

The Office at Your Office: Head of the Committee Against Workplace Bullying

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to determine the need for formalization of workplace bullying policies in organizations and which level of the organization should develop and administer those policies. While the issue of bullying has been a popular topic in recent news and personal conversations, it has not been adequately researched in workplace settings. We surveyed executives from 50 separate organizations to examine their workplace bullying practices. We found that acceptance of bullying policies was more likely when those policies were developed by Human Resource Departments and when policies were formalized. Women felt more strongly than men about having a workplace bullying policy and indicated a stronger understanding of other company policies. Organizational size did not have a significant relationship to responses.

Introduction

While the issue of bullying continues to become increasingly popular, it is important that organizations recognize the growing concern of bullying in workplace settings. Many researchers have studied bullying in a general sense and the direct effects it can have on people such as lack of self-confidence (Townend, 2008) and post-traumatic stress disorder (Gustafsson, 1996) as well as why people bully. However, there has not been adequate research on the following topics: how to determine a need for a workplace bullying policy, how to establish a policy, what to include in a workplace bullying policy, and who should create and administer the policy.

According to Annie Townend, a consultant and business psychologist, bullying most frequently occurs related to: gender, race, age, religion, and homophobia – all issues relevant to workplace settings (Townend, 2008). With no legal definition and a handful of varying court decisions on the topic, it is important that organizations take a proactive approach with workplace bullying practices. Organizations cannot wait for laws to be created before addressing bullies at work – the cost is too high (Daniel, 2006). Lewis Mathy believes that “bullying is the sexual harassment of 20 years ago; everybody knows about it, but nobody wants to admit it” (Russell, 2001, p. 1).

While harassment is illegal, bullying in the workplace is not. Therefore, there is not a universally accepted definition of workplace bullying (Yuen, 2005). For the purpose of this study, the following workplace bullying definition was used: continuous, unwanted behavior towards an employee by another employee (or group of employees) with the intent to cause physical or emotional harm (Lee & Brotheridge, 2010; Schat & Kelloway, 2005).

In a poll conducted by Zogby International for the Workplace Bullying Institute with 7,740 online interviews, it concluded that an estimated 54 million people (about 37% of American workers) have been bullied at work and that bullying is four times more common than harassment (Deschenaux, 2007). As workplace bullying continues to be a problem, organizations need to address the issue directly. It is important for organizations to establish a clear, formalized workplace bullying policy to create more formalized and comfortable workplace settings for all employees.

The objective of this study is to determine the need for formalization of workplace bullying policies (determining if executives recognize a need for a policy) and which level of the organization should develop and administer the policy. The three organizational levels studied were Human Resources/Upper Management, Department Managers, and an Employee Taskforce team.

Theoretical Background

Research on workplace bullying began in Sweden during the 1908s when Heinz Leymann, a German-born psychiatrist, was focusing on schoolyard bullying and later connected a link between bullying and adults in workplace settings (Olweus, 2003). Through the years, many bullying-related studies have been completed such as mobbing and work harassment (Einarsen, Raknes, & Mattheisen, 1994). It has been studied in a variety of locations around the world, including Australia, South Africa, Austria, and Germany. However, the topic of workplace bullying did not become popular in the United States until the 1990s (Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, & Alberts, 2007).

Referred to as an “epidemic” in 2008, workplace bullying has become an increasingly popular problem in workplace settings due to the lack of policies for preventing and handling this issue in the United States (Bryner, 2008). The poll conducted by Zogby International for the Workplace Bullying Institute also indicated the following results out of the 7,740 collected surveys: in 62 percent of the cases, employers did nothing, 72 percent of bullies were bosses or managers, and bullying affects half of American workers (71.5 million workers when witnesses are included) (Deschenaux, 2007). The effect that workplace bullying has on organizations can be costly. Costs to organizations can include health care costs, legal costs, reduction in efficiency and productivity, and the expense incurred to hire and train new staff (Daniel, 2006).

Research on why people bully others has concluded that bullies are typically driven by a need for power and control (Namie & Namie, 2000). Research has also found that targets of bullies often experience the following problems: health problems such as anxiety and physical issues (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001), increased risk of depression (Namie, 2003), alcohol abuse (Richman, Rospenda, Flaherty, & Freels, 2001), and even suicide (Leymann, 1990). Organizations should be concerned about the effects of workplace bullying on their employees and make changes to ensure that workplace bullying is not only

addressed, but not tolerated. Because bullying can have a “ripple effect” across the organization, it is not something to be ignored (Coyne, Seigne, & Randall, 2000).

Policy Development

To create an organizational policy, it must be formalized. Having an informal policy – one that is not known or accepted by all employees – will lead to confusion and consequently, less employees will follow it. To formalize a policy, a company can do the following: include the policy in the company handbook, introduce and explain the policy in employee training, and practice the policy at all levels of the organization.

Having a formalized workplace bullying policy is not only beneficial for the organization; it’s beneficial to the employees as well. When employees believe that their organization is committed to helping achieve their socio-emotional and tangible needs, employees will be more committed to the organization and therefore, help it reach its goals (Eisenberger *et al.*, 2004). Therefore, have a workplace bullying policy creates a type of environment where the organization can show their commitment to their employees.

To have a formalized workplace bullying policy, an organization must do the following: create a policy, make sure employees are aware of the policy, ensure acceptance and knowledge of the policy at all levels of the organization, include the policy in various workplace locations (employee handbook, workplace posters, website, etc.), and ensure that all guidelines are followed and frequently updated. Therefore, it is our belief that having a formalized workplace bullying policy leads to greater acceptance of the policy by employees in the organization.

H1: Having a formalized workplace bullying policy will result in greater acceptance of that policy.

With little research on the impact of development source – the level of the organization that creates and administers company policies – it is difficult to measure employee acceptance. Three levels of the organization studied were Human Resources/Upper Management, Department Managers, and an Employee Taskforce as the development sources. Based on the three studied levels, we believe that there will be greater acceptance of the workplace bullying policy if the Human Resources Department and/or Upper Management creates and administers it. If an Employee Taskforce teams creates the policy, we believe it would have the greatest rejection.

H2(A): If only the Human Resources Department and/or Upper Management creates and administers the workplace bullying policy, there will be greater acceptance of the policy.

H2(B): If only an Employee Taskforce creates the workplace bullying policy, it will be negatively accepted.

Need for Policy

A variety of research has indicated that there are differences in emotional reactions based on gender. Therefore, one would assume that men and women handle workplace bullying in different ways. A common stereotype suggests that women are more emotional than men in terms of feelings and

emotional responses to different situations (Heesacker *et al.*, 1999). Other studies have found that women, in comparison to men, report higher levels of “emotional responsiveness” (Bradley *et al.*, 2001) and are more emotionally reactive to negative behaviors (Vance *et al.*, 2004).

H3: Women feel a greater need for a workplace bullying policy.

H4: Women have a better understanding of company policies due to the need for a policy and requests to frequently update and remind employees of the workplace bullying policy.

Methods

Sample

Data was collected from 50 executives each at different organizations. The organizations represented a wide variety of industries ranging from non-profit organizations and banking to city government and retail. The positions of executives included the following titles: Human Resource Managers, Business Managers, City Administrators, CEOs, Presidents, Owners, and Executive Directors. For the purpose of this study, executives were placed into the following categories:

- Human Resource Managers
- Business Managers/CEOs/Presidents/Owners
- Administrators/Executive Directors

Of the 50 executives, 66 percent of respondents represented Business Managers/CEOs, Presidents and Owners.

Males represented 54 percent of respondents and respondents reported an average of 11 years at their position in their current organization. Respondents represented an average age of 43.7 years and a range of 20 to 65 years old. In addition, 70 percent of respondents had at least a Bachelor’s Degree and 24 percent of respondents had at least one type of professional certification.

The survey also represented a variety of organizational sizes. Respondents were asked to identify the size of their current organization - at all locations - at the following levels (with the number in parentheses representing the number of respondents at those organizational sizes):

- 1 – 15 employees – 28%
- 16 – 50 employees – 22%
- 51 – 100 employees – 8%
- 101 – 300 employees – 14%
- 301 – 500 employees – 8%
- More than 500 employees – 20%

Based on the collected data, all organizational sizes were represented. Exactly 50 percent of respondents were from small organizations (50 employees or less) while the other 50 percent represented medium to large organizations (more than 50 employees).

Procedure

Surveys were administered via email with a link included to the online survey (via Survey Monkey). Participants in this study were asked on a voluntary basis with the knowledge (given in the email) that survey results would be kept confidential with no direct benefits to those who chose to participate or adverse effect to those who chose not to participate.

The response rate was 67 percent. Out of the 75 surveys sent out via an online survey (Survey Monkey), there were 56 respondents. However, there were only 50 usable surveys as some participants did not fully complete the survey and were therefore, thrown out. The survey was administered in April 2011 and participants were given 2 weeks to complete the survey.

Research Design

The survey was created by combining a minimum of 3 questions per variable, manipulated and randomly placed in the survey. Each participant was asked to read 50 different statements about their organization and rate their feelings to the statement on a 1 to 5 scale, ranging from Strongly Disagree to Strongly Agree. Since there are no pre-determined scales for workplace bullying and our focus areas, we created the scale and statements/questions based on existing research themes, the literature review, and our experience in Human Resources. The survey was designed to take no more than 15 minutes to complete.

Measures: Dependent Variables

Our first dependent variable measured, the need for a bullying policy, had an alpha of .878. It included the following 3 items: "A policy would be helpful in responding to workplace bullying in our organization", "Our organization would benefit from having a workplace bullying policy", and "Our organization would not benefit from having a workplace bullying policy".

Our second dependent variable, acceptance of the workplace bullying policy, had an alpha of .789. We used the following 5 items to measure this variable: "I would read my organization's workplace bullying policy", "I would communicate the workplace bullying policy to others in the organization", "If I saw bullying at work, I would report it", "If I saw bullying at work, I would use the company policy to follow up", and "There are set guidelines on how to report violations of company policies".

Participants used a one-to-five scale to identify how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the previous statements in relation to their work experience at their current organization (in their current position). The responses of the participants assisted in determining correlations between various hypotheses.

Measures: Independent Variables

The first independent variable measured, frequency of updating policies, had an alpha of .733. The following 7 items were used to measure this variable: "I receive updates/reminders of the workplace bullying policy once a year", "I receive updates/reminders of company policies once a year", "I receive updates/reminders of the workplace bullying policy two to five times a year", "I receive

updates/reminders of company policies two to five times a year”, “I feel knowledgeable about the workplace bullying policy”, “I feel knowledgeable about other company policies”, and “When I joined this organization, I was given an employee handbook”.

The next independent variable, formalization of policies, used a 5 item scale and had an alpha of .807. Items used in this scale were the following: “Our organization has a workplace bullying policy”, “Our organization has a sexual harassment policy”, “Our organization has an ethics policy”, “Our organization holds diversity training”, and “Our organization has a dress code.

The last independent variable measured, development source, had 3 items and no reported alpha. The items measured, but not significant were: “HR/Upper Management should develop and maintain the workplace bullying policy”, “Department Managers should develop and maintain the workplace bullying policy”, and “An employee taskforce team should be assembled to help develop and maintain the workplace bullying policy”.

Participants used a one-to-five scale to identify how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the previous statements in relation to their work experience at their current organization (in their current position). The responses of the participants assisted in determining correlations between various hypotheses.

The following chart represents the measures of this study and the related hypotheses:

Variable	Hypothesis	# of Items	Alpha
Need for WB Policy (DV)	H3	3	.878
Acceptance of WB Policy (DV)	H1, H2A, H2B	5	.789
Frequency of Updating Policies (IV)	H4	7	.733
Formalization of Policies (IV)	H1	5	.807
Development Source (IV)	H2A, H2B	3	N/A

Measures: Other Variables

While other variables were not included in my hypotheses, I did collect other data to help support my study. I also measured the following independent variables (with the numbers in parentheses representing their alphas):

- Methods: Where company policies can be found (i.e. employee handbook, posters, etc.) - (.843)
- Orientation towards bullying sensitivity: If and when employees would report bullying – (.937)

- Enforcement Source: Who should be in charge of enforcing company policies (Human Resources or Department Managers) and the need for continuous training on company policies – (HR: .809, Department Managers: .829)

Participants used a one-to-five scale to identify how strongly they agreed or disagreed with the previous statements in relation to their work experience at their current organization (in their current position). While these measures did not directly relate to my hypotheses, they can be used for future research and support for validity of this study.

Hypotheses & Results

Hypotheses were tested using a variety of methods. To look at the significance of combined variables and how much they overlap, we must look at the significance of correlations (represented in the chart below). The stars located near the alphas represent the significance of the correlation between the measured variables. If there is not a star, there was not a significant correlation.

	ABuPol	NPol	ForPol	FrePol	DevSource	Gender	Age
Acceptance WB Policy	[.789]						
Need for WB Policy	.360**	[.878]					
Formalization of Policies	.623***	.193	[.807]				
Frequency of Updating Policies	.610***	.279*	.792***	[.733]			
Development Source	.006	.164	.039	.118			
Gender	.269	.377**	.307*	.284*	.141		
Age	-.053	.009	-.301*	-.078	-.012	.103	
Education	-.037	-.023	-.167	-.119	.365**	-.015	-.209
* < .05, ** < .01, *** <= .001							

For each hypothesis, we included individual results and each table shows a representation of the total amount of variance that the independent variable predicts of the dependent variable.

Results

H1: Having a formalized workplace bullying policy will result in greater acceptance of that policy.

Model	R	R ²	R ² Change	F Change	Sig. F Change
1	.281	.079	.079	2.015	.145
2	.641	.411	.332	25.954	.000

Model 1: Age, Gender

Model 2: Age, Gender, Formalization of Policies

A hierarchical regression was run for this hypothesis. In Model 2, this hypothesis was significant (.000) and therefore, supported. Given H1, formalization of policies predicts 33.2 percent of the acceptance of the workplace bullying policy.

The effect size of this hypothesis is large (R=.576) for the test Model 2 variable. Therefore, we can determine that formalization is important when it comes to a workplace bullying policy in a workplace setting.

H2(A): If only the Human Resources Department and/or Upper Management creates and administers the workplace bullying policy, there will be greater acceptance of the policy.

H2(B): If only an Employee Taskforce creates the workplace bullying policy, it will be negatively accepted.

	Human Resources	Department Manager	Employee Taskforce
Mean - Acceptance of WB Policy based on DevSource	4.4167	4.1333	4.000
n	12	6	4

ANOVA: Between Groups $F(3,46)=1.057, p=.377$ (Non Significant)

An ANOVA was run to test these hypotheses. In the chart, the mean of the acceptance of the workplace bullying policy is represented by development source where greater numbers represent a greater acceptance of the workplace bullying policy. However, due to the scale and items used for this study, there is not a large enough distinction between means to determine a significant correlation.

Looking at the scale below, you can determine why these hypotheses are not supported. The n sizes are based on those number of respondents who answered with once Development Source (IV) over all the rest (i.e. a “5 – Strongly Agree” in Human Resources and 1s in other Development Sources). However, you can see that there are a variety of combinations where some respondents concluded that there should not be only one Development Source, but a combination of sources. For example, 15 respondents have no preference for Development Source while 5 respondents thought it should be a combination of the Human Resources Department and Department Managers.

Development Source	Frequency
No Preference	15
HR&EE	6
HR	12
HR&DM	5
DM	6
DM&EE	2
EE	4

H3: Women feel a greater need for a workplace bullying policy.

	n	Mean
Male	27	3.3086
Female	23	3.9855

ANOVA: Between Groups, $F(1,48)=7.960$, $p<.01$

Effect Size = .142 (Large)

An ANOVA was used to test H3. Looking at the chart above, the mean scores represent the need for a workplace bullying policy with the greater the mean, the greater the need for a policy. Therefore, H3 is supported because women found a greater need for a workplace bullying policy.

The effect size of this hypothesis is large (.142).

H4: Women have a better understanding of company policies due to the need for a policy and requests to frequently update and remind employees of the workplace bullying policy.

	n	Mean
Male	27	2.6878
Female	23	3.0683

ANOVA: Between Groups, $F(1,48)=4.205$, $p<.05$

Effect Size = .0805 (Medium)

An ANOVA was used to test H4. Looking at the chart above, the mean scores represent the need to frequently update company policies with the higher the mean representing the higher need to update policies. Therefore, H4 is supported because women found a greater need to update company policies.

The effect size of this hypothesis is medium (.0805).

Findings

The findings in this study are important to all organizations and executives within those organizations because our research shows the need and importance of formalized workplace bullying policies. Our

data also suggests that organizational size is not significant. Therefore, our data supports that all sizes of organizations are relevant to these practices.

While conducting the literature review for this study, we found very little empirical research about workplace bullying. Most of the review was storytelling about the topic. While our measures were not great, we feel as though our data showed enough support for a significant study. Not only did we have supported hypotheses, but we had representation from 50 different organizations, representing various industries and all different sizes.

Limitations to our study included no pre-determined scales and little knowledge of workplace bullying in workplace settings. We believe that the biggest limitation was the unwillingness for executives to participate in the study due to the topic – a “touchy” subject, especially among executives.

Our study is especially important to Human Resource Managers and organizations that are willing to take a proactive approach when it comes to workplace bullying in organizational settings. Even though there is no formal legislation on this topic, organizations can use our data and other research to create their own workplace bullying policies.

For organizations who feel like workplace bullying is a problem, our data suggests looking into the structural issues that allow workplace bullying to exist. First, the issues must be determined and then they can be addressed or corrected.

Future Research

While our study supports data suggesting that organizations need to determine workplace bullying policies, there is still a lot of research to be conducted on this topic. Areas of this topic that can still be researched include: what to include in the workplace bullying policy, what department should create and administer the workplace bullying policy, and ways companies can encourage/support legislation on this topic.

For better results in future research, a more defined scale and different questions should be used, especially when measuring Development Source. Also, sample size should be increased. While 50 executives from different organizations is a good representation of data, a larger sample size would be beneficial to this topic.

It would also be beneficial to survey employees in an organization rather than executives. While executives may be reluctant to share information about bullying in their organizations, it will be more difficult to secure participation from random employees. However, we feel as though the data would be more significant if represented by random employees in an organization and not executives.

Conclusion

In conclusion, we determined that acceptance of bullying policies was more likely when those policies were developed by Human Resource Departments and when policies were formalized. Women felt more strongly than men about having a workplace bullying policy and indicated a stronger

understanding of other company policies. Organizational size did not have a significant relationship to responses.

Our research provided good data for this topic and we would encourage organizations to create workplace bullying policies.

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