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THE ROLE OF HUMAN RESOURCES

Beat bullying in the workplace

Information and
guidance on the role
of Human Resources
in tackling workplace
bullying and harass-
ment, and promoting
dignity at work

dti


unite
the UNION


at WORK
DIGNITY

The Dignity at Work Partnership is a project set up in 2004 by Amicus the Union (now part of Unite) to raise awareness of workplace bullying and harassment, and the damaging effect they have on employees and organisational development.

Funded by the Department of Trade and Industry (DTI) and Amicus, the project aims to identify the most effective ways of dealing with bullying and harassment, and to encourage employers to adopt best practices in tackling the problem.

Organisations are invited to join the partnership and to sign a voluntary charter expressing commitment to pursuing dignity at work values. In return they receive a package of support to help them deal with bullying and harassment.

For details of the partnership contact Mandy Telford, Coordinator, on 020 7420 8900 or visit www.dignityatwork.org

Partnership steering group members include: ACAS, British Airways, BAE Systems, BT, Connect: the Union for Professionals in Communications, Legal and General, Remploy, Royal Mail, The Chemical Industries Association and the TUC.

➤➤ Our aim is to encourage employee representatives and employers to build a culture in which respect for all individuals is seen as an essential part of conduct for everyone in the workplace ◀◀

Baroness Anne Gibson
Chair, Dignity at Work Partnership

This leaflet has been produced by the Dignity at Work Partnership to provide human resource specialists with information, guidance and examples of good practice in tackling bullying and harassment at work.

Statistics show that bullying is worryingly wide spread. One fifth of all UK employees have experienced some form of bullying or harassment, according to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD). A TUC survey says two million workers claim they had been bullied at work in a six month period.

What is bullying?

Bullying can take many forms. It is generally accepted as unwanted behaviour that offends, persecutes or excludes someone. It includes treating individuals in a demeaning and unacceptable way and can be intimidating, malicious or insulting, or a misuse of power to undermine, humiliate, threaten or cause injury. Harassment is usually seen as constant interference or intimidation that violates people's dignity or creates a hostile or degrading environment.

➤➤ Two million workers said they had been bullied at work in a six month period ◀◀

Facts about bullying

Anyone can be the target of bullying and it can occur at all levels of work. It damages individuals, the performance of organisations and profitability. The cost and consequences of this are:

- ❖ time and money spent investigating and resolving complaints
- ❖ money lost through absenteeism
- ❖ loss of employees – targets of bullying and employees who witness it are more likely to leave than complain or challenge bad behaviour
- ❖ recruitment costs resulting from high employee turnover rates
- ❖ expenditure on tribunals and financial settlements.

Certain groups including black and Asian employees, women and disabled people, are more likely to be targeted – nearly one third of Asian employees, or those from other ethnic communities, report they have experienced some form of bullying or harassment, compared with 18 per cent of white employees.

Disabled employees are at least twice as likely to report having experienced one or more forms of bullying and harassment compared to non-disabled employees (CIPD).

Often employees who are bullied state others in their workplace are subjected to the same treatment. This indicates the organisation has a bullying culture.

➤➤ Targets of bullying and employees who witness it are more likely to leave than complain or challenge bad behaviour ⚡⚡



WORKPLACE BULLYING – WHAT CAN BE DONE ABOUT IT?

In 2006 The Dignity at Work Partnership published findings from research conducted on its behalf by the University of Portsmouth on the effects of bullying and harassment in the workplace and the most effective ways of dealing with it.

Key findings and recommendations include:

- ❖ **Zero tolerance:** Organisations found to be most successful at dealing with bullying and harassment adopt a zero tolerance approach
- ❖ **Business case:** There are significant costs associated with the failure to deal with bullying and harassment at work and financial benefits to having a zero tolerance approach. This is best demonstrated through the development of a clear business case
- ❖ **Policies:** These set standards for acceptable behaviour and make it clear to individuals what their responsibilities are towards each other
- ❖ **Strong leadership:** Actions of leaders and senior managers are crucial. They must take the lead in tackling bullying and harassment to show employees they take the problem seriously
- ❖ **People focus:** UK workplaces are increasingly target driven environments with a shift away from people focused management towards command and control cultures
- ❖ **Intervention:** Early and informal action to resolve complaints and conflicts is core to effective intervention. The earlier an issue is resolved the better for all parties concerned
- ❖ **Training:** Awareness raising programmes and training are important in achieving change, but need to be mandatory and interactive to be effective
- ❖ **Trade Unions and HR:** Bullying at work is best tackled through a partnership of management, trade union representatives and human resource practitioners.

ROLE OF HR SPECIALISTS

HR specialists play an increasingly strategic role in the development and administration of policies and practices to manage employees and meet organisational aims.

The type of HR role depends on the size of the organisation, for example:

- ❖ small organisations tend to add HR functions to the existing duties of an employee. A specialist consultant may be employed on a one off basis
- ❖ medium organisations may employ an HR generalist who introduces new policies, reviews existing ones and communicates them to the workforce
- ❖ large organisations are more inclined to employ a pool of HR specialists dealing with specific areas such as employment law, employee relations or training and development.

The role of HR specialists has changed from the old personnel model characterised by pastoral care for employees, handling absence, recruitment, dismissal and pay; to today's HR function which is more business orientated, providing advice to managers on planning and how to achieve business objectives.

➤ One in four saw themselves as change agents ◀◀

In the 'HR survey: where we are, where we're heading', one in three senior HR specialists perceived their current roles as a strategic partner, and more than half of the respondents wanted to become strategic business partners in the future. One in four saw themselves as change agents (CIPD, 2003).

This recent transformation has been due mainly to the growth in employment legislation, which places increasing demands on HR specialists to ensure management are aware of, and comply with, legal requirements and responsibilities.

Impact on HR

This shift in emphasis and responsibility has left HR specialists exposed to claims of indifference to the wellbeing of workers and being unsupportive of their problems.

Researchers uncovered strongly held views that HR's primary role is to protect organisations from legal challenges, regardless of the impact on employees who may have legitimate complaints.

HR specialists will have to work hard to convince employees that this is not the case, if they are to create a culture and an environment where bullying and harassment is not tolerated.

➤ HR specialists will have to work hard to convince employees... ◀◀

FACING THE CHALLENGES

“Forty four percent of employees feel they are not treated fairly at work’.” Good Work survey, Amicus the Union (now part of Unite)

HR plays a pivotal role in enabling the development of policies, practices, and procedures, which create dignity at work principles. These help make employees feel more positive about their employer and their work. They can also encourage a greater willingness to accept change, learn new skills, and obtain higher standards, which directly impact on the efficiency and performance of organisations.

Ensuring all HR policies are ‘dignity sensitive’ by examining their effect on employees, sends out the message that their welfare is important, and provides the basis for tackling negative behaviour such as bullying and harassment.

The ways in which HR specialists can bring benefits to organisations and their workforce are by:

- ❖ **Increasing pastoral care:** where organisations are unionised, trade union representatives are increasingly providing the pastoral care previously given by personnel, including advice on personal, financial and work related issues.

HR’s shift from this role has created a gulf between them and the workforce. As a result HR is viewed as uncaring and unsympathetic. One solution is for HR specialists to use external advisory services or trade union representatives to support employees. HR’s role should be to make and present the case for increased pastoral care and the resources needed to provide it

➤➤ HR is viewed as uncaring
and unsympathetic ◀◀



- ❖ **Working informally:** Researchers found some of the HR specialists they questioned find it difficult to intervene and solve problems informally and stick rigidly to the safety net of policies and procedures. They refuse to deal with informal complaints as they feel it is unethical as the accused may not know if a complaint has been made against them, who made it and what has been said.

However, the researchers found all parties agreed nipping problems in the bud was the best way forward. Working informally reduces the risk of problems escalating; it allows grievances to be aired and mediation to take place. It prevents wasting of time and resources in investigating formal complaints.

While the rights of both the complainant and the alleged perpetrator must be protected at all times, the challenge for HR is to recognise the benefits of informal intervention, and incorporate this into their way of working

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- ❖ **Working in partnership:** The research confirms bullying and harassment is dealt with best when union representatives, HR specialists and managers work in partnership.

Organisations with a zero tolerance approach accept that incidents of bullying will occur, but treat it as an organisational concern and not just a problem between individuals. They will also have policies, procedures and a range of other initiatives in place to challenge and curb unacceptable behaviour. Working in partnership also enables:

- **sharing of information and resources:** due to their close contact with workers, union representatives are often aware of incidents and have information unknown to HR. This gives them the opportunity to collect data that could be fed into a strategic approach to dealing with bullying and harassment
- **informal action:** this increases the possibility of resolving bullying and harassment issues quickly by working together to defuse the situation.

- **effective rehabilitation:** following the resolution of a complaint, the complainant and the accused employee need to be reintegrated into their workplace. HR and the trade union representative can work together to ensure a smooth transition. They can pave the way by meeting with other team members, to help stop rumours and gossip and encourage a dignity at work ethos.

The challenge for HR is to know when to step back from the traditional adversarial approach to employee relations. The drive to reduce bullying and harassment is an area where HR and trade unions can work together to improve dignity at work.

❖ **Ensuring fair and speedy resolution:**

Researchers found HR is often mistrusted and not seen as impartial by employees. This view is compounded if complaints are not dealt with fairly and investigations take too long to be completed. The challenge is for HR to make sure:

- the investigators appointed are trained and seen as credible by all sides involved in the complaint
- there is clear and regular communication to all parties on the progress of the investigation

- recommendations from the investigation are implemented fully
- the complaint is not used to penalise the complainant or the accused at some point in the future.

❖ **Engaging employees:** If organisations want the best out of workers they need to show they are valued and their views count. An engaged workforce that understands what is required of them and know the accepted standards of behaviour, are more likely to be motivated and succeed in delivering the organisation's goals. Policies give guidance and set out rules and regulations on how an organisation should operate. They reflect the organisation's purpose, values and overall aims.

Researchers found policies are considered to be more effective when they have been developed with employees. Involving workers in developing an anti-bullying and harassment policy improves their understanding and acceptance of the need for cultural change. It also creates ownership of the policy and helps them to examine their own behaviour. The challenge for HR is to find ways to allow greater input from employees into policies in order for them to succeed

❖ **Communication:** A commitment to dignity at work and tackling bullying and harassment means nothing if it is not communicated.

All employees need to know about changes in policy, practices, procedure, and legal requirements, as well as expected standards of behaviour. HR can ensure this happens through the induction process and effective internal communications. This may include working with management and communications specialists to identify appropriate messages and promote them through newsletters, direct mail, the organisation's website, team briefings, notice boards and any other means available.

The challenge for HR is to ensure a constant flow of information which tells everyone what they need to know and what they want to know in a timely fashion. In the case of board members and chairs of organisations, good quality information and regular updates provided by HR will keep them informed and help to monitor progress

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➤➤ Good data shows HR and management where problem areas may exist in an organisation' ⚡⚡

❖ **Make the best use of data:** HR tends to be at the heart of collecting and collating quantifiable data needed for effective employee management systems. This includes information on complaints, sickness, absence, and on those leaving the organisation. But the data is not always analysed sufficiently to gain the most from it.

Collection of data on bullying is important in order to respond effectively to problems as and when they arise, and for continuous monitoring of interventions. Good data shows HR and management where problem areas may exist in an organisation, which they can then attempt to put right.

The researchers recorded concern about HR's inclination to deal with each reported incident of bullying and harassment as a separate case, rather than trying to build up a composite picture by linking relevant data.

The challenge for HR is to bring together information from as wide a source as possible within their organisations, preferably on an annual basis. The purpose is not just to identify headline figures such as the number of sickness absences per year. Data should be used to identify trends and track detail such as which team or line of work do people come from, what is their gender, age or ethnicity, where in the organisation do most complaints come from, what is the nature of these complaints; and so on

- ❖ **Make training and development relevant:** Responsibility for identifying development needs of employees and providing training may rest with a range of people, including line managers and HR specialists. Its provision will be determined primarily by the funding available, followed by an assessment of individuals' development needs and the benefit to the organisation.

➤➤ Research findings state training is most effective if it is mandatory ◀◀

The partnership's research findings state training is most effective if it is mandatory. However, suggestions of enforced training may provoke a backlash undermining attempts to change attitudes, behaviour and cultures.

HR can assist in making training and development more relevant to employees by advising managers and other decision makers on appropriate training and training providers.

- ❖ **Help manage resistance:** The greatest challenge for HR is to help manage resistance to change. Employees are more likely to respond positively if they are told the benefits. This requires clear communication spelling out the advantages. Setting an example of acceptable behaviour at the top of the organisation, where leaders are seen to be practising what they preach, also sends out a clear message. However, it is the effectiveness of HR's ability to meet the challenges already outlined, that will ultimately determine their success in managing change.

CASE STUDY

BT has a workforce of 108,000 in some 70 countries. The company's Director of People & Policy, Caroline Waters, says that in BT bullying and harassment are seen as unacceptable because they increase stress, decrease productivity and damage people.

The company has had an anti-bullying policy for over ten years. In 2005 it launched its 'Let's Cut It Out!' campaign which raised awareness of the issue and provided managers and employees with an anti-bullying toolkit. This toolkit included a behavioural assessment tool, a series of docudramas which explored bullying in real life workplaces, and support for people who felt they were being bullied. It also provided techniques for employees and managers when challenging their own or others' bullying behaviours.

Two years ago the company stepped up a gear with its campaign by launching a new policy. BT's Chairman, Sir Christopher Bland, spoke at the launch event of his own experiences of being bullied by senior politicians, in the army and in boarding school. He openly acknowledged that he had bullied others in the past, and made a commitment to continue to challenge himself over his own behaviour.

Awareness of 'Let's Cut it out!' has been generated and maintained in a variety of ways, including video emails to all employees via the online newspaper, a poster campaign and wrist bands. Line managers were already trained facilitators, but they underwent separate, specialist training in how to maintain awareness of BT's values and how to respond to instances of bullying and harassment.

CONCLUSION

HR specialists are well placed to enable change, working closely with leaders and managers, employees, training providers and trade unions to ensure best practice.

They can play a key role in tackling bullying, spreading the word about zero tolerance and ensuring an environment in which everyone is respected and enjoys dignity at work.

➤➤ Ensuring all HR policies are 'dignity sensitive', by examining their effect on employees sends out the message that their welfare is important ◀◀

REFERENCES AND INFORMATION

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Telephone: 020 8612 6200,
www.cipd.co.uk

Harassment, bullying and violence at work: A. Ishmael, Spiro Press

Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS)

Telephone: 08457 474747
www.acas.org.uk

Amicus the Union (now part of Unite)

Telephone: 020 7420 8900
www.amicustheunion.org

The Andrea Adams Trust

Telephone Helpline: 01273 704900
www.andreadamstrust.org

Department of Trade and Industry

Telephone: 020 7215 5000
www.dti.gov.uk

Dignity at Work Partnership

Telephone: 020 7420 8900
www.dignityatwork.org

Employment Tribunals

Telephone: 0845 795 9775
www.employmenttribunals.gov.uk

Health and Safety Executive

Telephone: 0845 345 0055
www.hse.gov.uk

Trade Union Congress

Telephone: 020 7636 4030
www.tuc.org.uk

The UK National Stress Network

Telephone: 07966 196033
www.workstress.net

Other leaflets in the Beat Bullying in the Workplace series:

- ❖ The role of leaders
- ❖ The role of trade unions
- ❖ The business case