

EXPLORING THE DETRIMENTAL EFFECT OF WORKPLACE BULLYING ON WORKFORCE AGILITY

* **Mohamed Basheer Elanthi**

****Prof. Dr. M. Dhanabhakym**

* *Ph.D Research Scholar, Department of Commerce, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore.*

***Professor, Department of Commerce, Bharathiar University, Coimbatore.*

ABSTRACT

In the fast paced current business climate, with solid worldwide rivalry, the organizations are building up their work force in a way that they can adjust rapidly with high reflexivity being able to deal creatively with surprising changes in the business environment. It is fundamental to be proactive and tranquil in the organisation to acquire agility. Workplace bullying may be the most critical factor that pulls down the workforce to shroud their talents and reduce confidence in the workplace to take their own decisions at times. There were numerous studies have been conducted about workforce agility and workplace bullying, yet has a little studies have done on consolidating workplace bullying and workforce agility. The main goal of this study was to explore the effect of workplace bullying on workforce agility. A sample of 200 employees were collected from 4 different companies operating in technical and professional services industries in Kerala with a workforce strength ranges from 50-200 employees. A structured questionnaire has been used to collect data and constructs were measured using 5 points Likert Scale. The results confirmed that workplace bullying has a significant detrimental effect on workforce agility using regression analysis.

Key Words: Workforce Agility, Workplace Bullying, speed, resilience,

1. INTRODUCTION

Organisations today operate in an environment where time is the most critical asset, changes need to be converted as opportunities, global rivalry is inevitable, use of highly sophisticated technology is turned as a weapon for survival (Breu, Hemingway, Strathern, & Bridger, 2002). Rapid changes, threat from global corporations, uncertainty about the future, replacement of brick and mortar business settings to electronic business, emergence of social commerce etc are basis for surge in to the adoption of agile workforce in the work environment (Lawrence and Lorsch, 1967). With its extreme rivalry from global market, economic globalization, and ever shifting customer demand, the present tempestuous climate has forced pressure on enterprises to create agility, improve their flexibility and viability, as well as execute it timely (Al-Faouri, Al-Nsour, & Al-Kasasbeh, 2014). Thus, workforce agility be used as a revival plan of organizations to cope with the new challenges (Elanthi & Dhanabhakym, 2021). Researches confirm that organization can achieve agility only with the help of highly agile workforce and strongly suggest workers should possess all the attributes of being agile throughout the career (Sherehiy, Karwowski, & Layer, 2007). Previous researches confirms that attributes of workforce agility can only be developed with the prevailing improved organizational factors such as work environment, job demand and job control, and with the cooperation with the co workers in the organizations (Sherehiy et al., 2007).

Workplace bullying is defined as the situation in which an employee is systematically and repeatedly the target of work-related and/or personal negative acts at work (Van Den Brande et al., 2017). Prevalance of workplace bullying has severe adverse effect in organization, employees and the society as well. Bullying destroys teams and causes disenchantment, demoralisation, demotivation, disaffection and alienation. Organizations become dysfunctional and inefficient (Force & Senate, 2020). There may be several causes which promote bullying such as organizational characteristics, workplace relations, job relations, individual characteristics etc (Kalwala & Chirunomula, 2017). Adverse effects of bullying affect productivity, industrial relations and create mental and physical health of the workforce. It causes reduction in work speed, reluctance to adapt to the work culture and eventually results in lowered productivity, high absenteeism, low morale, and a stressful environment (Kalwala & Chirunomula, 2017).

In the phase of coping with rapid changes, organizations are seeking talented and agile

workers in, and to use this as a competitive advantage. But the hindrances which pulls the goal back is should be removed systematically by putting an extra care and effort. Workplace bullying is one of the hindrances that should be addressed and managed.

2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Workforce agility is considered as one of the most important strategic factors by all major corporate now days. Flexible, quick and adaptable employees help to enhance competitiveness among employees and organizations (Plonka, 1997). Goal achievement, adapting to changes, building and maintaining group culture, proactive behaviors etc were achieved only through developing agility in workplace. Organizations follows an agilitydriven mechanisms for the development of agile workforce from initial stages of selection of employees such as worker selection, acquisition, fast paced learning, and just-in-time delivery of training (Breu et al., 2002). Workplace bullying is all the long term and repeated activities which intentionally aim to harming the target employees, create psychological harm, exclusion of someone from workplace, personal groups or even social exclusions or creating personal imbalances (Cobb, 2017). Organizations face serious obstacles as a result of workplace bullying, but it is one of the most overlooked issues in the field of employment relations(Akella & Akella, 2020). Workplace bullying has negative consequences on emotional, psuchological, mental, physical and socio economic wellbeing of an employee in the organizations(Sansone & Sansone, 2015). Creating agility in the workplace, it is crucial that the employees should be mentally and physically healthy and ready to accept and adapt to the environment. Thus, the main research question of this study is: whether dimensions of workforce bullying has any effect on workforce agility?

3. WORKFORCE AGILITY

WFA (Work Force Agility) can be considered as one of the most strategic factors which all the organisations are trying to reach. There have a number of definitions, meanings and explanations are given to workforce agility by number of researchers. Agile workforce can be timely reconfigured to adapt to the changing conditions through adaptive and proactive behavior (AL-Kasasbeh, Halim, & Omar, 2016). Workforce now is considered as intellectual assets which are capable of determining the success or failure of any organizations. Agile workforce provide better insights to the happenings in the business environments, quick to adapt change with high accuracy and ready to accept challenges (Breu et al., 2002) which in terms turned as the key factor to tackle competitions.

Studies on workforce agility can be broadly classified in to two perspectives; the first group of researchers focuses on agile manufacturing and has employed workforce agility as a dimension of agile manufacturing whereas the second group focuses on workforce agility as a tool for achieve competitive advantage.

Sherehiy et al., (2007), in his study classify the attributes of workforce agility in to 7 attributes, 1) flexibility and adaptability, 2) responsiveness, 3) speed, 4) integration and low complexity, 5) mobilization of core competencies, 6) high quality and customized products, and 7) culture of change. Among these, high quality and customized products was excluded in his later studies on the basis that the attribute is not pervasive. Later the studies conducted by Sherehiy & Karwowski, (2014) viewed workforce agility in two perspectives; from the ability perspectives and the capability perspectives. Workforce agility from ability perspective has defined the ability of the workers not only to respond to rapid and unexpected changes but to exploit its rewards. From the capability perspective, workforce agility is defined by workers being good at solving operational and administrative problems, embracing change and new technologies, initiative, ready to shoulder responsibilities, learning and gravitating towards developing themselves.

4. WORKPLACE BULLYING

Workplace bullying is defined as “the perceived situation in which an employee is systematically and repeatedly the target of work-related and/or personal negative acts at work”(Cobb, 2017; Van Den Brande et al., 2017). There are many other scholarly definitions to bullying, According to Yamada, 2008, workplace bullying refers to the situation in which an employee is systematically and repeatedly the target of work-related and/or personal negative acts at work (Van Den Brande et al., 2017). Bullying has become a serious issue in many organizations irrespective of the size of the enterprise and the number of employees working. The workplace bullying on employees has a draconian effect in mental health, emotional balances, socio-economic lives, professional performances and even result in job burnout(Sansone & Sansone, 2015). In a study, Van Den Brande et al., 2017 has classified bullying as serious bullying, where employees face bullying behaviours weekly and occasional bullying, where workers face bullying monthly or even more long durations. There many remedial measures were adopted to avoid workplace bullying, among them, grievance management is an effective mechanism used to reduce organisational conflict (Dhanabhakym & Monish, 2019) and is also fruitful to reduce bullying.

5. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This research design follows a cross sectional design since the data collected from the respondents is only a single time. The data were collected using simple random sampling technique which was filled both offline and online (digital survey forms) to avoid time delay in getting responses.

Participants

The participants of this study were 200 employees from 4 different companies operating in technical and professional services industries in Kerala with a workforce strength ranges from 50-200 employees. All participants must have at least one year experience in their workplace.

Instruments

The data collected by using a structured questionnaire consisting demographic profile, workplace bullying, In order to ensure the reliability of the study tool, internal consistency reliability through Cronbach's alpha test was used. The Cronbach's Alpha for the dimensions of workplace bullying are 0.811 and 4 dimensions of workforce agility adapted from (Sherehiy et al., 2007) such as responsiveness, competency, flexibility and speed, Cronbach's Alpha is 0.793. All the items in the scale were measured using 5 point Likert scale ranged from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree).

6. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

Table 6.1 shows the descriptive characteristics of samples collected from 6 different companies operating in Kerala which has a workforce strength between 50-200 employees. Out of 200 samples majority was male with frequency of 116 against female of 84 with a percent of 58 and 42 respectively. These include 80 numbers from the age category of 18-30 years, 107 persons from 18-30 years (53.5%) and 13 persons from 41-60 years (6.5%). The study consists of 10.5% top or middle level managers, 18 % executing managers and 71.5% of workers.

Table 6.1 sample characteristics

		Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	116	58
	Female	84	42
Age	18-30	80	40
	31-40	107	53.5
	41-60	13	6.5
Designations	Top/Middle	21	10.5
	Managers		
	Executing Managers	36	18
	Workers	143	71.5

Table 6.2 explains the mean and standard deviation of Workforce agility and workplace bullying, the total number of valid respondents are 200. There is a mean score of 3.07 with an SD of 0.97 at the while the mean score of workplace bullying was 3.67 with an SD of 0.71.

Table 6.3 explains the correlation results of the analysis from SPSS 24. The result showed that the correlation coefficient between workplace bullying and workforce agility is -0.767 with a significance of 0.000. This shows that there is a significant and high negative relationship between workplace bullying and workforce agility.

Table 6.2

Descriptive Statistics

	Mean	Std. Deviation	N
Workforce Agility	3.0663	0.96989	200
Workplace Bullying	3.6650	0.74164	200

Table 6.3

Correlation coefficients of Workplace Bullying and Workforce Agility

		Workforce Agility	Workplace Bullying
Pearson Correlation	Workforce Agility	1.000	-.767
	Workplace Bullying	-.767	1.000
Sig. (1-Tailed)	Workforce Agility	.	.000
	Workplace Bullying	.000	.

From the table 6.4, the regression result, workplace bullying also has a negative and significant effect on workforce agility with a value of R square (R^2) of 0.588. This means that every increase of 1 score from the average on the workplace bullying will decrease 0.588 scores on the measurement of workforce agility.

Table 6.4

Model Summary of Workplace Bullying and Workforce Agility

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.767 ^a	.588	.586	.81687

a. Predictors: (Constant), Workplace Bullying

Table 6.5

Regression Coefficients^a

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	5.229	.136		38.574	.000
	Workplace Bullying	-.632	.038	-.767	-16.820	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Workforce Agility

This study aims to understand the effect of workplace bullying on workforce agility. Based on the result, there is a negative and significant effect on workforce agility with a value of R square (R^2) of 0.588. The research is conducted relatively in large sized firms where has a workforce strength of 50-200 employees. This proved, there needs to efficient and effective remedial mechanisms should be implemented to reduce bullying at workplace which only helps to increase agility in employees.

7. CONCLUSION

“When there's conflict in the air, most people want to be on the winning side, or the side they think will survive” (The Tim Field Foundation, 2016). According to many research, as bullying continues many of a target's co-workers choose to side with the bully, so bullying turns into mobbing. Gradually, bullying causes reduction in work speed, reluctance to adapt to the work culture and eventually results in lowered productivity, high absenteeism, low morale, and a stressful environment. Agile workforce provide better insights to the happenings in the business environments, quick to adapt change with high accuracy and ready to accept challenges so agile workforce are considered as intellectual assets.

8. SCOPE FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

The researcher tries to explore only the effects of workplace bullying on employee agility on select companies in kerala. Researcher has not taken any other effort to understand the efforts of workplace place on any other aspects. There is a scope to explore how prevalence of workplace bullying affect emotional, mental and workplace culture aspects of employees. The scope is also extended to study effect of workplace bullying on workplace agility on global scenario.

REFERENCE:

- Akella, D., & Akella, D. (2020). Workplace Bullying and Ethical Issues. *Understanding Workplace Bullying*, 169–182. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-46168-3_8
- Al-Faouri, A. H., Al-Nsour, M. M., & Al-Kasasbeh, M. M. (2014). The impact of workforce agility on organizational memory. *Knowledge Management Research and Practice*, 12(4), 432–442. <https://doi.org/10.1057/kmrp.2013.19>
- AL-Kasasbeh, A. M., Halim, M. A. S. A., & Omar, K. (2016). E-HRM, workforce agility and organizational performance: A review paper toward theoretical framework. *International Journal of Applied Business and Economic Research*, 14(15), 10671–10685.
- Breu, K., Hemingway, C. J., Strathern, M., & Bridger, D. (2002). Workforce agility: The new employee strategy for the knowledge economy. *Journal of Information Technology*, 17(1), 21–31. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02683960110132070>
- Cobb, E. P. (2017). Workplace Bullying and Harassment. In *Workplace Bullying and Harassment*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315468891>
- Dhanabhakyaam, M., & Monish, P. (2019). Impact of employee grievance management on job commitment in cyber park kozhikode. *International Journal of Advanced Science and Technology*, 28(17), 775–779.
- Elanthi, M. B., & Dhanabhakyaam, M. (2021). *Agile Workforce a Post Pandemic Revival Plan for SMEs*. 1–18. <https://doi.org/10.4018/978-1-7998-6632-9.ch001>
- Force, W. T., & Senate, F. (2020). *Dignity at Work Task Force Nature and Consequences of Workplace Bullying*.
- Kalwala, S., & Chirunomula, N. R. (n.d.). *EFFECT OF WORK PLACE BULLYING ON JOB SATISFACTION AND ORGANISATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY - an empirical study*. 478–484.
- Lawrence, P.R. and Lorsch, J.W. (1967) *Organization and Environment: Managing Differentiation and Integration* (Harvard University Press, Cambridge, MA).
- Plonka, F. E. (1997). Developing a lean and agile work force. *Human Factors and*

Ergonomics In Manufacturing, 7(1), 11–20. [https://doi.org/10.1002/\(SICI\)1520-6564\(199724\)7:1<11::AID-HFM2>3.0.CO;2-J](https://doi.org/10.1002/(SICI)1520-6564(199724)7:1<11::AID-HFM2>3.0.CO;2-J)

Sansone, R. A., & Sansone, L. A. (2015). Workplace bullying: A tale of adverse consequences. *Innovations in Clinical Neuroscience*, 12(1–2), 32–37.

Sherehiy, B., & Karwowski, W. (2014). The relationship between work organization and workforce agility in small manufacturing enterprises. *International Journal of Industrial Ergonomics*, 44(3), 466–473. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ergon.2014.01.002>

Sherehiy, B., Karwowski, W., & Layer, J. K. (2007). A review of enterprise agility: Concepts, frameworks, and attributes. *International Journal of Industrial Ergonomics*, 37(5), 445–460. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ergon.2007.01.007>

Tim Field Foundation, 2016b, <http://bullyonline.org/index.php/bullying/154-why-human-resources-don-t-supporttargets-of-bullying>

Van Den Brande, W., Baillien, E., Vander Elst, T., De Witte, H., Van Den Broeck, A., & Godderis, L. (2017). The moderating role of emotion-and problem-focused coping strategies in the association between work stressors and exposure to workplace bullying. *Gedrag En Organisatie*, 30(2).