QUALITY OF LEADERSHIP AND WORKPLACE BULLYING: THE MEDIATING ROLE OF SOCIAL COMMUNITY AT WORK

A 2-Year Follow-up Study of Danish Workers

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Workplace Bullying_WB definition

Workplace bullying is an unethical behavior representing a major stressor for victims, witnesses, organizations and the society.

"Harassing, offending, socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone‘work. In order for the label bullying (or mobbing), ..., it has to occur repeatedly and regularly (e.g. weekly), and over a period of time (e.g. about 6 months). (Einarsen et al. 2011)
WB_prevalence and consequences

With a global estimate of 15%, ranging from 11 to 18% (Nielsen et al., 2010) WB has detrimental consequences for:

victims and witnesses:
- depression, anxiety, burnout, sleep problems, (Nielsen & Einarsen 2012; Hogh et al., 2011)
- post-traumatic symptoms (Hogh et al., 2012)
- psychosomatic symptoms (Einarsen et al., 2011)
- musculoskeletal complaints (Vie et al., 2012)

and organizations:
- job dissatisfaction, lowered commitment, frequent turnover,
- sickness absence, costs due to tribunals, damaged reputation,
- negative publicity, loss of customers

(Escartin et al., 2013; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Hogh et al., 2011; Hoel et al., 2010)
Background

Within the work environment hypothesis of WB, which emphasises the crucial role played by work-related factors in the aetiology of WB (e.g., Agervold and Mikkelsen 2004, Hoel and Salin 2003, Einarsen 2000, Leymann 1996)

A significant link between leadership and WB has been observed (Nielsen 2013; Hoel et al. 2010; Hauge et al. 2007; Skogstad et al. 2007, etc...)

- These studies are cross-sectional

There is a lack of knowledge about the mechanisms underlying the relationship between leadership and WB (Nielsen et al. 2013).

- Studies examining explicitly the role of the psychosocial work environment are lacking
Study aim

1) The prospective relationship between quality of leadership and WB

2) If social community at work acts mediates the leadership-WB relationship
   We expect a partial (vs. full) mediation
Leadership

Leadership behaviours are not always consistent (Barling et al., 2011)

A leader may exhibit both charismatic and aggressive behaviors (Pfeffer 2007)

See for example the ambiguity of Steve Jobs (Berglas, 1999; Harvey, 2001)

How this study differs from other studies on leadership and WB

In our study we do not focus on a particular leadership style (e.g. autocratic, Tyrannical, ...)

We use an alternative approach focusing on a general appraisal of leadership quality
Leadership  

Social Community at Work

Leaders may influence WB through a process of emotional contagion (Mathisen et al. 2011)

When followers hold negative perception of leaders, they may respond decreasing the level of commitment and job satisfaction (Lock & Crawford, 1999, 2001)

and undermining their own and the team performance (Wand & Howell, 2010)

Coworkers may react adversely to employees displaying these type of attitudes, initiating a negative spiral that undermines the social community (e.g. Le Pine et al, 2002)

The deprivation of belongingness leads to a variety of negative outcomes (Baumeister and Leary, 1995)
Participants

• Employees participating in both waves (2006 and 2008) of the Danish “Workplace Bullying and Harassment Cohort” (WBH) (Hogh et al., 2012), a workplace investigation covering different occupational sectors (both public and private, n=60 workplaces).

• From the initial follow-up sample (n=1664), we excluded participants missing values on any of the variables considered (n=78), leaving a final analysed sample of n=1586 participants.

• The sample size was composed of a majority of women (67.2%)

• The mean age was 45.7 (SD=10.1)

• The job seniority was 11.1 years (SD=10.1)
Measures

• **Workplace Bullying** measured with a Danish adaptation (Hogh et al., 2012) of the Revised Negative Act Questionnaire (NAQ-R; Einarsen et al., 2009).

  23 items (work-related, person-related and physical intimidation)

• **Quality of Leadership** measured using the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ; Pejtersen et al., 2010).

  To what extent would you say that your immediate superior:
  1) make sure that the individual member of the staff has good development opportunities?
  2) gives a high priority to job satisfaction?
  3) is good at work planning?
  4) is good at solving conflicts

• **Social Community at Work** measured using the Copenhagen Psychosocial Questionnaire (COPSOQ; Pejtersen et al., 2010).

  1) Is there a good atmosphere between you and your colleagues?
  2) Is there good co-operation between the colleagues at work?
  3) Do you feel part of a community at your work?

All scales showed good internal consistency
Analyses

The recommended bootstrap procedure (Preacher & Hayes 2008) was used as implemented in PROCESS (Hayes 2012).
Results

**DIRECT AND INDIRECT (THROUGH SOCIAL COMMUNITY AT WORK) EFFECT OF POOR LEADERSHIP QUALITY ON WB, n=1592.**

Total effect: .36
Direct effect: .28
Indirect effect: .08

Note: Unstandardized regression coefficients adjusted for gender, age and WB at Time 1. Indirect effects estimates based on 5000 bootstrap samples. All coefficients significant at p>0.001.

*A re-run of the same mediation model using social community at work at T2 confirmed the full mediation [path ab; b=0.25, p<0.001; Bootstrap SE=0.08; 95% LLCI=0.08, 95% ULCI=0.24]*
Discussion (1)

• Our findings are in line with *the work environment hypothesis* of WB

• Among psychosocial work environment factors, a poor quality of leadership plays an important role with regard to WB

• Inadequate leadership ended up in frustration and stress, with negative effects on the social community at work, which in turn results in WB
Discussion (2) _ Possible explanations

A poor social community at work may lead to a **poor sense of belongingness** that in turn:

1. may adversely impact on **performance** \( (\text{Baumeister et al., 2000}) \)

   low performance has been shown to increase the risk \( \text{WB} \) \( (\text{Einarsen, 1999}) \)

2. may **decrease prosocial behaviors** \( (\text{e.g. helping/cooperating}) \) \( (\text{Twenge et al., 2007}) \)

   poor interpersonal relationships is a well-known antecedent of \( \text{WB} \) \( (\text{Skogstad et al., 2011}) \)

3. may **lead to aggression and anger** \( (\text{Buckley et al., 2004}) \)

   this agrees with the "provocative victim" profile \( (\text{Olweus, 1978}) \)

   they risk social isolation \( (\text{Matthiesen and Einarsen 2007}) \)
Strengths, limitations, future studies

• **Strengths:**
  - Follow-up design
  - The large and occupationaly heterogeneous sample of employees (N=1664)

• **Limitations:**
  - Recall bias related to the subjective measures used
  - Two-points time mediation

• **Future research:**
  - Three-wave study design
  - Shorter time intervals
Study implications

Strategies aimed at reducing and/or preventing WB, e.g.:

• the monitoring and implementation of training programs for leaders in order to increase their awareness of the implications that their behaviors may have on subordinates;

• promoting and maintaining a good atmosphere, cooperation and sense of community at work
THANKS FOR YOUR ATTENTION

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