Workplace Bullying: Is lack of understanding the reason for inaction?

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Executive Summary

While workplace bullying or emotional abuse comes in many forms, the outcomes of being tormented at work are often the same for both targets and bystanders. Workplace bullying significantly decreases physical, psychological and emotional well-being. Despite there now being a large variety of resources available for managers to inform them about what should and can be done to prevent and manage workplace bullying there still appears to be lack of action to address it in workplaces. Furthermore, when managers do try to intervene, targets often report dissatisfaction as to how the matter is handled. So why is this the case? In this article we outline these differences in perception and provide suggestions as to how managers can successfully address bullying in the workplace.

Workplace Bullying: Is lack of understanding the reason for inaction?

At what point is the line crossed between a series of humorous work pranks and workplace bullying? This question is actually more complex than it looks. Take the very well-publicized office complaint case of David Thorne and Simon Dempsey – a story that has taken social media sites and the

wider internet by storm over the last couple of years. Although it has now been revealed that the interactions between Thorne and Dempsey are somewhat fictitious (loosely based on actual interactions between the author and a previous co-worker), the behaviors and their ensuing complaints provide a lens from which this question can be considered.

In this case, Dempsey makes 10 formal complaints in 6 months all relating to the behavior of his work colleague Thorne. The complaints allege that Thorne:

1. Opened a package addressed to Dempsey which contained a T-shirt and replaced it with a pair of socks;
2. Stole Dempsey's lunch from the fridge and replaced it with a single pickle;
3. Changed the title of Dempsey's business cards to Horse Whisper;
4. Accessed Dempsey's computer and photoshopped Justin Bieber's head onto photographs in his personal album;
5. Impersonated Dempsey on the telephone, telling an important customer that he couldn't get a job done because he 'needed to take a nap';
6. Painted Dempsey's iPhone white with liquid paper;
7. Moved Dempsey's desk and personal belongings to the kitchen;
8. Accessed his computer in order to change preset hot keys and webpages;
9. Defaced a poster that Dempsey had behind his desk;
10. Sent an email request from another worker's computer, resulting in Dempsey paying for fictitious company mandated swimming lessons.

But is it workplace bullying?

When viewed in isolation, each of the acts seem fairly innocuous and actually quite humorous, however are these behaviors workplace bullying? When examining the range of comments that have been posted online in response to this case, there seems to be a blurring as to the answer to this question. Some hold Thorne up on a pedestal hailing him as 'the world's most brilliantly obnoxious co-worker' calling him 'heroic' and 'legendary'. Others however, do not agree and identify Thorne as a 'jerk' and a 'bully'. Dempsey does not fare well either. Comments such as 'Simon needs to grow a pair', 'I really think he has it coming', 'what a whinge bag', and 'he deserved every bit of being trolled' demonstrate how many perceive Dempsey as being the problem.

A further topic of discussion that divides internet commenters in this case is the appropriateness of the behaviors Thorne subjected Dempsey to. Some believe the behaviors are inappropriate posting comments such as 'Eventually the good employee will leave and the company will have to deal with the office bully. The lack of discipline on the bully makes this a hostile work environment'; 'poison'; and 'David is a bully from what I can see' to those that believe that the behaviors simply constitute funny work pranks noting 'It's amusing to me that people use words like 'bully'. This is piss taking all the way!'.

While Thorne and Dempsey's interactions are only loosely based on actual events, many of us may have seen or heard of

similar behaviors occurring in our own workplaces. Indeed, the recent and high-profile case of bullying in the NFL has also undoubtedly raised questions as to what constitutes workplace bullying? In this case, a young player from the Miami Dolphins football team (Jonathan Martin) was systematically targeted by several other players for over a year. Martin was constantly subjected to racial and homophobic slurs, called a 'bitch' for the entire season by another player, and subjected to sexually graphic language and gestures toward his sister (whom the perpetrators incidentally had never met) and mother. These insults came in the form of verbal and physical abuse as well as text messages sent to his cell phone. By the end of October 2013 Martin could take no more and vowed to leave the club if he was subjected to any further behavior (by this time he had been prescribed antidepressants by a psychiatrist and his mental well-being was jeopardized). But the abuse did not stop. On the contrary, Martin continued to be relentlessly mocked. Then on the evening of October 28 after being told he was not welcome to join his team-mates for dinner and having his meal tray thrown to the floor when he tried, Martin checked himself into hospital for psychiatric treatment. NFL appointed investigator Ted Wells, later found that three team members had engaged in harassment of their fellow players for more than a year.

What both cases demonstrate, is that there is no clear consensus as to where the line is crossed between workplace

banter (or team comradery) and workplace bullying. Furthermore, many individuals do not think that workplace bullying is something that could happen in today's organization let alone in a football club. Take for example the comments of Marshall Faulk (Pro Football HOF – Class of 2011; 2000 NFL MVP) on the NFL "GameDay Morning" show (Culture of NFL locker rooms) on the 3rd of November, 2013 who stated:

> "I just didn't think [an] adult could be bullied by another adult – I just felt like that was a kid thing."

As researchers, we are not surprised at this. In our own research, we have found that many individuals do not understand what workplace bullying is – especially when they have never been subjected to bullying. Importantly they also do not know what it is not. In this article we attempt to provide some clarity on this topic for managers and workers in the hope that it will raise awareness and spur action to prevent more cases such as Dempsey and Martins' from occurring.

Workplace bullying and its effects

Research released in 2014 estimates that approximately 27% of the U.S. workforce has been (20%) or are being (7%) subjected to workplace bullying. A further 21% of workers report they have witnessed it. When combined, these figures suggest that almost half the U.S. workforce has had some experience with bullying in the workplace. Whatever term you

use – bullying, mobbing, emotional abuse, workplace incivility, employee abuse, general harassment – being subjected to this type of behavior can have a devastating effect on those who are targeted, not to mention the flow on effect for bystanders (affected in many cases as much as the target) and the work environment in general.

Individual effects

Over 20 years of research has consistently demonstrated the severe, long-term negative effects of workplace bullying on these three groups. For Dempsey and Martin the short-term effects could have included increased anxiety and panic attacks, and a reduction in self-esteem, attendance at work, productivity and overall wellbeing. Long-term effects comprise stress related symptoms similar to post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, and in more extreme cases suicide. Indeed, Martin was affected so badly that he was prescribed anti-depressants, required psychiatric assistance, and twice contemplated suicide. Negative outcomes for bystanders (witnesses) include fear of being the next target (would you want to be the next Dempsey or Martin?), guilt and shame for not wanting to get involved in the conflict, or more generally they are affected because they have to work in what can become a very toxic environment.

Organizational effects

Naturally, these negative effects also lead to substantial organizational costs. Absenteeism from work due to stress and anxiety and poor productivity is not uncommon. Reduced job satisfaction and higher intention to leave are well-documented consequences. Furthermore, there is the cost of re-locating or re-training when individuals transfer to another team or leave the organization all together (commonly targets leave). Indeed, estimates from around the world repeatedly find that the financial costs of bullying to business are substantial (up to $100,000 per annum for each bullied individual). Workplace bullying therefore deserves our understanding, attention and action.

Workplace bullying – What it is and what it is not

Still the question remains – what is workplace bullying? Can the interaction between Thorne and Dempsey be classed as workplace bullying? Was there a point where the taunts that Martin was subjected to turned from locker-room antics to bullying? Take some time to think about what you would consider to be bullying in the workplace and if YOU perceive what happened to Dempsey and Martin was bullying?

From an academic perspective, workplace bullying occurs when an individual experiences a number of negative behaviors repeatedly over a period of time (a pattern of similar or different behaviors over a period of about 6 months). Commonly, a single episode of negative behavior is not

considered to be bullying unless that singular action results in continuing ramifications or ongoing threat for the target.

Also important when defining workplace bullying is the presence of a power imbalance, that is one party is at a disadvantage or unable to protect or shield themselves from the bullying. However, when two (or more) individuals are experiencing an ongoing conflict and all parties feel they have an equal power base in the conflict – then this is not bullying. It is important to note that a power imbalance can develop over time and be a direct reaction to the persistent inappropriate behavior of the alleged perpetrator. The case of Martin is a clear example of this.

To illustrate this point we use the analogy of an empty back-pack. Imagine that you are wearing an empty pack on your back. It's very light and easily carried for a very long time. Now imagine a little bit of weight (an insult, a practical joke, or criticism of your work) is added to your pack – still not a real issue is it? You could probably continue to carry that pack for a long time. But now imagine that when you went to work weight continued to be added now and then (through say exclusion, intimidation, and/or focusing on your inadequacies). Soon you would start to feel the extra weight and inevitably over time, there would come a point where you would not be able to manage – something would have to give.

In addition to this, the behaviors tend to escalate both in terms of frequency and the nature of the behaviors. Often it begins with occasional, covert behaviors that gradually increase in frequency and in doing so, become more overt (progressively heavier weights are placed more often into your back-pack).

What this analogy demonstrates is that while a power imbalance may not exist at the beginning of the conflict (Martin most likely thought he could handle the insults and banter or thought it was all good fun, at the beginning) they can develop over time. These can be directly attributed to the bullying behavior (things became so bad for Martin, he quit).

So, now that we have given an overview of what workplace bullying is, where does your original definition sit within this classification? It isn't easy. To add to the complexity of this problem regrettably the term 'bullying' is now used so regularly that there is understandable confusion as to what bullying is, what it is not and that adults can be bullies. Indeed, we suggest that regular use of the term 'workplace bullying' can dilute perceptions of its severity and result in a lack of understanding of central definitional elements. In particular, the repeated and sustained nature of bullying behavior is often not considered. This leads to a blurring of the line between one-off inappropriate acts and unacceptable behaviors that form a pattern of behavior. This is a vital point. It is the repeated and persistent nature of workplace

bullying that substantially affects targets, and sets it clearly apart from other forms of aggressive behavior.

These differences in understanding undoubtedly pose a problem for those who are tasked with addressing this issue. If individual perceptions of this phenomenon can vary so considerably, is it any wonder that it is so hard to address in the workplace?

What do we know about the causes of workplace bullying?

Workplace bullying should not be characterized as simply a misuse of authority, or interpersonal conflict- it is considerably more complex than that. Normally it is portrayed as a conflict that occurs between a more powerful individual (often perceived as the manager) and a less powerful counterpart (usually perceived as the subordinate). However, bullying can occur between colleagues and even in an upwards direction (subordinates bullying their managers and/or supervisors), suggesting more complicated power dynamics are at play. Workplace bullying is multi-dimensional with individual characteristics of targets, perpetrators and bystanders as well as the work environment itself (stress, organizational change etc.) all contributing, synergistically, to its occurrence and escalation.

Bullying is often portrayed as a conflict between individuals, with the role that the work environment plays commonly not recognized. Recent discussions suggest that our

Capitalist society may inadvertently be encouraging workplace bullying. From this perspective the constant quest for dollars and kudos and 'only the toughest will survive' mentality may be flourishing in organizations. Under these conditions, inaction may occur when managers and workers behave inappropriately as there is a perception that these behaviors may actually assist the organization to more efficiently meet its objectives (although when the human and financial costs of workplace bullying are considered this is not true). Of course, the work environment is not the only reason why workplace bullying occurs. It is often forgotten in favor of viewing the issue as an interpersonal conflict.

Workplace bullying and the law

So where does workplace bullying currently stand from a legal perspective? According to research with targets, 81% of U.S. employers are either resisting doing anything, or doing nothing at all about workplace bullying. In addition, 44.8% of workers with no experience of workplace bullying report inaction by their organizations when it occurs. This may be attributable to there currently being no U.S. state or Federal laws in force to address this phenomenon. Encouragingly however, twenty-nine states (the first of these being California) and two U.S. territories (Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands) have introduced the 'Healthy Workplace' bill, that seeks to create a 'civility code' for organizations to follow. With potential fines for employers who are found

liable of bullying of $25,000 (New York State example), there
is a growing incentive for organizations to become more
proactive in their anti-bullying efforts. Unfortunately
however, these proposed laws are yet to be enacted.

Where individuals have successfully sought legal recourse
it has generally been because the episode was proved to be
related to 'Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964'. The
Act outlaws discrimination or harassment relating to a
person's race, color, disability, age, religion, gender or
sexual orientation. Therefore, if a target is unable to
demonstrate that the bullying they are experiencing relates to
at least one protected category, they currently have little
legal recourse (so someone like Dempsey would find it
difficult to win a case). An example of this occurred in
California where a target's case was only successful
(receiving $340,000) because it was demonstrated that they had
also been subjected to sexual discrimination.

Some targets have been successful using state law. In
these instances, the targets were able to demonstrate exposure
to intentional emotional distress or negligence on the part of
the employer (receiving substantial six-figure amounts). While
there may have only been a handful of cases to date, targets
will continue to seek legal recourse. Thus there are
increasingly strong incentives for employers and organizations
to proactively take action.

What can be done to address Workplace Bullying?

One of the most common approaches organizations use to tackle bullying in the workplace is to have a 'dignity at work' policy or similar (used by a number of U.K. based organizations including Coca-Cola, AXA Insurance, British Telecom and The Royal Mail). The effectiveness of such policies however, is unclear. While some research indicates a workplace bullying policy is beneficial for giving individuals a clear understanding of behaviors that will not be tolerated, others have found it makes little difference. We recommend any policy be accompanied by a comprehensive training and development program that includes interventions such as awareness training and/or skills' training, and the active development of a positive work environment. While policy alone can only communicate the type of desired behavior and the consequences for behaving otherwise, interventions can be used alongside policy to create long-term behavior change.

Primary, secondary and tertiary interventions

Workplace bullying interventions are often classed as formal or informal. Further they are delineated in terms of whether they occur before, during or after a bullying episode (see Table 1 for examples of these classifications). Many suggest there is too much reliance on formal responses. Indeed, in some cases action to address an incident may be delayed as the organization mandates that a formal complaint

must be made before any action can be undertaken (is this what happened in the Thorne and Dempsey case?). Unfortunately, to the target this is often seen as 'too little, too late' because by this point the bullying behavior has escalated to a point where everyone loses. Organizations that are serious about 'doing the right thing' must undertake a more proactive and informal approach as soon as the threat of workplace bullying is evident. We have found addressing inappropriate behavior early and taking a 'no blame' approach, can be a very successful way of resolving conflict before it escalates into bullying.

Insert Table 1 about here

Primary interventions

With regards to primary or preventative interventions, one example of a formal approach to addressing workplace bullying may be an audit of the workplace that highlights areas where bullying may be occurring or could occur. Informal preventative approaches may involve uncovering practices and day-to-day behaviors that tolerate and accept bullying-type behavior in our workplaces. One such intervention is the Civility, Respect and Engagement in the Workplace (CREW) initiative, introduced by the Veterans Healthcare Administration (for the Department of Veteran Affairs) and the National Center for Organization Development (NCOD). This program seeks to cultivate a respectful work environment that

rejects aggressive and inappropriate behavior. It is not a 'bullying program' but a program that encourages positive behavior within the workplace by reducing the acceptance of inappropriate behaviors and increasing the potential for positive interactions to occur.

Secondary Interventions

Formal secondary interventions (implemented during an incident of inappropriate behavior) can include the target seeking support from an independent contact person either within the organization (e.g., contact officer) or externally through an employee assistance program. Advice to targets can include that they keep a diary, noting the behaviors experienced including dates, times, places, who and what was said or done and if there were any witnesses. Furthermore, formal incident reports can be prepared that result in investigation of the bullying accusation (this is what Dempsey did). Ideally any investigation should be completed promptly with concern for the well-being of all, including targets and alleged perpetrators, and natural justice at the forefront.

Alternatively secondary informal approaches can be through the social support targets and witnesses (even perpetrators) receive from each other or from others within and external to the organization. Ideally if primary interventions such as training of positive behaviors and what to do when confronted by bullying behavior have been implemented effectively

bystanders may feel more equipped to step in and de-escalate incidents. This informal intervention can then be followed up more formally to identify if the behavior is part of a pattern of bullying and if further intervention is necessary to resolve the conflict.

Tertiary Interventions

Finally, when an incident of bullying has been identified, tertiary interventions can include grievance and disciplinary procedures. Conferencing as part of a restorative practices approach or mediation between the parties may also be used. It is worth noting however that, due to the power dynamics that occur within workplace bullying, fierce debate surrounds the suitability of mediation in all cases. Employee assistance programs can also offer formal support for targets (e.g., counseling) and perpetrators (e.g., coaching). Furthermore, due to the part that an organization's culture can play with regards to supporting the occurrence of bullying, some re-design of the workplace, such as, physical design, job design, or procedures may be warranted. Informally others within the workplace can continue to reinforce and model respectful behaviors.

Are Managers/Management doing enough?

Despite all that is known about workplace bullying we find ourselves asking the same questions again and again … *Why are so many people experiencing such terrible behavior in our*

workplaces? and *Why aren't we doing more to address it?* Targets of workplace bullying often report they feel unsupported by their bosses and/or the organization (remember the 81% statistic noted earlier?). Some perceive that managers fail to act because they just want to 'sweep the issue under the carpet' and make it go away. While this might be true for some, our research has found evidence indicating that something else may be occurring. Our research suggests that until you have experienced workplace bullying yourself, you simply don't know what it is like and therefore may fail to respond with the urgency it deserves.

The following analogy demonstrates this point more clearly:

There are very few people who would not agree that placing your hand on the racks of a hot oven would be extremely painful - however until you actually experience the searing heat of your skin coming into contact with hot metal, you cannot really comprehend just how much it does actually hurt, or more importantly how long it will take for you to recover.

Our research suggests that this is exactly what is happening with workplace bullying – and it's not just managers that don't seem to comprehend the hurt that it can cause. We have identified that co-workers with no experience of workplace bullying also seem to have the same blind-spot. So

is it any wonder, that despite nearly 20 years of research, bullying still frequently occurs? In the remainder of this article we demonstrate through research evidence that it may be this disconnect in understanding that is thwarting efforts to stamp out bullying in our own workplaces.

Investigating perceptions

We explored this notion by conducting research that investigated perceptions of the severity of workplace bullying behaviors. Our sample consisted of 1014 individuals (509 males; 505 females) from a range of industries in the U.S.A. Using a conservative definition of bullying (i.e., targets are classified only if they had experienced two or more inappropriate behaviors at least weekly for a period of six months) we categorized our sample. In total, 112 (12.3%) individuals were identified as targets of workplace bullying. Just over one third were managers and the remainder were team members. The non-target group consisted of 372 managers and 517 team members.

We sought to find out at what rate targets and non-targets experience behaviors that have been shown to be characteristic of workplace bullying. The behaviors experienced most often are presented in Table 2. While there were similarities with the behaviors experienced across the groups (most of which are subtle and could be seen as covert in nature), bullied managers and team members experience these behaviors almost

four times as often as non-bullied individuals. This
underscores the repeated nature of workplace bullying.
Coincidentally, the behaviors that our bullied team members
reported experiencing seem to mirror the behaviors experienced
by Martin from the Miami Dolphins.

Insert Table 2 about here

In addition, we sought to determine whether the behaviors
that are experienced the most, are also perceived to be the
most severe in impact (see Table 3). What is most telling is
that while individuals with no experience of bullying view
overt and aggressive actions as the most severe, targets
report actions that prevent them from performing their work
duties effectively as being the most impactful. Interestingly,
we found similar results when a parallel study was conducted
with 1052 Australian workers.

Insert Table 3 about here

Does experience matter?

We suggest that these differences may relate to
individual experience (or lack) of the behaviors. For
instance, an individual with no regular experience of being
subjected to behaviors, such as *withholding information* or
being exposed to an unmanageable workload, may find it
difficult to understand how severe the behavior can be for the
recipient. On the other hand, for that same non-target *threats*

of violence or actual physical abuse are easily considered as severe (or in the case of our non-targets moderately severe). Perhaps a reason for this is because we are taught from a very early age (and constantly reminded in the media) that this type of behavior is unacceptable?

What these results also show is that there is a clear difference in perceptions of the harmfulness of workplace bullying behaviors. Even the worst behavior according to non-targets (*threats of violence or actual physical abuse)* is perceived as moderately severe. Furthermore, we found that non-targets rate the impact of this behavior as less severe than any of the other behaviors identified by targets. Even more informative is that non-target managers (managers who have no experience of workplace bullying) rate the harmfulness of workplace bullying behaviors as having less impact than any other group. Table 4 clearly shows this tendency.

Insert Table 4 about here

Experience matters!

Earlier in the article we reported that 80% of workplace bullying targets feel as if little or nothing is done by their bosses to deal with it. Could the results presented in this paper provide a reason as to why this is occurring – that managers without their own personal experiences of workplace bullying just don't realize how much targets are being affected? Our research suggests that even the occasional

experience of inappropriate behavior is not enough for someone
(team-mate or manager) to fully comprehend the harm that
workplace bullying does.

We suggest the difference in perceptions relate directly
to a person's understanding of how severe or destructive
workplace bullying can be, and that this (unfortunately) can
only come from direct and ongoing experience. This lack of
understanding may then lead to inaction (by managers and co-
workers) because they just don't get what workplace bullying
is, how bad it can get, and the need for prompt action! This
is especially important when the practical implications for
effective responses to incidents of bullying or the
implementation of prevention programs are considered. In
short, if non-target managers do not fully comprehend what
workplace bulling is, how can we expect them to devise and
execute the correct responses and implement successful
prevention programs?

A comment by past NFL player and now commentator Michael
Irvin (Pro Football HOF – Class of 2007; 5 time Pro Bowl
selection) on the NFL "GameDay Morning" show (Culture of NFL
locker rooms) on the 3rd of November, 2013 emphasizes this
point.

> "As a leader in the locker room if I feel that it's
> going too far I am going to say something, so I cannot
> imagine no one in that locker room saying a word and

watch this thing go too far. So I don't know where it
lies, does it lie on the guys in the locker room, does
it lie on Mr Martin and his sensitivity, I don't know
where it lies, but it is hard for me as a leader to
imagine it."

We would suggest that Michael Irvin is not alone and that
many people within a range of organizations and professions
find workplace bullying hard to understand. Correspondence
bias or attribution error is one way of explaining the
different perceptions of targets and non-targets. Within this
view, those who are not directly involved in a situation
cannot fully comprehend its impact, leading to invisibility
and construal problems. Thus, if those who have not
experienced workplace bullying are not able to recognize the
situation as bullying (the invisibility problem), how would
they be able to understand it as the target sees it (the
construal problem) and act accordingly?

The solution

So how can we overcome this bias and expect managers (and
others) to respond with the urgency that bullying requires? We
believe that more needs to be done to assist non-targets to
understand the harmful affect workplace bullying creates. Key
to this, we believe, comes though highlighting and reinforcing
the major definitional element – the enduring and repeated
nature of the inappropriate behaviors. The questions is, can

primary prevention efforts such as the implementation of a new written policy or a half-day awareness building seminar achieve permanent change in understanding and perceptions? We suggest NO.

We do propose however, that a comprehensive awareness program is required. Such a program may look something like this: First individuals need to be trained in terms of what bullying is and importantly what it is not. In line with our research findings, emphasis should be made that not all bullying behaviors are easy to recognize and that the behaviors that we might think may cause the most harm are not sometimes the worst for recipients (and vice versa). Participants should also be introduced to the more insidious and subtle nature of bullying, highlighting that behaviors such as someone withholding information from you, excessive monitoring of your work, being exposed to an unmanageable workload or being ignored by others when they occur regularly and in combination with each other can have a crippling effect on targets. Thus, the repeated and cumulative effect of bullying on individuals as well as how this affects targets needs to be reinforced.

In addition, the escalating nature of bullying and the correlating decline in the target's ability to function (remember the back-pack analogy?) needs to be highlighted and demonstrated in a range of ways to participants. This means going beyond showing a video of people talking about bullying

and rather engaging participants in activities that demonstrate the effect of repeated inappropriate behaviors on an individual (the previously presented back-pack activity can be very effective for demonstrating this). We believe this approach will debunk some of the commonly held myths of workplace bullying and reduce the overuse of the term to describe any incident of inappropriate or intimidating behavior in the workplace.

Importantly, a comprehensive training program that seeks to increase participants' understanding of bullying needs to occur within each level of the organization, including those at the very top. But as our study demonstrates, those who are expected to respond and manage cases of bullying or model positive behaviors, may not understand the severity of the phenomenon (unless they have previously on the receiving end of such behaviors). Those who are responsible within the organization for responding to an accusation of bullying or for offering support, be they a manager or contact officer, must take concerns about bullying seriously.

Indeed, if organizations want to eradicate (as far as possible) workplace bullying, substantial resources and time need to be invested not just into training but into organizational structures, procedures and policies. In doing this, organizations will make all members of the workforce responsible for addressing workplace bullying as well as other similar inappropriate behaviors. Ideally we suggest

organizations move to adopting a primary prevention approach that addresses bullying and the culture that condones it. Programs such as the Civility, Respect and Engagement in the Workplace (CREW) initiative can be very effective. In this program constructive interpersonal interactions are developed rather than concentrating on the reduction of inappropriate behaviors.

As part of such an initiative staff from all levels of the organization would engage in skills development that enhances their interpersonal competencies. For instance, as performance management is a potential trigger for accusations of bullying, training could focus not just on how to give constructive feedback but also how to receive performance-related feedback. In this way the focus of preventing workplace bullying is not on just developing individuals' interpersonal skills but also the processes within the organization.

This is where we hit the biggest 'Catch 22.' How can there be organizational change if some who can influence change within the organization (non-target management) do not understand how bad workplace bullying can actually be? This is where we hope this article and others like it will influence understanding of the complexity of workplace bullying as well as the damaging effects it can have on a wide range of people within organizations and their bottom-line. We implore organizations to take on this significant challenge so that

targets such as Dempsey and Martin do not have to endure the

severe and on-going impacts that workplace bullying can cause.

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Table 1
Possible interventions based on formal-informal; primary-secondary-tertiary models

	Primary	Secondary	Tertiary
Formal	• Policies and codes of conduct • Risk audit • Workplace bullying awareness workshops • Training for all staff on how to respond to bullying	• Contact support officers • Targets keep a diary • Incident reports • Prompt investigation into incidents • Employee Assistance Program (EPA)- Counseling	• Grievance policies and procedures • Conferencing or mediation processes • Support for all parties • Re-design aspects of the workplace
Informal	• Developing respectful behaviors in the workplace • Modeling of respectful behavior by management	• Social support for targets and witnesses • Bystanders stepping in	• Conscious/unconscious reinforcement of respectful actions e.g., don't engage in gossip

Table 2.
Five most often experienced behaviors by bullying classification and position

Non-targets		Targets	
Team Members (n=517)	Managers (n=372)	Team Members (n=78)	Managers (n=47)
1. Being ignored or excluded (22.4%)	**1. Being ignored or excluded (23.4%)**	**1. Having your opinions ignored (84.6%)**	**1. Having your opinions ignored (83.0%)**
2. Having your opinions ignored (21.9%)	**2. Having your opinions ignored (23.4%)**	*2. Being shouted at (83.3%)*	2. Spreading of gossip or rumors about you (78.7%)
3. Being ordered to do work below your level of experience (19.7%)	3. Someone withholding information which affects your performance (21.8%)	**3. Being ignored or excluded (78.2%)**	**3. Being ignored or excluded (74.5%)**
4. Being shouted at (17.2%)	4. Being given tasks with unreasonable deadlines (21.2%)	4. Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction when you approach (78.2%)	4. Being humiliated or ridiculed in relation to your work (74.5%)
5. Someone withholding information which affects your performance (16.6%)	*5. Being shouted at (20.7%)*	5. Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work (76.9%)	5. Repeated Reminders of your errors or mistakes (72.3%)

Note: Percentages were derived from the number of participants from that group who had been subjected to the behavior. Behaviors in bold were experience by all groups, behaviors in italics were experience by three of the groups.

Table 3.
Five most severe behaviors as perceived by bullying classification, position, and experience of the behavior

Perception of Severity by Non-targets with no experience of the behavior		Perception of Severity by Targets with experience of the behavior	
Team Members	Managers	Team Members	Managers
1. Threats of violence or abuse or actual physical abuse (Mean=1.92, **MS**) 2. Being shouted at (Mean=1.90, **MS**) 3. Being humiliated (Mean=1.89, **MS**) 4. Having insulting or offensive remarks (Mean=1.88, **MS**) 5. Having allegations made against you (Mean=1.86, **MS**)	1. Threats of violence or abuse or actual physical abuse (Mean=1.91, **MS**) 2. Having insulting or offensive remarks (Mean=1.84, **MS**) 3. Being humiliated (Mean=1.83, **MS**) 4. Intimidating behaviors (1.83, **MS**) 5. Being shouted at (Mean=1.81, **MS**)	1. Someone withholding information which affects your performance (Mean=2.55, **ES**) 2. Excessive monitoring of your work (Mean=2.47, **ES**) 3. Being shouted at (Mean=2.46, **ES**) 4. Being ignored or excluded (2.46, **ES**) 5. Being humiliated (Mean=2.42, **ES**)	1. Being exposed to an unmanageable workload (Mean=2.66, **ES**) 2. Being given tasks with unreasonable deadlines (Mean=2.66, **ES**) 3. Having insulting or offensive remarks (Mean=2.63, **ES**) 4. Being humiliated (Mean=2.60, **ES**) 5. Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction (Mean=2.60, **ES**)

Note: Means are on a 3 point Likert-type scale where 1 = not at all severe and 3 = extremely severe. MS=Ranked as Moderately Severe; ES=Ranked as Extremely Severe

Table 4.
Mean Severity perceptions of the behaviors perceived as most severe by Target-Team members and Target-Managers with an experience of the behavior

Behaviors perceived as most severe by Target-Team Members	Non-targets with no experience of the behavior - severity perceptions		Targets with experience of the behavior - severity perceptions	
	Team Members	Managers	Team Members	Managers
1. Someone withholding information	Moderate	Moderate	*Extreme*	Extreme
2. Excessive monitoring of your work	Moderate	Moderate	*Extreme*	Extreme
3. Being shouted at	Moderate	Moderate	*Extreme*	Extreme
4. Being ignored or excluded	Moderate	Moderate	*Extreme*	Extreme
5. Being humiliated	Moderate	Moderate	*Extreme*	Extreme
Behaviors perceived as most severe by Target-Managers				
1. Being exposed to an unmanageable workload	Moderate	Moderate	Extreme	*Extreme*
2. Being given tasks with unreasonable deadlines	Moderate	Moderate	Extreme	*Extreme*
3. Having insulting or offensive remarks	Moderate	Moderate	Extreme	*Extreme*
4. Being humiliated	Moderate	Moderate	Extreme	*Extreme*
5. Being ignored or facing a hostile reaction	Moderate	Moderate	Extreme	*Extreme*

Note: Light grey shading=lowest severity mean for that behavior; Dark grey shading=highest severity mean for that behavior; Moderate=Perceived as Moderately Severe, Extreme=Perceived as Extremely Severe

Author Bios

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