

MOBBING AND BULLYING IN BUSINESS ORGANIZATIONS AND CONSEQUENCES ON HUMAN HEALTH

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Abstract: *Organizations are often analysed as open systems interdependent, interconnected or interrelated with the referential environment, where the resources, results, processes are evaluated as organizational environment, structure, dynamics and culture. „In a workplace environment that is built on a narrative that values staff needs for identity, belonging, and social interaction, workers are humanized. Cooperation, compassion, empathy, and mutual aid are engendered and employees work together to meet mutual goals, becoming allies rather than threats. Instead of viewing each other as competitors for scarce resources, organizational members are seen as collaborators; and differences in work styles and skills are valued, not feared. Thus, the context, in general and the organizational context, in particular, lays its prints on the development of individuals in a situational frame they perceive differently, choosing the terms of adaptation, costs and benefits, social rituals and beliefs, the set of values, norms and status, the best modality of dealing with the others, with their leaders, the preference for a certain type of management appealing to the personality of the people involved. In such organizational context the existence of conflicts within organizations generates bullying practices that has now become identified as a serious issue in the workplace context.*

Keywords: *mobbing, bullying, stressors, consequences*

JEL Codes: I10, I31, M20

1. INTRODUCTION

Leadership is known as one of the organizational causes of bullying and some researchers have found a significant relationship between some of the leadership styles and bullying (Stouten et al. 2010).

Shahbazi (et al. 2013:1816) presents three hypotheses concerning the relation between the leadership and workplace bullying.

Hypothesis 1: Benevolent leadership will have a negative relationship with workplace bullying. Benevolent leaders have a serious concern for subordinates' personal and familial well-being (Cheng, Chou, Wu 2004)

Hypothesis 2: Moral leadership will have a negative relationship with workplace bullying. likewise, a moral paternalistic leader possess superior personal virtues (Hayek, et al. 2010); thus, it is clear that these personality features of a leader can guarantee subordinates against bullying behavior.

Hypothesis 3: Authoritarian leadership will have a positive relationship with workplace bullying. There is a positive relationship between authoritarian leadership and workplace bullying. An authoritarian leadership style may also create a climate of fear in the workplace where complaining may be considered futile (Salin, Hoel, 2011).

Sloan (et al.,2010:93) makes reference to two types of leadership and explains the difference between them regarding the openness to the bullying practices."While laissez-faire leadership creates an environment that breeds mobbing, authoritarian leadership breeds bullying behavior. Just knowing the leadership style, however, is inadequate for understanding the dynamics that maintain mobbing and bullying cultures (Einarsen, 2010). In fact, leadership style cannot, by itself, explain the development and response of these behaviors (Einarsen). As Einarsen reports, current models do not supply the theoretical dimensions needed to support the assessment of leaders as both *good* and *bad*. Leadership models with the depth required for exploring this phenomenon include dimensions that evaluate leadership support for both organizational goals and the goals and interests of the individual."

Workplace bullying has been recognized explicitly as a negative, deviant and counterproductive behavior that has destructive effects on both employees and organizations and society as a whole. It has also been realized that bullying is a complex phenomenon and tend to be many causes and antecedents for this behavior. In line with this argument some of leadership styles such as laissez-fair, tyrannical and autocratic styles of leadership are assumed to create conditions that may lead to bullying at workplace. (Shahbazi et al., 2013:1815)

„In many countries, trade unions, professional organizations, and human resources (HR) departments have become more aware over the last decade that behaviors such as intimidation, public humiliation, offensive name-calling, social exclusion, and unwanted physical contact has the potential to undermine the integrity and confidence of employees and reduce efficiency [...]. Bullying may go beyond colleague-on-colleague abuse and become an accepted, or even encouraged, aspect of the culture of an organization. A number of organizations now recognize the need to change the culture of the workplace and have developed clear company policies to offer protection from bullying to their employees." (Cowie et al., 2002:34) Bullying behavior can exist at any level of an organization—bullies can be superiors, subordinates, co-workers and colleagues (Davenport, Schwartz & Elliott, 1999).

2. MOBBING AND BULLYING

Although the terms *mobbing* and *bullying* have been in current usage for work psychologists, managers or law people for many decades, it seems that the issue is still on the agenda of many researchers as well as advocates of employees rights. According to Duffy and Sperry (2007) bullying results in the humiliation, degradation, devaluation, loss of professional reputation and, usually the elimination of the target from the organization with all the concomitant, financial, career, health and psychological implications that one might expect from a protracted traumatizing experience.

There is no agreed definition of the phenomenon described by various terms used in the field such as (Anjun, Yasmeen & Yasmeen, 2011:81): workplace harassment (Broadsky1976), workplace mobbing (Leyman 1990), workplace bullying (Adam & Crawford, 1992), harassment (Bjorkqvist et al, 1994), workplace aggression (Baron and Neuman, 1998), workplace victimization (Zapf, 1999), perceived victimization (Aquino & Bradfield, 2000), aggression (Nansel et al, 2001), etc. „To understand the full nature of phenomenon we must take care to collaborate regarding its terms and definition. This collaboration will support in the development of a standard nomenclature to facilitate employers and legislatures for the development of intervention strategies." (Anjun, Yasmeen & Yasmeen, 2011:81)

Lewis (1999:106) thinks that the early period of interest saw many debates surrounding the key issues concerning the definition and terminology as terms such "bullying", "mobbing" and "abuse" are all widely used depending on the geographical location of the authors and on how bullying differs, if it does, from workplace harassment.

Broadsky offered the definition of *workplace bullying* or *harassment* in 1976 as being repeated and persistent attempts by one person to torment, wear down, frustrate, or get a reaction from another. It is treatment which persistently provokes, pressures, frightens, intimidates or otherwise discomforts another person.

The term *mobbing* was coined by Leymann as “workplace mobbing” (1990) after his previous studies in the 80s about hostile environment in educational system. He transferred his studies to work environment and observed the consequences of campaigns initiated most often by persons in a position of power and carried on by coworkers against a person the same work environment for the purpose of excluding, punishing or humiliating the respective person. Westhues (2002) thinks that as the campaign proceeds, a steadily larger range of hostile ploys and communications comes to be seen as legitimate. At the same time, Leymann suggested that the frequency should be around one incident per week over a period of at least 6 months in order to be considered a criterion for bullying.

Whitney and Smith (1993) emphasize that bullying is a form of aggression which is perpetuated on the victim in a position of less authority and encompasses a problem that is social as well as interpersonal in nature.

Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) consider that aggressive behaviours that have taken place within the last 6 months ‘now and then’ or ‘weekly’ can be defined as bullying.

Bullying is usually defined as a subset of aggressive behavior, in which the aggression is repeated, and in which there is an imbalance of power such that it is difficult for the victim to defend him/herself (Olweus, 1999).

Bullying and mobbing are “vindictive, cruel, malicious or humiliating attempts to undermine an individual or groups of employees” with mobbing additionally defined as a “concerted effort by a group of employees to isolate a co-worker through ostracism and denigration” (Denenberg & Braverman, 2001:7).

Workplace bullying is repeated physical, psychological, or sexual abuse, harassment, or hostility within workplaces and consists of behavior that is known, or ought to be known, to be offensive, unwanted, or unwelcome (Cuyper, Baillien, Witte, 2009).

Shahbazi (et al. 2013) show that common to virtually all definitions of workplace bullying is that they include three key elements:

- Repetitive negative actions,
- That occur on a frequent basis,
- And occur in a place of work, where there is imbalance of power between the Parties.

From another perspective, the elements of these definitions include the following: perpetrator, victim, and workplace.

According to the Queensland Bullying Taskforce (2002) bullying can be approached according to whether they are ‘overt’, ‘covert’ and ‘hostile’ behaviours. Examples of overt workplace harassment include loud and abusive language, yelling and screaming, unexplained rages, unjustified criticisms and insults, constant humiliation, and unjustified threats of dismissal or other disciplinary procedures. Covert workplace harassment includes acts such as sabotaging an employee’s work by withholding information which is required to fulfil tasks, hiding documents or equipment, constantly changing targets or work guidelines, not providing appropriate resources and training, and isolating or ignoring an employee on a consistent basis. Hostile behaviours include deliberately overloading an employee with work and impossible deadlines, exclusion, or harming an employee’s employment or career prospects. (Timo, Fulop & Ruthjersen, 2004).

3. BEHAVIOUR CATEGORIES IN MOBBING AND BULLYING

There are various terms employed for the two main characters involved in the mobbing-bullying process: perpetrator (Shahbazi et al. 2013), offender (Sloan et al.2010), bully or actor (Lutgen-Sandvik, et al.,2009) and victim (Leymann,1996), target (Sloan et.al.2010).

Leymann (1996:170) used 45 behaviour items that he distributed in 5 categories:

1. Effects on the victims' possibilities to communicate adequately:
 - the superiors denies the victim the possibility to express him/herself;
 - the victim is constantly interrupted when speaking;
 - the coworkers prevents the victim to express him/herself;
 - the co-workers yell and offend the victim;
 - the victim's work is criticized;
 - the victim's private life is criticized;
 - the victim is terrorized with phone calls;
 - the victim is verbally threatened;
 - the victim is threatened in writing;
 - the refusal of contact with the victim (eye-contact is avoided, rejection gesture, etc.);
 - the victim is ignored (for example, a way of addressing to another person as if the victim were not present or visible).
2. Effects on the victims' possibilities to maintain social contacts:
 - nobody speaks with the victim;
 - the victim is not allowed to address to another person;
 - the victim is assigned with another position that isolates him/her from the others
 - the coworkers are forbidden to talk to the victim;
 - the physical presence of the victim is denied.
3. Effects on the victims' possibilities to maintain their personal reputation:
 - the victim is aspersed or slandered;
 - rumors are spread about the victim;
 - the victim is ridiculed;
 - the victim is said to be mentally ill;
 - the victim is forced to undertake a psychiatric examination;
 - the victim is said to have a handicap;
 - the victim's actions, gestures and voice are imitated in order to be better ridiculed;
 - political opinions or religious beliefs are attacked;
 - the victim's private life is ridiculed;
 - the origin or nationality is joked about;
 - the victim is forced to accept humiliating activities;
 - the victim's work assessment is unjust and unfair;
 - the victim's decisions are questioned or contested;
 - the victim is aggressed in an insulting and obscene manner;
 - the victim's sexual harassment (gestures or proposals);
4. Effects on the victims' occupational situation:
 - the victim is not assigned any tasks;
 - the victim's depriving of occupation and supervising to prevent him/her from finding one;
 - the victim's assignment of useless or absurd task;
 - the victim's assignment with activities below personal competences;
 - the assignment of new tasks permanently;
 - the assignment of humiliating tasks;
 - the assignment of activities above qualification in order to discredit the victim;

5. Effects on the victims' physical health:

- the assignment with dangerous and novice tasks;
- the threat with physical violence;
- physical aggression of the victim as a warning;
- bad physical aggression;
- the victim is submitted to unreasonable expenses in order to be prejudiced;
- creating uncomfortable situations at home or at work;
- sexual aggression on the victim;

The 45 behaviour items of the perpetrator against his/her victim have a double significance: on the one hand, they characterize the mobbing in its true essence, and on the other hand, they may be converted into an instrument of measuring the mobbing.

Davenport (et al.1999:41) distilled this list into 10 key factors of the mobbing syndrome:

1. Assaults on dignity, integrity, credibility, and competence
2. Negative, humiliating, intimidating, abusive, malevolent, and controlling communication
3. Committed directly or indirectly in subtle or obvious ways
4. Perpetrated by ≥ 1 staff members
5. Occurring in a continual, multiple, and systematic fashion over time
6. Portraying the victim as being at fault
7. Engineered to discredit, confuse, intimidate, isolate, and force the person into submission
8. Committed with the intent to force the person out
9. Representing the removal as the victim's choice
10. Unrecognized, misinterpreted, ignored, tolerated, encouraged, or even instigated by management

Namie & Namie (2000) have identified the following bully profile according to behavioural patterns in organizational context: (1) bullies use surprise and secrecy to gain leverage over those targeted; (2) they are never interested in meeting someone else halfway, so trying to negotiate with a bully is useless; and (3) they routinely practice psychological violence against specific individuals (through putdowns, belittling comments, name-calling, constant criticism, blame, sabotage, stealing credit, cutting the individual out of the communication loop or through angry outbursts intended to intimidate). Making unreasonable job demands, criticizing abilities and excluding targeted employees from meetings and relevant information are all activities found in the bully's repertoire. In almost every instance, the bully's actions will negatively affect the targeted individual on an emotional level.

Sloan (et al, 2010:90) makes the difference between the parts involved and interrelated within the organizational context that is the bullies and the victims. „While those who are cooperative and collaborative are too often framed as weak (Namie & Namie, 2009), the person who leads through temper tantrums, critical aggressive demands, greed, insulting behaviour, and dominance is framed as a skilled leader. One of the consequences is that both the individuals and the organizational structures conspire to protect the bully/mobber. Organizational architectures that facilitate bullying and mobbing perpetuate structural violence. The complexity deepens when the two phenomena are intertwined. Through the process of mobbing, the target becomes vulnerable in the organization. Individual bullies in positions of power then attack, isolate, and eliminate their targets.” Sloan further comments on Namie's identifying features of the targeted persons: refusing to be subservient (58%), superior competence and skill (56%), positive attitude and being liked (49%), and honesty (46%) (Namie & Namie, 2009).

In Dr. Hornstein’s view (1996) bullies fall into 3 types:

	Characteristics
Conquerors	Only interested in power and control and protecting their turf. They try to make others feel less powerful. Can act DIRECTLY (e.g. insulting and/or rude words or gestures, [or tones] or INDIRECTLY (e.g. orchestrating battles and watching others disembowel each other)
Performers	Suffer from low self-esteem so belittle targeted persons (can be obvious or subtle put-downs).
Manipulators	Interested only in themselves. Easily threatened and vindictive. Experts at lying, deceiving and betraying. Take credit for the work of others. Never take responsibility for their own “errors.”

4. HEALTH CONSEQUENCES

Namie & Namie (2009) described bullying as “...repeated, health-harming mistreatment, verbal abuse, or conduct which is threatening, humiliating, intimidating or sabotage that interferes with work or some combination of the three.” But more important than the definition itself is the introduction of the concept of *health-harming* bringing forth the idea that bullying itself is long-term health-damaging action with serious consequences on the person affected.

They agree that bullying behaviour leads to real and serious physical and emotional problems for the individuals they target, including but not limited to damage to their self-esteem and confidence, anxiety, depression, gastrointestinal disorders, headaches, insomnia, exhaustion, poor concentration, and substance abuse (2000:60-61).

Bullying, impacts negatively on targets’ mental and physical health with well documented psychological effects including symptoms consistent with stress, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder and depression (Lewis, 2006).

Among the many consequences of bullying behavior are anxiety, withdrawal, low self-esteem, and other physical and mental health difficulties. Rather than recognizing these behaviours as a consequence of the abuse, too often they are turned into causes implying that the target is to blame, at least in part. Too often, the target of bullying (individual or group) is blamed for the violence committed by the bully, implying that the target must have done something to warrant the ire of others. (Sloan et al.2010)

The negative consequences of bullying and mobbing are greater and more common for the target than for the offender (European Foundation, 2002). While “bullies need targets to live; targets find it hard to live when bullies intrude in their lives” Targets experience isolation and shame; may lose their employment or have their employability negatively impacted; experience mental health and/or physical crises; and are at risk of suicide.

Changes Experienced by Targets: Poor concentration, Insomnia, Substance abuse, Headaches, Gastrointestinal disorders, Depression, Anxiety, Exhaustion, Suspicion, Fear, Forgetfulness, Fatigue, Failure to pay bills, Crying, Irritability, Change in appearance (Davenport, et al, 2002; European Foundation, 2002; McCord & Richardson, 2001).

Soares (2004:12) presents the consequences of bullying for mental health. He defines the psychological distress with the following consequences: depression, anxiety, aggressiveness and cognitive problems. “Psychological distress is to mental health what fever is to infectious diseases: a measurable symptom, an obvious sign of a health-related problem, but which by itself cannot explain the etiology nor the severity of the problem.” At the same time, another outcome

is hopelessness. (Soares, 2004:15): " Hopelessness appears when the individual's initiatives to respond and react to an event appear to be blocked".

Numerous studies have illustrated the relationship between bullying and the onset of post-traumatic stress syndrome. Leymann and Gustafsson (1996) highlight a very important aspect: post-traumatic stress syndrome can bring about changes in personality in victims of bullying to the point of triggering depressive or obsessive behaviours.

Soares (2004:17) believes that „most individuals afflicted by post-traumatic stress syndrome try to avoid all recollections or thoughts associated with the traumatic event. But despite the avoidance strategies, the individual will relive the event in repeatedly, through nightmares, intrusive thoughts, etc. The most frequent symptoms are troubled sleep, nightmares, depressive feelings, feelings of guilt, and irritability”.

Among a plethora of potential health problems to produce a diagnosis, Maslach & Leiter (1997:416) proposed the notion of *burnout* as an erosion of one's engagement to one's work, which includes three dimensions: exhaustion, depersonalization, and inefficiency. Thus, "What started out as important, meaningful, and challenging work becomes unpleasant, unfulfilling, and meaningless. Energy turns into exhaustion, involvement turns into cynicism, and efficacy turns into ineffectiveness”.

Lutgen-Sandvik (2009:57-58) displays a series of studies and authors concerned with the consequences of workplace bullying: " Empirical and anecdotal evidence indicate that bullying affects all aspects of targets' lives. Their self-esteem (Price Spratlen, 1995), physical and emotional health (Duffy, Ganster, & Pagon, 2002; Rospenda, 2002), and cognitive functioning (Brodsky, 1976) are at risk or damaged. Targets report higher levels of anxiety, depression (Namie, 2003a), alcohol abuse (Richman, Rospenda, Flaherty, & Freels, 2001), and suicidal ideation (Leymann, 1990) than do non- bullied workers. Longitudinal research suggests that perceptions workplace injustice (no doubt experienced by targets) are associated with chronic stress, high blood pressure, and increased risk of coronary heart disease (De Vogli, Ferrie, Chandola, Kivimäki, & Marmot, 2007). Targets of long-term workplace abuse also experience symptoms of post- traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).”

Hillard (2009:47) provides the following opinion about the consequences of bullying as secondary morbidity: „Victims of workplace mobbing frequently suffer from: adjustment disorders, somatic symptoms (eg, headaches or irritable bowel syndrome), PTSD, major depression. In mobbing targets with PTSD, Leymann notes that the “mental effects were fully comparable with PTSD from war or prison camp experiences.”Some patients may develop alcoholism or other substance abuse disorders. Family relationships routinely suffer. Some targets may even develop brief psychotic episodes, generally with paranoid symptoms.”

At the same time, Davenport (et al.1999) draws attention on the three degrees of mobbing and their consequences on the physical or mental state:

First degree: Victim manages to resist, escapes at an early stage, or is fully rehabilitated in the original workplace or elsewhere

Second degree: Victim cannot resist or escape immediately and suffers temporary or prolonged mental and/or physical disability and has difficulty reentering the workforce

Third degree: Victim is unable to reenter the workforce and suffers serious, long-lasting mental or physical disability.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Difficult relations with co-workers, subordinates or superiors represent one of the factors that induce a counterproductive workplace behaviour (Penney&Spector, 2005) which can be relocated in other similar work environments by the targets of bullying, generating a incivility workplace spiral (Andersson&Pearson, 1999).

Mobbing is a serious stressor that can lead to psychiatric and medical morbidity and even suicide. Major depressive disorder—often with suicidal ideation—is frequently associated with being mobbed.

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