

An evaluation of the execution of the aggression policy in the municipality of Hengelo.

English summary



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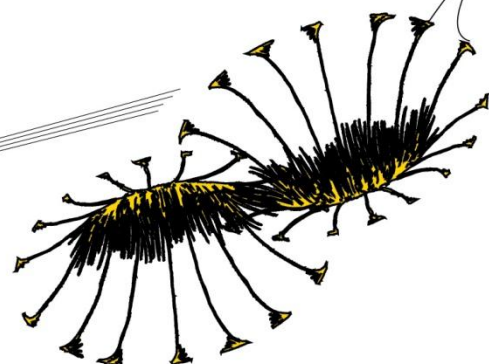
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Introduction

Aggression and violence against public servants unfortunately is a contemporary problem, in the municipality of Hengelo this is a common problem as well. There are a lot of public servants who have contact with civilians on a regular basis and incidents involving aggressive citizens are not out of the ordinary. Aggression may have several negative consequences, it may personally affect public servants and it may negatively affect the execution of public tasks. This emphasizes the importance of care offered to a servant who encountered an incident involving aggression.

Dutch law obliges the employer to keep their employees safe, therefore employers need to have policy which is aimed at fighting and preventing aggression in the workplace. The municipality of Hengelo has this type of aggression policy at its disposal. The main principle is that the municipality does not accept aggression against their employees. As a part of this policy, several measures have been taken in order to prevent aggression. These include physical measures like safe reception desks, camera surveillance and safe consulting rooms. Other measures are aimed at employees, they have been instructed about the risks of aggression while executing their tasks and about how to act during and after an incident involving aggression according to the aggression protocol. In addition the employees are being offered training courses in the management of aggression, these course are obligatory for employees.

After an incident, employees are obliged to report to their supervisor. Subsequently the supervisor is responsible for the first care of the employees as well as the after-care in the period after the incident. Besides that the supervisor is responsible for registering the incident in the central registration system. Lastly the supervisors have to take action against the aggressors. Measures vary from warning the aggressor to reporting them to the police.

Problem definition

From the moment of implementation, there has not yet been an evaluation of the aggression policy of the municipality of Hengelo. There is however a need for an evaluation since this is obliged by law. Furthermore, some problems have been identified in the execution of the aggression policy. An evaluation of the execution may be useful to point out what parts of the policy are not being executed as expected and what factors influence this.

The mentioned problems mainly relate to the procedure of reporting and registering incidents and the participation of employees in the aggression management courses. The number of incidents which are registered seem relatively low to an organization the size of the municipality of Hengelo, the suspicion is that in practice there is a far larger occurrence of incidents than can be seen in the registration system. Some supervisors acknowledge that not every incident is registered. Existing research about registering incidents finds the same conclusions. As a consequence the registered incidents probably are not a reflection of the actual situation. Further the municipality does not offer the employees training courses in aggression management anymore because of the low interest to participate amongst employees.

The described situation raises a few questions. The first question is what the actual amount of incidents is, since there are indications that the amount of incidents which is registered does not reflect the actual amount. Second, one could wonder to what extent the execution of the aggression policy is as intended, certain indications like reporting and registering incidents and a low motivation for participating in aggression management courses show that the execution of the aggression policy

is not as intended. It is likely that other responsibilities in the aggression policy are not executed as was intended as well. It is interesting to find out which factors influence the execution of aggression policy and to what extent. That might explain why the execution of the aggression policy is not satisfactory and on the basis of this recommendations can be made to improve the execution. Besides the raised questions, the municipality of Hengelo wonders whether their aggression policy conforms to legal standards.

All of the above leads to following main research question:

'To what extent is the execution of the aggression policy of the municipality of Hengelo as is intended and what factors influence the execution?'

In order to be able to answer the main research question, the following sub-questions have to be answered:

What does the aggression policy of the municipality of Hengelo consist of and what responsibilities do the executives have?

Does the aggression policy of the municipality of Hengelo conform to legal standards?

What is the size and nature of aggression incidents against employees of the examined departments?

To what extent is the execution of the aggression policy as intended at the examined departments?

Which factors influence the execution of the aggression policy in the municipality of Hengelo?

The aim of the research is to first find out to what extent the execution of the aggression policy is as intended and what factors influence the execution. Subsequently recommendations can be made to improve the execution of the aggression policy which is the eventual goal of this research.

Theoretical framework

Introduction

In this theoretical section there will be a focus on the execution of policy and the factors that influence the execution of policy. These factors are of utmost importance since their influence on the policy execution is going to be tested in this research later on.

Policy and policy execution

Policy can be described as the striving of achieving certain goals with certain means and within a certain time period. Furthermore policy is an attempt to reduce, solve or prevent a problem by goal-oriented thinking and acting (Hoogerwerf, 2008). Several stages can be identified within the policy process from beginning to end, the focus of this research is on the execution stage of a policy. The execution of a policy can basically be described as 'the appliance of the means of a policy' (Maarse, 1995, p. 125). It involves activities, executing policy decisions which have been made earlier in the process. The actors involved in executing a policy can be divided in categories. The actors which are assigned to carry out executive tasks are executive actors. The persons or organization the policy is aimed at are policy subjects. The third category consists of other actors who somehow are involved with the policy execution, for instance advisory boards.

The execution of policy can be viewed from a top-down and a bottom-up perspective (Coolsma, 2008). In this research the bottom-up approach is being used, it is aimed at the executives of the policy and their characteristics.

Factors which influence the execution of policy

According to Coolsma (2008), there are four characteristics of executives in relation to a policy which have an influence on its execution. These characteristics are 'knowing', 'being able to', 'willing' and 'must'. There are other factors which influence the execution of a policy, which can be seen in the figure below. The characteristics of a policy itself, the executive organization and environmental influences can all have an effect on the execution of a policy (Coolsma, 2008). Since this research focuses on the executives of a policy, most attention will be paid to the characteristics of the executives.

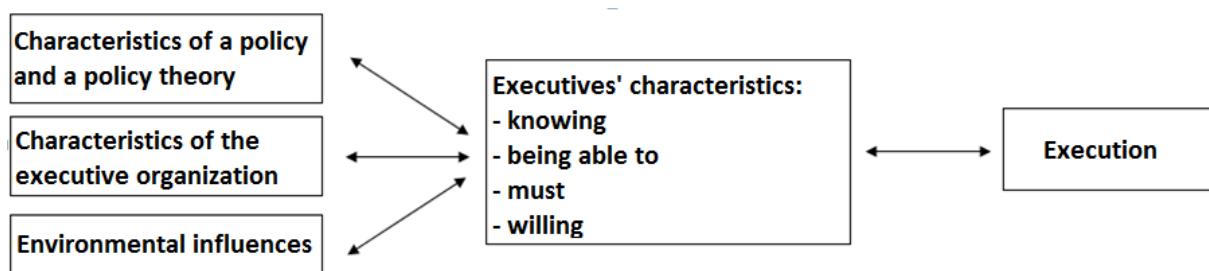


Figure 1. Factors which influence the execution of a policy, based on Coolsma (2008)

The first characteristic or factor which has an influence on the execution of a policy is the '*knowing*' of a policy by the executives. It is important a policy and its contents are well-known to an executive in order for them to be able to execute a policy (Coolsma, 2008). Further they have to know what is expected from them in terms of responsibilities (Bekkers, 2007). Furthermore the information they need has to be available to them (Maarse, 1995). An important aspect in this regard is

communication. A consequence of a lack of communication of the organization to the executives of a policy is lack of knowledge about a certain policy, which may lead to a poorer execution (Kemper & De Ruig, 2009).

Another characteristic is *being able* to execute a specific policy. On the one hand it is about the capabilities of an executive, so about whether he or she is able to execute a policy based on his or her professional competences (Coolsma, 2008). On the other hand it is about facilitating an executive with a useable policy, the means necessary and resources to execute a policy (Coolsma, 2008; Kemper & De Ruig, 2009). The key word here is usability, using the policy and the means should take as less effort as possible. A lack of either professional competences of the executive or facilitating the executives in any way may lead to poor policy execution (Coolsma, 2008).

Further the executives need to be *willing* to execute a policy. The executives have to accept the means, goals and behavioral rules associated with a policy (Coolsma, 2008). The success of policy and measures will be dependent of a wide support in the organization (Van Vugt & Bogaerts, 2007). Executives' support is dependent of their motives. If the difference between their motives and the goals and means of the policy becomes larger, the chance that executives will act as they see fit will become larger as well. This will generally have a negative influence on the intended execution of a policy (Coolsma, 2008).

Lastly the factor which can affect the execution of a policy is '*must*'. It is about whether executives are being forced to execute a policy in a certain way or have room for interpretation regarding the execution. Forcing executives could positively affect the execution of a policy, it can however have a strong contra productive effect as well (Coolmsa, 2008).

The influence on the way policy is being executed can originate from different sources. The department an executive is working at and their colleagues can have an influence on the way in which the employee will execute the policy (Ufkes & Giebels, 2014). Besides this, the policy itself may or may not offer a certain freedom in the execution of a policy (Bekkers, 2007).

Concluding, regarding the factor '*must*' it is important to what extent executives have freedom to decide in what way they will execute the policy.

Methodological framework

Introduction

This research can be categorized as a process evaluation of the policy execution. It is aimed at the question why the execution is not as was intended (Ministerie van BZK 2012). This chapter will discuss the further methodological framework.

Research design

The research design selected is a comparative case study design. The reason for this is that differences between departments have been observed in terms of execution of the aggression policy, differences between departments might explain this.

The departments will be viewed as cases. The case study part of this research will mainly focus on describing the size and nature of aggression and the execution of responsibilities within the aggression policy by employees within the departments. After describing the results, a case comparison will be performed to identify similarities and differences between cases. The explanatory part about which factors influence the execution of the aggression policy will be performed for all employees as a whole, because of statistical feasibility. The possibilities for finding statistically significant relations for all respondents in this research are greater when analyzing all employees as a whole.

Selection

There are a lot of different departments within the municipality of Hengelo. The first relevant difference between these departments is whether they are aimed internally or externally. It is important to select departments which are aimed externally and have a lot of contact with civilians or clients. The employees working in these departments logically encounter aggression from outsiders more frequently (Fischer & Van Reemst, 2014). This leads to them using the aggression policy more often as well, as a consequence they will profit most from a well working aggression policy. Therefore the internally aimed departments are excluded from this research.

Together with human resource advisors a choice has been made between the remaining departments, the most important criterion is frequent contact with civilians. On the basis of this seven departments have been selected. There is a variety in functions of these departments as well as the civilians or clients they are dealing with.

The next step is selecting respondents within the cases which have contacts with civilians. Together with the supervisor of the selected departments, the people who are suited for this research are selected. This is about filtering out the employees who do not come in contact with civilians like policy makers. Every suitable employee within the selected departments has been invited to participate.

Data collection methods

Several data collection methods have been used depending on the sub question.

A document analysis has been performed to first analyze the aggression policy. The content and function of all documents has been described. The responsibilities for employees and supervisors within the aggression policy have been identified which will have been used as input for later sub questions about the execution of these responsibilities. Additionally the document analysis will be used to determine to what extent the policy conforms to legal standards.

To collect data for the remaining sub questions, surveys have been used. This is about collecting data to determine the actual size and nature of aggression against employees, to determine to what extent the policy is being executed as intended and eventually to analyze which factors influence the execution. Two separate surveys will be used, one aimed at the employees and one aimed at the supervisors because of their different responsibilities.

Operationalization

The operationalization is mainly aimed at the third, fourth and fifth sub questions. The first sub question does not need an operationalization, it is about describing the aggression policy and extracting the responsibilities for the executive actors. To analyze whether the aggression policy conforms to legal standards, an assessment form of the Labour Inspectorate is used (Ministerie van SZW, 2014). This does not need any further operationalization.

The operationalization of the size and nature of aggression, the execution of the aggression policy and factors which influence the execution will consecutively be described.

Regarding the size and nature of aggression, it is about measuring the number of incidents and the nature of these incidents in the past year and about the procedure of reporting and registering incidents.

The respondents are asked if they have ever encountered aggression and how frequently they have encountered aggression by category the last year. These categories refer to the nature of the incident and they originate from the aggression policy. They are verbal aggression, personal threat and physical aggression.

Next they are asked what incidents they would report to their supervisor, which is also categorized by nature. Subsequently they are asked for reasons to report and not to report incidents after which they are asked how frequently their incidents are registered and why this would not always be the case.

The supervisors are asked likewise questions about the employees to get another perspective on the size and nature of the incidents. They are also asked about their personal experiences with incidents.

The basis of the operationalization of the execution of the aggression policy is the analysis of the aggression policy in which the different responsibilities of the employees and supervisors are extracted out of the policy. The employees as well as the supervisors are asked to what extent they execute their responsibilities. If possible they are also asked how often they have done this and they are asked to provide examples. Further the employees are asked to what extent their supervisors execute some of their responsibilities and the other way around to provide some additional perspective.

Lastly the factors which influence the execution have to be operationalized. The basis for this lies in the theoretical framework in which the factors have been described. To clarify, this is about the factors knowing, being able to, willing and must in relation to the aggression policy (Coolsma, 2008). These factors will be aimed more specifically at the aggression policy and the situation in the municipality of Hengelo. Each of the factors will be measured using several Likert scale items per factor. These items are statements regarding the factors which will be presented to the respondents. The respondents can indicate on a scale of 1 to 5 to what extent they agree to the statements (De

Vaus, 2002). So several items are used to measure a factor, subsequently the mean score for these items will be calculated which leaves one score per factor. This score indicates how well the respondent scores for a certain factor. For instance, if a respondent scores close to 5 for the factor 'knowing', this means the aggression policy is very well known to the respondent. The items are slightly different for employees and supervisors because of their different responsibilities in the execution of the aggression policy.

The *execution* of the responsibilities within the aggression policy as a whole will also be measured. This is necessary because the four factors are linked to the execution.

To be able to answer the fourth sub question the respondents have been asked to what extent they execute their responsibilities. The mean of the extent in which they execute all of their responsibilities is calculated, which leaves a mean for the execution as a whole per respondent. A higher mean, means a better execution. Again this is different for employees and supervisors since they have different responsibilities.

Analysis

All survey data is entered into the statistical analysis program SPSS.

To describe the size and nature of aggression and the execution of the aggression policy for all cases, descriptive statistics are being used to describe departments. In the case comparison the means of the size and nature of aggression and the means of the extent of the execution of the aggression policy will be used to compare departments. Thus descriptive statistics will be used for the case study part of this research. The same goes for the size and nature of aggression and the execution of the aggression policy for the supervisors as a group.

To measure the influence of the identified factors on the execution of the aggression policy for employees, regression analysis is used. The influence of the factors knowing, being able to, wanting and must on the execution as a whole will be analyzed. The whole group of employees is being used for the regression analysis, the number of respondents within cases is too small to be able to find significant relations so the whole group will be analyzed.

For supervisors correlation is sought between the identified factors and the execution. The reason for selecting correlation for this is the group of supervisors is too small to perform a regression analysis.

The scale items which measure the identified factors have been analyzed for reliability. All factors are sufficiently reliable for both the supervisors and the employee surveys.

Results

Because of the extended results in the original report and the limitations in this summary, only the more general results will be described.

Analysis of aggression policy

The aggression policy has been analyzed mainly to describe it and to extract the responsibilities the supervisors and employees have. During the analysis it turned out that the aggression policy was somewhat outdated. Some of the responsibilities which are described are not up to date and certain

information is not correct anymore.

Further the responsibilities for employees and supervisors have been extracted and they are quite different. This is important mainly concerning measuring the extent in which these responsibilities are executed later on.

Conformity to legal standards

The aggression policy of the municipality of Hengelo has been compared to the inspection points of the Labour Inspectorate to analyze to what extent it conforms to legal standards. The policy mostly conforms to legal standards, there are however some parts which are not completely conform standards.

The employees who report and register incidents do not receive feedback on their report, also the registered incidents are not analyzed. Both these responsibilities are part of a good aggression policy according to the Labour Inspectorate. Besides this, aggression incidents are not structurally part of meetings within the departments, whereas this is advised.

The situation regarding training employees in aggression management also is not as it is supposed to be. Currently these courses are not provided anymore because of the low interest by employees.

Some departments provide for their own courses, this is however not being done by most departments. Training employees is a necessity according to legal standards, on the basis of the described situation the aggression policy does not conform to legal standards.

Regarding interior design, the situation in municipal buildings is mostly satisfying. The only point of interest is that civilians are able to access most offices in the city hall, which means they can physically reach the employees. The Labour Inspectorate states that these areas should be separated.

Lastly the aggression policy and its measures have to be structurally evaluated, which is not being done currently. This research is a first evaluation of the policy since its implementation. Structural evaluation is not embedded in the policy whereas legal standards demand this.

Apart from the described points of interest, the aggression policy of the municipality of Hengelo conforms to legal standards.

Size and nature of aggression against employees

The suspicion that the size of aggression against employees is far larger than the number of registered incidents has been confirmed. Last year there were 37 registrations in the system which involve 31 incidents. The minimal amount of incidents last year according to the employees is 210. This amount is the minimal amount and it only involves the 129 employees who have taken part in this research. The actual amount for all employees will probably be far larger. In addition, the number of incidents is underestimated by most of the supervisors.

Similarities and differences between departments regarding the size and nature of aggression have been identified during the case comparison. When regarding the nature of aggression, most incidents involve verbal aggression. Personal threats are less common and physical aggression is least common in all departments. There are however differences between departments regarding the number of incidents. Employees of departments with activities concerning inspection and enforcement encounter higher amounts of all sorts of aggression. Employees of departments which have activities

concerning assisting or helping citizens encounter relatively less incidents. The nature of their task seems the most logical explanation for this difference.

There are several reasons for the large discrepancy between the number of registered incidents and the actual number of incidents. The employees indicate they do not report every incident involving aggression. It turns out that the willingness to report incidents is larger when the nature of aggression becomes more serious, personal threats and physical aggression are reported more often relatively seen. Also employees of departments who encounter more aggression on average are more willing to report incidents. The most important reason for not reporting incidents is that employees do not consider some incidents to be serious enough. Another reason is that a certain amount of aggression is part of the job according to some of the employees. Further not all reported incidents are registered, this is confirmed by some of the supervisors. In some cases supervisors and employees consider it to be sufficient to only talk about the incident after it is reported and to not register it subsequently because the incident is not considered serious enough. Besides that some supervisors state it is a lot of effort to register incidents since they have already provided direct care to the employee and they might have taken other measures as well.

Thus the procedure of reporting and registering incidents is not working sufficiently. Both employees and supervisors are lacking their executive responsibilities in this regard.

The execution of the aggression policy

Generally speaking the execution of the aggression policy can be considered sufficient. There are however some responsibilities which are not being executed as well. Besides this, differences in execution have been identified between departments. It has already be concluded that the process of reporting and registering incidents is not working sufficiently.

For employees the most notable results are that their knowledge of the aggression protocol generally is not that good and currently their training in management aggression is unsatisfactory. There are differences between departments. In some department the knowledge of the aggression policy can be considered low, this has a negative impact on their usage of the protocol. Large differences have also been identified in the extent to which employees are trained in aggression management. According to the policy every employee which has contacts with civilians or clients needs to be trained, according to the results 81% is trained. In one department half of the employees have not been trained at all, in most departments the majority have been trained and only in one department everyone has been trained. Furthermore the last training is more than five years ago for 28,5% of employees which have received training. This cannot be considered as 'remaining trained'.

Supervisors generally have the same areas of concern as the employees. It is about the knowledge of the aggression protocol and the training of employees. It is their responsibility to inform the employees about the aggression policy and to make sure their employees receive sufficient training in aggression management. A third of the employees state not to have been informed about the protocol. New employees are even worse informed. The management aggression courses are not currently provided and the level of training of some employees is insufficient. It is however the

responsibility of the supervisors to make sure both the informing and the training of employees is taken care of.

Factors which influence the execution

Lastly the factor which influence the execution have been analyzed. According to the theory these factors are: knowing, being able to, willing and must in relation to the aggression policy (Coolsma, 2008).

The influence of the factors has been tested for the employees and significant influences have been identified. The factor 'willing' has been found to have the strongest positive influence. This means if the support amongst employees for the aggression policy is better, on average this has a positive influence on the execution of their responsibilities.

Further a positive influence has also been found for the factor 'knowing'. This means if the knowledge of the employees about the policy is better, the execution of their responsibilities within the aggression policy generally will be better as well. It turned out that the factor 'being able to' only has a small influence. If employees are more competent and the policy is more usable, it will have a slight positive influence on the execution. No significant influence of the factor 'must' has been found. This means it does not matter if someone tries to influence the way an employee wants to execute the policy, it will not influence the extent in which the responsibilities will be executed eventually. In addition it turned out that the department an employee is working for has an influence on the execution. Working for a specific department may lead to a better execution of the responsibilities.

The group of supervisors has been analyzed as well, it was tried to identify correlations between the factors and the execution. The strongest correlations which were positive, were found for the factors 'knowing' and 'must', unfortunately however the group was too small to find significant correlations between the factors and the execution.

Conclusion

Based on the results in this report, it is possible to answer the main research question:

'To what extent is the execution of the aggression policy of the municipality of Hengelo as is intended and what factors influence the execution?'

First of all the aggression policy mostly conforms to the according legal standards. There are however a few points of interest which need to be addressed in order for the aggression policy and its execution to conform to legal standards.

Generally the execution of the aggression policy by the executive actors can be considered sufficient. There are however differences in the extent in which different responsibilities are being executed. Furthermore there are differences between departments in the execution.

In all cases the supervisors as well as the employees are lacking in executing their responsibilities regarding the procedure of reporting and registering incidents. Employees do not report all incident, mainly because they do not consider the incidents they encounter to be serious enough and believe a certain amount of aggression is a part of the job. Further supervisors admit not to register every incident that has been reported. Usually they decide together with the employee it is not necessary due to the nature of the incident or they consider it to be too much effort. This means the procedure of reporting and registering incidents does not work sufficiently.

Further the main points of interest which are not quite sufficient at some departments are the knowledge about the aggression protocol and training employees in aggression management. Both supervisors and employees are lacking their execution in these areas. In some departments the knowledge of the employees about the protocol is insufficient. At the same time it is the responsibility of the supervisors to inform the employees, only a third of the employees state they have been informed.

The results further indicate not every of the questioned employees has received training. Furthermore a considerable amount of the employees that have been trained, received their last training more than five years ago. According to the policy every employee which has contacts with citizens or clients need to be trained, and employees need to stay trained as well. The supervisors and the employees are both are responsible for this and currently their execution in these areas generally is not satisfactory.

The factors which influence the execution of the employees mainly are the 'willing' and 'knowing' of a policy and to a smaller extent 'being able to'. A significant influence of the factor 'must' has not been found. In practice this means if employees are more supportive of a policy and its measure and they have better knowledge of the aggression policy, this on average leads to a better execution of the policy. To a smaller extent the same goes for the competences of employees and the usability of the aggression policy. If these go up, on average it will have a small positive influence on the execution. It does really matter if someone tries to influence the way employees execute the policy, generally this will not have any influence on the extent to which the policy is being executed eventually. Lastly an influence of the department employees are working for is found. This means if an employee works for a specific department, this can be of influence on the extent to which they execute the policy.

Because the supervisors were only a small group, unfortunately no significant correlations have been found. When ignoring the significance, the strongest positive correlations have been found for 'knowing' and 'must'.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn in this report, recommendations will be made in order to improve the execution of the aggression policy. The conclusion indicates that it is very important to focus on the factors knowing and willing while making recommendations.

Renew attention to the aggression policy and make sure it stays on the agenda

Make sure this happens on departmental level, currently there is attention for aggression policy on a central level, however this does not seem to reach employees since a considerable amount is not informed and has insufficient knowledge of the policy. The additional challenge is to keep it on the agenda, this may be done by establishing a workgroup with involved employees who keep it on the agenda within their departments.

Extra attention to new employees

New employees on average are not well known with the protocol and are less able to use it, extra attention towards this group is necessary.

Resume aggression management courses

It is obliged to make sure employees are sufficiently trained, currently this is not the case. Aggression management courses need to be resumed again.

Simplify the procedure of reporting and registering incidents

Simplifying the procedure takes away some of the obstructions for employees to report and for employers to register incidents. Eventually this may lead to a higher willingness to report and register incidents.

Remind supervisors of their responsibilities

Supervisors are not currently being supervised themselves regarding the executing of their responsibilities. If it turns out they are not executing their responsibilities sufficiently, this should be pointed out to them. Their hierarchical superiors are the appropriate persons to do this.

Evaluate the aggression policy structurally

The aggression policy is not structurally evaluated. This should however be done according to the policy itself and to legal guidelines.

Analyze incidents and provide feedback

Registered incidents are not currently being analyzed and because of this no feedback is provided to employees. This is however part of a decent aggression policy according to legal guidelines. Furthermore if incidents are not being analyzed, then they are being registered for no reason.

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