SEXUAL HARASSMENT TRAINING: RECOMMENDATIONS TO ADDRESS GAPS BETWEEN THE PRACTITIONER AND RESEARCH LITERATURES

ELISSA L. PERRY, CAROL T. KULIK, AND MARINA P. FIELD

Sexual harassment training is a common human resource activity, and the practitioner literature is replete with advice about how to implement it. Little research, however, has specifically explored what makes sexual harassment training effective. This paper uses what we know from general training research and theory and sexual harassment research to assess the extent to which the practitioner literature is making relevant and reasonable recommendations for sexual harassment training. We identify practitioner-research gaps in the literature, including areas that academic research and theory suggest are important for training effectiveness but where the practitioner literature falls short. The practitioner literature may be silent, offer incomplete advice, make recommendations that do not directly link to research findings, or present recommendations that are inconsistent with research findings. We recommend that these gaps be bridged and we provide specific suggestions for how human resource managers can improve the quality of the sexual harassment training they provide. © 2009 Wiley Periodicals, Inc.

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Managing sexual harassment in the workplace is an important issue for human resource (HR) managers. Sexual harassment can create physical and psychological difficulties for victims (Fitzgerald, Drasgow, Hulin, Gelfand, & Magley, 1997) and, if left unmanaged, can also result in high costs (in terms of absenteeism, turnover, and reduced productivity). It can also cause legal headaches for organizations (Faley, Knapp, Kustis, & Dubois, 1999; Pearson, 1997). A common approach to dealing with sexual harassment in organizations is to provide sexual harassment training. Sexual harassment training is
quickly moving from an optional activity to a legally advisable one (Bisom-Rapp, 2001; Martucci & Lu, 2005). In fact, a number of states require employers to provide sexual harassment training (Martucci & Lu, 2005). In response to greater demands for such training, a multibillion-dollar sexual harassment training industry has developed (Bisom-Rapp, 2001).

Sexual harassment training may be a particularly difficult type of organizational training for HR managers to design and implement. Sexual harassment training addresses emotionally laden issues, and trainees may be resistant to receiving it (Jackson, 1999). The costs associated with implementing ineffective sexual harassment training can be quite high. Ineffective training programs may fail to reduce sexual harassment and result in backlash from intended recipients of the training. Ironically, these effects make organizations more vulnerable to legal action than the absence of training. For example, at least one employee was so upset by his organization’s sexual harassment training that he brought a sexual harassment suit against his employer (Bisom-Rapp, 2001). In addition, providing training may create a false sense of security that something is being done about sexual harassment, leaving real organizational problems unaddressed (Bisom-Rapp, 2001). As more states mandate sexual harassment training, greater attention will likely be given to the content and nature of the training provided. For example, some legal experts have noted that California law sets forth “a relatively high standard for training methods” (Martucci & Lu, 2005, p. 89) and recommended that California employers evaluate whether their training methods are effective (Martucci & Lu, 2005). For many reasons, therefore, it is important to understand whether the sexual harassment training organizations provide is likely to be effective.

HR managers typically do not keep up with the academic literature and instead rely on HR trade publications and the general business press as information sources (Colbert, Rynes, & Brown, 2005; Rynes, Colbert, & Brown, 2002). Even if HR managers were inclined to tackle academic journals, however, it would be difficult for them to draw firm conclusions from the academic literature about the factors that contribute to effective sexual harassment training. We know surprisingly little about when and why sexual harassment training is effective (Newman, Jackson, & Baker, 2003). Fitzgerald and Shullman (1993) described the lack of attention to the evaluation of sexual harassment interventions as a “glaring omission” (p. 16) in the sexual harassment literature. Reviewing the literature eight years later, Bingham and Scherer (2001) identified only nine published reports that systematically evaluated a sexual harassment training program in a workplace or educational setting.

While there is little research on the effectiveness of sexual harassment training, there has been an explosion in general training-related research in the past 10 years (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001). In their review of the training research literature, Salas and Cannon-Bowers (2001) noted that “the field can now offer sound, pedagogically based principles and guidelines to practitioners and instructional developers” (p. 473). Specifically, much work has been done to identify the factors that consistently influence training effectiveness. In the current paper, we use this “state-of-the-art” training research and theory to evaluate the recommendations that HR managers are receiving from the practitioner literature regarding sexual harassment training.

First, based on a review of the general training and empirical sexual harassment literatures, we describe aspects of training that are most likely to influence training effectiveness. Then we systematically review the practitioner literature to identify the topics raised and the training recommendations offered. We use research and theory to assess the wisdom of what the practitioner literature tells HR managers they should be doing with respect to sexual harassment training. By identifying the gaps between the research and practitioner literatures, we hope to encourage a more thoughtful approach to designing sexual harassment training in organizations.
Our review concludes with specific recommendations for effective training that HR managers can implement. We highlight the critical role that HR managers can play in assessing the organization’s sexual harassment climate and facilitating changes to this climate, we describe trainee characteristics (e.g., gender role conflict) that HR managers can assess prior to training to provide the most effective training content, and we explain how computer-based training may help HR managers incorporate important learning principles into training as well as address any legal concerns regarding their programs.

Research Findings and Practitioner Recommendations

We use a training effectiveness framework developed by Salas and his colleagues (Alvarez, Salas, & Garofano, 2003; Salas, Cannon-Bowers, Rhodenizer, & Bowers, 1999; Tannenbaum, Cannon-Bowers, Salas, & Mathieu, 1993) to discuss training-related findings in the research literature and recommendations made in the practitioner literature. This framework emphasizes factors that operate before, during, and after training to influence training effectiveness. In addition to these factors, it is important to consider training evaluation because training effectiveness is assessed based on the impact training has on a variety of outcomes (Alvarez et al., 2003).

Our review of the practitioner literature involved a comprehensive search of published articles addressing the topic of sexual harassment training. We used multiple databases covering a variety of disciplines: the social sciences (JSTOR, PsycINFO, PsycArticles, Social Sciences Citation Index), business (ABI/INFORM), education (Eric), law and government (LexisNexis), and multidisciplinary (Proquest). These electronic sources accessed both academic and nonacademic outlets. We concentrated our review, however, on articles appearing in outlets (e.g., HR Magazine, Training & Development, Personnel Journal) that were most likely to be read by HR professionals (Colbert et al., 2005; Rynes et al., 2002). In our review, we included outlets targeting general managers (e.g., Successful Meetings) and the general press (e.g., USA Today) because these are easily accessible to practitioners. As a result, the search emphasized outlets where authors are more likely to be journalists, managers, or consultants than academics (Colbert et al., 2005). We focused our attention on articles that were, for the most part, nonempirical and published in nonrefereed publications including books or chapters. Not all of the articles that were generated from our search had sufficient information to analyze. Our search resulted in a final sample of 52 practitioner articles published in the 1980–2003 period. The articles we reviewed are indicated by asterisks in the reference list.

Two of the authors read and analyzed each article using Salas and colleagues’ (Alvarez et al., 2003; Salas et al., 1999; Tannenbaum et al., 1993) training effectiveness and evaluation framework as a guideline. The authors assessed the extent to which each article discussed organization, pretraining, training design and delivery, and posttraining factors as well as four means to evaluate training (Kirkpatrick, 1996). Next, we highlight what the research findings were with respect to each training effectiveness factor, and follow that with a discussion of what the practitioner literature said with respect to each factor. Key research findings and practitioner recommendations are summarized in Figure 1. Practitioner recommendations presented in more than 20% of the reviewed articles appear in bold in the figure.

Organization Influences

Research Findings

The context in which training occurs can have an impact on training effectiveness (Kraiger, McLinden, & Casper, 2004; Tannenbaum et al., 1993). Some organizational climates hamper training effectiveness because they impose obstacles that lead trainees to feel they will be unable to apply what they learn in training. Other organizational climates fail to encourage providing realistic information about the training and its potential usefulness to trainees. Supervisory support such as helping employees set training goals, providing
<table>
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<tr>
<th>Training Effectiveness Factor</th>
<th>Research Findings</th>
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<th>Bridging the Gap</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Organization Influences</strong></td>
<td>* Organizational climates can impose obstacles to training effectiveness</td>
<td>* Need organizational and top management support [consistent with research findings but incomplete]</td>
<td>* Conduct organizational needs assessment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>* Supervisory support for training enhances training effectiveness</td>
<td>* Train broadly at all levels of the organization [no direct link to research findings]</td>
<td>* Assess organizational climate</td>
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<td>* A training philosophy that supports sufficient staff and budget is important for training effectiveness</td>
<td>* HR should adopt role as change agent to support training efforts</td>
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<td><strong>Pretraining Factors</strong></td>
<td>* Pretraining self-efficacy, motivation, cognitive ability, and prior training experience impact training outcomes</td>
<td>* Conduct needs assessment [consistent with research findings but incomplete]</td>
<td>* Conduct individual needs assessment</td>
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<td></td>
<td>* Training can be differentially effective based on trainees’ sex, propensity to harass, and degree of gender role conflict</td>
<td>* Organizational position (supervisory vs. nonsupervisory) should influence training content [no direct link to research findings]</td>
<td>* Reduce impact of individual differences on training outcomes (e.g., bring trainees to a similar level prior to training)</td>
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<td>* Voluntary training may have more positive effects on motivation to learn than mandatory training</td>
<td>* Make training mandatory [potentially inconsistent with research findings]</td>
<td>* Increase trainees’ pretraining motivation through:</td>
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<td>* framing of the training</td>
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<td>* supervisor support</td>
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<td>* removal of obstacles</td>
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<td>* Tailor training to individual needs based on gender and other individual differences</td>
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<td><strong>Training Design and Delivery Factors</strong></td>
<td>* Behavioral modeling, practice, and timely and specific feedback positively influence learning, training performance, and transfer</td>
<td>* Use interactive/experiential methods [potentially inconsistent with research findings]</td>
<td>* Consider voluntary training where appropriate</td>
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<td></td>
<td>* Effectiveness of training methods may depend on particular skills/tasks trained</td>
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<td>* Incorporate opportunities for specific and timely feedback about knowledge learned and skills acquired</td>
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<td></td>
<td>* Role plays are particularly useful for interpersonal skills</td>
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<td>* Provide opportunities for practice</td>
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<td></td>
<td>* Videos can improve knowledge and reduce inappropriate behaviors but may not change attitudes</td>
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<td>* Base training method on training content and competency being trained</td>
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<td></td>
<td>* Attitude change requires more interactive/experiential training methods</td>
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<td>* Interactive/experiential methods (e.g., role-play) may be particularly useful for the acquisition of skills and changing attitudes</td>
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<td>* Effective trainers have topical expertise and training-specific skills</td>
<td>* Employ trainers with appropriate expertise [consistent with research findings]</td>
<td>* Passive methods (e.g., lectures, videos) may be suitable when the objective is information dissemination</td>
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<td>* Use outside training consultants [no direct link to research findings]</td>
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**FIGURE 1.** Research-Practitioner Gaps and Bridges
release time to prepare for training, and/or making arrangements to have trainees’ work covered while in training are conducive to training effectiveness. Finally, an organizational training philosophy that results in providing sufficient staff and budget for training can also impact whether HR will deliver a successful training program (Salas et al., 1999). These organizational factors can influence how effectively training will be implemented and how employees will perceive it.

Within the sexual harassment literature, organizational climate has received a good deal of research attention. Research by Fitzgerald and her colleagues (see, e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Hulin, Fitzgerald, & Drasgow, 1996) found that organizational climate, specifically the extent to which the organization tolerates sexual harassment, contributes to the prevalence of sexual harassment in the organization. Employees’ perceptions that the organization tolerates sexual harassment are likely to reduce the effectiveness of sexual harassment training and may also reduce their motivation to participate in training. Such climates may create perceived and actual obstacles that limit trainees’ ability to transfer what is learned in the training (e.g., how to respond to sexual harassment) back to the job.

### FIGURE 1. Continued.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Posttraining Factors</th>
<th>Evaluation Factors</th>
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<tr>
<td>* Individual characteristics (e.g., self-efficacy, mastery orientation) facilitate training transfer</td>
<td>Depending on the training objectives, training effectiveness can be assessed by:</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Supervisory support for training and a positive posttraining climate increase motivation to transfer</td>
<td>* Reactions. Appropriate for assessing potential backlash against the training</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Maintenance efforts (e.g., goal setting) increase the likelihood of training transfer</td>
<td>* Learning. Appropriate for assessing whether individuals have increased their knowledge or changed their attitudes</td>
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<td>* Attend to climate for transfer [consistent with research findings but incomplete]</td>
<td>* Behavior. Important for understanding whether job behavior improved</td>
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<td>* Follow-up after training</td>
<td>* Results. Important for determining the organizational impact of training</td>
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<td>* Provide takeaway materials</td>
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<td>* Use maintenance interventions (refresher training) [consistent with research findings but incomplete]</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Increase trainee self-efficacy and mastery orientation</td>
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<td>* Encourage supervisory support by making it a part of performance appraisal</td>
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<td>* Assess and improve organizational climate</td>
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<td>* Increase motivation to transfer by providing opportunities to practice newly learned skills on the job and rewarding improved knowledge and behaviors</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Provide trainees with learning points once back on the job</td>
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<td>* Develop maintenance interventions matched to trainee individual differences</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Reactions. Implement surveys following the training to measure attitudes about the training and its perceived usefulness</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Learning. Develop or use already developed measures of sexual harassment knowledge and attitudes prior to and following training</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Behavior. Conduct surveys asking respondents to report on their own and others’ sexual harassment related behaviors at work</td>
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<tr>
<td>* Results. Assess the number of sexual harassment complaints and/or climate prior to and following sexual harassment training</td>
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* Practitioner recommendations discussed by 20% or more of the articles reviewed are boldfaced. Bracketed information reports the quality of each practitioner recommendation relative to research evidence.
Practitioner Recommendations

When practitioner articles discussed organizational influences, they focused most frequently on organizational training philosophy, specifically, recommendations about who should be trained. More than 20% of the 52 practitioner articles touched on this topic. These articles expressed the belief that it is important to train a broad set of individuals in the organization (see, e.g., Carey, 1998a; Milite, 1999; Smiley-Marquez, 1999). In addition, many articles specifically advised organizations to train employees at all levels in the organization. This seems to be reasonable advice; however, it was not always clear what the basis for this recommendation was.

Pretraining Factors

Research Findings

Individual characteristics (e.g., trainees' abilities, attitudes, and self-efficacy) and motivation to learn exist prior to training and play a role in training effectiveness (Alvarez et al., 2003; Kraiger et al., 2004; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001). Pretraining needs assessment can assess both individual attributes and characteristics of the job or organization that may influence training effectiveness. Training research shows consistent evidence for the effects of pretraining self-efficacy (perceived ability to master training content), pretraining motivation, cognitive ability, and prior training experience on learning outcomes (Alvarez et al., 2003; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001).

Despite evidence of their potential importance in the general training literature, sexual harassment training research has tended not to study individual characteristics such as trainee abilities, motivation, or self-efficacy. Instead, this research has explored the role of demographic variables (particularly trainee gender) and other individual characteristics in training outcomes.

Both meta-analytic studies (Blumenthal, 1998; Rotundo, Nguyen, & Sackett, 2001) and narrative reviews of the literature (see, e.g., Gutek & O’Connor, 1995) find small, but consistent gender differences in perceptions of sexual harassment, especially when behaviors are less severe and more ambiguous (Gutek, 1995). Gender differences in perceptions of sexual harassment suggest that training may have different effects on female compared to male trainees. And, in fact, a number of studies have found that sexual harassment training has a greater positive impact on men than women (Beauvais, 1986; Blakely, Blakely, & Moorman, 1998; Bonate & Jessell, 1996; Moyer & Nath, 1998). Research suggests that within-gender differences also play a role in training effectiveness, however (see, e.g., Kearney, Rochlen, & King, 2004; Perry, Kulik, & Schmidtke, 1998; Robb & Doverspike, 2001). Sexual harassment training has been shown to be less effective in changing attitudes of men who have a higher proclivity to harass (Robb & Doverspike, 2001) or who report more gender role conflict (Kearney et al., 2004). Pryor (1987) developed the Likelihood to Sexually Harass instrument, which asks men to respond to a series of scenarios to measure their propensity to commit the most severe forms of sexual harassment. Gender role conflict (GRC) is a psychological state in which socialized gender roles have negative implications for the self and others. This propensity has been measured using the GRC scale (O’Neil, Helms, Gable, David, & Wrightsman, 1986), which assesses men’s attitudes concerning gender role behavior.

Practitioner Recommendations

Needs assessment and motivation to learn were the pretraining elements discussed most frequently in the practitioner literature, discussed by more than 20% of the practitioner articles. A number of articles explicitly advised assessing trainee and organizational needs prior to training (e.g., Champagne & Mcafee, 1989; Larison & Olk, 1996), while others more generally suggested that training needs to be tailored to the particular company (e.g., Carey, 1998b; Zachary, 1996). This
recommendation is appropriate and consistent with training research and theory that emphasizes the importance of conducting pretraining needs assessments (Roberson, Kulik, & Pepper, 2003). More than 20% of the practitioner articles touched on issues relevant to trainees’ motivation to learn. The majority of discussions relevant to motivational issues focused on whether sexual harassment training should be mandatory versus voluntary. Most of these papers recommended that sexual harassment training be mandatory (e.g., Johnson, 1999; Moore & Bradley, 1997; Orlov & Roumell, 1999). Research indicates, however, that voluntary training may have more positive effects than mandatory training on trainees’ motivation to learn (Salas et al., 1999).

Training Design and Delivery Factors

Research Findings

Training objectives (whether training is intended to change behaviors or attitudes); opportunities for specific, timely, and accurate feedback and practice during and after training; and the instructional strategies and methods used (how information is presented; how knowledge, skills, and abilities are demonstrated) have implications for training effectiveness (Salas et al., 1999). The effectiveness of particular methods (e.g., lectures, role-play) may depend on the particular skills or tasks being trained (Alvarez et al., 2003; Arthur, Bennett, Edens, & Bell, 2003). For example, role-play simulations may be particularly effective for training interpersonal skills (Salas et al., 1999). Behavioral modeling, practice, and feedback have been found to positively influence learning, training performance, and training transfer across a number of contexts (Alvarez et al., 2003; Tannenbaum et al., 1993), although their effectiveness may depend on the training task (Alvarez et al., 2003). Finally, Salas et al. (1999) noted that trainers may not be adequately prepared to design and deliver training. Training effectiveness is enhanced when trainers pair topical expertise with training-specific skills that enable them to maintain trainee motivation and maximize the learning environment (Salas et al., 1999).

Most studies assessing the impact of sexual harassment training have employed videos, either alone or in combination with other methods such as discussion or case studies (e.g., Beauvais, 1986; Blakely et al., 1998; Kearney et al., 2004; Moyer & Nath, 1998; Perry et al., 1998; Robb & Doverspike, 2001). Few empirical sexual harassment training studies, however, have directly compared the effectiveness of alternative sexual harassment training methods (for exceptions see Bonate & Jessell, 1996; York, Barclay, & Zajack, 1997). Although computer-based sexual harassment training programs are increasingly available (e.g., Welber, 2001; Wellbrock, 1999), we did not find any empirical studies assessing their effectiveness. As a result, we know little about the impact of different sexual harassment training methods on various outcomes. A study by Perry et al. (1998), however, suggests that sexual harassment training methods may have differential effects across training outcomes. In Perry et al.’s (1998) research, videos were effective at improving trainee knowledge about sexual harassment and reducing inappropriate behaviors but did not change attitudes related to the propensity to harass others. The authors suggested that attitude change may require more interactive and experiential training methods. Consistent with this, Beauvais (1986) assessed a training program that included an interactive discussion of a video series and found some evidence that the training changed sexual harassment related attitudes.

Practitioner Recommendations

Approximately half of the articles in the practitioner literature discussed instructional strategies and methods. The majority of publications discussed experiential methods (e.g., role-play, interactive discussions) or a combination of experiential methods and information presentation (e.g., video and presenting factual information) techniques.
Role-play, discussions, videos, and case studies were among the most common training methods discussed in the literature. Although much of the content was descriptive (letting HR managers know that these methods are available options), several authors made more explicit recommendations regarding the use of interactive and experiential methods, suggesting that these methods (e.g., role-play) are likely to be particularly effective in the context of sexual harassment training (e.g., Carey, 1998a; Moore & Bradley, 1997; Orlov & Roumell, 1999). The advice in the practitioner literature is consistent with research suggesting that role-play simulations (an experiential method) may be particularly effective for training interpersonal skills (Salas et al., 1999). This advice, however, overlooks the fact that less interactive methods may be appropriate in some training contexts.

More than 20% of articles discussed trainer characteristics. Some authors discussed the importance of using trainers with the appropriate background and expertise (e.g., knowledge of the psychological and legal issues relevant to sexual harassment) (Kronenburger & Bourke, 1981; Laabs, 1995; Paludi & Barickman, 1998; Schroeder, 1999). This is consistent with the academic training literature (e.g., Salas et al., 1999), which has emphasized the importance of providing adequate training to trainers so that they have the requisite skills.

Other design and delivery factors were mentioned in the practitioner literature but received spotty and inconsistent coverage. For example, some authors in the practitioner literature suggested that an important issue was the choice between inside and outside training consultants (Orlov & Roumell, 1999). A number of authors noted that organizations typically do or should use outside consultants (e.g., Carey, 1998a; Ganzel, 1998; Milite, 1999; Reinhart, 1999) for practical, political, and legal reasons. Some authors suggested that organizations often do not have the necessary in-house expertise to develop training programs that are legally defensible (Carey, 1998a; Milite, 1999). In addition, some authors caution that employees may perceive in-house training as overemphasizing management’s perspective on sexual harassment issues (Carey, 1998a; Milite, 1999). No direct research evidence exists, however, related to the use of inside compared to outside training consultants.

**Posttraining Factors**

**Research Findings**

Individual characteristics, climate for transfer, and maintenance interventions are likely to influence training effectiveness (Salas et al., 1999). Posttraining self-efficacy is related to learning, training performance, and training transfer behaviors (Alvarez et al., 2003). Posttraining mastery orientation (a goal orientation in which individuals seek to develop competence by mastering novel situations) is also related to transfer behaviors. The transfer climate in which supervisors model trained behavior and reinforce appropriate behaviors as well as supervisor support have been found to affect employee motivation to transfer what is learned in training to the job (Tannenbaum et al., 1993). Finally, evidence exists that maintenance intervention strategies (e.g., setting goals for posttraining behaviors) can improve the probability of training transfer (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001; Tannenbaum et al., 1993).

Some empirical sexual harassment training studies have found positive outcomes associated with sexual harassment training, including positive trainee evaluations (e.g., Barak, 1994), greater knowledge of sexual harassment (e.g., Beauvais, 1986), and higher demonstrated skills in response to simulated sexual harassment incidents (e.g., Blaxall, Parsonson, & Robertson, 1993). Research has not systematically explored how these immediate training outcomes transfer to the work environment to affect on-the-job behavior. Fitzgerald and her colleagues’ (e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Hulin et al., 1996) research suggests, however, that positive transfer is less likely in organizations where the climate is more tolerant of sexual harassment.
Employees working in such organizations are unlikely to be motivated to apply what they learn in training (e.g., how to file a grievance) when they return to their jobs.

Practitioner Recommendations

Posttraining factors were among the least frequently addressed factors in the practitioner literature. Only maintenance interventions (e.g., using refresher training) were addressed in more than 20% of all articles. Focusing on this factor, however, is a good sign because there is evidence that intervention strategies can improve the probability of training transfer (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001; Tannenbaum et al., 1993). The majority of authors who discussed maintenance interventions focused on the importance of providing repeat or refresher training (Johnson, 1999; Lenckus, 2001; Orlov & Roumell, 1999). This likely leaves practitioners, however, with questions regarding what refresher training should look like and when it should be implemented (e.g., how long after the training is completed).

Training Evaluation

Research Findings

Training evaluation is essential to determine whether training accomplishes its goals. The choice of evaluation method should be based on the purpose of the training. Training can be evaluated by assessing trainees’ reactions to the training (satisfaction with training, perceived usefulness of training), learning (changes in attitudes, knowledge, and skills), behavior (changes in job behavior), and results attributable to training (increased sales or reduced costs, improved return on investment) (Kirkpatrick, 1996).

Practitioner Recommendations

Our review suggests that training evaluation was another of the most infrequently discussed topics in the practitioner literature. Two articles discussed the need for training evaluation in general (Larison & Olk, 1996; Moore & Bradley, 1997), but few articles discussed any given type of training evaluation (i.e., reaction, learning, behavior, or results). When training evaluation was raised, learning was the most frequently discussed means of training evaluation, followed by results (e.g., reduced number of sexual harassment complaints). Finally, behavior and reactions were discussed the least frequently.

Research-Practitioner Gaps

Figure 1 demonstrates that very different information is presented in the Research Findings and Practitioner Recommendations columns. In some cases, the two literatures provide inconsistent advice for HR managers trying to design and implement sexual harassment training. In other cases, the practitioner literature offers no advice, incomplete advice, or advice that is not linked to research evidence. Here, we highlight some of the most important discrepancies between the two literatures.

Organization Influences

The practitioner literature is sparse and incomplete regarding the role of organizational influences such as climate and supervisory support in sexual harassment training. For example, situational constraints can negatively impact trainees’ motivation to learn (Tannenbaum et al., 1993). In addition, supervisor support for training is positively related to trainees’ motivation to learn, transfer trained material, and acquire knowledge (Kraiger et al., 2004). Surprisingly, only a limited number of publications discussed the fact that organizational values and climate could influence training and training effectiveness (Larison & Olk, 1996; Moore & Bradley, 1997; Orlov & Roumell, 1999; Sbraga & O’Donahue, 2000). Further, these publications did not offer a clear and unified approach to assessing and shaping organizational values and climates that would support sexual harassment training. The limited number of publications (less than 20%) that discussed support focused on the importance of the organization’s and top management’s
commitment to and support for training (e.g., Milite, 1999; Orlov & Roumell, 1999). Beyond endorsing the training, however, these publications provided little in-depth discussion about what support should entail; nor did they provide recommendations on how to create a supportive environment. For example, little discussion was given to how supervisors might help employees set training goals or provide release time for training. More attention to these issues is warranted.

Pretraining Factors

The practitioner literature frequently recommended conducting an individual needs assessment (e.g., Champagne & McAfee, 1989; Larison & Olk, 1996), but it has been silent regarding which individual characteristics (e.g., attitudes, abilities, self-efficacy, competencies) are most relevant to assess in the context of sexual harassment training effectiveness. In addition, individual characteristics studied in empirical sexual harassment research (e.g., likelihood to sexually harass, gender role conflict) have not received attention in the practitioner literature. The only individual characteristic discussed in the practitioner literature was organizational position, and even this was discussed very infrequently. Some authors suggested that all employees should receive the same basic training, but that supervisors should receive additional training about legal responsibilities and managing complaints (e.g., Johnson, 1999; Orlov & Roumell, 1999; Reinhart, 1999).

Although research has discussed whether training should be mandatory or voluntary (Salas et al., 1999), the implications of this for pretraining motivation have not been directly or thoroughly explored, despite evidence that motivation can influence learning outcomes. The practitioner literature suggested that sexual harassment training should be mandatory (e.g., Johnson, 1999; Orlov & Roumell, 1999; Paludi & Barickman, 1998), while training research and theory indicate that voluntary training may have more positive effects on the motivation to learn (Wiethoff, 2004).

The lack of attention to individual characteristics (e.g., pretraining self-efficacy, cognitive ability) and limited focus on pretraining motivation are problematic in light of training research findings (Alvarez et al., 2003; Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001). HR managers may not recognize that training may be differentially effective for various individuals or understand the role that motivation plays in sexual harassment training.

Training Design and Delivery Factors

Learning principles (behavioral modeling, practice, and feedback) have been found to influence learning, training performance, and transfer positively across a number of contexts (Alvarez et al., 2003; Tannenbaum et al., 1993). Opportunities to practice specific behaviors (e.g., how to respond to sexual harassment) and to receive specific, timely, and accurate feedback on those behaviors during and after training have important implications for training effectiveness (Salas et al., 1999). The practitioner literature, however, has been nearly silent regarding the use of traditional learning principles. A few articles in the practitioner literature (e.g., Licata & Popovich, 1987; Orlov & Roumell, 1999; Thacker, 1992) discussed how practice and feedback should be used to facilitate learning. These articles are exceptions—articles in the practitioner literature rarely address the learning principles that training research and theory suggest should guide how training is conducted.

In addition, although several authors in the practitioner literature recommended using a variety of training methods, their discussion was incomplete and potentially inconsistent with training research and theory. Few authors in the practitioner literature wrote about the choice of training methods other than to suggest that interactive and experiential methods were generally preferred (Moore & Bradley, 1997; Orlov & Roumell, 1999). Practitioners’ preference for...
interactive and experiential methods (which emerged from our review) may be misplaced when training individuals on certain types of content and for certain competencies. In fact, lectures are quite effective for training a variety of skills and tasks (Arthur et al., 2003). If the goal of sexual harassment training is to provide objective content (e.g., to define sexual harassment and teach employees to recognize it), a lecture format may be an effective and efficient way to train large groups of individuals. In addition, the failure to discuss the reasoning behind the choice of instruction methods in the literature may leave HR managers with the mistaken impression that the most commonly used training methods (e.g., role-play, discussions, videos, case studies) can be used indiscriminately to address a range of sexual harassment problems.

Posttraining Factors

The practitioner literature has been relatively silent about the role of posttraining factors, particularly individual characteristics (e.g., trainees' abilities, attitudes, self-efficacy), the climate for transfer, and posttraining motivation in training effectiveness. None of the articles we reviewed discussed the role that individual characteristics may play in influencing whether what trainees learn in training transfers to the job. Research, however, shows, for example, that posttraining self-efficacy influences transfer behaviors (Alvarez et al., 2003). This research suggests that sexual harassment training may have greater long-term impact for certain individuals or when organizations implement practices designed to boost trainees' posttraining self-efficacy (e.g., show trainees how they can apply what they learn to their jobs).

The small number of authors who discussed issues related to the climate for transfer tended to focus on the importance of following up after training (e.g., Moore, Gatlin-Watts, & Cangelosi, 1998) and providing takeaway reference materials (e.g., Carey, 1998a). Few details were provided, however, regarding what follow-up should include. In addition, little to no attention was given to the role of the posttraining climate generally (e.g., the value placed on continuous learning) or more specifically to managerial, supervisor, and peer support in training transfer. Evidence exists, however, that transfer climate and specifically management support for training affect trainees' motivation to transfer what they learn in training to the job. For example, motivation may be low where supervisor reinforcement or modeling of the trained behaviors is minimal (Tannenbaum et al., 1993). Because posttraining factors (e.g., self-efficacy, motivation to transfer) generally have not been explored in the practitioner literature, HR managers have limited knowledge about when training, even if initially effective, transfers to the job.

Training Evaluation

The fact that reactions were infrequently discussed as a means to evaluate sexual harassment training is an encouraging finding because measuring reactions, while an easy strategy for training evaluation, does not provide direct information about learning (Bingham & Scherer, 2001; Kirkpatrick, 1996). Unfortunately, the effect of training on behaviors was also discussed quite infrequently. As a result, HR managers know little about the actual changes that result from sexual harassment training. The lack of attention to evaluating training effectiveness in the practitioner literature may be irrelevant if the sole goal of training is to provide an organization with legal protection. Implementing sexual harassment training of unknown quality, however, may have serious negative implications that could ironically make organizations more vulnerable to legal action (Bisom-Rapp, 2001).

Recommendations to Bridge Research-Practitioner Gaps

Our review of the practitioner literature revealed a number of gaps between the factors demonstrated to influence training effectiveness and recommendations made in the
practitioner literature. We agree with Salas et al.’s (1999) observation that “while further research is needed to refine training, more energy should be focused on disseminating what is already known about training to organizations” (p. 153). In this section we provide concrete suggestions for HR managers who are interested in implementing more effective sexual harassment training. These suggestions are summarized in the final column of Figure 1.

**Take a broader perspective and conduct an organizational needs assessment prior to training.** Our assessment of the practitioner literature suggests that HR managers may not be adequately informed about the role of organizational context or understand how to impact it to improve sexual harassment training effectiveness. We recommend that HR conduct a training needs assessment prior to designing and delivering sexual harassment training (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001), which includes the organizational level of analysis. Such an assessment could include an evaluation of the organizational climate and the level of support for sexual harassment training. The assessment outcomes would help HR managers determine the organization’s commitment to sexual harassment training programs, identify obstacles to successfully implementing sexual harassment training, and suggest aspects of the climate that may need to be changed or developed to provide greater support for sexual harassment training.

Fitzgerald and her colleagues’ work (e.g., Fitzgerald et al., 1997; Hulin et al., 1996) suggests that one aspect of climate that should be assessed is the organization’s tolerance for sexual harassment. They developed an instrument (the Organizational Tolerance for Sexual Harassment Inventory [OTSHI]) for this purpose. HR could conduct an assessment using the OTSHI and provide results to senior management making the climate more explicit and public. Results from such an assessment could be used to create a perceived need for change and a sense of urgency, both of which are essential to successful change efforts (Kotter, 1995). Successful change efforts also have organizational leaders who champion change and employees and other stakeholders (e.g., union leaders, board members) who see the need for change (Ulrich, 1998). Although HR managers are often not in a position to effect change on their own, they are increasingly adopting the role of change agent (Caldwell, 2001). If change is to happen, HR must take an active role in identifying senior-level executives who will champion sexual harassment climate change, support the implementation of sexual harassment training, and build a coalition of support (e.g., senior management, representatives from key stakeholder groups) for these efforts within the organization (Ulrich, 1998).

**Consider the role of trainee characteristics in training effectiveness; conduct an individual needs assessment prior to training.** If HR managers assume that all trainees are equally prepared and motivated to engage in sexual harassment training, the training may not be effective for all participants (Salas et al., 1999). An individual needs assessment conducted prior to training may help HR managers determine who needs to be trained and the type of training they require. Some individual differences that impact training effectiveness (e.g., individuals’ likelihood to sexually harass) are clearly controversial, and management may feel legally vulnerable identifying individuals who do not “know” what sexual harassment is or who may have a greater proclivity to harass. Other individual characteristics (e.g., gender and gender role conflict), however, are associated with the likelihood to sexually harass and can be used to help HR managers tailor training to individual needs.

Relative to men, women are more likely to recognize ambiguous and less severe forms of sexual behavior as examples of harassment (Gutek, 1995). They are also more likely to be at risk of sexual harassment (Bergman & Henning, 2008; U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission [EEOC], 2008). As a result, male and female trainees are likely to
enter a sexual harassment training program with different levels of sexual harassment knowledge and motivation to learn. To address pretraining differences between the sexes, men and women may require different types of sexual harassment training, which can be facilitated by separating men and women into same-sex groups for some or all of the training. Diversity training, for example, is sometimes more effective when it is delivered to homogeneous training groups, where trainees have common needs and benefit from observing people like them model the trained skills (Roberson, Kulik, & Pepper, 2001).

Conducting some of the training in same-sex groups may also make it easier to provide different training content to men and women. Sexual harassment training may have a greater positive impact on men (e.g., Beauvais, 1982; Bonate & Jessell, 1996; Moyer & Nath, 1998) because it provides them with knowledge about sexual harassing behaviors they do not have. Men may particularly benefit from training that helps them recognize less extreme forms of sexual harassment such as telling jokes of a sexual nature. On the other hand, training directed at women could focus on how to respond to overtures from men who may not understand that their behavior is sexually harassing.

Sexual harassment training may also have a greater positive impact on men because they are less likely than women to be targets of sexual harassment (e.g., Bergman & Henning, 2008; U.S. EEOC, 2008) and may see the issue as less relevant than women prior to the training. This suggests that sexual harassment training provided to men must "sell" them on the value of such training. Training should thus be designed to encourage men to engage with the training and carefully process the information provided. Highlighting the positive benefits of such training (e.g., reduced absence, improved morale) for both the company and employees may help trainees understand the importance of sexual harassment training. Women may not need to be "sold" on the importance of sexual harassment training to the same extent. They should be provided, however, with the skills necessary to respond to and manage the sexually harassing incidents they are more likely to encounter.

Another individual difference that influences training effectiveness and may therefore be useful for guiding training content is gender role conflict. Research finds that sexual harassment training is more effective for individuals who experience less gender role conflict as measured by the GRC (Kearney et al., 2004). Evidence that gender role conflict can be directly targeted for change is mixed (O’Neil, 2008), but high GRC scoring men benefit from factual information about how restrictive gender roles associated with gender role conflict impact their attitudes and interactions with others (O’Neil, 2008). In particular, sexual harassment training could target high GRC scoring male trainees’ preoccupation with success, power, and competition. Trainers could help these males identify their preoccupation, explain how sex role socialization influences men’s experiences, and describe the difficulties that arise as a result of this preoccupation. This awareness may help this particular subset of males be more receptive to sexual harassment training.

Computer-based training that assesses individual needs and provides individual-specific training (without keeping permanent records) may increase training effectiveness and reduce employers’ legal concerns. Computer-based sexual harassment training programs have been available commercially for a number of years (“Training and development,” 2004; “Training and development,” 2007; Welber, 2001; Wellbrock, 1999), although little is known about their relative effectiveness. A computer-based training program could be developed that conducts an individual needs assessment (e.g., measures gender role conflict or knowledge about sexual harassment) and delivers training tailored to the trainees’ assessed needs (Hartley & West, 2007).

In addition to identifying differences that have implications for training content,
trainers can take steps to minimize the influence of individual differences on training outcomes. Understanding that trainees may have different characteristics (e.g., gender role conflict, likelihood to sexually harass), competencies (e.g., current knowledge about sexual harassment), and motivation prior to training may help HR managers understand the importance of developing interventions to bring all trainees to a level where they can benefit from the training. For example, the provision of pretraining preparatory information can ensure that all trainees have a basic knowledge of sexual harassment related issues. Further, the general framing of the training, for example, emphasizing the opportunities it affords rather than as a punitive measure designed to limit costs, can increase the motivation (Salas & Cannon-Bowers, 2001) of those most reluctant to participate. Such framing can help ensure a base level of motivation to participate across all trainees. Steps to minimize the impact of individual differences on training outcomes (e.g., providing pretraining preparatory information) would seem to raise few legal concerns.

**Target aspects of the organization and training that may directly influence trainee characteristics.** Aspects of the organization and the training program can influence trainee characteristics such as motivation to attend training and learn. For example, trainees with supportive supervisors (e.g., those who help their employees establish training goals) may perceive the training as more useful and thus be more motivated to attend training and learn (Tannenbaum et al., 1993; Wiethoff, 2004). Moreover, eliminating organizational obstacles that prevent trainees from applying what will be learned in the work environment may positively influence trainees’ motivation. For example, HR managers could provide training to supervisors to help them understand how they can support training transfer (e.g., help employees identify and respond to sexual harassment in situ). Aspects of the training may also influence trainee characteristics. Salas et al. (1999) suggested that voluntary training may have more positive effects than mandatory training on motivation to learn. Sexual harassment training, however, tends to be mandatory for legal reasons. Training serves multiple objectives, and while voluntary training may meet some goals (e.g., increase motivation to participate), it may have negative implications for others (e.g., legal compliance). HR managers should carefully consider whether and what aspects of sexual harassment training should be mandatory versus voluntary because this decision is likely to have important implications for trainees’ motivation to participate in training.

**Incorporate learning principles into sexual harassment training.** Despite the effectiveness of learning principles (Alvarez et al., 2003; Tannenbaum et al., 1993), very few authors in the practitioner literature discussed how behavioral modeling, practice, and feedback should be incorporated into sexual harassment training. Diagnostic feedback helps individuals learn new concepts and develop new skills. Training, therefore, should incorporate specific, timely, and practical feedback to trainees. In addition, trainees must be given opportunities to practice what is being learned (Schuler & Jackson, 1996).

Where the primary training objective is to increase sexual harassment related knowledge, computer-based training could be employed. Computer-based training has been developed that presents trainees with information followed by a series of questions. Answering these questions then tests the trainees’ understanding of the material (Wellbrock, 1999). Specific feedback in the form of correct responses could be provided immediately and incorrect responses could initiate more practice (e.g., presenting additional information and questions). Where a primary objective of training is to develop skills related to responding to sexual harassment, role-play could be used. Participants could be given opportunities to respond to simulated sexual harassing situations with different partners. These enacted role-plays could be followed by written scenarios in which
respondents “practice” how they would respond to various potentially threatening situations. Trainees’ responses to the role-plays and scenarios could then be reviewed and trainees provided with immediate and constructive feedback.

Consider the training methods that are likely to be most effective given the training content and competencies being trained. The effectiveness of particular instructional methods is likely to depend on the training content (Alvarez et al., 2003) and the specific competency being trained (Arthur et al., 2003; Salas et al., 1999). Interactive instructional methods such as role-plays may be most appropriate to help trainees develop the interpersonal skills required to effectively respond to a potential harasser. Role-plays can be developed around critical incidents (Flanagan, 1954) reflecting organizational situations that trainees might realistically encounter on the job. This realism can help trainees see the training’s relevance and facilitate training transfer to the work context (Roberson, Kulik, & Pepper, 2002). For example, an organization intending to teach salespeople how to manage a client who sexually harasses might find role-plays particularly useful.

On the other hand, presentation techniques such as lectures and videos may effectively teach facts and definitions related to sexual harassment. “Passive” methods (i.e., videos, lectures) may be completely appropriate if the organization’s training goal is primarily disseminating information (Perry et al., 1998). For example, an organization intending to teach supervisors how to distinguish sexual harassment from other forms of employee misconduct might effectively communicate this information through a standardized lecture. HR managers need to determine (through evaluation) what methods are most effective for training different types of skills and content. At a minimum, HR managers should recognize that if their training goals are primarily skill-based, experiential methods may be more useful than more passive alternatives.

Assess and influence posttraining factors. A positive transfer climate contributes to transfer behaviors (Alvarez et al., 2003). Sexual harassment training should not end when the video is turned off and everyone has returned to work. HR managers must assess the organizational context (e.g., climate) to which trainees return and take steps to make it as supportive as possible. For example, trainees might be provided with learning points to help them retain knowledge, and organizations should ensure that managers support both the trainees themselves and what they learned in the training (e.g., reinforcing the use of newly learned grievance reporting procedures). One way to encourage supervisor support is to make supportive behaviors a basis for supervisors’ own performance appraisals (Kraiger et al., 2004). For example, supervisors could be evaluated on the extent to which they provide feedback sessions after training to discuss how to help trainees create a respectful and nonoffensive work environment. HR could also assess their organization’s tolerance for sexual harassment. Presenting the organization with evidence that a climate tolerant of sexual harassment exists may serve to stimulate climate change.

In addition, HR managers must be aware that individual differences influence knowledge transfer and learned skills (Roberson, Kulik, & Pepper, 2009). This suggests the value of assessing trainees following training and developing maintenance interventions based on individual differences (e.g., abilities, attitudes) that emerge. It may also mean taking steps to influence individual characteristics. Training effectiveness research and theory suggest that posttraining self-efficacy tends to have a positive effect on learning, performance, and transfer, while posttraining mastery orientation has a positive influence on transfer behaviors (Alvarez et al., 2003). Posttraining self-efficacy may be improved by helping trainees understand how they can successfully apply what they learn in sexual harassment training to their jobs.

Attention also should be given to increasing trainees’ motivation to apply what has
been learned by providing employees with opportunities to practice newly learned skills (communication, conflict resolution) and rewarding them for improved knowledge and interpersonal behaviors. For example, supervisors’ knowledge and application of sexual harassment policies and procedures could be incorporated into annual performance assessments. In addition, efforts to increase supervisor support for training, discussed previously, are likely to increase employee posttraining motivation.

**Evaluate, evaluate, evaluate.** While there are many ways to evaluate training (see, e.g., Kirkpatrick, 1996), the critical issue is whether training delivers the results the organization hopes to achieve. Depending on the organization’s training objectives (e.g., to satisfy legal requirements, improve skills, create a more positive working climate), different assessment strategies may be appropriate.

Employees’ reactions to training (e.g., satisfaction with the training, perceived training usefulness) are among the most frequently used and easily obtained data to assess training effectiveness (Tannenbaum & Yukl, 1992). Although these data may provide little insight into whether training improved knowledge or changed behavior, they may provide useful information about potential backlash toward the training.

Several studies have evaluated learning by assessing knowledge and attitudes about sexual harassment prior to and following a training intervention (e.g., Beauvais, 1986; Maurizio & Rogers, 1992; Thomann et al., 1989). Depending on the specific objective of the training, an assessment could be developed or adopted from the empirical literature. Such an assessment could focus on knowledge of legal issues surrounding sexual harassment or organizational policies related to filing a complaint. These assessments could be readily adopted in a pretest/posttest design.

Training evaluation focusing on behavioral outcomes is essential to determine whether employees are actually using on the job what they have learned in the training. To assess behavioral changes, organizations could implement a survey prior to and following a sexual harassment training intervention. The survey could ask employees to evaluate their own and others’ behavior on the job (e.g., the extent to which they or their coworkers make inappropriate or offensive comments or remarks). A similar approach has been used to evaluate the effects of diversity training on posttraining behavior (Sanchez & Medkik, 2004).

Few studies implemented in organizational contexts have assessed results related to sexual harassment training. An exception is a study by Williams, Lam, and Shively (1992) that tracked the number of reported incidences of sexual harassment over time in an institution that implemented sexual harassment training interventions at various points. Another way to assess an organizational outcome related to sexual harassment training would be to administer the OTSHI (Fitzgerald et al., 1997), a measure of the organization’s tolerance for sexual harassment, prior to and following training.

**Conclusion**

Quite a few factors that have been found to influence training effectiveness (e.g., pretraining and posttraining self-efficacy) in the academic training literature have not been addressed in the practitioner literature. In addition, when factors found to influence training effectiveness were addressed in the practitioner literature, they were often discussed only superficially. This may be due to practitioner authors’ lack of knowledge or because HR managers feel they have limited ability to implement certain best practices. If HR managers implement sexual harassment training based on recommendations in the practitioner literature, the training may protect their employers from legal liability, but it may not reduce or control sexual harassment. In fact, sexual harassment training that is not informed by training theory and research may do more harm than good and result in unanticipated costs to the organization.
including backlash and unabated incidences of harassment.

Salas and his colleagues (e.g., Salas & Kosarzycki, 2003; Salas, Cannon-Bowers, & Blickenderfer, 1997) have speculated on what causes the lack of reciprocity between training research and practice. Similarly, Rynes et al. (2002) suggested reasons for the gap between HRM research and practice. One of the primary causes these authors identified is that researchers do not do a good job of translating their research findings into specific practical recommendations. In addition, research findings are not accessible to HR managers because rigorous research is often published in academic journals that are hard to find and difficult to read. As a result, HR managers may not know what they do not know. This review is an attempt to highlight the areas in which training research “knows” what is effective, but practitioners are either unaware of this research or are aware but have failed to disseminate what this research shows. In these situations, Salas and his colleagues have suggested that researchers attempt to bridge the research-practitioner divide by making their training recommendations more specific and directive and communicating these recommendations in forums (e.g., in “bridge” publications such as HRM) to which practitioners have access.

In addition to difficulties related to academics’ sharing established knowledge with practitioners, another likely cause for the research-practitioner gap exists in the area of sexual harassment training. Some areas of the academic training effectiveness literature are more developed, such as training characteristics, than others, such as organization influences (Alvarez et al., 2003). Where the literature is underdeveloped, it cannot inform sexual harassment training because it is impossible to transfer what we do not yet know to the realm of practice. In addition, practitioners have identified issues that have not been addressed in the training effectiveness research. For example, some in the practitioner literature advocate training on an annual basis (e.g., McGrath & Harper, 1994; Moore & Bradley, 1997; Smiley-Marquez, 1999), or for a specific period (Zachary, 1996). Training research and theory are mute on these issues. This makes it all the more important that practitioners evaluate the training programs they implement.

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References

References with an asterisk were identified in our review of the practitioner literature and their content is summarized in the Practitioner Recommendations column of Figure 1.


