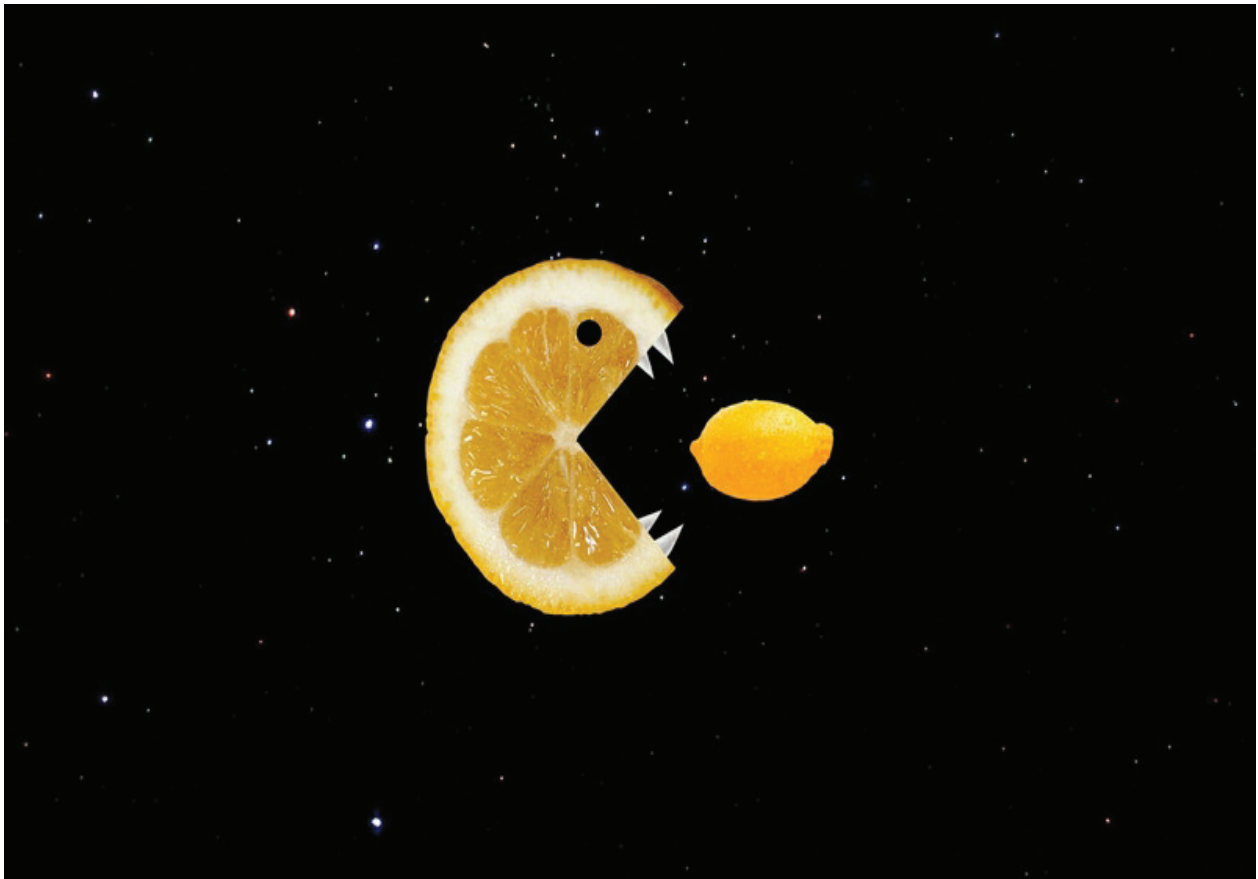# TACKLING WORKPLACE BULLYING & HARASSMENT

17 ACTIONS TO TAKE TODAY

INTRODUCTION

It is not news that bullying and harassment goes on at work. The cost scale of harassment and bullying at work reasonably well known; what we want to do is review that evidence and try to identify key learnings so you can take the best action and make the most impact with what is likely to be limited resources.

There is no evidence that workplace bullying in the UK is on the decrease, despite the various attempts made to reduce its incidence. So it's time to look again at the data, and how to tackle this hidden, expensive and corrosive workplace problem. To access our data sources, see List of Resources at the end of the document.

This paper not only makes the business case for tackling bullying and harassment at work, but also gives you actions to take today, in your organisation.

THE COST OF BULLYING

Almost a quarter of people at work claim they have experienced or witnessed bullying at work in the last six months. This is a great many people! The cost of bullying and harassment in terms of morale, performance and sheer human misery has been well documented. Bullying is also associated with a greater propensity to leave the organisation, higher sickness absenteeism, lower productivity and organisational commitment than those who were not bullied. And the negative effects of bullying extend to include also those who were bullied in the past and for those who witness bullying taking place.

THE LINK BETWEEN MENTAL ILL HEALTH AND BULLYING

The Health and Occupation Research network (THOR) is a research and information dissemination programme on the incidence and health burden of occupational disease and work-related ill-health. Data is collected from a research network of over 2000 specialist physicians and GPS throughout the UK and this data comes from a THOR request made by CMP Resolutions. The table below shows that a 55% of cases of workplace illness recorded by GPs were of mental ill-health attributed to work place stressors.
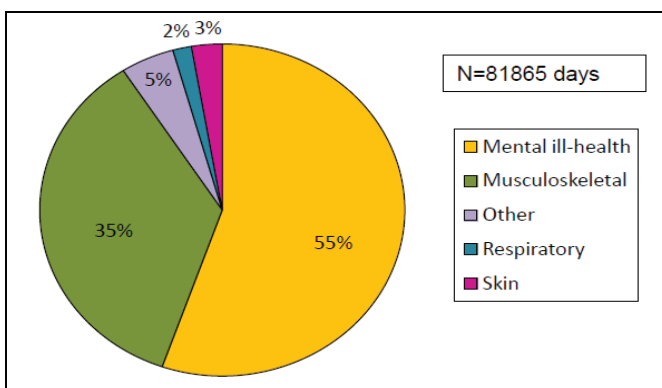

Proportion of total days certified by diagnostic category

The mean number of days per absence is over 24 days for mental ill-health absences; if you combine incidences of mental ill health with the length of absence, then work-related mental ill-health makes up more than half the number of sickness absence days that are absence certified by a doctor. THOR attributes a workplace stressor/s into nine major categories, shown below.
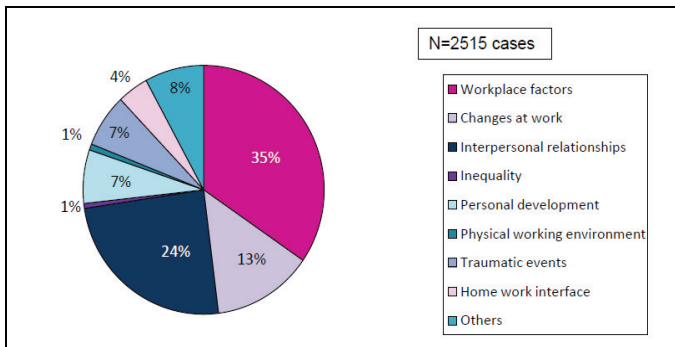
Proportion of work-related mental ill-health by attributed event/stressor

Interpersonal relationships are the second most common underlying source of mental ill-health. Almost a quarter (24%) of mental ill-health sickness absence relates to interpersonal relationships. And the table below shows that the majority of cases in the category of mental ill-health are attributed to bullying and harassment (41%) and interpersonal difficulties with a manager (33%).
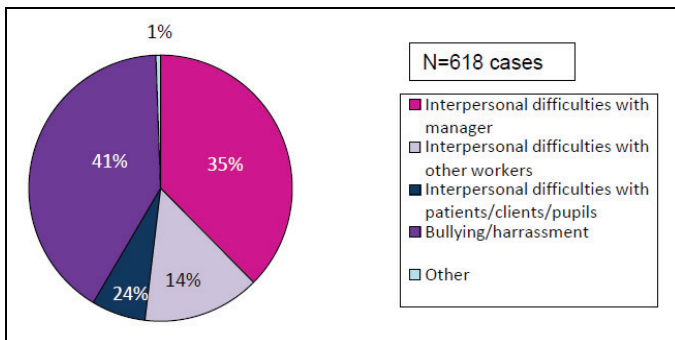
Proportion of work-related mental ill-health cases attributed to interpersonal difficulties

This shows that many people are off, for longer, with mental ill-health, and underlying that are problems with interpersonal relationships: and underlying *that* is bullying and harassment, and difficult bosses.

TAKE ACTION

1. *Train managers not just to manage sickness absence, but to minimize their role in it.*

2. *Give them the skills to manage performance in such a way that they sustain and strengthen their relationship with their staff, as well as achieving the task. Make sure no one inadvertently bullies or harasses, out of ignorance or a lack of skill.*

3. *Offer conflict coaching, mediation and harassment advisors, rather than counselling, to get people back from sick leave.*

WHO PEOPLE TALK TO

Who people turn to for support
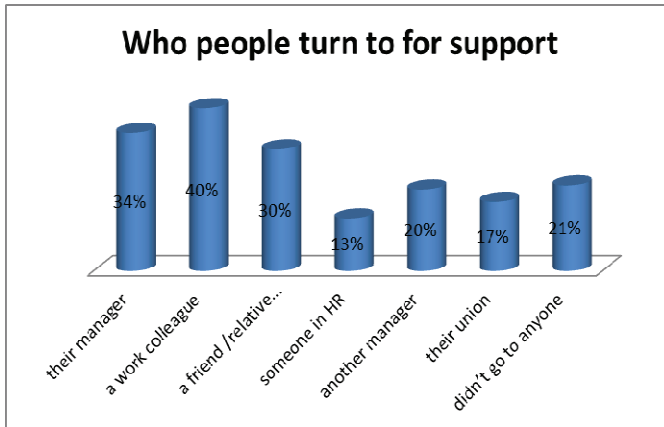
It is clear that a 'work colleague' is first choice – but often those colleagues lack the knowledge or perhaps the skill to support their colleague in the best way.

One reason they talk to relatives and friends, or do nothing, is because of those witnessing or experiencing bullying 37% cited their line manager and 59% cite senior line management as being responsible.

TAKE ACTION

4. *If the problem lies with those in the management hierarchy, then either there is still a great deal of work to be done on changing the behaviours of managers, or people are misinterpreting strong and fair management as bullying. In which case, focus your efforts on making clear to your employees the difference between bullying and robust management.*

For two out of three targets of bullying (66.8%) the behaviour goes on for more than a year and for approximately 40% for more than two years.

TAKE ACTION

5. *Colleagues, peers and seniors in too many organisations are watching bullying and harassment going on without stepping in to challenge it. There is a skills and confidence gap that needs to be tackled.*

People feeling bullied or harassed talk to a range of people about the issue but appear reluctant to talk to HR or their union. In the main people seem to seek the support of a colleague, manager or someone outside of work. Human Resources are not where people turn when they feel bullied. The will go anywhere else – or nowhere – in preference to talking to HR; it make no sense to position bullying and harassment support within HR.

TAKE ACTION

6. *Build a team of harassment advisors or colleague support officers internally – or set this service up with an external provider – to provide a listening ear for people to talk through their experiences with.*

7. *Advisors who know the difference between bullying and strong management; who can show empathy and offer support; and who can help their colleague reach a constructive decision about what action to take, will make a positive difference to the greatest number of people.*
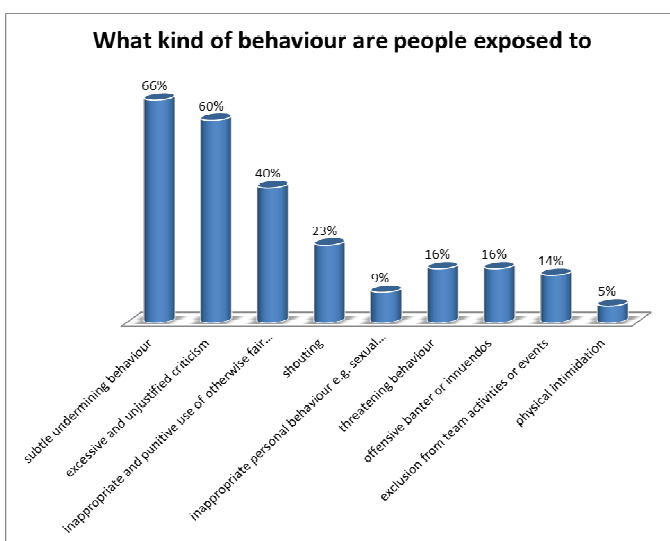
Being the target of bullying behaviours makes a person three times **less** likely to take a formal complaint. This suggests that 80% of bullying cases go unreported.

TAKE ACTION

8. *Find out why in your organisation people are unwilling to 'go formal' by running focus groups and surveys.*

WHAT PEOPLE EXPERIENCE AS BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

The graph below shows that the kind of issue people are talking about – rightly or wrongly – as bullying, are subtle. Undermining behaviours; 'excessive' (which is subjective) and 'unjustified' (which is subjective) criticism; the inappropriate use of fair procedures – which may include being performance managed, or how sickness absence is tackled. What might be called the more overt bullying behaviours of shouting, being threatened, and exposure to banter, make up very much fewer of the incidents causing concern.

What kind of behaviour are people exposed to

- subtle undermining behaviour — 66%
- excessive and unjustified criticism — 60%
- inappropriate and punitive use of otherwise fair... — 40%
- shouting — 23%
- inappropriate personal behaviour e.g. sexual... — 9%
- threatening behaviour — 16%
- offensive banter or innuendos — 16%
- exclusion from team activities or events — 14%
- physical intimidation — 5%

WHY ARE PEOPLE RELUCTANT TO REPORT BULLYING?

People under-report instances of bullying and harassment because they are in some way fearful of the consequences of doing so. If you want to empower your staff to speak out, you need to address those fears.

PERSONAL INADEQUACY

People often experience strong feelings of personal inadequacy when they are 'bullied': 'there must be something wrong with me', 'it's my fault for being weak'. They feel a great deal of embarrassment about being seen as a 'victim', and this starts a vicious circle where they become more convinced of their blame in the process, and less able to be assertive and speak out.

TAKE ACTION

9. *Run workshops or online training that gives a model that makes sense of their responses and feelings: the Drama/Karpman Triangle (Victim, Rescuer, Persecutor is impactful, memorable, and brings about real 'lightbulb' moments for people, to enable them to overcome this sense of being 'weak' and become more assertive and able to tackle the issues with the people directly.*

DON'T LABEL THE BEHAVIOUR

Many of the behaviours listed above are subtle and people just know they feel negative about what they perceive is happening to them; they may know or be unsure that the behaviours are not 'bullying' in a real sense. Labelling people as 'bullies' may be cathartic for people as individuals, but closes down the door to self-reflection and behaviour change. Everyone will own up to having occasionally behaved 'poorly' towards colleagues (justified by the circumstances we were in at the time or the organisation's needs, of course) but very few will own up to having behaved in a bullying manner.

The stigma of the label 'bully' does not help improve working relationships or the ability of your organisation to manage internal conflict in a sensible fashion. The reaction of someone to being confronted with the impact of their behaviour is one of shock and, probably, disbelief. Most Respondents we have investigated into complaints about bullying or harassment are horrified and frequently themselves feel victimised by the complaint.

TAKE ACTION

10. *Introduce the notion of 'incivility' as distinct from 'bullying'. Many people just want the behaviour to stop, and offering this less incendiary term to*

describe these most commonly reported behaviours will allow people to step forward and raise their concern without feeling they are going to 'get someone in trouble' or start a process that is punitive and damaging to all concerned.

11. *Ensure you have access to conflict coaching for managers so they can reflect on the impact of their behaviours and find an internal motivation to change.*

12. *Have you got access to professional mediation which can be available quickly? Getting people together to talk about the dynamics of the relationship in a non-blaming way, is often the best way to empower the vulnerable, and educate the dominant person.*

ZERO TOLERANCE

Many organisations are introducing a 'zero-tolerance' policy (often with unintentionally ironic 'Stamp it Out' or 'Beat the Bullies' branding). In our view there are drawbacks to 'zero-tolerance' policies in regards to bullying and discrimination. While a company's intentions are commendable, as in so many things, intention is one thing and impact is another. If you have swung towards 'zero tolerance' as a way of minimizing bullying and harassment, it's worth thinking again. An organisation with the view that 'bullies are bad' and "all bullies should be found and punished' is one which inadvertently has created a culture of complaint and fear – the opposite of your intention.

By demonising the behaviour, there is every chance that we drive it underground. People will get better at disguising it and bullying will evolve into more subtle forms of coercion and manipulation, and with this, the possibility of change becomes more remote.

Zero-tolerance is a worthy ideal. No one should have to suffer bullying in the workplace. And paradoxically, it may actually be tolerance - insofar as we recognise and acknowledge in ourselves the desire to bully - that offers us the best chance of helping people to do otherwise.

TAKE ACTION

13. *Abandon the 'witch-hunt' approach in favour of something more akin to an Alcoholics Anonymous approach. The ideal then is not for some senior executive to lose their head. Rather, they would stand and publicly declare "My name is X, and I'm under such extreme stress that I feel like bullying my staff every single day." In the face of increasing demands,*

wanting to make things happen now, without the niceties, is neither incomprehensible nor evil.

14. *Educate your leaders and senior managers to understand that while the urge towards compelling others may be understandable, it is not a necessity. Give them ways other than bullying to achieve their tasks without destroying trust, respect and relationships in the process. Some people will undoubtedly need help in learning alternative management techniques. In which case what they need is not to be punished, but mentored, coached and educated.*

15. *Review your thinking about 'Zero Tolerance': this may be counter-productive, and simply drive the problem underground, rather than promoting healthy debate and better understanding of workplace behaviours.*

CHECK YOUR FINDINGS FOR ATTRIBUTION THEORY IN ACTION

In CMP's 25 years' experience of investigating complaints of bullying and harassment, and of reviewing organisational responses to bullying situations, we know that one result of the stigma attached to the 'bully' label is **a reluctance to uphold complaints** of bullying. Too often the organisational response is to blame the complainant. Our experience is that there is a tendency to 'understand' the organisational needs as being the causes of the manager's behaviour, rather than to name that behaviour as bullying - unless the behaviour was seen as being intentional.

Part of the reason for this disconnect is that when we see this type of behaviour in others (particularly if we are on the receiving end) we tend to ascribe the motivation for it to their moral character – we will usually label their 'bad' behaviour as bullying and see them as 'bad' people. However if we ourselves indulge in the same sort of behaviour, we know there is a rational reason for it – 'the job needs to be done, so do it'; 'I need it – *now*'. We know we aren't fundamentally bad people, but there is a situational demand on us, and we pass that pressure on to get what we need. This is known as 'Attribution theory'. Attribution Theory says that what I do is justifiable and sensible, given the circumstances I'm in; and what you do is poorly judged, self-interested and immoral, given your character.

TAKE ACTION

16. *Train your Hearing Managers or Deciding Officers to ensure that they properly weigh the evidence put forward in grievance investigations and don't succumb to Attribution Theory. Fair outcomes will also help*

overcome the frequently held belief in many organisations that 'management will do nothing' or are 'biased' against complainants.

17. Monitor the outcomes of your investigations. If your organisation is not upholding many complaints, then either people are complaining about reasonable behaviours and you need to run a programme of education; or your Hearing Managers are not properly weighing the evidence and are making inappropriate findings, in which case they need proper training.

CASE STUDY: BACP CHANGES ITS APPROACH TO BULLYING AND HARASSMENT

British Association for Counselling & Psychotherapy

DELIVERABLES

- Trained 9 directors and senior managers to carry out internal investigations.
- Established 6 "Diversity Champions" to advocate BACP's policy
- Trained 20 team leaders in conflict management skills

OUTCOMES

- Diversity Champions successfully recruited from across the organisation.
- Top-down support for the initiative highlighted by the ease of securing funding.
- Diversity Champions received such strong support in the Y1 that the service was expanded in Y2
- Improved culture of dignity at work show by follow-up survey

The British Association for Counselling and Psychotherapy's vision was to deliver a "positive virus" to its staff, and top-league practice in relation to achieving equality and dignity at work. It implemented a new strategy to improve Dignity at Work and to ensure theirs was a safe, trusted and transparent working environment. It now has a clear and fair organisation-wide procedure for dealing with grievances.

ESTABLISHING "DIVERSITY CHAMPIONS"

- Advocates for BACP's policy
- A first point of contact for staff feeling aggrieved.
- A support for people who feel unhappy about behaviours towards them relating to their diversity
- Able to help prevent grievances from escalating to formal processes.

DISPUTE RESOLUTION TRAINING FOR A GROUP OF STAFF

- Better understanding of BACP's vision for dignity at work, and able to manage conflict early, constructively and at a local level.

INVESTIGATION SKILLS TRAINING

- A group of directors and senior managers now work consistently and to best practice when undertaking their duties as investigators and hearing managers of grievance and harassment allegations.

ABOUT CMP RESOLUTIONS

CMP Resolutions has supported many organisations tackle bullying and harassment at work. For more information about how CMP Resolutions can support you, please contact

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COST OF CONFLICT REFERENCES AND SOURCES

Grievance and disciplinary data sources

CIPD Cost of Conflict Report 2004

http://www.cipd.co.uk/NR/rdonlyres/2A206FFD-CF79-4F2A-9B8A-FA7F2A05CE07/0/manconflwrk.pdf

CIPD Report Cost of Conflict 2007

http://www.cipd.co.uk/subjects/empreltns/general/_mngcnflcwk.htm

Average staff and manager salaries

http://www.statistics.gov.uk/pdfdir/ashe1109.pdf page 3

Managerial conflict management time

Thomas and Schmidt, Conflict Management Time for managers:

http://www.jstor.org/pss/255781

Stress absences

http://www.cbi.org.uk/pdf/20100607-cbi-pfizer-absence-report.pdf exhibit 16 page 20 – (work-related stress is 22%)

http://www.hse.gov.uk/statistics/tables/thorgp09.htm 27% stress caused by interpersonal relations at work

http://www.cipd.co.uk/NR/rdonlyres/6D0CC654-1622-4445-8178-4A5E071B63EF/0/absencemanagementsurveyreport2008.pdf Page 27 40% stress is workplace related, and p 26 showing management style and relationships are in top 3

Employees take on average 29 days off due to stress; bullying accounts for between 10-20% stress absences, with the substantial variation in figures resulting from among other things the definition used or measurement criteria applied. Beswick, J., Gore, J. and Palferman, D. (2006). Bullying at work: a review of the literature (WPS/06/04), Derbyshire: Health and Safety Laboratories.

Incivility at work

http://www.csp.org.uk/director/members/newsandanalysis/news.cfm?item_id=D5E19B7BEA35BEB9AFCAE8BFCF2DD611

Turnover rates

The median labour turnover rate 2010 survey: 13.5%

http://www.cipd.co.uk/NR/rdonlyres/3103F1EB-14FA-48AF-BA0F-B446A7F82C6D/0/5250_RTP_survey_report.pdf page 3

Source of data from The Health and Occupation Research network (THOR)

2013-01-THOR-GP, Centre for Occupational and Environmental Health, University of Manchester

13