Bullying in Project Management: A Global Challenge

Paul Pelletier LL.B., PMP
Why Are You Here Today?

Play video clip of Devil Wears Prada – highlighting many examples of unacceptable, disrespectful behavior

“Does this look familiar to your project environments?”

“Have you been treated like this on a project by a boss, project leader, client or colleague?”

“How many of you think the boss is just getting results”?
Prevalence Rates of Bullying

- Been Bullied: 20%
  - Currently Bullied: 21%
  - Witnessed: 7%
- Aware: 23%
- Unaware: 28%

WBI U.S. Natl 2014

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Stats on Workplace & Project Bullying

- **Computer Weekly** – “…project work is taking toll on IT workers across the UK, with nearly two-thirds claiming to have been bullied.”

- **2013 Harvard Business Review** – “the number of people… targeted by workplace bullying has increased drastically.”

Learning Objectives

- Define project bullying
- Tools for identifying bullies
- Impacts of bullying on projects
- Anti-bullying action plan for PMPs
“If you are neutral in situations of injustice, you have chosen the side of the oppressor. If an elephant has its foot on the tail of a mouse, and you say that you are neutral, the mouse will not appreciate your neutrality”.

Desmond Tutu, Retired Archbishop, South Africa

Neutrality isn’t an option
Workplace/Project Bullying - Definition

1. Repeated health-harming mistreatment or verbal abuse;
2. Threatening, humiliating, intimidating conduct;
3. Sabotage that interferes with work; or
4. Some combination of the three
Bullying is not...

- Expressing differences of opinion
- Offering constructive feedback, guidance, or advice about work-related behavior
- Reasonable action taken by an employer or supervisor relating to the management and direction of workers (e.g., managing performance, taking reasonable disciplinary actions, assigning work)
Bullying Behaviors

“IT’S A VERY SPECIAL OCCASION...
YOU WENT A WHOLE MONTH WITHOUT HUMILIATING ANYONE.”
Bullying Behaviors (cont.)

Aggressive Communication
- Insults, shouting, dirty looks, finger points, angry emails, staring down, invasion of space, humiliation, starting rumours, social media taunting, harsh practical jokes

Manipulation of work
- Removing/changing tasks, giving unmanageable workloads, impossible deadlines, excessive micromanagement, preventing access to promotion/raises/training

Sabotaging work
- Withholding pertinent information, leaving employees out of communication, failing to give credit or stealing credit, constantly pointing out mistakes
# Bullying is not Leadership

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LEADERS</th>
<th>BULLIES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Encourage</td>
<td>Demotivate/Dictate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Set Good Example</td>
<td>Disrupt/Aggressive</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Integrity</td>
<td>Lack integrity/ Avoid responsibility</td>
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<tr>
<td>Build</td>
<td>Destroy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resolve Conflict</td>
<td>Create Conflict</td>
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<tr>
<td>Fair/Mature</td>
<td>Unfair/Immature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Value/Reward</td>
<td>Devalue/ Take credit/Sabotage</td>
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What Motivates Bullies?

- Bullying is about power & control (win/loss)
- Bullies generally target someone who poses a "threat". Envy/jealousy motivate
- Bullies seek to control and dominate (militaristic approach)
- Bullies are egotistical, often narcissistic
Most organizations have Respectful Workplace Policies that outline behavioral expectations.

**UWB** - “systematic, annoying, and continued actions which include threats and demands; creating a hostile work situation by uninvited and unwelcome verbal or physical conduct.”

May be referred to as “UWB” or “workplace harassment”
Bullying takes place in a disrespectful workplace and looks like harassment within most policies.

Bullying may represent both a violation of organizational policy and, if bullying or human rights legislation exists, a violation of these laws.

Respectful Workplace Policy violation is an internal matter.

Legal violation is an external matter.

Conclusion: In absence of legislation, 80% of bullying is completely legal.
Most Common Bullying Scenarios

Top-Down: 56%

Bottom-up: 11%

Coworkers: 33%

WBI U.S. Natl 2014
Who Gets Targeted?

 Targets usually are:

- “Go-to" veteran workers
- More technically skilled than the bully
- Better liked than the bully
- Ethical and honest
- People with nurturing and social orientation -- a desire to help, heal, teach
Why are Project Managers Targets?

- PMs are a perceived threat because:
  - they are bringing about change
  - they are more skilled
  - they are more liked/popular
  - they draw resources toward their project – likely away from bully
  - their project is high profile and gets them a lot of attention
How does Bullying Feel?

It feels as bad as it looks

It feels as bad as the project does
Health Impacts of Bullying

Bullying causes physical and mental health impacts, the most serious of which include:

- Cardiovascular (hypertension, strokes, heart attacks)
- Gastrointestinal issues
- Immunological impairment (infections, colds, flus)
- Auto-immune disorders (chronic fatigue, fibromyalgia)
- Debilitating Anxiety/ Panic Attacks
- Clinical Depression / Post-traumatic Stress
Project Impacts of Bullies

- Bullies have direct project impact
- Bullying prevents work from being finished
- Project team and individual creativity suffers
- Performance and team spirit deteriorate
- Customers turn away (project dies)
- Employee turnover

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According to a WBI poll “Among workers who’ve been on the receiving end of bullying:

- 48% intentionally decreased work effort.
- 80% lost work time worrying about the incident.
- 66% said that their performance declined.
- 78% said that their commitment to the organization declined.
- 12% said that they left their job
- 25% admitted to taking their frustration out on customers”.
Organizational Impacts

- Financial (projects fail/delayed, lost clients, lost staff, lost time)
- Human Resources (sick leave, replacing staff, complaints, conflicts)
- Legal (lawyer’s fees, conflict resolution, severance costs)
- Reputation (organization perceived as toxic, gossip, PR issues)
- Share Value (if it becomes a big issue, could decrease share value)
Start with you

Project managers can keep their own behaviour in check and foster civility among others

- Manage yourself
- Model good behaviour
- Ask for feedback
- Teach civility
- Create group norms
- Reward good behaviour
Ethics in Project Management

Take Away Points

- Bullying in PM is very prevalent
- Bullying has large negative impacts on people, projects and organizations
- As PMPs, we must act
- Increased awareness is having positive impacts
- Share information about negative impacts of bullying
- The goal - zero tolerance for bullying
Motivation to be a Change Leader

“You have enemies? Good. That means you’ve stood up for something, sometime in your life.”

Winston Churchill,
Former Prime Minister of the United Kingdom
Questions & Comments

- Bullying in Project Management: A Global Challenge
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Thank you!