



Market Milestone

Why Skillsoft's Workplace Harassment Prevention Training Solution Primes Behavior Change: A Learning Science Evaluation

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Key Stakeholders:

Chief Learning Officers, Chief Human Resource Officers, Chief Compliance Officer, Learning and Development Directors and Managers, Compliance Directors and Managers, Corporate Trainers, Content and Learning Product Managers

Why It Matters:

Harassment comes in many, often subtle, forms and can have a disastrous impact on the victims and the workplace culture. Harassment is about what we *do*, how we *do* it, and our intent. It is about *behavior*. Harassment prevention requires a deep understanding of oneself and others. It requires understanding how one's behavior can be interpreted by others and can affect others. There is a strong need for engaging, effective and scalable workplace harassment prevention training solutions that drive workplace culture and behavior change.

Top Takeaway:

Effective harassment prevention training requires content that is engaging and highlights the nuances of harassing behavior. This content must then be delivered in a way that broadly engages multiple learning and memory systems in the brain in a way that "draws the learner in" and primes the learner for behavior change. Skillsoft's Workplace Harassment Prevention Training Program meets these challenges with compelling content delivered through scenario-based video and storytelling. This Program engages emotional learning centers in the brain, draws the learner in, and primes the learner for behavior change.



THE NEED FOR EFFECTIVE WORKPLACE HARASSMENT PREVENTION TRAINING

Harassment is a widespread issue that can be found in all business sectors, and can have a disastrous impact on victims, offenders and the company in which the offenses occur. In many cases the harassment is intentional (e.g., Harvey Weinstein), but in other cases, harassment emerges from biases that are unconscious and can often be subtle. The financial costs of harassment are significant, and one high profile incident can be devastating to a company's bottom line.

Many states mandate harassment prevention training, and corporate entities are following suit. Unfortunately, most harassment prevention training programs focus exclusively on the mandated educational requirements, with little regard for the quality of the training content and the effectiveness of its delivery. This "check the box approach" might meet the mandated requirement but it does little to address the problem of workplace harassment.

SKILLSOFT'S WORKPLACE HARASSMENT PREVENTION TRAINING: OVERVIEW

Harassment is about behavior. It is about what we do, how we do it, and our intent. It is one thing to know "what" to do but it is completely different (and mediated by distinct learning and memory systems in the brain) to know "how" to do it. (Ashby & Maddox, 2011; Maddox & Ashby, 2004). Training solutions that focus on the "how", help change behavior and can lead to more positive workplace cultures. Training solutions that focus on the "what," do not. Unfortunately, many workplace harassment prevention training solutions focus on the "what" and not the "how."

Skillsoft is different. Skillsoft embraces learning science--the marriage of psychology and neuroscience—and their approach to workplace harassment prevention training is grounded in and guided by [learning science research](#). Learning science makes clear that workplace harassment prevention training programs that build a culture of respect must have two key ingredients.

First, the training content must be accurate, of high-quality, and compelling in the sense that it draws the learner in. It is well established that the more the learner sees themselves as an active participant in the learning the more they learn, and most importantly, the more they are primed for behavior change.

Second, this content must be delivered in a way that effectively engages the relevant learning and memory systems in the brain. The extensive use of [scenario-based storytelling](#) through video to deliver the content is the secret sauce. This engages cognitive and emotion centers in the brain that facilitate long-term retention and ultimately leads to behavior change.



SKILLSOFT'S WORKPLACE HARASSMENT PREVENTION TRAINING: CONTENT

Skillsoft's Workplace Harassment Prevention training solution is comprised of several different courses with specialized versions targeting employee role (i.e. employees, managers, frontline supervisors), specific mandates (i.e. state, federal, country), and is available in multiple languages, including Latin American Spanish.

This evaluation focuses specifically on Skillsoft's Workplace Harassment Prevention for Managers training course, but the evaluation is directly applicable to Skillsoft's larger Harassment Prevention suite of courses. The course includes lessons on the (often subtle) distinction between a harmless joke and unlawful harassment, on-site versus off-site or after-hours harassment, what to do if you are harassed, how to handle a complaint, and the benefits of a respectful and harassment free workplace, to name a few. The course content is comprehensive, and it is clear that Skillsoft engaged leaders in the field with strong subject matter expertise. The course is comprised of a several short video-based lessons and built with single concept [scenario-based micro-learning](#) in mind. The content is a broad mix of scenario-based workplace interactions, expert commentary, a facilitator who guides the learner, as well as objective tests and exercises. Real-world scenarios and audience involvement create an immersive learning experience in which characters sometimes break the fourth wall to reinforce learning. Viewers watch characters face uncomfortable situations where they then ask the audience, "What would you do?" Taken together, the content effectively engages cognitive and emotional centers in the learner's brain that draw the learner into the situation and enhance learning, long-term retention and prime behavior change.

One of the main characters in the training scenarios is an employee named Ken. Ken makes inappropriate comments to female coworkers, asks inappropriate probing questions of a coworker who is in the midst of a gender transition, teases a co-worker in a wheelchair, and makes fun of a co-worker who is an atheist. Ken is not intentionally being cruel; he thinks he is just being funny. He is genuinely confused that co-workers don't appreciate his "humor." Ken has many discussions with the facilitator who explains to Ken that what he perceives as humor is actually harassment and hurtful to other employees. Most of us can recall at least one "Ken" in our lives and that is the strength of including this polarizing character in the training. All learners can relate. In addition to Ken's interactions, several complex and subtle harassment scenarios play out that address pertinent themes such as sexual orientation, religion, weight gain, gender identity, objectification of women, quid pro quo harassment and the like. These are subtle but emotionally powerful situations that leave the learner thinking deeply. None of the targets of harassment are wallflowers. They are all strong individuals faced with a complex situation. This adds to the realism.

The thoughtful psychological explanations and descriptions of the challenges associated with workplace harassment, and how ones' own personality and agenda are relevant is especially effective. The content is compelling, engaging, and broadly engages learning and memory systems in the brain that facilitate behavior change.



SKILLSOFT’S WORKPLACE HARASSMENT PREVENTION TRAINING: LEARNING DESIGN AND DELIVERY

Without an effective learning design and delivery system, Skillsoft’s high-quality Workplace Harassment Prevention content would be ineffective. Fortunately, the learning design and delivery aligns with the learning science research and is effective at enhancing long-term retention and priming the learner for behavior change. The course presents the scenario-based video learning content, followed by scenario-based exercises that challenge the learners’ understanding of their responsibilities, and supplements both with periodic knowledge checks to validate the learning. Performance thresholds must be exceeded on these knowledge checks to continue the training. Extensive research suggests that knowledge checks and testing make excellent training tools (Roediger & Karpicke, 2006a, 2006b). Retrieving information from memory strengthens that memory in the process. In addition, testing makes clear to the learner what topics were learned well and what topics require further study. These experiences, challenges and testing are complemented with one-on-one discussions between the on-screen mentor and the manager-in-training, as well as commentary from subject matter experts who lend additional credibility and thought leadership and allow the learner to experience multiple perspectives.

Taken together, this draws the learner in so that they begin to see themselves as part of the story, and from multiple different perspectives. The learner can “walk a mile” in one or more of the characters’ shoes, which engages the prefrontal cortex and medial temporal lobes (i.e., the cognitive skills learning system), but also recruits emotion centers in the limbic system of the brain that facilitate information retention and broaden the contextual scaffolding for the learner (Maddox & Markman, 2010). This leaves the learner poised for behavior change and well along the way toward developing the situational awareness needed to deal with the broad array of harassment scenarios that they might face in the workplace.

SKILLSOFT’S WORKPLACE HARASSMENT PREVENTION TRAINING: TWO ADDITIONAL ASSETS

In addition to compelling content delivered in a way that effectively engages multiple learning and memory systems in the brain, Skillsoft’s Workplace Harassment Prevention training solution offers additional assets for clients to further customize the learning experience. First, Skillsoft’s policy management, attestation and assessment tool, Skillsoft [Certitude](#), can be incorporated into the Workplace Harassment Prevention training program. Skillsoft Certitude has [several uses](#), but key among them is that it allows the creation and management of questionnaires, surveys and disclosures. Certitude provides a means for organization to better understand and monitor their culture and to provide a means for employees to disclose information.

Second, in the second half of 2019 Skillsoft will offer clients additional flexibility by offering multiple versions of the critical content within the course. These version options can be used to fit organizational requirements or preferences. What is described above is the “edgy” version that addresses a broad range of societal issues including sexual orientation, religion, weight gain, gender identity, etc. A “toned down” version will be offered that focuses more



directly on traditional harassment topics such as sexual harassment. Finally, a third version will be available that focuses on the manufacturing and industrial sector, as opposed to a traditional corporate setting. Critically, all three versions offer the same instructional design and provide means for organizations to provide training that is more relevant to their employees and to prime the learner for behavior change.

OVERALL EVALUATION

Amalgam's overall evaluation of Skillsoft's Workplace Harassment Prevention training solution is that this is a high-quality offering. The content is well-constructed and compelling. It includes a broad mix of high-level commentary from subject matter experts, dramatic interactions among a diverse cast of characters faced with real-world harassment, and a facilitator who guides the learner through the training process. Critically, the content delivery is such that it broadly recruits the cognitive skills learning system in the brain while simultaneously activating emotion and motivation centers in the brain. This draws the learner into the situation, and they begin to see themselves as part of the story, and from multiple perspectives. This "walk a mile in my shoes" experience speeds initial learning, increases long-term retention and primes the learner for meaningful behavior change. Although this analyst has not seen every harassment prevention training program in existence, he has seen dozens, and Skillsoft's Workplace Harassment Prevention solution is exceptional.

REFERENCES

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ABOUT AMALGAM INSIGHTS

AMALGAM INSIGHTS

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- ◆ DevOps, Serverless, Containerization, and Blockchain
- ◆ Open Source Development
- ◆ Enterprise Talent Management, Training and Learning Development
- ◆ Data Science and Machine Learning

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Todd is a Learning Scientist/Research Fellow at Amalgam Insights. He focuses on the Talent Management and Learning & Development sectors and the challenge of leveraging talent and learning science—the marriage of psychology and brain science—to provide customers with optimized talent management and learning and development solutions.



Prior to Amalgam Insights, Todd:

- Established himself as a leader in the field of human learning, memory, and performance in a 25-year career as an academic and researcher.
- Was awarded over \$10 million in federal research funds for his own human learning and performance laboratory.
- Published over 200 peer-reviewed research reports and was cited over 10,000 times by fellow researchers.

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