

Chapter 2

Interpersonal Bullying at Work as the Conceptual Benchmark for Depersonalized Bullying at Work

Workplace bullying encompasses subtle and/or obvious negative behaviours embodying aggression, hostility, intimidation and harm, generally characterized by persistence, displayed by an individual and/or group to another individual and/or group at work, privately and/or publicly, in real and/or virtual forms, in the context of an existing or evolving unequal power relationship (Adapted from D'Cruz and Noronha 2013; Einarsen et al. 2011; Hoel and Beale 2006; Tracy et al. 2006). These behaviours operate at two levels of organizational analysis, namely the interpersonal level and the depersonalized level. Interpersonal bullying, a sociorelational phenomenon (Keashly and Harvey 2006), dominates the discourse within the substantive area. Having been systematically investigated and theorized about across the globe over the last 20 years (Branch et al. 2013; Einarsen et al. 2011; Samnani and Singh 2012), interpersonal bullying has evolved into a singular entity whose source, manifestation, antecedents, course and consequences are well recognized. Depersonalized bullying, a sociostructural phenomenon (Keashly and Harvey 2006), has emerged only recently as an inductive outcome of field-based research (D'Cruz and Noronha 2009; Liefoghe and Mackenzie-Davey 2001). The acknowledgement of its potential adverse effects (D'Cruz and Noronha 2009) and penetration into contemporary workplaces (D'Cruz 2012; D'Cruz et al. 2014) must be accompanied by further empirical efforts to comprehend the phenomenon better. Interpersonal bullying provides the basis for moving meticulously towards this aim. The knowledge already available on the personalized level of workplace bullying sets the stage for developing a similar parity about its institutionalized counterpart.

An overview of the basic hallmarks of interpersonal workplace bullying, as provided in this chapter, serves as an appropriate point of departure in the quest to uncover the essence of depersonalized workplace bullying as such an endeavour highlights the various attributes pertinent to establishing equivalences between the two concepts. Through dimensions such as source, visibility, form, aetiology, target orientation, temporality, power dynamics and outcomes for targets, bullies,

Table 2.1 The distinctive features of interpersonal bullying at work

Dimension	Interpersonal bullying at work
Source	Downwards, upwards, horizontal or cross-level co-bullying
Visibility	Public and/or private
	Direct, overt and obvious and/or indirect, subtle and ambiguous
Form	Real (traditional) and/or virtual (cyber)
Aetiology	Target characteristics
	Bully characteristics
	Work environment factors
Target orientation	Specific—singling out of a person or group of persons
Temporality	Usually persistent but also includes single incident
Power dynamics	Illegitimate personal ‘power’ of bully
Outcomes for targets	Adverse physical and mental health
	Growing powerlessness
	Exit response
Outcomes for bullies	Mixed depending on aetiology and trajectory
Outcomes for bystanders	Adverse as per current research but anticipated to be mixed depending on stand taken
Outcomes for organizations	Negative in terms of financial and non-financial indicators

bystanders and organizations, the particular nature of interpersonal bullying at work is presented below and summarized in Table 2.1.

Manifestation

The sources of and visibility and forms through which interpersonal bullying at work is demonstrated are varied. Though downwards bullying (from superior to subordinate) is the most common source (Branch et al. 2013; Einarsen et al. 2011), horizontal (between peers) (Einarsen et al. 2011), upwards (subordinate to superior) (Branch et al. 2007) and/or cross-level co-bullying (where peers and/or subordinates join superiors) (D’Cruz and Rayner 2012), involving a single or multiple bully(ies) and target(s) (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006), are also reported. Instances of targets turning into bullies, termed as provocative victims by Olweus (2003), have been documented, underscoring that exposure to negative acts can trigger bullying as a ripple or reciprocal effect and blur the line between the two protagonists (De Cuyper et al. 2009; Hauge et al. 2009). The direct, obvious and in-your-face and/or indirect, subtle and behind-your-back manifestations (Bloch 2012; Samnani 2013) of bullying could be enacted privately and/or publicly (Lutgen-Sandvik 2006). Boundarylessness, concreteness, permanence, invisibility and anonymity inhere within virtual/cyber forms of bullying, adding to the features it already shares with real/traditional (face-to-face interactions in a physical site) bullying

(D'Cruz and Noronha 2013). Visibility and form have implications for the extent to which bullying becomes a communal experience (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005) and whether evidence of its enactment becomes available, complicating target coping (D'Cruz and Noronha 2013; Samnani 2013).

Targets' Experiences

Employees subjected to interpersonal workplace bullying undergo severe strain, represented physically, emotionally and behaviourally and indicative of poor health and decreased well-being (Nielsen and Einarsen 2012). Low self-esteem, poor self-confidence, self-hatred, sleep problems, anxiety, anger, depression, nervousness, insecurity, suspicion, bitterness, concentration difficulties, chronic fatigue and various somatic problems as well as suicidal thoughts are commonly reported (Hogh et al. 2011). By and large, targets are unable to successfully apply problem-focused coping strategies to ameliorate or halt the situation and end up opting for emotion-focused, passive and avoidant coping strategies. Indeed, attempts at redressal through formal organizational measures, generally linked to workplace human resource management (HRM) practices, further victimize targets who, being cornered and bereft of options, quit the employer organization (D'Cruz and Noronha 2010a, b). Targets' exit response is usually considered to be unsuccessful, maladaptive and destructive for the individual and for the organization (D'Cruz and Noronha 2010a, b; Hogh and Dofradottir 2001; Hogh et al. 2011; Niedl 1996; Rayner 1997, 1999; Zapf and Gross 2001), pointing out that targets feel cornered, helpless and powerless over time, emphasizing that bullying develops into a no-win and no-control situation for them (D'Cruz and Noronha 2010a, b). As Samnani and Singh (2012) state, target outcomes are both person-related (psychological and physiological) and work-related. Lutgen-Sandvik (2005) maintains that targets' defencelessness arises only after their display of agency and efforts to resist and resolve the situation have failed. Interpersonal bullying is believed to be a more crippling and devastating problem for employees than all other work-related stress put together, constituting an extreme type of social stressor at work (Zapf et al. 1996). Yet, recent enquiries speak of targets' internal locus of control, opportunity to start afresh, sense of well-being and renewed sense of self (D'Cruz 2010; D'Cruz and Noronha 2012; Lutgen-Sandvik 2008).

Concomitant with the recognition of the severe adverse impact, target characteristics are seen as responsible for the onset of the bullying, forming part of an agglomeration of factors linked also to the bully and the workplace that trigger this misbehaviour. Target-related aetiology broadly includes personality, social skills and group dynamics (Samnani and Singh 2012; Zapf and Einarsen 2011). Interestingly, contemporary research describes instances where targets show counteraggression (Hauge et al. 2009; Jenkins et al. 2012; Lee and Brotheridge 2006), turning into provocative victims (Olweus 2003) who bully the perpetrator and/or other colleagues at the workplace. Counteraggression, which may/may not

subsume revenge and retaliation, gives targets a chance to regain control and to enhance self-worth (Hauge et al. 2009; Jenkins et al. 2012; Lee and Brotheridge 2006), notwithstanding its negative dimension.

Bullies' Experiences

Whereas perpetrator behaviour in interpersonal workplace bullying is ascribed to micropolitical strategies, attempts to protect self-esteem and lack of social skills by studies that rely on mainly target, and sometimes bystander, accounts (Bloch 2012; Jenkins et al. 2012; Zapf and Einarsen 2011), bullies themselves provide a different picture. Bloch's (2012) participants (i.e., the bullies) maintained that though targets were undergoing various personal or professional difficulties that called for empathy and/or sympathy, participants viewed them as violating workplace values and norms and challenging workplace hierarchy and positions, sometimes without any sense of propriety, concern and remorse. A few participants pointed out that while their initial responses to the targets were those of sensitivity and compassion, complying with social requirements associated with the circumstances, these remained short-lived as they found targets taking advantage of their positive stands and further disregarding workplace expectations. Participants' consequent reaction which included contempt, resentment, anger, vengeance and disgust caused them to engage in bullying. With considerations of morality undergirding bullying behaviour, participants sought to justify and legitimize their actions not just individually by themselves but also jointly through their work groups, in addition to making target-related attributions.

Accused bullies in Jenkins et al.'s (2012) research mostly denied allegations (though 26 % were substantiated). Apart from interpersonal differences as the cited cause, managerial efforts to deal with difficult employees whose performance was poor or behaviour was inappropriate while, in keeping with the former's job requirements, were considered by the latter as being singled out for harassment. Besides, conflicts arising due to organizational processes and practices that the manager was not responsible for were interpreted as bullying. Whereas managers in stressful environments connected their negative workplace behaviours to the context, considering their actions to be reasonable though unpopular aspects of their role, inadequate coping could be the underlying factor. Poor social skills, leading to inappropriate behaviour that is not perceived as problematic by the manager, who views the complainant as overly sensitive, emerged as relevant. Interestingly, 66 % of Jenkins et al.'s (2012) participants described themselves as targets of bullying. Where managers experienced upwards bullying, they usually refrained from reporting it either due to discomfort about admitting to such an experience and/or perceptions that handling such behaviour is part of their job. Yet, it was not uncommon for their bullying subordinates to formally complain against them, indicating the importance of timing in determining who gets labelled as the bully versus the target. Nonetheless, not only does facing

complaints about being a bully adversely affect managers, precipitating severe emotional distress, but also the absence of union support available to subordinates is brought home sharply. Twenty-five per cent of Jenkins et al.'s (2012) participants faced dismissal or were forced to quit the organization as a result of the allegations of bullying against their names.

Target Orientation

That interpersonal bullying at work involves the singling out, harassment and victimization of an individual or a group of individuals, who experience extreme adverse effects as a result, highlights the target orientation of the phenomenon. That is, the bully's aggressive behaviour is discriminatory, focusing on a specific individual or set of individuals who are negatively impacted, rather than being generally applied across workplace colleagues who are thereby spared from harm (Einarsen 2000; Einarsen et al. 2011). Indeed, the systematic identification, intimidation and cornering of targets by bullies to the point of powerlessness and defencelessness mark the interpersonal bullying situation (D'Cruz 2012; Einarsen et al. 2011). Achieving a sense of one-up-personship (Branch et al. 2007; Jenkins et al. 2012), either for predatory or conflict-related reasons (Einarsen et al. 2011), is seen as the motive behind interpersonal bullying. Nonetheless, the issue of intent remains controversial, with targets and bullies likely to differ on this dimension (Einarsen et al. 2011; Zapf and Einarsen 2005). Perception and attribution of intent are significant in and integral to targets' assessment of their experience. Targets are convinced that bullying is not accidental but purports to harm them and this view clinches their labelling of the situation as abusive (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005). Yet, it is almost impossible to verify bullies' intent as the deniability dynamic provides them with an effective cover (Rayner et al. 2002). Further, even where the motive giving rise to bullying can be determined, it may be purely instrumental in achieving the bully's and/or the organization's goal rather than linked to unleashing harm towards the target (Einarsen et al. 2011; Zapf and Einarsen 2005). Obviously, including both target and bully perspectives not only showcases the complexity that inheres in an interpersonal workplace bullying situation but also allows for a balanced account of the phenomenon to inform intervention (Bloch 2012; Jenkins et al. 2012).

Power

Interpersonal bullying at work reflects an asymmetry of power between targets and bullies (Einarsen et al. 2011). While authority linked to the organizational hierarchy may play a role in situations of superior to subordinate bullying, this may not be the case in instances where peer-to-peer bullying or subordinate to superior

bullying takes place, being facilitated by issues of social affiliations, expert power, target dependence/inadequacy, work group dynamics and so on (Branch et al. 2007, 2013). Yet, regardless of the formal workplace relationship, interpersonal bullying contributes to the growing powerlessness of the target who over time perceives himself/herself as having little or no recourse. That is, while initially targets may feel as strong as the bully, they gradually realize their weaker position, ending up vulnerable and defenceless (Branch et al. 2013; Einarsen et al. 2011; Zapf and Einarsen 2005). Interpersonal bullying is thus an interaction between two unequally matched protagonists, indicating a sovereign conceptualization of power as a zero-sum game (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005). Essentially, interpersonal bullying involves the illegitimate use of personal power and the overstepping of widely accepted limits of appropriate behaviour (Branch et al. 2007, 2013; Liefvooghe and Mackenzie-Davey 2001). Interestingly, emerging arguments counter this dichotomous depiction, citing the dialectical character of power as evidenced in targets' coping strategies. That is, while targets feel and describe their sense of impotence, they simultaneously resist the bully even though these attempts may have limited and/or delayed outcomes (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005). Namie and Namie (2000) point out that targets' agency is empowering and central to feelings of control and efficacy.

Temporality

Persistence, which includes both duration and repetition of hostile acts, has generally been associated with interpersonal workplace bullying. The length of bullying appears to be closely related to the frequency of bullying, with those bullied regularly reporting prolonged exposure (Einarsen and Skogstad 1996). It is this persistence that sets interpersonal bullying apart from other misbehaviours at work (Rayner et al. 2002) and gives it a corrosive nature (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005). In terms of duration, bullying seems to move on a continuum from short-term to long-lasting exposure to negative acts, with a 6-month time frame often being used for the purpose of operationalization. The choice of temporal cut-off stems from assessment procedures in psychiatric disorders which invariably result from such a difficult and often traumatic experience (Einarsen et al. 2011; Zapf and Einarsen 2005). Nonetheless, targets usually report that bullying continues beyond the 6-month criterion (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005; Zapf et al. 2011). In terms of repetition, bullying is generally defined as habitual, patterned and systematic. Yet, while an episodic recurrence of aggressive behaviours on a weekly basis is commonly agreed upon, being bullied with even more regular frequency as well as being subjected to a single severe bullying encounter experienced as a critical life event are equally deserving of recognition (Einarsen et al. 2011; Lutgen-Sandvik 2005; Zapf and Einarsen 2005). There is growing cognizance of the intensity of one-off incidents, acknowledging the potential of a single extreme event to unleash

grievous harm, particularly given individual differences in the appraisal of and coping with various experiences (Branch et al. 2013).

Employer Organizations

Though interpersonal bullying involves essentially two sets of protagonists, namely bullies and targets, workplaces influence and are affected by the phenomenon. Bullying stems not just from protagonists' characteristics but features of work organizations form part of the multicausal view of interpersonal bullying (Branch et al. 2013; Hauge et al. 2009; Salin and Hoel 2011).

Organizational antecedents such as organizational culture and climate, leadership, job design and work organization and organizational change (Salin and Hoel 2011; Samnani and Singh 2012) operate within the work environment hypothesis where situational factors give rise to bullying behaviour between individuals (Salin and Hoel 2011). Organizations where interpersonal bullying is ignored or overlooked indirectly permit it to continue even though it is not integrated into the work culture or climate—in other words, bullying gets normalized and reproduced since it is not addressed and nipped in the bud (Branch et al. 2007; Salin and Hoel 2011). Tyrannical [(anti-subordinate and pro-organization), similar to autocratic or coercive styles], derailed (anti-subordinate and anti-organization) and laissez-faire (where abdication of responsibility prevails) forms of leadership exemplify three types of destructive leadership behaviour which are associated with bullying (Aasland et al. 2010). A stressful work environment characterized by job insecurity, role conflict and ambiguity, work group disharmony, heavy workload and intensification, high job complexity, low job autonomy and poor ambient and ergonomic work conditions provides a fertile ground (Baillien et al. 2009; Branch et al. 2007; De Cuyper et al. 2009; Hauge et al. 2007, 2009). Various forms of organizational change including restructuring, budgetary cuts, mergers, new top management, downsizing, adoption of technology and altered employment patterns increase bullying either directly or indirectly, often with greater emphasis on task-related misbehaviours (Baillien and DeWitte 2009; Skogstad et al. 2007). With the foregoing studies incorporating an interpersonal level of analysis, Leymann's (1996) view that anyone can become a target of workplace bullying under the right circumstances is reinforced.

Yet, notwithstanding the organizational triggers, interpersonal bullying at work entails numerous direct and indirect costs for employers such as sickness, absenteeism, reduced productivity, transfers, turnover and replacement, complaints and grievance processes, litigation and target compensation (D'Cruz 2012; D'Cruz and Noronha 2010a, b; 2011). While in monetary terms, an average case of workplace bullying can cost an organization between US\$ (United States dollar) 30,000 to US\$ 100,000, the non-monetary costs of weakening of employee morale, motivation, efficiency, satisfaction and commitment as well as damage to employer reputation and loss of public goodwill are equally prohibitive (Hoel et al. 2011).

Moreover, instances of workplace bullying reside in organizational memory and are often relived among organizational members as well as passed on to new organizational members, sustaining a climate of apprehension (Hoel and Cooper 2000).

Bystanders

Organizational members/employees who, as colleagues of the bully(ies) and target(s), observe and witness the interpersonal bullying situation double up as bystanders. Despite the limited research attention accorded to bystanders thus far, it is widely acknowledged that far from being a neutral force in the bullying situation, their stand is of crucial significance in determining its evolution (D'Cruz 2012; Mulder et al. 2013; Paull et al. 2012; van Heugten 2011). Playing a variety of roles (see Paull et al. 2012 for a detailed typology), bystanders' heterogeneous behaviour varies from apathy to agency and can be broadly classified into actively colluding with the bully, taking no position and supporting the target (D'Cruz 2012; van Heugten 2011). While fear stemming from job insecurity, paucity of training and skills, lack of status and inexperience prompts passivity (van Heugten 2011), even among bystanders who wish to help (Rayner 1999), this silence empowers bullies and underscores the acceptance of incivility while weakening targets and furthering their victimization. Support promotes target coping, not only restoring target confidence but also facilitating joint redressal attempts in spite of target and bystander trepidation about consequences and limited success in resolving the situation (van Heugten 2011). Whereas D'Cruz and Noronha (2011) speak of contextual factors such as workplace relationships and managerial ideology, Mulder et al. (2013) point to bystanders' target-related attributions and anticipated stigma by association in the attempt to understand bystander behaviour.

Bystanders of interpersonal workplace bullying are known to suffer negative outcomes such as increased stress and lowered motivation, job satisfaction, commitment, efficiency and productivity, as a result of observing bullying, anticipating being targeted and being/feeling unable to help targets (Hoel et al. 2011). It is not uncommon for them to consider leaving the organization as a result of witnessing bullying (Rayner 1999). Undoubtedly, the adverse effect of bullying on bystanders adds to organizational costs.

Theoretical Frameworks

The most comprehensive models of interpersonal bullying at work integrating the foregoing discussion are those of Einarsen et al. (2011) and Branch et al. (2013) whose macro-, meso- and microlevel foci cover not just the antecedents, course and consequences but also the ambiguities and complexities involved. Einarsen et al. (2011) highlight the initiation of bullying, linked to perpetrator, target and

organizational features, the role of perception, the impact of bullying on targets, perpetrators and organizations and the influence of intervention as well as the linkages between these factors, with cultural and socioeconomic contexts forming the backdrop. Branch et al. (2013), drawing on Weiss and Cropanzano's affective events theory (AET), describe both the societal, organizational and individual characteristics, interactions and responses as well as the processual and temporal dimensions that make up bullying, underscoring the dynamic and cyclical nature of the phenomenon and identifying avenues for intervention. Samnani and Singh's (2012) framework, comprising target and bully qualities and group, organizational and societal factors as well as effects at all these levels, encompasses similar degrees of depth and breadth as Einarsen et al. (2011) and Branch et al. (2013), presenting a more static depiction. Other models, noteworthy for the strength of their explanatory power, are specific in scope, looking at causes (e.g., Baillien et al. 2009), communication cycles (e.g., Lutgen-Sandvik 2003), social exchange (e.g., Parzefall and Salin 2010), escalation of conflict (e.g., Zapf and Gross 2001) and counselling (e.g., Tehrani 2011), to cite a few.

Interventions

Measures to address interpersonal bullying at work could operate at primary, secondary and/or tertiary levels, focus on targets, bullies, bystanders and/or organizations and be located within and/or outside the workplace (D'Cruz 2012; Ferris 2004, 2009; Saam 2010; Tehrani 2012; Vartia and Leka 2011). Anti-bullying legislations have been enacted in some countries (e.g., Sweden and the Netherlands) or in provinces in other nations (e.g., South Australia in Australia) (Yamada 2011). Organizations institute anti-bullying policies, culture building, awareness and training sessions (including leadership coaching and bystander sensitization) as well as grievance and redressal procedures, remedial and corrective actions and assistance programmes (D'Cruz 2012; Ferris 2009; Namie and Namie 2009; Saam 2010; Salin 2009; Vartia and Leka 2011). Targets, bullies and their significant others can access extra-organizational avenues such as legal advice, psychiatric and psychological support and medical aid (Field 2010, 2011; Schwickerath and Zapf 2011; Tehrani 2011).

In spite of the availability of intra-organizational mechanisms, employer commitment to resolving and eliminating workplace bullying is seen as critical to successful intervention. Indifferent top management and weak HRM positions promote rhetorical responses which further victimize targets and shield bullies (D'Cruz and Noronha 2010a, b, 2011; Ferris 2004, 2009; Harrington et al. 2012; Lewis and Rayner 2003) and boost the widely regarded view that collectivization endeavours through trade union action and co-worker mobilization are the sole effective solutions to workplace bullying (Beale and Hoel 2011; D'Cruz 2012; D'Cruz and Noronha 2010a, b, 2011; Hoel and Beale 2006; Ironside and Seifert 2003).

It is relevant to state that though interpersonal bullying at work is considered distinctive from harassment arising from membership to social categories such as gender/sex, race, sexuality, caste, religion and illness/disability, this point is contentious. Some researchers seek to distinguish bullying from other recognized types of harassment while their counterparts argue that these are closely linked and hence cannot be differentiated to the point of emphasizing one and excluding or trivializing the other (Lutgen-Sandvik 2005). Targets' own experiences indicate their inextricable enmeshment as social identities could trigger interpersonal bullying and category-based harassment could precede/follow interpersonal bullying, with targets themselves either failing to separate the two or considering their dual experiences as unified and singular. Thus, while analytical differences are important to tease out the simultaneous and sometimes subtle manifestations of numerous convergent entities, their complex and dynamic intermingling to the point of a nuanced fusion must be recognized and deciphered (D'Cruz and Noronha 2013). Currently, there are empirical efforts underway, particularly in the UK (see Fevre et al. 2012, 2013), to explore bullying in relation to social identity. Nonetheless, in viewing the intersections between different types of harassment and interpersonal bullying at work, it is pertinent to acknowledge that while both phenomena can be jointly enacted particularly because social categories make some people easier to target (Lutgen-Sandvik and Tracy 2012), they should not be conflated to the extent of obscuring their particular nature and undermining their individual specificity, visibility and need for action (Lee 2001).

The foregoing sections underscore that insights into interpersonal bullying at work include source, visibility, form, aetiology, target orientation, temporality, power dynamics and outcomes for targets, bullies, bystanders and organizations. Moreover, theoretical frameworks with varying range of foci and explanatory capacity as well as primary, secondary and tertiary interventions within and outside the organization characterize the field. Knowledge of depersonalized bullying at work must be developed on similar lines in order to come up to par and allow an even progress of the substantive area. Using the various dimensions of interpersonal bullying at work known so far as benchmarks, the empirical studies included in Chap. 3 seek to achieve equivalences in the understanding of depersonalized bullying at work.

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