

Building Relationships and Resilience in the Workplace: Construction of a Workplace Bullying Training Program

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ABSTRACT

In recent years a growing number of interventions have been designed to reduce the impact of workplace bullying within organisations. However, due to a lack of research into this area relatively little is known about the efficacy of such programs. This paper presents an overview of a longitudinal research project being constructed to determine the impact of training on workplace bullying to assist employees to manage workplace bullying when it occurs. We propose an intervention which includes restorative justice practices, emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills training may be able to assist in reducing the impact of antisocial behaviours. The project will employ an experimental research design to determine the impact of the training on individuals and work teams within organisations.

Keywords: Conflict Management, Interpersonal Behaviour, Individual Learning, Stress and Stress Management

To survive in the current economic climate, organisations have been forced to adapt and change. As a result, the complexity of the workplace has increased, bringing additional sources of stress for workers and managers (Cartwright, 2000; Fulcheri, Barzega, Maina, Novara, & Ravizza, 1995; Hoel, Cooper, & Faragher, 2001). Workplace bullying, a phenomenon which has in recent decades attracted attention from researchers and practitioners globally, mainly because of its serious economic and psychological costs, has been linked to environments where competition and stress are high. For example, research has suggested that workplace bullying is associated with highly competitive workplaces (O'Moore, Seigne, McGuire, & Smith, 1998; Salin, 2003). Indeed, Salin's (2003) study of 385 members of The Finnish Association of Graduates in Economics and Business Administration found a strong link between perceived organisational politics and workplace bullying (Salin, 2003). Salin (2003) concluded that in some cases workplace bullying may be perpetrated in order to promote some people's own selfinterest, which is in turn rewarded by the organisation through promotion. Vartia (1996) found similar results in relation to competition and workplace bullying. In particular, competition for tasks, advancement and supervisor approval were common reasons given by the 949 study participants. Keashly and Harvey (2006) suggest that workplace bullying can be instrumental to achieving a desired outcome and is not just reactive to perceived harm from another. In other words, workplace bullying can be a proactive act in order to achieve a desired outcome (e.g., a promotion). Surprisingly, until recently research exploring the effectiveness of proposed interventions to address workplace bullying has been lacking. This paper presents a personal skills training program designed to assist employees to manage workplace bullying if and when it occurs. Through using a quasi-experimental design this study will be able to explore the effectiveness in achieving these outcomes.

WORKPLACE BULLYING: AN INTRODUCTION

Workplace bullying incorporates a range of inappropriate behaviours in the workplace, from low intensity behaviours often termed incivility (for a review of the term incivility see Andersson & Pearson, 1999) to higher intensity aggressive and violent behaviours. As a result, it is often described as an umbrella term, incorporating harassment, intimidation, and aggressive or violent behaviours (Fox & Stallworth, 2005; Hadikin & O'Driscoll, 2000). However, in order for these behaviours to meet the definition of workplace bullying, they must meet two essential criteria: the regular occurrence of these inappropriate behaviours over a period of time, and the inability of the targets to defend themselves (Einarsen, 2000). For example, in order for aggressive acts to fulfil the criteria mentioned, the acts would need to occur repeatedly over a period of time with no effective defence from the target (Einarsen, 2000). An important extension to the criteria is that a single event can also be considered workplace bullying if it induces a perceived ongoing threat to the target (Zapf, 2004). For instance, a threat to destroy someone's career could be considered to be workplace bullying if the threat is perceived to continue over a period of time and the target finds it difficult to defend him/herself.

Workplace bullying has been found to have significant consequences for those who are targeted, those who witness it, and the organisation. Consequences can range from physical harm through to an increase in psychological stress for the recipient (Einarsen, 2000; Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003). Physical and psychological impacts can include fatigue, muscular complaints, lack of self-esteem, sleeplessness, depression, feelings of abuse and victimization, nervousness and psychosomatic complaints (Einarsen, 2000; Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003).

Research has also indicated that the impacts extend to witnesses of bullying events (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003). Co-workers have reported that workplace bullying impacts on them physically and psychologically largely through an increase in stress levels and concern about being the next

target (Rayner, 1999). This climate of fear (Rayner, 1999) is likely to impact upon the organisation through loss of productivity, increased absenteeism, intention to leave and turnover, as well as the cost of intervention programs (Einarsen, 2000; McCarthy & Barker, 2000). However, in spite of increased research focus on workplace bullying still relatively little is known about the effectiveness of intervention and prevention strategies (Einarsen, 2000; Raver, 2005, for recent work into interventions). This may be due to a lack of a theoretical model explaining workplace bullying (Einarsen, 2000), or due to the complexity of the phenomenon. With this limitation in mind, the following paper proposes a research project designed to assist targets of workplace bullying to cope, while also measuring the effectiveness of the approaches taken.

Prevention and Management of Workplace Bullying

Given the complexity and multi-dimensional nature of workplace bullying “no single, off-the-shelf policy will suit every organisation [with] a variety of elements...useful in developing an effective bullying policy” (Woodman & Cook, 2005, p. 10). As such a number of researchers and practitioners have suggested a range of responses to prevent and manage bullying in the workplace. For instance, Hubert (2003) proposed a systematic approach to addressing workplace bullying, which included the five phases of (1) prevention; (2) uncovering; (3) support; (4) intervention; and (5) after-care. Similarly, McCarthy and his colleagues (2002) suggested any effective response to workplace bullying needs to include “prevention, redress/resolution, and support” (McCarthy, Henderson, Sheehan, & Barker, 2002, p. 27-030). Nonetheless, relatively little is known about the successfulness of proposed interventions. With this limitation in mind the following section will now expand upon the framework proposed by McCarthy and colleagues (2002).

Prevention

Typical methods of preventing workplace bullying include “training, counselling and consultation” (Vartia, Korppoo, Fallenius, & Mattila, 2003, p. 296). McCarthy et al. (2002) also suggest that prevention measures should include a clearly articulated ‘no bullying’ policy, training including knowledge of responsibilities and obligations of employers and employees, as well as an effective risk identification and system for complaints. When asked about how to deter workplace bullying, four strategies were rated highly by 512 Chartered Management Institute members in the UK: (a) training; (b) a contact point for advice; (c) the provision of an internal confidential counselling service; and (d) external mediation (Woodman & Cook, 2005). Training to increase awareness about what constitutes workplace bullying, its impacts, and what interventions can occur are considered vital steps in preventing workplace bullying and should occur throughout the whole organisation (McCarthy, et al., 2002). Training about workplace bullying should outline the importance of clear objectives, roles and processes within the workplace, as well as the causes, impacts and how workplace bullying is handled in the current workplace (Vartia, et al., 2003). Furthermore, the promotion of coping skills and resilience is also suggested as essential to assisting targets to handle workplace bullying experiences (McCarthy, et al., 2002). It is suggested that training should also be provided to managers on how to manage cases of bullying (McCarthy, et al., 2002; Richards & Daley, 2003).

Redress or Resolution

Due to the potential of workplace bullying to intensify if not dealt with early, the provision of early intervention measures is vital (McCarthy, et al., 2002). Early intervention is important not just in terms of assisting the target, but also in sending a clear message that inappropriate behaviours will be addressed within the organisation (McCarthy, et al., 2002). Redress measures can include informal (e.g., a contact officers network to provide advice) and formal measures

(e.g., a timely investigation process, Richards & Daley, 2003). Similarly, appropriate grievance procedures should include both informal and formal measures such as, an informal mediation processes, disciplinary action, the provision of information about internal and external opportunities for redress and compensation (McCarthy, et al., 2002).

According to McCarthy and his colleagues (2002) it is vital that perpetrators of workplace bullying are made aware of their inappropriate behaviours. This can either occur at the point of the inappropriate behaviour, or through a performance review (McCarthy, et al., 2002). However, it has been suggested that when approaching the perpetrator managers should take a problem-solving approach, and not a punitive framework (McCarthy, et al., 2002). This approach assumes that the perpetrator will be willing to address their behaviour and as such may not always be successful (McCarthy, et al., 2002).

Support

It is recommended that support via employee assistance schemes and HR systems (such as counselling) should be provided to all parties (McCarthy, et al., 2002; Richards & Daley, 2003; Tehrani, 2003). It has been proposed that the provision of support can reduce the impact of workplace bullying (Quine, 1999). Alternatively, it has been suggested that the lack of support is central in the ability or inability of targets to cope (Lewis & Orford, 2005; Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996; Matthiesen, Aasen, Holst, Wie, & Einarsen, 2003). In an interview study of 10 women who had experienced workplace bullying, Lewis and Orford (2005) found that being heard and 'believing in you' was important to a sense of support. Alternatively, questioning an individual's account was described as unhelpful (Lewis & Orford, 2005).

However, despite the recognition that the provision of support is important in assisting targets to cope with workplace bullying (Lewis & Orford, 2005; Leymann & Gustafsson, 1996;

Matthiesen, et al., 2003), research has indicated that targets are reluctant to seek support from the organisation due to the perception the organisation is ineffective in addressing workplace bullying (Ferris, 2004; Hoel & Cooper, 2000). Davenport and colleagues (1999) suggest that managers who fail to understand the concept of mobbing (or workplace bullying), are unable to manage and address the behaviours, and react with a denial that inappropriate behaviour occurred. Moreover, a study into racial/ethnic bullying, found that “employees who have experienced bullying have less confidence in the ability of their organisations to deal effectively with these types of incidents, particularly when the perpetrators are their supervisors” (Fox & Stallworth, 2005, p. 453). Interestingly, this lack of trust in the organisation was articulated only when the target was being bullied by their supervisor and not a colleague (Fox & Stallworth, 2005). The lack of trust in the organisation may be a result of the manager being perceived as a representative of the organisation, or that the organisation will ‘look after’ the manager.

We propose that a comprehensive training program consisting of workplace bullying awareness and soft people skills will assist in reducing the occurrence of workplace bullying. Furthermore, we suggest that such a program will assist employees to manage incidents of bullying in the workplace and may improve the provision of support in these cases as well as aid in the seeking of support by targets. The following section will introduce the elements of the proposed training intervention.

THE PERSONAL SKILLS PROGRAM

In a previous study conducted by the research team, a number of interviewees indicated that training for all staff in relation to the nature of bullying or discrimination may assist in reducing the number of frivolous grievances and accusations (Branch, 2006). In other words, there would be a decreased use of the term ‘workplace bullying’ to categorise all forms of interpersonal conflict indiscriminately due to a better understanding of the meaning of the word. This

suggestion is supported by a number of researchers (see McCarthy, et al., 2002; Richards & Daley, 2003; Vartia, et al., 2003). It is suggested that training should also be provided to managers on how to manage cases of bullying (McCarthy, et al., 2002; Richards & Daley, 2003).

In addition, it has been suggested that the term 'bullying' may be used as a weapon against another in the workplace (Einarsen, 1999) or to voice dissatisfaction with organisational issues (Liefoghe & Davey, 2001). This would indicate a need to assist employees to voice this dissatisfaction in a more functional manner and for managers to be able to hear and address the concerns of staff in an empathic way. Thus, workplace bullying training would be the initial step in management (McCarthy, et al., 2002). Personal skills development would include training in restorative justice practices (Braithwaite, 2002; Gentry & Benenson, 1993; Olweus, 1993) emotional intelligence (Murray & Jordan, 2006) and interpersonal skills (Dick, 1991) within a workplace bullying framework these would be used to help individuals to identify when bullying occurs and how to successfully manage the situation.

Restorative practices have been used successfully for some time in schools to help reduce and manage bullying. Restorative justice antibullying programs tend to combine community discussions, which include students, parents and teachers developing preventative solutions to bullying as well as mediation for individual cases (Braithwaite, 2002). Examples of the training would include developing conferencing skills combined with the emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills to be discussed below. Studies support the strength of these programs, with one study in Norway reporting a 50 percent reduction of bullying (Olweus, 1993). Furthermore, it has also been suggested that the benefits of school restorative practices can extend into the home, with children transferring conflict resolution skills they learnt and developed at school, reducing conflict with siblings (Gentry & Benenson, 1993). If a similar approach to addressing workplace

bullying could also be included in a training program in organisations the potential to assist employees is high.

Recent research has also found that emotions-focussed training can assist in increasing the emotional intelligence of individuals within organisations (Murray & Jordan, 2006). Examples of the training that will provided include building awareness of others and own emotions; use of reflective diaries; mind mapping to assist in perspective taking; examining the impact of emotional contagion, emotional progressions, emotional triggers and strategies for emotional repair and building psychological and physical resiliency.

In addition, interpersonal skills training was also found to increase elements of emotional intelligence (Jordan, Murray, Ashkanasy, & Connors, 2005; Murray & Jordan, 2006). Examples of these skills that will be trained include supportive communication; conflict resolution and goal setting skills. Personal skills development may help employees to consider the emotional components of their experiences, potentially avoiding the development of inaccurate inferences about others in the workplace, and enable employees to develop the skills to voice their dissatisfaction appropriately while also considering the feelings of others (McCarthy, et al., 2002). Furthermore, informing staff of the organisational processes for voicing dissatisfaction may also assist in avoiding the use of the term 'workplace bullying' for what can be an organisational issue for some. Therefore, the personal skills program will also include emotions focussed training to assist in this area.

The promotion of coping skills and resilience is also suggested as essential to assisting targets to handle workplace bullying experiences (McCarthy, et al., 2002). In an earlier study, McCarthy et al. (1995) found that training in interpersonal skills, conflict resolution and stress management assisted in helping targets of workplace bullying manage the behaviours better. Dispelling the

myths of workplace bullying through awareness training may also assist in increasing targets and potential targets resilience to workplace bullying (McCarthy, et al., 2002).

RESEARCH DESIGN

The success of this personal skills and workplace bullying training program will be ascertained through conducting a comprehensive two-year program of research. The primary methodological approach to be used within this research project will be a quasi-experimental longitudinal research design. The research project will be carried out in a large public sector organisation currently being recruited. Prior to the commencement of training, a series of semi-structured employee interviews will be conducted to develop an understanding of the organisational context and the occurrence of workplace bullying within the organisation. Semi-structured interviews are an active joint process between the researcher and the participant (Neuman, 2006), with the interview taking on the form of an informal conversation between the participant and the researcher (Patton, 2002). Through this process the researcher is able to contextualise the participant's experience and develop an understanding of the emotions involved and central features of the issue being discussed (Sheehan, 2000).

The training intervention itself will consist of two days of training, followed by a half day follow up training session. Training will be facilitated by the research team and conducted with approximately 20-25 participants, with a minimum of 10 programs conducted within the organisation. Where possible, a member from the organisation's HR department will also attend the program, to ensure that any organisational issues can be fully addressed at the time of training. In line with the quasi-experimental framework, a control group of participants will also be utilised. The recruited control group will not attend the training program however, given the topic area and the ethical expectations of the research they be given the opportunity to attend the training once data collection has been concluded. Further follow up data from this group will be

obtained using semi-structured interviews. See Figure 1 for explanation of the research design and timeframes.

Insert Figure 1 here.

Prior to attending the training participants will be asked to complete a self-report measure which will include measures of workplace bullying (Einarsen & Hoel, 2001), emotional intelligence (Jordan et al., 2002), intention to leave (Scott, Connaughton, Diaz-Saenz, Maguire, Ramirez, Richardson, et al., 1999), social support (Caplan, Cobb, French, Van Harrison, & Pinneau, 1980) and organisational citizenship (Motowidlo & Van Scotter, 1994) as well as a collection of relevant demographic information. This measure will be repeated on a further two occasions. The second survey will occur after participants have completed the training intervention and attended a follow-up training session (approximately one month later). The final survey will be administered three months later to determine whether the changes measured will change after a period back in the workplace. The control group will also complete the survey at three equally spaced points in time.

Survey Measures

Workplace Bullying

In order to determine the extent of negative acts, items from the revised Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ-R, Einarsen & Hoel, 2001) will be used. The NAQ-R possesses two underlying factors; personal bullying and work-related bullying (Salin, 2001). Personal bullying consists of 12 items that address negative behaviours that are directed at aspects of the person (e.g., gossiping, insults, teasing, and criticism). Alternatively, work-related bullying consists of eight items that relate to behaviours that directly occur within the workplace, such as excessive

and/or unreasonable monitoring, withholding of information, and unreasonable work expectations. The NAQ-R is considered a valid and reliable tool to measure workplace bullying (Einarsen & Hoel, 2001).

Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence will be measured using the Workgroup Emotional Intelligence Profile (WEIP-6: Jordan, Ashkanasy, Härtel & Hooper, 2002). The WEIP-6 consists of 36 items and employs a seven point Likert type response format that ranges from 1 (strongly disagree) to 7 (strongly agree). Items encourage individuals to reflect on their own and others' behaviours within a work team environment. The measure captures emotional intelligence within two scales that conform to Mayer and Salovey's (1997) definition of the emotional intelligence construct (Jordan, et al., 2002). The first scale is entitled 'Ability to Deal with Own Emotions' and contains nineteen items. 'Ability to Deal with Others' Emotions' scale contains seventeen items. Cronbach's Alphas range from 0.70 to 0.85 and are considered adequate.

Intention to Leave Measure

The third standard measure used within the questionnaire is based on the research conducted by O'Reilly, Chatman, and Caldwell (1999). Intention to leave was considered an important dependent variable as research into workplace bullying has consistently found a positive relationship between intention to leave and an experience of or witnessing workplace bullying (e.g., Einarsen & Raknes, 1997). Following the approach taken by Scott et al. (1991) intention to leave will be measured using four items. As well as the intention to leave measure displaying reasonably high Cronbach's Alphas of around 0.83 (Scott et al., 1999), O'Reilly et al. (1991) found that the scale predicted turnover.

Social Support

In order to test for the amount of support participants perceive is available to them from within and outside of the workplace a measure developed by Caplan, et al., (2004) will also be used within this study. As support appears to play a vital part in the prevention and management of workplace bullying it was considered an important variable to measure. This measure is widely used by researchers and is considered to be a reliable (Cronbach's alphas range from .86 to .91) and valid scale of social support (Scott et al., 1999). The measure consists of three subscales that measure the support obtained from three sources, your supervisor (boss), coworkers and relatives/friends (Caplan, et al., 1980).

Organisational Citizenship

Organisational Citizenship will be measured using the 'Citizenship Rating Scale' devised by Motowidlo and Van Scotter (1993). The measure utilises a 5-point Likert-type scale ranging from 1 (not at all accurate) to 5 (very accurate). The measure consists of two scales that assess the constructs of "Interpersonal Facilitation" (scale 1) and "Job Dedication" (scale 2). The Cronbach's Alpha reliabilites of the two scales are 0.89 and 0.94 respectively.

Data Analysis

Interview Data

Interview data will be analysed using Strauss's (1995) approach to data analysis, as described by Neuman (2006). Strauss (1987) suggests three stages of data coding, within each stage the data is reviewed by the researcher with different goals for each stages. The stages include, open coding, axial coding and, finally selective coding (Neuman, 2006). Although distinctive stages within the data analysis the researcher moves between and back to each stage where necessary (Strauss, 1987). Naturally, as the coding begins the majority of the time will involve open coding. As the analysis progresses, the researcher tends to move through the stages, with selective coding becoming more prominent towards the final stages (Strauss, 1987).

Survey Data

Survey data (including the retrospective pre-test data) will be analysed using the statistical software package SPSS. Prior to data analysis all scales will be summated to provide mean composite scores for each of the scales measured. Summated scales have two major benefits. The first is that measurement error is reduced because of the use of several variables used to measure the same construct. Second, summated scales represent many facets of an individual construct (Hair, Anderson, Tatham, & Black, 1998). Following the summation of the scales two separate tests will then be conducted. The first test conducted on the data will be repeated measures ANOVAS to determine whether a statistically significant change has occurred. Following this, calculations of effect sizes using Cohen's *d* (1988) will also be conducted to determine whether the results obtained from the paired samples *t*-tests have practical and theoretical significance (Pallant, 2005). Indeed, Rosenthal, Rosnow and Rubin (2000) state that there is an expectation in intrapersonal sciences research that effect sizes should be presented as well as significance levels.

IMPLICATIONS & CONCLUSION

Workplace bullying and other forms of anti-social behaviour have increasingly become a concern for organisations, practitioners and researchers around the world. However, in spite of a number of suggested intervention programs designed to prevent and manage workplace bullying still relatively little is known about their effectiveness. With this in mind, this paper proposes a research project which is designed to assist targets of workplace bullying, while also measuring the effectiveness of the approaches taken.

This research will lead the field in an area which has been largely under explored internationally. Perhaps the most significant theoretical implication of this research is an advancement of our understanding of the effectiveness of training in preventing and managing workplace bullying.

Through the use of a comprehensive training program using a quasiexperimental design we will be able to measure the impact of such training. In terms of practical implications, a benefit of this research is that it will provide organisations with empirical evidence outlining the interventions that may assist them in addressing bullying in their workplaces, and possibly other similar behaviours. Additionally, this research will further enable the testing of benefits that can be derived from such training to be conducted in the future. In this way the results of our research can be subjected to review and re-testing from subsequent academic researchers and practitioners (Ciarrochi, Chan, & Caputi, 2000; Neuman, 2006). We are currently finalizing our theoretical development of training interventions for the prevention and management of workplace bullying and will then move on to the development of a formal training program.

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Figure 1. Research Design and Timeframes

