

research snapshot

summarize | mobilize



Does Workplace Bullying Affect Work Output?

What is this research about?

There is some disagreement about how bullying in the workplace affects workers. Some research suggests that bullying reduces the amount of work a person does. Other research suggests that bullying can increase the work done by a person. As well, the most common forms of workplace bullying are hidden within work expectations, making them hard to detect. How a person reacts to bullying depends on a number of factors. Some of these factors are: if a person thinks bullying is caused by a personal attack or a result of the work culture. How does bullying explain variances found in work performance?

What did the researchers do?

A conceptual model was developed to explain the potential effects of workplace bullying. The attribution model is used to explain differences in how the target interprets bullying. A new meaning of workplace bullying was presented that had details on how bullying is attributed. The new meaning is: Bullying at work is when a Target is exposed to multiple negative social acts over a period of time. The intent of the Bully is to cause harm to the Target. The bullying may be hard to detect or may be obvious. When bullying is hard to detect the Target may not know the behaviour is meant to harm him/her. Thus, the Target does not have to recognize that they are being bullied.

What you need to know:

Some forms of workplace bullying are hard to identify. It is important that young workers know what the different types of bullying are and how it can affect them. This paper gives details on types of bullying and how bullying can be interpreted.

What did the researchers find?

Three dimensions were used to examine how a target interprets bullying. These factors are: cause of bullying (work related or personal), form of bullying (work or non-work), and reason for bullying (to harm or to help target) Six possible interpretations of bullying are produced when these three dimensions interact:

- Developmental: Person centered bullying, expressed through work that is to 'help' the target.
- Opportunistic: Person based bullying expressed through work meant to harm the target.
- Work Culture: Work centered bullying, expressed through work that will 'help' the target.
- Harmful Work Place: Work based bullying expressed through work that is harmful to the target.

- Personal Attack: Person centered bullying that is directed at the target and meant to harm.
- Culture of Humiliation: Work related bullying that is not related to work and harms the target.

If bullying is common in the workplace the behavior may be blamed on work culture (Culture of Humiliation). This will often result in a decrease in work performance. When bullying is obvious and personal, trust will lessen between the target and bully. These issues are present with Personal Attack or Opportunistic Bullying. This is particularly problematic when the work culture doesn't prevent bullying, such as with Harmful Work Place.

Typical reasons for bullying are personal gain and dealing with emotions. Personal gain bullying is often subtle. Targets may think subtle bullying is for their own benefit. Bullying is generally viewed as helpful when the bully is a person with power, when the target is optimistic, or when the relationship is thought to be good. Trust can grow when bullying is viewed as work related and the outcome is thought to help the target, such as with Development Bullying. In such situations a target's work performance may increase. Increases in work performance are also present when a target uses positive thinking to deal with bullying.

How can you use this research?

Companies will want to encourage a non-aggressive work culture. Aggressive work cultures can hide bullying, which has a higher chance of decreasing work performance.

Training programs should integrate new information on bullying in the workplace. Including these details will help young workers develop skills needed to ensure bullying in the workplace does not hinder their goals.

About the Researchers

Dr. Al-Karim Samnani is an Assistant Professor in the Odette School of Business at the University of Windsor.

Dr. Parbudyal Singh is a Professor in the School of Human Resource Management at York University.

singhp@yorku.ca

Dr. Souha Ezzedeen is an Associate Professor in the School of Human Resource Management at York University.

Citation

Samnani, A-K., Singh, P. & Ezzedeen, S. (2013). Workplace bullying and employee performance: An attributional model. *Organizational Psychology Review*, 3(4), 337-359.

Available online at bit.ly/1pHwRaT

Keywords

Deviant/counterproductive behavior, Ethics, Cognition/perception

Knowledge Mobilization at York

York's Knowledge Mobilization Unit provides services for faculty, graduate students, community and government seeking to maximize the impact of academic research and expertise on public policy, social programming, and professional practice. This summary has been supported by the Office of the Vice-President Research and Innovation at York and project funding from SSHRC and CIHR.

kmbunit@yorku.ca

www.researchimpact.ca

