



DProf thesis

Managing business transformation at different stages of the recession

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**Faculty of Science & Technology / Health, Social Care and
Education**

**DProf Risk (004B916) - Doctorate in Professional
Studies**

Title of Research Programme:

**Managing Business Transformation at different stages of the
Recession**

Thesis Title: Managing Business Transformation and the impacts of
bullying During Times of Economic Uncertainty

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Abstract

Background: The recession caused by the Global Financial Crisis (December 2007 - June 2009) led to austerity until 2017. During this period, organisations made significant internal changes to stay profitable, resulting in job cuts and limited reemployment. Data for this study was collected in 2015 from a major multinational shipping and logistics firm during a change project that led to redundancies, relocations, higher performance standards, and demotions, profoundly altering the company's strategies, operations, and work environments. This case study examined the impact of organisational change during economic downturns, especially during austerity, on affected individuals, focusing on how such changes might foster workplace bullying. The study compared experiences before, during, and after the 2008 crisis, considering workplace bullying as a personal construct based on employee's perceptions. It analysed the impact of austerity-driven change projects on workplace bullying and the correlation between such changes, stress levels, and instances of bullying.

The Research Aims and Objectives to address this were as follows:

1. To explore the role of stress during a change project in an uncertain economic climate on well-being and interpersonal relationships, and to uncover the interpersonal relationship patterns that gave rise to workplace bullying.
2. To examine employee views of what constitutes workplace bullying, if they had experienced or witnessed it, whether they felt it had occurred due to/or had increased because of the change project, and whether the uncertain economic climate due to austerity affected this. To discover the occurrence and nature of workplace bullying according to HR, line managers, and employees.
3. To explore, among those who had experienced or witnessed bullying, how it was dealt with and if they felt it was managed effectively by line managers or HR. To explore the existence, knowledge, and perceived efficacy of policy documentation or written guidance regarding workplace bullying according to HR, line managers and employees, and assess their views on whether these are sufficient to address the unique challenges of change programmes and workplace bullying.

The overall objective was to examine the role of change projects during austerity on employee experiences of workplace bullying and to explore the relationship between change projects, stress, and workplace bullying.

To do this, the Research Questions were as follows:

1. How does organisational change during an uncertain economic climate lead to workplace bullying?
2. How are stress and interpersonal relationships impacted in this process?

Research Design and Methodology: This research used an organisational case study design approach with constructivism and interpretative epistemology. The qualitative research methods included policy document analysis; semi-structured interviews with 20 employees directly and indirectly impacted by the project and thematic analysis to analyse the data.

Findings and Conclusions -Three main themes were identified,

In Theme 1, conducting a change project during the economic downturn negatively impacted employee's job security, decreased employee well-being, and increased anxiety and stress levels. What followed was the deterioration of workplace relationships that led to workplace bullying.

In Theme 2, workplace bullying was carried out by those in positions of power within the organisation, including managers and peers from the old teams. This bullying targeted the new teams, who had been assigned the tasks, and in some cases, the roles of the older teams were affected by the project changes.

In Theme 3, the management of bullying incidents was considered ineffective. The existing policies and procedures were not fully utilised, and the responses from management and HR in handling bullying cases were viewed as inadequate.

Outcomes of the Research: The product and outcome of this research are stakeholder recommendations on a way forward for managing bullying when conducting a change project in periods of economic turbulence. These consider the changing landscape of the nature of the work environment in the context of major external socioeconomic influences.

Chapter 1, Introduction

This chapter delineates the study rationale, project context, and interrelationships among the three primary components of the research title: definitions of recession, austerity, and business transformation, to provide the contextual background, including the research period, environment, and operational definition of workplace bullying. This background establishes the nexus between my interest in the economic downturn's impact on organisational changes and the focus on workplace bullying. This chapter elucidates the project's significance for my career, reflecting on my change management experience and its importance for practice-based researchers and change management leaders. It concludes with the terms of reference and objectives, presenting the research organisation, project aims, and objectives.

Study Rationale and Project Context

Definition of a Recession, and Austerity and Context

The International Monetary Fund defines a recession as a significant and widespread decline in economic activity, resulting in a prolonged downturn and negative growth (International Monetary Fund, 2020). Kose & Ohnsorge (2020) argue that while recessions may last only a few months, full recovery to pre-recession economic levels can take years. The 2008 Global Financial Crisis, commonly referred to as "The Recession", occurred globally from December 2007 to June 2009. It is widely acknowledged that discussions of this recession also encompass the subsequent austerity period which lasted until 2017, and these two periods are collectively termed "The Recession" (Kose & Ohnsorge, 2021). The phrases "economic uncertainty" and "downturn" are frequently employed to characterise both phases. The 2008 Global Financial Crisis was precipitated by the collapse of the housing market, a mortgage and banking crisis, and a stock market crash, resulting in a significant rise in unemployment due to declining corporate profits. Contributing factors included low interest rates, widespread bad credit, insufficient regulation, and the proliferation of toxic subprime mortgages, which collectively led to what is considered the most severe economic recession since the Great Depression of 1929-1939 (Kose & Ohnsorge, 2021). Following the crisis, a period of austerity emerged, as government policies aimed at reducing and controlling escalating public debt as economies sought to recover from the aftermath of the financial turmoil (Kose & Ohnsorge, 2021).

Data for this study was collected during a 2015 change project amidst austerity. Employees were asked about their experiences before, during, and after the 2008 Global Financial Crisis and subsequent austerity to examine contrasts across these periods and understand the impact of economic instability on change projects and workplace bullying.

Definition of a Business Transformation and Context

Business transformation refers to comprehensive, strategic changes within an organisation aimed at enhancing competitiveness, improving efficiency, or implementing a significant strategic shift. The Harvard Business Review (Kotter, 2007) defines business transformation programmes as substantial, paradigm-shifting initiatives that organisations undertake to accelerate change and growth beyond typical incremental improvements. These initiatives are broad and strategic, designed to create value by optimising employee potential, leveraging intellectual property and proprietary technology, and enhancing operational efficiency to maximise profitability. Business transformation involves a fundamental reconfiguration of operations to respond to shifts in the industry and broader market environment (Kotter, 2007). Such transformations are often driven by external factors, including the need for an organisation's products or services to adapt to evolving market demand, the introduction of new regulatory requirements, increased market competition, and the need to adjust to changes in the economic landscape.

Business transformation programmes strategically address organisational challenges by altering the underlying organisational paradigm (Wherrett, 2020). McKinsey Consulting notes that these transformations aim to boost performance through higher revenue, lower costs, and improved workforce productivity (Bachman et al., 2022). They involve fundamental changes in operating models, systems, processes, personnel, geography, operations, and technology to achieve business outcomes. Consequently, they encompass multiple change management projects targeting specific processes, systems, technologies, teams, or departments, led by Project and Change Management professionals who manage the project's structure, governance, communication, and control mechanisms and monitor goals and results (Cruise, 2017). These large-scale, multi-year efforts are driven by economic pressures and mandated by shareholders and senior management, to ensure long-term success and growth.

Business transformation programme initiatives include examples like regulatory changes such as the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and technology updates such as implementing System Applications and Products in Data Processing (SAP) to centrally manage HR, Finance, Operations, Sales, and Supply Chain functions. Other initiatives involve acquiring, divesting, merging, integrating new businesses, forming joint ventures, or partnering with similar entities to expand market presence. Examples also include outsourcing, offshoring, or nearshoring operations to reduce costs, streamline processes, and establish expertise centres. These strategies typically involve operational changes and cost-cutting measures, such as job relocations or redundancies.

In this study, the business transformation strategy, mandated by the company's headquarters in response to revenue loss from the 2008 financial crisis, involved a central programme to develop a strategic transformation roadmap. This included several smaller change projects focusing on technological advancements, location closures, and cost-cutting exercises. The transformation targeted the organisation's operating model, realised through acquiring an offshore business and relocating core processes offshore, leading to onshore location closures and team redundancies. The IT business was divested and outsourced to a specialised provider.

The programme was centrally managed by a team of programme leads, governance managers, solution architects, HR and legal experts, and project managers, reporting directly to the board of shareholders and senior stakeholders. As the principal change management architect, my responsibilities included designing the new operating model, overseeing organisational restructuring, transitioning businesses and teams to the new company, and managing redundancy and exit processes for teams affected by the IT business carve-out.

Definition of Workplace Bullying

During the literature review process, a working definition of workplace bullying was identified that accurately characterised bullying acts, facilitating a more comprehensive understanding of the dynamics of the phenomenon. This definition was subsequently adopted in the present study. It was formulated by leading scholars in the field of workplace bullying. The most recent iteration of Einarsen et al.'s (2010) definition was utilised because of its comprehensive delineation of bullying acts, which has consequently been employed in numerous studies as a reliable source. Bullying is defined as,

... Repeatedly and regularly harassing, offending, socially excluding, or negatively affecting someone's work over a period. Tasks that escalate and where the targeted person ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts. Examples of acts include Spreading gossip and rumours about you, Being ignored or excluded and having your opinions and views ignored, hostile reaction when you approach, Practical jokes carried out by people you do not get on with, Being the subject of excessive teasing and sarcasm, Having insulting or offensive remarks made about you (i.e. your habits, background), Being shouted at or being the target of someone's anger, Intimidating behaviour such as finger-pointing, invasion of personal space, shoving, blocking/barring the way, Threats of violence, physical abuse, or actual abuse. Someone withholding information which affects your performance, Being given tasks of unreasonable or impossible targets of deadlines, Being exposed to an unmanageable workload, Being ordered to do work below your level of competence, Having critical areas of responsibility removed or replaced with more trivial or

unpleasant tasks, Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work, Repeated reminders of your errors and persistent criticism of your work and effort, Excessive monitoring, Pressure not to claim something you are entitled (e.g. sick leave, holidays), Hints from others that you should quit your job) ... Einarsen et al. (2010, p.22).

This definition would, in the research project, facilitate employee's comprehension of workplace bullying by providing the terms and behaviours which several scholars in the field now accept to classify acts of workplace bullying (Einarsen et al., 2010; Boulet, 2021; D'Cruz & Noronha, 2012; Georgakopoulos et al., 2011; Matthiesen, 2007; Salin, 2003; Shoss & Probst, 2012).

Why conduct this research? My interest in the relationship between economic and organisational changes and workplace bullying

I have established a career spanning over 26 years in business transformation programmes, as a management consultant specialising in change management and organisational change. These projects were familiar to me, as I have both designed and been directly impacted by major organisational changes, including redundancies and role shifts. My interest in organisational change and bullying began around the end of 2007, just before the recession, when I was already involved in leading business transformation initiatives as a change management professional.

During these initiatives, I increasingly recognised the underlying organisational discontent among employees involved in change projects. In every project I undertook before, during, and after the recession, until submitting this thesis proposal in late 2012, I either observed or was informed of workplace bullying incidents. These incidents seemed to stem from the economic pressures faced by organisations during turbulent times. At the time, I lacked the terminology to identify these behaviours as "workplace bullying". However, these occurrences aligned with the aforementioned bullying definition, and the acts described. In several projects where I was the change manager, I was required to implement policies and practices that constituted workplace bullying, negatively impacting employees as directed by the organisation or its managers. I witnessed the severe effects on employee's mental and physical health and experienced workplace bullying myself. I recall numerous instances in which my supervisors imposed unreasonable performance targets, denied staff benefits, used intimidation, coerced employees, overlooked promotions, and withheld rewards despite meeting objectives. These actions fit the definition of workplace bullying.

These experiences provided empirical evidence that workplace bullying increased during organisational changes amid the economic recession and austerity measures, affecting both employees, change initiatives and organisations. This observation motivated further research

in this field. In my professional experience, business transformation projects often induce stress among employees and affect workplace relations. An unstable economic climate exacerbates these issues, as changes are often accelerated by external factors (Salin, 2003). The 2008 economic recession and subsequent austerity measures forced organisations to optimise resources to maintain profitability, leading to changes in organisational and functional structures. These changes impacted individuals, teams, and the execution of routine tasks, increasing workload while decreasing job security and performance. While the existing literature on workplace bullying spans various communities of practice, there remains a lack of practice-based investigations into bullying within change projects during economic downturns. Quantitative methodologies dominate research in this area, while this study's distinctive contribution lies in its qualitative approach, adopting a bottom-up, multi-informant perspective to examine the experiences of employees, managers, and HR professionals regarding workplace bullying. My professional background influenced this methodological choice. The study includes ontological and ethnographic accounts of employees experiencing organisational changes, focusing on the increase in stress and its impact on interpersonal dynamics and workplace bullying during economic turbulence.

The results of this study can guide the development of project environments that reduce resistance to change, through staff engagement and empowerment. This approach could enhance project implementation by addressing employee needs, ultimately supporting more effective and sustainable change initiatives in the field of change management.

Terms of Reference and Objectives of the Project

I undertook this research in a multinational organisation, which is the oldest and largest global shipping and logistics conglomerate, with a presence in over 150 countries and over 100k employees. They are leaders in their field and also own oil and gas businesses with offshore drilling activities worldwide. In the group's organisational structure, each entity is managed and controlled as a separate business subsidiary. However, all still report to the larger holding group. The company in question is headquartered in Europe, family-owned, and operated, and has been at the forefront of the shipping industry since 1904.

Owing to the 2008 recession and the resulting loss of earnings, they were forced to re-engineer their global business operating model to cut costs and remain profitable. This, in turn, would trickle down to all businesses within the main holding group. Starting circa 2008, the centre of the business transformation (change) programme was the group's IT business (also spread across the globe). It served the entire group's (and all its other subsidiaries) technology infrastructure services and needs. The IT business was pivotal to the organisation because it was the backbone responsible for mandatory processes such as customs, shipping,

container services, disaster recovery, oil and gas safety, and network infrastructure. It was also the costliest business in the group portfolio.

From 2009 to late 2012, I worked in the IT business as a change and project management leader in their offices headquartered in Europe. During my tenure, I was part of the primary transformation programme team that would eventually design the transformation to divest, outsource, and offshore the IT business to another vendor. It was an unprecedented outsourcing initiative, the size and scale of which had not been done historically. This received a lot of internal and external attention due to the magnitude of this divestiture. The implementation across the groups was intended to last for five years. My role was to design and manage the organisational transformation that would become the blueprint for the rest of the group to follow. This included designing the target operation model with HR and Legal teams and the organisational structure of the retained and divested IT teams. I participated in all the employee elements of the change, i.e. job roles, redundancies, relocations, set up of new locations, outsourcing teams to the new external vendor company, etc., through the various stages of the transformation until the organisation was fully outsourced and offshored, at which point I exited the company. As mentioned before, this business transformation programme instigated several caveat change projects that the entire company and all its other businesses would undergo centrally and, in each country, they operated in. As a result of this business transformation, the headquarters mandated these businesses to change their operating environments, including various cost-cutting measures, because of the divestiture of the IT business. The central business transformation programme would be fully implemented in a five-year timeline when the programme would complete its strategy changes. However, the caveat change projects in the rest of the business effect would last beyond the intended five years (and potentially trigger smaller change projects), as the implemented changes would then become the new way of working and the operational status quo. The need to outsource and divest most of this IT company was a new and foreign concept for the holding company. It was met with a lot of change resistance but defended by shareholders and executive leadership as unavoidable if they were to remain profitable.

The Research Project - The research in this thesis was conducted in one of the Southern African offices because the organisation in this location had, since the economic downturn, undergone a series of smaller change projects as mandated by headquarters, in preparation to offshore local expertise to a newly sourced and staffed Shared Service Centre based in South Asia, between 2013-2014. For the Southern African Customer Service Teams, this resulted in job losses. For those who were retained, the options were involuntary relocation to South Asia or termination of employment, salary reductions, role demotions, service level alterations, and the requirement to train new teams in South Asia in their job roles. This project affected the rest of the Southern African organisation and its customers, who relied

on the Southern Africa Customer Services Teams locally and internationally. The entire global organisation would eventually experience the consequential impact of this change due to the relocation of localised expertise to a new Shared Service Centre, which led to decreased productivity and service performance levels.

I had prior knowledge of the programme, the scale and pace of changes the Southern African office was undergoing, the impact this would have on staff morale, well-being, and stress, and how the changes could decrease workplace productivity and company performance. I also knew how difficult the change programme was for employees, primarily because the company did not have a culture prepared for running one change programme after another, given that they had never had to do so before.

Study Aims

During the literature review, it became evident that there is a significant gap in qualitative research exploring the impact of organisational change and the evolving economic climate on workplace bullying, as well as the mechanisms through which these factors have an influence. This case study aimed to address this gap by exploring the interpersonal and individual impacts of organisational change programmes implemented in the Southern African and South Asian branches. Focusing on the perspectives of employees, managers, and human resources professionals, this study investigated the impact of these change initiatives, with particular attention to workplace bullying during periods of economic instability. Specifically, it examines how the economic downturn, alongside significant business transformation, may have exacerbated workplace stress and influenced workplace relations, including the prevalence of bullying, within the context of the change project.

Research Questions

The research took a qualitative bottom-up, multi-informant approach to address:

1. How does organisational change during an uncertain economic climate lead to workplace bullying?
2. How are stress and interpersonal relationships impacted in this process?

Research Aims and Objectives to address this were,

1. To explore the role of stress during a change project in an uncertain economic climate on well-being and interpersonal relationships, and to uncover the interpersonal relationship patterns that gave rise to workplace bullying.
2. To examine employee views of what constitutes workplace bullying, if they had experienced or witnessed it, whether they felt it had occurred due to/or had increased

because of the change project, and whether the uncertain economic climate due to austerity affected this. To discover the occurrence and nature of workplace bullying according to HR, line managers, and employees.

3. To explore, among those who had experienced or witnessed bullying, how it was dealt with and if they felt it was managed effectively by line managers or HR. To explore the existence, knowledge, and perceived efficacy of policy documentation or written guidance regarding workplace bullying according to HR, line managers and employees, and assess their views on whether these are sufficient to address the unique challenges of change programmes and workplace bullying.

The focus of this study are the direct and indirect ramifications of a particular change initiative executed during the austerity phase in 2015. However, all employees in this study were, at minimum, indirectly affected by various change initiatives implemented as part of the wider business transformation strategy that started circa 2008. This research aims to evaluate the influence of economic uncertainty on interpersonal dynamics in the workplace and its subsequent effect on workplace bullying during a change project. It concludes with recommendations for improvements in practice for teams undergoing organisational change.

Conclusion and Introduction to the Forthcoming Chapters

Chapter 2 presents a comprehensive literature review on workplace bullying, encompassing various dimensions, such as workplace bullying in the private versus public sector, the influence of organisational change on workplace bullying, the role of power and organisational culture in workplace bullying, the impact of the 2008 recession on workplace bullying, the antecedent role of stress in workplace bullying, and the interrelation between stress, workplace bullying, and employee well-being. Chapter 3 introduces the research design and methodology, detailing the rationale behind the project, project context, and research objectives. Chapter 4 elucidates the project activity and explains the practical implementation of the project. Chapter 5 provides an analysis of the findings and discusses emergent themes, the process of their deduction, and the supporting quotations. Chapter 6 offers a discussion of the findings, interpreting the themes in relation to the literature review presented in Chapter 2. It also examines how the case study aligns with or diverges from the existing literature, drawing on the previously reviewed literature and new research. Furthermore, it addresses the relevance of the findings in the study context, as well as gaps in the literature and the study's limitations. Finally, Chapter 7 concludes with a summary, recommendations, personal reflections, and an account of the research experience.

Chapter 2, Literature Review

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the literature review, initially covering statistics on bullying rates to illustrate the scale of the problem and differences between the private and public sectors. It then discusses organisational change and its potential link to increased workplace bullying, a key focus of this research. The 2008 recession is noted as a catalyst for organisational change, prompting an examination of its impact on workplace bullying, particularly within change programmes. This chapter explores how increased stress levels in change projects contribute to deteriorating workplace relationships and bullying, detailing the cause-and-effect relationship between stress and bullying. Additionally, the link between stress, workplace bullying, and employee well-being is discussed to understand how these factors affect relationships in projects and overall employee well-being. Finally, the management of bullying by leaders and those in positions of power is addressed.

Literature Focus

A comprehensive literature review on workplace bullying, harassment, and violence during organisational changes, with a particular focus on recessions, business management, and human resources was conducted. Search engines and databases were used, including Open Athens, Summon, Middlesex University's research repository, Psych Info, Web of Science, Google Scholar, Google Books, Academia.edu, and Google, to identify relevant journals, books, and articles. The search utilised keywords such as workplace bullying, incivility, harassment, victimisation, organisational culture, psychological contract, recession, austerity, financial crisis, economic uncertainty/change, workplace relationships, organisational change/projects, work stress, and employee well-being. This yielded a diverse range of studies in management sciences and psychology, encompassing workplace psychology, labour relations, human resources, organisational behaviour, culture, and management styles. The focus on bullying research reviewed the impact of organisational changes on behaviour in individuals and teams. The literature review addresses workplace bullying rates, the role of organisational change in bullying, influences of power and culture, the impact of recession, stress-related bullying, and effects on workplace relationships and employee well-being.

Statistics on the Rates of Workplace Bullying

A survey conducted between 2003 and 2006 by Notelaers et al. (2013) with a total of 5,727 respondents measured the prevalence of bullying across 19 Belgian private sector organisations encompassing a diverse range of occupations and industries. This study

revealed that 89% of respondents had experienced workplace bullying incidents over a six-month period.

Illustrated in Table 1, Ng (2019, p. 33) reported the prevalence of workplace bullying in other countries between 2001 and 2012.

Table 1 - Prevalence of workplace bullying in different countries

Year	First author	Country	Occupations	Sample size	Prevalence rate (%)
2001	Voss [53]	Sweden	workers in postal service	3470	3.3
2004	Varhama [54]	Finland	municipal employees	1961	16.0
2007	Niedhammer [55]	France	various workers	7694	10.2 (past year)
2007	Matthiesen [56]	Norway	various workers	2215	8.3
2009	Ortega [57]	Denmark	various workers	3429	8.3 (past year)
2011	Giorgi [58]	Italy	various workers	3112	15.2
2011	Glao [59]	Norway	bus drivers	1023	11 (past 6 months)
2011	Lallukka [60]	Finland	various city workers	7332	5 (current workplace)
2011	Notelaers [61]	Belgium	various workers	8985	8.3
2012	Perbellini [62]	Italy	workers	449	30.1
2012	Keuskamp [63]	Australia	various workers	1145	15.2
2012	Niedhammer [64]	France	various workers	29,680	6.4
2012	Cunniff [65]	South Africa	various workers	13,911	35.1

The "WBI U.S.A Workplace Bullying Survey" by Namie et al. from the Workplace Bullying Institute (2021) examined workplace bullying prevalence in the USA. Using a representative sample of 1,215 adults, the researchers applied the 2020 U.S. Bureau of Labour Statistics workforce estimate of 160,537,000 to extrapolate bullying rates. These rates estimate the number of American workers experiencing bullying. Table 2 shows their findings (Namie et al., 2021, p.7).

Table 2 - Workers affected by bullying in North America

Types of Experiences with Bullying	Proportion	Number
I am experiencing it now or have experienced it in the last year	.1325	21,275,127
I have experienced it before in my work life, but not in the last year	.1703	27,344,560
<i>Total of those with Direct Bullying Experience</i>	.3028	48,619,687
I have seen it happen (in-person or via remote work) to others	.1275	20,472,292
I know, but have not seen, that it happened to others	.0633	10,163,891
<i>Total of those who Witnessed It</i>	.1909	30,652,240
<i>Total of Americans Affected by Bullying</i>	.4938	79,287,984
I am, or have been, a perpetrator myself <i>Self-Identified Bullies</i>	.0411	6,599,303
I have not experienced or witnessed it: I do believe it happens in workplaces	.1349	21,660,488
I have not experienced or witnessed it: I believe that what others consider "mistreatment" happens	.0954	15,318,091
<i>"Believers"</i>	.2303	36,978,580
<i>Total of Americans Aware of Bullying</i>	.6609	106,118,730
I have no personal experience or knowledge of, or an opinion about, abusive mistreatment at work	.3390	54,432,213

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Their research shows that 79.3 million American workers face workplace bullying. Of these, 30% have experienced bullying (a 57% rise since 2017), 49% of witnesses were affected, and 43.2% of remote workers encountered bullying. Employees report a 52% bullying rate compared to 40% among managers. Public opinion attributes 48% of this rise to toxic workplace cultures (Namie et al., 2021, p.7/16). According to Eser's (2023) research 75% of employees observed bullying, 45% experienced stress-related health issues, and 48% faced mental well-being problems. Additionally, 40% reported bullying lasting over a year, with 80% of perpetrators being bosses or supervisors. Only 12% of workplaces have anti-bullying policies. 51% of victims reported management inaction, and just 21% reported incidents to human resources.

Bullying research has largely focused on the public sector and non-managerial roles. Salin (2001, 2003) addressed this by examining workplace bullying among business professionals in private firms, emphasising organisational politics. She evaluated bullying prevalence, frequency, types, and the work environment's role in a 12-month study of a Finnish professional organisation with 1000 employees. Results showed that 24.1% reported being bullied, and 30.4% were indirectly affected, with weekly bullying incidents. This underscores the connection between high organisational politics and bullying, highlighting the significant impact of leadership style, job design, organisational norms, values, and climate on bullying prevalence (Einarsen et al., 1994; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Hoel & Salin, 2003; Vartia, 1996).

Workplace Bullying in the Private and Public Sectors

Heames (2007) notes an increase in bullying as a social and emotional contagion in global organisations. Salin (2003) observes that workplace bullying is more prevalent in the private sector, driven by market globalisation, forcing companies to enhance efficiency and profitability, leading to organisational changes and performance reward systems that have exacerbated bullying. The focus on efficiency and profitability, coupled with organisational change and uncertainty, elevates stress levels and correlates with increased workplace bullying. Employees aim to protect their financial resources for strategic and non-strategic reasons, diminishing workplace civility, which performance-driven managers often neglect the importance of. Salin (2003) posits that individuals frequently use bullying as a political tactic for personal advancement. Steinman & Herman (1997) identify power dynamics, organisational changes, economic conditions, company culture, leadership styles, and managerial practices as contributing factors. Salin (2003) also found that in the private sector, particularly during organisational changes, employment legislation regarding staff dismissal makes strategic bullying appealing as a micro-political tactic to bypass labour laws, remove unwanted employees, or secure one's position. Zapf & Worth (1997) support Salin's findings, noting that bullying is often used informally to terminate undesirable staff.

While Einarsen et al. (1998), and Hoel & Cooper (2000) argue that high bullying rates in the private sector stem from stressors like internal pressures, competition, and job insecurity; Yamada & Duffy (2018) found that workplace bullying occurs across public, private, and non-profit sectors, affecting individuals and organisations regardless of the industry. Their study, covering healthcare, K-12, higher education, and corporate environments, supports Steinman & Herman (1997), showing that factors such as reduced job satisfaction, economic instability, workload, and role demotion contribute to bullying, irrespective of sector. They concluded that bullying's negative health and psychosocial effects necessitate neuropsychotherapeutic interventions, severely impacting organisations. This will be further explored under the link between stress, workplace bullying, and employee well-being.

Role of Organisational Change on Workplace Bullying

Catalano & Dooley's (1983) economic stress hypothesis suggests that adverse economic events generate psychosocial stressors, which, in turn, influence both individual and group behaviours. They propose that a stressful psychosocial work environment, along with challenging working conditions, can lead to conflict and bullying. Moreover, organisational changes during an economic downturn exacerbate this stressful environment. This stress, compounded by information overload and time pressures, undermines workplace civility, as organisations focus on short-term revenue at the expense of employee well-being. Estes (2008) indicates that organisational context significantly influences bullying behaviours. The

modern work environment, characterised by management and organisational cultures that prioritise efficiency, cost-cutting, restructuring, outsourcing, offshoring, competition, downsizing, and the use of temporary contracts, contributes to increased workplace stress. Hoel et al. (2002) and Skogstad et al. (2007) established a link between organisational changes and an increase in workplace bullying due to increased efficiency demands, high job demands, low job control, role conflicts, ambiguity, and job insecurity. Einarsen et al. (2012). Skogstad et al. (2007) and Matthiesen (2006) note that bullying intensifies amid changes such as downsizing, pay cuts, mergers, restructures, role changes, divestitures, and redundancies. Skogstad et al. (2007), for example, found that bullying incidents were more frequent during periods of downsizing, which they attributed to heightened internal pressures, increased competition, and job insecurity which specifically fosters workplace bullying.

Power and Organisational Culture in Workplace Bullying

Einarsen et al. (2003) and Cortina et al. (2001) identified bullying as an abuse of power, characterised by power imbalances between perpetrator and victim. Workplace bullying is repetitive and prolonged, rendering victims unable to defend themselves, due to power disparity and lack of control (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005). Diminished power renders employees more susceptible to becoming victims of bullying (Cortina et al., 2001; Einarsen et al., 2003). Salin's (2003) study corroborated this finding, demonstrating that employees in lower hierarchical positions reported a higher incidence of bullying incidents compared to those in managerial and expert positions.

Hauge et al. (2007) use the work environment theory to suggest that bullying is associated with stressful and competitive workplaces, but it is ultimately reinforced by organisational culture and leadership styles that condone such behaviour. For bullying to persist, the culture must indicate its acceptability. Hoel & Cooper (2000), Hauge et al. (2007), and Einarsen et al. (2007) corroborate this theory, demonstrating that bullying is correlated with negative work climates that condone bullying, high or unchallenging workloads, poor work relationships, dissatisfaction with management, role conflicts, low job control, and organisational climates lacking in employee empowerment and development.

Victims frequently attribute bullying to organisational politics and preferential treatment (Pauksztat & Salin, 2021). Drory (1993) corroborates this assertion, noting that decision-making processes often involve organisational politics in areas such as promotions, task assignments, performance appraisals, resource allocation, and dismissals. Skogstad et al. (2011) observed significant variations in workplace bullying across different levels of seniority groups, suggesting that these behaviours might also be influenced by factors at the departmental or organisational level. Leymann (1996) previously indicated that bullying partly

arises from a destructive organisational environment and that the phenomenon is shared within groups.

Einarsen (2011) identified three reasons for bullying: (1) the personality traits of perpetrators and targets, (2) interpersonal and group processes, and (3) the organisational work environment. Escartin et al. (2013) support this, noting that workplace bullying literature attributes causes to the organisation, social system, and perpetrators (e.g., line managers or those in power). Hutchinson (2013) and Pauksztat & Salin (2021) agree that bullying occurrence and support for perpetrators and targets are influenced by social norms within organisational culture, shaped and maintained by social influence processes.

Boulet's (2021) research on survivors, investigators, lawyers, counsellors, and observers of bullying revealed that workplace bullying is a global and pervasive issue, analogous to a virus that permeates all aspects of life. Writing during the coronavirus pandemic, Boulet (2021, p.9) characterised workplace bullying as "the other epidemic", noting that the pandemic has exacerbated its detrimental effects on employees and organisational culture. These effects encompass negative impacts on victims, bystanders, and organisational culture, wherein poor leadership practices that prioritise performance and profitability often facilitate harassment and bullying. Morillo (2021) concurs that workplace bullying proliferates in unhealthy organisational environments where such behaviour contributes to improved organisational outcomes, creating a self-perpetuating cycle. This phenomenon became more prevalent in the years following the 2008 financial crisis.

A significant portion of the existing research has examined the consequences of the 2008 recession, which I will now explore in greater depth.

Impact of the 2008 Recession on Workplace Bullying

During the 2008 Global Financial Crisis, the deteriorating economy exacerbated workplace bullying, because cost-cutting measures such as restructuring and downsizing often require employees to do more with fewer resources (Georgakopoulos et al., 2011). During the 2008 economic downturn, Shoss & Probst (2012) observed a notable increase in workplace bullying, attributing this rise to the financial challenges faced by organisations during the recession. This environment fostered widespread fears of job insecurity, employment instability, pay or benefit cuts, role changes, and layoffs, thereby threatening employee's economic resources. The research indicates that actual or perceived threats to employee's economic security and prospects contributed to workplace bullying by exacerbating aggressive conduct. This behaviour was driven by the need to manage the real or perceived loss of financial resources, as explained by Hobfoll's (1989) Conservation of Resources Theory (COR) in Unal-Karagüven (2009). Perrewé et al. (2012) research on the 2008 Global Financial

Crisis aligns with the findings of Shoss & Probst (2012) that the diminished empowerment and increased employment uncertainties, resulting from organisational changes due to the recession, likely contributed to an increase in incidents of bullying as employees faced financial threats to their well-being.

Furthermore, economic stress is closely linked to counterproductive work behaviour and increased interpersonal deviance (Herchovis, 2010), with a positive correlation established between organisational changes and task-related bullying, such as the imposition of unreasonable workloads (Skogstad, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2007). Economic stress is also associated with heightened levels of anxiety, depression, and anger (Shoss & Probst, 2012); emotions that can precipitate workplace bullying as individuals use such behaviours as a coping mechanism. Economic uncertainty, increased job instability, and diminished control, combined with recession-induced organisational changes require employees to do more with fewer resources and compete for limited resources, further contributing to workplace bullying (Perrewé et al., 2012; Georgakopoulos et al., 2011).

Stress and Workplace Bullying - The Bi-Directional Relationship

Numerous studies have been conducted to elucidate the dynamics and causes of bullying (e.g. Neuman & Baron, 1998; Vartia, 1996), and measure bullying rates across different countries and professions (e.g. Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Hoel & Cooper, 2000). In the previous section, the argument was made that the 2008 recession caused economic stress (Shoss & Probst (2012)). It is essential to recognise the bidirectional relationship between stress and workplace bullying. In this section the focus is on bullying as a complex multifaceted, layered phenomenon, demonstrating a causal link between the immediate and indirect impacts of stress.

Research on the relationship between stress and workplace bullying has identified three causal factors: (a) bullying causes stress; (b) increased stress leads to bullying; and (c) bullying, whether experienced or witnessed, acts as a catalyst for further bullying behaviours, suggesting that the experience of bullying can lead to additional bullying acts. Therefore, asserting that one directly causes the other often leads to circular reasoning. The following discussion aims to clarify key aspects of these positions.

Stress causes Bullying

Agervold & Mikkelsen (2004), Einarsen, Raknes, & Matthiesen (1994), and Hauge et al. (2007) have all observed that increased stress also causes workplace bullying, arising from dysfunctional organisational characteristics and psychosocial factors within the workplace. According to Agervold & Mikkelsen (2004); Notelaers (2019) and Zapf & Einarsen (2005) this phenomenon can be attributed to the work environment hypothesis. This hypothesis is the

most widely used framework for explaining workplace bullying, as it highlights how stress associated with organisational factors -specifically those related to the work environment and working conditions - serves as a precursor to being bullied at work. This perspective is supported by Salin (2003), and Skogstad, Matthiesen, & Einarsen (2007), who identify various stress-related factors as contributors to bullying, with organisational changes and the stress resulting from working conditions, being the most prominent. To put it simply, workplace bullying arises from a tense, disorganised, and discordant work environment. Such environments are typically characterised by high-stress positions, elevated performance expectations, poor work structuring, ineffective leadership approaches (including authoritarian or hands-off management styles), conflicting roles, limited autonomy, job uncertainty, and an atmosphere of rivalry and criticism (Neuman & Baron, 2003).

DeCenzo and Verhulst (2021), in their recent exploration of current labour demands, at multinational brands such as American Express, Cisco, and Adobe, reached the same conclusion as their peers, with their findings concluding that workplace bullying results from an increase in stress factors such as unrealistic task and role demands, interpersonal demands, and organisational leadership issues. Economic stress can be a key driver of strain outcomes, potentially triggering the emergence of workplace bullying (Shoss & Probst, 2012). The hostile environment created by organisational change amplifies negative emotions, which, in turn, fuel bullying behaviours towards colleagues. This occurs as a result of the combination of heightened negative emotions, reduced self-regulatory resources, and misdirected aggression, with bullying emerging as a consequence of the economic stress experienced by employees.

Research by Hoel et al. (2002), McCarthy (1996), Sheehan (1996), and Skogstad et al. (2007) also offer a strategic view, which proposes that the stress employees experience due to organisational changes and job insecurity contributes to increased interpersonal aggression at work, which act as a distinct precursor to bullying. When stress increases due to job insecurity, employees respond by reducing their organisational citizenship behaviours. Bullying is therefore a consequence of stress because employees facing economic threats may:

- a) Engage in organisational citizenship behaviours not for the benefit of the organisation, but to protect their job security and gain favour with management,
- b) Deliberately reduce helping behaviours and increase negative actions toward colleagues they view as threats to their resources, aiming to safeguard their resources and gain management's approval, and

c) Participate in political behaviours that enhance their status while simultaneously damaging relationships with co-workers.

Furthermore, research by DeCuyper et al. (2009) demonstrates that the positive relationship between stress and bullying occurs because bullying is more likely to thrive in environments where colleagues are potential rivals and leaders fail to emphasise civility during challenging times.

Bullying causes Stress and Group-Level Contagion

Although stress can cause bullying, it is also a commonly reported consequence of workplace bullying (McKay et al., 2008). Through their research, Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen (2007) identified that stress is a consequence of workplace bullying, arising from high levels of interpersonal role conflicts and destructive leadership behaviours. This finding aligns with Darko's (2018) research on workplace bullying and psychological distress, which posits that increased stress is a direct consequence of bullying.

Hershcovis & Barling (2010) and Ferguson & Participant K (2011) also argue that bullying acts as a stressor and a trigger for additional bullying. Those who experience or witness bullying are more likely to feel distressed and engage in bullying themselves, as a coping mechanism or to align with group norms. Bullying evolves at the group level through "secondary contagion", with displaced aggression and behavioural modelling. These behaviours signal acceptable conduct to employees and gradually integrate into the organisational culture, especially if leaders neglect to enforce civility during turbulent times. Employee responses in turn shape their own and co-worker's behaviours, creating a feedback loop that perpetuates bullying at both individual and group levels.

According to Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen (2007), targets and witnesses of bullying tend to evaluate their work environment more negatively due to an interactive relationship in which bullying causes stress, either through direct experience or observation. Nielsen, Matthiesen, & Einarsen (2010), Hershcovis & Barling (2010), and Ferguson & Participant K (2011) have all suggested that bullying serves as a significant stressor for both victims and witnesses. This perspective is supported by the findings of Vartia (2001), whose study, "Consequences of Workplace Bullying Concerning the Well-being of Its Targets and the Observers of Bullying", examined the impact of bullying on the well-being and stress levels of both targets and observers. Vartia's research revealed that both groups experienced elevated stress levels as a result of workplace bullying. Vartia (2001) and Mikkelsen & Einarsen (2003) explain that this group-level contagion also arises due to reduced job safety and security.

Matthiesen (2006) argued this concept using the stressor-strain framework proposed by Bowling & Beehr (2006), in the context of a company undergoing redundancies or downsizing.

The swift and unpredictable changes heightened stress levels and encouraged bullying behaviour as staff members competed for remaining positions. This resulted in a diminished sense of job security and, consequently, a reduction in organisational trust, stemming from the decisions made by those in leadership roles (Matthiesen, 2006). This is corroborated by Mikkelsen & Einarsen's (2003) argument that organisational change undermines trust and reduces commitment, as employees perceive that their psychological contract with the organisation has been violated. Argyris's (1960) psychological contract theory (in Anderson & Schalk, 1998) offers insight into this, suggesting that change initiatives disrupt the psychological contract that governs the relationship between the organisation and its employees. As a result, these disruptions lead to a decline in organisational citizenship behaviours. In return, employees resist change, which can be observed in bullying behaviour evident at the group/team, and individual levels (Shoss & Probst, 2012).

Steinman & Herman (1997) concur that power shifts, organisational change, economic conditions, corporate culture, policy, leadership, and managerial factors all contribute to this phenomenon. According to the stressor-strain framework, these behaviours contribute to negative outcomes, including reduced job satisfaction, lower organisational commitment and citizenship, diminished performance, increased turnover, and a decline in employee well-being (Bowling & Beehr, 2006).

The role of stress in workplace bullying is clear, raising questions about how victims cope, its impact on their well-being, and whether they may become perpetrators as a coping mechanism. Bowling & Beehr (2006) introduced a reciprocity-attribution model within their stressor-strain framework, explaining the link between bullying and its consequences. Their research found that victims of bullying often retaliate against perpetrators and the organisation for allowing the bullying to persist. Victims learn that the organisational culture condones or even rewards bullying behaviours, leading them to adopt such behaviours to survive in the workplace. Hershcovis & Barling's (2010) social information theory suggests that this is bullying is also a stressor for witnesses, who may engage in bullying to cope with distress or enforce group norms (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Ferguson & Participant K, 2011). This is because individuals derive self-esteem from social group membership, and identifying with a group based on its distinctive features creates a self-concept motivated by keeping a positive and accepted social identity (Escartín et al., 2013).

In addition, bullying is a group-level contagion, that often goes unnoticed by victims and perpetrators (Shoss & Probst, 2012), where aggressive behaviours by groups, target one or more victims (Leymann, 1996; Zapf & Einarsen, 2005). Workplace bullying as a group-level contagion, is a symptom of systemic organisational problems (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2006).

Zapf's (2004) social stressor model indicates that social conflict within an organisation often arises from negative events gradually building up over time. For instance, forced cooperation during organisational restructuring creates time pressure to complete additional tasks, which leads to perceptions of an unfair work environment. As a result, negative behaviours begin to emerge in response to this perceived injustice. Ultimately, in reaction to these perceived workplace injustices at the organisational level, employees start to model their environment, and as a consequence, workplace incivility and bullying behaviours emerge at both the group and individual levels. The imbalance of power exacerbates the situation, making it difficult for victims to defend themselves due to limited control (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005). This lack of control, combined with added workplace stressors, can turn victims into perpetrators.

The Link between Stress, Workplace Bullying and Employee Well-being

Extreme social stress also leads to severe health outcomes for victims (Zapf & Einarsen, 2005). Unaddressed bullying harms both organisational and employee health (Glendinning, 2001), with abuse affecting employee's personal lives (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003). Research shows that bullying has severe consequences for organisations, including economic risk, reputational damage, moral and cultural harm, decreased performance, increased attrition, and more (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Einarsen, Matthiesen & Skogstad, 1998). It also severely affects the emotional and physical health of individuals involved (Gardner & Participant Cson, 2001), with evidence linking bullying to heart attacks, homicide, and suicide (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003). This is consistent with the findings of Chenevert et al. (2022), which indicate that a consequence of workplace bullying is the manifestation of post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms several years after the bullying incident has passed.

Recent research by Bratton and Bratton (2021) into contemporary human resource issues, triggered by the 2008 Global Financial Crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, suggests that negative behaviours like workplace bullying are rising in a globalised post-recession and post-pandemic capitalist economic environment, leading to declining health and well-being at work. Akella's (2020) research revealed that bullying is a psychologically destructive managerial technique used to increase performance and control employees. Over time, workplace bullying evolved from individual acts to a multi-dimensional phenomenon embedded in broader social, political, economic, and historical contexts.

The subsequent section examines how organisations and their management tackle the issue of bullying and its consequences.

Management of Bullying

Failure of leadership to address or acknowledge bullying (Salin, 2003; Georgakopoulos et al., 2011) signals toleration of such conduct (Shoss & Probst, 2012). Keashly & Jagatic (2003)

suggest that tackling bullying can help leaders achieve organisational goals more effectively. Understanding and addressing these issues enables leaders and employees to develop strategies for a positive work environment, enhancing productivity, and employee well-being, reducing stress-related health costs, and increasing profits (Georgakopoulos et al., 2011; Shoss & Probst, 2012). Marques & Luna (2011) call for research on how both managerial and non-managerial staff perceive the recession's impact on performance to improve profitability. Hood et al. (2011) recommend ethical principles and healthy environments to manage bullying during economic downturns.

Boulet (2021) examined the 2008 Global Financial Crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighting increased daily deaths, rising infection numbers, business and school closures, remote work, layoffs, and uneven financial relief. The author argues that beliefs about the virus are as varied as perceptions of bullying, and whether it exists. This raises questions about types of bullies, methods, tactics, and workplace bullying management. Boulet (2021) notes that since the 2008 crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, societal focus has shifted towards health, forcing and normalising discussions on well-being topics; because of productivity losses, profitability decline, high employee attrition and burnout, and increasing concern for employee health. Employees are increasingly unwilling to maintain the status quo, despite personal financial risks. Those who experienced bullying suffer long-lasting effects, and the pandemic has prompted critical reflection on work-life balance and well-being.

Boulet (2021, p.98),

... it is simply astounding the number of people in leadership positions who ignore or refuse to deal with complaints, participate in bullying, are annoyed when complaints are made, don't follow their policies, turn on the complainant or rid themselves of the person, demean the stress and mental anguish suffered, don't understand how their behaviour contributes, have a lack of awareness of the effects on the bullied and bystanders, have a lack of concern and compassion, target victims through constructive dismissal and non-disclosure agreements to prevent the bullied from speaking out and to hide toxic organisational cultures. They have no compassion for victims, who often after that have an inability to secure future employment ... Boulet (2021, p.98).

Pouwelse et al. (2018) agree that this negative experience can sometimes be just as bad for bystanders witnessing bullying.

Namie and Naime (2009) observed increased bullying during the 2008 recession, with perpetrators targeting more individuals. Boddy (2011) in "Corporate Psychopaths Theory of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis", highlights the rise of dysfunctional management in modern

corporations, particularly in rapidly changing industries like banking. These leaders, often in senior positions, shape the organisation's moral climate and wield significant power, prioritising self-serving goals over equality, corporate or employee responsibility and fairness. Needham (2019) found that leadership resulting in workplace bullying leads to significant financial losses and harms employee careers. In 2019, employers averaged \$68 million in payouts for workplace harassment survivors (Hughes & Kapoor, 2022). They recommend social responsibility programs to combat bullying and harassment, requiring full top management commitment. Despite challenges, especially since leadership styles contributed to the 2008 financial crisis, fostering healthy leadership practices is crucial.

Yamada & Duffy (2018) argue that Human Resources (HR), in conjunction with policy and management interventions, plays a critical role in reporting incidents and preventing bullying. However, victims often hesitate to approach HR due to the stigma associated with doing so. Effective interventions require a broader approach that extends beyond HR's current capabilities, including support for victims, coaching for offenders, and the enforcement of disciplinary actions for non-compliance.

Yamada & Duffy (2018, p.64) propose innovative practices, such as employing change management consultants to mediate disputes, draft effective workplace policies, and implement interpersonal interventions like coaching, professional development, psychotherapy, and disciplinary measures. Furthermore, they advocate for a greater reliance on ombudsmen and legal perspectives to enforce and address deviant behaviours, ensuring accountability for offenders. These recommendations highlight a potential gap in the existing literature and several questions remain about their practical implementation: 1) Are organisations genuinely interested in pursuing these routes, and at what cost?; 2) Do they perceive the benefits or prefer to ignore the problem, hoping it resolves itself?; and 3) when these routes are available and legal action is possible, might organisations restrict access to external consultants to protect their image and reputation? These concerns warrant further exploration, as they may influence an organisation's effectiveness and willingness to adopt comprehensive anti-bullying interventions.

Boulet (2021) highlights the increasing need to study diverse forms of bullying and their consequences. This encompasses bullying, cyberbullying, teen suicides, workplace intimidation, and employee burnout. Additionally, the research considers related phenomena, such as the shift towards remote work following the pandemic, the tendency of millennials to eschew corporate careers, and demands for reduced working hours. An important factor in workplace bullying is the revelation that the recent recession was partly attributable to self-serving and toxic leadership styles. These styles often employ bullying tactics to boost productivity without regard for consequences.

According to Yamada & Duffy (2018), change management consultants can mediate and improve bullying practices. However, Boulet's (2021) research, including management consulting firms, law firms, and banking, reveals a high prevalence of workplace bullying in the very industry that employs change managers to navigate complex change programmes. This indicates that despite their role in resolving workplace bullying, change managers also face similar issues in their work environments.

Yamada & Duffy (2018) also suggest more legal recourse as an intervention, which Boulet's (2021) research agrees with by suggesting that workplace bullying is increasingly becoming a human rights issue, and in places like Canada, the DARVO tactic (deny, attack, reverse victim, and offender) is being further explored by acknowledging that ignored behaviour is condoned and rewarded behaviour. Although this is a good recommendation, it cannot be explored in isolation, as comprehensive interventions are needed in practice.

Interventions

For Einarsen and Einarsen (2021, p.30) addressing workplace bullying effectively requires interventions focused on the organisation's ethical structure, as bullying is a systematic, “gradually evolving process” linked to the organisation's culture. It is important to distinguish between ethical structures and company culture.

My research and experience as a change practitioner in strategic and cultural change have allowed me to assess the practical application of these recommendations. While academically sound, they overlook the complexity of transforming an organisation's ethical structure, which requires a comprehensive top-down paradigm shift in values, ethics, practices, functions, and possibly products, services, or market presence (e.g., market exit). Gaining consensus from stakeholders and executives, who are often hesitant to change without direct profit impact, is challenging. Even with approval, implementing such changes demands extensive organisational training and development, which is time-consuming. Securing approval for intervention programmes is difficult as they are often seen as non-essential to business operations and profitability. These programmes are costly and require significant buy-in from risk-averse sponsors and stakeholders. In transformation programmes, especially those addressing cultural shifts, challenges such as operational complexity, time constraints, resource availability, training, and coaching complicate the process. These factors make large-scale interventions, like changing a company's ethical structure, impractical and ineffective for immediate issues like bullying during a change programme. Additionally, when budgets and timelines are tight, change management is often the first area to be cut, even in critical high-profile transformation programmes with potential revenue benefits.

Einarsen & Einarsen (2021, p.30) underscore the necessity of addressing company culture in intervention techniques, particularly for issues like bullying, as altering an organisation's culture can improve intervention outcomes. Organisational policies are essential, but cultural change must occur first. Transformation programmes often fail due to overlooking cultural factors (Jumbe & Gerwel, 2016). Bukusi (2024) asserts that merging culture and strategy is vital for transformative change, best achieved through strategic transformation programmes with dedicated a change management function. This ensures employee adoption, engagement, and empowerment, critical for business transformation success (Montgomery, 2013). Peter Drucker a famous management consultant stated, "Culture Eats Strategy for Breakfast", (Whitzman, 2016, p.2), because in management consulting over 70% of client's transformation projects fail due to cultural issues. Guley & Reznik (2019, p.1) explain, "Culture is the flywheel that maintains stability. It creates organisational inertia and resistance to change". Change management best practices focus on addressing cultural factors early, reducing organisational friction and resistance, thus preparing and supporting employees and the organisation for change from both operational and cultural perspectives. Guley & Reznik (2019, p.4), have summarised this,

... A well-thought-out transformation strategy focuses on mindset change that leads to behavioural change that enables the transformation. Although updates to vision, mission, ethics, and values are great to start with, culture cannot be expressly defined but only influenced to evolve in a certain way. Start the transformation work with and within the existing culture by highlighting and capitalising on the strengths of the current culture to start changing mindsets with a focus on a few critical behaviours and policies ...Guley & Reznik (2019, p.4).

Vartia & Leka (2011) argue that workplace bullying prevention and management interventions must be implemented at the organisational level (or programme level in the case of a transformation programme), influencing the organisation's stance on non-tolerance of uncivil behaviours, eliminating contributing factors, and addressing incidents with a focus on victims and rehabilitation of perpetrators. Vartia & Leka (2011) argue that creating a safe workplace requires attitudinal changes, cultural shifts, and policy frameworks to prevent bullying and assess the effectiveness of prevention measures.

Mikkelsen et al. (2011) found that involving target groups in the selection and evaluation of change programmes and securing management commitment is crucial for the success of interventions, aligning with findings by Hoel & Giga (2006), Kompier et al. (2000), and Keashly & Neuman (2009). Ensuring the ownership of those affected by organisational changes and engaging employees as culture change agents for business transformation can reduce implementation resistance. As change ambassador's employees prepare the organisation for

the longevity and scope of these changes and help integrate and embed business changes into long-term operational practices and the overall organisational culture in the long run.

Following the design of a culture shift initiative, further interventions are needed to change organisational culture and prevent workplace bullying, applicable to transformation programmes. These interventions are classified into primary, secondary, and tertiary forms (Hoel & Cooper, 2003; Salin et al., 2018b; Vartia & Leka, 2011).

1. **Prevent** - Primary interventions aim to proactively mitigate bullying risks through measures such as redesigning the work environment, leader training, anti-bullying policies, and awareness campaigns on bullying and its effects (Salin et al., 2018b; Vartia & Leka, 2011).
2. **Mitigate the risk of bullying by discouraging and penalising** - Secondary interventions are reactive measures designed to deter bullying and foster intolerance toward such behaviour (Vartia & Leka, 2011). These interventions emphasise implementing policies into practice. Salin et al. (2018b) suggest HR managers first use reconciliatory mediation. However, in severe conflicts with power imbalances, like bullying by a superior, disciplinary actions are necessary (Saam, 2010; Vartia & Leka, 2011), as mediation is ineffective without equal standing (Salin, 2009).
3. **Rehabilitate incidents of bullying** - Tertiary intervention seeks to reduce bullying's effects by improving victims' well-being and work environment and aiding perpetrators' rehabilitation. These reactive steps address post-incident abuse consequences (Vartia & Leka, 2011).

Interventions could result in developing anti-bullying and harassment policies, a whistleblowing policy, and a governance structure to address bullying. Rayner & Lewis (2011) stress that organisations must review policies in practice to promote anti-bullying cultures and manage bullying effectively. However, Harrington, Rayner, & Warren (2012) note that policy implementation and governance are often impeded by issues such as organisational awareness, complaint responsiveness, and investigation. Catley et al. (2017) suggest that continuous monitoring, evaluation, and review are essential to ensure the effectiveness of these policies for their intended communities.

Einarsen et al. (2011a) contend that awareness is essential, as bullying is an organisational issue, and prevention is effective only if management is aware and proactive. Vartia & Leka (2011) emphasise the importance of management's involvement and responsibility in fostering this awareness. Kumar (2012) recommends implementing bullying awareness within a change project, by incorporating regular culture and engagement pulse surveys to gauge change readiness and integrate bullying awareness. This can be part of a larger transformation program or a specific campaign, starting at the project's onset, and following

up with regular management debrief sessions and remedial action plans. Kumar (2012) also advises addressing workplace bullying through organisational policies, work environment redesign, leader training, and anti-bullying policies, providing mediation, governance, and remedies. Ongoing monitoring and evaluation should involve dedicated training committees, mandatory development programs, mentors, and counselling support services, supported by management and HR. In addition to organisational transformation programmes, employee contracts may include anti-bullying clauses, safe reporting measures, Trade Union representation, and legal arbitration. These aspects will be further explored in Chapter 7, Recommendations.

Despite numerous interventions targeting workplace bullying, empirical evidence supporting their effectiveness is notably lacking (Vartia & Leka, 2011). This deficiency arises from limited practice-based research from specialised practice-based communities, and the complex nature of bullying, which requires multi-layered interventions. Bronfenbrenner (1979) suggests that addressing workplace bullying involves interconnected systems, including individuals, social groups, work teams, departments, organisations, and broader societal contexts as part of an ecology. Hodgins, MacCurtain, & Mannix-McNamara (2014) in their literature review of workplace bullying interventions, argue that addressing the issue should not be limited to a single level, but rather should adopt an integrated approach encompassing the employee, their roles, the organisation, and societal levels. This is further discussed in Chapter 7.

Daniels et al. (2021) conducted a systematic review to identify key success factors for improving workplace health and well-being. Their study analysed various implementation practices, including primary, secondary, and tertiary interventions, and examined factors such as external market forces (e.g., financial crises), internal organisational contexts (e.g., mergers or takeovers), organisational culture, governance, delivery structures, the sequencing and continuity of programme implementations, organisational learning and adaptation, employee dispositions at all levels, and the role of strategic decision-makers. These factors are presented in the table below.

Table 3 - Analysis of workplace well-being interventions (Daniels et al. 2021, p. 4)

Code	Description
Intervention	<i>Primary work redesign focused; Primary health behavior focused; Multifocal (e.g., secondary + primary work redesign); Secondary; Tertiary</i>
Benefits	<p><i>Beneficial:</i> Demonstrable effectiveness on at least one health/wellbeing marker (and no adverse effects) between control and intervention conditions (direct effects shown).</p> <p><i>Contingently beneficial:</i> No demonstrated effectiveness on any health/wellbeing marker (and no adverse effects) between control and intervention conditions, but changes in at least one health/wellbeing marker for sub-groups (moderation) or in conditions where the intervention was implemented (effects transmitted through a mediator that is a marker of intervention implementation or intervention mechanisms).</p> <p><i>Non-beneficial:</i> Null or adverse effects. One adverse effect in the presence of other improvements in health/wellbeing is classified as non-beneficial, although such cases should be flagged in the analyses.</p>
Changes made (mechanisms activated)	<p>Changes made, not made or not made as intended (e.g.; wellbeing related roles, wellbeing related Human Resources, wellbeing related education, job quality, physical environment, tangible wellbeing resources) to activate mechanisms (or not) that explain changes in wellbeing.</p> <p><i>Mechanisms can be intended</i> – the intervention worked according to the theoretical principles of intervention (e.g., a work redesign intervention evidences changes in job quality linked to changes in wellbeing).</p> <p><i>Mechanisms can be unintended</i> – evidence the mechanisms worked according to some process not anticipated (e.g., a health promotion intervention evidences changes in social relationships linked to wellbeing, rather than changes in health behaviors).</p> <p><i>Negative mechanisms</i> - unintended mechanisms producing adverse effects (e.g., a health promotion intervention encourages competition between work teams, leading to deteriorating social relationships).</p>
Omnibus context	
External omnibus context	External shocks (e.g., financial crash) or a range of other external facilitators/inhibitors (e.g., labor market conditions).
Internal omnibus context	Factors internal to the organization not directly related to the intervention, including shocks (e.g., takeovers), competing priorities/logics, organizational capability/capacity (e.g., availability of resources).
Discrete context	
Organizational culture/political factors	Evidence of changing rituals and routines for symbolic purposes (e.g., middle manager stress management training, which may serve as a signal to others); evidence of narratives relating wellbeing to organizational values; evidence of symbolic involvement of senior managers and decisions to invest effort funds; evidence of use of power to influence the intervention.
Governance/delivery structures	Co-ordination and management of intervention activities, including factors such as presence of a steering committee, assigned responsibility for wellbeing and intervention implementation, who is represented in the governance structures, level of planning and program theory guiding the intervention, use of evidence-based practice, embedding wellbeing initiatives in a strategy.
Sequencing	Planned order of events/activities (e.g., prescribed order of assessment, decision, intervention, evaluation).
Continuity	Perseverance in implementation efforts, local adaptations, embedding practices into everyday activities.
Learning structures	Procedures for capturing learning from implementation for adaptation and/or capacity/capability building.
Service/service provider characteristics	Features of the intervention (e.g., novelty) or the people implementing aspects of the intervention at an operational level (e.g., training delivery). Relates to perceptions/attitudes/expectations and behaviors including commitment, value placed on health/wellbeing, beliefs on responsibility for health/wellbeing, denial/withdrawal from intervention, diffidence about health/wellbeing, passive and active resistance to intervention, competence/capacity/capability for implementation, passive or proactive engagement in intervention.
Worker dispositions	Dispositions of recipients of the intervention. Examples the same for service provider characteristics.
Line/middle manager dispositions	Dispositions of immediate managers of the recipients or other managers whose day-to-day work may affect the intervention implementation. Examples the same for service provider characteristics.
Senior manager dispositions	Dispositions of senior organizational leaders (CEO and other C-suite executives). Examples the same for service provider characteristics.
Expert/strategic implementers dispositions	Specialist functional roles with relevant expertise for implementation at a strategic/program level rather than operational level – mainly related to dispositions of human resources or occupational health functions. Examples the same for service provider characteristics.

The review's strength was its examination of various intervention types in organisational contexts. However, it lacked analysis of the complexities in workplace relationships, cultures, and norms (Daniels et al., 2021, p.12), a comparison of single versus multiple interventions, and the context of change projects. The researchers recommend further differentiation of studied contexts, such as sector, organisation, and culture, and the implementation of multiple interventions over time.

Daniels et.al. (2021, p.2) highlighted the gaps in their research by suggesting a framework for potential interventions in Table 4 below.

This research gap presents an opportunity for studies such as the present one to contribute, as this study specifically addresses the management of workplace bullying within the context of a business transformation programme, encompassing multiple change projects implemented concurrently over an extended period. Subsequently, in Chapter 7, the findings will be synthesised with practice-based experience to provide recommendations for the broader community of stakeholders.

[Table 4 - Typology framework of workplace well-being interventions \(Daniels et al. 2021, p.2\)](#)

	Implementation frameworks	Appraisal frameworks	Realist frameworks	Best Practice models	Regulatory Compliance Guidance
Framework features	Normative: How to undertake a single intervention; what content should go into a successful intervention.	Normative: Identifying the factors that affected intervention effectiveness as a learning platform for better-informed interventions.	Methodological: Identifying the underpinning configurations of Context, Mechanisms, and Outcomes (CMO) that generate effective interventions.	Normative: Factors to consider during intervention implementation.	Normative: Factors to consider during intervention implementation, incorporating best practice for regulatory compliance.
Framework represents	A descriptive and empirical mapping of the literature.	A route map for robust evaluation	A methodology for building theory through creating an empirical evidence-base, focused on intervention configurations.	A prescriptive, usually linear, sequence of activities.	A prescriptive staged model of intervention implementation.
Unit of analysis	Intervention implementation process; single interventions	Intervention features associated with effectiveness	Interaction of context, mechanism and outcome in an intervention and/or implementation	Intervention implementation	Intervention implementation
Characteristics	Dynamic: Process variables and participatory processes	Evidence based implementation appraisal	Dynamic: Context-Mechanism-Outcome (CMO)	Activity focused. Issues to consider and actions to undertake. Some accommodation of dynamism	Activity focused incorporating standards: Issues to consider and actions to undertake
Temporal features	Focus on pre- and during intervention features; linear staged	Focus on post-intervention appraisal	Focus on micro-temporal features of mechanisms that generate outcomes	Focus on pre-and during intervention actions; predominantly linear staged prescriptions (or stage-gates, i.e. feedback loops for adaptation)	Focus on linear staged prescriptions during intervention implementation
Theory level	Intra- and inter-personal psycho-social micro-theory (primarily micro)	Not specified	Can vary according to CMO configuration. In application, this is predominantly micro	Universal best practice principles	Regulatory compliance through universal best practice principles
Main contributions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Acknowledges dynamism •Proposes contextual influences •Acknowledges influence of key actors/and social systems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Identification of weakness in reporting implementation effectiveness •Identification of measurement and methodological weaknesses 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Provides a method for theorization •Provides a method for analyzing dynamics in relation to context, mechanisms and outcomes. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Typologies or categorization of organizational resources, structures and process to aid intervention success, configured round roles and activities of practice-actors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Guidelines that represent regulatory and compliance best practice, configured around activities
Calls for action arising/ research gaps	Theoretical explanations are fragmented and there is a need for greater integrative theory building to underpin the frameworks	Theory and implementation need to pay attention to dynamism. Lack of integrative theory to explain effective implementation. Detailed reporting post hoc to provide basis for evaluation of longer-term and systemic effectiveness. Improved longitudinal designs.	Requires accumulation of body of empirical evidence of theorized configurations in order to make theoretical progress.	Refinement and development required of staged models, mapping and assessment techniques, in practice settings.	Call for application of guidance by organizations.

These recent advancements in humanitarian approaches to bullying management from a human resources perspective will be further examined in Chapter 7, wherein the extant literature will be synthesised with contemporary research findings to demonstrate alignment with the recommendations derived from this study.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the literature supporting the proposition that higher workplace bullying rates are more prevalent in the private sector due to its financially competitive

nature. Organisational cultures and management styles that condone or overlook bullying, particularly when it enhances productivity and profitability, exacerbate this issue. During organisational changes, such as those necessitated by the 2008 recession, bullying increases due to threats to job security, productivity, and performance, as well as competition for limited economic resources. This stress and pressure diminish workplace civility. Rewarding negative behaviours for financial gain fosters an environment where bullying incidents increase, and employee relationships and well-being deteriorate. Managing this phenomenon requires a collective approach addressing systemic issues and not solely human resource management. The literature suggests increased bullying during change programmes, highlighting the need for further research on bullying during economic downturns, which this study focuses on. Chapter 3 discusses the research design and methodology chosen to support the study's aims and objectives.

Chapter 3, Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

This chapter will outline the outcome of the research design and methodology formulated in a 2013 module titled "Planning a Practitioner Research Development Programme", that planned the practical implementation of the study, including its research aims, objectives, scope, and focus.

This chapter initiates with an exposition of the study's theoretical framework, commencing with the constructivist and interpretivist epistemological approaches that form the foundation of the research. It then delineates the reasoning behind the chosen research design and framework, followed by a justification for adopting a case study methodology, followed by an explanation of the rationale for employing thematic analysis in data interpretation. The discussion extends to the selection of qualitative methods and the ethical considerations pertinent to the study.

Following the guidance by Rashid et al. (2019, p.3), a case study protocol involves the preparation of several key elements: (a) the research question, (b) research methods, (c) permission seeking, (d) ethical considerations, (e) the interpretation process, and (f) criteria for assessment and analysis. These components provide a comprehensive foundation for the case study approach, ensuring a structured and ethically sound research process.

The chapter concludes with a critical reflection on my position as an insider researcher.

Study Theoretical Framework

In this study, workplace bullying is understood as a personal social construct, shaped by employee's perceptions and lived experiences of their working environment. The research epistemology is underpinned by constructivism, to examine personal and social conditions within the organisation (Crotty, 1998). Crotty's constructivist approach was chosen to explore how employees perceive bullying through the ethnography of their lived experiences and the ontology of their perceived reality. This approach would enable employees to interpret their world using their background and knowledge, reflecting on their experiences and interactions. Behaviour patterns emerge as individuals engage with different circumstances and events, shaping their understanding and responses to workplace bullying. As Crotty (1998, p.8,9) suggests,

... meaning comes into existence in our engagement with the realities in our world. It is constructed, and different people may construct meaning differently, even about the same phenomenon ... (Crotty, 1998, p.8,9)

During the analysis phase, this facilitated the examination of "culturally derived interpretations of their social world" (Crotty, 1998, p.67), and the exploration of the values and beliefs that influenced employee's behaviours. The adoption of the epistemology and theoretical framework in Table 5 below, facilitated the analysis and understanding of participant viewpoints and the description of behaviours in the context of the organisational change project, which occurred within a constantly transforming organisation and an unstable economic marketplace. Creswell (2014, p.8) offers that,

... to social constructivists, humans construct meanings as they engage with the world. Depending upon their experiences, individuals develop subjective meanings, and it is the task of the researcher to look for the complexity of views that make up the social reality ... Creswell (2014, p.8)

A significant aspect of my professional experience that influenced the selection of methodology was the recognition that employees may encounter difficulties in articulating tacit practice knowledge. Stake (1995) explains that interpretivism involves understanding meanings, contexts, and processes, and identifying individual and collective social meanings from various perspectives.

Combining constructivism and interpretivism would facilitate access to employees' constructed experiences and interpretations of workplace bullying. Greener (2008) highlights interpretivism's effectiveness in considering multiple perspectives and focusing on subjective realities. This approach was crucial for understanding how employees construct and perceive bullying incidents within their work environment (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994). Orlikowski & Baroudi (1991) note that employees actively create meaning through their interactions. Thus, interpreting their social constructs of reality was necessary to deeply understand the phenomenon and recognise the importance of their subjectivity in articulating their experiences and beliefs. Language, the role of questioning, narratives, lived experiences, and their significance are elucidated through dialogues with employees reflecting on project-related issues.

One example of how this was structured in the design is that employees were to first be asked about their experiences or observations of workplace bullying within the project and then provided with the definition of and examples of workplace bullying (Chapter 1). Following this, they would be allowed to revise their previous answers (see Appendix 2a, Bullying in Section 2). This interpretivist approach enabled deeper reflection on experiences after understanding bullying definitions, as this study aimed to investigate real-world encounters (Crotty, 1998). Combining these approaches would contribute to the comprehension and interpretation of the organisational context as a catalyst for the emergence of workplace bullying. The theoretical framework is presented in the table below.

Table 5 - Theoretical Framework

Epistemology	Constructivism - Focusing the research design on participants constructs of workplace bullying.
	Interpretative - Expanding accounts of workplace bullying phenomenon beyond experiences and into interpretations
Design Approach: Organisational Case Study	Yin (2009, p. 18) defines case study as... <i>'an empirical inquiry which investigates a phenomenon in its real-life context, where multiple methods of data collection are used'</i> ... <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The use of organisational case study as a methodology, was because it examines the bullying phenomenon as it occurred within a real-life context, by seeking to convey understanding of the interpretations being explored (Crotty: 1998).
Qualitative Research Methods	Using ethnographic data for phenomenological research with the methods (described in Chapter 4) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Policy document analysis Semi structured Interviews: HR, Managers and Employees (impacted by the change project directly and those impacted indirectly) Thematic Analysis

Research Design / Rationale for Selecting the Framework

Reflexivity, as an iterative and evolutionary paradigm, facilitated an authentic interpretation of employee's experiences with bullying, enhancing the understanding of workplace bullying during austerity-driven change projects. The construction of interview questions, data analysis, and composition of findings refined my thinking, evolving from descriptive to deeper enquiry. Tindall (1995) suggests that a researcher's reflexivity significantly influences their chosen methodology. My professional experience in this context provided access to ontological and ethnographic data, influencing research interests, subject matter, methodology, and approach through the accounts of employees who had either encountered or observed bullying behaviour.

Initially, action research methodology (Coghlan, Cirella, & Shani, 2012) was considered for its problem-solving focus and innovative approaches to improving systems. Action research and collaborative management research involve synergistic engagements of managers and researchers and enhance the relevance of management practice (Shani et al., 2008; Coghlan, 2011). The subsequent discussion will elucidate the rationale behind this research method and ultimately the decision not to pursue it.

Unlike traditional evaluative research or practitioner research approaches, action research and collaborative management research methodologies offer distinct advantages. This alternative approach would have allowed for the utilisation of personal experience to create

and enhance practical knowledge about how the organisation managed change. This would have supported the growth of my expertise as a change practitioner/researcher, using scientific methods to explore the research enquiry and, thereafter, the application of findings to formulate recommendations. As a community-driven approach, it contributes to the expansion of knowledge by scrutinising system realities and testing strategies to improve change implementation while addressing organisational challenges. In choosing a methodology I evaluated how well action research, which is renowned for encouraging action learning, could improve the inquiry and analysis by using data gathering to pinpoint issues and use the study's results to plan, create, and implement interim remedies. As part of an iterative process of progressive problem-solving with the organisation and employees, it would then be possible to evaluate the effectiveness of these solutions. As a result, there would be data to support the suggestions made by the findings for upcoming change initiatives. For instance, after completing this DProf, the results might be applied to investigate ways to address bullying in change initiatives during uncertain economic times. This approach fits with my professional experience and would have been more recognisable to the employees. However, several constraints rendered this methodology unfeasible or inappropriate.

Access to the organisation and employees was granted at a single point during the change programme for data collection purposes. Furthermore, it was deemed undesirable to burden the organisation or employees with what could be perceived as an additional parallel change project with more requirements. This approach to data collection could make both the organisation and employees uncomfortable, as it involves studying their real-time reactions to workplace bullying. The sensitive nature of this issue could surface concerns that they might not wish to have analysed by an individual potentially viewed as an outsider. Such a scenario could subject the organisation and employees to unwarranted scrutiny, precluding the opportunity for reflection and assimilation of their experiences and potentially undermining the success of the change programme. Considering the existing change fatigue and scepticism, it could potentially have compromised the study results. The final rationale for excluding action research was that this methodology would have been more focused on the process of problem-solving and implementing novel approaches to enhance existing systems. This emphasis diverged significantly from the research question, which was primarily concerned with examining how organisational changes during periods of economic uncertainty contribute to workplace bullying and the subsequent impact on stress levels and interpersonal relationships. Moreover, this approach exhibited a fundamental methodological flaw, as it appeared to presuppose that change initiatives inherently resulted in the emergence of workplace bullying issues. It assumed that a solitary investigation, with a constrained participant pool, could bring about changes in deeply rooted systems, operational methods, and organisational cultures that had developed gradually within an

establishment primarily concerned with managing the transformations it was undergoing. Furthermore, it presumed that employees would possess the requisite hierarchical authority to facilitate modifications in organisational practices.

Qualitative research, in conjunction with constructivism and interpretivism, was deemed more appropriate for this study, as it facilitated a focus on employee narratives, interaction with, and interpretation of their experiences. This approach was also advantageous for decoding institutional discourse, enabling deeper probing to capture patterns, subjective meanings, and participant experiences, and to explore the linkages between economic turbulence and its impact on workplace bullying. It must also be acknowledged that there is a potential for personal bias to influence interpretations based on prior knowledge and beliefs rather than the data (discussed in Chapter 4, Project Activity). While quantitative data collection methods could have mitigated the issue of personal bias and allowed for data collection from a larger sample, thereby enhancing the generalisability of the findings, they often involve assumptions about employee experiences, resulting in a top-down approach. In contrast, qualitative data collection is more bottom-up, allowing for the validation of employee interpretations, unlike quantitative methods such as surveys, which restrict responses.

Banister et al. (1995) suggest that psychologists use qualitative research to complement quantitative studies, explore individual work experiences and organisational culture, or clarify the values behind management strategies. I considered combining qualitative and quantitative methods for improved data triangulation, hypothesising that qualitative techniques could enhance quantitative data, potentially increasing reliability, as detailed by Plowright (2011) in the Framework for an Integrated Methodology (FralM). The positivist basis of quantitative surveys allows researchers to remain detached from personal biases but limits subjective introspection in favour of observable experience (Cresswell, 2009). Although useful for identifying patterns and causes, quantitative surveys have limitations, their design and data collection methods, unlike interviews, prevent interaction with employees, restricting their responses, and necessitating assumptions about their experiences. A qualitative approach was chosen for this study because it allowed for a deeper exploration of the phenomenon, with employees engaging from ontological and ethnographic perspectives, thus providing better access to their perceptions, and lived experiences Taylor (1995).

This study employed interpretivism combined with constructivism in a case study approach, as illustrated in the aforementioned table, utilising qualitative data collection methods from employees at various organisational levels (employees, line managers, and HR managers) to obtain individual accounts, supplemented by an analysis of policy documents. Below, I outline the rationale for choosing an organisational case study as a design approach.

Organisational Case Study: The Rationale for Choosing This Methodology

This section explains the rationale for selecting an organisational case study, and its suitability for the research aims, and outlines the key components involved. Triangulation is discussed as a Project Activity in Chapter 4. Chapter 6 addresses the research limitations, including those of the case study methodology.

Rashid et al. (2019, p.1) posit that "qualitative case study methodology enables researchers to conduct an in-depth exploration of intricate phenomena within a specific context", agreeing with Baxter & Jack (2008) who contend that this approach facilitates the investigation of a real-time phenomenon in its natural setting through diverse data sources. This aligns with Yin's (2009, p.18) definition of a case study as an "empirical inquiry which investigates a phenomenon in its real-life context"; describing, analysing, and outlining events in their natural settings to clarify and illuminate causal links (Yin, 2014).

Creswell's (2014, p. 241) definition of case study approaches is that they are,

... qualitative in design in which the researcher explores in depth a programme, event, activity, process, or one or more individuals. They are bound by time and activity, where researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures ... Creswell (2014, p. 241)

A case study approach entails a comprehensive research design for in-depth, unbiased phenomenon examination, utilising multiple data collection methods to ensure robust investigation (Yin, 2009). Moreover, integrating diverse techniques such as questionnaires, surveys, interviews, observations, and the examination of primary and secondary sources, including newspaper articles, document analysis, and naturalistic conversations (Priya, 2021) facilitates a profound understanding of the phenomenon under investigation. DeVaus (2001, p.220) offers ...

The unit of analysis of case study research can be an individual, a family, a household, a community, an organisation, an event, or even a decision. In this way, case studies allow the researcher leeway in the method of data collection that allows for an unbiased study of the phenomenon, using several techniques of data collection ... DeVaus (2001, p.220)

Recognising the substantial impact of context on the researched phenomenon (Kaarbo & Beasley, 1999), this case study aimed to leverage the method's ability to thoroughly understand complex issues in real-world settings. Therefore, an organisational case study design was selected as the most suitable approach to examine workplace bullying amid an organisational change project during austerity, aligning with the study's theoretical

framework and research objectives. This approach would provide the real-life environment necessary to explore workplace bullying and test the research questions, as case studies serve to explicate, delineate, or investigate events or phenomena within their natural contexts, thereby elucidating causal relationships (Yin, 2014).

What undertaking an organisational case study entails:

According to Yin (2014), the most basic elements of designing case studies include

1. Define and identify the case study and its logic,
2. Prepare and design the case study - to collect the case study evidence or what a researcher needs to do before collecting case study data, including pilot case studies,
3. Collecting - the case study data,
4. Analysing - the case study data, including tools and techniques used, and
5. Reporting - on the case study findings.

Crowe, Cresswell & Robertson, et al. (2011) provide additional guidance on this methodology, and Priya (2021, p.99) has elaborated on this with specific procedural steps. This study utilised both sources to delineate the approach employed.

Defining the case - Crowe, Cresswell & Robertson et al. (2011, p.5) describe the initial phase as formulating precise research questions based on literature and theoretical concepts. Defining the case's scope, duration, stakeholders, geographical focus, evidence types, and data collection and analysis priorities is essential. This case studies approach included: (a) outlining research aims and objectives, (b) determining the research type as exploratory, examining a phenomenon in its natural context, and (c) developing research questions. Yin (2009) views these questions as crucial to case study design. Carefully crafted questions were employed to shape the study design and application. The precise formulation of these questions would determine the actual unit of analysis in the research.

Selecting the case - Crowe, Cresswell, and Robertson et al. (2011, p.5) offer this step as identifying a unique case of genuine interest for exploring an issue or phenomenon. Employee's memories of workplace bullying incidents, connections between diverse stakeholders, and prior change initiatives, provided this setting. In doing so, it included an examination of bullying at work in the previously indicated context as well as regarding more general organisational practices. This method made it possible to thoroughly examine bullying episodes and pinpoint important themes in employee's testimonies. Equally crucial was the ability to gain cooperative access to employees, the organisation, and its processes, ensuring a conducive environment for informative research. In this study, HR pre-selected sites and employees, but measures were taken to ensure data integrity and ethical standards. As Crowe, Cresswell & Robertson. et al. (2011, p.5) state,

... Of particular importance is the obligation for the researcher to think through the ethical implications of the study (e.g. the risk of inadvertently breaching anonymity or confidentiality) and to ensure that potential participants/participating sites are provided with sufficient information to make an informed choice about joining the study. The outcome of providing this information might be that the emotive burden associated with participation, or the organisational disruption associated with supporting the fieldwork, is considered so high that the individuals or sites decide against participation ... Crowe, Cresswell & Robertson. et al. (2011, p.5).

Participation declines are further discussed in the ethics section and Chapter 4.

In this stage, the process included: (d) Preparing and Designing the case study. As an independent researcher, a single case study was chosen due to resource and time constraints. Yin (2014, p.59) justifies single cases when they are unique, provide revelatory data, and explore a research question which exemplifies the phenomenon under investigation. (e) Identifying epistemological foundations that guide the case study. Lincoln et al. (2011) note that a researcher's epistemological stance influences data collection methods and understanding of social reality (ontology). In case studies, constructivism can support both exploratory and explanatory research. Examining bullying incidents through a constructivist-interpretive lens allowed an in-depth analysis of how employees socially constructed bullying within the context of organisational change and economic instability, emphasizing an interpretive understanding of their reality. (f) Literature review - Since beginning the DProf programme in 2012, I have extensively reviewed workplace bullying literature, including research methodologies, findings, limitations, theoretical frameworks, and hypotheses. This analysis identified the research gap addressed by this case study and informed the development of the research questions, aims, and objectives.

Collecting the data - Crowe, Cresswell, & Robertson et al. (2011, p.6) describe the following phase as collecting data using various qualitative methods, such as interviews, policy documents, and field notes. This process, involving multiple data sources (data triangulation) to enhance internal validity, is further examined in Chapter 4. The steps included preparing the case study sample and implementing data collection methods. The combined sources aimed to provide a comprehensive view of bullying and contextualize it within the research questions. Rashid et al. (2019, p.5) argue that case study research requires a clearly defined case to analyse the phenomenon's context and processes. Therefore, the phenomenon in this study was examined in its contextual relationships, not in isolation.

Analysing, interpreting, and reporting case studies - This stage included (i) analysing the transcribed interview data and (j) reporting and presenting the findings. Crowe, Cresswell, & Robertson, et al. (2011, p.6) emphasise that in a qualitative case study, iterative review and

organisation of detailed data are crucial for analysis. This process involves grouping and categorising key issues from the dataset for thematic analysis. Priya (2021, p.106) asserts that case study researchers use in-depth interviews and "coding" to create conceptual frameworks. This involves extracting, defining, and labelling key data elements during data interaction. Thus, codes emerge from field data (Charmaz, 2014, p.342).

Crowe, Cresswell, & Robertson, et al. (2011, p.7) caution against collecting excessive data in qualitative case studies and emphasise the need for sufficient time for data processing, analysis, and interpretation. Merriam (2002), Stake (1995), and Yin (2011) concur, noting that data processing is the most demanding and lengthy part of qualitative case study research, involving multiple iterations of various tasks. This case study involved repeated examination of interview transcripts, review of field notes, analysis of policy documents, and systematic categorisation and interpretation of the data. The interview data underwent rigorous analysis as described in Chapter 4. According to Yin (2011), this step is essential before researchers can extract meaningful insights and identify themes. This process facilitated the report writing and the presentation of findings in Chapter 5.

The Rationale for choosing Thematic Analysis

According to Braun & Clarke (2006, p.10),

... reflexive thematic analysis (TA) does not require the detailed theoretical and technological knowledge of approaches such as grounded theory and discourse analysis, it can offer a more accessible form of analyses ... Braun & Clarke (2006, p.10).

The authors contend that thematic analysis (TA) differs from other analytical methods such as Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) and Grounded Theory, which seek patterns in the data but are theoretically bound. IPA, linked to phenomenological epistemology, serves as a research framework, whereas reflexive TA offers more flexibility for analysing patterns in data. Unlike IPA, reflexive TA spans the epistemological and ontological spectrum, is applicable in both realist and constructionist paradigms, and addresses diverse research questions, including individual experiences and perspectives. Braun & Clarke (2022, p.8) offered a compelling rationale for employing thematic analysis in this case study explaining that it encompasses a broad spectrum of pattern-based analysis of data. These range from thematic analysis within social constructionist epistemology, which identifies patterns as socially constructed, to thematic discourse analysis. The latter method discerns patterns (such as themes and narratives) within the data and theorises language as constitutive of meaning, and that meaning is inherently social. According to the authors, because TA is not bound to any pre-existing theoretical framework, it allows for more flexible application, either within different theoretical frameworks or independently. The combination of constructivism and

interpretivism necessitated a flexible method, not bound to theory, that was sufficiently adaptable to facilitate an understanding of how employees constructed and interpreted their reality. According to Braun & Clarke (2022), this level of flexibility in TA is advantageous for novice qualitative researchers. For this research, another compelling justification for selecting thematic analysis is its adaptability, best described by the following excerpt,

... Thematic analysis can be an essentialist or realist method, which reports experiences, meanings, and the reality of participants, or it can be a constructionist method, which examines how events, realities, meanings, and experiences are the effects of a range of discourses operating within society. It can also be a contextualist method, sitting between the two poles of essentialism and constructionism, which acknowledges how individuals make meaning of their experience and in turn, how the broader social context impinges on those meanings. Therefore, thematic analysis can be a method which works both to reflect reality and to unpick or unravel the surface of reality ... Braun & Clarke (2006, p.9).

Thematic analysis aligned with the epistemology of this organisational case study, owing to its focus on the lived experiences of employees and their perceived reality of the change project, as well as how they interpreted, understood, and ascribed meaning to their experiences. The rationale for employing indicative analysis has been situated within Chapter 3, as it relates to the Qualitative Data Analysis process. This section will elucidate and integrate the selection of thematic analysis combined with the adoption of an inductive rather than deductive analytical approach in the theme development process, which constitutes a methodological decision when utilising Braun & Clarke (2022), thematic analysis framework. Furthermore, it explicates how this process was facilitated through the use of NVivo software.

Qualitative Methods

Initially, this study considered employing focus groups as a method before selecting interviews. Morgan (1997) offers that describes focus groups as a technique for collecting data through group interaction on a predetermined topic, where the researcher sets the topic, but the data emerges from the interaction among group members. Similarly, Kitzinger (1995, pp.299) describes focus groups as a method that,

... encourages group discussion, exchange of stories, and commentary on each other's experiences and points of view from participants who might otherwise not feel comfortable to voice an opinion or feel they have nothing to contribute ... Kitzinger (1995, p. 299-301)

The utilisation of focus groups facilitates employee exploration of their thoughts, feelings, and rationales through active or passive participation. Researchers can access various forms

of interpersonal communication and understand the meaning behind the language used in everyday interactions, incorporating the broader social context, and offering insights into cultural values and organisational norms. A focus group could have facilitated a more direct and simultaneous comparison of the opinions, experiences, and perceptions of employees directly and indirectly affected by the change programme. However, as bullying is a group-level contagion and escalatory process (Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Ferguson & Participant K, 2011), focus groups were avoided to prevent participant bias during data collection, which could influence wider participant groups during data collection. Furthermore, the sensitive nature of workplace bullying and confidentiality concerns indicated that not all employees would be inclined to disclose their experiences in a group setting. This approach also presented the risk of information misuse in competitive job environments, particularly in the context of job insecurity for employees directly affected by the change programme. This decision is substantiated by research findings, which demonstrate increased incidences of bullying among business professionals in workplaces characterised by high job insecurity (Salin (2020) and Hoel & Cooper (2000)). Consequently, due to the aforementioned concerns, focus groups were not utilised in this study to avoid potential compromises to both data ethics and participant's well-being.

Another consideration was The Negative Acts Questionnaire and Workplace Incivility Scale (Matthiesen, 2006) widely used in numerous studies (e.g., Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Fevre et al., 2012) to measure workplace bullying through predetermined harmful behaviours, allowing data collection from a large participant pool and enhancing generalisability. However, Salin (2020) advocates for more qualitative research methodologies, emphasising the importance of interpreting participant responses. The integration of both qualitative and quantitative surveys, as a mixed-method approach would obscure pattern identification and the understanding of escalation processes in workplace bullying.

Silverman (2011) contends that qualitative data enhances data collection and analysis. Ethnography aids in organising and analysing data, fostering researchers' understanding and observational skills. Compared to quantitative methods, this approach provided a more nuanced exploration of employee's experiences, focusing on both identifying and examining instances of workplace bullying. Semi-structured interviews, supplemented with policy analysis, were deemed the most suitable data collection method, permitting personal experience in question design, employee selection, interview conduct, data analysis, and report writing (Burman, 1995). Personal organisational knowledge as an insider researcher improved participant interaction and issue exploration, rendering this method effective for decoding organisational discourse. This study also employed observational techniques during interviews, with data recorded in written and audio notes after each interview. Ethnographic analysis and categorisation could be retrospectively applied to interview transcripts during

the report-writing phase, as interview data facilitates interpretivism, enabling the researcher to engage with the data to identify emergent themes (Banister et al., 1995).

Employing a constructionist and interpretivist epistemological framework within a case study, qualitative methods such as policy document analysis, semi-structured interviews, and observations recorded in field notes, followed by thematic analysis (and theme production as outlined in Chapter 4), would facilitate a deeper interpretation of employee experiences, perceptions, and the meanings they attribute to them. This approach would also enhance the transferability of the research findings for future studies (Creswell, 2009; Cherryholmes, 1993).

Ethical Aspects of the Project

This section examines the ethical considerations of the project, including confidentiality, data protection, trust, credibility, and sensitivity. Ethical approval was obtained from the university, including the Psychology Department's Ethics Sub-Committee (PESC), in November 2013 through the submission of the advisor-approved ethics form, interview schedule, information sheet, consent form, debrief template, risk assessment form, and the organisation's approval letter. Specific legal and ethical safeguards were incorporated into the research design and data collection process. Further risks were mitigated by integrating ethical principles into the Information Sheet and Informed Consent Form, structuring the interview schedule accordingly, and conducting a debrief post-interview. The invitations informed employees that participation was voluntary, that they could decline, and that they retained the right to withdraw at any point during the interviews.

Four Ethics Documents were used:

1. The Participant Information Sheet, complying with ethical research norms, outlined the study's objectives, roles of the researcher and employees, employee rights, data ownership, usage, confidentiality, protection, anonymity, university contacts, adherence to ethical obligations, and unambiguous research aims and intentions.
2. The Informed Consent Form, addressing ethical and legal requirements, required employee signatures before the interviews. To avoid preconceived notions and align with organisational terminology, "bullying" was replaced with "victimisation" and "harassment" to ensure employees understood the context.
3. Interview Schedule: The questions were designed to avoid leading the discussion and to maintain a balance between neutral, positive, and negative tones.
4. Debriefing: The interviews ended with a restatement of the research objectives, potential outcomes, and a guarantee of anonymity and confidentiality. Employees were informed

about the data usage and given a debriefing sheet detailing available support organisations both within and outside the organisation.

Gatekeeper Approval

HR approvals were secured for participant recruitment and the use of policy documents, with measures to protect data privacy and anonymity of policies, employees, and the organisation's identity. The use of policy documents required careful consideration. Authorisation was granted to extract and reference parts of these documents and the company's online values, as discussed in Chapter 4. Since the policies are publicly accessible only through legal proceedings like employment tribunals, they cannot be published to maintain confidentiality and data privacy, and to avoid issues related to labour practices and legal implications beyond this study's scope.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Maintaining confidentiality and anonymity was of paramount importance, both among the employees and within the organisation. Voluntary organisation-wide recruitment would have excluded some individuals affected by the change project. To enhance recruitment, HR compiled a list of affected staff members. This approach potentially introduced bias in the selection process. To counteract this, HR approved recruitment outside the initial list. Furthermore, HR remained unaware of the final group of individuals who took part, thereby mitigating the risk of selection bias. A private interview room situated on a separate floor from the main office was selected to ensure complete privacy, maintain anonymity, and minimise potential vulnerability. All identifiers from the interviews and policy documents were removed from this research.

Sensitivity

The ethical implications of potential participant distress during the interviews were considered. To address this concern, invitations to participate and the information sheet explicitly stated that the study would involve sensitive topics. An additional two strategies were employed to mitigate distress during the interviews,

1. The interview process accommodated employee's emotional needs by pausing sessions when individuals showed distress or had difficulty expressing themselves. It was only once necessary to ask if a participant wanted to discontinue, but no interviews were prematurely terminated.
2. At the end of the session, employees were encouraged to share remarks or request further assistance or information. They were informed that they could email me for any

subsequent help. The debriefing document included contacts for organisations like Stop Bullying and The People Bottom Line for further support on workplace bullying. Employees were also reminded of their access to internal support services, including counselling, as part of their healthcare package. Although no employees immediately sought additional emotional support, contact details were provided for future reference.

Trustworthiness and Credibility

As a former senior employee involved in change projects, there was a concern that employees might be reluctant to share openly, fearing management access to their responses. Due to the sensitive nature of workplace bullying, ensuring employees felt secure and that my past affiliation did not compromise trust or research credibility was paramount. Consequently, this study was conducted in Southern Africa, where I had no prior interaction with employees. It was clarified that despite my former employment, the research was independent of the company. Employees were briefed on their and my roles to facilitate comfort in discussing their emotional experiences. Ethical standards were maintained by informing employees of their right to voluntary participation and interview termination, providing ethics committee contact information, supplying ethics-related documents before interviews, and reiterating ethical principles at the beginning and end of each session. This basis facilitated trust.

Critical Commentary on My Role as Insider Researcher

Acknowledging the potential implications, Stake (1980) notes, that researchers may serve dual roles as both instruments and interpreters in research, particularly in case studies that promote self-reflection and critical analysis. It is worth noting that while I had previously been employed by the organisation and was familiar with the change programme that started this and previous projects, I was not in the organisation's employment during this study.

According to Fleming (2018, p.2),

... A researcher may be investigating parts of the organisation previously unknown to them and collecting data from strangers, even though they are members of the same organisation. The researcher may become more familiar with the group they are researching; they may research different aspects of the group that they are less familiar with, or their roles within the organisation may change during the study. A range of methodologies can be used for conducting insider research, including case studies, action research and ethnography ... Fleming (2018, p.2).

As an insider researcher, my direct experience with organisational change and its impact on workplace bullying offers a significant methodological advantage. Hannabuss (2002) posits that knowledge management is inherently political. To extract organisational knowledge, one

must determine its location, ownership, and individuals' willingness to share it, recognising that sense-making and identity are often organisation-specific. The advantage was that my role as an ex-employee change manager provided insights into change projects and their effects on the organisation and staff morale. Furthermore, I had access to stakeholders across various levels, which facilitated the research and data collection process. Costley et al. (2010) caution against the inappropriate handling of sensitive information acquired through situational knowledge and close relationships. As an insider researcher but ex-employee change manager, any possible reluctance to engage openly due to the power dynamics associated with my former position and perceptions of this potentially jeopardising participants job security were mitigated through all the measures previously discussed. Per the recommendations of Campbell & Groundwater-Smith (2007), clear information about the research objectives, and benefits, and strict ethics protocols were provided. Smith & Osborn's (2008) technique of "bracketing" was used to reduce researcher bias and preconceptions and allow the phenomena to speak for itself.

An analysis of past change initiatives revealed a clear hierarchy that mirrors the organisational structure, as seen in this case study. This hierarchy comprises strategic executives, programme managers, and middle managers directing change; programme and middle managers enforcing change; and employees expected to accept change.

The top tier of the organisational structure includes strategic executives and project team members, including myself. This group is personally invested in the success of change programmes, evaluated at both individual and organisational levels, often tied to performance-related bonuses. Hiring an external consultant to lead a change programme provides a neutral perspective, reducing conflicts of interest and allowing the executive team to focus on financial targets without operational and personnel disruptions. My intermediary role posed a limitation for insider-based research. Investigating workplace bullying during business transformation could divert executive leaders' attention from financial goals and may be seen as a conflict of interest due to my dual role as a change facilitator and researcher of its negative impacts.

Mid-level management, the second tier of an organisation, shares the same risks and rewards as the executive team but is responsible for implementing change programmes. This group faces significant job insecurity tied to the programme's success and often holds the most negative views on the initiative, making their support challenging to obtain. During organisational upheaval, they frequently exhibit increased workplace bullying. However, once trust is established and employees feel empowered by the change, they are more likely to offer direct insights into organisational dynamics, including bullying, its causes, and its management at both operational and executive levels.

The third tier comprises employees directly impacted by changes from the upper levels. They face the highest job insecurity, as most organisational changes occur here. Like the middle tier, these employees tend to resist change and need trust to share insights. Additionally, this group has shown the highest incidence of workplace bullying in previous projects.

The three groups exhibit unique power dynamics and might have been hesitant to participate in the research or allow access. My professional background greatly aided my approach and acceptance as an insider researcher. Costley et al. (2010) emphasise that researchers in insider studies must adhere to all ethical review board protocols. Additionally, they suggest using soft skills, such as sensitivity and awareness of the effects of organisational dynamics on individuals, especially concerning privilege, power, and politics. These skills are often the same used in leading change programmes. Martin & Green (2007, p.71) emphasise that insider researchers need comprehensive knowledge of both the subject and context before starting their research. They must consider the hidden aspects of organisations, which is particularly pertinent for insider researchers who inherently understand the organisational culture, social systems, political dynamics, and interpersonal relationships often concealed from external researchers.

Conclusion

Stake (1980) posits that the essence of case study research as a design methodology lies in choosing a case that optimises learning, transferability, and interpretation to reveal the functioning of organisations, programmes, communities, and other systems. In this chapter, the study's theoretical framework has been explicated, followed by the rationale for employing a case study approach, adopting qualitative methods and thematic analysis. The participatory aspect of this approach deepened the richness of the collected data. Moreover, the integration of constructivist and interpretivist viewpoints within an organisational case study approach has been justified to further enhance data quality, particularly given the ethnographic emphasis on employee lived experiences. This methodological structure enabled an inclusive and cooperative research process, thereby improving the quality of the collected data. This chapter also outlined the ethical considerations to ensure that the data was not contaminated in any way.

Chapter 4, Project Activity, describes the data collection process, the construction of the qualitative interview schedule, the use of pilot interviews to refine the actual interviews, the interview structure and process, the process of thematic analysis and theme development, triangulation, and reflexivity.

Chapter 4, Project Activity

Introduction

This chapter delineates the methodology employed in conducting the project. It encompasses the data collection process, the policy documents that were examined, the development and implementation of interviews, participant selection criteria, the utilisation of pilot interviews to refine the interview questions, the approach to thematic analysis and identification of themes and the application of Nvivo software to facilitate this process, triangulation methods, and finally, consideration of reflexivity.

Data Collection

Employees participating in this study were from Southern African offices that had experienced numerous changes since 2008. Initial consultations with the HR leadership aimed to select a suitable change project for investigation and prepare HR for research objectives and data requirements. Discussions included the historical context of business transformation and region-specific change projects, focusing on the impacts of the austerity change project, which is the main subject of this research. This provided insights into organisational dynamics related to change management practices, impacts on employees, protocols for addressing bullying, and support mechanisms. Additionally, I understood how the organisational culture was influenced by extensive change programmes. It was agreed with HR to conduct a pilot study, followed by interviews with the remaining participants and an examination of policy documents. The participant pool would include managerial staff, employees affected by the austerity change project or previous initiatives since the recession, and HR personnel.

Steps of the Data Collection Process

Step 1 - Selection of change project, and analysis of policy documents.

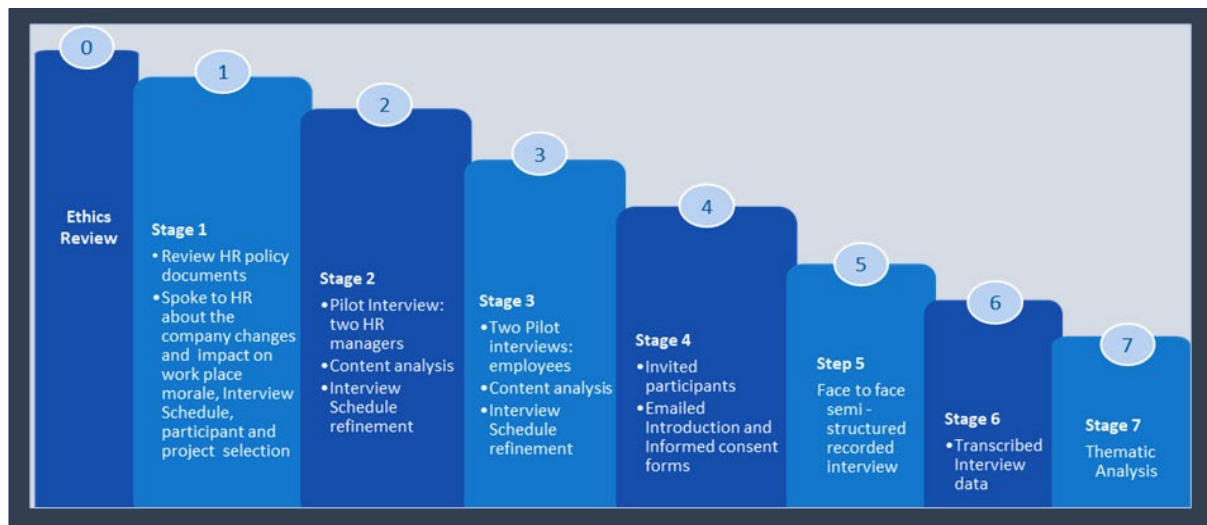
Steps 2 and 3 - Pilot interviews to assess the interview question's effectiveness, leading to refinement of the interview schedule.

Step 4 - Recruitment of participants. Participants were informed that involvement was voluntary, confidential, and anonymous. The interview duration was specified, that it would be recorded, transcribed, and analysed. Informed consent was obtained before participation.

Step 5 - One-hour interviews were conducted in a dedicated private meeting room.

Steps 6 and 7 - Interviews were transcribed and analysed, following Braun & Clarke's (2006) guidelines described in Chapter 3, and detailed later in this chapter.

Table 6 - Steps of the data collection process



Four Policy Documents

Before the interviews, HR provided the four documented policies and procedures related to employee management decisions. As mentioned previously, these are confidential, but I was allowed to take notes and reference excerpts from these documents. The subsequent sections present a concise overview of the official global policies and procedures implemented throughout the organisation. The application of these policies and procedures will be further examined in Chapter 5, Findings, where they will be correlated with specific data derived from the conducted interviews.

1. Sexual Harassment Policy - A standard protocol delineating the organisation's policy of zero tolerance towards discrimination based on race, age, religion, political affiliation, or gender, as well as sexual harassment.
2. Incapacity Procedure - Addressed performance issues and the management of underperformance in alignment with organisational and managerial goals and objectives. Defined as *"Incapacity, incompatibility, inability or lack of aptitude of an employee to perform contractual obligations at the required level or standard"*.
3. Grievance Procedure - Pertains to work-related injustices experienced by employees, excluding collective grievances. It outlines steps for managing grievances: first resolving issues between employees, involving management if unsuccessful, and referring to HR if necessary.
4. Disciplinary Procedure - Promotes *"natural and fair justice in the workplace, safeguarding both the company and employees"*. Disciplinary action must be lawful, fair, and conducted by authorized management to address unacceptable behaviour, such as contract

breaches due to misconduct like truancy and tardiness. Unsatisfactory outcomes should be referred to the Appeals process, not the Grievance Procedure.

The aforementioned sources did not address strategies for managing relationship conflicts during organisational change initiatives. Furthermore, there was no discussion of workplace bullying or guidance on addressing workplace bullying issues.

Constructing the Qualitative Interview Schedule

Key considerations in designing the interview schedule included the participant types, question relevance, and the economic climate before and during the study (austerity).

The employee and manager interview schedule was divided as follows (see Appendix for Full Interview Schedules),

1. Current Change Project and 2008 Global Financial Crisis and Workplace Relations,
2. Previous Change Project (after the 2008 recession) versus Current Change Project (during austerity),
3. Experiences of and Management of Bullying and Policies.

The HR interview schedule explored three areas (see Appendix for Full Interview Schedule),

1. Change Project and 2008 Global Financial Crisis and Workplace Relations,
2. Bullying,
3. Policy.

Pilot Interviews

HR authorised me to conduct pilot interviews, providing access to three staff members from two distinct teams, including a manager and a senior HR representative. Before the interviews, participants received an introductory email containing consent forms and an information sheet. Signed consent was required before the interview commenced or attendance was confirmed. This approach allowed me to fine-tune the interview schedule, address any concerns about its structure, evaluate the question flow and suitability across the participant sample, and assess data validity and quality.

The pilot interviews had three main objectives: to determine if participants could recall the impacts of change projects before, during, and after the 2008 Global Financial Crisis compared to the current austerity period; to assess the effectiveness of using separate question sets for those directly and indirectly affected by the current change project, as well as for employees and managers, ensuring logical question flow and data clarity, and to evaluate the efficacy of the HR interview questions. In all three scenarios, the objective was to ensure a coherent

interview structure with questions aligned to the research aims. The pilots helped gauge response types and assessed if interviews would yield the desired depth and richness of data. After the interviews, I gathered participant feedback on clarity and effectiveness and consulted my supervisors, sharing insights from the pilots. Minor adjustments were made to the interview schedule for clarity without altering content. The pilot data was included in the final data set.

Table 7 - Interview Schedule extract example

3. **For those IN the project** - How do you feel about the changes (for example: the resource / recruitment / pay cuts and freeze – *amend after confirmed by organisation*), and being involved in making it happen?

For those NOT IN the project - How do you feel about the changes (for example: the resource / recruitment / pay cuts and freeze – *insert if allowed by organisation*), and *not being involved* in making it happen?

Participant Population Interviews

The initial interview segment examined participant's perceptions of the current change project's management during austerity, contrasting it with those from the recession. It sought to identify differences in employee impact and whether economic uncertainty influenced these changes. This section focused on three key areas: participant's experiences with the current change project, their memories of past projects during the 2008 financial crisis, and any perceived differences between the two concerning the economic downturn.

The next section "Current Change Project, 2008 Recession, and Workplace Relations" examines the effects of the ongoing change project on responsibilities, workload, anxiety, emotional well-being, and stress, comparing them to previous projects before and during the recession. Participants were requested to consider the impact on their personal and professional lives, especially workplace relationships. Participants were asked for their views on specific organisational changes, including workforce reductions or role modifications, and whether they were directly involved or affected. The next section assessed their attitudes toward changes during austerity and whether their views would differ if these changes occurred post-austerity, when financial conditions were stable, to determine if economic perceptions influenced opinion differences. Furthermore, the study aimed to determine if different groups, like employees versus managers or those directly impacted versus the broader workforce, experienced varying effects. The interview then explored views on

managing interpersonal conflicts, including bullying, harassment, and victimisation, starting with participants' definitions of workplace bullying and any perceived rise in such incidents. For HR professionals it included the addition of queries related to increased requests for guidance on these conflicts. Questions across the participants groups also examined accounts of whether bullying behaviours increased during the current project compared to previous organisational changes post-recession.

The interview then explored participants' perceptions of behaviours considered bullying. Employees and managers shared their views, experiences, and accounts of bullying incidents. I then provided the definition and examples of bullying behaviours (in CH1). The discussion centred on their opinions about the definition and how it shaped their understanding of experiencing, being informed about, or witnessing bullying behaviours. This stage allowed initially negative respondents to reconsider and possibly adjust their answers by reflecting on the described behaviours. Participants with positive responses vividly recounted specific bullying incidents they experienced or witnessed, detailing the behaviours, involved parties, and event chronology. They also explained the impact on themselves and colleagues, the outcomes, and the effects on attitudes, work performance, and workplace relationships.

Certain questions were formulated to reflect the distinct experiences associated with the respective roles across HR, employees, and managers. For example, HR and manager interviews additionally focused on mediation responsibilities and the frequency and nature of bullying cases they managed, and employees and managers were specifically asked about their views, experiences, and accounts of bullying incidents, and if there was a different experience between managers and employees when dealing with bullying incidents. This approach, as delineated below, ensured that all participants irrespective of their role could provide substantive responses in this section.

Questions were asked about bullying incident reports from all participant groups. For unreported cases, questions sought to understand the underlying reasons for non-reporting. In reported incidents, inquiries were made about the individuals involved, the complaint's nature (formal or informal), the report recipient, assistance provided, resolution strategies, and the effectiveness of outcomes. The investigation also explored how managers addressed bullying, including formal and informal approaches, preferred conflict resolution methods, and potential areas for improvement or alternative strategies. This section examined participant's views on optimal bullying management, effective interventions, potential improvements, and preventive measures, transitioning seamlessly into the policy discussions.

Employees and managers were questioned about their knowledge of existing policies and procedures for addressing bullying. They were also asked whether they had utilised these measures previously and how they perceived the efficacy of current protocols in tackling

bullying issues. Additionally, this provided insight into the attitudes of both participant groups regarding the use of formal policies and procedures versus informal resolution methods. As outlined in the previous section, employing a semi-structured interview format struck a balance between focused areas of inquiry and the flexibility to probe deeper into participants answers. This approach offered an opportunity to explore participants views on potential improvements for supporting staff facing organisational changes and interpersonal conflicts. The aim was to collect their suggestions for improving policies to better aid organisations and employees experiencing workplace bullying during change initiatives.

Selecting and recruiting participants

After the completion of the pilot interviews, invitations were sent to the rest of the participant population. As noted in Chapter 3, HR initially provided a list of employees and managers from various departments who were directly affected by the change initiative. The participant group also included all HR personnel, such as business partners, an organisational design specialist, and a remuneration and benefits specialist. Moreover, HR sanctioned the request to seek additional volunteers. Through voluntary recruitment, this list included those indirectly impacted or who had previously experienced change initiatives during the recession. The emailed invitations encouraged all recipients to suggest the study to interested colleagues, to contact me for inclusion directly via email. The names of the final list of twenty participants remained confidential from HR. The recruitment email contained the four ethics documents described in Chapter 3, clearly outlining roles, responsibilities, voluntary participation, and a brief overview of the research. Participants were requested to come to the interviews having read the Information Sheet and signed the Consent Form.

Demographic factors were not considered in selecting participants, nor was such information collected. Nevertheless, at the beginning of the process, details were recorded about each participants position and length of service within the organisation. Below is a table summarising the participants involved in this research, showing the demographic details and pseudonyms of participants.

Table 8 - Interview Participant Overview

20 Participants	Pseudonym	Tenure	Gender	Role	directly/indirectly impacted
12 Employee Interviews					
1	Participant H	17yrs	female	Change Manager	Change Implementation - directly impacted
2	Participant D	11yrs	female	Old team employee	directly impacted
3	Participant O	8yrs	female	Old team employee	directly impacted
4	Participant M	23yrs	female	Old team employee	directly impacted
5	Participant F	4.5yrs	female	Old team employee	directly impacted
6	Participant Q	12yrs	female	Old team employee	directly impacted
7	Participant G	8yrs	female	Old team employee	directly impacted
8	Participant R	3yrs	female	Old team employee	directly impacted
9	Participant E	11yrs	female	Old team employee	directly impacted
10	Participant J	9 yrs	male	Finance employee - volunteer	indirectly impacted
11	Participant P	8yrs	female	Finance employee - volunteer	indirectly impacted
12	Participant S	14yrs	female	Operations employee - volunteer	indirectly impacted
4 Manager Interviews					
13	Participant L	20yrs	male	Old team manager	directly impacted
14	Participant N	10yrs	male	Sales manager	indirectly impacted
15	Participant K	24yrs	male	Finance Manager	indirectly impacted
16	Participant I	6yrs	male	Operations Manager	indirectly impacted
4 HR Interviews					
17	Participant A	17yrs	female	HR manager	-
18	Participant B	8yrs	female	Organizational Development Consultant	-
19	Participant C	8yrs	male	HR Manager	-
20	Participant T	8yrs	male	HR Business Partner	-

Interview Process

Given the sensitive topic of workplace bullying and participant's unfamiliarity with the interview schedule, concerns about confidentiality and my role were anticipated. Additionally, the ongoing change project heightened anxieties, especially for those directly affected by job changes. Therefore, it was essential to begin each interview by restating the study's objectives, introducing myself, and clarifying the roles of the researcher and participant, with a focus on data protection, confidentiality, and anonymity. Furthermore, it was explicitly communicated that participants had the option to pause or withdraw from the interview at any time.

Finlay (2002) asserts that rigorous research practices, such as maintaining audit trails of documented data, illustrations of methodologies employed, and decision-making processes in refining data (detailed in Chapter 3), enhance research credibility and dependability. Interviews were audio-recorded after informing participants that this was for transcription purposes. Participants were assured that personal information would be anonymised to protect their identity. Once participants expressed comfort, the interviews began.

Following Finlay's (2002) guidelines, field notes were taken during the interviews to capture observations. This helped recall interview dynamics during analysis, provided reminders when

reviewing audio recordings, improved access to participant's sentiments, and highlighted key points that resonated in the interviews.

A semi-structured interview format was employed. The tone was crucial, aligning with the study's epistemological and ontological framework, leading to a professional yet semi-formal, conversational style. This allowed participants to express their views freely because it fostered an atmosphere of comfort, security, trust, and ease. Interviews unfolded naturally without frequent reference to the guide, granting participants independence, which some appreciated as an opportunity to express their dissatisfaction with the change initiative's implementation and impacts. While effective, this approach entailed risks and required careful management. Participants occasionally deviated from the topic or gave overly detailed responses, resulting in incoherence. Conversely, some struggled with specific questions despite additional clarification. In both cases, probes and prompts helped redirect the interview and guide responses. Concrete examples also improved the quality of contributions. Interview schedules are included in the Appendix.

Qualitative Data Analysis Process

Thematic Analysis and Theme Development

As outlined in Chapter 3, the process of thematic analysis was informed by the framework established by Braun & Clarke (2006), guiding my understanding of how to conduct thematic analysis effectively to identify themes from data. Braun & Clark (2006) advocate for a process of continuous refinement, wherein data extracts are consistently interrogated, merged, collapsed, discarded, and modified as the researcher selects extracts, organises data extracts into codes, and synthesises the coded data extracts to ultimately identify specific major themes. Following the author's guidelines, the initial focus was on identifying prevalence, observable both within individual data items (i.e., specific interviews) and across the entire data set (i.e., all interviews).

A choice between deductive or inductive thematic analysis was required. Braun & Clarke (2006) describe the deductive approach as starting with a theory to develop hypotheses, which are then tested through data collection and analysis. Bannister (2002) suggests that deductive analysis is theory-driven, with codes derived from existing theory. This did not align with this study's theoretical framework. In contrast, in inductive analysis themes can be derived from the data itself. This approach entails generating codes based on the information discovered within the dataset. The process is cyclical, necessitating multiple analytical passes and continuous refinement. Although more time-consuming, inductive analysis typically yields a more comprehensive and exploratory result when compared to deductive coding methods (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). This data-driven method requires deep engagement with

interview transcripts, initial empirical observations from field notes, coding of emerging patterns, and analysis to identify recurring themes from raw data. Its flexibility permits the data to guide the analysis, avoiding the coercion of data into predetermined categories or theories.

An additional consideration was the reliability of inductive analysis for a small sample. Ando, Cousins, & Young (2014, pp. 1, 6) found that a small sample can produce 92.2% of the codes needed for thematic analysis. Similar to this study, they used Braun & Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis guide on six semi-structured interview transcripts, later verifying the codes with thirty-three additional interviews. They concluded that twelve interviews suffice to generate codes for thematic analysis, supporting Guest et al.'s (2006) claim that six to twelve interviews yield sufficient data for inductive thematic analysis. The researchers also used similar methods to identify and refine codes into themes, choosing to manually organize these codes in Microsoft Word.

Combined with the above, inductive analysis was well-suited to this study, due to its emphasis on experiential contexts, in-depth analysis of thematic significance, and examination of contributing factors. This enabled a more sophisticated exploration of specific data elements that are particularly relevant to the case study.

The subsequent consideration focused on whether to analyse themes at the explicit, semantic level or the interpretive, latent level. A semantic approach would allow for the identification of surface-level patterns within the data, whereas a latent approach would enable the investigation of underlying phenomena beyond the explicit content expressed in the interviews. This methodology involves progressing from systematically arranging data to reveal patterns within the semantic context, to a more profound interpretation of these patterns and their broader implicit meanings, ultimately leading to the development of comprehensive themes. The generation of themes at a latent level aligned with the theoretical framework outlined in Chapter 3, and as suggested by Braun & Clarke (2006),

... For latent thematic analysis, the development of the themes themselves involves interpretative work. Analysis within this tradition tends to emerge from a constructionist paradigm, where broader assumptions, structures, and meanings are theorised as underpinning what is articulated in the data ... Braun & Clarke (2006, p.13)

This explanation highlights that latent thematic analysis requires interpretive efforts in theme development and is typically rooted in a constructionist framework that explores the underlying assumptions, structures, and meanings within the data.

In practice, this process started with analysing the data at the semantic level, extracting relevant segments from each interview. This process continued until all interviews were

coded, allowing the identification of patterns across the dataset. Subsequently, the codes were refined through a more comprehensive latent analysis, which resulted in the formulation of themes. Braun & Clarke (2006) suggest that coding is an integral part of the analysis, helping to highlight meaningful data related to the phenomenon by organising it into significant groups. However, the coded data differs from the final themes, which are broader in scope and emerge in the subsequent phase of analysis, providing the foundation for arguments regarding the phenomenon under study. This process is described later in the next two sections of this chapter.

The qualitative data analysis process employed in this study, while initially perceived as aligning with Dey's (2005) conceptualisation of a spiralling approach, retrospectively bore a closer resemblance to Naish's (2014) description of a funnelling process, involving the iterative distillation of interview data, utilising the thematic analysis framework proposed by Braun & Clarke (2006). The process commenced with a comprehensive dataset that was progressively refined to elucidate the principal themes underlying participant experiences. The important themes that are explained in the findings chapter were finally generated from this methodical analytical process.

Using Nvivo Software to Process Interview Data

Vears & Gillam (2002) note that while data analysis tools can range from basic pen and paper to sophisticated software packages, the fundamental cognitive process remains the same. For this particular investigation, conducted by a single researcher, Nvivo was deemed the most suitable tool to facilitate this analytical process, as opposed to coding data using pen and paper or organising codes in an Excel spreadsheet. As explained in Adu's (2019, p.183) guide to qualitative data coding,

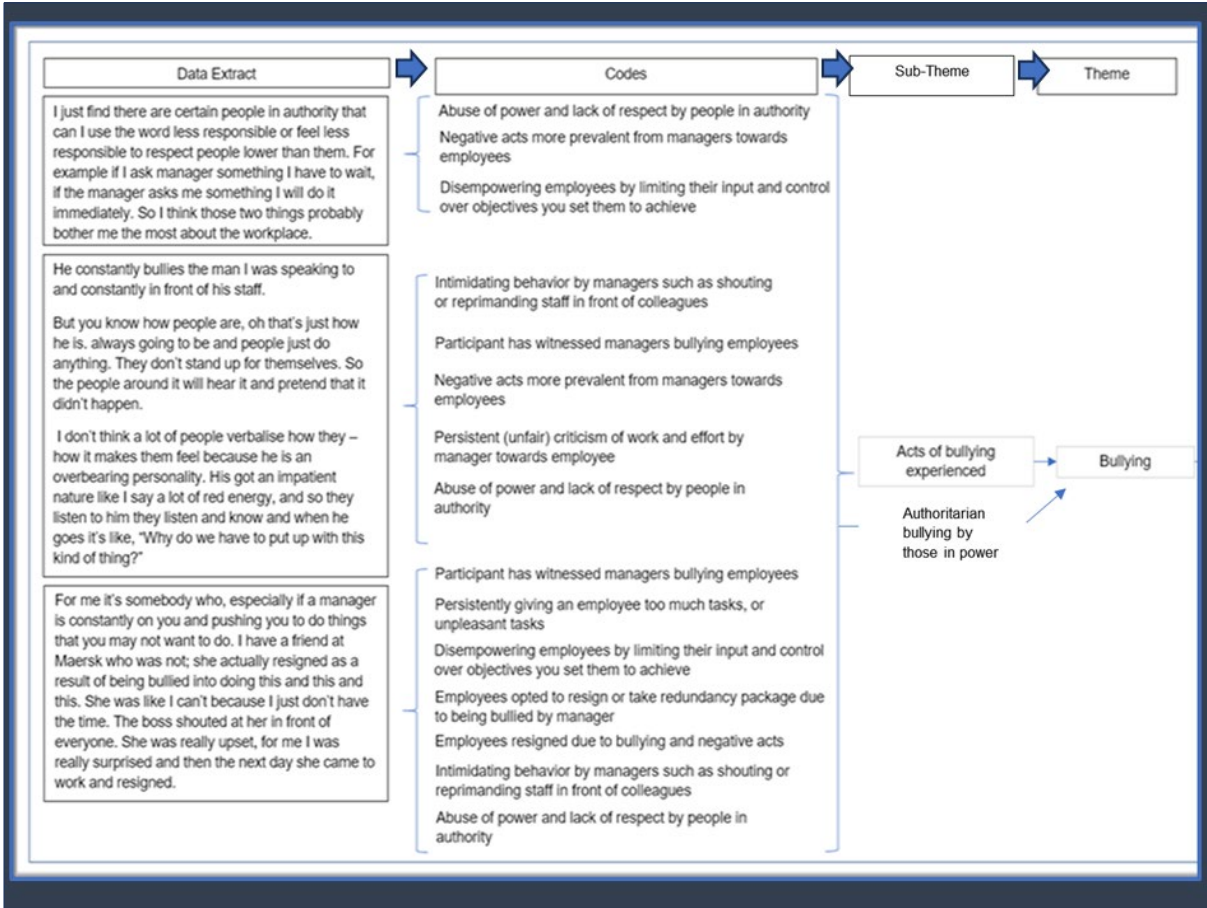
... Nvivo has a unique role of helping qualitative analysts to transform raw qualitative data into refined outcomes – addressing their quest to answer their research questions and understand a phenomenon. To ensure quality results, qualitative researchers work closely with the software – developing codes to represent the relevant text found in the data. Nvivo organizes the codes created and automatically tallies cases of relevant data segments coded, making it easier to further develop categories, themes, and theories. Nvivo also facilitates the visualization of the qualitative analysis outcomes ...
Adu (2019, p.183)

A case study by Hollywood (2020) focusing on the health and well-being-related perceptions and experiences of families living in areas of urban disadvantage, used Braun & Clarke's (2006) six-phase thematic analysis method combined with Nvivo for data management and analysis and proved that this allowed for "the application of coding techniques throughout the six-

phase thematic analytical process" (Hollywood, 2020, p.1). Nvivo was employed to meticulously examine and categorise interview data into codes, streamlining the data processing by enabling a systematic approach. This process contributed to the development of the list of codes (Priya, 2021), and encompassed data familiarisation, indexing, charting, and mapping to recognise patterns and frequency of occurrence. The procedure also involved thematic identification, iterative refinement, and interpretation, thus aiding in the detection of various causes, effects, outcomes, and their interconnections across the dataset, ultimately leading to the identification of themes. Below is a worked example showcasing the progression from initial interview data extracts to the creation of preliminary codes, followed by the refinement processes that culminated in the finalised subthemes and themes.

Table 9 - Theme Development worked example

Discussion on the development of themes will be included in Chapter 5.



Similar to the Hollywood (2020) case study, in this study, Braun & Clarke's (2006) guide to thematic analysis, was also combined with the data processing capabilities of Nvivo, explained in the following six steps.

Steps of Thematic Analysis

In this study adopting Braun & Clarke's (2006) six steps of thematic analysis involved,

1. **Familiarising with the data** involved a third-party verbatim transcription of audio to text. I reviewed the transcribed interviews, conducted a preliminary high-level analysis of the interview data, listened to the audio recordings, and took comprehensive notes.
2. **Generating initial codes** involved analysing raw transcript data to label and categorise data extracts. Nvivo was used to code each interview line-by-line systematically. Table 10 below is an example of coded data extracts for the various accounts of bullying.

Table 10 - Coded Data Extracts

Data Extract	Code
I just find there are certain people in authority that can I use the word less responsible or feel less responsible to respect people lower than them. For example if I ask manager something I have to wait, if the manager asks me something I will do it immediately. So I think those two things probably bother me the most about the workplace.	Employees opted to resign or take redundancy package due to being bullied by manager
	Employees resigned due to bullying and negative acts
	Intimidating behaviours by managers such as shouting or reprimanding staff in front of colleagues
	Persistent (unfair) criticism of work and effort by manager towards employee
	persistently giving an employee too much tasks, or unpleasant tasks
	Participant has witnessed managers bullying employees
	Negative acts more prevalent from managers towards employees
	Abuse of power and lack of respect by people in authority
	persistent public criticism of work and effort
	Same perpetrators and victims all the time usually perpetrator is someone in power
	Disempowering employees by limiting their input and control over objectives you set them to achieve

The preliminary code list (Priya, 2021) was iteratively reviewed, and refined by merging, deleting, and recategorising codes. After categorising codes, this allowed for analysis of the extracts as a whole to understand the data's central message.

3. **Identification and development of themes:** Interrelationships between codes emerged, revealing discernible patterns. Related codes were further grouped and labelled under nodes, which is a Nvivo term for a unit of analysis containing a group of similar codes comprising related data. It can also be thought of as the step to review data before candidate themes are named. A conceptual map was created to outline the nodes. This

was reviewed and grouped into candidate themes across the data set i.e. emerging candidate themes.

Below is an example of coded data extracts for the various accounts of bullying. It shows progression from a data extract to code, into the node "Acts of bullying experienced". Additionally, the last two columns in the table show how the node "Acts of Bullying Experienced", evolved into the theme "Bullying" and subtheme "Authoritarian Bullying by those in Power", described in the next steps.

Table 11 - Codes grouped into Nodes, Themes and Subthemes

	A	B	C	D	E
1	Data Extract	Code	Node	Theme	Sub theme
2		Employees opted to resign or take redundancy package due to being bullied by manager	Acts of bullying experienced	Bullying	Authoritarian Bullying - bullying by those in power
3		Employees resigned due to bullying and negative acts			
4		Intimidating behaviours by managers such as shouting or reprimanding staff in front of colleagues			
5		Persistent (unfair) criticism of work and effort by manager towards employee			
6	I just find there are certain people in authority that can I use the word less responsible or feel less responsible to respect people lower than them. For example if I ask manager something I have to wait, if the manager asks me something I will do it immediately. So I think those two things probably bother me the most about the workplace.	persistently giving an employee too much tasks, or unpleasant tasks			
7		Participant has witnessed managers bullying employees			
8		Negative acts more prevalent from managers towards employees			
9		Abuse of power and lack of respect by people in authority			
10		persistent public criticism of work and effort			
11		Same perpetrators and victims all the time usually perpetrator is someone in power			
12		Disempowering employees by limiting their input and control over objectives you set them to achieve			
13					
14	I just find there are certain people in authority that can I use the word less responsible or feel less responsible to respect people lower than them. For example if I ask manager something I have to wait, if the manager asks me something I will do it immediately. So I think those two things probably bother me the most about the workplace.	Abuse of power and lack of respect by people in authority			
	Node Summary	Theme 1	Theme 2.1	Theme 2.2	Theme 3
		Improvements			Sheet1

- Defining and naming themes** involved refinement of candidate themes. In the table above the candidate theme is "Bullying". In this step a thorough analysis was conducted, assessing the relevance of themes to their coded data extracts. This process meant

determining if extracts are better suited to different themes, thereby conveying different or more nuanced narratives, and regrouping, discarding, collapsing, and merging themes where appropriate.

5. **Refining themes** entailed analysing each theme individually, about one another, and to the research question, assessing their distinctiveness, and based on the data determining the need for subthemes to structure and illustrate meaning hierarchy. An example of additional patterns was evident within the theme "Bullying", requiring a subtheme i.e. "Authoritarian Bullying by those in Power". The process involved multiple reviews of the coded data extracts to check for theme relevance or any necessary reclassification. The table below shows coded data extracts for the various accounts of bullying, grouped in the node "Acts of bullying experienced", with the underlying subtheme "Abuse of Power (...) by people in Authority". This was re-categorised into the subtheme "Authoritarian Bullying by those in Power".

Table 12 - Nodes by Coded Data Extract

<p>Coding Summary By Node Data Collection</p> <p>Nodes\Bullying\Acts of bullying experienced\Abuse of power and lack of respect by people in authority Document</p>
<p>I don't know I just find there are certain people in authority that...can I use the word less responsible or feel less responsible to respect people lower than them. For exple if I ask manager something I have to wait, if the manager asks me something I will do it immediately. So I think those o things probably bother me the most about the workplace, profession related or not I don't know.</p>
<p>he constantly bullies the man I was speaking to and constantly in front of his staff.</p>
<p>I don't think a lot of people verbalise how they – how it makes them feel because he is an overbearing personality. His got an impatient nature like I say a lot of red energy, and so they listen to him they listen and know and when he goes it's like, "Why do we have to put up with this kind of thing?"</p>
<p>I experienced bullying in this organisation. I have when I was on FACT it was a ten month project and there was a miserable, miserable unhappy woman I can't put it any other way. And she made my life hell, actually changed my life forever, if that makes sense, because I have never felt so incompetent my whole life I was always a top performer our manager was always happy with me and then I worked on this project for ten months and she broke my spirit because nothing I did was ever right. So I think everybody can be testent to that, there's a bully in everybody's career I'm sorry to say that.</p>
<p>Manipulation I think getting people to do things for you that you can either do yourself or taking advantage of somebody's inability to say no. And realising that this person has a lot of strength that person is not so good so overload this person.</p>

The outcome of this was naming all the nodes into key themes and where appropriate subthemes, eventually producing the three main themes and their corresponding subthemes, as presented in Chapter 5.

6. **Producing the report:** The research report's production involves narrating the data derived from the themes, assigning pseudonyms to participants, and convincing readers of the analysis's validity through concise, logical, and non-repetitive theme construction. Each theme is justified with appropriate data extracts that encapsulate its essence,

embedded within the narrative to construct an argument relevant to the research questions. This step facilitated the initial narrative construction of themes, organizing them to effectively convey the data's narrative in the context of the research questions, detailed in Chapter 5.

In accordance with the TA six-step process for thematic analysis and research report generation, it was necessary to ensure data validity through triangulation.

Triangulation

According to Tindall et al. (1995), data triangulation methods involve gathering accounts from various participants within the selected setting. These accounts, coming from individuals in different positions within the context, are unlikely to align perfectly with one another. However, they emphasise that experiences, and consequently understanding, are inherently bound to the context in which they occur.

Denzin (2012) identified four basic types of triangulation, as elaborated below,

1. Investigator triangulation encompasses the utilisation of multiple researchers in a study. The capacity to corroborate findings across investigators enhances the credibility of the results and mitigates bias in the collection and analysis of study data. As the sole researcher, this method was not feasible.
2. Theory triangulation refers to the utilisation of multiple perspectives to interpret the results of a study from different viewpoints, with diverse questions in mind. The themes in this research were data-driven, therefore, preconceived theories were intentionally excluded to prevent their influence on the conceptualisation of the themes.
3. Methodological triangulation refers to the utilisation of diverse research methods, such as combining qualitative and quantitative research methodologies within a single study, to address the same research question. This approach was deemed inappropriate for the current research.
4. Data triangulation, which involves using various data collection methods like time periods, space, people, interviews, and field notes, was deemed the most suitable method for this study. This study focuses on a change project within the austerity period and its effects on individuals.

According to Yin (2009), case studies can attain reliability and validity by employing three principles for data triangulation,

1. Gathering multiple sources of evidence to formulate findings: a multi-informant approach was employed, utilising several data sources. As mentioned previously interviews were conducted with a diverse sample of employees, managers and HR, consultations with HR, policy document review, and field notes,
2. Utilising an independent database to store and organise the data: the data was organised in Nvivo and stored in the Middlesex repository, and
3. Linking the data from the research question to the findings: the process of thematic analysis was employed for this.

Data triangulation was most relevant for this study as it aligned with the context of the research and considered its limitations, which precluded the use of investigator and theory triangulation. This approach enhanced the accessibility of data for triangulation while maintaining its validity and credibility. Construct validity, typically relevant to survey questionnaires (Parahoo, 2006), was ensured through supervisory review and feedback on interview questions, ensuring these were aligned with the research aims and design. Pilot interviews further established construct validity and reliability, testing question effectiveness, necessary structural changes, appropriateness, and participant response validity. Respondent validation was not conducted. This limitation was mitigated by verifying with respondents that their responses were accurately comprehended before proceeding to subsequent interview questions but without any expectations as to how these questions should or would be answered. An additional level of validation was achieved through supervisory feedback during the iterative process of coding the data and developing themes, assessing whether they maintained the integrity of the data (Yin, 2009), and refining until the final list of themes and subthemes was derived. This according to (Farquhar et al., 2020) achieves validity by converging findings, sources, or methods.

Reflexivity

Upon commencing this DProf, I was initially unaware that this research's epistemological stance was grounded in constructivism and interpretivism, particularly regarding individual experiences and broader social contexts within organisations (Crotty, 1998, p.58,79). Through my professional experience, I observed the effects of an organisational culture where workplace bullying was prevalent, gaining access to employee interactions and their reflections on the meanings they attributed to those experiences. It was important to be cautious during participant interactions, ensuring that my organisational knowledge did not lead to confirmation bias or prompt responses too closely aligned with the research questions. As Tindall (in Banister et al., 1995, p.146) observes, "experience and understanding are context-bound", so my prior knowledge proved instrumental in interpreting organisational discourse during the transcription and analysis phases. This case study chose interviews over questionnaires to explore the subjective meanings participants attributed to

their experiences because as Burman (in Banister et al., 1995, p.51) argue, interviews foster reflexivity, a crucial aspect given the professional context and sensitive nature of the topic. My research was shaped by reflexivity, encompassing both personal interests and functional reflexivity, acknowledging my biases and assumptions. This awareness required careful consideration when formulating interview questions and conducting thematic analysis. The thematic analysis enabled me to identify and organise themes within the data (Braun & Clarke, 2006), structuring it under relevant headings relevant to the research question (Burman in Banister et al., 1995; Braun & Clarke, 2006). During the analytical process, I maintained cognisance of Burman's emphasis on reflexivity to mitigate misinterpretation arising from subjective bias. As Tindall (in Banister et al., 1995, p.150) advises, personal and professional interests could potentially influence analytical outcomes. This potential influence was addressed through active consideration of viewpoints and examples that did not necessarily align with the initial hypothesis.

Conclusion

This chapter outlined the data collection methodology, with particular emphasis on the utilisation of multi-informant interviews. A comprehensive list of the policy documents examined as part of the data corpus is provided, accompanied by a summary of the participants and the selection and recruitment process. Furthermore, the chapter elucidates the development and subsequent refinement of the qualitative interview schedule following the pilot interviews. The chapter further expounds on the conduct of the interview process, the application of thematic analysis for theme development using Nvivo, and the triangulation methods employed to ensure validity and credibility. Morse (1994, p. 23, 25) outlines four cognitive processes essential to qualitative methodologies, which were employed in this stage of the research,

... comprehending the phenomenon under study, synthesizing a conceptual framework that justifies the associations and linkages within its context, developing themes to explain the mechanisms and rationale behind the relationships, and recontextualizing and refining the knowledge of the phenomenon, its relationships, and emerging themes ... Morse (1994, p. 23, 25)

This chapter provided a comprehensive overview of the data collection and analysis processes. The subsequent chapter will elaborate on these processes in greater detail, elucidating the development of emergent themes, namely: Theme 1 - Impact of Change Projects During Economic Downturn; Theme 2 - Workplace Bullying, and Theme 3 - Efficacy of Management of Bullying Incidents.

Chapter Five, Findings

Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the data analysis. The methodology for conducting the analysis is described in the preceding chapter. Three primary themes emerged from the data, each with associated subthemes. The subthemes were categorised as such because they elucidate specific aspects of the issues and challenges experienced within the overarching theme. The structure of this chapter comprises an overview of the themes and subthemes, followed by an explication of the theme derivation and analysis process, the findings of the themes, and subsequently, an analysis of the application of the policies and procedures.

Overview of Themes

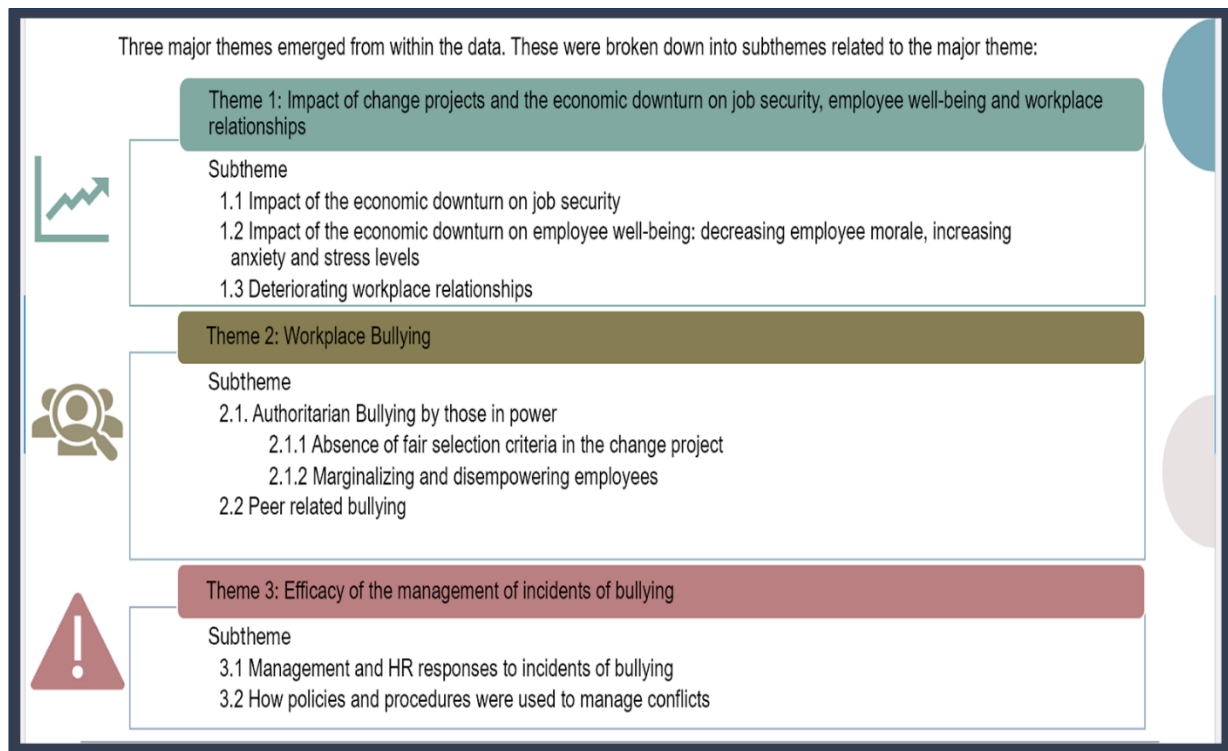
Theme 1 - Impact of change projects during the economic downturn and the impact on job security, employee well-being and workplace relationships.

Theme 2 - Workplace Bullying focuses on the types of bullying experiences reported.

Theme 3 - Efficacy of the management of bullying incidents, focuses on how bullying incidents were managed and the use of policies and procedures.

The themes, while distinct, were interconnected, forming a cascading sequence where each influenced the next. Figure 1 below is a visual of the main Themes and their Subthemes.

Figure 1 - Themes and Subthemes Overview



This section will proceed to present the analysis of the data as they correspond to each of the identified themes. To the extent possible, the analysis of the data has been kept distinct within each theme. However, this was not always feasible due to the complex nature of the topic itself and the cause-and-effect relationship of the data within and across each of the themes. A spiralling effect occurs throughout the themes. As job insecurity increased, employee well-being decreased, and consequently, workplace relationships deteriorated. Incidents of workplace bullying either increased or became more apparent, and the management of this was deemed either inadequate or ineffective. The research focus is delineated in Chapters 1 and 4, and the interview schedule is provided in the Appendix.

It is pertinent to reiterate that this research examines participants' perceptions of the various phases of economic downturn, specifically the period immediately preceding the recession, during the 2008 recession (December 2007 - June 2009), the subsequent austerity period (June 2009 - 2017), and this change project (conducted in 2015) during the aforementioned austerity period.

The research examined the perceived effects of the economic downturn on participants' professional lives, including workload, responsibilities, stress levels, interpersonal dynamics, and workplace bullying. It sought to identify any disparities in these aspects before and during the economic downturn, focusing on the specific change project under investigation. To elucidate the overarching argument derived from the findings, the study presents a narrative

that interlinks three primary themes, illustrating a chain of events culminating in workplace bullying. The narrative commences with Theme 1 - Impact of change projects during the economic downturn on employees (exploring the ramifications of the change project, the escalation of stress and subsequent deterioration of well-being and workplace relationships). This progression leads to Theme 2 - Workplace Bullying (due to the change project) and concludes with assessing the efficacy of organisational responses to incidents of bullying in Theme 3 - Efficacy of the management of incidents of bullying.

Findings Related to the Themes

Theme 1, Impact of Change Projects During the Economic Downturn

The initial finding from the data indicates that participants across all three groups, i.e. employees, managers, and HR, perceived that in comparison to before the economic downturn, change projects that occurred during the economic downturn resulted in a deterioration of job security, leading to a decline in employee well-being and workplace relationships. These findings have been categorised into three subthemes to demonstrate the impact on job security, employee well-being and workplace relationships.

This theme reveals a cascading effect wherein various factors appear to exacerbate one another. Specifically, an increase in job insecurity, as described in subtheme 1.1, led to increased workload, elevated stress and anxiety levels, and decreased employee well-being in subtheme 1.2. Subsequently, these factors contributed to negative impacts on workplace relationships, as outlined in subtheme 1.3.

Subtheme 1.1 - Impact on job security

This research did not include a review of historical data on past redundancies and bullying grievances, as this was classified as protected company data. Nevertheless, a central feature evident in participant accounts within this change project is that participants experienced an adverse shift in the company culture due to the economic downturn, which directly impacted their job security and for which they were unprepared. Before the economic downturn, the company's operational changes did not threaten job security due to high employee retention. Traditionally, the company employed graduates until retirement, implemented changes gradually, and actively promoted career development and progression. As explained by the following participant,

... If I think back about seventeen years when I had my first interview here, my manager said to me ... "This is a Danish company, we in every country in the world, we are the largest shipping company in the world, and we do not retrench people" ... Things have changed tremendously since then, but we did not use the word recession or cutting

staff until about four years ago. We did not discuss it in any way if that makes any sense. It is a very different company now than what it was a few years ago ...
(Participant A, HR manager with the company for 17 years.)

The economic downturn necessitated the company to explore methods of maintaining profitability through a series of change initiatives. Participant responses indicated that the implications for job security were unanticipated at individual, group, and team levels, and given the organisation's historical employment retention, at the organisational level as well. Participant A elaborates on this point,

... I think because change is more normal now and because people are seeing more cost cutting, more heads roll, more centralisation, more global service centres and less local employment. People tend to expect it now whereas previously it was more of a surprise because even though they thought they were doing well; it came as a surprise that it was not ... (Participant A an HR manager, with the company for 17 years).

The rapid, successive, and reactive change programs aimed to counter the economic threats of recession and austerity and safeguard company profitability. These measures led to organisational modifications such as centralisation, standardisation, offshoring, downsizing, retrenchments, and other cost-efficiency strategies. The previously stable working environment characterised by secure long-term employment, sharply contrasted with the destabilised conditions and ongoing job insecurity experienced by participants during and after the economic downturn

Participants faced continuous changes, often resulting in job cuts, with no stable periods to evaluate the effectiveness of previous changes before new ones were introduced. As a result, since the onset of the economic downturn, they endured persistent instability in the workplace, driven either by the constant threat of retrenchment or the evolving nature of their roles, leaving little time for preparation or adaptation, with limited opportunities outside the company. The following extract provides a representation of HR's general perception regarding the impact of changes on participants,

... For those people, incredible levels of anxiety for them. They each had a different story to tell obviously, but you were sitting with people who were breadwinners, the anxiety of being able to put bread on the table, I mean that was immense for many of them, and that was across the gender line as well, it was not necessarily the men at all. There were about three of the ladies were breadwinners, jobs were impacted. So, the economic anxiety was greater than anything else, particularly in our job market and naturally, the recession has cut back on positions. So, it is so much more

competitive out there to find positions ... (Participant A, HR manager, with the company for 17 years).

The internal threats stemmed not only from general company-wide changes but also from the direct and indirect departmental impacts causing successive operational disruptions. Despite the economic downturn threatening profitability and job security, most participants understood that job reductions were essential to sustaining the company's profitability, as illustrated by the following quotation,

... We were forced to make the changes because of the changes (economic downturn). The company was forced to say, we are not that profitable anymore, costs rising, staff expense to pay people. So, (it) all adds to the bottom line. I think the state of the economy (we) also must make changes because up until 2007/2008, the company never spoke about cutting down staff or anything like that or making changes to be more cost-effective ... (Participant D, employee, 11 years with the company, directly impacted by the change programme).

Individuals who witnessed their colleagues' termination experienced various emotions. Those who retained their positions felt relief, but at the team level, there was remorse and survivor's guilt for their redundant colleagues.

Although no positive aspects were identified, there was empathy towards teams that had experienced personnel reductions. Employees who had witnessed the departure of colleagues during the ongoing organisational restructuring expressed sentiments of grief and loss, a phenomenon acknowledged by HR. When queried about the implications of job losses during the economic downturn and austerity measures, alterations in responses and non-verbal indicators conveyed a sense of distress regarding the termination of coworker's positions during this period of organisational challenge. The primary reason, as noted by Participant B from HR, was the acknowledgement of employee's financial hardships due to the economic recession,

... It has been impactful, well one is the survival skills and for the individuals remaining behind to deal with the fact that their lost colleagues that they worked with quite extensively in the past ... (Participant B, HR consultant, eight years with the company).

Furthermore, the external market conditions resulted in limited employment prospects for those colleagues who were made redundant, as described by Participant A,

... A significant restructure project that took place prior to the recession, it was a shock people certainly were not happy, but the external workplace was still quite buoyant. There was a great concern about will I find another job. Post the recession, there has

been a reality check, the marketplace is not buoyant for positions or if you are lucky enough to find a position, you might not necessarily get to stay in the city of your choice ... (Participant A, HR manager, with the company for 17 years).

This response demonstrates empathy not only for individuals directly affected by the current initiative but also encompasses personnel impacted by previous change programmes immediately before and following the onset of the economic downturn, acknowledging the broader sense of apprehension among staff. The HR manager's response reflects an understanding of the profound impact of ongoing financial instability on employees, recognising its substantial effect on their psychological well-being, job security, and the financial difficulties exacerbated by the economic decline.

Participants included employees at various hierarchical levels who experienced change during the downturn. The data did not specify whether changes affected employees more than managers or some teams suffered more. Some participants believed all employment levels were equally affected, while others felt employees and certain teams were more impacted than managers, depending on where changes occurred. However, with the management-to-employee ratio, more employees were retrenched than managers as entire team sizes were reduced. For instance, the addition of a new offshore team led to the local team downsizing and increased local job losses. Relocated employees often felt survivor guilt toward those who lost their jobs and faced the choice between relocation and redundancy. The following quote illustrates this,

... Everybody had a choice; Durban staff that did not relocate it was their personal choice not to. It saved a few other staff in Cape Town's jobs. At the end of the day, you want everyone to keep their jobs; you do not want anybody to have to leave, but then the bigger picture is that it is the direction the company is moving towards ... (Participant E, employee of 11 years directly impacted by the changes).

The local older team that underwent relocation subsequently experienced more pronounced negative consequences stemming from alterations in roles, responsibilities, and workload increases (to be elaborated upon later in this chapter). Whilst one might contend that this arrangement safeguarded certain positions from redundancy, it nevertheless presented an unsatisfactory scenario. The onus of the outcome was placed upon employees rather than the organisation; should they opt against relocation, despite the potential disruption to their personal lives, the decision to be made redundant was perceived as their own. The following quotation aptly encapsulates this paradox: the participant conveys an almost appreciative stance towards retaining employment, notwithstanding the associated role modifications and personal upheaval, by juxtaposing her circumstances with those of colleagues who had lost

their positions. This observation suggests that the pressure surrounding the relocation decision itself constituted a form of workplace bullying.

... At first, we were all upset because we did not understand why all the tasks were taken offshore because people would lose their jobs, especially from the local team in Durban. Coming from a team of about sixteen people, eleven had to find alternative jobs, and only five managed to move to Cape Town. Personally, when it was first introduced, I was a bit upset. I did not know what was happening; it is taking me away from my comfort zone because I have been in Durban all my life, and now, I had to move. At first, I thought I would not move, and I started looking outside (for a job), but then I could not find anything. I had to decide for myself and my family. But it was sad for the rest of my colleagues that they had to find alternatives, which was not very nice especially for the ones that have families, already married or breadwinners, they could not leave their families behind. It was sad ... (Participant F, employee of 4,5 years directly impacted by the changes).

All participants perceived that the unstable economic climate intensified competition for employment opportunities. For individuals possessing specialised, transferable, or global skill sets, securing alternative employment could be more feasible during the economic downturn, as their expertise would be in higher demand. However, the majority of employees who experienced job loss lacked formal training and occupied unskilled administrative junior-level positions, for which there was limited availability in the external job market, often accompanied by reduced remuneration. One participant who relocated to retain her position described the impact of redundancy on a colleague,

... A colleague who used to work with me in Durban did not move and was retrenched in November. When they finished off, she only got a job this month. Which is seven months, almost eight months (without a job). Because there are no jobs, it took her eight months to find a job, and that, for me, was the main factor in deciding to move: job security ... (Participant G, employee of eight years, directly impacted by the changes).

Participants would have felt more comfortable if the changes had occurred during a more stable economic period, offering retrenched employees better external employment opportunities. Participant E highlights the scarcity of external job positions during the downturn and notes that many organisations also faced downsizing. Thus, even securing a new job did not guarantee job security.

... I mean what happens now in these kinds of conditions, you go out there, and the same thing is happening, you're not going to go out of this door and luckily into another

job, it's so tough to find work, to find a job ... (Participant E, employee of 11 years directly impacted by the changes).

The impact of these changes led to the subtheme below.

Subtheme 1.2 - Decrease in employee well-being (decreasing morale, increasing anxiety and stress levels)

Participant responses towards undergoing workplace changes during and after the economic downturn were predominantly negative, with clear indications of elevated stress and anxiety levels, and a general decrease in well-being, associated with job insecurity. Participants reported feeling inadequately prepared, both financially and emotionally, for the implications of these changes on their professional and personal lives.

... It hugely impacts me personally; you know I know how to plan, budget, and find my way around. I know I need to prepare myself. It does impact you because you think to yourself okay you need to prepare yourself. After all, this is the situation. I am in a fortunate position where I can plan, and I can budget and reduce my stress when it comes to that and try and make sure that I am conservative with my savings. If it works right, they do not need you. So, you got lots of anxiety. Previously it was not like that. I think even ten years ago, you know, you had the luxury of having ten people doing the job of three people now. So, people were not stressed as what they are now ... (Participant H, employee, directly responsible for making the change project happen, with the company for 17 years).

It was evident that downsizing through job cuts increased participants workload and stress levels. Consequently, strain in workplace relationships began to emerge as a result of the elevated stress levels (this is explored further in the subsequent subtheme).

... I can see a lot more like the stress level increase, and with that increased stress, it has made the working environment a little bit tenser. Everybody is stressed out where you normally have a discussion, just a quick five-minute discussion or something like that; now it turns into a debate or argument for somebody because they are just overworked. With relationships, there is some strain on the relationships ... (Participant I, manager with the company for six years, not directly impacted by the changes).

Despite the increased workload and stress, participants expressed gratitude for retaining their employment, as demonstrated in the extract below,

... I think with the current environment you almost accept the fact that things are going to happen and even if your workload ups a bit, you kind of appreciate the fact that you

have a job still and you still can come to work and carry on as normal so accept the work or working later and more stress. But at the end of the day, it is less stressful than if you are told sorry, pack your bag, and go now. It has increased the stress with the hours. Well in terms of stress levels, you know it is going to come. You are not too sure what the impacts are going to be at the end of the day, you know. Am I still going to be here in three months? ... (Participant J, an employee with the company for nine years, was not directly impacted by the change.)

Employees experiencing changes in job profiles faced informal demotion or task reduction to more menial roles. With fewer resources and a smaller team due to the job cuts, workloads, performance expectations, and responsibilities increased for those who retained their positions. No formal training was provided for the new responsibilities, and management pressured employees to enhance service delivery to achieve cost optimisation. This led to punitive and inequitable performance measurements over which employees had limited control. The increased workload, lack of necessary skills, and new performance metrics resulted in employees working unpaid overtime without adequate compensation or benefits. Although some considered resigning, they feared the scarcity of job opportunities outside the company. All employees reported feeling compelled to maintain their employment due to fear of job loss, leading to increased anxiety, stress, and decreased well-being, as described by an HR participant,

... Many people have taken on a lot more responsibility, and many hold some antagonism to the company because taking more work home, I am working harder, I am not being rewarded for it, so where is the benefit? If you are looking at their personal well-being, the majority of people have had a very negative effect, where stress levels have increased not only for those who have left but for those who have remained. the people left behind are considering what is next, when is the next project and when will I be impacted... it is a situation of I am next and when is it going to happen. So, they are constantly stressing about it... there's fear of people losing their jobs. Fear more amongst the senior people in their late fifties or early 40s; they fear it more because there will be opportunities outside. It was improperly controlled, and stress increased and expanded across the whole organisation ... (Participant C, HR manager, with the company for 8 years).

The quotation below illustrates how stress and anxiety were associated with these events occurring during a period of economic uncertainty.

... An increase because we are reducing the workforce and increasing the workload on people. So, it certainly is very stressful because you get an added responsibility for which you are not compensated. So that obviously increases your stress level. It

Increases anxiety and the responsibility just builds up...it creates additional stress, but unfortunately, with the economic climate that we in now you do not exactly have a choice ... (Participant H, employee, directly responsible for making the change project happen, with the company for 17 years).

The potential for redundancy resulted in participants prioritising the preservation of their economic resources, primarily to safeguard their families. This led to an increase in anxiety,

... Well, effectively, if you are going through a recession, you know that jobs are a bit scarcer. So obviously, as you are getting older in the jobs, you know that the recession is a bit worse than what it was, and the reality is that there are fewer jobs available, and that does increase anxiety because ...I still have a mortgage, and my wife still works. I have a daughter at university and a son at school still ... (Participant K, Finance Manager, not directly impacted by the change, with the company for 24 years).

In addition, the majority of the employment terminations occurred during the Christmas period, rendering the holiday season a time of heightened stress and uncertainty. This timing also limited opportunities for recuperation in preparation for the forthcoming year. The findings suggest that participants experienced elevated stress levels and were preoccupied with the potential implications of job loss on their familial responsibilities, as well as the challenges of planning for the new year with constrained resources. This preoccupation with preserving their economic resources resulted in more conservative expenditure during a period when family expenses were typically higher, adversely affecting both the individuals and their family life, as evidenced in the following extract,

... They announced it the day just before Christmas when it is a family time, and it is very hard emotionally to just process things at Christmas, then when it is March or towards the end of financial year ... things are closer to heart, and you are more concerned, or your family is more up on the top ...(Participant M, an employee, was directly impacted by the change and has been with the company for 23 years).

In some teams, redundancy notices were issued immediately, while others were subjected to extended consultation periods regarding the future of their roles. The quote suggests the company could have handled the changes better, especially with enhanced communication. It underscores the importance of treating employees humanely and prioritising their emotional well-being during the process.

... The company uses a learning curve of denial. I think being more open about it, the more people know, and the more we hear from people affected makes it easier for everyone to understand and accept the change. We were so uncertain of the change that it became hostile. We just knew half our resources were going, and we were

moving to a cheaper level. They were not open enough and said you know, there is a lot of work that is transactional. We are trying to do the cost-saving, this must be done because of the economic climate. They were not open about it, and that is where it became uncertain anger. That type of information we needed for us to manage change better we need to be more sensitive to people's feelings because you do need those people to work for you. So yes, we know the business still must run, we know the reasons why businesses change, but not everyone is a robot ... (Participant G, employee of 8 years, directly impacted by the changes).

This quotation clearly shows that poor communication from management, lack of information about upcoming changes, uncertainty about future employment, and prolonged planning and implementation negatively impacted staff morale.

The combined impact subthemes 1.1 and 1.2 led to the findings in the next subtheme.

Subtheme 1.3 - Deterioration of workplace relationships

Participant's responses indicated that the economic downturn, along with the implementation of a change project during this period, had a progressively adverse effect on workplace relationships. This impact was largely attributed to the increased workload and the negative emotions generated by the ongoing changes. The context and demands of the change project made it challenging to maintain positive workplace relationships. The following quote from HR highlights the deteriorating relationship between employees and management during this time,

... Concerning the relationships, I mean it's also applied a lot of pressure on the relationships especially when its employee manager makes that relationship a bit more difficult ... (Participant C, HR manager, with the company for 8 years).

This sentiment was not only expressed by the HR department but also corroborated by participants who observed the impact of organisational changes on workplace relationships,

... People are becoming more defensive and justifying why they could not do it ...now it is like I must do this I must do that, and now you expect me to do this as well. So, it is more of a defensive answer that you get. You can see it in the body language, more intense the environment ... (Participant I, a manager with the company for six years, was not directly impacted by the changes).

The impact extended beyond directly affected participants to those indirectly affected by the change. The impact extended beyond directly affected participants to those who witnessed the change. They experienced shifts in their working relationships with affected employees

due to the latter's elevated stress and anxiety, which hindered cordial workplace interactions due to increasingly overwhelming pressures. Indirectly affected teams had to adapt their working practices to accommodate diminished service delivery. This group of participants also harboured concerns that they might be affected next, given the series of changes the organisation had undergone. This led to a preoccupation with improving and maintaining performance levels, which was challenging due to reliance on both old and new teams to meet their performance standards. The Sales Manager's account below highlights how the team changes impacted his team's performance. He underscores that it was not just the new team's lack of capabilities but also their lack of cultural awareness and geographic proximity that hindered his team. Previously, the old team offered a certain level of support that facilitated their work, but this support was absent with the new team,

... The indirect impact to me is more of a frustration. To elaborate on that, it was a costing exercise, cost efficiency. What has happened is that we have people doing work that they do not necessarily know anything about; it is not the same culture, number one. Number two, you do not have an immediate team that can deal with you and guide you along the way. These people in the service centre brought in externally, and you expect them to know the business in three/four months, but they do not have anyone there to guide them. There are a lot of errors, Customers are unhappy, the ease of business is not there, it impacts the customer at the end of the day ... (Participant N, Sales manager, not directly affected by the change, with the company for 10 years).

The subsequent quotation further elucidates the project's impact on workplace relationships. The participant articulated how the contributions of other teams and individuals are essential for her task completion. However, within the project environment, where all employees experienced elevated stress levels, interpersonal relationships among employees became strained. This quotation establishes a connection between work delivery, increased stress, and the resultant difficulties in maintaining professional relationships,

... Estranged relationships because everyone is under immense pressure, so stress levels are very high. You must be conscious of how to approach people. You cannot help but get frustrated with somebody who you know is already frustrated, and the reason for that is because you want to deliver. The only way you can do that is by ensuring somebody else delivers, so there are those estranged relationships. Before the recession, I had never had any real stress levels, however, once this project came into effect that is when the frustrations were obvious, it was not like that before the project. Many relationships are strained because of the frustration and anxiety that people are feeling, and then to have to deal with somebody becomes very uncomfortable ... (Participant O, employee, directly impacted by the change, with the company for 8 years).

Increased workloads and demands intensified employee's difficulties in managing negative emotions related to the changes. This stress escalation reduced workplace civility, as frustrations were often directed at colleagues, with patience and tolerance waning due to concerns about job survival and retention. Prolonged exposure to a hostile work environment created tension among colleagues, negatively impacting professional life and workplace relationships. This led employees to prioritise self-preservation and job security, which in turn reduced pro-social helping behaviours and weakened team cohesion. As a result, increased competitiveness emerged, a shift that was acknowledged by HR in the following quote,

... We have become even more competitive. So, in this competitive dynamic performance management culture, people must compete even more, it is not overt, it is not in your face, and it is not with any kind of aggression. There is an underlying competitive theme that is coming through, like the survival of the fittest kind of thing. Otherwise, people are leaving. Since this new structure has bedded down in the last couple of months, we have a 60% turnover in staff ... (Participant A, HR manager, with the company for 17 years).

The environment ultimately resulted in a deterioration of workplace relationships, further recognised by HR as outlined below,

... Individuals are more competitive. There is more an individualistic approach. I need to take care of myself. People are more cynical, burnt out, and less likely to help each other out...negativities come through - there is more focus on taking care of oneself. Individuals are also more competitive in terms of how they work because the current demands of the roles require them to take care of themselves at the expense of team cohesion. It has impacted interpersonal relationships, comradery, and team cohesion; individuals suddenly seem shorter with each other. in the past, you have individuals willing to take the time out to assist each other; they are less likely to do so because every minute I am spending with you directly impacts my workload ... (Participant B, 8 years with the company as an organisational development consultant in HR).

An example of one of the challenges encountered was the relative inexperience of the newly established offshore team in Asia compared to the old team in Southern Africa. The old team had no input in the creation of the new team but was required to train them on tasks previously under their responsibility. Despite being employed to reduce the workload, their inexperience led to numerous mistakes. As one participant noted, this resulted in the remaining members of the old team having to redo their work with fewer colleagues than before,

... Workload, we got more because we are now employing people who have no experience. So, you have to change attitudes as well, and in terms of workload, it has changed. So, we do not have as much clarity as we did before as to what the exact workload is ... (Participant M old team employee, directly impacted by the change, with the company for 23 years).

This situation exacerbated the already strained relationship between the teams, leading to an unproductive working dynamic. Despite the added workload, the older team received no additional compensation and faced penalties if errors were not corrected within management-imposed deadlines, over which they had no influence. In addition, was the earlier discussed imposition of penalties rather than compensation for their efforts. The old team withheld knowledge to secure their jobs, control task performance, and appear more favourable to management, yet they harboured animosity towards managers. This stemmed from the belief that managers were unaffected by changes, though managers reported being impacted by downsizing decisions. Additionally, the old team's lack of empowerment and sense of alienation from management's changes directly affected them. To obtain an external perspective on this, an extract from a finance employee who was not directly impacted by the changes is presented, observing the relationship dynamic between the two teams and reflecting on how this has affected him directly,

... I have become a bit shorter with people, a bit more impatient because of the limited time, the time constraints, and increased workloads. So, relationships get strained, you do not deliver on time – it does put more of a strain on them. There were a few apparent bullying facts – like moving some of the tasks from the (old team) into the new team. They (the old team) are very frustrated and agitated because they are (rated) quite closely on them. At the same time, the new team get these finance managers and previous people who have had their jobs, being sarcastic and complaining that they cannot do these things; you know the new team is useless ... (Participant J, Finance employee, with the company for 9 yrs, not directly impacted by the change).

The first theme has explored the ramifications of organisational change initiatives during economic downturns, focusing on their effects on job security, well-being, anxiety, and stress in the workplace. This analysis revealed heightened apprehension regarding, escalating workloads, and the erosion of working relationships. The forthcoming theme will investigate the juncture at which these deteriorating conditions transcend mere interpersonal difficulties and enter the realm of workplace bullying.

Theme 2, Workplace Bullying

In this theme, the findings specifically relate to participant accounts of hostile acts, workplace bullying, and acts of incivility experienced in the change project. It appeared that as the economic climate deteriorated and the organisation underwent successive changes, incidents of bullying increased, and any bullying behaviour that was prevalent but previously concealed became more evident, public, and severe.

Chapter 1 provided the definition of bullying, and the types of negative acts involved. Upon reaching the section of the interview where this definition was presented, it became immediately apparent that in response to the definition, a small number of participants exhibited a notably defiant and almost defensive stance regarding their lack of experience or observation of these behaviours. These were mainly managers, and team leads who found the company changes beneficial for their career development. While they acknowledged the difficulties and showed some empathy, they appeared disconnected from the employee's real challenges.

Other participants who initially denied or minimised witnessing or experiencing bullying behaviours as mere interpersonal conflicts showed an emotional shift upon being provided with the bullying definition and examples of acts, altering their behaviours and responses during the interview.

They exhibited numerous pauses, utilised filler words, engaged in thinking aloud, and reflected both silently and audibly. The participants grappled with their perceptions of what did or did not constitute bullying, victimisation, or harassment while endeavouring to reason and reconcile examples they had experienced or witnessed with the examples of bullying acts provided. There were instances where they requested clarification or repetition of the question and reconsidered the examples of negative acts presented, recalling instances to relay and how to formulate their responses. The initial sense of discomfort stemmed from their inability to assimilate the behaviours they had experienced in the context of the bullying examples provided. Eventually, this discomfort dissipated because the provision of examples helped them to interact with the question. Some of the emotions experienced ranged from shock, and anger, to frustration. For those that had directly experienced bullying, it was a reminder of a traumatic experience in their working life, as discussed later in this chapter.

The responses also indicated a lack of awareness that the behaviours, which I had mentioned when sustained over a period, were defined as workplace bullying, as described in the following quotation by a participant directly affected by the change programme,

... I am surprised that the one (example of workplace bullying) says being subjected to work ethics beneath your competence. The definition is so broad, and there are so

many things that fall into the definition that I can think of hundreds of scenarios of work where we suffered, we are so unaware of it because it is not brought to light, or it is not made a big deal of ... (Participant O, old team employee, directly impacted by the change, with the company for 8 years).

The below quote demonstrates that this lack of awareness was also present for those indirectly affected by the change programme,

... Hearing that, I think much more has happened than I thought. I thought of bullying, especially in terms of the sarcasm, towards the new team. I have not seen too much, but where they work offshore, just hearing from other people, which happens a lot more than I may have realised. There may be a few apparent bullying acts – like moving some of the tasks from here from the country into the new team. The teams left behind feel like they are being bullied – they start doing menial tasks, and their work has been taken away from them, so I imagine that must be perceived as bullying. At the same time, the guys in the new team are in the same position because all the easier tasks are taken to the new team ... (Participant J, Finance employee, with the company for 9 yrs, indirectly impacted by the change).

The responses of these introductory examples from participants to the definition and examples of workplace bullying suggest that before being given the formal definition, these individuals predominantly perceived such behaviours as commonplace occurrences in the work environment. These behaviours were often attributed to interpersonal conflicts or the inability of employees (specifically, those identified as bullying perpetrators) to manage conflict effectively and constructively. This perception was evident both in instances of direct personal experience, as exemplified by Participant O's account wherein she refers to "where we suffered", including herself as part of the affected team, and in cases of indirect knowledge, as illustrated by Participant J's account of incidents he had heard about occurring to others.

When considering this definition of workplace bullying, it was evident that two distinct types of workplace bullying were occurring. One is at the organisational and management level by those in power in subtheme 2.1, and the second is at the individual and team or peer level in subtheme 2.2, by participants either undergoing the changes directly or indirectly.

Subtheme 2.1. - Authoritarian bullying by those in power

There was a clear indication that bullying incidents from those in management positions had increased. Here is a general example by HR, who, when asked about bullying incidents,

recalled an increase in management's poor communication style towards their subordinates,

... Interpersonal conflicts, negative behaviour, where would you like me to begin? It is quite a big portion of my job. So that could, it would be anything that could be a manager who is overly assertive, verging on aggressive. So, it is quite normal for me to facilitate those kinds of things. So, I have got as an example one manager right now struggling with interpersonal skills, barking orders particularly; it does not really work around here. It is not really our culture. Happens all the time ... (Participant A, HR manager with the company for 17 years).

Below is an example of this type of bullying act directly and indirectly experienced by a participant,

... I experienced bullying in this organisation. When I was on the project, there was a miserable, unhappy woman; she made my life hell, changed my life forever... I have never felt so incompetent my whole life; I was always a top performer. Our manager was always happy with me, and then I worked on this (change) project for ten months, and she broke my spirit because nothing I did was right, it changed me in a big way. I slipped into a bit of depression as a result. I spoke to people about it, and people said I must not take her seriously and let her get to me; that is just the way she is (she treats co-workers that way, too). I do not think I had any outlet; I carried it with me for a while. It affected everything, even my home life; your family suffers; you basically start from scratch; you have no confidence; I struggled; I could not see anything positive ... (Participant D, an employee eleven years with the company, directly impacted by the changes).

This excerpt illuminates the participants experience regarding bullying behaviour, specifically detailing an instance of bullying during a change initiative implemented amidst economic turbulence. The interviewee, Participant D, delineates the emotional impact of the experience, the way it was rationalised by those who witnessed it, and concurrently relays that this was the managers leadership style towards other co-workers. She then goes on to provide examples of the bullying acts,

... I mean the bullying, obviously one or two people that I see get away with it. It is the common targets all the time, which does happen, it is more of a management thing. There are certain people in authority who feel less responsible to respect people lower than them. She (the manager) constantly bullies the man I was speaking to and constantly in front of her staff. They (targets) do not stand up for themselves. People around will hear and pretend that it did not happen. I do not think a lot of people

verbalise— how it makes them feel because she has an overbearing personality and an impatient nature. People are like, ‘Why do we have to put up with this kind of thing?’, but nobody feels they have the authority to speak to anybody about it or that it will be heard. That is just the way she is, and people lump it; this person has been here for what six years ... (Participant D, eleven years with the company, directly impacted by the changes).

This example is consistent with some of the acts in the definition of workplace bullying, i.e. examples of acts include hostile reaction when you approach, being shouted at or being the target of someone's anger.

To further expand on this, two accounts of workplace bullying were particularly noteworthy due to the intensity of emotions experienced by participants as they recounted incidents and the manner in which reflecting on events altered their responses subsequent to the provision of the definition of workplace bullying. To illustrate the depth of the responses, it is pertinent to focus on these cases, as one participant (Participant P) was indirectly affected by the change project but witnessed the workplace bullying, whilst the other participant (Participant Q) was directly impacted by the change project and experienced workplace bullying as a direct consequence of the project.

In the preceding theme, this study examined the case of Participant P, a Finance department employee who, whilst not directly affected by the change project, observed its impact on relationships and workplace civility in the affected teams. Here she first explains that she and her co-workers also often experience bullying by a particular manager, whom several colleagues had reported to HR for abusing their power. Her account suggests that there exists a nuanced distinction between dysfunctional leadership styles and workplace bullying, where the former may potentially escalate into the latter,

... I have seen it. It's tough to deal with because if the person is in a management position to whom do you go? At the time, because they felt that they needed to investigate further, surely there must be a problem, right? So, they would interview their chosen few people. Nothing came of it, some people communicate easily, and some people have a more aggressive way of communication, like to show that they are in charge. For me it is more difficult if the person in charge portrays a sense of superiority. I think you can build a better relationship and have an easier workspace if you have good communication and a good relationship with your manager. You know there are so many examples, but speaking down onto the next person is what we experience ... (Participant P, Finance employee, not directly impacted by the change, with the company for 8 years).

She explained that this issue made the working environment uncomfortable. People had to be very aware of what and how they said things so as not to upset this manager. Participant P's reflection as a witness over these incidents was with a measure of residual distress. There was still some anger and frustration over the incidents and disappointment in how things were handled, as she recounts witnessing her direct ex-manager experience bullying from the same person,

... There are quite a few incidents. To meet your deadlines, you do not need someone breathing over your neck. At that time, it was quite stressful; my direct manager was very ill. She had (chronic illness), and unnecessary stress escalated the (illness). To see something like this carry on for so long, HR decided to intervene, but it did not work. When HR got involved, they questioned what happened, and I would not want to be part of it again. Some people tend to abuse to feel better about themselves if they have power over someone else. We were all affected. Some people more than others unfortunately ... (Participant P, Finance employee, not directly impacted by the change, with the company for 8 years).

Upon provision of the definition of workplace bullying, accompanied by examples of negative acts, her emotional containment altered significantly. She experienced a pronounced emotional response. When offered the option to terminate the interview, she vehemently declined. It was only after the definition that she re-evaluated her own past experiences of bullying. In the following quote, she refers to herself as well. The definition of bullying not only intensified her anger regarding witnessed incidents but also prompted her recollection of personal experiences. The following represents her response to learning what constituted workplace bullying,

... If I look at that definition, I feel like we have been bullied for four years. I mean the definition is so clear. It makes me angry, surely, they must have seen it happening, we were voicing it all the time. Why are they still allowed that person to continue the same role for years? I am shocked that half the stuff you mentioned is my experience, and what is sad is that you are a victim, and you do not even know it. You are accepting it because she is in charge in a higher position, and she got away with that. That is very sad, and you know what is sadder, is that hard workers out of there, if I look at the definition - I am sorry I went back to that, I could not overcome four years in five minutes. My direct manager at the time left because she was very ill, she was medically boarded. If you had to give her that definition she would have cried because all that you have mentioned she is experienced, and it impacted her health. No, I said too much, but I have learned a lot. I must thank you because I do not know if I would ever action it but at least I would know when I am bullied. I thought she was abusing her power, but I did not see another way out. It still makes me angry; it still makes me sad ...

(Participant P, Finance employee, not directly impacted by the change, with the company for 8 years).

In the example above we also see that some participants, like Participant P, viewed the study as a chance to express their views and validate their experiences, particularly with the workplace bullying definition. This process was illuminating and empowering for participants, aiding the recognition and understanding of workplace bullying and allowing them to make sense of their experiences. Being informed and validated about their bullying experiences enabled participants, to reflect on and articulate the emotional impacts. This contributed to a collective understanding of colleagues' challenges, as seen in Participant P's recollection of her former manager's bullying experience, which she found profoundly impactful. The definition of bullying prompted her to reflect on her manager's experience, revealing Participant P's empathy for her manager and others facing similar challenges, showcasing the broader aspects of empathy within this theme.

Participant P subsequently recollects experiencing direct bullying; however, she does not elaborate on the specific details of the incident due to the passage of time and the emotional distress associated with recalling her overall experiences before. Nevertheless, she provides one illustrative example,

... Simple things like leave. Why is it that I cannot go on leave when my leave is in? Do you know what I mean? Like Eid (Muslim Holiday) - I put in two days before the time because I have to prepare, it was approved, and my manager's manager told me I cannot go on leave... (Participant P, Finance employee, not directly impacted by the change, with the company for 8 years).

The second example concerns Participant Q, an employee whose position was at risk during the restructuring process. A notable aspect of her interview was the intensity and vividness of her recollection of the bullying incidents she experienced as if they had occurred recently. In contrast to Participant P, whose emotional response intensified after being provided with the working definition of bullying, Participant Q exhibited immediate emotional distress when recounting the incidents. She was able to provide several distinct examples of workplace bullying, detailing negative acts and their associated responses and consequences. Although the bullying was experienced collectively by Participant Q and her colleagues, she was aware that they were being subjected to bullying by a manager (for which intervention was sought, similar to the previous case described by Participant P). Upon being presented with the definition, she immediately experienced a sense of relief and vindication. This reaction differed from that of Participant P, who was at first distressed after learning what constituted workplace bullying but later appreciated being provided with this new knowledge. Participant Q described the feeling of being bullied in her previous team and the effect it had on her,

... Micromanaging and bullying specifically, a lot, a common overall feeling and that just killed me ... (Participant Q, an old team employee, directly impacted by the change, with the company for 12.5 years).

She was notably articulate and comprehensive about her bullying experience. She described being given unattainable targets and excessive workloads. She believed management prioritised company profitability and constant restructuring, neglecting employee well-being. This increased her stress levels and caused persistent anxiety about job loss even before the restructuring. She felt the previous manager hindered staff from applying for new positions and consistently gave unfair negative performance evaluations. When three team members were promoted outside the team, the manager suggested they were undeserving and lucky, implying their performance was subpar for the new roles. Examples of the negative acts provided in the bullying definition corroborated Participant Q's experience of the bullying she and her colleagues encountered. This is how she described the incidents of bullying by her previous manager towards her and other employees,

... I could see the way that manager was dealing with the old team people, and my own experience (sorry I am so scared that this will come out) so that was also adding much stress. You could see, and you could hear about conflicts from the management team; our office scorecard is linked to the year-end bonus, which is money. Bullying, yes! Personally, and from other people, not only in this country but also people I speak to in Manila and the new team, they will just say and mention the manager's name, and they cannot hold back the comment. The manager will make life very hard for you. She made me believe that I was not good enough and made me feel lucky to get the position, which I did not. She is always pushing people down on the floor. I don't know to what extent it happened to other people as I know people talked about it and I know also someone came to me about a month ago and he said to me that he'd written a formal complaint to HR for the same manager again - where he feels he was held back from a promotion because she had a lot to say, and people is scared of her. So, I know it is not just me. I know it is a wider network. Also, mentally, that you are not good enough. I will make sure that you do not move on because I need your skills here. I know also that it is a common thing ... (Participant Q is an old team employee, directly impacted by the change, with the company for 12.5 years).

Participant Q reported that even after the manager's removal from the department, employees continued to experience self-doubt and apprehension regarding the potential influence the manager might exert over them. Upon the manager's transition to another team with fewer personnel, the morale of this new team declined, and the bullying behaviours persisted.

The incidents of workplace bullying ceased upon the removal of this manager from her department. Her current manager's leadership style facilitated employee development, and she found him more approachable, empathetic, and supportive of reasonable workloads and deadlines. For her, this not only improved her work performance and health, but she also observed this leadership style positively influencing the attitude of her entire team. Even when faced with increased workload and responsibility, they felt supported in their roles as he encouraged them to enhance their knowledge and skills, providing opportunities that ultimately saved many of their positions from job cuts. Consequently, this approach led to improved working relationships, reduced stress levels, and increased organisational commitment behaviours among the team members.

In addition to experiencing bullying from managers, the data also demonstrates increased employee perceptions of organisational bullying via managerial actions. Collectively, employees reported that management implemented organisational changes, victimising and bullying those undergoing the changes, through unfair performance measures. Furthermore, specific managers were identified as repeat perpetrators of workplace bullying, resulting in direct experiences of bullying within the change project. This left participants feeling disempowered and compelled to comply with unreasonable demands due to fear of job loss. An additional dimension is that from an organisational perspective, employees reported perceiving unjust and unfair treatment by the organisation. HR acknowledged this, as noted below, with examples of bullying acts consistent with the definition of workplace bullying,

... Regarding the amount of work, the expectation has been too great. Since this change project, what I can relate to is conflicts coming from staff but not one individual against another individual it is more a group of staff to complain to management about the amount of work, which has been a big topic of debate that it has just become unmanageable it is just unfair. It is more about work volume less, also complaints coming in about excessive monitoring by management. It is because of that excessive monitoring and measuring that the push back from employees has just got too unacceptable they will say can no longer cope with workload ... (Participant A, HR manager, with the company for 17 years).

Even participants indirectly affected have echoed the sentiment that they witnessed organisational bullying from managers towards employees impacted by the change project, as described below,

... Like moving some of the tasks from here from the country into the new team. Teams left behind feel like they are being bullied – they start doing menial tasks and their work has been taken away from them ... Participant J (Finance employee, with the company for 9 yrs, not directly impacted by the change).

However, for managers bullying did not exist, and they defended the organisation. This was presumably because the changes empowered them in their roles as managers, and gave them more authority and decision-making control, when consistent with the organisational goals. As I observed in this extract,

... Certain managers in the way that they manage you could interpret it as a bullying kind of approach, but I mean that's just the way managers manage ... (Participant K, Finance Manager, not directly impacted by the change, with the company for 24 years).

Employee interviews reveal perceptions of increased bullying and power abuse by management during the change project, though this rise lacks corroborative evidence due to undocumented prior bullying incidents. Non-managerial employees viewed the abuse of power as a sign of disrespect from leaders, with repeated incidents involving the same perpetrators from leadership. Most participants reported experiencing or witnessing managerial bullying of the same victims. Two examples of such negative acts by leadership are discussed below.

2.1.a - Absence of fair selection criteria in the change project

On multiple occasions, it was observed that participants perceived the redundancy selection process in the project to be based on organisational or managerial preferences rather than a fair selection process adhering to labour guidelines. They posited that company performance management procedures were not being applied in the management of employees with suboptimal performance levels, and a clear case of constructive dismissal existed, wherein underperforming employees were assigned tasks beyond their capabilities or skill sets. It was apparent that employees interpreted the change project as a mechanism for implementing targeted redundancies, without providing individuals the opportunity to address or improve their performance. According to participant feedback, the selection of redundancy candidates often was influenced by the subjective judgments of managers involved in the change project, in consultation with HR. These judgments seemed to prioritise employees perceived as "poor performers" or those who were not favoured by management, rather than adhering strictly to appropriate redundancy and fair selection processes.

For example, employees not favoured by managers were given more unpleasant tasks, and managers were unpleasant to them in general, as illustrated in this extract,

... I have seen in the past where a manager does not necessarily favour a person in the team and can make life more difficult by giving them the not-so-nice parts or being unpleasant to them in general. I do not think she (the manager) had any confidence in her, and everything she did was not good enough, but the way she spoke about her, it

was as if she did not do a good job although she worked just as hard as everybody else. People just realised that if she didn't, if the manager didn't like you, she would make it unpleasant for you and many people, like a few people quite a lot of people opted to resign because of just not being happy ... (Participant R old team employee, directly impacted by the change, with the company for three years).

The subsequent quotations elucidate how the established working conditions engendered a culture that participants perceived as covert forced redundancy. Their perceptions indicated that employees were subjected to excessive workloads without adequate support for success, were assigned roles for which they lacked requisite skills, or were not afforded sufficient opportunities to develop the competencies necessary for satisfactory role performance. Additionally, as reported in the aforementioned quotation, some managers were believed to have cultivated an unfavourable working environment that ultimately compelled employees to tender their resignations. The following are examples of participants describing how constructive dismissal is used, i.e. where the decision to release an employee from service becomes more personal, and company policy and procedures around redundancy protocol are not followed during the severance process,

... People using their position and their authority to try and get certain demands done. When an individual or individuals are not performing, yes you have performance management, but I am not going to say too much more. Sometimes, we go to the extreme where it borders on whether we like the person or not, and I have seen that ... (Participant S old team employee, directly impacted by the change, with the company for 14 years).

Another participant describes her perception of two instances of workplace bullying between a subordinate employee and manager,

... This person, there are certain procedures to follow but they have numerous tasks to do, and their personality is not a procedural, logical step-by-step, or a relational type of personality. I think because of that and because they are so overwhelmed by the workload, they let a procedure slip, or they have not highlighted it to be a problem, but even if they have highlighted it, they are not a strong enough personality to keep pushing it. I do not think they are being managed properly, it has just been put down as poor performance on their side, but it is a work vs personality mismatch, and they will just not cope with it. They will never survive there on a long-term basis. And that for me, the way you handle that can be a form of bullying because you keep putting that person in a position that says they underperform. And whilst they might be underperforming, they feel like they are being bullied ... (Participant M old team employee, directly impacted by the change, with the company for 23 years).

The aforementioned quote describes a workplace bullying behaviour wherein an employee is compelled to perform tasks for which they lack the requisite skills or are assigned an excessive workload, thereby impeding their success. In the subsequent quote, she provides an additional example of failure in assigned tasks that were inherently impossible to accomplish successfully, but in this instance, the scenario involves a supervisor and a manager,

... There was another instance of, a different person, and they are very responsible, but unfortunately, they have just been tasked with things that they just knew could not work and were still held accountable for it. So, it was almost putting them in a position to fail, which is also a form of bullying and intimidation. It then came down to a lack of performance, but I do not know how many have been held accountable for things which would never have worked in the first place. Yes, two separate instances are just reasons for them not to be further employed. So, it is like a case has been made against them for things they cannot be accountable for ... (Participant M old team employee, directly impacted by the change, with the company for 23 years).

The grievance and incapacity procedures should have been employed to address situations of this nature. It is worth noting that none of the participants mentioned the application of these during the process. An examination of policy and procedural implementation will be conducted in a subsequent section of this chapter.

2.1.b - Marginalizing and disempowering employees

The old team experienced a significant reduction in their primary responsibilities, which were either eliminated or reassigned. Concurrently, they were allocated an increased volume of menial or undesirable tasks below their level of expertise, which was perceived as a demotion. Members of the old team possessing extensive subject matter knowledge were also marginalised through the prohibition of their expert input regarding what would work, or they experienced a sense of disempowerment due to the consistent disregard of their work-related contributions. As Participant H elucidates below, bullying can also manifest in the form of withholding crucial information about an employee's performance,

... Bullying can be anything from domineering to insisting. Another form of bullying - everybody has KPIs and objectives, and I think if you do not explain to people selfishly for a reason for your gain and not for the team member's gain. So that you can meet your objective. It is a different form of bullying. Not explaining what the objective is. It is a form of bullying by doing that ... (Participant H, personally responsible for making the change project happen, with the company for 17 years).

As mentioned in Theme 1, participants experienced a lack of input and control over objectives set by management, and reduced capacity to achieve these objectives, resulting in an unfair

assessment of their performance. Managers, supported by organisational goals, set these unrealistic performance measures with unattainable targets or deadlines. Numerous participants reported consistently being assigned unmanageable workloads comprising their targets. Furthermore, due to cost-cutting initiatives, there were limited opportunities for acquiring new knowledge and developing or distributing the workload, leading to task failure and consistently substandard performance. Analysis of the data across all participants, including employees and managers within the project itself, as well as other departments and HR, revealed a disempowered culture that emerged as a consequence of the project and the aggressive targets established at the organisational level, demonstrated by the following quote from a manager,

... We've got very clearly defined performance appraisals and that's what you are measured - the company is managed - you've got objectives and to a certain extent you can't control those things ... (Participant K, Finance Manager, not directly impacted by the change, with the company for 24 years).

This quotation illustrates how managers were subjected to considerable pressure regarding team performance (aligned with bonus incentives). There was insufficient time to coach and develop employees, and due to the aggressive deadlines and managers themselves receiving minimal soft skills training, their immediate response was to manage poor performance utilising bullying behaviours of excessive monitoring and criticisms of delivery. This resulted in certain underperforming employees becoming the targets of increasingly aggressive and intimidating behaviours (also bullying acts) by managers and occasionally being reprimanded publicly (also bullying acts), as described by Participant A in HR,

... With regards to the amount of work, the expectation has been too great. A group of staff complain to management about the amount of work, which has been a big topic of debate and has become unmanageable and unfair. It is more about work volume and less about bullying, the pushback from employees has just become unacceptable. They will say they can no longer cope with the workload. So that could, it would be anything that could be a manager who is overly assertive verging on aggressive causing mayhem and me taking them one side and guiding them differently happens often. So, I have got as an example one manager right now struggling with interpersonal skills, barking orders particularly or authoritarian. It does not work around here. It is not our culture ... (Participant A, HR manager, with the company for 17 years).

The analysis of these three quotations reveals that participants are inadvertently describing actions that are considered to be bullying, as delineated in the established definition of bullying. Participant A, from HR, was not cognisant that her examples constituted workplace

bullying. Moreover, it became evident that a consequence of the escalating demands and diminishing performance standards was the emergence of a marginalised and disempowered workforce. This evolved into a cultural norm, perpetuated by reinforcing the negative behavioural patterns occurring, as elucidated by Participant B from HR.

In her statement, Participant B draws a connection between workload-related stress (discussed within subtheme 1.2) and instances of authoritarian bullying perpetrated by individuals in positions of power. Specifically, Participant B's quote highlights that employees encountered unreasonable task assignments, excessive demands, and performance expectations—factors that contributed to heightened workloads and pressures. Additionally, employees found themselves assigned to tasks they lacked control over or were demoted to less desirable responsibilities. In this context, the only alternative for employees was unemployment, which effectively compelled them to accept task-related bullying,

... I do feel that the demands of the work and what is required and what needs to be delivered is a huge source of stress and anxiety and drives a lot of the behaviour. So, in that sense that could be deemed as bullying, not a person-to-person kind of behaviour but more, this is what needs to be delivered, and it will be delivered at any cost. Unreasonable deadlines you know they cannot keep abreast of what needs to be done and when. Individuals who are high performers are now unable to cope; individuals must work nightmarish hours. Our (the company's) work-life balance has been highlighted (as) an area of concern during our employment engagement survey. The increase in pressure and work demands from the head of the department, and what could be deemed as unreasonable working conditions ... (Participant B, HR employee for 8 years with the company).

She goes on to explain the impact this has had on employees where there was a sense of being bullied by the organisation in terms of their roles and responsibilities,

... It is a highly pressurised environment, and since the inception of the old team, there has been a large turnover. Previously, you had long service hours within those departments. They feel too many demands; they cannot cope with the workloads. Their tasks are excessive in terms of what they are expected to deliver and what alternatives are available in the rest of the organisation so that they find a way out of the situation. And many of them in those roles almost feel like an imprisoning situation... they have no choice but to be there until an alternative becomes available. People feel imprisoned, they feel spiteful, their roles are to an extent demeaning of what they are able to give. We tend to have a culture of hiring graduates, and many feel that what is expected in those roles is beneath what they can offer because their roles require them to support menial tasks ... (Participant B, HR employee for 8 years with the company).

In addition to the task-related bullying described above, the extract below describes the perception that when employees did do well, they were not rewarded for their efforts. Because staff numbers were fewer and workloads higher, employees were indirectly pressurised not to claim sick leave, holidays, and other benefits to which they were entitled. This could be deemed another example of organisational bullying. It should be acknowledged, that this, and some other issues discussed by participants, were based on views, perceptions, or hearsay, rather than direct experiences, or bearing witness to negative acts,

... I think a recent example what I have heard I do not know the truth behind it, but somebody wanted to take some leave. Basically, applied for the leave, the leave was approved and then a few days before the leave was scheduled the boss decided to deny the leave, and the employee was obviously very unhappy because the employee obviously booked a holiday ... (Participant H, employee, directly responsible for making the change project happen, with the company for 17 years).

What was more concerning were incidents where the entitlement to benefits like sick leave, had a direct impact on employee health for employees with a diagnosed medical illness, as recounted in this direct experience of workplace bullying,

... The second example is where she regularly checks when you come in to work, time you scan in and out, your internet usage, your phone bills, micro manages everything and then she says to the managers you will have discussions with the top three people, and we didn't know and she called me in and she said to me the last fourteen months we have pulled the data, I was there a year and two months you were off sick for four days and she knows that we have as per law that we have twenty-one days over a three year, is there something wrong because that is very high. I was so taken aback, and I like to be prepared, she could have just emailed and say just go and think about what you did for the four days. I was in the meeting there and like, she wants to know if I have seen my doctor about this, and I was in shock and I thought four days over fourteen months. I felt that after the fact, I could not go to her again and say – you know those four days. She says you know it is our responsibility to come to work and yet again I felt like I was being attacked as a human, it is my right. I was so scared to take off, and I never took off when I was sick. You know I am so tired. I am in pain all the time. I was only diagnosed last year after twenty years, so I knew I sat with a lot of migraines, IVF therapy, and my body just pains, and I could not find a reason. It does not matter if I were half dead, I would come to work and that still haunts me. I have another example, but I do not want to throw you with all my examples ... (Participant Q old team employee, directly impacted by the change, with the company for 12.5 years).

Subtheme 2.2 - Peer related bullying

Organisational citizenship behaviours exhibited a decline; however, this phenomenon was more pronounced in the current change project, as there was a progressive reduction observed through the various change initiatives over time, as described below,

... Individuals are more competitive within these teams; I need to take care of myself. So, it is difficult for individuals to not personalize what is going on. Interpersonal relationships - people are more cynical; I have had a few conversations where they are less likely to help each other out. There is a lot of negativities in relationships that exist within the teams; there's more of a focus on taking care of oneself, people are less likely to go out of their way, Individuals are more competitive work because the current demands of the roles, require them to take care of themselves at the expense of cohesion and achieving results as team. it has impacted the interpersonal relationships within the team because everyone is just trying to do what is needed, get through the day, and get on with their task. in terms of comradery and team cohesion that has been impacted, individuals suddenly seem shorter with each other. Previously, you had individuals willing to take the time to assist each other. They are less likely to do so because every minute I spend with you directly impacts my workload ... (Participant B, 8 years with the company as an organisational development consultant in HR).

Negative behaviours were often ignored or condoned when used to achieve the organisation's goals, which in turn affected leadership and team citizenship behaviours. However, this was not only relevant to the current change project,

... Sometimes there I would say going through that type of set affects your relationship in a negative way because people feel that they need to guard what they have. Even your colleagues would, I stand to be corrected but if they guard their knowledge and do not reveal what they know, it does not even necessarily mean it can affect you at all. Or they would be less inclined to assist so less helpful because if I help you and you show up as someone who has got things done. You are more likely to get the position than me, therefore, I cannot help you; you must find your way. That is the negative side that I have picked up, and it is when I look back to 2010 when we went through that restructuring as well. So, you will find people becoming protective, or they want to point out other people's mistakes. It can bring out the worst in people how they act and behave differently because of their situation ... (Participant P, Finance employee, not directly impacted by the change, with the company for 8 years).

This quotation primarily addresses the anxieties individuals harbour regarding their work performance and job security. These worries seemingly lead to a reduction in altruistic

behaviour and possibly harmful actions. When employees observe instances of unfavourable management behaviour that goes unchallenged, they may be inclined to adopt these with less altruistic behaviour towards their workmates in situations where such support is needed, driven by a desire for self-preservation.

... What is happening is that we are measuring people more and more on the data we can produce so intentions of staff do not count. It is only the outcome. What happens is that we have a customer portfolio for each individual customer services agent, but they also need to share responsibility with the team because if they are not there then it needs to be transferred to their colleagues. What we see happening is that there is friction when it comes to, do I want to touch that from my colleague because if I fail to do something there it might have repercussions for me, and we are brilliant as an organisation to find out who has done what wrong so there is always the threat of repercussions ... (Participant L old team manager, directly impacted by the change, with the company for 20 years).

This created a them versus us culture, described below by a participant not directly affected by the changes but who worked with both teams regularly, and observed the pressure both teams faced that led to negative acts developing between the teams,

... It tends to form a scenario for them (new team) versus our (old team) scenario. That is the kind of frustration because of offshoring process (to the new team) but I do not think it is directed at any individuals per say. It is more of a them and us scenario, it can become quite heated, and quite an issue. Sometimes if you lose that control you cannot perform. So yes, I am sure that does happen ... (Participant K, Finance Manager, not directly impacted by the change, with the company for 24 years).

The quote highlights repeated negative acts, such as unreasonable tasks, unmanageable workloads, persistent criticism, and constant reminders of errors, occurring due to the change project between the old and new teams. The old team faced persistent criticism, unmanageable workloads, impossible targets, unpleasant tasks, and excessive monitoring, with no control over their objectives and ignored opinions. However, these same negative acts were directed at the new team by the old team. The old team, holding power over the new team, frequently reminded them of errors and criticized their work since the tasks assigned to the new team were previously managed by the old team and were escalated back to them if not performed correctly. A power imbalance led to the new team experiencing peer-to-peer bullying. Although most bullying perceptions related to task delivery, the old team's bullying of the new team was predominantly group-directed, with few individual instances. As mentioned in Theme 1, this behaviour also stemmed from the old team's perception of the new team's collective incompetence.

Evidence indicated excessive task performance monitoring and low tolerance for errors for the new team and ignoring their learning curve. Additionally, a divisive "them versus us" culture emerged. Older team members preferred fixing faults themselves rather than sharing knowledge with the new team, which would have allowed them to learn from mistakes and reduce errors. Paradoxically, this knowledge transfer would have helped the new team gain the experience they were criticized for lacking.

Withholding performance-related information is a negative act (Einarsen et al., 2010). The teams were trapped in this cycle, with few participants realising its impact on both new and old teams' performance, progression, and cohesion.

The old team had more institutional knowledge and years of service, and thus more power and authority, than the new team. This raised concerns about potential abuse of power through negative acts like constant public criticism, limiting development opportunities, excessive unfair monitoring, and task-related bullying. This disregard mirrored the old team's previous power abuse grievances from managers. The negative emotions the old team felt towards the organisation and those in power were reflected in their behaviour towards the new team, making them perpetrators of the same actions they experienced.

Theme 3, Efficacy of the Management of Incidents of Bullying

Two subthemes were identified in this analysis. The first examines participant's reluctance to report issues based on their perceptions of how management and HR addressed bullying incidents. The second highlights a limited awareness of formal organisational policies and procedures established to address relationship issues, as well as a perceived low efficacy of these policies in resolving relationship conflicts specifically arising from the change project. This section will first present the findings on subtheme 3.1 - Management and HR responses to bullying incidents. Subsequently, it will discuss the company policies and procedures as a preamble to subtheme 3.2 - How policies and procedures were utilised to manage conflicts.

Subtheme 3.1 - Management and HR responses to incidents of bullying

Certain participants observed that in previous change initiatives following the economic downturn, employees appeared less inclined to vocalise concerns regarding negative behaviours. However, in this project, participants demonstrated increased awareness of and willingness to report negative acts and bullying incidents when they occurred, as evidenced by the following extract,

... Well, if it was happening before, it was not visible, now it is so evident that people in other departments are noticing it, feeling it. So, that is the only way really were you can sense that something is wrong, is that if other people are complaining about it or

if the person is feeling it is complaining and that is what we are feeling or hearing now compared to other projects ... (Participant O, old team employee, directly impacted by the change, with the company for 8 years).

Upon analysis of the discourse within this extract, and in relation to the quotations presented in this section, it appears that bullying was also prevalent in previous projects since the economic downturn, as in this project. It is possible that there was an increase in bullying following the economic recession. Due to the absence of prior comparative data, when an HR participant was queried about her recollection of similar negative acts in this project compared to the pre-recession period, her response indicated that whilst bullying existed in change projects before the recession, it was,

... No[where] close to these numbers ... (Participant A, HR manager, with the company for 17 years).

This suggests that enhanced visibility and awareness of bullying behaviours within this change project resulted in increased reporting. Nevertheless, there was a perception that HR demonstrated a bias towards management, not only within the change project itself but also in their passive approach to managing conflicts and interpersonal issues between managers and employees. There existed a tacit acceptance that perpetrators in positions of authority could evade consequences for harmful negative workplace behaviours. This reinforced the message to victims and those involved in the change project that, despite increased vocalisation amongst colleagues regarding bullying, there would be insufficient support from management or HR for those subjected to such behaviour. The following quotation illustrates participant perspectives regarding the management of bullying by managers and HR,

... It is tough to deal with because if the person is in a management position who do you go to and if that person doesn't portray the same behaviour patterns in the company of their manager it's even more difficult to explain or to make them see what you experience, because I don't know if they know about it. We had a session with HR because they felt that they needed to investigate further. Surely there must be a problem, right? So, they would interview their chosen few people on what they think of this and what happened, they were questioning about that person. So, nothing came of it and, I do not know the logistics behind it, and I do not know if there is added factors. I do not know if they gave feedback, I do not know if they did anything to change it. I am baffled you know, one would think that HR, and I understand they are here for the business, but they should also be here for the people, for employees ... (Participant P, Finance employee, not directly impacted by the change, with the company for 8 years).

The quotation shows that victims and witnesses felt HR and management interventions in workplace bullying were ineffective, leading to underreporting through official channels. This was especially true when the perpetrator was in a position of authority. In this study, most bullying incidents involved managers or senior team members.

Participants from the old team reported some positive experiences with their manager's approach to bullying. Specifically, the old team manager was perceived as proactive in addressing conflicts between old and new team members. His interview corroborated this view. Several participants noted his skill in helping employees improve behaviours individually and as a team, mediating conflicts, and setting rules for acceptable behaviour. Bullying was sometimes resolved, although mediation occasionally failed; however, the increased visibility of bullying allowed for better management. Interventions by the manager improved work relationships among team members and those witnessing the bullying. Witnessing bullying enabled participants to openly support the victim. The old team manager, with the most extensive management training, had distinct interview responses regarding bullying and its management. Unlike most managers who denied bullying, he acknowledged workplace incivility and bullying incidents. His transparent approach involved addressing problems directly and fairly, fostering team trust. He was frequently sought for mediation, and even when mediation failed, his proactive style empowered participants to enhance awareness and actively address issues to improve team support,

... It was resolved internally it was not like reported to the national customer service manager or through HR. It was just, my boss is more like we are not a kindergarten class where we must hold hands and run to the teacher when somebody is talking and looking not in the right place. So, he encourages us to speak to each other because he says we are adults if there is a problem you need to speak up. If you cannot speak up for yourself - he is like that ... (Participant G, employee of 8 years, directly impacted by the changes).

Most resolved or attempted resolutions of bullying incidents involved this manager and his team. Reliance on managers to resolve bullying is problematic; in this case, an effective manager happened to resolve incidents, but in other cases, incidents largely remained unresolved. Additionally, there was a perceived lack of management competence in addressing peer-related bullying, and in some instances, the manager was the perpetrator. These recurring incidents indicate the need for additional training to address peer-related bullying effectively.

In a singular instance where bullying was reported, the perpetrator was dismissed by the Managing Director (MD), and this action was taken only after multiple individuals directly reported the misconduct to him. The positive aspect of this situation was the existence of an

escalation channel for severe cases, which involved not only the older team's manager but also the organisation's highest-ranking official.

Although this finding was encouraging, such cases were infrequent and did not represent the culturally enforced norm. Moreover, this approach was not prevalent among the other managers interviewed or in participant's experiences of how management teams generally addressed incidents of bullying. Furthermore, the majority of participant's accounts regarding the management of bullying incidents indicated that HR and management ineffectively handled such situations, resulting in a lack of resolution.

Subtheme 3.2 - How policies and procedures were used to manage conflicts

As outlined in Chapter 4, limited access was granted to excerpts from policy documents, with permission to take notes. Additionally, the company's published values were available on its global website, as referenced below. Before presenting the interview findings on Subtheme 3.2, it is essential to review existing policies and procedures to evaluate their effectiveness in addressing bullying management. The interview findings will then be analysed concerning the use of these policies and procedures in managing workplace bullying incidents.

A brief review of these policies and procedures follows,

1. Sexual Harassment Policy – this was a standard document outlining the company policy of zero tolerance towards gender discrimination, and sexual harassment. Redress for workplace bullying in relation to the above was not formally documented in this policy as it related only to sexual violence at work.
2. Incapacity Procedure – defined as *"Incapacity, incompatibility, inability or lack of aptitude of an employee to perform contractual obligations at the required level or standard"*. This procedure was centred around performance-related issues and managing poor, or non-performance of employees based on goals and objectives defined by the organisation and management. The document did not address managing poor performance in cases of constructive dismissal caused by the organisation, such as workplace bullying where an employee is repeatedly assigned excessive work, tasks beyond their skill level, or unattainable goals. Consequently, it lacked procedures for redressing unfair dismissal due to workplace bullying.
3. Disciplinary Procedure. This procedure aims to promote principles of natural and fair justice in the workplace, protecting the interests of the company and employees. The policy statement that sets out this procedure stipulates that, *"Discipline should be applied lawfully and fairly by the level of management with the authority to apply such disciplinary sanction"*. It is defined as *"any corrective action initiated by management in response to unacceptable behaviour or conduct"*. This procedure addresses employee breaches of the

employment contract due to wilful misconduct, such as truancy and tardiness. Unsatisfactory outcomes are to be referred to the appeals process outlined here, not the grievance process. This policy is unsuitable for addressing workplace bullying, as it only details the disciplinary action process, complementing the Incapacity Procedure.

4. Grievance Procedure – defined as *"any injustice experienced by the employee arising out of the work situation, whether these are individual or collective grievances"*. There is no specific mention in this procedure of how employees can use this procedure to specifically address issues of workplace bullying, workplace incivility or negative acts. However, bullying could be implied to be covered by this procedure. The policy also excludes collective grievances that lead to the need for collective consultation. In other words, it would not apply to collective grievances about managing the change project.

The procedure mandated that grievances be submitted without fear of reprisal, prejudice, or victimisation, ensuring confidentiality. It outlined a hierarchical resolution process: first, employee-to-employee resolution; second, management mediation; third, referral to HR. This structure assumes grievances primarily occur between employees and that mediators are impartial, though impartiality is not explicitly stated. Parties were allowed representation (internal or external) during mediation. This procedure is most pertinent for addressing workplace bullying linked to change projects. It allows employees to initiate grievance procedures for bullying incidents involving colleagues, supervisors, or organisational issues related to job performance, such as failing to meet collectively set targets.

5. Code of Conduct – This document was not among the confidential policy documents to which HR granted access, as referenced in Chapter 4; however, excerpts from this policy are publicly available on the company's global website. The code of conduct was established at the corporate level in collaboration with HR. The section pertinent to employee management is,

... The right environment for our people. Connected by real purpose, we create opportunities to grow, develop and exceed expectations. We win together as a diverse and global workplace where people feel safe valued and empowered ... (Our core values. www.CompanyX.com). n.d. accessed 2015.

The company's values include zero tolerance for discrimination based on race, age, religion, politics, or gender, as well as sexual harassment. HR participants believed these values implicitly addressed workplace bullying through acceptable behaviour standards. Thus, the grievance procedure and code of conduct suggest a process for addressing workplace bullying incidents.

The table below indicates that half of the participants in this study lacked prior knowledge of the official Policies and Procedures before the interview. Additionally, they were queried regarding their preferences for utilising the policies and management intervention.

Table 13 - Participant knowledge of and willingness to use policies and procedures

Total number of participants	Participants with prior knowledge of above Policies and Procedures
20 Total interviews	Ten participants had no knowledge of any company policies and procedures in place to help them manage conflicts
When made aware of the policies and procedures in place, and asked if/how they would prefer to use them going forward:	
Total number of participants who indicated preference to use policies, procedures and management intervention	Thirteen would first use the policies and procedures to manage relationship conflicts and bullying (with management and HR support), as opposed to resolving issues informally and directly with the perpetrator
	Seven would prefer to resolve relationship conflicts informally with the perpetrator, and without involving management or HR

The data indicates that 50% of the sample of participants were unaware of the policies and procedures. 65% of the total participants expressed willingness to utilise the established policies and procedures (thereby relying on either management or HR support), compared to 35% indicating they would not opt to employ the policies and involve HR or management in addressing bullying incidents.

Participant D in the extract below clearly indicates her preference for informal resolution as opposed to formal resolution as a first step, but also recognises that this is not feasible for every employee,

... I do not think I am well aware enough. I think ideally if somebody if you are clashing with somebody, I try in an amicable way say can we have a coffee, or something is just not right can we talk it out... not everybody can do that. I think that should always be tried first if not get your direct manager involved to try and sort that out first, and then obviously, you need to go the policy route and involve the people that need to be involved, but I would say just to go there first, and I say you never know what you can sort out, just between the two people ... (Participant D, employee, 11 years with the company, directly impacted by the change programme).

Some participants preferred using informal methods over the policy due to potential repercussions and the risk of becoming more of a target,

... I think I would be scared to use it, scared if I am going to be victimised and that is a big part for me. If I am going to have a grievance (process) against another colleague of mine, we go into a room, and I explain my grievance. That person who was bullying me and excluding me from everything, how do I know it is going to stop? I then became more of a victim than I was. Whereas if I do it informally it is just us speaking about it (bullying) not going through, and I feel for the other person it could be humiliating to be called into the room and said are you the one that is doing this. For me, I do not want to be victimised, and I also do not want to humiliate another person. Whereas if we do it informally over a cup of coffee and try to work out our problems, it is much less stressful, and it will be harder than with a full legal procedure ... (Participant G, employee of 8 years, directly impacted by the changes).

While others recognised that while an informal approach is better if resolution between colleagues is not possible, the grievance policy is a more appropriate and effective route,

... It would depend on what the situation is and who the problem is with. If it is with someone (employee), obviously you would try and sort things out again, but personally without having to go through steps like that, but if it's not something that can be done or it's maybe a person of high ranking or anything like that, then they're not easy to approach. So, I imagine something like that would work better ... (Participant R old team employee, directly impacted by the change, with the company for three years).

The quote highlights the participants preference for a formal approach with senior management, reflecting an understanding of power dynamics and a perceived lack of empowerment for informal resolution, thus favouring a documented grievance process with HR. This analysis suggests perceived inequity and management bullying, as shown in the prior themes, and a reluctance to use informal dispute resolution. Notably, this participant, who faced redundancy and had to relocate her family to keep her job, expressed significant dissatisfaction with the organisation and management, recounting instances of bullying that explain her reluctance to use informal methods,

... In this company, it is obvious that my manager did not like a team member. Whether it's just the way they talk to them or talk about them or don't, you see can a person (the manager) doesn't like another person (employee), and you can see just the way they treat them they might treat everybody else, they like hi and smile when they see them (everyone else) and when they see this person for example ignore them. This person in my previous team she took the (redundancy) package from here she did not want to move to the other department, and on the day that she was meant to be leaving my manager at the time didn't even say goodbye to her, when she goes to say

goodbye to everyone, my manager left ... (Participant R old team employee, directly impacted by the change, with the company for 3 years).

The research indicated that all participants (employees, managers, and HR personnel) believed management could implement additional measures to enhance support for employees subjected to bullying, regardless of the perpetrator's position, the context of isolated project environments, or organisational demands. One such quote from the change manager illustrates this,

... I think as a company we can always do more; we can always do better on how we personally deal with it and how we go through change knowing the current economic situation. I think being a bit more human the way we do things. We know we obviously want to see profitability, efficiency things like that. There is the human side, and we need to look at it. It is important to be considered and one of the main factors, you know, and I know, the company has always done that. There is always room for improvement continue doing a little bit more, going that extra mile. It makes people feel more comfortable in the workplace about bullying and allows them to speak out about the different types of bullying. Some people are being bullied but they do not even know ... (Participant H, Change Manager, directly responsible for making the change project happen, with the company for 17 years).

Of particular significance in this quotation is the acknowledgement by the change manager responsible for project implementation that additional measures were necessary for the management of change projects, especially in light of the prevailing economic conditions. Furthermore, she concedes to me, as a fellow change manager and ex-employee, that in comparison to projects preceding the economic downturn, this particular project lacked sufficient consideration and planning regarding its impact on personnel. Such planning would have fallen within the purview of her responsibilities and those of the leadership team.

At the same time HR confirmed that there was an increase in this project of the amount of people requesting guidance related to dealing with negative acts,

... Previously before the change there used to be a noise from individual people. Since this change project, what I can relate to is conflicts coming from staff but not one individual against another individual, it is more a group of staff complaining about excessive monitoring by management. It is because of that excessive monitoring and measuring. Interpersonal conflicts, negative behaviour where would you like me to begin. It is quite a big portion of my job. So, it is quite normal for me to facilitate those kinds of things. Happens all the time ... (Participant A, HR manager with the company for 17 years).

However, later in the interview, she acknowledges that despite an increase in requests for guidance, the actual utilisation of the current policies and procedures, as well as requests for HR intervention in implementing them, has been limited,

... If there are any serious issues, it wouldn't necessarily come to me (via the policies and process) because we also have a well-being service provider where staff can contact the psychologist or somebody else to give them coaching or guidance ...
(Participant A, HR manager, with the company for 17 years).

Participant A considered the code of conduct, which includes values and behaviours, adequate for managing all relationship conflicts. The following extract highlights several areas she identifies within the code of conduct that address bullying management,

... We have a code of conduct. A code of conduct talks quite clearly about expecting employees to live by the company values which talk about how we would respect one another, and how we can have different opinions but at the end of the day we respect the ultimate decision that has been made. So, we are talking about how we behave towards one another, respecting one another, and being upright and honest. So, talking about our company values within our code of employment, it is also our behaviour when it comes to following the law. So, it could also be legal issues, sexual harassment any such thing and we will not tolerate anything contrary to those laws. So that's all-in-place I would like to think that we have got quite firm policies, which speak about the legal requirements but also requirements the way we want our system to work. So, the corporate culture we have designed to get along with one another ...

Both HR and employees agreed that policies and procedures needed improvement and lacked clarity on workplace bullying. However, her assessment of how the grievance policy could assist employees facing change and bullying was vague and non-committal. The interview's overall tone suggested that her reluctance might be due to fears of increasing her workload and potential organisational repercussions,

... It is difficult to say (how can it be improved) because it is not actually actively used. Probably could be improved by communicating that actually exist and making people aware of its existence and why it is there. Although I must be honest, I would not want to market it too well that it starts encouraging people to you know moan about anything because our culture is rather one of, if you have got an issue address it there and then. Personally, I would promote that before I promote a personal grievance process which that should be your last resort ... (Participant A, HR manager, with the company for 17 years).

The analysis of the aforementioned extract reveals that while Participant A was unable to identify potential improvements or more effective applications of the policy, she also did not express support for its use in managing incidents. She appeared hesitant to promote the policy, likely due to concerns about potential repercussions. This stance seems counterintuitive given her role and her account of dealing with an increasing number of incidents. Despite this, she demonstrates reluctance to implement changes that could reduce the frequency of such incidents or, at the very least, improve the efficiency of the grievance process for those affected. This perspective is consistent with that expressed later in this chapter by Participant L (Manager). While she handles many interpersonal issues, serious matters rarely reach her. She views grievance procedures as a last resort, preferring alternative resolution methods first. Yet when asked about their knowledge of the processes and policies in place and if they would use them, participants felt they needed more HR support than they were receiving. For example, while not specifically mentioning the grievance process, the participants response below implies this with the intervention of HR as a mediator, which would consequently mean initiating the grievance process,

... I think HR should take a firm stand where that (policy and procedures) is in that situation. I think our HR should have stepped up. HR should play a bigger role in the case of bullying while going through restructure maybe they can focus on that area more. So maybe focus can be drawn more to those people. HR could focus more and be more compassionate towards those people ... (Participant P, Finance employee, not directly impacted by the change, with the company for 8 years).

Almost half the study's participants believed HR should have better managed bullying during the project and restructure. When asked about preferring formal policy use over informal resolution, one participants response indicated mistrust, lack of confidence in HR, and a breach of psychological safety,

... HR are the biggest gossips, and I would not really want to deal with grievance procedures via them. There are individuals who are better than that (in HR), but in my experience, there are a lot of things happening that have not been handled well. I do not think employees necessary feel they can lodge grievances; I am not sure they think they will be believed. In terms of my familiarity (with the policies), like I said I would have to go read up, what is the procedure that is actually functioning for me and to who I go first (i.e. manager) ... (Participant M employee, directly impacted by the change, with the company for 23 years).

Even the old team's manager expressed reluctance to use policies and procedures, as shown in the following extract.,

... Yes, well wait till a formal complaint has been filed; it's sometimes too much for people to file a formal complaint so I would say to have or to build a relationship and rapport with people and to look at informally advising whatever is going on, that would be first prize ... (Participant L old team manager, directly impacted by the change, with the company for 20 years).

Participant L's implication herein pertains to the general reluctance of employees to utilise the formal grievance policy, as previously alluded to, and consequently, his preference for mediating on an employee-to-employee basis, with management intervention as a preferred method of mediation.

Furthermore, while HR had addressed this aspect in their interviews, they were cognisant that in future they could potentially enhance their support for employees undergoing such a change, as evidenced by the following quotation,

... One learning that certainly is coming through is that organisations concentrate a lot on employees or that we... beginning to concentrate a lot more on the human side of things. And all our energy and effort seem to go and how do we help those people get through a significant change and the impact. What nobody seems to have cottoned onto is helping the people managing that project to deal with their emotional onslaught that it creates. So, that is the next step in that process most certainly for us ... (Participant A an HR manager, with the company for 17 years).

This subtheme elucidates several interrelated factors contributing to the reluctance in utilising policies and procedures for managing bullying, beyond a mere lack of knowledge. These factors include power imbalances, dissatisfaction with HR and management, and apprehension regarding potential retargeting. Concurrently, upon examination of the existing policies and procedures, it was evident that none adequately addressed the unique challenges encountered during change projects amidst an economic downturn. Specifically, they failed to account for the impact on employee well-being and organisational morale, as well as the potential increase in workplace bullying and associated negative behaviours that may arise from conducting projects in such a climate.

Conclusion

This chapter has presented a discussion of the research findings pertaining to the three major themes that emerged from the study, accompanied by extracts from the interviews to illustrate salient points made by participants.

The results of this study demonstrate that the implementation of a change project during the economic downturn generated a cascading effect that negatively impacted employee's job security, increased their workload and stress levels, and decreased their well-being. The

consequential impact directly deteriorated workplace relationships for the teams directly affected and indirectly impacted by the changes. This combination of effects led to increased incidents of workplace bullying. Two primary groups perpetrated bullying: those in positions of authority, i.e. managers, and between peer groups, i.e. the older team towards the new team, with a range of negative acts recounted even before participants were provided with examples of these acts as part of the workplace bullying definition. The findings further indicate that the management of bullying incidents was perceived as unsatisfactory. Although the code of conduct and grievance procedures could potentially be beneficial in addressing these issues, there was a general lack of awareness regarding the policies and procedures in place, and how they could be utilised to support such grievances. Chapter 6 will present a discussion of the findings for each of the themes presented here within the context of the literature. Additionally, a critique of the limitations of this research will be offered.

Chapter Six, Discussion

Introduction

In the preceding chapter, the findings were presented through a narrative delineating how events within the change project and the exigencies of implementation during the economic downturn culminated in bullying. Theme 1 elucidates the adverse effects of implementing the change project during the economic downturn, which exacerbated employee stress, compromised their well-being, and deteriorated workplace relationships. This resulted in a cascading negative effect, as evidenced in Theme 2, which illustrates the increase in workplace bullying as a consequence of the change project. Theme 3 specifically examined the efficacy of bullying incident management, which is crucial for formulating valid recommendations for future intervention projects.

The objective of this chapter is to critically analyse and elucidate the study findings in relation to extant literature. Limitations of the research will also be addressed.

To recap, the research questions were to explore: How does organisational change during an uncertain economic climate lead to workplace bullying? How are stress and interpersonal relationships impacted by this process?

The economic environment referred to in the context of this research is the Global Financial Crisis of 2008 (i.e. the recession from December 2007 to June 2009), followed by a period of austerity from 2009 to 2017, according to Kose & Ohnsorge (2021).

It became evident during the presentation of findings that the themes exhibited a degree of interconnectedness. The results revealed a pattern of causal relationships and an escalation process cascading within the themes. This proposition is derived from the data; however, due to the qualitative nature of the study, which was predicated on interviews conducted at a single point in time, it cannot definitively confirm a cascade or establish causation. It is imperative to acknowledge this as a limitation that future research could address through longitudinal studies.

Discussion of the findings, in relation to the themes and literature

This discussion will address each theme sequentially, commencing with Theme 1 - the impact of change projects during the economic downturn and their effects on job security, employee well-being, diminishing employee morale, heightened anxiety and stress levels, organisational trust, and the deterioration of workplace relationships. Theme 2 will examine how the environment described in Theme 1 contributed to the emergence of workplace bullying and the extent of such behaviour. This theme will also be contextualised within

relevant theories explaining the underlying causes and mechanisms. Theme 3 will evaluate the efficacy of the management of bullying incidents.

Theme 1, Discussion of the Impact of Change Projects during the Economic Downturn

Theme 1 findings show that a change project during the economic downturn harmed employee's job security, well-being, and workplace relationships. Literature reveals several causes for this. Einarsen & Skogstad (1996), Salin (2003), and Hoel & Cooper (2000) note that bullying is rampant in the private sector due to excessive competition, performance pressure, and job insecurity in high-pressure environments. Salin (2003) argues that global market economies pressure companies to enhance efficiency, performance, and profitability through organisational changes, creating internal stress for employees. In this study, uncertainty about organisational changes is a stressor linked to workplace bullying. The company's organisational changes were driven by the 2008 recession and subsequent austerity until 2017, aimed at maintaining financial viability, as described in Chapter 1.

Catalano & Dooley's (1983) economic stress hypothesis, discussed in Chapter 2, explains how the economic downturns and the change project created psychosocial stress for individuals and groups facing job insecurity. This stress influenced participant's behaviours, fostering stressful and discordant working conditions, which led to conflict and subsequent bullying behaviours. According to the work environment theory (Shoss & Probst, 2012), and the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), workplace bullying in this study stemmed from high-stress, competitive environments forcing employees to compete. Participants faced relocation, redundancy, and job changes, with economic threats extending beyond job insecurity to impact job roles, tasks, remuneration, benefits, and organisational trust.

Organisational Trust - Participants observed a significant shift in company culture after the economic downturn, adversely affecting their job security. They noted that leadership began prioritizing revenue, cost reduction, efficiency, and employee productivity, often using coercive methods, at the expense of employee well-being. This shift undermined a collaborative work culture and led to a perception that the company no longer prioritised employee's interests. Trust in leadership diminished, and employees felt less valued. Shoss & Probst (2012) and Mikkelsen & Einarsen (2003) argue that reduced trust leads to lower citizenship behaviours, with decreased efforts and performance towards the organisation or co-workers. In the old team, this resulted in misplaced aggression towards the organisation and colleagues.

Participant responses indicated that the numerous adverse changes since the economic downturn fostered negative behaviours. The study revealed that successive change projects involving redundancies, role modifications, and demotions left participants in a state of

persistent anxiety, apprehensive of potential job loss. For the participants, before the economic downturn, change projects did not pose threats to job security or involve redundancies or role modifications, maintaining high employee retention rates as the company was not financially at risk. The majority of participants, with long tenures at the company, confirmed that job retention and security were significantly higher before the downturn. Previously, the organisational culture supported employment from graduation until retirement, positively reinforcing its employee value proposition. Changes before the downturn were executed thoughtfully and with a focus on employee welfare, fostering career development and ongoing learning, in contrast to post-downturn changes which rendered roles more transactional. Participants perceived that the company's commitment to long-term career investment had diminished, replacing the once-secure job environment with uncertainty regarding job continuity and role stability.

The individuals experienced a sense of unpreparedness coupled with the certainty that, following their observation of the organisation's difficulties, they would inevitably be affected. The expeditious and consecutive implementation of change initiatives during the economic downturn afforded insufficient time to prepare for the ramifications on employment security. The concept of a stable work environment was persistently threatened by the extreme and swift measures necessitated for the organisation's survival. In this volatile context, with minimal time for recovery between changes, the individuals perceived their job security to be perpetually at risk due to potential retrenchment or role modifications. Even in instances of job alterations, the rapid succession of implementations allowed inadequate time for adaptation to new roles, collaboration with reduced or new teams, or fulfilment of productivity requirements, thereby exacerbating their anxiety regarding job security. This transformation shifted the organisational culture from one of security to one characterised by threatened job stability. Furthermore, the global economic downturn rendered the procurement of new employment challenging, intensifying both internal and external job insecurity. The heightened competition in the labour market resulted in demand primarily for highly specialised skills, while the organisation's cost-reduction measures led to increased redundancy rates among lower-skilled workers. This further amplified their perceived job insecurity.

Employees acknowledged the necessity of job cuts and organisational changes but believed the company could have managed them more thoughtfully and consultatively, considering their well-being. Declining morale was exacerbated by the direct or indirect impact of job cuts or role changes on their positions, resulting in increased workloads and inadequate skills to meet productivity and quality targets. This led to inevitable task failures, jeopardizing potential raises or bonuses, and risking further job cuts. Reduced staff and disbanded teams provided minimal support in the new structure, affecting work quality, increasing rework,

extending task completion times, and hindering effective escalation management. Consequently, service level agreements and key performance indicators suffered.

Stress - The findings, corroborated by participant extracts, showed that rising economic stress led to anxiety, depression, anger, organisational mistrust, and frustration. This escalation resulted in increased conflict between old and new teams, managers and employees, and among peers, ultimately leading to bullying behaviours.

In relation to the economic stress hypothesis (Catalano & Dooley, 1983) and work environment theory (Shoss & Probst, 2012), the findings demonstrate that the impact of economic stress (resulting from the recession and the change project) exacerbated workplace stress to a level where bullying behaviours emerged. These behaviours manifested as individuals utilised them as coping mechanisms, for self-preservation, and/or as a consequence of the negative emotional stress they experienced.

This study reported instances of task-related bullying from the old team towards the new team. For example, the old team had to assist the new team with tasks taken from them, causing their work to suffer. They had more menial tasks, fewer resources, lacked necessary tools, and were financially penalized in the bonus reward process for non-performance. Consequently, the old team blamed the new team, leading to increased bullying. This aligns with Georgakopoulos et al. (2011) and Unal-Karagüven (2009), as stress and negative emotions in the old team were antecedents to bullying behaviour.

As a survival strategy to protect their financial resources amid economic threats, the old team adopted bullying behaviours towards the new team, aligning with the conservation of resources theory (Hobfoll, 1989), discussed in Chapter 2. However, findings indicate that bullying was not merely a self-preservation tactic by the old team. The decline in organisational citizenship behaviours was also a learned response to the changing organisational culture due to the economic downturn. This led to a discordant work environment, transforming the company's culture into a punitive one. According to Zapf's (2004), social stressor model, discussed in Chapter 2, participants who were initially victims later became perpetrators, as evidenced by this research, adopting the same authoritarian bullying practices they reported in the study.

Well-being - Although the data was collected in 2015 and the change project ended in 2014, participants still reported reduced well-being due to bullying throughout the economic downturn, affecting their personal lives and health due to experiencing or witnessing bullying. Research shows bullying negatively impacts the affective and cognitive well-being of those involved, causing anger, anxiety, depression, stress from job insecurity, and PTSD from direct or witnessed bullying (Grant et al., 2007; Inceoglu et al., 2018; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). This

aligns with researchers (Finne et al., 2011; Grynderup et al., 2016; Nabe-Nielsen et al., 2017, in Berglund et al., 2024), who argue that bullying distress can have long-lasting effects. The study found these effects persisted beyond two years, with participants reporting PTSD symptoms and burnout, consistent with Berglund et al. (2024) and Chenevert et al. (2022), who found a high correlation between workplace bullying, PTSD, and burnout. These issues relate to reduced job satisfaction and organisational commitment, supporting Shoss & Probst's (2012) findings on the Work Environment Theory and its impact on well-being.

Some participants felt relieved to survive retrenchments but also guilty that their colleagues lost their jobs. This guilt was evident in those who retained employment, facing a choice between redundancy or forced relocation with their families, which negatively impacted their personal lives. Examples highlighted effects on health, home life, and financial stability, particularly due to the timing around Christmas and New Year, a costly period. Although some felt relieved to keep their jobs, many experienced professional and personal well-being declines due to changes. Job role changes meant increased workload and responsibilities; participants did not receive corresponding remuneration, leading to low morale and feelings of being undervalued. The organisation's increasing demands for better service delivery and cost optimization left participants feeling disempowered, unengaged, and lacking control over their daily work and its outcomes.

The performance management system-imposed penalties on employees for failing to meet objectives, despite their lack of input or control over these targets. Their endeavours to compensate for inefficiencies by working additional hours were unsustainable, unremunerated, and did not improve outcomes, whilst also negatively affecting their familial relationships and well-being. This resulted in a deteriorating cycle of limited job autonomy, unreasonable demands, and punitive measures, increasing occupational stress and anxiety, with no viable improvement opportunities due to the economic downturn. Employees experienced emotional unpreparedness, were overwhelmed by excessive workloads, and were unable to adapt to changes, resulting in negative affective states and consequences.

Workplace Relationships - Participants recognised that their negative emotions towards workloads and the organisation were misdirected and taken out on each other daily. Their primary concern was survival, adapting to new job roles, and job retention. Job insecurity, low control over new roles, prolonged economic downturn, and resulting organisational changes compounded the negative environment, reducing organisational and team citizenship behaviours. I noticed a rise in detrimental rivalry for job security, with previously collaborative attitudes shifting towards reporting on colleagues who were not meeting performance standards. Self-preservation led to a decline in workplace civility and strained relationships. This supports the view that bullying can be strategic, as employees vie for resources and management favour (Hoel et al., 2002; and Skogstad et al., 2007), consistent

with Hobfoll's (1989) COR theory. The adverse emotional strain experienced by staff members led to their adaptation to the workplace environment. The old team tended to either enhance or reduce their assistance to the new team through task-related bullying, primarily to safeguard their interests. This behaviour was aimed at avoiding potential reprimands from superiors and (as noted in field observations), creating a favourable impression on management by displaying ostensible task-related support that was, in reality, self-serving. This phenomenon was observed throughout the research findings, with reports of bullying emerging even in teams not directly affected.

Bullying became ingrained in the organisational culture beyond the team directly affected by the austerity project, turning into an organisational norm through change programmes enforced by managers via bullying (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Hauge et al., 2007; Einarsen et al., 2012). These scholars note that a work environment with low job control, role conflicts, ambiguity, job insecurity, and heightened efficiency and profitability demands correlates with deteriorating workplace relationships and increased bullying. Organisational changes like downsizing and outsourcing, implemented in this project, heighten economic stress and are linked to task-related bullying (Skogstad et al., 2007). Participants reported that hostile treatment among teams, managers, and employees was due to worsening workplace relationships due to the recession. Research shows a significant rise in negative mood indicators in populations during job cuts (Lansdall-Welfare, Lamos, & Cristianini, 2012). The combined threat to job security, increased stress and anxiety, decreased employee morale, and reduced organisational commitment led to increased bullying. This aligns with findings on why bullying occurs in such environments (Shoss & Probst, 2012; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2003; Georgakopoulos et al., 2011; Salin, 2003).

All participants in this study were cognisant that the project deliverables were to provide recommendations regarding redundant functions and for cost reduction purposes. However, the absence of transparent communication and engagement, whilst reinforcing the message of the organisational benefits of the project but evading questions about redundancies, engendered widespread discord.

Theme 2, Discussion of the Impact of Change Projects on Workplace Bullying

The results from Theme 2 indicate that participants noted an intensification of pre-existing bullying behaviour, which became more apparent throughout the project.

Researchers (Shoss & Probst, 2012; Hauge, Skogstad & Einarsen, 2009; Zapf & Einarsen, 2011) posit that bullying proliferates at individual and group levels, intensifying due to various adverse antecedents, consequences of running the change project during the economic

downturn, and develops into a deteriorating cycle (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Hauge et al., 2007; Einarsen et al., 2012).

Herscovis & Barling's (2010), social information theory, suggests that bullying occurred at both group and individual levels, initially stemming from the organisation and managers, then evolving into peer bullying due to misplaced aggression and reduced organisational commitment amid job insecurity. Post-recession individual-level bullying increased (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2003), with HR responses indicating that bullying became an accepted leadership style, in turn exacerbating individual-level bullying.

The organisational changes necessitated by the recession were the primary catalyst for various acts of bullying, as defined by Einarsen et al. (2020) in Chapter 1, perpetrated or experienced over a prolonged period. Reports of bullying centred around the old teams, those external to but indirectly impacted by the change project, employees with prior change project experience since the recession, and managers. These acts included lack of control over the work environment, consistent criticism of efforts (e.g. managers to employees), imposition of unreasonable targets, uncertainty regarding job retention or role changes, insufficient skills to perform new roles, replacement of tasks with more menial ones, punitive performance targets and measures, unjustified denial of promotion, and deprivation of statutory rights and entitlements. The majority of participants in this study reported increased stress levels due to forced compliance with demands at the expense of their well-being, motivated by fear of job loss and financial insecurity.

During interviews, managers and employees exhibited discomfort when discussing bullying and conflict. Managers and the older team members occasionally rationalised task-related bullying.

Bullying by Managers and the Organisation - Bullying at this organisational level was perpetrated by those in positions of authority (management and the organisation) towards teams and also targeting specific individuals. While managers denied the existence of bullying or its utilisation to further organisational objectives or target individuals, participants frequently experienced and observed these behaviours. There was substantial evidence of managerial bullying reported by participants across the organisation.

In the project, the organisation tacitly condoned these behaviours as they furthered organisational objectives such as cost reduction, performance enhancement, and productivity improvement. The old team experienced marginalisation and disempowerment due to role ambiguity and demotion. They encountered difficulties in meeting performance measures, and attributed the resultant bullying to the organisation, citing unjust penalisation for the new team's performance despite having trained them and reported a lack of rewards in their new roles, instead facing punitive performance measures. The most prevalent

negative acts were the absence of fair selection criteria for relocations and redundancies, consistent criticism of efforts, being unjustifiably overlooked for promotions by managers including denial of statutory rights such as sick leave, leading to increased illness and eventual job termination.

Outside of the project, indirect accounts mentioned employees falling ill and resigning due to bullying, or employees transferring teams to avoid their managers. Recurrent offenders in managerial positions were noted, with HR intervening multiple times. In one case, a manager was relocated but continued the bullying behaviour. HR was aware of and acknowledged these issues transparently, reporting that bullying had been prevalent since the economic recession and had become normalised in the workplace.

Bullying between Peers - The findings highlight peer-to-peer bullying, with multiple accounts from the old team members who either observed or participated in bullying the new team, with older team members recognising this behaviour in themselves and others.

The excessive demands imposed upon the established team were cited as the primary reasons, as they consistently had to rectify the newly integrated team's work, which subsequently adversely affected their workloads and resulted in the inability to meet their objectives. The absence of comprehensive training and adequate support structures for the newly integrated teams, coupled with stringent punitive measures on the established team, exacerbated stress levels between the teams. The older team held positions of authority over the new team and exhibited decreased organisational citizenship behaviours towards them. Workplace incivility escalated, and the new team became the target of workplace bullying from the established team. There were reports of a decline in service quality and team cohesion, with significant consequences (job loss, health issues, and emotional challenges) for certain targets of workplace bullying. Furthermore, this decrease in performance standards from both teams indirectly affected the performance of other teams (e.g. Sales), who, in turn, engaged in bullying behaviour towards the older team when deadlines were not being met. In this theme, bullying was also utilised as a strategy (Hobfoll, 1989), for employees to advance in their roles and demonstrate competencies to management.

Participants unaffected by the project also reported increased bullying since the recession, attributing it to a cultural shift believing the organisation condoned these actions for economic gain.

Theme 1 and 2 - Tying theory to findings

These two themes elucidate the interconnectedness of the aforementioned theories on bullying, demonstrating how the evidence begins to coalesce. The economic downturn and change project generated stress, as posited by the economic stress hypothesis (Catalano & Dooley, 1983). The reciprocity-attribution model of (Bowling & Beehr, 2006), demonstrates

that this stress, in conjunction with an ecosystem characterised by high internal competition among employees, as described in the work environment theory (Shoss & Probst, 2012), resulted in deviant work behaviours and workplace bullying. This phenomenon occurred as participants, who were initially victims of bullying, subsequently emulated management behaviour and became perpetrators, aligning with the social stressor model (Zapf, 2004). Hobfoll's (1989) COR theory elucidates the mechanism by which bullying, at the individual level, functions as a means of self-preservation and survival. According to Ford (2009, p.251),

... COR theory postulates that bodily and psychological stress reactions are based on an inborn survival response that mobilizes the person to take action to regain the lost or reduced resources. COR theory therefore implies that prevention of PTSD must involve helping people to identify and restore or replace the most important resources that have been lost or depleted as the result of a traumatic event ... (Ford, 2009, p.251),

Aligned with Chapter 2, bullying occurred for both strategic and non-strategic reasons (Salin, 2003), as participants prioritised economic self-preservation and well-being, while managers compromised workplace civility to meet performance goals. Chapter 2 also argues that stress and job insecurity from organisational changes are precursors to strategic workplace bullying (Hoel et al. 2002, and Skogstad et al. 2007). This study observed that pre-existing organisational citizenship behaviours and civility were replaced by bullying to conserve financial resources and well-being, as suggested by the aforementioned researchers and Salin (2003). Strategic bullying potentially aimed to make staff leave voluntarily, achieving cost savings, though this perception lacks legal proof.

Theme 3, Discussion of the Effectiveness of Bullying Management

In Theme 3, the findings indicated that the efficacy of the management of incidents of bullying was deemed unsatisfactory by participants and that the policies and procedures were either perceived as inadequate, or they were not used, or participants were unaware they could have been used to raise grievances on bullying behaviours. I presented in Chapter 2, literature on various bullying management interventions. I will now discuss these in the context of the findings, with a view on whether they could have potentially worked in this change project to remediate incidents of bullying.

Einarsen & Einarsen (2021) suggests that organisational policies should be used to manage incidents of bullying. There was no specific company anti-bullying and harassment policy or whistle-blowing policy for bullying acts. However, of the four policies and procedures in place (discussed in Chapters 4 & 5), neither the grievance nor disciplinary procedure which could have been used, were called upon to manage incidents of bullying, and neither was the code

of conduct. Despite these not mentioning bullying specifically, all three of these could have been used to address issues of bullying.

Researchers (Saam, 2010, and Vartia & Leka, 2011) suggest that in conflicts with a power differential between the victim and the perpetrator, HR managers should be the ones to trigger disciplinary and grievance processes. This would have been especially relevant in this change project where there were instances of e.g. bullying from managers, and there was no equal ground in the relationship equation (Salin, 2009).

In this study, while HR and managers felt that incidents of bullying had increased, no proactive action was taken to support teams. Support was only provided on a case-by-case basis, and even then, participants felt that issues were mismanaged and unresolved. The findings also indicated that the efficacy of the management of incidents of bullying was deemed unsatisfactory by participants.

Many of the participants were unaware of what workplace bullying was. In terms of the use of the policies and procedures participants who were aware of the policies either; perceived them as inadequate and hence did not use them, or they lacked awareness of how to use the pre-existing policies to report any grievances, including workplace bullying. For those participants who did not know of them, when made aware of these during the interview, they indicated that aside from their low levels of trust in HR's ability to resolve issues, there was even less organisational trust and safety, and this would have prevented them from using the policies and procedures. Participant's sense of powerlessness was strikingly evident, as they felt insufficiently secure to seek assistance or lodge formal complaints, despite recounting instances of unfair treatment and intimidation by those in authority. Participants felt that HR was biased towards management and condoned poor behaviour. At the same time, HR indicated that bullying had become more visible in the project, and participants confirmed that even though they did not invoke formal grievances, they were more vocal about it in this project. This was because of the way it was affecting their working relationships, their ability to perform their roles, and their productivity, which eventually forced management to intervene. This meant management and HR were compelled to do something about it, whereas they might have ignored this in prior projects.

However, even when this was done when I reflect on the findings, participants felt neither HR nor management were equipped to manage incidents of bullying effectively and resolutely. The main reasons were that they felt was because,

1. HR lacked sufficient knowledge of bullying and its management,
2. HR and Management together dismissed, underplayed, and denied incidents of bullying,

3. The lack of a clear message at the organisational level or a firm policy and procedure in place to deal specifically with workplace bullying, nor was it explicitly mentioned in any of the existing policies and procedures, meant they had to spend a lot of their valuable resources proving that it was occurring, and
4. Participants feared repercussions if they reported bullying due to their low levels of job security and it might have affected this, or how they might be stigmatised and indeed revictimised if they reported incidents.

Another reason the policies were not used according to participants was because HR as custodians of these policies, were seen as complacent, ineffective in dealing with incidents, and untrustworthy in enforcing the policies. HR's ability to be fair, impartial and enforce adherence and governance, in a safe and regulated way was doubted, and hence their custodial responsibility was deemed to be compromised. HR was viewed as complicit with managers, biased and unjust in dealing with/or condoned incidents of workplace bullying.

However, HR was aware of increased bullying incidents, and one of the HR managers referred to it as "quite a big portion of my job", acknowledging that bullying had occurred before, it was nowhere close to the number of incidents and the vocalism they were experiencing in this project. This same participant had over 17 years of institutional experience to base a comparison on and confessed this was because employees felt marginalised and exploited by the organisation. According to HR, it was precisely because of management's aggressive targets and little time for team camaraderie, or even to coach and support employees, that their workplace civility decreased and increased their tendency to resort to bullying as a strategic tactic (either towards specific employees or at the team in general) to get the job done.

It's a valid point that one way of mitigating bullying through policies as suggested by Catley et.al. (2017) was for HR to monitor, evaluate, and review the four company policies and procedures, to assess their appropriateness to address issues of workplace bullying for employees impacted by the change programme. In my observation from HR responses it seemed, as noted earlier, that they were not only reticent to enforce grievance and disciplinary policies for the above-mentioned reasons; but they also seemed jaded and overworked. They seemed uninterested in even encouraging victims to invoke grievance or disciplinary procedures, due to the sheer volume of unofficial and official complaints they already were dealing with, and a general acceptance (as alluded to earlier) that bullying had become the organisation's new cultural norm. Moreover, they were also unaware of the span of acts that constitute workplace bullying. From my field note observations, they had little motivation to acquire more knowledge on the issue, or on intervention strategies on how

they could manage incidents of bullying because it would ultimately only increase their workloads.

Harrington, Rayner, & Warren (2012) have suggested that when there are problems with organisational awareness, responsiveness to complaints, and issues with subsequent investigation of bullying, organisational policies become redundant. This also means that the sole responsibility could not be placed on HR alone, especially since there was a general lack of awareness in the company of what workplace bullying was. The matter of bullying awareness will be addressed subsequently; presently, it is also necessary to examine manager's responses and their approach to managing bullying.

The findings indicated that there was a growing increase in bullying incidents from managers towards employees and a general abuse of power by management during the change project. In addition to HR's acknowledgement, participants also felt that managers benefited from the change project by having a more elevated position in the organisation, with more authority and span of control which they used to commit acts of workplace bullying. Much like HR, employees recognised that managers had challenging targets to fulfil but also felt that managers would do whatever needed to be done by any means necessary to ensure productivity and performance goals were met, even if this were to the detriment of workplace well-being. In addition to task-related bullying, participants also provided accounts indicating they felt management used the cost-cutting exercise to victimise and remove "unwanted" employees through termination. Despite a lengthy legal consultation process between the company, and the national labour arbitrator overseeing the redundancy process whose role it was to ensure that the selection of candidates for job loss was fair and impartial and followed the labour guidelines; participants felt that the redundancy process was personalised and based on favouritism to address the job cuts. They believed that the process was being abused to dismiss employees unfairly, based on who the company thought would be more instrumental in helping to achieve the new targets, and which employee any given manager favoured more. This they thought was directly in contravention of national labour guidelines of an equitable, fair, and impartial redundancy selection process. Participants indicated that those employees who were retained but did not have a good relationship with managers were then subsequently bullied more severely with unpleasant or unachievable targets being purposefully set that they would not be able to achieve. These employees received no coaching and support or training and development, which meant they would fail in achieving their targets (impacting their year-end bonuses) and subsequently have very little prospects for career progression. There were participant accounts where they believed that the creation of a hostile and negative working environment was a purposeful strategy for managers to get rid of an employee they did not like, effectively forcing the employee to leave voluntarily, which then meant the company would not have to pay for the redundancy

(thereby also achieving “indirect” cost savings). According to Einarsen et al. (2003) and Cortina et al. (2001), this is because bullying is an abuse of power, with a clear discrepancy between the victim and perpetrator's level of authority. Aside from the responses from employees and HR, there is of course no real evidence that bullying was actively promoted by the organisation, other than their condonement of it.

However, according to Einarsen (2020) and Cortina et al. (2001) during organisational changes, lack of empowerment and power imbalances increase. In the case of the latter, this allows strategic decisions to be made e.g. candidates for promotions, task assignments, performance appraisals, allocation of resources, and dismissals. The organisational goals and culture reinforce this even if they are perpetrated via acts of bullying. There was sufficient evidence from participant's (employees, HR, and the manager of the old team) responses proving this was the case. Steinman & Herman (1997) relate power dynamics to organisational change and economic conditions where the corporate culture, leadership and managerial factors play a role in the creation of (and often condone) bullying behaviours when it is in the best interests of the organisational goals of profitability, productivity, or cost cutting.

Outside of HR's management of incidents of bullying, apart from the team manager directly impacted by the change, who was forced to deal with incidents of bullying for the benefit of the team and the necessary performance required, the other managers interviewed conveyed little impetus to deal with bullying incidents. In the previous theme, I presented the argument for why bullying occurs as a strategic response to the environment, to protect economic resources in the face of job insecurity. In much the same way peer-to-peer bullying occurred, managers also adopted bullying behaviours to protect their economic resources and compete with other managers to secure or keep their jobs, and to impress their managers. It was unsurprising then that most of the managers I interviewed either condoned or denied workplace bullying acts committed by them or the organisation in general.

Nevertheless, it is important to recognise that the situation was not entirely negative. As previously mentioned, HR generally showed reluctance in implementing anti-bullying measures, despite the rising incidence of such behaviour. Whilst this was true, it must be acknowledged that HR, within their constrained resources and workforce, were endeavouring to address incidents to the best of their capacity. This was despite their limitations and the absence of broader organisational and leadership backing. A particularly positive outcome was the appreciation shown by both affected staff members and managers for HR's endeavours.

Interviews revealed a general lack of organisational preparedness to address workplace bullying, including insufficient understanding of bullying, acceptance of negative behaviours,

ineffective incident management, and inadequate policies. This, along with repeat offenders and cases escalating to top management, supports Harrington, Rayner & Warren's (2012) assertion that bullying policies fail when organisations lack awareness of bullying's nature and manifestations, and when management does not adequately acknowledge, respond to, and investigate complaints. Thus, despite efforts from some stakeholders, interventions will likely remain ineffective without comprehensive awareness and supporting structures.

According to Einarsen et al. (2011a) and Vartia & Leka (2011), a further mitigation strategy outside of policy implementation, is to first start with bullying awareness because bullying is an organisational problem, and deterrence is only effective when management takes ownership of the issue. In Chapter 2, it was mentioned that Vartia & Leka (2011) suggest that interventions for the prevention and management of bullying at work must occur at the organisational level. The evidence of this study suggests that excluding cases of bullying interventions mentioned earlier, this was almost absent at the organisational level, with little evidence provided by participants, that the organisation adopted a zero-tolerance stance on bullying. There was however evidence that when bullying was reported, remedies were implemented to stop the recurrence of bullying. However, these interventions were not consistently efficacious, as they often resulted in the relocation of the offender rather than the resolution of the issue (e.g. a manager with a recurrent history of bullying behaviour was transferred to another team, yet the problematic conduct persisted within the new team).

Bullying awareness was absent in this change project and previous ones since the recession, highlighting concerns about the implementation and resources of the change practitioner, who by her admission acknowledged the organisational constraints limiting effective change management. It would have been insightful to know what change management techniques, if any, were employed, as the findings suggest key elements of change management were neglected. This might have been a cost-saving measure by the financially constrained organisation, opting not to hire an experienced, impartial external expert. If an external expert had been involved, the change management process would likely have included awareness campaigns and pulse surveys as recommended by Kumar (2012) in Chapter 2.

Beyond awareness interventions, there was no organisational readiness plan, typically part of the change management plan. Such a plan would have set the organisation up for success by preparing employees for change and shifting the environment from resistant and fatigued to emotionally prepared and invested in the project's success. It would have integrated healthy change management principles, including awareness of the increase in bullying during change projects and strategies to prevent it. This would involve securing management sponsorship, stakeholder engagement, and linking anti-bullying efforts to project success, as well as rewarding collaborative workplace practices and empowering participants to foster such an environment.

The task would have involved creating a change roadmap, including consultation plans, to eliminate ambiguity and anxiety regarding job security and roles, alongside training and adoption plans for new roles. However, a significant oversight in this change programme and in managing bullying, as Bukusi (2024) notes, was the failure to integrate culture and strategy. According to Mikkelsen et al. (2011), this not only involves participant engagement in the selection and evaluation of the change programme but also requires participants to own workplace behaviours and practices and reinforces management's commitment to anti-bullying. This level of change programme cultural integration was absent in the organisation.

Chapter 2 outlined that effective bullying intervention plans (Hoel & Cooper, 2003; Salin et al., 2018b; Vartia & Leka, 2011) must include primary, secondary, and tertiary forms. In this project, primary measures to train managers or HR on bullying prevention were absent. Secondary solutions for reported bullying incidents failed to deter offenders, with multiple offences by the same perpetrators, indicating ineffective penalties. The negative reinforcement of bullying permeated the company culture, adopted by the organisation, management, and employees, implying that bullying to achieve goals was becoming the standard, modelled after management behaviours. At the tertiary level, management and HR offered minimal support to bullying victims. In this study's findings, there was limited evidence for reducing the negative impact of the change project on employees, supporting their well-being, and working environment, and most certainly much less for when this was endangered due to workplace bullying. According to Vartia & Leka (2011), these remedies would have needed to be in place for both victims and also for the perpetrators.

My field notes indicate an unhealthy and unsustainable environment, with employees experiencing change fatigue and hopelessness about improvement. This had a significant impact on all study participants, but also sometimes resulted in empathy towards coworkers. The study underscores the need for more education, awareness, and training on bullying behaviours and their management, or even a specific policy to address such acts. It also suggests the necessity for interpersonal sensitivity training or communication strategies for change projects (discussed in Chapter 7 - Recommendations).

In Chapter 2, a study by Daniels et al. (2021) was referenced, regarding potential interventions to enhance workplace health and well-being. It is revisited here due to its comprehensive academic perspective on workplace bullying. The study reveals that workplace bullying resolution should extend beyond incidents to include their management, the effectiveness of interventions, and the roles involved. The increase in workplace bullying, replacing the previous organisational culture, reflects broader organisational problems and cultural responses to economic downturns.

Another potential mitigation would have been according to Yamada & Duffy (2018) employing external change management consultants to mediate and improve bullying practices. However, Boulet's (2021) research in management consulting firms (law firms and banking were also included), claims an even higher prevalence of workplace bullying in the very industry where change managers are employed. The author's findings indicate that these industries exhibit the highest rates of workplace bullying within the private sector. Specific examples include:

1. Assuming that employees who are ill are feigning their sickness,
2. Ignoring leadership issues, and lacking leadership confidentiality and accountability,
3. Failure to implement or adhere to effective policies, or exclusionary practices,
4. Exploiting economic crises, such as recessions, to eliminate victims,
5. Conducting poorly executed or "sham" incident investigations, implementing poor or unfair disciplinary measures, retaliating against and defaming employees, and stigmatising victims,
6. Creating a negative environment where employees are set up to fail and have no control over their performance, thereby coercing them to resign, and requiring them to sign non-disclosure agreements with "hush" money as a reward, and
7. Refusing to provide work references or deliberately giving poor references.

The sole plausible mitigation conclusion to be drawn from this change project to improved workplace health and well-being, reducing and continuously managing incidents of bullying, and preventing its occurrence, is that the organisation would have needed to implement a comprehensive intervention strategy, similar to that suggested by Daniels et al. (2021), for the company as a whole. This as previously mentioned in Chapter 2 includes primary, secondary, and tertiary interventions at all levels. However, this was not possible during the economic downturn because of the urgency of the change projects, and the need to cost cut. This means that for anti-bullying interventions or even policies to be effective during an economic downturn, and in change projects, these need to be supported externally by Trade Union representation, Ombudsman, and Legal Arbitration which according to Yamada & Duffy (2018) should be responsible for strongly enforcing anti-bullying laws, and holding offenders legally responsible, which is commented on in Chapter 7.

Limitations of the research

This section of Chapter 6 examines the limitations of the research, specifically addressing policy documents, participant anonymity and confidentiality, sample size, interview duration and the selection of a qualitative approach over a quantitative case study.

Policy Documents: A major limitation of this study was restricted access to policy documents due to the company's legal and privacy clauses, as detailed in Chapter 4. Although permission to publish the documents was not granted, they were reviewed on-site, notes were taken to inform interviews, and small, uncited extracts were referenced, as shown in Chapter 4.

Confidentiality and Anonymity: Another limitation was the challenge of ensuring confidentiality and anonymity, as HR provided a participant list. This was mitigated by a) maintaining anonymity among participants, b) allowing participants to decline the interview, and c) permitting referrals, with new participants also able to decline. Consequently, HR could not determine who participated.

Sample Size: The literature review indicates that many studies employ quantitative research with larger samples using the negative acts questionnaire. Conversely, this study's sample size of twenty interviewees may be viewed as a limitation. As noted in Chapter 3, Crowe, Cresswell, & Robertson et al. (2011, p.7) caution against collecting excessive data, emphasizing the importance of allocating sufficient time for data processing and analysis. Although the process of reviewing the data, refining the methods, analysing themes, and structuring the findings was time-consuming and iterative, this approach is inherent to a case study. On the positive side, this iterative process facilitated substantial refinement, providing opportunities to revisit and enhance the analysis, thereby ensuring a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the findings.

This constitutes a strength, as despite the research being situated within the Faculty of Health, Social Care and Education, the findings are transdisciplinary and would also apply to business and management science practice and research.

Although a larger sample size could critique this study, sufficient quantitative research already exists in the field. This study aimed to explore the lived experiences of bullying within its natural context, as discussed in Chapter 3, through the perspectives of victims, witnesses, and observers. The organisational context also influenced the sample size, as access to many participants, especially during a change project, was not feasible. The study focused on obtaining rich narrative data on workplace bullying and its impacts on employees. This depth of data is crucial for meaningful interpretations and designing effective, real-world solutions in my professional practice, affecting thousands of employees. This DProf holds significance for both me and the organisations where I implement change projects, providing me with the

credibility to make impactful recommendations in designing change frameworks, projects, practices, and policies, many of which I have already developed. It is important to note that qualitative studies with small sample sizes are not intended for generalisability. Some participants volunteered, potentially introducing selection bias, as dissatisfied employees might have been more inclined to participate than their more satisfied counterparts.

Interview Duration: The duration of the interviews was sometimes restricted. The cathartic nature led participants to occasionally exceed the planned one-hour timescale. Additional time was allocated, but participants often couldn't extend beyond an hour due to work commitments. Consequently, sometimes topics, such as their experiences of bullying after being given the definition, couldn't be explored in depth. This section was near the end of the interview, after which we discussed their awareness of policies and procedures, their likelihood of using them in bullying cases, and their views on managing and improving bullying incidents. This part was rushed because we spent excessive time on the initial interview section, examining relationships and behaviours in this and previous change projects during the recession and austerity.

Qualitative vs Quantitative: A limitation in the design strategy is that opting for qualitative over quantitative methods prevented comparisons with a larger participant group. Additionally, I did not gather data before the economic downturn or other change projects, and HR had no prior records of bullying incidents, making it impossible to compare pre-project incidents. Even if available, access to such data would be restricted due to privacy concerns. Therefore, drawing conclusions from a single-point-in-time interview is challenging. The themes identified do not illustrate distinct events but suggest an escalation of bullying visibility due to the project. The data cannot establish causality, as there is no comparative or longitudinal data to support the suggested sequence of events.

Validity and Transferability: The limitations of this research should be assessed in terms of its viability, transferability, and overall findings, considering future research implications. The research must be relevant to the communities of practice it examines, with the insider researcher providing a rigorous critique to offer practical recommendations. This dual role situates their work within the research context, facilitating a discovery process that may lead to improved practices and methodologies.

Merriam (2002) suggests that qualitative research aims to interpret events rather than generalise findings. Qualitative research and the phenomena it investigates, by their very nature, are not always amenable to replication as the real-world changes (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1998); therefore, the interpretation is unique, time- and context-bound, which renders the debate of reliability and generalisability irrelevant (Easton, McComish, & Greenberg, 2000). Conversely, internal validity and authenticity are the primary

focus, as the findings need to be congruent with reality (Merriam, 2002), which this study has demonstrated.

The data collected in 2015 has undergone years of analysis and writing, with significant progress made by 2022. For some professional doctorates, this delay could mean missing the critical period of relevance, rendering time-specific research redundant. This required reassessing the research's relevance, considering the post-pandemic economic impact, and evaluating the results' transferability for future studies and practice-based recommendations. Examining the topic's relevance to the professional sphere amidst economic fluctuations highlights a key strength of this research. The recommendations are universally applicable, not just during transitions from recession to austerity. With forecasts of another recession, post-pandemic effects, increases in resignations favouring contracts with hybrid and remote work, and a heightened focus on mental well-being, this research is increasingly pertinent to business transformation management. Companies face more complex demands, making employee's professional experiences a significant scholarly interest.

Conclusion

This chapter presents a critical analysis of the study's findings about each theme and the literature reviewed in Chapter 2. It addresses the research question, confirming that organisational change during periods of economic uncertainty contributes leads to workplace bullying due to increased stress, deteriorated interpersonal relationships, and reduced workplace civility. Theme 1 demonstrates that change initiatives during economic downturns negatively impact job security, employee well-being, and workplace relationships. Theme 2 indicates an increase in bullying behaviours by those in positions of authority and among peers. Theme 3 reveals that the management of bullying incidents was inadequate. Reflections on the study's limitations and potential areas for further research are also provided. This analysis leads to Chapter 7, which examines how these findings compare to more recent research on the workplace bullying phenomenon. It also incorporates research on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. This is followed by recommendations for future action by stakeholders to manage incidents of workplace bullying both proactively and reactively.

Chapter Seven, Recommendations, Reflections, and Conclusions

Introduction

This final chapter is structured to commence with the study's aims and research objectives as presented in Chapter 1, serving to remind the reader of the study's purpose. This is followed by the section entitled 'What did I find', which demonstrates how the objectives from Chapter 1 have been addressed within each theme. This section addresses the research objectives and questions, grounding the responses within each of the emergent themes discussed in the previous chapter. Subsequently, recent advances in the field of management sciences regarding workplace bullying are discussed, along with legal developments that further support the study's recommendations for stakeholders. The chapter concludes with reflections on the research experience and provides conclusions.

'Why this study?' - To remind the reader, the Research Questions were:

1. How does organisational change during an uncertain economic climate lead to workplace bullying?
2. How are stress and interpersonal relationships impacted in this process?

The Research Aims and Objectives to address this were as follows:

1. To explore the role of stress during a change project in an uncertain economic climate on well-being and interpersonal relationships, and to uncover the interpersonal relationship patterns that gave rise to workplace bullying.
2. To examine employee views of what constitutes workplace bullying, if they had experienced or witnessed it, whether they felt it had occurred due to/or had increased because of the change project, and whether the uncertain economic climate due to austerity affected this. To discover the occurrence and nature of workplace bullying according to HR, line managers, and employees.
3. To explore, among those who had experienced or witnessed bullying, how it was dealt with and if they felt it was managed effectively by line managers or HR. To explore the existence, knowledge, and perceived efficacy of policy documentation or written guidance regarding workplace bullying according to HR, line managers and employees, and assess their views on whether these are sufficient to address the unique challenges of change programmes and workplace bullying.

'What did I find?' - Addressing the research questions and objectives

The study found that workplace bullying is an escalating process. However, the qualitative research, based on one-time interviews, cannot definitively establish causation. This

limitation suggests future research should utilise longitudinal studies. Despite this, participant interviews indicated that the change project and the pressure of its implementation during the economic downturn led to workplace bullying through an escalation process.

Theme 1 revealed that starting a change project during an economic downturn led to workplace bullying due to several factors. The downturn's widespread cuts reduced job availability, creating a competitive market with limited resources and control over roles. This situation led to redundancies, directly impacting participants job security and roles, with no job retention assurances. Additionally, redundancies and job shifts increased workloads and limited task management control, heightening stress and anxiety, and decreasing employee well-being. These factors combined adversely affected workplace relationships, reducing civility behaviours.

Theme 2 highlighted the rise of workplace bullying across different hierarchical levels during the organisation's change project. Authoritarian bullying was exercised by management, supervisors, and senior employees who abused their power to target subordinates and new members. Affected employees faced restrictive rules, punitive measures, and unattainable performance targets, along with unfair selection criteria for roles, incentives, and performance management in the change project. Bullying extended beyond directly affected teams, with supervisors using it to marginalise and disempower targets. Peer bullying also occurred within and between teams, with established teams exerting power over new teams, mirroring organisational and managerial bullying. This negatively impacted new teams' roles, tasks, and performance, forcing them to redo tasks and hindering their ability to meet deadlines and objectives.

Theme 3 highlighted the ineffectiveness of current policies and procedures in managing workplace bullying. Even when bullying was addressed, measures were insufficient to prevent its recurrence. The study identified a lack of preparedness and adaptability in the organisational and management culture to handle extensive business transformation changes effectively. Consequently, management and HR were ill-equipped to manage workplace bullying incidents. Existing policies provided inadequate guidance for equitable bullying management, reinforcing a culture that tolerated toxic practices, thereby compromising employee well-being.

Advances in the Management of Workplace Bullying and Legal Considerations

Advances in Human Resources

Chapter 2 highlighted recent advancements in managing workplace bullying from a Human Resources perspective, citing examples from Patagonia, Coca-Cola, and Samsung. Chapter 6 emphasised the need for further efforts in education, awareness, and training to address

bullying behaviours and responses. The focus will now shift to recent progress in Human Resources, which will provide the context for subsequent recommendations, aligning with emerging trends to suggest plausible practice-based future developments.

DeCenz & Verhulst (2021) used Coca-Cola as a case study to analyse its working environment, culture, and core values about global operations, strategy implementation, technological changes, remote work, downsizing, mergers, shared services centres, offshoring, and continuous change programmes. They aimed to understand the impact of operating in diverse cultural environments, ethics, and employee rights, and to assess the effects on employee health and well-being within the current global economy. This was compared to Patagonia, an ethical outdoor company prioritizing people and the environment, with a focus on health and work-life balance within its business strategy. The study found that companies with values similar to Patagonia's are becoming more attractive employers, embedding change deeply in their core values and ethics, unlike those prioritizing profitability at any cost. While not specifically addressing workplace bullying, the research offers insights into desirable emerging organisational cultures. They compared this to environments with higher incidents of bullying, harassment, and discrimination in Coca-Cola operational countries prioritising profitability over people-centric needs. The authors argue that beyond the economic environment, globalisation, technological innovation challenges, and the pandemic, increased workplace stress, violence, and bullying stem from the heightened task, role, and interpersonal demands on employees, coupled with organisational and leadership structures that contribute significantly to employee stress and experiences of incivility and bullying.

Although this research was conducted following the 2008 financial crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic has precipitated a new era of economic uncertainty, which continues to influence the current post-pandemic economic landscape. DeCenz & Verhulst (2021) corroborate this observation, examining how contemporary workplace practices amidst economic uncertainty and pandemic-induced stress have fostered dysfunctional organisational cultures, negatively impacting health, well-being, and increasing instances of workplace bullying.

A study by Mendonca et al. (2021) across various Asian cultures supports this research's findings. It revealed that many participants observed workplace bullying, described as the "bystander effect" (Boulet, 2021, p.9). Similar to this study, these organisations lacked explicit anti-bullying policies or did not enforce existing ones. Participants believed these policies failed to serve productivity objectives, making the management of reported bullying incidents "ineffectual and unsatisfactory" (Mendonca et al., 2021, p.286). The study also found a positive correlation between toxic leadership, job insecurity, and workplace bullying, leading to "victim or observer cognitive dissonance" (Mendonca et al., 2021, p.130), which reduced the likelihood of reporting bullying incidents. From a legal standpoint, current studies have started to investigate methods for enhancing legal protection against workplace bullying.

Legal Considerations

Akella's (2020) study on workplace bullying from ethical and legal perspectives involved interviewing employees, peers, managers, and administrators across private, non-profit, health, academic, and public sectors. The research reviewed laws from Australia, New Zealand, Africa, the Middle East, the USA, Canada, Asia, Europe, and the UK to advocate for more humane workplace practices. Their research uses a different approach and,

...questions the status quo associated with a capitalist economic system, deviating from a functionalist perspective that has been so far affiliated with workplace bullying research, using a range of theoretical frameworks, particularly critical realism, critical theory, labour process theory, and poststructuralism to analyse as societal constructs like profit imperatives, power, and control, entrenched in a capitalistic society ... (Akella. 2020, p.4).

This study posits that workplace bullying stems from entrenched micropolitical power relations within organisations, shaped by broader societal institutional frameworks of dominion and control, and subsequently embedded in various organisational contexts. It also suggests that the unequal power balance between labour and management leads management to use control mechanisms, such as workplace bullying, to maximise profitability and employee productivity. These power and hegemonic dynamics explain how workplace bullying functions as a control measure and why certain organisational practices and norms are endorsed and encouraged. Consequently, management and organisations may breach ethical boundaries to achieve objectives, often incentivising such behaviours with significant financial rewards, as demonstrated by the bonuses given to bankers during the recession, despite their role in the economic crisis.

Bratton & Bratton (2021) argue that to truly capture the essence of contemporary human resource management, organisations must consider the impacts of the recession, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the evolving world of work, within the context of "the fourth industrial revolution" (Bratton & Bratton, 2021, p.172). They suggest reimagining human resource management in post-pandemic capitalism, by learning from past events like the 2008 recession, to address workplace wellness declines. This involves critiquing HR practices and corporate strategies, and re-evaluating organisational dynamics such as job and work design, workforce planning, diversity, outsourcing, offshoring, downsizing, the balance between economics and ethics, workplace safety, performance, reward management, individualism, learning, leadership development, and coaching. They highlight that both external and internal factors in a globalised capitalistic economy have led employees to feel "expendable" (Bratton & Bratton, 2021, p.392). Their research on employment relationship management post-recession and post-pandemic, and the impact of disruptive organisational change,

reveals increasing employee grievances, including workplace bullying, due to negative impacts on employee relations and outdated conflict and disciplinary procedures. They argue for stronger legal measures to address declining workplace mental health, attributed to bullying. They conclude that the "indirect employee voice" (Bratton & Bratton, 2021, p.310) is increasingly emphasising health, safety, wellness, and economic, legal, psychological, and ethical considerations in contemporary labour relations.

DeCenzo & Verhulst (2021) also provide empirical examples of the current and emerging issues in contemporary human resource management, particularly in the legal and ethical context concerning occupational safety and labour relations, as well as managing health and safety risks given present workforce challenges. Although their book is intended for students of the subject and was not initially written with the COVID-19 pandemic in consideration, subsequent updates were necessitated in which they also addressed the pandemic's implications. The authors solicited insights from HR professionals regarding the authentic HR experience, specifically how policies and practices are adapting, not solely due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but also because of ethical issues that are, as a result of the pandemic, receiving increasingly prominent coverage, such as workplace violence and bullying. They specifically inquired about conflict resolution and grievance techniques adopted by the HR professionals and organisations, and how this differed from unionised and international labour law (DeCenzo, & Verhulst, 2021). The conclusion they reached was that workforce practices need to be modified at the employment contract level as part of labour law.

This phenomenon warrants further study, especially given Matthiesen (2006) and Mikkelsen & Einarsen's (2003) findings that organisational change often leads to diminished trust and employee commitment due to perceived breaches in the psychological contract.

The prevalence of thought leadership addressing phenomena such as COVID-19 pandemic-induced increases in attrition, resignations and trials of reduced working hours, is evident in contemporary media. These discussions reflect a post-pandemic shift in employee expectations, with an increased demand for healthier workplace practices and a preference for organisations whose ethos and corporate cultures promote occupational health and well-being. A significant divergence of opinion exists among prominent CEOs on this matter. For instance, the Chief Executive of Tesla and Twitter, Elon Musk, has publicly advocated for implementing more stringent termination practices, as reported in various news publications, for employees seeking modifications to their employment contracts. This phenomenon aligns with recent observations in my professional sphere, both during and following the pandemic.

Why Are Advancements in HR and Legal Relevant to This Research?

As a management consultant specialising in change and business transformation, post-pandemic I have observed large multinational clients facing mass talent attrition, despite offering high retention remunerations. Skilled talent increasingly defects to organisations with better working cultures, affecting a company's profitability margins. For example, during the pandemic, I assisted clients in transitioning to remote work and am currently developing flexible employment contract models incorporating hybrid/remote work to retain and attract talent.

DeCenzo & Verhulst (2021) support this perspective by examining labour demands and supply at large multinational corporations like Samsung and McDonald's. Their findings raised fundamental questions about the ethical issues of sourcing new labour and their requirements. They focused on employee relations in a global environment of evolving workplace needs, examining areas that may need shifts toward more favourable working practices regarding employee rights and relations, in a post-recession and post-pandemic world. They analysed policies such as performance management, economic pressures, affirmative action, contract compliance, legal arbitration, diversity, job attractiveness, compensation, and equal pay. Further, they examined organisational and job bias, talent management, ethics in recruitment, internal policies, wrongful discharge, the implied employee contract, statutory considerations, public policy violations, and court settlements. One outcome they cite is Thomas Friedman's book "The World is Flat" (2021, p.394), which argues that globalisation has significantly affected work and the economy, allowing employees to compete globally regardless of origin. This shift will lead to a more diverse business environment and a geographic shift in labour supply and demand. Consequently, companies must undergo HR transformation to attract and retain young talent in the future.

Friedman (in DeCenzo & Verhulst, 2021) hypothesises that globalisation has already started to shift demand to Asian, African, and Latin American countries, and this will increase because diverse workforces value employment relationships, work-life balance and altruistic societal cultures, compared to the individualistic and capitalist cultures of Europe and the USA. In my assessment of multinational clients' workforces, I observed this occurring more and more frequently. This shift highlights the increasing importance of company values, ethics, labour relations, employee rights, culture, health and safety, regulation, and legal systems, requiring organisations to adapt if they want to attract and retain talent. Boulet (2021) concurs, stating that toxic workplaces must be eradicated and employers (given the risks they are facing) need to foster positive workplace cultures and investigate negative actions, with legal redress available if necessary.

Corney's (2008) research reveals that workplace bullying remains unnoticed or underestimated because it fosters reverse ontological security, institutionalised through routine practices, particularly in the private sector. Cruz & Noronha (2012) found that employees depersonalised bullying via institutional work regimes; managers used HR performance models to victimize employees, who saw these as normal practices. Recent studies highlight the urgent need to address these issues fundamentally within labour law (Huitsing, Veenstra, Sainio, & Salmivalli, 2012a) and reform harmful institutional practices that affect employees and organisational productivity and profitability. Harrington & Rayner (2009) propose a framework that views the work environment as a series of interconnected societal layers. They argue that in practice-oriented settings, developing such a model can aid in identifying key areas for intervention strategies. This approach can serve as an educational tool to demonstrate the various immediate and distant factors that contribute to workplace bullying.

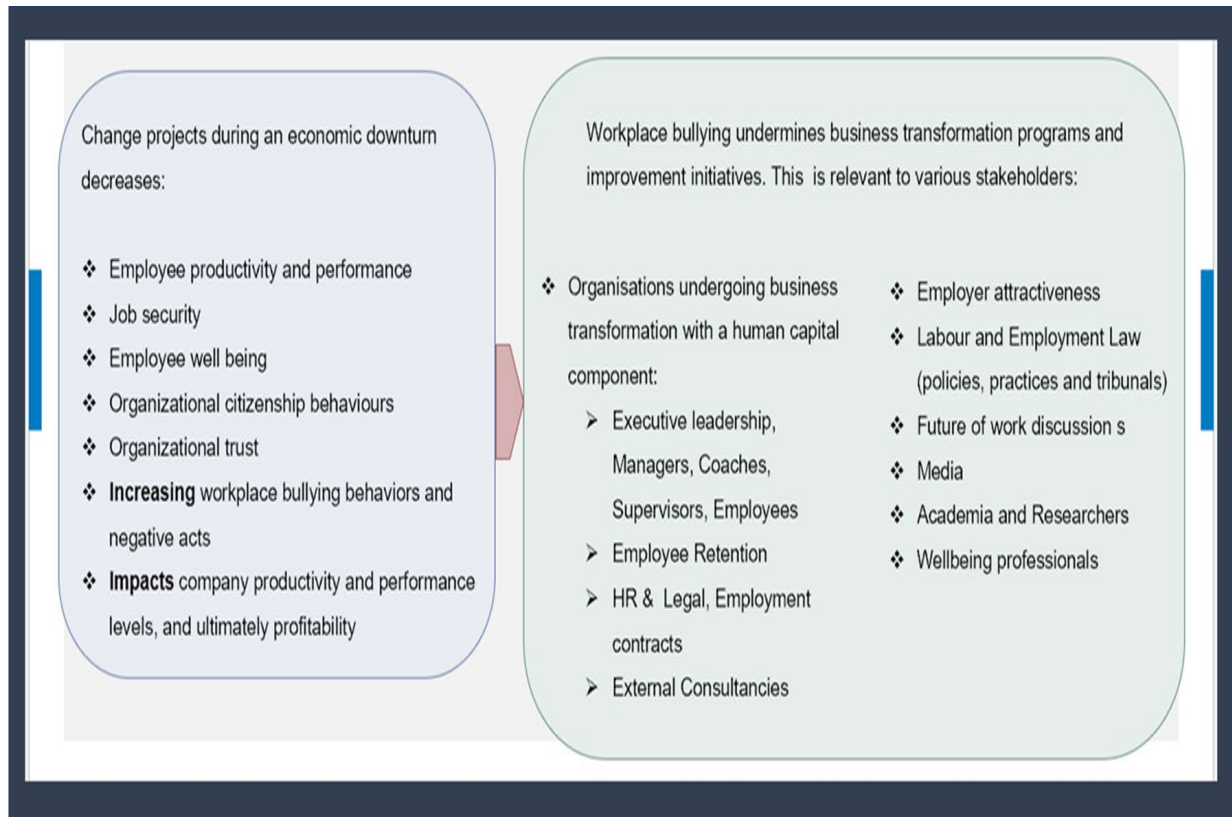
Recommendations

Before presenting the recommendations, it is essential to elucidate that the aforementioned new literature is pertinent to the study's findings and corroborates the recommendations for enhanced bullying management. Notwithstanding the additional support provided by the new literature regarding the field's trajectory, it should be noted that the recommendations for stakeholders are not predicated on this information. Rather, these recommendations are derived from the study's findings, which have been synthesised with my professional experience to formulate proposals that are both empirically and experientially informed, feasible, and implementable. These recommendations aim to facilitate the effective application of the findings in practical, real-world contexts,

1. For governments and legal practitioners: Revision and development of the below-mentioned set of proposals at the legislative, organisational, and training levels, and
2. For corporations undertaking business transformation initiatives: At the organisational level, these should be formulated into a comprehensive framework policy with processes and procedures implemented to facilitate their efficacy in practice-based environments.

Implementing ethical corporate citizenship practices toward employees is essential, ensuring respect and dignity in conduct without exploiting individuals for economic gain. This study highlights the need for comprehensive reforms in legislative, constitutional, arbitral, and organisational frameworks to enhance employee well-being, and as an effective talent management approach. Such strategies create a positive work environment and protect company productivity and profit margins from declines due to an overworked, demoralised workforce.

Figure 2 - Relevance of study findings to all stakeholders

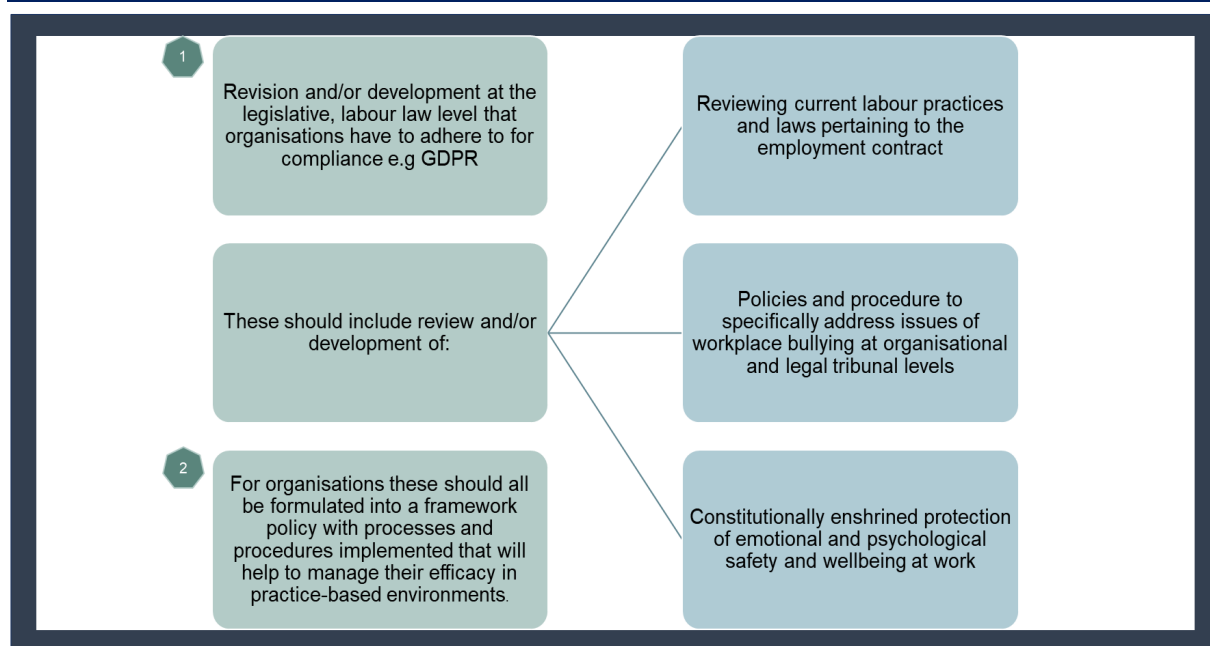


Study recommendations therefore call for the review and development of,

- Current labour practices and laws about the employment contract,
- Policies and procedures to specifically address issues of workplace bullying at organisational and legal tribunal levels,
- Constitutionally enshrined protection of emotional and psychological safety and well-being at work,
- Co-operation with employee representation bodies like trade unions to protect employee mental well-being and provide clear and effective interventions against workplace bullying practices,
- Change programmes to be run independently by change professionals to remove the emotive negative consequences of the transformation itself and to ensure fair workplace practice and easier transition into new ways of working,
- More training and awareness for all levels (management, HR, and employees alike) of workplace bullying,
- Specific leadership and HR coaching and development in conflict management, and

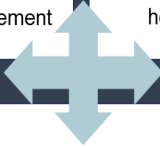
- Improved communication strategies when managing business transformation that are honest and transparent and make the employee feel engaged and part of the journey, and which cuts out negative speculative guesswork about job insecurity, and
- Employee surveys, to include mechanisms for employees to feedback on policies anonymously. In the change management field, this is done using change adoption and pulse surveys as a process to collect feedback. The results are used to address areas that require management accountability and intervention.

Figure 3 - Practice-based implementation recommendations for stakeholders



3

For organisations going through transformation investment in external change consultancies with agents designing structured change programs focused on employee engagement, wellbeing and retention:

- | | |
|--|--|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Role players, and benefits clearly articulated and supported by Executive Leadership teams ❖ Robust, timely transparent, multi-level communication strategies that remove noise out of the ecosystem ❖ Leadership and HR coaching and development into Bullying Management | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Ways of Working frameworks with step guides on the transformation evolution ❖ Persona journey mapping workshops ❖ Performance measures tied to change health surveys |
|  | |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Whistle blowing for workplace bullying practices for effective detection, management and remedial action or penalisation for repeat offenders ❖ Fair labour practices, healthy corporate citizenship behaviours rewards ❖ Labour relations refresher training and awareness for all levels (management, HR, employees) of workplace bullying | |

These recommendations are relevant for practice-based business transformation programmes where there is a people impact and need to mitigate negative consequences of such programmes, to protect employee well-being and retention, and any risk to company profitability. As Needham (2019) has discovered, workplace bullying is a costly business phenomenon for the organisation financially and the employees psychologically affected by change programmes. This leads me to my next section, where I reflect on my experience of this research.

Reflections on the Research Experience

Chapter 1 elucidated the rationale for this research and its connection to my interest in the relationship between economic and organisational changes and workplace bullying. This encompassed the motivation for conducting this study and the factors that led to this topic, including observations from professional practice, to elucidate the focus on bullying for this research. The present chapter concentrates on my personal journey through the case study and research process. This will provide a comprehensive link between the rationale presented in Chapter 1, incorporating the personal effect of the process as an insider researcher conducting the study in Chapter 4 and the emotions elicited in the Findings in Chapter 5, further substantiating the Recommendations in Chapter 7.

A key observation from the research was that the participants I interviewed seemed to have low morale. Overall, when I reflect on the interviews there was a clear sense of employee

disempowerment and low morale. After the interviews, while some participants seemed to feel a sense of relief from having the opportunity to openly discuss their experiences and grievances, they were nonetheless required to return to their daily roles. There, they had to process the negative emotions and perceptions about the organisation and their work environment that had been shared during the interview, all while continuing to perform under those same challenging conditions. As a result, it was difficult to conclude the interviews on a more positive note. Participants were provided with the contact information of an organisation (furnished by their company) and an external party they could contact if they required support to address issues discussed during the interview. Upon participant's departure, observations included indications of disempowerment, lack of financial control, limited opportunities, reduced emotional well-being, stress, negative workplace perceptions, perceived mistreatment, and powerlessness. The participants appeared to feel constrained by the economic downturn, with minimal job satisfaction. This apparent sense of entrapment significantly impacted me and remains a notable observation. Furthermore, the inability to assist the participants highlighted personal subjectivity, which paradoxically served as inspiration for the research.

To address subjectivity in interview design, pilots, and analysis, this study utilised Kolb's (1984) four-stage experiential learning model: experience (doing), reflective observation (reviewing), conceptualisation (learning), and active experimentation (applying knowledge). Initial interviews were drafted, piloted, observed for effectiveness, and refined with supervisors' feedback. This iterative process enabled continuous learning and application. Theme development similarly involved reflection, learning, and adjustments, resulting in a final list of themes. Moon (1999) advised considering the question's aim, the issue being explored, and contextual factors. The study assessed the significance of participant descriptions, emotional responses, and implications of experiences. It also examined the issue's relevance to other contexts and considered my emotional reactions to participant narratives, noting that emotionally resonant interviews were more memorable. When compiling the report and selecting data excerpts to illustrate themes, it was essential to balance these accounts with those of other participants to avoid subjective bias. The research strictly adhered to the phenomenological principle of bracketing. Transitioning to an insider practitioner researcher required unlearning key aspects of my professional practice, although complete disengagement from years of experience was impossible. This duality acts as both an advantage and a potential constraint in insider research. My insider perspective necessitated constant vigilance against unconscious bias, managed through supervisory consultations and mitigated in the research design, analysis, and documentation. This challenge involved separating professional knowledge to ensure scientifically rigorous research while translating findings into significant professional applications.

Conducting insider practitioner research led to an unexpectedly tumultuous emotional experience. Numerous times, abandoning the research was considered due to significant life events and professional duties. The DProf research was intricate, revealing various professional and personal traumas. As a change practitioner investigating bullying while experiencing it in change projects and navigating mid-adulthood events, substantial well-being challenges were faced. Fortunately, supportive supervisors provided guidance, helping harness this knowledge. Their support was crucial in engaging with the complexities and uncertainties of the DProf, critically examining professional assumptions, and staying open to multiple interpretations. Despite this support, significant discomfort was experienced in data interpretation and resolving workplace bullying. A key realisation was that experiencing uncertainty was integral to the research, indicating a shift from established knowledge to ambiguity and multiple interpretations. This introspective analysis reflects my experiences and personal growth amid challenging circumstances in a profession marked by adverse organisational cultures and significant emotional demands.

The DProf prompted an examination of the psychological dynamics in the research, impacting individuals involved and those responsible. It demanded self-reflection and literature review on adverse work environments. Addressing these challenges during the DProf allowed engagement in a parallel process with participants, confronting harmful corporate practices and finding ways to avoid them. Empathetic understanding of their experiences helped align my change management practices with the study's findings, necessitating a shift in direction and experimentation with innovative methods. This overcame unconscious biases when collaborating with stakeholders. Prioritising learning over judgement increased self-awareness and agency, enabling stronger advocacy against unfair practices like workplace bullying in change projects.

My empathy, informed by the participant's vulnerability and personal experiences, facilitated a more nuanced approach to conducting interviews, transcending mere clinical data collection. This empathetic methodology proved essential, given that the subject matter extended beyond professional domains. During the ethics approval process, this concern was addressed by providing contact information for support organisations, both internal and external, for participants who might require emotional and psychological assistance due to potentially distressing recollections of workplace bullying trauma.

Conclusion

Through this DProf, I learned to integrate myself authentically into my work instead of maintaining a facade of neutral expertise. I developed a deeper understanding of workplace bullying origins during economic instability. I now approach change programmes with greater caution and deliberation when designing impactful alterations. This experience has enhanced my ability to navigate complex narratives within multidisciplinary teams. It underscored the importance of institutional knowledge and effectively engaging employees during change projects. I gained insights into considering the competence and sensitivity of participants and managers and designing interventions that promote constructive discourse and positive engagement. This learning is consistently applied in my professional practice when designing business transformation initiatives.

This research offers valuable insights into transformational and empowering leadership styles compared to transactional task-related leadership and change agency amid evolving work environments, particularly in turbulent economies and their effects on employees in change projects. This knowledge has been applied effectively in professional projects, such as a recent role as the principal change manager for a major global automotive manufacturer outsourcing its entire IT operations, including employee transfers. Lessons from this research shaped the change programme's structure, incorporating recommendations for future practice. Employees were fully informed of the changes, their timing, and potential impacts on employment status, including employment relationships, contracts, roles, job profiles, and opportunities with the new employer. Although the process faced challenges, as change often does, transparency, openness, and structure aided employees in managing their transitions and personal experiences. This approach reduced ambiguity and, through regular feedback sessions, webinars, technology and cultural awareness training, and information sessions, improved employee engagement. Consequently, the workforce's business and personal change readiness and appetite were enhanced.

In my recommendations, I have previously addressed the strategies for directly influencing stakeholders who are most immediately affected by organisational change projects. Within my immediate professional environment, this is accomplished through the frameworks and recommendations I have outlined. I have already implemented this approach in the design of my change intervention programmes by incorporating strategic and tactical plans to mitigate change resistance in programme planning and by ensuring leadership and employee engagement that transforms resistance into change advocacy.

This research has expanded the scope of professional development opportunities, particularly concerning the dissemination of scholarly work. The conventional method of dissemination remains publication in academic journals. However, to maximise the impact of one's research,

it is essential to establish connections with leading scholars in the field. One potential avenue for engagement beyond the immediate work environment is the International Association on Workplace Bullying and Harassment, which organises an annual international conference and regular seminars featuring prominent scholars in this field. Participation in these events has been ongoing, and many of the researchers who lead this organisation are cited in the present study. Upon completion of this DProf, the intention is to request panel guest attendance to present the research findings.

The Workplace Bullying Institute, an organisation led by experts who write thought leadership articles and collaborate on research and training for employers and labour unions, presents a promising area for applying my extensive consultancy experience. Numerous organisations and institutions are advocating for legislative advancements in this field across various countries. Additionally, there is potential to co-author a paper with my supervisors or pursue postdoctoral work to further research workplace bullying in change projects, considering recent developments in HR and labour law practices and legislation. The opportunities are abundant and promising, as collective awareness shifts toward more ethical and humane workplace practices, and as corporations recognise the positive impact on their profitability.

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Appendix 1 - Interview Schedules

Appendix 1 a - Employee and Manager Interview Schedule

Interviewer, Tasneem Wadee Interviewee, insert **NAME**.

What is your role, and how long have you been with the organisation?

Change Project

Current Change Project and Recession and Workplace Relations

1. What affect do you think the change project (**replace with project name**) has had on you?
(insert participant response)

a. **IF** unclear from above - How does it make you feel, impact on your responsibilities, or workload? (insert participant response)

1. Prompt for anxiety and stress **IF** it does not come up - What influence do you think this project has had on your anxiety and stress levels? (insert participant response)

2. **For those IN the project** - How do you feel about the changes (for example, the resource / recruitment / pay cuts and freeze), and being involved in making it happen? (insert participant response)

For those NOT IN the project - How do you feel about the changes (for example, the resource / recruitment / pay cuts and freeze), and **not being involved** in making it happen?
(insert participant response)

3. What influence do you think the economic climate / recession has had on the way you feel, your workload, responsibilities, stress levels, relationships? (insert participant response)

2. **IF unclear from above then ask** - How is this different compared to before the recession? (insert participant response)

Previous Change Project (after recession) versus Current Change Project

You have spoken of the impact of the current organisational changes. I want to focus now on how this compares to previous change projects, at any point during the changing economic climate for example, any stage during the recession, i.e. before, when it was at its height or after

1. What is different between how this change project has affected the way you feel compared to a previous change project? (insert participant response)

3. Prompt - *For example*, the impact it has had on your stress levels, workload or responsibilities, or relationships? (insert participant response)

3. Do you feel the economic climate has had any influence (on any differences between the current and previous projects)? (insert participant response)

4. Has making organisational changes during a recession affected any group or levels differently than others? *For example*, people working on the project compared to everyone else or employees versus managers. (insert participant response)

Earlier you spoke of how the current changes, and being directly involved **OR** not being involved in them, make you feel,

- Given your knowledge of the details of the changes **OR** lack of knowledge of the details of the changes, how do you feel about the fact that the changes are happening whilst the economic climate is in austerity? (insert participant response)

4. **IF not covered above** – Would you feel differently if it happened after austerity when the economic climate is more stable? (insert participant response)

Bullying

Earlier we discussed how the change project has impacted on you at work, I want to move on and talk about interpersonal relationships and focus specifically on any problems in this area.

1. How has this project impacted your relationships at work? **OR** What changes have you noticed in your relationships at work? (insert participant response)

- Prompt IF not covered above – What changes have you noticed? What was it like before the recession? (insert participant response)

3. How have the current changes influenced any relationship conflicts or unpleasant behaviours between people (for example, repeatedly negatively affecting someone's work, being given tasks of unreasonable or impossible targets or deadlines, or an unmanageable workload, being ordered to do work below ones level of competence, being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with ones work, persistent criticism, excessive monitoring, hints that someone should quit their job, Issues of bullying, harassment or victimisation)? (insert participant response)

- Probe - How does this compare to any other change projects since the recession? (insert participant response)

2. Have you ever personally experienced, or witnessed or heard of someone else experiencing any bullying, any of the behaviours I mentioned, harassment or victimisation at work? (insert participant response)

If yes to Q3 - go to Q3.1, If No - go to Q3.2

3.1 Can you think of a RECENT specific example of bullying, or any other type of negative behaviour for e.g. being repeatedly subjected to excessive sarcasm, offended, or socially excluded, or any other type of harassment or victimisation and describe what happened?

(Pause to let them think) (insert participant response)

5. Probe –Who was involved? (insert participant response)

6. Probe (with an appropriate question from this list) - Who helped? How did this affect you OR people (attitudes, relationships, work)? What about the consequences for others? (insert participant response)

3.1.1 - Was it reported or resolved? (insert participant response)

If **yes**, please tell me about this. If **No** - Why do you think it was not reported or resolved? (delete either the YES or the NO question and insert participant response)

Continue to 4, then move to definition.

If No

3.2 Can you think of a RECENT example of any other type of negative behaviours for e.g. being repeatedly subjected to excessive sarcasm, offended, or socially excluded, or any other type of and describe what happened?

(Pause to let them think) (insert participant response)

1. Probe (with an appropriate question from this list) – Who was involved? How did this affect you OR people (attitudes, relationships, work)? What about the consequences for others? (insert participant response)

3.2.1 - Was it reported or resolved? (insert participant response)

7. If **yes**, please tell me about this. If **No** - Why do you think it was not reported or resolved? (delete either the YES or the NO question and insert participant response)

If still NO – skip Q4, continue to Q5, Definition, Q6 etc.

For people who answered YES to Q3 above (proceed to Q4, Definition and Q6 etc).

3. Can you give me OTHER examples of what you think bullying is i.e. what kind of behaviours might be perceived as bullying? (insert participant response)

For people who answered NO to Q3 above

4. Can you give me examples of what you think bullying is I.E what kind of behaviours might be perceived as bullying? (insert participant response)

Definition ... Research has shown workplace bullying is (repeatedly and regularly harassing, offending, socially excluding or negatively affecting someone's work, over a period. Examples of acts include, Spreading of gossip and rumours about you, Being ignored or excluded and having your opinions and views ignored, hostile reaction when you approach, Practical jokes carried out by people you don't get on with, subjected to excessive teasing and sarcasm, Being shouted at or being the target of someone's anger, Intimidating behaviour such as invasion of personal space, blocking the way, Threats of violence or physical abuse or actual abuse. Someone withholding information which affects your performance, Being given tasks of unreasonable or impossible targets or deadlines, Being exposed to an unmanageable

workload, Being ordered to do work below your level of competence, Having key areas of responsibility removed or replaced with trivial or unpleasant tasks, Being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with your work, Repeated reminders of your errors, persistent criticism of your work and effort, Excessive monitoring, Pressure not to claim something you are entitled (e.g. sick leave, holidays), Hints that you should quit your job) ...

5. How do you feel about this definition, and how does it affect your view of whether you have experienced or heard of bullying taking place? (insert participant response)

If they said NO to Q3, and now change their minds, revisit 3.1 and 3.1.1 (and enter in their responses under these questions)

6. How has the frequency or nature of incidence, of relationship conflicts like bullying changed since the change project, and why? (insert participant response)

Management of Bullying (including managers) For people who answered YES to bullying in Q3 (bullying section) above - You have talked about incidences of bullying, who helped and what the outcome was, so I would now like to discuss how you feel bullying should be managed.

For people who answered NO to bullying in Q3 (bullying section) above - I would now like to discuss how you feel bullying should be managed (delete one of the above)

If manager interview starts with Q1, then continue to Q2, etc. If employee start with Q2

- As a line manager what is your experience of getting involved in resolving disputes? (insert participant response)
- For people who answered YES to bullying in Q3 above - What could have been done to resolve the issues? What worked well and what could have been done differently?

(insert participant response either under this question and the probe below OR the next question in blue with its probe)

- Probe - What should be done to prevent the same thing from happening again? (insert participant response)

For people who answered NO to bullying in Q3 above - What could be done to resolve issues of bullying?

(insert participant response either under this question and the probe below OR the previous question in blue above with its probe)

- Probe - What should be done to prevent this happening in the future? (insert participant response)

1. How familiar are you with the policies and procedures in place to manage relationship conflicts?
(insert participant response)

If they know continue with Q4, etc.

If they do not know *"The company policy is (a formal and recognised grievance procedure for employees to communicate any grievances to management to ensure the resolution of such grievances. A grievance is defined as any dissatisfaction or injustice which has been experienced by an employee, arising directly out of the work situation, and which is brought to the attention of management.) ..."*

2. How would you feel about using the policy compared to resolving things informally? (insert participant response)

3. What improvements can be made to help people that are undergoing organisational change and are experiencing interpersonal relationship conflicts (for e.g. issues of bullying, harassment, or victimisation)? (insert participant response)

Is there anything you would like to add before we end? Thank you for your time if there is anything you think of, please let me know. I will email a debrief of the research at the end of the interview. As our conversation is confidential, please do not discuss it or the research with anyone in your organisation until after the interviews are all completed.

Appendix 1 b - HR interview Schedule

Interviewer, Tasneem Wadee. Interviewee, insert **NAME**.

What is your role, and how long have you been with the organisation?

Change Project

Change Project and Recession and Workplace Relations

4. What affect do you think the current change project (*replace with project name*), and doing it during the current economic climate, has had on people? **(insert participant response)**
 - a. How does it make people feel, or impact on their workload, or relationships? **(insert participant response)**
8. Prompt for anxiety and stress **IF** it does not come up - What influence do you think this project has had on anxiety and stress levels? **(insert participant response)**
5. Has it affected any groups differently than others? For example, employees versus managers? **(insert participant response)**
3. Prompt - What impact do you think it has had on people working on the project compared to everyone else? **(insert participant response)**
6. How do the effects of this change project compare to the effects of previous change projects? **(insert participant response)**
4. Prompt - For example, how has it affected the way people feel, the impact it has had on stress levels, workload, responsibilities, or relationships? **(insert participant response)**
7. Do you feel the economic climate has had any influence on any differences between the current and previous projects? **(insert participant response)**

Bullying

Earlier we discussed how the change project has impacted on people. I want to move on and talk about the impact on interpersonal relationships and focus specifically on any problems in this area.

- How has this project impacted relationships at work? OR What changes have you noticed in their relationships at work? **(insert participant response)**
- 9. Prompt **IF** not covered above – What changes have you noticed? What was it like before the recession? **(participant response)**

Has there been a change in the amount of your time spent specifically dealing with relationship conflicts or unpleasant behaviours between people (examples of conflicts or behaviours could include, negatively affecting someone's work, spreading of

gossip and rumours about people, being given tasks of unreasonable or impossible targets or deadlines, or an unmanageable workload, being ordered to do work below ones level of competence, being humiliated or ridiculed in connection with ones work, persistent criticism, excessive monitoring, hints that someone should quit their job, like bullying, harassment, or victimisation since the current change project (*replace with project name*)? **insert participant response**

- Has there been a change in the amount of people requesting guidance related to any of the types of behaviours I mentioned,)? **insert participant response**
 - Do you think the examples I gave you before is bullying? **insert participant response**
 - How would you personally define workplace bullying? **insert participant response**
 - Can you think of a RECENT specific example of bullying YOU HAD TO DEAL WITH, and describe what happened? **insert participant response**
2. Probe **IF unclear** in above - How did this affect the people involved? What about the consequences for others? How was it resolved, OR What was the outcome? Who helped? **insert participant response**
- Are there examples of other cases of bullying, interpersonal conflicts, or any other type of negative behaviour for e.g. being repeatedly subjected to excessive sarcasm, offended, or socially excluded, you can tell me about? **insert participant response**
 - What policies and procedures are in place to manage relationship conflicts (for e.g. Issues of bullying, harassment, or victimisation)? **insert participant response**
 - What do you think about the efficiency of the policy and procedures you have in place for resolving such issues? **insert participant response**
- How does what we have discussed here (i.e. about your experiences of dealing with conflicts such as the amount, type, outcomes, etc.) compared to previous change projects)? **insert participant response**

Policy

- How can the (Grievance) policy be improved to help employees that are undergoing organisational change, and are experiencing bullying or harassment? **insert participant response**

Is there anything you would like to add before we end? Thank you for your time. If you think of anything, please let me know. I will email a debrief of the research at the end of the interview. As our conversation is confidential, please do not discuss it or the research with anyone in your organisation until after the interviews are all completed.

Appendix 1 c - Pilot Interview Schedule

Pilot Interview 1 - Gxxy - IT technician (reports to Ryan) (0.8mnths with M () risk)

- current change project - Technology Adaption project, Impact is more workload and responsibilities outside of skills and a level below technical area of expertise.
 - past change project - DxxCO restructures, potential redundancies, direct workload impact.
- Said no to bullying.

Pilot interview 2 - Rxxn - IT team leader/manager (8yrs with M () rsk)

- The current change project is MGIS (move from Mxxk Line IT to Mxrsk Group IS). The project is in a transition phase. Merge all IT business units across regions into one consolidated business unit supporting the entire business. The impact is reduced staff numbers and a change in organisational practices to merge under global IT).
- past change project - Finance and Accounting - project based on SAP (Systems Applications and Products in Data Processing and Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP)) software, tailor-made specifically for A.P. Mxxller – Mxxrsk needs and requirements. FXCT is the new Mxrsk Container Business sales, finance, purchasing, logistics and invoicing system). The entire group was indirectly or directly impacted by a reduction in staff numbers, which impacted everyone's workload, and the quality of work decreased as a result.

Said no to bullying.

Pilot Interview 3 - Fxxhrie - HR Business Partner (6.5yrs with Mxxrsk)

- current change project - FOE Future Ops Execution, has regional and global operations impact because org processes will change to become more streamlined and standardised. The impact is that organisational structure will change, reporting and technology will change, business practices will change, and functional departments will change to become more standardised in practices as they transition towards centralisation and globalisation. They will do all this to move towards P3, which is a joint venture partnership of shipping companies that forms alliances for operational efficiencies. This will ultimately mean people impact, e.g., role changes, workload and work practices will change, and work location changes.█
- past change project - FXCT (same as above)

When it came to the bullying section, he hesitated about the first question. He wasn't sure about the link between what we had discussed and bullying. After the interview, he told me that he thought the first question under the bullying section was too much of an assumption and that he didn't understand the jump from change projects to bullying. He suggested a softer transition into this and that I should start this section with the question, "In your opinion, has there been a link between the change projects and bullying?"

In Q4 – Has there been a change in the amount of people requesting guidance related to bullying or harassment)? He answers NO, but in other business units, this has increased.

Appendix 2 a - Debrief Sheet

Debriefing

Debrief – Employee's and Managers

Exploring workplace relationships during organisational change in an uncertain economic climate

Researcher's name: Tasneem Wadee (TW335@live.mdx.ac.uk), Tel: +27 79 7512621 (SA) +44 7704610116 (UK)

Supervisor's name and email:

Dr Nicola Payne (n.payne@mdx.ac.uk), tel: 020 8411 5467

Dr Ceri Sims (Ceri.sims@bucks.ac.uk)

Dr Chris Woodrow (chris.woodrow@mdx.ac.uk)

Psychology Department, Middlesex University, The Burroughs, London NW4 4BT

Thank you for participating in this research.

The interview aimed to explore your views and experiences on whether organisational change in an uncertain economic climate (i.e. since the recession) may influence the well-being and relationships of employees, and whether employees have experienced inconsiderate behaviours from colleagues (for example: bullying, harassment, or mistreatment). It is hoped that this research will help inform better ways to support employees, managers and HR going through organisational changes, through both informal practices and formal policy.

The interview was recorded and this recording will be destroyed once your anonymous interview has been transcribed. The transcript will be totally confidential and anonymous, and if I use any short quotes from your interview, any possible identifying features will be removed. No one other than me and my three supervisors will see the transcripts and I will not disclose anything you say to anyone from your organisation. As our conversation is confidential please do not discuss it or the research with anyone in your organisation until after the interviews are all completed.

Do not hesitate to ask me now or contact me at a later date if you have any questions or concerns or if you would like more information.

I am aware that this interview covered some personal and sensitive issues and if this has caused you any distress I suggest you contact your healthcare providers' well-being service. Alternatively The People Bottom Line has some useful links in their support section or you can visit: Stand Up and Stop Bullying in South Africa for more information.

Website <http://www.stopbullying.co.za> or <http://www.thepeoplebottomline.com>

If you know anyone else who may be interested in participating, please pass on my details and ask them to contact me.

Appendix 2 b - Informed Consent

Informed consent

Middlesex University School of Health and Education

Psychology Department

Written Informed Consent

Title of study and academic year: **Exploring workplace relationships during organisational change in an uncertain economic climate (2014)**

Researcher's name: Tasneem Wadee (TW335@live.mdx.ac.uk), Tel: +27 79 7512621 (SA) +44 7704610116 (UK)

Supervisor's name and email:

Dr Nicola Payne (n.payne@mdx.ac.uk), tel: 020 8411 5467

Dr Ceri Sims (Ceri.sims@bucks.ac.uk)

Dr Chris Woodrow (chris.woodrow@mdx.ac.uk)

Psychology Department, Middlesex University, The Burroughs, London NW4 4BT

I have understood the details of the research as explained to me by the researcher, and confirm that I have consented to act as a participant.

I have been given contact details for the researcher in the information sheet.

I understand that my participation is entirely voluntary, the data collected during the research will not be identifiable, and I have the right to withdraw from the project at any time without any obligation to explain my reasons for doing so.

I further understand that the data I provide may be used for analysis and subsequent publication, and I provide my consent that this may occur.

Signature

Date: _____

To the participant: Data may be inspected by the Chair of the Psychology Ethics panel and the Chair of the School of Health and Education Ethics committee of Middlesex University, if required by institutional audits about the correctness of procedures. Although this would happen in strict confidentiality, please tick here if you do not wish your data to be included in audits:

Appendix 2 c - Information Sheet for HR

Information sheet

Information Sheet - HR

Exploring workplace relationships during organisational change in an uncertain economic climate

Researcher: Tasneem Wadee TW335@live.mdx.ac.uk, tel: +27 79 7512621 (SA) +44 7704610116 (UK)

Supervisors: Dr Nicola Payne n.payne@mdx.ac.uk, tel: 020 8411 5467

Ceri Sims Ceri.sims@bucks.ac.uk

Dr Chris Woodrow chris.woodrow@mdx.ac.uk

Psychology Department, Middlesex University, The Burroughs, London NW4 4BT

You are invited to take part in a research study. Please read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not you wish to take part. Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or if something is not clear or if you would like more information.

This research aims to examine how organisational change and an uncertain economic climate (i.e. since the recession) may influence the well-being of employees and managers. Your co-operation is requested as you may have key insights from an HR perspective, on employee well-being during economic instability that are vital to the aims of the research.

The research will i) establish what policies and procedures are in place pertaining to employee well-being; ii) explore your views of any impact of organisational changes on employee well-being, and relationships, AND; iii) explore your views on whether the current economic climate (since the recession) impacts the above.

It is hoped that this research will help inform HR of new ways to support organisational changes during economic instability, through both informal practices and formal policy.

Participating in this research will involve i) with your permission, access to your standard documents to establish what policies are in place relating to employee well-being, AND; ii) an interview, which will last about 1 hour. The interview will be in a private meeting room at your company's offices, and will be recorded and then transcribed. The transcript of what you say in the interview will be totally confidential and anonymous. Analysis of the transcripts will involve examining themes that occur across all the HR interviews that I conduct, and if I use any short quotes from your interview to illustrate a theme, these will be totally anonymous, and any possible identifying features will be removed. The anonymous interview data will be used in the write up of my Professional Doctoral Thesis, in partial fulfilment of my degree, which may lead to publication in scientific contexts.

No one other than me and my three supervisors will see the transcripts and I will not disclose anything you say to anyone from your organisation. As our conversation is confidential please do not discuss it or the research with anyone in your organisation until after the interviews are all completed.

Included with this information sheet is a consent form. I will bring a copy of this to the interview, which you will need to sign at the interview, prior to taking part. Consent forms will also be kept separately from interviews to protect your anonymity.

Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you feel distressed by anything we discuss, feel free to pause or terminate the interview at any time. If you decide to take part you may withdraw at any time without giving a reason.

All proposals for research using human participants are reviewed by an Ethics Committee before they can proceed. The Middlesex Psychology Department's Ethics Committee have reviewed this proposal.

Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.

Appendix 2 d - Information Sheet for Employees and Managers

Information sheet
<p style="text-align: center;">Information Sheet – Employee's and Managers</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Exploring workplace relationships during organisational change in an uncertain economic climate</p> <p>Researcher: Tasneem Wadee TW335@live.mdx.ac.uk, tel: +27 79 7512621 (SA) +44 7704610116 (UK)</p> <p>Supervisors: Dr Nicola Payne n.payne@mdx.ac.uk, tel: 020 8411 5467 Ceri Sims Ceri.sims@bucks.ac.uk Dr Chris Woodrow chris.woodrow@mdx.ac.uk</p> <p style="text-align: center;">Psychology Department, Middlesex University, The Burroughs, London NW4 4BT</p> <p>You are invited to take part in a research study. Please read the following information carefully before you decide whether or not you wish to take part. Do not hesitate to contact me if you have any questions or if something is not clear or if you would like more information.</p> <p>This research aims to examine how organisational change and an uncertain economic climate (i.e. since the recession) may influence employee well-being. Your co-operation is requested as you may have key insights that are vital to the aims of the research. The research will explore your views of i) organisational change on your workload, well-being, and relationships, AND; your views on ii) whether the current economic climate (since the recession) impacts the above.</p> <p>Participating in this research will involve an interview, which will last about 1 hour. The interview will explore your views and experiences relating to your professional/personal well-being, including your views on the support you have received or would like to receive. For line managers this will include the support you provide in your role as a line manager.</p> <p>The interview will be in a private meeting room at your company's offices, and will be recorded and then transcribed. The transcript of what you say in the interview will be totally confidential and anonymous. Analysis of the transcripts will involve examining themes that occur across all the interviews I conduct, and if I use any short quotes from your interview to illustrate a theme, these will be totally anonymous, and any possible identifying features will be removed. The anonymous interview data will be used in the write up of my Professional Doctoral Thesis, in partial fulfilment of my degree, which may lead to publication in scientific contexts.</p> <p><u>No one other than me and my three supervisors will see the transcripts and I will not disclose anything you say to anyone from your organisation. As our conversation is confidential please do not discuss it or the research with anyone in your organisation until after the interviews are all completed.</u></p> <p>The only circumstances under which I may consider breaking confidentiality is if you indicate to me that you would like my help because you fear for either your or someone else's safety. However, if this were to arise I would first discuss it with you and together ascertain the course of action that will best protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the parties concerned.</p> <p>Included with this information sheet is a consent form. I will bring a copy of this to the interview, which you will need to sign at the interview, prior to taking part. Consent forms will also be kept separately from interviews to protect your anonymity.</p> <p>Participation in this research is entirely voluntary. You do not have to take part if you do not want to. If you feel distressed by anything we discuss, feel free to pause or terminate the interview at any time. If you decide to take part you may withdraw at any time without giving a reason.</p> <p>All proposals for research using human participants are reviewed by an Ethics Committee before they can proceed. The Middlesex Psychology Department's Ethics Committee have reviewed this proposal.</p> <p>Thank you for taking the time to read this information sheet.</p>

Appendix 3 - Ethics Approval Form and confirmation email attached

Appendix 4 - Candidate Declaration Form attached