

Brutal colleagues

Angela Mansi looks at how bullying harms staff and companies

Some 8,000 people log on to the country's first anti-bullying website every day. Between one in eight and one in four employees say they have suffered from bullying at work.

Bullying is a main cause of stress and thus long-term sickness, so is detrimental not only to the health of the victim but also to the organisation. Over a long period, it can cause similar symptoms to post-traumatic stress disorder.

The CBI argues that stress costs industry between £5bn-£12bn annually in lost days. Not all stress is due to bullying at work, but there is a significant link. Three-quarters of stress at work is caused by the line manager, which suggests elements of bullying through rank. However, managers themselves can be bullied by someone lower and this has its own problems in terms of recognition and credibility.

According to research by Tim Fields, who set up the website mentioned above, 90% of bullies are serial bullies.

Mr Field has carried out pioneering research based on experience — he was bullied to such an extent that he was forced to leave his job, then suffered prolonged ill-health.

He argues that bullies choose to behave as they do because they have found that it pays, thus reflecting the behaviourist psychology perspective of learned behaviour. Bullies often see themselves as above the rules and have no respect for others, particularly those more vulnerable.

People are not born bullies, they become so. Although many theories say bullies have been bullied themselves — often true — it is NOT true that all people who have been bullied become bullies.

From picking a victim to promotion

Four phases of bullying behaviour has been identified:

- Phase 1: The bully chooses the victim — the identifying moment
- Phase 2: The bullying starts to control and subjugate, very subtly
- Phase 3: The bully forces the

victim out either through ill-health or by leaving the company. This phase is called the elimination of the victim. By this time, the victim is usually a wreck in terms of emotional and mental health, and may suffer symptoms similar to those of post-traumatic stress disorder. At this point, he or she may lose their job, health, marriage etc.

- Phase 4: The bully is often promoted, and goes into new situation to do it all over again

Implications for firms

Bullying can have a number of effects on an organisation:

- A culture of hostility and resentment usually develops

What is bullying?

Bullying behaviour at work can include the following:

- Constantly criticising staff
- Undermining staff in their role
- Picking on people in front of others
- Blocking promotion
- Shouting at staff
- Regularly making fun of the same person
- Ignoring staff
- Regularly excluding someone from group activities
- Giving impossible workloads so that people are set up to fail

- Low productivity
- Stifled creativity
- Staff treat customers as they are treated, with little respect
- Mistakes are made
- High staff turnover
- Overall organisational effectiveness is damaged.

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Like a psychopath: the profile of a bully:

The profile of the bully is similar to that of a psychopath

- Emotionally immature
- Initially very charming, extremely plausible, often glib
- Attention seeking
- Dramatic
- Overgenerous (at first)
- Over helpful too soon and out of proportion to what is needed
- Demanding
- Easily provoked
- Takes offence easily
- Malicious and vengeful (the key to bullies)
- Little empathy for others
- Exaggerates own suffering to gain support and sympathy from others

Stronger economy faces delays, while people ponder discrimination

Recent research has found that more than a third of UK workers — over nine million people feel they have been discriminated against at work because of their age. While 32% of disabled respondents felt that managers ignored equal opportunity policies, one in five black adults said they have been discriminated against at work. Women were less likely than men to think that discrimination existed in the workplace.

The research by MORI, from a report *Diversity Matters*, also found that the larger the organisation, the more likely it was to be perceived by employees as behaving in a discriminatory fashion.

Waqar Azmi, head of Equality

and Diversity at TMP Worldwide, said that: "Over the next decade, employers will be faced with a new set of challenges resulting from demographic changes and an increase in labour and skill mobility. This will force employers to take into account all the different groups to ensure they attract and retain the best skills for their business.

"The findings of this research emphasise the concerns of today's workforce. Only once these con-

Implications of legislation on age discrimination were scary

cerns have been addressed, will we see a long-term knock-on-effect on business productivity and, eventually, on the UK economy."

The research was revealed at a conference, hosted by the Guardian and TMP Worldwide, which looked at the impact of discrimination, ways of redressing the problems and examples of good practice.

This event highlighted problems, posed numerous questions and espoused good practice but left the audience to draw its own conclusions. Those who expected a range of ready-made strategies were disappointed.

For those who heard Sam Mercer, director of the Employers Forum on Age, consider the implica-

tions of proposed legislation to tackle age discrimination (due 2006) it was positively scary — all those service-linked practices such as pay, holidays and promotion requiring justification if they were not to be regarded as illegal.

Patricia Hewitt MP and Trevor Phillips, chair of the CRE, both spoke enthusiastically about how far the UK had come — but they also talked about how far it still had to travel: and neither gave the audience concrete information as to how. The eagerly awaited expected change to business productivity and the UK economy seems a very, very, long way away.

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