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Bullying: harmful and hidden behavior in organizations

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Abstract

The purposes of this paper are to examine the concept, types, reasons, methods, consequences and remedies of bullying and propose the comprehensive bullying model summarizing reasons, methods, consequences and remedies of bullying to prevent and get rid of it in organizations. First of all, it is expected that this paper will make contributions to academicians who will conduct studies in the field of bullying. It is also expected that this paper will make contributions to managers and entrepreneurs to be aware of harms of bullying, train HR professionals and all employees about them, prevent and get rid of bullying behaviors and bullies in their organization.

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1. Introduction

There are several studies conducted in the field of bullying in organizations in the management literature in the World. Bullying discourages employee motivation, organizational commitment, attendance and career planning. The purposes of this paper are to examine the concept, types, reasons, methods, consequences and remedies of bullying and propose the comprehensive bullying model summarizing reasons, methods, consequences and remedies of bullying to prevent and get rid of it in organizations. Introduction is the first section, the concept of bullying will be examined in the second section, the types of bullying will be explained in the third section, the reasons of bullying will be highlighted in the fourth section, the methods of bullying will be stated in the fifth section, the consequences of bullying will be pointed out in the sixth section, the remedies of bullying will be explained in the seventh section and the bullying model will be proposed in the eighth section. Finally, the conclusion will be the last section of this paper.

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2. The Concept of Bullying

Bullying is a major problem in organizations. It is a systematic, long term abusive treatment against an employee. Bullied employee starts to see himself/herself as a victim and feels helplessness in an organization.

The concept of bullying (a victim is socially excluded, tormented, teased, and harassed at work) was introduced in the mid 1980s by Norwegian and Swedish organizational psychologists (Leymann, 1986; Matthiesen, Raknes and Røkkum, 1989; Kile, 1990). International research started in the early 1990s (Zapf and Leymann, 1996; Sheehan, Barker and Rayner, 1999; Hoel, Rayner and Cooper, 1999; Zapf and Einarsen, 2001; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf and Cooper, 2003) (Einarsen et al.: 2).

Leyman (1990) developed the concept of “workplace bullying” which was an abusive behavior. He (1990) examined traumatized workers’ psychology. He (1990) realized that employees who were humiliated, excluded or punished by collective behaviors of their coworkers had severe damages. Namie (2000) adds that workplace bullying which is repeated hostile and aggressive behavior targeting certain employees in a systematic manner causes them feel distressed, offended and humiliated. He (2007) states that workplace bullying is a phenomenon in which an employee considers himself/herself as a defenseless victim of the negative actions of one or more coworkers. Vartia (1996) and Hoel and Cooper (2000) believe that workplace bullying is persistent and repeated negative behavior due to power imbalance and causes hostile environment. They (1996, 2000) add that the victim cannot defend himself/herself or retaliate equally. Einarsen et al. (1994) acknowledge that workplace bullying is a negative treatment against a victim, makes him/her feel inferior in a questioned situation and may concern both work-related and non-work-related issues (Öztürk, 2011: 2-3).

According to Einarsen et al. (2011: 15), “Bullying at work means harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone’s work tasks. In order for the label of bullying 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” (Giorgi, 2012: 261-262).

According to Matthiesen and Einarsen (2007: 735), bullying is a situation in which an employee receives negative treatment systematically for a long time and cannot defend himself/herself against this treatment easily (Branch et al., 2013: 281). Interactions between people who have equal power are not workplace bullying (Hoel and Cooper, 2001; Rayner et al., 2002; Einarsen et al., 2011) (Branch et al., 2013: 282).

Studies reveal that a significant number of employees face with persistent workplace bullying (Keashly and Harvey, 2006). Between 10% and 15% of employees face with workplace bullying in Europe (Zapf *et al.*, 2011) and North America (Keashly and Jagatic, 2011). According to some researchers (Leymann, 1996), bullying behaviors have to occur “at least once a week for six months to be considered as bullying” (Branch et al., 2013: 281).

Workplace bullying is both global and local problem. Studies reveal that the existence of bullying goes up to 17% (Nielsen et al., 2010). Bilgel et al. (2006) and Yildiz et al. (2008) showed that 55% and 40% of employees revealed that they faced bullying respectively (Giorgi, 2012: 263).

3. The Types of Bullying

Bullying can occur in different types in organizations. All types cause major personal and organizational problems.

According to Einarsen (1999), dispute-related bullying and predatory bullying are bullying types. Predatory bullying happens where the victim coincidentally faces with aggression and power abuse of other people whereas dispute-related bullying is originated in a conflict situation in an organization. Predatory bullying causes from destructive superiors and leadership styles, poor working environment, prejudice and scapegoats appointment. These two types of bullying can interchange during the process. Many victims acknowledged that the bullying started after they brought attention to a problem or they advocated a different view than their superiors or important colleagues.

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