



Hazing Prevention

Case Study: Hazing

Case of SSG Melgar



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Prepared by the Hope Research Center
Defense Equal Opportunity Management Institute
366 Tuskegee Airmen Drive, Patrick Space Force Base, FL. 32925
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Overview

This facilitation guide and accompanying case study have been prepared to assist all leaders who supervise both military and civilian employees. Equal opportunity (EO) and equal employment opportunity (EEO) professionals, practitioners, and leaders can use this guide to review and educate their members on policies, acceptable and unacceptable behaviors, and tactics to eliminate hazing behaviors.

Facilitation Guidance

It is highly encouraged to select facilitators such as EO and (EEO) professionals and practitioners to explore the complex dynamics of real-life situations, identify the issues involved, and utilize tools to address those issues. Facilitators must provide a controlled, safe, and non-attributional environment where individuals will be willing to share their perspectives. Throughout this guide, questions are framed to stimulate thoughts on areas to explore and consider in this process and applicable to the specific topic.

Content and Resources

The case synopsis gives insight into the case, key details, and findings. The case study references section provides additional detailed information relevant to the situation. Below this section, there are additional resources on similar cases that support specific aspects of this case and can be used to promote a more in-depth understanding of the dynamic issues related to hazing and workplace climate. Also included is pertinent information on the definition of hazing and how it can impact targets and the organization, the critical role leaders play in creating a strong, cohesive organizational climate, and examples of options for supporting approaches that could be implemented in similar situations.

Facilitation Instructions

1. Before the training:
 - a. Ensure the location and applicable resources (handouts) are prepared.
 - b. Ensure the facilitator is prepared.
 - c. Ensure the audience is prepared.
2. During the training:
 - a. Read the purpose and introduction. Answer any questions from the learners.
 - b. Read the definition of hazing or provide a handout/visual aid of the definition.
 - c. Read the case study.
 - d. Use the group discussion questions to facilitate open dialogue while encouraging independent responses from everyone.
 - e. Use the individual questions with anticipated responses (AR) as an opportunity to include all members in the discussion.
 - f. Conclude the session by summarizing the case study and the main points discussed during the discussion.



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3. After the training:
 - a. Conduct a follow-up assessment to determine the training effectiveness:
 - i. What went right?
 - ii. What went wrong?
 - iii. What could be done better next time?
 - b. Share the findings with the leadership and revise future training sessions as needed.
 - c. Monitor the organization for progress.

Case Study: Hazing

Purpose: The purpose of this case study is to provide critical information for:

- Identifying hazing behaviors
- Understanding the leaders' and individuals' roles in preventing hazing
- Responding to individuals who haze, are being hazed, or observe hazing
- Highlighting the role that climate and other factors play in hazing
- Acknowledging how other types of harassment are often involved in hazing
- Applying actionable approaches at the individual and leader levels

Introduction

Analyzing case studies is essential for comprehending the complex nature of workplace hazing. Real-world situations are rarely simple; the inherent messiness of life and the dynamic interplay of human factors mean that hazing often arises from a confluence of contributing elements. By delving into case studies, we gain valuable insights into the challenges that contribute to hazing and the multifaceted roles leaders play – either in perpetuating or mitigating these issues. We can also evaluate the effectiveness of various prevention strategies in complex, real-world contexts.

Case studies allow us to explore the interconnectedness of factors such as organizational climate, power dynamics, communication breakdowns, and individual behaviors. This exploration fosters a deeper appreciation for the intricacies of hazing, which frequently involves conflicting interests, ambiguous situations, and a wide range of human emotions. Understanding these complexities equips us with the knowledge and tools to cultivate a healthier, more supportive work environment, where practical and sustainable prevention approaches can be implemented.

The root causes of hazing are rarely straightforward. Organizational climate, leadership actions, and patterns of human interaction are almost always implicated. For example, a lax or permissive climate can normalize hazing through social acceptance. Similarly, leaders who condone hazing as tradition fail to address it with urgency, neglect to enforce appropriate



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consequences, or simply turn a blind eye, contributing to its continuation and potential escalation. Furthermore, hazing frequently revolves around the pressure to prove worthiness and loyalty through extreme measures, blurring the lines with other forms of harassment like sexual harassment, assault, or discrimination.

This case study exploration will focus on how different factors contribute to hazing and how identifying and addressing these factors can prevent future occurrences and improve the overall workplace climate.

Disclaimer:

This training is for awareness and educational purposes only. This case study may evoke feelings or emotions. If anyone experiences any adverse reactions, they should seek professional support. All topics discussed in this session are NOT substitutes for medical advice.

Definitions

DoDI 1020.03, Change 3. Effective: January 17, 2025 (military-only)

A form of harassment that includes conduct through which Service members or DoD employees, without a proper military or other governmental purpose, but with a nexus to Military Service, physically or psychologically injure or create a risk of physical or psychological injury to Service members for the purpose of initiation into, admission into, affiliation with, change in status or position within, or continued membership in any military or DoD civilian organization. Hazing can be conducted through the use of electronic devices or communications, and by other means including social media, as well as in person. Hazing is evaluated by a reasonable person standard and includes, but is not limited to, the following when performed without a proper military or other governmental purpose:

Any form of initiation or congratulatory act that involves physically striking another person in any manner or threatening to do the same.

- Pressing any object into another person's skin, regardless of whether it pierces the skin, such as "pinning" or "tacking on" of rank insignia, aviator wings, jump wings, diver insignia, badges, medals, or any other object.
- Oral or written berating of another person with the purpose of belittling or humiliating.
- Encouraging another person to engage in illegal, harmful, demeaning, or dangerous acts.
- Playing abusive or malicious tricks.
- Branding, handcuffing, duct taping, tattooing, shaving, greasing, or painting another person.
- Subjecting another person to excessive or abusive use of water.
- Forcing another person to consume food, alcohol, drugs, or any other substance.



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- Soliciting, coercing, or knowingly permitting another person to solicit or coerce acts of hazing.
- Hazing does not include properly directed command or organizational activities that serve a proper military or other governmental purpose, or the requisite training activities required to prepare for such activities (e.g., administrative corrective measures, extra military instruction, or command-authorized physical training).

Service members or DoD civilian employees may be responsible for an act of hazing, even if there was actual or implied consent from the victim and regardless of the grade or rank, status, or Service of the victim. Hazing is prohibited in all circumstances and environments including off-duty or “unofficial” unit functions and settings.

DoDI 1020.04 Change 1. Effective January 17, 2025 (civilian-only)

A form of harassment that involves conduct, without a proper governmental purpose but with a nexus to employment, intended to physically or psychologically injure or create a risk of physical or psychological injury to a person for the purpose of: Initiation into, admission into, affiliation with, change in status or position within, or a condition for continued membership in any military or DoD organization. Hazing does not include a properly directed command or organizational activities that serve a proper military or other governmental purpose. Hazing can be conducted through the use of electronic devices or communications, and by other means including social media, as well as in person. Hazing is evaluated by a reasonable person standard and includes, but is not limited to, these instances when performed without a proper military or other governmental purpose:

- Any form of initiation or congratulatory act that involves physically striking another person in any manner, or threatening to do the same.
- Verbal or written berating (including electronic medium) of another person with the purpose of belittling or humiliating.
- Encouraging or coercing another person to engage in demeaning, illegal, harmful, or dangerous acts.
- Forcing another person to disrobe, to wear embarrassing or humiliating attire, or to simulate sexual acts.
- Playing abusive or malicious tricks.
- Piercing, branding, burning, handcuffing, duct taping, tattooing, shaving, greasing, or painting another person.
- Subjecting another person to excessive or abusive use of water.
- Subjecting another person to excessive sleep deprivation.
- Forcing another person to consume food, alcohol, drugs, or any other substance.
- Soliciting, coercing, or knowingly permitting another person to solicit or coerce acts of hazing.



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Other Harassment Behaviors

Other harassment behaviors are common in cases of hazing, such as sexual harassment, sexual assault, or bullying. As a result, defining a situation as hazing can sometimes be difficult, as the overlap in behaviors can muddle the understanding of what motivated the incident. For example, sexual assault was intended to be a part of the plan for this act of hazing.

Case Synopsis

In 2017, Green Beret Staff Sergeant (SSG) Logan Melgar was killed in his barracks room by four other Service members he was serving with while serving in Bamako, Mali. Also involved was a Malian security guard and a British man who became friends with the American Service members. Upon entering the room, the plan was to haze and assault Melgar for disagreements with Chief Special Warfare Operator Anthony DeDolph. Others involved planned to help duct tape Melgar while he was in a chokehold and assaulted. The group entered Melgar's bedroom, and DeDolph put him in a chokehold for 30 seconds. Once he was released, Melgar did not wake up. DeDolph then began performing CPR. When that was unsuccessful, they rushed Melgar to a nearby medical clinic.

The Service members planned to haze Melgar because, they alleged, he "ditched" them at a party, and they perceived this as a slight. Documents released since have shown that some of these Service members were joking about sexually assaulting Melgar during the attack. Additionally, before the attack, the Service members asked Melgar's team leader if they were allowed to haze him and were told "yes." The actions carried out by these Service members cost them their careers and Melgar's life. Additionally, the perpetrators were charged with felony murder. SSG Melgar's team leader, Sergeant 1st Class James Morris, has not been charged.

Group Discussion

*Note: These are suggested questions. Potential responses are included below each question.

1. Based on the case synopsis, what actions of these Service members constituted hazing?
 - a. Physical assault
 - b. Duct taping
 - c. Coercing others to participate in hazing behaviors
2. In this situation, what other types of harassment played a role and how?
 - a. A planned intent of sexual assault
 - b. Retaliation (Melgar left the group at a party to attend another party)
 - c. What were the factors that likely contributed to the climate?
 - d. The inaction of other Service members (e.g., no bystander intervention)
 - e. Leaders allowing others to haze
 - f. High-stress workplace environment
3. What could have helped mitigate or prevent hazing?



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- a. Training directed at leaders emphasizing the importance of discouraging hazing behaviors
 - b. Promoting camaraderie amongst the team
 - c. Anonymous reporting options to inform leaders what was about to happen
4. What were some of the points of failure in preventing a situation like this?
 - a. Lack of leader accountability
 - b. Lack of Service member accountability
 - c. Lack of consistency in consequences for perpetrators of hazing at all levels
5. What are some long-term effects of a case like this on the organization regarding climate, mission productivity, and mental and physical health?
 - a. Climate:
 - i. Loss of trust and morale
 - ii. Peer pressure to haze
 - b. Mission productivity:
 - i. Inhibited ability to accomplish tasks
 - ii. Compromised integrity of the organization
6. Mental and physical health:
 - a. Increased anxiety or depression
 - b. Feelings of isolation
 - c. Physical harm
 - d. Death

Questions

1. What bystander intervention tactics could you use if you were aware of hazing?

Responses to listen for:

If I were a bystander who overheard DeDolph's plans to haze Melgar I would:

- a. Talk to him about better ways to address the situation.
- b. Reiterate to him that this is not how we treat other Service members and that we need to take care of each other even more in a deployed environment.
- c. Encourage DeDolph to speak to Melgar about staying together when the group leaves the base.
- d. Offer to attend when the discussion is held to help both parties see the other's point of view.
- e. Alert the chain of command about what I overheard so that they are informed.



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2. What mitigating approaches could help support a better climate or group cohesion in a situation like what is described in the case study?

Responses to listen for:

- a. It is a leader's responsibility to set the tone for a respectful and inclusive environment where hazing is not tolerated in any form, and it is the individual's responsibility to embrace and model these expectations.
 - b. It is essential to communicate proactively that hazing goes against our core values and will not be accepted. This means not just speaking out against inappropriate behavior when it happens but also creating a climate where everyone understands the importance of respect and dignity for all. This includes modeling these expectations as an individual.
 - c. Further, training should focus on the physical and emotional harm that hazing causes individuals and teams.
3. What role did Melgar's team leader play in this situation, and how could he have responded better?

Responses to listen for: The team leader should not have permitted the Service members to haze Melgar. He should have reported the Service members who intended to haze Melgar to the chain of command. Additionally, he could have addressed DeDolph and the other Service members to encourage them to discuss their grievances with Melgar and a mediator or facilitator. The team leader should have followed up with the Service members regarding their discussion and resolution.

4. Do you feel comfortable expressing concerns regarding hazing in your organization? If not, why? If so, what factors help you to feel comfortable expressing concerns?

Responses to listen for:

- a. I feel comfortable speaking up when I know my chain of command has my back and when I have seen them take concerns seriously.
- b. It is easier when there's a transparent process for raising issues without fear of retaliation.
- c. I worry about backlash or being seen as not a team player or just someone complaining, especially if the workplace isn't that open.
- d. Seeing a lack of accountability from leadership to hold those accountable makes me uncomfortable expressing my concerns.
- e. Much of it comes down to trust in leadership and my team and if the environment is one where we feel safe to voice concerns.



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Conclusion

During this discussion, we explored hazing and some other climate factors. As the case study indicated, every organization member can significantly affect the likelihood and severity of hazing behaviors. Everyone needs to be self-reflective and conscious of their behaviors to actively promote awareness and accountability for creating a team that embraces the responsibility of caring for one another and discourages harmful behaviors, such as hazing.

Likewise, it is essential to note that hazing and other unfavorable behaviors are likely to persist if perpetrators do not think their actions are wrong because they are accepted or do not believe they will be held accountable for them.

Everyone needs to recognize inappropriate behaviors that lead to hazing and feel confident in reporting these behaviors before a hazing incident occurs. This understanding must be encouraged and supported throughout the organization. Everyone wants to feel appreciated, valued, and safe in their organization.



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References

*Note: Each reference below contains pieces of this story. Please review them to ensure you have the full perspective.

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Handout

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1. What bystander intervention tactics could you use if you were aware of hazing?
2. What mitigating approaches could help support a better climate or group cohesion in a situation like what is described in the case study?
3. What role did Melgar's team leader play in this situation, and how could he have responded better?
4. Do you feel comfortable expressing concerns regarding hazing in your organization? If not, why? If so, what factors help you to feel comfortable expressing concerns?