

Bullying at Work: How to Confront and Overcome It*Andrea Adams with contributions from Neil Crawford*

Virago

London

1992

pp. 256, pbk

ISBN: 1-8538-1542-X

£9.00 (approx.)

401**Abuse in the Workplace: Management Remedies and Bottom Line Impact***Emily S. Bassman*

Quorum

Westport, CT

1992

pp. 224, hbk

ISBN: 0-8993-0673-X

US\$49.95

Mobbing: Emotional Abuse in the American Workplace*Noa Davenport, Ruth Distler Schwartz and Gail Pursell Elliott*

Civil Society Publishing

Ames, Iowa

1999

pbk

ISBN: 0-9671-8030-9

US\$14.95 (approx.)

Bully in Sight: How to Predict, Resist, Challenge and Combat Workplace Bullying*Tim Field*

Success Unlimited

Wantage, Oxfordshire

1996

pp. 373, pbk

ISBN: 0-9529-1210-4

£12.95 (approx.)

JOCM
13,4

**Corporate Hyenas at Work: How to Spot and Outwit Them by
Being Hyenawise**

Susan Marais and Magriet Herman

Kagiso

Pretoria, South Africa

1997

pbk

ISBN: 0-7986-4885-6

402

Adult Bullying: Perpetrators and Victims

Peter Randall

Routledge

London

1997

pp. 192, pbk

ISBN: 0-4151-2673-8 pbk

0-4151-2672-X hbk

£14.99 pbk

£45.00 hbk

Work Abuse: How to Recognize and Survive It

Judith Wyatt and Chauncey Hare

Schenkman Books

Rochester, VT,

1997

pp. 416, pbk

ISBN: 0-8704-7109-0 pbk; 0-8704-7110-4 hbk

US\$19.95 pbk; US\$29.95 hbk

Keywords Bullying, Workers, Harassment, Organizational conflict,
Organizational performance, Corporate culture

You are about to enter a nightmare. You are a conscientious and productive worker. Your boss, who previously was supportive, starts making carping criticisms of your work and gives no praise. Then, out of the blue, you are carpeted and subjected to screaming abuse.

Previously you were invited to planning meetings, but now you are left off the list – but your subordinate is included. Petty obstacles are put in your way, such as difficulties in getting materials or cooperation. You are losing prime assignments. As the problems compound, you lose confidence and perform below your best. After one small oversight, you are criticized in front of your coworkers without a chance to reply. You begin to dread coming to work, never knowing when the boss will sink another barb into your weakened ego.

The boss's attacks are only the beginning. Coworkers get in on the act. Friends who used to fill you in on gossip now stay away and hardly look you in the face. Rumors abound that you are becoming incompetent. Before you worked well in a team, but now everything you do is undermined. You have nothing to do except for occasional assignments that are set up for failure.

The stress at work is taking its toll on your home life. When you confide this to a friend, word gets back to the boss and the rumors and pressure get worse. Coworkers seem to be pitying you or laughing at you. You are said to be on the verge of a breakdown. That might be true! The only choices seem to be to resign or go on sick leave.

This scenario is one example of a worker under attack. There are numerous variations, but typical processes include lack of support, verbal abuse, undermining of performance, isolation and humiliation. Common? Evidence suggests that it is a remarkably frequent occurrence. In essence, workplaces are emotional torture chambers for a significant minority of workers. This has significant impacts not just on the victims but on morale and productivity.

The reality is that workplace abuse has been around as long as there have been workplaces. The factories of the industrial revolution were notorious for cruel exploitation. But this was seen as a feature of class warfare, ameliorated by the rise of workers' organizations and the introduction of legislation to stop the worst excesses. The abuse of individual workers has always existed but has not been widely discussed until recently. In the past decade, the publication of a number of insightful books signals a dramatic increase in awareness.

There are various names for these sorts of experiences, including harassment, abuse, bullying, and mobbing. Harassment and abuse are useful descriptive terms. However, they often suggest particular events whereas the term bullying captures the idea of a process or ongoing interaction. Many people might like to think that adults have outgrown a childish tendency to bully or susceptibility to being bullied; "bullying at work" nicely challenges this presumption.

Bullies are normally thought of as individuals, so how can the participation of coworkers be described? A term common in Europe, mobbing, captures this collective dimension.

Mobbing is the title of a recent book on the topic, with the subtitle *Emotional Abuse in the American Workplace*. The three authors – Noa Davenport, Ruth Distler Schwartz, and Gail Pursell Elliott – had personal experience of mobbing and then set out to investigate it and provide advice about surviving and overcoming it. They ably cover three important ways of approaching the phenomenon: understanding it, dealing with it as an individual, and dealing with it at an organizational and social level.

The first task is to understand and explain mobbing. Describing and naming an experience can be quite powerful when it crystallizes for others what they had previously ignored. The next question is why it occurs. The authors of *Mobbing* present a number of psychological mechanisms which, in the context of conducive organizational structures, make mobbing possible. Study of the

what and why of mobbing is fascinating; as an intellectual exercise it is likely to be of primary interest to researchers. Workers and managers are almost always more concerned with what to do about the problem. *Mobbing*, like many other treatments, analyzes the phenomenon as a prelude to the urgent issue of responding to it. There are two main audiences: individuals who come under attack and managers who are concerned about the health of the organization.

For the worker who is subject to mobbing, the essential first step is to understand what is happening. Some victims come to believe that they are responsible for everything that happens to them because of their own weaknesses and failures. The terms harassment, bullying, and mobbing are valuable because they point the finger at the harassers, bullies, and mobs and remove guilt from the victim. By describing the likely consequences, such as confusion, anxiety, insomnia, and post-traumatic stress disorder, *Mobbing* reassures victims that their experiences are “normal” responses to an intolerable situation.

Beyond this, the big challenge is to come up with a program of action for surviving and thriving in the face of mobbing. That’s a tall order. Davenport, Schwartz, and Elliott describe options ranging from grieving, building self-esteem, using humor, and taking care in choosing professional help. They also give advice on how family and friends are affected and how they can help. All this is quite valuable, but it is clear that there is no guaranteed way of getting through a serious case of mobbing. It often may be best to leave for another job.

Finally, *Mobbing* canvasses what can be done to create an organizational culture in which mobbing is minimized. Some organizations do this on their own initiative; laws, unions, and consultants can also play a role.

Mobbing is highly readable and informative. It is clearly structured, nicely laid out, well referenced, and filled with examples. The authors undertook interviews with a range of victims of mobbing. Quotes from these interviews are used throughout the text, giving a personal touch and realism to the discussion. Altogether, *Mobbing* is an ideal book to give anyone subject to or concerned about abuse at work.

However good a particular book may be, it can be worthwhile looking at others. This is especially the case for victims, who can obtain insights and inspiration, and is also true for managers and researchers. Out of the crop of contributions in the 1990s, it is hard to beat what has become a classic in the field, *Bullying at Work* by Andrea Adams with contributions from Neil Crawford. Adams, a British journalist, did an investigation into the issue leading to two radio programs broadcast in 1989 by the British Broadcasting Corporation. The programs triggered an immense response: victims finally heard someone describing their problems. The outpouring of further stories led Adams to focus on workplace bullying. The book is one outcome. It is a superb journalistic treatment with many amazing case studies, emphasizing that bullying is very serious, has enormous financial implications but has been little recognized in business or elsewhere. Many bullies are promoted or get new jobs.

There is little analysis in the book except for the chapters by Crawford, a psychologist. His assessment of the psychology of bullies is that they have been subject to neglect, abuse, and inappropriate anger, but not loved. They are envious, pick out victims, and build alliances with lackeys. He recounts some self-descriptions of bullies, including those who have gained insight into their problems.

According to Adams, victims have three main options: leave, accept the bullying, or fight back. Appeasement doesn't work, and the only option with the potential to solve the problem is fighting back.

Another British book is Tim Field's *Bully In Sight*. This is a comprehensive treatment of bullying at work and how to resist it, based on his own experiences and contact with large numbers of bullied workers. Field covers characteristics of bullies and victims, tactics of bullying, symptoms of being bullied, workplace contexts that bullies find congenial, costs, causes, how to stand up to bullies, legal options, and policy issues. Especially good is a 15-step process for unmasking a bully. Field has a tendency to produce long lists of characteristics, actions, and options. These lists are useful for giving ideas but make it difficult to hone in on key ideas. *Bully In Sight* reads as an angry and negative personal testament. The book could easily annoy researchers with its over-generalizations, but they should take note that Field has undoubtedly made an impact through his activism and support on bullying, with his Web site (<http://www.successunlimited.co.uk/>) being a valuable resource.

At the opposite end of the spectrum from Field is Peter Randall's *Adult Bullying: Perpetrators and Victims*. The book is a sober discussion of bullying based on more than 200 interviews with bullies and victims, describing the phenomenon in both workplace and neighborhood, with special attention to the creation of personalities of bullies and victims. There are many case studies to illustrate points. More than other books, Randall places emphasis on creation of the victim personality, which may involve, for example, overprotection as a child or having authoritarian parents. Many anti-bullying treatments downplay the complicity of the victim for the obvious reason that this may disempower them. If victims blame themselves, it is difficult to survive and fight back. However, understanding the bully-victim dyad can contribute to developing better strategies to challenge it. Randall has less than other books on how to deal with bullies at an individual level, but includes quite a bit of material on prevention and resolution of bullying in the workplace and neighborhood.

The most unusual contribution in the recent bullying-at-work genre is *Corporate Hyenas at Work* by Susan Marais and Magriet Herman, South Africans with personal experience of bullying. The book is an engaging exposition of problems due to "corporate hyenas," namely bullies and downsizers, who Marais and Herman systematically compare to hyenas in the wild. They describe disturbed corporate ecosystems, types of corporate hyenas (from top ones to loners), various styles of attack and interaction, symptoms of hyena-positive organizations, "corporate killings" (unfair dismissals,

victimization, downsizing), how to survive, and how to promote a sound corporate ecosystem. Analogies from the wild are used throughout, along with case studies and attractive graphics of hyenas and other animals.

The hyena analogy – especially salient in Africa – is remarkably fruitful and flexible, especially in highlighting different types and styles of bullies, their collective action, and corporate culture. This approach is likely to resonate more with some readers than others. Marais and Herman draw on interviews as well as their own experiences. Their final chapters on personal survival are especially good. Like a number of other authors, their response to being bullied was to become informed, investigate further, and provide their insights to others.

The book *Work Abuse*, though not just about bullying, deserves mention here. The authors, Judith Wyatt and Chauncey Hare, have long experience in advising workers in toxic organizations. Their lengthy book is written specifically to help workers in such organizations to develop the psychological insights, skills, and self-transformations to survive. For the individual worker, this is a more ambitious enterprise than using tactics presented in the other books.

Wyatt and Hare believe the central dynamic in toxic organizations is shaming. Workers are humiliated by others but also heap shame on themselves, whether it is for not measuring up to others or for particular failures. *Work Abuse* is a manual for understanding the shaming process and developing the capacity to stop shaming oneself, to not be affected by shaming from others, and to align one's self-interests with those of others in order to survive and thrive. Since abusive dynamics are found in most organizations, leaving may not be a solution, and may be impossible for some individuals for personal or financial reasons. Wyatt and Hare's program of self-understanding and self-development is not a quick or easy path but is certainly worthy of consideration for anyone who is at risk and wants to survive and achieve one's goals over the long term.

A victim of bullying thus has a choice of a variety of books filled with insight and practical tips. As well, there is quite a lot of material on the Web. Besides Tim Field's site, mentioned above, worthy of note is an attractive and informative site prepared by Gary and Ruth Namie, <http://www.bullybusters.org/>

It is understandable that authors use dramatic stories to illustrate their points, since horrific cases of abuse are more memorable and more likely to be recognized by and reported to others. My colleague Will Rifkin pointed out to me that as well as these "clinical" cases of abuse, there are less obvious "sub-clinical" cases to which numerous workers may be subject. Although for any individual the degree, impact, and consequences of bullying are less in these sub-clinical cases, the overall impact on workers and the workplace may still be significant and worthy of study and action. Diagnosing low-grade harassment is difficult; however, those subject to it are likely to recognize the processes when reading about more serious cases.

As well as the more practical guides, there is a body of research on bullying. While this cannot be reviewed here, it is worth mentioning the important studies by Heinz Leymann, a Swedish expert on mobbing, whose major works began to appear in the 1980s. Davenport, Schwartz, and Elliott's book is dedicated to his memory.

Most of the available books are far better on giving personal advice to victims of bullying than on providing policy advice to managers who are concerned about the impact of bullying on their organization. This might be explained by the fact that there are far more actual and potential victims in the book market than concerned managers. But there is something deeper involved. Many managers are themselves bullies and many others are supportive or tolerant of peers or subordinates who are bullies.

Bullying is undoubtedly damaging to organizational performance. The contribution of victims is seriously impaired and much time is spent in defensive measures by those fearful of attack. If victims fight back, workplace warfare can escalate dramatically. If official procedures are invoked or a court case launched, the drain on time and energy is enormous. Sometimes the battles enter the public eye, causing serious damage to the organization's image. Finally, disgruntled workers sometimes undertake sabotage, occasionally with devastating effects.

The orientation of Emily Bassman's *Abuse in the Workplace* provides a strong contrast with the other books. It describes the problem relatively briefly and then places it in a wide variety of contexts, from the psychological to the organizational. It compares workplace abuse to discrimination, sexual harassment, and abuse (outside of work) of women, children, and elders. It describes the problems associated with obedience to authority and learning via punishment.

Bassman describes how workaholicism can be a contributor to abuse, as well as policies for managed medical care and a contingent workforce. Practices that can be abusive in themselves, as well as facilitate abuse by individuals, include drug testing, truth testing (such as by polygraph), and various forms of surveillance of employees.

Bassman also surveys various corporate responses, such as ombudsmen and grievance procedures, with due attention to their limitations. She says no quick fix at the organizational level is possible, and argues that managers need to understand the culture and to pay attention to values, behaviors, and feedback systems. She is emphatic that blaming the workers is not a solution: deep cultural change is needed. *Abuse in the Workplace* is a valuable wide-ranging treatment, forging links between the issue of abuse and a range of other topics.

In spite of all its negative impacts, bullying continues and indeed probably is increasing as pressures are applied for greater performance from fewer workers. Bullying is not a rational process and is best understood as the exercise of power for psychological gratification at the expense of others. The authors are unanimous in rejecting bullying as a sensible way of improving organizational performance.

The issues of workplace bullying and sexual harassment have much in common. Sexual harassment has been recognized as an issue for much longer and there is a great deal of experience with development of policy and procedures. But in spite of this, sexual harassment continues on a wide scale. Official procedures are unlikely to deter more than a fraction of bullying. What is needed is a culture change: a corporate ecosystem that discourages and penalizes hyena behavior, to use Marais and Herman's picture. A management serious about promoting a climate free of bullying has many options, laid out in these books. One good way to start would be to give copies of these books to all employees and encourage them to propose ways to help eliminate bullying from the workplace.

There are several lessons from these books for researchers into organizational change. The issue of bullying and especially the collective dynamic called mobbing needs to be included in analyses of organizations. The traumatizing effects of bullying and the fear of being bullied can inhibit change (or occasionally foster it), as can the desire of bullies to maintain power over victims. The severe emotional impact on victims is hard to appreciate for those who have not been through it themselves or counselled those who have. Researchers need to appreciate the strong psychological issues involved in organizations, of which emotional abuse is one crucial element.

Brian Martin

Science and Technology Studies, University of Wollongong, Australia

Organization-Representation: Work and Organization in Popular Culture

Edited by John Hassard and Ruth Holiday

Sage Publications

London

1998

pp. 288

ISBN 0-7619-5392-2 hbk

ISBN 0-7619-5392-2 pbk

£45.00 hbk; £17.99 pbk

Keywords Organization, Organizational culture, Mass media, Corporate culture, Conflict

This book is like a promising essay whose introduction makes commitments that are never fulfilled. Perhaps one should not expect more from a collection of edited essays. Such an assemblage is, as often as not, a salad of diverse works whose fit depends more on the imagination of the reader than the skill of the editors. In this case, the editors make some very engaging promises, which they themselves seem promptly to forget. So it does not surprise that the various essayists are themselves not true to the major aims stated in the book's introduction.

Journal of Organizational Change Management

ISSN 0953-4814

Volume 13
Number 4
2000

Critical theories of organizational change

Guest Editor: Slawomir Magala



Paper format

Journal of Organizational Change Management includes six issues in traditional paper format. The

contents of this issue are detailed below.



Internet Online Publishing

with Archive, Access to the Wider Literature, Reference Linking, Multi User Network Licence and

E-mail Alerting Service.

Access via the Emerald Library:

<http://www.emerald-library.com>

See page 307 for full details of subscriber entitlements.

This issue is part of a comprehensive multiple access information service

Access to <i>Journal of Organizational Change Management</i> online	307
Editorial advisory board	308
Abstracts and keywords	309
Guest editorial	311
Critical complexities (from marginal paradigms to learning networks) <i>Slawomir Magala</i>	312
The subject(ivity) of management <i>Per Darmer</i>	334
Self and organization: knowledge work and fragmentation <i>Hugo Letiche and René van Hattem</i>	352
“I’m just me”: a study of managerial resistance <i>Ann P. Young</i>	375
Performance and quality of working life <i>Hans Pruijt</i>	389

CONTENTS

CONTENTS

continued

Book reviews 401

Bullying at Work: How to Confront and Overcome It

Andrea Adams with contributions from Neil Crawford

Abuse in the Workplace: Management Remedies and Bottom Line Impact

Emily S. Bassman

Mobbing: Emotional Abuse in the American Workplace

Noa Davenport, Ruth Distler Schwartz and Gail Pursell Elliott

Bully in Sight: How to Predict, Resist, Challenge and Combat Workplace Bullying

Tim Field

Corporate Hyenas at Work: How to Spot and Outwit Them by Being Hyenawise

Susan Marais and Magriet Herman

Adult Bullying: Perpetrators and Victims

Peter Randall

Work Abuse: How to Recognize and Survive It

Judith Wyatt and Chauncey Hare

All reviewed by Brian Martin

Organization-Representation: Work and Organization in Popular Culture

Edited by John Hassard and Ruth Holiday

Reviewed by Joel Foreman

Call for papers 412