

Barry Winbolt
TRAINING &
WORKSHOPS

Workplace Bullying

vs Fair and Robust Management

Barry Winbolt MSc.

info@barrywinbolt.com

About this event

Bullying in the workplace is a serious offence and when it occurs it should be dealt with promptly and firmly.

Unfortunately, a lack of a clear understanding of the term 'bullying' in the workplace means that is often used inappropriately. This can lead to several problems:

- Managers fear being accused of bullying so they sometimes put off having essential conversations about poor performance
- By resorting to the shorthand of 'bullying', people are discouraged from exploring relationship difficulties more constructively
- Formal disciplinary or investigations are started too soon, which is expensive and potentially damaging to all the people involved
- Genuine bullying and other forms of bad behaviour are confused and neither are dealt with properly

This event will equip attendees with a clear understanding of bullying, and strategies for countering spurious allegations of bullying. It will provide tactics for constructive conversation should an accusation of bullying be made; when such a complaint arises it should be seen as an opportunity to to engage and explore, rather than as a conversation-stopper.

Attendees will be given diagnostic criteria and clear guidelines on responding to accusations of bullying, and encouraged to use structured and solution-focused questions with a view to maintaining productive working relationships.

About the facilitator

Barry Winbolt MSc is a workplace relationship consultant, mediator and writer. He has over 25 years experience providing Solution Focused training and advice in working relationships, conflict management, communication skills and mediation. He is a regular presenter at international conferences, and over 25,000 participants have attended his acclaimed seminars and workshops on How to Deal with Difficult People, Anger Management, Conflict Resolution and related topics.

He is a member of the International Association on Workplace Bullying and Harassment.

Find out more at www.barrywinbolt.com

Workplace Bullying vs Fair and Robust Management

Notes to support the workshop

Contents

Introduction.....	4
Prevalence of workplace bullying	5
Discussing bullying	6
Bullying or harrassment?	8
Some examples of workplace bullying.....	8
When is it bullying?.....	10
Bullying checklist	10
The dynamics of bullying at work	11
Bullying as a conditioning process.....	11
The effects of bullying	13
Why employers need to take action	14
What employers can do.....	14
A note on policy.....	15
Provide emotional support.....	17
References and reading.....	19

Disclaimer

This workshop is designed to raise awareness and promote discussion on behaviour in the workplace. It is not intended as a substitute for proper legal advice where need arises, nor to offer guidance or advice on specific cases. It will provide ideas to structure thinking and discussion around the ubiquitous use of the term 'bullying', with the aim of promoting healthy debate among employees where concerns about behaviour arise.

Introduction

Bullying is a widespread social phenomenon that occurs in all walks of life; anywhere people live or work together in group bullying can occur. That is not to justify this pernicious behaviour, nor excuse it, but in order to deal effectively with it, we need to recognise where and how bullying occurs and to develop positive responses which strengthen, rather than diminish, working relationships.

It is inherent in the ways individuals in the workplace interact that a certain amount of banter and even more robust exchanges are a natural part of workplace lore. Combative humour, jibes and friendly put-downs are common and even acceptable in many working environments. For the most part, this is healthy and acceptable. If it does get out of hand people are capable of saying that they are offended and hopefully, in this respect, workplace behaviour is self-regulating.

Bullying doesn't happen 'by accident', and even though perpetrators (bullies) might say they "meant no harm" when reprimanded, bullying is persistent and repetitive and often involves a planned campaign by the bully, so it is quite likely that there was negative intent behind the behaviour.

Nevertheless, there are many forms of difficult or unacceptable behaviour in the workplace that do not qualify as bullying, so the first point of this discussion is to establish just what constitutes bullying. Once it has been identified, then it can be dealt with appropriately.

Use of the term 'bullying' has become widespread in the media and elsewhere. It is often used to describe pushy or domineering behaviour in broad terms. While there are many types of behaviour in the workplace that make others feel uncomfortable and provoke judgements, they do not and should not automatically qualify as bullying. Bullying, as we are using it here (and in the literature) refers to a specific type of relationship which results in actual or potential psychological harm to the target.

It is important to understand this because, although we all feel bullied at some time in our lives, this is insufficient to bring a charge against a bully and make it stick. If complaints are made they need to be supported by evidence, which in turn must show that the bully was persistently using behaviour likely to cause distress or do harm to another.

As we shall see, inappropriate use of the term also results in harm of another kind. Morale, reputations, motivation and working relationships can all suffer when someone makes an accusation carelessly.

Prevalence of workplace bullying

Bullying and harassment are common phenomena (both are referred to as 'bullying' from here on), and ones which employers have to take very seriously. Part of the reason for its frequency is that the line between harmless banter and offensive behaviour can be difficult to discern. This is one of the reasons it so often goes unchallenged. Even more common though are the number of accusations of bullying that don't properly fit the definition. For example, a manager giving an instruction that an employee disagrees with may provoke an accusation of bullying. inappropriately. This causes problems that will be outlined in this workshop.

Bullying is becoming increasingly recognised as a problem in the workplace, though it was not widely discussed in the UK until the 1980s. In 1990 Andrea Adams, a freelance journalist, drew attention to it with a series of radio broadcasts, and subsequently a book *Bullying at Work*. Wider academic interest grew from this point, and in a survey by the TUC in 1998 estimated that up to 5 million people in the UK workforce could be the victims of bullying at work. Other studies followed and these notes draw on several of the most significant ones. In particular, Lutgens-Sandvik et al 2007; Beswick et al 2006; Randall 1997 & 2001; Rennie Peyton 2003; Adams and Crawford, 1992 and Einarsen et al, 2003.

The web provides a plethora of surveys and reports on bullying, some of which claim impossibly high statistics for the prevalence of bullying. There is a tendency among these sites adopt a rather biased stance in favour of 'victims' of bullying. This is quite natural, given the purpose of the sites, but it could lead to surveys being skewed. For example, a survey conducted through a website devoted to bullying is likely to attract people who feel they are being bullied and who have gone online for advice. Clearly this is not a cross-section which is representative of the UK workforce with all points of view represented.

Another complication is the different definitions of workplace bullying. The HSE, reviewing the literature on workplace bullying in 2006, said that because of the variety of definitions, estimates of the prevalence of bullying varied, as did the quality of questions asked by researchers. Nevertheless, in the report *Bullying at Work: a Review of the Literature*, the authors say that "*a prevalence of around 1-4% of workplace bullying is likely within European workplaces.*"

In relation to UK sectors they go further:

"Taking the definition of bullying highlighted at the beginning of this report, this equates to an approximate prevalence of 2.4%. The results are based

on 5288 returned questionnaires from a variety of organisations from different industry sectors in the UK.”

(Beswick et al 2006)

They point out though that *“The lack of studies which have examined bullying as perceived by the accused bully also limits any conclusive estimates of prevalence.”*

All things considered, we can say that bullying is ubiquitous – it happens in all settings, to men and women – and that in the UK about 3% of people experience bullying at work. This is an average figure based on the findings of many authors and summarised by the HSE. Obviously, some workplace cultures are virtually free of bullying, and in others the incidence will be significantly higher than 3%.

Discussing bullying

In the past there has been a tendency for employers to use a formal (grievance) routes when responding to complaints of bullying. Wherever possible it is preferable to use an informal approach to resolve things first, and only resort to the formal grievance procedure if this is absolutely necessary.

It is proposed here that if an informal approach is also available it offers significant benefits:

- Earlier intervention before the dispute becomes polarised
- It encourages, and demonstrates, good management practice
- It encourages open debate, rather than repressed frustration
- It is easily accessible without resorting to specialists such as HR
- It is low-cost because cases can be resolved internally
- It strengthens relationships, rather than damaging them
- Mediation is available as a back up where an internal approach fails.

However, discussing bullying is often seen as a contentious issue, which is only to be expected where there is no reasonable basis for debate. Bullying is an emotionally laden topic which often triggers a process which precludes further discussion.

The aim here is not to defend bullying or to let bad behaviour of any kind go unchallenged. For example, it may be that a particular member of staff, manager

or otherwise, shouts and swears at others and that some of them feel bullied. The behaviour is clearly wrong and should be corrected with more appropriate and effective forms of communication. But should it be punished because it is bullying? This may not be the best way forward, and if the bad behaviour is directed at everyone (and does not target or isolate an individual), it does not qualify as bullying.

A couple of the standard textbook definitions of bullying are:

“Aggressive behaviour arising from the deliberate intent to cause physical or psychological distress to others”

Randall 1997

“Social interaction through which one person is attacked by one or more individuals almost on a daily basis and for many months, bringing the person into an almost helpless position...”

Leymann 1996

More specifically, ACAS characterises bullying as:

“Offensive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, an abuse or misuse of power through means intended to undermine, humiliate, denigrate or injure the recipient. Bullying or harassment may be by an individual against an individual (perhaps by someone in a position of authority such as a manager or supervisor) or involve groups of people. It may be obvious or it may be insidious. Whatever form it takes, it is unwarranted and unwelcome to the individual.”

ACAS

This last description also mentions harassment (defined below). This workshop makes no distinction between the two terms and uses bullying throughout. This is because, whatever the terminology, the purpose here is to help you take effective action to stop unwanted behaviour, and the impact and effects of both bullying and harassment on an individual are likely to be the same.

The key factor here is that bullying is unwanted behaviour that is persistent, repetitive and harmful to the person on the receiving end of it (the victim). There are many types of unwanted behaviour in the workplace and not all qualify as bullying. What distinguishes a bullying from someone who becomes difficult is that the bully has an agenda: a systematic and committed strategy of doing emotional damage to another person, intentional or not.

Bullying or harrassment?

There is no legal definition of workplace bullying. 'Bullies' are often – but not always – more senior than the person they are bullying. 'Bullies' sometimes target groups as well as individuals (HSE).

Harassment relates to unlawful discrimination on the grounds of race, sex, disability, age, religion or belief, or sexual orientation. The Prevention of Harassment Act (1997) covers harassment more generally.

Some examples of workplace bullying

According to the HSE and other authorities, bullying at work can take many forms. It can involve, for example:

- Constant criticism, removal of responsibility or being given trivial tasks to do
- Shouting at staff, persistent picking on people, in front of others or in private
- Blocking promotion or other opportunities
- Regularly ignoring or excluding people from work activities
- Spreading malicious rumours
- Singling out an individual for unfair or unequal treatment, e.g. blocking promotion or excluding from training opportunities
- Overloading or setting impossible deadlines (to fail)
- Constantly attacking someone in terms of their competence, professional or personal standing
- Insults or other pejorative comments, either face-to-face or less openly
- Constantly making someone the butt of jokes
- Repeated comments on the grounds of race, gender, disability, age, religion or belief.
- Copying memos or emails that are critical about someone to others who do not need to know
- Overbearing supervision or other misuse of power or position.

Examples and definitions of what may be considered bullying are provided here for guidance. For practical purposes those making a complaint should be asked to define what they mean by bullying, to clarify the behaviour they have found distressing or unacceptable, so that this can be dealt with. The organisation should be responsive, regardless of whether or not that behaviour fits a standard definition.

What bullying is not

Some pamphlets and guides say that bullying occurs whenever the victim 'feels bullied'. Though this is well-intentioned it can be misleading and even damaging. If it is sufficient for someone to feel bullied, then every time this happens someone else must be cast in the role of bully.

This can lead to unfounded accusations of bullying which can be as damaging to the accused as bullying is to the victim. There have been cases where unfounded accusations have led to a manager being suspended, sometimes for months, over an accusation that was eventually disproved. In the meantime, the (innocent) manager suffered ridicule, isolation, worry, stress, a damaged reputation and even harm to their career.

Therefore, it is very important that we only use the term bullying where it is justified. Some organisations over-react when they hear the word 'bullying' by immediately invoking complaint or grievance procedures. This may be appropriate where genuine bullying occurs – though there is no guarantee that punishment of the perpetrator will correct the problem – but it may not be the best way forward initially. Both will have the stress and worry of going through the grievance procedure, with no guaranteed outcome either way. Also, it does little to help restore a working relationship between the accuser and the accused, and this often deteriorates still further.

By way of summary, a more recent definition by Einarsen et al (2003), in their analysis of research and practice in the field of workplace bullying states:

“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 a target of systematic, negative social acts. A conflict cannot be called bullying if the

incident is an isolated event or if two parties of approximately equal 'strength' are in conflict."

(Einarsen et al 2003)

When is it bullying?

Many years' experience of helping organisations resolve conflict have shown that complaints of bullying are frequently not handled as well as they could be by employers. This is partly because they are frequently unsure of how to deal with such complaints, and even where a clear policy exists – and only recently have they started to become standard – the term 'bullying' is an evocative one which can provoke strong reactions and is widely misunderstood. As we have already seen, definitions vary, and so do employers' levels of understanding of the term. The same is true of staff, with some people using the term to describe behaviour they disagree with, particularly when they are feeling 'pushed' by management.

In response to requests from one group of managers the following list was drawn up to help them identify whether the behaviour in question should be considered as bullying or not, when dealing with complaints.

This is not a scientific test. It is a loose diagnostic list designed to give an indication of when bullying might be occurring. It is provided as a basis for discussion, as it has been found that when both staff and managers are able to consider bullying behaviour from a shared perspective, inappropriate complaints of 'bullying' diminish. Clarity of understanding makes it easier to identify bullying, and less likely that the term will be wrongly used, and provoke a knee-jerk reaction.

Bullying checklist

Any three points make taken together could be judged as bullying

- Is the behaviour unfair or unreasonable?
- Is it targeting one or more individuals?
- Is it repeated or regular?
- Is it one-sided, always in the same direction?
- Is there a power imbalance?
- Is there intent to do harm?

- Is it damaging, psychologically or otherwise?
- Can the target respond safely?
- Can the behaviour be talked about openly?
- Is the perpetrator likely to be responsive (i.e. recognise and change their behaviour)?

(Winbolt 2009)

The dynamics of bullying at work

Responding to allegations of bullying at work is time-consuming and can be fraught with uncertainty. For employers who have to deal with claims and instances of bullying, the dynamics can prove destructive and costly, and for complainants and those they complain against it is stressful and there is an inevitable emotional toll. Relationships, reputations and morale, not to mention motivation at work, can all suffer.

It has been argued that the structure, culture and ambitions of modern organisations can become the drivers of undesirable behaviour among employees, and that bullying is an inevitable side-effect of the 'bottom line' thinking that is increasingly prevalent.

Certainly, organisational culture affects employee relations, and there are strong links between management values and the behaviour and wellbeing of employees.

Whatever the causes – and they should certainly be identified in order to reduce the likelihood of bullying – it is the effects that we are concerned with here. The impact on individuals and the organisation that employs them is undeniable.

Bullying as a conditioning process

How is it that people can become the victims of interpersonal aggression typifies many bully-victim relationships? Working with victims of bullying gives some insight into the ways in which normally resourceful people find themselves unable to respond 'normally' when attempting to deal with the bully. People have often said that they do not understand how or why they become so helpless when confronted by the bully. They will speak of 'triggers' which can set them off worrying or tip them into a state of apprehension or fear where they are unable to think straight or to respond as they would like. These triggers might be, for example, the bully's name, a location, or even the smell of their perfume or after-shave.

The victim learns to associate a negative experience (being threatened or insulted for example), with a 'neutral' stimulus. So something which under normal circumstances is harmless – like a name, a place or a smell – can trigger a range of unwanted responses, typically fear and helplessness, and including physical reactions associated with emotion, like flushing, tears, shaking and shallow breathing.

What is going on here is that the bullying behaviour 'conditions' the victim in a persistent and repetitive process of associative learning. By identifying an individual's vulnerabilities (their fears and uncertainties), the bully taps into a mechanism known as fear conditioning, a process by which people (and other species), learn to fear new stimuli. Repeated exposure to the stimulus (the bullying behaviour), causes a pairing of the fear response with aspects of the bullying (name, place, smell etc), until the neutral stimulus alone can produce the state of fear, without the bully actually having to do anything.

This is described by classical conditioning theory, which explains the *"universal mechanisms by which we and other animals intuitively detect and store information about the causal structure of our environment."* (Gregory, 1987).

In effect, bullying produces a conditioned reflex which produces helplessness in the victim (in the sense that they are unable to respond as they would like). One way of looking at this is that it produces a sort of trance state that the victim is tipped into by the bully's suggestions, and eventually by the associated stimuli (name, place, smell, or whatever).

It is for this reason that it could be tantamount to further abuse to ask a victim to tackle the bully directly. Under certain circumstances, where the victim is properly supported and feels able to do it, this may be acceptable. But as a general rule it seems ill-advised to expect someone who has been conditioned to be helpless to then walk head-on into a situation where the conditioning could be further reinforced.

Conditioning works through the establishment of patterns (neural pathways in the mind). The way out of this is to learn to 'break the trance' by establishing new patterns of association. Victims of bullying can be helped by learning new patterns of behaviour – doing something different – and reinforcing them, where no amount of thinking and talking about the problem will resolve things in the same way. In fact, over analysis can actually reinforce the negative beliefs and response in the victim. Counsellors beware!

Of course, support and understanding are vital, and this will require some talk and discussion. But for a victim to become more resourceful in the face of bullying they will need to learn new patterns of behaviour and reinforce them through action. We are all familiar with the concept of 'having our buttons

pushed', these triggers can and must be re-programmed so that they can bully no longer push the victim's buttons. (Wolinsky, 1991).

One way to do this is through appropriate forms of therapy that focus on personal resourcefulness and empowerment, such as SFBT (Solution Focused), or Cognitive Behavioural (CBT) approaches.

The effects of bullying

Targets of bullying come to dread going to work. In extreme cases the effects of this mistreatment are such that the victim is no longer fit for work. Some, even when it is quite severe, only realise that they are the victim of bullying after several months or even years of mistreatment.

Targets of bullying will often say that they are surprised that it happened to them. They are often resourceful and effective people in the jobs, but this type of interpersonal aggression wears them down and renders them unable to tackle it as they would wish. Researchers from the University of New Mexico led by Pamela Lutgen-Sandvik say:

“Targets of bullying at work anticipate the workday with dread and a sense of impending doom. They steal through the workplace on a state of high alert, in anticipation of the next attack. Privately, they are profoundly ashamed of being victimised and are confused at their apparent inability to fight back and protect themselves. Workplace bullying is a type of interpersonal aggression at work that goes beyond simple incivility and is marked by the characteristic features of frequency, intensity, duration, and power disparity. Due to the hammering away described in these situations, targets often find themselves isolated, demoralised, and unable to escape or prevent the bullies' terrorising tactics.” (some references removed for brevity)

(Lutgens-Sandvik et al 2007)

Bullying affects everyone who comes into contact with it, whether victim or witness. Direct targets are likely to suffer long-term emotional and psychological disturbance, and in some cases this can be permanent or require psychiatric intervention. It will cause stress, damage self-esteem, impair cognitive functioning, and threaten emotional and physical health.

People who are abused in this way are at increased risk of depression (there is a direct link between what is known as 'learned helplessness and depression), chronic stress and absence from work can result, often long term. There are cases of bullying induced post-traumatic stress and even suicide. (Lutgens-Sandvik et al).

Colleagues who witness bullying can be considered secondary victims. Some may fear becoming a target themselves, but working in a generally negative environment and witnessing mistreatment of others is both stressful and disempowering.

The effects of bullying ripple out to effect with wider working community, so the problem affects everyone, not just the victims.

Why employers need to take action

Bullying and harassment are not only unacceptable on moral grounds but may, if unchecked or badly handled, create serious problems for an organisation including:

- Poor morale and poor employee relations
- Loss of respect for managers and supervisors
- Poor performance
- Lost productivity
- Sickness and absence
- Resignations
- Damage to the reputation of the organisation
- Tribunal and other court cases and payment of unlimited compensation.

It is in every employer's interests to promote a safe, healthy and fair environment in which people can work. This is also a legal requirement.

What employers can do

According to ACAS, employers should consider framing a formal policy. This need not be over-elaborate, especially for small firms, and might be included in other personnel policies, but a checklist for a specific policy on bullying and harassment could include the following:

- Demonstrable commitment from senior management
- Acknowledgement that bullying is taken seriously by the organisation
- A clear statement that bullying will not be tolerated
- An explanation of what constitutes bullying (and what doesn't)

- Examples of unacceptable behaviour
- Signalling that bullying will be treated as a disciplinary offence
- Manager training to include communication around sensitive issues
- A confidential, informal pathway for dispute resolution accessible to all.

A note on policy

Bullying and Harassment policy should be implemented, reviewed and monitored regularly. While legal aspects are very important, these should not overshadow the human and interpersonal considerations.

Any accusation is likely to impact psychologically and socially on any both the alleged perpetrator and the alleged victim. When investigating and acting on allegations of bullying, therefore, employers must take particular care to ensure that both parties are offered support aimed at ensuring their emotional wellbeing.

It must also be remembered that even where an accusation is subsequently judged to be false or inappropriate, both parties will have been subjected to stress during the investigation, and the reputation of one or both may be damaged, even where the complaint is dismissed.

These aspects should be considered and precautions should be defined in procedure to ensure that managers and the wider system understand how to care for all parties.

A clear policy

The statement of policy will gain additional authority if staff are involved in its development. It should be made clear that the policy applies to staff on and off the premises, including those working away from base. The scope should cover types of interaction and communications, including email use and content.

All organisations should have policies and procedures for dealing with grievance and disciplinary matters. Staff should know to whom they can turn if they have a work-related problem, and managers should be trained in all aspects of the organisation's policies in this sensitive area.

Informal approaches

In addition to a standardised formal complaints procedure it is recommended that organisations encourage their personnel to address any interpersonal

difficulties informally wherever possible. This may be with the help of an qualified mediator, but if tackled early enough and where it can be instigated, a collaborative conversation between the parties involved can very often enable each to air their views and come to a shared understanding. In some cases this might require training for managers, but it is also possible for suitably skilled HR people to facilitate such conversations. This avoids the need to go to full mediation.

An informal approach should not be used where there has been a clear case of bullying or other behaviour that requires a disciplinary approach

Set a good example

The behaviour of employers and senior managers is as important as any formal policy. Strong management can unfortunately sometimes tip over into bullying behaviour. A culture where employees are consulted and problems discussed is less likely to encourage bullying and harassment than one where there is an authoritarian management style. The organisation must make it clear that bullying and harassment are unacceptable, and support this with training and guidance for managers on how to identify and address any inappropriate behaviour.

Fair procedures

Procedures should be fair and transparent, with specific guidance on dealing promptly with complaints from employees. This should include desirable time-scales and what to do in the event absence from work of any of the parties. Stress-related absence sometimes accompanies complaint and investigation, and this can cause delays and further distress to those involved when protracted. Such procedures should have provision for confidentiality, and for both the person making the complaint and the subject of the complaint to be accompanied by a fellow employee or trade union representative of their choice [the right to be accompanied at grievance hearings is set out in the Employment Relations Act 1999].

Set standards of behaviour

Employers are advised to publish an organisational statement to make all staff aware of the standards of behaviour expected of employees. This can make it easier for all individuals to consider their own behaviour and be fully aware of their responsibilities to others.

This may include information about what constitutes bullying and harassment. Many organisations find it helpful to supplement basic information with guidance

booklets and training sessions or seminars (such as this one). Training can also increase everyone's awareness of the damage bullying and harassment does both to the organisation and to the individual.

Words and actions match

Policy is one part of the equation in reducing bullying. Employers must also show employees that complaints of bullying and other inappropriate behaviour – and information leading to such complaints – will be dealt with fairly, confidentially and sensitively. Employees will be reluctant to come forward if they feel they may be treated unsympathetically or are likely to be confronted aggressively by the person whose behaviour they are complaining about. Equally, they will not be motivated to raise their concerns if they believe that the information won't be acted on; people only tend to use an avenue of complaint when they have confidence in it. Credibility is therefore important.

Investigate promptly

Investigations should be prompt and objective, and demonstrate that the complaint is taken seriously. However, they must also be even-handed and avoid premature conclusions. Employees do not normally make serious accusations unless they feel seriously aggrieved, so the grievance should be explored to avoid pre-judging or drawing hasty conclusions about bullying. The investigation must be seen to be confidential, objective and independent. Decisions can then be made as to what action needs to be taken.

Provide emotional support

Accusations of bullying are stressful for everyone involved. They also point to relationship difficulties between the parties, and these may have lasted for some time before the 'problem' comes to light. It is therefore important to offer support equally to both parties, independently of any steps taken to resolve the dispute.

Counselling and support

Counsellors provided by Employee Assistance Programmes or independent counselling services can play a vital role in supporting the parties involved in complaints about bullying. The aim should be to provide support to help with stress and the psychological impact of an accusation. This support should be offered to both parties equally, regardless of their purported role in the complaint.

Mentoring

Mentoring provides the mentee with an opportunity to reflect on career options and progress, and helps them develop insight into their actions and behaviour when faced with a particular challenge. Treating experiences as an opportunity for reflection and learning is at the core of mentoring, so it is an effective aid to personal development and empowerment. It should have career and relationships focused so that it helps the mentee to build, for example, interpersonal skills and their levels of confidence.

Mediation

Mediation can provide an opportunity to resolve the complaint without need for any further or formal action. Some organisations are able to train staff from within, others may contract an external mediation service. Mediation is an *informal* process – as opposed to the formal internal processes of complaint and investigation – so it is confidential and entirely separate from organisational jurisdiction or involvement.

Whether or not an investigation shows cause for disciplinary action the people involved should be offered additional support. Some organisations seem to think that a disciplinary process will resolve interpersonal difficulties between two people but this is rarely the case. Coaching, mentoring or counselling may be necessary to help restore a viable working relationship, and where necessary improve behaviours that led to the complaint being made. Mediation might also be considered to restore the working relationship of the estranged parties.

References and reading

- Adams, A., Crawford, N., (1992), *Bullying at Work; How to Confront and Overcome It*, Virago, London.
- Addison, N., Lawson-Cruttenden, T., (1998), *Harassment Law and Practice*, Blackstone Press, Oxford.
- Allport, G., (1954), *The Nature of Prejudice*, Addison-Wesley Cambridge Mass.
- Einarsen et al, (2003), *Bullying and Emotional Abuse in the Workplace: International Perspectives in Research and Practice*, Taylor and Francis, London
- Gregory, R., (Ed.) (1987), *The Oxford Companion to The Mind*, Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Ishmael , A., (1999), *A Practical Guide to Combating Employee Abuse*, The Industrial Society, London
- Olweus, D., (1993), *Bullying at School*, Blackwell, Oxford
- Randall, P., (1996), *Adult Bullying; Perpetrators and Victims*, Routledge, London
- Randall, P., (2001), *Bullying in Adulthood; Assessing Bullies and Their Victims*, Brunner-Routledge, Hove
- Rennie Peyton, P., (2003), *Dignity at Work; Eliminate Bullying and Create a Positive Working Environment*, Brunner-Routledge, Hove
- Winbolt, B., (2002), *Difficult People; a Guide to Handling Difficult Behaviour*, ISR Publishing, Seaford.
- Winbolt, B., (2009), *Brief Manual; Bullying Survival Guide*, ISR Publishing, Seaford (available as a Kindle download: <http://amzn.to/120hnPH>)
- Winbolt, B., (2010), *Solution Focused Brief Therapy for the Helping Professions*, Jessica Kingsley Publishing, London

Research and review

- Beswick, J, et al., (2006), *Bullying at Work: a Review of the Literature*, HSE, Publication WPS/06/04, Buxton Derbyshire.
- Lutgen-Sandvik, P., (2007), 'Burned by Bullying in the American Workplace: Prevalence, Perception, Degree and Impact,' *Journal of Management Studies* ,44:6 September 2007
- Neilsen et al. (2008), Sense of Coherence as a Protective Mechanism Among Targets of Workplace Bullying, *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, Vol. 13, No. 2, 128 –136.
- Wornham, D., (2003), A Descriptive Investigation of Morality and Victimisation at Work, *Journal of Business Ethics*, Vol. 45, No. 1/2

© Barry Winbolt 2013

Permission granted to reproduce for personal and educational use only.

For use in connection with training sessions delivered by Barry Winbolt.

No other use permitted.

Contact details

E: info@barrywinbolt.com

W: www.barrywinbolt.com

M: 07980 66 53 49