How Can a Diverse and Inclusive Workplace Reduce Cases of Bullying and Harassment? (White Paper)

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Workplace bullying is on the rise and it is imperative to find solutions for combatting this issue, so we can work in healthy and productive workplaces. Let's review, some definitions, so we can recognize it, and list some preventive measures, so we can know what to do, when it happens.

What is Workplace Bullying?

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Bullying at work means harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone's work tasks. This behavior occurs repeatedly and over a period of time, in an escalated manner, in which the confronted person lacks the power to defend themselves. The target then ends up in an inferior position (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper). The one who is bullied cannot avoid the situation easily nor the negative treatment. It means that hostile communication is being used to encourage repeated health harming mistreatment, verbal abuse

or conduct, which is threating, humiliating, intimidating or sabotaging, and whose behavior interferes with work (Namie & Namie).

The occurrence of workplace bullying is dependent on several factors:

- A global economy with many demands
- A supervisor who demands immediate decisions and around the-clock interactions from staff
- Heavy workloads and poor scheduling for staff
- Rising stress levels and unnecessary distractions when staff members are working
- Quantity of sleep not enough for a staff member and too much to think about
- Supervisors not consistently checking safety measures in workplace

Sometimes the supervisor is controlling, as a result of organizational/technological changes in the workplace, creating role conflict amongst the co-workers. The supervisor has an autocratic leadership style, not allowing his/her staff to be involved in the general process of decision-making in the department.
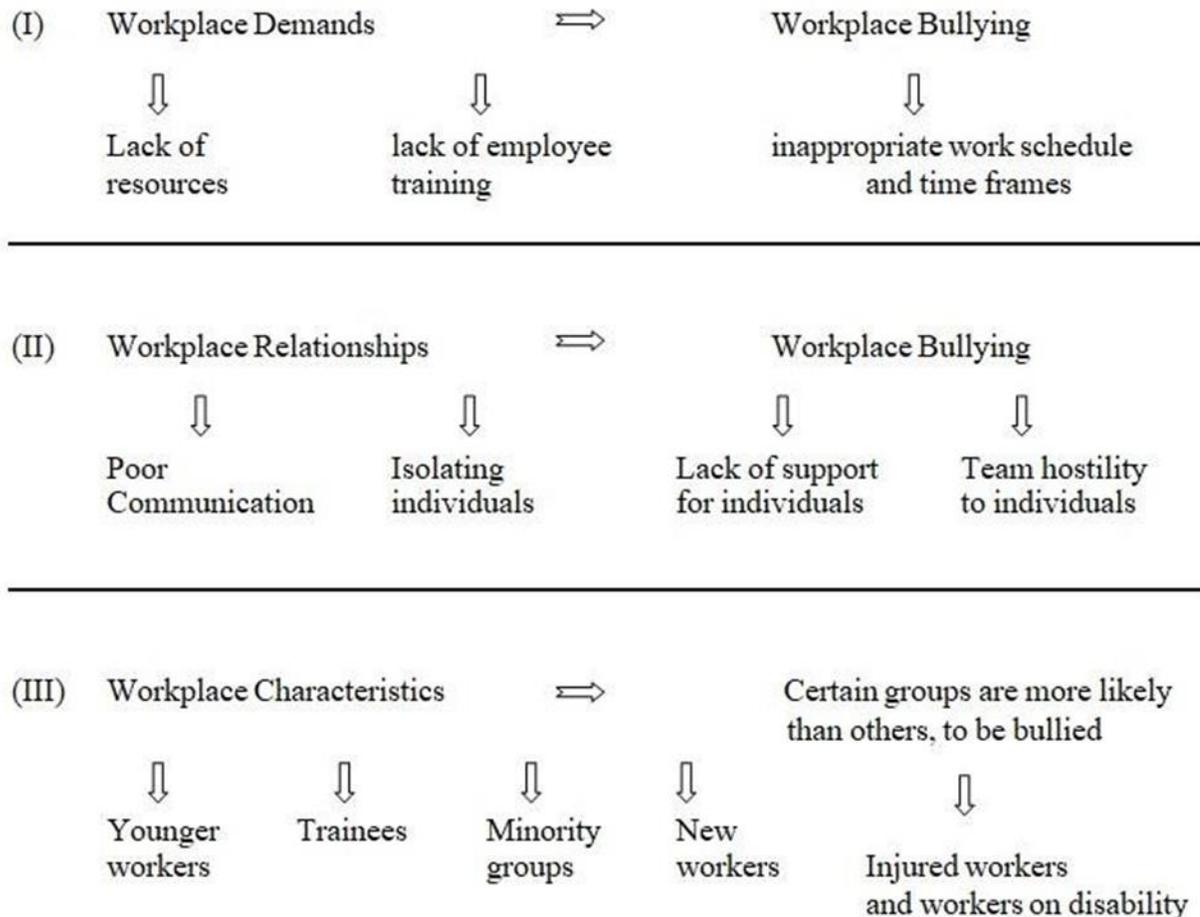
It is essential for our supervisors and managers to appropriately delegate responsibilities to their staff. This needs to be done in a civil fashion, without the use of derogatory language, or inappropriate critique or feedback. Giving your staff guidance, and being patient with questions and answers, helps us look up to managers and supervisors as mentors.

How Workplace Bullying Occurs?

Pictorially, the following chart summarizes the situation:

Pictorially ⟹

(I) Workplace Demands ⟹ Workplace Bullying

⟱ Lack of resources ⟱ lack of employee training ⟱ inappropriate work schedule and time frames

(II) Workplace Relationships ⟹ Workplace Bullying

⟱ Poor Communication ⟱ Isolating individuals ⟱ Lack of support for individuals ⟱ Team hostility to individuals

(III) Workplace Characteristics ⟹ Certain groups are more likely than others, to be bullied

⟱ Younger workers ⟱ Trainees ⟱ Minority groups ⟱ New workers ⟱ Injured workers and workers on disability

Keeping the Workplace Safe

How Can Managers and Supervisors Keep the Workplace Safe?

Managers and supervisors need to educate their staff about taking workplace bullying seriously. Develop a department policy that instructs colleagues what to do/where to go when workplace bullying occurs. If workplace bullying has occurred in your department create an open dialogue that is confidential and allows your colleagues to share feelings, problems and ideas about workplace bullying. Organize department workplace bullying prevention forums which provide an environment for possible resolutions of issues that arise. Encourage bystanders who observe the workplace bullying incident, or are indirectly affected by the workplace bullying occurrence "to speak up" and "stand up" for themselves and others who have been affected by workplace bullying.

As a manager or supervisor define job responsibilities clearly, and seek regular feedback from your colleagues about how your colleagues can envision their job roles and responsibilities. Provide your colleagues with the appropriate information and training, so that assignments are implemented effectively. Work on establishing bullying prevention techniques in your department:

- Empathy

- Assertiveness

- Development of friendships skills

- Development of emotional regulation

- Anger management skills

- Development of social problem skills

Statistics of Bullying in the Workplace

2017 Workplace Bullying Institute

workplacebullying.org

- 70% of the bullies are men, 65% of their targets are women, and 35% of their targets are men

- 30% of the bullies are women, 67% of their targets are women, and 33% of their targets are male

- 61% of the bullies are bosses and in 63% of these cases, the bully operates alone

- 40% of those targeted, are believed to suffer adverse health consequences from bullying

- 29% of those targeted remained silent about the abusive conduct, and only 17% of those targeted sought formal resolution.

Diverse and Inclusive Workplace

Why a Diverse and Inclusive Workplace Can Reduce Bullying and Harassment?

In an inclusive workplace there is a sense of belonging, a feeling of being respected and valued for who you are, so that you can do your best work.

When one works in an inclusive workplace, colleagues are not afraid to speak up and express issues that can be problematic. The organizational climate is more inviting for embracing a growth mindset. Generally, this mindset is encouraged by the leadership of the organization. If we hold our leaders responsible for what they are setting out to do, and for issues they care about, people will feel happy about being accountable for getting things done.

The Inclusive Model (Bradford & Chen, 1993) uses:
- Horizontal interaction not a rigid chain of command
- Empowers colleagues and does not restrict information and opinions
- Encourages continual, transparent communication not controlled; not communication where supervisor has to know everything and be in charge;
- Welcomes knowledge from different sources
- Rewards innovation and creativity, and does not maintain status-quo

- Encourages and faces constructive conflict, and does not avoid conflict

When there is a strong diversity and inclusion strategy in your workplace, one will create a shield for addressing bullying in the workplace.

Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

How to Create a Successful Diversity and Inclusion Strategy

A strong diversity and inclusion strategy will help one to address bullying (Frankel, 2012).

- State and Communicate Diversity and Inclusion Values clearly in mission statements, policy handbooks, and ensure they are visibly present on the website and in major communications. These statements must be expressed by the President/CEO and other organizational leaders.

- Create resource groups which are regularly communicating with leaders of the organization who can convey what's going on with diversity and inclusion, and who can work with such groups in finding solutions to situations that arise. The idea is to create more inclusive leaders.

- Establish mandatory diversity training that goes beyond compliance, across the organization. Assess the training to ensure that everyone participates in diversity and inclusion initiatives in the organization.

- Establish cross cultural mentoring so colleagues get to know others from marginalized groups. The idea is to reduce bullying in your setting.

- Implement diversity and inclusion strategies and receive feedback.

- In order to engage every level of the organization, encourage training and communication in diversity and inclusion.

- Encourage the role of intersectionality – the way all of our multiple identities in the organization intersect with regard to race, gender, sexual orientation, age, social and economic class, abilities and disabilities, etc. so all voices are heard.

If these initiatives do not work and workplace bullying continues establish contact with HR (Human Resources) and Diversity Departments in the organization, or use other resources.

The Importance of Leaders as Allies

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Leaders will become allies when they create inclusive organizational climates. When groups feel unsupported or excluded, these groups become marginalized. Eradicate incivility, aggression and subtle discrimination and all forms of discrimination. When organizational leaders become allies they show support and emphasize the importance of inclusion. Be prepared to change and show flexibility so that our diversive and inclusive environments create more civility amongst our colleagues so that we work more effectively together.

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