

# The problem of bullying in the arts

Is coaching an effective intervention?

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## 1. Introduction

Bullying is offensive, abusive, malicious, insulting and/or intimidating behaviour that occurs on more than one occasion. Most researchers agree that the frequency of bullying behaviour precludes one off incidents of aggression or violence. Although a familiar term in the context of the school playground, adult bullying in the workplace has become prominent relatively recently. It is known by various names in different parts of the world and is often referred to as mobbing, harassment or emotional abuse.

According to the German born psychologist Heinz Leymann (1996: 165) “the high frequency and long duration of hostile behaviour [...] results in considerable mental, psychosomatic and social misery”. Leymann, who became a Swedish citizen in the mid 1950s, preferred to use the term ‘bullying’ in the context of school children and ‘mobbing’ for adult behaviour. Today mobbing is often held to denote a form of group bullying. As professor and practicing psychologist, Leymann also noted that one of the side effects of mobbing was post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) and that this was frequently misdiagnosed. This might explain why some people harm themselves and even take their own lives as a result of bullying.

It can take many weeks or months for someone to realise that they have been targeted by a bully, because bullying behaviour can include overt aggression; insidious and covert behaviour; punishment without justification; physical threats; and overly familiar, manipulative behaviour. Dysfunction, in one respect or another, is at the core of negative behaviours like bullying. There are clear correlations between the behaviour of perpetrators of domestic abuse and that of workplace bullies – some of the techniques used by unscrupulous spouses, such as isolating, blaming and intimidating partners, parallel those used by manipulative workplace bullies.

In 2001/2, the first research into bullying behaviour in the cultural sector was carried out in the UK. Following two pilot studies in

performing arts venues in the north of England – one specifically targeting managers and one open to employees from any work area – a major national survey of members of the Broadcasting Entertainment Cinematographic and Theatrical Union (BECTU) was conducted. The union members worked in theatres and arts centres, in a variety of positions, in England, Northern Ireland and Scotland. Finally, a series of case studies recorded incidents in UK arts organizations, which involved workforces in museums, theatres, galleries and arts centres, and also members of local government arts departments, dance companies, creative industries and theatre companies.

The level of bullying in UK arts organizations was established using both quantitative and qualitative methods and this yielded data on the frequency of the behaviour and collected evidence of its effects on targets and their organizations. From 2007 onwards, individual artists, arts employees, consultants and managers contributed additional information to the research findings, which have been brought together in the book *Bullying in the Arts: Vocation, Exploitation and Abuse of Power* (QUIGG 2011). The most common type of perpetrator encountered in the arts research is the serial bully, who picks on one employee after another and attempts to destroy them: often the target is forced to move on, either to another role in the organization or to another workplace altogether.

## 2. Research history

Bullying has been researched and reported in the armed forces, police and prisons, the health services, higher education establishments and the Church of England. Reports of bullying in arts organizations have continued to come to light – not only from arts workers in the UK, but also from people working in the arts around the world. For example, in the 12 months to March 2011 individuals from Australia, Botswana, New Zealand, Canada and the USA made contact with the author to share and to comment on their experiences.

In the UK there has been an increasing number of legal actions where bullying has been identified as the main source of complaint. In April 2010, the UK's Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) said that complaints about workplace bullying had risen as a result of the recession: often outward signs of conflict in a workplace, including bullying, were hidden because they did not result in workers going on strike or to an employment tribunal. Further, ACAS found there were

serious implications for the health and wellbeing of staff, including stress. So, in addition to fiscal considerations, the cost of bullying can be measured in terms of the health of affected individuals, the performance and morale of organizations, and sometimes the public profile of an entire sector (TRADES UNION CONGRESS 1999).

### 3. Key findings

The effects of being bullied can be severe, involving both physical and psychological harm. Arts workers have reported stress and stress related illnesses that affect performance at work, health, emotional and mental wellbeing and home life. Recorded consequences of being bullied include depression, anxiety, sleep disturbances, panic attacks, low self esteem, protracted stress related illnesses and loss of confidence, resulting in reduced efficiency, absenteeism and unsafe work practices. In addition to one on one incidents of bullying between colleagues, arts workers have reported that some cultural organizations impose unfair working terms or conditions on employees – sometimes described as institutional or corporate bullying. UK Trades Unions in particular deal with issues such as these on an ongoing basis, including handling complaints from employees when employers:

- Exploit the long hours culture,
- Give inadequate notice of the need to work longer hours,
- Actively discourage employees from taking time off to which they are entitled,
- Dismiss employees' objections to working longer hours,
- Take advantage of low rates of pay,
- Promote the idea that workers should accept any wage offered,
- Remain indifferent to complaints about rates of pay,
- Deny accusations of workplace bullying – if things get tricky, promote the perpetrator,
- Adopt the position 'the organization cannot function any other way'.

Some arts workers also expressed a sense of helplessness in relation to what they perceived as unfair working terms and conditions imposed by employers, who they felt were indifferent to objections or complaints.

In 2001/2 most arts managers were unaware of bullying as an issue in their workplace, whereas most arts workers who responded to an online survey reported that bullying was either 'common' or 'not uncommon'.

Among the reasons for bullying identified in the pilot study was competence. Some managers thought employees were bullied because they were incompetent, however most employees thought managers who bullied did so because 'they' were incompetent.

The majority of arts managers, when commenting on terms and conditions, including some employees' complaints about long hours of work and low rates of pay, said that working in the arts was 'different' to working in other environments. Among these arts managers there was a notable lack of any formal education or training in managing people and, indeed, any training at all outside of their arts workplace. This is significant because, in the national survey of BECTU members, 43 per cent of participants were directly line managing one or more employees.

This national survey in 2005 collated information from 249 men and women who were members of BECTU, working in England, Scotland and Northern Ireland. They worked in theatres and arts centres that employed more than 22,000 people. In this survey, 65 per cent described bullying behaviour as occurring 'commonly' or 'not uncommonly' and only 6.4 per cent had never encountered any of the bullying behaviours listed in the questionnaire. The levels of awareness of bullying behaviour among managers showed a significant increase compared with the earlier pilot study.

In the survey of BECTU members, 39.7 per cent of the sample – or nearly two in five people – reported being the target of a workplace bully. This was the highest level of bullying recorded in any single employment sector and to the author's knowledge it remains the highest level today. Of all the groups surveyed young women working in the arts were most likely to be bullied. Bullies were identified as both male and female, and both men and women had been targeted by a bully.

They employees who took part in the survey worked in administration, clerical, box office, cleaning, front of house, management, production, technical and other posts. They came from a range of venues and companies, varying in scale from small (that is, less than 20 employees) to large (that is, more than 100 employees). It is worth noting that larger organizations included the major London subsidized houses – English National Opera, Royal Opera House, Royal Shakespeare Company and Royal National Theatre – as well as commercial venues in the West End. Bullying behaviour was reported in every scale of venue and in every geographical region.

A multiple choice question asked participants about their experience of bullying and 46.6 per cent of survey respondents said they had witnessed

bullying behaviour at work. In all, 50 per cent said they had been told of bullying behaviour by a colleague. These statistics are important because the effects of workplace bullying are not confined to those people who are directly involved as target and perpetrator.

#### 4. Case Studies

In *Bullying in the Arts* (Quigg 2011) the case studies give accounts of eight bullying incidents in a variety of creative organizations. The analyses of the behaviour of both targets and perpetrators indicate familiar patterns in workplace bullying. Cyberbullying features in two of the case studies, where the bullies made dishonourable use of email to threaten and abuse. In all cases, bullying serves to create a toxic work environment.

The quantitative research and the analyses of the case studies led the author to consider how we who work in the arts deal with negative behaviours in the workplace: the key findings and conclusions highlight some of the issues these raise, including the psychological contract between arts employers and employees, the importance of ensuring that arts workers have a voice and the value of protecting and improving best practice in arts management and cultural leadership.

The resulting model for survival of the bullying experience included positive steps – ‘Action’ – that could be taken by the target as an individual and also by the management/leadership of the arts organization as a whole. Through case studies, the absence of these positive steps – ‘Inaction’ – was observed to result in the worsening of bullying behaviour and its continuation beyond the experience of the initial target.

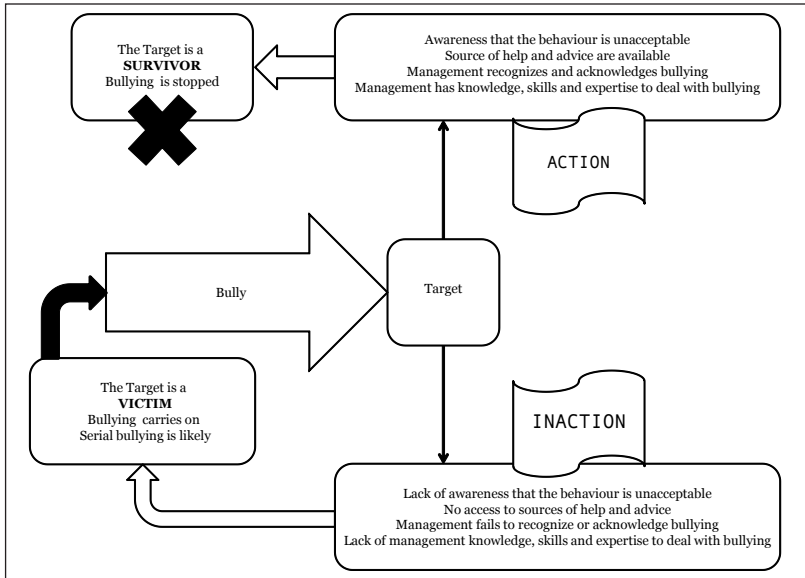


Fig. 1: Action and Inaction

The ‘Action’/‘Inaction’ model demonstrates that when management listens and takes positive action, then targets of bullying are more likely to survive the experience and the bullying can be stopped; when management ignores the issue, and takes no action – or worse still when it takes negative action that punishes the target – then people who are bullied are more likely to become victims. When responses to bullying behaviour are inadequate, the quality of the work environment for everyone deteriorates and sometimes disintegrates altogether.

One of the reasons that awareness of workplace bullying is important today is that whether or not it thrives depends – not just on the individuals involved, as we might imagine – but on the quality of the environment where it takes place, especially when an organization is either under pressure or lacking in coping mechanisms, or both.

Pressure can include severe financial constraints, poor organizational performance or the upheaval caused by restructuring, for example. It can also occur in response to what one Artistic Director dubbed “burdensome bureaucracy” and is sometimes labelled ‘The Target Culture’: the constantly expanding task of gathering extensive data, including information on audiences and beneficiaries of cultural work. In the last decade particularly the pressure to deliver both statistical and qualitative information, and to meet targets, appears to be contributing

to the rapid upsurge of bullying behaviour in the arts workplace. As Dr Brian Kennedy (2001) said in a presentation to business people when he was Director of the National Gallery of Australia. “We live in the Great Age of the Bean Counter.”

The arts workplace can be emotionally and physically exhausting and there are huge pressures to deliver the highest quality service. A chain reaction of bullying is much more likely to occur in a pressured and demanding environment, than in a calm and relaxed one. It is a feature of the arts case studies that bullies win. In the wake of bullying, it is the targets and witnesses who tend to leave the organization, while management discreetly buries the experience.

Unconstructive leadership and inadequate management practice denote the absence of coping mechanisms. Given the current economic climate, and the fact that the cuts to the arts in the UK represent a tremendous body blow, organizations in the cultural sector and, indeed, many others, will need to be vigilant and to work hard in order to prevent an increase in workplace bullying.

## 5. Whistleblowing

Employers have responsibility for the health and safety of their employees in the workplace. Once an employee has approached their line manager, safety representative or trades union representative, about a risk to their own wellbeing, or the welfare of others, and is not satisfied that their complaint has been dealt with adequately, the UK’s Equality Act 2010 provides them with protection if they ‘blow the whistle’ on their employer. This is in marked contrast to the experiences of an employee in one of the arts case studies, who failed to make a successful complaint about how her immediate line manager was being treated, and the resulting effect this had on herself and other staff. The Equality Act provides some degree of protection from harassment, although this is qualified. Harassment is described as

unwanted conduct related to a relevant protected characteristic, which has the purpose or effect of violating an individual’s dignity or creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive environment for that individual.  
(EQUALITY ACT 2010: Part 2. Chapter 2. Section 26)

The problem with the definition is that, although protected characteristics include, for example, race, age, gender, sexual orientation, religion or belief, gender reassignment and disability, there is no provision in the

act for intimidation that is ‘not’ linked to any of these characteristics, and research has shown that bullying is non status based and that many people are targeted by a bully simply because they are good at their job and popular.

## 6. Management training and leadership

In terms of training opportunities and qualifications in the UK, The Creative and Cultural Skills report in 2010 *Performing Arts Blueprint* notes a disparity between “what is available through the formal education sector and what the performing arts industry actually needs” (CREATIVE AND CULTURAL SKILLS 2010: 19).

The report also states that a lack of specialist technical skills is a major problem. In addition, in the smaller arts businesses:

many employees take on management- and business-related responsibilities which are not in their areas of expertise. As such, administration skills suffer from as much of a skills gap as technical skills. (CREATIVE AND CULTURAL SKILLS 2010: 21).

Currently UK management and leadership education and training focuses on positive attributes like employee engagement and transformational leadership. However, perhaps we also need to include a long, hard look at the ‘dark side’ of arts management, to ensure that we are equipping arts managers to deal effectively with it. It is evident that leadership style and organizational culture can dictate the way in which bullying situations are handled: where a positive leadership style is in place, negative behaviours can be stemmed, and vice versa.

Arts employees have stated that even when anti bullying policies exist in the workplace often they are not implemented and management remains indifferent to complaints. How, then, is the voice of the cultural sector employee to be heard? If trades unions have no presence in a workplace who will speak for the beleaguered employee? Some researchers into bullying behaviour, such as Duncan Lewis and Charlotte Rayner (2003), have investigated the role of human resources (HR) personnel in dealing with complaints of bullying and found that often there may be a conflict of interest which can make it difficult for HR staff to challenge management policies and strategies, if these do not make adequate provision for bullying behaviour. In one arts case study the position taken by an HR department in a local government workplace does a disservice to the arts employee who is a third party to a bullying incident – in that she witnessed it but was not personally targeted. The



employee's complaint about the treatment of her boss by a senior manager was disallowed on the grounds that the authority had no provision in its regulations and procedures for third party complaints.

We who work in the arts subscribe to notions of inclusion, embrace diversity and pride ourselves on our integrity. We would, and do, disapprove of and criticize exploitation when it happens in other professions – but are we oblivious to it when it happens in the cultural sector? Do we excuse the oppressive behaviour of some individuals and arts organizations by claiming that the arts, and creative people, are 'different'?

*Bullying in the Arts* (QUIGG 2011) examines some of the myths about creativity and the role that artistic temperament might play in bullying behaviour. Some people argue that artists are, by nature, not always reasonable when working – indeed, in some quarters the myth persists that the greater the artist, the less rational or sane or ordinary they are likely to be. The arts research indicates, however, that creativity is not the preserve of the cultural sector, and that many of the things we think of as essential to promote creativity in our working lives actually have the opposite effect. Undoubtedly organizational culture affects perceptions of bullying behaviour; the ability of individuals and management to deal adequately with it depends on available resources and skills. Even if bullying is not, knowingly, condoned by management, a lack of satisfactory procedures to address complaints makes it extremely difficult to resolve bullying situations in a fair and reasonable manner.

In the UK, assistance from professional organizations like the Advisory, Conciliation and Arbitration Service (ACAS) and the trades unions can help to deal with bullying behaviour in the cultural sector. There are also many anti bullying groups and websites worldwide that offer advice and support – in Europe, for example, <<http://www.mobbing-web.de>>; <<http://mobbing-zentrale.ch>>; and <<http://mobbing.at/>>. To counter the problem, there is a need to continue to focus on leadership; teamwork; awareness of, and action on, bullying and other stressors; and clarity of information and advice. It is evident that the pressures experienced by arts organizations are also experienced in other employment sectors. In that sense, the arts are not 'different'.

As arts organizations face a future in which they will continue to be under financial constraints, the arts workplace remains a somewhat insecure environment. Working relationships between people in arts organizations do not always operate smoothly, but they do not have to

be fraught or combative, even when change has to be managed, difficult or key issues explored or significant decisions taken.

## 7. Interventions in workplace bullying

In 2010/11 a new pilot research project conducted by the author and the life coach Jan Scott Nelson investigated the role of coaching in finding effective methods of dealing with bullying. The objective was to determine what role there might be for coaching as a tool to interpose in the behaviour of both perpetrator and target, as a monadic intervention in each case.

Previously, researchers have found that consultants specializing in dealing with bullying focus on mediation and/or conflict moderation, and that coaching of a group or management team, within which bullying has occurred, is proposed as a part of organizational development (SAAM 2009). Tackling bullying within organizational development addresses some of the negative environmental issues that feature in bullying scenarios, however it does not always deal effectively with the behaviour of individuals at the epicentre of hostile behaviour. Dyadic approaches focus on mediation as a method to reconcile estranged parties. However, bullying is not always viewed as a true conflict situation and in most cases it is acknowledged that the parties involved in a bullying scenario do not have equal levels of power, so that dubbing bullying a 'conflict' can actually be harmful to the target:

Applying the label of conflict wholesale without qualification also creates the sense of shared responsibility for the bullying, and the victim may be expected to manage the situation on his/her own or, in some cases, be held accountable for the hostility exhibited by the other person. (KEASHLY/NOWELL 2003: 355)

There are a number of views about the nature of coaching, how it works and how it differs from counselling. The UK National Health Service describes counselling as 'a type of talking therapy or psychological therapy [...] talking to a counsellor about your problems. Counsellors are trained to listen sympathetically and can help you deal with any negative thoughts and feelings' (NATIONAL HEALTH SERVICE 2011). It is generally accepted that the roots of coaching are in counselling, and also in management theory and mentoring.

It may be that it leans towards mentoring more than counselling, although the skills set is similar – listening, questioning, reflecting back, etcetera. There is a view that counselling enables one to deal with issues

from the past and that coaching is more about working forward from the present, however it could be argued that, through coaching, life long self perceptions can shift, having a profound impact, and, similarly, counselling can focus on dealing with what is happening in the present – particularly where Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) is employed.

Aspects of teaching and training can form part of the coaching relationship, however this is controversial in that some coaches believe that it is not the role of the coach to offer advice, whilst others disagree.

Professional/personal coaching addresses the whole person – with an emphasis on producing action and uncovering learning that can lead to more fulfilment, more balance, and a more effective process for living. (WHITWORTH, KIMSEY-HOUSE, KIMSEY-HOUSE AND SANDAHL. 1998. Preface: xi)

Coaching can:

- evoke empathy with others,
- affect the client's mood,
- hold up a mirror to a client's processes,
- allow for brain dumping: a coach can be a reflective sounding board,
- support behavioural changes,
- enable change in perspective,
- create the rare opportunity to be the focus of non judgemental attention from someone who is your cheerleader,
- create a space where people can work on important issues in their lives,
- help us understand ourselves better,
- give support and encouragement,
- expand awareness,
- help people move into a new way of being.

Eric Parsloe is a respected author and Director of *The OCM Group* (which evolved from the Oxford School of Coaching and Mentoring in 1998), an organization that encourages the serious development of a wide range of approaches to suit the variety of situations and contexts in which coaching and mentoring takes place. This approach is holistic and has been labelled 'Situational Coach-Mentoring'. Parsloe (1999: 8) believes that coaching should "facilitate the exploration of needs, motivations, desires, skills and thought processes to assist the individual in making real, lasting change".

Thus, the model used in the pilot study with professional coaches combined elements of a cognitive skills model and an enquiry process. In the context of the earlier arts research, it involved a focus on the

exploration of the role of coaching and its potential, evaluating and synthesizing both quantitative and qualitative data, and communicating results. The arts research highlighted the importance of 'Action' on the part of the organization in which bullying occurs, with all that this implies for best practice in management and constructive leadership. Previously, non academic researchers, campaigners and lobbyists addressing the effects of bullying behaviour often advocated the equivalent of 'self help' remedies for targets of bullying, for example Walmsley (1991). These tended to promote personal assertiveness on the part of the victim as a way of combating workplace difficulties. Undoubtedly, being a target greatly stresses and demoralizes individuals and often there is an element of self blame and shame as a result of being bullied, resulting in a complex psychological impact (LEWIS 2004).

To take 'Action', arts managers need appropriate tools to deal with bullying in the workplace. According to UK employment law, disciplinary and grievance procedures offer verbal and written warnings, suspension and dismissal, depending on the circumstances. As EU legislation is converging, the same or similar measures concerning psychological harassment already apply elsewhere. Training is sometimes used and often this is, effectively, group coaching. Sometimes 'victims' of bullying are offered extended sick leave, counselling or stress management courses in an attempt to mitigate their negative experiences.

## 8. Methodology

The enquiry process element of the pilot survey led to the design of a questionnaire to evince chiefly qualitative information. Coaches were asked about their experience of dealing with clients' reported experience of bullying behaviour, whether as targets or as individuals accused of being perpetrators. Basic quantitative data was gathered about the frequency of accounts of bullying and the nature of the workplaces in which this is being reported – theatres, offices, local authorities, etcetera. The questionnaire was distributed via UK regional and international networks, during November 2010 – January 2011.

The qualitative data was gathered through a semi structured focus group of coaches in the north of England. To elucidate the information gathered via questionnaire, individuals were asked if clients named bullying behaviour themselves, or if coaches recognized it as such and/or if they raised awareness about the issue with clients. They were

asked to describe any strategies they had proposed to deal with bullying behaviour, whether their clients considered themselves to be a target or an alleged perpetrator. Finally, they were asked whether, in their professional opinion, coaching might form part of the solution to address bullying behaviour, and if not, why? The focus group meeting took place in March 2011.

### 9. 2011 Pilot Study Findings

The pilot study focused on the responses of 21 professional coaches. Of these, 14 people were from the UK, three from Australia, two from the United States, one from the Netherlands and one from Ireland. Of the 21 respondents, 16 offered contact details so they could participate in future research.

Coaches were asked how often the subject of workplace bullying had arisen with their clients during the previous 12 months, and whether these clients were male or female. There were 63 citations by 20 participants, as one respondent did not answer the question. More female than male clients had discussed bullying with the coaches – 39 as opposed to 23 (Figure 2). This correlates with other evidence – more young women report bullying behaviour than any other section of the workforce.

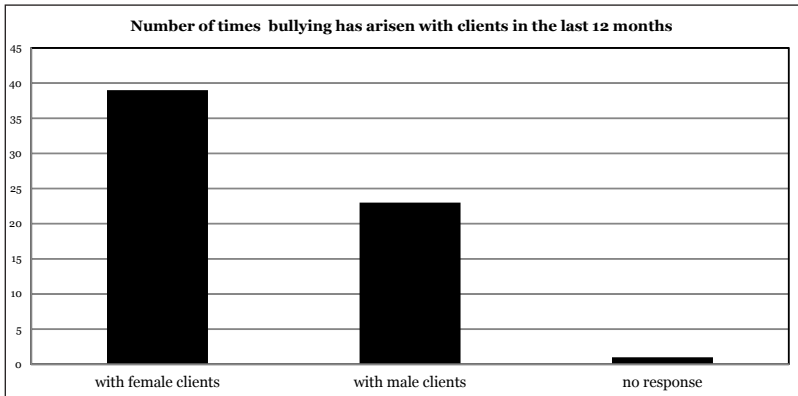


Fig. 2: Frequency of bullying

In terms of the coaches’ perceptions, 50 % of 20 who responded stated that occurrences of bullying in their professional practice took place occasionally, whereas seven viewed this as frequently and three as rarely happening (Figure 3). On further investigation it was found that those who thought occurrences of bullying were frequent had dealt with a

larger number of instances in the previous 12 months, that is, an average of 5.17 per coach as opposed to the average of 3.15 in the group as a whole. Although one respondent did not reply, no coach had ‘never’ had to deal with bullying as an issue.

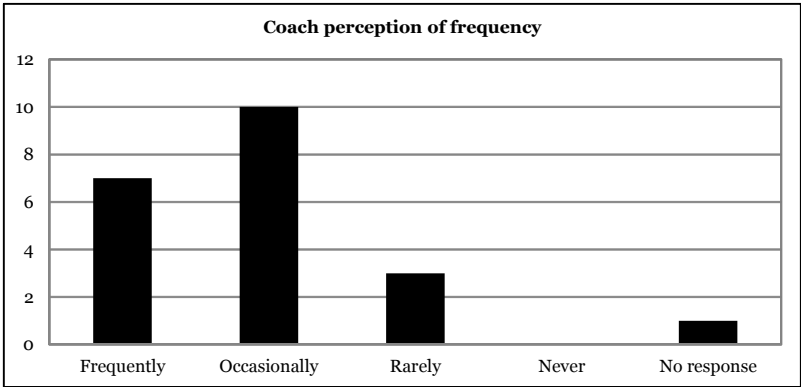


Fig. 3: Coaches’ perceptions of frequency of bullying

The research into bullying in arts organizations had found that many targets of bullying took some considerable time to realize what was happening in the workplace, and that bullies were often in denial about their behaviour. Coaches were asked whether their clients had identified bullying behaviour when it existed. The majority answer was ‘sometimes’ (9), followed by ‘yes’ (6) and five coaches said clients had not recognized they were in a bullying situation (Figure 4).

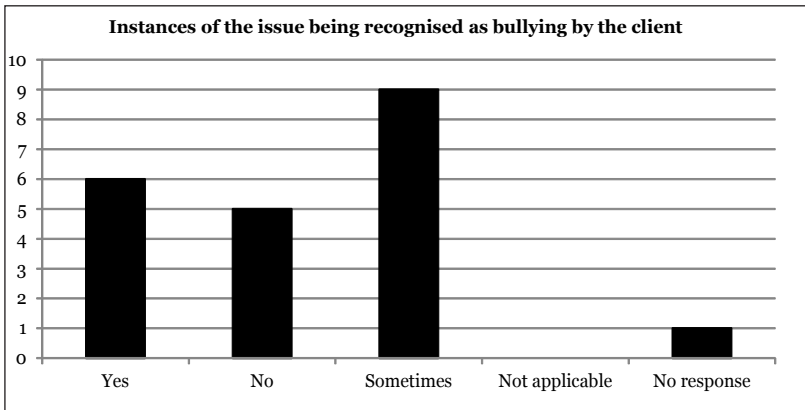


Fig. 4: Awareness of bullying by the client

Those respondents who had answered 'no' or 'sometimes' to the previous question (15) were asked whether they had been successful in making their clients aware that they were in a workplace bullying situation. Overwhelmingly they answered 'yes' (14). One respondent answered 'sometimes' but no coaches had been unable to identify a bullying scenario, even when their clients had failed to do so (Figure 5).

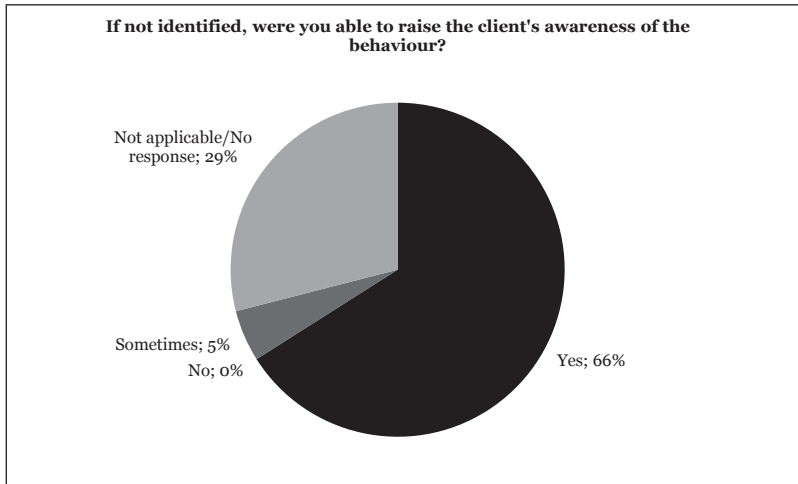


Fig. 5: Raising the awareness of the client

The issue of offering advice to clients – strategic or otherwise – is a difficult one in terms of how professional coaches operate, so a question that probed whether coaches felt able to do so might have attracted a degree of controversy. In the event, the majority of coaches (13) answered 'yes', 'sometimes' (4) and only one replied 'no' (Figure 6). It may be that those who replied 'not applicable' were of the opinion that offering advice on a strategy to the client was not part of the role of the coach.

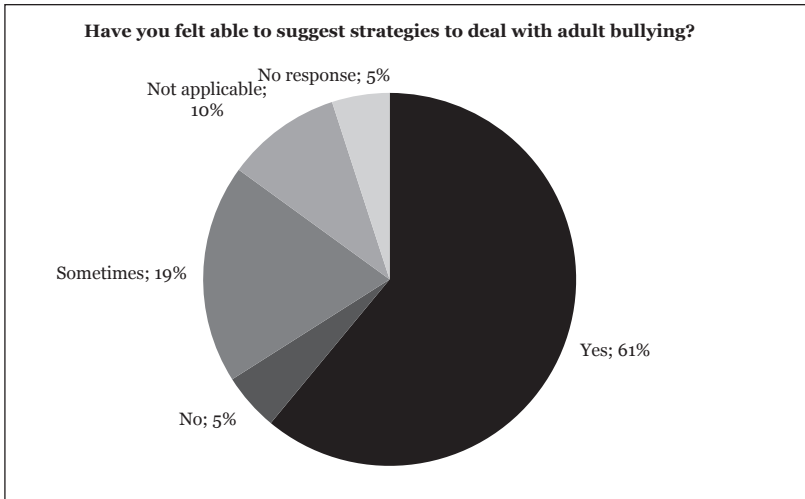


Fig. 6: *Strategies for dealing with bullying behaviour*

Identifying and implementing appropriate support mechanisms for the perpetrator of workplace bullying behaviour is problematic. Management interventions tend to be focused on the target, for example by offering counselling, however there is little clarity about the extent to which those accused of bullying behaviour seek or are offered help. In answer to a question about whether people accused of bullying had ever sought assistance via coaching, nine coaches answered 'yes' and 12 answered 'no' (Figure 7). This is further explored in the analysis of text responses – participants were asked to say what strategies they had suggested – and in the reports from the focus group that was convened to discuss the survey results (below).



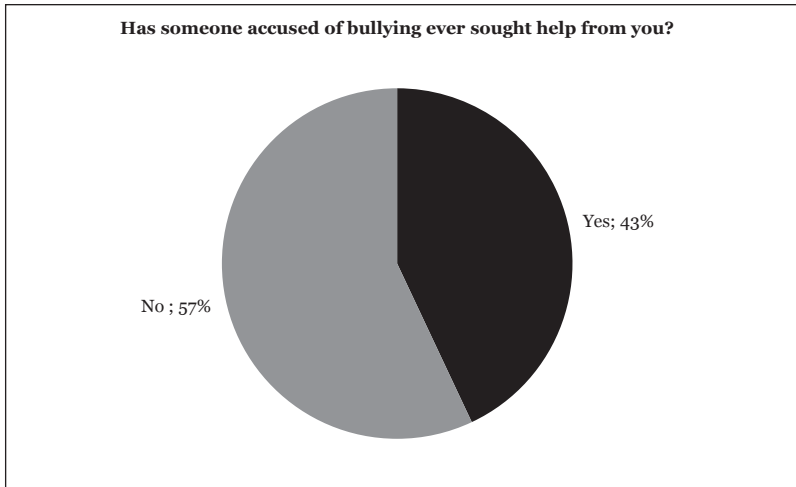


Fig. 7: Whether those accused of bullying sought help from coaches

The range of sectors in which bullying had occurred were identified by coaches in answer to a multiple choice question. The total of 35 citations represented responses from 20 coaches (there was one non response). The largest number of citations (11) was for management, followed by local government and health (Figure 8). In this study only two coaches had knowledge of bullying specifically in arts contexts – this may be indicative of the fact that examination of the issue in the cultural sector is in its infancy, or because the majority of coaches worked in commercial or private sectors. This is further explored in an analysis of text responses below.

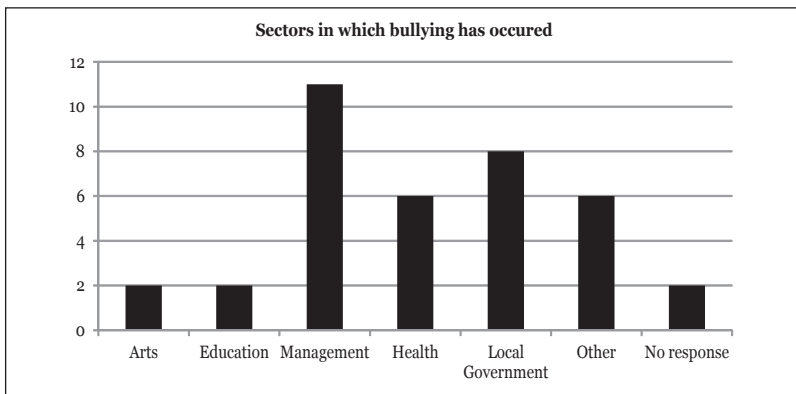


Fig. 8: Sectors in which coaches are aware that bullying has occurred

Overwhelmingly, coaches felt that there was an opportunity to use coaching to deal with both perpetrators and targets of workplace bullying: 20 respondents felt that it could be part of the solution (Figure 9). This is further explored in the analysis of text responses and in the reports from the focus group (below).

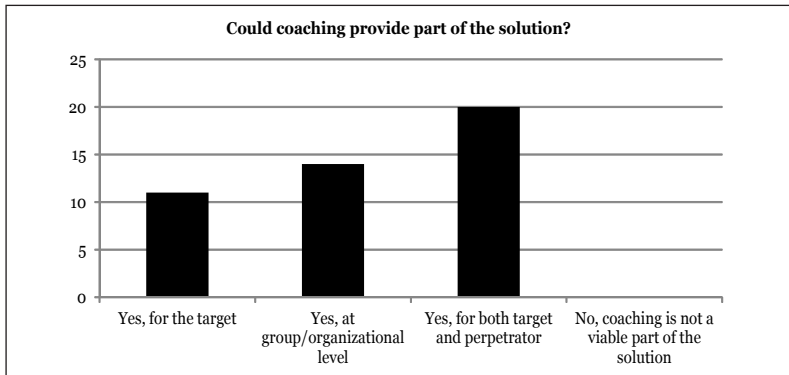


Fig. 9: *Could coaching be part of the solution to workplace bullying?*

## 10. Survey text responses, November 2010 – January 2011

Questions 8, 9 and 10 in the survey offered participants the opportunity to contribute additional information in their own words on what strategies they had suggested (Question 8); where clients involved with bullying were located (Question 9); and why they felt coaching could provide part of the solution to resolving workplace bullying (Question 10).

‘Question 8: [Has someone who has been accused of bullying ever sought help from you?] If so, what strategies did you suggest to them?’

The strategies suggested including raising awareness with the client, identifying and naming the problem. Some coaches focused on assertiveness, developing personal or inner strength, understanding the impact of the behaviour on a person and establishing which behaviours could be changed. This is similar to self help approaches promoted in popular literature (for example, WALMSLEY 1991).

Some coaches encouraged clients to detach themselves from the behaviour: “working not to take it personally and to become emotionally aware – and resist the assault by asking the perpetrator questions about

their conduct and its impact on them and their colleagues.” Whilst the advice is understandable, the fact of power imbalance in bullying situations may make this very difficult.

Where practical strategies were proposed, these took the form of finding ways to positively confront the behaviour, referring the client to appropriate literature, including HR policies and seeking support within the organization. Some coaches suggested clients should focus on building allies and having open discussions to work on developing “a more collaborative relationship that’s business focused and depersonalized.”

In one case the coach stated:

She [the client] had the courage to speak up against the bully and when that did not work, she brought it to the attention of management. Management tried to ignore the problem. My client filed a lawsuit against the employee and company.

In terms of the earlier research in arts organizations, the failure of management to intervene seems common with the result that the situation deteriorates (see Figure 1) and sometimes, as in this case, legal action by a dissatisfied complainant follows.

Two coaches were dealing with people who had been accused of bullying behaviour. In one case, the coach reported that the client had decided on considering an anger management course. The coach had advised taking steps to defuse anger that might result in bullying – “counting to 10, removing some of the stress points in their lives, delegating some people management duties”.

‘Question 9: Where bullying has been an issue, whether recognized by clients as such or not, can you say in which sectors/workplaces this has occurred?’

In the quantitative analysis (Figure 8) ‘Management’ dominated the sectors in which clients who reported bullying worked. However there is evident crossover between this and other sectors – managers work in the arts, health, government, etcetera, so respondents’ answers may be ambiguous. The detail supplied in the text responses provided further information: the arts and creative industries were cited, as were small businesses, voluntary (non profit) sector organizations, private and multinational companies, Federal Government, housing departments, health services, a Women’s Refuge and a caravan holiday park – these last two referred to managers in the establishments bullying other managers.

‘Question 10: Do you think coaching could provide part of the solution to dealing with workplace bullying behaviour, if participants were willing?’

The coaches had a positive response as to how coaching could help in workplace bullying situations. The main focus was on creating a culture of coaching within organizations –

for each [employee] to develop skills and techniques, ways of being which draw on positive resources creating positive experiences and more harmonious, workable relationships and environment.

Some coaches felt that HR personnel would need to be involved, and stated that in the workplace the use of coaching “can increase awareness and understanding of the issue.”

One coach compared the possibilities of using coaching to address bullying with the “effective and helpful” combined coaching/training models used for dealing with aggressive behaviour.

It’s a win-win for everybody when everybody has a chance to have a voice and more tools [for addressing negative behaviours] to work with.

Concurring with the model reflecting on the importance of the arts working environment in dealing with bullying behaviour (Figure 1), one coach said:

In my view, bullying is one of a range of behaviours that appears when larger environmental factors are not right. So, a broad approach that considers the individual behaviours (for example, victim and perpetrator) as well as the social system that provides the support for the behaviours is required. Coaching as an approach to change is great for this type of work and many of the more popular coaching methodologies and tools would fit the bill nicely.

Others agreed that the environment played a major role in determining whether outcomes were positive or negative:

Cultures either allow bullying to survive or not so it’s an organizational problem ... Coaching staff from all sides can simply raise awareness in an impartial way to understand the implications and effects of their behaviour on others.

On a personal level, respondents felt that coaching could offer the strategies to help people targeted by bullies to deal with workplace bullying:

Raising awareness – moving from the victim position [...] Working on confidence and self esteem issues. I was the victim of workplace bullying many years ago and it robs you of the confidence to do anything about it.

For perpetrators, coaching was held to provide the opportunity to raise “awareness of what is acceptable behaviour, what can be perceived by individuals as bullying.” For both perpetrator and target the advantages were cited as allowing individuals

to take the time and space to explore what's really going on for them and to think about whether they are being bullied or are bullying others. It can enable them to look at deep seated issues in relation to this and to explore how they might move forward and what solutions they might develop to do this.

There was a concern to highlight the difficulties of recognizing when someone is bullying, as opposed to what might be perceived (by the perpetrator) as strong management:

I have been involved with this with managers trying to manage tricky situations, sometimes they are the cause of the issue and sometimes they have to deal with the fallout from issues coming from staff [...] Often the bully is stressed themselves and an intervention such as coaching can help everyone involved.

However some coaches still thought of bullying scenarios as conflict situations and looked towards using coaching in that context:

Because it will help identify strategies, small steps, is solution focused and non judgemental. Mediation may also help if both parties can eventually be brought together [...]. More deep seated issues can require a more formal approach with mediation where the different parties are coached separately before meeting with a coach/facilitator to keep discussions on track.

Ultimately, bullying is the concern of both the organization and the individual and it has to be dealt with at both levels.

## **11. Focus Group, March 2011**

Three coaches participated in a group discussion with the authors (one of whom is also a coach). The questions raised were focused on the survey responses and the discussions were semi structured to reflect key points raised, and to draw out further information. The issue of unfounded accusations of bullying was raised, and the group agreed that coaching could help individuals to deal with the impact of this. Research has found that bullies often make counter accusations of bullying (FIELD 1999), and the coaches asserted that an individual wrongly accused of bullying is likely to suffer the same torment as a target of bullying behaviour.

In the context of whether clients of coaches recognize that they are being bullied, it was said that very often bullying is subtle and the target does not react until there is a trigger incident, when an emotional outburst of some kind – anger or distress – takes place. This correlates with research findings that a targeted schoolchild may one day react angrily to a bully, exhibiting disruptive behaviour that is untypical, and so coming to the attention of school staff (WILKIE 1996). The coaches reported that sometimes a person accused of bullying is horrified and

bewildered by the accusation, openly wondering why this has never been brought to their attention.

The importance of the quality and responsiveness of the working environment in which bullying takes place was noted, and one coach spoke of her experience of consultants in the medical profession who had no idea that their behaviour was bullying, partly because they were trained to behave in this way and also because students and other staff unwittingly colluded with it, resulting in a bullying culture. This mirrors those situations in the arts where personnel are ‘in awe of’ a major figure in their artistic organization, and is echoed in Andrew Gaupp’s descriptions of “spontaneous developers and creative founders” (GAUPP 1997).

The coaches worked in a variety of organizational settings: in the health sector, in a voluntary agency and also in a local government department, where there are stringent anti bullying policies and considerable support when bullying occurs. Generally the matter is resolved in house; sometimes issues result in a disciplinary hearing. Some organizations already offer coaching to bully and bullied, and this seems to be a useful model for the cultural sector.

Some organizations have a series of steps they take to deal with bullying:

1. Raising awareness of the negative impact of the behaviour,
2. Involvement of the immediate line manager in an advocacy role,
3. Formal mediation – at which stage both target and perpetrator would be offered a coach,
4. Informal review,
5. Formal review,
6. Disciplinary hearing,
7. Dismissal.

It was reported that in one organization over a period of time a coach had worked with staff because bullying had been reported. She could see that, despite intervention and the intention of change, two years on the problem still existed: the bully was still there and still behaving in the same way. It would seem that serial bullying is difficult to eradicate if the intention to change is not actually implemented.

The question of parallels between different types of abuse arose – researchers are now making links between being bullied or witnessing/experiencing domestic abuse as a child in family or in school; adolescent abuse/date rape; workplace bullying and domestic abuse (COLVIN et al. 1998).

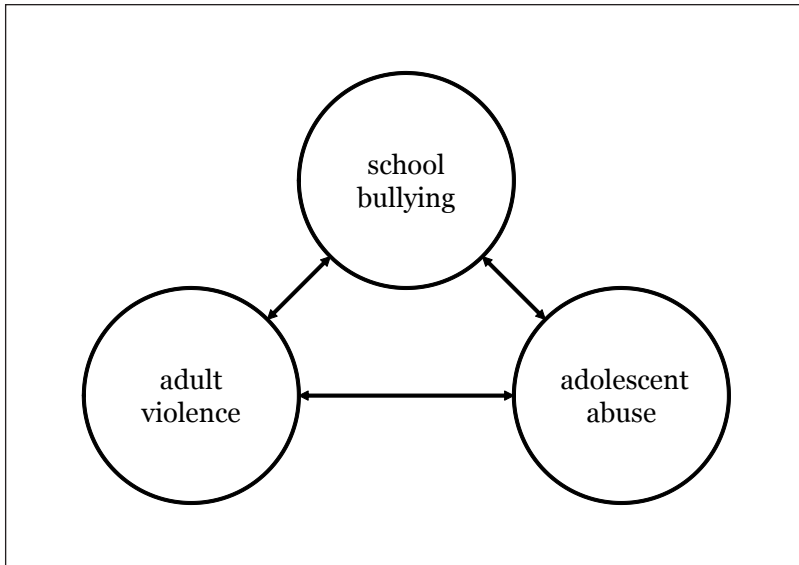


Fig. 10: *Cycle of violence*

Two coaches had worked in domestic abuse situations and said that in refuges they had seen many examples of the workers bullying other workers. It was felt that this might reflect the power and control issues that lie at the heart of most abusive situations, whether this is intimidation carried out by an arts manager, or domestic violence.

Finally, the discussion focused on the approach that could be used by coaches in working with the perpetrator. The point was made that coaches “would approach this differently, according to their skills and experience”. All agreed that coaching would be beneficial in dealing with negative behaviours in cultural organizations: it is already proving to be an excellent intervention strategy in other employment sectors.

## 12. The potential for a positive outcome for both perpetrator and target through coaching

‘The Perpetrator’: The evidence from previous research suggests that there is a sense in which bullies are, or feel they are, inadequate at some level in their lives – often it is a social inadequacy – and their behaviour can be a result of that (FIELD 1996). Perpetrators of bullying in arts organizations are usually in denial, particularly where an inadequate management does not recognize bullying and ultimately rewards the bully

and punishes the target. Where bullying is recognized, and retribution is required, the disciplinary or training route presents itself as most obvious. As yet, there is little data to support the efficacy of these as solutions.

Most coaching organizations agree that whilst the work is therapeutic, it is not therapy, that coaching cannot affect pathology – for example, deal with post traumatic stress disorder – and that imposed coaching will not work. Based on the evidence gathered, and the opinions presented, it was concluded that there are some essentials for successful engagement with perpetrators of bullying behaviour:

- A desire to change in some way (for example, to move on),
- Trust between, and the active and collaborative engagement and participation of, both coach and client,
- The person being coached must take responsibility for their actions and making their own decisions,
- The individual must acknowledge the issues and be prepared to take steps to make changes.

*The Target:* Targets of bullying, for reasons already given, are often offered mental health guidance, or access to both physical and mental health services where their reactive physical symptoms have been severe. However sometimes this can reinforce the perception, particularly of creative and/or sensitive people, that their personal shortcomings, both physical and mental, have caused the problem (WILKIE 1996).

In terms of its potential for contributing towards solutions to deal effectively with workplace bullying, coaching is designed to be non judgemental and could be attractive both to perpetrators and targets: the former often believe, at least initially, that they are wrongly accused, so that ‘being listened to’ is important to them. Targets are often afraid that they are responsible for making the bullying happen to them and this demoralizes them. Working with someone who is prepared to seek out the answer(s) with them is essential to moving on.

Change management is key to resolving bullying – helping the perpetrator to see the effects of their behaviour and to change it for the better, and helping the target to understand what has happened/is happening and be supported in addressing it.

Coaching, therefore, may be an option that is likely to be acceptable to both perpetrator and target, and there is a possibility that ‘group coaching’ could be enhanced by one-to-one opportunities for individual members in a creative team. Perpetrators in denial may choose coaching



as a least worst option, if pitched against disciplinary action and 'how to' training.

- Targets may welcome a non medical intervention, particularly if there is a coaching culture within the organization already.
- The whole organization may benefit from the introduction of a coaching culture if this is not already the case. In all circumstances, evidence that individuals at all levels can benefit from one on one coaching would reinforce the positive message to the organization as a whole.

In March 2011, a conference at the Department of Cultural Policy and Management, City University London, brought together a unique assembly of distinguished academics, artists, national cultural sector agencies, practitioners and arts management students to address the theme of the importance of best practice management and constructive leadership in counteracting destructive and hostile behaviour in arts organizations. The conference discussed working conditions, bullying and the role of internships in the cultural sector.

Across the globe, countries continue to refine equality legislation and 'protection from harassment' is now enshrined in a variety of laws governing Europe, Canada, USA, Australia and New Zealand. The importance of identifying methods to intervene successfully has been made more significant by the global economic situation – organizations under pressure are more likely to suffer a decline in the working environment, including employees' terms and conditions: employees under threat of unemployment or detrimental changes in the workplace are more likely to engage in unproductive and antagonistic behaviour. Identifying solutions to help eradicate workplace bullying in the arts is of paramount value to the health of the global cultural sector.

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**Appendix 1**

## Questionnaire for Coaches

*Jan Scott Nelson and Anne-Marie Quigg are conducting research into whether coaching could be effective in addressing adult bullying. We would be grateful if you could take a little time to complete this short questionnaire. Thank you in advance for your contribution. It is greatly valued.*

1. Please give contact details if you are willing to participate in future research:

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2. How often have you dealt with adult bullying as part of your professional coaching practice? (This could be in the context of workplace coaching, or in one to one personal life coaching.) *Please state the approximate number of times this has arisen, with different clients, in the last 12 months, and whether these have been male or female.*

12 month total \_\_\_\_\_ Females \_\_\_\_\_ Males \_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you regard this as:

Frequently  Occasionally  Rarely  Never

4. Has the issue been named or recognized as bullying by the client?

Yes  No  Sometimes  Not applicable

5. If not, do you believe you were able to raise the client's awareness of the behaviour?

Yes  No  Sometimes  Not applicable

6. Have you felt able to suggest strategies to deal with adult bullying?

Yes  No  Sometimes  Not applicable

*If so, please let us know, briefly, what these were:*

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7. Has someone who has been accused of bullying ever sought help from you?

Yes  No

8. If so, what strategies did you suggest to them?

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9. Where bullying has been an issue, whether recognized by clients as such or not, can you say in which sectors/workplaces this has occurred?

Arts  Education  Health  Management  Other

*Please say where:*

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10. Do you think coaching could provide part of the solution to dealing with workplace bullying behaviour, if participants were willing?

Yes, for the target  Yes, at group/organizational level

Yes, for both target and perpetrator

No, coaching is not a viable part of the solution

*Please say why:*

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