
**Submission to the Productivity Commission
re the January 2019 Issues Paper on
The Social and Economic Benefits of Improving Mental Health**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide input to the Issues Paper. My comments relate to the psychological impacts of workplace harassment and bullying. It is good that this Issues Paper references mentally healthy workplaces (e.g. pp 28-29). I provided some points to the Productivity Commission in 2014, for the Inquiry into the Workplace Relations Framework, and was pleased to see bullying-related matters included in that final report.

I have worked in and across a number of workplaces and work units over the last 20 years or so. Unfortunately, I have experienced multiple instances of harassment and bullying. This has taken a toll on my health (psychologically, physically and personally) and it has had a cumulative impact too.

Regarding *participation in work*, as the last straw, I have quit jobs to escape harassment and bullying. Currently, I do not work nor am I a taxpayer. Each year, I used to earn six figures and pay five figures in tax. The type of subject matter I dealt with and the roles I had, were influencing policy, analysis based on evidence, better decision-making, capability building and culture change. I think I encountered a bit of the tall poppy, green eyed monster, glass ceiling and glass cliff conundrums.

In terms of *productivity*, due to tactics including undermining and stonewalling, the bullies were successful in removing my high value-add work to instead dole out low value-add 'post-box' tasks. Using my last area as an example, I was essentially told to do 'paper-shuffling', to 'flick out' requests to other areas (the ones who would do work) and do a 'cut-and-paste' of the return, then the manager would do a spellcheck of that and a comparison against a style guide. There was a barrage of negativity and put-downs from the manager, in person while no one else was around or via email. Towards the end, my focus and interest were diminished. I was unable to be enthusiastic about or concentrate on the repetitive and procedural nature of the post-box tasks, at the expense of my higher-level high value-add work, and I felt the psychological effects mounting. That just fed straight into the hands of the bully, who also started to discredit me, along with ramping up the inappropriate emails. Divide and conquer ensued in the work area. Those of the same gender were treated abominably, either ignored or put-down, or a combination of both tactics at different times. Those of the opposite gender were treated well. They were praised and cajoled by the bully, in order to coax a small following. Should the bully start to be questioned or should anyone start to doubt the bully's competence or actions, the followers would be there, knowing that the bully would likewise give coverage to them.

Regarding *incomes*, I have heard that the bullies and their followers have gone on to receive higher duties and promotions while I self-extracted myself from the workplace and now earn nothing. Further, my defacto is now solely responsible for the mortgage and expenses, my savings have been depleted, and I do have superannuation but I cannot touch that.

In terms of *living standard*, this is different since our household income has halved and we have little discretionary spending to inject into the economy.

Regarding *social engagement and connectedness*, if you are harassed and bullied, it impacts how you present and are around every single person that you interact with. Whether that be your partner, your friends, your current or former workmates, or even the person who serves you at the supermarket. Once you near or breach your psychological limits, you become aware that you can no longer look after yourself properly or stop the cracks from showing. Then you feel terrible about the witness and bystander effect particularly on the people closest to you, who care about you, and can see how you are changing (not for the better) and have to help. Imagine what it is like for your other half, when you say "I can't do this anymore" and "I don't want to become a shell of a person". Or

you decline a catch up with your friend after work, even when you know they are trying to arrange it to check in on you, replying “sorry but I’m really exhausted, and I just want to go home”.

The longer I am not in work, the less eager I am to return, the more scrutiny I apply to potential workplaces and potential employers, as doubt and apprehension creeps in about whether I might enter yet another harassment and bullying scenario in a toxic environment. However, I should have 30 years worth of work left in me.

People in the workplace must notice what happens to the person who has been mistreated. If the one who has done the harassment and bullying is given safe harbour (or worse, rewarded with A/g or a promotion), it sets the standard for what is tolerated, accepted and strived for by others. That becomes relevant to organisational health and culture (which rings massive alarm bells to me, but perhaps it evokes an undercurrent of joy in the current and aspiring egoists, harassers and bullies).

I do not think the problems relate to education. These days, before you set foot in a workplace, you are usually given ‘the rules’ along with an e-learning test of some sort, which includes knowledge of and a commitment to the workplace being free of harassment and bullying. Organisations spruik that they have a zero-tolerance approach.

There are problems in the controls.

- Bullies and harassers can be adept at utilising charm and can be fine with lying, when it suits their need to set themselves up for a grab at power and control.
- In some instances, I have asked for the harassment and bullying that I experienced to be looked into, also for it to be externally reviewed.
 - I felt that corporate areas were reserved and at a distance; that they erred on the side of ‘let’s do nothing’ and try to ‘make it go away’ as we can deem it as ‘just a communication issue’. Corporate areas can be ‘trapped’ by the bully too, as the bully subtly tries to get corporate to help in putting additional pressure on the bullied, as the bully even tries to play the victim, and as the bully creates lies about the competency and input of the bullied.
 - I was stuck with trying to do my job (avoiding being diverted from it by the crafty bully, attempting to push back on the extra lower-level and unrelated tasks), trying to do good by my organisation and its stakeholders, seeing if I could minimise the witness and bystander harm, seeing if I could help my colleagues too, and waiting to see if Corporate or an external reviewer would do an investigation. All of that, takes a toll.
 - I am put off by the concept of being charged a fee to ask the Fair Work Commission to consider an order to stop bullying. I would also be concerned about the impact on my career plus the reputation of the organisation.
 - I am put off by the idea of going down a worker’s compensation or litigation avenue too. Without getting into the details, I did speak to a lawyer a few years ago, and they actually said something like “a lot of other people have physical injuries” implying that being psychologically wrecked is less or not important. Now, since I have gone through cumulative scenarios and impacts, I would be put through the wringer, would have to dredge up a lot and deal with that, and it would be difficult to allocate and divvy up the responsibilities.
- If they have been given procedural fairness and a chance to clean up their act but they refuse then fire the harassers and bullies, and, make sure they are not promoted.
 - See past those who give-off temporary charm and an air that they know what they are on about, but who are really into getting the power, control, status and money.
 - They might be okay at a simple ‘follow the recipe’ type of job. Or okay at feigning ‘mimicry’ of someone who does know what they are doing.
 - Not a good idea to put them in charge of others or any higher up the chain. If they have a history of playing favourites (to the advantage of staff who: are already known to have ‘crossed the line’, are the ‘yes men/women’, are malleable, and/or are the low- to mid-range performers) or sharing

information about other team members (which is of a confidential nature or gossip), then those are flags.

- See if there is any information freely given word-of-mouth, by staff who are the high-performers and held in high regard, if they have come across the alleged bully before or know other people who have worked for them.
 - How much do they talk themselves up and 'hold the floor', before you realise it is 'all talk'. What is 'window dressing', where they purport to sell the right stuff, before you realise they do not have the goods. Ask them a series of questions. Get to the bottom of what it is that they actually do, what their direct input has been, and what other people have said the quality and value is.
 - Keep a watch on those who have had formal reports made about them. Remember that saying, the best indicator of future behaviour is past behaviour. Ask high-performers who are held in high regard along with people who have worked for them before, for their views. What do they think about the work output, the teamwork and leadership. Do not canvass just once. It might take some time to see all the faces and be able to form an opinion. If supportive feedback comes in but it is mainly from the ones who are the yes men/women, malleable or egoists, then those are flags.
- Do not have egoists, harassers and/or bullies on the selection panel or as referees. You know the likes of who they will pick or recommend.

There are a few lists floating about, outlining the 'skills of the future', what we need going forward. If we do not improve controls for harassment and bullying, then those harassers and bullies may well end up making those people with the skills of the future an endangered species or extinct.