Leaders who Bully: An Adlerian Perspective on the Purpose and Impact of Bullying in Organizations and What Executives Can Do to Eliminate It

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When the topic of bullying comes up, it is often in the context of schoolyard bullying and is often perceived as an interpersonal conflict. However, bullying occurs in the workplace as well, and workplace bullying has drawn increased attention in recent years. Historically, most bullying research focused on the targets of bullying and attempted to explain how bullies select their targets and how bullying impacts targets. In contrast, this paper will focus on the bullies themselves. While bullying can occur at any level in the organization, this paper focuses on leaders who bully and explains why bullying is not a personality conflict; rather, there are both individual and organizational factors that tolerate, if not encourage, leader bullying. Based on the published literature, this paper will present an overview of the history and development of research related to workplace bullying; the current definition of bullying and characteristics of bullies; an analysis of Adlerian concepts applied to leader bullying; an explanation of why bully leaders are promoted in organizations; an analysis of how leader bullying impacts organizations; and what executive leaders can do to eliminate bullying. This paper will also identify areas where further research is necessary to better understand how and why leaders bully, and what can be done to both stop and prevent this destructive behavior.
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"In a real sense all life is inter-related. All men are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly. I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be, and you can never be what you ought to be until I am what I ought to be. This is the inter-related structure of reality."

Martin Luther King, Jr.

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When the topic of bullying comes up, it is often in the context of schoolyard bullying and is often perceived as an interpersonal conflict. However, bullying occurs in the workplace as well. This paper focuses on business leaders who bully and explains why bullying is not a personality conflict; rather, there are both individual and organizational factors that allow, if not promote, leader bullying.

**History of Bullying Research**

In the 1970’s, Olweus (1978) began using the terms “bully,” “victim” and “whipping boy” in connection with his research related to school bullying. Olweus, a Scandinavian researcher, focused on bully prevention.

Heinz Leymann, a German physician, was one of the first to research bullying in the workplace. In the 1980’s, Leymann applied the term “mobbing” to a systematic pattern of hostile and unethical workplace communication by one person or several individuals towards a single individual. Leymann observed that in a workplace setting, the person to whom the communication is directed is unable to defend himself or herself. Leymann concluded that in most situations, to be considered “mobbing,” the behavior had to occur at least once a week for
six months or more (Namie & Namie, 2009). Leymann’s work focused on the impact on the targets of workplace bullying.

British journalist Andrea Adams first used the term “workplace bullying” in the 1990’s. Today, most Europeans still refer to the phenomenon as “mobbing,” but the United States, Canada, Britain, Ireland, Australia, New Zealand use the term “bullying” (Namie & Namie, 2009).

While most researchers studying the phenomenon of workplace bullying have focused on targets, Whicker (1986) studied leadership in organizations and concluded that there are three distinct types of leaders: “trustworthy,” “transitional,” and “toxic.” Toxic leaders engage in bully behaviors (Tavanti, 2011).

Whicker’s research is important because while research focused on the target studies the impact of bully behavior and the target’s response, research focused on the bully focuses on individual and organizational factors that promote or at least allow bullying. Therefore, research focused on the bully may be used to find ways for executives to create an environment in which bullying is discouraged. When bullying does occur, this research can be used to identify timely and effective interventions to stop the behavior and prevent its recurrence (Tavanti, 2011).

Prevalence of Bullying in the Workplace

Tavanti (2011) concluded that bullies are “a common reality in most organizations” (p. 134). The Workplace Bullying Institute (“WBI”), founded by two psychologists, conducts empirical quantitative research on workplace bullying. In 2010, WBI commissioned public pollsters to conduct an on-line workplace bullying survey in the United States. According to the survey results, just over one in three respondents (35%) have been bullied and another 15% witnessed bullying. Just over half (62%) of workplace bullies are male while 58% of targets are
More than half (68%) of all bullies bully someone of their own gender. Individuals between the ages of 37 and 49 were most likely to experience bullying. In most (72%) cases, the bullying was top-down; that is, the bully held a position that ranked superior to the target’s position (Zogby International, 2010). Similarly, Pate, Morgan-Thomas & Beaumont (2012) found that managers are the most frequently reported perpetrators.

**Eliminating Leader Bullying in Organizations**

**Definition of Bullying**

A review of the current literature indicates that various researchers and organizations have created definitions which contain common elements, but there is no single definition of workplace bullying. Bullying is commonly described in the literature as unwelcome, negative and characterized as mistreatment. Bully behavior is described as intimidating, offensive, abusive and insulting (Chekwa & Thomas, 2013; Lutgen-Sandvik, Namie & Namie, 2009). Most researchers agree that in order for the behavior to be considered bullying, it must be repeated and persistent (Chekwa & Thomas, 2013; Pate, et al., 2012; Lutgen-Sandvik, et al., 2009; Namie & Namie, 2009).

Bullying involves a perceived power imbalance (Pate, et al., 2012; Coloroso, 2010). This element is consistent with the WBI survey results indicating that workplace bullying is usually a top-down phenomenon (Zogby International, 2010). Bullies, who crave power, attempt to dominate their targets (Haig, 2008; Coloroso, 2010). Targets feel threatened and even sabotaged (Lutgen-Sandvik, et al., 2009). Bullies criticize and blame their victims without taking responsibility for their own behavior (Chekwa & Thomas, 2013; Coloroso, 2010). Bully behavior is unilaterally instigated: often, because of the power differential, the target is unable to respond to the bullying (Namie & Namie, 2009).
Because of the extreme negativity and persistence, bullying creates a hostile environment and targets often feel humiliated and vulnerable (Pate, et al., 2012; Yahaya et al., 2012). Bully behavior has been described as “sabotaging” and interferes with the target’s work performance (Namie & Namie, 2009; Yahaya et al., 2012).

**Forms of Bully Behavior**

Bullying can take many forms. Most researchers agree that bully behavior consists of verbal and non-verbal behaviors and tactics, but does not necessarily reach a level of physical confrontation (Namie & Namie, 2009; Lutgen-Sandvik, et al., 2009). Consistent with the power imbalance that characterizes bullying and the top-down nature of most incidents of bullying, bullying frequently involves setting up employees for failure (Haig, 2008). For example, a bully might exclude a target from a meeting or similar work activity (Chekwa & Thomas, 2013); withhold information that is necessary for an employee to meet performance expectations (Haig, 2008); or assign unmanageable workloads, unachievable tasks or tasks with unreasonable deadlines (Haig, 2008; Yahaya et al., 2012).

Bullies may refuse or simply fail to give feedback (Haig, 2008) and provide incomplete and unclear information and direction (Haig, 2008; Yahaya et al., 2012). Not surprisingly, bullies may ignore their targets, making them “disappear” (Chekwa & Thomas, 2013). Other examples of bully behaviors include yelling, spreading gossip and rumors, not giving credit, or taking credit for something the target did (Chekwa & Thomas, 2013; Haig, 2008).

An Adlerian would view this top-down behavior as a form vertical striving. Underlying this behavior are deep feelings of inferiority. A bully holds the mistaken conviction that he or she will not get what he or she wants, and feels threatened. All of this creates profound anxiety. To safeguard himself or herself, the bully attempts to inflate his or her own value by deflating the
value of the target. To overcome the anxiety and get what he or she wants, the bully makes excuses, excludes others and engages in aggressive behavior. The bully excludes others by making them disappear; gossips and takes credit in an attempt to hide his or her inferiority; and generally distracts others so that his or her own inferiority is not discovered (Reardon, 2001).

**Bully Intent**

Interestingly, perhaps because of the focus up until recently on the target instead of the bully, there appears to be disagreement in the literature surrounding the bully’s intent. Chekwa and Thomas (2013) suggested that bullying is intentional.

The French Labor Code prohibits “morale harassment,” or mobbing, which when translated describes behavior that has the purpose or effect of dismantling the working conditions. The terms “purpose or effect” indicate that illegal bullying may be either intentional or unintentional (Yuen, 2005).

Scaglione and Scaglione (2006) referred to school bullies and suggested that bullies behave in a manner to get what they want, not with the intent of causing harm. Other researchers refer to destructive leadership and report that destructive leaders don’t intend to harm; rather, it is their thoughtlessness and insensitivity that harms others (Sheard, Kakabadse & Kakabadse, 2013).

It appears, then, that the current research provides no clear conclusions can be drawn about a bully’s intent to inflict harm. It may be that the bully’s only intent is to achieve his or her own objective, regardless of the impact of his or her behavior. Or, it may be that the bully intentionally inflicts harm, perhaps as a show of power or for some other purpose. Understanding the bully’s intent may be key to understanding the bully’s purpose, and therefore, determine the appropriate intervention.
From an Adlerian perspective, the analysis is much clearer. Adlerian psychology is teleological. As such, Adlerians focus not on the causes of behavior, but on the future and look for the bully’s purpose and goal. A bully’s intent is to hide his or her inferiority and safeguard himself or herself, not necessarily to bully. It may not even register with the bully that she or he is inflicting harm on others. However, that the bully did not intend to bully is beside the point. The bully made a choice to engage in bullying behavior. The natural consequence of the socially useless bullying behavior is that the bully gets what the bully wants at the price of distancing others and isolating him or herself (Reardon, 2001).

Qualities and Characteristics of Individuals who Bully

Similar to the lack of uniformity in the literature with respect to the definition of bullying, there is also a lack of uniformity with respect to the qualities and characteristics of bullies. However, one can identify common themes.

The literature consistently describes bullies as being motivated by their own self-interest (Applebaum & Roy-Girard, 2007). From this perspective, bullies use others, often their subordinates, to promote themselves and get what they want (Coloroso, 2010). Their lack self-control, self-centered behavior, desire for attention and self-gratification lead them to engage in bully behaviors and tactics (Gilbert et al., 2012; Coloroso, 2010). Bully leaders place “targets in a submissive, powerless position whereby they are more easily influenced and controlled, in order to achieve personal or organizational gains” (Tavanti, 2011, p. 131). This may be reflected when bullies take credit for their target’s work or achievements (Haig, 2008).

Bullies are commonly and consistently described as lacking empathy. Bullies find it hard to see things from another’s point of view. They are unconcerned with the impact or consequences of their actions, and refuse to take responsibility (Coloroso, 2010). Adlerians
likely would believe that, because of their perceived inferiority, bullies lack confidence in their own capacity and therefore, they want things to be easy. They lack the confidence necessary to take responsibility, and so they want no obligations to others. Instead, their self-oriented private logic creates an entitlement mentality. Furthermore, bullies are so afraid that they won’t get what they want that they are interested only in themselves, and their lack of interest in others results in a lack of empathy (Mosak & Maniaci, 1999).

Coloroso (2010) described seven types of bullies: confident, social, fully armored, hyperactive, bullied bully, bunch of bullies and gang of bullies. Confident bullies have powerful personalities and little empathy for others. Social bullies are caring and compassionate on the surface, but bully their targets by spreading gossip and rumors about them, thereby excluding them the group. Fully armored bullies come across as charming, but their charm is deceptive. When no one else is around, they are vicious and vindictive toward their target. Hyperactive bullies have poor social skills. Bullied bullies are both the target of someone else’s bullying and a bully themselves. They attempt to regain feelings of strength and power by bullying others. The bunch of bullies is a group of individuals who join together to engage in bully tactics. Similarly, a gang of bullies join together to bully in order to control and dominate other groups and individuals (Coloroso, 2010).

Adlerians would observe the themes in the current literature but engage in a different analysis. Underlying the misbehavior is a deep need to be safe, to be significant and to belong. These needs are present in all human beings. However, some individuals create mistaken convictions that lead to deep feelings of inferiority and get in the way of their ability to cooperate and collaborate. Instead of finding their place through useful behavior, they seek it out through misbehavior (J.M. Reardon, personal communication, September 12, 2013).
Often, these individuals will first seek significance and belonging by seeking attention. If they don’t get what they want this way, they will seek power. As a result of the bully tactics, not only do others do what the bully wants, but others feel threatened and stay out of the bully’s way. The bully behaviors have the effect of isolating the bully, which Adlerians view as a safeguarding mechanism designed to prevent others from discovering the bully’s perceived inferiority. At the same time, no one wants to tell the bully what to do, so the bully can do whatever he or she wants. At an extreme, the bully views cooperation and collaboration as “giving in.” Whereas the bully feels a sense of accomplishment and satisfaction when he or she is in control, he or she fears that his or her value will be diminished if he or she complies or gives in (Mosak & Maniaci, 1999).

At the end of the day, bullies of all types hold the mistaken conviction that in order to belong and be significant they must be bigger than others. Adler refers to this as vertical striving. From a phenomenological standpoint, bullies act as if all of life is a zero-sum game. Even non-material resources are scarce, and must be allocated. Bullies act as if augmenting another person would diminish the bully. This dichotomous thinking creates more anxiety and more conflict. In pursuing their goal, bullies effectively separate themselves from the very community to which they want to belong (Adler, 1954).

Compare this perspective to that of individuals at the opposite end of the continuum who approach life from a perspective of abundance. In their minds, resources are unlimited. They need only figure out new ways to frame things up, put things together, behave, produce or create. These individuals act as if every encounter can be a win-win. They seek equality, not superiority. Rather than being diminished as a result of their contributions, they are augmented. Through their contributions, these individuals find a sense of belonging and community with others.
Individuals with social interest have a sense of belonging, find their place in society and lead a healthy life.

**Narcissistic Tendencies in Individuals who Bully**

An analysis of the definition of bullying and characteristics of individuals who bully, compared to the definition of narcissism and characteristics of individuals with narcissistic tendencies suggests a relationship between narcissism and bullying. Like bullies, narcissists are self-interested and approach life from a perspective of scarcity.

**Definition of narcissism and criteria for diagnosis.** According to the DSM V, “Narcissistic personality disorder is a pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy” (American Psychiatric Association, 2013). Narcissistic personality disorder is diagnosed if five or more of the following criteria are present: “a grandiose sense of self-importance;” a preoccupation with “fantasies of unlimited success, power or brilliance, beauty, or ideal love;” a belief that he or she is special and should only associate with similarly special people; “requires excessive admiration;” “has a sense of entitlement;” “takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends;” “lacks empathy;” envies others or believes others envy him or her; and displays arrogant or haughty behaviors (American Psychiatric Association, 2013).

It should be noted that diagnosing an individual with Narcissistic Personality Disorder using the DSM V requires clinical findings (Meier & Semmer, 2012). Individuals with narcissistic traits or tendencies, which are deemed to be commonly present in a normal population, can be distinguished from individuals who have a pathological level of narcissism, or are diagnosed with Narcissistic Personality Disorder (Boddy, 2010).

Under this analysis, if we assume that everyone in the workplace has narcissistic tendencies at some level, the question becomes, how much is too much? What is an acceptable
level of narcissism in the workplace? At what point does narcissism become destructive or counter-productive? Current published research does not answer these questions (Tavanti, 2011).

The analysis is clearer from an Adlerian perspective. Whereas the DSM V describes the symptoms of narcissism from the perspective of a medical model, Adlerians focus on movement towards a goal. As an Adlerian, the question is not at what point narcissism becomes counterproductive. Rather, Adlerians would ask, what is the purpose of the behavior? (Reardon, 2001). Bullies judge themselves to be inferior or less than others. This judgment, or mistaken conviction, makes them vulnerable. In order to safeguard themselves, bullies turn inward. They develop a grandiose sense of self-importance. In order to overcome the mistaken conviction, they turn to bullying, which they excuse or justify through their own private logic. They do not cooperate because they believe they cannot cooperate and get ahead at the same time (J.M. Reardon, personal communication, September 12, 2013).

**Productive nature of narcissism.** Current research puzzles over how these typically destructive tendencies of narcissists can, at some level, be productive (Andreassen, Hetland & Pallesen, 2010). Research has consistently found that even high levels of narcissism can be productive in certain situations and environments (O’Reilly, Doerr, Caldwell & Chatman, 2013). Examples of leaders with narcissistic tendencies include Abraham Lincoln, Mahatma Gandhi, Theodore Roosevelt. As Sheard et al. (2013) put it, “amongst those who have some narcissistic tendencies, we find some of the greatest leaders.” Tavanti (2011) said that most highly productive leaders have some toxic qualities, such as narcissism.

One meta-analysis identified specific characteristics associated with leader effectiveness that are also associated with narcissism, including energy, dominance, self-confidence and charisma (O’Reilly et al., 2013). The narcissist’s belief that he or she is special may be extended
to his or her subordinates and work group, or even to the organization as a whole (Kets DeVries et al., 2010). As a leader, the narcissist effectively persuades subordinates that they have a special mission, thereby inspiring loyalty and group identification (Kets DeVries, 2010). This belief may be instrumental in situations that require innovation. Accordingly, a narcissist may be successful as an entrepreneur or change agent, for example (Tavanti, 2011).

Further, the narcissist’s sense of control and power along with the desire to be in charge often comes with an ability to speak with authority (Yildiz & Oncer, 2012). This apparent confidence creates a positive first impression (O’Reilly et al., 2013).

Adlerians do not refer to “toxic” behavior; rather, we refer to behavior as useful or useless. Useful behavior is cooperative and the tool of social interest. Useless behavior is rooted in competition and the tool of self-interest. Certainly, Lincoln, Gandhi and Roosevelt engaged in useful behavior and made significant social contributions.

The difference lays in the way that Lincoln, Gandhi and Roosevelt perceived and interpreted their experiences, and therefore in the reality that each of them created. All human beings have feelings of inferiority to some degree, and all of us strive to move from a place of inferiority to superiority (J.M. Reardon, personal communication, September 12, 2013). However, not all of us move in the same direction. Some people move in a passive direction. These individuals believe that they won’t get what they want, and so they withdraw. Others move in an assertive direction. These individuals believe that they deserve what they want, as do others, and so they participate and negotiate to find mutually beneficial resolution. Finally, some individuals move in an aggressive direction. Because they are fearful and anxious that they won’t get what they want, they act out aggressively.
Whereas bullies move in an aggressive direction, individuals like Lincoln, Gandhi and Roosevelt moved in an assertive direction. Their spirit to overcome is grounded in social interest, rather than to overcome anxiety and inferiority. Lincoln strived to save the union and avoided secession by the south and the division and war that he believed would result in a divided country. Gandhi strived to promote justice, civil rights, freedom, truth, peace and religious pluralism. He avoided violence, discrimination and injustice. Roosevelt, who suffered from asthma as a child and young adult, strived to overcome physical weakness. He compensated to overcome his feelings of inferiority associated with his health by studying nature and becoming an avid outdoorsman. Later in life he promoted the conservation movement and created the national park system. Roosevelt strived for conservation, consumer protection and control of corporations. He avoided corruption and oppression (Robinson, 1921).

**Narcissistic tendencies and bullying.** While leaders with high levels of narcissism can be productive and successful for the reasons explained above, narcissism has been compared to a toxic drug: it “can be a key ingredient for success, but it does not take much before a leader suffers from an overdose” (Kets DeVries, 2010, p. 12). Given the DSM criteria for narcissism, it is not surprising that aggressive narcissists are prone to bullying subordinates (O’Reilly et al., 2013). Aggressive narcissists want to be visible and recognized for their talent and brilliance. They are willing to ignore or exploit others – including their subordinates -- in order to get the recognition they want and believe they deserve (Tavanti, 2011). For example, aggressive narcissists are willing to take credit for others’ work and accomplishments in order to make themselves look good. And, instead of taking responsibility when things go wrong, they blame others (Applebaum & Roy-Girard, 2007).
Once again, Adlerians would see in this behavior the bully’s anxiety that he will look bad, be overtaken and be perceived by others as incapable, inadequate, undeserving or worthless. We see the deep needs for safety, belonging and significance. We see the pattern of self-interested vertical striving to be better than. And once again, we see the extreme behavior that bullies will engage in to protect themselves so their inferiority won’t be discovered.

**Measures of Bullying and Narcissism**

Workplace bullying and narcissism have generally been measured using one of two types of methods: subjective or operational (Tsuno, Kawakami, Inoue & Abe, 2010). Self-reports are an example of a subjective measure. Targets are asked whether they feel they have been bullied or observed bullying at work, along with a variety of questions about the bullying, such as when the bullying took place and whether they felt their health had been affected (Zogby International, 2010; Tsuno et al., 2010). Research based on subjective measures is limited given the variance in definitions of bullying. For example, the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI) conducted two surveys in 2010. Each of the surveys questioned respondents about the prevalence of employer policies prohibiting “mistreatment.” In the first survey, only 3% of respondents indicated that their employer had and enforced a policy prohibiting mistreatment. However, in the second survey, this number increased to 30.4% of respondents. The researchers believe that this discrepancy was related to a difference in the way they formulated the survey question. Specifically, in the later survey, researchers attempted to distinguish bullying from illegal harassment. They first defined illegal harassment, and then asked whether the respondent’s employer had a policy prohibiting “mistreatment,” referring to bullying. The researchers believe that a significant number of respondents misinterpreted the question and answered affirmatively, referring to their employer’s anti-harassment policy (Zogby International, 2010).
Employee engagement or attitude surveys have been used to measure employee attitudes and relate the results to bullying and harassment. In one study, an organization studied employee attitudes over a period of five years, and noted that employees reported declining levels of trust in senior management. At the same time, the employees reported an increasing level of problems with bullying and harassment. After implementing several interventions in an attempt to eliminate bullying and restore trust, the researchers resurveyed employees. The survey included one question to measure bullying. The study found that while some level of trust had been restored, restoring trust is a complex and challenging process. The researchers acknowledged that the use of a single question related to bullying was a limitation. However, they felt that their ability to study the relationship between trust and bullying in a real-world environment was just as valuable as a study where measurements are more precise but the environment is artificial (Pate, et al., 2012).

In another study measuring the impact of bullying on organizational trust, researchers concluded that bullying significantly impacts both organizational trust and organizational citizenship behavior. They measured narcissism using the Narcissistic Personality Inventory (NPI), which has been cited as the most common measure of narcissistic behavior. The NPI is composed of 7, 16 or 40 forced-answer questions that are based on the DSM-III criteria for narcissistic personality disorder. A high score on the NPI indicates greater narcissistic tendencies. The NPI does not form the basis for a clinical diagnosis of narcissistic personality disorder, however. Rather, it measures narcissism in the general population (Fireman & Santuzzi, 2012). The researchers in this study measured trust using the Organizational Trust Inventory (OTI); and “organizational citizenship behavior” (OCB) using a questionnaire. Organizational citizenship behavior has five dimensions: altruism, conscientiousness, sportsmanship, courtesy
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and civic virtue (Yildiz & Oncer, 2012). Each of these dimensions describes useful behavior that is motivated by self-interest and creates feelings of belonging.

The Negative Acts Questionnaire - Revised (NAQ) is an operational measure that is frequently used to measure bullying (Hoel, Glaso, Hetland, Cooper & Einarsen, 2010). Instead of asking whether the respondent “feels bullied,” the NAQ-R lists 22 negative acts. The words “bullying” and “harassment” are not used. Respondents are asked to identify how often they experience each of the acts by assigning a value between 1 and 5. A value of 1 indicates that the respondent never experiences the negative act; a value of 5 indicates that the respondent experiences the negative act on a daily basis. Higher scores correlate with workplace bullying. In order to constitute bullying, the negative acts occur at least weekly and must persist for at least 6 months (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2009; Tsuno et al., 2009).

Another study used the Basic Adlerian Scale for Interpersonal Success - Adult form (Basis-A Inventory) to assess the connection between workplace harassment and the Adlerian construct of lifestyle. The Basis-A measures five primary areas: Belonging/Social Interest; Going Along; Taking Charge; Wanting Recognition; and Being Cautious. The Work Harassment Scale (WHS) was used to assess workplace harassment. The study found that individuals who perceive high levels of harassment score low on Taking Charge and high on Wanting Recognition and Being Cautious (Astrauskaite & Kern, 2011).

Although Astrauskaite and Kern’s (2011) research focused on targets, it seems likely that the BASIS-A could be used to assess the lifestyle of the bully. In order to conduct such research, however, the researcher would need to be able to identify which leaders engage in bullying. This could be accomplished by using one of the measurements described in this section to evaluate
subordinates’ perceptions of bullying. Alternatively, the researcher could use NAQ to measure narcissism and the BASIS-A to assess the lifestyle.

**The Impact of Leader Bullying in Organizations**

In an ideal world, a leader’s role is to create a compelling vision of the future, communicate that vision, and create the conditions to achieve the vision through inspiring and motivating others. Effective leaders rely, in part, on their relationships with others to fulfill their role (Sheard, et al., 2013). Effective leaders build trust in their organizations, which is related to increased organizational learning, cooperation, desire to change, taking responsibility, productivity, job satisfaction, and decreased absenteeism, turnover and transaction costs (Yildiz & Oncer, 2012).

In contrast, narcissistic leaders’ arrogance, unrealistic vision, sense of entitlement and lack of concern for others’ feelings and abilities, along with their constant desire to be in the limelight, make it extremely difficult for them to create the relationships with others that are necessary for them to fulfill a leadership role (Yildiz & Oncer, 2012). As Adlerians, we recognize this behavior for what it is: a bully shuts others out and bars them from participation so that no one discovers the bully’s perceived incompetence and weakness. The bully does not know how to function in a relationship that threatens him or her. Therefore, the bully believes that in order to be safe and belong, he or she has to be better than others. The bully believes that his or her position is more important than the relationship. In effect, the bully creates a discouraging, demoralizing and fearful environment where employees disengage.

To put it simply, narcissistic leaders fail to create the climate necessary for achieving sustainable performance (Yildiz & Oncer, 2012). Adlerians refer to this behavior as “useless,” describing the self-interested nature of narcissism (J.M. Reardon, personal communication,
September 12, 2013). While narcissistic leaders may succeed in the short term, they destroy the very systems that are necessary for success (O’Reilly, 2013).

impact on talent

One of the reasons why narcissism and bullying are so destructive is the profound impact of their exclusionary behavior on those around them. Targets report feeling confused, frustrated, weak, degraded, useless, angry, undermined, isolated, stressed, depressed and fearful as a result of the bullying (Haig, 2008). Targets who are subjected to bully tactics such as being ridiculed in front of their peers or lied about to others report feeling like they always need to be on guard. Things seem out-of-control, and they feel powerless and incompetent (Yahaya et al., 2012).

Targets also report losing their self-confidence (Yahaya et al. 2012). Bullies attempt to dominate their targets in an attempt to gain power (Haig, 2008; Coloroso, 2010). One tactic to accomplish this is to control information: bullies strategically communicate messages or share information that enhances their own power and superiority (O’Reilly, 2013). By engaging in such tactics, subordinates and targets become dependent on the bully and feel incapable of acting independently (Tavanti, 2011). The bully comes out feeling superior and achieves his or her goal of diffusing the anxiety brought on by feelings of deep inferiority (J.M. Reardon, personal communication, September 12, 2013).

The target, on the other hand, begins to feel inferior. Privately, targets feel “profoundly ashamed of being victimized and confused at their apparent inability to fight back and protect themselves” (Chekwa & Thomas, 2013, p. 441). The target’s self-concept (I am not capable of protecting myself) falls short of his or her self-ideal (to be significant, I must be strong and assertive) (Mosak & Maniaci, 1999). As a result of the increasing feelings of inferiority, targets become discouraged (Hoel et al., 2010).
Disengagement, absenteeism and turnover. Adlerians know that being overwhelmed by feelings of inferiority leads to self-protection which leads to self-interest and a moving away from social interest. Targets may cope with their feelings of powerlessness, shame, confusion and discouragement by disengaging (Atkins, 2009). They intentionally withdraw and diminish their commitment to their job and their organization. Targets do their job, but no more. One example of this is that targets of bullying are less likely to help their colleagues (Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2009).

One of the most well-documented consequences of bullying is increased absenteeism (Lutgen-Sandvik, et al., 2009). The increase in absenteeism has been explained by findings that bullying leads to stress and physical impairments (Haig 2008).

Targets themselves recommend exiting, either from the organization or to another position within the organization but outside of the bully leader’s span of control. It is clear that bully leaders have a significant impact on turnover (Tavati, 2011). Organizations that employ bully leaders are at risk for creating a public image that leads to difficulty in both attracting and retaining talent (Namie & Namie, 2009; Lutgen-Sandvik, et al., 2009).

Productivity. Not surprisingly, disengagement, absenteeism and turnover lead to decreased productivity. Atkins (2009) found that bullying can significantly and negatively affect employee productivity. Bullying distracts targets from their work and renders them unable to focus (Lutgen-Sandvik, et al., 2009). It destroys motivation and teamwork and creates inertia (Sargent, 2011). In some cases, targets are so fearful of, or intimidated by, the bully that they waste time engaging in activities to avoid the bully (Lutgen-Sandvik, et al., 2009). In one study, an executive coach explained how a narcissistic leader’s mood affected his subordinates. "If he came into the trading floor in an apparent bad mood, everyone would just sink down below their
screens and they would be worried… they didn’t want to catch his eye and get zapped" (Sargent, 2011, p. 32).

Adlerians would see an interesting contradiction in this situation. Through a leader bully’s continual attempts to keep his or her inferiority a secret, diffuse anxiety, and move toward superiority, the bully uses private logic to excuse and justify the useless behavior which the bully believes puts him or her ahead. The bully’s self-oriented private logic is that by diminishing his or her subordinates, the subordinates will do more and do better. While common sense would indicate that a leader gets further ahead by encouraging others and engaging in useful behavior, the bully’s private logic seems to be that by making others feel inferior, they will strive to be superior, thereby doing better. In reality, they withdraw to protect themselves (J.M. Reardon, personal communication, September 12, 2013).

**Impact on Organizational Performance**

Common sense would also indicate that an organization’s performance will be negatively impacted when employees become discouraged, disengaged and unproductive. Current research bears this out.


The focus of the contemporary business world is no longer on creating a stable organization, but instead on continuously increasing profit at any loss. … [T]he greed of the shareholders has created a toxic culture within organizations. In this environment, both leaders and employees are rewarded for their short-term accomplishments, which
lead to an increase in competition between employees, unethical practices and a disregard for co-workers (p. 25).

Paradoxically, there is evidence that “shareholder value may be sacrificed” to leader narcissism, including bullying (O’Reilley, 2013, p. 25). Targets report spending between 10 and 52 percent of their day coping with harassment, including bullying, instead of working (Chekwa & Thomas, 2013). According to one study, “a loss of just two percent of productivity at an average Fortune 500 company due to unfair treatment (including bullying), costs in the neighborhood of $8 million per year” (Chekwa & Thomas, 2013, p. 47). Among the financial impacts of leader bullying are increased healthcare costs (Haig, 2008), recruitment and retention costs (Namie & Namie, 2009), turnover and transaction costs (Yildiz & Oncer, 2012) and operating costs (Lutgen-Sandvik, et al., 2009).

**Organizational culture.** Other costs to the organization are less tangible. For example, organizational citizenship behaviors, defined as voluntary acts that promote organizational effectiveness, were reduced by leader bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik, et al., 2009, p. 58). Also, employees are more likely to form unions in organizational cultures where leaders bully and abuse their power (Namie & Namie, 2009).

**Organizational change and transformation.** The literature is clear that narcissists and bullies, who crave power (Haig, 2008) thrive on chaos and change (Applebaum & Roy-Girard, 2007; Haig, 2008; Boddy, 2010; O’Reilly, 2013). A leader who will come in and take control may be very appealing to an organization in a state of disorder. After all, employees and leaders alike who feel out of control seek order and stability (Yildiz & Oncer, 2012). Certain organizational characteristics have been identified as being conducive to bullying, such as instability, undefined work structures and procedures, and insufficient levels of communication
and direction (Chekwa & Thomas, 2013). These characteristics seem consistent with characteristics of organizations in a state of disorder (Boddy, 2010).

Bullies, who convey confidence and present their opinions with authority (O’Reilly, 2013), may at first appear to possess the leadership qualities and skills that are necessary to lead the organization through the turbulent times. Sooner or later, it becomes apparent that the bully actually uses the chaotic state to hide behavior that would be unacceptable in a more orderly state (Haig, 2008). Lacking empathy and concerned only with themselves, bully leaders have little regard for the impact of change on their subordinates (Sheard, et al., 2013). The benefit of the bully’s ability to take charge may outweigh the risks to the organization associated with the bully behavior, but only for the short term (O’Reilly, 2013).

While the organization is crying out for transformation, the bully can only bring about change. The bully leader, who is focused on self-preservation, discounts and dismisses any feedback that does not support his or her behaviors, actions and decisions. This is because he or she can only allow change that will enable him or her to retain his or her power and privilege. The organization continues to retain the same consciousness, relying on the same automatic patterns (Reardon, 2002).

What the organization needs is change and transformation. In a collaborative or “community-centered environment, change is modeled after processes in nature that continually regenerate themselves in response to environmental conditions and external threats” (Yildiz & Oncer, 2012, p. 39). In these environments, the organization constantly reinvents itself. Change is not perceived as a threat. All are invited to give input and leaders respond to all input (Reardon, 2002). Employees and leaders challenge the status quo, engage in respectful discourse, solicit and give opinions, and feel safe, recognized and empowered (Yildiz & Oncer, 2012). The
disequilibrium that is created by the free flow of information creates a new consciousness and a new structure emerges (Reardon, 2002). These environments manage change resiliently; they have no need for a controlling leader to take the helm.

**Intervention and Prevention**

According to Capra, an organization, as a living organism, chooses which disturbances to notice and how to respond (Reardon, 2002). An executive who realizes that he or she has bully leaders reporting to him or her has three choices: “Take it, leave it, or change it” (Tavanti 2011, p. 128). Given the significant and negative impact a leader who bullies has on organizations, but considering the potential positive contribution that the same leader can make to the organization, there is good reason for the executive to decide to change and transform it.

Traditionally, workplace bullying has been considered a dyadic problem (Johnson, 2011). It is tempting to treat bullying as a personality conflict. At first glance, the solution may appear to be a matter of either telling the bully and the target to work it out and get along, or mediating the conflict (Namie & Namie, 2009). The research strongly suggests that neither approach will be successful (Namie & Namie, 2009; Hauge, Skogstad & Einarsen, 2009; Sargent, 2011; Hoel, 2010). Rather, the first thing to consider when deciding how to change and transform the organization is that bullying is a systemic problem (Tavanti, 2011).

Johnson (2011) analyzed workplace bullying using an ecological model. This model is based on the premise that four systems shape human development. At the innermost level, the microsystem is comprised of individual factors, such as activities and roles, and interpersonal relationships. In the context of workplace bullying, the microsystem includes the bully and the target. Various groups intersect to form the mesosystem. In the context of workplace bullying, this would include the department or immediate work group, including the manager. The
The exosystem is comprised of “broader systems that indirectly affect the individual” (Johnson, 2011, p. 56). In the context of workplace bullying, the organization would be the exosystem. At the outermost level, the macrosystem is comprised of the culture and values of a society. In the context of workplace bullying, the macrosystem is the society in which the organization functions (Johnson, 2011).

The ecological model is comprised of three stages: antecedents, events and outcomes. In the context of workplace bullying, antecedents are the conditions and factors which create the environment in which bullying can occur. The event is the bullying. The outcomes are the impacts of the bullying. There are antecedents and outcomes in each level of the ecosystem (Johnson, 2011).

According to this model, “antecedents flow from the macrosystem through the inner system” (Johnson, 2011, p. 57). In other words, there are factors in all four systems which enable bullying. Outcomes flow from the bullying through all four systems. The most effective way to stop the bullying is to intervene in the center. That is, if an executive wants to eradicate bullying, he or she needs to focus on both the systemic factors which enable the bullying, and the impacts of the bullying (Johnson, 2011).

The following sections of this chapter describe a variety of interventions that can be used at various places in the system, along with a description of two types of controls in the macrosystem. In order to bring about the change and transformation that is necessary to eliminate leader bullying, an executive will work with a knowledgeable and experienced expert to construct an intervention plan based on an assessment of bullying in the organization including the impact of leader bullying on the organization, the organization’s vision, mission and values and the organization’s current capacity to learn and grow. The goal of the intervention
plan is to introduce bifurcators that will break up the current equilibrium and promote a flow of energy to enliven the system and bring about a new structure. The challenge is to avoid introducing so much disorder that the organization is overwhelmed and cannot absorb or metabolize the energy. Generally, any of the interventions described in this section can act as bifurcators for this purpose.

**Microsystem Interventions**

At the microsystem level, interventions focus on the bully and the target (Johnson, 2011). Because this paper concerns leaders who bully, this section will focus on interventions directed at leaders. An executive whose goal is to eradicate leader bullying must be concerned not only with intervening with individuals currently in leadership positions who currently engage in workplace bullying, but also on interventions directed at ensuring that current leaders do not become bullies, and future leaders do not engage in bullying.

**Leadership style and bullying.** As a preliminary matter, it is important to understand the relationship between leadership style and bullying. Hoel et al. (2010) identified four leadership types and analyzes their relationship to leader bullying: non-contingent punishment leadership, ("reprimands me without telling me why"), autocratic ("ignores my views and opinions"), laissez-faire ("ignores problems when they arise"), and participative leadership ("shares information with me") (p. 458). Both autocratic and laissez-faire leadership styles have been associated with leader bullying (Hoel et al., 2010; Skogstad, Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007).

Autocratic leaders are authoritative and directive. They make decisions without input from their subordinates, who may be too intimidated to voice their opinions. They control their subordinates through the use force. This use of force, combined with the power differential that exists between manager and subordinate, can lead to bully behaviors. Further, the use of force
may be motivated by bully characteristics, such as self-interest, self-promotion and a sense of entitlement, instead of the best interests of the organization. Subordinates and other observers may perceive this behavior as an illegitimate use of power, or even an abuse of power. If the autocratic leader behaves arbitrarily and inconsistently, their behavior is even more likely to be perceived as bullying (Hoel et al., 2010).

Laissez-faire leaders abdicate their responsibilities at work and are perceived as absent. Their subordinates and co-workers want them to pay attention, take act responsibility and provide leadership, but they don’t. Their failure to step up to the plate, provide direction, solve problems and resolve conflicts may itself be perceived as bullying by subordinates or co-workers who would like some attention and direction. Accordingly, Laissez-faire leadership has been associated with leader bullying (Hoel et al., 2010). Consistent with this research, an executive who does nothing to address leaders who bully will, through their inaction, legitimize and institutionalize bullying (Pate, et al., 2012).

In contrast to autocratic and laissez-faire leaders, transformational leaders “broaden and elevate the interests of their employees” (Mosca, Fazzari & Buzza, 2010). This is in direct contrast to bullies, who perceive elevation of their employees’ interests as a threat to themselves and therefore, something that must be overcome. Transformational leaders build commitment in subordinates through visioning, modeling, supporting, challenging thinking, setting expectations and encouraging teamwork (Rubin, Munz & Bommer, 2005). In doing so, they move the organization forward (Rosete & Ciarrochi, 2005; Rubin et al., 2005). Research suggests that transformational leaders are successful largely due to their ability to recognize and manage emotions and meet follower’s emotional needs. Adlerians would say that it is apparent that transformational leaders are successful largely due to their social interest.
There are similarities between these three leadership styles and what Adler referred to as life style. An individual’s life style is the way in which a person moves toward his or her life goal, all the while striving for superiority as a means of coping with and overcoming inferiority. Life style is learned from early social interactions and serves as the guiding framework for all later behaviors. A lifestyle is not good or bad. It is simply how a person perceives the world and how or she fits into it. A person’s lifestyle reflects how he or she sees people and events, solves problems and achieves goals. A person’s life style reflects his or her values, motives, interests and goals (Mosak & Maniaci, 1999).

Psychological priorities are related to a person’s life style. Psychological priorities reflect how a person attains a sense of belonging and what a person avoids most. There are four psychological priorities: comfort, control, pleasing and superiority. Autocratic and laissez-faire leaders fit squarely with specific priorities. An autocratic leader’s priority is control of others. A leader with this priority prioritizes predictability and fears vulnerability. He or she and moves away from vulnerability by taking control of others and making things happen in his or her own manner and timeframe. A laissez-faire leader’s priority is comfort. A leader with this priority prioritizes comfort and fears stress. He or she moves away from stress by avoiding decision-making and problem-solving and leaving matters unfinished.

**Recognition.** The first step toward eradicating bullying in any organization is to recognize it. Executives who understand signs and appreciate the impact of workplace bullying will see the importance of periodic town hall meetings and similar activities in which they engage directly with employees and leaders and observe actions, behaviors and interactions. They will also recognize the importance of conducting periodic workplace climate surveys, observing changes in employee engagement and other signs of bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik, et al.,
In doing so, they can recognize and identify leaders with bully characteristics as well as leaders who engage in bully behaviors in the organization.

Recognized in time, before the behaviors become habitual and before the work environment becomes devoid of social interest, it may be possible to intervene and turn the bully leader’s behavior around. Alternatively, bully leaders who cannot or will not change, or whose credibility has been destroyed by their actions and behavior, can be replaced before they cause further damage (Applebaum & Roy-Girard, 2007).

This is consistent with the Adlerian focus on soft-determinism and movement. The bully leader cannot go back in time to change the events that occurred during early childhood and led to the formation of his or her lifestyle, including his or her methods of solving problems and achieving goals. However, the bully leader can recognize his or her actions and the purpose of those actions. From an Adlerian perspective, a person begins to change himself or herself by first considering himself or herself. The bully leader first needs to recognize his or her thoughts and actions and gain insight into his or her overcompensation and defensive patterns of problem solving. Then, he or she can reconsider, reinterpret and choose a new pattern of behavior. In doing so, the bully leader can replace the bully tactics with useful patterns of thought and behavior.

**Leader selection.** Recognition serves another purpose as well. Executives who are aware of the definition and characteristics of bully behavior, along with the leadership styles associated with bullying, can take steps to ensure that this information is used to recognize and screen out bullies when identifying high-potential candidates for leadership positions, creating development programs, and selecting and hiring for leadership positions (LaVan, Katz & Jedel, 2011). As a practical matter, it is unlikely that a senior executive will be performing all of these
tasks himself or herself. However, given the top-down nature of bullying, this information is particularly important when a senior executive is hiring direct reports or participating in the selection process for other executives.

Further, this information can form the basis of conversations and setting expectations with human resource executives or middle manager who are involved in or oversee these day-to-day tasks. For example, human resources can create candidate assessments and screening questions to be used in the selection process. These expectations can also be incorporated into performance reviews, which may be one factor in the evaluation of candidates for promotion.

Given a bully’s focus on getting what he or she wants at anyone’s expense, along with his or her strong desire to be superior and in control, it would make sense that a bully would pursue promotional opportunities to higher positions of leadership within the organization. In fact, a bully would likely believe that he or she is entitled to a promotion. Implementing steps to both screen out bullies and promote individuals with useful behavior patterns will create logical consequences that make the bully think twice about whether bully tactics serve his or her purpose of getting ahead. If the expectations for leaders are clearly defined and developed, the bully may actually choose to engage in socially interested behaviors – provided, of course, that the bully first recognizes his or her bully behavior and its inconsistency with what is expected.

**Feedback and expectations.** Once a leader recognizes his or her bully behavior and begins to see that the consequences of bullying are at odds with what he or she wants, he or she is primed to respond to feedback and consider making changes in order to meet expectations. Unfortunately, current research suggests that senior leaders become isolated, and the higher an individual’s level in an organization, the less feedback they receive from others about the impact
of their relations with others in the organization (Wasylyshyn, 2008). The most senior leaders receive the least feedback.

A recent article in Psychology Today entitled, “It’s Lonely at the Top,” explains that executives are “often isolated and lonely” (Blum, 2011). In a recent blog, M. Ena Inesi of the London Business School and Adam D. Galinsky of the Kellogg Graduate School of Business give five reasons for this phenomenon, based on their research. First, people in positions of power question the motivations of others who help them or act in some way to benefit them. Instead of believing that the other person’s actions are motivated by generosity or benevolence, the leader concludes that the other person’s actions amount to nothing more than a selfish attempt to get something he or she wants (Inesi & Galinsky, 2012).

Second, because of the way the leader perceives the other person’s motives, the leader is less likely to reciprocate the generosity or benevolence. This failure to reciprocate creates a distance between the leader and the other person (Inesi & Galinsky, 2012).

Third, the cynical perception of the other person, and the distance created by the failure to reciprocate interfere with the leader’s ability to create trusting relationships. This is because neither the leader nor the other person will have the opportunity, much less feel comfortable, engaging in the interactions that create trust. Neither will feel comfortable sharing confidences or disclosing vulnerabilities, for example (Inesi & Galinsky, 2012).

Fourth, for the same reasons that power makes leaders less likely to reciprocate with generosity, it makes leaders less likely to commit. Because the leader believes that the other person consistently acts in his or her own best interests, and is willing to take advantage of the leader, the leader feels less committed to the other person, and less connected (Inesi & Galinsky, 2012).
Fifth, and perhaps most interestingly, it is not the case that leaders are simply generally suspicious of others. Rather, “it is in the very moment that someone tries to establish closeness through generous acts and unsolicited favors that power gets in the way. “ According to Inesi and Galinsky (2012), this is what leads to loneliness at the top.

Not only do leaders receive little feedback due to their level in the organization but, according to Senge (2006), their ability to learn from their behavior is also affected by their level in the organization. Most effective learning takes place by trial and error. An individual takes an action and directly experiences the consequences of that action. He or she takes another action, and experiences the consequences of that action, and so forth. However, as individuals rise to higher levels of leadership and responsibility in the organization, the consequences of their actions become so widespread or long-term that the individual no longer has the capacity to experience the consequences. The more people impacted by the action, the harder it becomes to experience the consequences of the action. It is impossible to experience the consequences of a recent action when the consequences won’t occur until some point in the distant future. The individual can no longer learn through direct experience. Senge (2006) believes that as a result, leaders become blind to these consequences.

This has two important implications for executives. First, executives need to realize that because of their level in the organization, they need to guard against becoming blind to the consequences of their own behaviors and actions by being observant and self-aware, and asking for feedback. Second, they need to provide frequent, consistent and focused feedback to their subordinates (Mosca, et al., 2010). This can be accomplished by providing feedback during regular status meetings and annual performance appraisals with their subordinates (Treadway, Shaughnessy, Breland, Yang & Reeves, 2013). According to Namie and Namie (2009), creating
a list of prohibited or undesirable behaviors is an ineffective strategy. A positive approach is more effective. For example, executives should observe and evaluate the leader’s use of non-aggressive tactics to get results, solve problems and manage conflicts (Fredericksen & McCorkle, 2013). Non-aggressive tactics might include facilitating, developing, orchestrating and coaching, as opposed to commanding and controlling (Gilbert et al., 2004).

Further, executives should use status meetings and performance appraisals to set an expectation that their subordinates will regularly observe and evaluate the impact and consequences of their own behaviors and actions, as well as their capacity to engage in non-aggressive tactics (Hoel et al., 2010). Given that bullies often act in their own self-interest, it will be important for the executive to emphasize that the interests of the organization take precedence over the leader’s personal interests (Namie & Namie, 2009). If the leader’s or the executive’s observations and evaluation suggest that the leader might be engaging in bully tactics or heading in that direction, the executive can both clarify expectations for behavior and consider appropriate interventions, such as skills training and coaching. By both evaluating the leader’s behavior and setting expectations with respect to that behavior, a leader who has a history of engaging in bully tactics might come to realize that behaviors that were effective in the past are no longer effective and won’t be tolerated. Bully leaders are more likely to alter their behaviors as a result (Treadway, et al., 2013).

**Modeling.** In addition to providing feedback and setting expectations, executives should model non aggressive behavior and encourage their leader subordinates to do the same (Fredericksen & McCorkle, 2013). Throughout an executive’s interactions with subordinates, he or she can model behaviors such as active listening and information gathering, reflecting emotions, checking for understanding and commitment and sharing credit. When disagreements,
conflicts or crises arise, the executive can model coping skills, stress management and emotional control. In other words, the executive can model a transformational approach to leadership (Mosca, et al., 2010).

**Emotional intelligence.** Chekwa and Thomas (2013) suggested that developing emotional intelligence is one way to address workplace bullying. Emotional intelligence is the ability to understand one’s self and others and to adapt one's behavior to the situation and circumstances, effectively managing one’s own and others’ emotions (Duckett & Macfarlane, 2003; Palmer, Walls, Burgess & Stough, 2001). Emotional intelligence also means being focused on others and being empathetic (Bradberry & Graves, 2009). An emotionally intelligent leader is in tune with followers’ needs and goals and adjusts his or her leadership style in order to influence followers in a demanding and ever-changing business environment (Leban & Zulauf, 2004). Emotional intelligence has been linked to higher job satisfaction, emotional attachment, career commitment, job involvement, work-life balance and altruistic behavior (Carmeli, 2003).

Studies suggest that emotional intelligence is developed over time and with experience. It is possible the role of emotional intelligence becomes increasingly more important as one progresses into increasingly higher levels of leadership within an organization. Accordingly, as individuals develop from managers to leaders, emotional intelligence becomes more critical (Leban & Zulauf, 2004). This makes sense from an Adlerian perspective, because emotional intelligence is associated with high levels of social interest, including connection, cooperation and contribution. Emotional intelligence is also associated with low levels of self-interest, including withdrawal and detachment from others, domination over and control of others, and entitlement, which is associated with superiority over others. Emotionally intelligent leaders engage in socially-interested behaviors that are opposite of self-interested bully behaviors,
including humility as opposed to superiority; taking responsibility as opposed to blaming others; building genuine relationships as opposed to excluding; and seeing others’ points of view as opposed to focusing only on themselves.

An executive concerned with bullying among leaders in the organization could arrange for a measure of emotional intelligence, the SMS-EQ, to be administered to current leaders (Duckett & Macfarlane, 2003). The results could be used to develop an emotional intelligence profile of an ideal manager. This profile could then be used to aid in developing selection criteria and components of development programs (Duckett & Macfarlane, 2003) as well as in identifying and developing management potential (Palmer et al., 2001). The findings could also be used when selecting higher level leaders (Langley, 2000; Dulewicz & Higgs, 1999).

**Formal coaching.** In addition to the interventions described above, or perhaps as a method for executing on the interventions described above, an executive might consider engaging a professional coach to work with leaders in the organization who engage in bully tactics or are at risk for doing so. Coaching can be viewed as an intervention at both the microsystem and mesosystem levels. Coaching should be viewed as a leadership development tool intended to help bring about a higher level of performance, not as a tool for correcting or curing deficient performers. Therefore, formal coaching will be appropriate for some leaders, but not for others. For example, a coach is not a substitute for a psychologist, and coaching is not a substitute for therapy (Coutu & Kauffman, 2009).

Additionally, in order for coaching to be effective, the leader must be willing to look inwardly and recognize the impacts of his or her behavior and leadership style (Coutu & Kauffman, 2009). A leader who is resentful or stubborn, who blames others for his or her behavior, or who is resistant or defensive, must be willing to examine these behaviors in order to
benefit from coaching (Coutu & Kauffman, 2009; Sargent, 2011). In general, coaching is most effective if the leader exhibits a willingness to engage with the coach to learn and improve, and demonstrates a commitment to the organization’s values and goals (Coutu & Kauffman, 2009).

If an executive decides to retain a coach, an initial goal of the coaching relationship will be to raise the leader’s awareness of his or her “dysfunctional patterns of behavior” (Sargent, 2011, p. 32), or as an Adlerian would say, of his or her useless behavior. It would be inappropriate for the coach to attempt to “fix” the leader. In coaching a bully leader or leader at risk for bullying, the coach would encourage the leader to explore the purpose and impact of his or her behavior, along with alternative behaviors. In the coaching relationship, the leader decides which behavior he or she wants to engage in, and therefore, which impact he or she wants to create (Sargent, 2011). Examples of topics that are appropriately addressed in a coaching relationship where one of the goals is to eradicate leader bullying are self-awareness, emotional control, being attuned to others, and gaining insights to foster strong relationships (Wayslyshyn, 2008).

Examples of coaching questions would include the following: What impact do you want to have? What legacy do you want to build? What value do you want to bring to the organization? What’s stopping you? What is your biggest challenge? Whom do you admire? Why? What are your five proudest accomplishments? The following coaching questions could be asked in the context of the leader’s engagement in bully tactics: What happens when you (describe the behavior objectively)? How does this behavior benefit you? Describe an ideal working relationship. What would it be like if your working relationships were (reflect back)?

At the start of the coaching relationship, the coach and the leader would create a coaching contract. The coaching contract would describe a successful coaching outcome, clarify the
boundaries for confidentiality, and outline the commitments on the part of the coach and the leader (Sargent, 2011). Creating a coaching contract would seem particularly necessary for bully leaders who seek power and control, want to be admired, and have their own agendas.

While coaching in this context is an intervention and not a form of therapy, principles of Adlerian psychology complement coaching and apply to coaching in this context. For example, the primary goal of Adlerian psychology is to increase social interest. The same is true of coaching in this context. While coaches do not diagnose, treat or work with mental illness, coaches do help clients to recognize and identify things like convictions, goals, intentions, defensive patterns and overcompensation in order to find more useful ways of solving problems, for example. A coach can expose the bully leader’s underlying purpose or motivation, thereby making the bully behavior less desirable to the bully. In doing so, the coach would help the leader to identify patterns of bullying and the purpose of the bully behavior, in order to find more useful patterns of behavior.

**Mesosystem Interventions**

From an Adlerian perspective, the organization needs to be viewed holistically, not as a collection of individuals. Individuals in the organization need to take a seat and contribute to the work of the organization, which reflects the Adlerian concept of social interest. For this reason, although microsystem changes are important, “sustainable organizational change is not achievable when the solution is narrowly focused on the individual” (Namie & Namie, 2009). Interventions at the mesosystem level focus on work groups and departments, including the leader.

**Team assessment.** Similar to the concept of recognition at the microsystem level, the early recognition of bullying through feedback at the mesosystem level is important as well.
Bullying at this level impacts not only the target, but the entire team. Conducting team assessments on a periodic basis is one way to accomplish this goal. It should be noted that the goal of the assessment would be to assess team performance, not to assess bullying specifically. Rather, the assessment would be designed in such a way to identify various factors, including bullying, which positively or negatively impact performance. The results of the assessment would provide clues if bullying is occurring. Further assessment, analysis or investigation would be required to determine whether bullying is actually taking place and if so, to understand the scope of the bullying and identify the source of the bullying.

A simple team assessment could be constructed with fifteen to thirty statements on a four point scale. Questions could be constructed on various dimensions of team effectiveness. Following are examples of questions that could be incorporated into a team assessment which would provide clues that the team is being impacted by bullying.

- **Vision**
  - My team members and I are encouraged to work for the good of our organization, our customers and our community.
  - Our leader helps us understand our role and how it fits into our organization’s mission and goals.
  - My team has clear goals for this ___ (month, quarter, year or other time period relevant to business objectives).

- **Communication**
  - We take time to hear team members’ points of view and discuss alternatives before making a decision.
• We review our results each __ (month, quarter, year or other time period relevant to business objectives), discuss our progress and identify any need for change.

• I have the information I need to do a good job.

• **Conflict management**
  
  ▪ I feel confident about speaking my mind and expressing my opinions.
  
  ▪ Team members struggle for power, attention and authority.
  
  ▪ Team members feel comfortable checking with other team members if there are questions about the right way to do something.

• **Leadership effectiveness**
  
  ▪ Our leader encourages participation, creative thinking and new ideas.
  
  ▪ Our leader appreciates our efforts and provides feedback when team members behave or perform well.
  
  ▪ Team members have clear roles and work assignments.
  
  ▪ Our leader demonstrates a lack of control over his/her moods/emotions or reactions.

• **Empowerment**
  
  • Team members have little opportunity to provide input.
  
  • I have sufficient authority to do my job.
  
  • We welcome new ideas and ways of doing things.

• **Trust**
  
  • I feel guarded and cautious when interacting with my team members.
  
  • I feel guarded and cautious when interacting with our leader.
- We are good at accepting the personal needs and differences of each team member.

- Relationships
  - Team members support each other and work together to reach our goals
  - I feel that I am part of the team and contribute to its success.
  - One team member or a small group of team members dominate our discussions and make the decisions.

**Training.** Information gathered in the team assessment can help form the basis of a training needs analysis. Training can be directed toward building skills and capacity in areas that both encourage productive behaviors and discourage bullying, as well as building skills and capacity for effectively responding to bullying if it does occur so that it will not spread. An executive who builds workforce skills and capacity through training will simultaneously be building leadership bench strength with individuals who have the skills and capacity for transformational leadership.

**Problem-solving.** Problem-solving is one skill that can be learned through training. Research suggests that bullies are more likely to lack social problem solving skills (Cook, Kirk, Guerra, Tia & Sadek, 2010). Autocratic leaders who engage in bullying and are prone to controlling and directing, solve problems with little to no input from others. Laissez-faire leaders whose lack of engagement can be perceived as bullying, fail to solve problems.

Most Adlerians would likely conclude that the primary reason why bullies lack problem solving skills is that their anxiety and emotion associated with the problem gets in the way of their ability to understand and evaluate the problem rationally. Further, their desire to protect themselves and resulting exclusionary behaviors prevent them from examining the problem from
multiple points of view and inviting others from varying disciplines and with varying areas of expertise to participate in the problem solving. Through training, an organization can create a common problem-solving model which will help eradicate bullying as well as promote confidence in using problem-solving skills to respond to bullying should it occur (cite?).

Schwarz (2002) proposed a nine-step problem solving model that could form the basis of a training program. This model lends itself well to team problem solving. The first step is to define the problem by identifying the gaps between the current state and the desired state. This step helps to turn the focus from individuals and personalities to concrete and objective observations (Schwarz, 2002).

The second step is to identify root causes underlying the gaps. The root causes are then sorted into broad categories. This step helps to identify patterns and themes, and helps to turn the focus away from blaming behavior (Schwarz, 2002).

The third step is to create a system or plan for evaluating potential solutions. For example, in this step employees could be trained to establish criteria that evaluate both long-term as well as short-term impacts and outcomes of the proposed solutions. Employees could also be trained to evaluate potential solutions based on each solution’s consistency with the team’s goals and the organization’s mission, vision and values. The team could decide how much weight to assign to each criterion. Alternatively, criteria could be prioritized. A scorecard, checklist or similar tool could be used to help visualize the evaluation process (Schwarz, 2002).

It is important to ensure that the evaluation plan be developed before moving on to the fourth step, which is to generate potential solutions. At this step, no evaluation should take place. Rather, even ideas that seem implausible should be presented, discussed, combined with other ideas or used to formulate more ideas. The team should make a record of all of the potential
solutions presented. This can be accomplished through brain-storming or more structured activities (Schwarz, 2002).

Once the group generates an appropriate number of potential solutions, the fifth step is to evaluate those solutions based on the criteria identified in step three. This structured process of evaluating solutions based on criteria agreed upon by the group will help avoid power struggles or domination by a single team member or small group (Schwarz, 2002).

Through the evaluation process, the group will be able to objectively select the best solutions, which is the sixth step. This could be done simply by ranking each criterion on a scorecard, by vote, or by discussion and consensus, for example. One the solutions are selected, the group will prepare to execute on the identified solutions. The seventh through ninth steps are to develop an action plan, implement the action plan, and evaluate outcomes following implementation (Schwarz, 2002).

Through training employees to problem solve in this manner, the organization effectively creates a culture in which problems are not something to be avoided or sources of dis-ease, but opportunities to identify areas of needed change and growth. This problem-solving method encourages individuals to reframe issues and shift their paradigms, thereby creating new patterns that will result in improved performance. Strange attractors that once appeared to polarize people can be points of unification that bring rest in the newly formed system (Reardon, 2002).

**Assertive communication.** Another skill that employees can learn through training and practice is assertiveness. Like problem solving, this is a skill that can be used to both eradicate leader bullying and help targets and witnesses of bullying respond in a way that will discourage bullying. For example, assertiveness training can help provide both the leader and the target with the skills and insights necessary to engage in non-aggressive but direct and confident
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confrontation (Fredericksen & McCorkle, 2013). Leaders who engage in bullying in an effort to get what they want (Skogstad, et al., 2007) could instead be trained to use assertive communication to engage with others meet both their own needs as well as understand and respect other’s needs.

For example, employees can be trained on how to accept and use criticism. Bully leaders perceive criticism, including constructive criticism, as a personal attack. This results from their feelings of inferiority, convictions and vertical pattern of striving for superiority. For example, an individual may hold the mistaken conviction that he or she is stupid or that the person making the critical statements does not like him or her. In an effort to defend themselves, these individuals become aggressive toward the person making the critical statements. This can escalate into an aggressive exchange, and can create a conflict.

Assertive communication skills can help individuals recognize the mistaken beliefs and begin to adjust their thinking. Employees and leaders alike can be trained to interpret criticism as feedback as about their actions, instead of a personal attack. Michel (2008) presented several skills for dealing with destructive criticism, including listening to the words and not the tone, delaying a response until emotions have calmed down, disagreeing, negative inquiry and “fogging.”

Similarly, individuals can be trained to effectively deliver critical feedback in a way that will help avoid triggering defensiveness and aggression in the first place. Training on how to give constructive critical feedback will also help individuals who have the mistaken belief that they must be liked, and cannot criticize another person without offending them (Michel, 2008). Michel’s (2008) model instructs individuals to choose an appropriate time and place to deliver
criticism, describe the behavior or actions that are objectionable, make a specific request for change, and conclude the conversation on a positive note.

Michel (2008) identified six different types of assertive communication. Employees should be trained to use all six types. Which type of assertive communication is most appropriate depends partly on the skills and mindset of the person who wants to be more assertive, partly on the context and situation that the individual is dealing with, and partly on the behavior and style of the person or people to whom the assertive communication is addressed (Michel, 2008).

A basic assertion is a specific, concise and direct statement about what an individual feels, needs, wants or believes. Basic assertion statements can be used to make a request, give a compliment or present information. Basic assertions are often “I” statements (Michel, 2008).

An empathic assertion contains both a basic assertion of the speaker’s feelings, needs, wants and beliefs and a statement recognizing the other person’s feelings, needs or wants. Empathic assertions are most effective when the speaker wants to show that he or she is sensitive to the other person’s situation, even though the speaker’s feelings, needs, wants and beliefs may be inconsistent with those of the other person. Empathic assertions are effective when responding to bullying because they allow the target to acknowledge the bully as an individual without going along with the bullying to avoid a conflict. Leaders who find themselves making statements that others perceive as bullying can effectively change their behavior by putting themselves in the other person’s shoes (Michel, 2008). Empathic statements promote social interest.

A consequence assertion informs the other person of the consequences that will follow if the other person does not change his or her behavior. Because a consequence assertion can easily be perceived as threatening and aggressive, this type of assertion should be used only as a last
resort. An individual making a consequence assertion needs to be aware of the possibility of being perceived as threatening and aggressive, and actively manage his or her body language, eye contact and tone to avoid escalation (Michel, 2008). This technique fits in well with the Adlerian principle of logical consequences.

In a workplace context, a consequence assertion should only be used if the other person has violated a standard policy, procedure or guideline; if there are consequences in place for such violation; and if the person making the consequence assertion has the authority to deliver the consequences and is prepared to do so. Because leaders who engage in bully behavior are often concerned only about their own interests, a consequence assertion is an effective intervention when properly delivered. Because executives are more likely to be in a position to carry out the consequences, this type of assertion seems more likely to be effective if used by an executive as opposed to a subordinate or peer who is the target of the behavior (Michel, 2008).

A discrepancy assertion points out an inconsistency or contradiction related to the other person’s behavior. For example, the other person may be saying one thing and doing another. Or, there may have been a prior agreement about how a particular situation or event would be handled, and the other person may be acting in a manner that is inconsistent with what has been agreed upon. A discrepancy assertion clarifies the discrepancy and invites a conversation to resolve the discrepancy (Michel, 2008).

If an employee or leader has very negative feelings about a leader’s, colleague’s or subordinate’s behavior, he or she can use a negative feelings assertion. To avoid escalating the situation further, an individual making a negative feelings assertion needs to be aware of and prepared to control his or her strong emotions. For example, an individual needs to choose the
place and time to make the assertion and think through in advance the message he or she wants to deliver (Michel, 2008).

In making a negative assertion, an individual first describes the other person’s behavior as objectively as possible. Next, the individual specifically and clearly describes how the other person’s behavior impacts him or her, and describes his or her feelings. Then, the individual makes a request for change, stating specifically how he or she prefers things be handled in the future (Michel, 2008).

Given that one of the characteristics of leaders who bully is a lack of empathy, negative feelings assertion by the target of a leader’s bullying may be very effective when delivered calmly and sincerely, and without judgment or threat. If an executive is working with a leader to recognize and change his or her bully tactics, a negative assertion raised by a subordinate may help drive the executive’s point home.

A final type of assertion proposed by Michel (2008) is a broken record assertion. A broken record assertion is exactly what it sounds like: the individual prepares his or her assertion in advance, and repeats it as many times as necessary. A broken record assertion would be an effective way for a target of leader bullying to disengage without ignoring his or her superior because by preparing in advance and use a few selected words, the target can avoid an argument and avoid being outwitted (Michel, 2008).

Once trained in assertive communication, the individual can choose the technique he or she believes is most appropriate. Generally, employees are trained to begin conservatively, and progress through more assertive techniques if the initial assertions are not effective. Also, techniques can be combined. For example, an individual who chooses the broken record technique can prepare statements using each of the other five techniques. He or she can begin the
broken record with a basic assertion and move through the other assertive statements as needed. Whichever type assertive communication or combination an individual chooses, it is important for the individual to recognize and control his or her emotions and deliver the message without judgment or accusation (Michel, 2008).

**Conflict resolution skills.** Employees can also be trained on conflict resolution skills.

Eradicating bullying from an organization should not be confused with creating an environment in which there are no conflicts or in which conflict-averse individuals are afraid to disagree (Sutton, 2007). There is no such thing as a conflict-free organization (Richmond, McCroskey & McCroskey, 2005). Rather, an executive who wishes to eradicate leader bullying needs to ensure that leaders and employees alike have the skills necessary for exploring and resolving conflicts (Sutton, 2007.) Like problem-solving skills, conflict resolution skills can help move an organization through stages of order and disorder.

Sutton (2007) believes that conflict can be both constructive and destructive. Conflict is constructive when it is based on logic and facts. Individuals wait until they have all of the facts and have had an opportunity to generate and debate possibilities before taking a position. Constructive conflict welcomes diverging opinions from all groups and levels of employees. Individuals are welcome to advocate for what they believe is right, but listen to what others have to say (Sutton, 2007). Constructive conflict causes individuals and groups to search for alternatives, thereby driving growth in the system.

By contrast, destructive conflict is driven by emotion. It is often relationship-based; that is, individuals fight because they can’t get along. Instead of focusing on logic and facts, destructive conflict often involves personal attacks (Sutton, 2007). Destructive conflicts are the most difficult to resolve (Richmond, et al., 2005).
Constructive and destructive conflicts are not mutually exclusive. Rather, effective conflict management requires an individual to recognize that conflict exists on a continuum between these two opposites and adjust his or her behavior whenever necessary to engage in conflict in a constructive manner (Sutton, 2007). For example, a leader who is engaged in destructive conflict can begin a dialog to generate new possibilities that are acceptable to all involved. The leader can also explain his or her position in more detail with the hope of persuading others to adopt his or her position. Finally, the leader can re-think his or her own position by carefully reconsidering others’ opinions, analyses and evaluations.

From the holistic perspective of individual psychology, conflict is both constructive and destructive, and both facts and feelings are involved. All behavior is purposeful, and individuals move toward self-imposed goals and what they desire, and away from what they want to avoid. A stalemate represents purposive stillness. An individual can be “stuck” in confusion, hesitation, doubt and/or procrastination. A conflict won’t be resolved if one or more individuals believe they won’t get what they want or need and as a result, engage in self-protection. This is the useless nature of self-interest.

Social interest, on the other hand, is useful. Cooperation is the tool of self-interest. Conflict can be useful and constructive when individuals engage, contribute, negotiate and collaborate to work things out in a way that considers the welfare of all stakeholders. This requires each individual involved in the conflict resolution process to see things from others’ points of view and act with empathy.

By viewing conflict holistically and solving conflict through social interest, it becomes apparent that conflict can indeed be transformational. Therefore, as a practitioner, diagnosing conflict as constructive or destructive becomes less important than working through the conflict.
Cloke and Goldsmith (2005) describe workplace conflicts as on-going problems which, if managed effectively, can bring about lasting, positive organizational change. They believe that there are opportunities in conflict, which can transform both the individual and the organization. Conflict resolution is not a step-by-step process, but a frame of mind. They have identified eight “paths” for reframing conflicts in order to reach transformational resolutions.

The first path involves observing and understanding the organizational culture that influences how individuals in the organization handle conflict. These observations and realizations can help the individual to identify the hidden meanings surrounding, and underlying reasons for, the conflict. This path encourages individuals to see how the culture affects their own view of how conflicts should be handled. These insights can help the individual transform his or her own approach to conflict, which may also influence others to transform their approach as well. In this way, individuals shift from controlling the outcome to sharing responsibility (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2005).

The second path emphasizes communication skills, particularly listening skills. This path encourages reframing the meanings one assigns to conflicts by listening with empathy and an open mind. Through this process of seeking mutual understanding, both parties to the conflict begin to recognize the root causes of the conflict and create resolution strategies that bring about transformational change (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2005).

The third path looks for hidden meanings that are below the surface of conflicts and block resolution. In this context, Cloke and Goldsmith (2005) compare conflicts to icebergs: both are made up of many layers. Some of the layers are visible and easily described. Others reside beneath the surface and outside of anyone’s awareness. Personal pasts are an example of hidden meanings that reside beneath the surface. An individual’s personal past may cause a person to
divert attention, cover up emotions or buffer anger, for example. The goal of this path is to remove barriers to resolution and transformation by actively and honestly probing beneath the surface of the conflict, identifying, understanding and reframing the hidden meanings (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2005).

The fourth path requires an individual to communicate openly and directly about emotions elicited by conflict. These emotions can then be acknowledged by both parties to the conflict and reframed. This helps the parties to work collaboratively to reach a resolution (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2005).

The fifth path sifts through the obstacles to resolution and separates things that really matter. For example, choices are separated from options; differences are separated from commonalities; positions are separated from interests; and the past is separated from the future. The goal of this path is to focus on what is important to reaching a transformational resolution. For example, the parties focus on satisfying interests, generating choices, finding common ground, and creating the desired future state (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2005).

The sixth path encourages creative problem solving. By appreciating conflicts as complex puzzles, enigmas and paradoxes the parties can generate diverse and overlapping options for resolution. This requires thinking outside the box and problem solving in a new way (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2005).

The seventh path encourages learning through the difficult behaviors that surface in the midst of conflicts. For example, in dealing with these behaviors in the context of any of the paths, an individual becomes more empathetic and patient. An individual also learns to choose his or her response to the behavior and to persevere through the difficulty (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2005).
The eighth and tenth paths suggest that leadership competencies in conflict resolution, conflict coaching and mediation, along with a formal conflict resolution process will enable employees who are unable to resolve conflicts on their own, to resolve conflicts with assistance. These paths are recommended over allowing the conflicts to remain unresolved, or attempting to resolve them through litigation or some other external or adversarial process (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2005).

The ninth path explores resistance to resolution as a reflection of unmet needs. This resistance can be reframed as a request for changes. The requested changes could be things like improved communication, increased involvement in decision-making or greater authenticity and transparency. The goal of this path is to identify and satisfy the unmet needs so that the parties can collaboratively reach a transformational resolution (Cloke & Goldsmith, 2005).

Conflict causes disorder and without disorder, an organization would cease movement, reach a state of entropy and die. Conflict, therefore, can be used to create a temporary state of disequilibrium to move the organization to a new state of equilibrium (Reardon, 2002). The ten pathways described here show how conflict be replaced with collaboration to create forward movement.

**Exosystem Interventions**

In addition to interventions at the microsystem and mesosystem levels, the ecological model supports the proposition that leaders bully in organizations that allow them to bully (Hauge et al., 2009). Analyzing the problem of bullying in the armed services, Doty and Fenlason (2013) said that if bully leaders were not an accepted part of the culture, they would be extinct. Bullying thrives in organizations where the chief executive and other executives directly or indirectly condone bullying (Hoel et al., 2010). Putting an end to the bullying is not simply a
matter of putting an end to the bully. It is a matter of making executive decisions and taking action to change the culture of the organization (Liefooghe & Davey, 2010; Lutgen-Sandvik, et al., 2009).

Culture is defined as “the shared values, beliefs or perceptions held by employees within an organization” (Tsai, 2011, p. 98). When an organization has a strong set of values and beliefs that are widely shared in the organization, a strong culture will emerge. The culture is socially learned, and provides the rules for employee behavior. Employees interpret and give meaning to events in the context of organizational culture. These interpretations and assigned meanings influence employees’ attitudes and behaviors. It follows that a strong values-based culture leads to consistent behavior among employees and a healthy work environment with less conflict (Tsai, 2011).

**Policies.** At the exosystem level, many researchers advocate creating policies that prohibit bully behavior. Sutton (2007) stated that the first step to “enforcing the no asshole rule” is to state the rule, in writing, and act on it. Namie and Namie (2009) stated that creating a policy is the preferred intervention for eradicating workplace bullying. Atkins (2009) advocated creating a reporting process so that targets know how to and are able to report bullying. As with all of the interventions presented in this paper, a policy prohibiting bullying will be far more effective if the organization implements other interventions as well (Georgakopoulos, Wilkin & Kent, 2011).

Namie and Namie (2009) listed the elements of an effective anti-bullying policy, which are very similar to anti-harassment policies that employers implement to eradicate harassment based on membership in a protected class. These elements include the following:

- clearly naming, defining and prohibiting bullying;
giving examples of bully behavior;

- setting forth clear expectations for desired behavior;

- differentiating bullying from tough management and supporting managers who engage in tough management;

- a formal complaint procedure;

- a prohibition on retaliation for reporting bullying;

- an assurance that the organization will conduct an investigation and take appropriate follow up action

Georgakopoulos et al., (2011) found that anti-bullying policies are most effective if they are developed collaboratively between employees and management. The policy needs to be clear and concise, so that employees can clearly understand what is prohibited and what to do if they experience bullying. The policy must be distributed throughout the organization and supported by all levels of management. Executives should clearly communicate their expectations to managers and human resources that the organization will respond promptly and appropriately to any violations of the policy (Georgakopoulos et al., 2011).

As an Adlerian, one of the most important considerations when developing an anti-bullying policy is to make clear the sequence and consequence in which things happen. Violations of the expectations set forth in the policy result in logical consequences. Logical consequences promote personal choice over power and authority. Logical consequences associated with violations of an anti-bullying policy value social interest over self-interest but imply no moral judgment.

**Communication and feedback loops.** Similar to the importance of communication and feedback between the executive and the leader, creating feedback loops and encouraging open
communication is critical at the mesosystem level. A complaint and investigation procedure in an
anti-bullying policy is one example of a feedback loop. Feedback loops drive change and make
an organization more responsive to its environment (Senge, 2006).

A feedback loop is a circular process in which information is assimilated, processed,
evaluated, acted upon and retransmitted. This circular process consists of four stages. First,
information is assimilated, captured or stored. Second, the individual or group who are
assimilating the information interpret the information and give it meaning. Next, the individual
or group digest the information and decide what to do with it. This includes evaluating and
analyzing the information and making decisions about whether to act on the information and if
so, how. Finally, the individual or group evaluates the actions taken, assesses their effectiveness
and recalibrates if necessary (Cooper, 2012). This represents a single feedback loop, in which the
group or individual asks for input and makes decisions to act upon it.

For example, assume that an executive gathers and assimilates information through an
organizational or team survey. Once the survey feedback is captured, the information received
will be analyzed. The feedback will be organized and categorized and patterns will emerge.
Comparisons may be made between feedback on the current survey to feedback from previous
surveys; feedback from one division or department to another or to the organization as a whole;
or feedback on the current survey to industry benchmarks or best practices. In other words, the
raw data is put into a relevant, meaningful context. The executive will then interpret the
information and give it meaning, perhaps with the assistance of human resources.

Next, the executive will decide what actions need to be taken. For example, if the survey
indicates that bullying is a problem in one area of the entire organization, the executive can
evaluate and select appropriate interventions. This includes rewards for respectful workplace
behavior and logical consequences for bullying. Once the interventions have been put in place and taken affect, the executive will reassess their effectiveness, making adjustments as needed. In the context of bullying, logical consequences will communicate to everyone involved (department, division or entire organization) that bullying is not acceptable and won’t be tolerated (Lutgen-Sandvik, et al., 2009).

Many organizations go further than single cycle feedback loops, creating double and triple feedback loops in which the executive will ask for additional feedback once a decision has been made or action taken. In this way, participants not only give input, but help refine solutions and outcomes. In this way, the executive continues to be the decision maker, but all involved are included in the decision-making process through the invitation to provide input in a way that makes a contribution. Double and triple feedback loops become a vehicle for transformative change.

It is important that the executive fully support this process. There can be no back-and-forth on decisions and consequences; there can be no moving backward if the bully leader resists the logical consequences; and there can be no indecisive standing around once bullying occurs, waiting to see if it will happen again. The executive must act purposefully. This is an example of what Adler meant by, “Trust only the movement” (Mosak & Maniaci, 1999).

Feedback loops of this nature can be put in place throughout the organization. The reporting process in an anti-bullying policy creates a feedback loop. An executive could also implement a 360 degree feedback system in leader performance appraisals (Lutgen-Sandvik, et al., 2009). A 360 degree feedback system, a form of multi-rater feedback, provides an opportunity for individuals who work with and are impacted by the leader to evaluate specific aspects of his or her performance (Lutgen-Sandvik, et al., 2009). The information is compiled
through the feedback loop and used to adjust behavior. Town hall meetings are another example of a way in which an executive can create a feedback loop.

Because of the circular fashion in which feedback is received and acted upon, feedback loops can enhance or buffer changes that occur in a system. Senge (2006) described two types of feedback loops: positive or reinforcing and negative or balancing. Positive or reinforcing feedback loops enhance or accelerate change and move an organization away from equilibrium. Eventually, the reinforcing feedback will be replaced by balancing feedback. Negative or balancing feedback loops buffer change and stabilize or balance the organization. For example, if a change is made and the feedback that is gathered opposes the change, there will be a balancing and stabilization. The organization will return to its original condition. These feedback loops help understand cause and effect relationships between the parts of the organizational system. Feedback loops prevent the organization from becoming disconnected (Senge, 2006).

As a practical matter, a few additional aspects of feedback are important. First, the feedback system must be inclusive. All members of the organization must have an opportunity to provide feedback. When soliciting feedback, it is important to manage employee expectations by clarifying that the feedback gathered will be one of the inputs in the decision-making process. Whenever possible, the gathered feedback should be synthesized and summarized and made public within the organization, ideally along with responsive feedback that points to the direction in which the decision will be moving (Reardon, 2002).

**Responding to incidents of bullying by building trust.** Despite his or her best efforts to eradicate bullying, an executive still needs to be prepared not only to respond to the bully with logical consequences, but to the organization at large in the event that bullying occurs. Given the
disrespectful and harmful nature of bully behavior, responding to the organization at large is in large part a matter of rebuilding trust.

Trust encompasses six qualities: integrity, competence, consistency, loyalty or benevolent motives, openness and respect (Pate et al., 2012). At the most basic level, individuals at all levels in the organization must be able to trust that executives, leaders and co-workers will not harm them (Glaser, 2007). This is explained by the human need for safety and belonging. Mutual trust implies that employees at all levels of the organization will work together to achieve common goals; in this case, the eradication of bullying and the creation of social interest: a sense of community and collaboration focused on the organization’s vision, mission and values (Glaser, 2007).

If, through a climate survey or other means an executive becomes aware of leader bullying in the organization, he or she will need to take action to regain the trust of both the targets and the bystanders who observed the bullying and also were affected by it. Alternatively, if the executive learns that it is not a leader directly engaged in the bullying but his or her subordinate, such as a middle level manager, the executive will need to provide coaching to the leader so that the leader will effectively deal with the behavior.

Pate et al. (2012) outlined four steps or stages in rebuilding trust. First, the executive will need to apologize. A face-to-face apology, such as a department meeting, is preferred. The executive needs to identify and acknowledge the behavior and its impact. The executive needs to take responsibility for the behavior, and apologize for not taking action to eradicate the behavior sooner. Finally, the executive needs to provide reassurance that appropriate steps are being taken and resources have been allocated to ensure bullying stops and does not recur (Pate et al., 2012).
It is important that the executive focus on a vision for the desired corporate culture, and how employees in that culture would treat each other and be treated.

Second, the executive needs to work with appropriate personnel, such as human resources, to conduct an investigation (Pate et al., 2012). Employees need to be encouraged to notify human resources of any incidents or concerns of bullying, and reassured that they will not be retaliated against for participating in the investigation. The leader who is accused of bullying also needs to be informed of the investigation and interviewed. The executive or the investigator need to explain the impact of the behavior to the leader, as well as set forth the organization’s expectation that the leader fully participate in the investigation and refrain from any behavior that could be perceived as retaliatory. In some instances, it may be necessary to remove the leader from the workplace pending the investigation. Each of these steps helps to promote safety for all involved.

Third, the executive needs to take appropriate follow-up action in response to the information learned in the investigation (Pate, et al., 2012). This includes following through with logical consequences for the leader who engaged in the bullying, including disciplinary action or termination if warranted. Other follow-up actions and interventions depend on factors such as the severity of the bullying and what interventions have been put in place previously to eradicate bullying. Any of the interventions discussed in this paper might be appropriate. These follow-up actions and interventions communicate that in order to belong in this organization, certain behavior is expected. Logical consequences will result if you cannot or do not meet these expectations.

Fourth, the executive needs to monitor the situation going forward (Pate, et al., 2012). The extent and type of monitoring depend on the scope of the bullying, the interventions decided
upon in step three, and the feedback loops already in place in the organization. The goal of monitoring is to identify bullying as soon as it reoccurs and begin the cycle of movement from the current state to the future desired state, over again.

**Shared vision, mission and values.** The future desired state reflects the organization’s shared vision, mission and values. The underlying basis of an organization’s activities, from its communications to its policies to its culture of relating to others, is the organization’s vision, mission and values. In the context of leader bullying, the vision and values of the organization promote, allow or discourage bully behavior.

Given the premise that behavior is goal-oriented, what is the purpose of bullying? As Doty and Fenlason (2013) said, “As long as the imagined view of a successful leader (whether it is true or not) remains the screaming, yelling, selfish, berating commander standing in front of a soldier or a staff, then it is not likely that we will remove this cultural aspect from our services” (p. 57). An executive who wants to eradicate bullying will need to establish a new vision of success.

Adler recognized that people have a need to belong (Mosak & Maniacci, 1999). A shared vision, mission and values bring individuals together in an organization. People who would otherwise rely on their own subjective experience will instead act upon the shared vision, mission and values and commit to the common good (Gilbert, Carr-Ruffino, Ivancevich & Konopaske, 2012). Strengthening social interest is critical (Teslak, 2010). Without a shared vision, mission and values, individual values will conflict, power struggles will ensue and bullying may result (LaVan et al., 2011).

A shared vision is a mental picture of what the organization will look like in the future: the organization’s future desired state. A clearly articulated organizational vision is not top-
down; rather, it emerges from a sharing of individuals’ personal visions. It follows that a shared vision encourages collaboration, belonging and community. At the same time, a shared vision attracts people with similar personal visions (Senge, 2006). For example, one aspect of an organization’s vision could relate to what it is like to work in the organization. The vision might include things like a safe workplace, professional relationships, equitable human resource practices, and the opportunity for all employees to reach their full potential. Leader bullying would not fit into this vision.

The organization’s mission reflects the organization’s purpose and sets a common direction for all employees. The mission identifies what the organization does (the products and services the organization provides); to whom the products and services are delivered (the market and customers the organization serves); and why the organization provides the products and services (the results the organization expects). The mission seeks to set forth the organization’s contributions to the macrosystem, or community (Senge, 2006).

Shared values reflect how an organization wants to be and act while working to achieve the vision. Shared values explain how employees, customers and vendors will be treated, and how employees will treat each other, customers and vendors. They guide decision-making and drive behavior. Shared values also help create expectations for how customers and vendors will treat employees. Examples of organizational values could include operating in the organization’s best interests; resolving conflicts through communication; and being open to new ideas (Senge, 2006).

A true solution to leader bullying comes not through responding to symptoms, but through addressing fundamental processes underlying bully behavior and using systems thinking and shared vision, mission and values to change the bully behavior without personalizing or
blaming. The organization’s shared vision, mission and values must guide the selection and implementation of interventions throughout the system.

**Macrosystem Controls**

In addition to interventions at the microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem levels, the ecological model supports the proposition that, as explained at the start of this chapter, antecedents of bullying flow from the macrosystem through the inner system” (Johnson, 2011, p. 57). While interventions at the microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem have the power to bring about powerful change in the organization, one must keep in mind that the organization connects with, relates to and participates as a member of the macrosystem.

Fredericksen & McCorkle (2013) identified two categories of control or accountability that reside outside of the organization: Legal, or articulated control and political, or community control. While their research was conducted in the context of public organizations, this paradigm can be used to help understand interventions available at the macrosystem level in both private and public organizations.

**Legal or articulated controls.** One of the first things that comes to mind when a person thinks about eradicating bullying is a legal prohibition on bully behavior and legal remedies for targets. Several jurisdictions have enacted such legislation. The legislation can be considered an intervention insofar as its purpose is to prevent bullying (Lippel, 2010).

In 1993, Sweden became the first country to enact a law against bullying, or mobbing. The law requires employers to take steps such as creating policies and training managers. The law also protects employees who complain from retaliation, compensates targets and penalizes employers who fail to comply (Lippel, 2010). However, research related to the effectiveness of
the legislation suggests a lack of compliance, finding that only one in nine employers had implemented the legal requirements (Namie & Namie, 2009).

The French Labor Code requires employers to take steps to prevent “moral harassment” and holds employers liable for acts of moral harassment, even if the employer took the required steps. The French Penal Code also imposes criminal sanctions for bullying (Yuen, 2005).

In Belgium, the Royal Decree of 17 May 2007 concerning the Prevention of Psychosocial Load Caused by Work, Including Violence, Harassment and Sexual Harassment at Work focuses on prevention. “Psychological Load” refers to any “load” arising out of the work which negatively affects a person’s physical or mental health. The law requires employers to conduct a risk analysis and determine preventive measures; appoint individuals to handle prevention and counseling tasks; and provide training.

In Finland, the Occupational Health and Safety Act, No. 738/2002 prohibits physical and psychological violence and threats of violence, sexual harassment and bullying. The Act requires employers to take certain safety precautions to prevent and respond to violence. Little if any attention is given to remedies for targets. Similarly, Spain’s legal framework for preventing bullying encompasses laws related to occupational health and safety (Lippel, 2010).

Similar to Finland, in the United Kingdom, bullying can be addressed under the Health and Safety at Work Act of 1974. In addition, the Protection against Harassment Act of 1997 prohibits conduct that the actor knew or ought to have known would cause alarm or distress. In order to be actionable under the Act, there must be multiple episodes of the bullying behavior. The Act also requires the conduct to be “oppressive and unacceptable.”

Currently, the United States has no statutory prohibition on bullying. Like many countries, the United States has laws which prohibit harassment based on membership in a
protected class, including Title VII (Chekwa & Thomas, 2013). However, the United States Supreme Court has stated that Title VII is not to be used as “a general civility code” (Chekwa & Thomas, 2013 p. 239). Also like many other countries, most states have occupational safety and health laws and regulations, which could be applied to bullying. However, the scope of this legislation is typically much more narrow that the scope of anti-bullying legislation (Lippel, 2010).

Additionally, there are a variety of torts which could apply to bullying, such as intentional infliction of emotional distress, assault, battery, false imprisonment and retaliation. However, each of these laws requires the plaintiff to prove each of the elements that extend beyond bullying, such as a physical act or injury or a specific type of bully behavior (LaVan et al., 2011; Chaplin, 2009).

Also, some laws protect conduct that can lead to bullying. For example, a leader might bully an employee because the leader is angry about the employee’s efforts at union organizing or because the employee is complaining about a term or condition of employment. Union organizing and discussing terms and conditions of employment (even complaining about them) are protected by the National Labor Relations act. Bullying in reaction to the employee’s participation in the protected conduct would violate the National Labor Relations Act’s prohibition on retaliation (LaVan et al., 2011).

Many scholars and legal experts believe that the current legislative framework in the United States is inadequate to prevent against and remedy bullying. One alternative is the Healthy Workplace Bill (Chaplin, 2009). The Healthy Workplace Bill would make bullying illegal in the United States. This Bill has been introduced in 25 states since 2003. However, it has not been enacted in any state to date.
The Bill prohibits “abusive conduct” which is defined as severely abusive conduct that causes tangible harm to the target. Examples of behavior that would be prohibited by this Bill include derogatory remarks, verbal or physical intimidation, sabotage and threats. Although a single act might constitute “abusive conduct” if it was particularly egregious, the prohibition generally requires that the behavior be repetitive. “Tangible harm” refers to both physical and psychological harm. In order to prevail, the plaintiff must prove that the defendant acted with malice, which means that the defendant, without just cause or reason, intended to harm the plaintiff.

The employer is vicariously liable for abusive conduct, whether or not there was a negative employment action and regardless of the bully’s position in the company. The employer’s damages are limited to $25,000 for each unlawful employment practice. Conceivably, an employee could bring an action for millions of dollars without any proof of damages. For this reason, some critics are concerned that the Healthy Workplace Bill would lead to “strike suits” which are brought by plaintiffs to force the employer to settle to avoid a potential judgment (Chekwa & Thomas, 2013).

Critics also argue that the Healthy Workplace Bill is overly broad in its definition of bullying. They argue that employees could bring a cause of action under this law for any behavior that they were unhappy with (Chekwa & Thomas, 2013). A law that is vague and overly broad is concerning to leaders and executives if it interferes with their ability to hold employees accountable.

As a practical matter, legal interventions are of little use to an executive who is attempting to eradicate bullying. An executive’s focus is on building stronger leaders who will build stronger employees who will build a stronger organization. Laws may serve as a deterrent
to some, but fail to provide any direction about the type of behavior that is desired. Further, compliance with the law is often viewed merely as an effort to avoid sanctions, as opposed to an effort to do the right thing. Efforts to avoid sanctions on an involuntary basis do not positively affect trust (Pate et al., 2012).

Research also indicates that legal interventions have very little impact on day-to-day behavior (Fredericksen & McCorkle, 2013). It seems unlikely that a bully leader, who will do anything to protect his or her self-esteem, will be deterred by law. Rather, it would seem that interventions at the microsystem, mesosystem and exosystem levels are far more effective than legal interventions.

**Political or community controls.** Political or community controls include pressure from stakeholders (for example, customers and shareholders) and public perceptions (Fredericksen & McCorkle, 2013), as well as societal values and cultural norms (Johnson, 2011). For example, the National Communication Association recently awarded a grant to study the following research question from an international perspective: “based on the assumption that the violation of national, gendered, or other cultural norms will be perceived as bullying behavior, to what extent will national differences in cultural values and communication norms be associated with differences in behaviors perceived to constitute workplace bullying?”

An example of political or community controls is an e-mail sent in 2001 by Neal Patterson, co-founder, chairman and chief executive officer of Cerner Corporation, a publicly traded organization with approximately 10,000 employees. Cerner provides health care information technology systems to hospitals and medical organizations throughout the world.

According to the New York Times, Patterson sent the following email message to 400 U.S. managers in 2001:
We are getting less than 40 hours of work from a large number of our K.C.-based EMPLOYEES. The parking lot is sparsely used at 8 a.m.; likewise at 5 p.m. As managers -- you either do not know what your EMPLOYEES are doing; or you do not CARE. You have created expectations on the work effort which allowed this to happen inside Cerner, creating a very unhealthy environment. In either case, you have a problem and you will fix it or I will replace you.

NEVER in my career have I allowed a team which worked for me to think they had a 40-hour job. I have allowed YOU to create a culture which is permitting this. NO LONGER. (Wong, 2001).

Patterson did not specify in the email the reasons for his discontent. However, he later said that on his way to his office that morning, a receptionist who shared the elevator with him commented about a declining work ethic at the company. He explained that after drafting the email, he attended a meeting. After the meeting, he had two managers review the email before he sent it. In fact, he did not send the email until four hours after he drafted it (Wong, 2001).

Although the email provided no guidance for managers about the areas of performance or behavior underlying his dissatisfaction, Patterson laid out potential punishments. These included laying off 5% of the staff, a hiring freeze, closing the employee gym and implementing a punch card system. He also said that “Hell will freeze over” before he would provide “more” employee benefits. Patterson said he would gauge employee response to these actions by the number of cars in the parking lot by 7:30 a.m. and after 6:30 p.m. during the week and on weekends. The email ended, "You have two weeks. Tick, tock" (Wong, 2001). Needless to say, these punishments merely emphasize Patterson’s power and authority. They are arbitrary, unrelated to
The email spread throughout the organization and was posted on the Internet. One analyst said that investors perceived the email to mean that overtime was required or the company would not meet its forecasts. Within seven days of the email, the company’s trading volume soared and valuation plunged 22 percent (Wong, 2001).

In a subsequent apology, Patterson said that he had not intended to carry out the punishments. Rather, he intended to promote discussion. Patterson, who the New York Times article described as “arrogant,” said that “he was simply looking to crack the whip on his troops. That sometimes requires sharp language, he said, and his employees know how to take it with a grain of salt.” Employees, he said, understood that he was exaggerating (Wong, 2001).

Interestingly, according to the New York Time article, Patterson attributes his management style to growing up on a farm, where after spending endless days on a tractor with no company or interaction, he concluded that “life was about building things in your head, then going out and acting on them” (Wong, 2001). From an Adlerian perspective, there is a clear void of social interest.

It should be noted that whether because of Patterson’s apology or in spite of his bullying, Cerner has recovered. At the time Patterson sent the email, the company was valued at $1.5 billion and employed 3100 employees (Wong, 2001). Today, Cerner is valued at $2.8 billion and employs approximately 10,000 employees. Patterson remains the company’s chief executive. According to Forbes, Patterson is worth $1.4 billion as of 2013. One can only assume that the system at Cerner absorbed and processed the feedback, which led to growth and a new state of
consciousness. The disequilibrium that resulted from Patterson’s email challenged the existing pattern of behavior and brought about a new pattern.

While Cerner recovered from this incident, the response from the macrosystem was merely a reaction which led to interventions which brought about transformation. Both the political controls and the legal controls in the macrosystem represent consequences for bullying after it occurs, not interventions for eradicating bullying. For this reason, while political and legal controls may serve as a deterrent, they do not form the basis of an executive leader’s strategy for eradicate bullying in the organization.

Conclusions and Recommendations

While research traditionally focused on bullying among students and often viewed it as a dyadic phenomenon, more recent research has recognized that bullying occurs in the workplace as well, and has studied not only the targets of bullying, but the bullies themselves. Adlerian concepts are useful in explaining the impact of deep feelings of inferiority and why bullies seek power instead of collaboration. Additional Adlerian concepts, such as mistaken convictions, private logic, patterns of striving, social interest, overcompensation, personal priorities, and lifestyle are also useful in exploring and understanding leader bullying.

Further development of these Adlerian concepts in the context of bullying could lead to a transition away from the medical model and corresponding focus on narcissism as defined by the DSM V, and toward a more practical focus on the underlying purpose of bully behavior. Further development of Adlerian concepts could also lead to a more holistic perspective through the reframing of dichotomous concepts, such as the productive and destructive nature of narcissism. Finally, further development of Adlerian concepts could lead to a general reframing of bully behavior as useful or useless, instead of toxic.
Altogether, and most importantly, further development of Adlerian concepts in the context of bullying could lead to a more practical and socially useful framework for practitioners conducting interventions in an effort to guide transformational change in organizations. The holistic perspective of Adlerian psychology emphasizes the impact of leader bullying on the organization as a whole and not only on individuals within the organization. There are a variety of interventions at the micro, meso, exo and macrosystem levels which can be used to create transformational change to eradicate the patterns of bully behavior and build stronger leadership and a stronger organization.

Further research is needed to identify best practices for developing an intervention plan for bully behavior; to explore and evaluate the validity and effectiveness of the interventions presented in this paper; and to suggest additional interventions. Also, further research is needed to explore the impact of cultural diversity on the effectiveness of the interventions presented in this paper in the context of multi-national organizations. Finally, further research is required to assess the prevalence of workplace and leader bullying, and determine whether these behaviors are becoming more or less prevalent. If so, what are the reasons behind the increase or decrease? What other societal or other trends can the increase or decrease be linked to? This information will give clues about actions executives can take to eradicate workplace and leader bullying in their organizations. Adlerian psychology lends itself well to this inquiry.
References


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