

RESEARCH AND PRACTICE IN HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT

Poilpot-Rocaboy, G. (2006). Bullying in the Workplace: A Proposed Model for Understanding the Psychological Harassment Process, *Research and Practice in Human Resource Management*, 14(2), 1-17.

Bullying in the Workplace: A Proposed Model for Understanding the Psychological Harassment Process

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ABSTRACT

Because different studies suggest that psychological harassment represents a great threat to most workers, it has received considerable and growing interest across the world and has emerged as a new field of study in Europe, Australia, South Africa and the U.S. In spite of these studies, bullying still appears as a complex phenomenon. This paper summarises the relevant literature and proposes a specific model of the psychological harassment process. This model presents psychological harassment as a four phase process to improve the understanding of this pernicious workplace phenomenon. As a very costly phenomenon, which harms the health of the victim and the competitiveness of the firm, the paper concludes that HR managers should combat psychological harassment in organisations.

INTRODUCTION

Recent studies in many European countries suggest that the issues of violence and harassment in the workplace affect a substantial part of the workforce (Paoli & Merllié 2001, Di Martino, Hoel & Cooper 2003, Einarsen & Nielsen 2004). These studies also indicate that psychological violence and harassment, rather than physical violence, represents the greatest threat to most workers (Di Martino, et al. 2003). According to Paoli and Merllié (2001), around nine per cent of European workers had exposure to some psychological violence. When risk of intimidation and bullying was compared between EU countries, the highest risk was found for Finland (15 per cent), Netherlands (14 per cent) and the United Kingdom (14 per cent), whilst the lowest figures emerged for the Mediterranean countries (Italy, four per cent; Portugal, four per cent). Another study (Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel & Vartia 2003) estimates that between one and four per cent of employees in Europe may experience serious bullying, and between eight and 10 per cent occasional bullying. In France, 10 per cent of workers were found to be exposed to psychological harassment (Paoli & Merllié 2001). The French Association of Human Resource Managers study (Bouche 2001) shows that psychological harassment is an increasing phenomenon. A third of the 160 human resource (HR) managers consulted were confronted with cases of harassment in 2000. The number of complaints doubled, and after investigation, HR managers had three times more real cases of psychological harassment in 2000 (in comparison to 1999).

In Australia, bullying in the workplace is widespread. The Beyond Bullying Association (see <http://cwpp.slq.qld.gov.au/bba/book.html>), using international research, extrapolated that between 400,000 and two million Australians would be harassed at work in 2001, while between two point five and five million Australians will have experienced workplace harassment at some time during their careers. The Australian Council of Trade Unions 2000 survey found that 54 per cent of respondents reported that intimidating behaviour occurs in their workplace, and a third reported that abusive language is used (Queensland Government 2002). A recent Australian study by Timo, Fulop and Ruthjersen (2004) reveals that workplace bullying and harassment present a significant challenge, specifically for hospital administrators and managers, in general.

Psychological harassment has received considerable and growing interest across the world and has emerged as a new field of study in Europe, Australia, South Africa and the U.S. (Einarsen & Nielsen 2004). In spite of these studies, psychological harassment still appears as a complex phenomenon. For a better understanding, some authors have proposed a general model of workplace violence (Di Martino, et al. 2003), a model of bullying

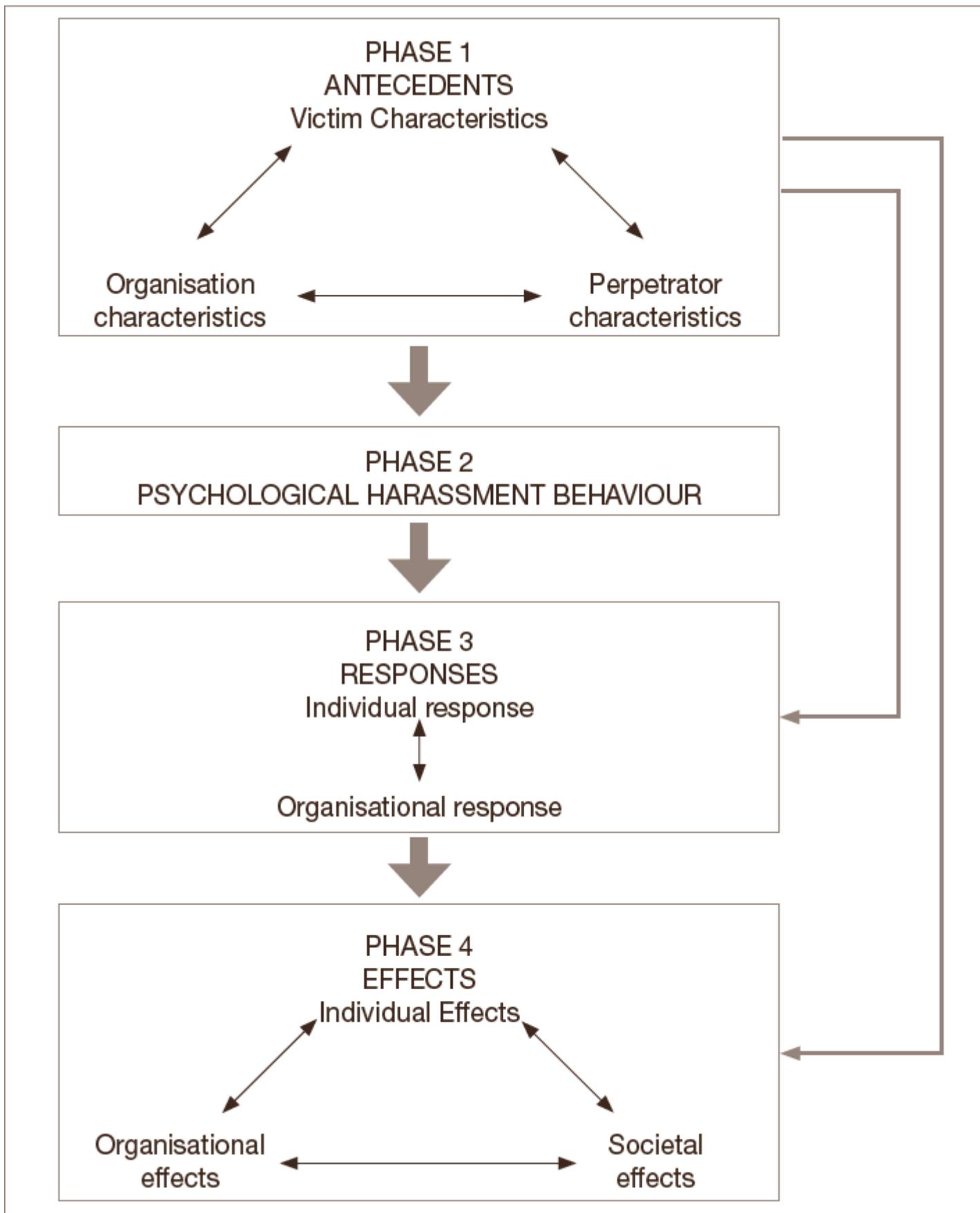
prevention (Hubert 2003), and a model of bullying organisation antecedents (Salin 2003). However, these models do not present an overall psychological harassment phenomenon and a specific bullying model. In fact, Di Martino, et al. (2003) include all types of violence in their model (i.e., sexual violence, physical violence), while Salin (2003), and Hubert (2003) only present a part of the psychological harassment process.

This paper summarises the bullying in the workplace literature and proposes the first specific model of the psychological harassment process in order to understand this pernicious workplace phenomenon. Firstly, the paper presents the psychological harassment model as a dynamic process with four phases. Secondly, these four phases – (1) antecedents, (2) psychological harassment behaviour, (3) responses and (4) effects – are specified and analysed. Thus, this model presents the determinants and the effects of bullying in the workplace, and in this way, shows that combating psychological harassment must be a managerial priority in the workplace. In fact, because bullying increases stress, and reduces wellbeing at work (McCarthy, Sheehan, & Kearns 1995, Leymann 1996a, McCarthy, Sheehan Wilkie & Wilkie 1998, McCarthy, Rylance, Bennett & Zimmerman 2001, Di Martino, et al. 2003, Einarsen & Mikkelsen 2003, Djurkovic, McCormack & Casimir 2004, Matthiesen & Einarsen 2004, Nielsen, Mattieson & Einarsen 2004), affects job performance (Ayoko, Callan & Hartel 2003, Hoel, Einarsen & Cooper 2003), and potentially influences the intention to leave the job (Djurkovic, et al. 2004), it is a very costly phenomenon, which can harm the health of the victim and the competitiveness of the organisation.

THE PSYCHOLOGICAL HARASSMENT MODEL

Psychological harassment is a heterogeneous phenomenon. Each bullying action shows a different frequency, has different determinant motivations (e.g., remove someone from the company, competition for tasks, status, advancement, gain a supervisor's favour, or play a joke on someone), a variety of consequences, and the phenomenon occurs in different circumstances. From this paper's standpoint, psychological harassment is first a dynamic linear process with four phases, which is illustrated in Figure 1. The interaction of three types of antecedents (phase 1) can develop psychological harassment behaviour (phase 2), which creates response from the victim and the organisation (phase 3), and produces three types of effects (phase 4). But, it is also a unilinear process. For instance, the antecedents (phase 1) can directly influence the responses (phase 3) of an individual (e.g., personality) or an organisation (e.g., culture). For example, the personality of the victim can influence the nature of the individual response, or the culture of the firm can influence the characteristic of the organisational response. In the same way, the antecedents (phase 1) can directly influence the effects (phase 4). For instance, the personality of the victim can influence the psychological harassment health effects.

Figure 1 Model of the Psychological Harassment Process



THE PSYCHOLOGICAL HARASSMENT PROCESS PHASES

Phase 1: Antecedents of Psychological Harassment

Psychological harassment is a complex phenomenon characterised by multi-causalities. Victim factors, perpetrator factors and organisation factors represent three determinants which all interlink. Moreover, harassment behaviour

is a dynamic process which arises from the interaction of individuals and their work context as is depicted in Figure 1.

Victim Characteristics

As Zapf and Einarsen (2003) note, the causes of bullying at work have been a 'hot issue' of debate in both the popular press and in the scientific community. In fact, an apparent question arises: "Is there a clear and standard profile of victim?" Some (Coyne, Seigne & Randall 2000) argue that individual antecedents, such as the personality of victims (for instance, neuroticism), may be involved as causes of bullying. Nevertheless, most researchers (Hoel, Rayner & Cooper 1999) distance themselves from the simplistic view that bullying is the result of pathologies, or psychopathic personality traits. Indeed, evidence with regard to personality traits as antecedents of bullying is still sparse. When individual antecedents have been the subject of study (e.g., Zapf & Einarsen 2003), victims with low self esteem, high anxiety levels, introverted, conscientious, neurotic and submissive characteristics have been identified. However, as Di Martino, et al. note (2003: 16), "The extent, to which these personality characteristics should actually be considered causes of bullying, or whether they should be considered a result of being bullied, is still an open question." Leymann (1996b) argues that these characteristics need to be interpreted as a "normal response to an abnormal situation". Thus, most authors (Hirigoyen 1998, Poilpot-Rocaboy 2000) have totally disregarded the role of individual characteristics and persuasively argued that anyone can become the target of psychological harassment behaviour. In fact, it is the interaction of individuals, the victim and perpetrator, and the work context that creates the situation of bullying at any time.

Different authors have suggested that individual factors can influence the incidence and process of violence in the workplace. Socio-demographic variables such as gender, age, educational level and marital status are analysed in different studies (Di Martino, et al. 2003). For instance, in France, Hirigoyen (1998, 2001) showed that 70 per cent of the victims were women. Furthermore, the European Parliament pointed out, that according to some research findings, women are more frequent victims than men of every type of harassment, whether it is 'vertical' harassment of a subordinate by a superior or vice versa, peer group ('horizontal') harassment, or harassment of a mixed type. The Third European survey on working conditions in 2000 (Paoli & Merlli? 2001) showed that on average more women than men are exposed to intimidation in the EU. This general trend has been confirmed and further specified by national studies. Di Martino, et al. (2003) revealed that in all EU countries, with only two exceptions, women are subject to more bullying than men. Different authors have attempted to explain this fact. Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel and Vartia (2003) argue,

There is some relation between female socialisation and the victim role because women are said to be educated to be less self-assertive and less aggressive, and tend to be more obliging than men. Consequently, women are even less able than men to defend themselves when bullying is starting. (p.112).

Moreover, for various reasons, women hold less powerful positions in organisations (than managerial or supervisor positions) and being in subordinate positions may contribute to their increased risk of becoming a victim of bullying.

Bullying may be conceived as a power relationship between perpetrator and victim. This idea is defended by different authors (e.g., Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper 2003) who attribute the imbalance of power between the parties as a central feature of bullying. This imbalance of power often mirrors the formal power structure of the organisational context, but the source of power may be informal, based on knowledge, experience, and length of service, as well as access to support from influential persons. The vulnerability of the victim is linked with his/her social situation (e.g., single parent with dependant child, or the only man in a female group), physical characteristics (e.g., handicapped person, or the only black person in a white group), and economic situation (e.g., single income) may also modify the imbalance of power and intensify bullying. In Australia, in the report of the Queensland Government Workplace Bullying Taskforce (2002) records, the officers of the Office of Public Service Merit and Equity reported incidents of workplace harassment against the following members of the target groups in the public sector: women, Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, people with a disability, and people from non English speaking backgrounds.

Perpetrator Characteristics

Is there a clear and standard profile of a perpetrator? While some authors argue that the personality of the perpetrator is a cause of bullying such as the 'psychopathic personality' (Field 1996, Hirigoyen 1998), others (Poilpot-Rocaboy 2000) reject this idea and argue the perpetrator is not always a sick person. But, a contrary viewpoint is that not everyone can be a perpetrator in work life, because education and moral values act to stop someone being a perpetrator at work, even in a context where bullying behaviour is allowed.

Zapf and Einarsen (2003) note bullying research has revealed that bullies seem to be male more often than female,

and supervisors and managers more often than colleagues. They suggest three main types of bullying related to certain characteristics of perpetrators. The first type is the bullying due to protection of self esteem. Zapf and Einarsen (2003) contend that many theorists assume that protecting and enhancing self esteem, which can be understood as having a favourable global evaluation of oneself, is a basic human motive which influences and controls human behaviour in many social situations. Thus, high levels of self esteem are likely to exhibit more aggressive behaviour than low levels of self esteem. Moreover, Baumeister, Smart and Boden (1996) suggested that various negative emotions such as frustration, anger, anxiety and envy play a mediating role between self esteem and aggression. For instance, Ahmed and Braithwaite (2004) show that shame and pride are related to workplace bullying. Likewise, in other studies (Zapf & Einarsen 2003) on workplace bullying using the reports of victims, envy on the part of the bullies is considered one main reason for their bullying. According to Neuman and Baron (2003), the perception of unfair treatment, and the subsequent frustration and stress produced often serve as antecedents to workplace aggression and violence. These authors note that the General Affective Aggression Model includes frustration as one potential cause of such behaviour.

According to Zapf and Einarsen (2003), the second type of bullying is due to the lack of social competencies on the part of the perpetrator. Lack of emotional control, lack of self reflection and perspective taking are aspects related to bullying. For example, a supervisor may vent his anger by regularly yelling at one of the subordinates without being aware of the consequences of this behaviour. Finally, Zapf and Einarsen (2003) present bullying as a result of micro political behaviour. It has been suggested that some cases of bullying follow the logic of micro political behaviour in organisations. This type of bullying indicates harassment of another person in order to protect or improve one's own position and interest in the organisation, and has been described as a phenomenon mainly occurring at the middle and higher hierarchical levels of an organisation.

Some managers profit by using bullying as a form of micro political behaviour, which may be one of the explanations as to why supervisors and managers are so often among the bullies. From a 'social learning' perspective, O'Leary-Kelly, Griffin and Glew (1996) submit that harassment is learned by observation, experience or imitation of several sources (family, school, military service, television, and firm). But as Brodsky (1976) concludes, if perpetrators may indeed have some common characteristics making them prone to bullying, they will not exhibit such behaviour unless they are in an organisational culture that rewards, or at least is permissive of such behaviours. The interaction of individuals and the work context is an essential component of the psychological harassment behaviour.

Organisation Characteristics

In France, Hirigoyen (1998, 2001) has shown that psychological harassment is more often present in certain specific industries and occupations, such as the administrative function, education and the health sector. Di Martino, et al. (2003) confirm this observation and note a recent review of European surveys of bullying identified several high risk occupations. Overall, there appears to be a higher risk of bullying within the public sector (public administration and defence, education and health) than within the private sector. In the Di Martino, et al. (2003) study, the use of tenure or 'job for life' within the public sector provides less room for mobility, with fewer people leaving as a result of a conflict situation. It is also argued that many of the jobs associated with a risk of bullying involve a large degree of emotional labour. In such circumstances, employees may be more inclined to greater personal openness and involvement in their relationship with colleagues as well as clients, possibly making them more vulnerable to psychological abuse. In Australia, the report of the Queensland Government Workplace Bullying Taskforce confirms these findings. This report (2002) identifies specific industries and occupations in studies on workplace harassment in particular in the fields of health and community services, education and public administration.

Beyond industry and occupational characteristics, different authors try to find organisational antecedents of bullying. Salin (2003) summarises the literature explaining workplace bullying and puts forward organisational antecedents of bullying. Explanations for and factors associated with bullying are classified into three groups: (1) enabling structures or necessary antecedents (e.g., perceived power imbalances, low perceived costs, and dissatisfaction and frustration), (2) motivating structures or incentives (e.g., internal competition, reward systems and expected benefits), and (3) precipitating processes or triggering circumstances (e.g., downsizing and restructuring, organisational changes, changes in the composition of the work group). She concludes that bullying is often an interaction between structures and processes from all three groupings. Hoel and Salin (2003) propose a list of organisational antecedents of workplace bullying. Four types of antecedents appear: (1) changing in general and changing nature of work, (2) work organisation, (3) organisational culture and climate, and (4) leadership.

Organisational change seems to be widely associated to bullying. In order to sustain competitiveness in an increasingly global marketplace, most organisations are still in the midst of struggling with the effects of dramatic change processes, with downsizing, organisational restructuring, and work intensification as a common result (Di Martino, et al. 2003). Under such circumstances, the relationships between employees are likely to be affected. For instance, organisational restructuring has been found to act as a risk factor of bullying in several studies and this risk may grow if managers adopt more autocratic practices to bring about change (McCarthy, et al. 1995, Sheehan 1999). A nationwide Irish study (HSA 2001) explored the impact of technological change and change in ownership

and found that, in both cases, the risk of being bullied was substantially greater in organisations where such change had taken place. The potential impact of change and restructuring processes on bullying has been analysed by different authors (Hoel & Salin 2003). Some argue that the need for restructuring may encourage more authoritarian management practices with the effect of lowering of thresholds at which inappropriately coercive managerial behaviours (become) manifest in organisational life (McCarthy, et al. 1995). Others argue with greater job insecurity, employees may also become less resistant to managerial pressure, and more unlikely to challenge unfair and aggressive treatment on the part of managers. The compression of the hierarchy provides fewer opportunities for career advancement thus increasing the competition between managers for promotion to a shrinking pool of jobs, with growing interpersonal conflict and bullying as possible outcomes (Hoel & Salin 2003).

Work organisation is also considered to be an antecedent of bullying (Dejours 1993, 1998). A negative and stressful working environment has frequently been associated with bullying (Leymann 1996b). This relationship can be explained as various environmental work factors are considered to produce or elicit occupational stress, which again may increase the risk of conflict and bullying. The characteristics of the negative and stressful environment are, for example, work intensification, a high degree of pressure, unclear and unpredictable job situations, enforced team working, unclear roles and command structures, as well as various job related physical aspects (noise, heat and coldness) (Hoel & Salin 2003).

When considering the organisational antecedents of bullying, organisational culture may play a decisive role (Dejours 1993, 1998). Culture manifests itself at the group level, in different artefacts, rituals, routines and stories, as well as physical artefacts and symbols, specific norms and rules covering the behaviour of group members. According to Hoel and Salin (2003: 211), "As new members enter the organisation they will gradually adapt to the shared norms of the organisation and their work group by means of socialisation processes."

A study (Archer 1999) of bullying in the British Fire Brigade identified the training process as a powerful source of socialisation of behaviour. In particular, when every uniformed member of the organisation shares the same socialising experience, amplified by factors such as the 'watch' culture where the individual is allocated to the same tight knit work team, little room for diversity is provided. Humiliating jokes, surprises and insults can also be part of the socialisation process whereby new members are tested. This kind of humour can easily go sour and turn into bullying if the target, for some reason, cannot defend him, or herself, or does not take it as a joke (Hoel & Salin 2003). Moreover, bullying has been found to be prevalent in organisations where employees and managers feel that they have the support, or at least implicitly the blessing of senior managers, to carry on their abusive and bullying behaviour (Einarsen 1999). Such views seem to be confirmed by the fact that over 90 per cent of respondents in a large survey of members of UNISON, the British public sector union, identified "bullies can get away with it" as a potential cause of bullying (Di Martino, et al. 2003). In some organisations, bullying may not be an integral part of the culture, but it is still indirectly 'permitted'. If there is no policy against bullying, no monitoring policy and no punishment for those who engage in bullying, it could be interpreted that the organisation accepts the behaviour as normal and legitimate (Hoel & Salin 2003). Brodsky (1976: 83) argues that, "For harassment to occur, the harassment elements must exist within a culture that permits and rewards harassment."

Two styles of leadership have been found to be associated with bullying: an authoritarian style and a laissez-faire style. Indeed, settling conflicts or dealing with disagreements through autocratic leadership has been linked to bullying (Vartia 1996). In contrast, people who had neither been bullied, nor had observed bullying taking place, reported that disagreements at their workplace tended to be solved by negotiation (Vartia 1996). Moreover, a laissez-faire style of leadership may also provide a fertile ground for bullying between peers or colleagues. A manager's ignorance and failure to recognise and intervene in bullying cases may indirectly contribute to bullying by conveying the message that bullying is acceptable. Similarly, dissatisfaction with the amount and quality of guidance, instructions and given feedback has been shown to be associated with higher levels of bullying (Hoel & Salin 2003).

Psychological harassment is a complex and dynamic process. It is the interaction of individuals (victim and perpetrator) in the work context that gives rise to psychological harassment behaviour. There are many possible determinants of bullying and probably often multiple causes of bullying within the organisation, within the perpetrator, or within the victim. No clear and standard profile of individuals, whether the perpetrator or the victim, or organisations has emerged. Each situation of bullying should be considered carefully to understand the circumstances of each bullying case.

Phase 2: Psychological Harassment Behaviour

Many studies have tried to define and understand psychological harassment behaviour. These investigations have been conducted in Scandinavia (Einarsen, et al. 2003), in Australia (McCarthy, et al. 1998, 2001), the United States (Keashly & Jagatic 2003), and in France (Hirigoyen 1998, 2001, Poilpot-Rocaboy 1998, 2000, 2002, 2003). In spite of the large body of information obtained from these assessments cultural and linguistic differences exist. For instance, the Third European survey on working conditions considers that legal and cultural differences between member countries may influence the way the questions are understood, and hence, determine the nature of responses. Also, the level of knowledge or awareness about work environment problems and the attitudes and

concern about such problems vary greatly from one country to another (Paoli & Merlié 2001). Furthermore, variable terms are used (i.e., psychological violence, emotional abuse, employee abuse, bullying, mobbing, moral harassment, workplace harassment, workplace aggression, workplace incivility, victimisation, interpersonal deviance and social undermining) to describe this dysfunctional workplace behaviour. Nevertheless, psychological harassment shares some common characteristics. In France, article L 122–49, paragraph 1 of Code du Travail (Labour Code) summarises these characteristics. This article states,

No employee should have to suffer repeated acts of moral harassment which have for their purpose or effect a degradation of his working conditions liable to violate his rights and his dignity and to alter his physical and mental health or to compromise his professional future.

Thus, the first characteristic of psychological harassment is the notion of repetition. Psychological harassment is a repeated and enduring behaviour. It is often perpetrated through repeated behaviour, of a type, which alone may be relatively minor, but which cumulatively can become a very serious form of violence. Although a single incident can suffice, psychological harassment often consists of repeated, unwelcome, unreciprocated and imposed actions. Frequency and duration are two important elements to define psychological harassment (Leymann 1996a, Chappell & Di Martino 1998, Hirigoyen 1998, Poilpot-Rocaboy 1998, Di Martino, et al. 2003, Einarsen, et al. 2003). Some authors (Leymann 1990, 1996a, Einarsen, et al. 2003) notice that bullying should occur at least once a week and exposure to negative behaviours is repeated within a six month period.

The second attribute and the third characteristic are the nature of the behaviour and the focus on a target. Psychological harassment is a negative and unwanted behaviour. It is the process whereby hostile and aggressive behaviour is directed systematically at one or more colleagues or subordinates, leading to a stigmatisation and victimisation of the target. Bullying is behaviour that offends, humiliates, intimidates or undermines a person. The dignity of the recipients of harassment is at the centre of attention, thus extending the scope of health, safety and wellbeing at work (Leymann 1996a, Di Martino, et al. 2003, Einarsen, et al. 2003).

The fourth characteristic is the result of the behaviour. Psychological harassment creates many negative consequences. Psychological harassment creates a risk to health and safety. Di Martino, Hoel and Cooper (2003) define psychological violence as intentional use of power against another person or group that can result in harm to their physical, mental, spiritual, moral or social development.

These four characteristics help to identify the phenomenon. Moreover, the variety of bullying behaviours is so comprehensive that many authors propose to clarify the nature of the harassment behaviour. For example, in Scandinavia, Leymann (1996a) identified five different forms of workplace harassment behaviours which include the manipulation of: (1) the victim's reputation, (2) the victim's possibilities of communicating with co-workers, (3) the victim's social relationships, (4) the quality of a person's occupational and life situation, and (5) the victim's health. These forms are taken up by Hirigoyen (1998) in France and by different Scandinavian studies (Einarsen, et al. 2003). In his NHS community trust research, Quine (1999) proposes a 20 item inventory of bullying behaviours to measure the phenomenon. The 20 items are included in five categories: (1) threat to professional status, (2) threat to personal standing, (3) isolation, (4) overwork, and (5) destabilisation.

In the United Kingdom, the Guidance on Bullying (UNISON 1996) proposes that there are nine different forms of bullying behaviour. In this document they are listed as (1) making life difficult for those who have the potential to do the bully's job better than the bully, (2) punishing others for being too competent by constant criticism or by removing their responsibilities, often giving them trivial tasks to do instead, (3) refusing to delegate because they feel they cannot trust anyone else, (4) shouting at staff to get things done, (5) persistently picking on people in front of others or in private, (6) insisting that a way of doing things is always right, (7) keeping individuals in their place by blocking their promotion, (8) if someone challenges a bully's authority, overloading them with work and reducing the deadlines, hoping that they will fail at what they do, and (9) feeling envious of another's professional or social ability, so setting out to make them appear incompetent, or make their lives miserable, in the hope of getting them dismissed or making them resign. And in the United States, numerous inventories of negative behaviours, identified with bullying, are proposed (Keashly & Jagatic 2003).

In the Australian literature a number of harassment behaviours have been identified. For instance, the guide written by Workplace Victoria (a division of the Victoria Work Cover Authority) to deal with workplace violence and bullying (Job Watch and Worksafe Victoria 2003) enumerates eleven harassment behaviours which could be workplace bullying. These negative behaviours are presented as (1) practical jokes, (2) verbal abuse (3) insulted, (4) excessive supervision, (5) constant criticism, (6) put down in public, (7) the subject of rumours, (8) overloaded with work, or not given enough work to do, (9) not getting the necessary information to do the job, (10) personal effects or work equipment being damaged, and (11) threatened with the sack.

This short review of the literature shows that a large variety of actions can be considered as psychological harassment. In spite of this variety, four characteristics (repetition of the behaviour, nature of the behaviour, focus on a target and result of the behaviour) can be used to diagnose the psychological harassment behaviour and distinct it to other negative behaviours in the workplace.

Phase 3: Coping with Psychological Harassment

When the psychological harassment is perceived, the victim feels negative emotions. Often the target of harassment responds by acting out certain behaviours. In the same way, the organisation can develop a response to harassment as is shown in phase 3 of Figure 1. However, few studies have investigated how individuals and organisations respond to psychological harassment, which is the third phase of the psychological harassment process.

Individual Response

Individuals can respond to psychological harassment passively or actively. Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004), in the first psychological harassment study in Iceland, classify the response of the victims in four clusters: assertive response, seek help, avoidance and do nothing. These can be arranged on a passive versus active dimension. The passive manner is essentially a 'do nothing strategy', and it is illustrated by an absence of reaction of the victim. The explanation of this kind of response is that the victim does not understand what has happened, and often does not dare to speak about the situation, because the victim thinks the situation is going to stop. In this case, the victim loses confidence and self esteem, feels alone and stays insulated gradually in the firm.

Certain specialists of victimisation explain the inaction of the victim by the existence with a cyclic process. This process is somewhat identical to the marital violence process. There are four aspects to this process, which have been identified as (1) the perpetrator reassures the victim after a violence act, (2) the victim hopes the violence is going to stop, but (3) when the victim is confident, violence occurs again. An alternative response to the passive format is the action (active response). Different types of action exist. For example, the victim can write, day after day, what is occurring, in order to keep the memory of the successive facts. The victim can communicate about the situation with co-workers, supervisors, managers, HR management, trade union representatives and even personnel of the health service. The purpose is to challenge the perpetrator, to support from colleagues, to inform the direction, to seek help. If the victim feels it is not possible to have help, a legal remedy can be sought, or leave to preserve health. In France, thanks to 'La loi de Modernisation Sociale' (Social Modernisation Law), the victim can more easily respond actively.

Some researchers (Thacker 1996, Zapf & Gross 2001, Olafsson & Johannsdottir 2004) suggest coping strategy is contingent. For example, the coping strategy can be related with various variables, such as the severity or duration of the harassment situation (how long the victim is harassed?), the characteristics of the victim (gender and status), the hierarchical relationship between the perpetrator and the victim, the status of the perpetrator, and the fear and the anticipation of the response of the company in the event of a complaint. For instance, Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004) show that coping strategies reflect the severity or duration of the bullying situation, and depend on the gender of the victim. Males tend to seek help less and use avoidance behaviour less than women, and males are more likely to use assertive strategies, confirming gender stereotypes about what constitutes appropriate behaviour. Increased bullying is also associated with the use of avoidance and passive response (do nothing) behaviour. Olafsson and Johannsdottir (2004) contend these results are mainly in accordance with findings from schools. It is suggested that active coping styles are employed during the initial stages of bullying, but that victims resort to more passive coping strategies as the bullying becomes more serious. Zapf and Gross (2001) also found that victims of bullying generally used constructive conflict solving strategies in the beginning of the conflict. Later, they subsequently changed their strategy several times, and often severed their linkage with the organisation. These researchers discovered that victims of bullying often advised other victims to leave the organisation and seek social support elsewhere.

Organisational Response

Organisations respond to bullying in terms of passive behaviours. Inaction is a passive coping style. Organisational agents ignore the complaint of the victim. Seldom does the organisation appear to be concerned with the complaint. This can be explained by the fact that in accordance to the organisation, the behaviour is regarded acceptable, as 'the norm', or the complaint is not taken with interest ("it is not serious!", "it is for fun!"), or the harassment situation is perceived as an interpersonal conflict ("it is their problem!"; "it is their private life!"). The inaction is also explained by the fact that managers do not often know how to act against this phenomenon (Hirigoyen 2001).

Organisations and their agents can also actively respond to bullying behaviour. The action is an active style of coping. Organisational agents, such as HR managers, supervisors, managers, trade union representatives and personnel of health services, may intervene and seek information, develop communication, training, sanction, change organisational factors (work context, work organisation, style of leadership and management, organisational culture). In a study of the organisational representative response, Ferris (2004) proposes another classification than passive and active coping styles. Three representative organisational responses to allegations of bullying were presented: (1) the behaviour is acceptable, (2) the behaviour is inappropriately equally attributed to both parties as a personality conflict, and (3) the behaviour is harmful and inappropriate. The author argues that not all responses are supportive and that some responses (the first and the second) can further harm an employee.

She concludes that counsellors must review potential organisational representative responses with employees and recommend mandatory training for organisational representatives. Fitzgerald and Shullman (1993) show, in the case of harassment the type of organisational response relates to various situational variables such as leadership and management style and organisational culture; perpetrator's characteristics such as status and performance; victim's characteristics such as status, performance, duration of the harassment situation; and characteristics of the decision maker (status, personality and gender). These individual and organisational responses determine the consequences of the psychological harassment in the workplace.

Phase 4: Effects of Psychological Harassment

Different studies show that psychological harassment in the workplace causes harm for the individual, the organisation and society. These symbolic relationships are expressed in phase four of Figure 1.

Individual Effects

Many studies show that psychological harassment has extremely negative effects for individuals. Generally, there are three individual consequences. The first effect is a deterioration of the victim's physical and mental health (McCarthy, et al. 1995, 1998, 2001, Leymann 1996b, Ayoko, et al. 2003, Di Martino, et al. 2003, Einarsen & Mikkelsen 2003, Djurkovic, et al. 2004, Matthiesen & Einarsen 2004, Nielsen, et al. 2004). Typically, research points to increased stress levels and reduced physical and psychological wellbeing, with the most frequently identified negative health related outcomes including: anxiety, depression, psychosomatic symptoms (hostility, hyper sensibility, loss of memory and feelings of victimisation), aggression, fear and mistrust, cognitive effects (such as, inability to concentrate, or think clearly, and reduced problem solving capacity), isolation, loneliness, deterioration of relationships, chronic fatigue and sleep problems. Workplace bullying not only affects the targets, but also their colleagues or other bystanders. According to different studies (Einarsen & Mikkelsen 2003), witnesses of bullying reported more mental stress reactions than workers who had not witnessed anyone being bullied in their department. Witnesses may also suffer due to a real, or perceived, inability to help the target.

In the most severe cases of bullying, victims have frequently been diagnosed with post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD (Leymann & Gustafsson 1996, Matthiesen & Einarsen 2004, Nielsen, et al. 2004, Tehrani 2004). The PTSD diagnosis refers to a constellation of stress symptoms typically exhibited by victims of exceptionally traumatic events. The hallmark symptoms of PTSD are reexperiencing, avoidance numbing and arousal. First, the trauma is relived through repeated, insistent and painful memories of the event(s) or in recurring nightmares. Also, the victims may experience an intense psychological discomfort and/or react physically when exposed to reminders of the trauma. Second, victims with PTSD tend to avoid stimuli related to the traumatic situation(s) and exhibit a general numbing of responsiveness. For instance, they may have problems remembering the actual event(s) or may exhibit a reduced interest in activities they used to enjoy. Often they feel detached from others. A third symptom is hyper arousal. This may be manifested in, for example, sleeping problems, concentration difficulties, highly tense and irritable behaviour, as well as in exaggerated reactions to unexpected stimuli (Einarsen & Mikkelsen 2003). Some authors (Leymann 1996a, Hirigoyen 2001) have claimed work harassment to be a major cause of suicide. Psychological harassment may also have wider ramifications beyond those directly involved. Research has shown that witnessing violence may lead to fear of future violent incidents and as such has similar negative effects as being personally assaulted or attacked (Di Martino, et al. 2003).

The second effect of psychological harassment is the economic consequence for the victim. A loss of income is often real. Harassment may generate coping strategies and health effects which can develop into sickness absence, a lessening of productivity, a reduction of performance, resignation from the organisation, and work incapacity because of a loss of self confidence. Hirigoyen (2001) notes that in 36 per cent of the cases, the victim leaves the firm. In 20 per cent of the reported cases, the person is laid off, in nine per cent of the cases, the departure is negotiated, in seven per cent of the cases, the person resigns and in one per cent of the cases, the person is put in anticipated retirement. In addition to this loss of incomes, the victim may have medical expenses, psychotherapeutic spending and fees of lawyers. According to Hirigoyen (2001), 30 per cent of the victims stopped working due to illness, disability, or are made redundant for medical inaptitude. In 66 per cent of the cases, the victim is actually excluded from the work world.

The third effect of bullying is the family and social implications. The results of exposure to psychological harassment are likely to affect several important spheres of life, for example, relationship with family or friends, leisure activities, household duties or sex life (Einarsen & Mikkelsen 2003). Di Martino, et al. (2003) report that in a German national study of bullying, a total of 20 per cent of the sample reported conflicts with partners or family, with eight point one per cent eventually leading to a separation from their spouse. Research shows that all of these individual effects are dependent on various variables such as severity and duration of harassment, coping strategy of the victim, coping strategy of the organisation, characteristics of the victim (sensitivity, education and experience). These effects create many costs for the organisation.

Organisational Effects

Hoel, Einarsen and Cooper (2003) report,

From the very start of research into workplace bullying, attention has been paid to the negative effects the experience may have on victims... by contrast, much less attention has been paid to a possible relationship between bullying and organisational outcomes. (p.145).

Psychological harassment is very costly for organisations. Leymann (1990) argues that a case of bullying may cost the organisation around 30,000 to 100,000 euros each year. Di Martino, et al. (2003) reveal that in a study of bullying at two Finnish hospitals it was estimated that the annual cost of absence from bullying was equivalent to 195,465 euros. In Australia, using the latest Australian estimates, the cost of workplace harassment to industry was estimated at between \$6 billion and \$13 billion per annum when calculating the cost of direct, hidden and lost productivity, including lost opportunity costs. Given this estimate, workplace harassment represents between point nine and two per cent of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Queensland Government 2002).

Costs to the organisation can be significant. These costs include direct costs relating to absence, sick leave, turnover (contributing to recruitment, training and development costs), reduced productivity and performance, and strike among both victims and work groups, and costs in relation to potential litigation (time spent in tribunal and court, compensation for loss of earning, compensation for psychological damage, loss of public goodwill and reputation). In their study, Hoel, et al. (2003) summarise the literature regarding the organisational effects of bullying and list the costs due to absenteeism, turnover, reduction performance and productivity, use to union or legal system and strike action in a British local authority. The authors specify that the costs relate to the victim's behaviour, but also with the witnesses of the bullying. The number of potential organisational effects resulting from psychological harassment in the workplace suggests that combating bullying makes good business sense.

Societal Effects

The direct and indirect costs to society of psychological harassment are difficult to estimate. Di Martino, et al. (2003) note the assessment of the total costs of psychological harassment to society is made more difficult by the fact that it is not possible to estimate such costs by simply adding up all the individual costs and all the organisational costs. However, several consequences of bullying may translate into an economic burden for society. Absenteeism costs arising from long term illness, premature retirement on the grounds of ill health, long term unemployment and welfare dependency, premature and unplanned loss of productive employees (thus depriving the workforce of skills and talents and affecting overall national productivity), economic burden for personal care is passed on to family and friends are examples of societal costs.

Depending upon the national system for healthcare, medical expenses arising from harassment may represent a substantial cost to society. These expenditures arise from the national model for compensation, consequences of bullying, such as long term sickness absenteeism and premature retirement may translate into an economic burden for society and lead to a drop in productivity and output. An impact on service and quality of care is also identified. Employees working in an atmosphere of fear are unlikely to provide care and service to the best of their abilities and the quality of service provision may suffer, and eventually deteriorate (Arnetz & Arnetz 2001).

CONCLUSION

A salient contribution of this paper is to presentation of the first specific conceptual model of psychological harassment in the workplace. This model presents psychological harassment as a four phase process. Because the model explains the determinants and the effects of psychological harassment behaviour, it is an essential step to develop practices for combating the phenomenon of workplace bullying. In fact, understanding the drivers and relevant variables of psychological harassment shows why it is important to combat the phenomenon. An understanding of the antecedents of psychological harassment and behaviour explains how it is possible to address the phenomenon. This conceptual model provides underpinning to propose a potential process to HR management intervention to combat psychological harassment in the workplace.

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

This paper has been written when I was visiting the School of Business and Information Management of the Australian National University (Canberra). I would like to express my thanks to the people of the school and particularly Richard Winter and Chris Chan for their extremely helpful comments.

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