

# Chapter 44

## Impact of Organizational Trauma on Workplace Behavior and Performance: Workplace Bullying Due to (In)Competency

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### ABSTRACT

*Research suggests, according to Branch, Ramsay, and Barker (2013), that a significant number of people are exposed to persistent abusive treatment within the workplace, with the majority of studies within Europe indicating that between 10% and 15% of the workforce are exposed to workplace bullying (Zapf, Escartin, Einarsen, Hoel, & Vartia, 2011), with North American research reporting similar prevalence rates. This is a significant, ongoing dilemma for researchers and practitioners, for which an agreed resolution would be useful because of legal and policy implications. Hence, the purpose of this chapter is on the impact of organizational trauma on workplace behavior and performance based on workplace bullying. The chapter is based on a case study regarding a program that is funded by the Department of Education within a community college in the State of California. The community college is one of four community colleges under the same community college district.*

### INTRODUCTION

The term *trauma*, is rarely used in conjunction with the term *organization*, as in *organizational trauma*. The term *organizational trauma*, when used, often refers to the health and well-being of an organization being questioned. Hence, *trauma*, when used in an *organizational* setting, is often referred to organizational crisis that can escalate to *organizational trauma* if it reaches and continuously exceeds a level where people involved can no longer cope with the situation. With *organizational trauma* there exists *burnout*. According to Bell, Kulkarni, and Dalton (2003), Maslach (1993) described burnout as having three dimensions:

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1. Emotional exhaustion,
2. Depersonalization, and
3. Reduced personal accomplishment and commitment to the profession.

Burnout has been conceptualized as a process rather than a condition or state, and some have theorized that it progresses sequentially through each of these dimensions (Maslach, 1993). Maslach and others have examined the interpersonal, and organizational characteristics that contribute to burnout, and confirmed that both individual interpersonal and organizational characteristics can do both at the same time. Of particular interest to this discussion is the finding that organizations can either promote job satisfaction or contribute to burnout (Söderfeldt, Söderfeldt, & Warg, 1995). Individual staff members suffer, and the resulting loss of experienced staff can diminish the quality of client services (Arches, 1991).

Burnout is derived from multiple factors, however, for the purpose of this chapter, focus will be on two interrelated factors: (workplace) bullying and competency [the lack of knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics (KSAOs)]. The first factor in burnout is, workplace bullying, refers to *repeated*, unreasonable actions of individuals (or a group) directed towards an employee (or a group of employees), which are intended to intimate, degrade, humiliate or undermine, or which create a risk to the health or safety of the employees(s). The second factor in burnout is, competency, which consists of knowledge, skills, and abilities and “other” attributes, further referred to as KSAOs (Tran, 2008):

1. Knowledge is usually defined as the degree to which a candidate is required to know certain technical material,
2. Skill indicates adequate performance on tasks requiring the use of tools, equipment, and machinery,
3. Abilities are physical and mental capacities to perform tasks not requiring the use of tools, equipment, or machinery, and
4. Other characteristics include personality, interest, or motivational attributes that indicate a candidate will enjoy certain tasks, rather than whether they can do those tasks (Schneider & Schmitt, 1986: 53).

Workplace bullying often involves an abuse or misuse of power. Bullying behavior creates feelings of defenselessness and injustice in the target and undermines an individual’s right to dignity at work. Bullying is different from aggression. Whereas aggression may involve a single act, bullying involves repeated attacks against the target, creating an on-going pattern of behavior. Tough or demanding bosses are not necessarily bullies as long as they are respectful and fair and their primary motivation is to obtain the best performance by setting high yet reasonable expectations. Workplace bullying can be instigated by coworkers, supervisors, contract workers, or labor representatives, and although rare, meek bosses can be also bullied by their direct reports. Some bullying situations involve employees bullying their peers, rather than a supervisor bullying an employee. The term *mobbing* refers to a group of coworkers targeting another worker. Supervisor should intervene immediately to address and stop mobbing behaviors.

In a prevalence study of U.S. workers, 41.4% of respondents reported experiencing psychological aggression at work in the past year, which representing 47 million U.S. workers (Schat, Frone, & Kelloway, 2006). Furthermore, according to other research performed by Pompili, Lester, Innamorati, De Pisa, Iliceto, Puccinno, Fiori, Tatarelli, and Girardi (2008), which focused on the impact of mobbing on the physical health of workers among 102 individuals who were targets of mobbing, 32 subjects (31.4%) had low suicide risk, 17 subjects (16.7%) had a medium suicide risk, and 4 subjects (3.9%) had

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