisational structure has policies (e.g., anti-harassment policy) in place but are poorly enacted, it can lead to means-end decoupling and a *weak organisational climate for safety*. In this situation a *climate for tolerance* (permissiveness) emerges. Illustrating what happens in a climate for tolerance, a nationally representative study found that men admit to engaging in more overt sexually harassing behaviours when they perceived the organisation has few policies or practices in place to prevent or report harassment, there was no punishment for harassers and more broadly, leadership who demonstrate little interest in the issue.[xxviii] Addressing climates for tolerance requires proactive and reactive measures. Proactive measures involve explicitly identifying and reinforcing organisational values and workplace expectations. Reactive measures require identifying practices within the workplaces that increase the risk of bullying and harassment occurring. When these risk factors are identified, management should work to eliminate the risks posed by them, or at least put specific practices in place to monitor, mitigate or intervene.

SPECIFIC RISK FACTORS IN AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENT

Workplace practices that have a demonstrated link to workplace aggressions and conflict include the recruitment, selection and performance management of staff within offices. Situational factors observed by employees contribute to a climate for tolerance. Situational factors can include role modelling as well as the physicality of the workspace. This section explores known practices that create opportunities for conflict (that then escalates into bullying and harassment) that Parliament should be mindful of. It also discusses the specific policies and standards that are currently in place

for parliamentary staff as well as the factors that contribute to permissiveness within the physical work environment.

Recruitment and selection

Parliamentarians collectively employ over 2000 electorate officers and approximately 600 advisors who are spread across 227 work teams.[xxix] Members and senators hold the responsibility for the recruitment, selection and ongoing management of these staff while managing their own job demands in a dynamic and fast paced workplace. [xxx] Despite the size and demands of the workplace there is no centralised support or standardised approach for recruitment and selection. Vacant positions have been advertised on employment websites (e.g., Seek), social media (e.g., LinkedIn) or through internal channels (e.g., political party intranets or referrals). Different methods carry benefits and risks. Internet posts can cast the net too wide; the hiring speed is unpredictable and carries lower employer satisfaction rates.[xxxi] Internal recruitment can carry higher initial employer satisfaction with performance, however, carries risks for reinforcing a homogenous workforce. A homogenous workforce means missing out on a diversity of skill sets and experiences and reinforces the prevailing culture. Another risk includes perceptions of nepotism.

Nepotism reduces employee morale and productivity and can lead to workplace conflict.[xxxii] It does this because it creates a divide between employees who perceive themselves as merit hires and those who have been hired through connections. It extends to the perceived uneven distribution of office perks such as travel entitlements, travel opportunities and more desirable work tasks. There is a substantial risk that recruiting internally through political party networks can lead to perceptions of nepotism and the need to actively manage power dynamics. For example, when someone holds a senior position within a party but a more junior office position, it can lead to role conflict and manifest itself in previous example of developing their own business cards. Another example includes the publicised accusations of bullying within a minister's office. In 2019, reports surfaced that a minister had been subjected to an internal inquiry after staff complained of a toxic work environment characterised by bullying and intimidation. Central to these claims were allegations of an advisor exploiting a "special relationship" (perceived nepotism) with the minister and accumulating substantial travel expenditure and allowances. In addition to accusations of belittling behaviour, being the sole member of staff to travel with the minister was a significant point of contention.[xxxiii] To mitigate real and perceived occurrences of nepotism, standardised recruitment methods, such as structured interviews, remain the best way to ensure that candidates are seemingly hired on their merits or at least are given the same opportunity to demonstrate their credentials for the job.[xxxiv] By only meeting with internal hires or personal contacts for informal

chats, employing members and senators cannot adequately assess the character of employees, their approach to work, or how they will fit into a team.

Performance management

Work performance management includes clear role descriptions, fair allocation of tasks, workplace recognition and managing underperformance.[xxxv] Research tells us that clearly defined roles and responsibilities are crucial for workplace collaboration. In their absence, team members are more likely to waste time negotiating roles or protecting turf rather than working towards achieving team goals.[xxxvi] Clarity of roles includes expectations of working hours, travel and reporting lines. Constant change and ambiguity of roles is a strong predictor of team dysfunction and interpersonal conflict. To address this concern, parliamentary staff would benefit from standardised and detailed job descriptions as well as clear, regularly communicated work expectations. This reduces ambiguity for the individual staff members, their colleagues and in turn reduces boundary testing over the contest for more desirable work tasks and benefits.

In addition to role clarity, other considerations for Parliament include establishing a culture for training and development through training modules as well as regular opportunities for feedback and professional development conversations. Frequent travel, demanding deadlines and lack of physical presence in the office mean that the wellbeing and professional development of staff has long been overlooked. Parliament could benefit from a centralised HR system that could develop guidelines for performance management reviews, with the expectation that these reviews would be scheduled annually during extended sitting breaks in the Parliament's sitting calendar. While professional development meetings or performance appraisals can feel intimidating for both the supervisor and employee, they remain an important tool for many organisations. Professional development meetings have a demonstrated link to employee motivation, performance and longevity in the workplace. It is a dedicated time when employers can have face-to-face discussions to reinforce organisational values and work expectations. It also provides an opportunity for employees to discuss their experiences with their job tasks and provides an important opportunity to receive recognition and feedback for their performance.[xxxvii]

Adequacy of existing policies, practices and procedures for parliamentary staff

Members of parliament staff [MoPS] are currently employed by individual members and senators through the Department of Finance – however, policies and practices employed within the department are not extended to parliamentary staff. For ministers and ministerial advisors there is a Statement of Standards however, there is little accountability attached to these standards. In

previous parliaments, the Special Minister for State held portfolio responsibility for parliamentary standards and the MoPS Act staffing arrangements.[xxxviii] This role has not been extended under the current Government nor is there a clearly identifiable person responsible for the review and oversight of staffing standards and arrangements.[xxxix] Formalised roles reinforce the importance of standards and provide clarity for points of contact when issues emerge. Formal roles also have a dedicated and targeted focus which ensures they are not balancing conflicting priorities. Ministerial oversight, however, may not be the most suitable responsibility for parliamentary standards. Ministerial oversight creates a burden that the minister will act appropriately should a close colleague or staff member breach the standards, especially as there are no documented precedents or stated consequences for breaching the standards. Moreover, the stakes are high. In 2018, when a minister was investigated over allegations of bullying, the minister responded by allegedly threatening the then Prime Minister that they would quit the ministry, parliament, and trigger a byelection[xl] – putting the Prime Minister's office in a situation where they had to weigh up the cost of their own leadership and stability of the government by responding to staff allegations of misconduct. This example demonstrates the challenges under the current Statement of Standards approach and how means-end decoupling from the intended culture can quickly unfold. To address policy ambiguity and decoupling, the standards could be better reinforced and maintained by an independent HR reporting process that has the power to respond to allegations of misconduct. Responses could range from investigating allegations, mediating interpersonal conflicts, proposing changes to staffing arrangements or in the most extreme circumstances recommend termination of employment or a ministry position.

Recommendations

Changes to policies, practices and procedures

- Introduce greater professionalism to Parliament by formalising a dedicated HR function that would provide coordinated recruitment support, standard job descriptions and employee conditions. HR should be independent from political parties (including ministerial oversight), appropriately qualified and have the resources to receive and investigate complaints.
- Clarify and clearly communicate who is responsible for the oversight of standards.

Changes to employee structure

- Consider processes that would treat staff members as employees of Parliament rather than employees of individual members and senators. This would lead to greater accountability and requirement for professionalisation in parliamentary staffing.

Physical work environment

The physical work environment covers all aspects of the workplace that contribute to employee sensemaking over what is deemed permissible behaviour. These physical and social cues contribute to the organisational climate.[xli]

During sitting weeks parliamentarians and their staff work exceptionally long, arduous hours with demanding workloads. The average sitting day will adjourn late in the evening and senate estimate hearings can require working into the early hours of the morning, with staff reporting up to 19-hour workdays.[xlii] During these days there are minimal opportunities for breaks and employees work in relative isolation in electorate offices or the suites within Parliament House. Isolation, stress and lack of accountability creates risks where inappropriate behaviour can go unnoticed and fester.

Another situational factor is that parliamentary suites were designed (in the old and new Parliament House) so that parliamentarians do not need to leave. The lounges are large enough for sleeping and each office has an ensuite and wardrobe facilities. The physical space has been designed so that there is no separation between work and personal life in Canberra. When work blends into personal life the inverse can happen too. Relationships forming out of working in proximity and stressful environments have become common in practice and in parliamentary gossip.[xliii] Substantial cultural change in Parliament, should therefore also consider appropriate changes to the way Parliament operates and the expectation that parliamentarians spend extended periods away from their electorates, family and employees.

Recommendations

Changes to the work environment

- Consider changes to sitting weeks, including their frequency, the structure of essential and non-essential business (essential being the passage and debate of bills), and the working hours for sitting days and senate estimates.
- To reduce the unintended blurring of work boundaries, review employee conditions and entitlements, including unvetted security access to parliamentary suites in out-of-work hours.
- To reduce employee burnout and stress, consider revising the travel allowance scheme so that instead of receiving an allowance, accommodation is paid for on an office credit card and travelling employees receive time-off-in-lieu days for sitting weeks. A standard system for managing accommodation would reinforce the conduct expected of staff while travelling for work.
- Consider changes to the physical workspace by removing lounges from parliamentary offices and replacing them with chairs (e.g., tub chairs). Such changes would signal that parliament is a place for work and business hours.

INTERVENTIONS TO PREVENT WORKPLACE BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

Given the gravity of workplace bullying in society and organisations there is an alarming gap in empirical evidence on the effectiveness of practices to prevent or intervene in workplace aggressions.[xliv] Unfortunately, researchers know more about what does not work rather than having a ready-to-implement toolkit of best practices.

Historically, organisations and HR consultants have focussed on developing interventions at the interpersonal level – practices such as coaching, mediation and education. These practices focus on equipping victims to understand poor behaviour and then self-initiate a dispute resolution process by making a complaint. This is problematic as research has demonstrated that bullying arises from the workplace environment (climate). As such the most common approaches to managing workplace bullying fail to deliver meaningful change to either the tolerated behaviours in the organisation or the victim's ability to maintain well-being and productivity in the workplace.[xlv]

ESTABLISHING A ZERO-TOLERANCE CLIMATE

There is practitioner and academic consensus on the essential need for anti-bullying and harassment policies and organisational training however, the mere existence of these practices are not enough as standalone interventions.[xlvi] Standalone policies often lead to means-end decoupling which is where there is a formal policy, but it is poorly enacted across the organisation. This ultimately leads to employees mentally dismissing the importance of the policy in place (i.e., establishing a climate for tolerance).[xlvii] In addition to means-end decoupling, poorly delivered training has significant consequences. It can lead to increases in unresolved complaints and contribute to a false sense of security - that the organisation is already doing enough to protect its liability in bullying and harassment complaints.[xlviii]

To establish *good* anti-bullying and harassment policies that support organisational values they need to remove any ambiguity over what is tolerated and what is not. They do this by addressing the specific risk factors, defining, and giving specific examples of bullying, harassment and sexual harassment.[xlix] At a primary intervention level, organisations also need clearly developed and accessible workplace conflict management systems, a culture for training and development and a redesign of job environments to reduce significant risk factors.[l]

In terms of training, anti-harassment modules, specifically training on sexually harassing behaviour, are more effective at leading to attitude changes when they are delivered by appropriately skilled trainers and utilise interactive/experiential methods.[li] Training that contextualises, incorporates role

playing, and encourages participants to view behaviour from multiple perspectives has been proven to be more salient than training that merely delivers a verbal or written presentation. Supervisory support for training also enhances training effectiveness. One way to increase perceived supervisory support is to mandate (rather than recommend) training across all levels of the organisation and to incorporate the training into performance appraisals and organisational reporting.[lii]

CONSIDERATIONS FOR AUSTRALIAN PARLIAMENT

Employees look to the behaviour and expectations of their leaders. Parliamentarians are role models to employees not just within their office but across Parliament itself. Parliamentarians being required to attend training on a reoccurring basis (e.g., every session of parliament) would send a powerful signal concerning the behaviour expected of all staff and improve their capacity to identify and intervene in employee behavioural breaches. Parliamentarians are already familiar with reporting their compliance for travel allowance claims to the Independent Parliamentary Expenses Authority.[liii] A similar system could be put in place to monitor and evaluate training completion. Evaluating the effectiveness of training and its intended enhancing of employee trust and safety could be achieved through regular (e.g., annual) culture surveys. Carefully and well-designed culture surveys provide valuable snapshots of the attitudes and perceptions of staff members. They can be used for future planning, to address concerns and signal that the opinions of employees are valued.[liv]

A glaring gap in the ability for Parliament to implement these interventions is an independent and adequately resourced human resources function. HR plays an important role in "providing conducive work environments for the growth and development of employees".[lv] This role is fundamental because research shows that perceived organisational support and peer mentorship are instrumental in helping individuals cope with bullying and remain in the workplace.[lvi] It is ultimately a function that sees employees as a critical resource for workplace performance and maintains appropriate systems in place to ensure that appropriate personnel are selected for and supported in their jobs. Despite the importance and benefits of formalising HR systems, it is not a common feature of Parliaments across the globe. Australia can however benefit from the recent policies and procedures developed by their counterparts in Canada. The developments in Canada serve as an example of how a formalised role for HR can be embedded into the MoPS employment framework. Learning from Canada's experience presents an invaluable opportunity for Australia to adopt progressive procedures and to become a global frontrunner for employee safety and wellbeing.

Precedents for parliamentary HR functions in the Commonwealth

In the Canadian House of Commons, the Code of conduct and role of the Chief Human Resources Officer (CHRO) is established under the Standing Orders of the House. The Code covers all federally employed staff and sets out a number of requirements for the prevention of bullying and harassment.

The CHRO is responsible for the oversight and development of mandatory harassment and violence prevention training, the resourcing of external and independent investigators, as well as the provision of advisory services to members.

A Members of the House of Commons Workplace Harassment and Violence Prevention Policy outlines the process for investigating allegations of misconduct and the details concerning harassment and violence complaints to be published in annual reports to the Minister for Labour.

Further reading:

- *House of Commons Canada* (2021, January 28). Members of the House of Commons workplace harassment and violence prevention policy. https://www.ourcommons.ca/content/boie/pdf/policy_preventing_harassment-e.pdf
- House of Commons (2021, January 1). Standing Orders of the House of Commons. *Parliament of Canada*. https://www.ourcommons.ca/about/standingorders/Index-e.htm

Recommendations

Changes to policies, practices and procedures

- Introduce a zero-tolerance policy for bullying and harassment that clearly defines appropriate and inappropriate behaviour and stipulates there will be consequences for non-compliance. For this policy to cover all parliamentary employees.
- Expand, improve and mandate training for identifying and preventing workplace bullying and harassment.
- For training compliance to be reported annually.
- Introduce employee culture surveys as a mechanism for reviewing effectiveness of policies, practices and procedures and to determine if there is a decoupling of intended and actual behaviour.

The long run impact of diversity

The hierarchical and masculine culture within Parliament House creates a hotbed for gendered harassment. One way to transform this culture over time is to bring in greater diversity. Seeing more women in management and having women on boards is positively associated with reduced instances of risk-taking behaviour, malpractice and employee turnover in organisations.[lvii] By recruiting more women into senior positions the Australian Parliament can reap the rewards from these empirically proven benefits, including a greater commitment to social values and ethical compliance.[lviii] At a more basic level, greater visibility of women reduces perceptions of females as organisational outsiders and leads to reduced incidents of undermining and gendered harassment. Another diversity consideration is age. Some studies have found a link between age and bullying behaviour. [lix] This link suggests that workplace conflict will be more likely in offices with a higher ratio of young employees. The academic literature suggests older employees are likely to have a higher appreciation for and aversion to consequences.[lx] Within Parliament there are risks for young employees working in isolation, either alongside parliamentarians or in electorate offices during sitting weeks. Without strong boundaries and clearly communicated organisational values younger employees could be more likely to engage in the blurring of work boundaries, not fully comprehend respectful workplace behaviour, procedures for reporting, and are more likely to participate in the behaviour demonstrated by their peers – e.g., social expectations concerning alcohol and the use of Parliament House facilities outside of regular office hours. The link between age (or limited work experience) and bullying behaviour has implications for performance management, supervision and the communication of acceptable workplace behaviour.

CASE STUDY ON TRANSFORMING ORGANISATIONAL CLIMATE

A strong organisational climate for safety is linked to safety compliance and participation in safe practices.[lxi] A strong climate for safety is the perception that the organisation values and is strongly committed to ensuring employee safety. Frequent, regular communication about the importance of safety[lxii] as well as equipping employee resource groups[lxiii] are important considerations for driving change and maintaining momentum in organisational climates. The following case study demonstrates how an Australian public sector organisation understood the importance of involving employees in transforming organisational climate.

The Victorian Police Force (VPF) was previously characterised as a male dominated, authoritarian organisation that had struggled to attract and retain female staff members. Towards the end of the last century, the VPF started to attract negative media attention over reports on gender and racial discrimination within the VPF ranks. These reports covered incidents of negative attitudes towards women and minorities, sexual harassment as well as the bullying and harassment of gay and lesbian employees. The then Police Commissioner, Neil Comrie, acknowledged that the male dominated culture had contributed to a dysfunctional and unwelcoming environment for women and minorities. His approach to remedying this phenomenon was for greater attempts to recruit more women, introduce equity training and offer leadership programs for women. He also appointed the first VPF Gay and Lesbian Liaison officer. These initiatives experienced resistance and backlash from VPF employees and after a couple of years had resulted in minimal change to either the organisational climate or workforce diversity.

In 2001, the appointment of the first female police commissioner, Christine Nixon, proved to be a catalyst for transforming the organisation in a surprisingly short period of time. Nixon was an organisational outsider and was able to utilise her prior experience in human resource management to involve the whole organisation in taking ownership for organisational change. The first step was consultation, visiting teams within the VPF to ask for their input into the changes they would like to see. After an initial period of consultation Nixon introduced a five-year comprehensive plan for change that went above and beyond introducing policies at the top to actively dismantle the "old" way of doing things. Key components of this plan were encouraging public accountability and ensuring that ethical practices were embedded in rewards systems.

In establishing a Corporate Plan for Change, the VPF published explicit and detailed guidelines which included managerial responsibility for ethical conduct, the prevention of harassment, and the training and support of staff. Six key organisational values were also formulated following consultation with groups of police officers. These six values were integrity, leadership, flexibility, respect, support and professionalism. These values were accompanied by examples of behaviours that reflected the climate that the VPF were trying to create. It also led to changes in the language being used across organisational communication, recruitment and training – for example, training programs to become a police officer evolved from an emphasis on physically fighting crime to demonstrating leadership through community service. Training for all staff was also updated to reflect contemporary equity and diversity issues and provided every two years. To reinforce the importance of the corporate plan and maintain momentum a number of other key changes were introduced. Nixon used her position to see new reporting procedures introduced under the Whistleblowers Protection Act, which provided greater protections for reporting non-compliance

and greater capacity for the VPF to discipline and discharge police officers for misconduct. At the top, Nixon appointed and resourced a Diversity and Inclusion Officer to signal that the changes were important and permanent. At the bottom, Nixon emboldened employees to be "change agents" by establishing employee resource groups. These groups were embedded throughout the organisation with the role of monitoring diversity and inclusion activities and being able to recommend new policies, practices and procedures. Employee resource groups signal that cultural change is everyone's responsibility and encourage work teams to keep each other accountable. As informal champions, members of these resource groups play an important role in reinforcing the organisational values and maintaining diversity and inclusion practices as a priority.

The end result of all the activities was substantial. Nixon's contract was extended for another five years, there was a marked increase in female police recruits and a decline in overall attrition rates. Externally, the VPF reported a higher public satisfaction rates compared to their interstate counterparts.

The VPF case study demonstrates that substantial change is possible and can lead to tangible benefits. Building a strong climate for safety and respectful behaviour requires ongoing consultation to embolden employees to keep each other accountable for ethical conduct. It also requires resources along with a commitment to dislodge old values and risk factors, and to discipline misconduct. All of these commitments and practices contribute to establishing organisational consensus for zero tolerance of misconduct and instilling trust in the leadership's commitment to safe and respectful workplaces.

Recommendation

Changes to employment structure

- To embolden employees and change across Parliament consider the establishment and resourcing of employee resource groups as per the Victorian Police case study.

Further reading:

Metz, I., & Kulik, C. T. (2008). Making public organisations more inclusive: A case of the Victoria Police Force. *Human Resource Management, 47*(2), 369-387.

SUMMARY

The Australian Parliament is a hotbed where bullying and harassment has flourished and gone unchecked for too long. The workplace is decentralised, competitive and stressful. Employee structures are fragmented and lack standardised roles and expectations. While individual members and senators have responsibility for managing their teams, they are often absent and removed from their office dynamics, with few structures in place to support them in preventing or responding to misconduct. The Government has a strong imperative and opportunity to address the prevailing climate for tolerance. The previous experience of the Victorian Police Force as well as the recommendations in this submission can be of assistance in shaping the Government's response.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Changes to employment structure	1. Introduce greater professionalism to Parliament by formalising a dedicated HR function that would provide coordinated recruitment support, standard job descriptions and employee conditions. HR should be independent from political parties (including ministerial oversight), appropriately qualified and have the resources to receive and investigate complaints. 2. Consider processes that would treat staff members as employees of Parliament rather than employees of individual members and senators. This would lead to greater scope for accountability and requirements for professionalisation in parliamentary staffing. 3. To embolden employees and change across Parliament consider the establishment and resourcing of employee resource groups as per the Victorian Police case study.
Changes to policies, practices and procedures	4. Introduce a zero-tolerance policy for bullying and harassment that clearly defines appropriate and inappropriate behaviour and stipulates there will be consequences for non-compliance. For this policy to cover all parliamentary employees. 5. Clarify and clearly communicate who is responsible for the oversight of standards. 6. Expand, improve and mandate training for identifying and preventing workplace bullying and harassment. 7. For training compliance to be reported annually. 8. Introduce employee culture surveys as a mechanism for reviewing effectiveness of policies, practices, and procedures and to determine if there is a decoupling of intended and actual behaviour.
Changes to the work environment	9. Consider changes to sitting weeks, including their frequency, the structure of essential and non-essential business (essential being the passage and debate of bills), and the working hours for sitting days and senate estimates. 10. To reduce the unintended blurring of work boundaries, review employee conditions and entitlements, including unvetted security access to parliamentary suites in out-of-work hours. 11. To reduce employee burnout and stress consider revising the travel allowance scheme so that instead of receiving an allowance, accommodation is paid for on an office credit card and travelling employees receive time-off-in-lieu days for sitting weeks. A standard system for managing accommodation would reinforce the conduct expected of staff while travelling for work. 12. Consider changes to the physical workspace by removing lounges from parliamentary offices and replacing them with chairs (e.g., tub chairs). Such changes would signal that parliament is a place for work and business hours.

[i] Einarsen, S., Hoel, H. Zapf, D., & Cooper, C. (2003). The concept of bullying at work. In S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf., & C. Cooper. (Eds.), Bullying and emotional abuse in the workplace: International perspectives in research and practice, London: Taylor & Francis; Woodrow, C., & Guest, D. E. (2014). When good HR gets bad results: Exploring the challenge of HR implementation in the case of workplace bullying. *Human Resource Management Journal, 24*(1), 38-56.

[ii] Bowling, N. & Beehr, T. (2006). Workplace harassment from the victims perspective: A theoretical model and meta-analysis. *Journal of Applied Psychology, 91*(5), 998-1012; Woodrow, C., & Guest, D. E. (2014). When good HR gets bad results: Exploring the challenge of HR implementation in the case of workplace bullying. *Human Resource Management Journal, 24*(1), 38-56.

[iii] Cortina, L. M., & Areguin, M. A. (2021). Putting people down and pushing them out: Sexual harassment in the workplace. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 8*, 285-309.

[iv] Cortina, L. M., & Areguin, M. A. (2021). Putting people down and pushing them out: Sexual harassment in the workplace. *Annual Review of Organizational Psychology and Organizational Behavior, 8*, 285-309.

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