

Chapter 10

Workplace Cyberbullying and Its Impact on Productivity

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the author presents a very sensitive socio-psychological issue of workplace cyberbullying and the ways the employers try to discipline cyberbullying. The technology and digital media access have brought in speed, accuracy, and accessibility to everyone and anyone across the world in a work setting simultaneously brought in the dangerous culture of cyberbullying, which negatively impacts productivity. The author takes up some of the critical issues like browbeating, berating, stealing, excluding, dissing, doxing, snide, threatening, victim, bully, stress, stalking, flaming, outing, and trickery to clarify as to how the workplace cyberbullying issues happen inside the workplace.

BACKGROUND

Workplace cyberbullying refers to repeated, unreasonable actions of individuals, or a group of workers, directed towards an employee or groups, which are purposely intended to intimidate, degrade, humiliate, and undermine others, or creates a risk to the health and safety of the employees including their physical, emotional, and psychological safety (Branch, Ramsay, & Barker, 2013; Rayner & Cooper, 2006, p. 47-90). The National Crime Prevention Council defines workplace cyberbullying as the process of using the Internet, cell phones or other devices to send or post text or images intended to hurt or embarrass another person (Rayner & Cooper, 2006, p. 47-90). The Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) (n.d.) defines workplace cyberbullying as an aggressive action that is repeated, health-harming with the mistreatment of one or more persons. Workplace cyberbullying increases the negative effects that persist over time, and the victim is at the risk of experiencing severe stress, anxiety, and poor physical and mental health (Farley, Coyne, Sprigg, & Axtell, 2015). The victims may become excluded from their regular working life due to ill health, stigmatization, victimization, or reputational damages due to workplace cyberbullying. These experiences may increase the chances of poor employee productivity,

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due to the victims working less efficiently, as they may take more time off, feel less committed to the organizations, or may quit, which may even increase the attrition rate, thereby bring down the productivity of the organization. Enormous options to be connected to the network during the working hours and non-working hours have increased with the advantage of the seamless connectivity with the help of digital devices that induces the workplace cyberbullying (Sarkar, 2015). From the above, cyberbullying in the workplace is viewed as an inappropriate and unwanted social exchange of behaviours, initiated by any perpetrator online or any digital technology-supported equipment, and this is now an epidemic across the world that is impacting productivity across the world, and it is rapidly spreading across the world, including the developing countries like India.

Workplace cyberbullying impacts the victims in the form of anonymous, fraudulent, aggressive, unwanted messages, or by spreading rumours. In the case of workplace cyberbullying, the perpetrators hack the email accounts of victims to threaten them. The perpetrators if undetected will move on to intimidate the victim through unwanted phone calls, and by using malicious or abusive messages during the working and non-working hours, and this is termed as workplace cyberbullying (Ramsay & Troth, 2011). The workplace cyberbullying impacts more than just a targeted individual victim (Farley, Coyne, Sprigg, & Axtell, 2015). The negative effects of the workplace cyberbullying can impact the entire workplace, or even the whole organization, by increasing anxiety and panic in the minds of the workers. The workplace bullies inflict pain in the employees by putting employees under distress, which forces them to be away from work. This psychological fear makes them avail of more sick days creating a high rate of absenteeism in the organization. This happens due to the impact created by workplace cyberbullying that increases stress-related health issues in the employees. This damages their positivity, which then percolates into demotivating them, and forcing them to disengage from their work. The above negative impact on the entire organization at various levels hits badly on the productivity of the whole organization (Farley, Coyne, Sprigg, & Axtell, 2015). It decreases the productivity that affects the entire business and indirectly increases the cost of the company in recruiting frequently, as retention of talent becomes increasingly difficult due to workplace cyberbullying (West, Foster, Levin, Edmison, & Robibero, 2014).

The broad classification of workplace cyberbullying according to various protocols and manuals will be provided in this section. The manuals or the protocols carry clarified definitions (McTernan, Dollard, & Lamontagne, 2013) of various bullying acts to explain the concept to employees and the common public, if required. The following includes different kinds of workplace cyberbullying to enable stakeholders to both understand and identify the phenomenon:

1. **Flaming:** This act occurs when cyberbullying a victim by using inappropriate or vulgar language to attack the victim to enjoy or create a terror inside the victim (Board & Fritzon, 2005; Salin, 2001).
2. **Harassing:** This act of cyberbullying is done by using technology to send inappropriate, hateful, and hurtful messages to the victims. This is done with the intention to damage the morale of the victim, and cause embarrassing situations to impair their strengths (Board & Fritzon, 2005; Salin, 2001).
3. **Outing:** It is a purposive act of leaving out someone deliberately or sharing the victim's secret or personal information in a public forum. The perpetrator damages the reputation of the victim. The mode may be by regular blackmail or indulging in sexual harassment on the victim (Board & Fritzon, 2005).

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