

The numbers in the tables also indicate the relative cost-benefits of targeting various organisational factors in development programs. For example, the bullying key driver table indicates that if the quality of performance feedback is improved by 10%, we could expect to achieve a 6.2% reduction in the level of bullying behaviour. If the level of employee involvement in decision-making processes is increased by 10%, we would expect to achieve a 5.2% reduction in the incidence of bullying behaviour – and so on.

Discussion:

Apart from any contribution of individual employee factors (e.g., personality style, aggressive traits, degree of impulse control etc.) what organisational factors influence the level of reported bullying behaviours in a particular work environment? The results of the present study suggest that levels of bullying behaviour essentially reflect the overall quality of an organisation's people management practices.

More specifically, the quality of performance feedback, the degree of involvement in decision-making processes, levels of supportive leadership (i.e., the extent to which immediate managers show empathy and demonstrate understanding of the issues faced by employees; the degree to which managers are proactive in addressing emerging employee issues and concerns) and the availability of flexible working arrangements exert the strongest influence over employee reporting of levels of bullying behaviour in their workplace.

Work environments characterised by low levels of these factors are associated with an increased risk of bullying behaviours. By contrast, workplaces exhibiting high levels of these leadership and work team climate factors are associated with a low risk for bullying behaviours.

Implications:

The findings of the present study suggest that implementing 'bullying awareness' seminars is a superficial and limited strategy for addressing the incidence of bullying behaviour in organisational environments. Rather, to achieve a sustained reduction in the incidence of bullying behaviours, the results of the present study suggest that organisations need to target aspects of their core people management practices. Thus, focusing on the quality and frequency of performance feedback (e.g., in addition to corrective feedback, increasing informal and development-oriented feedback processes), enhancing leadership capability (specifically, levels of supportive leadership behaviours), and fostering a more engaging work team environment through involving employees in decision-making processes that impact on their work, are the organisational factors likely to exert the strongest impact on reducing the incidence of bullying behaviours.