Effective ways to improve workplace culture and dynamics following a workplace investigation

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Abstract

This paper aims to summarise recent literature regarding the most effective ways to improve workplace culture and dynamics following an investigation into workplace behaviour. This research considers interventions at the individual, team, policy and organisational levels and evaluates their effectiveness in reducing toxicity in the workplace and decreasing the likelihood of bad behaviours re-occurring. Worklogic clients (between years of 2014 - 2016) were invited to participate in a short anonymous online survey in which they described the interventions that they implemented following a workplace investigation of alleged misconduct. The results suggested that while many organisations are following basic recommendations in the literature, there are a number of interventions, such as emotion-awareness focused discussions and team-based activities, which could vastly improve the workplace environment. Recommendations are provided, based on the literature, as to the best methods for organisations to cultivate a healthy and positive culture in the team and in the workplace, after a misconduct investigation.
Over the past decade, there has been a substantial increase in research worldwide surrounding the identification, manifestation and impact of poor behaviour in the workplace, particularly workplace bullying. This research is validated by recent changes to the Fair Work Act (2009) to incorporate the term ‘workplace bullying’ into legislation, emphasising the relevance of bullying research and the need to address such behaviours in workplaces across the nation (O’Rourke & Antioch, 2016).

Earlier studies into the effects of workplace bullying emphasised the impact of such behaviours on the individuals directly involved. Recently, there has been an increased focus on the impact of such behaviours on overall workplace culture and dynamics. This is an important area of research, as poor behaviours in the workplace not only create interpersonal problems but promote the likelihood of further inappropriate behaviour, breeding toxic workplace environments. Working backwards, the idea therefore, is that, by improving workplace culture and dynamics, the incidence of bullying and other such problems may then be reduced, resulting in more constructive workplace environments, as well as reducing the resources and costs required to manage such problems.

Much of the research conducted on workplace bullying investigates the prevalence of workplace bullying and the conditions under which it appears. Whilst this is not our primary focus, it is important to understand the conditions under which bullying manifests, so such conditions can be alleviated to prevent further misconduct. There are a number of factors implicit in some types of organisations that can create an unsettling environment for employees. In general, there is a far greater incidence of workplace bullying in large, public sector organisations compared to smaller, private sector organisations, with employees in the private sector reporting greater confidence in their organisation’s ability to manage bullying issues (Hodgins, MacCurtain & Mannix-McNamara, 2014; Salin, 2008b). Larger organisations tended to have more formal written policies and established human resources departments, so it is noteworthy that such policy factors did not seem to modulate the prevalence of bullying (Salin, 2008a).

Furthermore, it is important to identify that unhealthy workplace behaviours can manifest in a number of ways. Bad behaviour can be a result of inappropriate conduct by the parties at an individual level. It can be a result of poor team management or poor role assignment at a team level. It can also be organisational – a result of poor structure of the organisation as a whole. Policy matters can also influence the prevalence of poor behaviour at all these levels. In this proposal, we consider interventions at each of these tiers that may influence the ways in which unhealthy behaviours are managed in the workplace (Furnham & Taylor, 2011). The literature reflected the importance of
interventions at the individual, team, policy and organisational levels in improving workplace culture and dynamics. Intervention at all levels are vital for a succinct and enduring approach to preventing workplace incidences in the future.

**Individual interventions**

The individual interventions identified as being most successful in improving workplace culture were interventions that included a focus on parties’ emotions. Recent literature suggests that consideration of parties’ emotions in dealing with the incident allows parties to feel more in control of the procedure and improves self-efficacy (Jameson, Bodtker & Linker, 2010). This often manifests through informal facilitated discussion between the parties, which incorporates consideration of parties’ thoughts, feelings and expectations. Promoting emotional perspective taking – so all parties can come to a mutual understanding of other parties’ feelings - can assist in moving forward and encourages a more conducive environment for managing the problem (Jameson, Bodtker & Linker, 2010). The converse is that parties’ emotions are not addressed, and underlying resentment is able to fester. This can then present as reduced job satisfaction and poorer attitude towards work, which can have effects well beyond the individual level (Hutchinson & Hurley, 2013).

Promoting positive attitudes through open discussion can assist in conflict resolution and help management to revise the duties and roles of the parties involved in the conflict, so as to prevent further incidences and a negative impact on workplace culture (Hutchinson & Hurley, 2013).

Management’s approach towards incidences of bullying was also important in predicting future unhealthy behaviours. Whilst management methods of dealing with bullying are outside the scope of this paper, it is important to note that the notion of procedural fairness was important in promoting lower rates of absenteeism, greater job satisfaction, commitment, and work ethic, resulting in greatly improved workplace dynamics (Barsky & Kaplan, 2007). In this regard, it is not so much the effect of procedural fairness being in place as much as it is the employees being aware that there are fair procedures in place (Barsky & Kaplan, 2007). The overall tone of the bullying procedures also influenced workplace culture, with several studies suggesting that procedures focused on mediation and reconciliatory measures rather than strictly punitive measures resulted in better outcomes for the workplace as a whole (Cicerali & Cicerali, 2016). Reconciliatory measures noted include discussion with parties involved, consulting health care services and offering counselling for the individuals involved, procedures that assist in early intervention (Salin, 2008a).
Whilst these reconciliatory measures were important in the initial stages of conflict, it was noted that, as conflict progressed, more punitive measures were important to indicate a strong commitment to anti-bullying by the organisation and to deter similar behaviours (Salin, 2008a). Whilst transfer measures, such as physical separation of complainant and respondent and transfer to a different department were less useful in addressing the true nature of the problem, they were important where the respondent was in a managerial position or causing significant distress to the complainant (Salin, 2008a). Punitive measures were deemed necessary where it was important to set a clear example about inappropriate behaviours and where a respondent’s behaviour is so poor that reconciliatory methods are not possible and the only option is to demote or terminate the respondent (Salin, 2008a).

The literature concurs that the poorest means of dealing with workplace bulling is avoidance – where no measures are taken to deal with the conflict at hand. This ‘laissez-faire’ attitude is manifested in an abdication of responsibilities and is not only detrimental in solving the present problems but sets a precedent of inaction and acceptance of poor behaviours which can often escalate personal conflicts and promote an overall toxic workplace environment (Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland & Hetland, 2007). Hence, when interventions are implemented at the individual level, it is just as important that their implementation is communicated to all employees so as to promote confidence in their workplace that appropriate measures are in place and that management are taking an active role in handling the conflict (Skogstad et al., 2007).

**Team interventions**

The most common team interventions suggested in the literature were training of employees regarding workplace bullying and general conflict management. Training was stressed to be of importance because it increased general awareness of appropriate behaviours and empowered employees to feel more competent in identifying and reporting incidences of inappropriate behaviour (Salin, 2008a). There is good evidence that appropriate training may combat bullying, provided the training reflects the experiences of the current workplace, rather than being a generalised training framework that is non-specific to the organisation (Strandmark & Rahm, 2014; Fox & Stallworth, 2009). In such cases, training materials that are not reflective of the organisation can actually create an additional outlet for tensions as a result of conflict discussion and can be detrimental to the organisation (Beirne & Hunter, 2013).
Active bystander training is a recent notion that involves promoting employees to notice inappropriate behaviour and stand up against such behaviour rather than remaining silent and enabling the behaviour (Van Heugten, 2011). Such training is an important remedy at the team level – as it makes bullying everybody’s problem and promotes a culture of zero tolerance (D’Cruz & Noronha, 2011). It is well studied that silent bystanders contribute to the escalation of maladaptive behaviours, and, conversely, rewarding employees who take a firm stance against bullying creates an attitude that quickly spreads throughout the organisation and makes bullying less and less acceptable (Paull, Omari & Standen, 2012).

Other important team interventions include educating employees about the impacts of bullying, even if they are not directly involved in the conflict (Van Heugten, 2011). Taking this broader approach to addressing poor behaviours means that the whole organisation can reflect and improve on workplace dynamics, rather than only the parties involved (Van Heugten, 2011). This education can extend to coaching of the team to be active in their commitment to safe workplace and knowing how to recognise premediating bullying behaviours (Saam, 2010).

Using feedback systems, such as attitudes surveys and appraisal discussions, can provide a broader perspective on the general sentiments of employees and assists in identifying potential problem areas and patterns that are often markers of future bullying behaviours (Salin, 2008b; Tavanti, 2011). Such surveys are obviously important for management to identify areas in need of improvement but also vital for creating a sense of openness and empowerment to the individuals of the organisations (Tavanti, 2011). Teams that feel comfortable confronting issues of poor behaviour create a workplace culture that is not stifled, or breeding underlying resentment, and means that when such issues arise, they can be dealt with in a timely and appropriate manner. Promoting effective team work through team building activities can also promote this sense of openness and is important for building trust and accountability; key pillars in preventing the manifestation of toxic behaviours in the workplace (Beirne & Hunter, 2013).

The literature stresses, however, the importance of continuous follow-ups in team based interventions rather than one-off activities, in order to ensure similar poor behaviours do not re-occur (Marsh, 2013). Whilst a one-off activity is important following an investigation, and far more beneficial than no intervention, continuous follow-ups and ‘checking in’ on the team suggests a real commitment by the organisation and is far more likely to promote long term positive workplace culture (Hodgins et al., 2014; D’Cruz et al., 2011). Any team intervention is also important as a means for increasing collaboration between groups and reduces the alienation of particular parties,
ensuring all employees not only feel included but responsible for the behaviours which manifest in the workplace (Strandmark & Rahn, 2014).

Policy interventions

Stressed in much of the literature is the importance of a clear anti-bullying framework. Whilst the contents of such framework is not the focus of this paper, it cannot be ignored how often a comprehensive anti-bullying framework was noted as being a key factor in reducing workplace bullying incidences (Salin, 2008a). Whilst there are the obvious consequences of such a framework when bullying has occurred, the framework also works to improve awareness of what constitutes bullying and what is appropriate conduct in the workplace (Salin, 2008b). Reducing the ‘fuzziness’ surrounding the definition of workplace bullying assists in increasing awareness surrounding bullying and furthermore gives employees confidence in their organisation to appropriately manage such conduct (Cicerali & Cicerali, 2016; Salin, 2008b). Such frameworks also empower the management team and create an environment of trust and support, and an open platform to discuss issues that come to light (Beirne & Hunter, 2013; Strandmark & Rahm, 2014).

Implementing positive policies and a humanistic values system is becoming increasingly popular, as more literature is revealing the benefits of a healthy workplace (Beale & Hoel, 2011). Policies implemented at the organisational level which focus on broader ideas of mutual respect and dignity appear to have more influence than policies that focus solely on bullying (Beale & Hoel, 2011). Reinforcing the importance of empathy, tolerance and respect not only creates an amicable work environment, but also promotes the development of workplace friendships that are important in counteracting bullying (Strandmark & Rahm, 2014).

Organisational interventions

The organisational interventions following an investigation are often the most instrumental in improving workplace culture but also require much more effort and coordination amongst departments. A study by Hodgins et al. (2014), suggested that organisational morale and climate are key predictors of incivility in the workplace. Developing organisational values that reflect a healthy and open workplace culture are shown to foster change of attitudes, values and beliefs amongst employees in the organisation, which can act as direct deterrents to bullying behaviours (Hodgins et al., 2014).
Unfortunately, in a number of bullying cases, management are often some or most of the cause of the poor behaviour (Beale & Hoel, 2011). Therefore, it is vital that management training is conducted, to ensure that managers have the capacity to handle workplace disputes confidently, and are setting a model example for fellow colleagues (Salin, 2008b). A study by Allison and Bastiampillai (2016) suggests that managers should be trained in leading anti-bullying programs and be given key performance indicators in relation to these goals. Recent literature highlights that younger managers are demonstrating greater awareness of bullying and a larger repertoire of methods for dealing which such issues. This suggests that managers are being employed with consideration for their ability to handle dispute (Salin, 2008a). Managers should be trained to be flexible and behave in a proactive and positive manner in order to reduce the occurrence and escalation of poor behaviours (Saundry, Jones & Wibberley, 2015; Armstrong & Baron, 2005). Furthermore, employing emotionally strong individuals for managerial positions has been shown to alleviate bullying behaviours (Cicerali & Cicerali, 2016). Therefore, improving emotional intelligence in managers will play a key role in creating a supportive and approachable leadership team (Hutchinson & Hurley, 2013). Conversely, weak leadership and a lack of assumed responsibility are key features of a managerial team which often lead to bullying behaviours (Salin, 2008b).

A current trend in literature is the emphasis of health promotion in the workplace as an organisational approach to improving culture and dynamics. Health promotion in the workplace involves increasing awareness of the influence of employee interactions on the health of individuals and the organisation as a whole (Strandmark & Rahm, 2014). Promoting personal development in the workplace, through organisational strategies such as appraisal systems, training and performance-based pay, can vastly improve the work ethic. It can also create a more efficient workplace which is less prone to poor behaviours. Further behaviours that promote health at an organisational level include investment in employees; providing them with more autonomy and control over their work demands (Grawitch, Ballard & Erb, 2015). Promoting work life balance by providing external resources such as child care benefits or gym memberships can often result in a less stressful work life and overall improved culture (Grawitch et al., 2015). Stress management training was also deemed vital in creating a workplace less riddled with stress, and hence less affected by the health problems that result from such chronic stress (Grawitch et al., 2015).

Overall, the common theme in organisational approaches was empowering employees. Empowered employees have higher job performance, greater job satisfaction and reduced stress
levels (Strandmark & Rahm, 2014). Empowered individuals have the ability to engage and participate with the collective, provide their opinion and challenge unfair behaviours.

The purpose of our research was to compare these interventions for improving workplace culture with what is currently being implemented in some organisations in which an independent investigation was conducted following a workplace complaint. The intention was to understand whether the findings in academic literature were being reflected in Worklogic clients’ approaches and, if not, which areas could be enhanced to minimise further incidences of poor behaviour in the workplace.
Method

Following a review of the current literature regarding effective ways to improve workplace culture and dynamics, a qualitative survey was created (via Survey Monkey) which reflected the most common interventions at the individual, team, policy and organisation levels. The survey included questions regarding the demographics of the organisations, as well as any concerns that arose due to an investigation. The survey then covered all four levels of interventions, allowing participants to comment on whether these interventions were a result of the investigation, what impact these interventions had at each level, the most effective interventions implemented and any barriers to intervention. The survey provided comment boxes for additional information where necessary.

The survey was emailed to Worklogic clients who had engaged Worklogic consultants to conduct one or more investigations for them in the years 2014 – 2016 inclusive. Where a law firm was involved, the instructing solicitor was first contacted for permission to email the survey to clients. Of the 108 clients emailed, 27 completed the survey - a completion rate of 25%. Participants had two weeks to complete the survey and were sent a reminder email one week prior and one day prior to closing of the survey. Participants were offered a comprehensive report of survey findings following the completion of the survey. Responses were anonymous and informed consent was implied in completion of the survey. No survey questions were marked compulsory.

As the survey responses were qualitative in nature, data was analysed via Microsoft Excel and visual inspection. Results were collated.
Results

The organisations surveyed were spread over a number of industries, including community and social services, federal, state and local government, health care, corporate, tertiary education, media, and manufacturing.

![Industries surveyed](image)

*Figure 1. Pie chart illustrating industries surveyed.*

59% of organisations were in the public sector, 22% in the private/for profit sector and 19% in the non-profit sector. All organisations surveyed had over 100 employees, with 30% having 101-500 employees, 18% having 501-1,000 employees and 52% of organisations having over 1,000 employees.

![Number of individuals employed](image)

*Figure 2. Bar graph of individuals employed at organisations surveyed.*
96% of these organisations reported having a designated HR department and, with that, an agreed set of values. Of that 96%, 85% reported that the agreed set of values had been effectively communicated to staff, through processes such as induction training, reminder training, CEO messages and employee communications.

All the organisations surveyed reported having policies and procedures in place regarding the following:
- Bullying
- Confidentiality and proper use of information
- Privacy
- Grievance procedure
- Occupational health and safety

Over 70% of organisations reported having policies and procedures in place regarding the following:
- Conflict of interest
- Performance management
- Computer use and IT
- Sexual harassment
- Recruitment and selection
- Flexible work/carers
- Discrimination
- Complaints and handling procedures
- Social media
- Procurement
- Fraud
- Whistle-blower procedure
- Employee wellbeing
- Diversity

Notably, less than 55% of organisations reported having policies covering:
- occupational violence
- inclusion
- promotion
Table 1

The Forms of Workplace Conduct Covered in Organisations’ Policies and Procedures.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Workplace conduct covered in policies and procedures</th>
<th>Response %</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bullying</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational health and safety</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Privacy</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Confidentiality and proper use of information</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Grievance procedure</td>
<td>100.0%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conflict of interest</td>
<td>96.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Performance management</td>
<td>96.3%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sexual harassment</td>
<td>92.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Discrimination (including racism, sexism, disability...)</td>
<td>92.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexible work / carers</td>
<td>92.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment and selection</td>
<td>92.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Computer use and IT</td>
<td>92.6%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social media</td>
<td>88.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Complaints handling procedure</td>
<td>88.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Procurement</td>
<td>85.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fraud</td>
<td>85.2%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Whistleblower procedure</td>
<td>81.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee wellbeing</td>
<td>77.8%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diversity</td>
<td>70.4%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational violence</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclusion</td>
<td>51.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Promotion</td>
<td>48.1%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regarding effective communication to employees of these policies, 37% of organisations reported effectively communicating all the policies in place, 56% reported effectively communicating some of the policies, and 7% reported a lack of effective communication of policies.

Policies that were reported to receive the most staff attention included:

- Bullying
- Discrimination
- Flexible work
- Employee wellbeing

- Sexual harassment
- Occupational health and safety
- Social media
Organisations reported a number of concerns which arose following the investigation conducted by Worklogic. These were divided into individual party concerns, team concerns and organisation-wide concerns.

The highest reported concerns relating to individual parties included:

- Personality conflict (78%)
- Poor interpersonal/communication skills of respondent (72%) and complainant (61%)
- Poor supervisory/management skills of respondent (50%)

Other common concerns regarding individual parties included a refusal by the complainant to accept changed expectations, perceived excessive workload, poor performance of the complainant and respondent and personal ethics of complainant and respondent.

The highest reported concern relating to the team was:

- Perceived poor team culture (81%)

Other common concerns included lack of accountability for performance by team members and lack of clarity of roles and tasks. Organisations also expressed concerns related to the third party (supervisor or manager), with some suggesting that the third party had poor management skills, was unable to deal with the escalating conflict, and failed to follow organisation’s policies and procedures in decision-making.

The highest reported concerns relating to the organisation overall included:

- Perceived poor messages and modelling from middle managers (60%)
- Perception that past complaints were not adequately dealt with (53%)

Other common concerns included the organisation’s decisions not complying with stated values, poor messages and modelling from executive leadership, the performance management process not being applied by supervisors and managers, and culture issues. Cultural issues include a lack of support for feedback, innovation and improvement and the presence of toxic elements in the workplace. Interestingly, no organisation reported that their human resources were not sufficiently trusted or empowered.

In public and private sectors, there were, on average, more individual concerns reported than team or organisational (although this difference was not significant). In the non-profit sector, organisational concerns were the most frequent.
Following the specific Worklogic investigation conducted, 21% of organisations reported the complainant in the matter resigning and 16% reported the respondent resigning.

*Individual interventions*

88% of the individual interventions that were reported to be implemented following the investigation were undertaken as a direct result of the complaint and/or investigation. The most common individual interventions included:

- Access to counselling services offered to the affected persons (70%)
- Meeting with the respondent (59%) and complainant (41%) to communicate future behavioural expectations, policy requirements and consequences of non-compliance
- Classification or revision of parties’ roles and duties (47%)
- Meeting with affected persons to provide feedback on investigation findings (41%)

Other common individual interventions implemented include ongoing coaching offered to parties for monitoring progress and providing support, informal facilitated discussion between parties, mediation between parties and changes in parties’ reporting lines.

These interventions were generally reported to address the specific matters of the dispute, to improve team culture and dynamics and to reduce the risk of future misconduct, but had little reported effect on organisational-wide culture and dynamics.
Figure 3. The effectiveness of individual interventions in addressing individual, team, organisational and risk issues.

The most effective individual interventions reported by organisations included ongoing check-in meetings with parties, open and frank discussion between managers and employees, clarification of roles and responsibilities and restructuring where required.

Most organisations reported no barriers to implementing effective individual interventions (75%). Some organisations reported a lack of human resources, insufficient time or skills to implement the intervention, a lack of commitment to change and the intervention regarded as a low priority at the time.

Team interventions

90% of the team interventions which were implemented following the investigation undertaken as a direct result of the complaint and/or investigation. The most common team interventions included:

- Restructure, including change in or clarification of roles (44%)
- Coaching (44%) and training (44%) offered to supervisor or manager
- Training offered to whole team (33%)
Other common team interventions reported were revision of workload for certain people in the team and increased number or changed format of regular team meetings. No organisations reported introducing regular team-building activities, although 11% of organisations reported conducting a one-off team building activity.

These interventions were generally reported to address the specific matters of the dispute, improve team culture and dynamics and reduce the risk of future misconduct. Restructuring of roles and coaching of manager or supervisor was also reported to improve organisation wide culture and dynamics, although other team interventions had little effect on organisational-wide culture and dynamics.

Figure 4. The effectiveness of team interventions in addressing individual, team, organisational and risk issues.

The most effective team interventions reported were changes in structures and reporting lines, the termination of respondent or complainant, coaching of managers and supervisors and team building activities.

67% of organisations reported there being no barriers to implementing team interventions. Numerous organisations reported a lack of human resources, insufficient time, lack of financial
resources, lack of commitment to change and the intervention being regarded as low priority as being barriers to implementation of team interventions.

Policy interventions

Only 16% of policy interventions were reported to be implemented as a direct result of the complaint or investigation. Most policy interventions were reported as being implemented independent of the investigation. The following were the most common policy interventions:

- Bullying (88%)
- Complaints handling procedure (63%)
- Whistle-blower procedure (50%)
- Grievance procedure (50%)

Other common policy interventions included sexual harassment, discrimination, flexible work/carers, performance management, conflict of interest, occupational health and safety, fraud and social media. Occupational violence and promotion policies were not implemented by any organisations surveyed.

These interventions were generally reported to address the specific matters of the dispute and reduce the risk of future misconduct, but few policy interventions were reported as improving team or organisation-wide culture and dynamics of the workplace. Grievance procedures were the only intervention reported to improve team culture and dynamics, and performance management was the only intervention reported to improve organisation-wide culture and dynamics.
A small number of policy interventions were developed following the investigation, including conflict of interest, fraud, social media, and confidentiality and proper use of information. Most interventions were simply revised following the investigation. 53% of the interventions were communicated to employees following intervention development or revision.

The most effective policy interventions reported were reminding staff of respectful workplace behaviours and what constitutes bullying, presentations given by human resources, and improved grievance procedures.

Most organisations reported no barriers to implementing these policy interventions (64%). Barriers that were mentioned include lack of commitment to change, the intervention not considered a priority, insufficient time, a lack of human resources and relationships with unions and representatives.
Organisation-wide interventions

75% of organisation-wide interventions which were implemented following the investigation were a direct result of the complaint or investigation. The most common organisation-wide intervention was:

- Introduced compulsory leadership training for executive managers (29%)

Other reported organisation-wide implementations included development of organisational values, communication of organisational values to all staff, increased/improved training to all staff in relation to expectations of appropriate behaviour, introduced/improved performance management process, introduced compulsory management training for middle managers, implementation of a culture review, and change in structure and reporting lines.

These interventions were generally reported to address the specific matters of the dispute, improve team and organisation-wide culture and dynamics and reduce the risk of future misconduct.

Figure 6. The effectiveness of organisational interventions in addressing individual, team, organisational and risk issues.
The most effective organisation-wide interventions reported were implementation of a culture review and awareness training at employee induction. Interestingly, a culture review reported resulted in the termination of several employees, which notably improved the workplace culture.

Most organisations reported no barriers preventing the implementation of organisation-wide interventions (78%). Some reported barriers included insufficient time, lack of commitment to change, lack of human resources and lack of financial resources (predominantly a strain on financial resources).
Discussion

Overall, the results revealed that the investigations conducted by Worklogic more often than not resulted in the implementation of interventions at the individual, team and organisational level. Interventions at the policy level were revised but very few organisations implemented new policy interventions, which may suggest a level of inflexibility to make changes at this level. In general, the types of interventions tended to reflect the literature, although traditional interventions (such as counselling, meetings, training) were more popular than more contemporary intervention (such as health promotion and empowerment). In light of this, less than a quarter of the organisations reported the respondent or complainant resigning following the investigation, reflecting the use of alternative interventions to resolve the issue.

The most common individual interventions, including counselling, meeting with parties, revising work duties and providing investigation feedback, aligned with past research on effective individual interventions. These methods reflect a less formal approach to intervention that is conducive to understanding the sentiments of both parties involved. Counselling is an important intervention to address the personal issues of the parties involved and addresses both the emotions of the individuals as well as other influential factors such as stress and low job satisfaction. Meeting with both parties emphasises a degree of procedural fairness and a lack of alienation, and the ongoing nature of such meetings reflects the importance of continued support rather than one-off intervention. Revision of work duties appropriately reflects consideration of the individuals’ abilities and workload and feeds into stress management. Formal approaches to interventions, such as issuing formal warnings and relocation or termination of parties were far less common and potentially reflect the increased flexibility of management to manage conflict through other means. The most effective interventions suggested by participants were those which promoted open discussion amongst parties involved and clarification of duties, which seemingly aligns with the literature’s preference for workplaces with an open platform for communication.

Individual interventions tended to have an effect at the individual and team level, however, it appeared that these interventions had little impact on improving the culture of the organisation. This may suggest that the availability of such interventions in the organisation is not widely known or publicised in the company. In addition, the size of the organisation may reflect the insignificance of individual interventions at the organisational level.

Most organisations found few barriers to implementing individual interventions, which suggests interventions at this level for the most part are achievable. A lack of human resources was a
potential barrier which may suggest that in organisations where a human resources department is absent, managers may be ill-equipped or poorly trained to manage conflict at this personal level. One-off training was more widely implemented than ongoing training, which is of slight concern, considering the importance stressed by the literature as to the need for continuous interventions at all levels.

The most frequent interventions seen at the team level were restructuring or clarification of roles, and coaching and training offered to both managers and the whole team. This strongly aligns with the literature that suggests team training is vital for reducing incidences of bullying and increasing awareness on what is and is not acceptable. It was reassuring to see that training for managers was also widely reported, as managers tend to be the pivotal player in promoting change in the organisation. Notably, performance management, a key formal intervention in correcting an individual’s conduct in the workplace, was rarely reported. This could indicate that the organisation did not view the alleged misconduct (whether proven or not), and/or the complainant’s conduct, as warranting corrective action in the ‘performance’ sense. Furthermore, one-off team building activities were reported (although not frequently), yet ongoing or repeated team building was not reported in any of the organisations. This is of some concern, as improving team dynamics is key in developing strong work relationships and a cohesive team environment – both direct deterrents of bullying behaviours. Particularly, the lack of regular team activities suggests a potential lack of commitment to improving workplace culture at a team level. Despite this, the organisations that did engage in team building activities suggested that they were amongst the most effective, illustrating the central role of improving team cohesion in the workplace. Other effective interventions were changes in structures and reporting lines and interestingly, the termination of the respondent or complainant. This seemed to be of greater impact at the team level rather than the individual level, suggesting that a party may be more likely to have their employment terminated if their behaviour is influencing the team.

The team interventions tended to have an impact at the individual and team levels but lacked a substantial impact at the organisational level. Coaching of managers and restructuring team roles did seem to improve organisational culture which reflects the integral role managers have at all levels of interventions.

Whilst many organisations had no issue implementing team interventions, several reported insufficient time or a lack of human resources as barriers to intervention. A lack of commitment and financial resources were also mentioned, suggesting that interventions at a team level require a
greater commitment from the organisation and often come at a greater cost. Considering the importance of team activities and team relationships in the functioning of a healthy environment, it would be worthwhile for the organisations to weigh up the cost and time of such interventions against their proven effectiveness.

Very few of the policy interventions reported to be implemented were done as a direct result of the investigation. This may be due to a lack of flexibility in introducing such policies or a disregard of such policies’ importance. Many policies were revised, however, following intervention, which suggests that perhaps important policies were already in place and hence did not require implementation. Interestingly, of those interventions that were implemented or revised, nearly half were not communicated to staff following the intervention. This is of some concern, as policies regarding poor workplace behaviours will have limited effect on the organisation if they are not known to all.

Nearly all organisations reported having bullying procedures in place, which is positive, considering the overwhelming support for such policies in the literature. Other policies reported were relatively standard in nature, and included complaints handling procedures, whistle-blower procedures and grievance procedures. Unfortunately, there were very few policies related to employee empowerment, such as inclusion, employee wellbeing, diversity, recruitment and selection, promotion, and privacy. Recent literature proposes the importance of a humanistic values system in the workplace and stresses the value of mutual respect and support for employees. It is possible, however, that these measures are in place but are not considered official ‘policies’ of the organisation and hence have not been reported here. The most effective policy interventions were reminding staff of appropriate workplace behaviours and what constitutes bullying – which further exemplifies the importance of communicating policies to staff. Presentations by human resource departments were also reported to be effective interventions, highlighting the central role of HR in improving organisational culture.

Policy interventions were important in improving dynamics at the individual level and in reducing the risk of future misconduct. However, they were reported to have little effect on improving the team or organisational culture and dynamics, which is most likely as a result of the lack of health-related policies reported to have been implemented.

The majority of organisations reported no barriers to implementing/revising the policy interventions. Some barriers reported including a lack of priority and commitment to change, which is reflected in the inflexibility of many organisations towards policy change. Interestingly,
relationships with the union/representatives were reported to be a barrier in implementing policy change and is a consideration worth noting as this may be an under-reported occurrence.

Finally, the most common organisational intervention implemented was the introduction of compulsory leadership training for executive managers. Other common interventions included development and communication of organisational values, improved training about appropriate behaviours, better performance management processes, change in structure and reporting lines and cultural reviews. The implementation of leadership training well aligns with the literature which suggests good leadership can create a healthy workplace environment and poor leadership can actually promote bullying behaviours. Furthermore, the development of better management processes and changes in organisation structure further reflect the key role management plays in improving the culture of a workplace, and in particular, the significance of having emotionally aware individuals in management positions. The most effective organisational interventions were reported to be culture reviews and awareness training which suggests the importance of an organisational approach in issues that may stem from individual conflict. Interestingly, the culture review resulted in the termination of several employees, which was reported to drastically improve workplace culture. This is primary evidence of the importance of such organisational interventions in revealing issues in the workplace that otherwise may not have come to light.

Organisational interventions were reported to improve all levels of the workplace and also reduce the risk of future misconduct, highlighting the integral role of organisational level intervention in workplace bullying matters.

Most organisations reported no barriers to the implementation of organisational interventions. Some mentioned barriers included costs, insufficient time, lack of commitment to change and lack of human resources, although these were minor issues, and the cost of such interventions was deemed appropriate for improvement in workplace culture that resulted.

Overall, it is clear that whilst many organisations are headed in the right direction and are taking various actions to tackle poor behaviours in the workplace, greater flexibility would be substantial in improving the culture and dynamics of organisations following an investigation. Furthermore, greater emphasis on team interventions and on empowering individuals in the organisation, would assist in improved job satisfaction and work ethic (resulting in lower rates of bullying). It would also empower individuals to stand up against bullying behaviours and promote a more open and positive workplace culture, which is fundamental for a healthy workplace environment.


