



A Look Behind the Curtain: Workplace Bullying

20th June 2022

Our latest webinar – number fifteen – took place in June 2022. Attendees from all around the world listened to a presentation by Eylem Demir Sentürk, Founder and CEO at Women on Stage, about the taboo topic of workplace bullying and discussed their experiences and potential solutions.

This is a brief summary of the key points discussed.

Workplace bullying is a taboo topic, and because of this, it can take victims time to understand what is happening, and even longer for companies to provide an appropriate solution.

Workplace bullying: A definition

Workplace bullying is a repeated verbal, physical, social, or psychological mistreatment by a person or group of people at work. According to the UN Declaration of Human Rights, workplace bullying is a violation of human rights and personal integrity. If not prevented, workplace bullying can lead to serious short- and long-term issues, including stress, anxiety, insomnia, fatigue, depression, burnout, breakdown and even suicide.

According to the latest Swiss government statistics in 2019, 7.2% of their 5.4 million workers reported some level of bullying at work. While 51% experienced bullying by their line managers, 49% reported being bullied by their colleagues and 38% of the bullied employees developed severe stress.

“Bullying at work happens four times more often than sexual harassment or racial discrimination.”



Anxiety



Burnout



Depression



Suicide



Answers from the expert:

“Workplace bullying is a conscious systematic approach with the goal to make the target feel so miserable, underqualified, insufficient, powerless, and helpless that the person feels that there is no other option than to quit the job.”

Eylem Demir Sentürk, Founder & CEO of Women on Stage

There are three types of bullying: Work related, Intimidating and Person-related. While work-related and intimidating behaviors are mostly driven by superiors, person-related bullying are most often driven by colleagues at the same hierarchical level.

1

Work-related bullying

Withholding information, assigning unmanageable work, constantly changing the work assignments, excessive micromanagement, minimising suggestions, ideas or questions, criticising or belittling, coercing, taking credit for other people’s work

2

Intimidating bullying

Verbal aggression, non-verbal aggression such as shouting, finger-pointing, invading personal space, microaggressions including facial expressions and body language

3

Person-related bullying

Teasing, spreading rumours, gossiping, isolating or excluding, lying

Workplace bullying is more than just bad management or assertiveness, and it’s more than poor communication styles or personality clashes. It is conscious and systematic, with a goal to undermine people and make them miserable, manipulate them, remove power from them, create an atmosphere of fear, and potentially make them leave.

Targets of bullying who focus on their emotions, tend to personalize the aggressive behaviours of bullies, and develop feelings of helplessness. This feeling increases the possibility of being victimized and can lead to long-term negative mental health outcomes such as stress, anxiety, and depression.

Occupational research recognizes the damaging consequences of workplace bullying not only for the employee but also for the whole organization. Psychological complaints resulting from bullying reduce professional performance including quality of daily work and motivation. Furthermore, it increases the absenteeism, loss of qualified personnel and decrease of the competitiveness of the company.

Working from home has created another dimension of workplace bullying, micromanagement, with managers digitally tracking their employees and expecting immediate responses to emails.

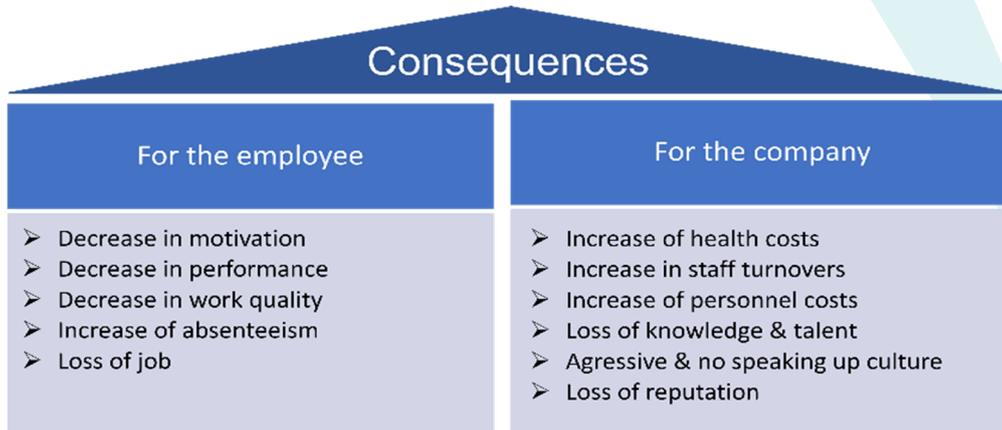
Bullying is different from working under pressure.

“Bullying is too often tolerated in the workplace.”

The impact of bullying

Workplace bullying has damaging consequences for the bullied individual and the company where the bullying is taking place. While it creates short- and long-term mental and physical health issues, it also negatively affects the motivation, performance, the work quality of the individual and increases the absenteeism, health related costs, staff turn over and causes loss in knowledge, talent, reputation and creates a toxic work environment for which companies pay a high price.

“Aggressive leadership can permit a culture where bullying is more likely, as it provides role models and room for bullies.”



Preventing workplace bullying

There are a number of things that companies can do to deal with and prevent workplace bullying:

- Support the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights
- Ensure that corporate compliance policies forbid harassment of any kind and include 'zero tolerance to workplace bullying' by all employees at all levels
- Put anti-bullying training in place
- Create campaigns that take away the taboo of workplace bullying, including awareness and #shareyourstory
- Encourage a transparent 'speak up' culture
- Promote a psychologically safe, caring and respectful work environment



Answers from the expert:

“We need compassion for real change. Not all bullies will recognise that what they are doing is bullying. Both sides need a safe space where they can reach out. This needs trust and honesty without judgement or blame.”

Eylem Demir Sentürk, Founder & CEO of Women on Stage