

Bullying and Nepotism at Workplace: Coping Strategies

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Abstract - Workplace bullying and nepotism, both are the real and serious issues. Most of the individuals may not have directly faced these negative acts at the workplace, but may have experienced such issues in some or another way. These issues exist in organizations - which raises a question: can these issues be controlled or reduced in such way that every employee gets a fair treatment. So, this research focuses on finding ways to curb these negative acts at the workplace. The findings of this research will contribute to an understanding of coping strategies of bullying at workplace.

Keywords- Bully, Coping Strategies, Negative behavior, Nepotism, Target, Workplace Bullying.

I. INTRODUCTION

Bullying at workplace is a global phenomenon and a significant concern for managers all over the world [1]. The term bullying may trigger unpleasant memories in target's mind. There are number of instances when an individual get bullied like gossiping, ignoring, demeaning etc. Nepotism is one of the form of workplace bullying [2], [3]. Nepotism is an unethical phenomenon which offers assistances to close friends or family. Thus, Nepotism paralyzes the HR Practices and ultimately touches the level of justice amongst the employees. In the workplace, every individual deserves a merit- based or fair treatment by the employer. Nepotism is manager's or owner's preferences for hiring their family members. This is a common mechanism in the organizations to hire their relatives. The opinions on nepotism depends on the experience with it. Like, if an individual is on the side of privileged group, then he/she will probably favor it and if on disadvantaged group, then he/she will despise these practices. Nepotism is so deeply rooted in our DNA from centuries that it does not allow to eradicate favoring individuals close to us. The trouble arises when the two different institutions- business and family- come into conflict. Family, whose purpose is to care and nurture the family members, whereas, purpose of business is to produce goods and services at profit. Conflict arises when the management promotes or hire an incompetent, unqualified or underqualified individual instead of the deserving candidate [4]. This is considered to be an injustice in the eyes of a non- family member employee or an individual who expects a fair treatment from the organization.

This study commenced with an attempt to describe bullying and nepotism in India. Popular search databases were used for the literature of bullying and nepotism at workplace (e.g., Academia.edu, Google Scholar, Scopus, Science Direct, etc.) with following keywords, namely, bullying, nepotism, coping strategies. The published studies were selected to understand the research gaps available from the existing literature. Thereafter, discusses effects and coping strategies of workplace bullying.

II. NEPOTISM AND WORKPLACE BULLYING IN INDIA

The history of Indian culture discloses that Indian social system divides society into 4 main castes, namely, Brahmin, Kshatriya, Vaishya and Shudra. As a consequence of which society developed the idea of out-groups (individuals of other caste) and in- Groups (family members & individuals of same caste). Thus, the caste system in India has ended up promoting Nepotism [5]. The socio-cultural dynamics in India emphasize that bullying at workplace is possible which could even coexist with caste, religion, gender and sexuality based discrimination [6]. The society in India is relational, where social connections as well as in-group (apna), and out-group (paraya) differences play an important part [7], [8]. These practices are influenced by others factors namely caste, ethnicity, class, relationship, division, rank, career, profession, region, religion, language with implications for the social life performance [9]. Sooner or later, all such factors contribute to favoritisms and nepotism, with in group members getting special privileges and outsiders discriminated. Consequently, intergroup and interpersonal conflicts are the common consequences [8], [9], [10]. Such type of culture is very common in the Indian workplace,

where superiors tend to favor those subordinates who belong to their own caste, religion and community. These type of partial and biased behavior at the workplace promote incivility and jealousy among the privilege and disadvantaged group and discourage the non-family member employee [4].

III. EFFECTS OF BULLYING AND NEPOTISM IN THE WORKPLACE

Number of researches have mentioned the detrimental effects of workplace bullying on target's health, well being, absence from work. Top level management should understand the consequences of these issues on individual as well as on organization because bullying in the form of nepotism thrive in the workplace. Nepotism has a direct adverse impact on employees [11], like dissatisfaction, reduction in commitment, discouragement, intention to leave, and work withdrawal behavior of a non-family employee. It affects individual's health resulting in stress, sleep disorder, headache, post-traumatic stress disorder, and suicidal tendency [12]. Nepotism affects the organizational performance, where employees think of quitting their jobs, and spread negative views about organization through word of mouth. Organization can even lose their valued executives. Group level consequences involve segregation within the team, reduction in team performance, lack of unity in the group, and poor interpersonal relationships. These unfair incidents occurring in the organization found to be an unethical behavior that disturbs the employees and workplace negatively [11].

These issues exist in organizations - which raises a question: can these issues be controlled or reduced in such way that every employee gets a fair treatment. So, the objective of this study is to find ways to curb these negative acts at the workplace.

IV. FINDINGS

This section examines coping strategies for dealing with bullying and nepotism. So, researcher recommends few coping ways that should be used by an individuals and organization to deal with these situations. These coping strategies as elaborated below.

For individuals

Now, what are the options for those employed at places where these negative acts at the workplace is already an established pattern? The target should take the decision, what they want? First- expect that bullying will continue. Second- think of the way, how they can be out of the situation? For most of the victims, their major concern is to see their life back to "normal". Others think that getting an apology is vital. Few want a public admission of wrong doing by bully or bullies. And, for some, they want to see

the offenders to suffer in the same way. So, researcher recommends that victim should decide what they want.

- **Accepting and Adjusting-** Literatures provides evidence, that most of the target do nothing, and let things happen in their own course of time. This is not because they are ok being bullied, what makes them take the decision of accepting it as their fate and adjusting to their situation are again two reasons, the thought of possible risks and repercussions and their own ideologies. These repercussions include job insecurity, fear of being further bullied, being aware of the blind attitude of the organization and human resource department and being aware of one's own ability and lack of power.
- **Avoidance-** The other way of coping is avoiding, which is one of the way to deal with the stress caused because of these issues, which include accepting the situation, thinking about something else, or concentrating on other tasks.
- **Silence-** One way of not accelerating these acts is simply to be silent. It's a calculated silence of Gandhi's passive protests where silence was used to try to undermine the dynamic. But, this may be suitable only in some circumstances or with few people.
- **Aggression-** Aggression is a well-known coping reaction in these acts by an employee but this can be harmful when associated with paranoia. Then, the connections become "insecure-avoidant or conflict-inducing" [13].
- **Fighting-** Not many targets come to take the decision of fighting back with the perpetrator. Very rarely targets take action against bully, even if they do they rather stand up against those who are relatively at equal or lower power position, not for superior. What is important to take note of here is that the steps are very thought of and planned, not taken in the spur of the moment or out of rage, hence the target should strategized before finally deciding on taking appropriate action against the perpetrator(s).
- **Leaving-** The next way of coping is leaving. Here, leaving was found to happen by leaving the organization, getting transfer or taking early retirement. Many studies show that, when faced with bullying behavior an individual intends to leave and/or eventually leaves the organization.
- **Turning to Self for Help-** The targets should try to cope with situations of bullying on their own. They seem to avoid talking about it to avoid attention of people and perpetrator. So instead of looking outside for help they try to solve its own their own. It is found that when the targeted resort to self-help coping mechanism, they may opt for both positive and negative ways of coping. Positive refers to the

ways in which the target tries to end its ordeal by looking at the brighter side and making efforts to change his situation. Negative ways of self-help, where the target forced herself to get dejected from everyone or find faults in him/herself.

- **Seeking External Help-** If it is not possible to solve at its own, it is always better to ask for help or talk about it to others for emotional requirement and for resolving the problem.
- **Help from the union association-** Many workplace have staff or union association. The target should discuss their expectation of what they want to happen. Those representatives may provide help and suggestions on how to deal with these threats.
- **Group Complaint-** If number of employees facing these issues, it may be better to write a joint letter of complaint against bully. Such moves may be tempting but have often proved unsuccessful, with threats of dismissal the result. Any steps you decide to take can be clarified with them. It may be that your situation is not unique and that the union already has plans for raising the issue themselves.
- **Formal method-** Taking this decision of writing or filing a formal complaint might be difficult for few targets. If the formal path is followed, the situation certainly will change as now people's jobs also at stake. At this point, few think to leave the workplace, as they think that they cannot cope up with the process. If someone reaches this point, then it is rare that any choice is ideal—there will be a cost and a benefit in all options.
- **Direct coping strategy-** Humor can be considered as a strategy to resolve an intense situation, so that it may be easier to handle. This is one of the direct coping strategy and [14] found that it tended to make the situation better.

To summarize, Self-Reliance/Problem-Solving emerged as the overall preferred coping strategy, followed by Distancing and Seeking Social Support to the same degree; least preferred coping strategies is Internalizing and, particularly, Externalizing. As Self-Reliance/Problem-Solving, Seeking Social Support, and Distancing are considered “approach” strategies, and Externalizing and Internalizing are considered “avoidance” strategies [15], it would seem that an individual typically prefer the use of “approach” strategies in response to any negative act at the workplace.

For Organization

Sometimes targets do not react because of the fear of bullying's consequences. So, keeping this thing in mind, it is of utmost importance that monitoring is undertaken at site level so that, one can check that things are not getting worse. This section provides the parameters that might be considered by the organization. This will include policies,

informal and formal complaints systems for bullying at workplace.

- **Policies-** A policy is a statement of principles or behavior that one seek to discourage or encourage. The statement should include a description of acceptable and non- acceptable behaviors.
- **Procedures-** When developing policies at the workplace, the associated procedure should be decided which include the appropriate involvement of the staff so that the implementation of the complaint can be complete quickly.
- **Informal Procedure-** At first thought, none of the employee will think of taking their organization to court. Effective informal process can ‘pop’ the conflict escalation balloon, negating the need for very expensive formal systems that can (in themselves) be damaging.
- **Formal Process-** Organization should provide the formal path of complaining systems to their employees, where proper procedure to be mentioned that whom a victim should complaint first. If boss is a bully, then an established second channel for the complaints to be needed.
- **Treat Employees fairly-** Manager or owner should hire a family members based on qualification and competence for the role. Additionally, they need to maintain the transparency about the recruiting and compensation criteria.
- **HRP Policies-** Organizations should develop Non-family business policies like “never hire a relative of an employee's”, “never hire relatives at the same facility”, “never hire relative in the same department”, “and never allow to supervise their own relatives”.
- **Review all employment decisions** – While taking decision on promotion, pay, hiring and termination, it must be reviewed by more than one individual who does not have any conflict of interest. Decision should be based on the legitimate business needs ensuring that same standards apply to all employees.

V. CONCLUSION

This article is just a drop to an ocean in the field of bullying and nepotism at the workplace. It extends the body of knowledge of bullying and nepotism in the Indian context. Furthermore, if organizations follow the suggestions in the study to control bullying behavior that will lead to a better and healthy working environment. In order to strengthen the organization with a better work environment, these critical issue should be addressed with an utmost priority.

In conclusion, an individual may opt for more than one way of coping simultaneously. The future researchers should study coping strategies or styles with respect to specific situation to get a better and clear picture on how

an employee cope with these negative acts at the workplace. Additionally, future researchers should assess which strategy is best for curbing negative emotions in target and which strategy is best to avoid further incidents of bullying and nepotism. Moreover, future researcher should notice the coping mechanism chosen by the individual had an influence of their demographics, which included their position, family background, gender and generation they belonged to. The other aspects that play role in the choice of coping mechanism include, the organizational attitude and the individuals own characteristics, these can be called the antecedents to coping.

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