WorkplaceBullying and Organizational Politics

"Power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely"

Lord Acton´s Comment

"Powerless corrupts; absolute powerlessness corrupts absolutely"

Variant of Lord Acton´s Comment

"Absolute Power corrupts; Absolute powerlessness corrupts absolutely"

Own ´s Variant of Lord Acton´s Comment

Forum CRITEOS 2006, 23-25th of November

The project:

- ☐ Literature review:
  - ▪ Risk factors according to previous research in other countries?

- ☐ Conceptual Model
  - ▪ Main Concepts?
  - ▪ Main hypothesis?

- ☐ A quantitative study:
  - ▪ What is the level of incidence of Workplace bullying in the portuguese banking sector?
  - ▪ Which are the most important risk factors explaining bullying?

- ☐ **Goal**: Tool to help the design of effective anti-bullying policies and prevent bullying at work

Aims of the project (1):

□ To analyze the impact of several aspects of the *organizational work environment* (e.g. communication climate, organizational and social support climate, perceptions of political behaviors, rewards and benefits) in the occurrence of bullying;

□ To analyze the impact of *globalization, organizational delayering, restructuring and downsizings, increased pressures for efficiency*, which increase internal competition, on bullying (Salin, 2003; Baron & Neuman, 1998);

Aims of the project (2):

☐ To analyze the role played by *political behaviours and power structures in society* (gender, social and organizational status) in the perception of behaviors as bullying.

☐ To assess the *level of incidence of Workplace Bullying* in the Portuguese banking sector;

☐ To identify the *most frequent bullying behaviors* in order to contribute to the design of prevention and intervention measures in a effective way.

The project:

☐ the main purpose of this pesentation is to introduce a *conceptual model of workplace bullying*, improving on traditional models by paying greater attention to the psychosocial work environment, namely some contextual variables like *communication and social support climate*, *perceptions of political behaviours*, *organizational and social status* and *organizational citizenship behaviours*.

☐ the model, we will present, rests on the assumption that *certain individual predispositions interact with certain situational/contextual facilitators* to foster bullying and influencing the course of the process.

Several Terms to describe the phenomenon:

□ Since the early 1990´s, different terms and concepts have been used to describe persistent, offensive, abusive or insulting behaviour which make the recipient feel upset, threatened, humiliated or vulnerable, undermines its self confidence and may cause post traumatic stress (Lee,2000; Enarsen,2000).

□ Thus, concepts like "*workplace bullying*", also referred as "*mobbing*", "*harassment*", "*employee abuse*", "*psychological terrorism*", "*victimization*", "*scapegoating*", "*workplace aggression*", "*petty tyranny*" have been used in the study of those situations, according to Einarsen (2000).

The Problem of a definition

- Nowadays, after running trough a long road away, *"bullying"* is an **internationally accepted term** to refer to this phenomenon, and from an organizational taboo it has became a main stream topic in the field of organizational behaviour (Einarsen, 2006).

- Bullying consists of repeated and persistent *negative behaviors*, including **harassing, offending, socially excluding someone,** involving a *perceived power imbalance* and to influencing someone's **behavior, work tasks or social work environment.** Bullying is an *escalating power conflict* in the course of which the target of the aggressive behaviors finds it difficult to defend him (her) self and end up in an inferior position. A conflict cannot be called bullying if the incident is an isolated event or if two parties have approximately equal strength (Einarsen, 2003)

Introduction (1)

☐ The subject of workplace bullying has received much ***media and academic attention in recent years***: managers, personnel staff, trade unions officials, worker representatives and employees have begun to focus attention upon this phenomenon (Raynner, 1997; Hoel & Salin, 2003; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2003)

☐ The ***severe outcomes related to workplace bullying*** and inherent aggressive behaviours have led a growing number of researchers to study them in UK (e.g. Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Randall, 1997; Rayner, 1997;2000), in Germany (Zapf, 1999;Niedl, 1996), in the Nordic countries (Leymann, 1996; Vartia, 1996; Einarsen, Raknes & Matthiesen, 1994a) and also in other countries and continents (Keashly & Jagatic, 2003; Baron & Neuman, 1996;1998).

Research - Main causes:

- In order to understand and explain bullying, the research carried so far has traditionally focused on *two explanatory models* for the occurrence of workplace bullying:

  - *personality (victim / prepetrator)*

  - *work environment - and organizational climate*

  - *Socio-economic factors*

(1) The personality hypothesis:

☐ *Victims of bullying* have been described as overachievers with an unrealistic view of theirs abilities and resources, conscientious, literal-minded, somewhat naïve (Brodsky, 1976), anxious in social settings and having low self-esteem (Einarsen et al, 1994).

☐ By other side, *bullies or perpetrators* were seen as the product of complex social processes, which created an antisocial personality characterised by the aggressive manipulation of other people (Randall, 1997), and have also been described as having an authoritarian or abrasive personality and acting as a petty tyrant (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Asforth, 1994:1997).

(2) The work environment hypothesis:

- ☐ Authors, mainly from Scandinavia, have searched for explanations in *organizational factors* and deficiencies in the work environment and have found as strongly influencing the occurrence of workplace bullying the "quality" or *styles of leadership*, *low work control and autonomy*, *role conflict*, *time pressures*, *role ambiguity*, *strained and hectic atmosphere*, *certain reward systems*, *low satisfaction with the social and communication climate* (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Vartia, 1996; Einarsen et al.,1994; Zapf, Knorz and Kulla, 1996; Salin, 2003).

(3) The socio-economic factors hypothesis:

- Also, *organizational changes*, like "*restructuring*", "*downsizing,lay-offs*", "*technological changes*", "*changes in management*", have been shown to be positively related to hostility and bullying (Baron & Neuman, 1998; Doherty, 1996).

- *Group processes* and *societal forces* have also been included by other researchers to wide the scope of analysis (Tylefors,1987; McCarthy,1996; Sheehan,1996).

Workplace Bullying, Organizational Changes and Organizational Citizenship Behaviour

Causes:

BULLYING:

Consequences:

Organizational Work Environment

•*Com., organizational and social climate*
•Role conflict
•Leadership styles
•Organizational culture
•*Political Behaviors*

Organizational Changes
•**Downsizings**
•**Technological changes**
•**Lay-offs**
•**Cost-cutting**
•**Reengeniering**

Individual characterist.
•Personality Traits
•*Individual Perceptions*
•Demographic factors

Organizational Strategy
SocialIsolation
Rumours
Gossip, slander
Criticism
Organizational measures
Threats of violence

Víctim:
Job Dissatisfaction
Stress Symptoms
Psychosomatic Complains
Depression
Cardiovascular diseases
Post traumatic stress

Organizational Citizenship Behaviors

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A Conceptual Model (1):

- Bullying is a "***complex and dynamic process***", where both action and reaction should be understood within the organizational context in which they take place (Salin,2003; Keashly & Jagatic,2003).

- Accordingly, *the conceptual model* we will present about workplace bullying maintains that certain *individual predispositions/perceptions* interact with certain *situational facilitators* to foster bullying, revolving the individual factors largely around *dispositional attributes* and the *contextual factors* were selected to span the *macro and micro-levels* that constitute an organization (House, Rosseau & Thomas-Hunt, 1995, cited in Ashforth, 1997).

A Conceptual Model (2):

☐ As ***macro-level factors*** we consider the recent socio-economic and work organizations trends associated with markets ***globalization*** and,

☐ the ***micro-level factors*** include ***work environments variables***, namely ***social climate, political behaviours, work load, reward systems and organizational citizenship behaviours*** amongst others.

A Conceptual Model (3):

□ In our model, at the organizational level, in some instances *workplace bullying can be a form of organizational politics* that is, a competitive strategy deliberately undertaken in order to improve organizational efficiency and productivity (Salin, 2003). At the dyadic level, bullying will be conceptualized as an "*interpersonal power conflict*".

□ This calls for *establishing a rationale for workplace bullying as a competitive strategy*, a connexion amongst the main concepts involved and also for introducing the main theoretical approach underlying our model. Then, building on this framework, a definition of workplace bullying will be introduced.

A Conceptual Model (6):

□ The *concept of power* – or rather a power imbalance – often appears in definitions of bullying; power is often understood in *relative terms*, expressed as an *imbalance of power* between the parties, where the position of the target is identified with a deficit vis-à-vis the perpetrator.

□ As such, *the power imbalance* may reflect *formal power relationships* or may refer to *perceptions of powerlessness* resulting from the bullying process itself due to conflict escalation, leaving one of the parties' increasingly defenceless (Einarsen, 1996; Leymann, 1996; Hoel & Salin, 2003).

A Conceptual Model (7):

- ☐ Brodsky (1976),one of the pioneers researchers, also perceives *bullies* as *manipulating* their colleagues or staff in order *to achieve power or privilege* (either formally by the gaining of reward and promotion, or informally by the power obtained from generating terror among co-workers);

- ☐ Thus, it can be seen that, for some managers, the use of *bullying tactics* to achieve *organizational goals* is simply perceived as a mean to an end; this may indicate the extent to which *bullying behaviour* can be seen as an *instrumental activity* (Lawrence. 2001).

A Conceptual Model (8):

- Much of the work on adult bullying has revealed that *bullying behaviour* does appear to have a strong *instrumental component* (Randall, 1997);

- Therefore, as *instrumental aggression*, in general, is usually used to established or *maintain some form of power over others*, it appears likely that *bullying behaviour*, in particular, can be *understood instrumentally* (Lawrence, 2001).

A Conceptual Model (9):

□ To illustrate the *"dynamic side"* of the bullying process and to emphasize **organizational politics as a breeding ground for the occurrence of bullying** I will draw on the analytical model sets out by Salin (2003), in which the organizational antecedents of bullying are classified in three groups, according to their role in the process:

- ▪ **enabling structures and processes** or necessary antecedents (e.g. power imbalance, low perceived costs of bullying behaviour, feelings of dissatisfaction and frustration with the work environment);

- ▪ **motivating structures and processe**s (internal competition, reward system and expected benefits, bureaucracies) and,

- ▪ **precipitating processes** (e.g. restructuring and crisis, organizational changes, changes in work groups).

A Conceptual Model (10):

- In order to emphasize this **"Political Perspective"** taken here, the names of the three categories have been changed. The model proposes that the motivating structures and processes refer to "*motivating political factors*" (e.g. internal competition, reward system,) while the "*enabling political factors*" include the essence of the organizational climate that becomes the root of that phenomenon (e.g. political behaviours, conflict management style, communication climate). As an addition to this model, the impact of "*power structures in society*" and organizational status are broadly referred.

Bullying at work – Dynamics of the Underlying Processes

Enabling, Motivating and Precipitating Structures and Processes
(adapted From Salin, 2003)
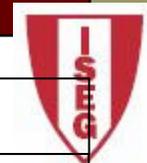
Socio – economic factors in contemporary society

Power structures in Society

Motivating Political Factors:

Internal Competition

Reward System & Expected Benefits

Bureaucracy and Difficulties to lay off employee

Enabling Political Factors

Com.,Organizational and Social Sup. Climate

Confict Management Style

Power Imbalance & Political Behaviors

Workload and Time Pressures

Precipitating Processes

Reestructuring and Crisis

Organizational Changes

Changes in Management

Interpersonal Power Conflicts

Bullying possible and more likely

Proposal of a "DEFINITION":

☐ In this investigation, *bullying consists of repeated and persistent* **negative political behaviors** *towards one or more individual(s), involving a perceived power imbalance and affecting someone's work tasks or social work environment. Bullying is an escalating conflict process in the course of which the target of the aggressive behaviors finds it difficult to defend him (her) self and end up in an inferior position. A conflict cannot be called bullying if the incident is an isolated event or if two parties have approximately equal strength (Verdasca, 2006).*

HYPOTHESIS (1):

- *H1: In a work setting characterized by restructuring, changes in management, downsizings and other variables connected with economic globalization there is a increasing probability of bullying to occur;*

- *H2: There is a positive relationship between perceived organizational politics and the occurrence of bullying;*

HYPOTHESIS (2):

□ *H3: Reward systems based upon individual performance criteria and goals attainment at all costs are conducive to the emergence of bullying behaviours amongst employees;*

□ *H4: A work environment characterized by high work load, poor social climate and poor internal communication climate is prone to the emergence of bullying. Otherwise, satisfaction with managerial and communication climate and social support are negatively related to the occurrence of bullying;*

HYPOTHESIS (3):

☐ *H5: The perceptions of organizational citizenship behaviours (OCB) are negatively related to the perception of being the target of bullying behaviours. Otherwise, the performance of OCB may be a rationale strategy do defend one´s self against bullying behaviours*

☐ *H6: We postulate that, most frequently, people perceive to be bullied by perpetrators of higher organizational and social status;*

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CONCLUSIONS (1):

□ A ***conceptual model of workplace bullying*** has been outlined, emphasizing not only the ***potential political nature of the behaviours*** involved in the process (enhancing the instrumental nature of workplace bullying) but has also suggested that the ***individual cognitive processes should be understood in "context",*** i.e., the aggressive behaviours that make up this dynamic process should be interpreted taking account dispositional and situational variables of work environment;

CONCLUSIONS (2):

- On the ***academic side***, power structures in society and its potential overlapping with bullying have not yet been thoroughly addressed in any modelling process of this phenomenon. This is one issue that the current model proposes to investigate;

- On the ***practitioner side***, recognizing the eventual instrumentality of bullying and understanding the gains for the bully (in individual or organizational terms), is crucial for the effective design and implementation of anti-bullying policies.