Bystander Training within Organizations [*]
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A number of organizations, including private sector, non-profit, government agencies, and universities, have been doing "active bystander "training. There are at least two reasons to consider engaging all levels of an organization in such a process:

- *Encouraging the positive*: to foster productive behavior from all managers and employees, and other members of the organization, if any; to improve morale and collegiality; to "build community" and foster "inclusion;"

- *Discouraging the negative*: to curtail discriminatory, destructive, and illegal behavior. At a time when employers around the world are concerned about racism, bullying, harassment, ethics and safety violations, many managers want to encourage people to react, and take appropriate action, with respect to unacceptable behavior.

Although this kind of training appears to have started with respect to topics like safety and diversity, training for active bystanders is pertinent to many kinds of behavior. Training materials have been developed by a number of people (e.g., Aguilar, 2006; Scully, 2005).

Who is a "bystander"?

A bystander could be anyone who sees or otherwise becomes aware of behavior that appears worthy of comment or action. In the past, much workplace training has focused mainly on three cohorts: 1) people who do or say something (whether positive or negative) that might merit a response, and 2) people who are impacted by what is said or done, and 3) supervisors. There is a fourth cohort that is also important: there may be one or more *bystanders* present, who can influence the workplace climate. Bystanders can highlight positive acts that might otherwise be invisible or overlooked. They can redirect or de-escalate negative acts that might be problematic. Bystanders might be peers or teammates. They might be subordinate or senior to the person whose comment or behavior warrants reaction. Training that encourages "active bystanders" takes into account the different power dynamics and contexts that may be involved.

Encouraging the positive

Bystander training is designed to help people in all cohorts to note—and to commend—the achievements of their fellow workers. Such commendations often matter a lot to the person concerned and are thought to be useful in encouraging future, socially desirable behavior. (See Goldstein, Martin, and Cialdini (2008), and Patterson, Grenny, Maxfield, McMillan and Switzler, (2007) on effective persuasion and influence tactics). The hope is that training may help workers in all job categories to be "good mentors" to colleagues who need a bit of information or help—and for everyone who would be delighted by a word of encouragement. The hypothesis is that "on the spot" help and affirmation from bystanders may be especially effective because it is an immediate, positive, often unexpected reinforcement. (See Blanchard's (1982) classic discussion of the "one minute manager" for similar reasoning.)

Discouraging the negative

Bystander training is also thought to be useful in helping people in all job categories to react, and then act appropriately, when they see unsafe, unprofessional, offensive, discriminatory, or illegal behavior in the workplace.

As an example, consider the potential importance of a bystander in the realm of cross-cultural interactions in affirming the norms of an organization. A norm or value at work is only as strong as what happens in the breach of that norm, and bystanders may either help—or make things worse—if there is a breach. For example, a Caucasian person who reacts negatively to a racist comment may signal to Black employees that there are allies in the organization who share values of commitment to diversity and inclusion. (See Blake-Beard, Scully, Turnbull, Hunt, Proudford, Porter, LaRoche & Fanning (2006) on the importance of cross-race allies at work.) By the same token, the *silence* of bystanders in such a situation can leave minority employees wondering if they are being judged adversely, in a way that may increase their interest in leaving an organization. Exit interviews with minority employees often reveal that it is not just inappropriate remarks by individuals that sting, but the silence of a wide array of bystanders. (See the *Corporate Leavers Survey* for more about those who leave a job: http://staging.lpfi.org/workplace/corporateleavers.html)

High-ranking bystanders are believed to be especially important in constraining unacceptable behavior by other senior people, in circumstances when workers in lower ranks might find action more risky or difficult.

Why is it useful to think about bystanders?
There are a number of reasons to encourage bystanders in the workplace to be "active" when action is appropriate. These include:
• There are often more peers and bystanders to affirm excellent performance than there are supervisors. The people who go "above and beyond" are often invisible to their supervisors. Bystanders can affirm exemplary behavior much more often than bosses, if only with a quick smile and warm thanks.
• A responsible bystander may be able to react immediately and on the spot, at times when action is safe and appropriate. This may be more effective in affirming good behavior or discouraging unacceptable behavior than are reactions that are delayed. In addition, affirming useful innovations and catching errors on the spot may be more cost-effective than are delayed responses.
• People who are planning an illegal or otherwise unacceptable action do not usually share their plans with supervisors, compliance officers, security, mental health practitioners, or police. They may however boast or give clues to friends and co-workers. (See for example, Fein, Vossekuil, Pollack, Borum, Modzeleski & Reddy (2002) for a study of such behavior by school shooters.) Bystanders have also been identified as key players in reducing the impact of bullies in the schoolyard, who feed on bystander attention but often give up if bystanders do not reinforce them (Coloroso, 2004).

• Third parties may be able to help resolve many different kinds of problems amongst people in conflict (Ury, 2000).
• Social psychologists and neuroscientists have repeatedly demonstrated how people are affected by the actions of those around them. (See the work of Cialdini (1985) who introduced the

concept of "social proof.") Collegiality, and even happiness, may be as contagious as the negative emotions. (See recently reported work by Christakis and Fowler (2008) on the cessation of negative behaviors like smoking and the encouragement of positive behaviors regarding health, among people who are connected in social networks, and on the contagious nature of happiness.) Happiness may contribute to workplace morale and good performance, and is, of course, good in and of itself.

In short, the increased interest in bystander training spans issues and parties in the workplace: senior managers who can demonstrate commitment to diversity and inclusion, colleagues who can give instant recognition of exemplary performance, teammates who can improve work-group relations, and a broad base of workers who can affect cost control and safety. This article reviews some hypotheses about the uses and effectiveness of bystander training, as well as some current dilemmas and debates.

From passive to active bystanders

The word bystander often conjures the phrase, "passive bystander." Much research on bystanders has examined why some bystanders remain passive (Darley & Latané, 1968; Latané & Darley, 1970), and there is even a popular if controversial term for such passivity, namely the "bystander effect." Some reasons that are cited for the "bystander effect" are: diffusion of responsibility (surely someone else will say something, and, if others are not doing anything I also will not react).

Further research reported in this issue suggests that in fact *many* factors contribute to making some bystanders passive in their workplaces: fear of losing friendships, fear of loss of privacy, fear of "bad consequences," fear of getting too involved. Bystanders may believe that nothing good will happen if they speak up. They may fear retaliation or be concerned about embarrassing their work-group, or a colleague, or their superior (Rowe, Wilcox & Gadlin, JIOA, 2(1).

Two hypotheses are worthy of attention:

- It may be better for co-workers and colleagues for a bystander to do something, even something small or a bit clumsy or after the fact, than to remain silent when actions warrant a response;

- With training, many bystanders can learn to be more comfortable and appropriate in their responses.

Some recent research shifts the focus from the numerous inhibitors of active bystander interventions to some of the factors that may enable bystanders (Ashburn-Nardo, Morris & Goodwin, 2008; Rowe, et al. in this issue of *JIOA,* and Levine, M and Crowther, S (2008). The first step from passive to active bystander is recognizing that something has happened that is worthy of a response. Bystander training then ushers in useful discussions of "why was this behavior exemplary or unacceptable?" or "who might feel included, or excluded, here?" without focusing these discussions in a way that may trigger discomfort.

Recognition of socially desirable behavior

In order to foster productive and inclusive behavior, it is important to train all the cohorts in a workplace. All workplace roles are important in thinking about encouraging and commending good teamwork, excellent performance, and productive human interactions within the workplace.

The concept of "distributed leadership" (e.g., Gronn, 2002) shows a move away from the idea of one leader at the top to the idea of "a leader in every seat."

All groups may benefit from the practice of **micro-affirmations** (Rowe, 2008) which are defined as: "*apparently small acts, which are often ephemeral and hard-to-see, events that are public and private, often unconscious but very effective, which occur wherever people wish to help others to succeed*." However, micro-affirmations may be unequally distributed in organizations. This is one of the reasons to be sure that training is offered to *all* cohorts including bystanders. For example, members of a predominant group at work, or of senior managers, may recognize and comment upon one another's contributions, but miss the less understood and appreciated contributions of another group. Research on the "invisible work" of women, particularly actions that foster collegiality and trust in groups, shows that women's opportunities at work may be limited when they do not receive appreciation for their different but important types of contributions (Fletcher, 2001).

Recognition of unacceptable behavior

By the same token everyone in the workplace is important in discouraging and dealing with unethical and discriminatory behavior. The new standards of accountability encouraged by Sarbanes-Oxley legislation, in the wake of ethics scandals that might have been forestalled had more managers and employees reported their misgivings, encourage the involvement of peers and bystanders (Samuelson & Gentile, 2005).
Diversity research and diversity training also have addressed the importance of all four of the groups mentioned earlier. That is, there is research on why "perpetrators" of injustice do what they do (because of stereotypes, prejudice, threats to their status); what "victims" or "targets" of injustice might do (develop a personal armor, find allies for change, pick their battles); and what managers can do to create a climate that fosters effective collaboration across a diverse workforce. Active bystanders may also be effective with respect to discrimination. A bystander, for example, may be able to "*pivot*" a situation—from one where there is awkward silence, exclusion, or hurt—to one where there is support, both for individuals, and for an organization's espoused values of inclusivity.

Toolkit for the active bystander

Bystander training usually includes observing and practicing a range of potential bystander options. Scenarios based on real world incidents illuminate bystander training. The scenarios often include **micro-inequities** (Rowe, 1990) — the seemingly small slights whose impacts may accumulate. Here is a sample scenario from a participant in bystander training (LaRoche & Scully, 2008):

> José recalled his mentor's advice about networking, so when he was at the company's holiday party and saw two colleagues talking to the regional Vice President, he walked right over to say hello. The VP responded, "Thanks, I'll take another white wine please." It took José a few stunned seconds to realize the VP had mistaken him for a waiter, and a few more stunned seconds to realize his two colleagues were not setting the record straight and introducing him.

The apparent micro-inequity in this example was exacerbated by the silence of the bystanders—the two colleagues who did not correct the Vice President's biased perception. In an organizational context,

where power differences are involved, bystanders may be silent—to help the powerful save face, to avoid provoking conflict, and to preserve their own status. Recent research shows that bystanders with a high social dominance orientation (who respect authority and reinforce inequality) are less likely to respond – and respond more slowly – to discriminatory remarks or actions (Rosette, Hewlin, Carton, 2008).

Bystander training might emphasize a range of responses that the two colleagues in the above scenario might use, in order to bring Jose into the conversation, save face for the Vice President, and/or show their own social adeptness at networking and connecting people (LaRoche & Scully, 2008). One of Jose's colleagues might say:

- "I could use more white wine, too. Let's find a waiter."

- "You should talk to Jose about our Northeast accounts. I'll try to find a waiter."

- "Good idea. Jose, would you join us for a glass of wine, too? Let's flag the waiter for four more glasses. So, have you met Jose? He's a key player in Northeast accounts."

Notice that the last two responses not only pivot the prejudiced assumption but bundle in a micro-affirmation.

Practice makes it easier to respond, instead of freezing in stunned silence. Bystander training also permits discussions about the "underlying issue" in a scenario. It will not be evident to all training participants that "unconscious bias" may have made the Vice President in this scenario perceive that a Hispanic man in a nice suit and tie is a waiter rather than a fellow business colleague. Tackling this matter head-on in a training session might lead to resistance. But such insights may surface as a scenario is unpacked—creating a spontaneous, focused, productive dialogue about the challenges faced by people of color in the US.

The impact of active bystanders on "inclusion"

Workplaces in which all people can fully contribute their energies and talents are increasingly valued, worldwide. Fostering inclusivity is seen to be important to the bottom line. Both affirming a wide range of contributions and curtailing inappropriate comments and actions create a workplace where all may flourish.

Bystanders can signal that inclusivity is a real value by *praising* the contributions of a colleague who may normally be ignored by the majority—as when an invisible support staff person is thanked in public, for various, specific contributions, by the manager who is accepting an award for her department. A lab technician might *interrupt* inappropriate and escalating personal remarks between two research scientists, by *shifting the conversation* back to the work at hand. A gracious supervisor might *raise a question* to clarify who actually contributed to the success of a project, and then *demonstrate concern* for appropriate compensation for all contributors. A professor might assign work that covers the art and architecture of many different religions, demonstrating to students from different religions *that they are not invisible*. A manager might gently remonstrate with his peer, about a thoughtless putdown of a new Black employee, in a way that indicates to the new employee that *he is not entirely alone*.

Active bystanders can be valuable allies in the workplace. Some organizations train "allies" – across dimensions of diversity – to help build inclusive workplaces in which employees trust that their colleagues will support them appropriately, even when they are not in the room. Allies provide support not just for other members of their own social identity group, but across dimensions of difference (Scully, 2009). There are challenges in finding and trusting true allies,

for example between Black women and white women, but a virtuous cycle of trust and support can be created (Blake-Beard et al., 2006). Working collectively, rather than as individuals, to create an inclusive environment (Scully & Segal, 2002) and finding safe space in which to "ask the difficult questions" across differences (Proudford, 2002) may be helpful with the challenges of the global workplace.

Linking the two "faces" of bystander training

Encouraging the positive and discouraging the negative may operate as related processes. Recent work in neuroscience suggests that much of our decision-making is not available to conscious thought. Many of the manifestations of bias and of exclusivity are likely to be unconscious. (See the IAT at https://implicit.harvard.edu/implicit/research/). One of the few ways of dealing effectively with unconscious bias is to encourage a universal mode of respectful and appropriately affirming behavior. This behavior may have two effects: to affirm good performance and socially desirable behavior, and to *block* "unconscious" discrimination.

Some current debates and challenges

Several debates are of interest in the area of bystander training in organizations. For example, how does unconscious behavior operate? In a November 18, 2008 review article in the New York Times, "*Bias Test, Shades of Grey*," John Tierney discussed different points of view about unconscious bias. Many people agree that unconscious bias exists—and that this has been shown by substantial research—but there is controversy about the tools used to measure such bias, specifically the IAT mentioned above. Many people intuitively agree that micro-messages, (positive and negative) appear anecdotally to have significant consequences. However, more research would be needed to demonstrate whether and how micro-inequities and micro-affirmations may actually have consequences in the workplace. In particular more research is needed about the hypothesized linkage(s) between unconscious judgments and workplace behavior.

There is also a concern in this field, as in others, about how, if at all, to demonstrate that training has an effect on beliefs and/or behavior, and, if so, how training may affect different populations. Research is also needed on the question of how training might best be presented in various cultures and different kinds of workplace. Some employers, for example in the US military, are working to instill the concept of "personal accountability." Research is needed to examine how this concept may translate across cultures and in various different languages.

Is there a "critical mass" at which bystanders may have measurable effect on a workplace climate?

A premise of training is not just that individuals become more able to be active bystanders but that the accumulation of many active bystander interventions positively shapes a workplace climate. There is anecdotal evidence that, after bystander training, individuals feel more comfortable in making a bystander move, and may even self-consciously reference the training (in terms such as, "OK, I'm going to be an active bystander here.") In a culture where many or all people have experienced bystander training, there may be more support for bystanders (other bystanders who are present might help) and less anti-bystander backlash.

Can bystanders make things worse?

Some participants in bystander training express the worry that a bystander might "make matters worse." This complex concern rests on the question, "whose interests are at stake?" A bystander intervention might reassure one party while causing embarrassment to another. What one bystander sees as problematic, another may not. In addition, people sometimes misinterpret what they see and act on that faulty assumption. A bystander might make matters worse for the people at hand, while acting in the

best interests of the organization. Training should include thorough discussions about when to act, when and whom to consult, and of course, whether to report the unacceptable behavior of another person to a compliance office.

Clearly, a bystander might "make matters worse" for an injured person by damaging that person's relationships or by causing acute embarrassment. An "active bystander" might make things better for himself or herself and be "feeling better" to have taken some apparently righteous action—but might at the same time infringe on the privacy of the person defended. For example, a supportive comment about gay people that accidentally "outs" a colleague may be intended to show commitment to diversity but cause an individual harm. Even commendations may be problematic in an organization, if majority employees overlook minority groups.

Including bystander training as one part of a set of organizational resources

Bystander training emphasizes that bystanders are but one mechanism for responding to difficult situations. Some employers who encourage active bystanders provide a comprehensive list of resources and compliance offices, and a detailed discussion of the organizational complaint system, for the use of bystanders who would prefer to discuss their observations, or report their concerns, rather than deal with problems at the time and on the spot. This support is vital with respect to the most serious issues, including safety violations, discrimination, criminal and other illegal behavior. Because, as noted above, so many bystanders hesitate to act, it may be especially important for a complaint system to provide a zero barrier, confidential resource, like an ombuds office, as well as compliance offices. These broader structural supports may permit bystanders to consider their options safely, before taking action.

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