
Workplace Bullying: An Integrative Literature Review

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Abstract

Workplace bullying is a phenomenon that appears widely in research literature in a variety of disciplines. The review found that a concise definition for workplace bullying was not available in the literature and in the United States there was a lack of federal legislation addressing workplace bullying. This integrative review reports that bullying is categorized as work related, personal, and physical/threatening. These behaviors occurring in the workplace negatively impact both the individual and organization. Outcomes to individuals are viewed in terms of impacting work, health (physical and emotional), and affective domains such as motivation. Negative organizational impacts of workplace bullying are classified in terms of cost, productivity, reputation, legal issues, and organizational culture. This review suggests methods that HRD professionals can implement to help individuals and organizations reduce workplace bullying. Suggestions are provided for future empirical research for HRD professions in relation to workplace bullying.

Keywords

workplace bullying, individual and organizational impacts

Employee behaviors harming individual employees and organizations can be classified as counterproductive workplace behaviors (CWBs; Fox & Spector, 2004). Spector and Fox (2010) further stated “CWB is considered an umbrella term that subsumes, in part or whole, similar constructs concerning harmful behaviors at work” (p. 133). Aggression, deviance, retaliation, and revenge are all behaviors that are included within CWBs. When studying aggression, Neuman and Baron (2005)

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more specifically, placed bullying behaviors within the category of aggression. Bullying is different than other forms of CWBs. Anderson and Pearson (1999) reported that incivility, manifested as low level of aggression in the workplace can escalate into more intense forms of aggression including bullying. According to Namie (2003), aggressive workplace behaviors can be viewed on a spectrum quantified on a 1 to 10 scale which provides a lens to understand the intensity of behaviors. Specifically, Namie (2003) states:

Incivilities range from 1 to 3, while bullying covers mild to severe interference with the accomplishment of legitimate business interests, reflecting scores of 4 to 9. The highest score is reserved for battery and homicide which grind work completely to a halt. (p. 1)

Frequency provides another perspective to view workplace bullying in addition to intensity. Unlike incivility and violence, bullying is by definition ongoing and repetitive in nature (Lee & Brotheridge, 2006). Often the negative impacts to those targeted by bullying behavior are unmistakably clear; however there are many indirect impacts on others and on an organization. Robinson and Bennett (1995) provide a typology for deviant workplace behaviors directed toward the organization and individuals based on the level of severity. Their framework helps to understand how aggressive behaviors like bullying can impact both individuals and organizations. In their typology, Robinson and Bennett (1995) provide examples of minor deviant behaviors impacting organizations such as leaving early, talking excessively, intentionally working slowly, and wasting resources while more serious behaviors include sabotaging of equipment, accepting kickbacks, lying about hours worked, and stealing (Robinson & Bennett, 1995). Examples of minor deviant behaviors directed toward individuals include showing favoritism, gossiping, blaming others, and serious deviant behaviors include verbal abuse, stealing from coworkers, endangering coworkers, and harassment. This typology demonstrates evidence that in addition to impacting the individual, organizations are also victims to the counterproductive workplace behaviors and hence to workplace bullying.

There are numerous articles in the popular media on bullying in the workplace. Although these articles are not part of the review for this article, they do provide evidence on the extent to which the issue is impacting the workplace. Although there are varieties of theoretical frameworks providing lenses to examine workplace bullying, the input, process, output model provides a concise framework to examine types and outcomes of bullying. One of the major issues for human resource development (HRD) professionals is to first understand the acts of workplace bullying and identify how it negatively impacts individuals and organizations. This knowledge will enable them to work strategically with the organization to address this vice. The purpose of the review is to examine workplace bullying, specifically, in regards to what types of workplace bullying are reported in the literature, explore the individual and organizational impacts of workplace bullying, and report the HRD professional's role in reducing workplace bullying.

The following research questions guided the study:

Research Question 1: What are the types of workplace bullying reported in extant research?

Research Question 2: What are the organizational impacts of workplace bullying?

Research Question 3: What are the individual impacts of workplace bullying?

Method

The study utilized the process of data collection, analysis, and findings synthesis as required in an integrative literature review (Torraco, 2005). Torraco (2005) states that an integrative literature review “. . . is a form of research that reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated” (p. 356). The integrative review provides a method to fully synthesize extant data on the topic of workplace bullying.

Data were collected using various online library databases such as Proquest, JSTOR, EBSCOHost, and Business Source Premier, and Google Scholar. Keywords used in searching for existing research literature were *workplace bullying*, *counterproductive workplace behaviors*, and *escalated incivility*. Reference lists from the articles found were also used to create a comprehensive list of literature to review. Research articles were read in their entirety and a total of 42 studies were retained for the overall research aligned with the definition of workplace bullying used in this study. Specific findings pertaining to the research questions of this study were entered into a database. The database was then used to create tables describing the factors explaining each of the three research questions. This study used what Torraco (2005) outlined as conceptual classification of constructs in which constructs are formed to classify the extant research.

Defining Workplace Bullying

The literature has not followed one specific definition for bullying and specifically, workplace bullying. In general, according to Namie (2003) bullying can be viewed on a continuum that starts with incivility, moves to bullying, and ends with workplace violence. In addition to the inconsistent definitions in a large body of literature, Martucci and Sinatra (2009) stated that there are no specific federal laws that prohibit workplace bullying. In the literature, the key words that appeared in definitions include *negative acts*, *unwelcome*, *source of power*, *target has difficulty defending oneself*, and *have the intent to harm the target*. The synthesis of this literature suggests that workplace bullying is viewed as repeated unwelcomed negative act or acts (physical, verbal, or psychological intimidation), that can involve criticism and humiliation, intended to cause fear, distress, or harm to the target from one or more individuals in any source of power with the target of the bullying having difficulties defending

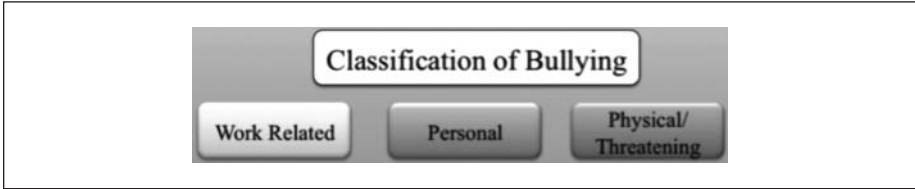


Figure 1. Classification of types bullying

himself or herself. Workplace bullying, for the purpose of this study, is defined as a repeated and enduring act which involves an imbalance of power between the victim and the perpetrator and includes an element of subjectivity on the part of the victim in terms of how they view the behavior and the effect of the behavior (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003). In workplace-bullying literature, the bully is referred to as the instigator and the person being bullied is called the target.

Findings

Findings from this research project identified and classified acts that are seen as bullying in the workplace. Furthermore, findings identifying negative outcomes of workplace bullying for the organization and for individuals are presented.

Types of Workplace Bullying

Research Question 1, sought to describe the types of workplace bullying reported in extant research. In the literature, acts of bullying had characteristics that allowed them to be classified. Characteristics of bullying that emerged were categorized within three major areas. The types of bullying were coded based on how the literature described the act and what the target was being bullied about. Figure 1 shows the classification areas that were developed from the synthesis of bullying acts. Work-related, personal, and physical/threatening bullying are the three overarching thematic areas that become apparent from the literature that all acts of bullying could be placed within. Each of the three types of bullying are then broken down and presented in more detail.

This classification partly aligns with Maglich-Sespico, Faley, and Knapp (2007)'s types of bullying (work related, psychological/emotional, and physical). For this study, researchers left out any physical types of bullying in alignment with the CWB continuum in which physical behaviors would be in the "violence" category. Threats, depending on their nature, would classify as a type of bullying but threats could also be viewed as illegal in many localities based on the nature and therefore might go beyond bullying.

Types of work-related bullying were viewed in terms of workloads, work processes, and evaluation and advancement. The factors reported in the research for work-related bullying are shown in Figure 2.

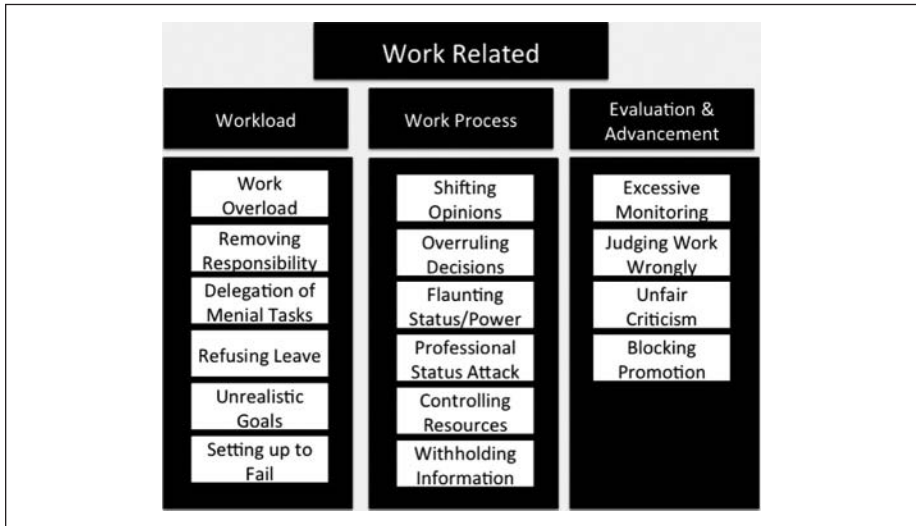


Figure 2. Work-related bullying types

A common issue that emerged from the literature concerning work-related bullying was that positional power creates opportunities for the bully to exert power over the target. In the literature, individuals were given heavy workloads as one form of bullying (Jennifer, Cowie, & Ananiadou, 2003). Additionally, bullying could take place in the form of refusing leave (Quine, 1999). In contrast, workload bullying was also reported in the literature to include removing responsibilities and delegation of menial tasks (Quine, 1999; Vartia, 2001). Some of these workloads issues could create unrealistic goals (Fox & Stallworth, 2006) and attempt to setup individuals to fail in their job (Rayner, 1997). All these acts can have negative impacts on the target’s career advancement.

Some workplace bullying behaviors were found to use work processes. These behaviors were multidirectional between peers, subordinates, or supervisors. Behaviors included stifling opinions and overruling decisions (Einarsen, 2000; Simpson & Cohen, 2004; Vartia, 2001). Additionally, controlling resources and withholding information were seen as forms of bullying impacting the work process (Baillien, Neyens, DeWitte, & De Cuyper, 2009; Gardner & Johnson, 2001). Professional attacks and flaunting status and power were two other forms of bullying that occur in relation to work processes (Fox & Stallworth, 2006; Hutchinson, Wilkes, Vickers, & Jackson, 2008; Yildirim, 2009).

The third category of work-related bullying, evaluation and advancement, often occurred between a supervisor and subordinate. Inappropriate leadership evaluation included excessive monitoring, judging work wrongly, giving unfair criticism, and blocking individuals from promotion (Randle, Stevenson, & Grayling, 2007; Rayner, 1997;

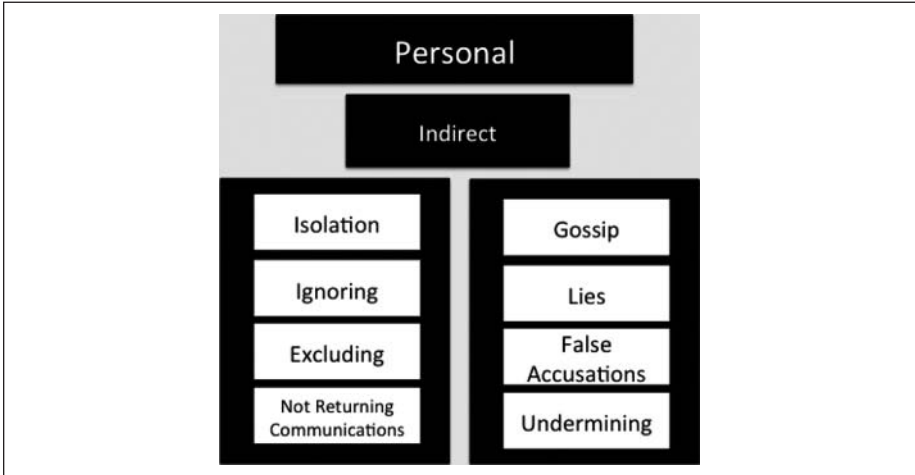


Figure 3. Indirect personal bullying behaviors

Simpson & Cohen, 2004). These forms of bullying are enhanced by the power the individual evaluating can exert on the target.

Psychological/personal types of bullying were divided into direct and indirect types of bullying where direct bullying are interactions between the bully and the target and indirect bullying are interactions between the bully and others who indirectly harm the target. Figure 3 shows indirect personal bullying types and Figure 4 lists direct personal bullying types.

Indirect personal bullying behaviors include forms of exclusion and isolation that amount to ignoring (Agervold, 2007; Djurkovic, McCormack, & Casimir, 2005; Einarsen, 2000; Fox & Stallworth, 2006; Jennifer et al., 2003; Quine, 1999; Randle et al., 2007; Rayner, 1997; Vartia, 2001; Yildirim, 2009). Gardner and Johnson (2001) reported bullies not returning communications such as phone calls, memos, and emails, further isolating individuals. Additional indirect methods of bullying include spreading gossip, lies, false accusations, and undermining an employee (Agervold, 2007; Hershcovis, 2010; Quine, 1999; Randle et al., 2007; Rayner, 1997; Simpson & Cohen, 2004).

Direct personal bullying types, where bullies have direct contact with the target, include a spectrum of behaviors from interrupting others to more severe acts such as intimidation and threats. Bullies were reported in the literature to use tactics such as verbal harassment, belittling remarks, yelling, and interrupting others (Djurkovic et al., 2005; Fox & Stallworth, 2006; Gardner & Johnson, 2001; MacIntosh, 2005; Rayner, 1997). Direct bullying further included engaging in persistent criticism, intentional demeaning, personal jokes, negative eye contact, and humiliation (Agervold, 2007; Baillien et al., 2009; Fox & Stallworth, 2006; Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Quine, 1999; Randle et al., 2007; Rayner, 1997; Simpson & Cohen, 2004; Yildiz, 2007).

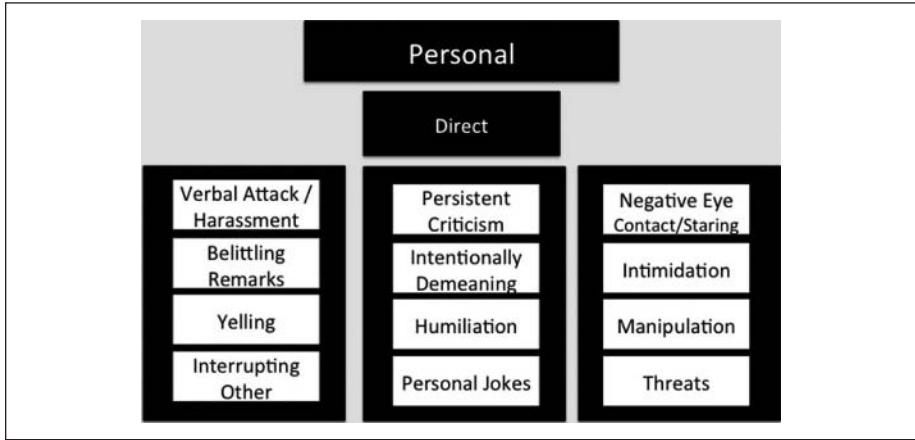


Figure 4. Direct personal bullying behaviors

More severe forms of direct personal bullying included intimidation, manipulation, and threats (Von Bergen, Zavaletta, & Soper, 2006; MacIntosh, 2005; Rayner, 1997; Simpson & Cohen, 2004).

Organizational Impacts

Research Question 2 focusing on the organizational impacts of workplace bullying, found factors such as loss of human capital effectiveness (productivity), legal costs, increased health care costs, increased need for training, and increased turnover leading to advertising, recruiting, interviewing, retraining, and so on. (Ayoko, Callan, & Hartel, 2003; Von Bergen et al., 2006). Organizational impacts of workplace bullying were categorized into productivity, cost, culture, legal, and reputation (see Table 1).

Productivity. Productivity impacts on organizations included increased absenteeism (Kivimaki, Elovainio, & Vahtera, 2000; Namie, 2007) and decreased performance (Baillien et al., 2009; Yildirim, 2009) among bullying targets. More specifically, missed deadlines, employees’ use of time (Gardner & Johnson, 2001), loss of creative potential (MacIntosh, 2005), and increased workplace errors (Paice & Smith, 2009) were reported.

Costs. Due to an increase in health-related issues for targets of bullying (Johnson, 2009; Namie, 2003, 2007; Quine, 2001; Randle et al., 2007) an increase in costs for health plans and worker compensation claims were reported for organizations (Gardner & Johnson, 2001; MacIntosh, 2005). Increased turnover was widely stated (Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Namie, 2003, 2007) which leads to increased cost incurred by organizations for advertising positions that need rehiring, marketing, interviewing, and training newly hired employees.

Culture. Harvey, Treadway, and Heames (2007) found that bullying is much more likely to happen if the bully feels that the organizational climate grants them the

Table 1. Organizational Impacts of Workplace Bullying

Organizational impacts				
Productivity	Cost	Culture	Legal	Reputation
Absenteeism	Health plan increase	Climate	Wrongful discharge lawsuits	Customer relations
Decreased performance	Recruiting	Ineffective interpersonal relationships (peers/supervisors)		
Employees use of time	Turnover/retention	Ineffective teamwork		
Loss of creative potential	Worker attrition	Lowered morale		
Missed deadlines	Worker compensation claims	Organizational commitment		
Workplace errors		Work environment		

bleeding to bully. Bullying that happens due to organizational leaders' unwillingness or inability to address this phenomenon effectively can lead to incivility spirals that can contribute to a toxic organizational culture (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Furthermore, workplace bullying was reported to negatively affect the target's relationship with peers and supervisors (Glaser, Nielsen, & Einarsen, 2009; MacIntosh, 2005), lower teamwork (Baillien et al., 2009; Gardner & Johnson, 2001), reduce morale (Namie, 2003), and decrease organizational commitment (Gardner & Johnson, 2001) all of which have significant implications for the organization's culture.

Legal. Gardner and Johnson (2001) reported wrongful discharge lawsuits as a legal issue of workplace bullying for organizations. Along the lines of bullying, sexual harassment and discrimination lawsuits are often categorized under a bullying umbrella and are further areas of legal cost for organizations. This study did not examine sexual harassment and discrimination due to the vast amount of research in each area, making those topics research studies in their own merit.

Reputation. Organizations with higher incidents of workplace bullying show increased turnover, lower customer relationships, lower creativity, and lower productivity (Johnson, 2009; MacIntosh, 2005; Namie, 2003, 2007). Together, these variables support that workplace bullying can negatively impact an organization's reputation.

Individual Impacts

Research Question 3, focusing on the individual impacts of workplace bullying, revealed factors such as worker safety, job satisfaction, humiliation, fear, decreased

Table 2. Individual Impacts of Workplace Bullying

Individual impacts of workplace bullying			
Work	Health		Affective domain
	Physical	Emotional	
Absenteeism	Cardiovascular disease	Depression	Anger
Burnout	Chronic disease	Psychological health/ psychological affects	Anxiety
Career impact	Headaches	PTSD	Concentration loss
Commitment lower	Health decrease	Suicide	Easily upset/ tenseness
Concentration loss	Higher body mass		Exhaustion
Errors in workplace	Increased smoking, alcohol, and drug use/abuse		Fear
Income loss	Medical costs		Humiliation
Intolerance of criticism	Physical health		Impatience
Job satisfaction lower	Sick time		Isolation feeling
Loss of time due to worrying	Sleep disruption		Motivation
Morale	Sleep-inducing drugs		Powerlessness
Performance/ productivity			Sadness
Quit/thinking of quitting			Self-confidence
Social interactions inside work			Social interactions outside of work
Work hours (hours cut)			Stress

group cohesiveness, job loss, and reduced performance (Ayoko et al., 2003; Coyne, Craig, & Chong, 2004; Parkins, Fishbein, & Ritchey, 2006; Thompson, 2003). Individual impacts were categorized into three groups: work, health, and affective domain as shown in Table 2.

Work. Impacts of workplace bullying on the individual’s work-related outcomes were extensive in the literature. Career impacts found in the literature included increased absenteeism, burnout, and quitting work or thinking of quitting work (Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Kivimaki et al., 2000; MacIntosh, 2005; Namie, 2003, 2007; Vartia, 2001; Yildiz, 2007). Targets of workplace bullying were found to report decreased commitment, lower job satisfaction, poor morale, and lower performance/productivity (Gardner & Johnson, 2001; MacIntosh, 2005; Namie, 2003; Yildirim, 2009). Examples

of lowered performance include increase in work errors, decreased concentration, and lost time due to worrying about bullying situation (Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Paice & Smith, 2009; Namie, 2003; Yildirim, 2009; Yildiz, 2007).

Individual victims of workplace bullying were found to cut back on work hours and suffer income loss (Gardner & Johnson, 2001). Targets of workplace bullying often reported having impaired social interactions inside the workplace (Yildirim, 2009). From a management perspective, managing and evaluating an employee who has been the target of workplace bullying could be difficult due to their decreased job satisfaction and intolerance of criticism, heightened by the acts of bullying (Quine, 1999, 2001; Yildiz, 2007; Yildirim, 2009), thus leading to unfair evaluations that could have legal implications.

Health. Individual health impacts due to workplace bullying were separated into two categories, physical and emotional. Physical impacts include increase in cardiovascular disease, chronic disease, headaches, higher body mass, and decrease in overall physical health (Johnson, 2009; Kivimaki et al., 2000; Moayed, Daraiseh, Shell, & Salem, 2006; Randle et al., 2007; Simpson & Cohen, 2004). Often, these physical impacts increased sick time taken by targets and increased medical costs for the individual (Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Namie, 2003). Targets of workplace bullying reported an increase in smoking, alcohol, and drug use/abuse, increase in sleep disruption, and increase in the use of sleep-inducing medications (Namie, 2003; Paice & Smith, 2009; Quine, 1999; Vartia, 2001; Yildiz, 2007).

Emotional impacts reported include clinical depression, psychological health issues, posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and suicide (Ayoko et al., 2003; Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Kivimaki et al., 2000; Kivimaki, Virtanen, Vartio, Elovainio, & Vahtera, 2003; Namie, 2003, 2007; Rodriguez-Munoz, Moreno-Jimenez, Vergel, & Hernandez, 2010; Yildirim, 2009). Rodriguez-Munoz et al. (2010) stated that symptoms of PTSD are “. . . highly prevalent among victims of bullying.” (p. 2630). The authors further stated, “PTSD is an anxiety disorder characterized by a constellation of symptoms thought to result from exposure to one or more traumatic events.” (Rodriguez-Munoz et al., 2010, p. 2617).

Affective domain. Individual impacts within the affective domain include feelings, attitudes, and emotions. Workplace bullying led to anxiety, fear, sadness, and anger (Ayoko et al., 2003; Namie, 2003; Quine, 1999, 2001; Simpson & Cohen, 2004; Yildiz, 2007). Bullied individuals struggled with concentration loss, decreased motivation, lowered self-confidence, and feelings of powerlessness (Baillien et al., 2009; Gardner & Johnson, 2001; MacIntosh, 2005; Moayed et al., 2006; Simpson & Cohen, 2004; Vartia, 2001; Yildirim, 2009; Yildiz, 2007). Yildirim (2009) found that individuals reported feeling a negative impact on social interactions outside of work due to workplace bullying. Furthermore, impacts such as individuals becoming easily exhausted, upset, impatient, and having feelings of isolation were also found consistently throughout the literature (Glaso, Matthiesen, Neilsen, & Einarsen, 2007). The overwhelming factors most often cited throughout the literature were the feelings of stress, depression, and humiliation (Ayoko et al., 2003; Gardner & Johnson, 2001;

Kivimaki et al., 2003; Moayed et al., 2006; Namie, 2003, 2007; Quine, 1999, 2001; Vartia, 2001; Yildirim, 2009).

HRD Research and Workplace Bullying

The far-reaching impacts of bullying in the workplace are supported by the articles reviewed and this review shows significance for researching the topic further. This research has shown different types of workplace bullying and provided constructs to classify bullying actions and outcomes. The classifications provided in this study can guide future researchers to create an instrument to assess the level of workplace bullying within organizations. Additionally, it is suggested that consistent measurements are created to assess the impacts of workplace bullying on individuals and organizations. As there has been scarce research on how to implement programs to reduce bullying in the workplace, from the perspective of HRD professionals, it would be useful to see how employees view workplace policies on bullying and if organizations that have stronger policies have less workplace bullying. Additionally, it would be useful to understand if different types of workplace bullying noted in this study impact individuals and organizations in different ways.

An experimental study would provide support to assess the best educational methods to reduce workplace bullying. For example, online training could be implemented with one group, face-to-face training with another group, and then the impacts of these trainings can be compared with a control group to examine how training can be best applied to reduce workplace bullying. Finally, the literature reviewed on workplace bullying did not address technology. Research is needed to examine the impacts of cyber bullying in the workplace.

It should be noted that this study is limited to previous literature that helped to synthesize the understanding of bullying. Synthesizing the literature helped to identify types of workplace bullying behaviors as well as its individual and organizational outcomes. But, these understandings are derived from indirect sources and findings can or should be confirmed with empirical studies, such as survey and interviews or documents at organizations. Observation would also be another method to collect data but would provide challenges with difficulty and privacy.

Recommendations for HRD Professionals

Bullying is a critical issue in the workplace that occurs in a variety of formats, impacting individuals and organizations. The HRD professional “needs to provide employees with up-to-date expertise” (p. 339) and according to Torraco and Swanson (2001) “The HRD function has long been relied on to support a broad range of business objectives” (p. 339). Thus, strategically, HRD professionals must work with individuals and organizations to eliminate workplace bullying to more effectively reach business objectives and provide a safe work environment.

For HRD professionals to work with the organization to reduce bullying, it is critical for them to understand how bullying is defined in the context of the workplace and the specific types of bullying that are occurring in the workplace. When researching incivility, a form of counterproductive behavior that is of less intensity than bullying, Estes and Wang (2008) suggested that it is important to create an incivility-free workplace, establish policy, and build leadership that is authentic to reduce incivility. In addition to the similar recommendations found for incivility, the findings from the literature highlighted in this study suggest that it would be appropriate to use assessment, monitoring, corrective actions, and training to reduce bullying in the workplace.

Bullying-Free Workplace

Although there is no federal legislation in the United States that specifically defines and protects against workplace bullying, 16 states have introduced legislation and some have adopted the bill for a healthy workplace, however none have passed the bill into law (Healthy Workplace Bill, 2010). Organizations need to ensure that they are compliant with all laws and provide a safe working environment for their employees. Additionally, for organizations that are operating globally, it is critical that they are aware of all laws that impact bullying. For example, Canada, Australia, Ireland, Sweden, and the United Kingdom all have specific laws that relate to workplace bullying. HRD professionals need to provide organization consultation in the assessment of compliance to laws applying to workplace bullying. They can lead the design and development of training programs that are compliant with the laws the organization must follow in regards to bullying. Having an organizational-wide initiative for creating a bully-free workplace will show leadership's commitment to the bully-free workplace and can provide impetus to other organizational-wide actions such as mentoring or coaching that can be used to change the perspectives on workplace bullying.

Policy

Organizations cannot afford to tolerate any level of workplace bullying. Specific policy needs to be in place to allow the target of the bullying and other employees in the organization formal methods to report these behaviors. Methods of reporting should allow for a check system that provides services to those when evidence is present that a situation is present at the level of even incivility that may expand to bullying. Investigation procedures should be created to ensure that employees are treated fairly. As bullying could be from supervisors, it is suggested that a third party such as human resource professionals handle these types of issues.

Organization's policy should include formal training to reduce acts of bullying. This education should encourage reflection to assess levels of bullying in the organization. Although current employees are a great way to assess the level of bullying, Estes and Wang (2008) suggested that exit interviews could be used for assessing incivility.

Similarly, exit interviews can help to assess the level of bullying prevalent within an organization. Training should be developed that provides situations and demonstrate how bullying impacts the individual, organization, and others indirectly. HRD professionals need to be involved with the development of policy to support the creation of a workplace that is free of bullying.

Assessment and Monitoring

Once HRD professionals are aware, policy is implemented, and the culture is communicated, it is important for HRD professionals to be instrumental in assessing the level of bullying and monitoring bullying in the workplace. Initial assessment can provide the organization with a benchmark to assess the growth of the organization while constant monitoring is needed to ensure that the organization is continuously providing a safe working environment.

Corrective Actions and Training

If the organization recognizes an issue with workplace bullying, it is important to have a process in place for corrective action. Organizations need to ensure that all organizational members understand the actions that should take place if bullying occurs. Furthermore, organizations need to ensure that all actions fall within the legal requirements of the locality of the organization. Once the corrective actions have been taken, training should incorporate the lessons learned from the situations.

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