Institution: Birkbeck, University of London

Unit of Assessment: 19 Business and Management

Title of case study: Revealing the Nature and Prevalence of Bullying in New Zealand Workplaces has enabled Political Action

1. Summary of the impact

Research into the prevalence of workplace bullying and stress conducted between March 2008 and December 2009 in New Zealand has had three main impacts. The research findings highlight the importance of psychosocial issues in workplaces and directly contributed to the New Zealand Government's decision to include psychosocial workplace hazards as a priority in the Occupational Health Action Plan to 2013. Data from the research is one of the main factual bases for a new guideline developed by staff in the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment on workplace bullying. The guidelines made the research findings available to Health and Safety Inspectors and Professionals, Unions and Employer Groups as well as presenting practices for Occupational Safety and Health Fact Sheets for preventing and dealing with bullying at work.

2. Underpinning research

The research was carried out by Trenberth of Birkbeck in collaboration with researchers:

Professor Bentley, Dr Catley, Dr Gardener - Massey University, Auckland

Professor O'Driscoll – University of Waikato, Hamilton

Dr Cooper-Thomas – The University of Auckland, Auckland

The research collaboration built on the expertise that exists in the Business and Management unit of assessment in the area of work stress and coping. Assignment Leader for the Methodology part of the project exploring bullying and stress in New Zealand workplaces, Trenberth (Birkbeck) was awarded NZ$21,000 from the grant of over $200,000 to develop the research design and questionnaire and provide advice to the research team on data collection and analysis along with Professor O'Driscoll. Trenberth made a significant contribution to the conceptual framework and development of the survey instrument and made regular visits to New Zealand to collect primary interview data from the Education sector and to meet colleagues to write up and disseminate the findings.

Contextual Information

Workplace psychosocial factors, notably bullying and stress, are known to be associated with negative consequences for individuals, organisations, industries, and the wider community. A 2002 amendment to New Zealand's Health and Safety and Employment (HSE) Act recognised that harm may be caused by work-related stress and that workplace hazards can include a situation where a person's behaviour may be a source of harm. Psychosocial work factors are now a national priority under the Workplace Health and Safety Strategy for New Zealand to 2015 partly as a result of the current research findings.

The research developed a reliable and validated way of measuring the nature and prevalence of bullying and stress in New Zealand workplaces that could be applied elsewhere for comparative purposes. The research design was highly participatory in the exploratory phase, involving strong collaboration with industry stakeholders at national (Department of Labour and ACC sponsored groups), industry (industry bodies and associations such as the New Zealand Nurses Association, New Zealand Education Association) and organizational levels (District Health Boards, hospitality firms, travel firms, teaching unions, schools and universities). Stage 2 involved the design of a methodology to measure workplace bullying and stress.1728 respondents from four sectors, health, education, hospitality and travel were surveyed on dimensions including negative acts, organizational commitment, organizational support, leadership, sense of community, social support, psychological well-being, general health, absenteeism, turnover intentions, work performance, bullying, coping, and organizational responses using a number of well documented and validated scales along with a wide range of theoretical predictor and outcome variables. An internationally recognised measure of bullying, the Negative Acts Questionnaire, was employed and the New Zealand results have been added to an international database in Norway. It is the largest survey of workplace bullying in New Zealand (**3.1**).

Key Findings

The research revealed, aside from high levels of bullying, the importance of organizational level initiatives for controlling the problem. Leadership style and the degree of organizational, supervisor and colleague support are important factors reported (**3.1**). It was found that that incidence of workplace bullying in four sectors – health, education, travel and hospitality was high by international standards (18% of 1728 employees across the four industry sectors experienced bullying behaviour) and was significantly correlated with higher levels of strain, reduced well-being, reduced commitment to their organization and lower self-rated performance (**3.2**). The research raised interesting issues around the role of social and supervisor support in buffering psychological strain as a result of bullying, with ethnic differences apparent which are exemplified in the most recently published paper in 2013 (**3.3**). Of 332 New Zealand travel industry staff and managers, one in ten respondents experienced bullying in the workplace. Targets of bullying reported lower levels of constructive leadership, colleague and supervisor support and lower self-rated performance (**3.4**).

The three exemplar academic peer-reviewed publications illustrate the quality of the research, its value to an international audience, and suitability for publication in high quality scholarly journals (**3.2, 3.3, 3.4**). Findings specifically relating to Occupational Health and Safety Practitioners won best paper awards at the *Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management Conference (ANZAM)* international conference in 2011 (**3.5**).

3. References to the research - **Birkbeck author shown in bold.**

3.1 Bentley, T., Catley, B., Cooper-Thomas. H., Gardner, D., O'Driscoll, M. & **Trenberth, L.** (2009). *Understanding stress and bullying in New Zealand workplaces: Final report to Occupational Health & Safety Steering Committee* (pp1-100). Wellington, NZ: Health Research Council/New Zealand Department of labour. The key output to the Occupational Health and Safety Steering committee on December 17 2009.
http://www.massey.ac.nz/massey/fms//Massey%20News/2010/04/docs/Bentley-et-al-report.pdf.

3.2 O'Driscoll, M., Cooper-Thomas, H., Bentley, T.A., Catley, B., Gardner, D., and **Trenberth, L**. (2011). Workplace bullying in New Zealand: A survey of employee perceptions and attitudes. *Asia-Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 49 (4), 390-408.

3.3 Gardner, D., Bentley, T., Catley, B., Cooper-Thomas H., O'Driscoll, M. & **Trenberth, L.** (2013). Ethnicity, workplace bullying, social support and psychological strain in Aotearoa/New Zealand, *New Zealand Journal of Psychology,* 42 (2), 84-89.

3.4 Bentley, T.A., Catley, B., Cooper-Thomas, H., Gardner, D., O'Driscoll, M., Dale, A, and **Trenberth, L.** (2012). Perceptions of Workplace bullying in the New Zealand travel industry: Prevalence and management strategies. *Tourism Management*, 33, 351-360.

3.5 Catley, B., Bentley, T., Forsyth, D., Gardner, D., Cooper-Thomas, H., O'Driscoll, M. & **Trenberth, L.** (2011). Managing workplace bullying in New Zealand: Perspectives from Occupational Health and Safety Practitioners. *Australian and New Zealand Academy of Management Conference (ANZAM), Wellington, New Zealand 7-9 December.* ***Best Paper Award and Best Paper Award, Human Resource Management & Development Stream.***

Grants:

Grant for the Research Awarded to: See Section 2 for Principal Investigation Team
Grant Title: Understanding Workplace Stress and Bullying in New Zealand Workplaces
Sponsor: Health Research Council and the Department of Labour of New Zealand
Period of the Grant: March 2008 – December 2009
Value of the Grant: $NZ 220,000

4. Details of the impact

The Honourable Kate Wilkinson, Minister of Labour wrote to Professor Bentley, the leader of the research project, in October 2011 acknowledging the contribution the research had made to the understanding of the nature and prevalence of psychosocial hazards in New Zealand Workplaces (**5.1**). The acting manager for Labour Research and Evaluation acknowledged the three main impacts of the research. These were highlighting the importance of psychosocial factors in workplaces, contributing to the decision to include psychosocial workplace hazards as a priority area for the Occupational Health Action Plan to 2013 and using data from the report as one of the main factual bases for a new guideline Ministry staff wrote on workplace bullying in New Zealand (**5.2**). The significance and reach of the research, particularly around ineffective leadership as a main factor leading to increased stress and bullying and that employers in all sectors had limited understanding of the workplace bullying problem and how to address it, led the Department of Labour to issue a press release on April 15 2010 (**5.3**) specifically citing the research, warning employers that they had a duty under the Health and Safety in Employment Act to provide a healthy and safe workplace, which included having a workplace in which bullying is not tolerated. Lesley Haines, Department of Labour Head of Employment Relations, warned employers that they needed robust practices and procedures to deal with workplace bullying issues. Haines said the Department would work with each sector covered by the report to raise awareness of the issues raised by the research findings. Fact sheets and guidance material have been prepared (**5.4**). The Labour Department was quoted as saying "*it would use the findings to produce fact sheets and other 'guidance material' to help employers and staff deal with bullying."* The research had a significant impact on the Department of Labour's Occupational Health Action Plan to 2013 (2.1.5, p.11) where the findings from the research directly contributed to the decision to include psychosocial workplace hazards as a priority area for the Occupational Health Action Plan to 2013, as an initiative of New Zealand's workplace Health and Safety Strategy (**5.5**).

The research showed that bullying was notably higher in the health and education sectors, where ineffective leadership was one of the main causes. These findings were disseminated to unions and to the Human Resource Institute of New Zealand. The findings showed that television representations of foul-mouthed and abusive chefs may not be far from the truth with belittling behaviour an accepted and "normalised" part of the hospitality culture. An article in *Hospitality* (2009) about chefs behaving badly in New Zealand cited the research drawing attention to the differences between bullying in the kitchen and other parts of the hospitality industry (**5.6**). The research generated enormous media coverage and impact, highlighting the problem of bullying in the workplace, with one in five being bullied in the workplace. This media coverage included 12 radio and television interviews and some 8 newspaper articles. An article in the New Zealand Herald (*http://www.nzherald.co.nz/nz/news/article.cfm?c_id=1&objectid=10638499)* drew attention to the role of leadership and management in the thriving culture of bullying in the workplace. The reach and significance of the research is further demonstrated by being cited in an article on exploding the myths of workplace bullying in the Perth, Australia Work Safe Forum (**5.7**) where the research focus on identifying risk factors for bullying were referred to. The research put workplace bullying under the spotlight in New Zealand Employment Law fora as an increasingly recognised major workplace issue with legal implications (**5.8**).

Expanding Reach

The findings of the research have been widely disseminated across New Zealand industry by members of the research team conducting road shows to groups of stakeholders with the aim of increasing awareness among *employees* and *organizations* – who must understand the nature and prevalence of bullying before they can take steps to prevent it. Involvement of the national, industrial and organisational parties provides an excellent platform for dissemination and ongoing engagement to ensure best the possible impact and industry uptake of the findings. Presentations of the results were made to all these bodies during 2010-12 and to what are now the Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment for public release in April 2010 (**5.3, 5.5**). The research has been picked up by a range of media and professional organizations including the Association of Salaried Medical Specialists as late as 2013 (**5.9**). It has been disseminated to all industry groups

through presentations such as meetings of regional occupational health and safety practitioners during 2011. The research is being replicated in the ASEAN countries as a comparative study for capacity building in those countries. While it is difficult to evidence that the research has resulted in less bullying and stress, the impact through influencing government policy and attracting coverage by media, and safety and employment law forums has resulted in more organizations producing their own bulling policies that are not just part of harassment policies. The research team was invited to comment on the Safe Work Australia draft COP on Workplace bullying in 2011, based on the research which was cited (**5.10**).

5. Sources to corroborate the impact
References who can corroborate the impact of the research into Understanding and Preventing Stress and Bullying in New Zealand Workplaces on Occupational Health Action plan.

5.1 Member of Parliament
Wellington, New Zealand.

5.2 Manager, Research, Evaluation and Analysis
Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, New Zealand.

5.3 Department of Labour (2010). *Department of Labour's Comments on Bullying Research*, Media Case 15 April 2010, http://www.dol.govt.nz/news/media/2010/bullying-report.asp.

5.4 Ministry of Business, Innovation and Employment, *Stress, Fatigue and conflict in the workplace,* http://www.business.govt.nz/healthandsafetygroup/information-guidance/all-guidance-items/bullying-factsheet   Downloaded on 22/10/13.

5.5 Department of Labour (2011). *Occupational Health Action plan to 2013: Workplace health and Safety Strategy for New Zealand to 2015,* New Zealand Govt, p.11.
http://www.business.govt.nz/healthandsafetygroup/about-health-and-safety/whss/action-agenda-action-plans/occupational-health-action-plan-to-2013.

5.6 Colville, W. (2009). Chefs behaving badly - we're a world leader in workplace bullying, *Hospitality,* 45 (9), pp 10-12.

5.7 Powell, R. (2011). Exploding the myths of workplace bullying. Perth Work Safe 2011 Forum www.safetyline.wa.gov.au/PDF/Work%20Safe%20Forum/Bullying.pdf *Research quoted as "provides a recent overview of the research into bullying", p.6.*

5.8 New Zealand Employment Law (2010). Workplace bullying. *New Zealand Employment Law: Issues, developments and reforms to New Zealand's employment law, Thursday April 15,* http://labourlawnz.blogspot.co.uk/2010/04/workplace-bullying.html.

5.9 Association of Salaried Medical Specialists (2013). Bullying in the Workplace, *Standpoint,* February 2013, pp 2-6.

5.10 Darby, F., Bentley, T., & Gardner, D. (2011). Comments on the Safe Work Australia draft COP for Workplace Bullying. *246 Department of Labour, New Zealand.*