Workplace Bullying: A Complex Problem in Contemporary Organizations

Alexia Georgakopoulos
Nova Southeastern University
USA
Email: georgako@nova.edu

LaVena Wilkin
Sullivan University
USA

Brianna Kent
Nova Southeastern University
USA

Abstract

Workplace bullies, people who belittle, humiliate, and threaten their co-workers cost organizations billions of dollars a year. While it is estimated that fifty-four million people are subjected to emotional abuse in the workplace each year, U.S. organizations are still struggling to recognize and alleviate this problem. In this study, a qualitative approach explored the problem of workplace bullying from a theoretical perspective. Qualitative data was collected through focus groups methodology and through Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM) computer-assisted methodology. The study was conducted with conflict analysis and resolution graduate students who utilized Roger Schwarz's (2002) The Skilled Facilitator problem-solving model to deepen their awareness of the negative impact workplace bullying has on organizations, targets, and bullies and to provide possible solutions to this social problem. This study found that organizational cultures exacerbate the problem when the leaders either do not understand workplace bullying or dismiss it as tough management. The study concluded that a systems approach to designing a training program that addresses the root causes, involves individuals at all levels, and provides skills for dealing with this phenomena can promote a harmonious working environment.

Keywords: Workplace bullying, contemporary organizations.

Introduction

Workplace bullying has received increasing academic attention during the past ten years, and that focus appears to be well placed. Not only is this phenomenon harmful to individual employees, but is also costs U.S. organizations billions of dollars each year (Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Sypher, 2004). Moreover, bullying is not an isolated or rare phenomenon. According to The Workplace Bullying Institute (U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey), thirty-seven percent of all U.S. workers have been targets of workplace bullies. Unfortunately, organizational leaders either do not recognize the detrimental effects of workplace bullying, or they do not know how to productively intervene (Salin, 2003). As a result, bullies continue their reign of terror, and targets worry about the bully, lose trust in the company, or leave their workplace.

Workplace bullying needs to be explored in a sustained and systematic way because organizations have a responsibility to protect their employees from the psychological harassment of a workplace bully (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2003). Additionally, since workplace bullying has a negative impact on a company's profitability, organizational leaders who proactively address this social issue will more effectively meet their organizational goals (Keashly & Jagatic, 2003). Another benefit workplace bullying research is increased awareness of the actions and behaviors of workplace bullies. Armed with a deeper awareness of workplace bullying, organizational leaders will be better equipped to provide a safe and healthy working environment for all employees. In fact, once workplace bullying is understood, the incidences of this social problem may begin to diminish in organizations in the United States (hereafter referred to as American organizations).

Literature Review

Workplace bullying costs American organizations billions of dollars a year, and this bully inflicted trauma is emerging as a more deleterious problem for both individuals and organizations than all other occupational stresses combined (Adams & Crawford, 1992). A 2007 study commissioned by The Workplace Bullying Institute estimated that fifty-four million people have been bullied at work (U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey). With all the laws, policies, and regulations designed to protect workers from harassment, asking how bullying can happen is a paramount question. One contributing factor is that bullying behavior is often ignored, tolerated, misinterpreted, or even instigated by the organization's management as a deliberate management strategy (Sheehan, 1999).

Although workplace bullying should be a serious concern for organizations, it often goes unreported because the targets feel humiliated and shamed (Baron & Neuman, 1998). Moreover, employers exacerbate the problem by ignoring or discounting complaints. Many targets suffer silently; some quit their jobs. For others, the stress is so unbearable it contributes to heart attacks or other stress-related physical ailments (Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Stress, 1999). In extreme cases, either the bully or the target resorts to homicide or suicide (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003; Namie & Namie, 2003; Workplace Violence, 2001). These overwhelming feelings of stress can impact not only the target but other workers who witness the bullying. Lutgen-Sandvik (2006) reports that the stress and desire to quit also translate to witnesses of workplace bullying. Her finding means that workplace bullying is not a problem isolated to the target and the bully but is a systemic problem. Lutgen-Sandvik's findings are supported by Vartia (2001) and Mikkelson & Einarsen (2001, 2002) who found similar results in international studies.

Glendinning (2001) says workplace bullying is akin to a cancer in the workplace; and, if measures are not taken to cure it, both the organization and individual employees will become increasingly unhealthy. Targets of workplace bullying often report increased fear, anxiety, helplessness, and anger. Although the source of these feelings is emotional abuse at work, the targets often carry the negative effects into their personal lives (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003). In addition, targets report reducing their efforts, taking time off to avoid the bully, or leaving the organization. As a result, productivity and profits diminish (Harvey, Heames & Richey, 2006). As the public's awareness of workplace bullying increases, targets will become more vocal and conciliatory remedies will be necessary.   Some people believe this matter is best resolved by organizational awareness and training programs (Glendinning, 2001; Salin, 2003; Sheehan, 1999). However, proponents of legislative changes posit that power imbalances, evidenced by the fact that seventy-two percent of the bullies are supervisors, and the organizational culture contribute to the problem (Keashly, 2002; U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey).   In their opinions, companies will continue the status quo until mandated to change (Davenport, Schwartz & Elliott, 2002; Namie & Namie, 2003).

Most of the existing research on workplace bullying has been conducted outside of the United States, in countries including Sweden, Australia, France, Britain, Finland, Italy, and Germany. Although bullying is endemic in American organizations, the United States has lagged behind other countries in studying this phenomenon. As American companies expand into global markets, they will need to understand and address the problems associated with workplace bullying.

Workplace Bullying Defined

In the workplace, bullying is a form psychological violence. Dr. Heinz Leymann (1996), a Swedish pioneer in the study of workplace bullying, defines this phenomenon as "psychological terror involving hostile and unethical communication directed in a systematic way by one or a few individuals mainly toward one individual" (p. 165). Although there is not a clearly agreed upon definition of workplace bullying, bullying is interpersonal behaviors that are unwelcome and unsolicited (Keashly, 1998). Building on Leymann's (1996) definition, the following three criteria differentiate bullying from milder forms of workplace aggression. Bullying is psychological violence or abuse that is **persistently and continuously** repeated over time. It is done with **malice**, and the **target perceives it to have a negative impact** on his or her performance and wellbeing (Coombs & Holladay, 2004; Einarsen, 1999; Keashly, 1998; Namie & Namie, 2003; Wornham, 2003). Einarsen et al. (2003) define workplace bullying as "harassing, offending, socially excluding someone, or negatively affecting someone's work (p.15). The behavior, interaction, or process must occur repeatedly over a period of at least six months and put the target in an inferior position (Einarsen et al., 2003; Keashly, 1998).

Although conflict may escalate to bullying if it is not productively managed (Einarsen et al., 2003), one distinguishing factor between conflict and bullying is the frequency and longevity of the action (Salin, 2003). An isolated incident between two parties in positions of equal power is not considered bullying (Einarsen et al., 2003).Workplace bullying behaviors are typically not physical. When bullying behaviors are physical, they typically encompass physical gestures such as throwing things and pounding the desk, not physical contact. Usually bullying takes the form of verbal and psychological abuse (Keashly, 2001). Moreover, bullying spans a variety of behaviors that can be summed up in three broad categories. The first category is a threat to personal standing such as public humiliation, verbal threats, shunning the target, and spreading gossip or rumors (Djurkovic, McCormack & Casimir, 2005; Keashly, 2001). Specific behaviors include cursing, screaming, and publicly criticizing the target (Keashly 2001).

The second category, threat to professional standing, involves withholding vital information, work obstruction, taking credit for the target's work, denying access to training, not providing constructive feedback, and assigning impossible tasks or workloads. The third behavioral category is tactics of control and manipulation. By utilizing these tactics, the bully attempts to control the target by threatening job loss, isolating the target, or boasting of owning a weapon (Keashly, 2001; Djurkovic, McCormack & Casimir, 2005).   In addition, when workplace bullying is unmanaged or mismanaged, it can escalate into violent and illegal physical acts of aggression (Andersson & Pearson, 1999). Often, targets of workplace bullying say the experience is difficult to describe. Many targets contend that unless someone has experienced bullying behaviors, the demoralizing effect bullying has on one's mental state is impossible to understand (Keashly, 2001). Given the complex task of describing what bullying feels like, one study developed metaphors to draw a mental picture of the targets' experiences. Those metaphors included a battle, nightmare, water torture, and being fed garbage. Others said they felt abused and broken (Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik, & Alberts, 2006).

Antecedents to Workplace Bullying

Many studies have theorized about the root causes of workplace bullying, and they conclude that there is not specific reason people bully (Einarsen, 1999; Zapf, 1999). In fact, the root causes include both organizational and individual factors (Salin, 2003; Skogstad, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2007; Zapf & Einarsen, 2003), and there are multi-causal layers of antecedents within each of those categories. Moreover, from the individual perspective, antecedents to workplace bullying may be viewed through the lens of both the target and the bully.

For example, Zapf and Einarsen (2003) report three main reasons people bully. First, they are attempting to protect their self-esteem. Bullying may result from a manager's need to boost his or herself worth and undermine a subordinate as a result of feeling envious of a subordinate's talents or work ethic. (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2008). Second, people may bully because they lack social competencies, including emotional intelligence. Micro-political behavior also contributes to bullying: one person makes decisions that protect his or her own position even though that decision may harm the other's standing or reputation in the organization (Zapf & Einarsen, 2003). Moreover, power imbalances and organizational culture contribute to bullying (Salin, 2003). Although much of the power abuse occurs between managers and subordinates, mendacious power differentials can occur between co-workers of equal standing in the organization. This type of bullying behavior may happen when employees are encouraged to compete against one another for sales quotas or to achieve other work related goals. In an effort to discredit a coworker, the bully may gossip, sabotage work, or criticize ideas (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2008).

Likewise, Zapf and Einarsen (2003) suggest three reasons individuals become targets of workplace bullying, including being outside of the group, having low self-esteem and social competence, and being an overachiever. Differences in age, race, gender, ethnicity, and educational levels may intensify conflicts and increase bullying behaviors because people do not understand the motivations and actions of people who are perceived as different (Baron & Neuman, 1998; Harvey et al., 2006; Keashly, 1998; Zapf and Einarsen, 2003).   Additionally, individuals who lack self-confidence or sufficient conflict management skills are more likely to be targets of workplace bullying (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007). Finally, people who are characterized as overachievers may also fall prey to a workplace bully because the bully may feel threatened by the target's competence (Zapf & Einarsen, 2003). Additionally, organizational changes, cultures, and leadership styles often contribute to the pervasiveness of bullying behaviors (Davenport, et al., 2002; Hoel & Salin, 2003; Namie & Namie, 2003; Skogstad et al., 2007). For instance, restructuring, downsizing, and mergers mean people are often asked to do more with fewer resources (Hoel & Salin, 2003; Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2008).

As the span of control increases, managers may adopt a more autocratic leadership style and job security is threatened. These changes may result in increased resentment and tensions (Hoel & Salin, 2003), which can lead to stressful working conditions that may trigger workplace bullying (Rayner, 1997). Finally, the decline in the economy is a contributing factor to workplace bullying. With unemployment rates at 9.5% (Cohen, 2010, p. 2), targets cannot simply leave a job, and bullies are aware of the economic power they have over the target (Cohen, 2010). Some organizations build enabling structures into the workplace by creating an internal reward system that encourages competition. Often, these organizational leaders value profits over people (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2008). Lutgen-Sandvik and McDermott (2008), contend organizational structures may support bullying by implementing "anti-employee policies" and laissez-faire management styles (Hauge, et al. 2007; Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2008). Examples of anti-employee polices are progressive discipline policies and at-will employment policies that can result in job separation for no reason. Interestingly, laissez-faire management, which is a hands-off approach to management, also exacerbates bullying behavior because the manager may want the bully and target to work out their problems without interference from the administration (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2008).

Many times organizational leaders either do not know how to deal with bullying behaviors, or they do not understand the costs involved with avoiding or mismanaging them (Salin, 2003). The negative impact for the target can be exacerbated when allegations of bullying are discounted or labeled as personality conflicts. By labeling a conflict a personality conflict, the target is expected to share some of the blame/burden for the bullying. Keashly (2002) contends that when organizational leaders fail to prevent the bullying, or when they do not put an end to it, targets view the organization's response as abusive behavior. In turn, targets are abused by both the bully and the organization (Keashly, 2002). When organizational cultures do nothing about the bullying behavior, they contribute to it and are seen as conspiring with the bully (Keashly, 1998). Additionally, since many workplace bullies are supervisors, when bullying behavior is condoned, it becomes part of the organizational culture (Tepper, Duffy, Henle, & Lambert; 2006) leading employees to emulate bullying behavior. This trickle-down effect magnifies the problem and leaves organizations with the responsibility of identifying and eliminating workplace bullying (Hodson, Roscigno, & Lopez ,2006).

Effects of Workplace Bullying

Lutgen-Sandvik's (2004) Employee Emotional Abuse (EEA) Model describes workplace bullying as "a repetitive, targeted, and destructive form of communication directed by more powerful members at work at those less powerful" (p. 472). This model, which builds on Leymann's (1996) research, suggests there are four phases to bullying incidents. The first is the precipitating incident that puts the target on the bully's radar. The precipitating event may be a job-related change that increases internal and external pressures, such as downsizing or changing jobs. When the problem is not addressed, the bullying spirals into the second phase. In the second phase the bully assails the target with repeated criticism, manipulation, isolation, or threats. This may take the form of progressive discipline embedded in the pretext of constructive feedback or complaints about the target's performance. Next, in phase three, the target reports the abuse to upper management. In this phase, the target is often "revictimized" (p. 477) and labeled as a troublemaker. As a result of the target's attempts to remedy the situation, the bullying behavior may become more frequent and vitriolic. Finally, the target quits, is fired, or is transferred in phase four. When this happens, targets often blame the organization as much as the bully because the organization failed to protect them (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003).

Left unchecked, the negative effects of workplace bullying can be costly for both the company and individual employees. A study by the National Institute of Occupational Health and Safety (NIOSH) found that stressful working conditions lead to higher levels of absenteeism and turnover and lower motivation and morale (Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2007; Stress, 1999; Zapf & Gross, 2001). Additionally, a study conducted by Christine Pearson of the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill corroborated those findings. Her research found that 53 percent of the respondents reported lost work time attempting to avoid the bully; 22 percent reduced work efforts; 10 percent cut back on the number of hours they worked; and 12 percent quit (Pearson & Porath, 2005). Even when targets report bullying, their claims can be either discounted or labeled as personality conflicts by managers who are ill-equipped to handle the problem. Therefore, rather than risk the added humiliation of having their allegations ignored, targets of workplace bullying often suffer in silence and live in fear of personal humiliation, social rejection, and economic loss .

Keashly and Neuman (2004) contend that targets of workplace bullying suffer from chronic stress with targets reporting high levels of "anxiety, depression, burnout, frustration, and helplessness" (p. 339). In addition, anger, frustration, fear, and resentment plague targets of workplace bullying (Keashly & Neuman, 2004; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007). This increased stress can lead to insomnia, clinical depression, eating disorders, heart disease, and stomach ailments (Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Keashly & Neuman, 2004; Stress, 1999; Sypher, 2004). Moreover, even employees who are not direct targets of bullying behaviors suffer negative effects. Employees who witness their co-workers being abused may be afraid that they will be the next target of the bully. As a result, non-targeted co-workers also experience more stress, lower levels of job satisfaction, and higher turnover rates than individuals working in bully free environments (Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy, & Alberts, 2007). In some cases, witnesses choose not to get involved which may lead to feeling guilty. In other instances, witnesses may try to help the target by finding ways to retaliate against the bully. In any case, the witnesses spend a great deal of time discussing the bullying resulting in potentially lower productivity for the organization (Pearson & Porath, 2005).

Finally, when a bullying-target relationship exists in a team, the team is perceived to be of lower status than teams in which bullying does not occur (Coyne, Craig, & Chong, 2004). This toxic work environment not only impacts individuals, but it also has a negative effect on group performance due to low levels of trust and fear poor communication (Keashly & Neuman, 2004). These stress-related illnesses result in both lower productivity and higher absenteeism, and these two factors cost U.S. organizations billions of dollars a year. The American Institute of Stress estimates that one million workers miss work every day due to stress-related illnesses (Job Stress, n.d.). Absenteeism, turnover, accidents, medical costs, workers' compensation awards, and reduced productivity contribute to an estimated annual $300 billion in added costs and thus lost profits (Job Stress, n.d.). Additionally, targets are less committed to the organizations for which they work. As a result, individuals are not the only ones suffering; organizational profits are negatively impacted. In combination, these factors hinder The United States' ability to compete in the global market (Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Sypher, 2004).

Current Legal Recourse

A review of the remedies for targets indicates limited legal recourse. Yamada (2000 a, 2000 b, 2005) points out that the limited legal recourses and the severity workplace bullying indicates a serious need to revise and expand legal recourses. Currently, there are two existing tort laws, Intentional Infliction of Emotional Distress and Intentional Interference with Employment Relationship, offer some protection. Although, juries in Massachusetts and Indiana awarded damages in excess of one million dollars to employees who were barraged with persistent, calculated humiliation by their superiors (Gardner & Johnson, 2001), the employee bears the initial brunt of litigation costs (Namie & Namie, 2003). Likewise, two federal legislative acts, Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) and Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, offer limited protection to victims of workplace bullying. Although the Bureau of Labor Statistics states that workplace violence is a safety and health issue and falls within the OSHA laws, the General Duty Clause of OSHA only offers guidelines, not rules and recommendations, for reducing employees' exposure to violence (OSHA's Mission).

Additionally, Title VII protects workers from discrimination based on race, religion, color, gender, or national origin. In 1991, this was extended to include protection from hostile or abusive working environments. The criterion for determining "hostile and abusive" is a place where "intimidation and ridicule are so severe they alter the conditions of the victim's employment and creates an abusive working environment that interferes with performance". The Supreme Court ruled that the criteria are met "if a reasonable person finds this behavior hostile and the victim perceives the environment to be abusive" (EEOC). However, recently, the New York state senate proposed legislation that allows workers to sue for physical, psychological, or economic harm caused by abusive treatment in the workplace. If workers can prove they were targets of verbal abuse, sabotage, or threats, they may be able to recoup lost wages, medical expenses, and even punitive damages. Moreover, sixteen other states are proposing anti-bullying legislation (Cohen, 2010).

Other Possible Remedies for Workplace Bullying

One researcher, comparing the social anomaly of workplace bullying to the sexual harassment issue of twenty years ago, says that the time has come to address this concern (Einarsen, 1999). The degree, gravity, and regularity of workplace bullying necessitate policy changes (Bowman & Zigmond, 1997).*Are internal remedies, such as training programs, the solution? Or will changes occur only if they are mandated?* Therein lies the question.

Recently, the U.S. Department of Justice hosted a consortium of experts from law enforcement, government, private industry, victim services, academia, mental health, and the Federal Bureau of Investigation to address workplace violence. One recommendation was to fund research to determine if incremental changes to existing laws would be sufficient or if proposing new legislation would be more appropriate. Another was for organizations to develop internal conflict resolution programs that would include providing awareness and conflict resolution training (Rugala & Isaacs, n.d). Keashly and Neuman (2004) posit that if internal programs are successful, they must be data driven, have support from individuals at all levels of the organization, and be continually "monitored, evaluated, and adapted" (p. 345). The first step is conducting a needs assessment to determine the types and occurrences of aggressive behavior. That data can be captured via grievance, harassment, and discrimination claim reports. Second, successful programs require both financial and human resources. Not only will employees and supervisors need to be involved in the development and implementation, but organizational and union leaders should also support these efforts. Finally, frequent monitoring and continuous improvement will assure the program meets the needs of the individuals and the organization (Keashly & Neuman, 2004).

The United States lags behind other countries when it comes to anti-bullying remedies; and as it searches for rational strategies, policymakers may want to model the guidelines other countries have implemented. In 1993, Sweden was the first country to establish an anti-bullying ordinance, and it is the only country where legislation contains distinct language about what constitutes workplace bullying. Additionally, South Australia has anti-bullying laws that assess fines to organizations that do not intervene and stop the bullying behavior (Von Bergen, Zavaletta, & Soper, 2006).   Other countries, including, France, Spain, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway and Germany have introduced legislation aimed at creating a bully-free work environment. In 2002, Quebec, Canada incorporated incremental changes to its Labor Standards Act which renders psychological harassment illegal (Namie, 2003; Rayner et al. 2002). In addition, Oregon, Washington State, Oklahoma, and California have proposed legislation to create new policies making it unlawful for employers to allow bullying and intimidating behaviors. Moreover, citizens of Hampshire, Massachusetts voted to approve a public policy that declared "workplace psychological harassment to be an occupational health issue" and requires employers of fifty or more employees to have an anti-bullying policy in place before December 31, 2005 (www.bullyinginstitute.org).

Research Questions

The overarching research question for this study was "Why is workplace bullying a complex problem that needs to be addressed in contemporary organizations?" Although much of the current literature on workplace bullying addresses this question, there is room for expansion. The answers generated in this study provide organizations and individuals with a deeper understanding of this phenomena, as well as possible alternatives for combating it. Taking measures to reduce workplace bullying can alleviate the associated stress and improve employees' mental, physical, and financial health. As a result, productivity and motivation will improve; stress-related health-costs may decrease; turnover will be reduced; and organizations may experience increased profitability (Sypher, 2004). If the United States hopes to maintain its economic power, providing a work environment free from violence, threats, and harassment will become a priority (Glendinning, 2001).

As organizational leaders begin to address this problem, they may benefit from understanding why workplace bullying is an organizational and individual problem, discovering the root causes of workplace bullying behavior, and learning ways to protect targets of bullies. This can lead to a more peaceful and harmonious working environment, which can contribute to improved organizational effectiveness.This study uses research generated from graduate student focus groups (more fully discussed in the methodology). Graduate students are potential future employees and represent an educated population whose future contributions to conflict resolution and to the employment base offer interesting insight into the workplace bullying phenomenon. Specifically, using graduate students serves to answer several specific research questions:

- What preconceptions do graduate students have regarding the bullying phenomenon and in particular its causes and potential solutions?
- How do these perceptions compare with empirical research that is outlined in current literature?
- How do these preconceptions bias the way graduate students view and respond to workplace bulling in actual settings?

- How can education and training correct misconceptions, reinforce correct conceptions, and subsequently teach graduate students to better identify root causes and successful interventions

Although the research questions focus on a specific group of perceptions regarding workplace bullying, the questions address significant issues the current research neglects including how future employees perceive workplace bullying and how pre-employment and thus pre-bullying intervention through training and education can help reduce workplace bullying incidents in the future.

Methodology

This study utilized facilitation workshops in following the focus groups qualitative methodology in which facilitators applied the skills identified by Schwarz (2002). Focus groups are comprised of a small number of people with similar attributes and attitudes who participate in a facilitated discussion exploring a specific topic (Greenbaum, 2000). Stewart, Shamdasani, and Rook (2007) note that focus group moderators are often, but not necessarily, well trained in group processes and functions. Therefore, the advantages of focus groups methodology include adaptability to different levels of structure, focus, and skills (Stewart, Shamdasani, & Rook, 2007). Participants in focus groups explore an identified topic in a series of face-to-face communications for a specific period of time (Greenbaum, 2000). This interaction impacts and influences the participants and simulates dialogue in natural settings (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Greenbaum (2000) suggested the depth of exploration emerging from verbal and non-verbal interaction occurring in focus groups generates rich qualitative data. Moderators do not hold power in focus groups or influence the content of the groups' interaction (Krueger & Casey, 2000). Instead, effective moderators need strong facilitation skills (Greenbaum, 2000) to assist participants while remaining apart from the focus groups.

Roger Schwarz (2002) developed a nine step group problem-solving model through the use of effective facilitation skills. The Schwarz model is grounded in the reflective thinking process conceptualized by John Dewey (1985). According to Dewey, problems solving gives rise to reflective thinking and to the understanding of relationships. Similar to Dewey's (1985) process, the Schwarz (2002) skilled facilitator model increases the effectiveness of a working group by improving organization and function through the reflection of experiences, exploration of pertinent data, brain-storming of solutions, and the creation and implementation of an action plan. The four cores values of the skilled facilitator approach, valid information, free and informed choice, internal commitment, and compassion (Schwarz, 2002, p. 11) connect with the open interaction of focus groups. The selection of facilitated focus groups methodology for this study promoted a deeper understanding of the work place bullying phenomenon and its impact on contemporary organizations.

The study also utilized Interpretive Structural Modeling (ISM), a computer-assisted methodology. The advanced feature software of ISM involves "mathematical algorithms that minimize the number of queries necessary for exploring relationships among a set of ideas" (Broome, 1998, p. 4). The ISM software program facilitated the layered task of organizing items into a comprehensible set of relationships and displaying these relationships as a structure (Broome, 1998). ISM methodology is comparable to focus group sessions because ISM draws from participant groups with experience and knowledge about an issue. Although ISM can formulate several types of structures (Broome, 1998), this study used the categorization type structure, which was consistent with the fishbone diagramming used by the focus groups in the facilitation workshops. It is possible that the findings of this study may transfer to other similar communities who express understanding of this phenomenon from a conflict resolution perspective. This qualitative and quantitative study presents the perspectives of a target group of graduate students in a conflict analysis and resolution program. However, additional focus groups with other practitioners of conflict analysis and resolution, as well as students from different fields in varying states of educational progress, may support a more holistic and significant understanding of workplace bullying.

Participants

This study included 112 graduate students, enrolled and active in an interdisciplinary facilitation theory and practice course in the Conflict Resolution and Analysis Program at Nova Southeastern University (NSU). Seventy-two Master's level and 40 Doctoral level students volunteered to participate in weekly group facilitation problem-solving workshops over a period of four weeks.

The participants represented a variety of ages, races, ethnic identities, and professional backgrounds. Specifically, 95 percent of the participants currently hold positions in U.S. organizations with 86 percent having worked for more than six years in a U.S. organization; 40 individuals were self-identified Hispanic with roots in South and Central America, Mexico, and other Spanish cultures regardless of race with seven having been born outside of the United States; 20 African and African Americans with eight having been born outside of the United States; 40 Caucasian persons of European, North African, or Middle Eastern origins of whom three were born outside of the United States; and five Asian or Pacific Islanders with roots in the Far East, Southern Asia, the Indian Subcontinent, and the Pacific Islands one of whom was born outside of the United States.

Researchers

Two of the researchers were course instructor who supervised all the workshops. The role of the researchers involved observing the facilitation process and ensuring that the facilitators followed the Schwarz (2002) facilitation model appropriately. If facilitators asked questions regarding the facilitation process, or strayed from the Schwarz model, the researchers intervened in order to provide process guidance and direction to the facilitator(s). However, the main role of the researchers was as observers and the participants functioned as facilitators and focus group members.

Time and Context

The facilitation workshops occurred at the main campus of Nove Southeastern University in Davie, Florida. The study included four, three-hour sessions with 11 separate focus groups ranging in size from 8 to 15 participants. The facilitation workshops presented the first opportunity for most of the participants to examine, in-depth the issues involved with workplace bullying. At the start of the facilitation workshops, the study participants received the following context statement: This facilitation workshop was designed to allow graduate students in the conflict resolution field an opportunity to examine a wide range of factors they feel may address the complex issue of workplace bullying. Every facilitation problem-solving workshop involved a facilitator, a co-facilitator, and one memory log recorder. All study participants revolved through these identified roles during each of the four facilitation workshops. The remaining study participants functioned as focus groups members. The homogeneity of the focus groups was created through the participants' enrollment and active participation in one identified facilitation course at the same university. Diversity was created in the focus groups as 50% of the focus groups were online distance students, 50% were residential students, and the participants' demographics were wide ranging.

The Schwarz Skilled Facilitator Model

In this study, facilitators used the Schwarz skilled facilitator model. During the process, facilitators used the Schwarz problem-solving model. The model is comprised of nine steps; however, in this study data gathering involved six of the nine steps: (1) define the problem, (2) identify root causes, (3) establish criteria for evaluating solutions, (4) generate alternative solutions, (5) evaluate alternative solutions and (6) select the best solutions (Schwarz,2002, p. 221). For this study, steps (7) develop an action plan, (8) implement the plan, and (9) evaluate outcomes did not apply to this study. In step one the focus groups defined the problem of workplace bullying by identifying the discrepancy between the current state of workplace bullying and the desired state. Once agreement was reached, each focus group developed an individual problem statement and progressed to the next step.

During step two, the facilitators used the nominal group technique ([NGT], Broome & Cromer, 1991; Delbecq, Van de Ven, & Gustafson, 1975) to assist the focus groups in generating ideas regarding the potential causes of workplace bullying. Once the focus groups reached agreement on idea generation, the focus groups used fishbone diagrams to categorize the root causes. This allowed grouping of the roots causes by broad categories rather than in isolation of one another.After generating root causes, the focus groups moved to step three. In this step, the facilitators asked the focus groups to develop criteria for evaluating solutions. In order to elicit both positive criteria and unplanned secondary consequences, the facilitators assisted the focus groups by following verbatim the two part question posed by Schwarz (2002): "'The solution should be one that ___.' 'The solution should not be one that ____" (p. 224). Facilitators helped participants generate alternative solutions through brainstorming in step four. Members of the focus groups participated in the brainstorming process openly and verbally, or silently, through the technique of idea writing. In idea writing, focus groups received a single sheet of paper and one group member wrote an idea and then passed the paper to another group member who built on the idea or generated a new idea.

Brainstorming occurred silently, but the externalization of ideas triggered new thoughts. During brainstorming the facilitator intervened as needed with the rules for brainstorming (Schwarz, 2002) to maintain organization in the process. These rules include not evaluating ideas during brainstorming, accepting all ideas even ones that seem implausible, generating numerous ideas, combining and expanding on previous ideas (Schwarz, 2002). As the groups brainstormed, all of the identified alternative solutions were recorded. In step five, the focus groups scored the alternate solutions based on the criteria each focus group developed in step three. The facilitator intervened in the process when members needed assistance discussing and providing reasons for individual scores on specific solutions. In step six the focus groups selected the best solution(s) through majority vote or consensus.

Data Analysis

In order to effectively and thoroughly analyze the generated data, participants were asked to place items into appropriate categories. The categories were not labeled at the onset of sorting the data into categories. For the process of categorization, groups of participants worked together as multiple coders to place elements into appropriate categories. So, participants rather than researchers were primarily responsible for grouping/categorizing the data. The process is similar to a content analysis method. According to Krippendorf (2004), content analysis is the systematic coding of recorded text, and it is appropriate when the researchers aim to deepen awareness and understanding of a particular phenomenon, such as workplace bullying. Moreover, content analysis is often used to analyze meaningful data and summarize inferences generated by groups, and this was accomplished by having participants analyze the idea generation flipcharts developed by the group. The method utilized in this stage of the research included facilitation software referred to as Interpretive Structural Modeling of which the Categorization Option was selected. The Categorization Option asked the relational question "Does item A belong in the same category with item B?" Participants have the option to answer "Yes" or "No". Participants agreed on the majority vote rule with at least a two vote distinction between yes and no votes in order to validate a majority. Facilitators asked participants a series of these questions until all items for each group were placed in appropriate categories.

Furthermore, participants in the workshop were offered an opportunity to move any item into another category during the amendment phase. In order for an item to be moved, the individual who owned the idea or the individual who disagreed with its position provided a rationale for such a change. After listening to the individual's rationale, the group discussed the ideas and reached a consensus on the placement of the item in a particular category. Thus, items were not viewed as static as they were in flux in relation to members' meanings. Majority vote was used to reach a final decision. Furthermore, the researcher along with an assistant coder compiled and coded the final idea sets for all groups into collective categories. This allowed a master data set with consistent categories.

Kvale (1996) has indicated that coders increase the reliability of a study and indicated that two coders may be sufficient for establishing intersubjective agreement. In this project, a doctoral student in conflict resolution with a Master's degree in business and a background in workplace bullying research helped the researcher with the coding. Coders placed most items in the same categories; however, when ambiguity surrounded the placement of an item in a category, the coders were allowed to discuss the item in order to reach an agreement on its placement. Categories that were same or similar were merged and unique categories remained intact. From the recommendations of Miles and Huberman (1984) an interrater reliability coefficient was calculated by dividing the number of agreements by total number of agreements plus disagreements. This process yielded a reliability coefficient of 97 percent.

Results

The findings of this study are encapsulated in the developed categories that are directly correlated to each step of the problem-solving model. For the first step of the model, participants generated a variety of perceived problems on the topic of workplace bullying. Specifically, when participants were asked "what is the current problem in relation to the desired state for workplace bullying," the 11 groups generated a total of 251 items. This question specifically focuses on the issues bullying raises for both the organization and individuals, and the responses help illuminate why workplace bullying is an issue that needs to be more aggressively addressed. The problem elements were categorized into 10 major categories and 29 subcategories when the researchers compiled the data from the separate groups. At times the categories were worded differently between the groups but reflected similar ideas.

In these cases the researcher and assistant coder placed items from similarly named categories into a category that best identified the group of items. See Table 1 for major categories, subcategories and examples related to defining the problem of workplace bullying and the perceived definitions of workplace bullying that the students generated based on their extensive research and interpretations. The major categories and associated number of items generated by participants are as follows: (1) Negative Outcomes was the most robust category with 70 elements. This category explored the negative financial outcomes to the organization as well as to the individual, unsafe working environments, and negative impacts to the organizational climate. (2) The next most robust category is Victim Harassment with 55 items. This category includes a variety of actions the participants associated with harassment such as physical abuse, psychological abuse, and emotional abuse. (3) Organizational Culture included 35 elements.   This category included aspects of the organizational culture such as hierarchy/structure, organizational performance, organizational persons, differences in values, poor management and external environmental constraints. (4) Characteristics of the Bully included a total of 33 items and described personal issues related to the bully such as physical, psychological and environmental conditions. The following remaining categories included 14 items or less: Power (14 items), Communication (13 items), Lack of Definition or Understanding (12 items), Policy and Procedures (12 items), Perceptions (6 items), and Education and Training (5 items). Items within each category were further categorized into subcategories to better define the problem of workplace bullying.

Table1
Step 1: Define the problem: Categories, subcategories, and examples

Category	Sub-category	Examples
Organizational Culture/Environment	Organizational Hierarchy	Can be reinforced by the organizational struct Boundaries within the workplace are not se
	Organizational Performance	Lack of incentives to motivate. Causes increased competition in organizations.
	Differences in Values and Expectations	Lack of acceptance of cultural differences. Can be encouraged by inaction
	Organizational Persona	Bullying is embedded in the culture of the organization. Boss is a bully, which can cause subordinates to become bullies.
	Poor Management	Can be brought on by organizational leadership. Occurs when management is apathetic to victim.
	External Environment Constraints	Can go unreported due to financial constraints. Can be brought on by the external environment (i.e. Recession).
Policy/Procedures	No Protection	No policies in place. Lack of organizational procedures
	No Ramifications for Behavior	Bully is never penalized for misconduct. No consequences.
Communication	Style	Bully insults, then apologizes. Displaced anger.
	Skill	Poor interpersonal skills. Lack of communication in workplace.
Education and Training	Organizational Training	Lack of professional development. Misinformation
	Organizational Experience	Bully lacks experience.
Perceptions	Jealousy	Bully wants what others have.

	Expectations	Bully did not get sought after promotion. Bully is motivated by greed.
Negative Outcomes	Financial	Legal actions by employees High turnover rates.
	Unsafe Environment	Can be a precursor to workplace violence. Creates an unsafe environment.
	Organizational Climate	Creates disrupted workplace. Creates a climate of lack of respect.
Lack of Definition or Understanding	Definition	Bully is not defined. Is often labeled as something else.
	Understanding	Often not recognized as a problem. It is not recognized because no one knows how to address the problem.
Power	Improper Use of Power	Feeling power in one's position. Authority issues.
	Lack of Power	Need for power over the victim. Occurs when employees seek additional power.
	Imbalance of Power	Complex Structural dynamics. Bully can cause confusion in organizations as employees see differences between hierarchal power and actual power.
Victim Harassment	Physical	Injury sustained. Physical trauma.
	Psychological	Bully damages self-esteem of co-workers. Creates intimidation among co-workers.
	Emotional Outcome	Is hurtful and isolating to victim. Promotes helplessness in the victim.
	Behavior	Affects relationships outside of work. Stress that carries from the workplace to the home.
Characteristics of Bully	Physical	Drugs affect decision-making ability. Physical aggression
	Psychological	Bully likes to inflict pain on others. Bully likes fear.
	Environmental	Bully lives/resides with a controlling spouse. Childhood experiences (i.e. physical abuse).

It is important to take into consideration the significance of all the categories despite the number of items reported within each category as frequency does not always suggest rank order; however, the number of items generated in each category is significant to report in this study because the number of reported items generates an understanding of the most robust categories. Even though the number of items in each category is reported, students did not rank order problems during this process.

During the second phase of group problem solving in the facilitation sessions, participants generated a comprehensive list of 142 root causes associated with workplace bullying. They generated these items based both on their extensive research into workplace bullying and their perceptions of workplace bullying. The items were categorized into 10 major and 20 sub-categories. The major categories and associated number of items generated by participants are as follows: (1) Bullying Characteristics (43 items), (2) Factors for the External Environment (27 items), (3) Victim/Personal Characteristics (27 items), and (4) Organizational Culture/Environment (22 items). The following remaining categories included 6 items or less each: Power, Awareness, Perceptions/Expectations, Education and Training, Communication, and Policy and Procedures. The root causes were identified as aggregates that participants felt were responsible for causing workplace bullying in the workplace environment.

It is interesting to note that the participants' root causes were multiple, varied, and intricately related to the problems participants generated. This finding points to the complexity involved in workplace bullying and illustrates that workplace bullying cannot be explained by one or a few significant reasons but rather by a number or disparate reasons.

Table 2
Step 3: Root causes for workplace bullying identified: Category, subcategories and examples

Category	Sub-Category	Example(s)
Factors from the External Environment	Human Factors	Discrimination based on sexual orientation. Perceived gender roles.
	Organizational Factors	Response to uncertainty due to globalization. Competitiveness between companies.
Organizational Culture/Environment	Personnel Related	Never been reprimanded by supervisor or manager. Undefined roles for staff.
	Organization Related	Group norms that make bullying acceptable behavior. Pressure to meet bottom line.
Policy/Procedures	Lack of Policy/Procedures	Non-existent policies on workplace bullying.
Communication	Style	Inability to properly use technology (i.e. e-mail).
	Skill	Lack of interpersonal skills.
Education and Training	Training	Lack of proper training
	Education	Lack of education
Perceptions/Expectations	Perception	Lack of perception
	Expectations	Anger at not getting a much deserved raise.
Awareness	Definition	Bullies sometimes do not realize they are bullies.
	Understanding	Lack of proof of workplace bullying.
Power	Need for Power	Lack of checks and balances.
	Abuse of Power	Misuse of power through verbal abuse.
Victim/Personal Characteristics	Innate Characteristics	Disability. Age.
	Learned Characteristics	Low self-esteem. Lack of social skills.
Bully Characteristics	Physical	Perceived gender roles.
	Psychological	Low self-esteem. Temporary insanity.
	Behavior	Bully considers other a threat. Response to rage.

Next, participants generated 151 criteria for what they perceived solutions organizations should meet in order to effectively address workplace bullying. Eight major categories were identified. See Table 3 for the categories, subcategories and examples. This step was vital to the solution generation phase as participants identified the most important criteria solutions should meet to address the problem of workplace bullying.

Table 3

Step 2: Establish Criteria for Evaluating Solutions

Category	Sub-Category	Example(s)
Focused on Bully	Related to Behavior Rehabilitation	Does not give bully a free pass. Does not place blame on the bully.
Focused on Victim	Related to Victim	Does not stigmatize victim through labeling or gossip.
	Related to Organization	Should enhance organizational image.
Focused on Changing Organizational Culture	Safety	Should make employees feel safe and respected. Should promote a healthy environment
	Improved Morale and Well-Being	Should be uniform and fair. Should create more harmony.
	Consistent with Organizational Mission	Should provide guidance/principles to organizational leadership. Should be consistent with our mission statement.
	No Negative Consequences	Should not limit the supervisor/peers ability to provide feedback. Should offer constructive criticism.
Policies/Procedures	Discipline	Should not immediately punish without guidelines.
	Integration	Should positively incorporate solutions into existing code of ethics.
Awareness	Definition	Should clarify the definition of workplace bullying.
	Recognition of Problem	Should raise public awareness.
Based on Facilitation, Research, Training, or Laws	Facilitation	Addresses root causes and problem statement.
	Research	Should consider researching other groups' preventative and reactive procedures.
	Training	Workshop on diversity.
	Laws	Should be in accordance to law.
Addresses Time and Resources	Time	Should be gradual, attainable, realistic time frame.
	Resources	Should not require inappropriate amounts of resources (scalable).
	Flexible	Should not be situational.
Promotes positive feelings	Related to people	Should not be biased. Should consider human values and interests.
	Related to organization	Should be applicable to all organizational levels.

In terms of alternative solutions, the groups generated a total of 144 items they perceived as ameliorating and effectively addressing the problems associated with workplace bullying in contemporary organizations. Participants included creative ideas about how organizations might address, approach, and/or prevent the problem of workplace bullying. The groups categorized the items into 8 major categories and 24 subcategories. The categories, subcategories and examples can be seen in Table 4. The major categories and associated number of items generated by participants are as follows: (1) Education was the most robust category with 42 elements. This category explored the topic of workplace bullying in the form of cognitive, behavioral, and developmental training. Participants expressed that effective solutions in education should focus on giving people knowledge but behavior skills training should also accompany the educational efforts. (2) Policy/Procedures was the next most robust category with 36 elements. This category dealt with law, protective policy, response systems, and disciplinary interventions. (3) Organizational Culture and Environment was the next most robust category with 29 total elements. Items in this category included improving communication, changing the organizational persona, promoting protection, and building support structures.

Table 4

Step 4: Generate Alternative Solutions

Category	Sub-Category	Example(s)
Assessment/Review	Organizational System	Constant Assessment or evaluation of environment.
	Macro Level: Programs	Determining effectiveness of training.
	Micro Level: Individual Performance	Employee evaluations for the bullies.
Organizational Culture/Environment	Hierarchy	Re-structuring organizations.
	Values & Expectations	Review of ideology of workplace bullying.
	Organizational Performance	Fair reward and recognition system.
	Building Organizational Support & Persona	Flex time/work schedule.
	Effective Management	Authoritative figures must present united front
	Effective Communication	Committee for regular workplace bullying discussion.
	Protection	Increase security with guards and cameras.
Policy/Procedures	Protective Policy	Zero tolerance policy on workplace bullying.
	Ownership in Policy	Employee representation (a voice about setting appropriate policy).
	Response System	Formal reporting and documentation process.
	Disciplinary Intervention	Assertive coaching for the bully.
Removing Stress	Social Events	Work-related social activities (picnics, luncheons, banquets, birthday parties).
	Fringe Benefits	Stress relief room.
Support Structure	Victim Advocate	Third party helpline for the victim.
	Counseling	Peer counseling program.
Education	Informational	Create video on workplace bullying.
	Skill-based Training	Team building exercises.
	Developmental Programs	Professional development sessions.
	Diversity Programs	Sensitivity training.

In the alternative solutions phase of the study, participants directly addressed the problems generated in stage one of the study and considered the criteria closely. Finally, as a purely hypothetical exercise, participants were asked to create mock action plans for how they perceived organizations could incorporate solutions. Also, participants were asked to include the evaluation step into the action plan so that a loop back evaluation would be tied to the action plan. Since participants in this study were not affiliated with any one organization the action plans generated serve as examples for the process. See Figure 1 in the Appendix for an example action plan with two specific solutions included.

Discussion

Although other countries have aggressively addressed the social phenomena of workplace bullying for several years, research on this topic in the United States is in its infancy. As a result, many U.S. organizations do not fully understand the phenomenon; therefore, they fail to recognize the individual and organizational costs linked to workplace bullying. This study was designed to increase awareness of the actions and behaviors associated with workplace bullying and to reveal solutions for effectively dealing with workplace bullying from the perspective of graduate students entering the workplace. Understanding this phenomenon is the first step in diminishing it. In turn, this may lead to safer, healthier working environments for all employees, as well as increasing organizational profits.

The results of this research indicate that the perception is organizational cultures often exacerbate the problem of workplace bullying. In part, this may be attributed to the fact that there is not a generally accepted definition of workplace bullying, so leaders either do not recognize the signs of bullying or they perceive it as merely a tough management style. It was also found in the literature that workplace bullying may not be recognized as a problem because neither organizational leaders nor individual employees know how to deal with it. Unfortunately, apathetic leaders reinforce bullying behaviors.

14

These findings support the research of Sheehan (1999), who posits that tolerating or ignoring workplace bullying encourages the negative behavior. Moreover, the student's suggested that bullying may result because often managers improperly use their power to intimidate their subordinates. This can manifest itself in angry tirades of verbal insults or in isolation tactics. When the boss is the bully, subordinates emulate that behavior as a culturally accepted organizational norm, and subordinates may become bullies. This finding is consistent with research conducted by Tepper et al. (2006) that found abusive supervision has a trickledown effect. Although seventy-two percent of bullies are bosses (U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey), horizontal bullying does occur. In these cases, the bully can cause confusion in the organization as employees see differences between hierarchical and "real" power.

Often, when bullies lack legitimate power, they use bullying tactics to increase their influence in the organization. The research subjects think that this will result in the bully hurling insults and exhibiting misplaced anger. These tyrannical fits may be brought on by jealousy or having unrealized expectations, such as not receiving an anticipated promotion or raise. Physical violence is on the extreme end of the continuum in aggressive behaviors and only occurs in rare cases. Normally, emotional and psychological violence are the weapons of choice for workplace bullies. Using these tactics, workplace bullies damage the self-esteem of the target, and their actions make the target feel helpless especially when the situation is not addressed by the organization.

Moreover, the damage is not contained at work. The student's developed these ideas, and their perceptions are important because they represent the fears the next generation of employees has about being bullied at work. The findings of this study are consistent with other reports (Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Sypher, 2004) that posit being a target of a bully affects relationships outside of work, and the high levels of stress are carried home. Perhaps most interestingly, the participants' responses seem to mirror response by actual workplace bullying victims as outlined by Lutgen-Sandvik (2008).

Lutgen-Sandvik's study explored the impact on target identity as the result of traumatizing workplace bullying, and the actual feelings of victims are reflected in the participants' perceptions. The implication of this mirroring is that workplace bullying and its effects have been adopted into the collective mindset and, now, just the perception of workplace bullying can be damaging.

This study also found that the research subjects think there are a myriad of reasons people bully. Their perceptions, based on their research of the literature, offer a perspective on the underlying motivations of bullies. Interestingly, there was an interrelationship to the problems identified in step one of the process and the root causes named in step two. In addition to previously noted organizational cultures that aggravate the problem, this study found that increased diversity, globalization, lack of education and training, and poor interpersonal and social skills are antecedents to workplace bullying. In fact, as the workforce becomes more diverse, workplace bullies may choose targets based on sexual orientation, gender, age, or physical disability. This finding is especially interesting because the students offered real world issues that can directly lead to bullying instead of suggesting that the problem is inherent in the bully. This finding shows that the students, while fearful of bullying, do in fact think there is hope in rectifying bullying situations. This finding also is interesting because it suggests that there is still fear in students and employees that being a member of a minority group still poses significant risk. This perception alone can be seen as a form of organizational bullying that requires employees to suppress, hide, or make excuses for their minority status.

Often people are not aware of how their actions impact others. In fact, some people may not even realize they are bullies. Aggressive communication styles, poor interpersonal skills, and cultural misperceptions may be the root causes of why people bully at work. When that forceful personality is paired with someone who has low self-esteem or a lack of social skills, the situation is ripe for workplace bullying. Without a clear definition of workplace bulling, without awareness and interpersonal relational skills training, and without policies that provide checks and balances, the perception that this is tough management, not workplace bullying, may be advanced. These findings by the focus groups are reflective of studies in communication and demonstrate perceptions about power imbalances. The participants, as students of conflict analysis and resolution, recognize the importance power plays in conflict, and their perception that the mixture of strong and weak personalities is ripe for bullying is indicative of their knowledge of the role power plays in relationships.

The results presented in this study not only inform organizational leaders about the perceived problems and causes of workplace bullying, but they also identify possible solutions that could effectively address this social issue. Rather than place blame on the bully, stigmatize the target, or censure organization, a valuable solution to this endemic problem should be one that is mutually beneficial to everyone affected by workplace bullying. From an organizational perspective, the solution should be one that enhances their image and is linked to their stated mission. From an individual perspective, the solution should not stigmatize the target through labeling. And, while the findings do not advocate giving a free pass to the bullies, the data suggest that providing guidelines, coaching, and rehabilitation for the bullies may be more productive than immediately firing them. Interestingly, these suggestions come from conflict analysis and resolutions students who are well versed in conflict resolution methods. In addition, they represent real world solutions that would seem amenable to future employees.

Overwhelmingly this study confirmed the findings of other researchers (Gardner & Johnson, 2001; Olson, Nelson, and Parayitam, 2005; Sheehan, 1999; Vega & Comer, 2005) as it concluded that by providing skills-based training organizational leaders may decrease the harmful effects of workplace bullying and promote a harmonious, safe, and healthy working environment where employees at all levels of the organization are respected and valued. This confirmation is important because the study provided the perceptions of the students, but seeing those perceptions confirmed by earlier research reinforces that notion that workplace bullying lacks a clear definition and there needs to be widespread methods developed to deal with this burgeoning issues. Addressing the issue begins by clearly defining workplace bullying, raising awareness of its negative impact, and providing guidance, training, and feedback to employers. The participants suggested developing a video on bullying to raise awareness. Then, using team building exercises may be useful in both skills-based and sensitivity workshops. In addition to training, it is important to assess the organizational environment and to restructure a culture that inadvertently or intentionally supports bullying behavior. Since the participants felt bullying was a widespread and not easily definable, there is support for the need to address a culture that not only contains workplace bullying but engenders fear in future employees about being bullied and the consequences of that bullying.

Developing policies and procedures that incorporate a zero-tolerance policy for bullying, formal reporting and documentation processes, and continuous assessment of policy/procedure effectiveness can also help alleviate workplace bullying and the perceptions of workplace bullying. However, it is important to note that these policies will be more effective if they are developed collaboratively with organizational leaders and employee representatives. Finally, the policies must be communicated to the entire organization and to the community at large. By developing effective methods and ensuring that it is adopted as part of an organizational culture that is communicated to the surrounding community, the perceptions of future employees can be changed to diminish workplace bullying as a concern. In addition to increasing the awareness of workplace bullying and providing possible solutions to dealing with it, the results of this research indicate the value of utilizing Roger Schwarz's (2002) problem-solving approach to facilitation to help increase awareness of the problem of workplace bullying, identify the root causes of this phenomenon, and suggest solutions for alleviating this problem. The rich data provided by this study support Taylor Cox's (2001) postulation that diverse groups, using their varied experiences and perspectives, generate more creative and innovative solutions to organizational problems.

Finally, this study provides a strong impetus toward developing unique action plans for workplace bullying across organizations.It was not the scope of this study to present stringent and overarching action plans for organizations. The researchers present an example action plan for two solutions to illustrate how an action plan could be crafted in terms of a template chart. Organizational members are encouraged to build and create their own action plan including many people in the organization in order to build commitment and ownership for the action plans generated.

Trustworthiness and Limitations of the Study

Several factors support the trustworthiness of this study. First, the graduate students of facilitation, who later became the study participants, were Master's and doctoral students in a conflict analysis and resolution program. Not only did the students/participants bring unique experiences to the study, but they also have a keen interest in understanding and resolving conflicts in all areas.   Additionally, they thoroughly researched the topics of workplace bullying, the theory and practice of facilitation and Schwarz's (2002) *The Skilled Facilitator* model and created a facilitation training manual related to the topic of workplace bullying.

As a result, their depth of theoretical knowledge on each of these topics and their ability to relate facilitation theory to a complex and current conflict contributes to the trustworthiness of the research study. Secondly, the study is trustworthy because the participants applied, as accurately as possible, the problem-solving facilitation model by Schwarz (2002) and followed the nine steps of the skilled facilitator model in sequential order as described in the methodology. However, for the results of this study, only the first six steps were utilized.

One limitation to the trustworthiness of the study is that the research process did not include Step Eight or Step Nine of *The Skilled Facilitator* (Schwarz, 2002), and the results did not include Step Seven either. Therefore, the action plans developed by the problem-solving facilitation workshop groups were not implemented or evaluated. Ultimately, this research is a theoretical exploration of the problem of workplace bullying that lacks the application of the generated solutions in a natural and actual environment.

Implications for Future Research

Future research should build upon this study and include implementation and evaluation of an action plan for addressing workplace bullying. This approach may involve conducting content analysis of antecedents and causes of workplace bullying, designing and implementing awareness and skills-based training, then evaluating the change (if any) in the knowledge, attitude, and behavior of the participants.

Conclusion

The results of this research lead to several conclusions. First, the study emphasized that there is not a clear definition of workplace bullying, so it is a concept that is often misunderstood. As a result of this confusion, organizational cultures may either intentionally or inadvertently encourage bullying behavior. Moreover, in the United States, the target may not be protected by policies or procedures that apply to other types of harassment and discrimination. In addition to organizational cultures, poor communication skills, misperceptions, diversity, poor interpersonal skills, and globalization also contribute to workplace bullying. As the results of this study indicate, workplace bullying is not a simple problem requiring a one-size-fits-all solution. Given the myriad perceived root causes of workplace bullying at both the individual and organizational levels, a systems approach will be the most effective way to address the phenomenon.

This type of approach will evaluate the organizational culture to determine how it exacerbates workplace bullying and review the current procedures for dealing with workplace bullying. As the resolution process is developed, it should build upon the interests of both the organization and the individual employees, as this collaborative problem-solving approach will have more effective and longer-lasting results. It will also incorporate preventative strategies, along with support structures for bullies and targets.

References

Adams, A., & Crawford, N. (1992). *Bullying at work: How to confront and overcome it*. London: Virago, Press.

Andersson, L.M., Pearson, C.M. (1999). Tit for tat? The spiraling effect of incivility in the workplace. *Academy of Management. The Academy of Management Review, 24*(3), 452-471.

Baron, R.A., Neuman, J.H. (1998). Workplace aggression--the iceberg beneath the tip of workplace violence: Evidence of its forms, frequency, and targets. *Public Administration Quarterly*, *21*(4), 446-464

Bowman, J.S., & Jude-Zigmond, C. (1997). State government response to workplace violence. *Public Personnel Management, 26*(2), 289-299.

Creswell, J. W. (1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among thefive traditions.* Thousands Oaks, CA: Sage Publications Inc.

Cohen, A. (2010). Workplace bullying: New York bill targets abusive bosses. Time Magazine. Retrieved August 7, 2010 from http://news.yahoo.com/s/time/20102721/us_time/08599200535800

Coombs, T.W., Holladay, S. J. (2004). Understanding the aggressive workplace: Development of the workplace aggression tolerance questionnaire. *Communication Studies*, *55*(3), 481-497.

Coyne, I., Craig, J., & Chong, P.S. (2004). Workplace Bullying in a Group Context. *British Journal of Guidance and Counseling, 32*(3), 301 – 317.

Davenport, N., Schwartz, R.D., & Elliot, G.P. (2002). *Mobbing: Emotional abuse in the American workplace.* Ames, IA: Civil Society Publishing.

Denzin, N. K., & Lincoln, Y. S. (2003). *The landscape of qualitative research: Theories and issues.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Djurkovic, N., McCormack, D., Casimir, G. (2005). The behavioral reactions of victims to different types of workplace bullying. *International Journal of Organization Theory and Behavior, 8*(4), 439-460.

Druckman, D. (2005). *Doing research: Methods of inquiry for conflict analysis.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (n.d.). Retrieved June 11, 2005 from www.eeoc.gov.

Einarsen, S. (1999). The nature and causes of bullying at work. *International Journal of Manpower, 20*(1/2).

Einarsen, S., & Mikkelsen, E.M. (2003). Individual effects of exposure to bullying at work. In Stale

Einarsen, Helge Hoel, Dieter Zapf & Cary Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and Emotional Abuse in the Workplace: International Perspectives in Research and Practice (pp.165 - 184).* New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Einarsen, S., Hoel, H., Zapf, D, Cooper, C. (2003). The concept of bullying at work. In Stale Einarsen, Helge Hoel, Dieter Zapf & Cary Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and Emotional Abuse in the Workplace: International Perspectives in Research and Practice (pp.3 - 30).* New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Gardner, S. and Johnson, P.R. (2001). The leaner meaner workplace: Strategies for handling bullies at work. *Employee Relations Today*, *28*(2), 23-36.

Glendinning, P.M. (2001, Fall). Workplace bullying: Curing the cancer of the American workplace. *Public Personnel Management, 30*(3), 269-287.

Harvey, M.G., Heames, J. T., Richey, R. G., Leonard, N. (2006). Bullying: From the playground to the boardroom. *Journal of Leadership & Organizational Studies, 12*(4), 1-11.

Hauge, L.J., Skogstad, A. & Einarsen, S. (2007). Relationships Between Stressful Working Environments and Bullying: Results of a Large Representative Study. *Work & Stress, 21*(3), 220-242.

Hodson, R., Roscigno, V.J, & Lopez, S.H. (2006). Chaos and the abuse of power: Workplace bullying in organizational and interactional context. *Work and Occupations, 33*, 382 – 415.

Hoel, H. & Salin, D. (2003). Organizational antecedents of bullying. In Stale Einarsen, Helge Hoel, Dieter Zapf & Cary Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and Emotional Abuse in the Workplace: International Perspectives in Research and Practice (pp.203-218).* New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Job Stress (n.d.). *American Institute for Stress*. Retrieved June 24, 2005, from http://www.stress.org/job.htm

Keashly, L. (1998). Emotional Abuse in the Workplace: Conceptual and Empirical Issues. *Journal of Emotional Abuse, 1*(1), 85-117.

Keashly, L. (2002). Interpersonal and Systemic Aspects of Emotional Abuse at Work: The Target's Perspective. *Violence and Victims, 16*(3), 233-268.

Keashly, L. & Neuman, J.H. (2004). Bullying in the Workplace: Its Impact and Management.   *Employee Rights and Employment Policy, 8*(3), 335-373

Keashly, L. & Jagatic, K. (2003). By any other name: American perspectives on workplace bullying. In Stale Einarsen, Helge Hoel, Dieter Zapf & Cary Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and Emotional Abuse in the Workplace: International Perspectives in Research and Practice (pp.31-62).* New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Krippendorf, K. (2004). *Content Analysis: An introduction to its methodology.* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Kvale, S. (1996). *Interviews: An introduction to qualitative research interviewing*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Leymann, H. (1996). The Content and Development of Mobbing at Work. *European Journal of   Work and Organizational Psychology, 5*(2), 165-184.

Lutgen-Sandvik, P. (2003). The communicative cycle of employee abuse: Generation and regeneration of workplace mistreatment. *Management Communication Quarterly, 16*(4).

Lutgen-Sandvik, P. (2006). Take this job and . . . : Quitting and other forms of resistance to workplace bullying. *Communication Monographs, 73*(4), 406-33.

Lutgen-Sandvik, P. (2008). Intensive remedial identity work: Responses to workplace bullying trauma and stigmatization. *Organization, 15*(1), 97-119.

Lutgen-Sandvik, P., Tracy, S.J., Alberts, J.K. (2007). Burned by Bullying in the American Workplace: Prevalence, Perception, Degree, and Impact. *Journal of Management   Studies, 44*(6), 837 – 862.

Lutgen-Sandvik, P. & McDermott, V. (2008). The Constitution of Employee-Abusive   Organizations: A Communication Flows Theory. *Communication Theory, 18*, 304-333. Matthiesen, S.B., Einarsen, S. (2007). Perpetrators and Targets of Bullying at Work: Role Stress and Individual Differences. *Violence and Victims, 22*, 735 – 753.

Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. B. (2006). *Designing qualitative research* (4th ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Merriam, S.B. (2001). *Qualitative research and case study applications in education.*San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass Publishers.

18

Mikkelsen, E. G., & Einarsen, S. (2001). Bullying in Danish work-life: Prevalence and health correlates. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 10*(4), 393-413.

Mikkelsen, E. G., & Einarsen, S. (2002). Basic assumptions and post- traumatic stress among victims of bullying at work. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 11*(1), 87-111.

Miles, M.B., & Huberman, A.M. (1994). *Qualitative data analysis: A sourcebook of new methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Namie, G. (2003). Workplace bullying: Escalated incivility. *Ivey Business Journal,* November/December 2003.

Namie, G., & Namie, R. (2003). *The bully at work: What you can do to stop the hurt and reclaim your dignity on the job.* Naperville, IL: Sourcebooks.

OSHA's Mission. (n.d.). U.S. Department of Labor, Occupational Safety & Health Administration. Retrieved June 10, 2005 from http://www.osha.gov/oshinfo/mission.html

Patton, M. Q. (1990). *Qualitative Evaluation and Research Methods* (2nd ed.). Newbury Park, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Pearson, C.M. & Porath, C.L. (2005). On the nature, consequences and remedies of workplace incivility: No time for "nice"? Think again. *Academy of Management Executive, 19*(1), 7-18.

Rayner, C. (1997). The incidence of workplace bullying. *Journal of Community & Applied Social Psychology, 7*, pp. 199 – 208, Retrieved November 22, 2008 from EbscoHost database.

Rayner, C., Hoel, H., & Cooper, C. L. (2002). *Workplace bullying: What we know, who is to blame, and what can we do?* London: Taylor & Francis.

Rugala, E.A., & Isaacs, A.R. (Eds.). (n.d.). Workplace violence: Issues in response. U.S. Department of Justice, Federal Bureau of Investigation. Retrieved June 24, 2005 from www.fbi.gov/publications/violence.pdf

Salin, D. (2003, Oct). Ways of explaining workplace bullying: A review of enabling, motivating and precipitating structures and processes in the work environment. *Human Relations, 56*(10).

Schwarz, R. (2002). *The skilled facilitator: A comprehensive resource for consultants,Facilitators, managers, trainers, and coaches.* San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Sheehan, M. (1999). Workplace bullying: Responding with some emotional intelligence. *International Journal of Manpower, 20*(1/2).

Skogstad, A., Matthiesen, S.B., & Einarsen, S. (2007). Organizational Changes: A Precursor of Bullying at Work. *International Journal of Organization Theory and Behavior, 10*(1), 58 – 94.

Stake, R.E. (2003). Case Studies. In Norman K. Denzin and Yvonna S. Lincoln (Eds.) *Strategies of Qualitative Inquiry (pp. 134-164).* Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Stress at Work. Updated January 7, 1999. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (DHHS [NIOSH] Publication No. 99-101). Retrieved June 24, 2005 from http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/stresswk.html

Sypher, B.D. (2004). Reclaiming civil discourse in the workplace. *The Southern Communication Journal, 69*(3), 257-270.

Tepper, B.J., Duffy, M.K., Henle, C.A., Lambert, L.S. (2006). Procedural Injustice, Victim, Precipitation, and Abusive Supervision. *Personnel Psychology, 59* (1), 101-123.

Tracy, S.J., Lutgen-Sandvik, P., & Alberts, J.K. (2006). Nightmares, Demons, and Slaves: Exploring the Painful Metaphors of Workplace Bullying. *Management Communication Quarterly, 20*, 148 – 185.

Workplace Violence: A report to the nation. February 2001. The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (DHHS [NIOSH] Publication No. 99-101). Retrieved June 24, 2005 from http://www.cdc.gov/niosh/stresswk.html

U.S. Workplace Bullying Survey. Website Bullying Institute. Updated September 2007. Retrieved January 28, 2007 from http://bullyinginstitute.org/zogby2007/wbi-zogby2007.html

Vartia, M. (2001). Consequences of workplace bullying with respect to the well-being of its targets and the observers of bullying. *Scandinavian Journal of Work Environment and Health, 27*, 63-69.

Vega, G., Comer, D.R. (2005). Sticks and stones may break your bones, but words can break your spirit: Bullying in the workplace. *Journal of Business Ethics*, *58*(1-3), 101-109.

Von Bergen, G.W., Zavaletta, J.A., Soper, B. (2006). Legal Remedies for Workplace Bullying: Grabbing the Bully by the Horns. *Employee Relations Law Journal, 32*(3), 14 – 40.

Wornham, D. (2003). A descriptive investigation of morality and victimisation at work. *Journal of Business Ethics, 45*(1).

Yamada, D. (2000 a). The phenomenon of "workplace bullying" and the need for status-blind hostile work environment protection. *Georgetown Law Journal, 88*(3), 475-536.

Yamada, D. (2000 b). Brainstorming about workplace bullying: Potential litigation approaches for representing abused employees. *The Employee Advocate, 16*(3), 49-56.

Yamada, D. (2005). Crafting a legislative response to workplace bullying. *Employee Rights and Employment Policy Journal, 8*, 476-517.

Yin, R. K. (1994). *Case study research: Design and methods* (2nd ed.). Thousand Oaks,
CA: Sage Publications, Inc.

Zapf, D. (1999). Organizational, work group related and personal causes of mobbing/bulling at work. *International Journal of Manpower, 20*(1/2).

Zapf, D. & Einarsen, S. (2003). Individual antecedents of bullying: Victims and perpetrators. In Stale Einarsen, Helge Hoel, Dieter Zapf & Cary Cooper (Eds.), *Bullying and Emotional Abuse in the Workplace: International Perspectives in Research and Practice (pp.165 - 185).* New York, NY: Taylor & Francis.

Zapf, D. & Gross, C. (2001). Conflict Escalation and Coping with Workplace Bullying: A Replication and Extension. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology, 10*(4), 497 – 522.

Appendix

Sample Action Plan including Implementation and Evaluation

Objective	Date Assigned	Start Date	Scheduled Completion Date	Resources	Responsible for Planning and Implementation	Evaluation Method	Evaluation Date	Responsible for Evaluation
Create zero tolerance policy for workplace bullying.	6/15/08	7/1/08	Completed policy: 10/1/08 All Dept. Managers notified: 12/1/08 Implemented policy: 1/1/09	- Executive Committee. - HR to provide examples of policies - Review by Legal Department - Review by Department Managers	Director of Human Resources will coordinate creation of planning with Executive Committee members. After completed policy is established, HR will meet with all department managers. Department managers will inform employees.	Include questions about new zero tolerance policy in annual employee opinion survey.	During annual employee opinion survey conducted in March 2009.	Assistant Manager of Human Resources: Thomas
Increase security with guards and cameras.	6/15/08	7/1/08	Review of current security measures: 8/15/08 Recommendation for improved security to Executive Committee: 9/15/08 Executive Committee Approval: 10/1/08 Submit bids for new security measures to contractors: 11/1/08 Begin installation: 1/1/09 Completed installation: 1/30/09	- Current security policy/procedures - Security measures used by other similar companies - List of security service providers in area - Current security budget	Security Manager will conduct review of current security measures and create recommendations for improved security. Executive Committee will review recommendations and approve changes. Security Manager will work with Procurement Officer (Tyler) to bid on new security services. Security Manager will oversee installation of any new security equipment.	Security is assessed in the annual employee opinion survey. Department Managers will discuss security concerns with employees during individual employee performance reviews. Security Manager will review security procedures after implementation of new equipment.	Employee opinion survey in March 2009. During individual employee performance reviews conducted throughout the year. Security review conducted June 2009.	For employee opinion survey: Assistant Manager of Human Resources: Thomas During individual employee performance reviews: Department Mangers. For security review: Security Manager