Abstract
Bullying is an emerging issue of concern in many Australian workplaces. The personal and organisational effects of bullying are costly and have far reaching affects that extend beyond the work site itself. However, there still exist some definitional issues, questions about the drivers that initiate bullying behaviours and debate regarding appropriate organisational response.

This paper provides a research context on the issue of bullying in the workplace. It discusses both the historical and the current theoretical perspectives. It also explores work-based training as a potential response to the phenomena and poses some questions related to the practices, pedagogies and structures within the work environment that may mitigate against the success of workplace training as an all encompassing response. This exploration takes place within the context of current learning practices.

Finally, the paper provides an overview of current research being undertaken by the authors. This research examines management behaviour, learning and practice in relation to workplace bullying incidence and type.

Introduction
For most Australians participation in paid work requires the commitment of a substantial portion of an individual’s total adult life span. For most people it requires their attention for around eight hours a day, five days a week, forty-eight weeks a year for approximately fifty years. That’s a total commitment of around 96,000 working hours across a lifetime. Clearly, it would be in the best interests of the individual and their employer to have a safe workplace that provides adequate recompense, satisfaction and ensures the individual and their work is valued and respected. Sadly, for some individuals instead of the ideal, their experience of the workplace is a damaging array of disrespectful interpersonal behaviours. This behaviour is so harmful that for some individuals it results in confusion, deep personal hurt, loss of identity, illness, incapacity and, for some so sorely wounded, an inability to continue to work and the development of suicidal intent. For organisations that foster such behaviours through covert and overt means, the costs are high and the damage is sometimes irreparable.

This paper focuses upon the issue of respect at work as a primary requirement in ensuring a safe and fulfilling work life for employees. That is, civil interactions between individuals in the workplace. In addition, it argues that whilst training individuals to ensure that they operate within a civil and respectful framework is necessary, such training cannot be delivered in a vacuum. Organisations must have in place a training context which includes skill development aimed at dealing with...
bullying behaviours, understanding of legislation pertaining to bullying and the opportunity to incorporate new learning and better practice ideas into employees daily work lives.

**Incivility and Bullying in the Workplace**

For most people, their work is an important part of the intricate mosaic that depicts them as a person and their role in the achievement of shared work goals. This achievement of work goals relies upon an environment of mutual respect and interpersonal civility, manifested through norms concerning how people ought to behave. Whilst such norms can be witnessed in every community and culture across the globe (Goffman, 1967), civility remains a moral standard that requires leadership, choice and fostering, particularly within a work environment where a focus upon respect and polite behaviours is especially necessary due to increased and more complex interactions between people (Andersson and Pearson, 1999).

What people “do” that is, what, where and how they work, is an important way in which an individual labels and categorises, attributes meaning to their existence, and places value upon themselves as an entity (Butler, 1997). Labels are also useful to ‘describe’ the individual in intricate detail to both the internal and external observer. As a postmodern philosopher, Judith Butler (1997) suggested labels provide a mechanism by which to categorise an individual and a means by which to assume certain characteristics and attribute capacities. Therefore, being labelled at work is a most powerful phenomenon with the potential for far reaching effect.

Negative labelling and concomitant incivility in the workplace are, we argue, precursors to more overtly aggressive and hurtful interpersonal acts in violation of ascribed workplace norms. Incivility is described as:

“Low intensity deviant behaviour with ambiguous intent to harm the target, in violation of workplace norms for mutual respect ... characteristically rude and discourteous, displaying a lack of regard for others” (Andersson and Pearson, 1999, p. 457).

Escalated disrespectful and more overtly aggressive behaviour at work has been variously described as mobbing (Leymann, 1990), emotional abuse (Keashley 1998), bullying (Einarsen, 1999) and generalised workplace abuse (Rospenda, Richman, Wislar and Flaherty, 2000). Examination of these descriptions indicates that despite the different nomenclature, they are in fact all referring to the same basic construct – ongoing disrespectful, hurtful and damaging behaviours in the workplace. The defining feature between them and incivility, is the length of time over which the behaviours occur and the intent of the perpetrator/s to hurt or injure someone physically or psychologically (Baron and Richardson, 1994; Neuman and Baron, 1997).

Leymann (1996) identified five classes of bullying behaviour which he referred to as the manipulation of:

1. the target’s reputation  
2. the target’s possibilities of communicating with co-workers  
3. the target’s social relationships  
4. the quality of a persons occupational and life situation  
5. the target’s health
Research to date indicates that bullying behaviours emerge in a variety of forms; from social isolation, attacking a person’s attitudes, the spreading of rumours and malicious gossip to questioning competencies, undermining decisions, having too much or too little work, being expected to meet impossible time frames or having important information withheld (e.g. Leymann, 1990; Neidl, 1996; Vartia, 1996).

What is evident from the research is that workplace bullying is mainly psychological rather than physical aggression. Naime (2003) suggests that bullying is mostly “sub-lethal, non-physical violence” which “crosses boundaries of gender, race and organizational rank” (p 1). This would imply that the mechanisms most often employed by the perpetrators of bullying behaviours are power and language. Butler, in Excitable Speech: A Politics of the Performative (1997) adds weight to this assertion when she states “that words wound seems incontestably true” (p 50.).

Bullying is therefore more than just a “personality clash” or a case of mistaken intent. Naime (2003) suggests that before there can be any real understanding of the bullying phenomena, it must be understood that “it is different from harmless incivility, rudeness, boorishness, teasing and other well known forms of interpersonal torment”. He goes on to indicate this difference by relating workplace incivility, bullying and physical violence to a 10-point continuum where incivilities range from 1 – 3, bullying 4 – 9 and 10 relates to battery and homicide. This concept of bullying being a part of a continuum of conflict is also well illustrated by Glasl’s 1994 three phase (nine stage) model as amended by Zapf and Gross (2001). In this model it is suggested that bullying may be seen as conflict which emerges between phases two and three. The model indicates that there is a transition from a focus on the issues and interest in resolution (phase 1, steps 1-5) to interpersonal tension, blaming and moral outrage (phase 2, steps 4-7) with progression to openly hostile behaviours (phase 3, steps 6-9). Zapf and Gross (2001) argue that it is at the boundary between phases two and three that the interpersonal interactions between players becomes disrespectful, lacking in trust and then overtly hostile thereby constituting bullying behaviours.

Whilst there are many factors which impact on the issue of definition of workplace bullying a workable definition has been proposed by researchers Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, and Cooper (2003):

“Bullying at work means harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone’s work tasks. In order for the label bullying (or mobbing) to be applied to a particular activity, interaction or process it has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g. weekly) and over a period of time (e.g. about six months). Bullying is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts. A conflict cannot be called bullying if the incident is an isolated event or if two parties of approximate equal ‘strength’ are in conflict” (p 15).

The definition of workplace bullying is not agreed and is still fraught with many conflicting and convergent views and drivers. Descriptions and definitions of the phenomena are many, as are the ascribed reasons for the actions and motivations of the perpetrator/s. Rigby (2002) suggests however, that four features are generally present in those definitions provided in the literature:

(i) the malicious intent of the aggressor;

(ii) the pained reaction of the target;
Bullying – Time, Space and Work Pressures

For all human kind, the concept of time and space has changed irrevocably since the industrial revolution and more particularly, in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Increased mobility, flexible and multiple forms of communication and, the internationalisation of capital and therefore markets have contributed to this compression of time and space. Harvey (1989) notes that the “general effect is for capitalist modernization to be very much about speed-up and acceleration in the pace of economic processes and, hence, social life” (p 230). For individuals, their home and work lives are increasingly subject to an ever increasing demand to adapt to rapidly changing conditions. Pearson and Porath (2005) posit that the complexity of the fast paced world within which we now live and work, feeds incivility because there is not the time to be “nice”. Indeed, it is suggested that there is a new social order emerging where impersonal means of communication (e-mail, short messaging service and the like) do not require the normal courtesies of interaction and respectful communication and this then, translates to the person to person interaction that we undertake in our daily lives.

Temporary employment has also become a permanent feature of most work environments. The concept of working for one employer for life has been replaced with the emergence of the “portfolio worker” (Handy, 1985) that is, an individual temporarily employed by a series of employers (sometimes more that one at a time) during their work life. This then creates a different workplace dynamic in relation to employer/employee loyalty, maintenance of corporate knowledge and the ongoing development and maintenance of the fabric of organisational culture (Patterson, 2001). Pearson and Porath (2005) suggest that the emergence of this new dynamic may have some significant impact on the capacity of individuals to work together in a respectful and civil manner. They indicate that this new dynamic is emerging because the increased casualisation of workforces “leave fewer cues for appropriate interpersonal behaviour” and, the “new forms of psychological contracts and a ‘me first’ attitude” may result in an erosion of mutual commitment and respect (p 7).

Bullying: An International Experience

Examination of workplace bullying has emerged as a new field of study over the last decade or so particularly in Europe, Australia, South Africa and the USA. It is quickly emerging as a significant and costly twenty-first century trend that, begs the attention of researchers and management practitioners alike. There are numerous examples in the literature where individuals detail their personal stories of immense suffering at the hands of a workplace bully (Adams 1992; Clarke, 2005; Field, 1996) which serve to strengthen researchers call to action.

Olweus (1978) initiated the first systematic study of school bullying in Scandinavia. In subsequent studies, Olweus, (1992) found that peer victimisation has serious enduring effects for some individuals and, although the connection between schoolyard and workplace bullying has not been empirically proven, some important issues regarding individuals feeling its effects long after they have left school and have grown into adulthood have emerged (Rigby, 2002). Clearly, the injuries sustained from bullying do not just miraculously heal. Research into the effects of
school yard bullying indicate that children who were bullied frequently at school (i.e. at least once a week) felt worse about themselves and were more likely to experience a fall in self esteem (Rigby, 1997a). It is therefore logical to assume that the bullying behaviour does not inexplicably curtail at the cessation of school.

Research into the phenomena of workplace bullying had its origins in Sweden in the early 1980’s where family therapist, Heinz Leymann, investigated conflict in the workplace and undertook empirical investigations that led to the development of the concept of “mobbing” (1990). Leymann’s work resonated with the general populace and provided an impetus for further research across Europe in a mainly positivist tradition however, using a plethora of measurement methodologies. This resulted in a variety of claims of prevalence as exemplified by the following: 2-4% (Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2001), 5.6% (Einarsen and Skogstad, 1996), 10-16% (Vartia, 1996) and 33.5% (Cowie, Jennifer, Neto, Angula, Pereira, del Barrio and Ananiadou, 2000). Clearly, the diversity of methods utilised and the lack of an overall agreement on definition, diminishes the capacity for comparison of prevalence rates (Hoel, Rayner and Cooper, 1999) – for a fuller analysis see Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel and Vartia (2003).

Because of intense public interest fuelled by media reporting, interest in bullying research has spread to a wide variety of disciplines such as counselling, therapy, industrial relations, occupational health and safety (OH&S) training, consultancies, journalism and media (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf and Cooper, 2003). These interests, their diversity, language and alignments have resulted in “differing shades of meaning being projected into the concept of bullying at work” (McCarthy, 2003, p. 232). This broad interest has had the effect of bringing a welcome diversification in the methods employed in the ongoing examination of the workplace bullying phenomena. In particular, examination of the relationship between well-being and health and the bullying experience (Björkqvist, Österman and Hjelt-Bäck, 1994, Leymann and Gustafsson, 1996, ), power differentials (Zapf and Gross, 2001), form (Einarsen and Matthiesen, 2002), negative affects on well-being and efficiency of other employees (Rayner, 2002), high staff turnover, negligence and cases of sick leave (Niedl, 1996; Zapf Knorz and Kulla, 1996) have been investigated.

**Bullying: The Australian Experience**

In Australia, the research focus on bullying has, to a great extent, mirrored the European experience with the study of school bullying leading the way (see Rigby, 1996, 1997b). Whilst an emerging consciousness amongst community members, practitioners and researchers could be identified in the early 1990’s it was not until 1994 that the first conference focussed on bullying issues was convened. The first survey on workplace bullying was conducted in 1995 (McCarthy, Sheehan and Kearns, 1995). Since that time, Australia has had a steady growth of research contributions emanating from a wide variety of quarters including universities, unions, working women’s centres, and labour organisations.

As in Europe, research contributions in Australia have employed a variety of methodologies and definitions of workplace bullying. However, the contributions to better understanding workplace bullying in specific industries has been substantial (eg Barker, Skas and Dyer, 1999; Barron, O, 2000; Hockley, 1998).
Women, through the auspices of working women’s centres across Australia, have also provided substantial leadership in the examination and development of responses to the issue of bullying in the workplace. Through incidence studies and pilot projects for the management of bullying behaviours (Working Women’s Centre of SA, 1997), development of anti-bullying guidelines and targeted conferences (Working Women’s Service, Queensland 2000), working women’s services have provided a “voice” for working women nationally regarding their experiences of bullying in the workplace.

Australian bullying research is contributing to the overall development of knowledge about workplace bullying through its divergent and eclectic approaches. Work undertaken by Griffith University regarding the estimated bullying cost to Australian employers is a substantial indicator that this issue is of significant proportions (Sheehan, 1996). Paul McCarthy was recently quoted in the Australian (July 16, 2005) as saying: "The average case of bullying costs $20K when you include absenteeism, sick leave counselling and re-hiring if they leave." (Toomey, 2005, p 1) This has led McCarthy’s research team to estimate that bullying cost Australian employers up to $3 billion a year.

The Management Challenge
As identified previously, bullying in the workplace is a major organisational challenge for the twenty-first century. There is clear evidence that workplace bullying is expensive both in terms of profit and production. It has been seen to be the source of severe psychological trauma – which brings with it a plethora of costs associated with work injury. In addition, there are the unseen and unmeasured costs with regard to employee morale, sense of community, trust, family effects and organisational reputation.

One hypothesis for the apparent emergence of workplace bullying is that

“...as certain overtly aggressive behaviour becomes more unacceptable in a culture, the manifestations of aggression are transformed from observable behaviour to more subtle, less detectable actions "

(Crawford, 1999, p 86).

Other social researchers suggest that bullying has always been a part of the human condition and the only thing that has changed of late is the level of attention paid to behaviours we assign as indicators of bullying. Rigby (2002) suggests that if “there is a reported rise in bullying, this may reflect greater awareness and sensitivity” (p 25).

Regardless of the levels of reported bullying behaviours, there is a very discrete message being disseminated regarding employees expectations with regard to respect and appropriate interpersonal conduct within the workplace. Managers are required to be ever more vigilant in order to detect the adaptations described by Crawford (1999) and, to be aware of the often subtle manifestations of bullying behaviours.

Clearly, managers within organisations have an important role in working with employees to ascertain acceptable and not acceptable workplace behaviours. This clearly presents a leadership challenge when so much of the research indicates that it is in fact the managers and leaders of organisations that are often the primary perpetrators of much of the workplace bullying (Aquino and Bradfield, 2000; Mayhew and Grewell, 2003; Salin, 2003).
As suggested previously, leaders of the future need to take a multi-dimensional approach to the issue of workplace bullying and include strategic responses such as work-based training, infrastructure, policy/procedure and investigation/action within a context of researched knowledge and understanding. In addition, it is important that managers invest in themselves, so that they can exhibit behaviours that enhance their leadership capacity and therefore, enable them to identify and respond to workplace bullying behaviours in a timely and appropriate fashion.

Work-based Training
Training is often seen by organisations as the most efficient and effective way by which complex issues may be resolved. However, training in relation to the issue of bullying brings with it a number of dilemmas, not the least of which are escalated reports and perceived management vulnerability. Training around the issue of workplace bullying is an issue that seems to polarise opinion and begs further investigation.

This paper has demonstrated that the primary ingredient for a bully free workplace is respect through civil interactions. However, respect, is not something that can be taught or learned in a two hour, once off, consultant’s visit. This training response paradigm needs to be based upon an approach that is issue specific and focussed upon the three methods of i) acquisition of new skills and new ways of thinking and behaving, ii) learning of material such as legislation, regulation or theory and iii) the examination of specific issues and learning of techniques in order to address and overcome them.

In most organisations a large amount of effort is usually put into the latter two methods of training whereas; best effect may result from a planned approach based upon:

- Acquisition of management and employee knowledge and skill through structured training which specifically addresses conflict resolution, negotiation, dealing with difficult people, stress management, listening and responding
- Management skill enhancement through specialised training in undertaking effective recruitment and selection, monitoring and enhancement of employee work performance, understanding and utilising OHS&W legislation and organisational grievance procedures
- Acquisition of new management skills and new ways of leadership thinking and behaving through mentoring and coaching which specifically addresses the notions of ethical conduct, appropriate interpersonal communication, self, responsibility and leadership effectiveness

Specifically, in relation to bullying in the workplace Namie (2003) suggests that such training should include:

- Executive orientation and commitment
- Management training regarding what is/is not bullying, understanding the policy and the procedures, investigation processes
- Targeted training for human resource personnel, harassment officers, risk managers
- General training and policy implementation for the total workforce
Clearly work-based training is but a part of the overall response requirement in any organisation. An effective integrated and multi-faceted training program provides a very solid foundation for the management of a highly complex issue.

**Policies & Procedures**

As training is but a part of the total organisational response, so too is the development of an appropriate and responsive infrastructure. In order to respond appropriately to the issue of bullying in the workplace there is a need for organisations to reinforce any training undertaken with appropriate formal policies and procedures.

In particular, organisations should, as a minimum, strive for:

- A clearly defined Code of Conduct that explicitly states expected behavioural norms and organisational values
- A values-based policy that clearly states disrespectful bullying behaviour is unacceptable in regard to any person at any time, defines the parameters of the unacceptable behaviour, places it within OH&S and expected conduct frameworks and clearly states the employer’s commitment to a fair and just process for investigation and adjudication of complaints
- A procedure for the investigation of complaints including the provision of a third-party investigation and adjudication process, provision of progressive disciplinary action and restorative processes such as coaching and counselling

It is important that there are avenues available to staff who are the targets of a bully to seek assistance and refuge just as those identified as exhibiting bullying behaviours have an opportunity to modify their behaviours. These avenues must be formalised so that bullying is considered an important issue and taken seriously throughout the organisation from the most senior of levels.

**Future Research**

This paper provides a framework which informs the authors proposed research. This research aims to understand the skill set of managers, management training and how they interrelate with the issue of managing organisations so that staff are treated with respect and dignity at work. The research will be undertaken in several South Australian public sector agencies and will examine prevalence and incidence of bullying in the workplace, it will review responses to reports of bullying behaviours and will scrutinize organisational management and leadership practices and processes aimed at building resilience/capacity to manage interpersonal conflict at work.

The authors will utilise the Integrated Competing Values Framework (Vilkinas & Cartan, 2006) to provide a conceptual base for understanding the leadership behaviours exhibited within the agencies and to provide the platform for the design of future training and development activities aimed at minimising behaviours that may enable a culture of bullying to exist. The research will also provide details on suitable policies and procedures to be put in place to reduce the instances of bullying and also to deal effectively reported incidence.

**Conclusion**

Bullying clearly is an issue of concern for Australian employers and employees. It has high costs on both personal and organisational dimensions.
Whilst some definitional issues still exist and questions about motivation and debate regarding appropriate response remain, there is sufficient evidence to suggest that bullying is a complex and multi-facetted management challenge. The historical and current theoretical perspectives presented in this paper indicate that the responses to the phenomenon likewise, need to be multi-dimensional and integrated with management behaviour and practice.

This paper focuses upon the issue of respect at work as a primary requirement in ensuring a safe and fulfilling work life for employees. That is, civil interactions between individuals in the workplace. It has also explored work-based training as a potential response to bullying in the workplace and poses some questions related to the practices, pedagogies and structures within the work environment. Overall, it is suggested that training cannot be delivered in a vacuum and that organisations must have in place a training context supported by solid internal infrastructure (policies and procedures) plus, a committed and highly skilled leadership team.

Finally, the paper discusses research that is to be undertaken to determine the prevalence of bullying in the workplace and its effects and organisational responses.

References


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