

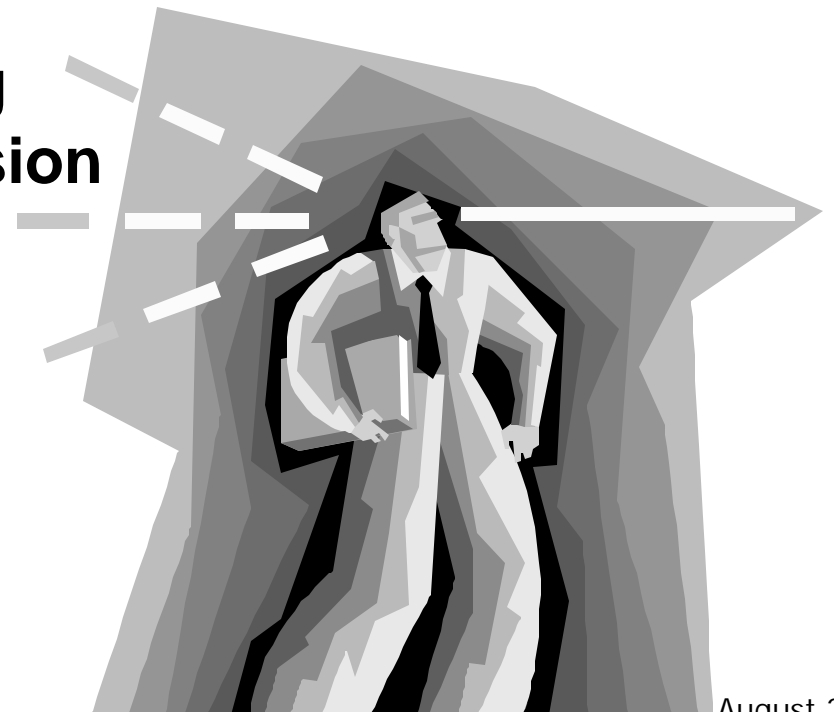


# Stress & Aggression In the Workplace

*A Collaborative Action Research Project*

## Hard Facts About The “Soft Stuff”

**The Business Case for Taking  
Action on Stress and Aggression**



Partially funded by a grant from the  
National Science Foundation

August 2002

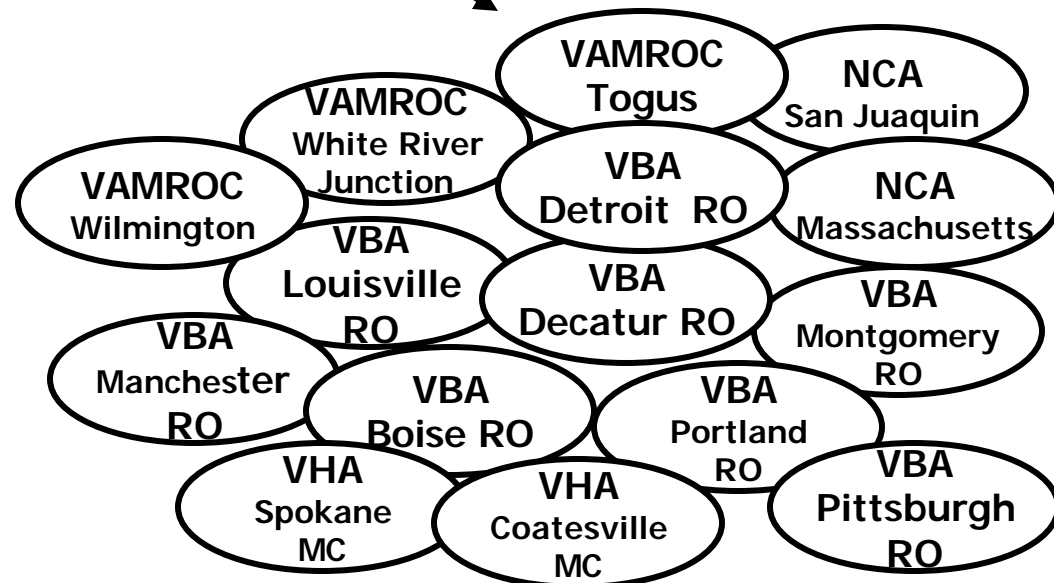
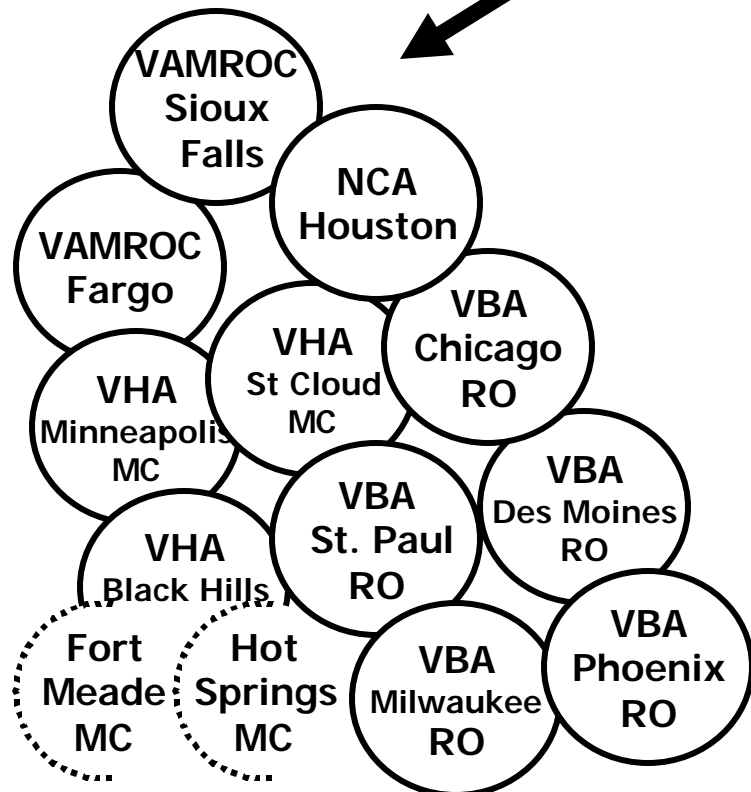


# VA Facilities Participating

PROJECT  
TEAM

11 PILOT  
SITES

15 COMPARISON  
SITES



Veterans Benefits Administration (VBA)  
Veterans Health Administration (VHA)  
VBA+VHA = VA Medical/Regional Office Center (VAMROC)  
National Cemetery Administration (NCA)



# Data Collection

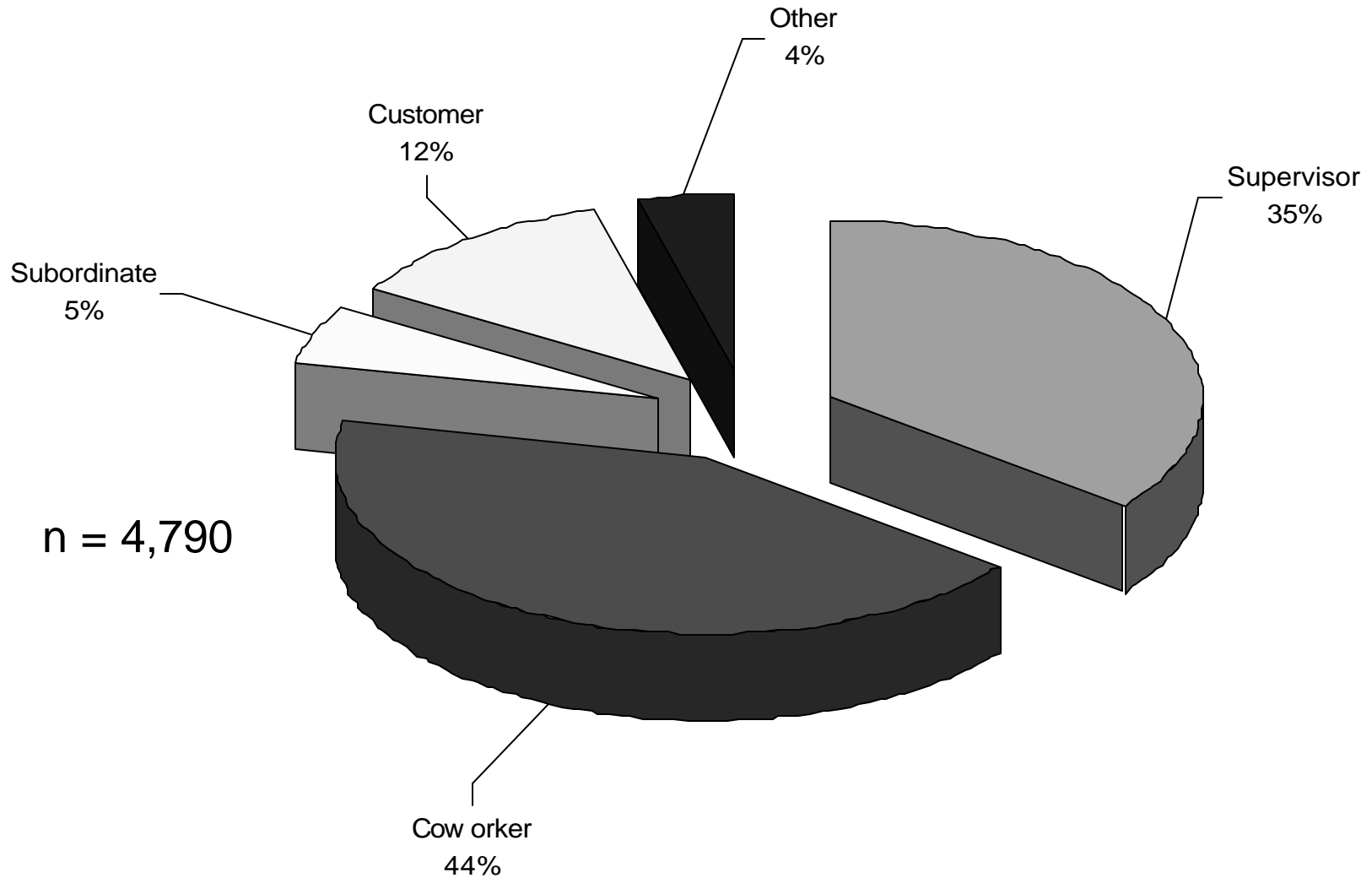
## Workplace Aggression Questionnaire

- Measures the nature (form) and relative frequency (duration & persistence) of aggression
- Identifies the source of aggression (i.e., supervisor, co-worker, subordinate, customer-client, other)
- Assesses perceptions of the causes of aggression
- Measures the degree of harm inflicted
- Identifies individual responses to aggression

## Employee Satisfaction Survey

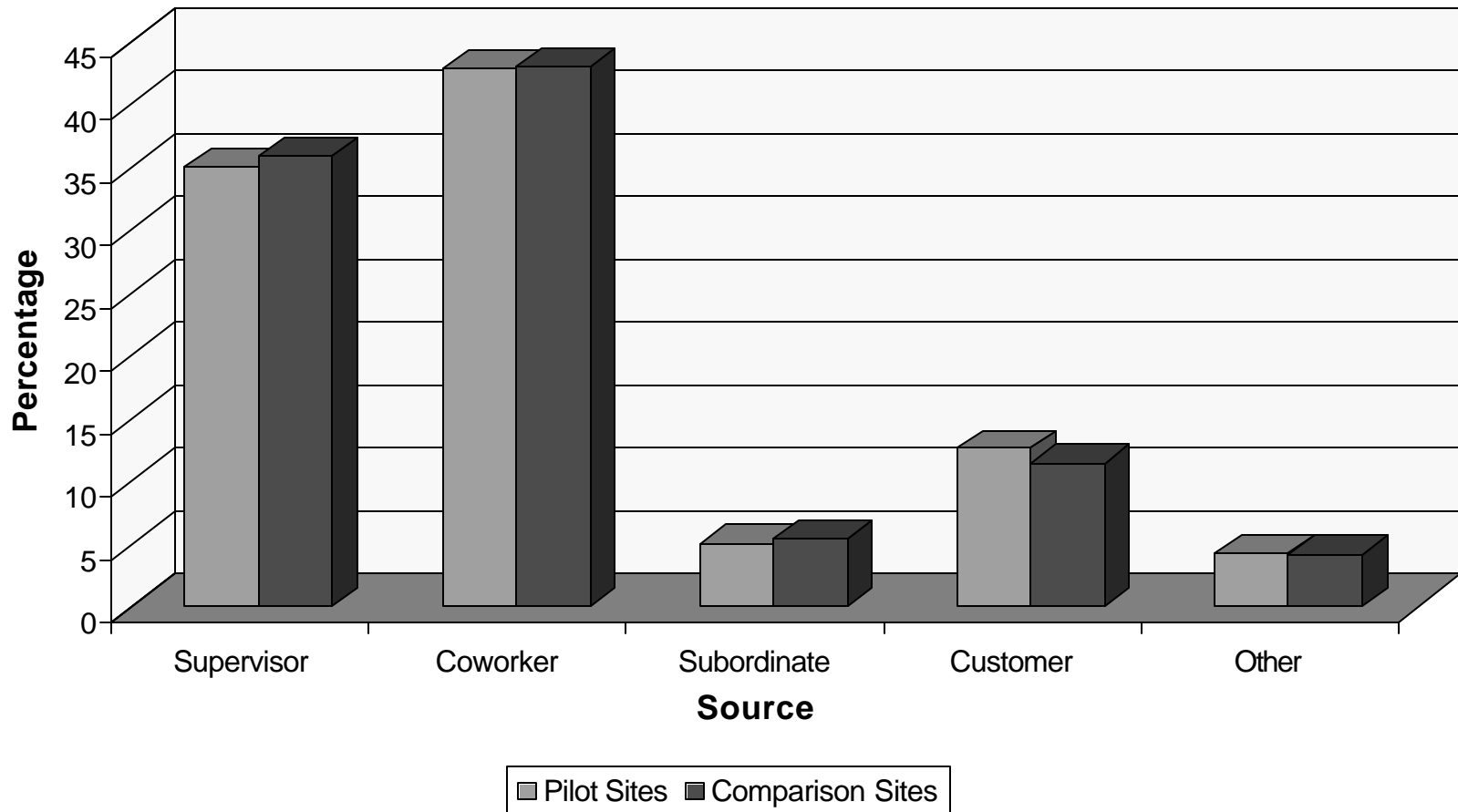
- 96 Question Extracted From the 1997 One VA Survey
- Key questions selected from larger survey
- We now believe that approximately 60 questions would provide the same data

# Source of Aggression: All Facilities

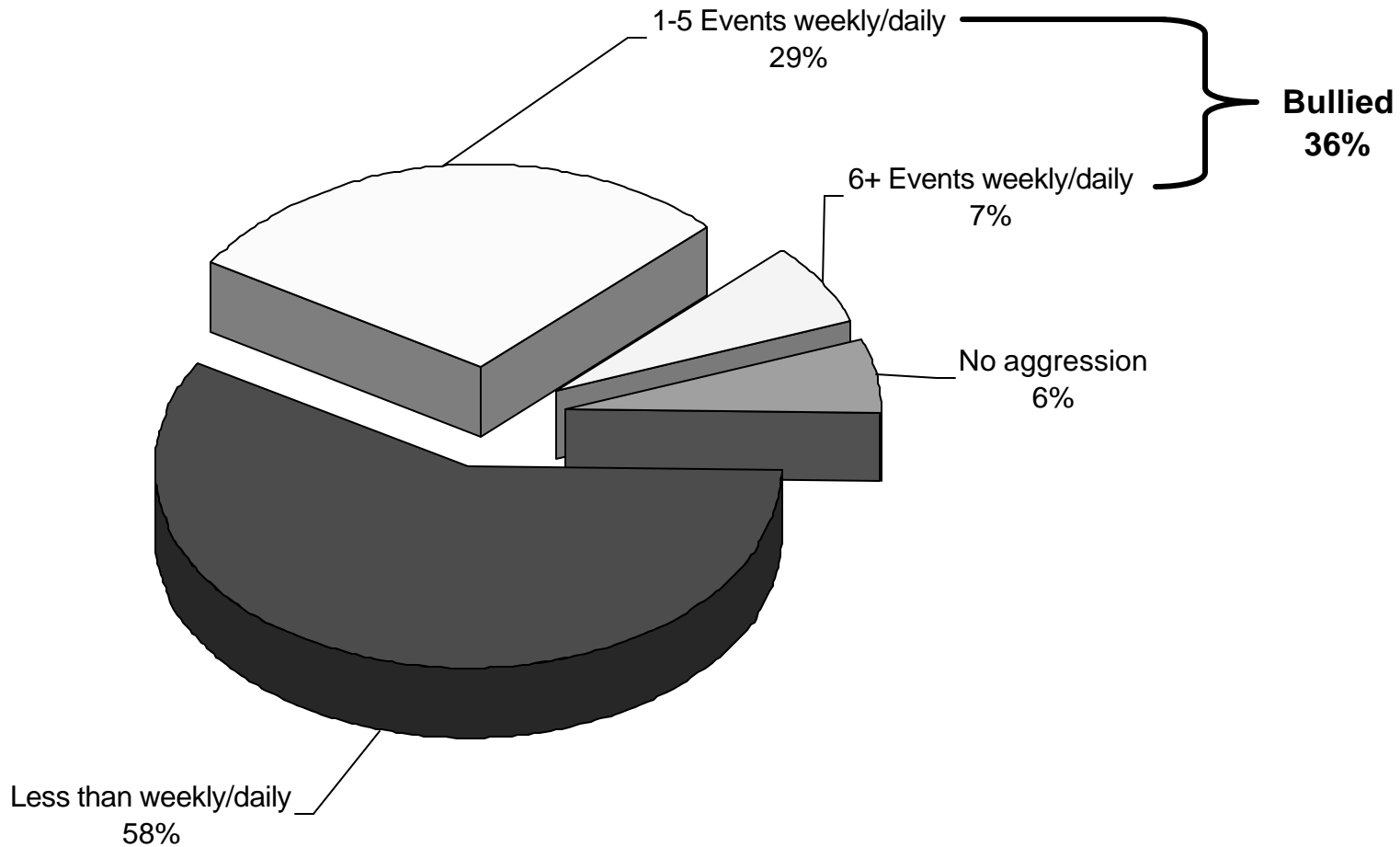


# Who are the Aggressors?

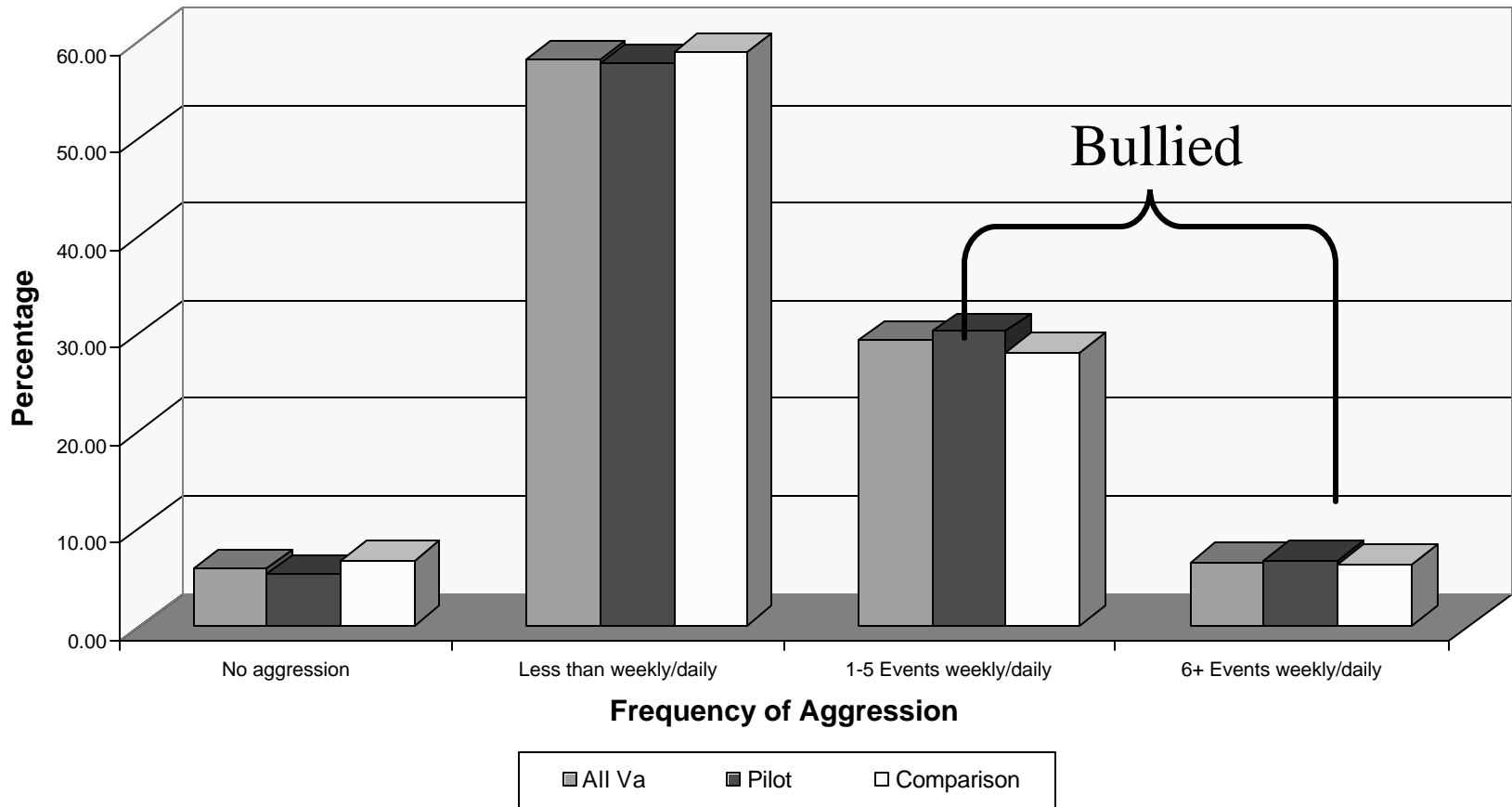
Source of Aggression



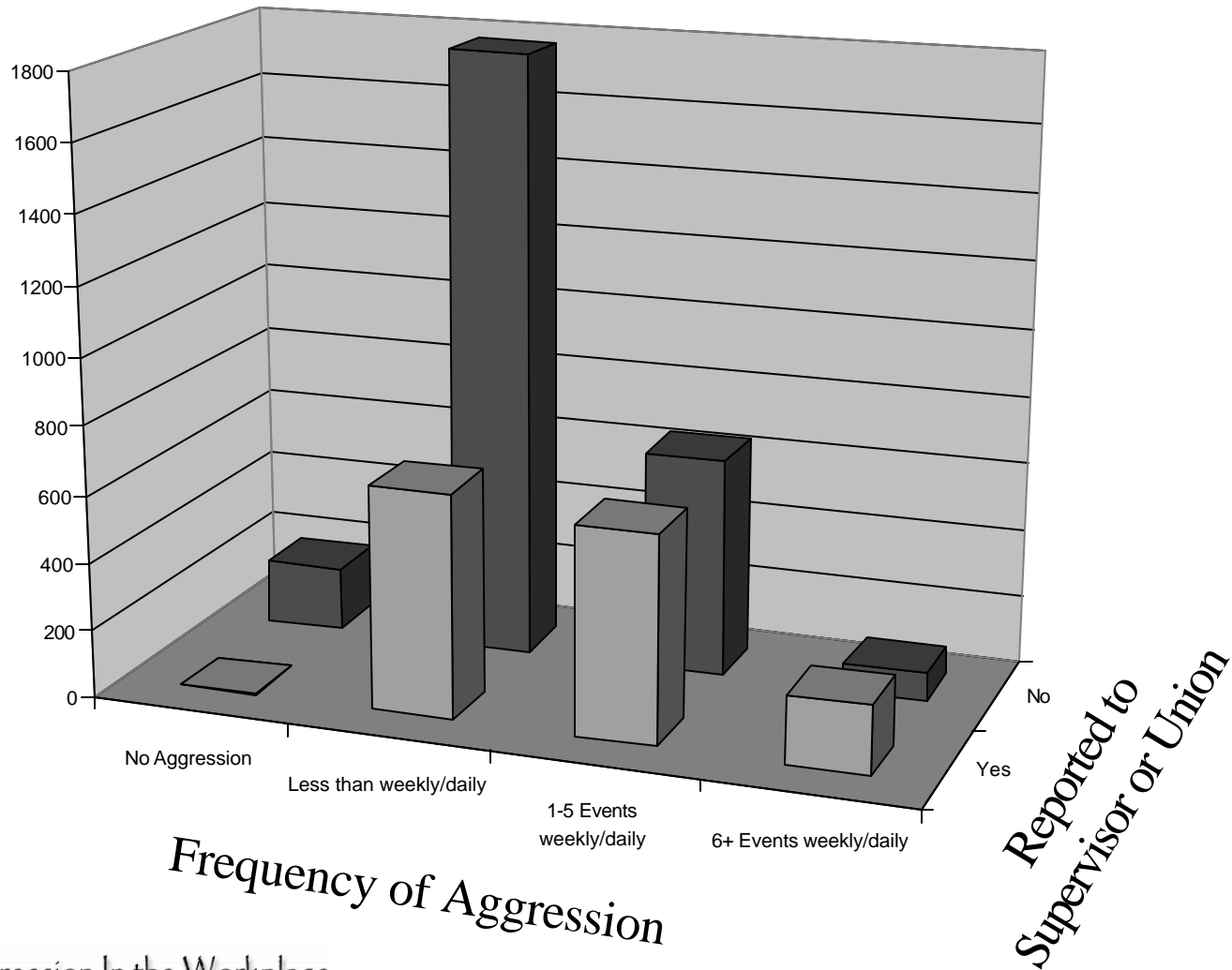
# Bullying: Persistent Patterns of Aggression within VA



# Frequency of Aggression: Pilot vs. Comparison Sites

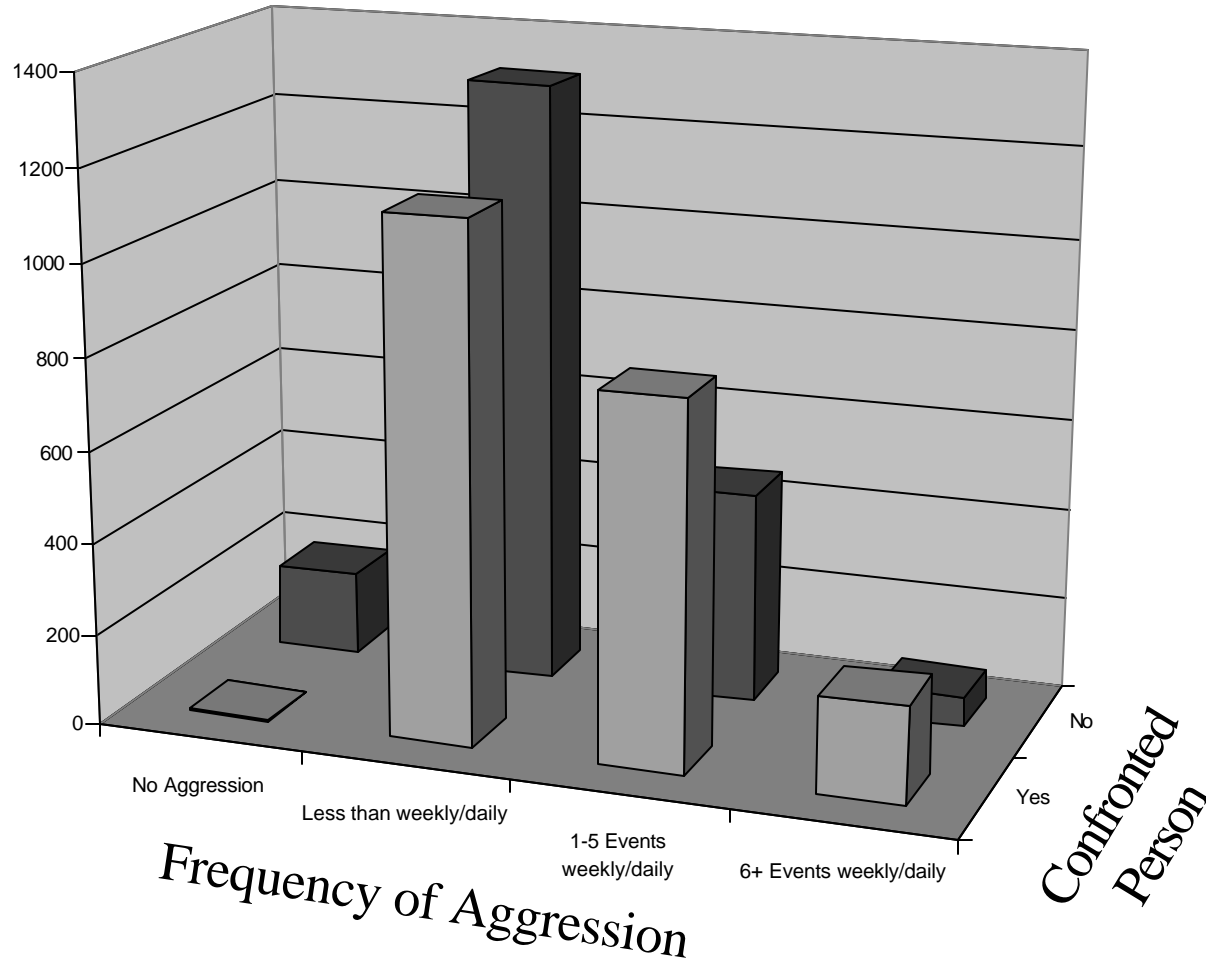


# Reporting Behaviors to Supervisor or Union Official as a Function of Persistence of Aggression



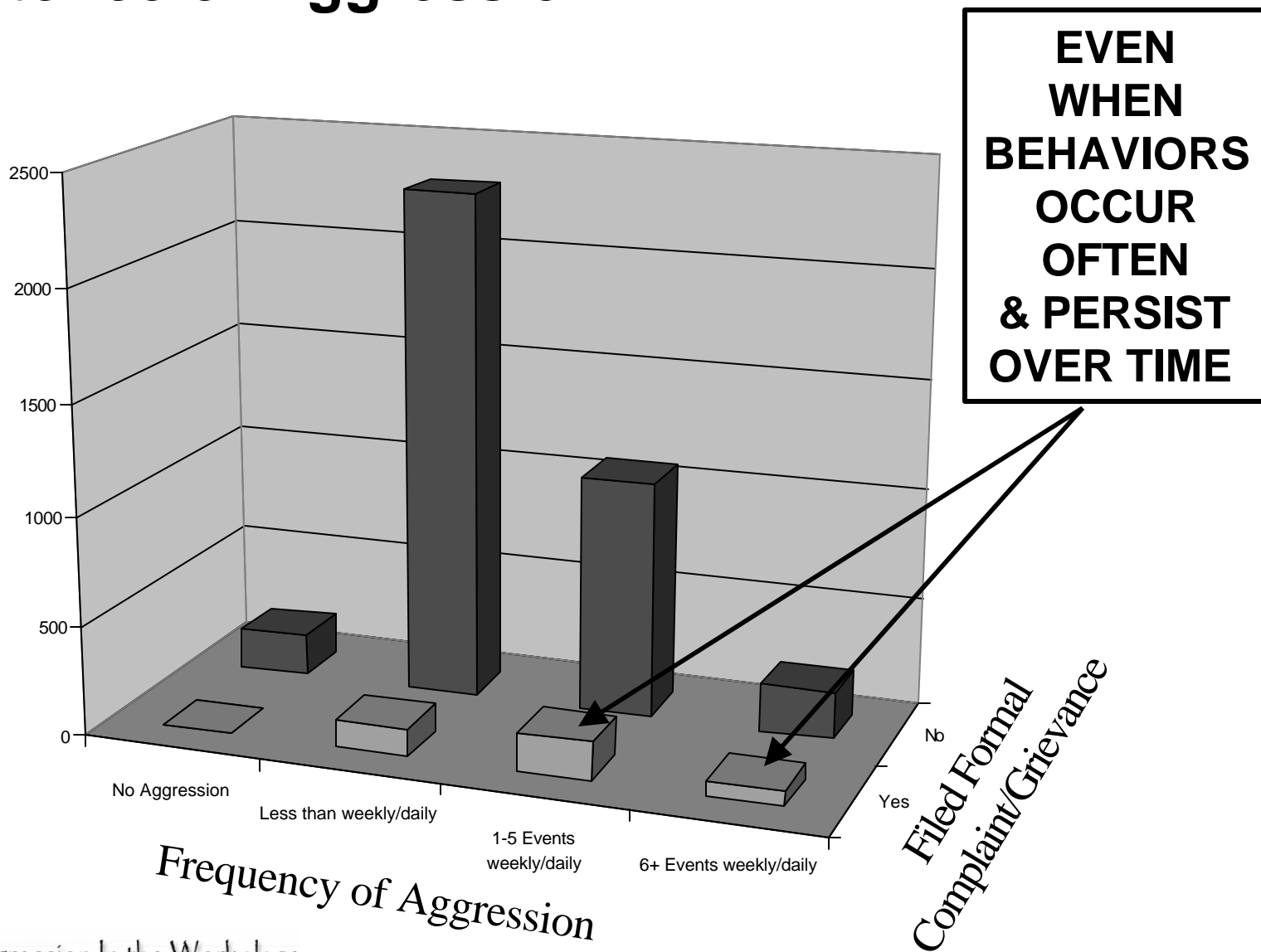


# Confronting the Person(s) Involved as a Function of Persistence of Aggression



# Filing Formal Grievance/Complaint as a Function of Persistence of Aggression

**NOTE:**  
Seldom do people file formal complaints



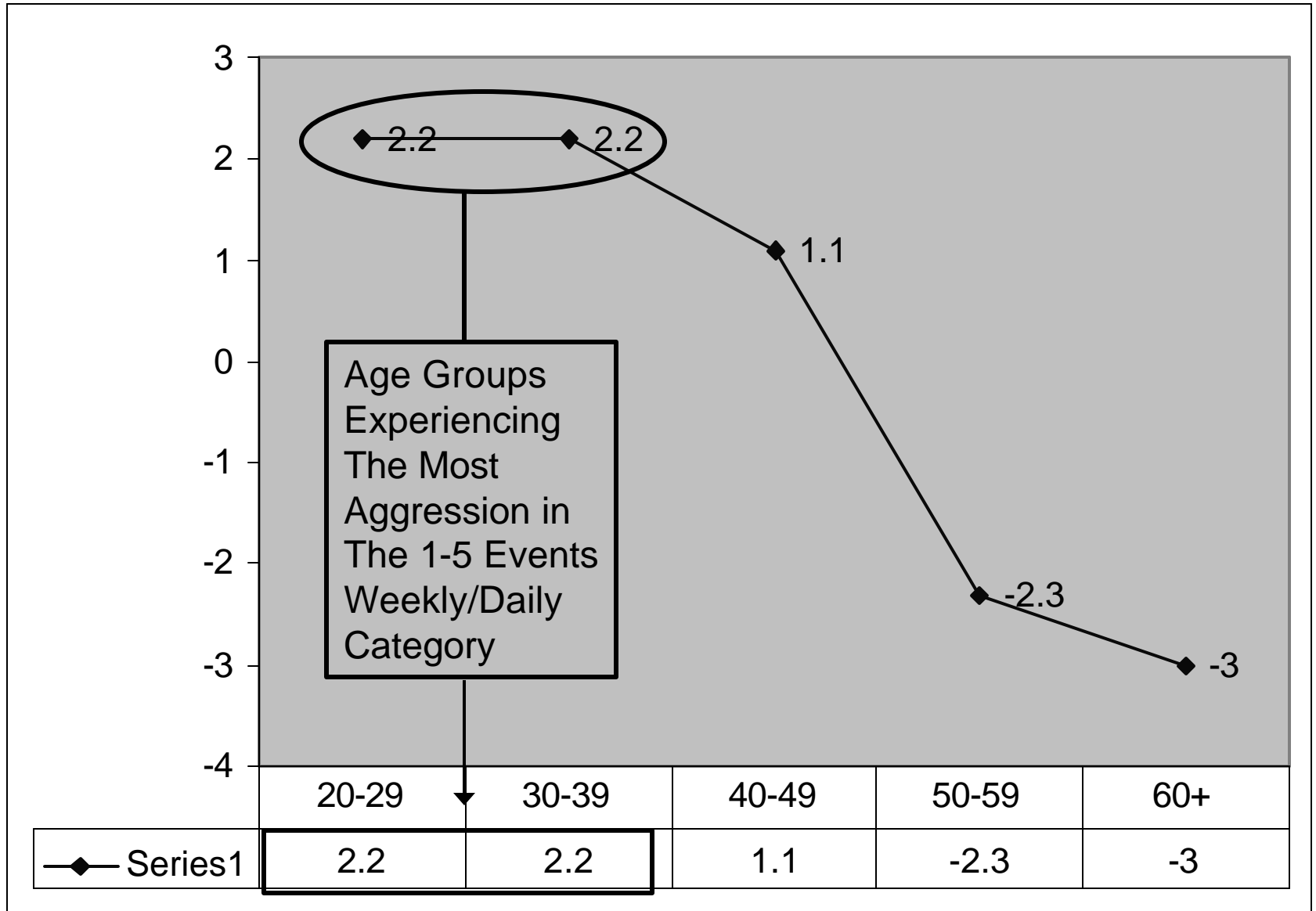
# Intentions to Quit and Age

Q91 – I am considering leaving this organization

<u># Respond.</u>	<u>Age</u>	<u>Agree</u>	<u>Strongly Agree</u>	<u>Total</u>
151	20-29	22.5%	15.9%	38.4%
540	30-39	23.1%	10.4%	33.5%
1409	40-49	20.2%	8.8%	29%

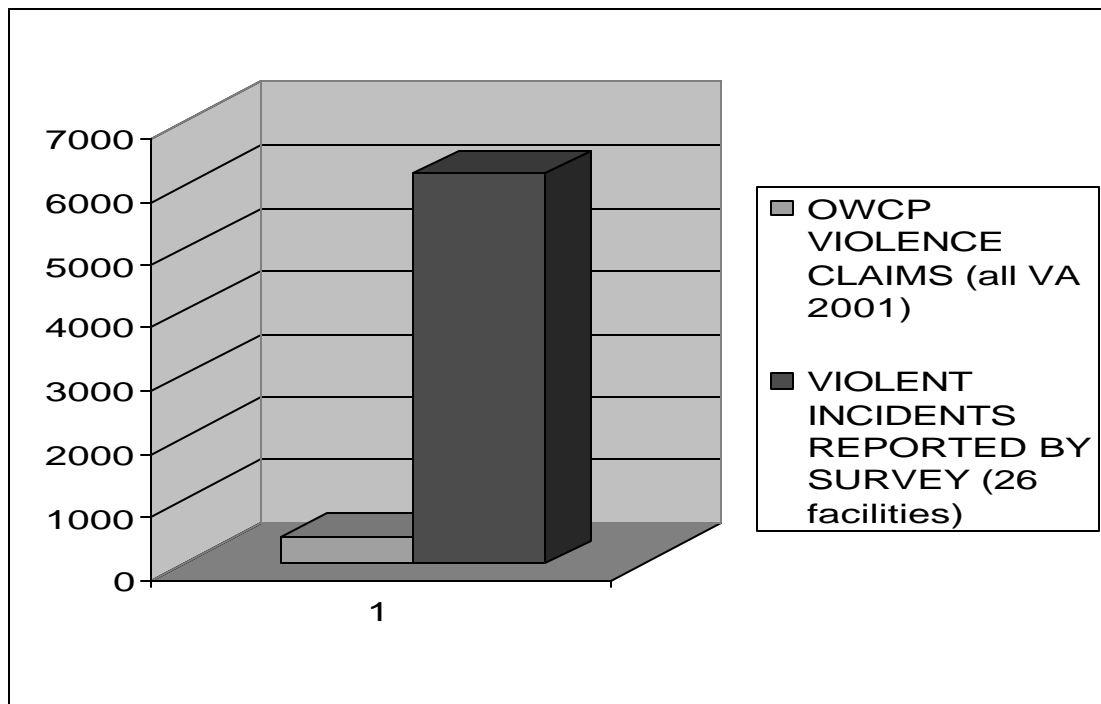


# 1-5 Aggressive Events Weekly/Daily Plotted Against Respondents' Age



Question	<i>AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIORS (OWCP Related) Sorted by Frequency</i>	Totals
97	Been sworn at in a hostile manner	1499
105	Been subjected to obscene or hostile gestures	1010
110	Been yelled at or shouted at in a hostile manner	1937
138	Been kicked, bitten, or spat on	360
143	Had someone hit you with an object	300
149	Been threatened with physical harm	605
150	Been pushed, shoved, thrown, or bumped into with unnecessary force	361
151	Been raped or sexually assaulted	21
152	Been assaulted with a weapon or other dangerous object	77
	<b>TOTALS</b>	<b>6170</b>

## Incidents Reported in Project Survey vs. OWC P Violence Claims Filed



# Aggression & Stress Learning Window

## What We Know

- **Non-physical/emotional forms of aggression occur frequently in work settings**
- **Unjust, disrespectful/rude behavior is strongly linked to aggression**
- **Employees overestimate the personal causes of aggression and underestimate the social and situational causes**



# Aggression & Stress Learning Window

## What We Know

- **Respondents reporting higher levels of overall aggression:**
  - are less satisfied on the job
  - report higher levels of perceived injustice
  - experience greater levels of stress
  - are more likely to feel bothered by such behavior
  - report greater intentions to quit



# Aggression & Stress Learning Window

## What We Know

- **Persistent patterns of workplace aggression have an adverse impact on employee and organizational performance, are associated with EEO & OWCP claims, and are associated with employee withdrawal behavior (i.e. absence, lateness, turnover)**





# What We Know

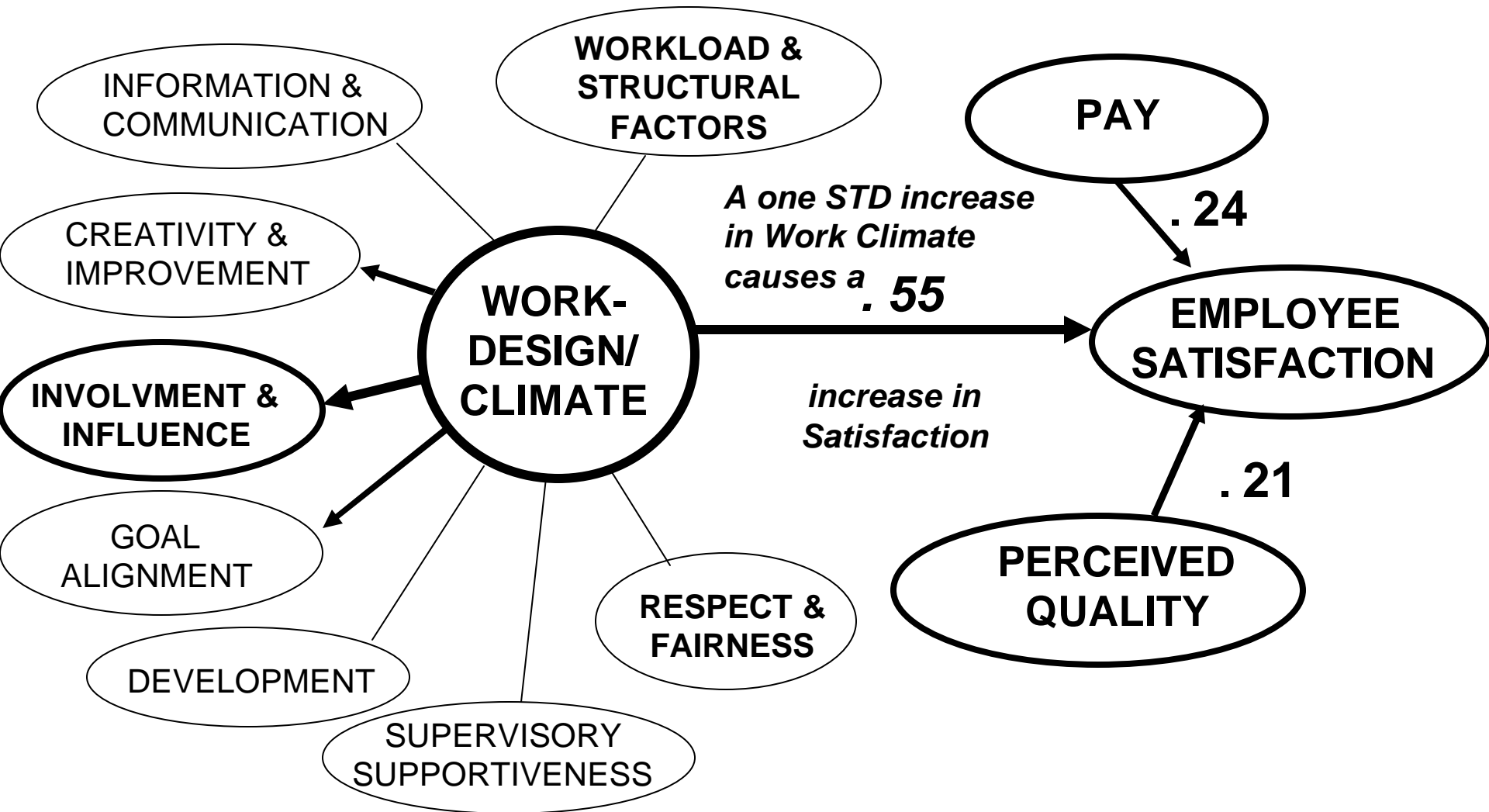
## About Aggression & Stress in the Workplace & Employee Satisfaction

- **High-involvement, “empowered” work climate is strongly associated with lower stress and aggression and higher employee satisfaction**
- **A major portion of the impact of the work climate cluster on employee satisfaction acts through perceptions of fairness and workload obstacles**
- **Increased employee satisfaction improves business results**





# The Power of Work Climate





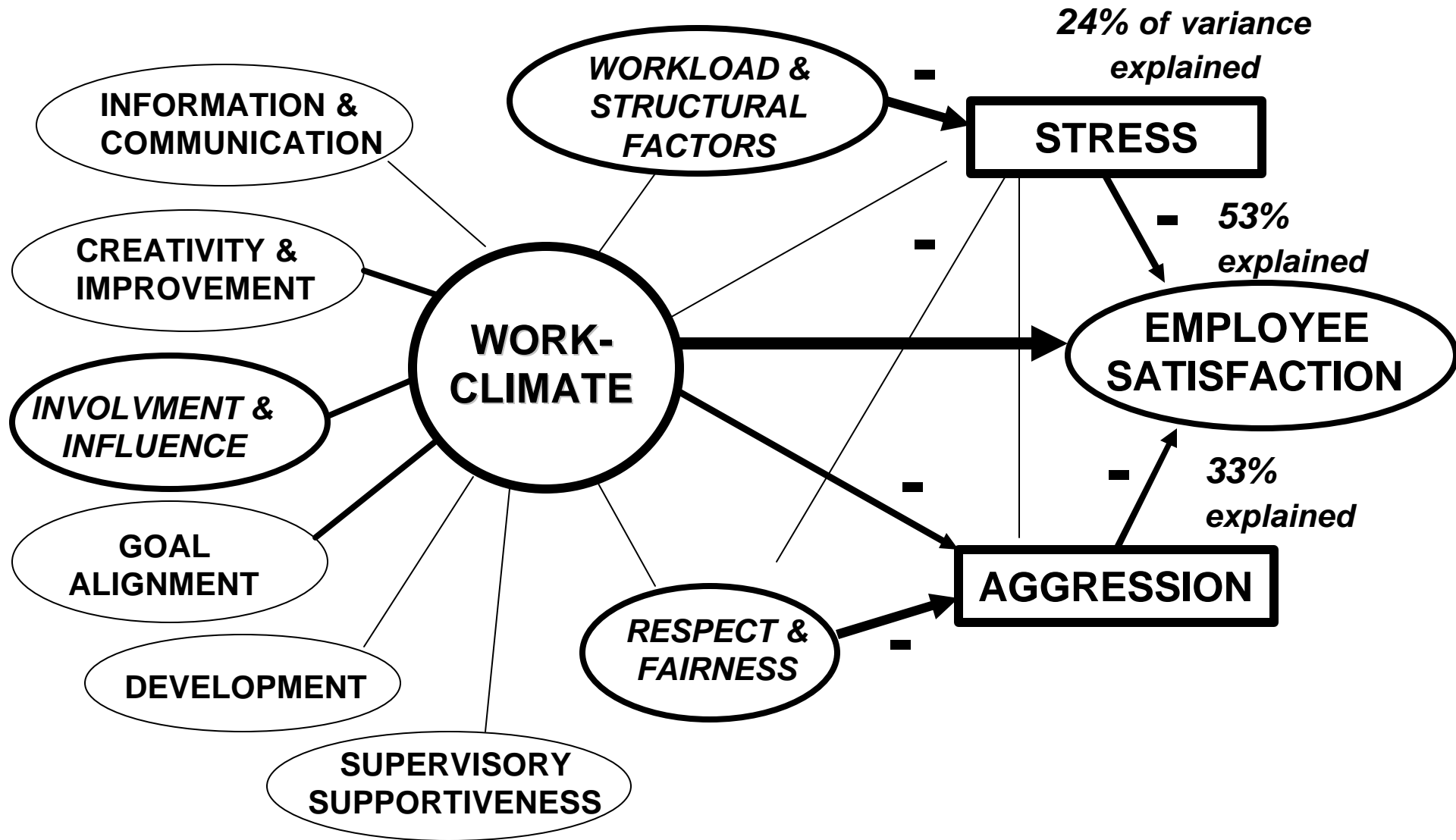
# WHAT IS WORK CLIMATE?

Derived From Analysis of 1997, 1999 & 2000  
Employee Survey Data

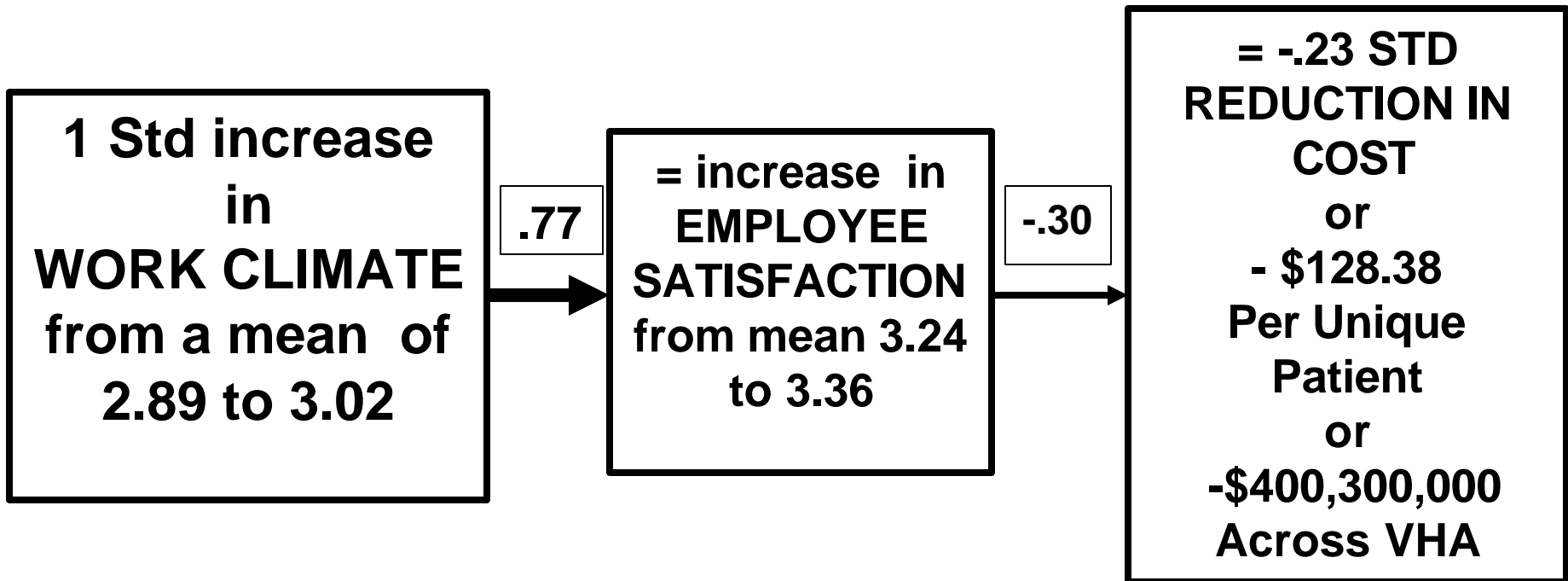
First-Order Factor/Scale		Central item(s) to scale
<b>INVOLVEMENT &amp; INFLUENCE</b>		<b>Efforts to get opinions; Employees involved in improvement</b>
<b>CREATIVITY &amp; IMPROVEMENT</b>		<b>New ways encouraged: Sup open to change</b>
<b>GOAL ALIGNMENT</b>		<b>Mgrs let employees know how their work contributes to org goals</b>
<b>INFORMATION &amp; COMMUNICATION</b>		<b>Kept informed about job and about organization</b>
<b>SUPERVISORY TRUST &amp; SUPPORTIVENESS</b>		<b>Trust between employees and supervisors; Supervisors help and support employees</b>
<b>SKILL DEVELOPMENT</b>		<b>Get training to enhance performance and career opportunities</b>
<b>WORKLOAD &amp; STRUCTURAL FACTORS</b>		<b>Workload is reasonable; Minimum interruptions and “red tape”</b>
<b>FAIRNESS</b>		<b>Disciplinary actions and disputes are handled fairly</b>



# Work Climate Effects on Aggression, Stress & Satisfaction



# Does Employee Satisfaction Matter?



# What We Know About Aggression and Stress in the Workplace and Employee Satisfaction

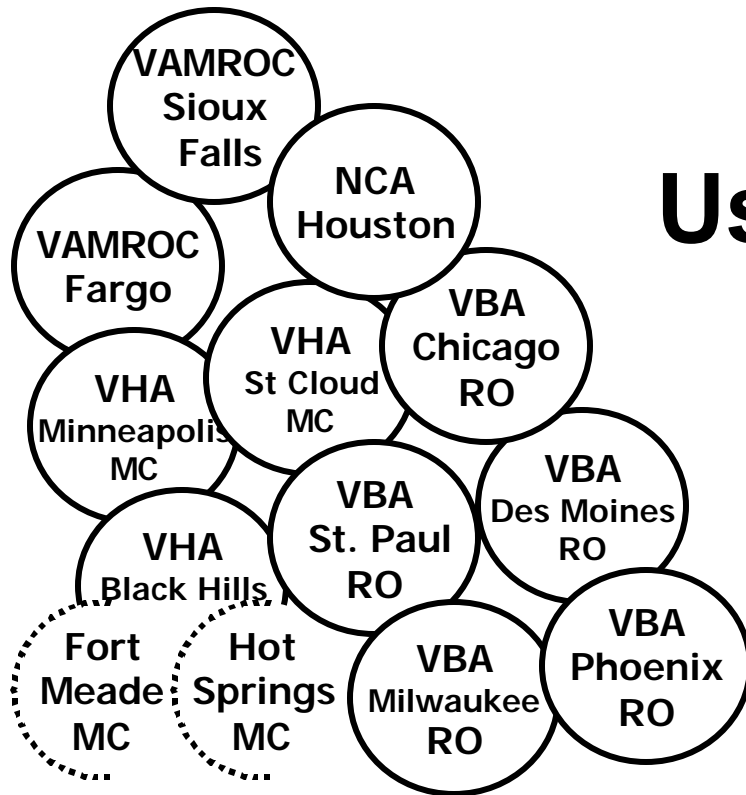
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## Using Local Teams To Act on Survey Data

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# Selecting Action Team Members

1. **Facilities volunteered to join the project after the Project Team briefed them on the project's objectives.**
  - Both management and the union had to agree.
  - Either party can withdraw the facility from the project.
  
2. **Management and the Union jointly selected Action Team Members using the following criteria:**
  - **Credibility with employees and leadership**
  - **High potential for success**
  - **Action-orientation**
  - **Varied backgrounds**
  - **Committed to learning**
  - **Good communication skills**





# **Just-In-Time Training and Initial Actions**

- 3. The Project Team trained the Action Teams on:**
  - The way to ask questions about the data they would receive, and
  - Learning practices that would help them work and learn together. (KEY)
- 4. Each team had a team leader and a learning coach .**
- 5. The Action Teams provided the Project Team with input into the original survey.**
- 6. The Action Teams prepared the facility for the taking the survey by briefing employees on project goals and survey process. (KEY)**



# **Reviewing Data and Feedback to Workforce**

- 7. The academic researchers received completed surveys and provided results to the teams.**
  - Conference with all action team members to release initial data and reinforce previously training**
  - Action Teams received facility descriptive statistics for each survey question (means , frequency distribution and standard deviations), comparison data for the other pilot sites, & some causal models (KEY)**
  - Action Teams requested data analysis of facility level data from the academic partners**
- 8. Action Teams briefed employees on the survey results. (KEY)**



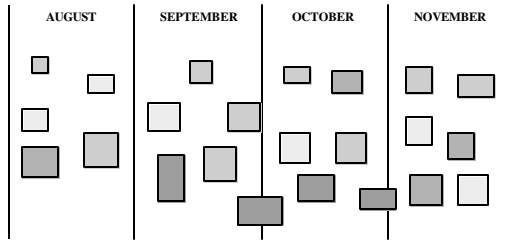
# Acting on Survey Results

- 9. Action teams examined and discussed the data and suggested possible areas of intervention**
  - In some cases, the Project Team asked questions to test the assumptions underlying the suggested intervention**
- 10. The Action Teams are in various stages of the analysis, identification, and implementation process.**
- 11. The Project and Action Teams will re-administer the survey in November 2002 to help evaluate results.**



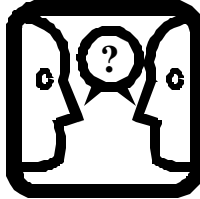
# Variety of Learning Practices

## HARVESTING LEARNING



EACH PARTICIPANT USES A DIFFERENT COLOR POST IT & DESCRIBES THE INCIDENTS THAT THEY PERCEIVE AS CRITICAL IN THE PROJECT

## INQUIRY, or ASKING



### REFLECTION

A technique that slows down us down so we can think about, assess, and evaluate the flow of ideas, events, and behaviors.

Where are we? *What are our assumptions?*

How did get here? *Is there anything we should change?*

What worked? What didn't work? *•Is there anything we can learn from what has happened?*

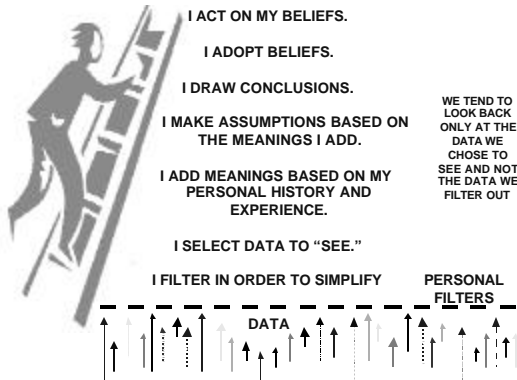
KNOWING

## LEARNING WINDOW

<b>WHAT I KNOW &amp; WHY I KNOW IT</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What data do I have to support my view?</li> <li>Do others accept my interpretation?</li> </ul>	<b>WHAT I THINK I KNOW &amp; WHAT I NEED TO DISCOVER IN ORDER TO KNOW IT</b>
<b>WHAT I KNOW I DO NOT KNOW</b>	<b>I MUST BE OPEN TO WHAT I DO NOT EXPECT</b>

DISCOVER

## LADDER OF INFERENCE



<i>Left Hand Column</i>	<i>Right Hand Column</i>
<i>(Unspoken)</i>	<i>(Public Statements)</i>
What I am thinking, but reluctant to say	What I am saying
My feelings	My statements
My motivations	

## STOP AND REFLECT

...a group caution light

"I would rate my contribution to our group as...."

"I would rate our group's effectiveness as...."

"I would rate myself this way because...."

"I would rate us this way because...."

"My suggestions for improving our group's effectiveness are...."



# **Our Local Action Team Process Is an Important Product**

## **What We Know**

- **Feedback to the workforce on the survey results is important**
  - **The Action Teams received survey data within 60 days following the survey**
- **Face time is important – virtual interactions are insufficient**
- **For many Action Teams, their use of the learning practices in meetings and activities created a special space that has had a positive impact on relationships**
  - **The process of creating this special reflective communicative space is critical to explaining the successes of project to date**
- **Individual Action Team members are using some learning practices in other settings**



# **Our Local Action Team Process Is an Important Product!**

## **What We Think We Know**

- **The larger VA culture has trained employees not to act without permission**
- **“Do you see a number as an answer or as posing a question?”**
- **The power in the data may lie in the conversation about the data rather than in the data itself**
- **Mixing quantitative data with qualitative data, including stories about what is going on at a facility offers greater opportunities for action**
- **Using the learning practices changes individual and group behaviors**
- **Integrating learning into work activities is critical to understanding the project dynamics and action team activities**



# **What We Know About Aggression and Stress in the Workplace and Employee Satisfaction**

- **High-involvement, “empowered” work climate is strongly associated with lower stress and aggression and higher employee satisfaction**
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# **Action Team - Examples of Interventions**

- **Employee Briefings on the Survey**
- **Flake-Off**
- **The Rover**
- **FISH**
- **Newsletters**