Technical University of Lisbon

Worklace Bullying, Power and Organizational Politics

Cardiff, 2 – 4th of 2010

Goals (1):

- To present the main findings of a study carried out in the Portuguese banking sector;

- To ilustrate a political dimension of Workplace Bullying through the meanings of bullying behaviours, in terms of power, political behaviours, internal competition and work load;

- To find in the accounts made by respondents elements of bullying, power and political behaviours.

Goals (2):

- To analyze more deeply which elements of **power** (reward, coercive, legitimate, expert and reference) (French & Raven, 1959) are embedded in bullying behaviours;

- To discuss the results, comparing them to another qualitative results from others studies previously carried on (Liefooghe & MacKenzie Davey, 2001; Liefooghe, 2003; Lee, 2000:2002)

Introduction (1)

Introduction (2)

- Our focus in his study is on **political behaviours**, **internal competition** and **workload**;

- Aditionally, other factors of the work enironment will be addressed: **general climate at work**, emergence and management of **conflicts at work**, the **way of settling differences**;

- **Power**, a core element of the definition, will be further studied, and ilustrated through short stories made by employees.

Methodology:

- Our study has been conducted in the Portuguese banking sector, through a self-fulfilled questionnaire.

- At the end of the questionnaire, respondents were asked to describe events that they perceive as WB, in order to complement quantitative data and to get additional meanings of bullying.

- In first place we will present the quantitative results of this study, regarding political behaviours, internal competition and stress or work overload.

Methodology and sample:

- Then the results regarding "general climate at work", the "way of settling differences at work" and "the emergence of conflicts at work";

- Our **sample** has been collected through a snow-ball process and we collected 64 stories of bullying episodes.

- It consists of 65,6% men and 34,4% women, being the mean age 42 years old. The majority is post-graduated (53,1%) and 48,5% are technical staff (34,4 are technical staff and 21,9% are middle management).

Portuguese banking sector (1):

- The portuguese financial sector has witnessed very important changes in the last 20 years:

- From liberalization to technological innovation, many were the factors that contributed to the sector´s modernization:

  - the impulse of new private banks;
  - the abolishment of administrative interest rates and bank credit ceilings;
  - a deeper connection to the European Community;
  - the deregulation and globalization of markets;
  - the introduction of the new information and communication technologies (ICT) in the banking activities.

Portuguese banking sector (2):

- To face fierce domestic and international competition:

    - reorganizations, restructuring, mergers and acquisitions have taken place to give financial institutions the competitive advantage they needed;

    - additionally financial institutions have diversified its products and services portfolio to keep fidelity of customers (Ferreira & Barata, 2004).

- Currently, the Portuguese banking sector is dominated by five major banking groups, which hold about 80% of the market.

Portuguese banking sector (3):

- The introduction of ICT in banking and the increased complexity of products and services supplied, have required a **more skilled workforce** and **new contractual arrangements**.

- As a result a focus on **flexibility at work** emerged (increased competencies, short term contracts, temporary work, part-time work and flexible pay policies) (Almeida, 2001; Reilly, 2000).

- Such types of contingent work have been associated with increasing job insecurity (OECD, 1999).

Portuguese banking sector (4):

- Also the intense merger activity lead to high levels of work-related stress, demotivation and declining organizational commitment (ILO, 2001).

- In a tight and precarious labour market coupled with weak collective response capacity, due to weakened union movement, banking employees face increasing difficulties to defend their rights, fearing to loose their jobs.

- Such factors may indirectly act as antecedents of bullying by influencing cost-benefit considerations (Björkqvist, Österman & Hjelt-bäck, 1994) and, therefore, management behaviour.

Previous Empirical Evidence in the Banking Sector

- Maciel, Cavalcante & Matos (2007), in a sample of Brazilian banking employees (n=2.609), found that 7,9% of respondents have been the target of bullying, at least once a week in the last 6 months, being the most frequent bullying behaviors "You are exposed to an unmanageable workload", "Your work damages your mental and/or physical health" and "you are given confusing or unclear guidelines".

- In another study, carried by Yilmaz & Soydas (2006), in a sample of 200 Turkish banking employees, 15,9% of respondents have been victims of bullying according to the definition presented, during the last 6 months. In this study the most frequent bullying behaviours reported were:"You are ordered to do work clearly below your level of competence" and "Someone withholding information which affects your performance", that is behaviours directly related to the work performed.

- Finally, Almeida (2003), in a sample of 384 banking employees, has found an incidence rate of 56,3% during previous working life. According to the findings presented in this study, victims of bullying referred that "frequently" or "occasionally" the "Head of department did not promoted them deliberately", 47,1% referred that "frequently" or "occasionally" "they did not dare to defend their rights anymore" (for example, being paid for overtime or take sick leave), 76,4% referred that "frequently" or "occasionally" they "were given constantly new tasks" and 4,7% referred that they were given unreasonable or unnecessary tasks.
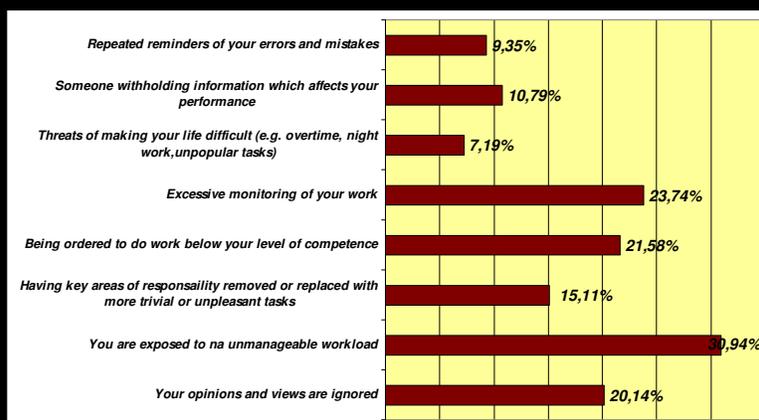
Main Findings
Portuguese banking sector (n=561)

- **Using a definition,** emphasizing the political nature of WB, to measure the subjective perception of being bullied during the last 12 months:

  - Frequently bullied: 5,9%
  - Ocasionally bullied: 24,8%
  - Never Bullied: 69,3%

- **Measure according to a list of negative behaviours (NAQ-R):**

  - Frequently bullied: 39,8%
  - Ocasionally bullied: 44,2%
  - Never bullied: 16%

- *Criteria:* "Frequently bullied" (daily and weekly),"Ocasionally bullied" (monthly and rarely), "Not bullied" (never)

The Portuguese banking sector

Most Frequent Bullying Behaiours (n=33)

Behaviour	%
Repeated reminders of your errors and mistakes	9,35%
Someone withholding information which affects your performance	10,79%
Threats of making your life difficult (e.g. overtime, night work,unpopular tasks)	7,19%
Excessive monitoring of your work	23,74%
Being ordered to do work below your level of competence	21,58%
Having key areas of responsaility removed or replaced with more trivial or unpleasant tasks	15,11%
You are exposed to na unmanageable workload	30,94%
Your opinions and views are ignored	20,14%

Quantitative analysis (1)

Bivariate Correlation			
	Political Behaviours	Work Overload	Internal Competition
Workplace Bullying (Subj).	0,318**	0,268**	0,068
Workplace Bullying (Obj.)	0,383**	0,309**	0,086**
**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).			

Quantitative analysis (2)

- Regarding the emergence of conflicts at work, 37,8% of respondents referred that "there are quite harsh conflicts and it appears difficult to find a solution".

- Regarding the way to settle differences at work, we find that 29,7% of respondents argue that "Who has authority takes advantage of one´s position" comparing to only 18,8% saying that "People talk over the matter and negotiate". This seems to preclude a strained work environment.

- This fact is confirmed by 45,3% of respondents who state that the "atmosphere at work is strained and competitive".

Quantitative analysis (3)

- The most frequent political behaviours:

    - 51,6% say that: "Some build up by tearing others down";
    - 45,3% say that: "Policy changes help only a few";
    - 37,5% refer that: "Favouritism not merit gets people ahead"

Power and Bullying:

- Power is a core element of the concept of workplace bullying.

- Power has been understood in relative terms, as an **imbalance or asymmetry of power** between the perpretator of the negative behaviours and the target.(Einarsen, 1996). The power imbalance doesn´t refer strictly to formal power differences, but may include also informal power differences or other individual, situational or contextual factors (Leymann, 1996; Vartia, 1996);

- Despite never explicit, from the general view that "**bullying is a bad thing",** it is implicit that the power used in bullying instances is **ilegetimate power**, as opposed to the power that would be regarded as legitimate, or the prerrogative to manage and to get things done (Liefooghe & MacKenzie davey, 2001).

Power and Politics

- **Power (Dahl, 1957)**
  - A capacity that A has to influence the behaviour of B so that B acts in accordance with A's wishes.
    - Dependency: B's relationship to A when A possesses something that B requires
- **Politics (Pfeffer, 1981)**
  - Behaviour to influence or attempt to influence the distribution of advantages and disadvantages within the organization.

The Meaning of Power

Power is the capacity to influence others (Dahl, 1957):

- The potential to influence others; not necessarily the exercise of power.

- Power requires one person's perception of dependence on another person

- The one that does not have the power, may indeed have some degree of freedom over his own behaviour and to make decisions.

Power and Bullying

- Power has a *potencial* is extremely important in Bullying situations because its perception inhibits the victim to react effectively;

- The *dependency* between the agressor and the victims is due to the control the agressor possesses over the resources the victim needs;

- At the begining of a bullying situation the victim has a given *degree of freedom* to make decisions;Yet, given te subtle nature of the process he doesn´t exercise his power till a moment when there are already negative consequences to the victim, impossible to overcome (effective injuries)

Sources of Power in Organizations

(French & Raven, 1959)

Sources Of Power

Legitimate Power → **Power over Others**

Reward Power

Coercive Power

Expert Power

Referent Power

Contingencies Of Power

- Substitutability
- Scarcity
- Centrality
- Importance
- Visibility

Power and Bullying Behaviours

- **Coercive Power:** the ultimate goal of coercion is compliance; manifests it self in the ability to dismiss ou to enacte disciplinary sanctions; could also be exercised in a subtle way, through teasing, unpleasant tasks or exclusion from the work team.

- It may manifest through bullying behaviours, like:

    - "Hints or signals from others that you should quit"
    - "Being left idle"
    - "Persistent criticism of your work and effort"
    - "Systematically being required to carry out tasks which clearly fall outside your job description (e.g. private errands)"
    - "Being excluded from social events"

Power and Bullying Behaviours

- **Legitimate Power:** results from the formal organizational standing, confering its owner the authority to make decisions affecting the subordinates; according to Ashforth (1994; 1997) and Liefooghe & MacKenzie Davey (2001) the abuse of this power can be perceived as bullying.

- It can be exercised through the WB behaviours:

    - "You are given tasks with unreasonable or impossible targets or deadlines";
    - "Key areas of responsibility are removed or replaced with trivial or meaningless tasks" ;
    - "Your work is excessively monitored";
    - "You are exposed to an unmanageable workload"

Power and Bullying Behaviours

- **Reward power:** Occurs when someone has control over resources that others need or value. The most popular forms of reward power are offering raises, promotions or simply compliments.

- It may manifest negatively through the staff appraisal performance and also through bullying behaviours like:

  - "Somebody causes you economic or material damages";
  - "Your opinions and views are ignored"
  - "You are systematically required to perform tasks to carry out tasks which clearly fall outside your job description"

Power and Bullying Behaviours

- **Referent Power:** Is an informal power source resulting from one being admired and respected. Anyone in any organization may possess this source of power. Its owner may be regarded as a model.

- This power could be exercised negatively, through WB behaviours like:

  - "Being ignored or excluded or being "sent to conventry"
  - "Spreadings of gossip and rumours about you"
  - "Being excluded from social events"

Power and Bullying Behaviours

- **<u>Expert Power</u>**: results from the access or control over vital information for people in the organization. It is the kind of power which gives its owner the ability to influence others. It is not restrict to managers but exists at all organizational levels.

- Could manifest negatively through bullying behaviours, like:

  - "Someone withholding information that affects your performance"
  - "Being ordered to do work below your level of competence"

Qualitative data analysis

- The focus is on the Stories collected, here presented aaccording tto the **frequency of the political behaviours identified**. These behaviours will be highlighted, as well as the bullying behaviours identified. Additionally, elements of instrumental bullying will be underlined.

- Organizational practices perceived as bullying were also identified, as follows:
  - **Staying at work until late (overtime not paid);**
  - **Not assigning work tasks (Being left idle).**
  - **Denying of promotion;**
  - **Staff Appraisal Performance**

Written stories:

- **Political behaviour: "Influential groups, no one crosses".**

- **"The Director usually stood at work until late in the evening, convoking the employees to meeting, for instance, at 11p.m., <u>forcing them to stay at work after the time-schedule (16:30)</u>. The same happened during weekends, when employees were called together a meeting and not allowed to be absent, in any circumstance, risking to be put aside Usually, supervisors <u>stay at work until late at night expressly to force the same behavior form workers</u>".**

  - **Bullying behavior "You are exposed to an unmanageable workload"**

Instrumental Bullying

Written Stories:

- **Political behaviour:"Influential groups, no one crosses".**

- "The bullying situation I will go to write down has happened in the organization I currently work in, but in another Department. I had recently joined the organization and my Supervisor, started to feel left behind in some issues which he didn´t master; that made him to ***react aggressively against me,*** during discussions related to theses subjects. Later on, he has even ***threatened me physically*** due to my intervening stance, also because I put up some issues regarding some colleagues of mine, who were also bullied. Despite his behavior, he never succeeded in letting me down. Some years later, I was victimized by an erroneous interpretation of the Code of Conduit and I was ***refused a promotion based on merit.*** I went to the Workers Representative and I was told that the issued could be solved in favour of me: When I confronted my Director, he reacted aggressively till the point of threaten to retaliate through approaching Middle Management".

  - Additionally, we identified the following political behaviour: "Some build up themselves by tearing others down"

  - **Bullying Behaviour**→"Intimidating behaviour such as finger pointing, invasion of personal space shoving, blocking / baring your way"; "Threats of violence or physical abuse"

Instrumental Bullying

Written Stories:

- **Political Behaviour :"Influential Group, no one crosses"**

- **"Some fellow workers have been and still are persecuted for political reasons, with negative consequences for career advancement purposes. This situation has started 4 years ago and resulted in the "racking" of a manager, in a dismissal of a colleague and also in disciplinary procedures moved against another two colleagues".**

- Additionally, in this account, we identified the following political behaviour: "Don´t speak up for fear of retaliation"

   - **Bullying Behaviour** ➔ "Insulting comments or behaviour with reference to your religion or political convictions"

Written Stories:

Political Behaviour: Don´t speak up for fear of retaliation

- "The Director of my Department boycotted I system I´ve elaborated in favour of another one acquired outside; my colleagues, despite not agreeing, have been publicly threatened to be target of disciplinary sanctions in case they were caught using the old system"

- "I assisted to the destruction of work documents concerning overtime and, also, to the overtime time records. I was told that it was better, regarding my own interests, not to speak up. I spoke up and, as a result, I think, did not get a promotion from then on".

Here, the bullying is perceived as an interpersonal issue, assuming the behaviour an instrumental nature, as a way of ensuring compliance.

Written Stories:

Political behaviour: "Some build up themselves by tearing others down"

■ "The main bullying situation I have been involved in was humilliation and making fun of myself, as a way _to tear me down and to demotiate me._ Nowadays, I feel stronger and if it hapenned to me again I would defend myself and pay in the same coin. Sometimnes people humilliate or make fun of others as a way of acquiring power over them and as a way to tear me down as, na carreira profissional. Isto é grave e hoje jamais o permitiria, defendendo-me e ripostando afirmativamente".

   ■ **Bullying behaviour->** Insulting or offensive remarks about your person (eg., habits and background) or your private life

■ "There are meetings where people are insulted and threatened of transference to another Department and of loosing the annual bonus, of they don´t achieve the goals defined. There are even situations of crying and dressing down workers publicly.".

   ■ Bullying Behaviour → Being shouted at or being the target of spontaneous anger (or rage); Threats of making your life difficult (e.g. overtime, night work, unpopular tasks); Being transferred against your will; Somebody causes you economic or material damages.

Written Stories:

■ **Political Behaviours: "F**avouritism not merit gets people ahead"

■ " There are promotions are rewards for the "yes man" with no merit"

■ "In the staff appraisal performance I was passed over in favour of colleagues who were close to some Board´s members"

   Additionally we identified the following Political Behaviour: "Promotions solely based on merit" (reverse)

■ "I was threatened to come to an unsustainable position in my Department, if I woudn´t agree with some decisions affecting the whole company, which I found absurd or unreasonable".

   Additionally we identified the following Political Behaviour"Safer to agree with management than to say that what you think is right"

Written Stories :

- **Organizational practice. "Being left idle"**

- "I have been a bank employee for 24 years; three years ago my access to the internal support system was blocked (without being given notice). *I was wondering if that happened because of having been on a sick leave for 5 years, being appointed for early retirement* As the proposal I got was just 60% of my salary, I could not afford all my expenses, and I had to refuse. From then on I have no tasks assigned, being completely idle. Should not be condemned this organizational behavior? I am 47 years, I have been already the Sub-Director of the branch. I was "bestial" and now I am "The beast".

   - **Bullying Behaviours→**"Someone withholding information which affects your performance"; "You are left idle"; "Pressure not to claim something which by right you are entitled to (e.g. sick leave, holiday entitlement, travel expenses and so on)"

Written Stories :

- **Organizational practice: "Being left idle"**

- "A colleague of mine is idle for 3 years; I mean no work tasks assigned, at all"

   - **Bullying Behaviour→"You are left idle"**

- I was left idle in my office, without phone and no work tasks assigned for an year, in order to force me to retire. This situation damaged my health, mainly psychologically, and I had to seek help from a psychiatrist, In the end I moved a legal procedure against my employer, helped by the Union. The same happened to several colleagues of mine"

   - **Bullying Behaviour → "You are left idle"**

Written Stories :

- **Organizational practice: "Denying of promotion"**

- This practice is evident in the accounts above mentioned as examples of "Favouritism, not merit gets people ahead" and, also in the following accounts:

- **"I assisted to the destruction of work documents concerning overtime and, also, to the overtime time records. I was told that it was better, regarding my own interests, not to speak up. I spoke up and, as a result, I think, did not get a promotion from then on".**

  (Male, Graduate, Technical Staff Senior)

- **And:**

Written Stories :

- **Organizational practice: "Denying of promotion"**

- **"The bullying situation I will go to write down has happened in the organization I currently work in, but in another Department. I had recently joined the organization and <u>my Supervisor, started to feel left behind in</u> some issues which he didn´t master; that made him to react aggressively against me, during discussions related to theses subjects. Later on, he has even threatened me physically due to my intervening stance, because I also put up some issues, regarding some colleagues of mine, who were also bullied. Despite his behavior, he never succeeded in letting me down. Some years later, I was victimized by an erroneous interpretation of the Code of Conduit and <u>I was refused a promotion based on merit</u>. I went to the Workers Representative and I was told that the issued could be solved in favour of me: When I confronted my Director, he reacted aggressively till the point of threaten to retaliate through approaching Middle Management".**

  (Male, Undergraduate, Clerical)

Written Stories :

- **Organizational practice: "Stay at work after timetable (and not be paid for overtime)"**

- **"The Director usually stood at work until late in the evening, convoking the employees to meeting, for instance, at 11p.m., forcing them to stay at work after the time-schedule (16:30). The same happened during weekends, when employees were called together a meeting and not allowed to be absent, in any circumstance, risking to be put aside Usually, supervisors stay at work until late at night expressly to force the same behavior from workers".**

(Male, Graduate, Supervisor)

- **"All the employees are obliged to work after their time schedule because normally the branches function just with the minimal human resources in terms of Human Resources. They have to work after their standard time-schedule without being paid for overtime".**

(Male, Undergraduate, Technical Staff Senior)

Interpersonal / Organizational Bullying

Interpersonal Bulying	→	Political Behaviours Bullying Behaviours Instrumental bullying
Organizational Bullying	→	Organizational Practices ■Overtime not paid ■To be left idle ■Denying of promotion

Conclusions (1):

- In line with Salin (2003), the written stories collected showed that bullying has a political and instrumental dimension and can be seen as a deliberate strategy to improve organizational efficiency by getting rid of people considered as threats or burdens.

- These results are also in line with Lee (2000; 2002), who demonstrated how bullying could be played through the expriences of staff appraisal, the denyal of promotion and performance related pay awards and, sometimes, by driving employees out of their jobs.

- The short stories written down by respondents reveal both examples of bullying as an interpersonal issue and as an organizational practice, showing an ambiguous notion of the concept. Also, according to Liefooghe (2001), in a study carried on in a UK High Street Bank, there isn´t an homogeneous concept of bullying at work.

Conclusions (2):

- In this study, despite showing awareness of bullying as an interpersonal phenomenon, employees give examples of organizational practices which constitute bullying for them (e.g. the denying of promotion as a way of getting compliance, the practice of staying at work long after timetable, overtime not paid) to voice their discontent with employer – employee relationship.

- "Being left idle" is the most remarkable example of bullying as an organizational practice. This may be specific of the banking sector, as in previous studies this behaviour is not so common. Here, it seems to reveal the extent to which bullying can be used as a policy.

- From the accounts above, we can conclude that the main source of power implicit is the accounts is coercive power and legitimate power. Reward power is used in a negative way, namely by the denying of promotion;