Understanding bullying and harassment in employee research

Recent findings, which have uncovered that 70% of LGBTQ people are sexually harassed in the workplace, have brought to light an under-reported but serious issue in employee experience. In light of these findings we have been thinking about our key learnings from our experience in researching employee experience of bullying and harassment. Our key observations on this topic are as follows:

- **Definitions** to clarify the differences between bullying and harassment are beneficial to include the survey design in order to encourage consistency of response. However, ultimately the individual employee will hold a perception of whether they are having these adverse workplace experiences.

- Inclusion of questions on **protected characteristics** can help to identify groups within the workforce who have had adverse workplace experiences. However, under GDPR guidelines, respondents are not obliged to provide sensitive personal information.

- Responses given in relation to experiences of harassment and bullying should be cross referenced with other survey statements that explore workplace culture plus the management styles evident among both line managers and senior managers. **This detail can be used to triangulate areas of high risk within an organisation.**

- When individuals who have experienced bullying and harassment are provided with open (text response) questions in which to describe their experiences, responses are often limited even when the assurance of survey confidentiality is provided.

- Questions on the source of the adverse experience (customer, team mate, manager etc) and on whether incidents were reported are more insightful. **Significant gaps between employee experiences and reported incidents may require further exploration of workplace culture.**

- Questions on the **perceived barriers to reporting** in our experience are the most instructive regarding how improvements can be made. The recent TUC study shows that two thirds (66%) of LGBT people did not report the harassment to their employer, with a quarter afraid that doing so would "out" them at work. Ultimately, insight is required that helps employers in creating a safe and productive, not to mention legally compliant, workplaces.

- Finally, if an employee research does cover bullying and harassment issues, the survey itself can include **signposting to the help and support channels** available within the organisation.

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