Exploring the link between Emotional Intelligence and Workplace Bullying: Results from two working samples.

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For more than a decade Emotional Intelligence (EI) has been promoted as a tool that can be used to promote positive individual, team and organizational outcomes in the workplace. Mayer and Salovey (1997) define EI as the awareness, understanding, facilitation and management of emotions in self and others. Although, researchers have demonstrated links between EI and organizational variables, little is known of the links between EI and workplace bullying. It has been argued that workplace bullying is not just a cognitive process but also emotional, suggesting that behavior 'is more of a function of emotional regulation than of rational or cognitive processes' (Sheehan & Jordan, 2003, p. 359). With this in mind some have suggested EI can act as a moderator between workplace stress and aggressive behavior (Slaski & Cartwright, 2003), while others propose that EI training may help reduce the negative effects of bullying (Cartwright & Pappas, 2008; Sheehan, 1999). However, caution is recommended with the potential for EI to be misused to abuse others (Cartwright and Pappas, 2008). Thus, further investigation into the link between EI and workplace bullying is needed prior to testing the efficacy of EI training in addressing workplace bullying.

This presentation will outline results from one study based on two Australian samples (Working Student sample: 104; Union sample: 300) that aimed to explore the question What is the nature of the relationship between EI and workplace bullying? and the following hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1: Is there a direct relationship between EI and workplace bullying?

Hypothesis 2: Do people with high EI perceive less experience of workplace bullying behaviors than those with low EI?

Hypothesis 3: Do people with high EI who have either witnessed or experienced workplace bullying experience less negative reactions at work than those with low EI?

Exploring the data from each sample separately it was found that a relationship between EI (WEIP-6, Jordan et al., 2002) and workplace bullying (NAQ-R, Einarsen et al., 2009) does exist. Specifically, the results reveal that targets of workplace bullying reported significantly lower EI scores than their non-bullied colleagues. Additionally, bullied individuals reported a significantly lower ability to manage their own emotions. Further results in relation to witnesses will be discussed in the presentation. Clearly, these findings indicate that further research examining the relationship between EI and workplace bullying is warranted including research to examine causality.