Chapter 23
Compassion and Empathy as Transformative Intervention Approaches:
The Management of Cyberbullying Issues Among Working Professionals

Leslie Ramos Salazar
https://orcid.org/0000-0001-7047-594X
West Texas A&M University, USA

Priyanka Khandewal
West Texas A&M University, USA

ABSTRACT

The use of empathy, compassion, and self-compassion can aid in the reduction of workplace suffering due to workplace cyberbullying. As such, this chapter defines each of these constructs and reviews their relevance to the management of workplace bullying. The main purpose of the chapter was to review prosocial interventions that incorporate positive psychological constructs such as empathy, compassion, and self-compassion. Prosocial workplace interventions serve to prevent and reduce workplace cyberbullying behavior in at-risk organizations. Interventions can be used to educate and train employees and leaders across organizations on how to cope with workplace cyberbullying as it emerges at work. A case study is offered along with recommendations to highlight how organizations might use an intervention approach to manage workplace cyberbullying. Future research directions are also offered to inspire workplace cyberbullying intervention research in organizations.

INTRODUCTION

Workplace cyberbullying is an emerging social problem in organizational contexts that can disrupt everyday interactions, relationships, and productivity. Coyne, Farley, Axtell, Sprigg, Best, and Kwok (2017) define cyberbullying as the "repeated and enduring negative behaviour in the workplace that occurs via technology" (p. 951). Cyberbullying in the workplace occurs over a time period, and the behavior must be unwanted and interpreted negatively. The negative behavior that occurs via technology may include texting negative remarks about another person or posting embarrassing photos of an employee via social media. In particular, Vranjes, Baillien, Vandebosch, Erreygers, and De Witte (2018) define workplace cyberbullying based on work-place contexts such as person related, which attack an employee, subordinate, customer, or a supervisor; work related, by communicating hurtful messages in the context of work such as a team meeting, providing hurtful feedback; and intrusive bullying, which includes bullying about personal matters such as one's family, hobbies, or personal physical characteristics. Menesini and Nocentini (2009) take a medium approach to defining cyberbullying, such as an aggressive behavior geared towards another person using electronic channels such as mobile/tablet devices and computers. Previous research from the Workplace Bullying Institute (2014) has been documenting the high prevalence of workplace bullying from supervisors, subordinates, peers, and customers, and the psychological and socio-cultural factors that contribute to workplace bullying (Astrauskaite, Kern, & Notelaers, 2014). Workplace bullying can cause social pain from social exclusion or rejection and emotional pain such as sadness and anxiety, and it can lead to emotional trauma and abuse, which can harm employees' work life and job satisfaction at work; as such there is a need for managers and leaders to understand how to cope with workplace cyberbullying at work to enable them to use approaches that can help manage workplace cyberbullying (Frost & Robinson, 1999; Smishek, 2003).

Because cyberbullying instances are becoming more prevalent, given the increase of online and mobile/tablet use at work, the need for interventions has become obvious. Previous interventions have focused on a variety of strategies such as stopping the bullying, fostering discussion, changing the topic, comforting the victim, attacking the bully, and passing; however, not all interventions have been effective (Freis & Gurung, 2013). Interventions to date that have implemented compassion and empathic approaches in the area of traditional bullying and cyberbullying offer a prosocial approach in dealing with this issue, and this chapter will review interventions and provide constructive criticisms to provide heuristic recommendations to future researchers who might wish to develop workplace cyberbullying interventions. The chapter will also provide a case study example using a workplace setting of cyberbullying, and will highlight how to go about in addressing cyberbullying behavior with compassion and empathy constructs using a model developed by the review offered by this chapter. As such, the aim of this chapter will be to review prosocial constructs relevant to compassion and empathy, and discuss how these approaches can enable professionals to effectively manage workplace cyberbullying issues in organizational settings.

BACKGROUND

Prosocial approaches can be utilized to manage conflict processes including workplace bullying. Negative spirals occur when engaging in negative online behavior such as cyberbullying. Studies indicate that when a perpetrator victimizes another online, victims might also retaliate and engage in similar victimization

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