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# Clear, consistent conduct policies key to tackle workplace incivility: HR leaders

Despite being unpleasant, incivility often seeps into the workplace in subtle forms such as interruption during meetings, public criticism, exclusion from decision-making, or overbearing management styles. Encouraging open communication by extending frequent sensitisation sessions and integrating civility into KRAs and KPIs can help build a civil workplace environment.



### Highlights

- Incivility often arises from differences in communication styles or hierarchical pressure. The solution lies in early intervention, training and building trust.
- Leadership modelling at the workplace can be an effective tool, creating a ripple effect across the organisation.
- Integrating civility into formal job expectations naturally promotes accountability and self-regulation, leading to better workplace outcomes.



An illustration depicting a diverse group of professionals engaging in respectful conversation in a modern office setting.

A culture of trust, accountability, transparency, mutual respect, open communication channels and providing unbiased platforms for employees to raise their concerns are some of the important determinants in building a civil workplace

environment, according to HR leaders.

Instances of workplace incivility—like shaming, gaslighting and excessively micromanaging others—were up 21.5 per cent in the first quarter of 2025, according to SHRM’s Civility Index.

Recently, Microsoft fired two employees who interrupted the company’s 50th anniversary celebration to protest its work supplying AI to the Israeli military, according to a group representing the workers—a recent example of the impact of incivility in the workplace.

In this context, ETHRWorld interacted with HR leaders to delve deep into various aspects such as practical experiences, HR matrices, standard policies in addressing workplace incivility, and its impact on business outcomes.

### **Defining workplace civility**

Workplace civility is about creating a culture of respect, understanding and inclusivity. It includes behaviours like not interrupting others while they’re speaking, refraining from micromanaging, not ignoring colleagues, or avoiding unprofessional body language.

“It’s about building a culture where differences aren’t just accepted but valued, ensuring everyone feels heard, seen and appreciated,” said Tanvi Choksi, CHRO, Mahindra Holidays & Resorts India.

Arppna Mehra, Vice President - Human Resources, Honeywell India, added, “Respect and professionalism are a core part of our values at Honeywell and we believe a civil workplace culture is the key to making people feel heard, valued and safe in an organisation.”

### **Lessons from experience**

As businesses navigate a landscape shaped by rapid technological advancements, generational diversity and polarised societal views, fostering a culture of civility is not just beneficial—it is becoming essential.

Choksi recalled a leader, in her previous organisation, who used ‘fear’ to drive results, resulting in high attrition and low engagement. Through a focused group discussion, the company discovered that the root issue was micromanagement by the team leader.

“We addressed this by initiating a coaching intervention for the manager, which significantly improved the team’s morale and re-engagement of the workforce,” she said.

For an organisation that is working on a wide scale with people from all sects of society, there will be people coming in with different skills, attributes, thought processes and temperaments. Therefore, such incidents are not uncommon while handling diverse teams, said Manish Mandan, Group Head - Human Resources & Admin at SLCM Group.

Mandan also shared that in diverse teams, incivility often arises from differences in communication styles or hierarchical pressure. The solution lies in early intervention, training and building trust.

### **Standard practices to address workplace incivility**

Despite being unpleasant, incivility often seeps into the workplace in subtle forms such as interruption during meetings, public criticism, exclusion from decision-making or overbearing management styles.

To address these issues, Choksi of Mahindra Holidays & Resorts India said, “Our approach is anchored in building trust and psychological safety—starting with regular one-on-one check-ins by our HR team and nurturing a ‘Speak Up’ culture, where every employee feels safe, heard and empowered to voice concerns.”

In her opinion, organisations should open anonymous feedback channels as a starting point. And the feedback must go beyond collection—it must drive meaningful action. The focus must remain on constructive solutions, not blame.

Mehra of Honeywell India said, “Addressing incivility starts with implementing policies that show no tolerance towards disrespect in the workplace and having leaders at every level who lead by example.”

Leadership modelling at the workplace, where senior staff demonstrate respectful, inclusive behaviours, can be an effective tool, creating a ripple effect across the organisation.

Mehra also emphasised encouraging open communication by extending frequent sensitisation sessions and safe, unbiased platforms for employees to raise their concerns.

Such efforts will help organisations to nurture a culture where respect is non-negotiable and everyone is held to the same standards of professional conduct, according to Mehra.

Addressing workplace incivility or bullying in agri logistics—a sector often characterised by physically demanding work, diverse workforces and hierarchical structures—requires targeted strategies, said Mandan of SLCM Group.

He stressed the importance of clear, consistent enforcement of conduct policies, especially in sectors like agri logistics, where varied educational and cultural backgrounds can blur behavioural expectations.

Integrating civility into formal job expectations naturally promotes accountability and self-regulation, leading to better workplace outcomes like higher morale and retention, added Mandan.

### Key metrics to monitor workplace civility

Tools like engagement surveys, regular pulse checks and exit interviews, as well as measuring attrition rates and regularly monitoring the number of reported cases are some of the common methods to gauge employee sentiments.

Apart from these measures, Honeywell India houses a dedicated Integrity and Compliance team to resolve employee concerns surrounding civility and respect while maintaining anonymity. This team functions independently of the other business teams to help reaffirm that employee concerns will be resolved with the utmost confidentiality and without bias, shared Mehra.

At Mahindra Holidays, “Our focus isn’t merely on reducing the number of reported cases, but on fast-tracking closure of reported cases. This has helped us in building a culture where employees feel safe and supported in raising concerns. What truly matters is fostering fairness, ensuring transparency and driving timely resolution. These elements serve as real indicators of a workplace where civility is not just expected, but actively lived every day,” said Choksi.

Mandan of SLCM advocated for integrating civility into Key Result Areas (KRAs) and Key Performance Indicators (KPIs).

“We believe that to ensure that each employee of the organisation is in line with the set standards of civil behaviour, the best way is to inculcate this in the KRA and KPI of the incumbent, which needs to be monitored periodically, with an appropriate feedback mechanism, and needs to be recorded,” said Mandan.

### **Importance of civility in the organisation’s success**

Workplace civility is the foundation that upholds respect, trust and positive working culture within an organisation.

“Professional behaviour and attitudes help foster a sense of safety, belongingness and empathy across levels,” said Mehra of Honeywell India.

Choksi of Mahindra Holidays & Resorts India added, “When employees are treated with dignity and respect, they’re more likely to engage fully, collaborate effectively, and bring their best selves to work.”

### **The future of civility at work**

As modern workplaces are becoming more hybrid, diverse and opinionated, managing differences constructively will become a greater challenge in the coming days. Political beliefs, social values, generational gaps and differing visions for society, all pose potential flashpoints.

So, workplace civility isn’t just a ‘nice-to-have’—it’s crucial for long-term success and reflects the core values that every organisation should uphold.