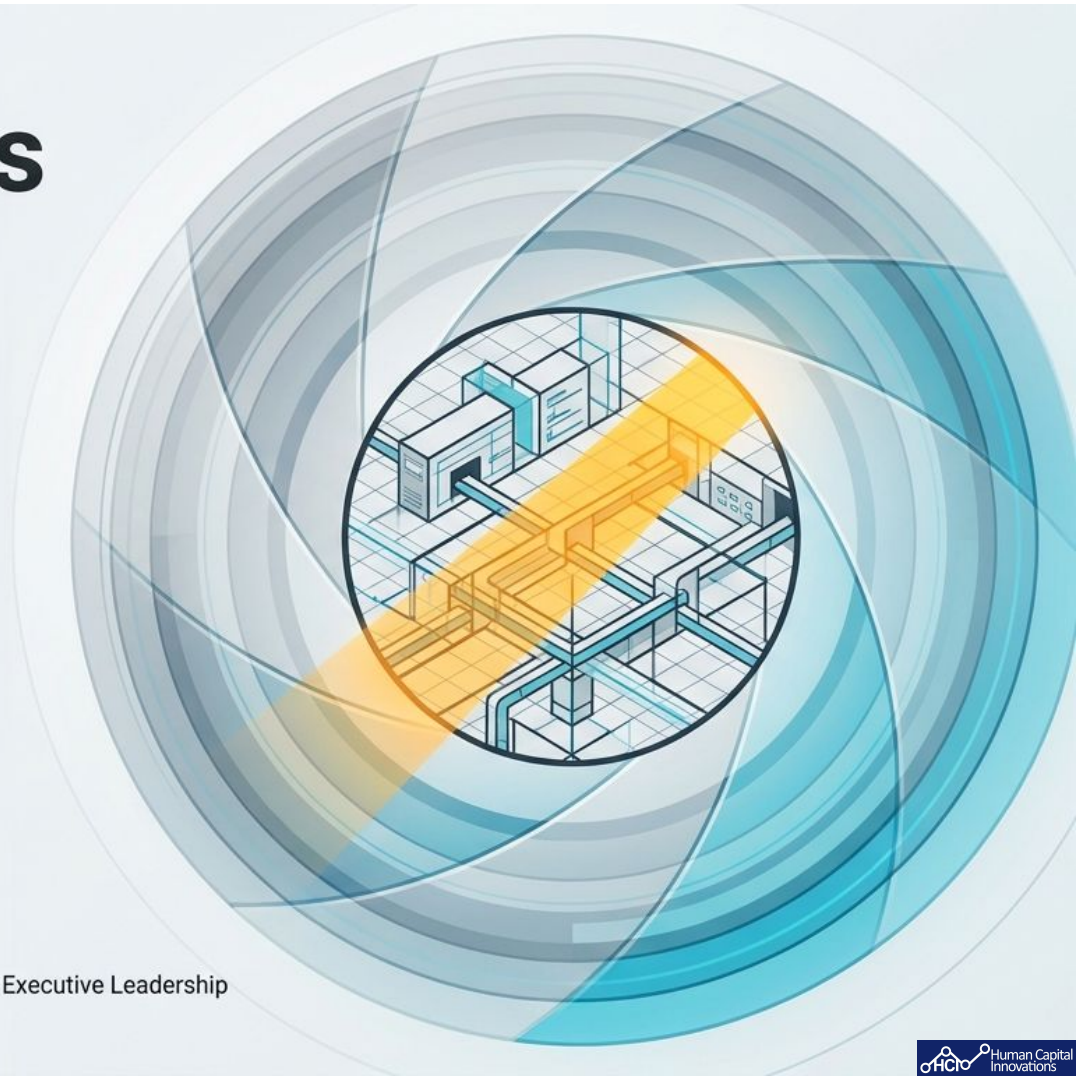


Shifting the Lens on Workplace Mistreatment

Moving from individual blame
to organizational accountability.



Based on the research of Jonathan H. Westover, PhD | Synthesized for Executive Leadership

The Pervasive Scale of Organizational Hostility



DIRECT IMPACT

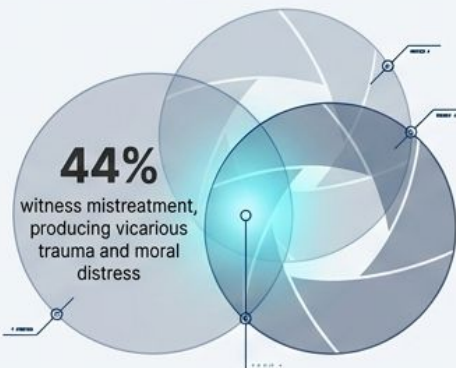
34%

34% of workforce members
experience direct mistreatment
(Dhanani et al., 2021)

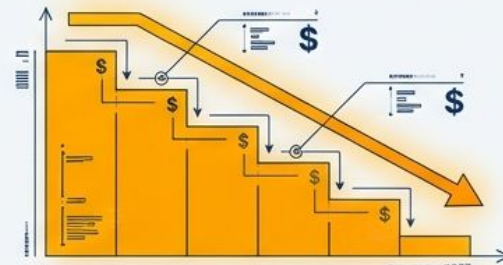
GLOBAL REACH



AMBIENT TOXICITY



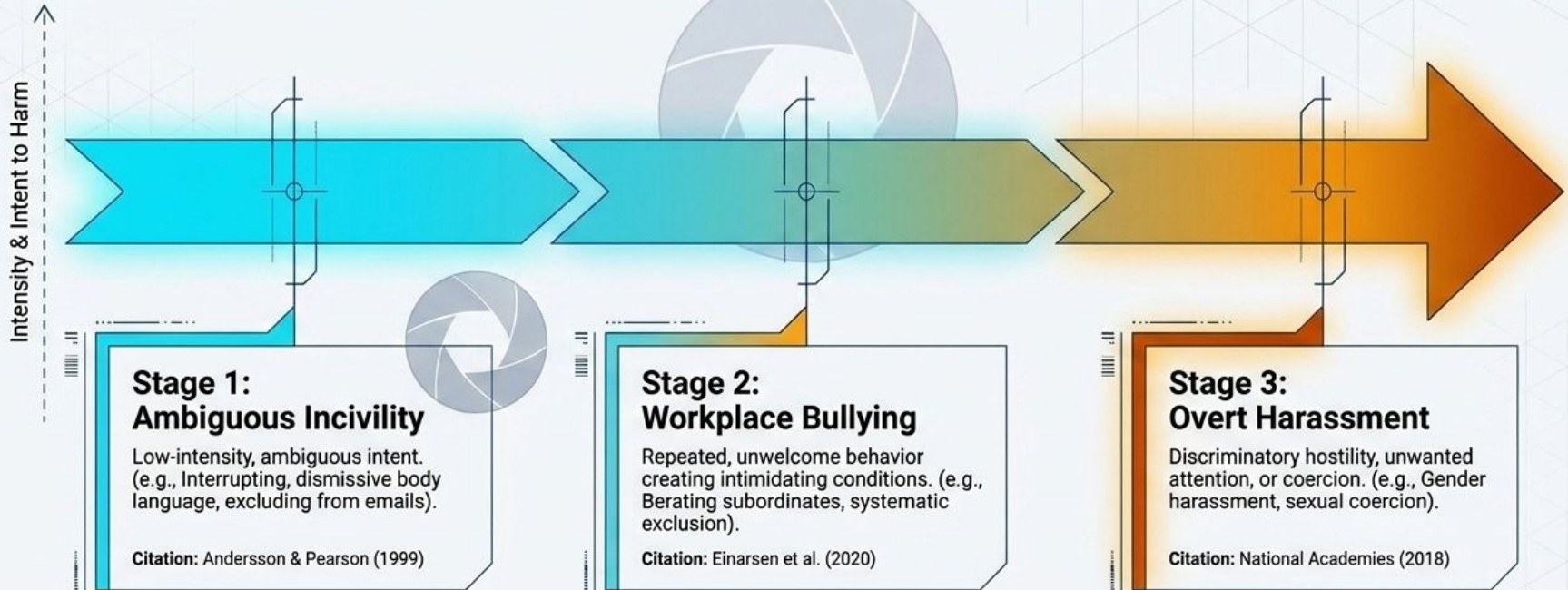
FINANCIAL HEMORRHAGE



\$300 Billion

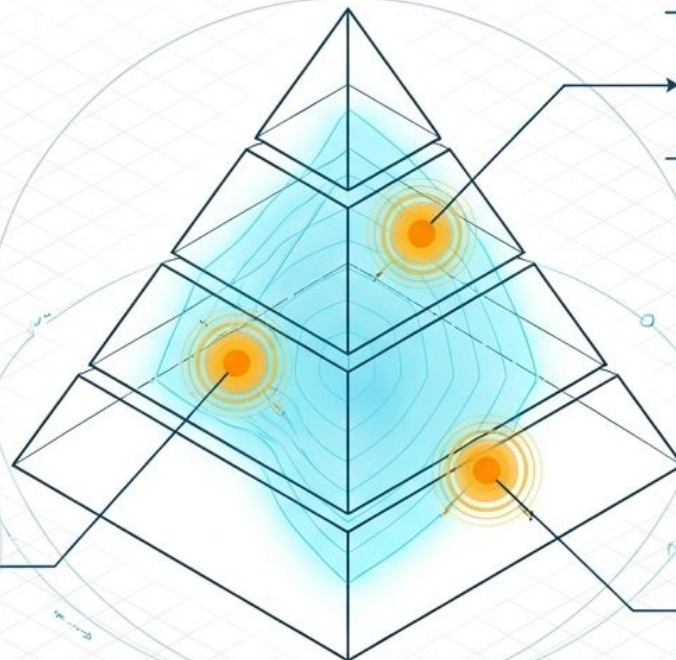
estimated annual cost to U.S. organizations
(absenteeism, turnover, lost productivity, legal expenses)

The Continuum of Workplace Harm



Mistreatment is Not Random; It is Selective

Key Insight: Mistreatment functions to maintain existing hierarchies, disproportionately targeting marginalized groups (Cortina, 2008).



Women in Leadership

- Higher rates of harassment/incivility than male peers (Settles & O'Connor, 2014).

Intersectional Targeting

- Women of color encounter the highest frequencies of incivility (Cortina et al., 2013).

Marginalized Identities

- Sexual minority women report markedly higher incivility; racialised professionals face selective incivility via organizational whitewashing (Sharaf et al., 2021).

The Archaic Lens: Victim Precipitation Theory

The Premise

An outdated criminological framework suggesting targets invite or provoke their own abuse through personality or behavior.

The Flaw

It scrutinizes the victim's characteristics rather than the perpetrator's actions.

The Verdict

Criminologists have long since abandoned [it]... and so should we. (Cortina, Rabelo, & Holland, 2018).



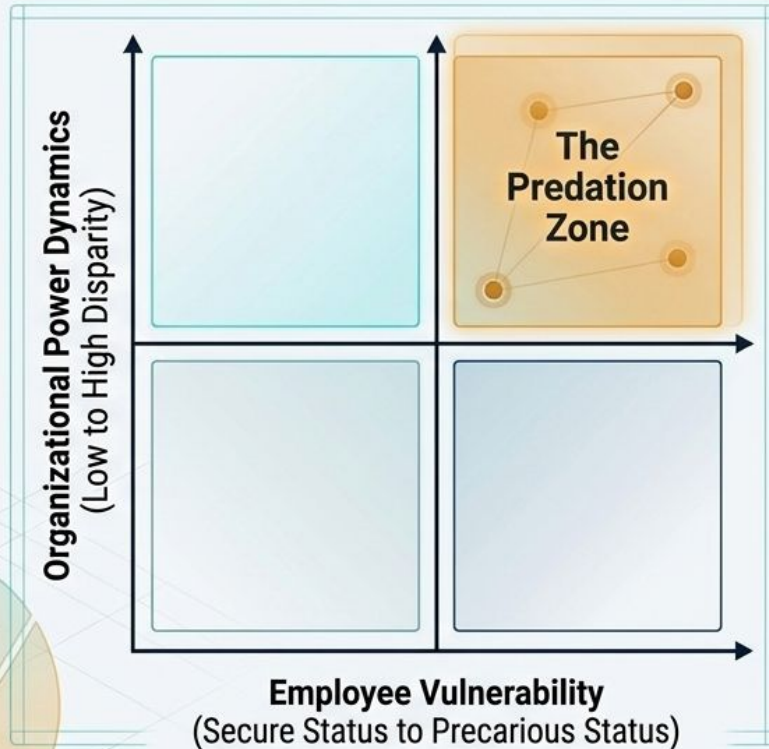
The Cognitive Shift: Reframing the Premise

Dimensions	The Archaic Lens	The Evidence-Based Lens
Theoretical Framework	Victim Precipitation	Perpetrator Predation
Focus of Investigation	The Target's behavior/personality	The Perpetrator's actions & enabling context
Assumed Cause	Interpersonal friction / target vulnerability	Exploitation of power differentials
Primary Intervention	Fix or train the target to adapt	Systemic accountability & environment design
Organizational Message	Protect the company	Protect psychological safety

The Architecture of Transparent Accountability



Mapping Vulnerability: Social Status Protection Theory



Core Insight

Harassment is fundamentally about enforcing gendered and hierarchical power, not sexual attraction (Berdahl, 2007a).

The Mechanism

Perpetrators strategically select targets based on perceived vulnerability (contingent workers, probationary staff, marginalized identities) combined with characteristics that threaten the perpetrator's status (Tepper et al., 2011).

The Fix

Provide equal structural protections regardless of employment status and explicitly penalize status-enforcement behaviors.

Engineering Culture: The CREW Model Process

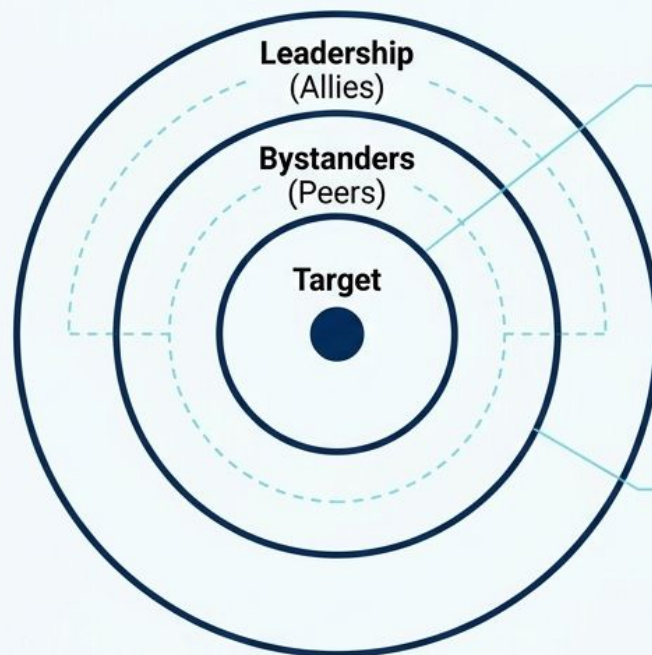
Civility, Respect, and Engagement in the Workplace targets systems, not victims (Osatuke et al., 2009).



The Active Bystander Ecosystem

The Concept

Shifting harassment from a private matter to a community responsibility (Banyard et al., 2007).



Peer Actions

Recognizing concerning behavior, interrupting in the moment, offering target support.

Leader Actions (Allyship)

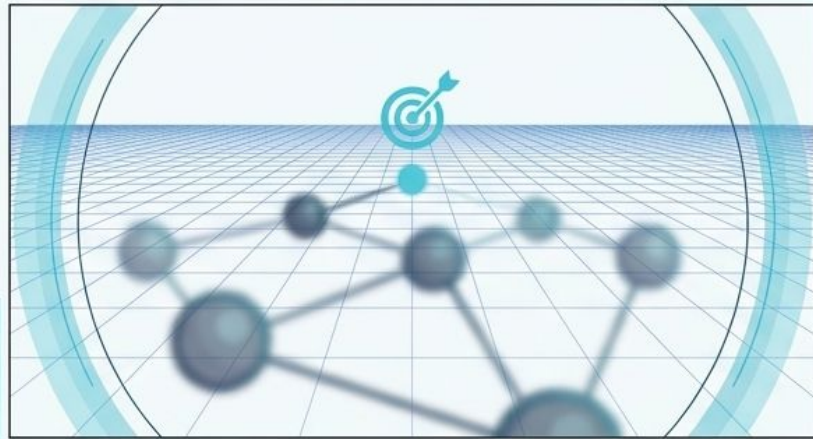
Direct confrontation, boundary setting, policy advocacy.

Case Callouts:

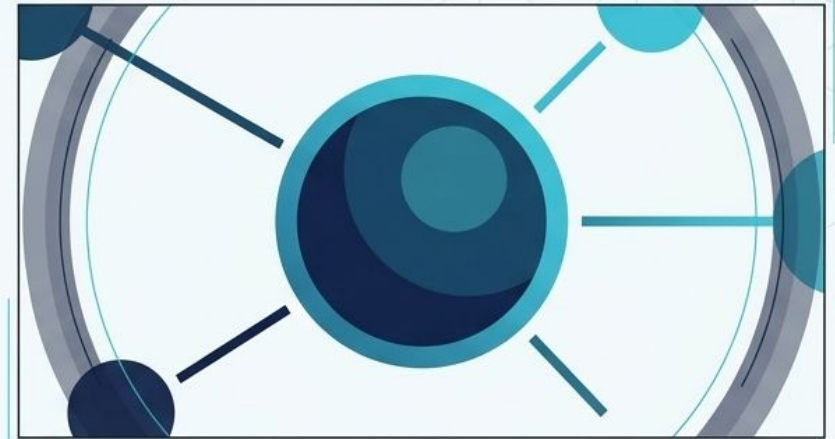
- **U.S. Military** (Army I.A.M. STRONG & Air Force): Replaced top-down mandates with bystander training, leading to increased reporting.
- **Deloitte**: GLOBE network trains leaders to interrupt subtle exclusion for LGBTQ+ employees.

Power-Conscious Leadership Development

The Leader's View



The Subordinate's View



The Science of Power

Formal authority reduces empathy, obscures interpersonal impact, and increases willingness to violate social norms (Keltner et al., 2003).

The Blind Spot

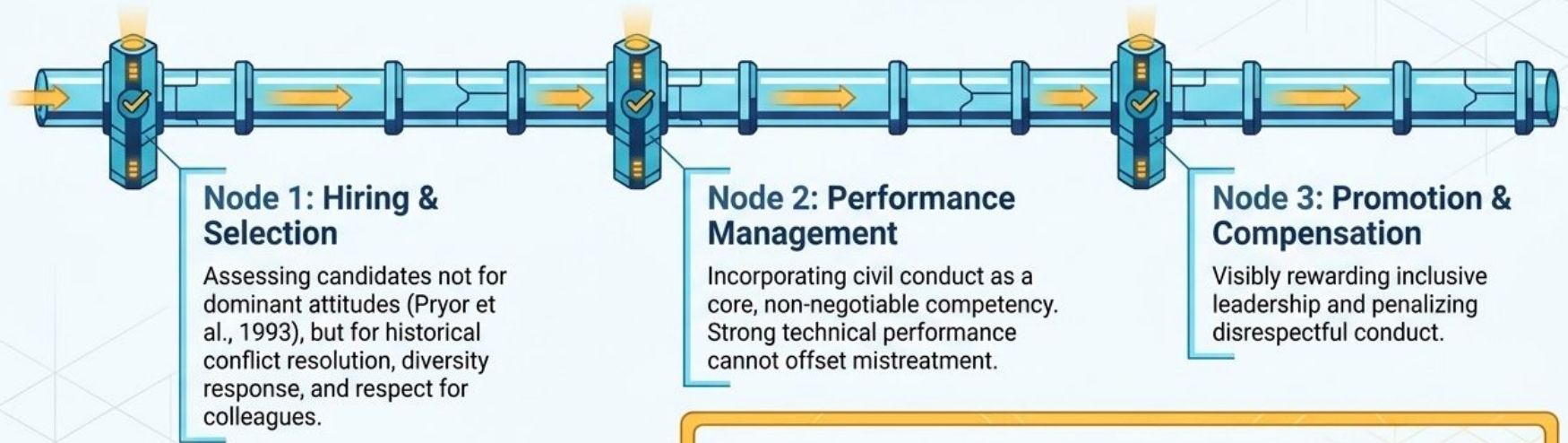
Leaders underestimate their capacity to intimidate and misinterpret silence as agreement.

The Intervention

Structured 360-degree feedback, facilitated dialogues across identities, and linking advancement to inclusion metrics.

Case Callout: Microsoft combined unconscious bias education with inclusion competency metrics linked directly to executive advancement, successfully increasing representation and climate scores.

Institutionalizing Accountability in the Talent Lifecycle



Case Callout:

Salesforce explicitly ties equality metrics, representation, and employee experience to executive performance evaluations and compensation.

Data-Driven Equity and Inclusion Infrastructure

The Strategy: Replacing subjective leadership impressions with rigorous, disaggregated metrics.

Metric 1: Disaggregated Turnover & Advancement

Identifying if marginalized groups leave at disproportionate rates (early warning for hostile environments).

Metric 2: Granular Climate Surveys

Measuring specific behaviors (e.g., ideas appropriated, frequently interrupted) rather than generic satisfaction.

Metric 3: Qualitative Audits

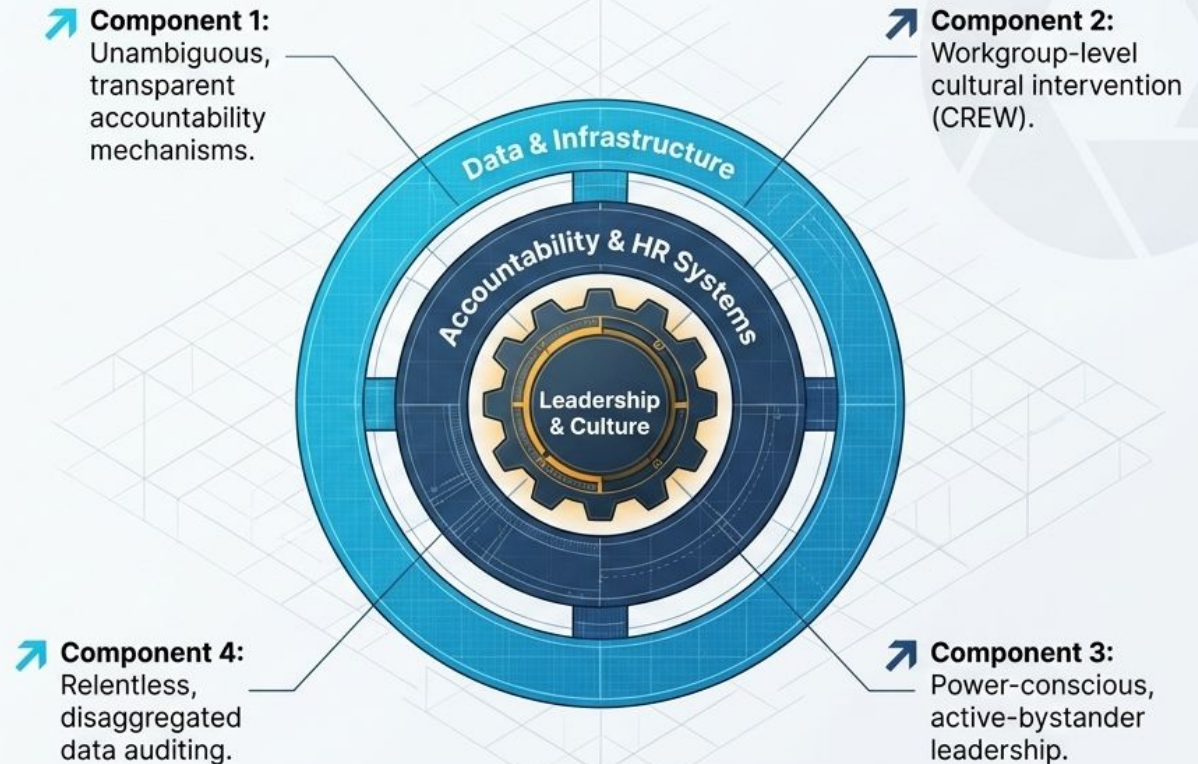
Third-party exit interviews and focus groups to capture unvarnished reality.



Case Callout: Accenture's Inclusion Index measures belonging, respect, and voice, disaggregating data by multiple identities to enable hyper-targeted organizational interventions.

The Systemic Architecture of Respect

Core Synthesis: True psychological safety is not achieved by fixing victims, but by engineering an environment where predation is structurally impossible.



The Bottom Line: We must place responsibility squarely on those who perpetrate misconduct and the systems that enable them.



Stop Scrutinizing Stop Scrutinizing the Target. Start Start Examining alent the System.

Closing Thought: Mistreatment reflects and reproduces societal hierarchies within organizational walls. Committing to diversity and inclusion requires zero tolerance for the environments that empower selective hostility.

Call to Action: Discard the archaic lens. Build the infrastructure of accountability.