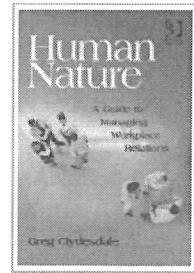


Human Nature : A Guide to Managing Workplace Relations

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Description: Humans are weird! They can be emotional, irrational and often unpredictable, yet as their manager, it is your job to get the best out of them. In fact they are often the key to your success. Sadly, humans do not come with an instruction manual which lists their technical specifications. Human Nature by Greg Clydesdale is based on the premise that the key to good management is understanding human nature and interpersonal relations. But what is human nature? Greg argues that even where human nature is addressed at a conceptual level; the link between theory and what actually happens in the workplace is usually weak and often fails to recognize that social ability is probably the defining aspect. It is his intense focus on human nature and the link between a theoretical understanding of it and what actually happens in the workplace that makes this book so valuable. Throughout the book, you see how managers must constantly make balancing acts between conflicting forces that exist at any given time. But the essential message is: 'If you want to make the World a better place, focus on being a better manager to your staff'. To help with this you will find an elaboration theory-based approach, in which a basic model is provided, and then elaborated on with examples from the work-place. The model consists of twenty human characteristics placed in three categories - emotion, motivation and cognition. These characteristics are then linked to what managers have to do in the workplace.

Subjects: Industrial relations
Organizational behavior
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6

Bullying

Duncan works as a skilled labourer in a manufacturing plant. He works in a separate unit to Jim, but occasionally he is told to help Jim out during peak workloads. This is not an experience that Duncan enjoys, as Jim always finds something to criticize about his work. For example, yesterday he criticized how Duncan maintained his tools.

Duncan explained to me, 'I have been doing this job for years and I know how to look after my tools. But it's not about the tools. It's just one example of criticism.'

Jim also likes to joke with Duncan, at least that's how Jim sees it. 'He makes these snide remarks that are meant to be attempts at banter, but there is nothing funny in it at all.'

I asked Duncan why he didn't complain. He replied by saying it wasn't a big enough issue. 'It's just tedious, really tedious. Sometimes I feel like I don't want to go in to work so I don't have to put up with it.'

Interpersonal conflicts are a regular occurrence in workplaces. Research suggests that managers spend about 20 per cent of their time dealing with conflicts.¹ These can include disputes over resources, goals or work procedures. In such cases, conflict is resolved by addressing the matter at hand, but in some cases, conflict can be very personal. In this chapter, we explore one of the more personal types of conflict – bullying.

An immediate problem with the literature is that academics do not always agree about what constitutes bullying. Einarsen defines bullying as: 'repeated acts and practices that are directed at one or more workers, which are unwanted by the victim(s), which may be done deliberately or unconsciously, but clearly

1 Thomas, K.W. (1992). 'Conflict and Negotiation Processes in Organizations', in M.D. Dunnette and L.M. Hough (eds), *Handbook of Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, vol. 3, Palo Alto, CA: Consulting Psychologists Press, pp. 651–718.

cause humiliation, offence, and distress, and may interfere with job performance and/or cause an unpleasant working environment'.² This definition identifies that bullying involves repeated negative acts that are directed at one or more people, and as a result that person feels some level of stress.

Another definition includes the victims' difficulty in defending themselves. It states that bullying is: 'a situation in which individuals persistently over a period of time perceive themselves to be on the receiving end of negative actions from one or several persons, in a situation in which the target of bullying has difficulty defending himself or herself against these actions'.³ This may include direct acts like verbal abuse, accusations and public humiliation, or it may be indirect and take the form of gossip, spreading rumours and social exclusion.⁴ It may include deliberate attacks on the worker's private life or attitudes. If the bully is a supervisor, it may include unnecessary criticism or excessive monitoring of work. A bullying boss may also withhold information, deprive staff of responsibility or give a person undesirable or overly simple tasks.⁵

These definitions focus on repeated acts, which suggests that a one-off act of aggression is not considered to be bullying. It is this aspect that differentiates between 'normal' conflict and bullying. Personal conflict and interpersonal aggressive acts may occur in the workplace for a number of reasons, but they will not be defined as bullying unless they occur as persistent and continuous behaviour. That is not to say that single acts of aggression are permissible, but they will fall under a different category of misdemeanour.

Workers exposed to bullying can end up feeling frustrated and stressed with the situation they find themselves in. They may feel a sense of helplessness and become alienated from their workplace, which in turn reduces their sense of belonging to the organization, while bullying itself will reduce work unit cohesiveness.⁶ Bullying is often an attack on one of our core motives – self-esteem. The resulting shame and psychological despair can last long after the

2 Einarsen, S. (1999). 'The Nature and Causes of Bullying at Work'. *International Journal of Manpower*, 10, 16–27, p. 17.

3 Einarsen, S., Hoel, H., Zapf, D. and Cooper, C. (2003). 'The Concept of Bullying at Work: The European Tradition', in S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf and C. Cooper (eds), *Bullying and Emotional Abuse in the Workplace: International Perspectives in Research and Practice*, London: Taylor & Francis, pp. 3–30.

4 Ibid.

5 Salin, D. (2003). 'Ways of Explaining Workplace Bullying: A Review of Enabling, Motivating, and Precipitating Structures and Processes in the Work Environment'. *Human Relations*, 56(10), 1,213–32.

6 Ashforth, B. (1994). 'Petty Tyranny in Organizations'. *Human Relations*, 47, 755–78.

bullying episodes have ended.⁷ The result is lower job satisfaction, which in turn increases absenteeism and turnover.

This can have a significant effect on productivity.⁸ In 1990, a Swedish study attempted to quantify the costs of bullying and harassment.⁹ The study included the loss of productivity combined with intervention costs, and came to an amount of US\$30,000–100,000 per year (in 1990 dollars). Workers themselves recognize this cost. In a study of 2,215 Norwegian labour union members, 27 per cent claimed that productivity had been reduced because of harassment.¹⁰

Bullying appears to be widespread. A study of a Norwegian shipyard showed that 7 per cent of the men were subjected to personal belittlement on a weekly basis.¹¹ Some bullying had a strong social element. This included exposure to gossip or rumours, insulting teasing, offensive remarks or being met with silence when entering a conversation. Some were socially excluded from their work group. Other bullying was centred on the work. This included having their work efforts constantly devalued, being denied access to information needed for their job, or being repeatedly deprived of work tasks and responsibilities.

Some of these bullying acts, such as insulting teasing, show similarities to superiority humour and banter. This raises a number of possibilities. The first is that what one person considers light-hearted banter may be considered unwelcome insults by another. It also suggests that some masculine behaviours in the workplace may be destructive. There is some evidence to suggest this is the case, as many studies show males have a significantly higher probability of being perpetrators of bullying than women.¹² Tough, male-dominated work

- 7 Roscigno, V.J., Lopez, S.H. and Hodson, R. (2009). 'Supervisory Bullying, Status Inequalities and Organizational Context'. *Social Forces*, 87(3), 1,561–89.
- 8 Keashly, L. and Nowell, B.L. (2003). 'Conflict Resolution and Bullying', in S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf and C. Cooper (eds), *Bullying and Emotional Abuse in the Workplace: International Perspectives in Research and Practice*, London and New York: Taylor & Francis, pp. 339–58.
- 9 Leymann, H. (1990), 'Mobbing and Psychological Terror at Workplaces'. *Violence and Victims*, 5, 119–26.
- 10 Einarsen, S., Raknes, B.I., Matthiesen, S.B. and Hellesoy, O.H. (1994). *Mobbing og Harde Personkonflikter* ('Bullying and Harsh Personalized Conflict'), Bergen: Sigma Forlag.
- 11 Einarsen, S. and Raknes, B.I. (1997). 'Harassment at Work and the Victimization of Men'. *Violence and Victims*, 12, 247–63.
- 12 De Cuyper, N., Baillien, E. and De Witte, H. (2009). 'Job Insecurity, Perceived Employability and Targets and Perpetrators of Workplace Bullying'. *Work and Stress*, 23(3), 206–24; Rayner, C. (1997). 'The Incidence of Workplace Bullying'. *Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology*, 7, 199–208.

environments may accept humiliating jokes and 'funny surprises' as part of the everyday life and an accepted part of the culture.¹³ Salin (2003) observes: 'However, this kind of humor can easily go sour and turn into bullying if the target for some reason cannot defend himself or take the jokes "as a man".'¹⁴

While male banter may provide an explanation for some occurrences, there are many other types of bullying, and industries dominated by women and educated professionals also appear to harbour this destructive behaviour. A study of 99 psychiatric nurses and assistant nurses revealed that 10 per cent felt exposed to bullying at work.¹⁵ In two separate surveys of American nurses, 64–82 per cent had experienced verbal abuse from physicians and supervisors.¹⁶ Teaching is particularly notable as a profession prone to bullying.¹⁷ High rates of bullying in the education sector have been recorded in Australia,¹⁸ Finland,¹⁹ the Netherlands,²⁰ the UK²¹ and the USA.²² In the UK, it seems that the prevalence of bullying in teaching is only surpassed by that among postal/telecommunications and prison staff.²³ Even the most intellectual and educated people seem to be involved. A survey of 726 Finnish university employees found that 24 per cent of females and 17 per cent of males experienced workplace harassment.²⁴

- 13 Collinson, D.L. (1988). 'Engineering Humor: Masculinity, Joking and Conflict in Shopfloor Relations'. *Organization Studies*, 9(2), 49–67; Einarsen and Raknes (1997).
- 14 Salin (2003), p. 14.
- 15 Matthiesen, S.B., Raknes, B.I. and Røkkum, O. (1989). 'Mobbing på Arbeidsplassen' ('Bullying in the Workplace'). *Tidskrift for Norsk Psykologforening*, 26, 761–74.
- 16 Cox, H.C. (1987). Verbal Abuse in Nursing: Report of a Study'. *Nursing Management*, 18, 47–50; Diaz, A.L. and McMillin, J.D. (1991). 'A Definition and Description of Nurse Abuse'. *Western Journal of Nursing Research*, 13, 97–109.
- 17 Randall, P. (2001). *Bullying in Adulthood: Assessing the Bullies and their Victims*, New York: Brunner-Routledge.
- 18 Vickers, M.H. (2001). 'Bullying as Unacknowledged Organizational Evil: A Researcher's Story'. *Employee Responsibilities and Rights Journal*, 13, 205–17; McCarthy, M., Mayhew, C., Barker, M. and Sheehan, M. (2003). 'Bullying and Occupational Violence in Tertiary Education: Risk Factors, Perpetrators and Prevention'. *Journal of Occupational Health and Safety Australia and New Zealand*, 19, 319–26.
- 19 Björkqvist, K., Osterman, K. and Hjelt-Back, M. (1994). 'Aggression among University Employees'. *Aggressive Behavior*, 20, 173–84.
- 20 Hubert, A.B. and Van Veldhoven, M. (2001). 'Risk Sectors for Undesirable Behavior and Mobbing'. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 10, 415–24.
- 21 Lewis, D. (2003). 'Voices in the Social Construction of Bullying at Work: Exploring Multiple Realities in Further and Higher Education'. *International Journal of Management and Decision Making*, 4, 65–8.
- 22 Spratlen, L.P. (1995). 'Interpersonal Conflict which Includes Mistreatment in a University Workplace'. *Violence and Victims*, 10, 285–97.
- 23 Hoel, H. and Cooper, C. (2000). 'Destructive Conflict and Bullying at Work', unpublished report, Manchester: University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology.
- 24 Björkqvist, Osterman and Hjelt-Back (1994).

These statistics raise a number of questions. First, do our teachers lack ethics given their high rate of bullying? This is an issue of concern given that they provide a moral education to our young. It also raises questions about how we teach ethics – something we will look at in Chapter 8. However, alternative explanations have focused on characteristics of teaching that might increase the chance of bullying occurring. For example, in Australia, teaching has been characterized by increasing workloads and working hours, and this increases interpersonal tension.²⁵ Consider the following example:

Henry was a maths teacher in a high school where one class of 15-year-olds contained a particularly disruptive student. Whenever Henry's back was turned, books would go flying, and on one occasion a pen hit him in the back of his head. Henry found it very hard to get organizational support, but finally convinced the school principal to witness a class. The principal stood outside, out of sight of the students, but in such a position that he could see everything through a window. After a very short time, the principal had confirmed what Henry was saying about the student.

A formal complaint was laid against the student, who responded with a counter-claim against Henry. The student claimed that Henry had been unfairly harassing him in class. Of course, the principal had seen everything, so the counter-claim should have been thrown out, but it wasn't.

A counsellor was brought in to conduct a meeting, which included the student, his parents, Henry and the principal. The student was given a chance to speak, and made a number of false complaints against Henry. They were blatant lies, yet no one said a word.

Finally, the principal spoke up, and the boy's parents quickly realized the truth, but the counsellor, who was keen to keep the peace, turned to the student and said, 'None of this is a reflection of you.'

Henry was disgusted. After all he had to tolerate while teaching, followed by the false accusations, 'where was the organizational support? Where was the apology?'

25 Dorman, J. (2003). 'Testing a Model for Teacher Burnout'. *Australian Journal of Educational and Developmental Psychology*, 3, 35–47.

In a politically correct attempt to keep the peace, the counsellor had just convinced Henry that he no longer wanted to be a teacher.

One study suggests that the nature of teacher output has an impact on the amount of bullying that occurs. In particular, it is hard to measure the quality and quantity of a teacher's work, and this increases the importance of interpersonal relationships with both colleagues and superiors in performance appraisals.²⁶ An imbalance of power and intense competition can increase the chances of bullying occurring. Interpersonal conflict among school teaching staff is quite common, particularly in situations where teachers are working in teams.²⁷

A poor work environment does not cause bullying, but it can raise tensions and frustrations that make bullying more likely to occur. In some cases, it can increase negative emotions that spill over. In others, work design increases competition and interpersonal rivalry. A lot of research in Scandinavia has identified workplace factors that can increase the chances of bullying occurring, as explored below.²⁸

REWARD SYSTEM AND WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

Some researchers have argued that individual-based reward systems may stimulate bullying, as some people may want to show that their performance is better than others.²⁹ This leads to negative competitive workplace behaviour. The obvious solution would be to introduce team-based reward systems, but these can themselves promote bullying, as team members may take their anger out on under-performing staff who drag the team's performance down and decrease their bonuses.³⁰

JOB DESIGN

If the work itself is badly designed, it can increase tensions and competitiveness. Although management research supports the creation of work teams, it also

²⁶ Hubert and Van Veldhoven (2001).

²⁷ Main, K. (2007). 'Conflict in Middle School Teaching Teams: Friend or Foe?'. *Australian Journal of Middle Schooling*, 7, 12–16.

²⁸ Çangarli, B.G. (2009). 'A Review of the Organizational Antecedents of Bullying'. *International Journal of Business Research*, 9(6), 100–106.

²⁹ Neuman, J.H. and Baron, R.A. (1998). 'Workplace Violence and Workplace Aggression: Evidence Concerning Specific Forms, Potential Causes, and Preferred Targets'. *Journal of Management*, 24(3), 391–419.

³⁰ Collinson (1988).

suggests that work requiring a high degree of co-operation and teamwork may actually increase the incidence of peer bullying. This was found in the Australian teaching study mentioned above, where teamwork actually increased interpersonal tensions. Some team members may become scapegoats for failures, and aggressive team members may focus on the least powerful group members. Using workers as scapegoats can be a result of displaced aggression, where aggression aroused by a different cause, in this case failure, is then directed at something else, in this case a staff member. Focusing aggression in this way may provide an outlet that relieves group tensions, but it is not fair on the worker being targeted.

Other features of poorly designed workplaces involve information and work control. When workers do not receive sufficient information about their job³¹ and have low control over it,³² their stress levels are increased. There is less tolerance for mistakes. If other workers or supervisors do have that information and control, it can put those people in a position of power that they can exploit. A German study revealed that workers who had control over time were less likely to be victims than those who didn't.³³ The same study revealed that reliance on others also raised the possibility of aggression. When people are forced to work closely together, it increases the chances of unresolved conflicts that can escalate into harassment.

ORGANIZATIONAL CULTURE AND CLIMATE

A number of studies have looked at the culture of organizations and found that bullying workplaces have competitive cultures, while non-bullying workplaces are easy-going and less competitive.³⁴ A quest for excellence can also contribute to bullying behaviour, as can be seen in the abuse doled out by some top chefs.³⁵

- 31 Vartia, M. (1996). 'The Sources of Bullying: Psychological Work Environment and Organizational Climate'. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 5(2), 203–14.
- 32 Rayner, C., Sheehan, M. and Barker, M. (1999). 'Theoretical Approaches to the Study of Bullying at Work'. *International Journal of Manpower*, 20(1/2), 11–16; Omari, M. (2003). *Towards Dignity and Respect: An Exploration of Antecedents and Consequences of Bullying Behavior in the Workplace*, final report, Curtin-IPAA Fellowship Programme, Perth: Curtin University.
- 33 Zapf, D., Knorz, C. and Kulla, M. (1996). 'On the Relationship between Mobbing Factors and Job Content, Social Work Environment, and Health Outcomes'. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 5(2), 215–37.
- 34 Vartia (1996); O'Moore, M., Seigne, E., McGuire, L. and Smith, M. (1998). 'Victims of Bullying at Work in Ireland'. *Journal of Occupational Health and Safety: Australia and New Zealand*, 34(6), 568–74.
- 35 Johns, N. and Menzel, P.J. (1999). "'If You Can't Stand the Heat!': Kitchen Violence and Culinary Art'. *Hospitality Management*, 18, 99–109.

Some cultures may promote an image of toughness.³⁶ When group norms allow aggressiveness in social interaction, it creates an environment in which bullying and harassment can easily occur. Aggressive interaction is 'permitted', as it is the way things are done in that organization.³⁷ An employee may engage in bullying behaviour because there will be no punishments for doing so. In this case, managers need to balance an aggressive culture with guidelines about what the limits are. This requires a policy against bullying, active monitoring and reprimands for those who engage in bullying. If these do not exist, the organization may suffer because of the lack of restraints.

LEADERSHIP

The behaviour of managers can have an important influence on the likelihood that bullying will occur.³⁸ A superior who encourages competition for tasks, status or advancement can sow the seeds of interpersonal conflict.³⁹ Similarly, 'weak' or 'inadequate' senior leadership can enable a bully to flourish at lower levels.⁴⁰ If management does not intervene in bullying, perpetrators see no reason to change their behaviour or even think that they have done anything wrong.

While inactive management can foster bullying, so can management that is too heavy-handed. A number of studies suggest that authoritarian management styles help to foster bullying, and people working in departments with authoritarian bosses are more likely to report being bullied.⁴¹ In some cases, the manager acts as a petty tyrant. A study by Ashforth revealed that some managers make arbitrary decisions regarding staff and show a lack of consideration to subordinates.⁴² Such managers display self-aggrandizing behaviours and use force in conflict-resolution. In such cases, not only is the

36 Neuman and Baron (1998).

37 Salin (2003).

38 Hoel, H. and Salin, D. (2003). 'Organizational Antecedents of Workplace Bullying', in S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf and C. Cooper (eds), *Bullying and Emotional Abuse in the Workplace: International Perspectives in Research and Practice*, London: Taylor & Francis.

39 Leymann, H. (1996). 'The Content and Development of Mobbing at Work. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 5(2), 165–84.

40 Einarsen, S., Raknes, B.I. and Matthiesen, S.B. (1994). 'Bullying and Harassment at Work and their Relationships to Work Environment Quality: An Exploratory Study'. *European Work and Organizational Psychologist*, 4(4), 381–401; Hoel, H. and Cooper, C.L. (2000). *Destructive Conflict and Bullying at Work*, Manchester: School of Management, University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology; Leymann (1996).

41 O'Moore, M. and Lynch, J. (2007). 'Leadership, Working Environment and Work-place Bullying. *International Journal of Organizational Theory and Behavior*, 10(1), 95–117.

42 Ashforth, B. (1994). 'Petty Tyranny in Organizations'. *Human Relations*, 4, 755–78.

boss abusive, but their behaviour can contribute to peer bullying, as aggressive behaviours are seen as the norm.⁴³

ORGANIZATIONAL CHANGES

Given the relationships between stress and bullying, it should be no surprise to find that bullying has been linked to periods of organizational change.⁴⁴ One study found that 45.3 per cent of the victims were bullied following organizational change,⁴⁵ including budget cuts, changes in management and major restructuring.⁴⁶

SECTOR DYNAMICS

Some things are beyond the manager's control, but you need to be aware of them and how they impact on your staff. For example, some industries have characteristics that make them more prone to bullying. It is particularly prevalent in the service sector, especially in health, public administration, education and financial services.⁴⁷ This may be because of the intangible nature of the work, which makes it difficult to measure performance. This lack of objective measures means that subjective judgements predominate.

Some researchers think that the increased emphasis on customer satisfaction is creating a situation where staff are increasingly bullied by customers. For example, one study revealed that 4.4 per cent of the health care professionals and teachers surveyed were bullied by their patients or students.⁴⁸ Leymann (1996) believes that nurses are particularly prone to bullying due to their heavy workload and the fact that they work under two supervisors.⁴⁹ Nurses must answer to both a doctor and a nurse supervisor – a situation that can lead to conflicting demands and uncertainty. It indicates a clear need for rules on the limits of the authority of each of their supervisors to allow greater role clarity, and a need to give workers greater control over their work.

Several human characteristics come to the surface during bullying. The most obvious is our need for control, and a number of studies reveal that

⁴³ Hoel and Salin (2003).

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Soares, A. (2002). *Bullying: When Work becomes Incident*, research report, Montreal: Université du Québec à Montréal.

⁴⁶ Hoel and Cooper (2000).

⁴⁷ Björkqvist, Osterman and Hjelt-Back (1994); Omari (2003).

⁴⁸ Soares (2002).

⁴⁹ Leymann (1996).

workers with limited control of their work are more likely to be victims of bullying. This suggests that if bullying is occurring in your workplace, it may be reduced by ensuring workers have sufficient control of their own work without excessive dependence on others. A second human trait is our tendency to social comparison. Many victims of bullying believe that envy is the core factor driving the behaviour of bullies.⁵⁰ A third feature is called the frustration-aggression hypothesis, which suggests that people's aggression levels rise when they suffer frustration.⁵¹ If people are frustrated in their workplace, this gives rise to negative emotions which affect their interaction with those around them – hence the importance for managers of providing a workplace that is less likely to generate negative emotions.

Managers should be aware of a number of factors that contribute to dissatisfaction and frustration. You need to ensure that workers are not frustrated by organizational constraints or a lack of control over their own jobs.⁵² Workers should have clear goals that reduce role conflict and ambiguity.⁵³ You also need to ensure that competition in the workplace does not get out of hand, and if necessary, you may need to change the reward/incentive system to reduce pressure from other staff.

A common finding of the research on bullying is that victims normally have less power than perpetrators. Because of this power imbalance, victims find it hard to defend themselves. Employees in socially exposed and visible situations are particularly vulnerable. This includes members of ethnic minorities and disabled employees with salaries subsidized by the government.⁵⁴ Women in many countries report higher victimization rates than men.⁵⁵ This suggests a connection between social and organizational power.

- 50 Einarsen, S. (2000). 'Harassment and Bullying at Work: A Review of the Scandinavian Approach'. *Aggression and Violent Behavior*, 5(4), 379–401.
- 51 Berkowitz, L. (1989). 'The Frustration-aggression Hypothesis: An Examination and Reformulation'. *Psychological Bulletin*, 106, 59–73.
- 52 Einarsen S., Raknes, B.I. and Matthiesen, S.B. (1994). 'Bullying and Harassment at Work and their Relationships to Work Environment Quality: An Exploratory Study'. *European Work and Organizational Psychologist*, 4(4), 381–401; Spector, P.E. (1997). 'The Role of Frustration in Anti-social Behavior at Work', in R.A. Giacalone and J. Greenberg (eds), *Anti-social Behavior in Organizations*, Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage; Vartia, M. (1996). 'The Sources of Bullying: Psychological Work Environment and Organizational Climate'. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 5(2), 203–14; Zapf, Knorz and Kulla (1996).
- 53 Vartia (1996); Einarsen, Raknes and Matthiesen (1994); Spector (1997).
- 54 Leymann, H. (1992). *Lönebidrag och Mobbad: En Svag Grupp's Psykosociala Arbetsvillkor i Sverige* ('State Subsidies and the Bullied: A Vulnerable Group's Psycho-social Working Conditions in Sweden'), Stockholm: Arbetarskyddsstyrelsen; Hoel and Cooper (2000).
- 55 Aquino, K. and Bradfield, M. (2000). 'Perceived Victimization in the Workplace: The Role of Situational Factors and Victim Characteristics'. *Organization Science*, 11, 525–37; Cortina, L.M.,

Formal power differences are another source of such power imbalance, and in many cases, it is the boss who is the bully.⁵⁶ There are times in the employment relationship when the power balance reaches a point where employees become very exposed. This includes employees who lack job security. Fear of losing a job can make employees feel powerless in the face of an intimidating threatening supervisor. Consequently, bullying is more prevalent during periods of downsizing where job security is at risk.⁵⁷

Workplaces characterized by poor planning, incompetent management and poor employee performance procedures also give rise to bullying. With little provision to measure performance, supervisors often resort to blaming staff for unmet goals. With no effective procedures to fall back on, the staff may feel intimidated and that they have to tolerate the abuse. The supervisor may feel that yelling and swearing at staff is one way of motivating them to perform better,⁵⁸ on the basis that 'Sometimes you use the carrot, and sometimes the stick.' This raises the possibility that you as a manager could have created a situation where your supervisors bully their staff because you have not organized work procedures sufficiently. This form of abuse can be reduced by introducing clearly defined goals and procedures for staff.

However, not all bullying by bosses is done to improve staff performance. In some cases, a supervisor for some reason perceives a staff member as a threat. The supervisor begins to behave in a heavy-handed way even though the employee may be perfectly competent. In other cases, bullying is stimulated by the human tendency for social comparison. Even though the supervisor is in a superior position, they too can exhibit these human weaknesses. In these cases, the bosses bully their subordinates because it gives them pleasure. It makes them feel superior.⁵⁹

Magley, V.J., Williams, J.H. and Langhout, R.D. (2001). 'Incivility in the Workplace: Incidence and Impact'. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, 6(1), 64–80; Hoel and Cooper (2000); Zapf, D., Knorz and Kulla (1996).

56 Cortina et al. (2001); Hoel and Cooper (2000); Knorz, C. and Zapf, D. (1996). 'Mobbing – eine extreme Form sozialer Stressoren am Arbeitsplatz' ('Mobbing – an Extreme Form of Social Stressor in the Workplace'). *Zeitschrift für Arbeits- und Organisationspsychologie*, 40(1), 12–21; O'Moore, M. (2000). *Summary Report on the National Survey on Workplace Bullying in Ireland*, Dublin: The Anti-Bullying Research Centre, Trinity College; Zapf, Knorz and Kulla (1996).

57 Sidle, S.D. (2009). 'Is Your Organization a Great Place for Bullies to Work?'. *Academy of Management Perspectives*, 23(4), 89–91.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid.

Escalation Theories

Organizational factors may provide fertile soil for bullying, but this does not necessarily mean that it will occur. Workplace conditions are enabling factors that will give rise to bullying if an additional motivator or trigger exists. That trigger may be interpersonal or role conflict that, fuelled by frustration and negative emotion, becomes more serious. Some academics have noted how bullying can arise out of minor conflicts, and escalate. These escalation theories maintain that bullying may begin with a work-related conflict.⁶⁰ If the conflict is resolved early, the issue can end, but if not, it can escalate into harassment.⁶¹ This places an onus on you as a manager to have intervention and conflict management strategies in place so that ill feeling does not escalate.

If the conflict is not resolved early, it can escalate, and one of the parties may find themselves in a disadvantaged position. They may find themselves stigmatized by their colleagues, at which point behaviour enters a new phase. The disadvantaged person is subjected to repeated and enduring aggressive acts. These take a number of forms, including humiliation and intimidation. It can include an attack on the person's self-image and self-esteem, giving rise to intense emotions. These emotions may include fear, suspicion, resentment, contempt and anger.⁶² Because of their disadvantaged position, they may feel that they cannot defend themselves or escape. Having been stigmatized, victims find it harder to co-operate with others and complete their daily tasks. This poor performance further endorses the stigma and gives the appearance that they are 'a deserving target'.⁶³ The result is a bullying spiral.

Another researcher who observed how minor aggression can escalate into bullying is Kaj Björkqvist at the Abo Academy in Finland. According to Björkqvist, there are three phases in a typical harassment case.⁶⁴ In the first phase, the aggressive behaviour is indirect and discreet, which can make it difficult for a manager to identify. It may include spreading rumours or other

60 Leymann, H. (1990). 'Mobbing and Psychological Terror at Workplaces'. *Violence and Victims*, 5, 119–26.; Leymann, H. (1992). *Från Mobbning till Utslagning i Arbetslivet* ('From Bullying to Exclusion in the Labour Market'), Stockholm: Publica; Leymann, H. (1996). 'The Content and Development of Mobbing at Work'. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 5(2), 165–84.

61 Leymann (1992); Einarsen, Raknes and Matthiesen (1994).

62 Björkqvist, K. (1992). 'Trakassering Forekommer Bland Anställda vid Abo Akademi' ('Harassment Occurs among Employees at Abo Academy'), *Meddelande från Abo Akademi*, 9, 14–17.

63 Einarsen (2000).

64 Björkqvist (1992).

less overt forms of bullying, but behaviour escalates to a second phase, where more direct acts appear. This includes public humiliation. They are made fun of and feel increasingly isolated. In degrading the victim, the bully finds justification for what they say, which removes any sense of guilt. In these early phases, the victim is attacked only occasionally, but in the last phase, there is an increase in the frequency and harshness of attacks.⁶⁵ The victim is now subjected to both physical and psychological forms of violence. They may be accused of being psychologically ill, or personally threatened.

Although victims may have little ability to defend themselves, this does not mean they are totally passive. In fact, some victims have used strategies that helped to improve the situation. Zapf and Gross investigated people who were bullied to see whether those who coped successfully used different strategies to those who didn't cope.⁶⁶ They found that both successful and unsuccessful victims started with constructive conflict-solving. Often the first strategy was a passive 'wait and see' response. When this didn't work, the most common strategy was to talk to the bullies. However, this strategy was used more frequently by unsuccessful victims, which suggests it was not effective. Fighting back was another strategy used by unsuccessful victims, and once again it did not work. The unsuccessful ones tried a number of different strategies. Some informed their superiors, and even increased their loyalty to work, showing more effort.⁶⁷ When constructive strategies failed, victims turned to destructive strategies such as reducing commitment to the organization, and finally leaving.

A key difference between the successful and unsuccessful victims was their ability to recognize and avoid escalating behaviours. Given the human desire for reciprocity and justice, unsuccessful victims often fought back, but this only escalated the conflict. By contrast, the successful victims were less likely to fight back and resort to negative behaviour, although the rate of success was low. Studies reveal that only 6–12 per cent of victims were successful, which illustrates just how few options exist for victims. It also reinforces the need for you as a manager to introduce mechanisms that prevent bullying and enable early intervention to prevent escalation.⁶⁸

⁶⁵ Einarsen (2000).

⁶⁶ Zapf, D. and Gross, C. (2001). 'Conflict Escalation and Coping with Workplace Bullying: A Replication and Extension'. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 10(4), 497–522.

⁶⁷ Niedl, K. (1995), *Mobbing/Bullying am Arbeitsplatz* ('Mobbing/bullying in the Workplace'), Munich: Rainer Hampp Verlag. Neidl, K. (1996) 'Mobbing and Well-being: Economic and Personnel Development Implications'. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 5, 239–50.

⁶⁸ Zapf and Gross (2001).

Interestingly, if the victim makes a legal complaint and supervisors are called in, the bullies perceive this as 'armament of the other party', which may lead to re-arming on their side. This can further escalate the conflict, and shows the importance of sensitivity and the need to understand the perspectives of both parties.⁶⁹

Dealing with Bullying and Harassment

When you as a manager are called to deal with a claim of bullying, you will need to make a judgement about whether bullying has actually occurred, and if it has, how to deal with it. Some features of human nature could interfere with your judgement. First, if the victim has chosen a strategy of reduced commitment and absenteeism, you may feel inclined to think that criticism of this person is justified. This shows how bullying can be a vicious circle, as it leads to behavioural changes, which makes the target more vulnerable.⁷⁰

You will have to come to terms with problems of attribution when attempting to determine the cause of the behaviour. In doing so, you need to avoid the fundamental attribution error, which is the human tendency to blame people for their own failings. This can lead us to believe that the victim is the cause of the trouble. Research from Scandinavia reveals that managers and other third parties 'seldom acknowledge the harm done to the victim as in fact bullying and harassment, but rather a no more than fair treatment of a difficult and neurotic person'.⁷¹

Other workplace features can distort attribution and may create a false impression of the victim. For example, in Chapter 5 we learned that some managers may treat their staff differently to others, creating a favoured in-group and an out-group. A victim of bullying from the boss is most likely to be in the out-group, but if the victim tells a colleague in the in-group, they are likely to be met with disbelief, as the boss has always treated the in-group members well. In such circumstances, the worker receives very little sympathy, and the colleague may believe that the victim is the cause of the problem. This raises the issue of care when interviewing staff about the issue.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Glasø, L., Matthiesen, S.B., Nielsen, M.B. and Einarsen, S. (2007). 'Do Targets of Workplace Bullying Portray a General Victim Personality Profile?'. *Scandinavian Journal of Psychology*, 48, 313–19.

⁷¹ Einarsen (2000), p. 392.

Human behaviour linked to cognitive dissonance can sometimes mean that innocent people receive a raw deal. You will recall that cognitive dissonance refers to when we hold two thoughts that are incompatible, so we often distort information to avoid that dissonance. This has relevance for bullying, harassment and other cases of victimization. For example, Janoff-Bulman proposed that people strive to maintain a belief (or schema) that the world is a benevolent and orderly place.⁷² We also like to believe that we are good people. One can see that such a belief would make people happier, but what happens when we find evidence to the contrary?

Rather than changing their existing schema, this situation often sees people's thought processes distorting information so that innocent people might be perceived as being guilty. For example, if we believe the world is a just place, the Irish, who endured the Irish potato famine, must have done something to contribute to their plight. In believing the world is fair, we actually become less sensitive to people's problems and less accurate in our perceptions.⁷³ This has important implications for fairness in the workplace when workers have experienced an injustice. We may not be as sympathetic as the issue warrants, and we may attribute some of the blame to the worker.

Another cognitive distortion that can cause us to have less sympathy for the victim is the fundamental attribution error: the human tendency to attribute events to internal characteristics of the person involved. For example, if you don't have any problems with the so-called bully, you will tend to attribute the problem to the victim's personality.

On the other hand, just because a worker feels aggrieved does not mean that bullying has actually occurred. Bullying procedures and laws are not there to cover every bruised feeling or bad day at work.⁷⁴ You will need to determine whether the victim has actually been treated differently to other staff. However, if the answer is 'no', this does not necessary mean that you don't have a bullying case. Consider the example of Adare, the company described in Chapter 5 which had a culture of aggressive humour. Some staff at Adare may find the behaviour offensive even though it is the norm. You must

72 Janoff-Bulman, R. (1992). *Shattered Assumptions*, New York: Free Press.

73 Lerner, M.J. and Miller, D.T. (1977). 'Just World Research and the Attribution Process: Looking Back and Ahead'. *Psychological Bulletin*, 85, 1,030-51.

74 Yamada, D. (2003). 'Workplace Bullying and the Law: Towards a Transnational Consensus', in S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf and C.L. Cooper (eds), *Bullying and Emotional Abuse in the Workplace: International Perspectives in Research and Practice*, London and New York: Taylor & Francis, 399-411.

distinguish between negative behaviours that are tolerated and behaviours that are not tolerated. You must also identify whether victims find it difficult to defend themselves.

Behind all conflicts lie issues of differing perception. The perception of victims can be very different to the perception of perpetrators. In fact, perpetrators may be surprised that they are being accused of bullying. The difference in perception may reflect different schemas of social interaction. A person whose life experience tolerates a tougher approach to social interaction may come across as offensive to someone with a schema of sensitivity.

It may be unfair to label someone as a 'bully' if they are simply continuing the social practices they have been brought up with. However, such people can be told of the effect their behaviour is having. If they are made aware of this without applying negative labels, it will not arouse defensive reactions and is more likely to lead to behavioural change, but of course, this depends on the level of infringement.

All staff members do not have the same level of resilience, and in some cases, the manager may be tempted to tell the worker to toughen up, but under most countries' laws, they cannot do this. You must take into account the victim's perception of the incident, knowing full well the subjective nature of both the victim's and the perpetrator's perceptions.

Academics stress the difference between *subjective harassment* and *objective harassment*.⁷⁵ Managers are interested in subjective harassment as it reveals a sense of real pain suffered by the target – something managers would like to reduce. Subjective harassment also informs management about how the victim perceives their interaction with others at work.⁷⁶ However, subjective harassment is not evidence that harassment or bullying has occurred.

Objective harassment is 'a situation where actual external evidence of harassment is found'.⁷⁷ To find evidence of objective harassment, you will need to explore any evidence given by the victim and perpetrator. This may include statements from co-workers, employers or independent observers. The situation must be appraised to identify anything that could be considered threatening or offensive.

⁷⁵ Einarsen (2000), p. 397.

⁷⁶ Niedl (2005).

⁷⁷ Einarsen (2000), p. 397.

If an aggressive culture exists or if a supervisor finds that bullying is a good way to control staff, it is unlikely to stop without effective organizational action.⁷⁸ The way an organization responds to bullying is important in maintaining staff loyalty. Perceived organizational support has a significant impact on whether bullied staff intend to leave.⁷⁹ Managers need to demonstrate that the organization cares for their welfare. You should inform your staff that the organization will not tolerate such behaviour. This includes developing formal policies and procedures that illustrate that the organization takes the matter seriously. A policy on bullying will include:

1. issuing a statement of general principles that the organization is committed to – this will most likely include a statement that bullying will not be tolerated, a recognition that staff must be treated with dignity and respect, and a statement that all staff are expected to comply with the policy or face disciplinary action;
2. drawing up a definition of bullying and acts that constitute bullying;
3. making a Contact Manager available, independent from existing staff and management, which will give staff the option of gaining independent advice; the contact manager should not be involved in any complaints procedure as this means they will gain extra work if they encourage a formal complaint; they must be objective;
4. setting up complaints procedures which outline the steps the organization will take if a complaint is received.⁸⁰

There are a number of ways a complaint can be dealt with. An effective strategy is problem-solving or conciliation, in which the victim and perpetrator discuss the problem with the goal of resolving it. However, this is only likely to be a useful option in the early stages when emotions are not aroused. Few victims feel that they can directly confront their abusers.

⁷⁸ Sidle (2009).

⁷⁹ Djurkovic, N., McCormack, D. and Casimir, G. (2008). 'Workplace Bullying and Intention to Leave: The Moderating Effect of Perceived Organizational Support'. *Human Resource Management Journal*, 18(4), 405–22.

⁸⁰ Adapted from Richards, J. and Daley, H. (2003). 'Bullying Policy: Development, Implementation and Monitoring', in S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf and C. Cooper (eds), *Bullying and Emotional Abuse in the Workplace: International Perspectives in Research and Practice*, London: Taylor & Francis.

Mediation is an option in which a third party facilitates the meeting and helps to remove any sense of intimidation the victim may feel. But once again, mediation assumes that the parties are equally capable of negotiating – an assumption that is unlikely in bullying cases. Furthermore, mediation seeks to resolve the issue to ensure that it doesn't happen in the future. It does not address or punish past actions, and may leave the victim with a sense that justice has not been served.⁸¹

Arbitration is where a third party settles the dispute, and this is seen as an appropriate way to deal with a case if the conflict has reached a stage where mediation will not work. Arbitration is appropriate where hostility is serious, but there is still some possibility to find agreement. If the level of aggression is worse than this, it may be necessary to appoint someone as a peace-keeper to ensure the conflict does not escalate any further.

When deciding which approach to adopt, you must have a good sense of the history and state of the relationship so that you can apply the appropriate procedure. If you apply the wrong method, your procedures may fail.⁸²

The goal of the procedures should be to modify the harasser's behaviour, protect the target and deter other organizational members from engaging in similar conduct.⁸³ If a case of bullying is upheld, it may be necessary to transfer or dismiss the bully, depending on its seriousness. Alternatively, in order to modify future behaviour, it may be appropriate to provide counselling and training. The bully must be made aware what aspects of their behaviour cause offence. It may also be necessary to offer counselling to the victim, who may have suffered significant psychological harm.

In some cases, separating the two parties is a logical solution, transferring one of them to another department. However, it is often easier to move the victim, especially if the bully is the boss. The victim may feel that is unfair that they have to leave and the perpetrator is allowed to stay, especially if their new job is not as satisfying.⁸⁴

Sheehan and Jordan (2003) suggest that managers should draw on concepts from the learning organization when dealing with bullying and harassment

81 Keashly and Nowell (2003).

82 Ibid.

83 Salin, D. (2009). 'Organizational Responses to Workplace Harassment: An Exploratory Study. *Personnel Review*, 38(1), 26–44.

84 Zapf and Gross (2001).

cases.⁸⁵ They argue that such cases can be reduced if organizations and their staff continuously improve their skills and abilities. This includes people becoming more attuned to their emotions and those of others. In the case of bullies, this may mean acknowledging inappropriate behaviour and apologizing. People are not always aware of their actions or their consequences. They should take the opportunity to learn how to regulate their emotions to improve relationships with others in the workplace.

An approach based on learning may also require a change in mental models about how management in the workplace is conducted and what is considered appropriate behaviour. It requires the adoption of a model in which bullying is not tolerated. The goal is not to abolish conflict in the workplace, as this will never be achieved, but to recognize that conflict should be constructive, not dysfunctional. Conflict should focus on problems and issues, not individuals. As football players say: 'Play the ball, not the man.'

The learning organization approach is consistent with the human model presented in this book, which argues that humans have limited capabilities and make mistakes. We also have limited self-perception, so we need to maximize self-learning opportunities when we goof. This is not to say that offenders should escape reprimand (especially repeat offenders). Bullies should be made to consider the consequences of their actions, as well led to understand the attitudes and emotions that lead them to bully in the first place. They should also be given self-management strategies to help prevent them lapsing back into negative behaviours.

Sheehan and Jordan argue that a learning approach is more likely to ameliorate bullying and improve workplace relations. While this provides an optimistic view of a destructive activity, we must not forget that bullying is exactly that – a destructive activity with very real costs to the organization and staff. Instead of spending time and resources dealing with complaints procedures, managers would be better to use their time preventing these issues arising in the first place. As a manager, you can reduce the amount of time you spend on these cases if you focus on improving the overall work environment to avoid the build-up of individual stress, remove destructive imbalances of power and role uncertainty, and ensure that boundaries of offensive behaviour are

85 Sheehan, M.J. and Jordan, P.J. (2003). 'Bullying, Emotions and the Learning Organization', in S. Einarsen, H. Hoel, D. Zapf and C.L. Cooper (eds), *Bullying and Emotional Abuse in the Workplace: International Perspectives in Research and Practice*, London and New York: Taylor & Francis, 259–69.

understood and maintained. It is your job to ensure that relationships between staff contribute to productivity, rather than reducing personal well-being.