Integrating Faith or Fear? Workplace Bullying as a Barrier to Faith and Service

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ABSTRACT

Workplace bullying as a phenomenon refers to all forms of violence, terrorism, and harassment intended to harm or truncate the physical and psychosocial well-being of a worker. While workplace bullying is one of the major causes of stress and other health problems, financial losses both to the organizations and affected people, little is known about its negative impact on the gospel ministry at the workplace. Integrating faith in professional practice (orthopraxy) is much more important than mere belief (orthodoxy). This is especially important in this era of religious pluralism and multiple interpretations of the Bible among Christians. Like the Bible Pharisees, some professionals are hypocrites who make life difficult for the people they hate at the workplace. This attitude to colleagues serves as a barrier against the gospel. This paper explores few cultural factors and organizational theories which encourage bullying at the workplace. Also, it argues that workplace bullying, especially in Christian organizations, instills fear instead of faith, and erects social and psychological barriers to the gospel. The paper concludes by proposing a model for ameliorating the circumstances, creating safe and positive workplace environments that are conducive for spreading the gospel and fostering deeper faith in Jesus Christ.

Introduction

Integrating faith in professional practice is a valid expression of spiritual commitment. Jimmy Carter, the former president of the United States of America once said, "It is not possible to separate what people feel and believe in the spiritual realm from what they will do as a matter of public policy" (Albright, 2006, p. 8). This is because religion has a strong influence on the thoughts and actions of people (Kerestes & Youniss, 2003; Stewart, 1999; Tagore, 2015). People who are sincere in their beliefs would express and affirm such beliefs wherever they go, even in non-religious matters. Some biblical examples include Dorcas, the fashion designer (Acts 9:36); Paul, Aquila and Priscila, tentmakers (Acts 18:3); Lydia, dealer in fabric (Acts 16:14) and the unnamed midwife (Gen. 35:17). All lived exemplary lives as faithful professionals in their work environments and communities. They lived their faith with the utmost wish to bring peace and morals that "offered a competitive advantage to early societies. [Through their lifestyles and Faith], they bolstered social order among followers and helped bind a tribe together" (Kristof, 2012).

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In the contemporary society, some work environments appear to be centers for physical and psychological trauma - a place for all forms of violence, terror and harassment against the well-being of workers. Recent studies revealed that workplace bullying is one of the major causes of sleeplessness, stress, depression, mental disorder, suicide ideas and other disabilities that suddenly affect work performance (Birkeland Nielsen, Emberland, & Knardahl, 2017; Birkeland Nielsen, Høstmark Nielsen, Notelaers, & Einarsen, 2015; Lallukka, Rahkonen, & Lahelma, 2011; Rodríguez-Muñoz, Moreno-Jiménez, & Sanz-Vergel, 2015; Tuckey, Dollard, Saebel, & Berry, 2010. While the International Labor Organization (ILO) asserts that an estimate of two million people die annually as a result of the above mentioned work-related health problems (Takala, 2002), little is known about the negative impact of workplace bullying on the integration of faith at the work environment. This is especially disturbing when the perpetrators are people who profess faith, especially in Christ. Therefore, in this paper, the concept of workplace bullying vis-a-vis faith and service will be simultaneously and briefly explored. Also, factors that lead to workplace bullying will be highlighted and possible ways to control it for the benefit of Christian faith and services will be recommended.

The concept of workplace bullying

The term workplace bullying refers to all forms of violence, terrorism and harassment perpetrated against a worker with the intention to harm. It could be psychological or physical harm repeated over a period of time against a vulnerable worker in the work environment (Branch & Murray, 2015; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, Cooper, & Einarsen, 2011; Escartín, 2016; Gary Namie, 2014; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008; Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel, & Vartia, 2003). Over the past two decades of intensive research on the phenomenon of bullying, researchers have not agreed upon a generally accepted definition. However, World Health Organization (WHO) and International Labor Organization (ILO), respectively defined workplace bullying thus:

> Workplace violence covers a spectrum of unacceptable behaviors.
> It includes incidents where staff are abused, threatened, discriminated against
> or assaulted in circumstances related to their work, including commuting to and
> from work, and which represent a threat to their safety, health, and well-being
> (Boyle & Wallis, 2016, p. 2).

Although terms like "violence", "terrorism", "harassment" and" mobbing" (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, Cooper, 2011) are used interchangeably in describing bullying phenomenon, scholars (De Angelis, Bacchini, & Affuso, 2016; Mazzone, Camodeca, & Salmivalli, 2016; Rosen, Scott, & DeOrnellas, 2017; Thomas, Connor, Baguley, & Scott, 2016) affirm that bullying can only occur if the following features are present: (1) aggressive intention, (2) repeated over time, (3) power imbalance. In other words, bullying is not an accidental occurrence. It is a well calculated and goal directed act of harm, which may also be a subtly concealed form of aggression against targeted people at the workplace. Dan Olweus, the first English researcher on the concept of bullying (Kallestad, n. d ; Limber, 2013), argues that it is a misconception for people of equal strength or position to assume they are bullied when they can defend themselves (Olweus, 2013). Olweus' (2013) argument is on the premise of school bullying. This is because bullies

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assume superior power over their targets who appear weak, fearful and lonely (Patel, Varma, Shah, Phatak, & Nimbalkar, 2017; Unnever, 2005; van der Ploeg, Kretschmer, Salmivalli, & Veenstra, 2017). Therefore, in the context of this paper workplace bullying is defined as any unacceptable behavior meted against a fellow worker intentionally, in the workplace, which effectively forecloses any opportunity for witnessing faith through service and developing cordial relationships.

Discussions on definition

Acceptable behaviors are generally defined by law in a given society. And, each religion has a code of acceptable behaviors for its adherents. For the Christian, the Bible prescribes acceptable behaviors to follow in every matter of life. Also, the effectiveness of a behavior is determined by the result achieved. And, although the intention of that behavior may be misconstrued at the first occurrence, when it is consistent, people would interpret and reciprocate it based on their understanding. Therefore, Christian professionals should be watchful and prayerful so that their actions and inactions would not impede the gospel.

Faith is an important substance in religion, and every religious group believes in certain principles that connect them to God or a supreme deity. It is important to note that there are various theories on faith, from theological and secular perspectives (Fowler, 2004; Hick, 1988; Hodder, 2017; Pace, 2017), which is beyond the purview of this paper. Faith in this context, refers to the fundamental religious dogma individuals accept to rule their spiritual lives. As a conscientious Christian, I would limit my discussion of faith to the traditional worldview of Christian faith, which is anchored in the Bible. This does not in any way make other religious faith insignificant in this subject of discussion.

Service as a concept has various meanings attached to it, depending on the form and structure of usage in a literary work. It could be used in denotative, connotative, metaphoric and metonymic forms (Johns, 1999). When used in a denotative form, it refers to an aspect of activity or work offered to people. In this paper, service refers to whatever profession a person chooses to earn a living. Therefore in choosing a profession for livelihood, Christians should check if such professions are congruous with their faith.

Workplace bullying and Culture

Workplace bullying as a phenomenon is a social problem that can occur at all levels of a work environment. Recent evidence from bodies of theoretical and empirical literature (Fleming, 2016; Hutchinson & Jackson, 2015; Jamieson, Mitchell, Le Fevre, & Perry, 2015; Trossman, 2015) show that environmental culture is one of the factors that facilitate workplace bullying. For instance, America has a high regard for individualism, and this cultural value directly or indirectly affects the social behaviors of people and the way bullying is handled at workplaces (Allaire & Firsirotu, 1984; Sanders, Pattison, & Bible, 2012). Suffice it to say that each organization develops from the existing culture of its society. Therefore to create an enabling work environment and cohesive society, it is important to understand the culture of the host community.

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The concept of culture has varied interpretations among scholars. According to Hofstede (as cited in Kirkman, Lowe, & Gibson, 2017), culture is "the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group from another" (p.13). Allaire and Firsirotu (1984), on the other hand, considers culture as a "stenographic cue for values, norms, beliefs, customs or any other such string of convenient identifiers." (p. 194). Even though scholars have controversies on the meaning of culture and may not agree on the dimensions that may stimulate negative aggressions at the workplace, it is important to note that most of the cultures of a nation are subsumed under an organization's culture (Jacobson, Hood, & Van Buren III, 2014). Therefore, it will take determined effort to educate and sieve out incongruous cultures of a nation from an organization's culture to mitigate bullying, especially if bullying has been established as a culture.

A recent study, which is probably the first on cross-cultural views on bullying at workplaces, reveals that some cultures do not see bullying as an aberration, while others do (Power et al., 2013). Concepts like Physically Intimidating Bullying (PIB) which represents aggression, and Work Related Bullying (WRB) which varies from workload to time frame, were two categories of bullying behaviors in the study. Also high-performance orientation, humane orientation and future orientation are the three identified cultural dimensions in relation to acceptability of bullying across the 14 countries and six continents involved in the study. High- performance orientation, which is characterized by competitive spirit, incidentally leads to high productivity. Humane oriented culture is relational: the superior is kind to the subordinate; while the future oriented culture uses gift as a means to appeal to the conscience towards success (Power et al., 2013). Although this study is a quantitative survey which does not give information on the lived experiences of people in their cultural milieu, (N=105) of the 1484 sample size of the study represents the African continent. According to Power et al. (2013), WRB is generally tolerated across the globe than (PIB).

While the findings classify sub-Sahara Africa and Latin America more humane oriented, which does not accept WRB, high-performance cultures like Asia accept both WRB and PIB as norms based on the teachings of Confucianism. According to the assertions on the benefit of national values or culture towards high productivity (Overbaugh, 2013; Sarid, 2015), World Development Report of 1987 based on the national values, affirms that East Asia improved geometrically in their economic status between 1965 and 1985. It is important to note that this culture is steep in Confucianism (Hofstede & Bond, 1988). Although the East Asia economy experienced tremendous economic growth through cultural values, it is unfortunate that organizations would embrace bullying as a culture, with the hope to gain economic growth. Making financial gains at the expense of sick, frustrated and depressed workers is a collateral damage (O'farrell & Nordstrom, 2013). This is more important, if such multinational organizations are established in humane oriented cultures. Therefore, there are indications from researchers that organizations should investigate cultural values contextually in order to ascertain bullying behaviors so as to reduce their prevalence (Hutchinson & Jackson, 2015; Roscigno, Lopez, & Hodson, 2009; Samnani, 2013).

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Power Distance

Based on Olweus' (2013) original definition of bullying, power imbalance is one of the outstanding factors that make bullying possible. The pattern in which power is distributed in social relationships has a significant impact on people's behavior in a society (Daniels & Greguras, 2014). Power could represent information, educational empowerment, promotion, food or anything that brings a sense of belonging within a community. In GLOBE studies, there are high and low power distant cultures. Jacobson, Hood & Van Buren III corroborate the opinion of scholars (Daniels & Greguras, 2014; Rauniyar, Ding, & Rauniyar, 2017) on high power distant cultures as those cultures in which power is restrictively distributed and very few people can be involved in governance, while in a low power distant cultures people are involved in governance, their views and needs are considered in the social affairs of their society. In any culture where there is high power distance, people will do everything to get such power to subdue perceived enemies. Suspicion, gossip, tribal sentiment, elitism are some of the salient nuances that come with power distant cultures. For instance, India was classified as one of the high power distant cultures (Bochner & Hesketh, 1994), and a more recent study on workplace bullying affirms that India has a high rate of bullying (Rai & Agarwal, 2017).

To professionals who serve in high power distant cultures, it is important to relate to power as one of the means to bring glory to God. Those who are in positions of authority should see themselves as stewards, and should exemplify humility, simplicity and love. Beyond the positional power, there are specific skills and abilities which a professional could use to impact a power distant culture for Christ. Nonverbal skills like smiling face, cheerfulness, and attention to duties could be used effectively for Christ.

Assertive culture

Assertiveness as a word does not connote aggression; rather, it is an innate ability to express needs and aspirations, without necessarily offending others (Nakamura et al., 2017; Say, 1985). Assertiveness is one of the cultural values of high performing nations, which enables them to advance their economies and push policies that advertise their relevance at the international fora (Dong, 2017; Kallender & Hughes, 2017; Nitoiu, 2017). While assertiveness as a culture has a positive outlook globally in terms of economic advancement, Jacobson and Van Buren III (2014), assert that workplace bullying is prevalent in high assertive cultures. GLOBE study on the dimensions of culture defines assertiveness as "the degree to which individuals in organizations or societies are assertive, confrontational, and aggressive in social relationships" (Jacobson & Van Buren III, 2014, p.9). In other words, assertive people could be confrontational in presenting their needs, aspirations and opinions. From GLOBE's perspective, there are high and low assertive cultures. Assertiveness that makes people 'domineering' and 'competitive', which is an example of high assertive culture, could lead to high cases of bullying. Assertiveness that recognizes personal and other people's needs without being confrontational, represents low assertive culture. Jacobson and Van Buren III (2014) posit that low assertive culture may not lead to high rate of bullying. It is on this premise that assertiveness is categorized as a possible cultural factor for bullying. Studies are showing that assertiveness is part of the skills victims of bullies are encouraged to develop in order to resist the continuation of such behaviors (Etienne,

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2014; Stagg, Sheridan, Jones, & Speroni, 2011). However, the fact is that where assertiveness is the culture, there is a tendency for bullying to arise, as people would be competing to get to power and prominence at the detriment of others (Wheeler, Halbesleben, & Shanine, 2010). Therefore, for a professional to integrate faith while serving in a highly assertive culture, the counsel of 1Peter 5:8 applies: "Be sober, be vigilant, because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walk[s] about, seeking whom he may devour".

Organizational theories that facilitate workplace bullying

One of the theories that is partly adopted in the management of human organizations that could facilitate bullying in the workplace is Darwinism (Allanson, Rawlings–Notar, & Charles, 2015; Bowles, 1997). Darwinism posits that total eradication of unwanted species gives advantage for the stronger species to survive (Sherwin, 2003). Therefore human beings can become great and successful in life through competing and eliminating the weakest. The ability to outwit, decimate perceived enemies and set up a brand that is the envy of all is the overarching aim of capitalism, which is developed from social Darwinism (Bowles, 1997; Sherwin, 2003).

Scholars in recent times are making effort to redeem the image of Darwinism from what they described as false application of thought in social sciences (Bilgili, 2017; Hodgson, 2005). While some of those arguments seem reasonable at the surface, Bilgili (2017) reiterated the impact of Darwinism on Turkish people and the need to put the record straight. It is clear that Darwinism had a negative impact in human organizations or society. From the creationist perspective (Barnes, Church, & Draznin-Nagy, 2017), humans did not evolve from the lower animals, even though it is still controverted among Christians (Disney & Poston, 2010; Sheler & Schrof, 1991). Therefore, reducing them to mere animals who evolved to become humans, empowers them to act like animals and apply the same strategy in running the affairs of human organizations. However, issues of Darwinism and Creationism are beyond the purview of this paper. Nevertheless, one of the major organizational theories that has been discovered to influence bullying is New Public Management (NPM).

New Public Management (NPM) theory

New Public Management theory was a type of organizational reform theory developed in the early 70's to redeem countries grappling with economic crisis (Tolofari, 2005). A recent study has shown that NPM is one of the theories that facilitate bullying in the workplace (Mawdsley & Lewis, 2017). NPM model posits that organizations, especially public enterprises, need to cut cost, welfare, and vigorously monitor productivity for efficiency. More so, they need to develop high competitive strategies to enable the public organizations engage favorably with private organizations to maximize profit (Bradley & Parker, 2006; Noblet, Rodwell, & McWilliams, 2006; Schubert, 2009). This model eventually puts pressure on employees, which results into hostility, bullying and health challenges. Mawdsley and Lewis (2017) focused their study on people with disabilities who work in public services in the United Kingdom. The study reveals that the workers who were interviewed had disabilities (long term health conditions) as a result of their frustrating work experiences. Therefore, adopting this management theory in organizational structures of the modern society, and similar theories that do not consider humane kindness may

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cause more harm than good (Bezes et al., 2012).

Faith-Based organizations and workplace bullying

Historically, faith-based organizations, especially Christian faith-based organizations (Reese & Shields, 2000; Vidal, 1999), have helped in shaping the moral values of human society, starting with the youth (Lerner, Dowling, & Anderson, 2003), through various developmental stages of life (Furrow, King & White, 2004). They have also played vital roles in the economic and social development of human society in tangible forms. For instance, they have been supportive in creating a number of jobs through the establishment of educational and health institutions, as well as other businesses that engage different cadre of professionals and skill workers. Therefore, faith-based organizations are expected to model good leadership in protecting and maintaining peaceful work environment. They should function differently from secular organizations where there is unfairness, which leads to violence, sabotage and loss of trust (Cropanzano, Goldman, & Folger, 2003). Additionally, they are expected to be focused, witnessing through policies and practices that correspond with their core values.

The Apostles' Model

The early Christian church had challenging experiences as they grew in number. People from diverse cultures joined the church, but were not fully converted. For example, the narrative in Acts chapter 5 reveals the unacceptable behavior of Ananias and Sapphira. While the Holy Spirit dealt with that situation through Peter's probing questions and the death of the couple, the narrative in Acts chapter 6:1-7 discloses another unacceptable behavior, the discrimination in sharing food among the people, which is an aspect of bullying. Scholars (Brendgen & Poulin, 2017) have developed different models that expose the causes of bullying in workplaces and how to handle it. They have shown that bullying may be caused by aggressive exposures of individuals in the early stages of life. They also affirm that people who were exposed to bullying in school in their early age become victims of bullying in their workplaces. They suggest that some of the ways to protect such people from the re-occurrence of being bullied in the workplace are by providing social support and friendship in those establishments.

In addition, the narrative in Acts chapter 6:1-7 provide insightful management model for resolving conflicts that may lead to bullying. The following are extracts from that portion of Scripture.

A. *Community engagement:* The first step is to genuinely engage the workers in the community by investigating allegations and reports about bullying to gain insight and to create awareness. There is no record to prove how many times the Hellenist widows were denied access to food or discriminated against on the issue of food. While it is stated that bullying can only occur if an aggressive behavior is meted against a weak person repeatedly with intention to harm, it is also possible to subtly and secretly plan evil, execute it once and harm weak people. The apostles did not keep quiet when they heard the complaints of the Hellenist widows. They acted immediately. If they had waited, the attitude exhibited to those widows would have instilled fear instead of faith, and would have erected social and psychological barriers against the gospel.

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B. *Open communication:* Early Christian church practiced communism at the onset of their mission. Apart from having everything in common, they also interacted with one another on every issue that was a concern. This approach to interaction made it possible for the apostles to know the experiences of the Hellenist widows.

C. *Selection of representatives***:** When the apostles reviewed the complaint of the Hellenist widows, and saw a need for equal representation of people from diverse cultures, who are sincere and godly, they called for prayer to select deacons to help in sharing food. This proposal was accepted. The people were satisfied and the gospel prospered within the community and beyond. The deaconry was an administrative convenience for the purpose of fairness, equity and justice in the church community.

In other words, the model employed in Acts chapter 6:1-7 include community engagement, open communication, and immediate action. These components, when applied in the workplace, will ensure that conducive environments are maintained and strengthened. More importantly, they will promote faith and lead to creating safe and positive workplace environments that are conducive for spreading the gospel and fostering deeper faith in Jesus Christ.

Conclusion

Faith-based organizations can create a conducive atmosphere for work and reduce the incidence of bullying at the workplace by following the apostles' model, understanding the culture of their host community and upholding theories that is in line with the teachings of their faith. Christian professionals can integrate faith in their service anywhere by surrendering totally to biblical teachings and living it out in their daily routines. While the apostles' model does not in any way claim to be the last resort for resolving bullying issues in faith communities, it can be adapted to ameliorate the situation.

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