**Ethical Leadership in Tackling Bullying of Staff in Schools**

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**Abstract**

This paper, based upon research by Riley, Duncan and Edwards (Bullying of Staff in Schools, 2012 ACER,) contends that school leadership has an essential part to play in building a bully-free culture within schools. The authors examine a leadership capabilities framework which incorporates the four key dimensions of personal, relational, professional and organisational capabilities. A subset of these capabilities has a direct impact on school culture both to countermand a culture of bullying and to promote aspects essential to a bully-free workplace culture. Addressing bullying behaviour is exacerbated by the fact that some school leaders fail to see that bullying of staff is a problem within schools, and they perceive behaviour identified as bullying as merely a part of the cut and thrust of a busy school environment. The authors argue that strong ethical leadership is required not only to see the debilitating effects of the bullying of staff but to have the courage to fashion a school culture free of it.

**Introduction**

This paper argues that school leadership has a key role to play in building a bully-free and ethical culture within schools. Drawing upon research by Riley, Duncan and Edwards (Bullying of Staff in Schools, 2012 ACER), the authors formulate a leadership capabilities framework underpinned by the four key dimensions of personal, relational, professional and organisational capabilities. A subset of these capabilities impacts directly upon school culture both to countermand a culture of bullying and to lay the foundations for a bully-free and ethical workplace culture. Tackling the problem of bullying behaviour in schools is made more difficult by the fact that some school leaders do not see any problem there at all, and they perceive bullying behaviour merely as part of the cut and thrust of a busy school environment.
environment. The authors argue that incisive leadership with a strong ethical dimension is required both to see and address the debilitating effects of the bullying of staff and to fashion a school culture free of it.

The research on which this paper derives is from an awareness by the researchers that “[...] no surveys have been conducted of Australian workplaces on the incidence of bullying” (Australian Government Productivity Commission, 2010, p.287). Consequently, there appears to be no answer to the question: Is bullying of staff evident in Australian schools? After their review of the literature in 2003-4 Duncan and Riley concluded there was no Australian research into the phenomenon of the bullying of staff and this conclusion lead to their initial research in 2005. Research in the USA, by Blase´ and Blase´ (2002, 2003a & b) reported findings about the bullying of staff from “the first and only study of school principal mistreatment of teachers in the world” (Blase´ and Blase´, 2003b, p.268). In 2008 Blase´ et al. presented a second national study of teachers’ perceptions of US principals’ mistreatment of teachers (Blase´ et al., 2008). The research described in this paper is a meta-analysis of three surveys by Riley, Duncan and Edwards (2005, 2007, 2009) as detailed in their 2012 publication. The meta-analysis involved 2529 participants and used nine demographic questions relating to State, school system, school type, student enrolment, gender, teacher experience, executive experience, current position and age. Forty-two items of bullying behaviour were analysed and respondents indicated whether their experience of each of these behaviours was ‘Persistent’, ‘Frequent’, ‘Sometimes’, ‘Rare’ or ‘Never’.

An important aspect of the research by Riley, Duncan and Edwards (2012) into the bullying of staff in schools lies in the fact that it did not put forward a generic definition of bullying and enquire of respondents whether this occurred. Rather, it took a set of typical behaviours found within the workplace, and falling within the scope of the definition of bullying, and asked whether and to what extent those behaviours occurred. The fact that 95% of respondents experienced one or more of those behaviours is instructive, while finding that three-quarters of respondents experienced a third or more of those behaviours suggests bullying is prevalent in the workplace. An implication of this is that bullying behaviour is largely invisible in the workplace – except to the target – because it is so typical of the behaviour encountered in schools. Yet, what in the past was unreflectively accepted as custom and practice, when filtered now through the set of behaviours that constitutes bullying, is seen today as having elements which form part of a culture of workplace
bullying. If workplace bullying is to be eliminated then those behaviours typical of it must be identified, enumerated and addressed, for not to do so leaves it undetected, undeterred and undiminished.

**Profile of the bully**

In examining the bullying of staff in schools it is helpful to provide a profile of the bully. However, this represented a challenge for it was discovered that the bully could be found in any position in the school (this was true for the target too); the bullying behaviour was often covert rather than overt and, although a power imbalance was frequently involved, the bullying could be teacher-to-teacher and not necessarily exhibited by a person in a formal position of power. However the research revealed that the more persistent or frequent bullies were the Executives and Principals, with Students, Colleagues and Parents being less so. The relatively high ranking of students was a surprise and needs clarification as there is some ambiguity that respondents may have reported that students bullied staff or students were the targets of bullying by staff or even by other students. A profile of the bully is incomplete without also examining the behaviours the bully employs and the outcomes they produce (see Figure 1). The key question is whether such behaviour is ethical. Bullying behaviours include humiliating another, attacking their private sphere (e.g. race, religion, ethnicity, political views), verbal and physical threats and open aggression. Regardless of the ethical theory one adopts, be it utilitarian, consequentialist, deontological or so on, such behaviour is unlikely to be considered ethical. The same is true if one considers the outcomes of bullying – low self-esteem, anxiety, depression, suicide. The unethical behaviour which bullying represents has no place in a school.

**Profile of the target**

Just as the bully could be found in any position in the school, so too the target could be found in any position. The target is any member of staff subjected to the set of behaviours which constitutes bullying and anyone can be on the receiving end of this type of behaviour. A surprising outcome of the research was that principals and executives felt themselves to be the targets of bullying just as much as other members of staff. Thus targets could be bullied by individuals who are above, below or at the same level as them in a school, although persistent bullying was from the top down. Another surprise result was that the target was often a more experienced teacher rather than a less experienced one (Riley et al., 2009). Our speculation here is that the less experienced teacher is unaware of what constitutes a culture
of bullying and that the expectations, workload and frenetic pace of the school are all normal for them.

Bullying is a mode of unethical behaviour which can be wielded against any individual in the school if it is allowed to exist unchecked. The challenge is to determine what conditions within a workplace are conducive to allowing such conduct to exist and when those conditions are identified to eliminate them. The profile of a target is essentially anyone who works in a school which is not actively building a bully-free workplace culture with a well-defined ethical dimension, and where leadership is not attuned to developing this dimension of the school culture and where staff are not actively engaged in asking the question, ‘Have we got a bully-free workplace culture? If not, then why not?’

The elements which give rise to the bullying of staff within schools are structurally embedded within the school workplace and when these factors are neither recognised nor addressed they give rise to a culture of bullying within the school – such a culture subsequently becomes the default culture within the school (Riley, Duncan & Edwards Workplace Bullies Research, May 2012).

**Model of school workplace bullying**

Moayed et al.’s model (2006, p.313) identifies the risk factors, bullying behaviours and outcomes of workplace bullying. We adapted that model (see Figure 1) by replacing the ‘risk factors’ identified by Moayed et al. with position within the school workplace as our research lists organisational position as one of the major risk factors to workplace bullying in schools. The model was subsequently modified to include two distinct forms of bullying, personal confrontation and professional destabilisation bullying. The former includes threats to personal and professional status while the latter involves isolation, overwork and destabilisation, the details of both forms of bullying are consistent with Moayed et al.’s model. With regard to the outcomes of bullying upon the health of targets, our research revealed that 7 out of 10 respondents had their mental and physical health impacted by bullying behaviours. The qualitative data revealed the effects of bullying are: to cause the loss of teachers to the profession, ill health of targets and a perceived negative impact upon student performance. Witnesses to bullying may have worse mental and physical health than those who are the targets of bullying. Further research is needed to profile the outcomes of workplace bullying. For example, psychological health complaints, psychosomatic
complaints, cardiovascular disease, absenteeism, chronic diseases, stress and lower job satisfaction as identified in Moayed et al.’s model. Our research revealed that unfortunately targets of bullying exist at every level of the school with teachers the most persistent targets based on the perceptions of school employees. The findings indicate that the persistent bullies, ranked in descending order are: principals, executives, colleagues, students, parents and support staff. Based upon the quantitative and qualitative data, it is reasonable to assert that a culture of workplace bullying exists [within schools] by virtue of failure to acknowledge it exists or failure to name existing ‘custom and practice’ for what they are.

Figure 1

The effect of professional destabilisation bullying on workplace culture

To appreciate the impact of professional destabilisation on school workplace culture it is helpful to identify eight attributes common to the 13 items of professional destabilisation bullying identified in our research. They include: unrealistic targets and workloads; work conditions and job descriptions changed or ignored; no consultation; denied award, professional or workplace entitlements; information and recognition withheld; affects performance; meaningless tasks; and being ignored, isolated or excluded. Two items of
professional destabilisation, *Tasks are set with unreasonable or impossible targets or deadlines* and, *You are exposed to unmanageable workloads*, were experienced by 4 out of 5 respondents at a Category 8 level which is 128 times above the acceptable level (which was identified in the research as an incidence of 1 in 80 or less) whereas the majority of the remaining items were 64 times above the acceptable level. However, one is forced to ask, *What is an acceptable level of bullying?* As a first step towards answering this question, we identified any instances of bullying above 0% as too high. To this end, a scale similar to the Richter scale (which is used to measure earthquakes) was used but with an increase between categories of a factor of two rather than 10 as used in the Richter scale. The ‘persistent negative acts’ and ‘persistent power imbalance’, typical of workplace bullying, reveal a hostile work environment where professional and personal survival is challenged. In a culture of professional destabilisation bullying, questions of professional responsibilities of employers and employees warrant clarification. In addition, the workplace culture needs to be reviewed and addressed.

Whereas a school culture is often defined as “the way we do things around here,” clearly when the way things are done entails professional destabilisation bullying then a more detailed analysis of the elements of a school culture is called for. In particular, considerable weight needs to be given to the ethical dimension of a school culture and those aspects which foster and enhance the dignity and well-being of every individual within that environment. Workplace cultures are very much a work-in-progress fashioned by the ever-changing work crew there at the time. As such the work-to-date needs constant review both by the work team, the team leaders and those drafting the work plan. An attempt in this direction is undertaken in the section below headed, *How does a leader or do leaders change such a culture?*

**Personal Confrontation and Professional Destabilisation Bullying**

As is shown in Figure 1, bullying behaviour has two dimensions, the first is personal confrontation bullying and the second is professional destabilisation bullying. The behaviours typical of each dimension are also listed there. Whereas professional destabilisation bullying can perhaps be understood, but not justified, as arising from the frenetic pace emblematic of modern day schools, personal confrontation bullying is not as easily understood. Clearly such behaviour is so highly unacceptable and unethical that the roots of that behaviour are hard to fathom. An initial research hypothesis was that perhaps confrontational bullying emerges
from the stresses and strains engendered by professional destabilisation bullying. However this hypothesis had to be abandoned as the statistical analysis showed that the two forms of bullying were independent of each other. Yet while each of the dimensions of bullying are independent of each other they rarely exist separately within the school. Where one form of bullying is found, the other is found also. The fact that both forms of bullying accompany each other, together with the ethically unpalatable nature of personal confrontation bullying, provides strong motivation to eliminate staff bullying in any of its forms from the school workplace.

**Quotes from targets of bullying**

The following extracts are from respondents to our 2007 online national survey and reflect the diversity of bullying experiences. Firstly, the extracts reveal the impact of bullying upon the targets’ health and mental well-being:

“Bullying rips your whole life apart”; “If I’d stayed in that situation I believe I would be a suicide risk”; “I ended up with … depression … coupled with suicide tendencies….”; “As a person who has been on the receiving end of staff bullying … I suffered health effects, both physical and emotional, including depression.’

The impact of staff bullying upon the profession is evident in the following:

“I plan to retire at 50 because I figure it just isn’t worth it. I thought once I was a principal I would not be bullied; I’m leaving teaching”; “[There was] executive destruction of a successful department due to belittling of excellent staff…”; “I have lost my new teaching career over not being able to cope with the verbal abuse from my [Head Teacher].”

We contend that a culture of bullying impacts upon those in the workplace either because they are the target, the witness or they experience the impact of bullying within sub-sections of the school. The following quotes highlight these aspects:

“Bullies flourish in an environment of dishonesty, favouritism and apathy. The damage done by bullies is immeasurable in terms of inefficiency, wasted time and money …”; “The teaching profession is a perfect environment for two types of bullying: exclusion and setting up.”

Consider these few extracts that appear in the introduction of individual chapters of our book.
“He literally shouted at me at the top of his voice. This was heard by others staff at the school at the time. They were quite scared and wondered, ‘What the hell was going on in there!’”

“It is …very difficult to collect evidence of such things [as bullying] occurring as staff are unwilling and fearful of putting their experiences down on paper for fear of reprisals.”

“I see other staff who feel they are not brave enough, nor experienced enough to lodge a complaint as the process is sometimes more daunting than the bullying …”

“Parents shout, raise fists, scream, argue, storm out of the room, accuse staff of enjoying making children suffer and sometimes accuse them of paedophilia.”

These statements reveal experiences of bullying that have immediate and long-term implications for individual schools and staff. The frequency and intensity of these reports of such behaviour reveal a culture of bullying that should never be accepted as the ways things are done around here or in any ethical workplace.

**The ethical dimension of bullying**

The ethical implications of our research are significant because of the impact of a bullying workplace culture upon students and the school community. The Ministerial Council for Education, Early Childhood Development and Youth Affairs now known as the Standing Council on School Education and Early Childhood and Education Services Australia have focused upon students in the National Safe Schools Framework (revised 2011). We advocate an adaptation of that framework for the workplace. It is titled, *National Framework for a Bully-free Workplace in Schools*. The overarching vision is:

“All schools are safe, supportive and respectful teaching and learning communities that promote student and staff well-being. Such a community requires a bully-free culture that is supportive and respectful of each member of staff in the school.”

The following six guiding principles reveal a commitment to: transparency, dignity, justice, respect, judgement and co-responsibility.

“All schools to:

- affirm the rights of all staff members of the school to feel safe and be safe from bullying at school
• acknowledge that being safe and supported at school is essential for staff wellbeing and effective performance
• accept responsibility for developing and sustaining a safe, supportive and bully-free culture for all staff
• encourage the active participation of all staff members in developing and maintaining a safe workplace culture for staff
• actively support staff to develop understanding and skills to establish and maintain a safe workplace culture
• commit to developing a safe school community through a whole-school and evidence-based approach to the eliminating of bullying.”

The moral purpose and ethical responsibility for establishing and sustaining a ’bully-free workplace’ necessitates critical reflection upon current practice, acknowledgement of bullying behaviours for what they are and an agreed set of principles to minimise its occurrence. For educational leaders there are capabilities necessary to develop a bully-free workplace and there is a shared or a co-professional responsibility with employers and employees accepting their entitlements and liabilities for the culture of their school.

The multiple dimensions of a school culture

The role of the principal or, in fact, any school leader, for example a department head, “is potentially such a pivotal one (in the school) that the way that role is filled – the characteristics of the person filling it and the way they go about their job is always liable to make some difference to the culture of a school” (Haydon, 2007, p.86). Given that understanding of leadership, leaders in the school have the opportunity to construct a social reality that has a bully-free culture. Before examining the role of leadership in development of the school’s culture, it is important to return to the characteristics of the leader and the way they go about their leadership. Here it is imperative that the leadership exercised is ethical. If this is not the case it will be impossible to develop a bully-free culture in the school workplace. Such leadership involves ethical decision making, evidence-based practice, fair processes, informed debate and full inclusion of all staff members, especially those marginalised by exclusion which can be one of the bullying behaviours identified by our research. It also means fair treatment of others, respect for evidence and argument, transparent processes and healthy debate, all of which can lead towards another important consideration if there is to be ethical leadership, and that is development of a clearly
articulated vision based on educational ideals and subscribed to by all. We turn now to the critical role of culture in ensuring a bully-free school workplace. If there is a culture of bullying in the school, the question is:

*How does a leader or do leaders change such a culture?*

We have already mentioned the importance of leadership in relation to school culture but to answer the question we must also recognise that it is the school’s culture that provides the guidelines for performance, whether for students or staff. Sergiovanni (2001) views culture as a strong leadership force so if there is the existence of a bullying culture in a school, leaders with a good understanding of the culture can take steps to change that culture. Its strength as a leadership force comes from the fact that a school’s core values and beliefs are what drive the way the school functions. Such a solid base makes for a strong force in leadership. It should also be recognised that the whole culture of a school may not be a bullying one, but in any school there exist sub-cultures and it is here, for example in a department, that there may be a culture of bullying.

If leaders are to take this approach to leading in a culture of bullying we need to have an understanding of what is meant by ‘culture’. Perhaps the simplest way of viewing culture in our context is to see it as ‘the way we do things around here’ or “a mostly unconscious way of feeling and acting common to a group”. The last mentioned view provides an excellent understanding of how a bullying culture can be fostered, as no one recognises that it is even occurring. It is simply seen as ‘the norm’! Herein lies the importance of culture in relation to developing a bully-free workplace as it is the culture which provides the values and norms which form the foundation of the school culture.

However, to delve more deeply into the concept of culture, we see that it has both an intangible and a tangible dimension. We could visualise it as an onion (see Figure 2) with its multiple layers of skin starting with the innermost, which is protected from change and external influences by the outer skins. This is the intangible dimension of the culture and is comprised of the beliefs, values, philosophy and ideology on which the culture is built. The outer skins (layers) form the tangible dimension of the culture or the visible expression of the innermost part of the onion and are comprised of all that can be observed in the school, for
example the way staff interact with each other. In a normal situation, there would be an alignment between the intangible and the tangible – the innermost core and the outer layers.

![Tangible & Intangible Dimensions of a School Culture](image)

**Tangible & Intangible Dimensions of a School Culture**

Figure 2

However, where there is a culture of bullying, there would be non-alignment and the observable behaviour would take the form of bullying – personal confrontation and or professional destabilisation.

Where it can be clearly seen that there is non-alignment between the tangible and the intangible, if, assuming that the leadership of the school is not totally comprised of bullies, and that any school’s (or department’s) beliefs, values, philosophy and ideology are socially, ethically and morally acceptable, then change is needed. It would mean checking for what part of the visible expression of the intangible dimension is out of alignment with that dimension. Such a review might involve holding up to scrutiny staff members’ underlying assumptions, such as the nature of human activity – what is the right thing to do?; the nature of human relationships – what is the right way to relate to each other; and the nature of reality and truth. As Schein (2010) indicates, these are underlying assumptions around which cultural paradigms form. If there is discord about these, then, if agreement can be reached, some action can be taken to begin getting the tangible in line with the intangible and, hopefully, a bully-free workplace would eventuate. On the part of leadership, all of this requires that those in leadership have:
• A critical understanding of their school or department’s culture, which allows them to pattern and repattern cultural symbols to convey the desired values
• Cultural critique skills
• Culture building skills, and
• An appropriate leadership style.

Further to this, if there is incongruity between the tangible and the intangible, to bring about a cultural change, such leaders will need to be able to embed and reinforce mechanisms. This can be achieved by:
• What leaders pay attention to, measure and control
• Leaders’ reactions to critical incidents and crises
• Deliberate role modelling, teaching and coaching by leaders
• Criteria for allocation of rewards and status
• Criteria for recruitment, selection, promotion, and retirement (Schein, 1991, p.224).

Such strategies help embed the shared values or vision of a changed work culture. It may be also that secondary mechanisms (Schein, 2010), which are consistent with the primary ones above are required. These include the school or department’s:
• Structure
• Systems and procedures, and even
• Visible features such as physical space, office location etc.

If a bully-free workplace culture is to be developed in the school, it is necessary to have all leaders, from the principal through to teachers as leaders operating out of the same leadership framework which we developed to ensure such a culture exists. The foundation for a leadership framework aimed at ensuring the existence of a bully-free workplace stems from three main areas or domains in which leadership is exercised. The domains are (i) community, (ii) future focus, and (iii) collective identity of school professionals. The first domain of community leadership values interdependence, respectful relationships and the dignity of the human being. The second domain, future focus, recognises new possibilities, which involve a bully-free workplace and new visions through which sustainable change is realised. The third domain, collective identity of school professionals, sees the worth of the values, beliefs, skills and educational
outcomes produced by the synergy of the staff as a collective identity. In each of these domains leaders demonstrate a range of capabilities, ‘qualities which integrate knowledge, skills and attitudes in such a way that they can be used appropriately and effectively in new and changing circumstances’. (Stephenson. 2000, p.2) The leadership capabilities shown in Table 1 sets out those needed by leaders to effectively and successfully develop a bully-free workplace culture. The domains and the capabilities serve as a guide for leadership of ‘an appropriate style’. Hence, the leadership framework is a guide for such important leadership functions as monitoring, mentoring and coaching, strategic thinking and planning. Such functions will allow leaders in schools and systems to eradicate bullying of staff and develop a bully-free culture in their workplace.

Table 1 Leadership Capabilities for the Development of a Bully-free Workplace in Schools

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Personal capabilities</th>
<th>Relational capabilities</th>
<th>Professional capabilities</th>
<th>Organisational capabilities</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Is self-reflective</td>
<td>Is relationally adept</td>
<td>Is contextually aware &amp; responsive</td>
<td>Engages in strategic &amp; futures thinking, aware of the big picture</td>
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<tr>
<td>Demonstrates intellectual acuity</td>
<td>Is emotionally mature</td>
<td>Shapes &amp; implements change processes</td>
<td>Avoids imposing old paradigms on new realities</td>
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<tr>
<td>Displays a sense of self-efficacy &amp; personal identity</td>
<td>Communicates with influence</td>
<td>Develops moral purpose</td>
<td>Develops organizational capacity to respond to needs of vulnerable staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uses intuition as well as logic &amp; reason</td>
<td>Is authentically present</td>
<td>Develops a sense of coherence</td>
<td>Builds a sharing organizational culture that focuses on energies &amp; talents of all staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Projects confidence, optimism &amp; resilience</td>
<td>Displays a trusting disposition</td>
<td>Inspires a collegial purpose &amp; vision</td>
<td>Fosters a growth promoting work place</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exemplifies honesty &amp; integrity</td>
<td>Cultivates collaborative work place</td>
<td>Focuses on core outcomes &amp; accountabilities</td>
<td>Exercises principled &amp; ethical stewardship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Demonstrates ethically responsible behaviours</td>
<td>Engages in positive politics</td>
<td>Engages in work place learning &amp; relevant professional development</td>
<td>Contributes to organizational sustainability</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The leadership capabilities are:

- Personal
- Relational
- Professional
- Organisational.

Examining these a little more closely, their importance in leadership in relation to ensuring a bully-free culture can be seen. For example, the leader with strong personal capabilities will apply “ethical standards to complex and perplexing tension situations” such as those encountered in a bullying situation; s/he will operate “from a clear set of values and high ethical standards”; such a leader “is impelled by core values and lives by those values”. Here the importance of the alignment of the intangible and tangible dimensions of the culture is imperative. If there is any non-alignment, the wrong message i.e. bullying is OK, is being communicated.

Strong relational capabilities in the leader mean, for example, that s/he will act for “the good of others, especially for those who are vulnerable or in need of assistance i.e. the target of bullying”; s/he will build an inclusive community, where there are strong and mutually respectful relationships that keep vision, goals and purpose at the forefront of all action.

In relation to professional capabilities, the leader will live by professional codes of conduct and is able to articulate a vision that draws others to commit to it and to implement it; s/he, for example, will be committed to professional learning opportunities not only for self but for others as well.
In terms of organisational capabilities, where today, leaders are subjected to externally imposed continuous and rapid change and the system itself demonstrates bullying behaviour, the leader skilled in this capability will be able to create organisational structures and processes that are adaptable and flexible enough to respond to such change without having a culture of bullying develop in the workplace. Further to this, s/he has the capacity to involve others in contributing to the process of developing these structures and processes.

If we zero in on the 18 professional and organisational capabilities it is apparent that the majority of them are especially conducive to the development of a bully-free workplace culture. Ten of the eighteen capabilities have a direct bearing on such a culture. Three capabilities focus specifically on the quality of the workplace: Fosters a *growth promoting work place*; Cultivates *collaborative work place*; Engages in *work place learning & relevant professional development*. Four focus on the professional calibre, collegial input and professional and personal needs of staff: Builds a sharing organizational culture that *focuses on energies & talents of all staff*; Inspires a *collegial purpose & vision*; Demonstrates capacity to *provide professional support*; Develops organizational capacity to respond to *needs of vulnerable staff* and a further three focus on adapting school structures and school communities to the evolving demands of a dynamic, global and future-oriented society: Avoids imposing old paradigms on *new realities*; Develops efficient & *robust structures & systems*; Contributes to *organizational sustainability*. It is hard to see how such a leadership framework, if implemented, would fail to adapt the school workplace to not only a bully free environment but one where staff were professionally engaged and challenged.

If leaders can exhibit the leadership described here and they are aware of the strength of culture as a leadership force, using the indicators of a bully-free workplace that we have developed (see Table 2) they can then assess where their school stands in relation to bullying. If it fails the ‘test’ this calls for an authentic cultural critique to identify where the non-alignment is between the core values and their visible expression or indeed the need to hold up the core values to scrutiny to identify if the problem lies at the heart of the school’s culture i.e. its core values and beliefs.
## Indicators of a Bully Free Workplace Culture ©Riley, Duncan & Edwards

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>No.</th>
<th>Description</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Staff have a sense of ownership of the school and its workplace culture.</td>
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<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Recognition of staff efforts is a feature of the school.</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>Job satisfaction is a school priority.</td>
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<td>4</td>
<td>Staff wellbeing activities and programs are highly visible within the school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Leaders have a comprehensive knowledge of their staff.</td>
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<td>6</td>
<td>Positive and respectful relationships between staff are the norm in the school.</td>
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<td>7</td>
<td>Staff are included in the decision-making processes within the school.</td>
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<td>8</td>
<td>Two-way communication between staff and leadership exists when setting workloads, deadlines and task priorities.</td>
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<td>9</td>
<td>Professional competencies are given due consideration when allocating staff roles, duties and responsibilities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Leadership demonstrates a willingness to engage staff in face-to-face discussions.</td>
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<td>11</td>
<td>Staff show respect for and support each other through inclusive actions and structures.</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>A clear vision of a bully free workplace is developed by staff and promoted by all.</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Staff have a clear understanding of what bullying behaviour is.</td>
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<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Leaders have a good understanding of what bullying behaviour is.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Staff are confident to report staff bullying.</td>
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<td>16</td>
<td>Leaders model bully free behaviour in their dealings with staff, students and parents.</td>
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<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Leaders act on any claims of bullying immediately.</td>
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<td>18</td>
<td>There are regular meetings of staff to assess bullying within the school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Staff bullying is promptly identified and dealt with.</td>
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<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>A register of workplace bullying exists within the school.</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>The school exhibits zero tolerance for staff bullying.</td>
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<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Support is given to staff who are affected by bullying.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Staff knowledge of workplace bullying is monitored and appropriate action taken.

Professional development on handling staff bullying is provided to all staff.

Parents are aware the school is a bully free workplace.

Parents support the school’s bully free workplace policy.

The school system strongly supports a bully free workplace.

The school system strongly supports schools in the event of bullying.

Reporting of staff bullying is confidential and effective.

The process for reporting staff bullying is well-known and straightforward.

1 Permission to use these indicators can be obtained by contacting John Edwards at john.edwards@workplacebullies.net.au

It is also highly relevant to apply Starratt’s (2004) foundational pillars (critique, justice and care) of an ethical school! In terms of his ethic of justice, which is closely related to that of critique, the question can be asked: is the school serving both the common good and the rights of each individual in the school? This recognises the dignity of each person both individually and as member of the community. If the question can be answered in the affirmative it is highly likely that a bully-free workplace culture exists. Taking this further we can move to his ethic of care and examine whether the school’s values are grounded in the belief that the integrity of human relationships are held to be sacred and that the school as an organisation holds the good of human beings within it as sacred. Again, if the values are grounded in this way, then it would mean each person in the school enjoys his/her intrinsic dignity and worth and there is an absence of bullying in the workplace.

**Workplace bullying passes below the radar**

Addressing bullying behaviour within schools is often complicated by the fact that many school leaders fail to see bullying of staff occurring at all within their schools. As mentioned earlier, this occurs because bullying behaviour is not seen as such but merely as part of the cut and thrust of a busy school environment. In other words, bullying of staff passes below the radar because it is not seen for what it is. The authors argue that incisive leadership with
an ethical dimension is required to both see and address the debilitating effects of the bullying of staff and to fashion a school culture free of it.

**Definition of Bullying**

Part of the reason bullying is not seen for what it is within schools has to do with a misunderstanding of the definition of bullying. Riley, Duncan and Edwards (2012) adopt Salin’s (2003) definition of bullying as “repeated and persistent negative acts towards one or more individuals which involve a persistent power imbalance and create a hostile work environment” (2003, p.10). The difficulty in interpreting this occurs because the first part of the definition, “repeated and persistent negative acts towards one or more individuals”, is interpreted as personal acts between staff which occur with some hostile intent, as for example to diminish or undermine another staff member or to dominate or prevail over them. The problem here is in focusing exclusively on the intentions of individuals rather than on the outcomes of their actions. Actions which “involve a persistent power imbalance and create a hostile work environment”, which is the second part of Salin’s definition of bullying, are just as much bullying behaviour as those undertaken with a deliberate negative intent towards another. The contrast between the two types of actions, that is actions with negative intent and actions reflecting a power imbalance and generative of a hostile environment, is best understood in the contrast between the two forms of bullying referred to as personal confrontation bullying and professional destabilisation bullying.

Professional destabilisation bullying very much reflects a power imbalance between two parties, it creates an uncongenial work environment which is not easily resolved and as a consequence of its lack of resolution its effects constitute “repeated and persistent” actions. This power imbalance is experienced as an inability of staff to redress excessive workloads, unrealistic targets and goals, or work tasks which have been set independently of them or with only minimal or no consultation. Setting such workloads, targets or goals for the staff member is also often undertaken independently of any consideration of the staff member’s competencies, job descriptions or expectations. As a result, the staff member perceives themself to be, and in fact is, frozen out of discussions central to defining and fulfilling her or his role, job description or job expectations. This behaviour represents professional destabilisation bullying as it reflects an absence of power by the person being bullied to redress their situation and it represents an abuse of power by the person responsible for the bullying. Problems of this type are further compounded by an ensuing lack of clarity about
the expectations an employee has about his or her role, together with a lack of reasonableness by the employee or employer about those expectations or job description. The ongoing inability of an employee to redress such bullying, and the necessity to endure it in the absence of redress, constitutes a “repeated and persistent [series of] negative acts towards one or more individuals”. Professional destabilisation bullying and the inability to resolve it leads to a decline in an employee’s mental and physical well-being. Two out of every three staff experience approximately a half or more of the thirteen types of professional destabilisation bullying behaviours cited in the research (Riley et al. 2012, Table 3.9 p.62). Professional confrontation bullying inevitably accompanies professional destabilisation bullying and one in every two employees experiences over a half of the twenty-two confrontational bullying behaviours cited in the research (Riley et al. 2012, Table 3.4 p.53). Three out of four employees experience a third or more of the thirty-five professional destabilisation or personal confrontational bullying behaviours cited in the research (Riley et al. 2012, Table 3.10 p.63). This suggests it is a problem which needs to be addressed urgently, if a school is to be viewed not only as a bully-free workplace but also an ethical workplace.

Conclusion

This paper has drawn attention to the fact that bullying of staff occurs at any and every level within a school between staff members; it has alluded to the debilitating effects that bullying has on the mental and physical well-being of staff and to the hidden or covert nature of workplace bullying masquerading under the guise of custom and practice within a school. It has noted that unless the culture of a school is critically reviewed to ensure it is bully-free then the default culture for that school will be a culture of bullying. The ethical consequences of this occurring highlights the central focus of this paper on the ethical dimensions of school leadership and the set of leadership capabilities needed to ensure a culture within schools that is bully-free and a culture that sustains and enhances the well-being and health of all staff within the school.

References


