

Workplace Bullying

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Bullying in the workplace seems to be on the rise. It certainly attracts much more attention in the media. There may be some very good reasons for why this destructive phenomenon is on the increase. With an economy that had the bottom drop out, job security is almost nonexistent. Bullying is a phenomenon of unequal power. One member has power over another. This differential increases as job security drops. Rather than negotiating differences of opinion, the member with the greatest power can now impose their view on those with lesser power.

On the positive side, there may be growing emphasis and pressure on organizations to be more accountable to employees who experience workplace bullying. Bullying is clearly a form of aggression and the person with power/position can stumble into a destructive use of power. These bullying acts and behaviors have serious effects on the workforce. A meta-analysis conducted by Herschcovis and Barling (2010) found that individuals who experienced interpersonal aggression had significantly lower job satisfaction, affective commitment, psychological, and higher intent to turnover and job stress than individuals that experienced sexual/gender harassment. Hence, the objective of this paper is to discuss what bullying is, why the incidence of workplace bullying is escalating and what organizations can do to address this destructive workplace behavior.

For most of us, when we enter the world of work, we have expectations of belongingness, trust, fairness and justice (Herschovis & Barling, 2010; Montes & Irving, 2008). However, an increasing number of employees have these expectations violated through the occurrence of bullying. Recent figures indicate that anywhere from 35% to 50% of U.S. employees have experienced bullying in the course of their careers (Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, & Alberts, 2007). Workplace bullying costs employers and insurers

billions of dollars annually in spending for increased healthcare, turnover, absenteeism, sick leave, litigation and negative publicity (Rayner, Hoel, & Cooper, 2002). With this in mind, it is evident that it is in an organization's best interest to take workplace bullying seriously and develop strategies to implement anti-bullying measures.

So what actually is workplace bullying and what interventions can organizational psychologists implement at the individual and organizational level to prevent, minimize, and address bullying in the workplace. Eirnsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper (2003) provide the following definition of bullying:

Bullying at work means harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone's work tasks. In order for the label bullying to be applied to a particular activity, interaction or process it has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g., weekly) and over a period of time (e.g., about six months).

Bullying is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts (p.15).

Fundamentally, any time physical, emotional or verbal behavior is used by a person or a group to coerce another person or group, bullying is occurring.

Of interest is the work of Zapf and Einarsen (2003) who provide a thorough review of the research on individual antecedents of bullying. They indicate that bullying is a result of the need to protect self-esteem, a lack of social competencies and micropolitical behavior. According to Zapf and Einarsen (2003), micropolitical behavior is behavior of individuals to increase their own interests, further their goals and protect their status. While such behaviors can be positive, they can escalate into psychological

and at times, physical aggression in the competitive environment that is prevalent in our current workforce and unstable economy.

Bullying is clearly a form of aggression and it usually requires a differential in power or position. Why and how does it occur in the workplace? First, think of power differences. In some settings, there are employees who have status and clout, while others do not. Next, add to that an economy that provides a great deal of uncertainty and the power differential increases. There is also another dimension to consider, many managers and administrators have come up the ranks in organizations and may not have strong leadership, management, or organizational experience or backgrounds. Rather than collaborating, they are more comfortable with directing others. Given these situations, the workplace is primed for bullying behavior.

How can an employee bully or coerce another employee? Recall the situation where employees find themselves in an unpredictable economic environment. An employee can threaten and attempt to coerce a subordinate by threatening a bad report to a supervisor or to higher levels of administration in an attempt to force the employee to give in to their inappropriate demands and behavior. This is especially risky when there is no clear guidance or standards for employee actions and behavior. Consider a basic rule: bullying that is not confronted and stopped will continue.

Employee on employee bullying has been described as taking many forms. These can include:

- Sarcasm addressed at the individual's work
- Public criticism
- Failure to accomplish assignments and challenging the leader to take action

- Making unreasonable work demands (aka- setting up to fail)
- Undermining them by-ruling their decisions and views without explaining
- Leaving them out of important meetings and asking them to be accountable for the content
- Stimulating gossip or discussion of them in their absence.
- Ignoring the problem

The reality is that organizations are typically conflict-averse and will avoid confrontation to an extreme. They typically seek to appease, "work things through", or ignore bullying behavior. Note the rule: bullying that is not confronted and stopped will continue.

Things that could help reduce workplace coercion:

- Conduct new administrations leadership and management training programs.
- Ensure that policies and procedures provide the needed structure and standards
- Develop employees to understand the process of engagement and the steps to reach it (they are predictable)
- Establish clear guidelines for definition and procedures to be followed in bullying situations, including timelines and reporting procedures
- Provide EI assessment, training and workshops for employees who cannot interact without bullying behavior. This can also be implemented as a preventative approach with all employees

When you get right down to it, bullying is the failure of leadership and managers to prevent and stop it. One of the most fundamental functions of leadership is to establish the culture and climate needed to accomplish the mission of the organizations. Bullying is

aggression and should not be tolerated in any organization. It is also a failure of interpersonal skills and accountability. There are a number of approaches to assessing and developing organizational climate, but a first step would be to ensure that the organizational members understand and have the opportunity to develop effective ways of interacting with each other. The concept of emotional intelligence is a product of positive psychology and provides a good and proven approach to improving interactions in the workplace (Brackett, Rivers, & Salovey, 2011).

An Approach to Address Workplace Bullying

So let's now examine, given the severity and prevalence of workplace bullying, how organizations can approach and address this issue in depth. Rather than taking a punitive stance let's consider a problem solving, skill based approach. As brought out previously, if the antecedents of bullying pertain to interpersonal and intrapersonal constructs, then it seems reasonable to develop training programs that enhance these constructs. Based on the research thus far, the skills identified to assist with dealing with the issue of bullying behaviors include, communication, conflict resolution, interpersonal relations, leadership, stress tolerance, and team building (Goleman, 2006; McCarthy Sheehan, & Kearns, 1995; Salami, 2010). In addition, the development of personal mastery (Senge, 1992) and emotional intelligence skills (Goleman, 2006; Salovey & Mayer, 1990) are important to consider as research shows that emotions, managed appropriately, can develop trust, loyalty and empathy. As an increasing amount of research is being completed in reference to this topic, it is becoming more apparent that factors, such as the ability to master one's own emotions and to read and respond appropriately to the emotions of others, make up a kind of intelligence that is equally

important as that of raw intelligence (Brackett et al., 2011; Goleman, 1995, 2006). This intelligence, referred to as emotional intelligence, pertains to the ability to understand emotion and emotional knowledge as well as the ability to regulate emotions to promote educational and intellectual growth (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997). It is an intelligence that can be developed and improved (Perkins, 1994; Sternberg, 1996).

It is important for employees to develop an awareness of their strengths and weaknesses, as an individual and as a leader, in order to formulate a personal leadership approach and work with other employees. In addition, assessing and developing stronger emotional intelligence competencies can vastly improve an employee's communication, ability to share their vision for the future and critical thinking skills (Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Salami, 2010). An employee's ability to lead and provide support and direction in such a way that followers gain a feeling of empowerment, as well as having the ability to lead by example due to the fact that they are in touch with their own values, mission and vision, is vital to effective organizational and employee development (Goleman, 1998, 2006). Strong emotional intelligence also plays a role in making it possible for organizations to support their employees by encouraging them to strive for excellence, celebrate their achievements and let them know that they are valued and respected (Goleman, 1998, 2006). All of these aspects are countered by workplace bullying. Organizations that lack emotional intelligence are at risk of failing to attain their strategic goals. Their style and culture inhibit spontaneity, value only the routine, don't tolerate mistakes, devalue diverse views, inhibit criticism of superiors and/or encourage secretiveness and retaliation (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997). Many of these issues are indicative of creating a climate and culture that fosters rather than alleviates workplace bullying. In

contrast, the emotionally intelligent organization promotes a culture where openness and clarity are the norm, and respectful assertiveness is the general rule. In addition, diversity is encouraged and constructive disagreement is valued as is continued flexibility and multidirectional communication. An emotionally intelligent organization has the ability to capitalize on the creative tension that emerges from maintaining a balance between being flexible yet centered, independent yet socially responsible, optimistic yet realistic, creative yet contained, and empathic though assured (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997). This so called tension and balance allows the organization to utilize and build upon the contributions of its workforce to successfully meet the challenges of an ever-changing external environment.

Emotional Intelligence

A series of studies on emotional intelligence indicates that people who are intellectually the brightest were often not the most successful, either in business or their personal lives (Mayer & Salovey, 1993; Goleman, 2006). Emotional intelligence refers to the capacity for recognizing our own feelings and those of others, for motivating ourselves, and for managing emotions well in us and in our relationships (Weisinger, 1998). Obviously, it is not enough to simply have feelings. Workplace bullying is fraught with feelings; however, they are inappropriate feeling. Emotions are not good or bad but it is the way we handle and express these feelings that make them negative or positive. Emotional intelligence requires that we learn to acknowledge and value feelings, in others, and ourselves and respond appropriately to them (Goleman, 1995, 1998, 2006; Yunus, Ghazali, & Hassan, 2011).

By effectively applying the power and energy of emotions in our daily life and work, we can become a source of information, connection and influence (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997). Modern science is continually providing evidence that it is emotional intelligence not raw brain power alone (IQ) that is the underlying factor of many of the most effective decisions, the most powerful and successful organizations, as well as the most satisfying and accomplished lives (Goleman 2006; Brackett et al., 2011). The two different types of intelligence mentioned above, intellectual and emotional, express the activity of different parts of the brain (LeDoux, 1996). Emotional intelligence is not the opposite of raw brainpower (IQ). Some individuals are blessed with a lot of both, some, with little of either. However, research is beginning to understand how they compliment each other, for example, how an individual's ability to handle stress affects the ability to concentrate and put intelligence to use (Mayer & Salovey, 1993; Goleman, 2006). Brain scientists are now providing physiological explanations for the connection between emotions and intellect. Antonio Damasio, Head of Neurology at the University of Iowa College of Medicine suggests that reasoning/decision making and emotion/feeling intersects in the brain. There is a collection of systems in the brain dedicated to the goal-oriented thinking process referred to as reasoning, and to the response selection referred to as decision making (Damasio, 1994). This same collection of brain systems is also involved in emotion and feeling. Feelings and emotion have a powerful influence on reasoning. Damasio views feelings as having a truly privileged status as they retain a primacy that pervades our mental life (Damasio, 1994). Feelings impact how the rest of the brain and cognition go about their business; therefore, their

influence is immense. If employees can become more aware of recognizing what they feel and understand how to use those feelings as tools could result in:

making good decisions, managing relationships, motivating yourself and others, maintaining hope in the face of adversity, controlling anxiety, and sharing empathy and compassion, which are all components of emotional intelligence and counterintuitive to workplace bullying.

Research also suggests that a technically proficient executive or professional with a high emotional intelligence is someone who grasps more quickly and with a greater amount of ease the emerging conflicts that need resolution, the team and organizational vulnerabilities that need addressing, the gaps that need to be filled or overcome, the underlying connections that result in success, and the unclear, obscure interactions that seem most probable to prove to be golden opportunities and profitable strategies (Goleman, 1998; 2006; Yunus et al., 2011). In the past, pure intellect involving statistics, analysis, intellectual excavation, disembodied relationships and abstract brilliance were often the elements that drove an organization to success (Goleman, 2006; Brackett et al., 2011). All that pure intellect may have been vital to make corporation's more successful but not without dramatic costs to the individuals that make up the organizations.

Workplace bullying resulting in deteriorating trust, jarring uncertainty, greater distance between managers and those they manage, dormant creativity, growing cynicism, increasing resentment as well as the disappearance of loyalty and commitment are the outcomes of operating organizations on pure intellect alone (Brackett et al., 2011).

Rather than employee's disconnecting emotions from intellect, emerging research indicates that emotional intelligence can enable employees to enhance reasoning

capacities and at the same time make better use of the energy of emotions, the wisdom of insight and the power intrinsic to the capacity to connect with the core values and beliefs of themselves and those around them, that they supervise or work with. (Cooper & Sawaf, 1997; Goleman, 2006; Salami, 2010).

For many years some of the most accomplished leadership thinkers have been advising organizations to keep the emotions in organizational life and to learn about, better value and manage emotions. These business scholars often suggested that in the realm of intuition rather than analysis is where we should look for the lost keys of management and a way to combat workplace bullying (Mintzberg, 1977; Sheehan & Griffiths, 2011). When an individual engages not only the analytical mind but also emotions and intuition, the individual's senses and emotional intelligence can enable them to quickly leaf through hundreds of possible choices or situations then arrive at the best solution in a matter of seconds rather than hours or even days (Damasio, 1994).

As an employee, or a leader in an organization or perhaps even being the chief executive officer of our own life, we make, or fail to make, executive decisions that have immediate as well as far-reaching consequences (Kaplan, 1991; Cooper & Sawaf, 1997; Yunus et al., 2011). As employees and leaders in the workplace, expectations are growing all the time as employees are expected to not only possess extensive knowledge and analytical expertise in a wide range of areas, but they must also demonstrate competence in: writing, speaking, listening, negotiating, influencing, and strategizing. In addition, leaders and executive officers are expected to demonstrate the attributes of a leader, which can include: honesty, sensitivity, empathy, humor, integrity, commitment, motivation, courage, conscience, purpose, vision, energy, trust, intuition, creativity, and

humility (Weisinger, 1998; Sheehan & Griffiths, 2011). In order to manifest all these characteristics and skills, to combat workplace bullying, it is vital to understand the essential role emotional intelligence plays in organizational and personal/professional development. The key point to remember is that emotional intelligence can be learned and built upon, largely through the ongoing, individualized training of awareness, through which we gain insight into ourselves and that we can then apply to others (Goleman, 1998, 2006; Sheehan & Griffiths, 2011).

Improving Corporate Performance – Addressing Workplace Bullying

It is becoming increasingly evident that the focus is not on the employees' intellect as the most valuable asset of the organization. In the era of intellectual capital, human skills involving emotional intelligence will be the most valuable. The top priority of many chief executive officers is to enhance intellectual capital by managing human relationships, which is a vast undertaking in an era when loyalty has been impeded by corporate downsizing, but is important because companies now depend heavily on employees for creative insights that only the enthusiastic can offer (Goleman, 1998; Yunus et al., 2011). Fear and innovation do not go hand in hand. In the absence of fear, creativity can flourish; however, when workplace bullying occurs, fear escalates and innovation becomes nonexistent. Research suggests that an employee with high emotional intelligence is someone who quickly grasps what emerging conflicts need resolution; the team and organizational vulnerabilities that need to be addressed; the gaps that need to be filled or overcome; the underlying connections that result in success; and the unclear, obscure interactions that seem to more than likely provide golden opportunities and profitable strategies for the workplace (Goleman, 2006; Kelly, 1998;

Sheehan & Griffiths, 2011; Weisenger, 1998). Several studies have correlated the contribution of emotional intelligence or competence, to excellence. Data obtained from competence studies conducted at forty different companies, to assess the relative weight of a given competence in setting highly effective employees apart from average employees, was compiled. The results showed that greater strengths in purely cognitive capacities were 27 percent more frequent in the effective employees than in average employees, while greater strengths in emotional competencies were 53 percent more frequent (Hay/McBur, 1997). In other words, emotional competencies were twice as important in contributing to effectiveness in comparison to pure intellect and expertise. In addition, Richard Boyatzis, of the Weatherhead School of Management at Case Western Reserve University, completed another study of more than two thousand supervisors, middle managers, and executives at twelve different organizations. This study indicated that out of the sixteen abilities that were explored in regard to distinguishing between highly effective and average performers, all but two were emotional competencies (Boyatzis, 1982). Another study of emotional competence in the workplace was completed by conducting an analysis of more than three hundred top-level executives from fifteen global companies. The results indicated that six emotional competencies distinguished superior performers from average performers. These competencies included: influence, team leadership, organizational awareness, self-confidence, motivation, social awareness, and skill (Goleman, 1998, 2006). Let's look back; the majority of these competencies have been identified as what is needed to address workplace bullying.

Practice Guidelines

Although many guidelines apply to all types of learning, they are especially crucial for efforts to improve emotional competence, due to the fact that cognitive learning and emotional learning involve distinctly different processes (Goleman, 1998, 2006). In practice, this means that the learning process requires repeated practice over a long period of time. In view of this, before an organization embraces a training or development program for emotional intelligence enhancement to address workplace bullying, it is essential that the organization be committed from the top, down. If the program is not embraced and viewed as an important or valuable process by the organization, employees will not stay with it long enough to undergo real change. Additionally, specific performance guidelines must also be implemented in order for training and development programs to be effective. Although efforts can be successful without adhering to all of the guidelines, chances for more effective social and emotional learning in work settings are greatly improved as the number of guidelines that are followed increases (Jacobs, 2001). Some of these guidelines include (a) individual and organizational emotional intelligence assessment, (b) focused training and development and (c) ongoing support, continuance and evaluation.

Research supports that the style of management contributes or deters bullying behaviors (Kisamore, Jawahar, Liguori, Mharapara, T, & Stone, 2010). Developing professional development training that addresses enhancing emotional intelligence competencies such as self awareness, empathy, interpersonal and interpersonal relationships, stress management, impulse control and flexibility can assist leaders to work with their emotions rather than choosing to exemplify bullying behaviors. This can

result in creating sustainable organizations that focus on valuing employees and confirms that the organization truly embraces the concept that employees are the organization's best commodity.

At the bottom line – bullying is an abuse of power. What can you do about bullying? Unfortunately there are not laws that address this destructive workplace behavior. It's especially difficult to address when the abuser is your boss. Any organization that seeks sustainability will recognize the demoralizing and abuse aspects of these bullying behaviors and establish their own clear guidelines.

Summary

Many organizations have begun to understand the need to create cultures and climates that maximize the potential of people working in these organizations. The people will provide the creativity and initiative to be successful, especially in an environment that values all members and one that reduces abuse and ineffective human interactions. Although it may not be the answer to every concern or issue facing organizations, companies in which employees collaborate effectively will have the competitive advantage, making the components of emotional intelligence even more essential and valued (Brackett et al, 2011; Goleman, 1998, 2006). By making emotional intelligence a priority, the implementation of human resource functions will allow organizations to show that they mean what they say when referring to employees as their most important asset. When there is zero tolerance for workplace bullying and there is a commitment to provide an environment that encourages, supports and reinforces the self-directed development process of emotional intelligence competencies, bullying can be stopped. There is no place in the workplace for the personalization and conflict over

disagreements and different points of view. Differences can stimulate learning and new solutions when they are considered with respect and contemplation. Bullying shuts down open discussion, creativity, innovation, and a sense of worth. Organizational leaders must recognize and stop this form of aggression.

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