Confession Pages as a Coping Mechanism for Workplace Bullying

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Abstract

Workplace bullying is a critical problem in the work environment. It has adverse effect on the productivity of employees. If the employees fail to cope up with this they decide to leave the organization. Organization’s success is dependent on the skill and efficiency of their employees. The exit of a talented employee can have a negative impact on the performance of the organization. Organization need to understand that success of their organization is highly dependent on the human factor.

Social media provide a medium to share views, emotion. Social media is of tremendous use in the business world. It help the employee to become more productive by being aware of the latest market trends or issue of their or public concern. Social media users are more likely to have good public relation. Social media can be defined as social interaction among people in which they create, share information and ideas in networks and online communities.

Keywords: Confession Pages, Workplace Bullying, Social Media

1. Introduction

At the workplace a certain amount of teasing occurs but when it becomes repetitive, causing stress to the target then it crosses over to the line of bullying. Workplace bullying is a critical problem at work. It is described as experience of mistreatment by others in the workplaces that are intended to cause harm. It include humiliation, physical, psychological, verbal and nonverbal abuse. “Bullying at work means offending, harassing, negatively affecting someone’s work tasks or socially excluding someone”. According to Gary and Ruth Namie workplace bullying is repeated verbal abuse, health-harming mistreatment or conduct which is humiliating, threatening, sabotage or intimidating that interferes with work. Workplace bullying presents serious employee relations problems yet the concept remains silent in the realm of employee relations (Yamada, 2008). Workplace bullying may have impact on the employee development and the productivity level of employees. It may include yelling, humiliation, intimidation, harsh criticism and verbally berating employees. These behavior generally have the intent to invoke fear, stress or psychological or physiological damage to the individual. Bullying often consist of power relationship or subservient relationship that has become pervasive and offensive (Yamada, 2008).

Dr. Gary and Ruth Namie has created Workplace Bullying Institute and has identified top three reasons for the workplace bullying. These reasons are as follows:

- Lack of legislation to prohibit the action.
- Minimized cursory action by the company.
- Bullies are hardly punished.

Bullying is not only restricted to unwanted verbal communication but it may also involve written form of communication. Bullying is somehow related to the management style of the supervisors. Workplace bullying is also representative of power and control. There are several forms of bullying. Some of them are as follows.

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• **Pressure bullying**—having to work to unrealistic time scales and/or inadequate resources.
• **Corporate bullying**—where an employer abuses an employee with impunity, knowing the law is weak and the job market is soft.
• **Organizational bullying**—a combination of pressure bullying and corporate bullying. It mostly occur when the organization try to adapt to the changes. This imposes expectation and excess pressure on the employee and the manager.

It can be in any form but will always involve mix of criticism, humiliation, coercion, insult and denigration. Study shows that country culture also has an important role to play in acceptance or rejection of bullying behavior. Countries like US, England and Australia are more likely to tolerate bullying at work if it is linked to achieving greater result. But their level of acceptance is still less in comparison to countries like Singapore, Taiwan and Hong Kong. In these countries there is even higher rate of acceptance of bullying bosses. It is linked to cultural feature of “High performance orientation”. Some countries like Argentina, Columbia and Mexico are anti-bullying. They give more value to humane treatment than economic performance.

If an employee is aware about these facts then it can be easy for them to cope up with bullying at work. Social media provide a common platform where people from different countries can easily communicate with each other. Social media is of tremendous use in the business environment. Research shows that the employees who utilize social media are nine percent more productive in the workplace. Sites like Pinterest or Instagram allows user to share their creative work or brainstorm new ideas. It help the employee to become more productive by being aware of the latest market trends or issue of their or public concern. It help the employee to be prepared to troubleshoot potential setbacks. Social media users are more likely to have good public relation. Social media can be defined as social interaction among people in which they create, share information and ideas in online communities and networks. “Social media can be used to connect individuals within an organization with needed expertise, improve employee engagement and reach out to customer or other stakeholders.”

“Current theory in the field of information technology suggest that social media and similar technology enables employees to share collaborative knowledge.”

Confession pages on the social networking sites provide a platform to the people to share their confession or secret to their respective communities. It can be defined as the statement acknowledging the facts that somebody would not have shared under their true identity. Confession pages became viral on internet in 2013. This trend has been spreading among the students in India and other nations. Some of the confession pages has been shut down due to cyber bullying.

As these pages are the medium to express one’s belief and emotion with their community. Through this research work I would like to study whether these confession pages in corporate setting can act as an effective tool to address Workplace bullying and help the victim to make aware the top management and their peers about their situation without openly coming into picture. These pages can also act as a de facto message board where employee ask for help regarding issues related to their work and other affairs. Presently these pages are very popular among the students.

Anony Monkeyia an official Facebook app. It is built for anonymous Facebook Pages. Google forms is a form that allows user to submit anonymously.

Question arises how these pages work. First of all after creating such page for a community moderator need to choose which anonymous system to use. Once the system is chosen, moderator in the page setting find their submission link and paste it in the “About” section of their page. No one knows who the administrator is and the administrator also does not know who is sending in the confession. Users are allowed to submit their thoughts anonymously and moderator edits and reviews these pages before publishing. Thus it will be very safe for the employee to share their experience and difficulty with their community member without coming in picture.

Several studies suggest that a victim of workplace bullying should find a co-worker to share their experiences or story rather than suffering it silently. Bullying at work makes a victim an easy target for further abuses. These confession pages provide the victim to share their stories with many other users who can lend a helping hand to victim. It can provide a coping mechanism to victims. Victim’s often compare themselves with other victim to understand and cope up with their victimization. These comparisons can be either upward or downward. In case of upward comparison victims compare themselves to the other victims that are better off. They act as an inspiration for them to cope up with bullying at work. Social media and similar technology enables employees to share collaborative knowledge.
for other victims. Downward comparison means comparing oneself to other victims that are worse off. Both these comparison helps the victims to understand the victimization in a better way.

According to (Hagemann, 1992) the central function of coping is reduction of tension and restoration of equilibrium. Victims of bullying first try to approach the problem with a constructive coping strategy but when they fail or perceive that it is not sufficient then they use destructive strategy. Everly et al. (2000) point out that social support can lead to companionship, instrumental support, information and emotional support. Emotional support can be defined as listening and understanding the victim’s emotional reaction and feeling. Companionship can enable the victim to make sense of their experiences. Victim’s of workplace bullying first try to approach the problem with a constructive coping strategy but when they fail or perceive that it is not sufficient then they use destructive strategy. Some of the victims focus on the strategy associated with successfully coping up trauma.

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Ciby and Raya in their article on “Exploring victim’s experience of workplace bullying: A grounded theory approach” has also talked about self-coping mechanism used by victims of workplace bullying. They have identified easy-going attitude, voicing the issues, perceived organizational support and sharing of emotional experience with friends and family. But in this study victims were more focused on obtaining support from higher official then the peer support. But when they could not get support from higher official they choose to exit.

Avoidance is another coping mechanism that help the victims to temporally erase their memories and gather resources to rebuild their life and deal with other challenges. Social support has a major effect on decision making and subsequent coping.

Organization can have confession page either on social networking sites or on organization internal network (Intranet). As the usage of social networking sites are banned in the It sector.

Infosys for a very long time operated as a conservative company having strict working hours, employees were fined for not wearing ties on specific days. But the Vishal Sikka CEO of Infosys is looking for his employee first. Infosys CEO wants to create an employee friendly workplace. Sikka is about to launch a new initiative “Murmuration”. This will encourage employees to bring forward their ideas to fulfill and serve their clients in the best way. Infosys CEO has also allowed to use “Facebook” and “Tweets” but the work has to be done. He is giving them freedom to socialize but at the cost of deadlines.

Social networking site have been banned for years but organization are slowing understanding that these site can make their employees more productive. Employees can easily vent out their frustration and anger which could have harmed the work.

People make confession out of frustration because they need to share their feeling with others. As we have mentioned in the coping mechanism that sharing of emotion act as a self-coping mechanism. Confession pages on social media have been designed to reach out to a broad audience very easily. We usually rely on social media to reduce our stress level. When anyone find it difficult to cope with the stress as a result of workplace bully then it is advisable to talk about it with friends, family members. But in this fast moving world each one is so busy that they have no time even for their family, they are living far away from their friends and family so it becomes difficult for them to share their problems. Social media help us to get connected with our friends and family and confession pages provide a platform where we can easily talk about our problem or seek others opinion on the matter that are causing stress without coming into picture directly.

Some of the confessions are as follows:

“My manager openly warned me like – ‘you have seen better of mine; now you will see worse. I will not release you and I am also interested in your next year rating (sic)’”, a post on the Infosys Confession page. (The Hindu)

“…employees get cheated by managers just as innocent voters get cheated by dirty politicians,” reads a confession note by an employee on the TCS confession page. (The Hindu)

“The appraisals were completely biased. We should remember that more than hard work, your loyalty towards your boss gets you [a] good rating,” posted a female employee. (The Hindu)
“My manager called me in meeting room and he informed me that, he will save me from termination or pink slip if I make him happy. He want to do s** with me in lieu to save me from termination. He tried to did my brain wash and convinced me that in company u will survive by give and take relationship. He gave examples like casting couch in films industry. I heard abt NY one have consecutive 3 c then get pink slip. I have last 2 consecutive C...my manager promised to give me A band if I agree to do that. I have no option I am single earning member in family having 2 kids and parents dependent on me. I have no option to compromise in the situation.....TCS spoiled my life.”

“I was an fresher recruited from NIT and got into TCS Gandhinagar for my ILP. Soon i joined there, after a week i had to face tough time there for petty reasons. e.g if i keep my cellphone in shirt pocket or in table, i had to write apology letters to the HR's and i had to write twice although i was not using the same. The other instance was that they told i had copied the code from one of my peers and was asked to write a letter to the HR that i copied in test and later no actionable mails came. But soon after the 2nd month of ILP when all were setting up to leave for the base location a mail came that your service has been discontinued and i returned home with a heavy heart. Two days later i was asked to rejoin after 20 days but i never went back and on the 18th day i was recruited by a multi billion dollar company of US as Business Analyst giving 3 times more salary(9.75lpa) what i was getting in TCS. Later on they posted me mails for FFS of the terms and conditions to repay Rs 36000 as breaching the bond and intimated twice and i gave a blatant reply of fighting the case in the court that i was in mental disharmony during the tenure in TCS and had they had let me into a difficult financial crunch by making huge arrangements all in a sudden. when i was asked to do the What nots there during my ILP and since then they havenot replied.But i am very happy and fortunate to have blessed by the GOD to have left the place.”

A number of victims of the workplace choose to leave the organization as an only option to handle the conflict. Many organizations also deal with workplace bullying is by terminating the victims that complain about bullying at work. So, in this case confession pages can be an effective tool to cope up with workplace bullying. Victims of the workplace bullying can easily post their bad experiences and make the management aware about the prevalent abusive workplace environment without the fear of getting fired. Reading and replying to the post by other follower can also provide support to the victim.

Confession pages have certain disadvantages too. It can create unnecessary chaos in the organization. Here the top authority has to take certain step to provide proper guideline and maintain the essence of the confession pages i.e. the identity of the person posting should not be revealed at any cost.

The confession made on various confession pages are done by the former employees who have left the organization for several reason including workplace bullying. This clearly shows that the employees have not got enough freedom to express their problem to the concerned authority. When the employees do not get support from the top management than they ultimately decide to leave the organization. We cannot say that confession pages will be hundred percent effective in dealing with workplace bullying but at least it will provide scope to the employees to vent out their frustration without any fear.

2. Recommendations

To cope up with problem of workplace bullying following step should be followed:

• One should not silently suffer this pain but should be vocal about bullying issues.
• Keep record of all the instances and analyze when such behavior is repeated.
• Learn verbal self-defense.
• Find some good friends, maybe your colleague will not be openly willing to help you in such matter so do not hesitate to post on confession pages. It will help you to get support and you will be able to communicate your stories in a better way. Mutual support and communication will help you to reduce your stress.

3. Conclusion

When someone listen and believe victim’s story then it help them in communiting their stories in a better way. Bullying also has a bad impact on health as the victim is exposed to the stressful situation. It is the responsibility of the employees to recognize and deal with the workplace bullying. This will prevent employees from physical and mental illness. Workplace bullying lowers the self-esteem of the employees and it will not only harm employees but
also the whole working environment of the organization. To deal with the problem of workplace bullying employer should provide a platform where victims can without any fear speak out their issues and confession pages can very clearly a good platform for the same. Once the employees feel that he will get support from the concerned authority, this will not only boost his morale but he will be productive for the organization.

4. References