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Twenty-five years of workplace incivility research: a bibliometric analysis and a human capability framework for learning, careers and future skills

Aditi Veda

aditi24veda@yahoo.com

National Forensic Sciences University

Ankit Singh

Jaipuria Institute of Management

Rachana Jain

Shri Vaishnav Vidyapeeth Vishwavidyalaya, Indore

Pooja Verma

Shri Vaishnav Vidyapeeth Vishwavidyalaya, Indore

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Abstract

Workplace incivility research has grown rapidly, yet its consequences have been framed almost exclusively in affective and health terms. This paper maps 25 years of the field (1999–2024) through a bibliometric analysis of 691 Scopus-indexed documents, combining performance analysis with co-authorship, co-word and co-citation mapping in VOSviewer. Output grew from a single article in 1999 to peaks of 93 in 2022 and 91 in 2024, concentrated in the United States and Canada and published predominantly in occupational health and applied psychology outlets. Four thematic clusters emerge, all converging on affective and health outcomes; learning, skill and career constructs are almost wholly absent from the field's knowledge structure, despite being implied by its dominant explanatory logics. Synthesising these patterns with conservation of resources, social learning, social exchange and sustainable careers theory, the paper develops the Workplace Incivility–Human Capability framework, repositioning incivility as an erosion of organisational learning and career capability.

1. Introduction

Workplace incivility (WI) is now a pervasive challenge for people managers across industries; meta-analytic prevalence estimates indicate that roughly three-quarters of employees experience it monthly (Magley et al., 2026). (Andersson and Pearson, 1999) define it as “low-intensity deviant behavior with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect”. Its expressions are ordinary rather than dramatic: a condescending tone, interruptions in meetings, the dismissal of a colleague’s idea, curt electronic messages, the withholding of information, the circulation of gossip. That ordinariness is precisely what makes incivility easy to overlook and difficult to manage.

The costs are well documented. Incivility depresses job satisfaction and commitment(Lim et al., 2008a) raises emotional exhaustion (Hur et al., 2015), reduces citizenship performance (Taylor et al., 2012), degrades task and creative performance for targets and witnesses alike (Porath and Erez, 2009a), drives withdrawal and turnover(Sliter *et al.*, 2012) and impairs next-day recovery (Nicholson and Griffin, 2015). Because it is enacted by organisational members themselves, incivility is increasingly framed as a matter of organisational social responsibility (Vasconcelos, 2020). More troubling, employees develop tolerance for low-level unethical conduct (Ghosh et al., 2013), and that tolerance, once established, normalises a spiral of reciprocal discourtesy(Andersson and Pearson, 1999; Beattie and Griffin, 2014) .

Yet the field has framed those costs more narrowly than the phenomenon warrants. Incivility scholarship has developed largely as an occupational health and affective-outcomes literature. What has attracted far less attention is what incivility does to an organisation’s capacity to *develop* its people. Learning at work is inherently relational: it depends on feedback seeking, error disclosure, informal peer exchange and the psychological safety that permits all three(Edmondson, 1999a; Noe et al., 2014). Careers are likewise relational, built through mentoring, sponsorship, visibility and accumulated relational capital (De Vos et al., 2020). And the competencies employers identify as most critical analytical and creative thinking, resilience and agility, leadership and social influence, curiosity and lifelong learning are

overwhelmingly social and cognitive rather than technical (Leopold, 2025). Each is precisely the kind of resource that chronic, low-intensity mistreatment depletes.

HRD scholars recognized this connection early. (Reio and Ghosh, 2009) argued that incivility belongs squarely within HRD's remit, (Estes and Jia Wang, 2008) traced its performance costs, and (Ghosh et al., 2011a) positioned it on a toxic continuum requiring developmental rather than merely disciplinary responses. That agenda has not been absorbed into mainstream incivility research. Whether it has, and where the resulting gaps lie, is an empirical question about the structure of literature which is what bibliometric analysis is designed to answer.

Two further considerations motivate quantitative synthesis now. The literature has grown beyond the point at which narrative review remains tractable; and the social context of work has changed fundamentally since the construct was introduced, as hybrid arrangements, computer-mediated interaction and AI-mediated collaboration have altered both how incivility is enacted and how it is experienced (Giumetti et al., 2013; Lim et al., 2008a; Lu et al., 2025).

1.1 Research questions and contribution

The study addresses five questions. **RQ1**: What is the annual publication trend in WI research between 1999 and 2024? **RQ2**: Which countries and institutions contribute most substantially? **RQ3**: Which journals and authors are most influential? **RQ4**: What is the conceptual and intellectual structure of the field? **RQ5**: What are the priority directions for future research, particularly at the intersection of incivility, learning and careers?

The paper makes three contributions. Empirically, it provides the first 25-year bibliometric account of WI scholarship, analysing 691 documents by 1,090 authors. Conceptually, it identifies a structural blind spot — the near-absence of learning, skill and career constructs from the field's knowledge structure — and develops the Workplace Incivility–Human Capability (WI-HC) framework to address it. Practically, it translates that framework into levers for HRD practice.

2. Theoretical background

Four theoretical lenses recur in WI research, and together they explain why incivility should be expected to carry developmental consequences.

Conservation of resources (COR) theory holds that individuals strive to obtain, retain and protect valued resources, and that threatened or actual loss produces strain (Hobfoll, 1989; Hobfoll et al., 2018) Incivility is a chronic, low-grade drain on attentional, emotional and relational resources. Because loss spirals accelerate and resource investment is a precondition for further gain, employees in uncivil environments retain less surplus for the discretionary, effortful activity that learning and career building require. Related job demands–resources reasoning treats incivility as a hindrance demand consuming energy without compensating growth (Bakker and Demerouti, 2017).

Social learning theory explains propagation. Behaviour is acquired by observing and modelling others, particularly high-status others (Bandura, 1977). Where uncivil conduct goes unsanctioned it is encoded as an acceptable script, which is why incivility spirals and why weak civility norms predict recurrence (Andersson and Pearson, 1999; Walsh et al., 2012). The same mechanism operates developmentally: newcomers learn not only what to do, but what it is safe to ask, admit or attempt.

Social exchange theory accounts for withdrawal. Uncivil treatment signals low relational value and prompts reciprocal reduction of discretionary contribution (Blau, 1964; Taylor et al., 2012) Targets narrow their networks, avoid the colleagues who could teach them and disengage from the informal exchanges through which most workplace learning occurs.

Affective events theory and *sustainable careers* theory supply the micro and macro time horizons respectively. Incivility functions as a discrete affective event shaping immediate attitudes and behaviour (Cortina et al., 2001; Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996); accumulated over time, such events constitute a career shock that alters trajectories and undermines the health, happiness and productivity defining career sustainability (Akkermans et al., 2018a; De Vos et al., 2020).

Read together, these lenses imply that incivility should erode learning capacity, career capital and the social competencies most in demand — an implication the field has articulated in principle but rarely tested.

3. Research design

3.1 Approach

The study applies performance analysis together with citation, co-citation, co-authorship and co-word mapping. Bibliometrics is appropriate where a field is large, interdisciplinary and fragmented, and where the objective is to characterise structure rather than estimate effects (Donthu et al., 2021; Zupic and Čater, 2015). VOSviewer 1.6.20 was used because it handles large reference sets, supports fractional counting and produces distance-based maps in which proximity reflects relatedness (van Eck and Waltman, 2010).

3.2 Search strategy and corpus

Scopus was the source database, selected for its coverage of business, management and psychology outlets and the completeness of its reference metadata. The search combined “workplace incivility”, “incivility” and “workplace” in title, abstract and keyword fields for 1999–2024, returning 750 records. Screening by subject area (business, management and accounting; psychology; social sciences), language (English), publication stage (final) and document type, followed by independent title and abstract review by two authors, removed 59 off-topic, duplicate and non-retrievable records, yielding a final corpus of 691 articles by 1,090 authors containing 37,973 cited references. Records were exported in CSV format including title, abstract, keywords, references and affiliations.

3.3 Analytical procedures

Three mapping techniques structure the results. *Co-authorship analysis* identifies collaborative structure: nodes represent authors or countries, links indicate joint publication. *Co-word analysis* reveals conceptual structure through keyword co-occurrence; duplicate and vague terms were removed and a minimum occurrence threshold of 25 applied, using author keywords and fractional counting following (Gaviria-Marin et al., 2018). *Co-citation analysis* reveals intellectual structure through the joint citation of two references by a third document, with an inclusion threshold of 20 citations. Cluster resolution, LinLog/modularity normalisation, minimum cluster size and iteration limits were held at VOSviewer defaults to preserve comparability with prior management bibliometrics.

4. Results

4.1 Publication trend (RQ1)

Table 1, traces the chronological distribution of the corpus. The earliest indexed publication dates to 1999. Output remained negligible throughout the 2000s before climbing steeply after 2018, peaking at 93 articles in 2022 (13.46 per cent) and 91 in 2024 (13.17 per cent). Almost three-quarters of the 25-year corpus was published in the final seven years.

Table 1
Annual distribution of publications, 1999–2024

Year	N	%	Year	N	%
2024	91	13.17	2011	21	3.04
2023	85	12.30	2010	4	0.58
2022	93	13.46	2009	10	1.45
2021	72	10.42	2008	1	0.14
2020	69	9.99	2007	3	0.43
2019	54	7.81	2005	5	0.72
2018	45	6.51	2004	1	0.14
2017	23	3.33	2003	1	0.14
2016	28	4.05	2002	1	0.14
2015	22	3.18	2001	4	0.58
2014	23	3.33	1999	1	0.14
2013	17	2.46			
2012	17	2.46	**Total**	691	100.00

Note(s): No documents were indexed for 2000 and 2006. Source(s): Authors' own work, based on Scopus data.

Three drivers plausibly account for the inflection: growing recognition that low-intensity mistreatment carries measurable organisational cost, which legitimised it as a research object; the COVID-19 pandemic, which reshaped workplace dynamics through remote work, job insecurity and heightened strain, making psychological safety salient as never before; and the migration of interaction to digital channels, which created new enactment surfaces and a distinct research stream (Giumetti et al., 2013; Lu et al., 2025) .

4.2 Geographic and institutional productivity (RQ2)

Table 2, lists the ten most productive countries. The United States (n = 308; 44.57 per cent) and Canada (n = 73; 10.56 per cent) dominate, followed by China (n = 71; 10.27 per cent). India ranks sixth with 47 documents, indicating that the topic has gained traction in emerging economies. Institutionally, Bowling Green State University and Texas A&M University lead with 17 publications each, followed by the University of Central Florida with 16.

Table 2
Ten most productive countries and leading institutions, 1999–2024

Rank	Country/territory	N	% of corpus	Leading institutions	N
1	United States	308	44.57	Bowling Green State University	17
2	Canada	73	10.56	Texas A&M University	17
3	China	71	10.27	University of Central Florida	16
4	Pakistan	52	7.53		
5	Australia	47	6.80		
6	India	47	6.80		
7	United Kingdom	42	6.08		
8	Turkey	23	3.33		
9	Singapore	18	2.60		
10	South Korea	17	2.46		

Note(s): N = 691; percentages exceed 100 in aggregate because of multi-country co-authorship.
Source(s): Authors' own work, based on Scopus data.

The concentration is consequential. Incivility is interpreted through culturally specific norms of deference, directness and face; what registers as rudeness in a low power-distance Anglophone setting may not in a high power-distance one. That more than 65 per cent of the evidence base originates in three countries limits the generalisability of both findings and interventions, and leaves most of the world's working population unstudied.

4.3 Author and journal influence (RQ3)

Table 3, identifies the most productive authors and the leading source journals. Lilia M. Cortina leads with 13 documents, followed by M. Sandy Hershcovis (11) and Vicki J. Magley (10).

Table 3
, Most productive authors and leading source journals, 1999–2024

Author	N	Source journal	N	Citations
Cortina, L.M.	13	Journal of Occupational Health Psychology	41	5,080
Hershcovis, M.S.	11	Journal of Applied Psychology	22	–
Magley, V.J.	10	Frontiers in Psychology	22	–
Clark, C.M.	9	Journal of Organizational Behavior	15	–
Miner, K.N.	9	Journal of Business Ethics	14	–
Taylor, S.G.	9	International Journal of Conflict Management	14	–
Lim, S.	8			
Walsh, B.M.	8			
Hur, W.M.	7			
Kabat-Farr, D.	7			

Source(s): Authors' own work, based on Scopus data.

Their contributions differ in kind as well as volume. Cortina established the construct's measurement and documented its psychological and organisational effects, later showing that incivility is not distributed randomly but falls disproportionately on women and racial minorities — a phenomenon she terms selective incivility and treats as covert modern discrimination (Cortina *et al.*, 2013). (Hershcovis, 2011) interrogated construct boundaries, arguing that incivility, bullying, social undermining and abusive supervision are studied as distinct phenomena on insufficient empirical grounds. (Clark, 2019) work is distinctive for being explicitly developmental: cognitive rehearsal, scripting and simulation are training interventions, and represent the clearest existing bridge between incivility research and HRD practice.

The outlet profile is itself a finding. The *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* leads with 41 articles and the highest citation volume (5,080), followed by the *Journal of Applied Psychology* and *Frontiers in Psychology* (22 each) and the *Journal of Organizational Behavior* (15). The field's centre of gravity sits in occupational health and applied psychology; no HRD, learning or careers journal appears among the leading sources.

4.4 Collaboration structure

The co-authorship network shows a connected but clustered community organised around a small number of prolific hubs, with limited bridging between them. At country level, the United States and Canada anchor the network, while collaboration between high-income and emerging-economy institutions is sparse — reinforcing the geographic concentration noted above.

4.5 Conceptual structure: co-word analysis (RQ4)

Keyword analysis identified 2,365 keywords across the 691 articles. After removing duplicates and applying the minimum occurrence threshold of 25, thirty-six high-frequency keywords remained, led by “incivility” (263 occurrences), “workplace incivility” (207), “humans” (186), “workplace” (147) and “article” (137). The co-occurrence network (Fig. 1) resolves into four clusters, summarised in Table 4, which also records what each implies for human capability — the link developed in Section 6.

Table 4
Thematic clusters and their human capability implications

Cluster	Keywords (n)	Representative keywords	Theme	Implication for human capability
1	12	Burnout, emotional exhaustion, gender, interpersonal relations, job satisfaction, job stress, organisational culture	Workplace psychodynamics: how affect, climate and interpersonal process shape experience and performance	Resource depletion reduces the surplus available for effortful learning; exhaustion predicts disengagement from voluntary development
2	10	Adult, article, controlled study, coworker, employee, female, human experiment, male	Employee demographics: who is studied, and with what design	Demographic asymmetries point to selective incivility and hence to unequal access to developmental opportunity
3	10	Interprofessional relation, middle aged, psychology, public relations, questionnaire, surveys, young adult	Psychosocial assessment: measurement of risk and worker mental health	Survey-based diagnosis dominates; capability outcomes such as training transfer or career progression are rarely instrumented
4	4	Aggression, bullying, incivility, workplace bullying	Workplace hostility: incivility's relation to adjacent mistreatment constructs	Construct proliferation without integration complicates the design of interventions a single HRD function must deliver

Source(s): Authors' own work.

Two observations follow. First, the clusters converge on affective and health outcomes: burnout, exhaustion, stress and satisfaction. Second — and this is the study’s central negative finding — no keyword relating to learning, training, skill, competence, employability, mentoring or career development met the occurrence threshold. Across 2,365 keywords and 691 articles, the developmental consequences of incivility are not part of the field’s conceptual vocabulary.

4.6 Intellectual structure: co-citation analysis

Of 37,973 cited references, 76 met the 20-citation threshold. Figure 2 maps the resulting network. The field rests on a compact and stable foundation: (Andersson and Pearson, 1999) spiral model (131 co-citations) and (Cortina et al., 2001) incidence and impact study (130) anchor the intellectual structure, with (Schilpzand et al., 2016) functioning as the principal integrative review (68), followed by (Pearson et al., 2000, 2001).

The foundational set is notable for what it omits. No HRD, learning or careers work appears among the most co-cited references, and the HRD contributions that exist — (Estes and Jia Wang, 2008) Reio and (Reio and Ghosh, 2009), (Ghosh et al., 2011a) — sit well below the threshold. The developmental agenda proposed fifteen years ago has not been absorbed into the field's intellectual core.

5. Discussion

Since 1999, WI has moved from a marginal construct to a substantial research stream. Introduced in the *Academy of Management Review* as a spiral phenomenon (Andersson and Pearson, 1999) it attracted little attention through the 2000s, when it appeared a secondary organisational concern (Schilpzand et al., 2016). Since 2018 output has risen sharply and its geographic reach, while still concentrated, now extends across four continents. Three structural features of that growth merit comment.

Convergence on affect, divergence from capability. All four co-word clusters organise around affective and health outcomes. This is a coherent research programme and it has produced robust knowledge. But the same theoretical logics that explains those outcomes also predict developmental ones, and those have not been pursued. COR reasoning implies that chronically depleted employees will withdraw from discretionary effort — and voluntary learning, feedback seeking and career self-management are precisely discretionary (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Noe et al., 2014). Social exchange reasoning implies that targets will contract their networks — the infrastructure of both informal learning and career sponsorship (Blau, 1964; De Vos et al., 2020). The field has established the mechanism and stopped short of the outcome. (Porath et al., 2015) come closest, documenting how incivility consumes the cognitive resources performance requires; extending that logic from performance to skill formation is a short step the literature has not taken.

Context specificity that intervention design cannot ignore. Most empirical work is set in nursing and healthcare, with hospitality a distant second; education, professional services, technology and the public sector are comparatively unexamined, and gig and platform work almost entirely so. This matters practically: the intervention evidence base — cognitive rehearsal, scripting, simulation — was developed largely in clinical settings with strong professional norms, defined hierarchies and co-located teams (Clark, 2019) Whether those designs transfer to distributed knowledge work is untested.

Construct proliferation without integration. Cluster 4 groups incivility, bullying and aggression, and the keyword evidence confirms these terms are used interchangeably despite differing in intensity, intent and consequence. Hershcovis (2011) raised this a decade and a half ago; the co-word structure suggests it remains unresolved. For practitioners the cost is concrete: an organisation runs one

respectful-workplace programme, not four, and cannot design it against four incommensurable constructs.

A fourth observation concerns the digital transition. Interaction has migrated to channels — asynchronous messaging, video, and increasingly AI-mediated drafting — that strip the paralinguistic cues through which civility is normally signalled and repaired. Cyber-incivility research exists (Giumetti et al., 2013; Lim et al., 2008b; Lu et al., 2025) but remains peripheral, and the corpus contains almost nothing on incivility in AI-mediated or hybrid work. Given that hybrid arrangements are now the norm in knowledge work, this is the field's most urgent contextual gap.

Taken together, these observations point to a single reframing. Incivility has been studied as something that happens *to* employees' well-being. It is also something that happens to an organisation's capacity to develop capability.

6. The Workplace Incivility–Human Capability (WI-HC) framework

Figure 3 presents the WI-HC framework, derived abductively by reading the four empirical clusters against the theoretical lenses in Section 2. It comprises four layers, a set of boundary conditions and a feedback loop.

Layer 1: Drivers. Incivility originates at three levels. *Individual and dyadic* drivers include negative affect, weak self-regulation and status threat (Reio and Ghosh, 2009). *Structural and cultural* drivers include weak or unenforced civility norms, high power distance and the reciprocal spirals following unsanctioned discourtesy (Andersson and Pearson, 1999; Walsh et al., 2012). *Techno-contextual* drivers are newer: hybrid and distributed work designs, cue-impoverished digital channels, and AI-mediated interaction that removes the social friction formerly constraining abrupt communication.

Layer 2: Depletion mechanisms. Three mechanisms convert exposure into consequence. *Resource loss* operates through emotional exhaustion, attentional depletion and impaired recovery (Hobfoll et al., 2018; Nicholson and Griffin, 2015). *Normative learning* operates through the modelling and gradual normalisation of uncivil scripts (Bandura, 1977). *Relational withdrawal* operates through reduced psychological safety, network contraction and the avoidance of help-seeking (Blau, 1964; Edmondson, 1999).

Layer 3: Eroded capability domains. The framework's contribution lies here, in specifying three outcome domains the literature has left unexamined.

Learning and development. Depleted employees shift from learning-goal to performance-avoidance orientation. Training transfer — already fragile and heavily dependent on a supportive work climate (Blume et al., 2010) is undermined when the post-training environment is hostile. Error reporting and feedback seeking decline as psychological safety falls (Edmondson, 1999b), and informal learning,

which accounts for the majority of workplace skill acquisition, contracts with the interaction network that carries it (Noe et al., 2014) .

Career development. Incivility damages career self-efficacy and reduces access to the mentoring, sponsorship and visibility through which careers advance. Because incivility is selective, falling disproportionately on women and minority employees (Cortina *et al.*, 2013), this erosion is unequally distributed and compounds existing disadvantage. Sustained exposure functions as a career shock (Akkermans et al., 2018b) and degrades all three pillars of career sustainability — health, happiness and productivity (De Vos et al., 2020) .

Future skills. The competencies employers project as most critical to 2030 are precisely those incivility attacks. Analytical and creative thinking are impaired by the cognitive load rudeness imposes, in targets and witnesses alike (Porath and Erez, 2009b). Leadership, social influence and collaboration depend on the relational trust incivility corrodes. Resilience, agility, curiosity and lifelong learning presuppose the psychological surplus depletion removes (Leopold, 2025). Incivility should therefore be understood not merely as a well-being risk but as a direct constraint on an organisation's future-skills strategy.

Layer 4: HRD enablement levers. Erosion is reversible. *Individual* levers include cognitive rehearsal and scripted response training(Clark, 2019), recovery and detachment training, and career self-management coaching. *Team and leader* levers include Civility, Respect and Engagement in the Workforce (CREW) interventions, which have demonstrated durable improvements in social behaviour, distress and attitudes (Leiter et al., 2011; Osatuke et al., 2009); bystander and upstander training; and the codification of civility norms in team charters. *Organisational* levers include embedding civility in competency frameworks, appraisal and promotion criteria; civility analytics treating incivility as a leading indicator alongside engagement; and formal digital-conduct standards for asynchronous and AI-mediated communication.

Boundary conditions and feedback. The framework's relationships are conditioned by national culture and power distance, occupational and sectoral context, hierarchical position, work design, career stage and the target's demographic visibility. The feedback loop is central: capability erosion is not a terminus. Employees with depleted resources and contracted networks are less able to challenge uncivil conduct, which weakens norms further and increases exposure — the spiral Andersson and Pearson (1999) described, extended from behaviour to capability. Enablement levers interrupt the loop rather than merely mitigating its effects.

7. Implications

7.1 Theoretical implications

The study makes four theoretical contributions. First, it repositions incivility as a *capability* phenomenon. Where the literature treats affective and health outcomes as terminal, WI-HC treats them as mediators linking incivility to learning, career and skill outcomes — a reframing that opens a currently unoccupied

research space and answers the HRD agenda set out by (Reio and Ghosh, 2009) and (Ghosh et al., 2011b).

Second, it extends COR theory temporally. Existing applications concentrate on proximal strain; WI-HC specifies a distal pathway in which resource depletion suppresses the discretionary investment that skill and career development require, generating loss spirals unfolding over months and years rather than days.

Third, it integrates a fragmented explanatory base. COR, social learning, social exchange and affective events theories have been applied to incivility largely in parallel. WI-HC assigns each a distinct mechanistic role — depletion, propagation, withdrawal and temporal accumulation respectively — within a single architecture, allowing them to be tested competitively rather than merely invoked.

Fourth, it connects two literatures that have developed independently. Incivility research and sustainable careers research share a concern with the conditions under which working lives remain viable, but do not cite one another. Treating chronic incivility as a career shock (Akkermans et al., 2018a) that degrades health, happiness and productivity (De Vos et al., 2020) supplies the bridging construct.

7.2 Practical implications

Learning and development. Civility should be treated as a learning-climate variable, not solely a conduct variable. This means assessing civility as a precondition for training transfer before investing in development programmes, since a well-designed intervention deployed into an uncivil unit will not transfer; and building civility competence into leadership and induction curricula through rehearsal-based methods rather than awareness briefings, for which Clark's (2019) approach is the best-evidenced model. Psychological safety should be reported alongside engagement scores, since it is the proximal mechanism through which incivility suppresses learning behaviour (Edmondson, 1999b)

Career development. Because incivility is selective (Cortina *et al.*, 2013), civility audits should be disaggregated by gender, tenure and role, and read against promotion and mentoring-access data; where uncivil units also show weaker advancement for particular groups, the two findings should be treated as one problem. Organisations should recognise that chronic incivility constitutes a career shock warranting the same support architecture as restructuring or role loss.

Future skills. Reskilling strategies presume a workforce with the cognitive and emotional surplus to learn. Where incivility is prevalent that presumption fails, and civility investment should be sequenced *before* large-scale reskilling rather than alongside it. Conduct standards should extend explicitly to digital and AI-mediated channels, where existing civility norms were never designed to apply.

Measurement and governance. Incivility should be tracked as a leading indicator with named ownership, rather than surfacing only in exit data or grievance reports. Zero-tolerance language alone is insufficient; the evidence supports developmental interventions over declaratory ones (Leiter et al., 2011) .

7.3 Social implications

Incivility is not distributed evenly. Because it falls disproportionately on women, minority employees and those with less positional power (Cortina *et al.*, 2013), the capability erosion it produces reproduces labour market inequality through a mechanism largely invisible to formal equality monitoring: no policy is breached, no complaint is filed, and the cumulative effect appears in the data only as differential progression. Treating civility as a developmental equity issue, rather than solely a well-being or compliance issue, makes that mechanism visible and addressable.

8. Future research agenda

Table 5, sets out priority questions derived from the gaps identified above, organised by the framework's layers.

Table 5
Priority research agenda

Domain	Priority research questions	Suggested designs
Learning and development	Does incivility moderate training transfer, and through which mechanism? Does exposure shift goal orientation from learning to performance-avoidance?	Longitudinal quasi-experiments around training events; experience sampling; multilevel modelling of unit civility and transfer
Career development	Does chronic incivility function as a career shock with measurable trajectory effects? Does it mediate the relation between demographic status and advancement?	Panel and career-history designs; sequence analysis; matched-sample comparisons of civil and uncivil units
Future skills	Which future-critical competencies are most vulnerable to incivility? Does exposure predict participation in and completion of reskilling?	Experiments on rudeness and creative or analytical performance; learning-analytics linkage to civility data
Digital and AI-mediated context	How is incivility enacted, perceived and repaired in asynchronous, hybrid and AI-mediated channels? Does AI mediation buffer or amplify it?	Vignette and field experiments; conversation-log analysis with ethical safeguards
Antecedents and prevention	What predicts the onset of incivility, as distinct from its consequences? Which interventions work in which contexts?	Prospective cohort designs; multi-site randomised intervention trials; realist evaluation
Context and culture	How do civility norms vary across national cultures, sectors and employment forms, including gig and platform work?	Cross-cultural measurement invariance testing; comparative multi-country studies
Construct clarity	Can incivility, bullying, undermining and abusive supervision be empirically distinguished, and does it matter for intervention design?	Meta-analytic construct validation; discriminant validity studies

Source(s): Authors' own work.

Beyond these substantive questions, the field would benefit from methodological broadening. Cross-sectional self-report survey designs dominate the corpus, as Cluster 3 indicates. Longitudinal, dyadic, experimental and intervention designs remain scarce, and without them causal claims about incivility's developmental consequences will remain unavailable.

9. Limitations

Three limitations should be noted. First, the corpus is confined to Scopus and to English-language articles in three subject areas; Web of Science, PubMed and non-English scholarship would extend coverage, and the exclusion of books and conference proceedings omits some conceptual contributions. Second, bibliometric methods describe structure rather than substance: high co-citation indicates influence, not quality, and the absence of a keyword indicates the absence of a *label*, not necessarily of the underlying idea — though at 691 articles and 2,365 keywords, the near-total absence of learning and career terminology is difficult to attribute to labelling alone. Third, the WI-HC framework is derived conceptually from bibliometric patterns and theory rather than tested empirically; it is offered as a research agenda and a diagnostic heuristic, and its propositions require the designs set out in Table V.

10. Conclusion

This study synthesised 25 years of workplace incivility scholarship through a bibliometric analysis of 691 Scopus-indexed documents. Output grew from a single article in 1999 to peaks of 93 and 91 articles in 2022 and 2024; the United States and Canada dominate production; Cortina is the most influential author and the *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology* the leading outlet; and the conceptual structure resolves into four clusters connecting incivility to burnout, satisfaction, bullying and turnover.

The most consequential finding, however, is an absence. Across the entire corpus, the developmental consequences of incivility — for learning, for careers and for the competencies organisations will need — are effectively unstudied, despite being implied by the theories the field itself relies upon. The WI-HC framework is offered to close that gap: it treats incivility not as an unfortunate feature of interpersonal life but as a slow, compounding tax on an organisation's capacity to develop its people. On that reading, civility is not a matter of manners. It is a precondition for learning, and therefore a strategic concern.

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Author Contribution

A.V. conceptualized the study, developed the research framework, conducted the bibliometric analysis, interpreted the findings, and drafted the main manuscript text. A.S. contributed to the theoretical framework, interpretation of the results, and critical revision of the manuscript. R.J. contributed to the literature review, data collection and analysis, interpretation of findings, and manuscript revision. P.V. contributed to data analysis, visualization, interpretation of results, and critical review of the manuscript. All authors reviewed, revised, and approved the final version of the manuscript.

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Figures

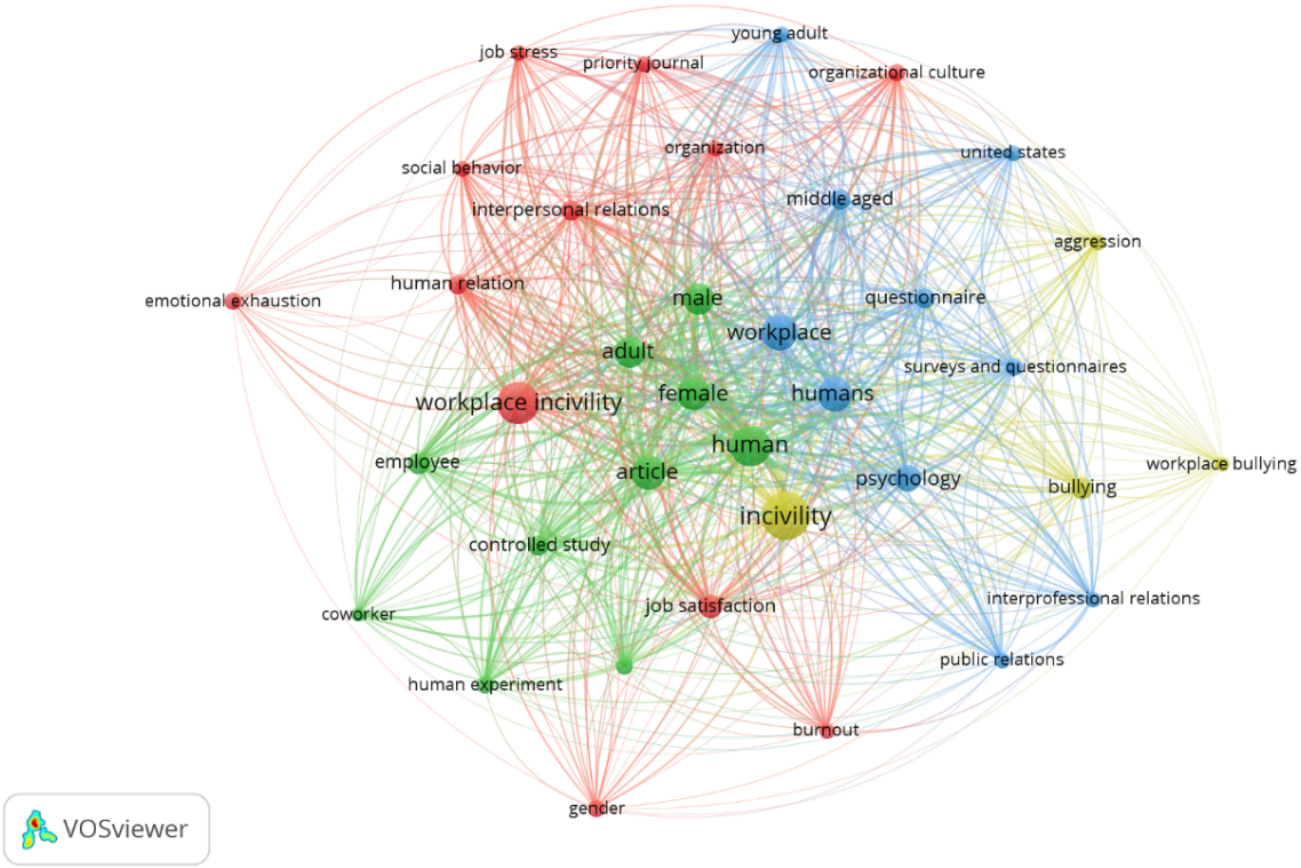


Figure 1

Co-word network of high-frequency keywords

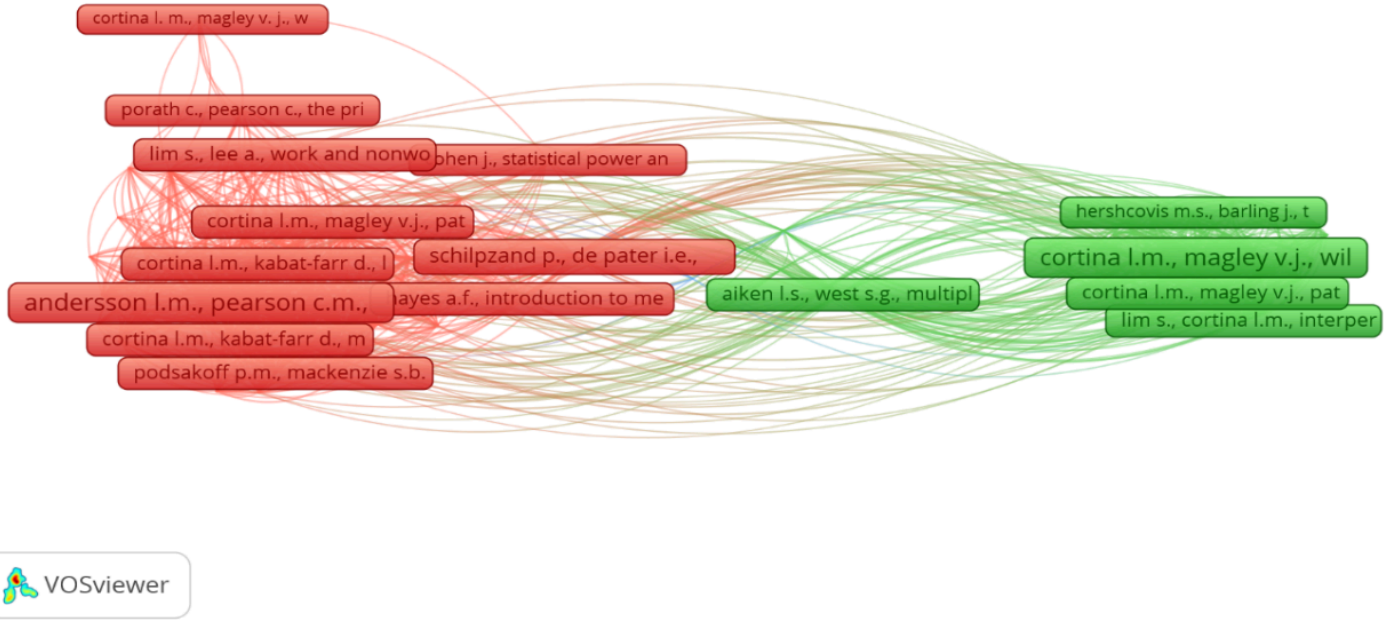


Figure 2

Co-citation network of cited references

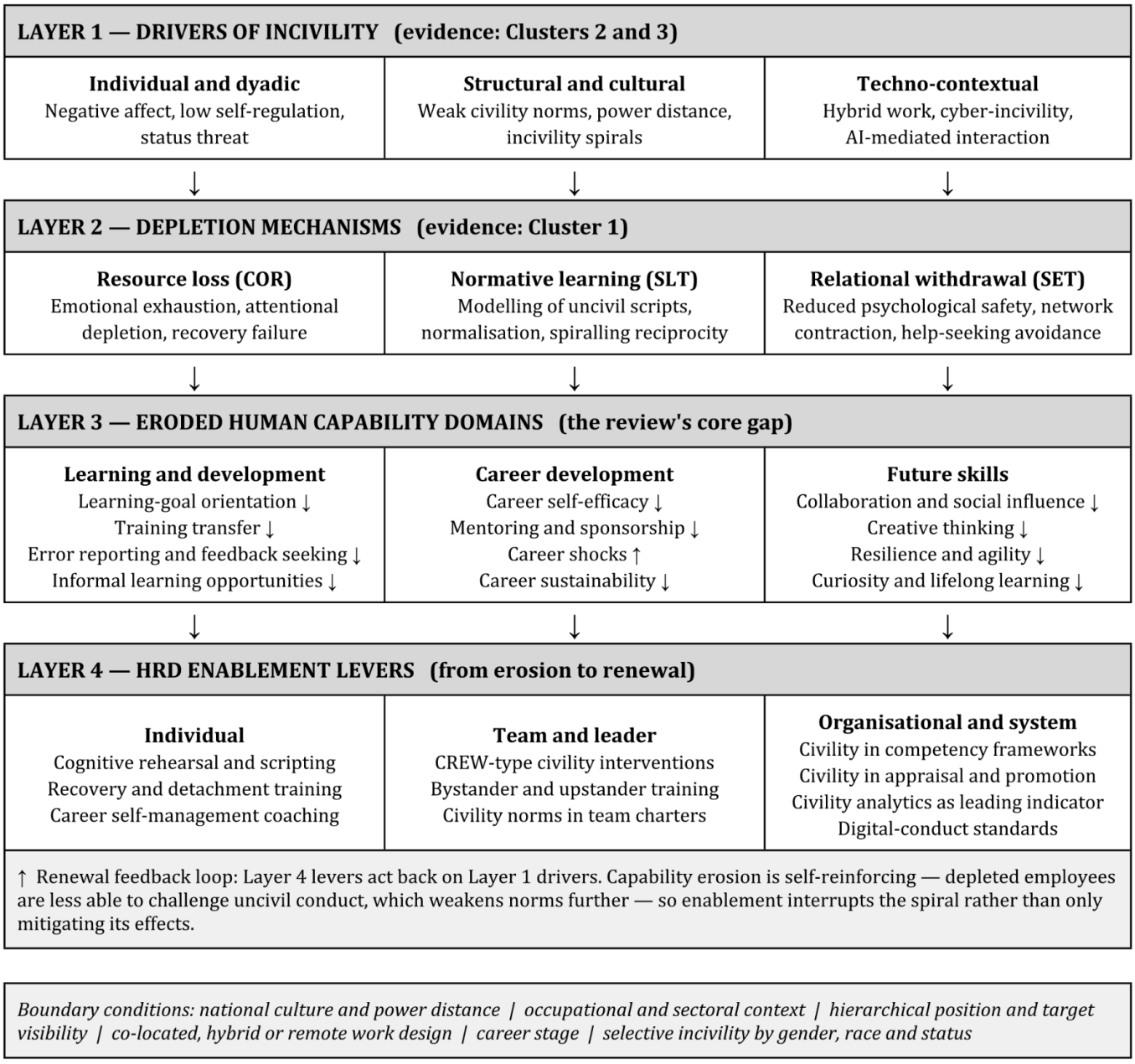


Figure 3

The Workplace Incivility–Human Capability (WI-HC) framework