Research Survey on Workplace Bullying

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Introduction and Motivation for This Study

In the early months of 2013 in my work at Mars Hill Church, I was given responsibility for helping to conciliate some conflicts among current and former staff members. I was also asked to help develop a wise and effective process for vetting charges against Executive Elders. I found it difficult to gain the cooperation of the complainants, those former staff members who had expressed grievances. Their emotional affect in phone conversations was marked by what I would regard as extreme fear. They were reluctant to cooperate with the conciliation process we had offered them.

I began asking these questions:

1. Is there something about the process we have offered that makes it hard for these claimants to participate?
2. If their claims are true, and they have in fact been mistreated, are there legitimate spiritual and psychological factors at play that we must take more fully into account when designing a process for addressing their concerns?

So I began looking for research on the psychological or sociological implications of reporting and grievance policies on victims of harm. There is a significant body of research on the phenomenon called "workplace bullying", as it is more commonly called in American scholarly literature, or "mobbing" as it tends to be called in the European literature.

As I reviewed some of this literature looking to answer my initial questions about how to best refine our "formal charge" policy, I was surprised to find many other correlations between the bullying research and my experiences attempting to facilitate conflict resolution at Mars Hill Church.

In my interviewing, I heard the following reports:

- Lack of trust that Mars Hill was adequately equipped to address the problems.
- Belief that other leaders are complicit in the reinforcing of the problems.
- Self-descriptors of symptoms that indicate emotional depletion, despair, and terror, such as feeling like a "corpse" after engaging in phone calls related to the conflict, feeling "alone", or panicking when seeing the caller ID indicating a call from me, possibly about Mars Hill conflict.
- Unwillingness to report grievances because of perceived past failures to see reports successful.

Furthermore, Executive Elders at Mars Hill had also recently acknowledged the following trends:

- a "culture of fear"
- recent dramatic staff turnover rates

At an initial glance, these indicators appear to strongly correlate with the phenomenon of workplace bullying. This document collects some highlights from a survey of the bullying research literature.

The Relevance of Secular "Bullying" Literature to The Church

While the workplace bullying research is largely conducted in the context of secular workplaces and the literature is written from a secular point of view, the core dynamics of bullying should be a central concern to church leaders. The New Testament indicates a strong value for keeping "bullying"-like tendencies out of the church by ensuring that its highest leaders set a peaceful tone and example.

Two biblical indicators of this are most noteworthy:

1. The qualifications of an elder in both 1 Timothy 3:3 and Titus 1:7 indicate that an elder must not be violent. Some definitions for *plektes*, translated "violent", include "pugnacious person, *bully*" (BDAG), "striker; pugnacious person, *bully*, quarrelsome person (ANLEX), "a person who is pugnacious and demanding" (Louw-Nida). Merriam-Webster defines *pugnacious* as: "having a quarrelsome or combative nature". According to commentator Philip Towner, "The degrees of modes of violence that the word might express are numerous (*bullying*, verbal abuse, angry pushing, and shoving), and prohibition should be regarded as widely as possible."[1]
2. First Peter 5:3 prohibits a "domineering" attitude among the church's leaders. Sam Storms, in his Re:Train lectures of April 2011 listed twenty-three examples of what pastoral domineering might look like. A few notable examples that appear to correlate with the phenomenon of workplace bullying are:
   a. "A pastor domineers whenever he uses the sheer force of his personality to overwhelm others and coerce their submission."
   b. "A pastor domineers whenever he uses slick verbiage or eloquence to humiliate people into feeling ignorant or less competent than they really are."
   c. "He domineers by building into people a greater loyalty to himself than to God. Or he makes it appear that not to support him is to work at cross purposes with God."
   d. "He domineers by short circuiting due process, by shutting down dialogue and discussion prematurely, by not giving all concerned an opportunity to voice their opinion."
   e. "He domineers by establishing an inviolable barrier between himself and the sheep. He either surrounds himself with staff who insulate him from contact with the people or withdraws from the daily affairs of the church in such a way that he is unavailable and unreachable."
   f. "He domineers by making people feel unsafe and insecure should they desire to voice an objection to his proposals and policies."[2]

The correlation between the organizational dynamics that result from bullying, some of our own recent trends, and the Bible's concern to avoid such dynamics within churches, all seem to warrant further investigation.

Descriptions of Workplace Bullying

According to the Washington State Department of Labor & Industries:

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 intimidate, degrade, humiliate, or undermine; or which create a risk to the health or safety of the employee(s).

Workplace bullying often involves an abuse or misuse of power. Bullying behavior creates feelings of

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[1] Towner, The Letters to Timothy and Titus, 253.
[2] Sam Storms, "Lesson #3: How a Pastor Leads and Loves, 1 Peter 5:1–4", lecture notes, Re:Train April 2011.

defenselessness and injustice in the target and undermines an individual's right to dignity at work.

Examples of bullying:

• Unwarranted or invalid criticism

• Blame without factual justification

• Being treated differently than the rest of your work group

• Being sworn at

• Exclusion or social isolation

• Being shouted at or being humiliated

• Excessive monitoring or micro-managing

• Being given work [with] unrealistic deadlines[3]

While bullying may be associated with dramatic physical threats, the research shows that, in fact, "bullying is initially characterized as consisting of highly covert and indirect behaviors."[4]

In their research on the correlation between bullying and symptoms of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD), Berg and Einarsen write:

Bullying can be described as a certain subset of conflicts, and may be defined as the exposure to persistent or recurrent oppressive, offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious, or insulting behaviour by a superior or a colleague...To be a victim of intentional and systematic psychological harm by another person, real or perceived, seems to produce severe emotional reactions such as fear, anxiety, helplessness, depression and shock. These reactions seem to be especially pronounced if the perpetrator is in a position of power or the situation is an unavoidable or inescapable one...Victimisation, such as exposure to intense bullying at work, may change the individual's perceptions of their work-environment and life in general to one of threat, danger, insecurity and self-questioning, which may result in pervasive emotional, psychosomatic and psychiatric problems.[5]

Bullying isn't just about heated arguments over issues. It's beyond that. It results in damage to one's sense of identity and human dignity.

The core problem of bullying at work is that it undermines the target's sense of being a valuable and competent person living in a safe and caring environment. Distressed and dissatisfied with themselves, victims may focus on and magnify potential threats from their surroundings.[6]

Bullying Involves Significant Power Differentials

Experts debate over how to best define bullying. Some argue that it is better understood in terms of *conflict*, such as "destructive conflicts going beyond the point of no return" or "long-lasting and badly managed conflicts". Others argue that *conflict* and *bullying* are two distinct concepts "hinging on the ability of the involved parties to respond to or defend against hostile actions."[7]

A key feature of bullying is the inability to defend oneself. If the parties involved are equally able to defend themselves, then the situation may well be a serious conflict, but it is not bullying.[8]

A further distinction can be made between predatory bullying and dispute-related bullying:

Predatory bullying occurs when the victim has done nothing provocative that would reasonably invoke or justify the bully's behavior. Dispute-related bullying, however, develops out of grievances between two or more parties and involves retaliatory reactions to some perceived harm or wrongdoing. If one of the parties becomes "disadvantaged" during the dispute, he or she may become a victim of bullying.[9]

Power differentials are key to understanding the difference between typical conflict and bullying. Power-imbalance is distinct to bullying. If a dispute is mutual, between equally powerful parties, we may not call that bullying.

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[3] "Workplace Bullying and Disruptive Behavior: What Everyone Needs to Know", Safety & Health Assessment & Research for Prevention (SHARP), Washington State Department of Labor & Industries, April 2011, 1.

[4] Loraleigh Keashly and Branda L. Nowell, "Conflict, Conflict Resolution, and Bullying" in Einarsen, et. al., Eds., *Bullying and Harassment in the Workplace: Developments in Theory, Research, and Practice*, Second Edition (CRC Press, 2011), Kindle Edition, 439.

[5] Stig Berge Matthiesen and Ståle Einarsen, "Psychiatric distress and symptoms of PTSD among victims of bullying at work", *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, Vol. 32, No. 3, August 2004, 336.

[6] Ibid., 339.

[7] Loraleigh Keashly and Branda L. Nowell, "Conflict, Conflict Resolution, and Bullying" in Einarsen, et. al., 423–424.

[8] Ibid., 424.

[9] Ibid.

Mutuality or reciprocity is perhaps the key distinction between bullying and conflict as it is generally defined. In conflict, parties mutually engage in exchange of behaviors and are simultaneously actors and targets. In the traditional conceptualization of bullying, there is a clear actor who is the instigator, and a target who either cannot respond or can respond only in a limited manner, which does not protect him or her from harm or stop the actor's behaviors. In dispute-related bullying, the bully-victim distinction is initially blurred as such interaction generates from grievances gone wrong. However, as the interaction progresses, a shift in ability to defend results in one party being at the mercy of the other.[10]

Bullying Entails "Affective" Conflict—It's Personal

Two broad types of conflict can be described: cognitive and affective. While cognitive conflict has to do with ideas and tasks, affective conflict is more personal and has the potential for deeper damage.

Affective conflicts, on the other hand, involve issues that threaten one's identity and value system and are often characterized by intense negativity, friction, frustration, and personality clashes. These types of issues are often perceived as nonnegotiables and set the stage for a win-lose interaction. Research has found that affective conflicts are likely to reduce performance and satisfaction, as well as lead to aggressive behavior on the part of one or both parties. Thus, these socioemotional conflicts have a high risk for serious damage to both parties.[11]

While problem-solving through open information sharing and discussion of alternatives may be a good and healthy way to resolve cognitive conflict, bullying is marked by affective conflict and normally cannot be resolved by the same approaches as one would take to cognitive conflict. After all, what's at stake is not an idea or tasks, but threat to the target's identity.

Indeed, Rayner (1999) found that open discussion and information sharing with the bully increased the likelihood of the bully taking retaliatory action against the target.[12]

Bullying Affects Witnesses, Victims, and the People They Talk To

Both victims and observers of bullying report a more negative work environment than those who were not bullied[13]

According to Rayner (1999), in a study of public sector union members, approximately one in five workers reported having considered leaving the workplace as a result of witnessing bullying taking place.[14]

A large number of people report having witnessed bullying taking place. The fact that "discussing the problem with colleagues" was found to be the response most frequently chosen by targets when faced with bullying, however, also suggests that a large number of people will be indirectly affected by bullying.[15]

Identifying and Measuring Bullying Is Difficult

Victims sometimes find it difficult to identify that bullying is what is in fact happening to them:

bullying often takes the form of subtle and indirect behaviour such as withholding information and slander. Hence, third parties may be unable or unwilling to perceive and label something as bullying until it has reached the stage of direct aggression.[16]

And perpetrators are usually blind to the fact that they are the bullies:

Using perpetrators to assess bullying may also be somewhat problematic. One problem is that some perpetrators do not perceive themselves as such because they may not understand or wish to admit that their behaviour can be considered bullying.[17]

Psychological and Health Effects on Victims

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[10] Ibid., 426.

[11] Ibid., 428.

[12] Ibid., 429.

[13] Denise Salin and Helge Hoel, "Organisational Causes of Workplace Bullying" in Einarsen, et. al., 227.

[14] Helge Hoel, Michael J. Sheehan, Cary L. Cooper, and Ståle Einarsen in "Organisational Effects of Workplace Bullying" in Einarsen, et. al., 136.

[15] Ibid.

[16] Morten Birkeland Nielsen, Guy Notelaers, and Ståle Einarsen, "Measuring Exposure to Workplace Bullying" in Einarsen, et. al., 164.

[17] Ibid.

One way that researchers have tried to account for the effects of bullying on victims is to correlate their psychological and physiological symptoms those those of Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD).

> Post-traumatic stress disorder, or PTSD, is a diagnosis that refers to a constellation of late stress reactions among people who have experienced, witnessed, or been confronted with one or more events that involve actual or threatened death or serious injury or threat to the physical integrity of self or others. The person's response should involve intense fear, helplessness, or horror (McFarlane, 2008). Three types of stress reactions are included in the diagnosis: (1) persistent reexperiencing of the traumatic event in either memories, dreams, or flashbacks or severe distress when reminded of the traumatic event(s); (2) avoidance of reminders of the stressors and a reduction in the ability to feel positive emotions (emotional numbing); and (3) persistent physical arousal that was not present before the stressor occurred. The symptoms should be present for at least one month. Symptoms do not have to be present every day, but they do have to cause disturbance to the person for the entire duration (Ford, 2008). Surveys have shown that targets of bullying have symptoms consistent with PTSD and only fail to fulfill the so-called stressor criterion.[18]

Symptoms of PTSD continue long after the trauma. The simple passage of time does not resolve these issues.

> Post-traumatic stress implies that the health weakening symptoms persist, or emerge with new intensity long after the actual trauma has ceased. Although this survey revealed that symptoms weakened somewhat as time goes by, the effect of time relationship was moderate. The small differences between victims exposed to present bullying and victims in which the bullying ceased more than a year ago support a notion that time only to a limited extent heals all wounds.[19]

One longitudinal study seems to have isolated bullying as the key cause of developing new psychiatric problems in some victims who had no previous psychiatric history.

> In a descriptive study, bullied targets (36 women and 12 men) with no previous significant psychiatric history were followed for a year. At the first interview, 81% reported high levels of stress at work; 52% and 83% reported depression and anxiety disorders, respectively. The targets were recommended to create a distance to the bully. At follow-up, only 23 still worked. These respondents had less depressive symptoms than the nonworkers, and only 19% reported a feeling of stress at work. In general, there was a significant change in symptoms of anxiety (60%) from baseline to follow-up, while there was no change in symptoms of depression. Many of the targets reported various persistent somatic symptoms or disorders, 88% had a high neuroticism score, and around half reported feelings of shame and guilt for having been bullied; they also presented loss of self-confidence. A quarter of the targets still had suicidal ideation at follow-up. A key finding of this study is the demonstrated severity of the mental health problems following exposure to bullying, leading to serious psychiatric pathologies in people who previously presented no significant psychiatric history.[20]

Victims tend to find reasons to blame themselves as an ironic way to retain a sense of self-worth and rationality as they try to make sense of the violence. In our more theological parlance, this would be similar to saying that the experience of being bullied makes one susceptible to believing lies about himself.

> In addition to the need for perceived controllability and predictability, people also have a need for self-esteem; for that reason, they will tend to construe events in a way that enhances and maintains self-esteem. Attributions of causality are highly relevant in this respect. Prolonged exposure to acts with which the targets cannot cope is likely to instigate the use of stable, internal causal attributions. Following the hopelessness theory, internal, stable, and global causal attributions for a negative event such as bullying is likely to lead to feelings of hopelessness, reduced self-worth, and depression. Internal attributions of causality are more likely when the bully is in a superior position, given that within work contexts being the boss implies a right to define what is right and what is wrong. Single targets are also more likely to make internal attributions.[21]

> In an early qualitative study, Kile (1990) found self-blame to be a typical reaction to long-term bullying. In fact, attributions of self-blame may be one way of dealing with highly stressful events such as bullying. According to Janoff-Bulman, there are two kinds of self-blame. Behavioral self-blame is related to internal, unstable, and specific causal attributions and is considered adaptive given that it allows victims to uphold a belief in the world as benevolent, predictable, and controllable. Moreover, by blaming their own actions rather than their character, victims may sustain their self-worth.[22]

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[18] Annie Hogh, Eva Gemzøe Mikkelsen, and Åse Marie Hansen in "Individual Consequences of Workplace Bullying/Mobbing" in Einarsen, et. al., 116.

[19] Helge Hoel and Ståle Einarsen, "Investigating Complaints of Bullying and Harassment" in Einarsen, et. al., 350.

[20] Annie Hogh, et. al., "Individual Consequences", 113.

[21] Ibid., 118.

[22] Ibid., 119.

Distance from the bully is one way that victims find relief.

> getting away from the bullying while continuing to work is beneficial to the targets' health and well-being.[23]

On Grievance Policies, Procedures and Escalation

Bullying Cases Rarely Resolve Well

Grievance procedures are often inadequate to address the problems, and even when they are well-defined and carried out effectively, success rates are poor.

> Where national customs and practice allow victims to file a complaint or a grievance, then any subsequent investigation and/or hearing will tend to be time-consuming and a drain on organisational resources because of the commitment of all those involved. Without proper policies and procedures in place, cases can remain unresolved for years, with organisational indecision and paralysis contributing to partiality and increasing animosity and internal conflict. However, even in cases where procedures are strictly adhered to and where cases are brought to a conclusion within a reasonable timeframe, the process tends to be destructive for all those concerned.[24]

Victims of bullying who do attempt to resolve the issue themselves usually fail and they eventually give up, rather than seeing it through to final resolution. Without help from others, they tend not to succeed.

> The early coping studies indicate that even though most targets make an effort to stop the bullying by means of various strategies, their efforts are usually to no avail, and hardly any targets manage to stop the bullying without help from others. A more recent qualitative study demonstrated similar findings among 30 self-selected targets of bullying. These targets would initially try to solve the problem by means of confronting the bully or reporting to management. When this strategy failed, they often attempted to control or suppress their negative feelings while trying to live up to the bully's demands. Alternatively, they sought support among colleagues and/or superiors. After some time, they once again tried to solve the problem. When this approach failed, they contacted the union. This last step was usually followed by long-term sick leave. Subsequently, the targets either were fired or quit themselves.[25]

Even when cases are resolved, the overall effect of addressing bullying directly can still be damaging to the organization.

> Furthermore, any accusation of bullying is likely to subsequently affect the organisation directly. Even where cases are seemingly satisfactorily resolved, there may be a price to pay in terms of organisational upheaval.[26]

Factors That Influence How Or Whether Resolutions are Attempted

The status of complainants relative to alleged perpetrators of bullying will probably have significant influence over how the complainants think about their options to express grievances, and what processes for resolving complaints may be realistic. The following criteria, which we'll later refer to as the "Musser Criteria", seem to be very important considerations for crafting a wise grievance policy:

> In addition to the type of conflict issue, the status of the parties in relation to one another will also influence the choice and effectiveness of a given management strategy. In the context of unequal status relationships within organizations, Musser (1982) proposes that bullied subordinates will base their choice of strategy on three criteria: (1) their desire to remain with the organization, (2) the degree of perceived congruence between their attitudes and beliefs and those of the supervisor, and (3) their perceived protection from arbitrary actions by the superior with whom the conflict exists.[27]

Keeping the Musser Criteria in view, we can consider how a subordinate is likely to choose from among a standard set of conflict resolution strategies when weighing the difficult decision about how or whether to raise his concern. Consider the following five possible approaches:

- *Problem solving*: this strategy represents a high concern for self and the other. Through open exchange of information, common interests are identified to create integrative solutions meeting both parties'

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[23] Ibid., 114.
[24] Helge Hoel, et. al., "Organisational Effects", 137.
[25] Annie Hogh, et. al., "Individual Consequences", 117–118.
[26] Helge Hoel, et. al., "Organisational Effects", 130.
[27] Loraleigh Keashly and Branda L. Nowell, "Conflict, Conflict Resolution, and Bullying" in Einarsen, et. al., 429.

needs.

- *Obliging* (accommodating, yielding): this strategy signifies a low concern for self but a high concern for the other by emphasizing commonalties and downplaying differences.
- *Dominating* (competing): representing a high concern for self with low concern for the other. This style focuses on fulfilling one's own interests at the expense of the other.
- *Avoiding* (withdrawing): represents a low concern for self and the other. The objective of this approach is not to acknowledge or engage in the conflict situation.
- *Compromising*: involves an intermediate concern for self and the other. By developing solutions that meet somewhere in the middle, both parties get some, but not complete, satisfaction.[28]

While *problem solving* is often the best approach for resolving conflict, it only works well when parties on both sides are willing to participate openly in a *non-hierarchical* manner.[29] However,

> If the subordinate values his or her position and perceives low congruence of beliefs as well as limited organizational protection, it is likely that problem solving will not be a viable option because of potential risks. In support of this prediction, research looking at bullying and harassing behaviors notes that few targets directly confront the actor, often for fear of retaliation.[30]

Bargaining or *Compromising* is only an option to the subordinate when he or she has some leverage in the situation. *Dominating* or *competing* creates a win-lose scenario and is likely to result in an escalation of the conflict. Also, it's risky for the subordinate because to "lose" probably means loss of position in the organization, which may be a greater price than the subordinate is willing to pay.

> Thus, *obliging* or *yielding* may be the only strategy available to a subordinate who has a strong desire to stay in his or her position but lacks power and/or protection. *Withdrawing* from the relationship either psychologically or physically may become an option as one's desire to remain with the organization is diminished through the conflict. Withdrawal may be characterized by increased apathy or actually terminating employment and results from the perception that there is no chance of winning and costs incurred in staying in the relationship have begun to outweigh any benefits gained from employment. This management strategy is consistent with findings from bullying research that many victims leave their organizations as a result of the bullying experience.[31]

Further,

> Richman et al. (2001) found that active coping strategies, such as problem solving, were not only ineffective in stopping harassment but also increased negative personal outcomes for the targets. Zapf and Gross (2001) likewise found that bullied targets' initial attempts at active problem solving were ineffective and were eventually abandoned for other strategies. Cortina and Magley (2003) found that giving "voice" to one's mistreatment placed the individual at risk for both work and social retaliation. The implication of these findings is highly significant for both the field of bullying and that of conflict resolution. Regardless of the fact that problem solving has long been heralded as the right way to manage conflicts, research suggests that such an approach on an unequal playing field is not necessarily the most effective or the most appropriate strategy, and it may actually make things worse.[32]

Preliminary Conclusions from the Musser Criteria

- Any effective grievance policy would have to attempt to overcome many of these obstacles in order to provide an approach that is a better option for subordinates than *yielding, avoiding,* or *withdrawing*.
- We must not assume that a *problem solving* is the best approach when it comes to resolving complaints that involve bullying.
- If we only offer *problem solving* approaches for resolution, without doing something to balance the power, it may well be that subordinates will intuitively know better than to pursue resolution by that route. Instead, they will probably revert to *yielding*, *avoiding*, or *withdrawing*.
- If our grievance procedures do not make provisions for mitigating the risks perceived by complainants, we develop a blind spot as a result of "false negatives". In this case, "no news" is not "good news"; it's "bad news". It would mean that our problem is so bad that those who should be speaking up perceive so much risk involved in speaking that they choose not to do so.
- The extent to which our grievance policies emphasize, retain, reinforce or leave imbalanced the hierarchical differential between parties, may be the extent to which *problem solving* is reduced in its viability and fairness as an approach to resolution. We should ensure that the opportunities we offer people to take up grievances are realistic and viable; otherwise, we may run the risk of provoking

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[28] Ibid., 427–428.
[29] Ibid., 429.
[30] Ibid.
[31] Ibid., 430.
[32] Ibid.

complainants to anger, similar to what fathers are warned by Paul not do to with their children (Eph. 6:4).

- It may be appropriate to reduce any real or perceived incongruence between "attitudes and belief" of subordinates and supervisors through training, communication, or education. For example, if subordinates perceive that management values "submission to authority" in such a way that implicitly tolerates bullying, then they will be less likely to address bullying experiences directly, according to the second Musser criterion (mentioned above). On the other hand, if subordinates perceive a greater congruence of "attitudes and belief" in their supervisors, they will be more likely to speak openly.

Pathways To the "Back Door"

One study of conflict escalation and coping with workplace bullying reports trends of bullying victims' response patterns to bullying.[33] As noted previously, attempting to resolve bullying actively and constructively tends to fail. This study reaffirmed that same trend. However, most people studied do at least make a first attempt at resolving the conflict actively and constructively. A question that follows is: *What tends to happen next after that failure?* The following diagram shows the trends.[34]

The diagram shows *active* (top) vs. *passive* (bottom) responses, crossed with *destructive* (left) vs. *constructive* (right) response strategies.

> Exit stands for active but destructive behaviour such as quitting the job; voice implies active and constructive problem solving; loyalty consists of passive but constructive hope of problem solving; and neglect stands for passive and destructive reduction of commitment...

> The number of each participant show who chose a particular sequence of conflict management strategies. Each line in the figure stands for a group with similar conflict courses. There were five different courses of conflict management. The most frequent course was VLVNE (voice–loyalty–voice–neglect–exit). The majority started with active strategies (voice) to constructively solve the problem. Only three out of nineteen individuals showed a passive behaviour (loyalty) in the beginning waiting for a solution. Most often, loyalty was followed by voice, voice was followed by neglect, finally followed by exit.
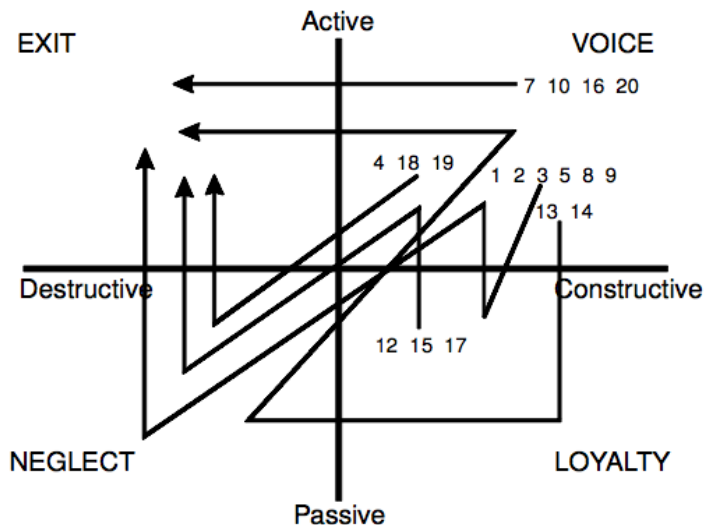

Figure 4. Conflict management strategies according to the EVLN-Model of Withey and Cooper (1989): Results from the qualitative study.

A few questions and observations relevant to an organization that tends to hear concerns about bullying:

1. When someone *exits* (upper left) as a result of bullying, were there any warning signs leading up to her departure? For example, had she already attempted one or more of the other strategies and failed?
2. When there is an active and constructive *voice* (upper right), does the organization recognize this as an asset and an opportunity for healthy correction? Legitimate concerns raised in this quadrant may be

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[33] Dieter Zapf and Claudia Gross, "Conflict escalation and coping with workplace bullying: A replication and extension", *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 10:4, 2001, 497–522.
[34] Ibid., 512.

representative of those held by others living in the other quadrants who've not yet come around to exercising *voice* (and may never). Legitimate concerns that are not resolved here will likely result in those concerns being driven underground—either as *neglect* or *loyalty*—

3. Latent, passively-held concerns (bottom) are not necessarily destructive. Some are held in hope (*loyalty*).

Escalation and How It Influences Viable Resolution Means: The Fisher and Keashly Contingency Model

We should always seek to address concerns at the lowest level of escalation possible, and to avoid premature escalation. The confrontation guidelines in Matthew 18:15ff suggest this principle. Unfortunately, some cases will come to our attention not at the beginning of the escalation process, but somewhere further up the chain of escalation. That is not to say that some reasonable escalation process will have been followed up to the point that we become aware of it, but that the measurable intensity of the conflict has escalated, quite possibly for *lack* of a reasonable resolution escalation. In order to be realistic about how best to proceed once we become aware of a situation, we'll probably need to attend to a variety of factors.

> [O]ne of the reasons for the failure of particular interventions in particular conflicts may be inappropriate application with respect to the stage of escalation. [35]

This has been called a "contingency approach" to determining the best intervention. Several contingency models have been proposed, most notably the Fisher and Keashly (1990) model.

The model outlines four stages of conflict and suggests that the way forward in resolution is not to attempt a sudden de-escalation from a highly escalated stage to the lowest stage, but to de-escalate gradually, one stage at a time, using appropriate interventions at each level. The following table shows four stages of conflict and some of the dynamics involved at each stage. Notice that as the conflict escalates, the relationship spirals downward and

> images of the other devolve to something bad, evil, and other than human. The exclusion of the other from the human condition opens up the possibility to treat the other in inhumane ways. Descriptions of severe bullying could be similarly characterized where the actor expresses contempt and disgust for the other and wants to be rid of him or her, either through exit or destruction. [36]

Table 1: [37]

Stages of Conflict Escalation

Dimensions of conflict

Stage	Communication / interaction	Perceptions / relationship	Issues	Outcome / Management
I. Discussion	Discussion / debate	Accurate / trust, respect, commitment	Interests	Joint gain / mutual decision
II. Polarization	Less direct / deeds not words	Stereotypes / other still important	Relationship	Compromise / Negotiation
III. Segregation	Little / direct threats	Good vs. evil / distrust, lack of respect	Basic Needs	Win-lose / defensive competition
IV. Destruction	Nonexistent / direct attacks	Other nonhuman / hopeless	Survival	Lose-lose / destruction

The following are intervention strategies that are workable at each stage.

1. Discussion

> At this level, parties can *negotiate* the resolution for themselves. At times, it may be helpful to include a third party *conciliator* to get them started in the right direction.

2. Polarization

> Because of the higher level of escalation, it is probably not reasonable to begin with self-directed negotiation. Other approaches will need to be taken first, to de-escalate the conflict in stages.

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[35] Ibid., 434.

[36] Ibid., 435.

[37] Ibid., 434, Reprinted from Fisher, R.J. (ed.), *The Social Psychology of Intergroup and International Conflict Resolution* (chap 9., 211–238). New York: Springer-Verlag.

    Consultation is necessary to "assist parties in examining the dynamics of their conflict and ground rules for improving the relationship toward one of trust and mutual respect."[38] Because relationship issues are central to the conflict at this point, it is necessary to address the relationship before it is reasonable to attempt problem-solving of the issues.

    Once the relationship dynamics have been sufficiently addressed, *mediation* can help the parties work on resolving the issues, which hopefully equips the parties to proceed with self-guided *negotiation*.

3. Segregation

    Because competition and hostility characterize the relationship at this stage, more powerful external means of intervention are required.

    Arbitration or "power" mediation may be used to get control of the hostility, then *consultation* for the relationship.

4. Destruction

    Because at this level of escalation there is physical danger and hostility, third parties must step in as peacekeepers and separate parties for the sake of safety. If the relationship can be stabilized, then it may be appropriate to move on to other means of addressing the conflict.

Conclusions

While this model doesn't script how every conflict must be handled, it is illustrative to show that the higher the level of escalation of the conflict, the more risk there is to either or both party in trying to resolve it. The strategies used to address the conflict must be realistically adapted to those situations.

Limits to Mutual Responsibility in Conflict Resolution

While Keashly and Nowell in their article on "Conflict, Conflict Resolution, and Bullying" suggest that models for conflict resolution may shed light on how best to intervene in bullying cases, they urge caution that we not make the mistake of treating bullying like other forms of conflict.[39] This is because conflict and its resolution can be understood as a normal, healthy part of any relationship or organization; however, we would not want to infer that bullying is therefore a tolerable form of conflict, as if it might even contribute to the health of the organization. It doesn't. Bullying is not like other conflict. It results in damage and should not be tolerated as an acceptable form of conflict in any relationship.

But there is a more personally damaging risk of treating bullying like any other form of conflict. Since in normal conflict, both parties share responsibility to pursue resolution, treating bullying as just another form of conflict:

    ...creates the sense of shared responsibility for the bullying, and the victim may be expected to manage the situation on his or her own or, in some cases, be held accountable for the hostility exhibited by the other person. As discussed, this can only result in further damage to the target.[40]

Biblically, we'd want to temper this claim by the biblical admonitions that hold parties responsible for pursuing reconciliation, whether that party is the one offended, or the one who knows of someone whom he has offended (Matt. 18:15; 5:23–24). However, we should also accept that, just as Matthew 18 does not represent a script that must be followed for resolving every personal conflict, neither is the combination of Matthew 18 and Matthew 5:23–24. We must grow in wisdom to make God-honoring decisions in every situation. The research under consideration can help refine our wisdom that is first grounded in Scripture.

Caveats about Using Mediation to Address Bullying

As we have seen, the stage of escalation in a bullying scenario will likely determine which intervention strategies will be effective. While mediation is often a very effective strategy, there are limits. Here are some of the criticisms that have been leveled against mediation:

1. "a basic assumption of mediation is that parties to the dispute are sufficiently capable of negotiating with one another as relative equals."[41] In cases involving significant violence (such as domestic violence or violent crimes), resulting in the substantial disempowerment of one of the parties, this assumption may well be false.
2. Mediation tends to be focused on present and future relationships, not on addressing or punishing past behaviors. But where someone has clearly been victimized by bullying,

    failure to redress past behavior may do little to address the bullying target's concerns for justice and recognition of the harm done. As damage to the targets is often cumulative in nature, the

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[38] Ibid., 436.
[39] Ibid., 440–441.
[40] Ibid., 440.
[41] Ibid., 437.

extent of the harm could easily be missed or delegitimized if the selected intervention focuses exclusively on a single episode without consideration of the history. In addition, the actor may well favor this approach because it does not require him or her to acknowledge responsibility for his or her actions.[42]

Christian mediation, along the lines of Ken Sande's *The Peacemaker*, however, *is* concerned with addressing the past through confession and repentance, as well as deep efforts to rebuild trust. Therefore, thus Christian mediation may not be as susceptible to this criticism as others may be.

3. Because mediation emphasizes privacy and confidentiality, it tends to keep wrongdoings outside public scrutiny.[43] Such confidentiality could actually work against the identification of patterns within a given relationship, or organizational unit, or across the whole organization. Such case-by-case, confidential processing may have the unfortunate side effect of covering up systematic or repeated violations.[44]

The Importance of Systemic Change

Changing a culture of bullying within an organization requires "dealing with bullying as a comprehensive and coordinated effort of a number of different activities and a number of different parties."[45] It requires addressing not only the short-term needs of specific parties, but also the larger systemic issues within an organization, as the organization works on developing a whole new system to systematically address the problem:

Such coordinated and comprehensive efforts require organizational awareness of bullying and a commitment to dealing with it directly...A critical element of the development of such systems is that the organization must examine the way in which its structures and methods of operations may cause, or contribute to, the proliferation of conflict among its members.[46]

Effects of Bullying on the Organization

Turnover

Among potential organisational outcomes of bullying, turnover has been of particular interest to researchers, with a number of studies reporting a positive relationship between bullying and intention to leave and turnover respectively.[47]

The following suggests that in some cases, the number people who actually leave is a "tip of the iceberg". Many more who remain have considered leaving.

To some extent substantiating such claims, in O'Connell et al.'s (2007) Irish study (2007) reported previously, 60% of respondents considered leaving whilst 15% actually left the organisation.[48]

Reduced Commitment of Employees

Reduced commitment to the organization is an effect of bullying:

In this respect, being exposed to bullying in whatever form is likely to manifest itself behaviourally and attitudinally, making targets constantly less able to cope with the daily tasks and cooperation required of the job and reflected in reduced satisfaction as well as commitment to the organisation.[49]

Loss of Productivity

Bullying results in a loss of productivity:

a moderate negative correlation was found between self-rated performance and bullying, with the "currently bullied" on average reporting a decrease of productivity of approximately 7% compared with those who were neither bullied nor had witnessed bullying taking place.[50]

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[42] Ibid., 438.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Ibid.
[45] Ibid.
[46] Ibid., 439.
[47] Helge Hoel, et. al., "Organisational Effects", 133.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Ibid., 130.
[50] Ibid., 135.

Surprisingly, loss of productivity sometimes looks like "working harder" to prove one's loyalty that backfires in exhaustion and mistakes:

> Where reduced commitment or withdrawal is used as a coping strategy, one would expect a negative impact on performance and productivity. In some cases, targets of bullying will respond by increasing their effort. However, even where targets adopt a strategy of working harder in order to demonstrate their loyalty to the organisation, the net outcome in terms of productivity may be negative, because mental exhaustion may reduce concentration and vigilance, possibly causing irritation and frustration among coworkers. Problems with concentration may also, in their own right, increase the propensity to make mistakes, thus increasing the likelihood of accidents, as well as reduction in output and quality of the product. [51]

While absenteeism is one common result of bullying—people finding reasons not to come to work—another surprising effect is that some people work longer hours, again, to try and prove their loyalty, but with negative results to productivity.

> In connection with reduced commitment to work or withdrawal, it appears reasonable to invoke the concept of presenteeism. This concept refers to situations where individuals extend their time at work beyond their official working day in order to demonstrate commitment to the organisation. According to Brun and Lamarche (2006), however, presenteeism is likely to have the opposite effect, reducing output and lowering the standard of production. [52]

Accumulation of Conflict "Residue"

> Even when conflicts can be deescalated to a more peaceful and constructive place, the experience of the conflict has produced fundamental structural changes in the parties, changes we may characterize as "sticky" conflict residues. Unless these residues are specifically recognized and addressed, they will encourage further contentious and hostile responses and inhibit efforts at resolution, generating the conflict anew. [53]

Financial Impact of Workplace Bullying on Organizations

Bullying is expensive. The cost has been studied on a per victim basis:

> Leymann (1990) calculated that every victimised individual would produce a cost to the organisation of approximately $30,000 to $100,000 annually. [54]

And a per bullying case basis:

> Sheehan et al. (2001) then calculated a unit cost per bullying case. They did so by dividing the annual total, as mentioned, by the relevant number of victims based on Australian working population data at that time. They argued that at the lower range of 3.5% prevalence rate, each case of bullying cost Australian employers at least AUS $16,977. At the higher prevalence rate of 15%, the cost equated to AUS $24,256. [55]

Factors that contribute to the costs of bullying:

- Sickness absenteeism
- Turnover and replacement costs
- Impact on productivity and performance
- Grievance, compensation, and litigation
- Loss of public goodwill and reputation [56]

Organizational Factors that May Contribute to Bullying Culture

> [I]t is important to bear in mind that bullying is a complex and multicausal phenomenon and can seldom be explained by one factor alone [57]

> [B]ullying seems to thrive where employees perceive contradictory expectations, demands, and values in

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[51] Ibid., 135–136.

[52] Ibid., 136.

[53] Loraleigh Keashly and Branda L. Nowell, "Conflict, Conflict Resolution, and Bullying" in Einarsen, et. al., 433.

[54] Ibid., 139.

[55] Ibid.

[56] Ibid., 140.

[57] Denise Salin, et. al., "Organizational Causes", 228.

their jobs and where expectations are perceived as unclear or unpredictable.[58]

When employees get the sense that bullies "get away with it", a "climate of fear" may be the result. It may be that management knowing about the bullying and failing to correct worsens the situation.

> According to Rayner (1999), in a study of public sector union members, approximately one in five workers reported having considered leaving the workplace as a result of witnessing bullying taking place. Rayner explained these figures by pointing to the presence of a climate of fear in which employees considered reporting to be unsafe, where bullies had "got away with it" previously despite management knowing of the presence of bullying.[59]

Some leadership styles contribute cultures of fear.

> [S]everal other studies have confirmed a relationship between bullying, on the one hand, and an autocratic leadership and an authoritarian way of settling conflicts or dealing with disagreements, on the other. An authoritarian style of leadership may also create a climate of fear, where there is little or no room for dialogue and where complaining may be considered futile. Such a form of autocratic or coercive leadership seems to come close to what Einarsen et al. (2007) label as tyrannical leadership and Ashforth (1994) referred to as "petty tyranny."[60]

The following recalls the importance placed upon "being examples to the flock" by not domineering in 1 Pet 5:3. New managers in an organization are influenced to bully by bullying veteran managers.

> Accordingly, bullying is seen to be prevalent in organisations where employees and managers feel that they have the support, or at least implicitly the blessing, of senior managers to carry on their abusive and bullying behaviour. Furthermore, new managers will quickly come to view this form of behaviour as acceptable and normal if they see others get away with it and are even rewarded for it.[61]

When bullying happens at the highest levels, the effects may be far reaching.

> That people may be bullied irrespective of their organisational status or rank, including senior managers, indicates the possibility of a negative domino effect, where bullying may be cascaded downwards as the targeted supervisors might offload their own aggression on their subordinates. In such situations, a bullying scenario in the boardroom may actually threaten the productivity of the entire organisation.[62]

Bullying may be present in both flat and hierarchical organizational structures, however:

> Hierarchical structures with large power disparities tend to result in more hidden forms of conflict that manifest themselves in more covert and potentially counterproductive ways.[63]

It's important that "unity of mission" and doctrine remain genuine and pure. Drift into uniformity or conformity may be precursors to bullying.

> Organisations characterised by an extreme degree of conformity and group pressure seem to be particularly prone to bullying. Consequently, bullying seems to flourish in institutions such as prisons, hospitals for the mentally ill, and the armed forces, where compliance and discipline are of overriding importance.[64]

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[58] Ibid., 229.

[59] Helge Hoel, et. al., "Organisational Effects" , 136.

[60] Denise Salin, et. al., "Organizational Causes", 232.

[61] Ibid., 230.

[62] Helge Hoel, et. al., "Organisational Effects", 135.

[63] Loraleigh Keashly, et. al., "Conflict, Conflict Resolution, and Bullying", 439.

[64] Denise Salin, et. al., "Organizational Causes", 231.