

4. Managing Power Abuse at Workplace

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Abstract:

Millions of workers across all industries and sectors are impacted by the relatively new phenomena of workplace abuse. The majority of the literature on workplace management addresses due process and employment discrimination.

The problem of managers or supervisors abusing their subordinates emotionally at work is rarely addressed. When managers or supervisors treat their staff abusively, or when the organization allows this behavior, it becomes abusive.

The media frequently covers societal violence in the news every day, including abuse of children, adults, and even pets, However, abuse in the workplace is seldom discussed. A growing number of workers are experiencing psychological and even health problems as a direct result of their jobs, prompting some companies to review their workplace policies. Recent economic downturns large layoffs, mergers, and restructuring have increased workplace stress levels.

There has been a sharp rise in workplace violence and stress as a result of employment cuts imposed by numerous organizations across the globe.

By Emphasizing the issues and repercussions for management, workers, and their families, this chapter focuses on workplace abuse as a developing organizational problem. It also offers suggestions on how to keep a healthy workplace

Keywords:

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4.1 Meaning of Power Abuse:

In the workplace, abuse of power occurs when one individual in a position of authority utilises such authority to dominate or manipulate others at the expense of other individuals' integrity, rights, or well-being. In the modern workplace, misuse of authority has become a serious problem that compromises workers' dignity. Power disparities must be addressed immediately to promote a safety and respect culture. Incidents of harassment and abuse by those in positions of authority have brought this to light.

Abuse in the workplace is becoming more prevalent across a wide range of industries and professions. According to Harvey Hornstein, author of *“Brutal Managers and Their Prey”* (Labich, 1996,)

“Today's workplace is like “some nightmarish schoolyard - a place where bosses shake down subordinates for their psychic lunch money and then stomp on their egos for sport,” also *“...one in five people will get abused by a boss on any given day,”* he continued. Employee harassment by managers or supervisors creates a poisonous work environment. Some supervisors cannot control their aggressive attitude, which creates a toxic work atmosphere for subordinates. Many retained employees have lost their job security as a result of downsizing and, in certain cases, mergers.

4.1.1 Forms / Types of Power of Abuse:

Power harassment can take many forms and can range from verbal abuse to physical assault.

Some examples of power harassment include:

- Verbal abuse, such as making derogatory or belittling comments.
- Intimidation, such as making threatening gestures or using a raised voice.
- Isolation, such as preventing an individual from participating in work-related activities.
- False accusations, such as accusing an individual of wrongdoing without evidence.
- Public humiliation, such as belittling an individual in front of others.
- Retaliation, such as firing or demoting an employee who has complained about power harassment.
- Power harassment can also occur in the form of subtle manipulation and use of authority, like forcing someone to do things they are not comfortable with or creating a threatening or hostile environment.
- Bullying or discrimination can include scolding in front of colleagues, rebuking loudly, or false evaluation and demotion.
- Intentional embarrassment, such as using any excuse to embarrass others.
- Aggressive behaviour: even if something is presented as a joke or due to a bad day.
- Manipulation: This can include exploiting peer pressure to coerce others' support.
- Breaching employee's rights – such as freedom of speech, the right of association or the right to be paid for the work done.
- Sexual harassment – unwanted sexual behavior toward another employee,
- Crime – committing or forcing to commit crimes, such as theft, fraud, and forgery.

4.2 Reasons for Power of Abuse:

The psychological makeup of an abuser:

While it's not an excuse, knowing the psychology of an abuser's behavior can help explain why the abuse might persist and even get worse. Individuals who are aggressive or have narcissistic tendencies may have a narcissistic personality disorder (NPD).

Less than 5% of people have NPD, according to research from the Cleveland Clinic. In addition to their drive to appear powerful and impressive, narcissists also lack empathy and frequently behave haughtily. There is a correlation between power abuse situations and narcissistic conduct.

Silent supporters and ‘group shun’:

Abusers enjoy having people who agree with them. They can frequently get this backing from workers who are weak enough to think that they will become the next victims if they refuse to join in, as well as from subordinates.

This strategy may result in a "group shun," in which a person experiences progressive exclusion from the workplace by other employees. The slow, complex nature of this strategy makes its targets feel alone because it is difficult for others to identify. This seclusion over time may give rise to delusions or feelings of paranoia.

Why does abuse of power persist?

While it's widely recognized, power abuse continues to be a prevalent issue in many workplaces for various reasons.

A lack of confidence or knowledge to report:

Sometimes victims of power abuse are unaware that they are being abused. They occasionally believe their experiences are commonplace and unremarkable. Sometimes there's no obvious way to receive assistance.

Depending on the offender, staff members might not be comfortable enough to report the issue or they might not be sure they can "*prove*" it.

When witnesses notice power abuse in the workplace, they frequently hesitate to take action. Frequently, people allow the problem to continue because they are unsure of their part in it or believe they are misinterpreting the circumstances.

The fear of consequences:

Victims and witnesses of power abuse are frequently discouraged from coming forward because of the possible consequences, which might include job loss, legal problems, or a fear of being falsely accused. Victims who are unable to report the abuse anonymously may choose to put up with the mistreatment rather than report it out of fear of being shunned at work. One's capacity to respond can also be impacted by financial obligations since individuals in positions of authority or wealth frequently have easier access to legal representation. In addition, victims can fear that if they report the incident, nothing would be done to assist them. If their accusations are dismissed, the abuser may become even more empowered and subject them to worse torture than they have already endured.

Impact of Power Harassment:

Power harassment can have serious, long-lasting effects. People who experience power harassment might suffer psychological and emotional trauma in addition to physical harm. This may lead to a decline in productivity, a rise in absenteeism, and in rare circumstances, the employee's resignation or termination. Everyone who is exposed to power harassment at work, including those who are not the direct targets but observe the activity, may experience a toxic work environment.

4.3 Managing Power of Abuse at Workplace:

Negative effects of power abuse in the workplace include decreased staff morale, higher employee turnover, and a loss of trust in management for both the victims and the company. The accomplishment of corporate objectives and productivity are significantly impacted by these factors. This is the reason it is crucial for businesses in all sectors to not only uphold proper standards and encourage moral behavior, but also to spot warning indications of power abuse. Employers are required to take action to stop power harassment at work. This can involve draughting and enforcing laws that forbid power harassment, educating staff members on what power harassment is and how to report it, and responding promptly and appropriately to reports of power harassment.

It's critical to establish an accessible, secure workplace where workers feel heard and protected to stop power abuse in the workplace. This can be done by creating explicit guidelines and reporting procedures for abuse, as well as by routinely educating management and employees on polite and moral behaviour. Using external ombudsmen or private counselors can also aid in the efficient and discreet handling of complaints. To encourage a culture of accountability and respect, it is imperative that there be repercussions for the misuse of power and that these penalties be implemented equitably and openly.

When it comes to acting and getting support, employees who believe they have been the victim of power harassment have several choices. They have three options: speak with an attorney, file a complaint with the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission (EEOC), or report the behaviour to their employer.

4.3.1 Preventing and Addressing Power Harassment:

Even though stress is a natural component of both work and personal life, power abuse of any kind, from any source, should never be accepted and always needs to be dealt with firmly. Even though many workplace abuses do not fall under the purview of employee-protected rights like safety, equal employment, and due process, they can nonetheless cause employees to experience major mental and physical issues if they are not addressed.

Management must create a documented **"zero tolerance"** policy for handling all forms of workplace harassment and discrimination before they can begin to build and sustain a healthy organisation.

An organization's vision and strategic human resource planning must include top executives' commitment to this strategy. However, management might not even implement a zero-tolerance policy if one does exist. The policy needs the backing of upper management to affect how seriously employees take the company's commitment to preserving a healthy work environment.

The following points can be taken into consideration in managing power abuse in organisations

A] The Role of Education: Empowering Management and Employees:

Fighting this issue requires raising awareness and educating management and staff about the misuse of power. Through the cultivation of a collective consciousness regarding the definition of power abuse, institutions can enable individuals to identify and confront inappropriate conduct.

Workshops and training courses can impart knowledge on setting boundaries, encouraging positive working relationships, and identifying early warning indicators. Rewards and performance reviews ought to be correlated with preserving a safe and healthy work environment free from abuse. Good management practices can help prevent or lessen abuse, employee assistance programs can help abusive supervisors change their behavior, development programs can treat abusive supervision, and management training programs can help supervisors recognise and deal with abuse (Bassman & London, 1993, p. 6).

Healthy organizations provide their new hires with access to a mentorship program to facilitate their transition into the role. Every new hire is paired with an experienced mentor. There are also lots of training options available to employees. For people who are under stress at work or in their personal lives, there are Employee Assistance Programs. Workers at thriving companies have a workload that is balanced. The employee's abilities are not exceeded by the demands of the job. These types of companies may offer wellness/recreation facilities as part of their employee offerings to encourage physical fitness and reduce stress. It is also suggested for workers to utilise flexible work schedules. Policies that are family- and employee-friendly are well-established and communicated.

B] The Vital Role of Human Resources: Ensuring Accountability:

Departments in charge of human resources (HR) are essential in handling cases of power abuse. Employers need to be proactive and put employee safety and well-being first by putting rules and procedures in place. HR specialists should keep a watchful eye on the workplace, react quickly to grievances, and guarantee a fair inquiry procedure. HR can encourage victims to come forward and hold offenders accountable for their acts by creating a climate of trust and confidentiality.

1. Overcoming Hesitation: Creating a Supportive Environment:

Due to concerns about job stability, fear of reprisals, or the stigma attached to being a target, many victims of power abuse are reluctant to report instances. To empower victims to speak up without worrying about the consequences, organizations need to foster a compassionate and encouraging environment. This can be accomplished by setting up private routes for reporting, making counselling and support services available, and declaring that there will be no room for reprisals against those who expose wrongdoing.

2. Thorough Background Check During the Hiring Process:

To prevent hiring individuals with a history of harassment or other negative behaviours, the HR department must conduct a comprehensive background check during the hiring process. Organizations can proactively assess applicants and make informed decisions by implementing an effective vetting system.

3. Proper Handling of Complaints

Additionally, HR ought to serve as a focal point for the prompt and efficient receipt and handling of complaints about workplace harassment. To encourage workers to come forward and report cases of power abuse and other forms of harassment that could jeopardise their ability to keep their jobs, there should be a confidential reporting mechanism in place.

4. Support for Victims: Support for harassment victims and witnesses should also be offered by HR. Offering therapy services, guaranteeing secrecy, and providing protection from reprisals are a few examples of how to do this. Employees should also be given a guarantee that will help them feel secure and supported at every step of the way.

C] Cultivating a Culture of Respect: Building a Safe and Inclusive Workplace:

Establishing an abusive-free workplace requires a strong organizational culture. All employees consider an organization to be a fantastic place to work if its culture fosters concern for both the needs of its workers and their families. Employee needs are always taken into account in a good organization.

To provide workers a sense of belonging, respect, and value, this kind of organization goes above and above what is necessary by law. Employee input is welcomed during the decision-making process. The work atmosphere is encouraging and collaborative. The working climate is one of teamwork, with management and staff having a great professional relationship. Inspiring leadership styles and supportive attitudes characterize supervisors. In order to help employees, complete their work, managers find and eliminate performance barriers and, where required, offer the required training. Healthy companies reward and acknowledge their employees for their individual and group accomplishments. There's a sense of a loving and supporting work community. Employee morale and work satisfaction are so frequently strong. All parties involved in the organization must work together to create a respectful culture. It entails promoting diversity and inclusivity, encouraging open communication, and offering continuing instruction in polite conduct and conflict resolution. Organization's may foster a healthy work culture that encourages cooperation, innovation, and overall well-being by establishing an atmosphere where each employee feels respected, heard, and safe. Workplace power abuse is a serious problem that needs to be addressed right away. Through the identification of warning indicators, education, and preventative actions, companies may establish a secure and welcoming workplace that fosters dignity and protects the health of all workers.

What to do in case of abuse of power?

4.4 Victims of abuse of power can take several steps:

- Take a stand against power abuse in the workplace.
- Documentation: Collecting evidence of the abuse of power.
- Seek support: Talk to a counsellor, HR, or a union.
- Seek legal advice: Consider taking legal action.

4.5 Imposing Accountability: Abuse of Power Is Not Tolerable:

Zero-tolerance policies must be put in place by organizations to show that they are firmly committed to ending power abuse. It is imperative to establish unambiguous protocols that delineate the repercussions of engaging in power abuse.

Prompt and exhaustive investigations must be carried out, and those found guilty should face suitable disciplinary measures. Organizations convey a clear message that misuse of authority will not be allowed by enforcing accountability and inflicting repercussions.

How to prevent abuse of power in the workplace?

The specifics of how to handle people who have misused their power should be outlined in your company's policy. But it's crucial to get the necessary proof before you penalize them. Keep a regular eye on the decisions and actions of those in control positions to achieve this. It can be done modestly with Firm bee. It's much simpler to stay in touch with staff members and learn more about their thoughts and ideas by utilizing the system's capabilities and integrations (like Slack).

Abuse of power, in the workplace and elsewhere, is a grave social and legal problem that can result in injustice, a decline in public confidence, and human rights breaches. That is why it is crucial to identify the warning signals of this kind of behavior, gather evidence if needed, and then report it to the appropriate authority. You cannot guarantee that the issue won't recur unless you take this action.

How can power abuse in the workplace be prevented?

Implementing education and putting in place support structures at an organizational level is necessary to stop bullying and power abuse in the workplace. It's not always helpful to just have policies in place; in the cases where they do, they are frequently disregarded or ineffectual.

To prevent power abuse in the workplace, take into consideration the following resources:

- **Intervention levels:** Have operations systems that allow space for employees to discuss conflicts, grievances or abuses with executive staff or human resources (HR).
- **Code of conduct:** Develop manuals and handbooks alongside an HR team to best protect the rights, boundaries and health of employees.

- **Disciplinary measures:** When preventative solutions are no longer protecting employees, have steps in place to stop and confront workplace abuses.
- **Support systems:** Create spaces where employees can safely share their experiences. This can be in the form of affinity groups, HR, staff surveys, and more.

The dilemma of ethics occurs when regulation fails and we must turn to character. Moral excellence, bravery, and honour are the foundations of character. In this situation, we must ensure that we are producing personnel with integrity—those who have the guts to defend themselves and others—and that organisations have the fortitude to commend those who do so. An organization's culture must have mechanisms supporting staff members in speaking out against behaviours or influences they may not find acceptable.

Regulatory bodies, business schools, and organisational executives must take proactive measures to enforce regulations and maintain awareness of the risks and ramifications of their own organisations' actions, as well as the liabilities they may face. People must have the guts to stay out of the situation, speak up against inappropriate behaviour, and be able to explain what is happening in plain terms when they are in it.

Both at work and in other spheres of life, abuse of power is a serious social and legal issue that can lead to injustice, loss of public trust, and violations of human rights. That's why it's so important to recognize the signs of such behaviour and, if necessary, to collect evidence and then report it to the relevant institution. Workplace abuse, however, disguised, can easily be spotted and curtailed by leaders through observance and all the ways listed above.

4.6 References:

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