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Towards dignity and respect at work: An exploration of bullying in the public sector

Maryam Omari

Edith Cowan University

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Towards Dignity and Respect at Work:

An exploration of bullying in the public sector.

MARYAM OMARI
Bachelor of Science (Zoology)
Graduate Diploma of Business (Management)
Master of Business (Human Resource Management)

Student number: [REDACTED]
PhD Candidate
School of Management
EDITH COWAN UNIVERSITY

Supervisor:
Associate Professor Peter Standen (Edith Cowan University)

PhD Dissertation

January 2007
USE OF THESIS

The Use of Thesis statement is not included in this version of the thesis.
ABSTRACT

Organisations today function in complex and dynamic environments which exert continual pressure to change and compete. Employees are often seen as a key to success in this world, as flexible and adaptable resources. The quality of their work life therefore takes on an important role in ensuring they reach their full potential.

A long-standing safety and performance issue in the workplace is bullying, or mobbing as it is called in the European literature. Bullying can have adverse effects for individuals, including both the perpetrator and the victim, as well as their families, the organisation, and ultimately the wider society.

This study explores the antecedents and consequences of bullying in the Australian Public Sector (APS). Information was collected from employees of a number of APS agencies in Western Australia.

The study was exploratory and hence used an inductive and mainly qualitative research design with three phases. First, focus groups were run with volunteer employees to devise a common understanding on what constitutes bullying in their personal experiences. Next, volunteers were asked to complete a questionnaire collecting information on the organisational climate and culture, and on the perceived frequency of bullying; it also asked for detailed stories of participants’ experiences of workplace bullying. Thirdly, semi-structured interviews were conducted with HR Managers and policy makers, and unstructured interviews with a number of alleged perpetrators – believed to be a first in the bullying literature.

Quantitative and qualitative data analysis techniques were used. The survey results were analysed with descriptive and inferential statistics, while an approach in line with that of the grounded theory was applied to the qualitative data. The qualitative results were used to elaborate on and provide a context for the quantitative results.
Findings indicate that a clear definition for bullying remains difficult. However, a model was devised to assist in identifying such behaviour in the APS context, based on six indicators: *impact on the victim, intent of the perpetrator, source of bullying, frequency of events, cause of the behaviour,* and *the setting within which it took place.* The concept of *power* was found to be central to all of these indicators.

The data also identified antecedents and consequences of bullying, although with complex and interrelated relationships. Antecedents were found at the individual level (in both victim and perpetrator), in group settings, and at an organisational level. Organisational context seemed to play a key role in establishing when behaviours become unacceptable. The consequences were far ranging, with impacts found at the individual level (for the victim), as well as amongst work groups and bystanders. Consequences were found to be related to work and organisational-level outcomes.

Researchers can build on the findings of this study to assist development of theory about bullying in both the Australian and international contexts, and especially in the Public Sector environment. The results can also help organisations and individuals identify and eradicate bullying in the workplace by creating environments based on dignity and respect for all.
DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not, to the best of my knowledge and belief:

1. Incorporate without acknowledgement and material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any institution of higher education.

2. Contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text; or

3. Contain any defamatory material.

I also grant permission for the Library at Edith Cowan University to make duplicate copies of my thesis as required.

__________________________
Maryam Omari
18 January, 2007
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis is dedicated to my parents Dr Shapour Mofakhami and Mrs Shirin Mofakhami, both inspirational people who sacrificed much for their children’s education and future success – thank you.

Associate Professor Peter Standen, my PhD and Masters supervisor, teacher and mentor deserves a very special mention. I would not have embarked on this journey without his agreement to supervise my research.

My thanks to my husband Associate Professor Arshad Omari, and my children Lilith and Alexander for sharing me with my thesis document over the last three years, and thanks to Zouzou for keeping me company.

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Finally, my humble thanks to the participating organisations and individuals who gave their time, and shared their sometimes painful experiences freely – without you this study would not be possible.
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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The Problem of Bullying

In recent years research in management, psychology, and related disciplines has focussed increasing attention on abuses of interpersonal power in the workplace. Bullying (Lewis, 1999, p. 41), mobbing (Leymann, 1990; Zapf, 1999), workplace violence (Atkinson, 2000), psychoterror (Heine, 1995), emotional abuse (Noring, 2000), workplace harassment (McMahon, 2000), psychological harassment (Luzio-Lockett, 1995), incivility (Andersson & Pearson, 1999), moral harassment (Di Martino et al., 2003), nonsexual negative interpersonal behaviours (Keashly et al., 1994) and similar terms have been used to describe behaviours that can have detrimental effects on employees.

Bullying is a newly recognised (though long extant) workplace safety issue, involving a wide variety of negative behaviours such as:

“… persecuting or ganging up on an individual, making unreasonable demands or setting impossible work targets, making restrictive and petty work rules, constant intrusive surveillance, shouting, abusive language, physical assault and open or implied threats of dismissal or demotion” (Stone, 2002, p. 660).

The seriousness of such abuses is well described by Lamplugh (2002, xi):

“Workplace bullying constitutes unwanted, offensive, humiliating, undermining behaviour towards an individual or groups of employees. Such persistently malicious attacks on personal or professional performance are typically unpredictable, irrational and often unfair. This abuse of power or position can cause such chronic stress and anxiety that people gradually lose belief in themselves, suffering physical ill health and mental distress as a result. Workplace bullying affects working conditions, health and safety, domestic life and the right of all to equal opportunity and treatment.”

A common theme in most definitions of bullying is the experience of negative behaviours (Rayner & Cooper, 2006, p. 124). Brodsky, a psychiatrist, is credited with one of the earliest definitions from the 1970s: “… persistent attempts on the part of one person to annoy, wear down, frustrate, or elicit a reaction from
another” (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2001). Despite over 35 years of acknowledgement of the problem, there is no universally accepted definition of bullying.

Heinz Leymann, a psychologist often regarded as the founder of research on workplace bullying, described bullying in equally graphic terms as: “… ganging up on someone or psychic terror … schisms, where the victim is subjected to a systematic stigmatising” (Leymann, 1990, p. 119). Leymann identified adverse outcomes of bullying on multiple levels: social issues (e.g. isolation); socio-psychological factors (e.g. loss of coping resources); psychological issues (e.g. helplessness, anxiety, and despair); and psychosomatic and psychiatric problems (e.g. depression and suicide).

Other studies have examined the costs of bullying for organisations. For example McCarthy et al (2003a) note:

“ … claims can arise in proceedings of misconduct, grievance procedures, industrial actions, proceedings of unfair dismissal, and actions for breaches of duty of care … stress claims … arise under workers compensation … [this] undermines productivity. … Other cost impacts include absenteeism, replacement of recipients and witnesses who leave the organisation, employee assistance providers, lost opportunities, and customer investment aversion” (pp. 320-321).

Bullying is increasingly seen to have legal consequences for organizations. Australian employers have a legislative duty of care to provide employees with a safe work environment that requires them to identify and control psychological injury, whether real or implied. It appears that courts are increasingly willing to consider psychological injury as a workplace issue (Timo et al., 2004).

Sheehan (2004b, p. 6) points to the ‘hidden’ costs of bullying for organizations, in terms of adverse client and industry perceptions, loss of investor confidence, and loss of ‘knowledge capital’ as staff leave or withdraw their commitment. In one attempt at quantifying the costs of bullying, the Morgan and Banks Job Index estimated the cost of bullying in Australia in 1999 as $3-4 billion per annum, increasing to $20 billion if suspected ripple effects are included (Gorman, 2001, p. 114).

Therefore, the costs associated with bullying are significant and far reaching, impacting on both victims and organisations. Bullying is also expected to adversely
affect co-workers, family members and society generally; Leymann’s work shows it permeates every aspect of an individual’s existence.

This thesis seeks a better understanding of the nature, antecedents, and consequences of bullying, focusing on the public sector, in order to allow individuals and organisations to work towards its elimination, and the creation of work environments based on dignity and respect for all.

**Psychological Safety as a Fundamental Aspect of Worker Motivation**

Psychological safety is increasingly a business issue for private and public sector organisations as they face the challenges of today’s complex and dynamic environments. External forces such as globalisation, technological change, changing legislation, increased emphasis on ethical conduct and social responsibility, and the shift to a service economy currently exert great pressure on organisations to increase competitiveness (Davidson & Griffin, 2003). In responding, organisations need to recognise the fundamental role of corporate cultures (Stone, 2002) and human (psycho-social) factors in motivating individuals towards improved corporate performance:

“People design, operate and repair the technology, people control the financial resources, and people manage other people … Compared with technological or financial resources, employees … are the most unpredictable, and the largest ongoing cost factor in any organisation. It is therefore crucial that they are managed effectively and that their personal and work needs are satisfied, if organisational objectives are to be achieved.” (Nankervis et al., 2002, p. 3).

Quality of work-life thus affects the satisfaction, productivity and efficiency of employees (Stone, 2006, p. 168). Working conditions can be seen as part of the ‘psychological contract’ (Davidson & Griffin, 2003, pp. 492-493) linking employee contribution to work conditions. Similarly, many theories of worker motivation show a fundamental need for security in the workplace (McShane & Von Glinow, 2000, p. 68).

Motivation theories are of relevance in the context of quality of work-life issues, especially Maslow’s Hierarchy of Needs. This theory categorises five groupings of needs; at the lowest end those relating to physiological and safety needs, progressing onto social and esteem factors, and concluding at the highest level
of the hierarchy with *self-actualisation*. The theory is based on the notion that once the lower order needs are satisfied those at the next level become dominant and therefore significant. However, the lower order needs are always of significance even if “… dormant as motivators” (Armstrong, 2006, pp. 257-8). In the context of bullying in the workplace, the need for *safety*, acceptance and belonging (*social factors*), and *self-esteem* can therefore be seen as critical prerequisites to an enjoyable, satisfying, and productive work life. Further discussion of the links between the lower order factors in the hierarchy of needs and bullying in the workplace will ensue in Chapters Four and Five of this thesis.

**Bullying in Different Sectors: The Case of the Australian Public Service**

Bullying may not be evenly distributed across industry. Zapf et al (2003, p. 118) consider bullying to be especially a problem among white collar workers, service employees and their supervisors, with the risks higher for those in social, health, public administration, and education sectors. A Finnish study found an elevated rate of victimisation for public sector employees (Salin, 2001), and saw its origins in public sector management trends:

“… the restructuring of the public sector in the 1990s may partly explain this, as downsizing and increased demands for efficiency and profitability may have contributed to increased stress, frustration, and insecurity. In addition, bureaucracy and the difficulties in laying off employees with permanent status may increase the value of using bullying as a micro-political strategy for circumventing rules, eliminating unwanted persons or improving one’s own position” (p. 435).

Similarly Caverley (2005, p. 401) suggests that bullying arises in public sector work environments from pressures generated by: “… continually shifting performance expectations and media/public scrutiny”.

The aim of this study is to explore bullying in the Australian Public Service (APS). Bullying is recognised as a serious issue by Comcare, the APS agency responsible for workplace safety, rehabilitation and worker’s compensation in the Commonwealth jurisdiction (Australian Government, 2005).

“Psychological injury claims are a significant driver of workers’ compensation premiums. In 2003-2004, Australian Government
claims for psychological injury accounted for 7% of total workers’ compensation claims, though nearly 27% of total claim costs. Costs of psychological injury claims are considerably higher than other injuries because they tend to involve longer periods of time off work and higher medical, legal and other claim payments. These costs do not take into account the organisational costs (such as the cost associated with absenteeism, labour turnover, workplace conflict and loss of productivity) or the impact on the psychological and physical well-being of individuals and their families” (Comcare Australia, 2005).

This thesis focuses on the individual and organisational costs to the APS not measured in statistics such as Comcare’s.

The nature of the adverse behaviours will be a focus of the study. The thesis examines whether there are certain types of people who are more prone to being bullies, and also to being victims, and whether certain organisational environments are conducive to, and perpetuate bullying. Consequences of bullying will be investigated in terms of both individual and organisational impacts. The focus of the research will be on bullying amongst co-workers, not with clients or other external stakeholders.

**Research on Bullying**

Scientific research on workplace bullying is fairly new but is gaining more attention in both international and Australian research communities. Recently a number of special issues of journals have been devoted to the topic: in 1997 in the Journal of Community and Applied Social Psychology; in 1999 in the International Journal of Manpower; and in 2003 in the International Journal of Management and Decision Making. In 1995 three conferences focussed on workplace bullying (Rayner & Cooper, 1997) while in 2006 the 5th International Conference on Bullying and Harassment took place in Ireland. A number of books have recently appeared (e.g. Rayner et al., 2002; Richards & Freeman, 2002; Tehrani, 2001a), along with online guides (e.g. Community & Public Sector Union, 2002; South Australian Office of Employee Ombudsman, n.d.), and codes of practice (e.g. WorkSafe WA, 2006).

A good deal of this research has focused on the nature of bullying and its consequences. Much has also been written on the profiles of the victim and the perpetrator. However, most of this is based on self-reports on the part of the victim,
with occasional conjecture about the perpetrator, raising a need for greater understanding of the subjectively experienced interactions between the two. For example, why are certain behaviours labelled as bullying by some staff and not by others? Why are the same acts sometimes reported and sometimes not? How do employees and managers decide which interactions infringe employee rights to the extent of justifying the label ‘bullying’? To what extent are misuses of interpersonal power encouraged by other aspects of the organisational culture? To effectively address bullying it appears necessary to go beyond victim self-reports and attend to the perpetrator and broader aspects of the work environment.

Lewis and Sheehan (2003) have made similar points in relation to the future directions of bullying research:

“ … while the earlier research tended to focus on the person who experienced workplace bullying, and specifically focused on the issue of definition, prevalence and severity, more recent research emphasises different characteristics such as the construction of meaning and a valuing of the diversity of interests and methodological approaches” (p. 2) … “The voice of those accused of being perpetrators remains to be heard and suggests an area for future research” (p. 3) “… we must not forget other component elements in the bullying experience, namely bystanders … including consideration of the role they play in the construction of different realities of bullying” (pp. 6 -7).

Lewis and Sheehan (2003) here suggest the construction of a more complete picture by including other key players, including not only the perpetrator but also bystanders, and this could be broadened to include managers and leaders responsible for setting cultural norms. Lewis and Sheehan (2003) also draw attention to the social construction of meaning and workplace realities, suggesting a more open-ended, qualitative and interpretive framework for research. Similarly, others (e.g. O'Moore et al., 2003) call for qualitative methods and a focus on the social climate of work in bullying research. This thesis builds on these suggestions by using a triangulated research approach involving multiple sources of information and data collection methodologies. As well, the qualitative and interpretative approach to the research allows for the construction of meaning, and therefore multiple realities, shedding further light on the complexities associated with bullying.
Aims of This Study

This study is an exploration of the perceived nature of bullying in the APS, covering its personal and environmental factors and its consequences. The exploratory approach recognises that, as noted above, previous research often fails to ask many salient questions and to include the full range of parties involved in creating the subjective realities that lead to reports of (or failure to report) bullying. As well, no known previous research has examined factors specific to bullying in the Australian Public Sector (APS) environment. Therefore, the literature does not offer a suitable framework for a quantitative hypothesis-testing study in this context, further reinforcing the need for the mainly exploratory, qualitative and interpretative approach used in this study.

As noted in the next chapter, there is some evidence (e.g. Atkinson, 2000) that the home environment of individuals is also of significance in the study of bullying. However, an in-depth study of the home environment was not the main focus of this research.

This study was conducted on APS employees in a number of agencies in Western Australia, varying in size and function. Information was collected from multiple groups - victims, perpetrators, bystanders, policy makers, human resource (HR) managers and practitioners – in three phases of data collection. First, focus groups were run with volunteers to examine the perceived nature of bullying and to better understand the APS context. Survey instruments were then distributed to staff at participating agencies to collect data on the organisational climate and culture, and on instances of bullying in terms of respondents, experiences as a victim, perpetrator, or bystander. The latter were solicited in the form of stories. Subsequently, semi-structured interviews were conducted with HR managers and policy makers in these agencies. Finally, unstructured interviews were conducted with a number of APS staff who had been formally or informally accused of bullying. At the time of writing, this appears to be the first study on bullying to directly examine the experiences of alleged perpetrators first hand.

The overall aim of this study is to inform the APS and similar organizations of; the nature, antecedents, and consequences of bullying in the Commonwealth public sector. This knowledge can assist the development of policies and
interventions aimed at identifying and reducing bullying in the workplace. The APS as the largest employer in the Australian workforce, as well as role model for government policies, has a significant duty to demonstrate and showcase best practice in people management. Researchers can also build on the findings of this study to assist in theory development, in both the Australian and international contexts.

Structure of the Thesis

The thesis comprises six main chapters. Chapter Two offers a critical review of the literature and provides a theoretical framework to structure the research questions. Chapter Three explains the research paradigm and methodological processes used to collect data. The fourth chapter reports the quantitative results from the survey, while the fifth reports and discusses the qualitative results from the survey, focus groups, HR manager, policy maker, and perpetrator interviews. Chapter Six summarises the findings, provides concluding comments, and raises questions for future research on bullying.
CHAPTER 2
LITERATURE REVIEW AND STUDY FRAMEWORK

Introduction

This chapter examines the current body of knowledge on bullying in the workplace with the aim of developing a framework for researching bullying in the APS. In particular, a model of the antecedents and consequences of bullying is developed to guide the research questions. The chapter begins with a look at the broader context of bullying studies: the role of human nature, the terminology used by different authors, the development of public interest in workplace bullying in Australia, the role of legislation in preventing bullying in Australia, studies of the prevalence of bullying around the world, and a discussion of the APS environment. The antecedents and consequences of bullying are then discussed before turning to the research framework and study questions.

The significance of workplace bullying was brought to researchers’ attention by the German psychologist Heinz Leymann (Lowry Miller, 2000) in his studies of mobbing (the terminology used in bullying studies is explored in the next section). Leymann’s work as a family therapist in Sweden in the 1980s lead him to the observation that psychological issues at home were often linked to unpleasant experiences at work (Lowry Miller, 2000). Thus, research on workplace bullying arose from clinical observations of severely traumatised people (Rayner et al., 1999).

A second early influence has been studies on bullying at schools. Schuster (1996, p. 297) states that the “term bullying was introduced into the scientific discussion by Olweus … to describe a child being teased, terrorized, or systematically victimized by his/her peers”. The links between workplace bullying and family dynamics or bullying at school are a reminder that bullying generally touches on fundamental aspects of human behaviour. While this review is limited to workplace bullying studies by researchers primarily from management, organisational behaviour, work sociology or industrial psychology backgrounds, it is
useful to acknowledge the pervasiveness of bullying and the significant research attention given to it in a wide range of fields.

**Human Nature**


“The involvement of people within an organization, people with different attitudes, values, and beliefs, seems to create a “natural” environment for conflicts to break out, as there will be “naturally” a difference of opinions, a competition for power and territoriality, jealousy, prejudice, envy, and problematic group dynamics.”

Bagshaw (2004) and Kaukianinen (2001) concur, stating that conflict is an inevitable part of human relationships. Keashly and Nowell (2003, p. 348) further contend that even when conflict is dissipated, a psychological “residue” may remain, preventing complete resolution of the issue.

Zapf and Gross (2001, p. 497) are of the opinion that unsolved social conflict leads to an imbalance of power, producing fertile grounds for bullying. Simpson and Cohen (2004) concur whilst also acknowledging the role of individual characteristics and organisational contexts. While Smith et al (2003, p. 175) report that the risk of being bullied is highest for those who were both bullies and victims at school. Notwithstanding the determinants for the behaviour there is national (Edwards, 2004), and international (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2004; Seward & Faby, 2003) recognition that the problem is significant, and on the rise.

McCarthy (2000, p. 1) discusses the modern work environment, “… wherein one can be both bully and victim” by virtue of circumstances. This contention is supported by other researches (e.g. McCarthy, 2003; McCarthy & Rylance, 2001; Rafferty, 2001), who also believe that anyone can become a bully or victim. In particular circumstances this can lead to a cycle where the victim can in turn become the bully. Einarsen et al (2003, p. 14) also support this notion.

Factors such as individual experience, status, and access to information seem also to play a part in bullying scenarios (Lewis, 2003b). Meek (2004, p. 312) contends that bullying tactics can be used as a social mechanism to pressure individuals who do not conform to group norms. In the Japanese context this is
known as *ijime*, and is used as an emotional response towards individuals who do not fit (due to performance or personal characteristics) during times of change, economic stress, and crisis. This discussion is of relevance to the APS which within the last decade has come to experience significant pressures and changes that will be explored below.

‘Bullying’ and Other Terms

Studies of bullying have not used a single definition (Rayner et al., 1999), presenting a challenge to their interpretation. This is partly due to the high level of subjectivity associated with the study of the area (Coyne et al., 2004; Hoel & Cooper, 2001). For this thesis, Bowie’s definition (cited in Timo et al., 2004, p. 38) forms a useful starting point: “… bullying is a set of dysfunctional workplace behaviours ranging from those that adversely impact emotional well-being and stability to physical violence causing injury and harm”.

Liefooghe and Mackenzie Davey (2003, p. 223) call for a subjective definition of bullying “… rather than a definition that is clear, unambiguous and understood by all”. This is not the first time that prominent areas of research have had to resort to such an approach. Francesco and Gold (2005, p. 18) state with respect to *culture* that: “A single definition of culture is not adequate because the concept is complex. Indeed, defining culture has become a study in itself”. Price (2004, p. 32) writes of the concept of *Human Resource Management* (HRM) that:

“Many people find HRM to be a vague and elusive concept, not least because it seems to have a variety of meanings … Pinning down an acceptable definition can seem like trying to hit a moving target in the fog. This confusion reflects the different interpretations found in articles and books about human resource management … It covers a range of applications that vary from book to book and organization to organization.”

The lack of a universally accepted definition is not a huge barrier to increasing understanding of a concept (Gray & Watson, 2001, p. 21), this applies to bullying which is inherently subjective in nature. However, in the workplace, investigation of complaints and possible litigation requires an objective description. This can be achieved in the same manner as for the concept of sexual harassment, where the *reasonable person* legal test would apply:
“… consideration of the following question: would a hypothetical ‘reasonable person’ feel that the complainant’s reaction to the behaviour was understandable in the circumstances? What is reasonable will depend on the circumstances of a particular case … factors such as the age of the complainant, their race or ethnicity, any disability they may have, the context in which the harassment occurred and the nature of the relationship between the parties could all be taken into account” (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2004, p. 13).

The complexities associated with defining bullying are shown in definitions and explanations put forth by various authors in Table 1.
### Table 1 – Some Explanations/Definitions of Bullying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Explanation/Definition</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>“… abusive behaviours in the workplace refer to hostile verbal and nonverbal behaviours (excluding physical contact) directed by one or more persons towards another that are aimed at undermining the other to ensure compliance.”</td>
<td>(Keashly et al., 1994, p. 342)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“… the systematic abuse of power”</td>
<td>(Smith, 1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying is defined within five main categories: 1- Threats to an individual’s professional status (e.g. public humiliation and accusation of mistakes); 2 – Threats to an individual’s personal standing (e.g. insults, teasing and spreading rumours); 3- Isolation – withholding work-related information or prohibiting access to opportunities for development; 4 – Overwork (e.g. impossible to meet deadlines); 5 – Destabilisation (e.g. lack of recognition or reward for good work). The authors are also of the opinion that the victim must actually feel harassed by this activities and their work affected as a result.</td>
<td>(Rayner &amp; Hoel, 1997)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Both mobbing and bullying involve offensive behaviour through vindictive, cruel, malicious or humiliating attempts to undermine an individual or group of workers. These persistently negative attacks on their personal and professional performance are typically unpredictable, irrational and unfair.”</td>
<td>(Di Martino et al., 2003, p. 6)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Although, the concept of ‘bullying’ … and the term of ‘mobbing’ … may have some semantic differences and connotations, to all intents and purposes they refer to the same phenomenon.”</td>
<td>(Einarsen et al., 2003, p. 25)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“Bullying-related incidents usually involve a range of covert and overt behaviours which are repeated over time. Thus, multiple tactics by perpetrators are to be expected”</td>
<td>(McCarthy et al., 2003a, p. 324)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>“… generic harassment”</td>
<td>(Einarsen cited in Vega &amp; Comer, 2005, p. 103)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A common element of most of these definitions is the detrimental effects on the victim. There are also clear indications of an imbalance of power, and the use of a wide range of techniques and behaviours to bully.

Regarding power, Lewis (2003a, p. 242) sees “… power as a source, not an act. It is an ability, a capacity, a potential; and it does not have to be used … a person may be powerful in one situation but powerless in another”. Power may be drawn from many sources including position or knowledge (Hoel & Cooper, 2001, p. 5), and influence over others or status within the organisation (Rafferty, 2001, p. 102). With respect to the public sector, Lewis (2003a, p. 250) reflects on Courpasson’s belief that: “… the re-emergence of bureaucracies is a sign that organisations are becoming more politically centralised and governed”. This suggests the wielding of power as a systemic issue, and one that is used as a tactics to meet objectives within organisations.

Another problem of terminology is the use of mobbing rather than bullying in the Scandinavian literature, including most of the early work in this area (Einarsen, 2000). The word mobbing is drawn from the biological sciences, where it refers to group attacks, generally on a predator but also within species (Schuster, 1996, p. 294). The English term first appeared in a translation of Konrad Lorenz’s 1963 study of outsiders in school and society (Schuster, 1996, p. 294). The use of mobbing in Scandinavian literature points to bullying as a group phenomenon, and some authors, (for example Pavett and Morris cited in, Rayner & Hoel, 1997) link this to Hofstede’s view of cultures, in which the Scandinavian countries are seen to have a more collectivist approach than individualist societies found in the UK and other parts of Europe, the US, and Australia (Wood et al., 2001, pp. 59-60). The term bullying, on the other hand, is more often used in English, Australian and some American studies, usually in a generic sense appropriate to individual and group behaviour.

Several dimensions to the distinction between bullying and mobbing have been identified. Schuster (1996, p. 298) indicates that “The only difference between both definitions lies in the treatment of the imbalance in strength: this is an integral part of the bullying definition but not of the one of mobbing by Leymann”. However, ‘strength’ is also synonymous with the power wielded by one or more individuals over others, whereas mobbing is seen to occur when victims are unable to
cope with attacks (Neuberger cited in Schuster, 1996, p. 298). Zapf (2001, p. 12) focuses on a third distinction: “The British view tends to focus on the bully … On the other hand ‘mobbing’ research has always had a clear focus on the victim”.

The term bullying is used in this thesis without implication regarding these issues. Bully does, however, have some interesting connotations regarding gender. Crawford (1999) notes that the word may be derived from the middle Dutch word broeder meaning brother, a male reference. Also, according to Crawford, it was used in the early eighteenth century to describe a pimp or villain, possibly a reference to the exploitation of women by men. As well, the association with bull may be taken to imply masculine behaviour. However, the present research evidence does not support conclusions about the extent of these behaviours amongst men compared to women, and the connotation that bullying is especially male behaviour is not intended in this thesis.

Another issue in defining bullying stems from often-implicit assumptions about the frequency of events. Many authors (e.g. Einarsen, 2000) consider that the behaviour must be repeated rather than a single incident, and some have even defined a minimum number of months for its duration (Leymann cited in Lee, 2000). However, others like Randall (cited in Lee, 2000) believe single incidents may also constitute bullying, as the impact of an isolated incident may be very significant for the victim. There is, however, agreement that like harassment, people have varying thresholds for what they consider bullying. The position taken here is that the focus should be on the resultant state, and therefore single acts - if significant enough - may also constitute bullying. This notion is further explored in Chapters Four and Five.

A final area for clarification is the distinction between harassment and bullying. Some authors (e.g. Hamer, 2004; Yandrick, 1999) use these terms interchangeably. Field (2002) and Simpson and Cohen (2004) are amongst the few who try to clearly distinguish the two, with harassment referring to bullying based on biases against certain ‘demographic’ groups:

“Bullying differs from harassment in that there is no obvious bias towards race, gender or disability, for serial bullies are usually cunning enough to keep their prejudices under wraps. As evolving law rescinds opportunities for physical violence and for the expression of prejudices through discrimination and harassment, it seems that the
more devious harassers modify the focus of their behaviour such that they remain outside the provisions of current legislation. They graduate from physical violence to psychological violence which is harder to prove and less well covered by legislation” (Field, 2002, p. 34).

“Both harassment and bullying concern unwanted behaviour which causes offence to the targeted individual and which is not justified by the working or professional relationship. This behaviour could be considered as harassment when directed against someone because of their race, sex, disability, age, sexual orientation or some other physical group orientated feature. Yet it might be considered bullying when based on ‘individual’ factors such as personality traits, work position or levels of competence in the job. Sexual harassment … will be orientated towards the gender of the target. … Bullying … is likely to be work orientated” (Simpson & Cohen, 2004).

For the purposes of this research Simpson and Cohen’s (2004) distinction will be used, with bullying viewed as involving individual targets rather than those groups covered by anti-discrimination legislation in Australia.

Finally, an alternative to defining bullying may be to ask what behaviours are not considered bullying, and to use these in establishing workplace standards of conduct and behaviour. A few such concepts could include: respect, dignity, fairness, ethical conduct, moral behaviour, appropriate treatment, reasonableness, nurturing, and inclusion. Some of these notions will be further explored in Chapter Five.

**Interest in Workplace Bullying in Australia**

Workplace climates and cultures affect perceptions of social responsibility amongst external stakeholders (McCarthy et al., 2003b, p. 14). Bullying has only recently come to public attention as a workplace issue in Australia, as elsewhere. A wide range of stakeholders have recently raised public awareness of bullying as a significant work issue through a variety of means: industry bulletins, for example, from the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU, 2003); large scale studies (Dyer, 2003); discussion papers (Lynch, 2002), guidance notes (WorkSafe Western Australia Commission, 2003a, 2003b); websites (Shallcross, 2004); and research groups (Beyond Bullying Association Inc, n.d.).
The economic costs of bullying may also form a catalyst for public attention and preventative action:

“The impacts were costed using Australian economic statistics … National costs from Au. [Australian dollar] $6-13 billion (3.5% prevalence) including hidden and lost opportunity costs, rising to $17-36 billion dollars per year (15% prevalence) were calculated. The model also indicated that between 350,000 and 1.5 million Australian workers could be victims of bullying at work. Costs to smaller organizations (less than 20 employees) were between $17,000 and $24,000 per annum. Cost estimates for larger corporations that included direct, hidden and lost opportunity costs ranged from Au. $0.6 and $3.6 million per 1,000 employees per year. The average per-case costs of bullying were between Au. $16,977 (3.5% prevalence) and Au. $24,256 (15% prevalence)” (McCarthy, 2004a, pp. 42-3).

The most significant bullying research in Australia has come from a group at Griffith University (e.g. McCarthy et al., 2003a; Sheehan et al., 1999) who first published in 1995 (Sheehan, 2004a). McCarthy and Rylance (2001, p. xiii) identify Australian studies conducted in a variety of occupations and workplaces; nursing, social service work, construction, pastoral care, universities, Olympic Games support services, flight attendants and courts. It is interesting to note that all these appear to be in service professions or industries.

Recently issues relating to bullying have also come to the attention of government workplace health and safety authorities, with guidance notes produced in Victoria (Victorian WorkCover Authority, 2003), South Australia (Lynch, 2002; South Australian Office of Employee Ombudsman, n.d.), and Western Australia (WorkSafe Western Australia Commission, 2003a, 2003b). Other organizations have begun empirical investigations: the Northern Territory government (Dyer, 2003) and the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU, 2003) have recently embarked on large-scale surveys of the prevalence of workplace bullying. However, as in the UK (Sheehan et al., 1999), the most aggressive push for acknowledgement of the significance of bullying behaviour, and action to redress it has come from unions (CPSU, 2003; Hannabuss, 1998).

The value of research to public policy or guidelines does, however, appear to have been under emphasised as McCarthy and Rylance (2001, p. xvii) point out:

“In Australia, as in other countries, policy development and the publication of guidelines have raced ahead of both research validation
and the implementation and evaluation of preventative measures …
This appears to have created a climate in which governments have seen the value in releasing guidelines as emblems of caring”.

While there seems to be much interest in workplace bullying in Australia, the issuing of guidance notes in the absence of thorough research might be seen as a ‘knee-jerk’ reaction, a band-aid strategy for a problem that on further investigation appears far more complex than portrayed in official documents.

The APS is no different to any other private or public organization in this regard: legislative protection (discussed in the next section) and policies in individual agencies appear to have been developed in the absence of research or systematic reviews. This throws open to question the preventative and protective value of such legislation and policies. The research on the APS in this thesis is intended as a step towards more empirically informed policy making.

**Legislation on Bullying**

To date three countries have enacted legislation against bullying in the workplace, Sweden in 1993, Norway in 1994 (McAvoy & Murtagh, 2003; Rayner & Hoel, 1997) and more recently Colombia in 2006 (Zanolli Davenport, 2006). In Sweden, this legislation places the responsibility for preventing bullying on managers:

“An Ordinance as part of the Swedish Work Environment Act goes so far as to prohibit victimisation at work, including “mobbing” or bullying behaviours. Significantly, in locating contributing factors within the work environment, the Ordinance accords management key responsibility for the problem and remedies” (Sheehan et al., 1999).

There seems to be much interest in addressing the issue of bullying in other parts of Europe. The Netherlands has a Working Conditions Act (1994) that protects employees from sexual harassment and psychological aggression (Hubert & van Veldhoven, 2001, p. 415). Germany, France, and Italy have also been working towards legislation relating to bullying (Lowry Miller, 2000), and Spanish researchers have recently called for the European Union (EU) to adopt regulations against bullying (Drago, 2002).
In the UK, Lord Monkswell introduced the Dignity at Work Bill into the House of Lords as a private member’s Bill in 1996. Although the Bill failed to reach the statute books, the discussion that ensued had an important role in raising general awareness of bullying in the UK (Sheehan et al., 1999). In 2001, the Bill was reintroduced to the House of Lords by Baroness Anne Gibson for a second reading (Dignity at Work Bill 2001, 2001). Yet again, it did not reach legal status.

In Australia, although there is no single legislation protecting employees against workplace bullying there are multiple legal avenues for action as shown in Table 2 based on MacDermott (2001, pp. 11-14).

Table 2 – Relevant Australian Legislation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Legislation</th>
<th>Coverage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Common law</td>
<td>based on the duty of care on the part of the employer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Occupational Health &amp; Safety (OH&amp;S)</td>
<td>based on the requirement to provide a safe workplace</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>legislation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anti-discrimination legislation</td>
<td>related to an attribute or ground covered as part of the relevant legislation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unfair dismissal</td>
<td>related to constructive dismissal, where under the relevant legislation voluntarily leaving a workplace can be seen to constitute dismissal given certain conditions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Criminal law</td>
<td>in instances of assault or threat of assault</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Worker’s compensation</td>
<td>where liability is raised as a consequence of bullying actions</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In the APS employees are bound not only by the legislation in Table 2 but also by the Australian Public Service Act (1999). This requires all officers to treat others with respect, especially in Sections 10 “APS Values”, 13 “The APS Code of Conduct” (see Appendix 1), and 16 “Protection for Whistle Blowers” ("The Public Service Act", 1999).

Going beyond such legal obligations on employers, Gorman (cited in Sheehan, 1999) identifies a need for a Code of Practice governing conduct in the
workplace (similar to that for sexual harassment in Australia). This idea has received support from the Community and Public Sector Union (CPSU):

“A code of practice provides practical guidance backed up by OH&S legislation. It sets a standard employers must comply with, or have arrangements in place which are equivalent, or better, than those contained in the code. A code of practice sets out how to establish preventative strategies as well as how to deal with bullying complaints” (CPSU, 2003, p. 1).

Attention to bullying is also growing amongst many state governments. In 2006, WorkSafe W.A. released a Code of Practice covering violence, aggression and bullying at work. In Tasmania the Anti-Discrimination Act (1998) makes specific reference to bullying behaviour that “offends, humiliates, intimidates, insults or ridicules” (McCarthy & Rylance, 2001, p. xvi). Changes have also been proposed for the Queensland Public Service Act (1996).

However, Sheehan (2004b, p. 7), provides some cautions about the role of legislation as a panacea for workplace incivility:

“Legislative change has some limitations. First, legislative change may be needed to encourage behavioural change but it does not always guarantee attitudinal change. Second, it suggests a punitive approach to addressing the problem … Such an approach tends to further a hostile environment where conflict is not dealt with constructively. Third, it diverts the problem away from those who are probably best placed for dealing with the problem and into the hand of human resource staff, or others … Organisations need to confront the perpetrators within a problem solving rather than punitive framework to address the problem. The persons identified as mobbers ought to be confronted about their behaviour. Second, those people ought to be offered an opportunity to deal with their behaviour within a framework of skill development”.

Sheehan is suggesting a more proactive and humanistic approach to dealing with workplace bullies, based on a better understanding of the psycho-social issues. To achieve this, however, will require systematic research into the causes of bullying in specific contexts. Legislation can be seen as a reactive response that will not necessarily create cultural change and corresponding permanent shifts in behaviour.
The Prevalence of Bullying

Is the problem of bullying so significant as to suggest more resources be put into research, legislation, codes of conduct, policies, union campaigns, and other actions? There are many estimates of the numbers of employees affected by bullying. Significantly, Lewis (cited in Sheehan & Jordan, 2000, p.3) found that bullying was more prevalent than sex discrimination, sexual harassment, and racial harassment.

Di Martino et al (2003, p. 41) in collating the results of studies on bullying in the European Union found the prevalence of bullying varied greatly across countries, sectors and studies from 1% to more than 50% of an organisation’s workforce. Unfortunately such comparisons pose a problem in that different definitions of workplace bullying have been used in most studies. In some, a list of predefined negative acts are provided to participants to identify with; in others, subjects are asked whether they have been bullied under a particular definition (Salin, 2001). Some examples of estimates across countries and regions are shown in Table 3.
Table 3 – Studies of the Prevalence of Bullying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries/Regions</th>
<th>Prevalence</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Scandinavia</strong></td>
<td>“Leymann … interviewed 2,400 Swedish workers and discovered that: men (45 percent) and women (55 percent) are subjected to [bullying]” (Lee, 2002). “Among male workers in a Norwegian shipyard … bullying was as high as 17%” (Einarsen &amp; Skogstad cited in Einarsen, 2000).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The United Kingdom</strong></td>
<td>“… 35 of the 50 people I interviewed … came forward … to tell me about experiences of workplace bullying” (Lee, 2000). “In a sample of 1,137 part-time students in an English university, 50% reported that they were bullied at work” (Rayner cited in Einarsen, 2000).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The United States</strong></td>
<td>“According to a report … by the U.S Department of Justice in 1998, approximately one thousand employees are murdered yearly while performing their work duties. The same study … noted that there were two million incidences of workplace violence reported, including one million simple assaults and 400,000 aggravated assaults” (Atkinson, 2000). “In two separate surveys on perceptions of abuse or mistreatment among nurses, some 64% and 82% of the respondents reported being verbally abused by physicians and supervisors” (Cox &amp; Diaz cited in Einarsen, 2000).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Australia</strong></td>
<td>In an Australian tertiary education institution “Over 80 of the 100 interviewees (80%) experienced 99 separate incidents where they had been bullied, subjected to unreasonable work practices/expectations or some form of occupational violence in the previous 12 month period” (McCarthy et al., 2003a). “Some 87% (232) of respondents described themselves as targets of … bullying and 13% responded as witnesses” (Stuart &amp; Finlay, 2001).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Europe</strong></td>
<td>“During 2003 mobbing affected around 5% of workers” in Spain (Carnero &amp; Martinez, 2005).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

As well, Table 4 provides a summary of some findings relating to the rates of bullying. It can be seen that the figures reported in the New Zealand and Canadian public sectors are higher than that of the Australian public sector (18%). Results in the table also indicate that rates as low as 2% and high as 80% have been reported,
the significant differences in rates may relate to national culture (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001), industry, and work environment. There are also suggestions that the experiences of males and females relating to bullying are different, but no studies have conclusively identified gender as an antecedent (Kaukianinen et al., 2001, p. 368).

Table 4 – Rates of Bullying

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Study</th>
<th>Occupation</th>
<th>Rate</th>
<th>Other information</th>
<th>Reference</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Zealand Canada</td>
<td>public sector</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>year 2000</td>
<td>(Reported in Australian Public Service Commission, 2004a)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>public sector</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>year 2002</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finland</td>
<td>prison officers</td>
<td>20%</td>
<td>no differences between men &amp; women</td>
<td>(Vartia &amp; Hyyti, 2002)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td></td>
<td>24.7%</td>
<td>bullied in the last 5 years</td>
<td>(Hoel et al., 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Denmark</td>
<td></td>
<td>2-4%</td>
<td>“now and then” “strict criteria”</td>
<td>(Mikkelsen &amp; Einarsen, 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>2.7-8%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Britain</td>
<td>various sectors</td>
<td>10%</td>
<td></td>
<td>Reported in (Mayhew &amp; Chappell, 2001)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ireland</td>
<td></td>
<td>23%</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td></td>
<td>27.2%</td>
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<td>EU</td>
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<td>UK</td>
<td>higher education</td>
<td>18%</td>
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<td>(Lewis, 1999)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>US</td>
<td></td>
<td>20%</td>
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<td>(Gardner &amp; Johnson, 2001)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>health higher</td>
<td>10.5%</td>
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<td>(McCarthy &amp; Mayhew, 2003)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>education</td>
<td>65%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>higher education</td>
<td>80%</td>
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<td>(McCarthy et al., 2003a)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Australia</td>
<td>various</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>higher for public sector (18%)</td>
<td>(Sweeney Research, 2003)</td>
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</table>
Tables 3 and 4 show that estimates of the extent of bullying vary widely. The national culture and the industry in which the surveys were conducted are likely to have influenced the results to a large but unknown extent. Despite this, results suggest that the problem is widespread; further the human and financial costs associated with a single incident can have a ripple effect across the organization and beyond, into the private relationships of employees. Thus the evidence, although qualified, supports the view that further action is required to reduce bullying.

**Bullying in The Australian Public Service**

The literature is inconclusive relating to the sector specific prevalence of bullying, with some studies finding that it is more prevalent in the public sector (Di Martino et al., 2003, p. 43), and others who make the same assertions relating to the private sector (Hoel et al., 1999, p. 202). Unfortunately, there are no comparable figures for Australia. However, there is general agreement that globalisation has affected the public sector, specifically with moves towards a more market-orientated approach (Rayner et al., 2002, p. 6). Many of the key challenges for the future of the APS reflect that of the private sector. For example: achieving a flexible, intellectually agile workforce; recruitment and attraction in a tightening labour market; planning for a more diverse career patterns; and addressing L&D [learning and development] gaps and developing future leaders (Lamond, 2005). Despite this, there are significant differences between the public and private sectors. The latter remains characterised by a high degree of regulation, traditional bureaucratic structures, job security, and low mobility; factors in themselves that may be significant in the study of bullying in the workplace.

This thesis is the first known multi-agency study of bullying in the (Commonwealth) Australian Public Service. In keeping with the growing public attention to bullying, its significance is now being realised in the APS. Incidents of harassment, discrimination and bullying were measured for the APS State of Service Report for the first time during 2002-03, yielding a figure of 18% (The Australian Public Service Commission, 2003, p. 113). Since then, other statistics have been gathered and reported, including those showing a significant rise in psychological injury claims in recent years (Leahy, 2004).
As discussed, certain features of the APS create a specific context for bullying that is likely to be very different from other sectors. First, it has a highly regulated nature, providing rules for business transactions and individual conduct across all APS agencies; a framework that defines acceptable behaviour (Appendix 1) and that which is not sanctioned. At the same time, individual agencies have different histories, functions, and types of business, and therefore unique cultural variations within the APS framework. There is thus tension between pressures for conformity and the need for flexibility and recognition of uniqueness. Standards for what constitutes bullying, and remedial actions to address it, are confronted with the challenge of enforcing global standards in the face of local cultures and decision-making practices.

A second feature of the APS lies in the sweeping changes to government found in many Western nations in recent decades:

“Over the last 10-12 years, Civil Service jurisdictions in Canada, the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia have seen various change initiatives … some are fuelled by internal and/or external pressures, which are forcing some Civil Service organizations to respond to corporate situations (i.e. improved service delivery at an accelerated rate). Some of these pressures include fiscal pressures and expectations of clients/customer” (Caverley, 2005, p. 402).

Caverley (2005, p. 402) further contends that these trends include “limits in flexibility and autonomy, often vague and disputed goals, continually shifting performance expectations, media scrutiny, and political interference [which] are just a few of the features common to the Civil Service which make coping with change a difficult endeavour”.

Such changes are sometimes described as New Public Management (NPM) principles. These principles have resulted in increased flexibility at the agency level, resulting in more discretionary managerial decision making with the ultimate aim of positioning agencies to deliver better outcomes (Anderson et al., 2003, p. 2). The NPM principles will be further explored later in this section. New Zealand research on the implementation of NPM principles has reported that the focus has very strongly been on “ … the financial, measurable, auditable, and short term” (Norman & Gregory, 2003), therefore posing questions on the long term sustainability and implications of the changes.
To some the notion of a flexible public sector may be an oxymoron. On one hand there is a push to be responsive to change and in tune with societal and business trends; on the other, APS employees are bound by the shackles of legislation, regulation, inflexible structures, policies, and procedures. This tension underlies many questions that fuelled the passion to embark on this thesis: has this created an environment where innovation and empowerment is encouraged but not allowed? Does it cause frustration and helplessness? How does this helplessness manifest itself? Does it affect the interactions amongst APS employees? If so, how?

The nature of work in the APS itself may be a contributing factor. Based on findings from a large numbers of violent incidents Di Martino et al. (2003, pp. 16-21) found that “… working in industries with high customer service orientation has been associated with incidents of psychological violence”.

Schneider and Barsoux (2003, p. 312) state that: “In today’s competitive environment, performance pressures are ever-increasing … pressure to achieve objectives above all else has led to a means justify the ends attitude”. This statement not only applies to the private sector, but increasingly to the public sector too; hence, the increased interest in the area of ethics in the public sector (Ehrich et al., 2004; Kimber & Maddox, 2003). Traditionally, the image of the public sector has been one that is less effective and influential compared to the private sector (Halligan, 2005, p. 27), with emphasis on efficiency as opposed to outputs, and more recently outcomes (Cooper & Atkins, 2005, p. 11).

Hubert and van Veldhoven (2001, p. 422) report that (local) government and public administration are high-risk work settings for unpleasant interactions between people. The reason for this is the lack of clarity in measuring the quality and quantity of work, and therefore interpersonal relationships between supervisors and workers are important in establishing one’s worth and status. Conflicting interests can therefore be common in this environment. As well, the hierarchical and bureaucratic nature of the public sector can result in power differentials (Crawford, 1997), creating potential for abuse.

Zapf et al (cited in Hoel et al., 2004, p. 370) reported that low job mobility coupled with high job security (Zapf, 2001, p. 18) in the public sector environment may create fertile grounds for negative behaviours. This would mean that due to the
nature of the APS, movements happen across agencies (internally), and due to informal networks, reputations can precede individuals.

Ehrich et al (2004, p. 25) state that:

“Corruption, fraud, illegal conduct and other types of criminal activity have characterised both public and private sectors around the world. Controversies surrounding the behaviour of ministers, senior public sector managers and other high profile leaders seem to be commonplace in public life and never far from the headlines”.

These behaviours can in turn be seen as role models for others lower down the hierarchy. After all, if prominent individuals in positions of power have benefited from displaying unscrupulous acts, what is there to prevent others from taking their lead?

The APS has gone through a significant period of reforms in the last decade. The aim of the reforms was to “… improve the performance and accountability of the Australian Public Sector and to provide better services to its citizens” ("Notes on Public Sector reform and performance management - Australia", 2004, p. 20). This was to be achieved through two objectives: “ … promote a culture of performance; and to make the public sector more responsive to the needs of Government by increasing the organizations’ accountability, promoting efficiency and effectiveness, introducing participative decision making and adopting a customer focus” (Hoque & Moll, 2001, p. 304).

The government implemented reforms in the APS through three major initiatives: the new Public Service Act, The Workplace Relations Act, and financial reforms (Anderson et al., 2002d, p. 18). The new Public Service Act changed the focus from legislation that was primarily regulatory in nature to one that is values-based. However, Anderson et al (2002b, pp. 10-11) state that “Rather than enforcing the application of values through prescriptive procedures that protect employees, the Act places obligations on employees to uphold the values under the threat of sanctions which include termination”. The researchers go on to contend that “When considered in the wider context of diminishing budgets, flexible employment practices, performance focus and contestability, values such as equity and a safe workplace may be compromised”. Curtin (2000, p. 115) further contends that the search for cost-efficient outcomes-based deliverables has resulted in process
becoming “… the poor cousin to progress”, yet again raising the possibility that the key pillars of the public service could be jeopardised.

Industrial relations changes were designed to promote individuality, and strengthen management authority (Anderson et al., 2002c, p. 5). O’Donnell (cited in, "Notes on Public Sector reform and performance management - Australia", 2004) contends that this allowed “… managerial prerogatives [to be] used in an arbitrary and subjective manner, with favourites rewarded and others less favoured potentially victimised”. This new power in itself therefore resulted in inequities.

The third pillar for change was the New Public Management (NPM) principles:

“… the transformation of the culture of the public service to an entrepreneurial and performance-focused vision, in which the size and reach of the public sector is reduced and what remains operates within commercial frameworks … resulting in reduced employment levels in the public sector and, potentially, reduced conditions of work” (Anderson et al., 2002a, pp. 2-4)

Within this framework, much of the efficiency dividends have been gained by cost cutting, through reducing unit costs. This has been through changes in wages, systems and structures, and intensifying performance management under the guise of ‘performance improvement’ (Ironside & Seifert, 2003, p. 387).

Anderson et al (2002d, p. 14) contend:

“NPM has been widely criticised … Concerns generally revolve around the applicability of economic theory to the public sector and the resultant diminution of impartiality, accountability, ethical standards, fairness and equity.”

A former Queensland Premier, Wayne Goss, writes in a critique of appraisal and reward systems in the public service that they do not take into account the “… nature of public work, principles of equity and fairness, and in many cases the different, non-monetary motivations of public officials” (2001, p. 4). The new APS performance culture necessitates regular scrutiny of employee performance, procedures and practices that have not traditionally been part of the APS environment. Given job security, and the fairly stable nature of the APS, it is therefore not surprising that there may be some reluctance to accept the new ways. This may be indirectly reflected in some APS statistics.
In 2002-3, 2003-4, and 2004-5 the rates of bullying within the APS were 18% (Australian Public Service Commission, 2003b, p. 113), 15% (Australian Public Service Commission, 2004b, p.184), and 17% (Australian Public Service Commission, 2005, p. 132) respectively. The main reasons for self-identifying as a victim were reported as: perceived personality differences (Australian Public Service Commission, 2004b), persistent and unjustified criticism, humiliation through sarcasm, and criticisms or insults sometimes in front of other employees or customers (Australian Public Service Commission, 2004b, p. 188). This ‘undue’ criticism may be a by-product of the need for increased efficiency and effectiveness within the workplace, reflective of the new performance driven culture.

Notwithstanding the safety aspects of bullying incidents, direct costs for organisations can be significant. These can manifest themselves as insurance premiums reflecting compensation claims and costs of legal action, especially in view of vicarious liability held by organisations.

Leahy (2004) the CEO of Comcare reports that in 2004-5, the average cost of psychological injury claims amounted to $109,360, with 16% of the claims resulting from bullying incidents. The predicted number of psychological injury claims for 2004-5 was 504, at 16% of all claims. The cost of bullying would amount to around $8.75 million, a significant figure by any measure.

In the context of bullying, such issues call for understanding of the causes or antecedents of bullying in the highly regulated but locally variable and constantly changing APS environment, and on the specific consequences of bullying in such a publicly visible service. The sections below draw research questions on the antecedents and consequences of bullying from the general literature to form the basis of this research into the APS.

Antecedents of Bullying in Organisations

Some published accounts of bullying tend to ascribe it to the bully’s anti-social behaviour or personality defects, a view that seems simplistic when the research literature is considered. While the exact causes of any bullying incident may be difficult to determine, a number of factors or variables have been found to promote bullying. Leymann (cited in Einarsen, 2000) identified four:
“(1) deficiencies in work design, (2) deficiencies in leadership behaviour, (3) socially-exposed position of the victim, and (4) low moral standards in the department”.

Thus antecedents of bullying can be separated into two areas: individual factors relating to both the victim and the perpetrator, and organisational variables relating to leadership, culture and other areas of management. The literature relating to these areas is discussed below.

**Individual Factors**

As individual factors behind bullying are found in both victim and perpetrator, a significant issue is how the intentions of the perpetrator compare to the perceptions of the victim. This point is elaborated in the discussion below.

**The Victim**

Is a certain sort of employee more prone to being bullied? Evidence on the profile, demography and traits of victims offers many possible answers that can be placed between the ends of a continuum reflecting the degree of ‘difference’ in the organisation, or power held by the victim. On one hand are the: younger, weaker, and smaller victims (Ramsey, 2002); the less skilled (Zapf, 1999); paranoid employees (Zapf, 1999); and those with fewer social skills (Einarsen, 2000). On the other hand there are the highly skilled, competent, high achievers (Yeung & Cooper, 2002), and the trusting, creative, and highly loyal if politically inept (Noring, 2000). Coyne et al (2003, p. 227) report that; “Those that by nature are unable to cope with criticism, are anxious and suspicious, and view the world as threatening perceive the working environment in more negative terms than do others in the same environment”. The diversity of the characteristics of the victim could be indicative of factors that may be antecedents in bullying scenarios.

Difference in physical characteristics such as weight of the victim, has also been reported as a possible cause factor. A Finnish study found that “The victims of prolonged bullying had an average of one unit higher body mass index than other employees (Kivimaki et al., 2003, p. 781).

Gender may also be a consideration in bullying scenarios. A study of flight attendants found that females were more accommodating of abusive passengers, and
dealt with them in a less assertive manner, however, they suffered more in the aftermath (Barron, 2000, p. 435). This finding suggests conflict management strategies differ for males and females, a factor that can escalate a conflict.

Based on a review of many studies, Coyne et al (2000) assert that some people may be predisposed to being bullied due to certain characteristics, however Leymann is reported in the same article as not supporting this contention. Similarly, Zapf (1999) contends that it is easier to harass those who are not part of the in-group. Rayner et al (2002, p. 186) also supports this notion by reporting that multiculturalism introduces further complexities into the study of bullying, as the notion of acceptable behaviour becomes a matter of opinion. Archer (1999) found “… bullying of individuals because of their sex or race remains an aspect of Fire Services culture and is perpetuated by some to ensure the continuation of the white male culture”. Diversity can therefore be seen as a potential reason for being bullied.

In terms of the relationship between personality and bullying, Hoel et al (1999, p. 202) believe that research is inconclusive. Munro et al (2005, p. 49) found similar constructs for narcissism and empathy between the groups they studied. However, Lynch and O’Moore (2004) discovered that agreeableness and conscientiousness was higher for the bullied (versus control) group. Coyne et al (2000, p. 335) found that “Victims tended to be less independent, and extroverted, less stable, and more conscientious than non-victims”. Einarsen (2000) suggests that the reactions of the victims are dependant on intellect and temperament; Burt (2004) contends: “Individuals who find sick jokes funny are more likely to engage in bullying”. There are also indications that exposure to bullying as a child can shape the victim, their emotions, and regulation thereof (Cowie & Berdondini, 2002, p. 209).

Stuart and Finlay (2001) indicate that the trigger for bullying quite often occurs when the victim refuses to behave in an unethical way. Coyne et al (2000, p. 346) provide further insights by indicating:

“Victims … are generally rule-bound and moralistic (honest and punctual) as well as organized (accurate). Perhaps this rigid, traditional, often perfectionist style may annoy fellow work colleagues and lead to the individual being bullied.”
Matthiesen (2004, p. 3) and Hostmælingen et al (2004) believe that some whistleblowers experience severe bullying when compared to non-whistleblowers, and that many end up leaving the organisation either voluntarily, by being sacked, or not having their contracts renewed.

Sheehan and Jordan (2003, p. 359) indicate, “bullying emerges from emotional as well as cognitive processes”. Einarsen (2000) is of the opinion that personality traits may be moderators of the individual’s reaction to victimisation, and that social support at or off work is also seen as a moderator. Schuster (1996, p. 295) reports on the work of Leymann and Niedl that “… age and gender play a minor role even though groups between 20-40 are slightly more affected”, with Zapf and Einarsen (2003) stating:

“… some individuals may generally or in specific situation be at risk due to social, demographic or personal factors, which increases their changes of experiencing bullying. Second, their personality and behaviours may be a possible factor in eliciting aggressive behaviours in others (p. 174) … overachievement and conscientiousness … may be highly annoying to others … [and] clash with the norms of the work group” (p. 178).

Cause-effect relations may not be simple in some of the personality variables. Zapf (1999) makes the interesting point that “… anxious, depressive and obsessive behaviour of the victim” may both be an effect of bullying and a cause of it. That is, such behaviours in some sense invite attention from potential bullies. From a clinical psychology perspective, such behaviours can be related to personality styles that have self-destructive tendencies towards seeking out domination or even psychological hurt from others (e.g. Shostrom, 1967). Australian research by Djurkovic et al (2006, p. 83) found “… bullying and neuroticism act independently on negative affect … [indicating] that the disposition of the victim does not influence emotional reactions to bullying”. Little research has examined when personality attributes are a cause or an effect. It has also been suggested that at some stage bullying becomes a self-perpetuating cycle, which makes causal relations even more difficult to address; this is discussed in Chapter Five.

The research on victims’ characteristics and demographics therefore raises many questions, but does not support broad generalisations at this point. Evidence from the literature suggests that some predictors such as physical characteristics,
personality, gender, and emotional well-being do exist, however, the prevalence and interrelationship between these indicators are yet to be examined thoroughly.

**The Perpetrator**

Can perpetrators of bullying be predicted on the basis of psychological or demographic characteristics? Beed (2001, p. 47) writes: “The gentlest person has the capacity to bully if pushed into an organisational straightjacket of authoritarian edicts and machinations”. The implication here is that bullies can be created by circumstance. Adams (1997, p. 179) states: “The trouble is that a bully is likely to have a ‘Jekyll and Hyde’ component to his or her character”. This would make it difficult to identify and label such people. There are some indications that the early childhood and the home environment are of significance in creating an individual who may be predisposed to displaying negative behaviours (Hoel & Cooper, 2001).

The literature relating to the perpetrator’s characteristics and profile is inconclusive. Einarsen (2000) and Cowie et al (2002) cite the imbalance of power in the workplace as a cause variable. Rayner and Hoel (1997) identify Machiavellianism as an influence where others are manipulated through acquisition of power (Samson & Daft, 2005b, p. 510). Zapf and Einarsen (2003, p. 168) cite the following main variables: low self-esteem, lack of social competencies, and willingness to engage in micro-political behaviour. Schuster (1996) cites Leymann’s report that, female perpetrators are more spiteful, talk behind people’s backs, ridicule them, and spread rumours, whereas, male perpetrators resort to assignment of new tasks, not talking, repeated interruptions, and violating self-esteem. It appears that strategies used by different (types of) bullies are as varied as the reasons that lead to the behaviours.

McCarthy (2004c, p. 175) states that at times a manager’s behaviour alienates the victim, which subsequently paints the victim as a poor performer and may result in charges of misconduct. It seems that managers can therefore actively lead an employee to become a poor performer. Neuman and Baron (2003, p. 190) suggest: “There is a substantial and growing literature suggesting that perceptions of unfair (insensitive) treatment, on the part of management and/or co-workers, often serve as antecedents to workplace aggression and violence”. In these situations, sometimes team members retaliate; this process is referred to as ‘upward bullying’ by some authors (e. g. Branch et al., 2004b; e. g. Branch et al., 2004c).
Rayner et al (2002, p. 119) emphasise the significance of support and training to help managers effectively deal with workplace challenges. They warn that a lack of attention and action in this area could exacerbate an already high-stress work environment. Rayner and Cooper (1997) identify most bullies as supervisors or managers; contending that the reasons for bullying may vary, from having difficult people to deal with to a low level of interpersonal skills or pressures and high expectations. Mayhew (2004, p. 25) suggests that some perpetrators are willing participants in bullying, whereas “... others may be coerced progressively over time through threats to their own economic survival. Yet, arguably, few will resist the pressure to adopt inappropriate behaviours in an organization where systemic pressure is mounting”.

There is also evidence that certain psychological profiles are associated with school bullying:

“... there is evidence that children who harass others had an avoidantly attached and emotionally less warm relationship to their mothers as infants, and display a heightened level of aggressiveness or assertiveness as well as low level of subjective well-being. They also have more problems at home and dislike going to school” (Schuster, 1996, p. 301).

The above characteristics can easily transfer to adult life and the workplace if left unresolved.

However, as with victims, perpetrators of workplace bullying are difficult to classify. Felson and Tedeschi’s (cited in Einarsen, 1999) distinction between predatory and dispute-related bullying suggests one avenue. The predatory bully is a psychologically unwell individual (Atkinson, 2000), possibly psychotic, who thrives on victimising others (Einarsen, 2000), perhaps as a result of the early childhood experiences described by Schuster (1996). The predatory bully may create an environment that avoids resolution and perpetuates the cycle. Individuals who may become predatory may include those managers Sheehan and Jordan (2000, p. 5) describe as having “... increasing levels of stress, poor social skills or low empathy”. On the other hand, in dispute related scenarios, an unresolved issue at work can lead to a cycle of disruptive behaviours, where the perpetrator and victim can both be seen as ‘victims of circumstance’ in that other factors prevent resolution of the issue.
Another clue may lie in Atkinson’s (2000) view that perpetrators often target those who are different to them, in characteristics such as race, religion, physical characteristics, weight, personality or sexual orientation. Hannabuss (1998) makes a similar point using the Japanese proverb “The nail that sticks out will be hammered”.

Finally, perpetrators (as well as victims in some cases) may have weak interpersonal and communication skills, as Stuart and Finlay (2001) find in their study. This will be further explored in Chapter Five. As most information relating to bullies is indirect and from second hand accounts, it is difficult to devise a comprehensive list of antecedents for the behaviour. Evidence suggests that psychological well-being may be an indicator, as well as the need for power and job preparedness by way of possessing the required competencies.

**Organisational Factors**

Crawford (1997, p. 221) states: “Bullying is so endemic in our lives that I will go as far as to say it is interwoven into the fabric of our work … Many roles in organizations have bullying built into their structure”. This is a significant assertion, and points to a systemic problem of organisational culture. Rafferty (2001, p. 101) believes: “In earlier times people were able to leave a job if they were bullied. With a shrinking job market, resignation is not a realistic option … [therefore] Bullying is sometimes used as a way of harassing an employee into resigning from his or her job”. New Public Management (NPM) principles adopted in the APS are seen as further exacerbating this issue (Ironside & Seifert, 2003).

Leadership is increasingly seen as critical to setting organisations’ values, directions and standards of behaviour, as leaders provide role models for others. Leadership is different from management in this regard: individuals in management positions may or may not have the personal qualities to engage or inspire others in this regard, and others may influence staff by showing leadership qualities without being managers. However, when managers do not address bullying they condone it by modelling avoidance. A lack of leadership can be seen behind the Secretary of the Department of Prime Minister and Cabinet, Dr Shergold’s (2004, p.4) observation that: “ … the public service has been tarnished by politicisation, intimidation and demoralisation”. Gettler (2004, p.196-8) talks of narcissistic leaders crushing dissent, others (Agervold & Gemzoe, 2004; Coyne et al., 2000; Vartia &
Hyyti, 2002) speak of the influence of leadership styles, and Salin (2001, p. 1220) of weak leadership, as contributing factors to bullying.

Some authors suggest bullying studies focus too much on the individual level at the expense of systemic factors in the organisational climate or environment:

“Bullying is arguably far more often the system and one’s role in it, rather than individual personalities. The additional explanation of bullying as an organisational practice rather than merely an individual or interpersonal one is important, as it allows a critical view on the day to day organisational exigencies facing employees” (Liefooghe, 2003, p. 33).

McCarthy (2004c, p. 188) supports this finding: “The serial restructuring and cost cutting in the new organizational forms inevitably relay all sorts of little brutalities that marginalize, threaten, and exclude … Hence, bullying/violence may become an normal part of interactions”. Hoel et al (2004, p. 384) support these contentions and indicate that the cycle of negative behaviours may escalate, and with that, the threshold of employees due to socialisation and self-selection. This fits with the notion that different behaviours may be deemed appropriate (or inappropriate) within different organisations, settings, and possibly cultures and industries.

From this perspective, the organisation is not merely a contextual variable (or moderator) but an independent variable that promotes and encourages bullying behaviour. Salin (2001) categorises the organisational determinants of bullying into enabling, motivating and precipitating variables, showing bullying as an outcome of organisational cultures and systems:

“ … explanations for and factors associated with bullying are classified into three groups, enabling structures or necessary antecedents (e.g. perceived power imbalances, low perceived costs, and dissatisfaction and frustration), motivating structures or incentives (e.g. internal competition, reward systems and expected benefits, bureaucracy and difficulties to lay off employees), and precipitating processes or triggering circumstances (e.g. downsizing and restructuring, organizational changes, changes in the composition of the work group)” (2001, pp. 1213 & 1218).

Other evidence points to a variety of more specific variables that might promote bullying: high power distance settings (Einarsen, 2000); work areas facing significant changes (Lee, 2002); downsizing (Heine, 1995); national culture (Einarsen, 2000); and work settings dominated by one gender (Schuster, 1996).
Moving from organisational to micro level variables, Zaph (1999) identifies three task factors: lowered job control, time-related control, and uncertainty, while Leymann (cited in Zapf, 1999) identified poor work organisation and leadership problems.

Large organisations might particularly promote such problems. Einarsen (2000) found bullying more prevalent in large organisations, while Glendinning (2001) considers hierarchical organisations a breeding ground for bullying when reward systems are limited and technically competent people get promoted to management positions where their responsibility for others may exceed their social capabilities as a leader or manager. Different justifications are provided for the organisational size-bullying relationship. Salin (2003b, p. 1220) attributes this to “… the size and length and formality of decision-making processes” which could allow the perpetrator to hide behind processes and systems, and Hoel (2001, p. 459) deduces that flattened organizations increase competition amongst peers for scarce promotions.

Large organisations are also affected by standards set through often unintended but unchallenged cultural norms. Sheehan and Jordan (2000, p. 5) summarise the role of organisational culture:

“… the existence of a culture in which short term gains are valued over the means used to achieve those gains will enhance the climate for bullying. Bullying will also be prevalent in organisations where confrontation is discouraged. This may be a result of an authoritarian leadership style or an organisational culture where there is a high power distance between managers and employees. A workplace that does not encourage collaboration or egalitarian values may also have low constructive conflict and is therefore open to the use of coercion as a tactic for gaining compliance.”

Of central interest to this thesis is how organisational factors in the public sector affect bullying. As noted in Chapter One, the literature does suggest that certain industries are more prone to bullying than others, including education, health, the public sector and financial services (O'Halloran, n.d.). Some reasons for this are suggested in the variables listed above, including high power-distance relationships, levels of change, and gender imbalance (in some agencies). Further, the APS generally, along with most of its agencies, counts as a large organisation and is therefore prone to the issues raised above.
Sector-specific issues leading to bullying are also seen as significant. Fairbrother is cited by Lee (2002) as describing the rationale for the emergence of bullying in the UK public sector. This stems from major restructuring and re-organisation in the 1980s, and the move away from a traditional bureaucracy to a core of long-term full-time staff and a contingent workforce constantly adjusted to meet labour demands. In Australia, Kimber and Maddox (2003) consider that the APS has headed down the same path. In keeping with this theme McMahon (2001, p. 58) asserts that “… competing on a level playing field with the private sector, whilst held to the accountability burdens of the public sector” provides additional pressures which can then in turn result in bullying incidents (Hoel et al., 2001, p. 459).

In their study of workplace bullying, Stuart and Finlay (2001, p.8) found that 51.8% of public servants saw the reason for bullying as challenging the status quo, this finding is also supported by other authors (Mannix McNamara, 2004, p. 5) and is of relevance in the context of an organisation’s culture, which by nature is thought to be stable.

In moving away from traditional conditions of employment the new public service environment appears to bring intensification of work along with greater managerial discretion, factors that might promote bullying as one report suggests:

“The pressure felt by senior executives to meet performance targets with fewer resources could be encouraging them to bully their managers into delivering results. What they fail to recognise is that this kind of macho management can backfire, resulting in demoralisation, stress related absenteeism, and higher staff turnover” (One in eight UK workers are victims of bullying at work, 1997).

In summary, it appears that many factors within organisations, including structure, culture, the nature of the work, and leadership may be of significance in bullying scenarios. The APS seems likely to reflect many of the organisational antecedents of bullying identified in both public and other sectors. Further analysis of the mechanisms by which such ‘toxic’ work environments might arise in the APS is a major focus of this thesis.
Consequences of Bullying Behaviour

As with antecedents, the consequences of bullying can be found in both individuals (victim and perpetrator) and the organisation. McCarthy and Mayhew (2004, p. xi) indicate that “A wide circle of witnesses, work colleagues, family members, and friends, as well as supervisors, managers, health and safety harassment officers, counsellors, medical doctors, insurers, lawyers and regulators can also be drawn into interactions with recipients and perpetrators of bullying and violence”. Rayner (1999) also acknowledges the role of “others” in bullying scenarios, and the resultant “ripple effect”. The consequences may also permeate to the home environment, wider personal life of individuals, and the community, important issues that are outside the scope of this study.

Consequences for the Individual

Consequences of bullying for individuals and perpetrators as separate groups will be discussed below. However, it is noteworthy that while the possibility of negative consequences for victims of bullying is obvious, some sociologists speak of a ‘bully-victim dyad’ relationship built on co-dependency developed over time through complex social interactions (Hannabuss, 1998). In this, the perpetrator learns that taking on an aggressive stance brings success, while the victim adopts a more submissive role to avoid confrontation. These behaviours become a continuing social dynamic. It can be argued that both victim and bully face psychological harm from such relationships. For bullies, this goes beyond the harm that may come from direct outcomes of the bullying behaviour such as sanctions or acts of revenge.

These behaviours may become an accepted part of the social fabric of the workplace. Other bullying researchers concur (e.g. Einarsen et al., 2003; Hoel et al., 1999; Rayner et al., 2002) and highlight the significance of the history and relationship between the two parties, and the power differentials, in understanding the long-term acceptance of the dyadic relationship. Bullying is therefore not necessarily reacted to in a completely passive way (Hoel & Cooper, 2001), and may be a destructive cycle of behaviour (to be discussed in Chapter Five). Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2002b, p. 402) explain this as follows:
“Exposure to bullying behaviours and state-NA [Negative Affectivity] may also interact in a vicious cycle of events. Exposure to interpersonal problems and conflicts may of course bring about an elevated level of distress in the individual. Distressed individuals may then interpret the behaviour of others as personal insults or attacks, thus increasing their own level of negative emotions, which again may result in others avoiding them or reacting aggressively to them. Exposure to bullying behaviours may both justify and enhance their negative emotional state as well as their negative attitude to others.”

**The Victim**

The effects of bullying on the victim have been considered in many studies. Erosion of self-esteem (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003) appears to be an important factor, in turn affecting personal relationships (at work and home) and leading to social isolation (Cowie et al., 2002), as well as lowering the victim’s well being (Rayner, 1999) and work performance (Glendinning, 2001). Stress is another important consequence (Neuman, 2000), manifest in various ways including anxiety, excessive worry, headaches, feeling exhausted and panic attacks (Stuart & Finlay, 2001, p. 13).

However, the literature also shows that both immediate and long-term responses to bullying are highly subjective and therefore vary according to the victim’s perception of the events involved (Einarsen, 1999), the climate of the organisation (Cowie et al., 2002) and the victim’s threshold (Crawford, 1999) or level of tolerance for antisocial acts.

**The Perpetrator**

In keeping with the notion of a bully-victim dyad, some authors consider that there must be some form of reward or positive outcome for the perpetrator if the behaviour is perpetuated (e.g. Ramsey, 2002). Bullies may even get bolder if they do not meet opposition. If, as Porteous (2002) amongst others claim, bullying is basically a misuse of power, then bullies will target those who are younger, smaller and weaker (Ramsey, 2002). In this situation being able to exert pressure on others becomes a reward in itself, boosting the perpetrator’s self-esteem. From another perspective, the reward may lie in avoiding psychological issues or compensating for them if bullies are frustrated in their own lives or deficient in their abilities (e.g. Kellahan, n.d.). The notion of dyadic co-dependency also suggests benefits exist for victims in such relationships, although no research evidence on this is known. It is
also important to note the existence of benefits for perpetrator or victim does reduce
the abusive nature of bullying.

**Consequences for the Organisation**

McCarthy (2004a, pp. 46-7) provides a model for individual, organisational
and other costs and consequences. This includes: health and well-being; behavioural
reactions; work impacts; degraded relations; legal costs; medical; and loss of income
at the individual level. At the organisational level costs/consequences include:
productivity; competitiveness; incident management; insurance; corporate threats;
and social accountability. Other costs are assessed at the social, economic, civil,
political, and cultural level. McCarthy’s model has a focus on cost, whereas the
present study explores consequences more broadly.

There are conflicting views in the literature relating to the impacts of bullying
on organisational performance with some researchers favouring a negative linkage
(e. g. Dunlop & Lee, 2004, p. 67; Hoel et al., 2003a), and others suggesting a
possible positive relationship (e. g. Salin, 2001, p. 1221) where productivity
improves as a result of bullying. These notions will be further explored in Chapter
Five.

The organisational consequences of bullying are largely linked to stress, not
only in its direct impact on individuals but also through referent costs such as
lowered productivity (McMahon, 2000), absenteeism (Atkinson, 2000), turnover
(Stuart & Finlay, 2001), worker’s compensation claims (Atkinson, 2000) and legal
action (Atkinson, 2000) - although cases rarely make it to the courts due to the
negative publicity associated with such actions according to McMahon (2000). Organizations also bear vicarious liability for the actions of their employees
(Porteous, 2002).

Victims’ view of bullying as mistreatment (Porteous, 2002) points to other
less visible but very costly effects. For example, Neuman (2000) suggests “ …
injustice can elicit acts of revenge, sabotage, obstructionism, theft, vandalism,
withdrawal behaviours (withholding effort), turnover, spreading gossip, grievances,
cynicism and mistrust”.

41
The line between bullying and organisationally acceptable behaviours can appear tenuous. Coercion, punishment and the use of fear or shame are sanctioned in many ways, through systemic and individual means, in the pursuit of organisational objectives (e.g. McMahon, 2001). When justified as a way ‘to get things done’, the long-term consequences may include culturally-sanctioned acceptance of individual uses of such powers which, in the absence of safeguards, may easily turn into abuses.
Summary of the Literature Review

This section so far has examined studies of bullying with the aim of developing a framework for studying it in the APS environment. Three types of variables have been identified, as shown in Figure 1: individual differences, organisational context and the home environment (although investigation of the latter is beyond the scope of this research). The next section identifies specific research questions from the issues raised in this literature review.

Figure 1: Research Model
Research Questions

The literature review identified bullying as a complex phenomenon in three ways. First, the description of the behaviour as bullying involves subjective evaluations that may be made differently by individuals and are affected by cultural and other norms. Second, its causes or antecedents are complex. Perpetrators’ characteristics (such as personality) play a part, but at times bullying can also be understood as a dyadic relationship maintained over time by both parties. As well, many factors in an organisational environment are thought to precipitate or encourage bullying. Third, its outcomes are also complex. For victims, serious consequences to psychological health may arise, and these may be transferred to the home and community. Bullies also face retribution and sanctions that may occupy the time and emotions of other organisational (and family/community) members. Further, when victim and bully are in a dyadic relationship both may potentially experience rewards as well as negative outcomes. For organizations, bullying is reported to have a wide range of consequences such as lower productivity, absenteeism and turnover.

A fourth observation is that these factors - the meaning attached to bullying, its likely antecedents, and its consequences - appear to vary across national cultures and industry sectors. This thesis aims to develop a framework for understanding bullying behaviour in the Australian Public Service environment, in order to help policy makers and managers reduce it. Previous research relevant to this context (both in Australia and on public sector bullying) is in its infancy, lacking both systematic conceptual models and rigorous testing of such. Consequently, the approach here involves an exploratory attempt to describe the variables relevant to the meaning, antecedents and consequences of bullying in the APS environment.

The three research questions are:

1. What constitutes bullying in the workplace?
2. What are the antecedents of workplace bullying?
3. What are the consequences of workplace bullying?
Theoretical Framework

Figure 2 shows the types of variables identified from the literature review that form the starting framework for this study. This framework is devised with consideration for the unique APS context whilst building on the work of prominent researchers in the field. The study aimed to identify variables of each type through a variety of data gathering methods.

Einarsen’s (2000) framework for bullying and harassment is based on the individual level and the organisation is not seen as an antecedent so much as a moderating variable. Zapf (2001, p. 17) provides a causes and consequences model from his earlier work, considering the area from person, social group, and organisational perspectives. The model adopted in Figure 2 has similarities to Zaph’s model but considers the influences more broadly, accounting for both internal and external organisational influences. Einarsen et al (2003, p. 23) propose a theoretical framework encompassing; individual, organisational, cultural, and socio-economical factors. Salin (2001, p. 1226) puts forth a model built on: enabling, motivating, and precipitating structures and processes. McCarthy (2004a, p. 53) provides a model indicating that individual; organisational, social, economic and environmental factors are mediating variables, and that the risk factors are multi-directional bullying/violence; client initiated; and external violence.

There are both similarities and differences between these models. The model in Figure 2 is more relevant to the present context than these published frameworks as the unique nature of the APS, and its regulatory and political framework are expected to introduce significant variables.

What is Bullying in the Workplace?

Due to the subjective nature of the label *bullying*, this study asked participants to define it from their experiences, by describing the behaviours, or a narrative of the most significant bullying incident. The notions of subjectivity and objectivity associated with this approach are further explored in the Chapter Three.
What Are the Antecedents of Bullying in the Workplace?

This thesis focuses on the (internal and external) organisational antecedents of bullying due to the sector specific focus of the study, although factors relating to individuals were also included. The focus was also restricted to bullying amongst co-workers, excluding interactions with clients or other external stakeholders.

![Theoretical Framework - Bullying in the Workplace](image)

**Figure 2: Theoretical Framework**

Information on the *individual characteristics* of perpetrators was collected through qualitative and descriptive means (focus groups, open-ended questions, and stories). This information was mainly indirect; that is, participants reported the bullying behaviour of others. As well, unstructured interviews were conducted with people who had been labelled as bullies. Victims’ demographic information and job characteristics were collected through a survey and supplemented by the qualitative data.

*Organisational antecedents* of bullying were identified from the survey questions, and other qualitative methods as well as two published scales, the
Organisational Climate Questionnaire (OCQ) that captures feelings about the work environment (Stringer, 2002), and the Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) which categorises organisational cultures (Cameron & Quinn, 1999).

Explanations of each of these instruments and their relevant scales will be provided in Chapter Three.

**What Are the Consequences of Bullying in the Workplace?**

The consequences of bullying at *individual* and *organisational* levels were studied through qualitative methods: focus groups, open-ended questions, and stories. Respondents were asked specifically about the impacts of bullying in the survey instrument. Other implications of the behaviour came to light through narratives and interviews.

**Summary**

The literature on bullying seems to be fraught with inconsistencies. This exploratory study aimed to improve the quality of data available through a mainly qualitative and triangulated research process (to be discussed in the next chapter). This involved multiple sources of data and different data gathering techniques. Another contribution of this study is to examine these variables in the Australian context within the APS.

In conclusion, the study aimed to research issues associated with bullying in the Commonwealth public sector. The aim is to identify a model that can assist researchers, managers, and human resource practitioners to better understand, prevent, and address bullying in this environment, with possible wider applicability.
CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHOD

The sections below describe the research process, beginning with a discussion of the overall approach and possible research paradigms. Next, the target population and study design are described followed by instruments, procedures and the methodology for data analysis. The final section covers the limitations of the study.

Approaches to Studying Bullying

Liefooghe and Olafsson (1999) describe a person bullied as “... not a passive receiver, but an active interpreter of ambiguous stimulus from their environment”. This view encapsulates various challenges apparent in attempting to study a phenomenon so subjective as bullying in the workplace. What exactly was the behaviour displayed? Can it be recalled unambiguously by either party? Was it meant to offend or intimidate? Why was it construed as offending or intimidating? How does the context (e.g. organisational culture) influence both parties’ recall and interpretation of the situation? Such subjectivities invite a qualitative approach to identifying and explaining bullying.

Much of the early research on bullying was quantitative, reflecting interest in the prevalence of such behaviour and the outlook of quantitatively trained psychologists. Most of these studies were European, and using different definitions and methodologies for measurement. Although there is some evidence that national culture plays a role in bullying incidents (Wallis cited in Mayhew & Chappell, 2001), cross-cultural studies are few and far between. Drawing comparisons between, and with these studies therefore presents problems, and for the present research the potential advantage of a quantitative approach in building on frameworks or findings from previous studies was limited.

As well, the focus here on bullying in the APS environment presents unique challenges given the limited previous research on public sector environments,
especially in Australia. As noted earlier, both the high level of regulation and the principles of New Public Management (NPM) suggest particular dimensions to bullying in the APS. However, these are best addressed in an exploratory manner, and for this qualitative research is helpful.

While qualitative methods are still uncommon in bullying research, their value has been noted by some authors. For example Lewis (1998) comments:

“Another feature of the literature is its heavy reliance on quantitative data … quantitative research methods need to be supplemented by qualitative techniques in order to provide a comprehensive picture of workplace bullying” (p. 94) Quantitative approaches are of little help in identifying the subjective meanings and experiences of the people affected by bullying … the study of workplace bullying is still in its early stages, and little is known about the perceptions, motives, reactions and strategies of the people concerned. Qualitative methods are far more useful for the task of exploring these social realities and social constructs. Furthermore, by allowing people to ‘speak for themselves’ to a large extent, qualitative approaches are less likely to fall into the trap of imposing the researcher’s values and reactions on to the situations being studies” (p. 98).

Similarly, Matthiesen (2003, p. 111) suggests that qualitative approaches are useful in supplementing quantitative findings in studying issues such as bullying and personal conflict.

A more general perspective on the role of qualitative research in studying subjective phenomena is provided by Miles and Huberman (1994, p. 10):

“Qualitative data, with their emphasis on people’s lived experience are fundamentally well suited for locating the meanings people place on events, processes, and structure of their lives … and for connecting these meanings to the social world around them … qualitative data are useful when one needs to supplement, validate, explain, illuminate, or reinterpret quantitative data gathered from the same setting.”

As well, Laing (cited in Gill & Johnson, 2002) suggests that causal analysis of human interactions may be simplistic in that the interpretation of events and the context are fundamental to a true understanding of a given situation.

This study used quantitative methods in the form of a survey to APS employees in 11 agencies, and qualitative methods to enrich and elaborate on the statistical findings. In both cases, the study was mainly inductive in nature, aiming to uncover subjective realities that might help the construction of future theories,
following the interpretative paradigm of social science research. As Holstein and Gubrium (2005, p. 484) put it:

“Interpretive practice engages both the *hows* and the *whats* of social reality: it is centred in both how people methodically construct their experiences and their worlds, and in the configurations of meaning and institutional life that inform and shape their reality-constituting activity”

This approach is valuable when researching bullying as a subjective phenomena.

The interpretivist paradigm can be contrasted with the functionalist paradigm as Gioia and Pitre (1990, p. 591) distinguish them in Table 5:

Table 5 – The Interpretivist Versus the Functionalist Paradigm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goals</th>
<th>Interpretivist Paradigm</th>
<th>Functionalist Paradigm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>To describe an explain in order to diagnose and understand</td>
<td>To search for regularities and test in order to predict and control</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theoretical Concerns</th>
<th>Social construction of reality</th>
<th>Relationships Causation Generalization</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reification process Interpretation</td>
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</table>

| Theory-Building Approaches | Discovery through code analysis | Refinement through causal analysis |

Although Gioia and Pitre’s approach is to contrast these paradigms, it is important to note that quantitative and qualitative *methods* can be used in accord with each other. From this perspective, these methods themselves are not opposites, rather as Johnson and Harris (2002) state:

“It is important to recognise that quantitative and qualitative research methods need not live in total isolation from each other. The two approaches should not be seen as discrete either/or options. They can be viewed as labels that describe two ends of the continuum. The two methodologies can complement each other.”
In the present study both quantitative and qualitative methods have a role, and although the research has an underlying interpretivist quality, in using statistics to summarise respondents demographics and views, some use is made of functionalist thinking. Gioia and Pitre (1990, pp. 584-5), following the well-known framework of Burrell and Morgan (1988), propose that “… the use of any single research paradigm produces too narrow a view to reflect the multifaceted nature of organisational reality” and consider that contrasting approaches may be useful in the generation of multiple perspectives. Further, they state:

“The grounding of theory in paradigm-appropriate assumptions helps researchers to avoid the common tendency to try to force-fit functionalist theory-building techniques as a universal approach … using different theory-building approaches to study disparate issues is a better way of fostering more comprehensive portraits of complex organizational phenomena.”

For Gioia and Pitre, the boundaries between the two paradigms above can be bridged if proponents use the structuralist approach that considers “… social construction processes together with the objective characteristics of the social world … it occupies an intermediate position on the subjective-objective continuum and spans the interpretive-functionalist transition zone” (p. 592).

While most of the research into bullying takes a functionalist perspective, this study used a broader approach closer to Gioia and Pitre’s recommendation. A functionalist perspective is in some ways evident in the quantitative findings, and an interpretative paradigm in the analysis of the qualitative results, interviews and focus group findings. However, in either case it was not possible to determine the objective truth of victims’ or perpetrators’ reported experiences. The emphasis on subjectivity does not preclude the possibility of such truth, rather the focus of this study is on the perceptions associated with bullying. As Rayner et al (2002, pp. 191-2) note:

“I may have the experience that someone is ‘out to get me’ and that I am being bullied. An independent person might question the alleged perpetrator and discover that they are not ‘out to get me’, but that they can see how I might have reached that conclusion. In this case, the experience of someone being ‘out to get me’ is true, but the reality is that they are not. In such cases, ‘facts’ are ambiguous and their use demands care and sensitivity.”
Similarly, Matthiesen et al (2003, p. 101) point out: “The fact that an experience is true for the person concerned does not of course mean the version of the conflict given by one party is universally valid”.

This research therefore uses an alternative approach to the study of bullying in the workplace in which the realities and perspectives of all parties - victim, perpetrator and bystander - are taken as valid objects of study. In practice, of course, most quantitative or functionalist studies do not ascertain the objective reality of bullying events (if that were possible), but rely on self-reports. Here, the limitation of that is made more explicit and the possibility of multiple perspectives is seen as enriching understanding of this complex subject.

**Research Design**

Some features of the research design have already been mentioned: it is multi-method and multi-paradigmatic in the ways described above. It also has an exploratory focus, rather than a hypothesis testing one in trying to elaborate the antecedents and consequences of bullying. Kekale (2001, p. 557) makes a point relevant to this: “The research approach that features, typologizes and connects concepts or phenomena … and tries to create a deeper understanding of them is inevitably going to be mainly descriptive and qualitative in nature”.

Another design feature is the use of triangulated data sources, involving victims, bystanders, alleged perpetrators, HR managers, and policy makers. Triangulation is also evident in the use of multiple methods: a survey, semi and unstructured interviews, focus groups and stories. Ghauri, Gronhaug and Kristianslund (1995, p. 93) believe that triangulation improves the validity of research findings by collecting the same data in different ways or collecting different data on the same subject. In the bullying literature a number of authors call for triangulated study designs to reduce bias from victim self-reports (the most common source of data) and to better understand the multiple realities in bullying incidents (Cowie & Berdondini, 2002; Liefooghe & Olafsson, 1999; Rayner & Hoel, 1997).

In keeping with this, validity is seen here as a function of the selection of subjects and description of the qualitative research process, this will be further expanded on later in this Chapter. As Stenbacka (2001, p. 552) notes:
“Validity is ... achieved when using the method of non-forcing interviews with strategically well-chosen informants ... It is obvious that reliability has no relevance in qualitative research, where it is impossible to differentiate between researcher and methods ... A thorough description of the whole process, enabling conditional intersubjectivity, is what indicated good quality when using a qualitative method.”

Finally, this investigation is a field study - participants were simply asked to reflect on their observations and experiences in the workplace – and cross-sectional in nature, with individuals as the unit of analysis.

**Population and Sample**

The population for this study is considered to be APS employees based in Western Australia (WA). When a number of agencies were approached, four volunteered to participate in the study, along with a number of other APS employees who became aware of the research. The participating agencies were of varying sizes and had differing functions, but are considered representative of APS agencies generally (see next chapter). In total these agencies had around 600 employees in WA.

Staff were made aware of the study through emails within individual agencies. Involvement in the study was purely voluntary. Participation was sought from all employees for focus groups (see Appendix 2) and for the survey (Appendix 3). Human Resource managers and policy makers within agencies were sought to participate in interviews (see Appendix 4 and Appendix 5). As well, at the conclusion of the survey participation was sought from individuals who had been labelled as bullies (see Appendix 6).

Three focus groups were run with 28 participants. The survey response rate was 37%, giving 219 useable questionnaires. Fifty-four stories from victims and bystanders were also returned with the survey instrument. Two policy makers and three HR managers participated in semi-structured interviews. Finally, 11 APS officers who had been formally or verbally accused of bullying came forward to provide their stories through unstructured interviews. These data collection phases are discussed below.
Research Methods

The methods used in this research – focus group, survey, and interviews - are discussed below in turn.

Focus group

For this study, three focus groups (see Appendix 2 for session plan) were run with a total of 28 volunteer APS staff from different agencies. These sessions aimed to identify variables and gain a shared understanding of issues associated with bullying in the APS environment. Morgan (cited in Cavana et al., 2001, p. 154) considers the focus group to be a useful method of data collection as it gives immediate feedback on issues of interest.

A number of authors of bullying studies have called for the use of focus groups as a suitable first stage of data collection, for example:

“Focus groups provide a useful method for getting responsive data on the nature of bullying at an organisational level … a useful first stage before moving to a questionnaire/survey design, in order to maximise the validity of the data obtained from the latter, and the validity (external and internal) of the instruments” (Cowie & Berdondini, 2002, p. 43).

“One way to start increasing people’s awareness is through discussion in groups about their understanding of what constitutes bullying. This will facilitate the development of a shared frame of reference, which will help to reduce ambiguity about the interpretation of the bullying behaviour” (Liefooghe & Olafsson, 1999).

Emails were sent to the participating organisations asking for volunteers to attend the sessions. The focus groups were run in the training room of the Australian Public Service Commission (APSC) office in WA., participants from the different APS agencies were present at each session.

The Survey

The survey aimed to capture substantive data on the profile of the victim and that of the perpetrator, as well as the climate and culture of organisations. It also sought to capture information on bullying incidents. Some blank space was also provided at the end of the instrument for stories of respondents’ experiences of
bullying. The instrument (see Appendix 3) was devised from a review of the literature and focus group findings. Explanation of each of the survey components will follow.

**The Organisational Climate Questionnaire**

The *Organisational Climate Questionnaire* (Stringer, 2002) is a 24-item instrument measuring employees’ feelings towards their work environment. The OCQ has been refined over a 34-year period; in its current (1987) format it measures six dimensions: *structure*, *standards*, *responsibility*, *recognition*, *support* and *commitment* (2002, pp. 65-67). Stringer (2002, pp. 10-11) provides the following explanation of these:

**Structure**

“… reflects employees’ sense of being well organized and having a clear definition of their roles and responsibilities. Structure is high when people feel that everyone’s job is well defined. It is low when they are confused about who does what tasks and who has decision making authority … a sense of appropriate structure has a large impact on people’s aroused motivation and performance.”

**Standards**

“… measure the feeling of pressure to improve performance and the degree of pride employees have in doing a good job. High standards mean that people are always looking for ways to improve performance. Low standards reflect lower expectations for performance.”

**Responsibility**

“… reflects employees’ feelings of “being their own boss” and not having to double-check decisions with others. A sense of high responsibility signifies that employees feel encouraged to solve problems in their own. Low responsibility indicates that risk taking and testing of new approaches tend to be discouraged.”

**Recognition**

“… indicates employees’ feelings of being rewarded for a job well done. This is a measure of emphasis placed on reward versus criticism and punishment. High recognition climates are characterised by an appropriate balance of reward and criticism. Low recognition means that good work is inconsistently rewarded.”

**Support**

“… reflects the feeling of trust and mutual support that prevails within a work group. Support is high when employees feel that they are part of a well-functioning team and when they sense that they can
get help (especially from the boss) if they need it. When support is low, employees feel isolated and alone.”

Commitment
“… reflects employees’ sense of pride in belonging to the organization and their degree of commitment to the organization’s goals. Strong feelings of commitment are associated with high levels of personal loyalty. Lower levels of commitment mean that employees feel apathetic toward the organization and its goals.”

The predictive validity of the OCQ has been substantiated through both laboratory and field research (Stringer, 2002, p. 74).

The Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument

The Organisational Culture Assessment Instrument (OCAI) (Cameron & Quinn, 1999) consists of six questions with four alternative responses. Six dimensions of organisational culture are measured: dominant characteristics, organisational leadership, management of employees, organisational glue, strategic emphasis, and criteria for success. These are based on the Competing Values Framework and help to classify the dominant culture of the organisation as an adhocracy, a clan, hierarchy or market-focused. Measurement is across two axes as shown in Figure 3. The first differentiates flexibility and discretion from stability and control, and the second, an internal orientation from an externally focused approach of differentiation and rivalry (Cameron & Quinn, 1999, pp. 30-32).
Figure 3: The Competing Values Framework

Cameron and Quinn (1999) provide the following explanation for each quadrant (this is further expanded on in Appendix 4):

Hierarchy
“… a formalised and structured place to work. Procedures govern what people do. Effective leaders are good coordinators and organizers. Maintaining a smooth-running organization is important. The long-term concerns of the organization are stability, predictability, and efficiency. Formal rules and policies hold the organization together” (p. 34).

Market Culture
“… a results-orientated workplace. Leaders are hard-driving producers and competitors. They are tough and demanding. The glue that holds the organization together is an emphasis on winning. The long term concern is on competitive actions and achieving stretch goals and targets. Success is defined in terms of market share and penetration. Outpacing the competition and market leadership are important” (p. 36).

Clan Culture
“… a friendly place to work where people share a lot of themselves. It is like an extended family. Leaders are thought of as mentors and, perhaps, even as parent figures. The organization emphasizes the
long-term benefit of individual development with high cohesion and morale being important. Success is defined in terms of internal climate and concern for people. The organization places a premium on teamwork, participation, and consensus” (p. 38).

Adhocracy
“… a dynamic, entrepreneurial, and creative workplace. People stick their necks out and take risks. Effective leadership is visionary, innovative, and risk-orientated. The glue that holds the organization together is commitment to experimentation and innovation. The emphasis is being at the leading edge of new knowledge, products, and/or services. Readiness for change and meeting new challenges are important. The organization’s long-term emphasis is on rapid growth and acquiring new resources. Success means producing unique and original products and services” (p. 40).

Reliability of the OCAI has been assessed with Cronbach alpha coefficients, which are satisfactory (between 0.7 – 0.8). There is also evidence from different researchers and studies indicating that the instrument displays strong validity (summarised in Cameron & Quinn, 1999, pp.140-144).

Other Survey Components
A section of the instrument titled ‘Your Work Experience’ aimed to capture information on the prevalence, sources, frequency, incidents, context, and instances of bullying (the value of stories is further considered below). Closed-ended questions provided quantitative data that could be elaborated by qualitative answers to open-ended questions. Demographic data and job-related characteristics were collected to provide a profile of survey respondents.

Finally, the instrument concluded with some blank pages for survey participants to share one or more stories of their experiences, as a victim or bystander of bullying.

Stories
Stories are a rich medium for seeking a full and vivid description of past events. Chase (2005, p. 656) describes stories or narratives as tools for “… retrospective meaning making – the shaping and ordering of past experience”. In writing about workplace violence Underwood (2001p. 82) observes “… the power of metaphors is apparent when they are created in those spontaneous moments when
one is desperate for language to capture and convey the importance of the meaning of the lived experience in question”.

The power of stories was also observed in those collected via the questionnaire in this research: many participants volunteered stories - some even provided a number - to describe various incidents, why they had come to pass, and how these incidents had affected them. Many resorted to the use of metaphors, as Underwood found, providing descriptions of situations that may have been too difficult to verbalise.

Interviews

Interviews with various groups were another important method in this study. Semi-structured interviews with three HR managers (Appendix 5) and two policy makers (Appendix 6) were used to gain insight into the environment of each APS organisation. The semi-structured format allowed respondents to provide as much information as possible on organisational contexts, root causes of bullying, the nature of incidents and their consequences. Hair et al (2003, p. 135) note that interviews may help unearth unexpected and insightful information.

Interviews with HR managers took place in the participating organisations in interview rooms or the offices. Interviews with policy makers were held in similar locations. These provided a macro-level perspective on APS reforms and agency priorities. Information was also sought on the organisation’s state of awareness and actions related to workplace bullying.

Unstructured interviews with eleven alleged perpetrators (see Appendix 7 for brief) gave an understanding from the other key player in bullying: a significant gap in the existing literature. Cowie and Berdondini (2002, p. 42) observe that “… interviews are responsive to the unique nature of each bullying situation. Thus, they are particularly suited to obtaining in-depth material on the nature of bullying and participant’s experiences”. This would apply to both victim and perpetrator.

In order to provide a more complete picture of the complexities of bullying, individuals who had been verbally or formally accused of bullying were invited to provide their perspective. In an earlier study (Omari, 2003) a number of people identified themselves as ‘alleged perpetrators’ and approached the researcher. As
well, the present survey instrument opened the door for others to participate voluntarily. Due to the sensitivity of the data, a completely unstructured interview format was used to avoid pressuring participants and to keep the results free from contamination. “An unstructured interview has the advantage of being unbiased by any pre-ordained ideas of the interviewer and, theoretically, more truly reflects the world of the interviewee”, as Cavana et al (2001, p. 148) put it. These interviews took place in meeting rooms at the premises of respondents’ organisations, or over the telephone.

**Quality Control**

The survey questionnaire was pre-tested and fine-tuned prior to implementation (see Cover Note in Appendix 8), to improve the validity and quality of the data. The pre-testing involved APS employees in an earlier study (Omari, 2003), who were asked about participating in later research. Most agreed to complete the survey and provide some feedback on its design, wording and sequence of questions.

The validity of the data in the survey was addressed by using the literature as a check on content validity, and by the use of standardised measures of climate and culture. The focus group process had already been tested and refined in the earlier study (Omari, 2003). Finally, there was significant overlap between questions asked in the various research methods (triangulation) in order to improve the validity and quality of the results. As the study took an interpretivist and exploratory approach, these may be considered adequate steps to ensure quality of data.
### Procedure

A summary of the data collection procedures and information sources is provided in Table 5.

**Table 5 – Data Sources and Procedures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Focus Groups</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Stories</th>
<th>Interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Victims</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Perpetrators</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bystanders</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td>✔</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>HR Managers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Makers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The research procedure was not strictly linear. Invitations for APS organisations to participate in this study were spread through the researcher’s formal and informal networks. Four volunteered, along with a small number of APS staff in other agencies.

Data collection began with focus groups. Through email, officers were invited to attend off-site half-day focus groups, and three sessions were organised. The survey instrument was next dispatched in a sealed envelope, with a pre-paid envelope. The envelopes were not individually addressed in order to increase participants’ privacy and confidentiality. In the four organisations, the survey was sent out from a central point by delivering an envelope to each officer’s desk. Officers were initially given three weeks to return the forms; this was later extended by two weeks to improve the response rate. A reminder email was also sent out in each organisation requesting volunteers to complete and return the survey forms.

Following the survey dispatch, HR managers and policy makers were approached to participate in interviews. Before the interviews, permission was sought from subjects for audio recording in order to transcribe the sessions. At the
same time, a number of officers who had been labelled as perpetrators came forward to participate in unstructured interviews.

**Ethical Issues**

The University’s ethical guidelines were followed for this study. The prime ethical considerations were the privacy of the participants and the confidentiality of the information. Participants were told the study was purely voluntary at all stages, and volunteering agencies or officers could choose to withdraw from the research at any stage, though none opted to do so. Participants were also assured that data identifying participating agencies or officers would not be collected. This was communicated to the agencies and participants when asking for expressions of interest, in the covering letter of the survey, and in the introduction letters for interviews and focus groups.

In the focus groups, stories, and interviews, respondents were explicitly asked not to provide names or other information identifying themselves, their agency or others.

**Data Analysis**

The majority of data collected with the survey instrument was quantitative, and analysed with descriptive and inferential statistics. A significance level of $\alpha = 0.1$ was used in the latter, due to the exploratory nature of the study and focus on behavioural relationships (Hair Jr et al., 2003, p. 255).

Qualitative data collected through stories, interviews, focus groups and open-ended survey questions were subjected to thematical analysis, a standard procedure for the analysis of qualitative data (Veal & Ticehurst, 1999, p. 105), especially where theory development is the focus, and also when research is grounded in organisational realities as described by participants (Schmitt & Klimoski, 1991). Locke (2001, p. 8) states “The interpretive … paradigms are distinguished by an interest in understanding the world of lived experience from the point of view of those who live it. Their concern, therefore is with subjective reality”. This is an important consideration for studies such as this where the subjects’ perceptions
become their reality. In this study no attempt was made to distinguish perception from reality.

Qualitative data analysis can be based on four processes (Morse cited in Collis & Hussey, 2003, pp. 262-3): comprehending, synthesizing, theorizing and recontextualising. In the first stage of comprehending, the researcher becomes familiar with the topic and the context. Morse argues that the researcher needs to have knowledge of the literature but should remain detached to allow new discoveries. In the second stage of synthesizing, different ideas are drawn together with the aim of developing “integrated patterns”. The third stage, theorising, requires development and reformation of theories, and the final stage of recontextualising develops the wider applicability of theories through generalisation.

This study followed these steps, in an iterative process moving between data and emerging patterns that improved the quality of the findings in line with the “cyclical and non-linear” approach suggested by Gioia and Pitre (1990, p. 588).

This approach was influenced by Grounded Theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Partington (2002, p. 136) writes of Glaser and Strauss’ (1967) seminal work, The Discovery of Grounded Theory: Strategies for Qualitative Research, that “… [it] is about being systematic with qualitative data … concerned with the application of procedures and guidelines for a rigorous approach to using qualitative data for building theory, rather than just description”. Charmaz (2005, p. 529) also writes that Grounded Theory allows for an appreciation of “process and context”, both factors of significance in study of bullying.

The high level of subjectivity associated with the nature, antecedents and consequences of workplace bullying therefore suggests a method in line with the Grounded Theory approach to data analysis. Partington’s (2002) recommendation that researchers suspend judgement in the early stages of analysis, to mitigate against weak theoretical conclusions was also used in this research.

Finally, Locke (2001, pp. 46-54) describes four stages of a grounded theory process. In Stage 1: comparing incidents applicable to each category the coding of items of interest is begun. Stage 2: integrating categories and their properties develops a conceptual framework of the coded ideas. Stage 3: delimiting the theory adds clarity to this framework, with the understanding that it is not yet complete. In
the last stage (4), *writing the theory* (p. 54) earlier coding processes are revisited in consolidating and framing the theory.

In the present research, analysis was not as systematic as in Locke’s model (based on Glaser & Strauss, 1967), but did move iteratively between analysis and review processes; later, emerging themes were checked back against the original data with the aim of *grounding* theory development.

**Limitations**

The sample in this research may limit the generalisability of its findings, being comprised of four APS agencies in WA and a small number of volunteers from other APS agencies. It is not known how far the WA branches resemble their counterparts in other states, although they are expected to be quite similar based on data in Chapter Four. A more serious limitation might lie in the unknown similarity of the APS to state and local government agencies, and to other public sector entities. As the purpose of this research was to model public sector bullying, its generalisability to private and non-profit organisations is not considered here.

Other limitations lie in the data collection. Participation was purely voluntary, and the survey was distributed by management in participating agencies. It is therefore difficult to identify the representativeness of respondents or the reasons for non-response of others. It may be that some survey forms never reached their intended targets. There was no obvious indication of bias in terms of the demographic profile of respondents (see Chapter Four), or reports of irregularities in the survey distribution.

The subject of the research may also have been a disincentive to participate. During initial contacts with agency representatives, it was found that a few people were visibly uncomfortable when they discovered the researcher was conducting a study of ‘bullying in the workplace’. Subsequently, the study was presented as a constructive attempt to increase *Workplace Dignity and Respect* - a revised approach that proved far more successful. Nonetheless, survey questions on bullying may have still made some individuals uneasy and reduced response rate.

It should be reiterated that information collected for this study was taken at face value. That is, the premise was that the participants were responding to
questions in good faith and with no hidden agendas. There was no indication that the situation was to the contrary.

As participants were asked to recount experiences they had to rely on memory. This could introduce an element of error or inaccuracy depending on the degree of trauma experienced as a result of the bullying, and the time lapse between events and study participation.

Clearly, the respondents were interpreting the events and behaviours of others, as they were asked to do. However, it must be noted that this introduces an element of subjectivity into the findings, where perceptions are influenced by the subjects’ value system and ideals. This approach is nevertheless appropriate for a study of this nature, with a focus on viewing the incidents, behaviours and consequences from the perspective of the participant.
CHAPTER 4

DATA SOURCES AND QUESTIONNAIRE FINDINGS

Introduction

The primary goal of the study was to explore the antecedents and consequences of bullying in the workplace, specifically in the context of a highly regulated work environment (the APS). This chapter is broken down into two main sections covering the data sources and associated statistics, and secondly findings from the survey instrument, including descriptive and inferential findings relating to demographics and bullying. The effect of the work context is also discussed.

The research revealed complex relationships between variables. While the primary focus was on relationships between the predictor variables and incidents of bullying, as the study progressed relationships amongst the individual and organisational predictors and consequences also became apparent. These are introduced in this chapter, and more fully explored in the next.

Data Sources

An important feature of this study was the use of multiple-methods to provide different perspectives. Hoel et al (1999) argue for the use of triangulation from multiple sources. Rayner et al (1999) suggest that the attribution process may affect accurate report of bullying incidents, and suggest the use of qualitative methods as a solution - in line with Hoel et al’s (1999, p. 208) assertion:

“… attribution theory provides a useful warning against simplistic analyses of bullying situations taken solely from target reports. This is not to say that target reports are inaccurate, but that their cognitive selection of events, and a subsequent emphasis placed on some events rather than others to back up a self vindicating picture could be an issue.”

This study therefore included data from the following sources: focus groups, a survey, stories, semi-structured, and unstructured interviews. The types and
numbers of participants for each method (Table 6) and associated issues will be discussed below.

**Table 6 – Data Sources and Respondents**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Focus Groups</th>
<th>Survey</th>
<th>Stories</th>
<th>HR Manager interviews</th>
<th>Policy Maker interviews</th>
<th>Perpetrator interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 focus groups with 28 participants</td>
<td>219 useable forms, response rate ~ 37%</td>
<td>54 stories</td>
<td>3 interviews</td>
<td>2 interviews</td>
<td>10 interviews and 1 written story</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Focus groups**

Three focus groups comprising 28 participants were run during the study. The participants came from four different APS agencies. The focus groups involved individual and group activities, including brainstorming, to collect information on the nature of behaviour considered as bullying, the causal factors leading to bullying behaviour in the APS, and the consequences for individuals and organisations.

**The Survey**

The survey yielded a response rate of around 37%, representing 219 usable forms from APS employees in 11 agencies. In reality, it is hard to estimate the true response rate for two reasons. First, the number of surveys dispatched were based on total numbers provided by participating organisations; due to leave, absenteeism, turnover and other staffing issues, at best these numbers are close approximations of actual staff numbers. Second, survey forms were disseminated by the organisations. There was no real indication of how many survey forms reached their intended targets, especially for organisations with multiple-sites. As a result the actual response rate may be higher than 37%.

**Stories**

In the survey, respondents were asked to recount their experiences with bullying; 54 study participants volunteered to tell their stories, some provided multiple stories. It should be noted that not everyone who reported that they had been subjected to bullying chose to provide their story; and some indicated that it
was too painful to recount the event. A few respondents provided stories from a bystander’s perspective.

**Interviews**

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with three HR managers and two policy makers from four separate APS agencies to help reveal the context of work in the APS generally and within individual agencies.

As well, unstructured interviews were conducted with 10 individuals who had been formally or verbally accused of bullying. These *alleged* perpetrators volunteered to tell the story from their perspective; another volunteer chose to write the story as she had since relocated to another state. The alleged perpetrators were from five different APS agencies.

**Demographic Characteristics**

The survey collected demographic data, including self-reported information on the victims, and second-hand data on perpetrators as reported by the victims. Each set of results will be discussed in turn.
Demographics of Survey Respondents

Gender
Half the respondents (50%) were female, 45% were male, and 5% didn’t provide information on their gender (Figure 4).

Figure 4: Gender of the Survey Respondents

APS data reported for June 2004 indicated that women constituted 53.8% of APS employees (Australian Public Service Commission, 2004b). This study appears to have gender representation broadly similar to that of the APS at the time of the study.

Age
The age of respondents was concentrated in the 30 – 49 bracket (Figure 5). Exact age data is not available from the APS, however comparable data was available through the State of the Service Report (Australian Public Service Commission, 2004b); under 25 (4.3%), 25-34 (25.5%), 35-44 (30.9%), 45-54 (30%), 55 and over (9.3%). Although different categories were used, age in the present study seems to follow a pattern similar to that of the APS population.
Figure 5: Age Groups of Survey Respondents

Education Level

Figure 6 shows the highest level of education attained by the survey respondents. Almost a third of the respondents had completed secondary education, and a similar percentage gained tertiary qualifications. APS data on education levels were not available at the time of the study.

Figure 6: Education Level of Survey Respondents
**First Language**

The vast majority (92%) of the respondents had English as their first language as can be seen in Figure 7, with 8% being from a Non-English Speaking Background (NESB). The APS figure for officers with English as a first language is slightly higher at 96.7% (Australian Public Service Commission, 2004b).

![Figure 7: First Language of Survey Respondents](image)

**Job Classification**

Due to different enterprise agreements, APS agencies have differing classification structures. Respondents were asked to provide their *APS equivalent* classification. However, findings suggest some not familiar with the wider APS context may have misinterpreted this question. As an example, level 1 positions have been phased out in most APS agencies, while in others a level 1 classification would be equivalent to that at the level 3-4 APS wide (i.e. entry level positions). Therefore a 20% finding for the level 1 classification (Figure 8) is highly suspect, and such findings should be viewed with caution.
Figure 8: Job Classification of Survey Respondents

The following breakdown is provided for APS equivalent classifications for 2004: APS level 1 (1.2%), APS level 2 (5.2%), APS level 3 (14.2%), APS level 4 (22.6%), APS level 5 (13.2%), APS level 6 (20.2%), EL (Executive level) 1-2 (20.3%) (Australian Public Service Commission, 2004b). The percentage of APS level 1 officers reported in this study (20%) is far higher than that in the APS (1.2%), again raising the issue of inconsistent answers to this question. This would have had an impact on answers to the APS level 3 category as well – this classification is considered ‘entry-level’ in many APS agencies.

Job Type

As can be seen from Figure 9, almost half the survey respondents were in client service positions, and were therefore front line staff. Of the remaining, almost half were in managerial and specialist positions. No equivalent APS data are available.
Years in the APS

Tenure in the APS ranged from just 3 months to a maximum of 40 years. The mean was around 11.5 years. No equivalent APS data is available for this variable.

Profile of the Survey Respondents

The majority of the survey respondents were 30 – 49 years old, having completed year 12 qualifications, and had English as their first language. In terms of duties, the typical respondent was a mid-level officer, conducting front line client service work, and had been with the APS an average of 11.5 years. The proportions of male and female respondents were fairly even.

Alleged Perpetrators

Survey respondents reporting that they had been bullied in the workplace were asked to describe the perpetrator in the most significant occurrence.

Relationship to Victim

Figure 10 shows that while the majority of bullies were identified as having higher positions than the victim, almost a third were reported as being peers. This finding will be further explored later.
It is interesting that despite the fairly even split between genders in the APS and in the survey, victims reported that bullies were mainly male (Figure 11). However, while women are equally represented in the APS, they may be over represented at low to mid level classifications, and therefore, in this context, power may not be evenly spread across genders, an area to be explored later.
Organisational Context

This section describes the size, climate, and culture of organizations employing survey respondents.

Organisational Size

Respondents were asked to provide information on organisational size in the following intervals: less than 50 employees, 50-100, 101-200, 201-300 and more than 300. The answers to this question had to be recoded as some of the categories yielded very low response rates that would create problems for inferential statistics. These response rates were due to participating organisations being of varying sizes. Data was recoded to two categories; less than or equal to 300, and more than 300 (Figure 12) with almost equal split in organisational size.

Figure 12: Organisational Size

Organisational Climate

Stringer (2002, p. 7) writes of organisational climate that it is “… fitting that we use a term that carries connotation of personal emotional response”. This concept gives an insight into the social atmosphere in the organisation, and therefore the context within which bullying may arise.
The OCQ instrument used to measure climate had six dimensions. For each, climate was measured on a scale of 1 to 4 where: 1 = *Definitely Disagree*, 2 = *Inclined to Disagree*, 3 = *Inclined to Agree*, and 4 = *Definitely Agree*. Table 7 shows the mean climate ratings were all on the positive side of the scale, with the most prevalent dimension being *commitment* and the least *recognition*.

**Table 7 – Climate Measures**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Climate</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commitment</td>
<td>2.95</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard</td>
<td>2.83</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Structure</td>
<td>2.79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Support</td>
<td>2.70</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>2.37</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recognition</td>
<td>2.09</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Findings from Table 7 indicate survey respondents were *committed* to their organization. There also seemed to be a push for productivity and personal drive to meet objectives (*standard*). This was followed by clear delineation of tasks and responsibilities (*structure*), and feeling of trust and mutual *support*. The lowest ratings where received for *responsibility* and *recognition* reflecting low empowerment and rewards for efforts exerted. The findings paint a one-sided picture where employees are expected to readily give of themselves but organisations do not offer support or recognition.

These findings are reflected in responses to individual questions in the climate survey. Table 8 shows extreme (low and high) means. Figures have been adjusted for negatively worded questions. The first item on the table had the highest mean and the lowest standard deviation (0.64). Yet again, the theme of unreciprocated commitment and recognition is apparent, however, there is also some diversity in responses relating to trust and loyalty towards organisations.
Table 8 – Organisational Climate Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Climate Indicator</th>
<th>Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generally, I am highly committed to the goals of this organisation.</td>
<td>3.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Around here there is a feeling of pressure to continually improve our personal and group performance.</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>When I am on a difficult assignment, I can usually count on getting assistance from my boss and co-workers.</td>
<td>3.0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I feel that I am a member of a well functioning team.</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is not enough reward and recognition given in this organisation for doing good work.</td>
<td>1.0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Organisational Culture

Cameron and Quinn (1999, p. 14) write of organisational culture that: “It reflects the prevailing ideology that that people carry inside their heads. It conveys a sense of identity to employees, provides unwritten and, often, unspoken guidelines for how to get along in the organisation, and enhances the stability of the social system that they experience”. Therefore, culture reveals aspects of the organisation that may lead to bullying.

For the purposes of this study culture was measured by the OCAI using four dimensions (see Chapter Three). For each, measurement was on a scale of 0-100, with the final result representing a percentage outcome overall. Forty one percent of the respondents identified the main culture in their organisation as Hierarchical (Table 9). This was not surprising seeing the study focused on the public service, traditionally known for its bureaucratic and highly structured work environment. Despite the advent of the New Public Management (NPM) principles, other studies (e.g. Bradley & Parker, 2006) have found that the public sector remains internally focused and inflexible, with a preoccupation with “… the enforcement of rules, conformity, and attention to technical matters”, all of which are of significance in bullying. Further discussion of these points will take place in the next chapter.
Table 9 – Culture Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Measure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Hierarchy</td>
<td>41.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Market</td>
<td>23.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clan culture</td>
<td>22.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adhocracy</td>
<td>12.4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Together Market and Clan Cultures representing a competitive stance and a cohesive place of work respectively account for almost 45% of the workplaces. The least common culture was Adhocracy, representing high innovation, and a dynamic work environment.

Table 10 reports the extreme means for individual culture, those scoring above 40, and 10 or lower. The standard deviation figures are relatively low for lower scores, showing uniform responses. In contrast, the same standard deviations are high for mean scores of 25 and above, showing more diversity in view points. The highest standard deviation was for the last item on the prevalent leadership style in the organisation. A discussion of the significance of leadership will ensue in the next chapter.

These results indicate pockets of work within the organisations that are innovative and characterised by risk taking behaviour, but these are exceptional rather than the rule. In the main, most agencies surveyed were reported as being highly structured, stable, and rule bound.
Table 10 – Organisational Culture Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Culture Indicator</th>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>Standard Deviation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The organisation defines success on the basis of efficiency. Dependable delivery, smooth scheduling, and low-cost production are critical.</td>
<td>48.4</td>
<td>23.97</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The glue that holds the organisation together is formal rules and policies. Maintaining a smooth running organisation is important.</td>
<td>45.7</td>
<td>25.12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organisation is a very controlled and structured place. Formal procedures generally govern what people do.</td>
<td>43.3</td>
<td>22.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organisation emphasizes permanence and stability. Efficiency, control and smooth operations are important.</td>
<td>40.4</td>
<td>25.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The leadership in the organisation is generally considered to exemplify entrepreneurial, innovating or risk taking.</td>
<td>10.7</td>
<td>9.03</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The management style of the organisation is characterised by individual risk taking, innovation, freedom and uniqueness.</td>
<td>9.8</td>
<td>8.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The organisation is a very dynamic and entrepreneurial place. People are willing to stick their necks out and take risks.</td>
<td>9.7</td>
<td>8.14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The leadership in the organisation is generally considered to exemplify a no-nonsense, aggressive, results-orientated focus.</td>
<td>33.3</td>
<td>26.02</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Incidents of bullying**

This section will summarise the incidents of bullying reported by victims in terms of prevalence of the behaviour, frequency and duration of events, location of incidents, and whether formal complaints were lodged.
Prevalence of Bullying

Overall, 33% of the survey respondents indicated that they had been bullied at their current place of employment (Figure 13). It should be noted that the approach taken in this study was not to provide a definition of bullying. Rather, respondents were asked whether they believed they had been bullied, and if so, what form it took. The rate of bullying (and harassment) reported for the APS in 2004-5 was 17% (Australian Public Service Commission, 2005), significantly lower than that reported in this study. However, the APS acknowledges that these rates may be biased due to errors in the question format (Australian Public Service Commission, 2004b). As well, since this study was voluntary, it may be that those who believed that they had been bullied at work would have felt more compelled to put their views forward.

Figure 13: Percentage of Respondents Reporting Bullying

The generalisability of this result to the APS should be viewed with caution. Such figures can be viewed as either over or under-represented, depending on one’s point of view. Mayhew and Chappell (2003) indicate that international research studies report that the majority of victims resign, meaning that the actual rates of bullying may be underrepresented. The same statistics can also be over-represented
due to biases in self-reporting such as those predicted by the attribution error hypothesis discussed earlier.

Salin (2004, p. 5) considers:

“Women were in general more willing to write about their experiences and also seemed to report ‘less serious’ bullying episodes, whereas the stories of men were typically limited to very severe and longstanding conflicts. In addition, men tended to focus on work-related negative acts, whereas women emphasised non-work related acts.”

Table 11 shows slightly more women than men report being bullied, especially so given equal gender breakdown of study participants. Salin (2001, p. 435) states that “… employees in lower hierarchical positions, i.e. clerks and officials, experienced considerably more bullying than employees in managerial and expert positions”. Survey respondents were also predominately females in administrative/client service positions.

Table 11 – Prevalence of Bullying and Gender of Victim

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Bullied</td>
<td>14%</td>
<td>19%</td>
<td>33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Not Bullied</td>
<td>33%</td>
<td>34%</td>
<td>67%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>47%</td>
<td>53%</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Frequency of Bullying

Figure 14 shows that in a large number of reported cases, bullying takes place on a fairly regular basis (i.e. Weekly). This is a disturbing finding as repetition can erode the resilience of the victim quickly, and therefore carry personal consequences (discussed in the next chapter). One fifth of respondents reported that the behaviour had only occurred once (i.e. Other), however as it was done in a public manner and had a lasting effect it was considered bullying. Some respondents elaborated that they had relived the single incident by recounting it over and over again, making it seem like a recurring event.
Figure 14: Frequency of Being Bullied

Duration of Bullying

More than half the reported incidents of bullying continued for Months (51%), with 10% continuing for Years (Figure 15). These is yet another disturbing finding pointing to the long-term nature of incidents. The shorter reported durations may in turn represent issue-related factors, or situations of a temporary nature (i.e. elevated stress levels); however, these could also have flow-on effects.
Figure 15: Duration of Being Bullied

Location of bullying

Figure 16 shows that bullying takes place equally in private and public settings. This may be as a result of the open-plan nature of most APS agencies, with the few offices for senior staff, and meeting rooms as the only private places.

Figure 16: Location of Being Bullied
Respondents indicated that bullying in public occurred generally during team briefings, management meetings and training sessions. Other incidents took place in a public work area where other people were within earshot. In one example, spoken information relating to the victim that later appeared in a report for wide distribution was perceived as bullying. Subordinate “whiteanting” and discussions with others relating to the victim (i.e. gossiping) were also perceived as bullying by the study participants. These examples show a wide range of behaviours are considered bullying.

**Lodgement of Formal Complaints**

It is interesting that almost half of the respondents (47%) who had experienced bullying had lodged a formal complaint, many more than expected (Figure 17).

![Figure 17: Lodgement of Formal Complaints Against Bully](image)

Survey respondents were asked to indicate *why* they lodged a formal complaint. Those who had lodged a complaint did so to gain justice, for example: “no one else was taking them on”; “behaviour [was] inappropriate”; and because respondents were “not being fairly treated”. Complainants also reported that the situation was untenable as it was starting to affect their health or lifestyle. Victims
not lodging a complaint attributed this to factors relating to the victim, perpetrator, and the organisation (Figure 18).

Victims reported two contrasting reasons for the non-lodgement of complaints. Where the victim felt empowered, they saw it as their responsibility to deal with the situation to maintain their dignity as the following quotes show:

“I was dealing with it one on one. I see it as my responsibility (because of my organisational role) to confront bullying and controlling behaviour.”

“I have no respect for the person. I have decided not to give him power over me so he no longer has any relevance.”

Some victims did not feel empowered to help themselves. The main reasons for this were: the lack of job security (a number of respondents were still on probation); fear of reprisals; and lack of confidence that anything would change.

![Diagram: Reasons for Non-lodgement of Complaints Against the Bully]

**Figure 18: Reasons for Non-lodgement of Complaints Against the Bully**
Figure 18 summarises the factors inhibiting formal complaints. Some relevant quotes for each are:

**No job security:**
“During probation, management are pathological about wedding out complainers.”

**Fear**
“Fear of being branded as unable to manage in my job impacting on my credibility and perception of competence by others. Possibly reduced marketability to other jobs in the future.”

“I would be persecuted and ridiculed because I am a big strong man.”

**No hope**
“No point, nothing would be achieved.”

**No confidence in the system**
“Previous complaint feel on deaf ears.”

**No confidence in self**
“He was my team leader and I was shattered, non-functional as a result.”

Another factor contributing to the non-lodgement of complaints involved the perpetrator in two ways. First, the perpetrator’s behaviour seemed to be accepted within the organisation: “... everyone used to say that’s just how she is, don’t worry”. Second, the degree of power held by the perpetrator made them untouchable: “... the person in question is my boss’s golden boy and it’s certain to make my life worse”.

The final factor contributing to the non-lodgement of bullying complaints was the organisational culture. It appears that in certain pockets such behaviour is reinforced and condoned, and therefore endemic: “... the purple circle always back each other up”, “... culture of work [is] ... one of continual confrontations and competitiveness”, or “... would not get addressed, [as perpetrator is] a management culprit”.

Therefore, the reasons for not formalising a complaint against the perpetrator are wide ranging. An underlying theme of hopelessness coming through many of the responses is of concern. It appears that perpetrators can hide behind organisational
requirements and norms to justify their behaviour. Of note also is that victims are uncertain about how they will be treated if they complain. There are concerns that issues will not be taken seriously, and that complaints can backfire.

One respondent had a quite different response to bullying “Simply did the job better than peers and the bullying diminished”, highlighting the value of a positive response or perhaps an ability to look beyond unacceptable behaviour to the substantive reason that might have sparked it. This example also raises the issue of the fine line between acceptable management of poor performance and undue pressure on individuals (to be further explored in the next chapter).

Demographics of Bullying

Are there relationships between the demographics of victims and alleged perpetrators, and do either of these help predict the type of bullying? These questions were answered by statistically analysing, gender, age, English as a second language, classification, level of education, and job type against the perpetrator’s gender and relationship to the victim, the frequency, duration and place of bullying, and whether a complaint was lodged. Only a few significant relationships were detected.

Gender

Victim

Simpson and Cohen (2004) consider men and women to have different perceptions of what bullying may be. They suggest men consider the behaviour to be context specific, and therefore a possible management technique. Despite this, no such delineation was found in this study as respondents identifying as victims were as likely to be male or female.

Perpetrator

No significant relationship was found between the gender of the victims, and that of the perpetrator.
Age

Hoel et al (1999, p. 202) report that evidence on the relationship between age and bullying is conflicting: “… older employees [are] more vulnerable/frequently bullied in Scandinavia, younger workers in the UK, pointing to cultural as well as labour market differences”. However, no relationship was found here between the age of the survey respondent and self-identification as a victim.

English as a Second Language

Having English as a second language was the only demographic variable of the victim that returned a significant finding. Respondents who self-identified as having English as a second language also indicated that they had been victims of bullying at work more often ($\chi^2 = 6.56, p = 0.011$). Therefore, be stated that cultural diversity may be a factor in being bullied in the workplace. This is further explored in the next chapter.

Position Within the Hierarchy

Victim

Victims and non-victims did not differ in organisational position. A relationship may however exist between classification and having made a complaint ($\chi^2 = 11.193, p = 0.083$), such that as people become more senior, they were less likely to lodge formal complaints. These results however need to be viewed with caution as some cells of the cross tabulation returned values of less than 5, indicating the results are not conclusive.

Perpetrator

There is much suggestion in the literature that seniority of perpetrators is a factor in bullying (e.g. Simpson & Cohen, 2004). Some research (e.g. Branch et al., 2004a) also find “upward” bullying, that is, from subordinate to manager. However, in this study no significant relationship was found between the positions of perpetrators and victims.
Level of Education

No significant relationship was found between victims’ level of education and whether they reported bullying.

Length of Service

Lewis (2002, p. 194) found that “… lecturers who have more than twenty years’ service appear to show direct correlation between being bullied and the changes that have taken place surrounding their contracts of employment”. This indicates inability to adapt or respond to changes may be a trigger for bullying. As discussed in Chapter One, the APS environment has gone through significant changes in the last decade or two, as such there were expectations that there would be a linkage between the length of service and bullying. Despite this, no significant relationship was found.

Bullying and the Work Context

How is bullying promoted by the work context factors such as the nature of the job, organisational size, climate and culture?

Job Factors

Bullying was equally spread across the four job types, client service, specialist, manager and other.

Organisational Size

No significant relationship was found between organisational size and the following: position of bully (i.e. peer, superior, subordinate or other, as relating to the victim); frequency of bullying, duration of bullying, where it was taking place (i.e. in public, private or both); or whether the victim complained or not.

There were however significant findings in two areas. First, organisational size influenced incidents of bullying ($\chi^2 = 7.185, p = 0.007$), with more bullying reported in larger organisations (>300 employees). This finding will be explored in the next chapter.
A significant relationship was also returned for organisational size and gender of the bully ($\chi^2 = 12.617, p = 0.000$), with smaller ones having more female bullies, and larger organisations more male. This is an interesting finding which may reflect the nature of small and large organisations and the tactics used by the bullies. Larger organisations are more rule-bound, and rules provide avenues for bullying. In smaller organisations informal processes and more subtle means may be used. As reported in Chapter Two, these tactics are often used by female bullies.

**Organisational Climate**

Organisational climate was measured using the Organisational Climate Questionnaire (OCQ) (Stringer, 2002). Of the six indicators of climate used in this model, recognition, support, structure, standard, responsibility, and commitment, only the first two returned significant findings when tested against reported incidents of bullying.

In the OCQ, recognition is indicative of consistently rewarding a job well done; low recognition implies inconsistent rewarding of effort. Respondents who reported having been bullied had lower reported recognition ratings (Bullied = 1.85, Not bullied = 2.22; $t = -4.041, p = 0.000$). This finding relates to the perceptions of equity and fairness at work, as well as being representative of organisational systems, policies, and procedures; and the way in which they may be implemented within the organisation as will be discussed in the next chapter.

The second variable relating to organisational climate was support. In this context support reflects the perceptions of the respondents relating to feelings of inclusiveness, trust, and belonging. Respondents who reported to have been bullied, had lower support ratings (Bullied = 2.44, Not Bullied = 2.82; $t = 2.82, p = 0.000$), reflecting the victim’s feelings of isolation and not belonging to a cohesive group/team. Feelings of isolation serve to remove the individual from the group, in turn isolating them and making them different to norm, which may in itself perpetuate the negative behaviours creating a cycle or spiral effect.

The six dimensions of the OCQ were also tested against the variables in Section C of the questionnaire (The Workplace Experience) relating to reported incidents of bullying. The only significant finding was a relationship between recognition and the relationship of the perpetrator to the victim ($F = 3.320$, 


p = 0.025), with recognition being lower when the bully is a superior officer. This is not surprising given the power of the superior officer and their consequent ability to use or abuse systems and processes to their own ends.

Organisational Culture

Does organisational culture play a role in bullying scenarios? Lazarus and Cohen-Charash (2001, p. 58) state that:

“There may well be a connection between organizational culture and coping. This culture could facilitate coping in at least two ways: by (a) allowing or encouraging employees’ “safe” expressions of stress and emotions in a non-evaluative or supportive environment (Fireman, 1993); and (b) having clear rules about what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour.”

The quote above highlights the role of organisational culture in both establishing a frame of reference for acceptable behaviour in the organisation and in dealing with the consequences of bullying when it does occur.

The Cameron and Quinn (1999) model of culture used in this study has four typologies; Clan Culture, Adhocracy, Hierarchy, and Market. The first three were significantly related to bullying. The Clan culture is reflective of a friendly and cohesive work environment where morale is high and employees are part of an extended family; there is concern for people, and teamwork, participation, and consensus are encouraged. In an Adhocracy, risk taking and innovation are encouraged and rewarded, commitment is high, and the workplace is dynamic and creative. A Hierarchy on the other hand is rule bound, there is a high degree of structure, a focus on stability and efficiency, and managers are coordinators and organisers, ensuring the smooth running of operations.

Respondents who reported bullying rated their organisation as:

- Lower on Clan Culture, (Bullied = 17.9, Not Bullied = 25.4; t = -4.35, p = 0.000)
- Lower on Adhocracy, (Bullied = 10.7, Not Bullied = 13.2; t = -2.198, p = 0.000)
- Higher on Hierarchy, (Bullied = 46.51, Not Bullied = 38.5; t = 2.898, p = 0.005)
While these three cultures are clearly indicative of the general nature of the public sector, reflecting a high degree of bureaucracy and preoccupation with structures, procedures, rules, efficiency, and stability, as reported above, they are even more pronounced where bullying is reported. This is a worrying result, suggesting an overemphasis on hierarchy is detrimental to employee well-being.

No significant relationship was detected for the Market typology as few APS organisations were reported as having this culture.

The only significant link between Culture and demographics of the bully related to Clan Culture and the position of the bully, with Peers identified more frequently as bullies in a Clan Culture (F = 3.235, p = 0.028). This is interesting in that in a Clan Culture, leaders are seen as mentors and parent figures, it is therefore possible that there is competition within the group to gain the favours of those who can bestow rewards, and assist in further grooming and development of individuals.

Summary

The questionnaire showed higher reported rates of bullying in this study than previously reported in the APS. A lack of diversity tolerance, specifically relating to cultural diversity, appears to be a factor that could perpetuate bullying. Strong links were also found between bullying and organisational size, climate, and culture. These findings will be further explored along with the qualitative results in the next chapter.
CHAPTER 5
QUALITATIVE FINDINGS AND SYNTHESIS

Overview

This chapter reports the major findings and relates them to the literature. These findings concern issues relating to policies for, and management of bullying; the prevalence of the behaviour; views of what bullying entails; and explanations of the antecedents and consequences of the behaviour. The chapter concludes with some suggested solutions to the problem, and proposed future directions for research.

Bullying in the APS - Policy and Management

The interviews and survey in this research showed bullying to be largely ignored in the APS agencies. Policy staff perceived that traditionally bullying was not seen as a significant issue, and therefore not much attention had been paid to it, especially in smaller agencies with fewer resources. An HR Manager commented on the lack of action:

“I’m not sure if it is one of those things that we sort of sugar coat. That we’ve got it, and yes, we have some policies there, but we don’t really analyse any of the data or we are not really accountable for any of it ... we are expected to have a policy in place, and we do, but who actually checks our policy and is there any sign off on it?”

In the absence of clear guidelines and real intent to reduce bullying, many officers were unsure how to address bullying incidents. One policy maker stated: “Agencies are looking for ... some guidance ... a publication and maybe some awareness training”. Organisational imperatives create pressures to ‘get on with things’ that leave human issues a poor second: “There is a lot of pressure in balancing the department’s requirements or people’s requirements because every decision you make is worth money, and people look at that”.

Worse still, officers perceived workplace reforms were often aimed at increasing the power base of managers rather than dealing with the social issues: “… people wanted to have more hiring and firing power”.

The lack of attention to bullying was sometimes attributed to the limited ‘people skills’ of managers. Financial reforms had necessitated managers have good accountancy skills, and recruitment and promotion had focused on these to the detriment of ‘soft skills’ such as conflict resolution, negotiation, and liaison skills.

Despite the general perception that bullying was not well dealt with, some action was evident. HR Managers identified a range of responses from high to low profile at both national and local (State) levels. For example, most agencies had networks of Harassment Contact Officers (HCOs) or Diversity and Equity Officers (DEOs). In some, moves were afoot to make these groups proactive in relation to bullying and harassment. Some agencies had received wake-up calls about negative behaviours as a result of staff satisfaction survey findings indicating that bullying was a significant issue and on the rise. In such cases, the union had further contributed to the calls for action. Some agencies had developed and launched anti-bullying policies; these were usually available through their intra-nets.

However such initiatives were often not widely supported. All HR Managers were concerned that information on bullying and the organisations’ policy had not been well publicised. Indeed, some agencies approached for this study were reluctant to contribute out of fear that it might lead to greater publicity for bullying as a workplace issue and open “a can of worms”. Some senior managers were concerned that publicity could ‘open the flood gates’ and “give people an opportunity to have a go”, in the words of one.

Similarly, HR Managers and policy makers were concerned that when policies were in place they were largely ineffective. For example, education and training in relation to those policies were seen as lacking. All thought the development of policies should have been guided by research on bullying within the APS or individual agencies.

In summary, the APS environment can be characterised as having low recognition of bullying as a workplace issue. Respondents indicated a need for more effective and well researched policies, management action to broadcast and
implement such policy, clearer understanding of the nature, causes and prevention of bullying, a greater accounting of ‘people skills’ in the selection of managers, and more education and training on the issue. Many of the findings discussed below help to address these issues.

**Prevalence of Bullying**

Whilst bullying was perceived to be a problem it was difficult to pinpoint exactly how often bullying occurred. One HR Manager reported that in an agency of around 250 staff, 12 cases of bullying were investigated for the 2004–5 year, a complaint rate of 5%. The real rate is likely to be significantly higher considering other evidence from this study (Chapter Four) suggesting less than 50% of the cases result in formal complaints.

The literature review noted the difficulties in establishing objective estimates of bullying or using them for comparative purposes. These related to different methods used to assess the rate of bullying, for example, on one hand providing a definition of bullying and asking study participants to indicate whether they had been bullied or not, and on another, providing a list of negative acts and asking participants to indicate whether they had been subjected to the behaviour. For the State of Service Report, the APS assesses the extent of bullying by asking officers whether they have been bullied or harassed in the same question. Therefore, the questioning format itself may skew findings.

It appears, therefore, that there is little point in trying to measure the incidence of bullying in the APS objectively at this point in time. However, the results of this study do suggest it is quite a significant issue, giving weight to the perceptions of the policy makers and HR managers that their organisation responded inadequately to a significant issue of workplace safety.

**The Parties Involved in Bullying**

The literature review noted some concerns with the common view of bullying as a ‘victim-centred’ phenomenon. A story from an HR practitioner researching a worker’s compensation claim vividly demonstrates many of the complexities:
“The trigger ... was the team leader making a Comcare claim for stress and taking leave. Mediation was arranged between key team members and the team leader, however relationships had deteriorated to the point of a breakdown. The team leader has all the management theoretical knowledge, but lacks the ability to put it into place as a result of serious undermining of her authority through gossip, innuendo and confrontations by key team members designed to destabilise her. She is seriously doubting her own abilities, is suffering from low self-esteem (despite being a very intelligent and articulate person) and lacks confidence to deal with the behaviour displayed by the team members. The team members consist of Mr Negativity – been around for 30 years and everything is the fault of management – nothing is ever right, it’s all wrong. He goes around the office finding bits of gossip that support his theory that ‘they’ are going to do away with [the] office and it’s just a matter of time. He brings down everyone around him and sucks them into his conspiracy theories. Ms Union mediates at sexual harassment conferences and then comes back and tells everyone who was involved, what happened and all the goss. She is very vocal about blaming the team leader for the low morale and lack of cohesiveness of the team – and is a bit of an arsonist; she sets the fire and stands back to watch it burn. Undermining the team leader is her favourite method of operation. Ms Bully is a very strong, confrontational person who wanders around the office all day long without doing a stroke of work. She takes 3 hour lunches and records them on her flex as half an hour. She comes back into the workplace drunk and weaving around the desks. She confronts and attacks the team leader in team meetings and twists everything into a personal attack and judgement. She claims harassment if the team leader mentions the hour she has for morning tea every day to read the paper! The other team members are sheep – too scared to speak up and keep a low profile in case they are targeted.”

This story raises several issues: distinguishing victims and perpetrators when each individual may at times take both roles; the role of the group as bystanders; and the role of organisational culture in validating certain behaviours that may promote bullying – these issues will be explored later in this chapter. This story also highlights the value of researching bullying through third parties who may provide information from a different perspective: a second-hand account which might not have the attribution error associated with self-reporting (Rayner et al., 1999).

The following sections discuss the role of the parties potentially involved in bullying incidents as influences on, or ‘victims’ of it (Figure 19). Results introduced here will be further elaborated on in the antecedents and consequences. The literature review identified the following parties: the victim, the perpetrator,
groups/teams, significant others, bystanders, the organisation, government and society. The goal in examining these parties is to document the complexity of bullying, and therefore the need for APS officers to take a broad view of the phenomenon in their search for causes and counter-measures.

Figure 19: The Parties Involved

The Victim and the Perpetrator

The literature review noted that ‘victim’ may be a simplistic label for individuals caught up in bullying. Two studies show that individuals are often reported to be both bullies and victims (Ireland & Snowden, 2002; Jennifer et al., 2003). Further, as one survey respondent noted, not all people who are subjected to bullying see themselves as victims:

“When this man makes the comments I feel really annoyed and irritated – a weaker person could easily crumble, but his style doesn’t affect me which seems to encourage him to continue even more. He always tries to catch me out on things or make me look stupid but it doesn’t really work because I know what I’m doing and I clearly am not stupid.”

This point reinforces the notion that individuals who believe they have been subjected to negative acts do not necessarily see themselves as a ‘victim’. Varying thresholds for negative behaviours could account for this.
As well, even if perpetrators are considered to act unilaterally, the idea that they are inherently more cruel than ‘average’ persons has been disputed (McCarthy 2004). For example in the story below, an individual who was initially a good colleague resorted to covert bullying tactics when his power base was threatened.

“I was a new member of a budget team. My task was to ‘learn’ the tasks of a [senior officer] who produced the Department’s portfolio budget statements (PBS) as the [senior officer] was going to go on ‘sick leave’ during the time the PBS was to be produced. The [senior officer] gave me no encouragement, belittled me, left no working procedures and ‘sabotaged’ the budget spreadsheet so we would make a mistake in the PBS (fortunately we found this and the mistake did not occur). I believe he did not want anyone else to know how to do the PBS as he had done it for many years and if I was to learn it and succeed his importance would be diminished ... I and the team did achieve the results without him ... his bulliness (sic) continued when he returned from leave. He would not include me in discussions with Finance or the CFO [Chief Financial Officer], and would criticise openly and actively go out of this way not to help.”

Indeed, the interviews in this study showed alleged perpetrators often saw themselves as appropriately meeting the organisation’ needs, and often being labelled as a bully due to their change management role within the organisation. For example, an HR Manager accused of bullying while reintegrating an injured employee back to work after a period of recuperation justified their role in terms of the organisation’s need to maintain productivity and morale:

“We had one case recently where one person was injured and they were off work for 14 weeks and I know that they were very agitated about the fact that they had to come back to work. We were agitated about the fact that they weren’t at work, that we were paying them while they were staying at home. Trying to deal with the conflict that exists between an employee basically wanting to live their life and us wanting the employee to fulfil their contract. “We pay you to do what we want you to do; we don’t pay you to stay at home with your family”. “Well why not?” There really is a tension and so in order to deal with that tension, which exists all the time, there is going to be some conflicts. But at least we could minimise the power imbalances that some of that stuff brings up. We look at it and we say, from an HR perspective, “well I’m in a position of power and I’m really peeved that this person isn’t doing exactly what I want them to be doing”. And at this stage they are saying, “how peeved am I that these bastards are forcing me to jump through these flame filled hoops when I’m a decent, honest, hardworking person”. So there’s the potential then to take away from their enthusiasm and their
motivation, so even if you don’t see it directly it’s got an organisation impact that goes beyond.”

Thus, victims and perpetrators have subjective and often differing views of reality that may lead to conflict when they appear mutually exclusive. A power differential, and a (perceived) lack of reciprocated commitment from the organisation may exacerbate this.

In summary, the data exemplified the difficulties associated with objectively separating ‘bully’ from ‘victim’ or validating the use of either label. Notwithstanding this, for the purposes of this thesis a ‘victim’ will be seen as an individual self-identifying themselves as such, and a ‘bully’ as someone who is seen to engage in adverse behaviours. These labels will be further discussed below.

Groups/Teams

Groups or teams of which bully and victim are both members can be important agents in a bullying incident. For example, inaction by a group can be seen as hostility or lack of support, in effect condoning the negative behaviour:

“Whilst acting in an [executive] capacity I attended a regular Executive meeting. I was quite nervous and apprehensive and anxious to create a good impression. Anyway, ... I sat, observed and listened patiently and waited for the opportunity to join in with the discussion to maybe suggest that a) I was comfortable being in the environment, and b) I had something worthwhile to say. The opportunity came and I started to comment about a specific issue, (my heart racing at this point) only to get spoken over by an experienced [executive] and I was left sitting open-mouthed feeling embarrassed and angry – angry that I had been spoken over and (probably) more angry that not one of the other executive in the room acknowledged the incident and afforded me the opportunity to say what I wanted to. In a way, although it was only one person that was responsible for the incident I felt that the other executives in the room were guilty by association because not one of them seemed prepared to come to my rescue or even to acknowledge the incident.”

It may follow that, as Coyne et al (2004, p. 314) contend, more cohesive teams result in higher levels of victimisation. Thus factors which increase team success may inadvertently produce negative behaviours.

Another perspective on the role of the group or team was that it became adversely affected as a result of bullying. For example “The previous team member
was causing team instability ... the team became dysfunctional, unstable”, and “… made team decision making difficult”. This resulted in a less inclusive approach to work, in turn reinforcing traditional authoritarian and hierarchical approaches.

**Significant Others**

As noted in the literature review, significant others - family or intimate friends - can be key players in bullying incidents, both as causal agents (or perceived causes) and as people who bear the brunt of the consequences. Lewis and Orford (2005, p. 42) found that in their study “… seeking social support seemed to be both a risky and necessary strategy”. Lewis (2002, p. 128), however, found some reluctance on the part of the victims to formally seek support through HR departments and unions. This is not surprising, some authors (e.g. Van Gramberg & Teicher, 2006) question the neutrality and impartiality of HR managers in conflict resolution scenarios, seeing them more as agents of the organisation than “employee champions”. The story of one victim shows how one alleged perpetrator used family life as an excuse:

“I believe the bullying started when I first came into the job. I was the same age as the bully but his subordinate. Quite often I would ask questions why we did things a certain way because I was new to the job. I then started to notice his behaviour change. He would talk over the top of me, walk away when I was in the middle of a sentence and get me into his office on the pretence it was about work issues but really it was lectures on my inability to manage the work. I knew this wasn’t true as I had produced the highest number of [cases] completed in 6 months by any case officer in our office. He would tell me that I had to be more compliant because he had a stressful home life and was on anti-depressants.”

Other respondents described significant effects of bullying on family life:

“I nearly ended up in a psych hospital. My marriage has dissolved since this. I see a psychiatrist every week.”

“Had a nervous breakdown at age 24. Severely affected social and family interaction”.

These often involved emotional distress. “Anger” was often seen to affect relationships at home: “… arguments with family members”, and other victims went home “… in tears most evenings”. While an investigation of the home environment
was beyond the scope of this study, it remains a significant and under-researched part of workplace bullying.

**Bystanders**

Bystanders are seen to condone or support bullying through inaction in the literature but are also seen as needing social support (Lewis & Orford, 2005, p. 41) or at least victims of the experience (Rayner reported in Hoel et al., 2004).

One HR Manager described this well:

“The people who witness the bullying situation ... feel powerless to do anything about it. They might also be inclined to leave or if they do stay they will feel so cowed and feel so helpless in that type of environment that their productivity is going to be down the toilet anyway because why should they put in a little bit extra anyway when they see that it’s just a brutal environment.”

Another victim told a story of bullying that led to physical assault, where the victim was pinned between her desk and the perpetrator, who was then pulled off the victim by another team member. Hoel et al (2004, p. 380) discuss the significance of such scenarios, where a new incident raises the sceptre of an old. In this scenario, the victim found the incident subsequently affected her ‘rescuer’ more than herself, providing bad memories:

“For some of the other people who were involved in this the effects have even been further reaching than me. The person who actually pulled her off me and tried to save me is now in a managerial role herself and is dealing with similar type issues with another staff member and she started having flash backs about this incident. Whereas I haven’t given it too much thought, this was becoming an overshadowing issue in somebody else’s life who was only remotely affected.”

Earlier results suggest, bystanders’ inaction can be seen to make them ‘in league’ with the bully, encouraging the behaviour.

**The Organisation**

The literature review showed the role of organisational context in establishing norms of behaviour, and the last chapter identified links between organisational size,
climate, culture and bullying. One victim described an organisational lack of clarity about work roles and inconsistent processes as a form of endemic bullying:

“A systematic attack by organisation with inconsistent supervision, change of supervisors all the time. Inconsistent expectations on both parties, constant criticisms, no recognition of progress made, inconsistent work plans, inconsistent follow-up, continual monitoring, checking, watching, communication problems, constant pressure.”

Another victim reported bullying through criticism and the ‘cold treatment’ as a routine, culturally-acceptable response:

“During my probation I spoke up at a team meeting, voicing the feeling that everyone shared in the team. We had just been given through a management decision extra work. The feeling was that there was no way we could get through the work by the due date. I said this. Nothing was said to me at the time but the relationship between my superiors and me suddenly became cold. I began to have my work scrutinised and criticised. It is my feeling that this is an organisation wide procedure by management to weed out possible ‘trouble makers’ – put pressure on them (what usually happens in these situations is the employee starts to go down the route of appeals – starts grumbling and murmuring, asking for changes in coaches and team leaders which actually gives management what they want (i.e. reasonable excuse to sack the employee because they do appear to be trouble makers). Two weeks after my comment management bought in extensive paid overtime on weekends to get the extra work done ... I have also witnessed this management approach to another recent probationer in that case the employee left. If this is a management directive - it may not be - these things sometimes just have a momentum of their own - then it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy – stress the employee until he acts like a trouble maker. Management is the public service may have become paranoid by the “unsackable bad egg” in the past, but that’s no excuse to act this way.”

As noted earlier, aspects of the public sector environment including the highly regulated nature of the work, the current state of flux, and increased emphasis on outcomes can be seen as contributing to bullying. Of note also is the reference to a starter or probationer leaving the agency at early stages of employment due to bullying. As discussed earlier, this attrition may result in under representation of rates of bullying in the workplace.

Bullying was seen to affect organisations adversely, through lowered satisfaction, commitment, and productivity, and increased use of leave, and services such as employee assistance programs (EAPs). Some respondents also reported the
behaviour reinforced the “… stable culture, old public service style”, in turn perpetuating the behaviour and reinforcing the norms. These issues have been touched on in the review of the literature and will be further explored later in this Chapter.

**Government**

The literature review raised the issue of the government’s role in encouraging or preventing bullying in the workplace. Recent reforms of the Public Service Act (1999) have brought workplace relations changes and financial reforms. For example Kimber and Maddox (2003) consider that a new focus on managerialism detracts from an inclusive approach to management, with self-interest and end results driving the approach to work and people.

Interviewees in policy and HR roles considered the structural, technical, cultural and procedural changes in the APS to lack adequate change management processes, including adequate research prior to implementation. For example one HR Manager indicated that the introduction of a deficient and new computer system created instability at work through increased anxiety in staff.

Another HR manager similarly commented on a staff rotation policy:

“A couple of years back we looked at the issue about staff wanting to advance their career opportunities and move within [different work areas]. We also faced the issue of those staff who didn’t want to move and we created some false rotation which resulted in some staff taking stress leave, not wanting to come to work, they didn’t like the new work environment, they didn’t like the new team environment. Because they were from a different culture and different work areas and that created quite a bit of anxiety amongst the staff as well.”

These examples show government agencies suffer from poor change management practices, which may increase bullying as perceived deterioration in work environments coupled with increased expectations of outcomes creates angst amongst staff, and exacerbates power plays.

**Society**

Finally, society is also seen as both an influence on, and victim of, bullying. For example, increasing pressures for competition may alter cultures or norms
towards greater tolerance of bullying (Bilton cited in Kennedy, 2001; Mayhew, 2004). The costs to society in terms of mental health and workplace dysfunction are held to be large (McCarthy & Rylance, 2001; Vega & Comer, 2005).

The interviews with victims highlighted many psychological and physiological consequences of bullying, leading to periods of absenteeism, sick leave and work pressures for those left to accommodate the workload of absent colleagues. In extreme cases, victims reported months of absence from work, sometimes with hospitalisation at psychiatric institutions. The level of desperation experienced by some victims is illustrated by this quote:

“In the end I was unable to continue working in that situation and could not get a transfer so took 15 months leave without pay. It also cost me 2 months of higher duties and promotion”.

Bullying also adversely impacts clients. Respondents indicated that conflict at work resulted in poor client service in terms of incorrect and tardy advice, giving agencies a poor image. As the APS has a critical role in providing services to the Australian public, this goes to the heart of its objectives affecting society at large.

In summary, the above sections have illustrated many of the points from the literature about the complexities of bullying. It is often not simply a ‘mean’ person picking on a ‘victim’; often perpetrators and victims are hard to label unilaterally, and perpetrators may believe they are acting legitimately and in the organisation’s best interest. The team or group may be an agent of bullying, and bystanders may be both influences on and victims of it. The government’s reform agenda may allow room for bullying by focusing on financial and structural issues, yet government agencies appear to face significant consequences from bullying. Finally, society is also both contributor and victim of bullying.

While these points have been noted in the literature, researchers often fail to consider their full impact. The present data show that bullying in the public sector has all of these characteristics, calling for a more sophisticated discussion of its nature, antecedents, and consequences. With this in mind, attention is now turned to investigate these factors.
Respondents’ Views on What Bullying Involves

The literature review noted the absence of an agreed definition of bullying amongst researchers. However when an organisation such as the APS wishes to address bullying, there is clearly a need for a guidelines or other form of clarity. In this study a definition was not provided to subjects; rather, they were asked if they had been subjected to bullying, and if so what form the behaviours took. The aim was to learn what types of behaviours are deemed as bullying. Employees’ views, even if they depart from definitions offered by experts, form an important perspective that should be considered in addressing bullying. As noted in Chapter Three, bullying is very much a subjective or perceptual issue (e.g. Lawrence, 2001; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003; Rayner et al., 2002). This creates many difficulties, as one policy maker noted almost anything can be labelled bullying:

“A lot of people think they’re being bullied because they have been told to do a particular aspect of work which is not bullying I don’t think. It’s just saying this is your job and you have to do it. If you don’t do it then a manager’s got the right to say, “yes you have to do it”. And that’s not bullying.”

Thus there is a thin and contestable line between bullying and management actions to reasonably ensure operational efficiency, accountability, control or performance. The Public Service Act (1999) sets out rules relating to conduct in Section 13 The APS Code of Conduct. Of note is Subsection 5:

“An APS employee must comply with any lawful and reasonable direction given by someone in the employee’s Agency who has authority to give the direction.”

So, is someone who objects to direction then a ‘victim’, ‘perceived victim’ (Hoel et al., 2001) or ‘provocative victim’ (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2004, p. 86)? This issue is highly complex and context-specific.

While a definition is difficult at present, some guidelines can be suggested. The literature on the related concept of harassment (Mac Dermott, 2001) suggests the concept of ‘unwelcomeness’ may be at the heart of victims’ perception of bullying. There is usually an indication of ‘distress’ on the part of the recipient in bullying scenarios as well (McCarthy, 2003). In the APS context, the notion of inappropriateness could also be linked to the APS Values and Code of Conduct,
detailing required standards of behaviour of all officers at all times. Specifically, the following paragraphs of the Public Service Act (1999) are of note:

Section 10 APS Values, Subsection (1)(j)
“The APS provides a fair, flexible, safe and rewarding workplace”

Section 13 The APS Code of Conduct, Subsection (3)
“An APS employee, when acting in the course of APS employment must treat everyone with respect and courtesy, and without harassment”

Therefore a tentative description of bullying can be given at this stage:

Bullying is behaviour that is unwelcome, inappropriate in the given context, and causes distress to the recipient.

The role of context in this description reminds us that different groups may need different definitions for their purposes. For example, HR managers are concerned with policy, prevention, education and investigation of complaints; victims with identifying and labelling behaviours that cross personal boundaries; occupational health and safety practitioners with injury/case management; counsellors and psychologists with assisting and dealing with the consequences; researchers with studying the area and developing theories; unions with protecting members; and managers/leaders with risk assessment and operational efficiency.

As definition of bullying is complex, some authors suggest the need for parameters that allow the construct of bullying to broaden (Rayner et al cited in Coyne et al., 2000, p. 336). Others (e.g. Bagshaw, 2004, p. 1) note that conflict is both a product and a constitutive part of relationships, implying that delineation of these is a difficult task. An alternative approach to better understanding the concept of bullying would be the provision of a model incorporating the various characteristics associated with the behaviours. This is one of the main contributions of this study. The aim is to help policy makers and managers attempting remediation a clearer understanding of significant issues in bullying scenarios. As we shall see, different types of bullying call for different organisational responses. In some cases, they also invite managers to take a wider systemic view of the problem.

As noted in the Chapter Two, Einarsen (2003, p. 3), Hoel et al (1999, pp. 195-8) and Felson and Tedeschi (cited in Einarsen, 1999) suggest a number of characteristics that define bullying incidents, including their frequency, duration,
power balance, quality and content, objective versus subjective nature, interpersonal versus organisational scope, the reaction of the target and the intent of the perpetrator.

In the focus groups, interviews and the survey in this study participants were asked to describe incidents of bullying. The answers revealed some of these parameters as shown in Figure 20. The notion of power is at the heart of this model. Other significant dimensions were as follows: means of bullying (direct or indirect), intention of the bully (deliberate or inadvertent), source of bullying (by individuals or by groups), frequency of bullying (once-off or repeated), cause of bullying (issue related or predatory) and setting (on-site or off-site).

**Figure 20: Bullying in the Workplace: A model**

**Power**

A power imbalance, or an attempt to exert power, appeared central to bullying in many responses, expressed in words such as “... [a] bully trying to exert control, appear powerful to others, gain self confidence” and “... someone seeking
to gain favour with senior management by dobbing in someone else and by putting that person down” or “... this person is very controlling and enjoys exercising his power by playing mind games. His managerial strategy is to divide and rule. He manipulates every situation to satisfy his ego”.

Findings indicate that both ‘position’ and ‘personal’ power (Samson & Daft, 2005a, pp. 429-30) were significant in bullying. Position power is revealed in quotes such as “Team leader liked to play favourites and did not like my innovative ideas and willingness to speak up”, and “Manager used to getting his own way”, demonstrating that bullies enjoy the influence resulting from their position and will bully those who threaten their power. Such behaviours may be legitimised as acceptable practice in pursuit of ‘operational efficiency’, in hierarchical settings. Personal power is shown in words such as “Person in question is my boss’s golden boy” and “The purple circle always back each other up”, where the bully is (perceived) as a person of value to the work area or organisation, and to some extent “untouchable”.

The degree of power imbalance is critical in dealing with bullying. A large imbalance in formal power requires very careful handling of a bullying incident. Indeed reduction of bullying might be expected if organisations sought to reduce formal power gaps between staff who interact regularly, as the ‘line manager’ model is supposed to do but sometimes fails, or if they encouraged managers to develop awareness of consequences of power and employees to develop awareness of their own informal sources of power, and formal processes for dealing with grievances.

**Means of Bullying: Direct - Indirect**

One respondent’s description of bullying as a form of “psychological warfare” sets the scene for a wide range of reported ways to bully, both directly, through verbal and behavioural acts and indirectly as effects on the work environment and experiences. It is noteworthy that the term “warfare” has connotations of reciprocity, an issue further explored later.
Figure 21 diagrams the impacts found in content analysis of qualitative data.

**Figure 21: Direct and Indirect Means of Bullying**

**Direct Means of Bullying**

Verbal comments were made to either the victim or to others. Direct comments to the victim included “Threat of dismissal if I didn’t meet a target”, “General put-downs, being ridiculed and laughed at for not knowing things that I wasn’t taught”, “Speaking to me in a derogatory manner in front of other co-workers”, and “... use of obscene language”.

Other comments were made behind the victim’s back. The victims described: “Backstabbing and comments made to co-workers and managers designed to undermine my role and skill level to the point of vicious vindictiveness that had co-workers warning me to watch my back”, “Lying about me” or “Gossip and speculation”.

Four main behavioural tactics were identified as: by exclusion, through aggression, through undermining the victim and by implication. Exclusion of the victim involved leaving them out of work or social functions, or withholding information, for example “Having lunches that excluded myself (sic)” and
“Avoidance and not including me in group interactions”. Einarsen and Mikkelsen (2003, p. 139) emphasise the importance of exclusion: “… as a social and tribal primate, the survival of human beings depends on their being integrated in a well-functioning social group. Accordingly, from an existential point of view, social exclusion may be life-threatening”.

*Aggressive* behaviours included “threatening”, “hostile questioning”, “yelling” or “slamming chairs and throwing bags”. *Undermining* the victim on the other hand involved: “lies to manager”, “incorrect instructions/directions”, and “… undermining my authority with junior staff when challenged”.

Bullying *by implication* took a range of forms including “Eye rolling … in front of peers and superiors in meetings”, “Photo of suspect rapist pinned upon noticeboard with suggestions that it was a likeness to me” and “Making independent decision without discussion with myself (sic) on area of overlapping accountability for outcomes, engaging in behaviour with our director that promoted my director’s gender bias/favourtism towards him”.

**Indirect Means of Bullying**

Indirect means of bullying affected victims by disrupting their work environment, and creating negative experiences of work. Disruptions to the work environment involved excessive pressure or creation of discomfort and instability, for example “Forcing me to do something that was not in line with my limitations (I was on worker’s compensation)”, “Unachievable expectation of performance fuelled by continual criticism” and “Continued pressure to meet unrealistic targets.

*Discomfort and instability* was identified in comments such as “lack of support, threat of removal from team”, “… aggressive, overbearing nature, my way or the highway style” or “made to feel vulnerable”. Many respondents reporting bullying were on probation and therefore insecure in their employment.

The workplace experience of the victim covers the use of *organisational procedures* and *not being given the benefit of the doubt*. Organisational procedures involved such behaviours as “abuse of position power”, “Managerial use of APS Code of Values (sic) as a tool of punishment of individuals”, “Manager giving directions/orders without considering the consequences and experiences of junior staff”, “Superior trying to influence merit based selections” and “A senior manager
attempted to impose a command/control relationship with me when other forms of coercion failed.

Bullying by not being given the benefit of the doubt involved such behaviours as “The worst view possible of my actions and not listening or sometimes even asking for my explanation” and “Stress problems caused by excessive work and work practices were not believed by supervisor”.

As can be seen, bullying may therefore be directly visible and targeted at the employee, or indirect in that the work environment and the quality of work life of employee may be affected by disruptions, and legitimised through the use of organisational procedures.

The practical significance of these categories is to alert managers and policy makers to the possibility that bullying can be indirect as well as direct and can involve implication or exclusion rather than being active. In particular, many management activities can be seen as bullying if implemented in a way lacking in respect for staff. Employees perceive bullying to go beyond aggressive language or behaviour to a wide range of actions and avoidances of action, in both interpersonal relations and the formal duties of managers or corporate policy.

**Intent: Deliberate - Inadvertent**

A third factor in better understanding bullying is the notion of intent. That is, did the perpetrator target the victim deliberately or unintentionally? Many of the quotes provided earlier point to behaviour intended to affect the victim adversely. However, other evidence from victims suggests that the bully was unaware of their behaviour or its impact: “lack of awareness on the part of bully, not aware that their actions could be perceived as bullying” and “I think it was done unconsciously and perhaps not intended, however it happened and it was an event that stamped me”.

Should lack of intent exonerate the bully? Pryor and Fitzgerald (2003, p. 80) write of sexual harassment in the US context that: “Whether the perpetrator intended the behaviour to be offensive or not is not the point of legal deliberations. That the behaviour occurred and was unwelcome are the main considerations. What are considered to be unwelcome … behaviour[s] obviously varies from person to person and across circumstances”. Therefore, an outcome focused model of bullying
ignoring intent seems fitting. However, managers should also acknowledge that behaviours may be inadvertent, and/or the perpetrator wrongly accused.

The majority of accounts given by victims show the bullying was intentional, and part of a systematic process to gain power or rewards, as the following examples demonstrate:

“During executive meetings she would try to intimidate me, she would raise her voice and mouth obscenities (I found this highly offensive)”

“I once had a manager who was initially supportive of me but as my career success increased he became more and more controlling of me. This occurred quite systematically. He gave me opportunities to set me up to fail, denied me information, lied to me, refused to conduct meetings with me, he sent me from his office several times.”

“During a meeting a staff member who was one level above me made belittling comments after I had spoken ... This was initially embarrassing and prevented me from saying anything else during the meeting.”

This dimension suggests that at times bullying may not be an endemic issue, but could be resolved by raising awareness of appropriate workplace conduct and developing employees interpersonal skills. Managers and policy makers should be careful in pre-judging individuals who appear as perpetrators of bullying in the absence of thorough investigations of incidents.

**Source: By Individuals – By Groups**

The majority of informants described bullying as an individual effort, a perpetrator bullying a single victim or a group of victims. However, some implicated other perpetrators, mostly in terms of their inaction, for example:

“Structure of the department had 2 managers equally accountable for products which belonged to both managers. This set up required high degree of collaborative management or else both would not achieve outcomes. Desire by other party (say ‘B’) to control and direct business and to have me as an understudy. B adopted a strategy of behaviours to isolate me from information, including key meetings and emails and hook-ups. My non-awareness meant that he was at the forefront (e.g. I missed meetings etc), other areas and staff and director saw him as the key man, and me as an ineffectual/incapable manager as I was absent from decision making events and if or when asked did not have anything or little to contribute as I did not have information in the first place. B would hold out to other areas that he
was the man to make key decisions for the site. Desire by other party to make me feel isolated by talking about his problem (with me) to other subordinate staff so they took sides. Also held quasi-management lunches and specifically excluded myself (overtly done). Immediate supervisor, the director (say C) was partial to B and this appeared to be a contribution of ‘boy’s club’ type chauvinism, and a dislike for me personally. The more I sought assistance from C the more brush off I received from C. Ultimately despite rehab counsellors, psych facilitator and union involvement C still refused to act to pull B into line”.

While the main perpetrator here is the fellow manager (B), the director (C) through his inaction supported and contributed to the escalation and continuation of the behaviour. Bullying is perceived by employees to be an individual activity in many cases, but also sometimes one that is supported (actively or passively) by others in a coalition or group.

A challenge here for policy and remediation efforts is to look beyond initial causes or actors to the actions or inactions of third parties that may support or indicate tolerance for the abusive behaviour.

**Frequency: Once off - Repeated**

The distinction between harassment and bullying was made earlier in the thesis. It should also be noted that “Sexual harassment does not have to be repeated or continuous to be against the law” (Human Rights and Equal Opportunity Commission, 2004, p. 16). While the repeated nature of negative behaviours is a central theme of many definitions of bullying (see Chapter Two), McCarthy and Mayhew (2004, p. xiv) see this as a potential limitation.

Findings from this study suggest that employees do perceive single incidents, if significant for the victim and public in nature, as bullying. One described the outcome of a single incident as follows: “I took my feelings home and worried, stressed and thought about it all weekend”. Another example describes serious impacts on a person’s work reputation: “What I heard was that I had said something inappropriate – but have yet to find out what. My reputation and standing with the CEO, the person she told, and my boss has (sic) suffered”. Other comments showed that victims re-live single incidents, in effect making them repeated events. This finding is supported by other researchers (Hoel & Cooper, 2001; Ireland & Snowden, 2002; Lee, 2000; Rayner et al., 2002).
However, frequency of bullying is important. Leymann has reportedly suggested “… bullying behaviour itself may not be the cause of the problems for the victim but the real harm is caused by the: frequency of the behaviours, situation in which they occur, power gap between the victim and the perpetrator, lack of an escape, victims’ attribution of the offender’s’ intentions” (Tehrani, 2004, p. 358). Similarly, Zapf et al (2003, p. 113) suggest that: “… bullying becomes more and more serious the longer it lasts”. The findings of Chapter Four indicated that around 12% of incidents were reportedly single events, and that in the vast majority of cases bullying is an on-going behaviour.

Therefore, while the frequency of bullying is important, single incidents should also be considered when constructing definitions for research, policy or management intervention.

**Cause: Issue related - Predatory**

Felson and Tedeschi (cited in Einarsen, 1999) distinguish ‘issue-related’ bullying, based on work incidents, from predatory bullying, arising from the perpetrator’s nature or personality. In the present study, respondents’ views also showed this distinction. Victims’ explanations at times suggested predatory bullying, such as “… out of amusement to get a reaction” or “… conflicting personalities”. Alleged perpetrators, on the other hand, often gave work causes. Line managers or HR staff had been asked by their managers to remedy the victim’s poor performance, work outcomes or behaviours that contravened the APS Code of Conduct and Values. At times victims agreed that they definitely had deficiencies in work output or quality.

The significance of this distinction is that different remedies apply to the two sorts of bullying. Work-related issues can be addressed by discussion, short-term mediation or counselling, while predatory bullying may need long-term counselling, and perhaps continuous management monitoring.

**Setting: On site – Off site**

Bullying can occur in the office or off-site. In the office bullying occurred in the open plan work area or privately. Off-site incidents involved a social club, or
interactions in coffee shop, or even at home (“The manager was ringing me at home”).

One disturbing trend in on-site bullying is the growing use of e-mail. One respondent described a very high level of e-bullying: “I received daily inflammatory emails – coloured letters, bold print, lots of exclamation marks – demanding immediate action on a raft of issues and explanations, explanations of explanations, and then explanation of explanations of explanations”.

In summary, bullying occurred in a wide range of locations and media: in public and in private, via face to face interaction or by innuendo, via spoken word or email, through informal encounters or formal meetings, in the office or at social gatherings or even at home. This suggests policy and interventions should take a broad view of workplace abuse, and further examine the role of Information Technology (IT).

**Theoretical Implications for the Notion of Bullying**

The dimensions of bullying identified by interview and survey respondents indicate that bullying is perceived in a very wide range of circumstances, some of which go beyond the common but simple image of an aggressive individual using words or actions in an abusive way. Bullying may also be supported by third parties, may be indirect such as through implication or exclusion, may be technologically mediated rather than face to face, may involve inaction rather than action, may involve acceptable management activities such as performance management conducted in abusive ways, may involve personality issues or may represent work-based conflict, may be unintentional or even unconscious, and may take place outside the office. The broad range of experiences counted as bullying highlights a need to avoid simplistic definitions (in terms of words or behaviours for example), and perhaps to emphasise the underlying psychological issues of ‘unwelcomeness’, ‘inappropriateness’ and ‘distress’ evident in the definition adopted:

Bullying is behaviour that is unwelcome, inappropriate in the given context, and causes distress to the recipient.
Factors that Create and Maintain Bullying

What are the factors behind bullying in organisations? Are employees themselves a cause or is bullying driven by the organisational context? Are there factors beyond the employees and the organisation? This section examines the antecedents of bullying.

Initially, the antecedents were divided into individual and organisational levels. However, it became apparent that this dichotomy was limiting and that a more complex set of influences was involved, addressed here in three ways. First, discussion at the ‘individual’ level covers both victims and perpetrators. Second, antecedents were also identified at the collective, team or group level, discussed below in terms of dyads, the destructive cycle, cohesion and sub-cultures. Finally, ‘organisational’ variables can be divided into those in external and internal environments. The resulting view of the antecedents of bullying is shown in Figure 22.

Figure 22: Antecedents of Bullying
Another complication arose in relation to the distinction between antecedents and consequences of bullying. Findings also showed this division to be blurred: at times what could have been seen as a consequence of bullying was also identified as a cause. In these cases bullying appears as a self-perpetuating cycle where victim and bully are engaged in a long-term dyadic relationship that maintains itself or spirals downward. In such instances, cause and effect are not easily distinguished from a traditional scientific viewpoint, especially as this was not a longitudinal study, and the literature review noted the advantages of a dyadic view in studying bullying. While data collected here sometimes showed a dyadic perspective, in other instances it was not possible to question informants to this end, and therefore the language of ‘antecedents’ and ‘consequences’ are to be interpreted with caution in these next two sections.

Despite this qualification, the variables discussed here are clearly of great significance to the study of bullying, and their division by respondents into antecedents and consequences has some logic to it. This study addressed its exploratory objectives by identifying variables of significance in bullying incidents in the APS, and it is left to more analytic future research to untangle the complexities of cause and effect.

Other authors describe the causes of bullying as a complex interplay of variables in individuals, groups and organisations (e.g. McCarthy & Mayhew, 2004; McCarthy et al., 2003a; White, 2004). As Scutt (2004) notes, “… governments and business harbour within them contradictory principles, practices, policies and people”. In the APS, the regulatory and political frameworks created conflicts between “principles, practices, policies and people” at two levels, individual and organisational. At an individual level, conflicting roles often resulted in perceptions of bullying, as in the case of an HR manager who noted: “My personal experience has been that I have been bullied by staff members, and I have been bullied by former managers, and I have been accused of being a bully”. A wide range of factors in the bureaucratic culture of the APS were seen to promote bullying, for example “ … role modelling within [the] organisation”, “… power and asserting it” and “ … managers being pushed up the ranks too quickly”. These are discussed below.
The social environment at work, demonstrated through group interactions and the resulted level of support was also found to be a significant contributor to bullying. At an organisational level conflict often, though not exclusively, seemed to arise from NPM principles of efficiency and self-funding clashing with the APS mission of public service. As one policy-maker saw it:

“Cultural change was required because it was a new way of accounting and reporting within the Public Service. People didn’t think of outcomes they only ever thought about outputs. They didn’t know what the outputs were actually leading to ... But now people have to see the bigger picture ... For example in an organisation like my own where we have to also generate revenue. So we’ve got a little bit of budget funding but we’ve got to generate revenue so we can balance the books at the end of the day. A lot of the staff who previously worked in the organisation didn’t feel very comfortable about working in a cost recovery basis ... staff that I have here don’t always feel comfortable saying to people, “yeah please come along, but we have to charge you $20 to do that.”

Other examples of organisational variables representing conflict in the APS environment were: “… old versus new APS values and ideals”, “… previously ‘non-interventionist approach’, now more hands-on and involved, new culture less accommodating of non-conformity”, “… legislation, structural change ... change in IR processes (certified agreements), performance management linked to pay”, “… not enough support for managers influencing policies”, and “… I would see every time the issue of bullying came up that it was more a case of performance management than it was bullying”. Group and organisational variables are discussed later in this chapter

Individual Factors

Analysis of the interview and survey data showed six main variables that were reported as antecedents of bullying incidents. Interestingly, these applied to both victims and perpetrators, although in different ways. These variables were labelled: power, pressure, confidence, competence, state of health, and diversity (tolerance)(Figure 23).

These variables were found to be interconnected and existing in bullying scenarios to one extent or another. Often the existence of one (e.g. pressure) lead to
another (e.g. erosion of confidence), which in turn affected yet more variables (e.g. state of health) ultimately resulting in a synergetic outcome.

Figure 23: Individual Antecedents of Bullying

Victims
Before turning to the findings, a word of caution is appropriate. The notion of a ‘victim’ in bullying is not always clear; as noted earlier, respondents who report being bullied may not see themselves as victims. Further, it appears there is no archetypal victim, rather the context has a significant role in determining the labelling of individuals and events. The label ‘victim’ is therefore socially-derived, with both organisational context and individuals’ values determining acceptable behaviour. The discussion below should be viewed in this light.

Power
As discussed above previous studies show a power imbalance is at the heart of bullying (e.g. Hoel & Cooper, 2001; Lewis, 2003a), and this was a critical and recurring theme in the present incidents. Power can be seen on a continuum from powerful to powerless. Victims generally saw themselves as less powerful than perpetrators: “I was intimidated by her as she was in a powerful job, and has a huge presence as an individual”. In other cases, the victim reported bullying as a result of conflict between informal sources of power, a property of individuals, and their
relationships, formal sources, and an embedded property of structures (Buchanan & Huczynski, 2004, p. 829 - 32). The following quote shows this conflict:

“\[quote\]
I came in under a particular job title but the boss gave me much leeway in being involved in areas of my strength. On paper I was to report to a peer (who was at the same level) but in reality I was reporting to the boss and was mainly determining my own direction of work. This annoyed my peer and she did not hesitate to show it openly.\[/quote\]

In the APS power exists in the ‘office’ or position held by an employee more than in their employment level, although as this example shows individuals may perceive conflict between these. The APS Values and Code of Conduct set clear standards for the behaviour, however they clearly do not prevent bullying in themselves. Agencies serious about reducing bullying should consistently reinforce good behaviours through training, at induction and subsequently; role modelling specifically by senior management and organisational leaders; and through a consistent approach to promotions, performance management practices, and disciplinary actions.

**Pressure**

Many sources of pressure were reported in the victim’s personal life and work environment. Often it seemed these accumulated synergistically, that is the combined effect was more than the sum of the individual ones, further reducing employee resilience.

An example that related to personal pressures was: “The female officer made an aggressive general comment that the officer initiated part-timers [sic] only work Sundays ... Another female asked me when I was going full time as my children were now old enough. Shows how little she understands, my middle child with a disability needs appointments/therapy”. This victim is under pressure from the home environment due to caring for a disabled child and therefore works part-time, but this is seen by colleagues as a lack of commitment to work, creating pressures to increase work hours.

Survey findings showed that more senior victims were less likely to lodge a formal complaint, pointing to the additional political pressures in more senior positions. Further examples of pressures on individuals will be discussed later.
Reducing pressure and therefore employee stress is a major strategy for organisations wanting to ameliorate bullying. Personal problems can be addressed through increasing managerial empathy, and through the formal strategies such as Employee Assistance Programs (EAPs) and flexible work practices. Work stressors can be reduced through staff well-being surveys and interventions to ensure appropriate workloads and cultures of respect. Both avenues should be explored in meeting an employer’s duty of care – these will be further explored later in this chapter.

Confidence

Confidence is also a continuum, with individuals varying from highly confident to very uncertain and both ends leading to bullying. A confident individual and one that others see value in could be seen as a threat, for example where opportunities for promotion and interesting work are limited: “The main perpetrators likely see me/my skills as perhaps a threat and hence feel a need to put me down”. However, like power, it seems that confidence is more a problem when it is missing:

- “I am a worker not a manger, perhaps it all goes back to being bullied at school and the resultant low self esteem which still manifests occasionally.”
- “It is often difficult for less confident people to take the necessary steps, particularly if they have no job security.”

Building employee confidence is therefore a worthwhile initiative against bullying. Managers should develop employee skills through training for managers and employees, ensure positive feedback and appropriate reward systems, and change cultures to better respect employees for their skills rather than view them as replaceable parts in an impersonal machine. Training employees in assertiveness skills and negotiation and conflict resolution may also help create environments that do not reduce individuals’ personally or socially-derived self-esteem.

Competence

Bjorklund (2004) reports that victims of bullying have 50% longer response times and make 50% more mistakes in their work compared to a control group. Victims were also found to have impaired memory systems and a reduced mental
capacity, resulting in the conclusion that deficient work output was caused by lower competence levels.

A recurring theme in the present study was the fine line between perception of an act as bullying and ‘robust’ performance management. All alleged perpetrators interviewed indicated they were engaged in performance management of the victim before being accused of bullying. This points to possible initial deficiencies in the work performance of ‘victims’, and in turn, lower competence levels. For example an HR practitioner reports:

“... probationer ... basically accused [her manager] and I of bullying her when we were monitoring her performance for probation purposes. She was a smart woman and I think she had high expectations of "picking it up on the job". No matter how straight and blunt we were with her, she refused to see the seriousness of her inability to grasp basic concepts and when it came time to deliver the recommendation of termination she tried everything she could to place the blame elsewhere. In my experience, and it was certainly the case with [this person], 'bullying' is usually brought up when a series of adverse decisions have been made regarding a person's performance. In some instances the person feels that they are being singled out for unwanted attention, and in others normal performance feedback makes them believe they are being picked on. When this has been raised I always revisit the facts, evidence and examine any mitigating factors that have been brought to my attention. If there is any lack of evidence then that casts doubt on the validity of the performance monitoring information and I would let things slide until such time as more information was uncovered or behavioural patterns emerged again (as they undoubtedly usually do).”

Victims at times felt unable to deal with management demands; these were sometimes perceived as excessive and construed as work pressures. However, inability to effectively carry out one’s role was seen as a clear determinant by some victims. For example, the following victim knew their performance needed improvement:

“I have examined my conscience etc and whilst I have definitely got some developmental needs ... which I am happy to address etc I don’t believe I needed to be shouted at”

McCarthy (2004c, p. 175) considers the management of performance through another valuable lens pointing to bullying resulting in a cycle. Excessive pressure or poor performance can result in further pressures that can eventually lead to a
downward spiral of absenteeism and unsatisfactory conduct. This yet again points to an interrelationship between the individual and organisational antecedents of bullying.

Paradoxically, as with power and confidence, perception of high competence levels in a victim could also constitute a threat to the perpetrator and precipitate bullying. A victim said of the perpetrator that: “Person felt inferior and needing to ascertain her place in the organisation”. Here the victim was indicating that they had a higher level of work competency compared to that of the perpetrator’s.

To reduce the possibility that perceived incompetence can become an excuse for bullying, managers should be trained in interpersonal and negotiation skills, and in performance management skills that build an individuals’ competence and self-esteem. As well, use of merit based selections and promotion would ensure those more capable are given management opportunities.

**State of Health**

A large proportion of victims reported suffering from physical or psychological illness, but was this a consequence of being bullied or the cause? Illness has been found to predict new cases of bullying (Kivimaki et al., 2003, p. 781), pointing to it being a possible cause as well as a consequence.

The majority of the alleged perpetrators interviewed indicated that their accuser was unwell, as assessed by third party medical practitioners in almost all cases. In extreme cases, a number of perceived victims had attempted self-harm and had been hospitalised for psychiatric conditions. Possibly, alleged perpetrators overemphasise illness to justify their behaviour, however, many victim’s reported that they were not completely well citing “… post natal depression” or a history of psychiatric illness.

Thus, both physical and mental illness may cause a person to be bullied. It is likely that unwell people may sometimes become more sensitive to their treatment by others, and also that illness can be used as a justification for behaviour that appears to alleged perpetrators to be out of the ordinary. The exact role of illness is a complex issue.
Illness created conflicts for many managers in performance management scenarios, as shown in stories from victims and alleged perpetrators. One respondent who self identified as a victim told this story:

“I ... was still on probation. I was slow on the phones and the new team leader had a strong focus on achieving above and beyond the stats. Initially, time was put towards improving my performance, and I did so accordingly. He did continue to request further improvement, and I felt this was due to my inability at the job. For the next year in his team, he continually emphasised the performance stats and my inability to keep up. I felt I received inadequate feedback during this period from my phone coach who often told me that in the private sector I would be out of a job, and rarely gave positive feedback of any kind. I mentioned this to my team leader who claimed the coach was justified in his approach. I was then threatened with performance management and demotion. I was also required to speak to a Commonwealth Medical Officer in relation to my epilepsy condition and its effect on my performance.”

Here, the perceived victim was suffering from a condition that may have resulted in their poor performance; they acknowledge that they were “slow on the phones”. The NPM culture of many APS agencies emphasise outcome over and above work process, as the statistics driven culture here shows. This shows individual and organisational antecedents work to create pressures underlying in bullying.

This is further shown in cases were organisational policies or procedures were used at times by other individuals to pressure an ill person in the hope that they would leave the organisation or unit. Two stories illustrate how this is perceived as bullying:

“I was under performing but didn’t know why (later turned out I had post natal depression). I approached my team leader with the problem. She advised me to take some study time then she gave me so much work to do that I couldn’t take the study time on a regular basis. She also started regular meetings with me during which she would accuse me of doing and saying stuff that I hadn’t done ... I was to see the CMO [Commonwealth Medical Officer]. The CMO offered psychiatric hospital to me I was so ill by this stage ... I fully acknowledge I wasn’t doing as well as I should have been. But when push comes to shove I approached the team leader asking for help and she responded by going into some sort of mechanistic punishment strategy which was quite inappropriate in my view.”
“I had been experiencing work-related health problems which I felt would be exacerbated by a transfer to a section in the agency renowned for its high pressure work levels and stress problems. Despite expressing my concerns and supervisor being aware of my problems I was transferred to the above section. Within a matter of weeks my health problems became worse and like nothing else I had ever experienced and resulted in my suffering trauma ... counselling and assistance from my GP [General Practitioner]. Initial response from my supervisor was ‘bad luck’ and get on with the job as there was no chance of a transfer in the immediate future.”

Here a victim’s illness is both an excuse for management action that s/he labels as bullying, and also the reason a person is labelled a bully.

Managing poor performance can be especially difficult when associated with a medical condition. It appears the increasing focus on performance in the APS can lead managers to push staff at great cost to their welfare. Wellness programs, flexible work practices and EAP interventions may assist in reducing the incidence of illness but will not, of course, eliminate it. Training managers to deal more sensitively and proactively with performance problems appears important in minimising the costs and, ultimately, turnover. Proactive organisational wellness strategies (such as lunch time massages, Tai Chi, and healthy living seminars) may also reduce health concerns.

Diversity

As noted in the literature review, diversity and multiculturalism have been considered a contributor to bullying (e.g. Rayner et al, 2002). There is some evidence for this in the present study: perceptions of being bullied were higher amongst people with English as a second language. This is an important finding given the APS’ progressive policy towards diversity, suggesting a need to actively build understanding and tolerant cultures rather than simply diversify the workforce.

The concept of diversity can be extended beyond its conventional definitions: some victims believed they did not fit the mould of a typical employee due to their views, ideas, approach or backgrounds. They perceived that the perpetrator, and possibly the organization, had a difficult time reconciling these differences (which were different to the norm). As one stated, “… I disagreed with discussions/policy/behaviours. Additionally, I didn’t conform to the behaviour
wanted (nepotism, favouritism)”. These differences in stance and approach were also thought to invite negative behaviours.

Victims reported a range of factors behind bullying, relating to traditional notions of diversity (e.g., gender, age, and race) and more general differences in ethos:

- “Not buying into stupid racist conversation.”
- “Because this person said he disliked working with women; they shouldn’t be working, and because I didn’t join in with out-of-work drinks gatherings.”
- “I transferred from another part of the office where a different ethos existed.”
- “I was different to the perpetrator, I was a student from a minority group, the perpetrator believed that I received preferential treatment from our boss who was an innovative thinker and who supported me in my projects/work assignments.”
- “One of the executive has made repeated comments to myself [sic] and several other young (under 35) female staff. These comments focus on their opinions not being valued, question their ability to cope with their job/level of responsibility and downgrade the value and perceived quality and difficulty of our work … Comments made referring to our age, ability to cope etc would (in my opinion) never come up if we were male.”

Issues with diversity extended to complaints about discrimination, with complainants being ostracised and subsequently bullied. For example, one respondent reported being bullied “Because I had stood up against a manager who sexually harassed me”. This is a significant finding in that Section 16 of the Public Service Act explicitly protects ‘whistleblowers’.

In summary, it appears that a variety of differences between individuals underlie bullying. Organisations can address this with more substantial education, and diversity management programs.
**Perpetrators**

A unique contribution of this study is to investigate bullying from the alleged perpetrators’ perspective. As well, it examined the perpetrator’s role from the perspective of HR practitioners who had the job of investigating bullying cases, mostly as a result of complaints.

One general finding (as reported in the previous chapter) was that perpetrators were often peers when the organisation had a *clan culture*, characterised by high cohesion, a view of staff as family and supervisors who take on a parental role. Such cultures can breed competition amongst the ‘children’ for ‘parental’ favour, and as a result bullying by peers is more prevalent than bullying by others. The survey also showed that in *low recognition* climates the bully is most often a *supervisor*. Such climates are low risk settings with low levels of trust and empowerment, where decisions are heavily scrutinised by managers. Such micromanagement can be perceived as bullying.

A second general finding is that perpetrators reported conflict between their ‘nurturing’ and ‘judgemental’ roles that may have lead to perceived victims having received mixed messages. One alleged perpetrator tried to set some boundaries in this regard:

> “I was there as her team leader and not there as her friend and that I would be providing her with ongoing, honest feedback. Be it positive or negative ... So I made it clear ... there would be purely a professional [relationship].”

The qualitative data showed that, somewhat surprisingly, people were labelled as perpetrators when they faced problems on the same dimensions as victims: *power, pressure, confidence, competence, state of health, and diversity tolerance*. This may point to a significant contribution of the environment in bullying, where to some extent both parties are victims of circumstance. Of note, also, is that many of the six variables are continua, and therefore extreme states (e.g. relating to pressure, confidence, and competence) may upset the fragile balance in the workplace.
Power

Over 60% of the alleged bullies were superiors and almost a third were peers of their victims. The link between hierarchy and power are especially important in the public sector due to bureaucratic setting.

These quotes from victims demonstrate the use of position as personal power by perpetrators:

- “They were trying to make me look silly in front of the group, I assume in an attempt to make themselves look better.”

- “The perpetrator was the typical school bully and wanted to continually prove he was better than everyone else. Probably a bit of a control issue as well.”

- “The person is dodgy and manipulative, he lies about a lot of things, especially the boss. He is a greedy control freak and a misogynist and I think he enjoys it. I also threaten the bully’s power base.”

In these quotes, position power is seen as being overplayed. The perceived powerlessness of an alleged perpetrator is also a reported antecedent of bullying:

“Female peer in supervisory role felt left out of decision making process and also felt the need to assert her (supposed) authority. Female in question always refers to POWER – not responsibility. Female person often makes unnecessary remarks about ‘the boys club’. The male supervisors always respect her views, but do not always act on them, as they are not well structured and are short-term fixes. Female refuses to accept criticism from any person, male or female.”

Of note also is the abuse of power. This is illustrated in a victim’s perspective:

“The bullying behaviour is always around work issues and the unrealistic demands placed on these staff members. This man will abuse the power of his position, by not disclosing information or withholding information in certain circumstances which is often vital or crucial to the work requests of the staff members. I suspect this behaviour is exhibited more when he is under pressure. He does not seek to understand and can be argumentative.”

In summary, perpetrators reported acting from, or were perceived by others to act from, having too much or too little power, or by abusing their power. The culture
of the organisation plays a significant role in setting the scene for such scenarios. Organisations therefore must reinforce accepted behavioural norms through their policies and practices, and more importantly appropriate role modelling at all levels. These factors will be further discussed below.

**Pressure**

Pressure from the perpetrator’s personal life or organisational setting was often reported, for example:

“She [the alleged perpetrator] was going through a difficult stage, as her job was very high pressure and stressful, one of her best friends had just died of breast cancer at a young age, and her social life and relationships were not going particularly well. I confronted her about the situation. She was gruff at first but then was openly uncomfortable ... She also said that her frustration emanates from the boss not making my role clear, in that on paper I am supposed to do one thing, however in practice I do another (I was working in the area of my strength which at the time was a great need in the organisation). The situation continued until she got moved to another job, she was asked to take several periods of leave to help her cope better. I then went on maternity leave. After 18 months I came back and she is like another person, charming, pleasant, we joke and laugh and get along well now. My work less directly impacts on hers at the moment (although we are still peers), in terms of her personal life things seem to be smoother, and she is no longer in that high stress job (which took another victim after her).”

The impact of such pressures was occasionally realised by the perpetrator him/herself:

“I pressured that person to change the place they work ... to come and work in my section ... I didn’t realise at the time I was putting a lot of pressure on her. And I was causing her a lot of distress, I found out later ... she told me ... other people told me ... And of course I felt terrible, absolutely terrible that I had put her under so much stress.”

Such organisational pressures can potentially flow-on down the chain of command: “The General kicks the Colonel and then all down the way, the Private gets his poor old arse kicked”. This raises the significant point that although an interaction between two parties may be reported as an ‘incident’, there may be a chain of events, and many more staff entangled in the web with far wider implications.
Increasing work pressures are an integral aspect of the current APS environment following the implementation of NPM principles. The sudden nature of these changes required agencies to move quickly in order to deliver new outcomes. This may have left some managers recruited under the ‘old’ culture unable to cope with the nature and pace of change, and resorting to heavy-handed tactics to achieve required outcomes at great cost. Effective change management practices would require an audit of the current state of the organisation, and a clear vision for the future. Integral to this process is alignment between the culture, structure, policies and practices of the organisation (including clear standards of conduct), and the provision of support and training to leaders, managers and other staff to deal effectively with work pressures.

**Confidence**

Findings showed that perpetrators may have low or high levels of confidence in their abilities. High levels may reflect “… a commonly held view among psychologists and psychiatrists … that individuals with an aggressive and tough behaviour pattern are actually anxious and insecure under the surface” (Olweus 2003, p. 67). A number of victims were aware of this, for example one described the bully as a “… person [who] felt inferior and needing to ascertain her place in the organisation/team”. Thus, while bullying by narcissistic individuals may suggest a high level of confidence, it reflects low self-esteem at a deeper level. Ahmed and Braithwaite cited in Ahmed (2004) note that narcissistic pride itself, expressed though superiority and arrogance, can be construed as bullying behaviour. As one perpetrator was described: “… him wanting to be ‘top down’ and shine in the Director’s eyes (as collaborative approach would mean we both shine)”.

Other perpetrators felt their self-confidence threatened by a victim who, for example, was new and had potential: “I am a threat in his eyes, strong woman who has opinions when asked”, “Likely sees me/my skills as perhaps a threat and hence feels a need to put me down”, or “I entered the organisation as a graduate – some view us as getting more opportunities and chances and this breeds resentment”. This type of threat points to a lack of self-confidence in a more direct way than the narcissistic version.
How can self-confidence of managers be improved? This is especially an issue in areas undergoing continuous change, although it affects people in different ways. While some revel in change and improve their performance and motivation, others fall victim to doubt and uncertainty at the loss of their competence or power base. Effective change management, based on open communication and inclusive processes are a beginning. Beyond this, soft skills development and culture change efforts that flow from the top down would be of great assistance in increasing managers’ self-confidence.

**Competence**

A lack of competence was at times attributed to perpetrators, and may be related to their lack of confidence. For example, lack of competence, like confidence may lead a perpetrator to feel threatened by a victim. A number of victims described perpetrators’ lack of soft skills, and technical or procedural competence:

- “Was out of his depth in what was a very people-orientated branch.”
- “Lack of people management skills.”
- “Lack of understanding of staff roles.”
- “Untrained manager.”
- “The person concerned lacked emotional competence.”
- “He doesn’t know how to deal with opposition, reasoned or not.”

Sheehan and Jordan (2000) and Sheehan (2001) suggest weak social and soft skills, such as empathy incline managers towards coercion and bullying, particularly in changing work environments where such skills are required to lead change, as implied in the following comments: “I think she [the manager] is inexperienced, very process/procedurally orientated. Also, she got influenced by the other staff members and lost her impartiality” and “... [the perpetrator was] angry at a decision and not having skills/intelligence to discuss openly”.

A critical aspect of competence is self-awareness, and some perpetrators seemed unaware of the impact their behaviour had on the victim. Self-awareness has been seen as part of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995). One accused perpetrator demonstrated lack of such awareness or intelligence when confronted with her use of language and the resultant impact:
“He alleged a couple of instances where I had put him down in front of other staff members, where I had been abrupt and certainly a number of the instances I couldn’t recall. Obviously hadn’t made a big impression on me but had on him … I have raised with him a couple of issues of non-competence (sic)”

Another accused perpetrator acknowledged her lack of skills and abilities, but attributed this to the lack of preparation by the organization when asked to take on a difficult managerial role and ‘performance manage’ staff in the absence of training, instruction, or mentoring:

“It was the first time I had been a team leader … previous team leader said … this team member … doesn’t take direction, and has a problem with authority, good luck … I started looking at her work and thought, oh my goodness, it was just a disaster. It was all over the place. Plus huge amounts of unplanned leave … I wasn’t particularly skilled at stopping the [performance management] session where I should have.”

Therefore, organisations should look to develop managers’ skills, including soft skills, and especially so in times of change. Selection and career development procedures should also focus on relevant competencies. Findings of this study suggest that often this is not considered during change until issues arise and escalate. Often change management strategies lack ‘staff impact statements’ where such fundamental needs are identified and planned for. Needs analysis at the individual, job and organisational levels, leading to a learning and development strategy might help increase individuals’ knowledge, skills and abilities. The provision of mentors for managers, and HR procedural and technical support may also be important strategies to consider.

State of Health

Some respondents saw the perpetrator’s behaviour as a direct result of stress in work or personal life. One victim said of the perpetrator that: “He would tell me that I had to be compliant because he had a stressful home life and was on anti-depressants”. This justification can be seen as both a cause for the problem or possibly an excuse. Other victims described bullies as “… known to use violence”, or “I think the bully had problems with depression, stress and jealousy”. Many HR practitioners reported that quite often either the victim or the perpetrator was ill or
dealing with psychological issues, some having been hospitalised for a psychiatric condition.

One victim described a mentally ill bully who was not dealt with in a moral or ethical manner by the organisation. This bully was permitted to continue inappropriate conduct due to the difficult nature of the case:

“On a daily basis bully would yell or just loudly whinge about the organization being against her. Very paranoid (e.g. she was the only one working, she was being harassed by coaches/clients). She focused on a weak member of our team regularly saying very cruel personal things. Regularly bitching behind her back. She would always come in late and slam her bag down and throw things around while muttering and swearing. I took team leader aside after 3 months and complained, he said that he would deal with it but that the organisation already knew about it, it had been happening for years. I spoke to the harassment officer, 3 more team members complained… still no outcome. She was spoken to on 2 occasions, but no consequences/punishment … I got very upset, regularly was in tears at work and at home. Used to dread going to work … Eventually she started taking massive amounts of unplanned leave and more often than not I got stuck with her workload. She was evil to the clients and gave REALLY bad info, so by the time I got to them they were AWFUL. So not only did I get her crap, I had to clean up her work mess. Eventually she ran out of sick, carers and rec [recreation] leave and was taking LWOP [Leave Without Pay]. Every time she really WENT OFF the next day she would call in sick … she was committed to a psychiatric institution and didn’t return to work. My team leader openly admitted they didn’t take any action as they had no “top” support.”

As noted in the victim findings, physical and mental illnesses present organisations with complex issues. However, duty of care makes organisations and individual managers liable for inaction in scenarios such as the above. To reduce bullying, careful medical screening at selection should weed out those unsuitable for certain types of work. Organisations can also take a closer look at performance management of individuals, and training or education and culture change programs to tackle the systemic issues that inhibit recognition of bullying, along with interventions towards greater recognition of health issues generally noted in the victim section. Education on vicarious liability held by organisations may also encourage managers to address such difficult issues in a more proactive manner, and/or to put in place preventative measures. Often organisations are reluctant to
change unless there are clear financial benefits or penalties or adverse publicity to avoid.

**Diversity Tolerance**

A lack of diversity tolerance amongst alleged perpetrators emerged as a significant factor. As noted, diversity goes beyond conventional variables of gender, race or age to encompasses individual differences generally. Factors in bullies were similar to those of victims, including: “Queen ant/worse ant scenario ... heavy handedness approach in management, impersonal, rigid”, “… a very dominant superior attitude”, “… controlling antisocial aggressive officer” and “… nature of the person was confrontational and highly critical”. Physical differences were also mentioned. An accused perpetrator of heavy built reported the following email:

> “The words were something around the lines of, “you need to listen to the British Bulldog again”. You know, “short in stature, wider than she is sort of tall”.

National culture was also mentioned, with one alleged perpetrator being accused of bullying by an officer from a different cultural background: “... some of it’s a cultural thing ... I suppose I was seen to be criticising him rather than his performance”, she went on to indicate that:

> “I probably was a little short because I was getting totally frustrated with hearing him asking the same questions every other day about the same set of guidelines ... my frustration did show because I [used a] ... patronising tone of voice. Voice was scornful like a motherhood sound when reprimanding a misbehaving child ... I spoke to one of the other people and I said, “Is it a cultural thing? Is it that he doesn’t like women supervisors?”

As with health, conflict between personal values and ‘performance management’ cultures raised complex issues. One alleged perpetrator found the victim was receiving preferential treatment by way of lower targets for performance due to ‘personal circumstances’ such as relationships and level of attractiveness. When the alleged perpetrator, a recently arrived officer (i.e. an outsider), wanted to address this underperformance her behaviour was perceived as bullying:

> “There was this single, unattractive, woman with a shocking personality who prior to my arrival was competitive at the Manager level. We were the same age, however I had more experience in
highly explosive client contact situations and rated higher on an OOM [order of merit] that placed me in the position of being her supervisor. I noticed some performance issues and raised these with her. She was incredibly defensive and refused to listen because as far as she was concerned I was "doing her job". I started micro-managing the issues and when there was no improvement, escalated the action to include removing her from HDA [higher duties allowance]. She was furious and took her grievances to the Manager and said I was bullying her. The [manager] promptly came to me and asked me to cut [the officer] some slack because (and I quote) "you have a husband, a personality and a life - poor xxx has nothing and never will have".

This kind of scenario requires great sensitivity amongst managers. Given differences in the Australian society, managing diversity is a significant and ever present work issue. Awareness campaigns and sanctions may go some way in preventing bullying, however, the most powerful message is likely to come from role modelling by leadership groups. Training in diversity management, personality and mental illness are also strongly recommended as part of performance management processes.

In summary, individual factors that create and perpetuate bullying at work are the same for the victim and the perpetrator: power, pressure, confidence, competence, state of health, and diversity tolerance. For the first four indicators were detected at the two ends of a continuum, for example, being highly competent or incompetent. Such findings show that there is no archetypal victim or perpetrator. Further, the environment itself is a significant antecedent, as the next section will show. There is strong evidence that the APS environment based on NPM principles has contributed significantly to the deterioration of relationships at work, specifically due to poor change management practices and deficient training, education, support and role modelling.

Team/Group Issues

While this study began with a focus on individual and organisational antecedents, an unexpected finding was that the collective factors, and the victim’s team or group can have a significant influence in bullying incidents. This was partly an effect of the degree of support enjoyed by the victim, influenced by “… team size” and “… team cohesiveness”. The latter was noticeably affected by “… constant turnover of team members”, a significant aspect of the APS environment.
Rayner et al (2002, p. 111) acknowledge the significance of group members by highlighting the importance of the social environment in providing cues to behavioural norms.

Issues relating to the team or group will be discussed under four main subheadings: the destructive cycle, dyads, cohesion and sub-cultures (Figure 24).

**Determinants of Bullying**

![Diagram of Determinants of Bullying]

**Figure 24: Group/Team Determinants of Bullying**

**The Destructive Cycle**

In some of the incidents it was not clear who was the bully and who the victim; both members of a dyad saw the other as bullying them. This may mean that both parties in the relationship may have bullied the other at some stage, resulting in a cycle and therefore continuous interactions. The intricacies of a dyadic relationship are discussed in the next section.

One HR practitioner was keenly aware of how his (performance) management actions could have sparked complaints of bullying against him:

“I had made HR decisions directly affecting a staff member and the person’s responses via e-mail contained accusations, inflammatory comments and indications of retribution and payback. As indicated I was not bothered by the e-mails but I can clearly see that they constitute bullying. The speed, content and constant bombardment with demanding emails for a period of time was a concern. I can also see looking at the bigger picture that the person sending the emails..."
also felt that they were being bullied by me, because of the power I had used and the decisions I had made in my HR role.”

In such cases (assuming both sides’ views have some substance) it is unclear how to use the labels ‘perpetrator’ and ‘victim’. As noted in the discussion of the definition of bullying, the literature suggests it often occurs in a cycle of behaviours between staff in a dyadic relationship (Einarsen et al., 2003; McCarthy, 2003; McCarthy & Rylance, 2001; Rafferty, 2001). In line with this, Lee and Brotheridge (2006) find that verbal abuse and undermining result in reciprocal bullying. McCarthy (2004c, p. 179) cites an extreme example: “In one case, both the recipient and the alleged perpetrator left the employer believing the other was the perpetrator, and each later initiated legal action against the employer”.

Management actions are of particular interest in this cycle, as these may be more easily influenced by organisational initiatives to reduce bullying. McCarthy (2004c, p. 175) considers that at times managers may alienate staff by describing them as poor performers, to the point where the subordinate files charges of bullying. Through their lack of sensitivity in giving feedback, such managers may be inadvertently but actively leading an employee towards reduced performance and increased feelings of alienation and low satisfaction. Similarly Neuman and Baron (2003, p. 190) report that “there is a substantial and growing literature suggesting that perceptions of unfair (insensitive) treatment, on the part of management and/or co-workers, often serve as antecedents to workplace aggression and violence”. In these situations, staff may retaliate, a process referred to as ‘upward bullying’ by some authors (e.g. Branch et al., 2004b; e.g. Branch et al., 2004c).

The interviews also showed that managers’ responses to such complaints exacerbate the staff member’s reaction, creating a ‘vicious cycle’ or a ‘destructive cycle’ (Figure 25) as the stories below show. The reason for such escalation is not completely clear, but may be due to each party’s desperation in their lack of coping resources, or in more extreme cases may result from a developing or pre-existing psychological condition such as anxiety, depression, low self-esteem or personality disorder. Evidence for both of these hypotheses could be found in the data.

All alleged perpetrators were engaged in a performance management process. A word of caution here, is it that a certain type of alleged perpetrator (i.e. a manager involved in poor performance management processes) may have been more willing
to participate in this study? If so, that the study lacks information from other types of perpetrators.

However, evidence from the victim’s perspective also shows that a very large proportion of bullying incidents result from performance management and, therefore the discussion will concentrate on this. As noted earlier, internal and external environmental forces have recently been catalysts for increased accountability within the public sector. Historically, effective performance management was not an imperative, but new pressures require that organisations no longer ‘carry’ poor performers, bringing increased focus on the quality and quantity of work and appropriate workplace behaviours. For employees of long tenure, this may not be readily accepted. Compared to more recent recruits, such employees, may feel they are being ‘picked on’. Further, as noted above, it appears such change often precedes effective supporting policies and management development, leaving managers ill-prepared and under-supported, which may exacerbate an already explosive situation. This is illustrated in the stories below.

![The Destructive Cycle of Bullying at Work](image)

**Figure 25: The Destructive Cycle of Bullying at Work**

*Setting the Stage: Officers and Managers Interact in a Performance Management Context*

To explain the destructive cycle in a performance management context, we begin by assuming the staff member feels his/herself to be a ‘victim’ and the
manager the ‘bully’; as noted above a power imbalance is always behind bullying. This may or may not be because performance management process was carried out harshly or unfairly. However, the victim’s responses can also be interpreted by managers as bullying, which causes the managers to increase the sanctions and perhaps the officers to increase their pressure on the managers. Both labels – victim or bully - are difficult to sustain in this cyclical bullying, and who ‘began’ the quarrel is often a moot and unproductive question. A key aspect of Figure 25 is that during the destructive cycle, the perceived victims’ behaviour was reported as being far more severe than that of the alleged perpetrators’.

Perceived victims feel caught up in a web of inappropriate or unfair behaviours, and express the causes of this in many ways, including those of power, pressure, confidence, competence, state of health, and diversity (tolerance) noted earlier. In general, though, not many blamed their own psychological state.

On the other hand, perpetrators’ views of why bullying happened often failed to acknowledge the specific complaints and alluded to vague psychological factors, especially in the early stages of the incident: “… issues in personal life”, “… inappropriate fit to the organisation & values”, “… psychological imbalance”, “paranoia”, “… deficient performance (quality & quantity)”, “absenteeism”, “… unusual behaviour, prickly”. They were often faced with the complex task of having to decide whether the ‘victim’ was indeed unwell or whether their own behaviour or perceptions were at fault, even when their organisational role required them to help or assist the victim. One HR practitioner accused of bullying lucidly described these conflicting pressures:

“I don’t forget the overall situation and how it made me feel ... It was a very complex situation because of the person’s own circumstances and also because of other things that were happening at the time that, that the person was close to ... All of that created or contributed to a situation where there was much more of an adversarial approach than there had been before ... they had been absent a lot, it was now a case of needing to take a more heavy-handed approach ... And we had to formalise things which was something that I didn’t want to do ... In some ways I knew I had a task that I had to do and I quite enjoyed doing that and I could see the need for it and the contribution to the organisation. I have a very strong sense of justice which means that if I think that somebody is not getting the help that they need then I like to give that to them. But also I think that if someone is not contributing to their employer in a reasonable way, because they are
employed, then I think it is important that it’s sorted out as well ... So ... there was no doubt that my personal assessment of the person not being well also matched up with the assessments that other people [medical practitioners] had as well ... I was trying to keep it a task or a process and that was becoming personal ... My intent was to try and deal with this situation and hopefully help this individual to get back to the contribution that they had been able to make before. Because they are an exceptionally good worker and good person and I do believe that ... I really didn’t want it to go down [a disciplinary] path only because that creates a winner or a loser and I don’t really care about being the winner ... there were some days that I would literally come back from lunch and I would be looking over my shoulder. Whose going to be around, what’s going to be going on? I mean the person was quite influential. Not that I was worried about my physical safety but I ... just didn’t want get into a negative thing ... sometimes there were very hastily convened meetings and I tried to be very conscious of the noise levels and that person not being embarrassed because of the meetings and what might be said ... It was always what that person wanted ... the hurried meetings became a tactic and after a while I needed to put some more structure around that ... Well the person would kind of contact me and say I’ll be available until this time. You need to talk to me before this time. And they would be quite ... specific and quite demanding and quite unreasonably demanding ... they were very focussed on process and fairness ... despite the fact that I explained the fact why things needed to be done they wanted exceptions ... they were happy to use the processes when it suited them ... I am perceived as being quite rational and considered and non reactive to things ... So being accused of bullying behaviour wasn’t a nice experience but I’m still quite comfortable that it came about because the person wasn’t well and because of what they needed. Not because of anything that I had consciously set out to do.”

The accused were found to generally face these complaints bound by organisational rules of privacy, unable to publicly defend themselves, and very often feeling unsupported by the organisation when expected to act in the challenging role of change agent. One described this as being “... hung out to dry”. Many felt they were attempting to be supportive and caring to the perceived victim.

The accused reported reactions from not having a real impact at all, as they believed they were in the right and had good intentions, through to feeling their career was ruined (“mud sticks”). The latter respondents expressed disbelief at the accusations, feeling anxious, stressed, and devastated.
One story recounts an extreme case of performance management difficulty, in which the accused genuinely felt that bad behaviour was not dealt with effectively by the organisation and the performance management system.

"I was performance managing a ... staff member ... This person had a long history of non-performance and unusual behaviour ... Not responding to directions ... when given a directive just ignoring them ... we found out subsequently, [that they] had psychological problems [through medical assessment] ... they were classified as a passive aggressive. So they would appear and say that they were agreeing but then doing something behind the scenes ... by the time this person came to me they’d been moved to a number of different places within the organisation so that we could get the best output ... They had lots of other issues going on, their mother had been sick, and subsequently died ... No one had ever been able to get the person performing. ... they were a very difficult person to manage and a very time consuming ... In fact quantity wise, the quantity that we expected from this person was significantly less than other people in the area ... During this time the person would have a week off or longer. We were working with their psychiatrist and their psychologist, and the rehab [rehabilitation provider] ... to help them ... The deficiency was productivity in that the volume wasn’t getting out, the quality wasn’t there so they were making very poor decisions that had quite adverse affects on the clients ... I was talking to another staff member and she [the alleged victim] just came into the workplace and assaulted me. She bashed me and hit me and had to be pulled off by another staff member ... I didn’t know it was happening until she actually hit me and then I was actually pinned between a desk and a cabinet and she was pulled off. She then collapsed on the floor, an ambulance was called for her ... The end result of that was there were charges laid by the police, she was prosecuted for assault. The finding by the court was she was ... found not guilty by reason that she was in a “disassociated mental state” at the time. She was actually subject to disciplinary action by the department and her employment was terminated ... She did ... accuse me [of bullying her] ... before the assault ... and she was actually moved to another reporting team leader because of that. No substance was found in the ... complaint ... the folklore around this for staff ... is that I drove the person to assaulting me because I was so horrible to her that it tipped her over the edge. Whereas the person had a recognised psychiatric or psychotic injury ... she had tried to commit suicide ... key gossips within the organisation had their version of events and there was dreadful rumours and stories spread about what had happened and who had done what to whom. None of which had any basis in fact but we couldn't refute them because to tell them what had actually happened would be breaching that person’s privacy ... I was performance managing them, that’s never a pleasant experience but that’s what I’m paid to do. It’s part of my job, so that’s what I did ... Every time you thought you might be making some improvement they
would have three or four weeks off work and then come back and you would have to start the whole process again ... I was feeling harassed. I felt like I was being labelled and slandered and was powerless because I was doing what I was required to do ... stories about me could be spread where ever and to who ever they wanted. Once the assault took place ... I had some counselling afterwards ... this person is obviously unhinged, no one was in any doubt about that, was she going to turn up at my home, was she going to attack my child, was she going to attack me in the car park? She saw me as the cause of everything bad that had ever happened to her over the last couple of years. They’d been orchestrated by me ... I felt very unprotected. We had to take security measures and everything at home ... I didn’t feel safe. You know you’d see someone who looked a little like her and be worried she was going to come and beat you up again. It makes one much more cautious ... if you’re going to have to performance manage someone or deal with somebody ... the staff member can say whatever they want about you, and they will say to other staff that you're bullying them or harassing them, they will lodge a formal complaint against you. Whereas that is your job and the protection in this is around the more junior staff member rather than the person who’s doing the managing."

As can be seen, managers in such cases tended to attribute the problem to the subordinate’s psychology and state of health. There seemed to be little awareness of their role as agents of external environmental pressures, management, organisational culture or specific practices such as performance management. There also seemed to be a lack of support from the organisation. In reality, of course, environments do affect employee’s psychological health, sometimes in serious ways (see Felson, 2006), and attributing cause and effect in this context is not simple. Further, many people lack internal locus of control and tend to attribute negative outcomes to others (Samson & Daft, 2005b), or the environment.

Thus, a staff member may feel unfairly targeted by performance management, and a manager may feel unable to ascertain whether the person should be blamed and sanctioned or whether external factors, including their own management roles, have contributed. These issues point to a need for very careful performance management processes with high levels of support, including training and review. It seems this is not always done in the APS, creating unfair expectations: “Performance management [was] done properly for the 1st time – poor performance was a shock, previous team leaders had taken the easy way out and hadn’t done their job”.
Another element in the collective approach and the destructive cycle is that staff may establish unusual relationships with their managers (to be further explored later), causing a perceived breach of trust and betrayal. Managers, in turn, appear to approach many situations by giving staff the benefit of the doubt and taking their individual circumstances and personal life into account, with a reluctance to formalise, discipline or manage the issues; a lack of boundaries which may later precipitate escalation. While this may be expressed as wanting to help and support the officer, in the long run failure to use management authority to examine the issues objectively and set clear boundaries acts to disadvantage the officer and perpetuate the cycle.

A clear example of the difficulties of determining the causes for a person’s behaviour and the appropriate organisational response is illustrated in this story provided by an alleged perpetrator:

“... person ... was somebody who had had a long history of under performance and had had long periods of leave... And there was a little bit of a blurred line between whether the under performance was that in itself or whether it was related to some medical condition ... she had made it clear that she was depressed and you know this had gone on for some time ... by the time I got to her ... she was still under performing even after being in a training cell, which we dedicated specifically for her for a three-month period ... she had been under performing for two years ... we started to ask questions about why. And she started to tell us that she was depressed and that she has a problem with trust and so on ... she came in one day and I had asked her for some flex sheets and she said that she had put the flex sheets in ... the folder that I’d had for everyone else. And I said, “Well actually you haven’t put it in there.” And she said, “Yeah I have put it in there.” And I said, “Just get them to me anyway because I’ve just checked them.” So that night before I left which was quite late I checked again ... hers wasn’t checked off. So the next morning I came in to work and it was in there ... I asked so you must have put it in there that morning, the next morning. And she said, “Well I didn’t do that ... And she said, “Oh well I don’t really remember doing that. That really worries me because if I’d done it then I should have remembered it and that really concerns me.” And that made me start to think that’s a bit strange ... So then a few days went past and I came in one morning and she said, “How was your holiday?” And I said, “What holiday?” And she said, “Your holiday. You’ve just come back from holiday.” And I said, “I don’t know what you’re talking about. I haven’t been on holiday. I was here yesterday.” And she said, “Haven’t you just come back from two weeks holiday?” And I said, “That was a month ago ... And she sat down at her desk...
and got quite concerned and said, “Oh my god. I’ve lost two weeks. I don’t understand … then the third incident was that later that week there was … [a breach of privacy] that one of the staff members had found … And the officer had said, “Do you remember doing this?” And she said, “No I definitely didn’t do that” … the other officer said, “Well your name is on it. You’ve signed it … At that point I made a decision that that person wasn’t fit for work … I thought I can’t afford to have this person at work … lately she’d been thinking about a cat of hers that she really liked who had died and that made her feel really sad. And the cat had been dead for six years … And you know in the middle of us talking she raised something that just out of the blue … said, “My husband was a paedophile and that’s why I have a problem with trust.” And that just blew me out of the water because I thought, “God, why did I need to know that? I hadn’t known that before.” So all of that coupled together with the ramblings and the forgetfulness and the memory lapses I thought this persons not well … I … said … “what I’m here to do is try and get you to perform and you’re not.” … the person was in contact with clients on a daily basis and I was concerned about what other problems might happen. So we spoke to the person and the person said that they would go back and see their doctor about increasing their medication. And I issued her with an unfit for duty notice and sent her home … I guess I felt unsupported myself on having to deal with these types of issues … So after two weeks … when the person came back to work … I walked into that room and asked that person how they were … this person started to shake and started to look from left to right and was saying that, “I can’t talk to you, it’s all formal now, it’s all formal now.” and it was at that point that I was issued with a notice that a grievance had been lodged [against me] and that they were seeking action … for inappropriate behaviour and a breach of the code of conduct … [I felt] … Threatened. Very, very threatened … And I knew that I hadn’t done anything wrong. Well I didn’t think I had done anything wrong … I agree that that could have been done better and in hindsight not knowing and not getting any advice from anyone to do that, that could have been done better … the person was assessed … and deemed unfit … Psychologically unfit … The charge was that I … was sending her home on the basis that she was depressed and had no understanding of the nature of depression and that I had sent her home … What I was trying to do was to provide a duty of care to not only herself but to the organisation. That I didn’t consider that the environment that she was working in to be conducive to her condition given that she seemed to be getting worse over a short period of time. And I was trying to protect her.”

The Destructive Cycle: ‘Reverse Bullying’ in Which Officers Pressure the ‘Accused’

A cycle becomes ‘vicious’ or destructive when the initial ‘victim’ takes more serious action against the manager, with reports of physical and verbal assault and stalking in a number of cases. The accused reported feeling extremely anxious and
unsafe (see earlier stories), resulting at times in physiological symptoms and high levels of stress. In one extreme case, the staff member’s response breached the law:

“Someone who obviously perceived that I was bullying them was … a senior manager who seemed to have a disconnect between her values and those of the organisation. And so for her that manifested in her own behaviour in her being quite unhappy at work … Her general behaviour in the workplace, which was quite aggressive to her colleagues and uncooperative … was considered to be quite strange … She was uncomfortable with working in groups with other people. She was uncomfortable socialising with her colleagues … when she first moved into her senior role, in fact, her behaviour was quite the opposite. She was very keen to do well, worked very hard and had the support of her staff. Worked very cooperatively with her staff in an inclusive way. The more pressure these changes seemed to put on her the more autocratic she became … she was quite emotional at times … she would burst into tears and cry for quite considerable periods of time. Very small things seemed to trigger that crying and it wasn’t just with me but with other people as well … at the end of that period I was actually getting pressure from my National Manager, who was unhappy with her performance, about moving her. We had a discussion … we talked about some options about giving her a break from doing quite a large job and giving her some breathing space because she was clearly having some problems coping personally. And she came back and agreed to move to another area … her colleagues … tried to manage around things but that couldn’t go on forever … she made a decision to move into a different role, a role which she was well suited in terms of skills I might say, but not managing people. And I think to her mind that was a loss of status and a reflection on her competency, something she valued very much, things got a little bit worse … From that point on she took a lot of sick leave, long periods of sick leave … To the extent that when she came back I was concerned about her fitness to continue the work that she was going to do. And I wanted to get some medical assurance that she was fit and in that process there was little cooperation from her doctor or from her … I think that she thought that it was somewhat shameful for a senior person to have to go through that process … However in terms of trying to manage this process of her return to work she used every piece of administrative law to put barriers in the way of that happening. And then in parallel to that process, a bit down the track, I started to receive a whole series of anonymous and defamatory, nasty emails … it became apparent over a time that information in them and the opinions sought and the language used was very similar to hers. They became the subject of an investigation … [the emails] were very critical of my leadership style, my morale fibre as leader generally, of the things that had happened in the organisation, and my part in them … they were full of some very interesting literally illusions which were quite dark and sort of semi threatening but not overtly so. They were distributed to my manager
[and my colleagues] ... they were very personal and so they made me feel apprehensive because you didn’t know when the next one was coming. You didn’t know who the next one would be sent to. I started to feel somewhat unsafe. Not that I thought that there would be a physical attack but that you just weren’t sure because of the veiled nature of the content of the emails. But the worse thing about it really was that [the organisation] actually made me put in extra security arrangements for my family because they considered them to be quite serious. The wash up of the investigation found that the senior officer and her partner were implicated in sending the emails. ... we charged her with misconduct ... [and] terminated her ... I was pleased it was over. I didn’t particularly not want her to be able to get on with her life ... I cared ... I don’t what anything to do with her, but I don’t wish her ill either ... I can understand how uncomfortable she must have felt being in an organisation where I just don’t think she was aligned with what we were doing ... I invest in senior leaders and because her performance had been so good in the past I was prepared to put in that extra investment to try and come to a resolution with her. I think my intent was two fold. One was to help her achieve the level of good performance that she’d had prior to the decline. Two to make her feel good about that. I think the more I did that the more she felt I could see her failings and the more she couldn’t forgive me for that.”

Performance management is an area particularly prone to ending up in a destructive cycle where both parties lack the resources to resolve the issue, and prolonged involvement may lower their physical and psychological health. The previous three stories illustrate the difficulties of performance management when staff have psychological illness. It is not possible to disentangle the role of the accused reporting the incident, since victim and third party data were not available, nor what organisational or external pressures might establish or exacerbate such illness. It is perhaps useful to separate such incidents from those involving staff without extreme psychological dysfunction, where ‘mental illness’ is less a convenient management explanation. In both cases, however, bullying persists over time due to the inability of both parties to deal with interpersonal issues, and may escalate to the detriment of both if organisations do not explicitly deal with such issues and the role of power in performance management.

Finally, while vicious/destructive cycles can be readily seen in performance management, they occur widely, as long-term bullying relationships where both parties are unable to extricate themselves.
Dyads

The destructive cycles initiated in performance management contexts can be seen as examples of the more general phenomenon of bullying as a dyadic relationship. The Introduction noted that while bullies and victims are usually examined as individuals, some sociologists speak of a “bully-victim dyad” (Hannabuss, 1998), indicating a level of explanation focusing on relational co-dependency developed through a complex series of interactions. In these the perpetrator learns that taking an aggressive stance is successful and the victim learns to adopt a submissive role to get their way without confrontation (e.g. Einarsen et al., 2003; Hoel et al., 1999; Rayner et al., 2002). However, both parties gain psychologically from perpetuation of these behaviours, and the seemingly ‘passive’ party contributes equally to the cycle (Hoel & Cooper, 2001). This contrasts from the aggressive stance both parties can take in the ‘destructive cycle’.

The complex nature of such dyadic interactions is illustrated in a story recounted by a team leader. As in the three stories concerning performance management, this team leader struggled with the conflict between considering the officer’s personal circumstances and her role as mentor, and a nurturing and supporting manager while wanting to deal with the staff member’s underperformance. The officer in turn seemed to have wanted a personal relationship with her team leader, and considering the story, an almost ‘parent-child’ relationship. In the initial stages the officer seems to have opened up to the team leader by sharing her personal circumstances in attempting to develop rapport and a more personal relationship.

“It was the first time I had been a team leader … previous team leader said … This team member … doesn’t take direction, and has a problem with authority, good luck … I started looking at her work and thought, oh my goodness, it was just a disaster. It was all over the place. Plus huge amounts of unplanned leave … I’m the sort of person who cares about people and gets into their life situation and as a friend I am usually the one that people tell me their problems to and how do you fix it … the whole team knew that she was basically wrecking accounts … So they would go behind and pick up all of her errors and correct her work … I believe she just didn’t have the concentration span to focus on that work. So she hadn’t been given direct feedback about her performance. She thought that it was just a personal issue between her and her coach and that was the only issue … But telling her about her performance at that time was shocking to me … no one had discussed it with her. So in hindsight she was
probably receiving this information for the first ... she cried and accepted it and said, “yes I can hear what you’re saying” ... But then she proceeded to tell me her life story which is just desperately, desperately sad. Jerry Springer sad. And just made me cry when I went home, it was that awful and I let her go on and on and that’s why it [the performance appraisal session] took five hours because probably for two hours of that I listened to her life ... she has a problem with authority because of her previous relationships. The reason why she doesn’t trust her team leader is because of authority and the reason why she wants to deal with [defaulting clients] too softly is because she needs to be liked and all of these issues and it’s all very sad. So my leadership style is very supportive and not at all directive and it should have been because it was clearly under performance and I’ve learnt subsequently that if you have someone who is under performing supportive leadership style is just not going to get you anywhere ... when she called up and said, “I won’t be in until 11.00. I’ve got this issue with my daughter, you know about that.” I would go, “Oh okay see you at 11.00,” instead of, “No, you’re on phone shift I need you in here ... there were three breaches of privacy while she was in the team ... in talking to her previous team leaders and coaches they all said, “Oh absolutely hopeless’, ‘have to get rid of her’, ‘she’s mad”, ‘she thinks she’s a counsellor’ ... But looking at her previous [performance management paperwork] ... [it was] two years old it hadn’t been addressed and she hadn’t been given any formal feedback in a two year period. She had just been moved from team to team which seems to happen when we have performance issues ... She was ... older ... she thought that I was a soft touch ... I think she definitely was trying to impress me ... in hindsight I think she did... look up to me ... she was under treatment ... second [performance management session] ... So again I’m the first one giving the negative feedback ... So she says that basically, “I’m not going to talk to you about it” ... And crosses her arms and stops talking ... she said, “well, I’m not talking to you, you obviously hate me. I thought, I thought you were my friend.” ... whenever she feels that someone in authority is telling her what to do she behaves like a child ... and she’s gone back to her childhood and she feels like she is three because of her relationship with her parents ... Then it was six months later and this person was asked to leave the building because she was ... found unfit for duty. At which time she put in a claim that the reason she was unfit for duty was mainly because of my behaviour and my harassment. I had bullied her, that I had locked her in a room, that I’d refused to let her leave, that I’d screamed at her, that I’d refused to let her leave, that I’d screamed at her, that I’d pointed at her, that I’d refused to let her leave, that I’d screamed at her, that I’d pointed at her, that I had shaken papers at her ... And that during the time I’d abused our friendship ... [it] kept me awake for a whole week because I thought this is terrible and what have I done and everyone knows it ... it was just absolutely destroyed me because the way that she wrote things a lot of them were completely incorrect so I’d get angry. So I’d read one sentence and go, “that’s not even slightly factual.” ... “xxx knows about my life and I trusted her and I needed her and she disowned me.” And I’d feel like the
worst piece of scum in the history of the world and how could I have done that to someone and I’ve ruined her … I felt guilty. I felt really, really guilty. And I couldn’t get to that anger stage for very long because I think anger would have been easier to deal with. And then I took some leave from work because I was just feeling so down … So instead of being angry at this person I was angry at the Agency. I was angry at my boss for not recognising that this was difficult for me and just saying, “It’s glib... just don’t worry about it. She’s mad.” It’s what everyone kept saying... people were saying things like, “you know lessons learnt and you bring too much to work” ... and you always put too much heart into it and grow up ... I literally didn’t know how to do anything ... I had no idea what I was doing and that’s when I started to get angry. Everyone knew that I was dealing with this person ... that ... the team ... was bloody hideous. In hindsight I think it almost ruined my spirit because it was just every person had a performance issue ... they knew that my strength was work, not people. And my experience was in the work and not in the people. So they put me in the team that mattered the least which was the team where you put all of the drop outs and they call it the ‘veggie-patch’ and it’s all of the losers that aren’t performing and they get no outputs out of the team. So I think they probably thought if she does and average job in that team then that will be alright because we don’t get a lot out of that team anyway ... I would spend weeks trying to get appointments with my direct supervisor just to talk about what I was doing. And my colleagues, I think were particularly unsupportive because I think some of them wanted me to fail ... So it was just a really hard time and I was under prepared and unskilled for what I was doing ... my reputation was shot ... I thought I was a terrible team leader. I could never team lead again. My whole leadership style was shot. I’m too supportive. I’m not directive enough ... I was just very down on myself. So I took two weeks off. Came into work about four days out of that, but anyway … just couldn’t detach ... you know six weeks has gone by and I still feeling like absolute rubbish. I know this person is not in the Agency. I’m worrying about them not being able to financial support themselves if they are not at work ... And I never heard a word. Never heard what happened, no don’t worry … you’ve been cleared, whatever … The latest report has said that she is permanently unfit for duty ... Yes I could have done things better but I didn’t do it with malice. And I also didn’t do ... what other team leaders will do here and do it out of lack of time or care ... even though I did it badly at least I gave it my best shot ... So put a lot of effort into it. So it wasn’t for lack of trying I just didn’t get the outcome that I wanted. Because I really thought that I could fix it. I could make this person be okay.”

Within this particular scenario it is of interest to note that the alleged perpetrator was herself needing and craving support from her manager and peers in having to deal with such a complex situation. However, that support was not forthcoming, and possibly actively. This points to multiple dyadic relationships and
bullying situations with common players, therefore adding further complexity to an already involved situation.

It is interesting to note that so many of the stories recounted by the accused perpetrators revolve around performance management issues, and staff who are psychologically unwell, unfit for duty and unable to cope. It is unclear if this is an anomaly of this research, or a true reflection of cases that escalate to the point of formal complaint, a factor worthy of attention in subsequent studies.

In looking at these complex interactions over time, the role of organisational cultures and climates in facilitating abuse is of interest, and is explored below.

**Groups and Teams: The Moderating Effect of Support and Cohesion**

Team dynamics and cohesion may have a moderating effect on bullying (Quine, 2001). This may be especially so for people with low social skills; as Zapf and Einarsen (2003, p. 174) indicate these individuals face isolation and increased vulnerability in the workplace. In this study, respondents reported continuous changes in team composition inhibited the development of strong group bonds. In the story below a newly appointed, untrained coach received complaints from a representative of a cohesive team, however, the tables were turned when the team leader’s stance towards the complainant toughened:

“*The Coach was untrained and so we had no confidence in her ability to carry out her job. We felt let down in being given an ignorant coach. Several of us complained, she started to focus on certain statistics which led me to have to discuss my health problems in front of everyone – very humiliating. She would also frequently come over and complain about us laughing and talking, wagging her finger at us. We were a cohesive unit and performed well I talked to the team leader and even brought it up in a team meeting without result. Then (I started acting out – mimicking etc) in front of a person who later became our team leader. This team leader did change the situation but also gave me a copy of the APS values etc and I was put on a ‘getting back on track plan’ ... I realise that my response was a form of bullying but eventually managed to get my current team leader to see the behaviour was an act of desperation.*”

Team cohesion was reported as both contributing to bullying and moderating it by assisting victims in coping. Some responses related to former were:

- “*I was not known to their purple circle*”,

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- “Although it was only one person that was responsible for the incident I felt that the other executives were guilty by association because not one of them seemed prepared to come to my rescue or even to acknowledge the incident”,

- “I felt incompetent, scared, betrayed due to lack of support”, and

- “… previous team member was causing team instability, e.g. back stabbing of other staff members, the team became dysfunctional and unstable”.

Strong team support and cohesion were also found to be effective coping mechanisms. An alleged perpetrator had the following to say with respect to their experience of being subjected to reverse bullying:

“I had some very, very supportive people around me who were a tower of strength really and just were wonderful. If I hadn’t had those people I don’t know how at the end of two years I might have come out feeling.”

Social interaction is a critical element of work and humans by nature are social and collective beings. Belonging to a group at work therefore meets some of the lower order motivational needs, in Maslow’s hierarchy (Chapter Two). In contemporary workplaces expansion and downsizing occur frequently and at times without much warning, severing established connections and relationships, and leaving isolation or power differentials. This may be significant for those highly reliant on their social environment for support, raising the possibility of bullying. It is therefore important for newly formed groups, or those with new members, to engage in team building activities to welcome new members, and accept them into the fold.

**Sub-cultures**

Organisations are rarely homogenous in composition, with various sub-groups or cliques having their own sub-cultures (Fincham & Rhodes, 1992). Such differences are a strong cause of bullying if membership of a less powerful group exposes individuals.

A former team leader joining a regional office as a manager and change agent gave an interesting story of his efforts to change its culture towards greater
accountability and effectiveness, receiving in response resistance and accusations of bullying.

“... we had an insular office. Very strong industrially. Did things their own way. Was sort of a man’s man office, even the women thought that and they weren’t going to change for nobody sort of thing. So I came in as the Deputy Manager and there was a Field Officer, Field Assessor... he still went out in the morning and came back in the afternoon and there was really no accountability for what he did during the day... we had concerns about his level of productivity as well. So we started talking to him about going out on the road. It didn’t change his behaviour... we started to have suspicious that he was going off and having a look at his greyhound being trained and all this sort of stuff. So in the end we gave him a written direction that he wasn’t allowed to do it. He involved the union which was reasonable but the union basically said look, you know get into the eighties sort of thing... I got my first and I think my only derogatory nickname which I became known... as the ‘Axeman’ by him. He referred to me consistently, not to my face... But by that stage I had copped the nickname ‘Fuzzy Bear’ and the ‘Axeman’ and ‘Fuzzy Bear’ were a bit mutually exclusive... I think his attitude in the end alienated quite a few people... my sense of being accused of bullying came from his escalating the conversation to the Area Deputy Manager. Saying you know, “They are telling me I’ve got to, it’s just not fair you know, I’ve been working in this place a lot longer than they have.”... my intent was to facilitate the team leader making some changes within their team... in certain offices... and I’m going back to the mid eighties and carrying on into the nineties, but some Managers worked on the basis that the best way to rally the troops around was to develop a common enemy. And the common enemy were the people who make the rules, the people who give out the money, the people who make the selection decisions... There was a lot of interwoven sort of local... politics... there was definitely a cowboy mentality.”

While this story ascribes the bullying accusation to the “cowboy mentality” of the regional branch, it is difficult to tell to what extent the new managers’ values and actions in this incident lacked sensitivity and exacerbated the issues. It does, however, point to the difficulty of implanting values from one culture on another. Consistent application of rules across an organization may be problematic where subgroups have their own behavioural norms (Rayner et al., 2002), a major challenge in large, diverse and multi-site organisations.

In summary, the complexities associated with researching bullying scenarios cannot be overestimated. What has become clear so far is that an intricate web of variables at the individual and group level interact, at times synergistically, to
escalate issues which may have been fairly innocuous if all parties acted in good faith, from a common power-base, and were skilled.

A final story from a victim summarises earlier points, and highlights the dangers of simplistic explanations, the crucial need to have multi-source information, and the necessity to understand the organisational context and personal histories behind the event.

“Since coming to my organization I have felt that my skills (work) have ignored and that the only time I have been noticed is when I speak out or ‘arc up’. Maybe this is my way of attention seeking perhaps, I believe some response from superiors is better than none, even if it’s negative … I’m sure the perpetrators didn’t see that what they were doing to me is bullying … [I’m a] high performer but [have a] general mistrust of people in authority and a perception (however right or wrong) that promotion has a lot more to do with the ability to bullshit and bootlick than it does with the ability to process work, which is what the whole stupid organization is designed to do. So I dislike most team leaders (not all) because the culture in our organisation is such that power corrupts, and reasonable, supportive peers become arseholes when they reach ... [the managerial] level and above. Yes, I’m bitter and twisted aren’t I? Not all the time, but when I’m actually encouraged to be open about my true beliefs, especially in an anonymous way as now, all the vitriol I harbour (quite harmlessly and symptom free) in my psyche comes pouring out ... I was bullied mercilessly at primary school and early high school. I see bullying as a form of ritual (or systemic) humiliation of an individual or group by another individual or group. Humiliation, intimidation, embarrassment, belittling – all these I suffered at school. At work this often happened when promotional selection procedures are put in place which deter me from applying because I find them belittling and intimidating. I suppose I’m saying that I am bullied into staying where I am because the selection processes are so off-putting, condescending, time-greedy that I shrug and think “bugger it”. But when all is said and done, appreciation of me by management, peers and superiors is worth a darn sight more to me than an executive salary or the power, kudos and obsequiousness that goes with it.”

Organisational Antecedents

The Literature Review identified a number of organizational antecedents of bullying, including a crisis atmosphere (Yandrick, 1999), high level of organisational demands (Wornham, 2003), and certain environments (Hoel & Salin, 2003, p. 204). However, the review noted disagreement over sector based antecedents, with reports of more bullying in large, private sector, industrial, male-dominated organisations
(e.g. Einarsen, 2000), the service sector with its continuous personal interactions (e.g. Carnero & Martinez, 2005; Yamada, 2000) or the public sector due to its “... higher degree of bureaucracy, and stricter rules for laying off workers (Salin cited in Hoel & Salin, 2003, p. 210).

As noted earlier, APS policy makers and HR staff interviewed believed that the competitive environment created by the APS government reforms had increased accountability and reduced resources, causing employees to work “... harder and smarter”. The workforce were seen to be poorly equipped with interpersonal skills for managing higher performance, for example having limited understanding of performance management systems and processes. Where the new performance management systems were linked to pay, further depersonalisation was observed. A reluctance to deal with conflict was also reported, along with a general tendency to fit performance management outcomes to a bell curve, introducing central tendency, strictness or leniency errors.

Interviewees generally reported that in recent years more performance management cases were referred for review to the APS Commission, as agencies began to take performance management more seriously. Some had started dealing with bullying in a proactive manner through policy, training and education. Some respondents saw these efforts as primarily protection against vicarious liability, currently a significant issue for organisations (Binns, 2006), rather than concern for the people involved and the performance consequences.

Interviewees saw structural, legislative, technological and cultural change in their work environment, for example pointing to “... higher accountability”, “... increased need for improved performance and meeting targets”, “... focusing on results rather than how to get there”, “... doing more with less”, and “... keeping diseases (e.g. SARS, and Foot and Mouth disease, etc) out of Australia”. These pressures was seen to manifest in the form of “... flattening of organisational structures”, “... structured work environments resulting in less flexibility”, and “... change in the psychology of the organisation (as a result of the changes in the environment including threats of terrorism and border security): initially changes in skill profiles moving from technical skills to people and soft skills but now somewhat back to the more technical skills because of the environment.”
This interviewee, an HR manager, reported that previously his organisation attracted ex-serviceman and ‘para-military types’. With the focus on people management in the 1980s and early 1990s the agency attempted a cultural shift to a focus on soft skills. Since the terrorist attacks of 2001, the focus has yet again shifted back to enforcement, with the HR practices shifting focus to attract, retain and promote those with a more task orientated approach. The stature and ‘presence’ of officers who may have to detain and search members of the public was highlighted.

The sections below identify organisational determinants of bullying in the external and internal environments of APS agencies.

The External Environment

A theme in the individual findings was the effect of external pressures. The APS context has a strong focus on effectiveness and performance, as noted in recent comments by the Secretary of the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet describing increased preoccupation with outputs and less with processes (Shergold, 2004, p.8). As noted in many places above, it appears this pressure has a high cost for staff.

The specific organisational antecedents found in analysis of results are the Global Environment, Economic Changes, Legislative Changes, Societal Changes, Demographic Changes, and National Culture (Figure 26).

Figure 26: External Organisational Antecedents of Bullying
In the last decade globalisation by multi-national corporations has transcended traditional boundaries of time and space, bringing new values and new sources of conflict to local economies (McCarthy 2004a). One consequence for the APS has been heightened interest in national and border security; as Shergold (cited Halligan, 2005, p. 27) notes “… counter-terrorism, protection of borders and security… will test bureaucratic structures”. Terrorism and other dramatic events such as SARS and the Asian tsunami require the flexibility to allow for rapid response coupled with highly structured processes to ensure consistency of response.

McCarthy (2004a, p. 55) considers that these external forces have toughened government attitudes to those with different values within Australia:

“… in recent years, threats of illegal immigration and terrorism have contributed to the re-legitimisation of tough management targeted against the enemy from within and without. For example, the violent style of managing the arrival, detention, and processing of refugees who arrive in Australia is argued, by the government of the day, to confer benefits that outweigh the costs.”

An HR Manager of an agency concerned with border security identified a change towards recruitment of more confrontational and suspicious individuals, behaviours that also surfaced in dealings with other staff:

“We’ve been an agency concerned with the enforcement of laws, rather than a law enforcement agency and that causes us some struggle about what kind of individuals you have working for us. So in the past we have attracted former prison guards, ex military types … Then we went through a phase which started about 10 years ago where we wanted to be more about facilitation … We were focussing more on getting people with more intellectual capacity analytical skills, people skills, that sort of stuff. Then we had September 11 and a change of focus and a return to the enforcement days. So … I think people are trying to deal with those sorts of changes and so in looking for different types of profiles. People are required now to be more confrontational, not in a nasty sense but they need to do stuff in the past that they might have just let go … My personal belief is that we will be looking for a younger more physically fit, mentally tougher demographic than we might have been picking up in the relatively recent past … But the requirements of the work … in respect of stopping people and search … is a lot more onerous now. Of course because it’s a lot more onerous you get higher level of resistance from [people] and we see a lot of people who are very aggressive against all forms of authority. So we need to have our people who are
capable, physically and mentally ... of dealing with that. It also makes it very interesting in the interactions with your staff. If you train your staff to be mentally and physically capable of dealing with all sorts of trauma and all sorts of difficult situations and you train them to be by nature suspicious when they come to dealings with management some of them use those skills given to them to be particularly intimidating and quite aggressive.”

Therefore the global environment appears to have affected some agencies in ways that may heighten aggression and therefore bullying. In terms of management practice, selection processes may need to be reviewed to ensure a balanced approach to the human needs of the organisation. As well, the APS Codes of Conduct and Values must be fully discussed during induction and continuously reinforced as part of other HR processes such as performance management and promotions.

**Economic Changes**

The literature noted the role of ‘economic rationalism’ in creating bullying (Lewis, 1998; McCarthy & Rylance, 2001) in private and public sectors, through pressures to “...do more with less”. Spiers (cited in Lewis, 1998) and Lutgen-Sandvik (2003, p. 481) contend that this can create a climate in which bullying is inevitable. Farrell (2002) concurs stating “economic stress, downsizing and increased awareness and support for harassment victims are the most likely reasons for the increasing reports”.

Increased emphasis on efficiency in the APS, noted earlier, was described in detail by one HR Manager:

“... like all other government agencies, we’ve been pushed and stretched from the application and the efficiency dividend ... So ultimately where there may have been, at least a little bit of flexibility in the past, there isn’t that flexibility now. So there is a lot of pressure on in respect to resources and operation requirements. The role of Managers increasingly is how do you sort of manage to try to get the bulk of the requirements of the position done and how can you justify not doing the stuff you just can’t do because you don’t have enough people to do it. That tension exists within our organisation and I think we are not alone in that ... now when everyone is pushed, the expectation is that there will be a fair day’s work for a fair day’s pay for everybody. I think that’s been quite confronting for some people who have been used to having levels of flexibility, and those levels of flexibility have necessarily had to be trimmed back a bit. Also ... it’s placed a lot more pressure on Managers to be on the front foot in a respect to absenteeism and issues like that. That can be quite
confronting because people have got quite used to having a day off a month for a sickie”.

Economic rationalism was seen in such reports by HR managers and policy makers to ultimately increase rigidity in work practices and reduce managerial flexibility, with significant impacts on the quality of work life. Providing realistic job previews as part of the recruitment processes goes some way to preparing new entrants for the modern APS environment, however different strategies are needed for long term and existing staff. For the latter, clear and unambiguous information should be provided about the external and internal pressures facing agencies, with clear linkages to ultimate impacts on work practices and processes. Involvement of long-term staff in devising new work practices and arrangements may go some way in creating ownership and therefore a commitment to make the new arrangements work.

Legislative Changes

The APS’ ideal of a modern, efficient and effective service (Australian Public Service Commission, 2003a, p. 35-6) was evident in 1999 when a new legislative framework replaced the APS Act of 1920. A central theme was “… to improve staff performance, based on the recognition that getting the most out of people was crucial to improving public sector performance” ("Notes on Public Sector reform and performance management - Australia", 2004, p. 12).

One policy officer described the distinctions between these Acts:

“... the old Act was much more regulatory ... than the current Act. The current Act is more values based ... in the old Act things were set out ... the Act was very comprehensive and it said you can do this, you can do that. There was still some things open to interpretation but I think the Code of Conduct and the Values are much more likely to be interpreted today because it’s much more open”

Rigid work practices and arrangements on one hand, and values based interpretation of rules of conduct by managers on other, create conflicts of their own in an already volatile and fast changing work environment. Within the new legislative framework managers have far more discretion, magnifying disagreements or personality clashes. Organisational procedures such as performance management are expected to resolve these issues, but as noted above are often so poorly implemented they create an environment that actually facilitates bullying.
Changes in industrial relations legislation could also lead to bullying, as reported in a study of similar changes in the UK (Lewis, 2002). The interviewed policy makers believed that devolvement of industrial relations to the agency level, subsequently individualised through Australian Workplace Agreements, could be detrimental to individuals in eroding conditions of service and giving greater power to local decision makers, causing conflict and bullying. One policy maker noted the way in which industrial relations changes may affect the concept of merit in the APS:

“I’ve also seen a bit of classification creep as a result of these Certified Agreements, with some of the broadbanding arrangements that have taken place in various organisations ... But I know from the number of enquires that we get about people saying that merit doesn’t take place in organisations is because of some of the complexities in relation to broadbanding arrangements that Agencies have in place ... we say, “you really need to talk to Workplace Relations to resolve some of those issues. I can’t give you any advice or guidance in relation to those issues.” So yeah, there has been a huge shift and the first thing that I say when people might ring me up with a whole raft of enquires, “have you looked at what it says in your Certified Agreement?” People don’t use it as a base document or as a source document to investigate some of those matters. So in the industrial relations area huge changes.”

Agencies are still trying to come to grips with the implications of the new Public Service Act. In doing away with an 80 year old act many APS staff are left to start from the beginning in interpreting and applying the new legislation. The legislation has also created new silos. In concert, these factors exacerbate and further differentiate individual agencies’ approaches to bullying. Forming networks of HR practitioners, and those responsible for interpreting the relevant pieces of legislation, would open communication on interpretation and practices.

**Societal Changes**

Shifts in societal values change the expectations of APS clients, bringing continuous challenges. For example, in 2004 the Deputy Public Service Commissioner noted that: “… expectations of government by the public have increased; for seamless service delivery … faster access [and] … a ‘bottom up’ approach to building community capacity” (Tacy, 2004). These requirements by the public place additional pressures on staff to deliver quicker and more effective services. One HR Manager commented with respect to the unrelenting pace of
change that: “... ignorance is bliss at the moment but obviously the more things we roll out and try and develop the bigger its getting”. Such pressures were reported to manifest in greater absenteeism at times. Some managers accused of bullying reported that an employee’s prolonged absence had resulted in formalisation of performance management processes but had been justified by allegations of unreasonable workloads and work monitoring that were perceived as bullying.

A major theme emerging from the survey related to increased workloads and increased monitoring and scrutiny of work. These follow the NPM principles which, in turn, reflect societal needs for a more professional and accountable public service.

Yet again the solution may lie in effective change management processes. Much evidence collected here indicates that these processes are usually poorly addressed in that, the focus remains on the end product with little attention to the human implications of the changes. For example increased hours of operation may require more staff, and possibly those who can work outside standard hours, therefore requiring targeted recruitment activities as opposed to the use of standard processes. As well, in line with the requirement for more efficient and timely services, automation and computerisation have resulted in the phasing out of low-level administrative positions in most APS agencies (as discussed in the last chapter). However, job redesign processes may have taken place in an ad-hoc manner, resulting in increased and unreasonable workloads for the remaining staff. The inability to cope with the workload would then commence a cycle of disengagement, absenteeism and therefore poor performance, as mentioned in many stories of bullying.

Demographic Changes

Increased social diversity is reflected in changing organisational demographics, and the literature review and the section on diversity tolerance above have already noted the difficulties in reconciling differences within organisations (e.g. Salin, 2001; Yamada, 2000).

A lack of diversity tolerance was seen as a significant contributor to bullying by respondents with English as a second language who reported “... racist and sexist comments”. Others reported “... implications of homosexuality” or being targeted as a result of being “... from a minority group”.
The new values-based Public Service Act (1999) may further exacerbate demographic differences if agency recruitment and selection policies do not aim to achieve person-organisation values fit. The overriding corporate ethos of the agencies must also be reflected and reinforced through their HR practices to ensure congruency.

**National Culture**

The literature describes bullying as “part of Australian culture” (Wallis cited in Mayhew & Chappell, 2001), based on conflict between in-groups and out-groups (Gannon, 2004, p. 415-6), and influenced by politicians’ role modelling of bullying through “… brutal parliamentary banter and economic rationalist policies” (McCarthy, 2001, p. 91). Gannon (2004, p. 411) goes on to say: “… former prime ministers are on record in parliament as calling their political opponents scumbags, perfumed gigolos, and brain damaged looney crims … what is acceptable speech in Australia might well constitute a basis for legal action in the United States” (p. 411). Within the APS it is not difficult to see how senior and aspiring managers may take on a more aggressive stance to showcase their talents and abilities and set themselves apart from others, possibly modelling Agency Heads and Ministers.

An interesting example of cultural norms was provided by an HR Manager accused of bullying while involved in investigating possible breaches of the APS Code of Conduct by a staff member who was thought to be engaged in unauthorised activities overseas. The HR manager was subsequently accused of threatening violence towards the staff member:

“... he accused me of using bullying ... He accused me of saying that I was wishing to take his head and bash it against the wall to get answers. He said that he ... would no longer tolerate my continual use of violence, threats of violence against him ... he had made a formal complaint that it was abuse of power of my position, and he made a formal complaint against me and sent it to the Minister ... and the Ombudsman ... It’s a common expression, it’s an expression that I commonly use. You know, “I feel like I’m bashing my head against the brick wall trying to get this stuff from you ... it’s a common expression and you don’t commonly assume that it has a physical element to it. Even though it is a very physical kind of statement.”

In this case national culture could affect interpretation of language used. This is also of note considering the multicultural nature of the workforce, where those
with English as a second language may have misinterpreted the expression or taken it in a literal rather than contextual sense.

In summary, it appears that the external environment of the APS is a significant contributor to bullying, affecting directly and indirectly the organisational ethos, procedures, practices and policies. Yet again, it is difficult to untangle the web; it appears that the external environmental factors discussed: the Global Environment, Economic Changes, Legislative Changes, Societal Changes, Demographic Changes, and National Culture have a compounding effect that may amplify each other and promote bullying.

**The Internal Environment**

The literature review noted that internal environments of organisations may be a factor in bullying (e.g. Vartia & Hyyti, 2002, p. 122). Indeed, some researchers maintain that internal factors such as the organisation of work and quality of leadership are the main causes of bullying (Leymann cited in Zapf & Einarsen, 2003, p. 165). Other studies are less clear about the direction of causation relating to internal environments (e.g. Zapf, 1999) although they agree that it contains antecedents to bullying. Of course external environments also affect the internal environments of agencies.

This section explores the internal organisational factors discovered through the qualitative results: Structure and size, Policies and practices, Accountability, Culture and climate, Leadership and role modelling, the Nature of the work and Generational differences (Figure 27).
Figure 27: Internal Organisational Antecedents of Bullying

*Structure and Size*

Findings from the present study suggest that bullying is more common in larger organizations, as mentioned elsewhere in the literature (e.g., Conner & Douglas, 2005; Ireland & Snowden, 2002). Other structural factors identified by respondents were:

- outsourcing of the HR function, presumably resulting in less continuity and contextual awareness of the organisation;
- the advent of virtual teams in which remote management creates difficulties for interpersonal relationships;
- large team sizes that inhibit team cohesiveness; and
- continual changes in structures and work arrangements where the composition of the teams changes, inhibiting bonding and cohesiveness.

In particular open channels of communication seem to be important for reducing uncertainties and false assumptions. Continuous and accurate information sharing creates a culture and environment where there is less ambiguity, resulting in an understanding of future directions and the clarification of one’s role in those. As large organisations and teams by nature reduce this ‘connectivity’, effective communication strategies become critical to developing a more inclusive environment at the team and organisational levels.
Policies and Procedures

The results show two significant levels of policy in this study; first, anti-bullying policies within organisations, and second, general organisational policies. Both can potentially promote or prevent bullying. APS agencies are bound by the APS Code of Conduct that provides for Review of Action and Harassment procedures as safety net mechanisms. As well, many organisations in this study had their own anti-bullying policies. By comparison, a study of the private sector in Victoria reports found just over half the organisations surveyed had anti-bullying policies (Sweeney Research, 2003). The effectiveness of the APS anti-bullying policies however remains largely untested. The literature on bullying has continuously allowed for new and different approaches to policy development (Lowe, 2006) recognising the challenges involved in making policy effective.

In the APS anti-bullying policies were not considered very effective because, as one HR Manager observed: “Well you might try to have a manual where it’s got every type of clause in it which can cover every life condition but it will never, ever work for HR because we are dealing with people, all shades of grey”. While policy may be an enabler, it is management action that sets cultural values and preferred behaviours. For such reasons managers and HR practitioners are considered to be largely ineffective in dealing with bullying (Namie & Namie cited in Ferris, 2004, p. 390), and in as much as they hold responsibility for reducing it, they actually become contributing factors in this situation either through inaction or poor practice.

Respondents also considered organisational policies and procedures to perpetuate bullying by creating an expectation that it will not be addressed:

“A systematic attack by the organisation with inconsistent supervision, change of supervisors all the time. Inconsistent expectations on both parties, constant criticisms, no recognition of progress made, inconsistent work plans, inconsistent follow-up, continual monitoring, checking, watching, communication problems, constant pressure”.

This has been reported by others (e.g. McCarthy, 2004d, p. 9). As well, managers and HR staff may actively contribute to bullying through the use of policy, as implied in some of the performance management cases reviewed above, in which managers were perceived to be making heavy-handed interpretations of their discretionary power over staff. As Omari and Standen (2004, p. 13) state: “ …
managers may use promotion policies, leave entitlements or reward mechanisms to coerce or denigrate less powerful individuals. Although often justified as a way ‘to get things done’, such systemic or collective bullying may have the same long-term impacts as the more obvious interpersonal bullying”. Earlier it was reported that some staff feel uncomfortable going for promotions as the process itself is intimidating and leaves people open to public criticism. As well, many respondents reported that they resorted at times to sick leave as, due to heavy workloads they were unable to access their planned leave provisions (e.g. flexi time or annual leave). This at times was the beginning of the cycle of poor performance and attendance at work.

Performance management policies and traditions are perhaps a major problem. Some authors, including the former Queensland Premier (Goss, 2001, p. 5) and Anderson et al (2004, p. 4-5), contend that private sector performance management systems are not readily transferable to the public sector. As noted earlier, public service traditions have not focused strongly on performance, or linked it to pay, and lack both the cultural values and specific skills amongst front line managers to conduct performance management in a positive manner. As a policy maker put it:

“I think another major factor has been this performance management environment that we are trying to advance within the Public Service ... a lot of people aren’t very good at giving and receiving feedback and therefore they feel they are bullied in some of those situations. A lot of people don’t even understand their performance management system so they are working from an ignorance base and people feel that there is some bullying around that ignorance base as well. I think the biggest contributor though has been when it’s linked to pay. And you’re living in pixie land if you think that you can just say that everyone is doing a good job because that’s the way you’ve always seen it. And it’s much nicer to tell people they are doing a great job because you don’t want to get involved in any kind of conflict. Although people shouldn’t see it as conflict, people should just see it as being given constructive feedback. And there is always only going to be so much money an organisation can assign to rewarding people as part of a performance management scheme. So that some people for the first time are starting to hear the reality about how their workplace, their work is perceived. So that’s causing a lot of grief ... ... we’re getting more review cases about performance management issues. And I think it is because it is the first time that the supervisor and the staff member have sat down and actually had a performance management discussion. And it’s the first time that the staff members
found out that they are not doing a very good job. So at least performance management has been a catalyst for people to sit down. But again we don’t know how to do that well. Not everyone knows how to do that well. So there has been some real issues around that and I think that’s been a real … probably the biggest factor contributing to what people perceive as being bullying in the workplace”.

As noted in the discussion of individual antecedents, performance management especially raises issues of power differentials in interpersonal interactions. Performance management systems have also been seen as a significant contributor to bullying in other studies (Liefooghe & Mackenzie Davey, 2003; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003; McMahon, 2001). Such differentials may be more prominent in the highly structured, bureaucratic environment of the public sector. As well, its ‘new management’ philosophy appears to bring a disproportionate focus on results and statistical ‘outputs’, compared to the former emphasis on correct processes and deliverables (e. g. Anderson et al., 2003, p. 9).

Progress is being made towards a common base for dealing with bullying scenarios. The APS Commission is currently active in reviewing preventative measures and compiling educational material on bullying in the APS. At the individual agency level, the first port of call should be internal data gathering of statistics and the reasons for bullying, to provide a benchmark and design appropriate preventative strategies. In terms of other organisational policies, the focus should be on education and preparation so that staff are not intimidated by onerous or intrusive processes. Practices must be designed to follow APS standards but should also consider modern management practices that treat staff with dignity and respect. Success, to a large extent, will involve role modelling and leadership within individual agencies, factors that will be discussed shortly.

Accountability

The problems of transferring private sector principles to the public sector (Curtin, 2000, p. 122) have been noted in many places above. These include not only those evidenced in performance management procedures but also those underlying cultural values and attitudes. ‘Accountability’ is one such value often mentioned by respondents, the notion that an employee must be assessed on precise, usually quantitative, criteria, usually output related, and rewarded or punished accordingly.
Accountability usually has a top-down flavour: staff must increase responsiveness to managers’ concerns, but managers are not obliged to increase responsiveness to staff concerns. Respondents described this as illustrated by one manager with reference to a poor performer: “He doesn’t have that ability and my expectation is that he should. ... The accountability is probably greater than it used to be”. One victim’s story clearly shows how a culture of accountability caused a vocal staff member to be perceived as a trouble-maker when rejecting excessive organisational demands. This response appeared to the respondent as an intended consequence of an unspoken policy of pressuring ‘difficult’ staff, so they would respond with behaviour that could be sanctioned in the name of accountability:

“During my probation I spoke up at a team meeting, voicing the feeling that everyone shared in the team. We had just been given through a management decision, extra work. The feeling was that there was no way we could get through the work by the due date. I said this. Nothing was said to me at the time but the relationship between my superiors and me suddenly became cold. I began to have my work scrutinised and criticised. It is my feeling that this is an organization-wide procedure by management to weed out possible ‘trouble makers’ – put pressure on them (what usually happens in these situations is the employee starts to go down the rout of appeals – starts grumbling and murmuring, asking for changes in coaches and team leaders which actually gives management what they want i.e. reasonable excuse to sack the employee because they do appear to be trouble makers. If this is a management directive - it may not be - these things sometimes just have a momentum of their own - then it becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy – stress the employee until he acts like a trouble maker. Management in the public service may have become so paranoid by the “unsackable bad egg” in the past but that’s no excuse to act this way.”

Rapid staff changes, increasing targets, performance related pay, and the need to deliver services at any cost further precipitate the high pressure APS work environment. Managers are assessed on the capacity to deliver and be accountable to the agency and the Australian public, yet the APS context may not (as yet) be conducive to these practices. It was noted earlier in this thesis that organisational culture is by nature stable, especially so in the APS with its long tenure of staff. These forces therefore at times work against each other, creating conflict that may lead to bullying. Policy makers and managers in the APS should therefore be mindful of the costs of accountability, and in managing this change in ethos ensure
policies and practices are designed and implementation within the spirit of the APS Codes of Conduct and Values.

Culture & Climate

As noted in the literature review, organisational and possibly national cultures provide a frame of reference for employees’ interpretation of behaviours. The increased emphasis on management’s parameters of accountability, performance and outputs in the APS has been frequently noted in this study. This section takes a broader view of organisational climate and cultural values.

Chapter Four reported that bullying was more prevalent in organisational cultures with less of a clan emphasis (less cohesiveness), less adhocracy (risk taking and innovation) and a more hierarchical nature (rule bound and highly structured). While the new public sector management philosophy promotes values apparently responsible for success in the private sector - accountability, performance and outputs – their implementation can, in places, create more general rigidness. It appears that this combination increases bullying.

The reasons for this rigidification have been mentioned above, notably that staff were employed under the ‘old regime’ in which the power of the hierarchy was focussed on compliance but lacked flexibility. One policy maker interviewee put it this way: “In the previous decades there was also a culture formed in some agencies of ‘returned service people’ who were managers. APS people can see that as bullying behaviour because they are used to giving orders, you know, do this and that type of stuff”. Such inflexibility cannot produce sustained high performance and empowerment according to modern management theory (e.g. Samson & Daft, 2005b, pp. 595-599). Further, as noted earlier, the current generation of young employees have higher expectations of being consulted and involved in day-to-day decisions (Kramar, 2006a). They reject the old mentality and may rebel against managers or organisations enforcing it.

This rigidity can be seen as excessive masculinity, individualism and power-distance in the language of Hofstede’s (1984) well-known analysis of cultures. Excessive levels of these values in today’s APS culture were widely noted by respondents in answers to a range of questions, in terms such as “… treatment of staff was in fact too critical/judgemental”. “Rigorous bureaucratic approaches”
(Hopfl, 1994, p. 51) and an ‘ends justifying means’ mentality (Sheehan, 1999) have been blamed for this approach. One policy maker told how a rigid culture with high performance expectations can be seen as official bullying:

“I think that a lot of people are under a lot more pressure today than what they were five or ten years ago. Because of some of those reform issues ... policy shifts and changes within some organisations which are much more likely to have a new policy announced overnight and staff have got to run around and figure out how we’re going to implement this policy in the workplace and all the rest of it. And resources become more tight so people have to work smarter but they are working harder ... They are working as smart as they possibly can because the resources are so tight. So, I think that people who would normally be a bit more cool about some of these matters and lose their cool and people might consider that bullying because they’re under so much pressure, because they are putting people under so much pressure as well.”

Such cultures can also be seen as a source of negative political behaviour such as power plays and control, a central theme in other bullying studies (Salin, 2003a). One policy maker saw the new public sector culture as giving too much power to management at the agency level:

“Less standardisation across the service ... with the new Public Service Act where people do have the hiring and firing powers. What they wanted was to be like the Private Sector and that was given to them but in a very values based framework ... where we have a set of values and the Agency heads must uphold and promote within their organisations ... the Values, really relate to the APS as a culture so the general public know how, as an organisation, we must behave and then for individual personal behaviour we have a Code of Conduct. And again within that framework ... Agencies really can do what they want to do ... we have some minimal stuff that we say, you know, this is the minimal expectation with the organisation. But really they can do whatever they want to within their budgets. So ... within the people management side of things some other shifts have been things like performance.”

Humour and teasing are also seen as culturally sanctioned behaviours that constitute bullying (Salin, 2001, p. 1220). Similarly, in this study respondents’ reports of “inappropriate comments”, “snide remarks” and “denigration” show the many small and personal ways individuals exercised inappropriate power over others.
Difficulties were reflected not only in the organisation’s cultural values, but also in interpersonal climates. Chapter Four reported that bullying was higher in climates of low recognition and support in the studied agencies. For example, one team leader accused of bullying cited lack of support as a major reason for his/her behaviour:

“I would spend weeks trying to get appointments with my direct supervisor just to talk about what I was doing. And my colleagues, I think were particularly unsupportive because I think some of them wanted me to fail ... It was also compounded by the fact that at the time my, I had three part time [support staff] who two of them hated the other ... I spent probably 50% of my time mediating and managing that relationship where they absolutely hated each other ... And that took most of my energy so instead of being supported by my [support staff] who are supposed to be your backup, I was actually being robbed of [support staff].”

Other aspects of a negative work climate include hostility (Neuman & Baron, 2003, p. 196), and managerial roles and behaviours. These factors were reported by some victims:

- “This management does not encourage any form of job satisfaction, so most people are frustrated and they take that out on each other.”
- “A lot of pressure placed on employees top down, a lot of changes, too few staff, people forming groups to exclude others.”
- “Kick you while you’re down, a plan to make you resign for your own good rather than they sack you.”

In summary, respondents gave many illustrations of how a lack of cohesiveness, risk taking and innovation, and flexibility lead to bullying when combined with a greater emphasis on accountability, performance and outputs and a lack of attention to human factors such as support and training. Accountability, performance and output-focus were perceived to increase manager’s individualism, power-distance and aggression. These cultural values created interpersonal climates employees experienced as having high levels of hostility, lack of attention to emotional satisfaction, unclear interpersonal boundaries, excessive politics, undermining language (e.g. humour), clannish behaviour, infighting, and inappropriate use of pressure.
While the culture of the organisation may be more difficult to shift than the climate, leadership and management behaviour hold keys to both. Cultural audits are necessary as part of strategic planning process in individual agencies; these will help identify areas of organisational strength or weakness. In line with challenges set for agencies, HR policies and practices may then be developed that support (instead of working against) future directions. A significant issue for the APS, and one that was reported earlier in this chapter is the outsourcing of HR functions. This provides a danger in that consultants may devise and suggest generic policies and practices that are not appropriate for the APS context, therefore providing inherent conflict and a fundamental disconnect between policy and practice. It is suggested that insourcing already lost HR functions may be a first step in ensuring synchronicity between organisational cultures, policies and practices, in turn moving some way towards improving climate.

**Leadership and Role Modelling**

The need for leaders who model good behaviour was evident in this HR manager’s comments:

“So if we model the behaviour that we can bully then others will bully too and it continues on ... sometimes its about power. It’s about: I’m a more Senior Manager so I command that level of respect and the only way I’m going to get it from you is to bully you into it and I will do it that way ... Managers not knowing how to lead and that’s because we have promoted people very quickly up the ranks.”

Victims also felt inaction showed a lack of leadership, in that managers valued corporate success too much when it required them to sacrifice respect and dignity as core interpersonal values:

- “The [boss] ... pleaded with me to stay but I said that the perpetrator had to be moved. The ... [boss] knew of this individual’s bullying behaviour with colleagues but felt he was too valuable in terms of corporate knowledge to lose.”

- “I have been told by others since that they have been subjected to similar treatment, for different reasons, but ultimately for the purpose of achieving better stats for the team.”
Leadership is in many ways antithetical to the APS culture described above, with its emphasis on rigid codification of power in a top-down manner, one-to-one manager-worker control through 180-degree performance management, and the acceptance of corporate pressures for accountability, high performance and outcomes as more important than interpersonal relations. A funding and political environment that seeks to ‘empower’ individual agencies has done so without regard to their ability to deal with the resulting interpersonal issues. This is essentially a leadership issue, and could be addressed with better understanding of and training in leadership concepts and skills, as noted above in relation to some individual-level findings. Such interventions would need to be systemic, not restricted to a small group of senior staff already highly empowered as managers, and may need to recognise significant culture change away from managerialism as a priority.

The Nature of the Work

How work is organised by organisational systems contributes to bullying: the literature review noted that work lacking in interest (Vartia & Hyyti, 2002, p. 113) or challenge (Coyne et al., 2000, p. 336), and work that is poorly controlled (Liefgooghe & Mackenzie Davey, 2001, p. 377) reduces employees satisfaction and performance, creating stress that can precipitate either bullying or perceptions of being bullied.

Issues of work organisation were reported by a number of respondents, such as methods of controlling work timing, workloads and suitability of work to the workers’ skills:

- “Person ... uses ... [bullying] method to control staff.” (victim)
- “… the physical and mental pressures of being on the phone for a four hour period and then in-tray management ... Some staff would have about 200 in-trays to manage plus the phone shifts.” (HR Manager)
- “I was requested to undertake a task that required substantial personal effort, availability to work on weekends and long hours. Due to my personal situation I recognised that I would be unable to fulfil expectations
... it was later documented in a public report that I was difficult and obstructed management of the project.” (victim)

These issues may reflect a lack of awareness of modern trends in work organisation. Research shows high levels of features such as variety, goal clarity, worker-control and social and/or emotional satisfaction, along with moderate levels of demand, produce high levels of productivity, satisfaction, and psychological well-being (Hackman & Oldham, 1976 cited in Samson & Daft, 2005b). The absence of such features can produce a wide range of negative behaviours and psychological illness.

As with the previous issues, it may be that the APS’ focus on increased accountability, performance and outputs has corresponded with a neglect of how work can be organised to mitigate the resulting psychological problems such as stress, leading to bullying and other problems. It appears that changes in the APS environment have occurred at a superficial level with little attention to underlying human factors, as described by HR managers and policy makers interviewed. For example, it was reported that while changes in technology have resulted in new work practices, the fundamental nature of jobs has not changed as a result. This creates a disconnect between inputs, throughputs and outputs creating pressures which may have been remedied by appropriate jobs. These pressures adversely affect staff, leading to disputes, dissatisfaction, conflict and possibly bullying at work.

**Generational Differences**

It was noted earlier in this chapter that younger employees are less tolerant of the hierarchical quasi-military attitudes of older managers in some sections of the APS. Thus, generational conflict in values can become a source of perceived bullying. The literature reviewed noted that while some researchers find generational differences lead to bullying (e.g. Arsenault, 2004) others do not find them (e.g. Jorgensen, 2003).

This study produced many references to generational differences in values and behaviours as antecedents of bullying, exemplified in phrases such as “old school behaviour” and “old world culture”. As one policy maker observed:

“Some agencies also have an ‘older’ age profile. The newer agencies may have less of a sub-culture situation and therefore differences in
behaviour, maybe the same for more female dominated cultures. People can relate to their managers better now, previously the culture and environment was more hierarchical and different behaviours were more acceptable. Some young inexperienced people who come into the work environment for the first time are not used to being told what to do and may see some behaviours as bullying, also these days kids at school are educated (sensitised) about bullying behaviour. Long terms APS employees are expecting the younger ones to be much more compliant and do as they are told.”

A generation ‘gap’ was noted as a direct influence in bullying by one victim: “During a meeting a staff member who was one level above me made belittling comments after I had spoke re: how would you know, you’re too young”. HR managers also saw a generational gap quite clearly, as three noted:

“I think that when I joined the Public Service ... 30 years ago ... there was ... a big Public Service boom ... Whitlam government. Australian history all that type of stuff ... There were all these new services which were being created for the first time and the generation that was recruited at that time had a certain set of ethics and values. I call them white, Anglo Saxon Protestant kind of work ethic values. And that essentially was the Public Service ... it was a career service and that people used to say well you don’t get paid much money but the superannuation is good. The set of expectations that they want to make it their career and they would therefore do the sorts of things that would enhance a career. Do the sorts of things that would mean ... you get some certainty ... would be turning up for work and stuff like that. Now you have a situation where generation X and generation Y say, “that if you want me to come and work for you, well I’m prepared to do that, but it will be on my terms”. Which is that, “sure I’ve signed the contract with you but you need to understand that I have a life as well”. So that, “you impose your occupational strictures on me, you need to understand that I view them in the parameters in my life and whether or not I feel you’re being overly restrictive. And if I think you’re being overly restrictive because I’m taught at school to question that, I will question that. I won’t sort of sit back and cop crap like, you know, you used to do. We’re not going to do that now. You’re going to sit there and if you want me to do something you have to tell me why”. We’ve got to try and set up the dynamics so we can work within that. It is a new workplace culture. I don’t think there has been anywhere near enough work done on how to deal with that tension.”

“I think some of it is about culture as well. What was considered acceptable 10 years, 20 years ago in the Public Service ... was acceptable behaviour. I think some of our newer members... are more adept in terms of workplace bullying and harassment. But when we recruit even some of the people who have been around for a while and maybe not in the Public Service, but have got long life
experiences they come in with certain values and expectations in what they consider acceptable. So we haven’t really got rid of some of that culture. And I think it could be generation thing where some of the older members of our community what was considered acceptable, whether it be right or wrong at the time, have continued with those values and bringing it to the future as opposed to changing with what is happening in the current environment.”

“40 years ago if you were managing it was okay to bully. And that’s the way ... some people lead. So if it was okay to bully when you had 100 staff 20 years ago and that’s the way you sorted things out that the guys went out the back and had a chat ... There’s a big change in terms of organisational change.”

Generational differences can pose problems for any organisation, however in the APS low mobility and long service of senior managers may create additional issues. The remedy seems to be education and training of existing managers to understand the wants and requirements of the new generation. In return, new entrants to the APS must also be given a realistic job preview of the environment, ethos, required behaviours and standards of conduct. In the current environment of low unemployment in Australia, 4.8% for July 2006 (Australian Bureau of Statistics, 2006) young people have many more work choices open to them, most would be ready to leave an employer that does not meet their work and personal needs. As the demand for talent intensifies, the APS can ill afford to ignore generational issues.

**Technology**

Technological advances have been noted in the literature review as bringing new ways to bully, notably through email practices such as ‘flame mail’, ‘spamming’, and ‘cyberstalking’ (Novell cited in Crawford, 1999). In the Australian context Moyle (2004, p. 3) identifies the inappropriate usage of e-mails in the public sector as a contemporary workplace issue. Respondents voiced concerns about the inappropriate use of email as bullying:

- “... person’s responses via e-mail contained accusations, inflammatory comments and indications of retribution and payback.” (victim)

- “I received daily inflammatory e-mails – coloured letters, bold prints, lots of exclamation marks – demanding immediate action on a raft issues and explanations, explanations of explanations, and then explanations of explanations of explanations.” (HR manager)
Email was also used in reverse bullying, with a number of alleged perpetrators receiving regular emails that caused them much distress. One extreme case created a very high degree of apprehension:

“I started to receive a whole series of anonymous and defamatory, nasty emails ... They were very critical of my leadership style, my morale fibre as leader generally, of the things that had happened in the organisation, and my part in them. They were distributed, they were full of some very interesting literal allusions which were quite dark and sort of semi-threatening but not overtly so. They were distributed to [the General Manager] and all the other members of the Executive group in the organisation ... they were very personal and so they made me feel apprehensive because you didn’t know when the next one was coming. You didn’t know who the next one would be sent to. I started to feel somewhat unsafe. Not that I thought that there would be a physical attack but that you just weren’t sure because of the veiled nature of the content of the emails. But the worse thing about it really was that [the organisation] actually made me put in extra security arrangements for my family because they considered them to be quite serious.”

In view of some very well publicised abuses of the information technology (IT) and email systems internationally and in Australia, it would be expected that most APS agencies would have IT policies that would clearly articulate appropriate use of the email system. The APS Code of Conduct and Values also detail the required standards of behaviour as an APS employee. A full discussion of IT policy at induction is a mechanism for ensuring awareness of requirements, although this may need periodic reinforcement through newsletters or publications. It should also form a fundamental component of managerial and supervisory training programs.

**Theoretical Implications for the Antecedents of Bullying**

The APS environment is fairly unique as multiple agencies are affected by similar external and internal forces, including regulatory mechanisms. The APS faces significant challenges due to the constant state of flux, the rapid nature of changes, and the New Public Management principles. As Hoel and Salin (2003, p. 215) contend: “… where a number of antecedents may be present at the same time synergetic effects may occur, increasing the risk of bullying”.

Lewis and Rayner (2003, p. 370) are critical of the role of Human Resource Management (HRM), and Vandekerchhove and Ronald-Commers (2003) of
leadership in bullying. This is especially in the “managerial paradigm” where philosophical HRM perspectives and poor change management may increase bullying. This study found numerous references to the sheltering of bullies by managers, due to the bully’s inherent worth. As well, leaders’ inaction and lack of support for staff may promote bullying scenarios.

The preceding sections detail the individual, group, and external and internal organisational antecedents of bullying in the workplace. Figure 28 presents the complex web of variables that promote bullying. Importantly, these influences arise from both personal factors (both individual and group related) and the organisational context. The interrelationships and between these factors are also of significance. The home environment is also important but was not a major focus of this study. Finally, support, in terms of work environment or people was found to be a moderator of bullying.

![Diagram: Factors that Create and Maintain Bullying](image)

**Figure 28: Factors that Create and Maintain Bullying**
Consequences of Bullying

This study explored the consequences of bullying at two levels, the *individual* (victim or perpetrator) and the *organisation*. These levels are interrelated, and affect the employee’s personal life and home environment, although the latter effects are not considered here. Impacts on bystanders and significant others, and on government and society, are more difficult to assess but nevertheless also appear significant. This section concentrates on consequences for individuals and organisations, with some discussion of impacts on bystanders and others.

In examining the consequences of bullying time is an important variable. McCarthy (2004a, p. 46-7) offers a model of the costs of bullying in which both individuals and organisations lose. However, respondents here suggested the bully sometimes wins, at least in the short-term, if intended outcomes such as increased productivity result. However, in the long term undue stress may be placed on the victim resulting in absenteeism, turnover and psychological injury, and perhaps on the perpetrator if a destructive cycle results. In these cases, nobody wins.

Consequences for Individuals

These can be separated into consequences for the victim and for the perpetrator.

The Victim

Consequences for the victim can be very serious indeed when perpetrators are very psychologically unwell. McCarthy’s (2004c, p. 170) finding that “The experience of bullying is often part of the incubation process for more overt violence” was corroborated in this study, with bullying escalating to stalking and physical assault. Such severe behaviours were often reported as reverse bullying and part of the ‘destructive cycle’, where the initial victim was reported to be in an extremely distressed and at times disassociated state, often as assessed by medical practitioners. This suggests extreme psychological injury in at least one of the parties involved.

The results showed detrimental impacts in five interrelated areas: *work life*, *personal life* (relationships and self esteem), *health* (physical and psychological well-being), *finances*, *attitude* and *behaviour*. Other researchers classify consequences
less broadly; for example Lewis (1999, p. 96) divides them into emotional and physical well-being. As well, some victims reported *no effect* on them: this is discussed below.

**Work-life**

Victims reported significant effects on their quality of work life. At the extreme end of the scale were those feeling unsafe at work, for example:

> “I felt really uncomfortable and thought what if I get into the lift and this person is there. I had stupid dreams about being physically attacked by them when I got in the lift. Because they are actually a very large person ... they could push me over and break me ... The Commonwealth Doctor ... [declared her] unfit for duty because her medication was all over the show. She would self medicate. It was affecting her memory and attention to detail.”

Another consequence was that other employees would make assumptions about the victim’s abilities, severely damaging or destroy future work and career prospects: “... my reputation and standing with the [big boss] ... and my boss has suffered”. This has been reported in other studies (e.g. Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003, p. 132).

Less serious but still very significant effects included *reduced growth and development, demotion, reduced mobility and ultimately contemplating resignation or leaving the agency*. Such comments were usually accompanied by a level of isolation or desperation:

- “I felt unappreciated and isolated.”
- “Felt exposed and very unfairly scrutinised.”
- “Tended to withdraw, worked harder to meet requirements to obtain recognition for actual work, lost confidence, worked longer hours. Has taken lots of effort and time to change how I’m viewed at work.”
- “Hated going to work in the morning, hated going out to do jobs with this particular officer. Going home in tears most evenings.”
- “Increased time off ... lost authority and credibility with junior staff.”
- “I lost a lot of confidence and considered resigning, still am unsure of my place in the organisation.”
- “It has been difficult, I don’t learn much because I am sensitive about being ridiculed and put down. It makes me not want to come to work.”

Effects on well-being, performance and future prospects were also noted:

- “... had a negative effect on my work performance, and my general well being ... detrimental impact on my future, both short and long term.”

- “It’s finished my career in my department as she is a member of the powerful group in the organisation.”

- “It set back my career significantly.”

Despite such problems in the work life of most victims, a small group used the incident in a constructive manner, coming out stronger and more competent. One reported:

“I have certainly become more astute, robust and confident in my abilities having been through this. But I would not recommend this as a way to learn how to be an effective and credible manager!!”

The comment above came from a manager who was bullied by a peer. It may be that where there is low differential in terms of (position) power, sometimes the victim may come out as a survivor and long term winner. However, in the majority of the reported cases bullying seemed to affect enjoyment of the work environment, with victims eventually becoming disengaged and withdrawing by exerting less effort or staying away from work.

As by nature APS agencies have little leeway in designing exciting jobs with a high degree of self-direction, quality of work life is mostly influenced by human interactions. By ignoring bullying, enjoyment of work is eroded due to loss of connection between individuals, and withdrawal from their work and the organisation. APS agencies should therefore seek statistics on bullying through staff satisfaction surveys, in order to understand its causes and devise remedial policies and procedures.

**Personal Life and Well-being**

Many participants reported that work problems were taken home, affecting their home life and personal relationships. One found: “I got very upset, regularly was in tears at work and at home, used to dread going to work”, another that “I took
my feeling home and worried, stressed and thought about it all weekend”. The ‘spill over’ of negative (and positive) emotions from work to family life (and vice versa) has been widely documented (e.g. Toten, 2006).

At the extreme, emotional distress may come to pervade a person’s whole life, causing a ‘breakdown’ in functioning in all areas. Some studies have found Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) a consequence of bullying (e.g. Coyne et al., 2000; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002a). McCarthy (2004c, p. 183) illustrates some impacts on individuals:

“Many victims … find it difficult to persist in paid employment … Experiences of financial hardship due to loss of income and mounting medical and legal costs add to the trauma. At this stage victims are prone to suffer breakdowns in their relationships with partners, friends, and workmates … The consequent loss of social grounding also compounds the victim’s trauma.”

In other studies isolation has lead to such extreme consequences as contemplating suicide (e.g. Stuart & Finlay, 2001, p. 15). Less severe reactions here involve reduced self-esteem and confidence at work which may spill over into personal life. The following quotes illustrate loss of self-esteem and associated feelings of fear or anger:

- “Was initially upset, angry and insecure with myself I was also embarrassed.”
- “I felt initially scared, then concerned about my personal safety, then angry no-one would address, I cried most nights.”
- “Lost self respect … felt useless, self hurt.”
- “It made me feel unvalued and untrusted, it inferred that my work ethic was not good and that I did not value my fellow workers.”
- “Severely affected social and family interactions.”
- “Angered in the home environment.”
- “Problems in my personal life/relationships.”
- “Quietness” (withdrawal)
A few reported positive developmental outcomes from being subjected to bullying: “Made me stronger” or “I was upset but learnt to manage future situations/confrontations.”

Counselling services, EAPs, or stress relief strategies at work may be used in a reactive manner in order to reduce the impacts of bullying, but at best these would represent ‘band-aid’ strategy with a short-term focus. Fundamental change in behaviour of individuals, usually emanating from the culture of the organisation would be required to providing lasting change. The key for APS agencies lies in the acceptance of bullying as a significant workplace issue, and as a result allocating resources to developing proactive programs to deal with it. Accurate statistics on bullying (from EAPs or staff satisfaction surveys) and its impacts would be a first step. Quantification of the costs of bullying, a difficult endeavour, would provide a ‘wake-up call’ for many organisations. Some other government agencies such as Comcare are already collecting and reporting such figures.

**Physical and Psychological Health**

By far the most significant impact on victims seems to involve loss of psychological well-being, expressed in words such as “fear”, “paranoia”, “sense of failure”, “feelings of helplessness”, “despair”, “feeling trapped”, “loss of self esteem”, low “confidence”, “isolation”, “anger”, “disempowerment,” “loss of self respect”, “feeling pressured”, and “being afraid.

Bullying was reported to affect physical as well as psychological well-being. For example, HR managers reported high EAP usage and compensation claims as a result. Vingard (2005) has also found bullying to be a factor in sick leave. Kivimaki et al (2003, p. 782) found that long-term bullying was related to cardiovascular disease, with victims often being overweight.

Victims often reported early signs of psychological illness, such as feeling upset and hurt, with more serious cases involving symptoms of varying degrees of stress and anxiety:

- “I felt wretched, very stressed, I lost focus, felt nauseous, had to spend many many hours answering all sorts of bizarre material.”
- “Made me feel depressed and anxious, thorough loss of self esteem, disempowerment.”
- “I suffered extreme depression and was constantly stressed.”
- “I nearly ended up in a psychiatric hospital. My marriage has dissolved since this.”
- “I am now on anti-depressants.”
- “… sleep disorders”
- “I had a nervous breakdown at the age of 24.”
- “… resorted to self-destructive behaviour”
- “I was assaulted by the bully and had to endure months of gossip about what had happened without being able to respond due to privacy constraints in my role as a manager.”

There was no clear difference between men and women in health effects, although a variety of differences have been reported in other studies. In one male victims were more severely affected (Hoel et al., 2004, p. 382), due to men’s higher level of workplace participation and greater exposure to bullying behaviours as a result of their position and struggle for power. In another men and women were equally affected (Vartia & Hyyti, 2002, p. 113), and in yet another more women reported health impacts (Voss et al., 2001). The reason for these differences is not clear.

Regardless of gender differences, the health impacts of bullying affect all victims to varying degrees. The effect of differing thresholds for such negative behaviour was discussed in earlier chapters and appears to moderate the end result. It was reported in Chapter Two that Comcare statistics indicate that although most compensation claims relate to physical injury, psychological injury claims are more costly per case and take longer to deal with.

Impacts on the general well-being of staff also affect the home environment and may have consequences for significant others in terms of need for care, relationships, and financial impacts. APS agencies are bound by legislation and the Duty of Care to ensure safe work environments. Therefore safety audits in
organisations must include factors that could create and perpetuate bullying and its consequences of physical and psychological injury.

Financial

Victims also suffered financially through costs associated with visits to doctors or counsellors, shown in comments such as “I see a psychiatrist every week.” Some ran out of paid sick leave and had to resort to leave without pay or “Ended up off work due to injury”. Costs also arose from lost opportunity; one respondent reporting bullying “Cost me 2 months of higher duties and promotions.”

Financial burdens for individuals also affected other aspects of their life. Undue usage of paid and unpaid sick leave would keep an individual away from the work environment, resulting in knowledge gaps and inability to keep up with recent developments affecting career prospects and promotions. Therefore, financial impacts had both short and long term aspects.

In line with attendance management practices, it is prudent for APS agencies to monitor paid sick leave credits of staff and provide notice of depletion of entitlements. This would prevent overpayment, in turn minimising additional pressures (financial and other) on employees. Organisations could also reduce financial burdens by allowing victims to use annual leave or long service leave credits when unwell, although this would mean this type of leave will not be used in the spirit intended. These suggestions, however, only deal with the consequences of bullying in a reactive manner, and the real solution lies in proactive preventative measures.

Attitude and Behaviour

Victims reported a range of organisational behaviour problems, such as “low job satisfaction”, loss of “organisational commitment” and a “breakdown in trust”. These consequences may endure: “I am now far less trusting. I was hurt (not badly) but there are scars – I have forgiven but won’t ever forget.” Other respondents indicated that they had resorted to “passive” or more “overt aggressive behaviour” as a result of their experiences, or that they found it “hard to communicate with others”, and “withdrew in the workplace”.

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Others had resorted to withdrawal from colleagues: one decided to “... adopt a different persona at work to be ‘cold’ so he would not try to speak to me”, another indicated: “Didn’t want to associate with him to the extent I refused to give him any assistance in fact I probably went out of my way to antagonise him”. This quote shows the emergence of the destructive cycle of bullying discussed earlier.

These consequences affect organisational performance (De Cieri, 2005 p. 66), when bullying behaviours become ingrained in the culture. While the APS primarily attempts to manage such consequences through performance management, this is essentially punitive rather than a means to facilitate cultural change. Fundamental and lasting change may only be brought about through a thorough reconsideration of the organisation’s policies and practices as means of creating a culture of dignity and respect for all.

**No Effect**

A small minority of victims reported no significant consequences from bullying. This group may have high levels of self-esteem and tolerance for negative behaviours. They may also have better social supports or place less emphasis on work life as a source of psychological satisfaction. Others may just lack emotional responsiveness. Finally, some may have been less seriously bullied than those discussed.

Some reports of no effects are:

- “Dwelled upon it for a while then got on with life.”
- “Shrugged it off.”
- “No effect, I meet tossers everyday.”
- “I don’t have the problem that person does. Other people in the office suffer more, and I’m leaving soon anyway.”

While only a small group, the victims reporting ‘no effect’ are theoretically interesting, suggesting research into the amelioration of bullying symptoms might significantly reduce its effects in the workplace. Organisations might benefit from interventions such as counselling, post-traumatic stress reduction officers/teams, work-life balance programs, mental wellness programs, interpersonal skills training, creating a better social atmosphere, or better selection tests especially for stressful
placements (for example targeting candidates with psychological resilience). Further research on the clinical consequences of bullying is needed to underpin such recommendations.

The Perpetrator

Consequences of bullying for the perpetrator were less obvious, perhaps in part because many reports about perpetrators came from witnesses or victims and only a few mentioned how the perpetrator fared. As 53% of victims chose not to lodge a complaint, it can be assumed that in many cases no formal investigation took place and there may have been no obvious organisational consequence for perpetrators.

Some victims considered official inaction created a positive consequence by rewarding perpetrators. Such inaction may result from a lack of organisational support for complaints “[perpetrator] ... was committed to a psychiatric institution and didn’t return to work. My team leader openly admitted they didn’t take any action as they had no ‘top’ support”. In this case the bullying had been going on for a number of years, with many complaints falling on deaf managerial ears. These managers avoided their duty of care to the victims as well as the perpetrator.

Of course, consequences for real or alleged perpetrators may depend on whether or not they accept their role in bullying. A rare insight into the effects on one who did not accept the accusation showed significant mental health impacts:

“Well the accusations about me harassing or bullying ... I don’t think they were fair .... you feel a bit hurt that you’ve tried, well in my mind, to help someone and you know you’re basically rejected from doing that by that response. I guess what was easier for me was that I had some very, very supportive people around me who were a tower of strength really and just were wonderful ... even no matter how unjustified in retrospect you think the accusation is, you do tend to examine your own motives and what you’ve done and think could I have done it better? Was I unconsciously doing this thing when I thought I was doing this thing? Was I doing absolutely the best I could have done? And I probably went through weeks, probably months of not sleeping where I went through that process. It was a really pointless process in the end because I don’t think that sort of self-examination really came to anything other than I did the best I could in the circumstances at the time. And that’s all we can do ... She said things like “you’re a survivor,” in disparaging terms, you know. You’re a survivor but you don’t have moral backbone, was the sort of unsaid message.”
Another alleged perpetrator who rejected the label saw negative reactions from others. This person saw the alleged bullying as reverse bullying:

“I knew my conscience was clear ... it puts in your mind ... that there are three, four, five, half a dozen people that have an opinion about you. And that you may often become the talking point of those people. So if you see them in a group or in the street or if they are in the foyer or in the reception or you happen to get in a lift with two or three of them the indirect harassment is there because you know that there are some unsaid things ... I suppose all I did was lift the lid on a can of worms and let a few out and then slammed the lid shut so the rest is still festering in there.”

For those who accepted the label, pre-existing psychological issues such as mental illness or stress, might be exacerbated. Those without such conditions can be expected to have suffered loss of self-esteem or at least public image.

To date very little research shows the consequences of bullying for people accused of it. The problem of labelling people as bullies is not treated with adequate sensitivity. Some may be unfairly labelled, and suffer as much as the victims of ‘real’ bullies, and others may feel, with some cause, their actions were supported or tolerated by organisational cultures or norms of behaviour for managers in their corner of the agency. Yet others may feel socially unsupported, poorly trained, or personally lacking in resources for dealing with difficult interpersonal issues presented to them, unchosen, by the work environment. There are also the issues of varying thresholds for the use of position power, personal persuasion or assertiveness, and perhaps the lack of management guidelines for such ‘grey areas’.

Even where ‘bullies’ accept their behaviour, warrants the label and fully accept responsibility for harming others, remediation will require acknowledging their own psychological issues and the long term consequences of their dysfunctional behaviour, such as isolation, frustration and lack of interpersonal satisfaction in the workplace and possibly outside.

The duty of care of managers, and researchers’ interests in recommending organisational interventions requires much greater research interest in the psychological welfare of people labelled as perpetrators, both those who accept the implied judgement of incivility and those who do not.
For APS agencies further insight may require the investigation of complaints, where all parties are subject to interviews. However, there are privacy and ethical issues in developing and sharing such a body of knowledge. HR practitioners through their official network meetings could however discuss cases broadly to share experience and learnings.

Consequences for Bystanders and Groups/Teams

It is important to also acknowledge that the consequences of bullying can be felt by team members and other bystanders as some researchers have already reported (Einarsen & Mikkelsen, 2003; Hoel et al., 2003a). One respondent observed:

“Others that witnessed the assault are still affected by it years later and has caused flashbacks and nervousness when having to performance-manage their own staff with similar behavioural patterns.”

Some respondents reported that bullying had affected their work group in terms of “Team cohesion [had been] reduced”, “Perception of inequity” or “Not good for team morale”. These are social aspects of the organisational behaviour consequences noted above.

Finally, one HR manager reported a widespread ‘ripple’ or ‘snowball’ effect:

“We’ve had some codes of conduct where it has impacted on a group of individuals and that group have known each other in a social aspect as well so they’ve sort of fed off each other and that’s sort of impacted on the [section], and the region as a whole.”

It appears that bullying incidents can affect bystanders and group members negatively, in line with the individual impacts discussed earlier. However, it is interesting to also observe that some groups are buoyed by it, resulting in increased cohesion as the last example suggests. The provision of stress relief and counselling is an important first step for third party bystanders of bullying, although, people will be affected to different extents depending on factors discussed earlier, such as resilience and individual thresholds. To prevent reverse bullying, managers must also be vigilant in detecting early signs of retaliation (individually or in groups) against one or the other party. In the event of significant public incidents it is necessary to reinforce the APS Codes of Conduct and Values.
Consequences for Organisations

This section addresses the consequences of bullying for the work environment and the organisation. These consequences often, though not always, represent aggregate effects of the individual consequences (Hoel et al., 2003a, p. 150).

Work Consequences

The consequences of bullying on the work environment can be classified into six main areas: climate, control, engagement, productivity and performance, and turnover. These are interrelated, with some seen as precursors to others. As well, for some victims bullying had no effect on their work, as reported in previous sections.

Climate

Bullying is seen as disruptive to the work climate, creating tensions, conflict and a longer-term loss of trust amongst team members as described by victims:

- “There’s a lot of tension with that person around for everyone, the boss is oblivious if not supportive.”
- “Affected relationship with my peers.”
- “I found it difficult (once they were not my superior) to be civil to this person and contribute to their projects”.
- “Dysfunctional team.”
- “As we both had significant HR roles in the organisation our problems were quite apparent to others which had an impact on general trust.”

A tense work climate can create distractions with staff spending energy and effort dealing with conflict, and focusing less on the work. A negative work climate would also challenge the organisation’s duty of care to staff.

Open communication, and a supportive and nurturing work environments would help resolution of such issues. APS managers must therefore be skilled in issue identification and conflict resolution through advanced problem solving based on good soft skills.
Control and Engagement

A consequence of interpersonal conflict and tensions was lower control of job processes: “… unable to control outcomes I was accountable for”. This can be a disempowering experience, affecting work results.

When bullying leads to a work environment of poor control and interpersonal relations, victims tended to withdraw psychologically as a result of reduced motivation or commitment affecting work performance:

- “I did not wish to work in the same area”
- “I had to learn a series of strategies to ignore and avoid her (she sat next to me). More energy directed into this and less into learning work skills.”
- “Reduced my passion to take ownership of a client issue.”
- “Even now, 10 years later I take many steps to ensure I will not have to work with her.”
- “Tended to withdraw, have to make more effort to participate.”
- “Disengages loyalty and pride in work, and affects commitment.”

Low job involvement has direct consequences for effective organisational outcomes and productivity, so that effective management has a key role in addressing this (Kramar, 2006b). Managers have a duty to ensure positive climates while it may at times appear easier to avoid an issue or move staff to other work areas (as was reported above), this will have long term consequences. Managers and HR staff must remain vigilant and be skilled, prepared and supported to deal with conflict rather than let it fester and escalate.

Productivity and Performance

A tense work climate, loss of control and psychological disengagement can be expected to lower productivity, and many respondents reported effects on their level of attention, decision-making quality, and creativity:

- “I may not have been at my most productive.”
- “Overemphasised the need to dot the Is and cross the Ts.”
- “Decision making ability dropped.”
- “Affected … my work standard.”
“Stifling creativity.”

A very small number of victims however reported increased productivity after being bullied. This is a worrying finding with two possible explanations. First, the victim’s performance may have previously been sub-standard, and managers’ bullying (perhaps seen as ‘robust performance management’) had a positive effect, as some victims admitted: “I have examined my conscience and ... have got some developmental needs” or “I fully acknowledge I wasn’t doing as well as I should have been.” The second explanation may be that the victim pushed themselves even harder in the hope of stopping the bullying: “Made me more determined to prove the individual was wrong by performing better.” In either case, however, bullying is likely to have had negative impacts that outweigh increased productivity. There is no evidence in this study that increased productivity can be seen as an excuse for bullying. Training managers in effective performance management would help, as would provision of support by HR practitioners.

**Turnover**

The term turnover is used here in a generic sense, to imply movement from a position or section not just leaving the organisation. For some victims bullying lead to the ultimate outcome of leaving the workplace through absenteeism or long-term sick leave, to address a psychological injury. For some, this was voluntary, while others were moved or asked to take leave. Victims reported moving to different jobs or sections within their agency:

- “Ended up off work due to injury.”
- “A good job became a bad one, moved on to another position.”
- “I had to look to other employment.”

While bullying affects individuals in the first instance, the loss of a healthy work climate, job control, psychological engagement, productivity, and physical presence reported here will have consequences for the unit and the whole organisation, as reported in the final section below.

To determine the real cause of turnover exit interviews may be a good idea, or a ‘movement’ interview if requests for transfer or rotation are made. Attention
should be paid to areas with significant turnover as this could indicate an underlying issue in the work or personalities.

No Effect
Bullying did not disrupt the work of a small number of individuals: “It didn’t really affect my work”, “No lasting impact”, “I still maintained my work and tried not to let it affect this” or “Got on with my job”. A similar group was noted in the section on individual consequences above, mostly the same respondents. The lack of an effect on work may arise from similar causes: greater emotional resilience, insensitivity, low level of bullying or a greater non-work focus. Paradoxically in relation to the latter, it may also reflect greater dedication to the work itself, perhaps in conjunction with resilience, insensitivity or ability to get satisfaction from outside work, issues that warrant further investigation in future studies.

Organisational Consequences
Organisational consequences of bullying included: Culture, Morale, Performance and Productivity, Image, Costs and Ethics. As with the previous two indicators many respondents reported that their organisations were not affected by bullying.

Culture
Bullying had far reaching effects on organisational cultures, introducing values that reinforced the bullying in the organisation as a whole or in sub-cultures. Such sub-cultures generally reflected older values of the APS: “I avoided the ‘older’ areas of the office where the attitude is more entrenched” or “… creating a stable culture (old public service style) and resistance to ‘differences’ and change.” In these, the challenge of bullying was too great, and rather than precipitate change it lead managers and others to cling harder to the hierarchical, impersonal styles of management they knew well. This lead to further bullying, as noted earlier in the section on culture as an antecedent.

Other organisation or unit-wide consequences accrue from problems noted at the individual or team level in previous sections: the loss of trust, loyalty and commitment, and the rise of a climate or culture of fear and excessive competition:
“Lack of loyalty and commitment for managers equals lack of commitment and loyalty for organizations.”

“Promoted culprit.”

“It has to have a negative effect, it fosters clique groups and lack of trust in peers.”

“Made others fearful to make complaints.”

“Everyone is under negative pressure it seems no one wants to be here and so competition and nastiness is rife.”

APS agencies must be able to clearly articulate the vision for the future, in doing so it is not only the deliverables and challenges that must be enunciated but also the way in which the desired future is to be achieved. This process would require lucid articulation of the desired culture, complete with associated HR practices and policies that work to bring about the new state. A cultural audit will go some way in identifying the current state and strategising to bridge the gap to the desired state.

Morale

Cultures lacking interpersonal respect create psychological climates of helplessness, dissatisfaction and loss of trust in the organisation and its leaders, leading to low morale in teams, units and across the organisation. As one respondent indicated: “I and many others lost faith in management’s ability to lead and manage the organisation. Several team members took sick leave due to stress”.

Yet again the interrelationship of key consequences of bullying was shown: lowered morale itself a negative outcome, also affected other organisational variables. Morale may be monitored through climate and staff satisfaction surveys, but may also indicate for other organisational problems such as increased turnover and absenteeism, and lowered commitment and productivity. These should be assessed together, not separately.

Productivity

Low morale affected productivity and service quality: “Team morale was very low which affected performance”, “Loss of loyalty impinges on productivity and
client service”. As noted in the individual findings, bullying was also seen to affect victims’ job satisfaction, organisational commitment and attendance, with organisation-wide consequences.

This study found both negative and positive impacts on productivity from bullying, although negative impacts were far more frequent than positive ones. Decreased productivity was noted in terms such as:

- “Downtime in productivity, polarisation of staff into 2 camps, bad role modelling for staff with their 2 managers in conflict, staff confusion due to mixed messages sent to staff, efficiency of work produced by site diminished, inconsistent management work practices by 2 managers doing same work. Time lost to the [organisation] in leave taken due to this issue.”
- “Other more deserving and productive staff missed out on mentoring and assistance due to time spent with the [staff member.]”
- “Loss of loyalty, impinging on productivity and client service.”

At times lowered productivity at the organisation was reported as placing additional stress on employees to improve, in turn increasing pressures and work scrutiny. It is easy to see how this can create a vicious cycle with all parties losing in the long run. It may be necessary for APS agencies to consider a more holistic approach to productivity improvement that considers organisational structures, technology and systems as well as human factors.

Image

In a competitive labour market, attracting and retraining skilled staff is a priority; many organisations aim to be an ‘employer of choice’ (Armstrong, 2006, p. 396). The organisation’s reputation and image is important in this. Respondents reported that bullying caused the organisation to be seen in a negative light: “Lead to poor perception of the agency”, or “We all look bad when the public sees such unprofessionalism and dodgyness in our organisation. It’s a shame”, or “Set up organisation for embarrassing disclosure if the circumstances became public.”

APS agencies serious about attracting and retaining the best employees must consider how stories of bullying and negative work behaviours could affect their
image in the labour market. Clients’ loss of faith in the agency’s ability to deliver effective services as affects their image as a good place to work.

**Costs**

Many of the consequences mentioned above incur direct financial costs. Respondents noted examples including “high turnover”, “lost opportunity”, “compensation claims”, “more human resource (HR) work”, “long and costly process of resolution”, “high consultant’s fees”, “high sick leave”, “waste of resources”, “high recruitment”, “training”, “referral costs to the EAP”, and “pilfering”.

Quantifying these is difficult, and many organisations ignore them, perhaps to escape penalties such as legal liabilities. One of the few attempts to quantify bullying puts the average cost at $17,000 per victim (McCarthy et al cited in Mayhew & Chappell, 2003, p. 9). Comcare reported in 2003/4 that psychological injury represented 6.9% of claims but 27.1% of their cost, and forecast an average claim cost for psychological injury of $28,000 in 2004/5 (Davis, 2005). Bullying also creates vicarious liability for organisations (Mac Dermott, 2001, p. 9), with significant potential costs from litigation.

Some statistics of the direct costs of bullying are available to organisations, including worker’s compensation claims, usage of EAPs, costs of mediators or consultants, and direct costs of turnover. APS agencies would find that simply quantifying and collating these, in the absence of indirect costs may highlight the need for action and preventative measures.

**Ethics**

As noted in a number of places in this thesis, bullying breaches the APS Values and Code of Conduct, and difficult ethical issues for agencies condoning or ignoring bullying. McCarthy (2004b, p. 81) suggests that one common basis for ethical reasoning, utilitarianism, can actually legitimise bullying:

“… in the politics of violence there is continuing debate about the ‘reasonableness’ of action that brings diverse ethical theories into play… utilitarian ethics of the greatest good for the greatest number can legitimise the psychic terrorization of those constructed as threat to the productive life of the group, the organisation or the nation.”
The results of this chapter have often highlighted the tension between new APS values of individual accountability, productivity and outcomes, on one hand, and the human concerns of employees’ psychological, social and physical health needs on the other. The reputation of the organisation in economic or political terms has often been a justification for pressure on employees, an example of a utilitarian philosophy in which government or management-sanctioned ends justify the means of their achievement. It appears this ethical dilemma has not received adequate analysis in the agencies researched here.

This conflict reaches down to every aspect of daily life in these agencies. When respondents view continual “negative discussions”, “rumours” or “gossip” as bullying, they show the inadequacy of the APS Code of Conduct and Values as presently implemented as a guarantee of their rights to respect and dignity in the workplace.

**No Effect**

Some participants reported their agencies did not believe that bullying would have detrimental consequences, at least in as much as the agency ignored it: “The organisation went on as normal” and “They do not know or care”. HR managers, policy makers and survey respondents reported awareness of the notion of bullying at work, but often it was not given priority over other organisational needs.

The true impact of bullying in the APS is largely unknown but as reported in Chapter Two, the various State of Service reports have documented bullying figures of 15-18% of the workforce. This study found that 33% of the survey respondents reported bullying. Given earlier discussion in this chapter relating to consequences on individuals, bystanders and groups, and the work and the organisation as a whole it is therefore doubtful that organisations would not be affected by bullying.

**Theoretical Implications for the Consequences of Bullying**

Figure 29 summarises the findings on the consequences of bullying. As can be seen, the effects are interrelated, far ranging and taken together, very significant. At the macro level the work environment of the victim can be affected, lowering the quality of work life. Consequences may also spill into the home environment,
affecting family members and/or significant others. Support, through social networks, can however moderate the impacts of bullying.

This study found the main consequences of bullying were for the victim personally, with further implications for their work and organisational outcomes. Repercussions were also felt by bystanders and other groups/teams within the workplace. It can be postulated that these consequences would have referent costs to society as a whole.

Figure 29: Consequences of Bullying

Pulling Together the Main Threads

A Way Forward

A recurring theme of this study has been the subjectivity in interpreting behaviours as bullying. Individual thresholds for the label vary, as does the notion of what is ‘appropriate or inappropriate’ behaviour in a particular context, introducing significant challenges in researching bullying and creating interventions. One HR manager stated the problem is a: “very individual and personalised thing and what
might be considered harassment and bullying for one is very different for another. It’s very difficult to put it under an umbrella in terms of how we promote it and staff comfort levels in talking about it.”

Within the APS this is especially problematic as a Code of Conduct applies to all officers even though individual agency cultures provide a lens through which the Codes is interpreted, especially since the APS Act changed to emphasise values rather than regulations. In different agencies a given behaviour may be seen as appropriate or inappropriate.

Many bullying researchers (e.g. McCarthy, 2004c; Tehrani, 2001b; Walker, 2001; Wilson, 2000) see cultural change as a major step in addressing adverse behaviour in the workplace. However, there is a disconnect between the rhetoric, policy and practice, as reflected in the following quotes from HR managers:

- “Not pay lip service but dedicate some resources to deal with it.”
- “No one checks and the agencies are not accountable to anyone for reporting so there is no real pressure to do anything about it.”
- “I don’t think it’s all that easy in terms of priorities for the organisation. I suppose we have a business to run and our people are an important component of that but they are only one component of the business.”

The last quote is an interesting reflection of the legacy of the New Public Management principles, where the public service is seen as a ‘business’ that needs to be competitive, productive, and economically viable. This view is echoed by other authors (e.g. Brunetto & Farr-Wharton, 2005) and was discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis.

Research on bullying would be aided by better contextual understanding: What is it? Why does it happen? How does it affect people and organisations? These were questions that formed the basis of this research. Hoel et al (2003b, p. 416) are of the opinion that such questions must be clearly answered before any intervention can take place, a view echoed by an HR manager: “One of the stumbling blocks is the issue itself as well, there is so much uncertainty and there are no experts in the field this makes it hard to address.” McCarthy (2004e) sees the problem as significant and widespread enough to warrant a global response.
Another barrier to effective intervention is the low rate of awareness of issues associated with bullying (e.g. McCarthy & Barker, 2000). This can be viewed from different perspectives. First, employees are not necessarily aware of their rights under the policies on a safe and healthy work environment. Second, managers refuse to acknowledge bullying as a workplace problem. Study participants and HR managers thought that more promotion and publicity should take place to raise understanding. In line with this Liefooghe and Olafsson (1999) propose group discussions to build shared understanding and raise awareness in work settings. However, given organisational responses this might be a difficult task. Often victims are not believed or supported in the workplace (e.g. Einarsen & Matthiesen, 2004, p. 4).

Early intervention in bullying is widely advised (e.g. Barron, 2000; Smith et al., 2003), some suggesting this should start at school. In Australia, anti-bullying policies and education in schools is present from the primary years. One HR manager interview described the workload relating to bullying complaints: “… dealt with … Six or eight cases … potential to be higher if we don’t nip it in the bud”. This further reinforces the requirement for a proactive stance and therefore early intervention.

Much of the literature focuses on the development of relevant policy as the first step (e.g. Loafmann, 2001; Ramsey, 2002). However, the development of policies in the absence of a true understanding of the issue would make the intervention ineffective. In Australia the development of anti-bullying policies has raced ahead of research and understanding.

The major problem then is the reluctance of managers to acknowledge the issue and engage with it, as following quotes form HR managers illustrate:

- “It’s still very much in the closet and it only comes out when we hear about certain issues.”
- “Don’t want to be alarmist and open up a can of worms.”
- “… fear that added attention would increase statistics and make the organisation look bad.”
- “Union involvement means have to be careful about what is said and how.”
In this study all participating organisations were bound by the APS Values and Code of Conduct. However, each needs local departmental policies on workplace. Richards and Daley (2003, p. 248) make the point that this policy must be in tune with the culture of the organisation, and Vega and Comer (2005) suggest that it be support by senior management is critical. This raises the dilemma of achieving consistency yet recognising contextual difference.

Another requirement is congruence between anti-bullying and related policies. HR policies should form the framework for bullying policies. For example, recruitment and selection, learning and development, performance management, and compensations policies should be integrated, with common values-based messages at each step. As an HR manager in this study saw it: “Change leadership and culture by hiring and firing and reinforcing appropriate behaviours ... when attrition rates are low then training becomes a solution”, and “train managers”. Other authors (e.g. Sheehan, 2004b; Sheehan & Jordan, 2003; Vakola et al., 2004) have also raised the importance of effective learning and development programs, soft skills training, and performance management processes in bullying remediations. Other, organisational policies to warrant attention include e-mail and Information Technology (IT) policies, especially in view of the growing use of bullying through IT.

Crucial to the success of policies is organisational backing and role modelling. Support structures, including those at a team, site or organisational level are also fundamental. These could include, Peer Support Officers, Equity Officers, and Employee Assistance Program (EAP) providers. Other mechanisms for effecting dealing with bullying scenarios were reported as being: “an open atmosphere”, “strong team dynamics”, “culture of support”, “encouraging unionism”, “culture of early intervention”, “zero tolerance for the behaviour”, “valuing staff”, “actioning staff satisfaction surveys”, “dealing with complaints in good faith”, and having “HR staff and supervisors with the necessary skills and knowledge to deal with it”.

Inaction to bullying will increase incidents and severity (Ireland & Snowden, 2002). The consequences of bullying described earlier show its impacts on individuals and on organisations are far ranging and severe. Basu (2003, p. 145) cites a (US) sexual harassment case (Vinson v. Meritor Bank) where the court held “... a hostile work environment alone was a violation of employment discrimination”.

However, the problem remains that at times claims relating to bullying are difficult to prove (McCarthy, 2004c), and organisations in their attempt to be seen to address the issue deal with bullying and harassment incidents in the same vain and under the same code (Rayner, 1997).

In summary, bullying is a complex behaviour with multiple interrelated causes and impacts. Effectively dealing it issue therefore needs a multi-pronged approach involving organisational leaders, managers, policy makers, HR practitioners, and the involvement of employees at all levels. Policies will be ineffective in the absence of a thorough understanding of causes and behaviours in different settings.

**Future Directions for Research**

Despite some improvements in understanding bullying it is reasonable to state that research in Australia is in its infancy in all work sectors. Studies with diverse methodologies, subject matters, and different perspectives are therefore necessary.

With respect to research design, Liefooghe and Olafsson (1999) mention the need for multi-method approaches to interpret objective realities associated with bullying. Qualitative studies such as this one can be of great value in identifying variables of interest, and allowing researchers to explore these realities in-depth. Longitudinal studies would also be beneficial in revelations of cause-effect relationships.

Much of the literature has focused on victim’s accounts of bullying. Although valuable, this provides only one perspective on it. As shown here, attempts to hear the voices of others in bullying scenarios, the (alleged) perpetrator(s), bystanders, HR managers and practitioners, policy makers, and significant others can significantly improve understanding. Another valuable source of information would be those who have left organisations as a result of bullying. Despite methodological difficulties, explanations from these other groups will provide additional insights into the behaviour.
As well, research is needed on the effects of different settings, including the private and public sectors, different organisational sizes and industries, and multi-site businesses.

A cross-disciplinary approach to the study of bullying at work would also be of great value. These disciplines could include, clinical psychology, sociology, management theory, human resource practice, health and safety, ethics, and the legal perspective. Some researchers (e.g. Bjorkqvist, 2001) even propose drawing parallels with the animal kingdom by comparing human behaviour to that of animals at times of stress and social defeat. These will involve studies of animal behaviour, brain (bio)chemistry, and endocrinology.

Of interest also are studies of culture, national and organisational. Culture inside or outside of the organisation sets the context for the acceptance, prevalence, and the nature of the behaviour.

There is also a need for further work on definitions of bullying. Given the lack of consensus in the literature, qualitative studies would help set boundaries for research. Definitions reflecting the victim’s view of what constitutes bullying and its impact are suggested, rather than those reflecting the intent of the perpetrator. This approach would more closely mirror actual impacts on victims’ dignity and respect at work. A more systematic definition including single as well as multiple incidents is also another recommendation.

Finally, investigation of some related behaviours may further shed light on bullying. Some of these could include: teasing (Kowalski, 2004), use and interpretation of humour, and the role of gossip and rumours in the workplace.
CHAPTER 6
CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to explore the nature, antecedents and consequences of bullying in the workplace, focusing on Australian Public Service (APS) agencies in Western Australia. The main focus was the role of the organisation in creating and reinforcing this behaviour. A unique aspect of this study was the participation of alleged perpetrators, providing insights from a perspective rarely if ever previously reported. The research was centred around three questions: What is bullying in the workplace? What are the factors that create and maintain bullying? What are the consequences of bullying in the workplace? The main findings for each question will be discussed and integrated here.

What is Bullying in the Workplace?

Findings from this study show a higher rate of bullying (33%) than that previously reported for the APS (15% – 18%). However, it is difficult to ascertain whether the present figures under or over represent its incidence. An issue in the study of bullying at work is the lack of a clear and universally accepted definition for such behaviours. Different methods of measurement and definitions of bullying are used in different studies. This poses challenges in making direct comparisons of the rates of bullying.

Some studies of bullying provide a definition to participants while others ask whether they have been subjected to negative behaviours from a predetermined list. In line with the exploratory, qualitative and interpretative approach of this study, participants were asked if they considered that they had been subjected to bullying, and if so, what form the behaviour(s) took.

An important objective of this study was to provide some clarity on what bullying is perceived to be and to involve. Two insights were sought: the first a definition; and the second a model characterising the dimensions of the behaviour.
Study findings showed victims were subjected to a diverse range of behaviours, but that the impact of these on victims was significantly influenced by the subject’s threshold for identifying the behaviour as ‘bullying’ or otherwise as a problem, and their resilience or psychological coping abilities. Therefore, the definition of bullying should be victim-centred and outcome-focused:

*Bullying is behaviour that is unwelcome, inappropriate in the given context, and causes distress to the recipient.*

At the heart of this definition are the notions of ‘unwelcomeness’ by the subject, ‘inappropriateness’ given a particular context (i.e. in the APS environment contravening standards of behaviour identified in the Codes of Conduct and Values), and ‘distress’ caused to the subject.

A particular issue in applying this definition in the APS is the fine line between managerial prerogative in the name of ‘operational efficiency’ and performance management, and overstepping the boundary between practices acceptable to employees and those perceived as bullying. Here, the culture, context and history of the APS agencies are important. That is, are clear organisational performance management systems in place? Have these been articulated to all employees? Are they applied consistently? Are employees with a history of poor performance made aware that they are under performing and managed with respect and dignity? Such questions must be addressed by HR practitioners, policy makers, line managers, and the leadership in the organisation in order to ameliorate bullying.

From the interview and questionnaire results, a model of bullying at work consistent with this definition was devised. This consists of six dimensions: *impact on the victim* (direct or indirect); *intention of the bully* (deliberate or inadvertent); *source of bullying* (by individuals or by groups); *frequency of bullying* (once off or repeated); *cause of bullying* (issue related or predatory); and *setting* (on-site or off-site). At the heart of the model is the notion of *power*.

Power may emanate from positional or personal sources and may be a by-product of a hierarchical public service culture that creates settings with large power imbalances. Organisations seeking to reduce bullying must therefore be cognisant of the significant role of power differentials in bullying, and should seek to reduce it by training managers, and supporting them to deal more appropriately with power.
Such a model of public sector management would be based on leadership. Here, unlike traditional management, power is less based on formal positional or expertise power and more on power ‘authority’ and human relationships resulting in respect.

Impacts on the victim may be direct or indirect. The former can manifest verbally through the spoken word or behaviourally through exclusion, aggression, undermining or by implication. Indirect impacts occur when the work environment is experienced by the individual as having excessive pressure, discomfort, nor instability. These can be experienced through the use of sanctioned organisational procedures, and by a lack of confidence in employees who are not given the benefit of the doubt. All these impacts together reduce quality of the work life to the detriment of individuals, organisations and significant others outside the workplace. Organisations should therefore take bullying seriously.

The findings also showed that some bullies were unaware of the effects of their behaviour on others. The inadvertent nature of the behaviour should however not excuse the accused. Even if bullying is not endemic in an organisation, training in sensitivity and soft skills can help reduce inappropriate workplace interactions and bullying.

The study found that bullying was mainly an individual effort, not one where a group targeted an individual or another group as is commonly reported in Scandinavian studies of ‘mobbing’. However, the evidence also suggested that through inaction, other staff were seen to effectively condone and support the behaviour. This highlights the responsibility of all staff within an organisation in creating a positive work culture.

Most definitions of bullying highlight the repeated nature of the negative behaviours. However, findings from this study indicate that individual incidents, if significant enough, or publicly visible were also seen to constitute bullying, a finding in line with the accepted definition of harassment. Further, many respondents reported re-living the incident, making it a repeated event from the perspective of its psychological trauma.

Others reported an incident’s public nature had a ripple effect, significantly affecting their standing in the organisation as the story was passed around. While
frequency of bullying is important, its effects are compounded by each recurrent event. Therefore, definitions of bullying should also consider single events.

The results showed that at times bullying resulted from a perpetrator’s unbalanced personality. At other times, unresolved issues at work had escalated to conflict and bullying. Solutions to personality based bullying require a more long-term intervention, including sensitive performance management and counselling. For issue based bullying, a more short-term remedy involves effective conflict resolution strategies or mediation.

Bullying is not limited to work settings but can also occur off-site, in public or private locations, through communication media such as the telephone or email. Anti-bullying policies should therefore be integrated with broader organisational policies on communication outside the office.

In conclusion, the findings suggest studies of bullying would benefit by considering a definition that emphasises the subject’s perceptions of unwelcomeness, inappropriateness and distress caused by behaviour of others.

**What Factors Create and Maintain Bullying?**

The antecedents of bullying were investigated at the individual and organisational levels. The results showed an intricate web of influences at multiple levels and other significant drivers for the behaviour. A model was devised comprising three separate dimensions: *individual*, *group*, and *organisational*. The *support* enjoyed by the victim was found to act as a moderator of these. The role of the home environment was also acknowledged but was not a focus of this study.

‘Individual’ level antecedents involved six variables that applied to both victims and perpetrators, although in different ways. These were labelled: *power*, *pressure*, *confidence*, *competence*, *state of health*, and *diversity* (tolerance). At the ‘group’ level the antecedents were: *the destructive cycle*, *dyads*, *cohesion*, and *subcultures*. ‘Organisational’ antecedents were described as *internal* and *external* influences.

The six ‘individual’ variables were interconnected to a varying extent: one often affected others resulting in a synergistic outcome. The variables: *power*, *pressure*, *confidence*, *competence*, *state of health*, and *diversity* (tolerance).
pressure, confidence and competence were bipolar. For example, the victim could have too little power and the perpetrator too much or vice versa. The victim could be highly competent and the perpetrator much less or vice versa. Such findings show there is no archetypal victim or perpetrator and suggest the role of the context and environment have been downplayed in earlier models of bullying.

There was strong evidence that New Public Management (NPM) principles had created major changes in the APS environment. However, in most cases, change management strategies were not completely effective in addressing individual or organisational needs. Many of the solutions proposed in this thesis require a review of change management strategies to achieve; open communication, inclusive processes, and alignment between structural, technological, procedural and cultural pillars of the organisation. The HR function can also play a key role in addressing these needs through appropriate workforce planning, effective job redesign, appropriate recruitment and selection practices, the provision of skilling, appropriate and consistent performance management practices, and creating safe and healthy work environments in which diversity is valued, and dignity and respect exist for all.

Bullying was found to be exacerbated through interactions at a ‘group’ level. Two group antecedents: the destructive cycle and dyads lead to the formation of unusual relationships between victim and perpetrator. The destructive cycle began from a performance management process in which a psychologically unwell person, labelled themself as a ‘victim’. This individual would then retaliate against the perceived perpetrator, at times escalating to such unlawful behaviours as physical assault and stalking. In the dyadic relationship, the victim often formed an unusual perceived bond with the alleged perpetrator, who in turn usually became more tolerant of the ‘victim’s’ deviant behaviour out of regard for their personal circumstances including mental illness. These cases escalated quickly due to unrealistic and inappropriate expectations from both parties.

Group cohesion in the form of social support was an important contributor to employees’ quality of work life. This was often disrupted by structural, technological and procedural changes resulting in downsizing or shifting of teams and groups. These changes were considered to cause isolation and increase power differentials, further alienating individuals from each other.
Some respondents indicated that their large and diversified APS organisations worked in silos, with varying norms and practices. Constant movement across these silos and between APS organisations often resulted in individuals entering subcultures where they did not ‘fit’. For change agents this often resulted in hostile reactions, for others, isolation and exclusion.

The ‘organisational’ context was also significant in bullying incidents, through both external and internal environmental forces. ‘External’ forces resulted from: the global environment, economic changes, legislative changes, societal changes, demographic changes, and national culture. ‘Internal’ antecedents were found in: structure and size, policies and practices, accountability, culture and climate, leadership and role modelling, the nature of work, and generational differences.

In this study it appeared that many of the external organisational influences were interrelated, and had a compounding effect, creating organisational settings in which bullying was maintained and perpetuated. As an example, global developments appeared to create economic and legislative pressures on the APS, presenting challenges and pressures for systems established in another era. As well, the rise of NPM principles increased the APS’ need for flexibility, responsiveness, accountability and transparency, necessitating a ‘new world order’: a major shift for a public service that by nature and legislation has been stable for a good part of the last century. Such significant changes are bound to erode the APS historical bases and with that the power base of many. This appears to result in increasingly toxic workplaces, and a quest for survival by some through the use of negative behaviours such as bullying.

These environmental influences also affect the organisation’s ethos, producing diverse and competing interests and priorities and leading to workplace conflict. This is especially so in the APS agencies: large organisations that are hierarchical and rule bound. The need for a more professional and accountable public service has introduced new productivity and transparency requirements, factors that have not historically been a component of the Service. Expectation management is another issue worthy of consideration, especially so with three separate generations working at the APS (some for up to four decades), different agency settings, and history.
In summary, the antecedents of bullying are complex: again, it is often not simply a ‘mean’ person picking on a ‘victim’. Evidence from this study shows that the organisational context is a significant influencing factor in bullying. Of particular significance in the APS is the government’s reform agenda, which may be seen to allow room for bullying by focussing on financial and structural issues at the expense of human factors.

**What are the Consequences of Bullying in the Workplace?**

The true consequences of bullying will remain largely unknown: lost opportunity for efficiency and effectiveness, turnover, and loss of human capital are factors that are difficult to quantify. One reason many organisations in the APS and elsewhere have not considered bullying a significant workplace problem is that its costs remains largely unquantified. As well, with over 50% of the victims not formally complaining, its prevalence is largely under-reported.

This study sought to assess consequences of bullying for individuals and organisations. As for the previous two research questions, an interrelated web of factors came to light with far ranging implications. Bullying was found to affect the *home life*, the *work environment*, and the *quality of work life* of employees. Consequences were detected for *individuals*, the *work, organisations, groups and teams*, and *bystanders*. The degree of *support* enjoyed by the victim was found to moderate these impacts.

Individual consequences affected employees’: *work-life, personal life, health, finances, and attitudes and behaviour*. In a small minority of cases subjects reported that the bullying either had no impact on them, as they shrugged it off, or improved their productivity, perhaps due to previous performance deficiencies that may have brought increased scrutiny (perceived as bullying).

The negative consequences of bullying on individuals were reported to have a compounding effect where disengagement and withdrawal from work made the subject appear to have a ‘performance issue’, resulting in increased work monitoring and pressures.

The financial and other costs of bullying to organisations maybe better understood by regular collection of bullying statistics through staff satisfaction
surveys, complaints processes, exit interviews and worker’s compensation claims. In such cases reactive band-aid strategies such as EAP referrals or stress management courses may be used as a short-term remedy. However, the true solution lies with proactive strategies that incorporate preventative and behavioural modification approaches.

Perpetrators do not appear to face negative consequences, at least according to the victims of bullying. The low rate of complaints also suggest most are not adversely affected by management responses to complaints. However, perpetrator interviews suggest that if their behaviour is responded to, creating a ‘destructive cycle’, the alleged perpetrators are often more severely affected, at times having fears for their safety and that of their families.

Significant affects on groups and teams, and bystanders also came to light. Despite some reports that group cohesion improved in areas where bullying was rife, most others reported detrimental impacts on by-standers who had observed bullying. Increased cohesion could be seen as a coping mechanism, increasing support for the victim, and was found to moderate the negative impacts. The adverse consequences of bullying on groups, teams and bystanders can have detrimental impacts for the organisation, in low morale and disengagement.

Bullying was also found to have work consequences relating to: climate, control, engagement, productivity and performance, and turnover. Most reports described adverse impacts, although a number reported improved productivity and others no impacts. Possible reasons for such findings include deficient initial work performance, varying thresholds for bullying, and resilience.

A tense work environment was seen to cause loss of control, leading to psychological disengagement, lower performance and greater turnover. The solutions to such complex interactions are never easy, but require a strategic and integrated approach to addressing the root causes of bullying.

Consequences of bullying for APS agencies were also found to be far reaching. Negative impacts were reported for: culture, morale, productivity, image, costs, and ethics. A small group of respondents believed that there were no negative consequences for the organisation particularly when there was no management response.
The impact of bullying on the culture of the organisation is significant and can create systemic problems such as poor ethos, litigation costs and difficulties in attracting quality staff. In particular, attracting and retaining quality staff should be paramount for organisations, and poor publicity due to bullying can have significant costs for APS agencies.

The vision for the future must be clearly articulated in the APS agencies along with the ways in which organisations should move forward. An integrated and strategic plan, including that of HR practices and policies, is required for successful shifts in organisations. Change management strategies should also be based on a clear understanding of the current and desired state, and the way in which this gap is to be bridged. Special attention must be paid to the impacts of changes on existing and future staff.

In conclusion, the consequences of bullying are wide ranging affecting employees at work and home. Individuals, both victims and perpetrators, are affected adversely by bullying, as are groups and teams, bystanders and organisations. The actual costs of bullying remain largely unquantifiable due to under-reporting and compounding impacts.

**Concluding Comments**

A major contribution of this study was in providing multi-source perspective of bullying where information was collected from different points of view. The voice of individuals labelled as perpetrators was heard, as was those of victims, HR managers and practitioners, policy makers, and bystanders. This approach provided novel insights into the behaviours and experiences of other significant parties in bullying scenarios.

A second major contribution was to provide the first multi-agency account of bullying in the APS, a unique work environment. While the APS Codes of Conduct and Values apply to all officers, individual agency cultures form a lens through which these Codes and Values are interpreted. The APS has been recently subjected to continuous and revolutionary change, disrupting many of its long established cultural values and practices. The quest for a more professional and accountable Service has resulted in individual agencies pursuing different approaches to
productivity and efficiency whilst being accountable to the public and the government within a tight regulatory framework. These forces for change have created competing priorities, often creating tensions at work.

A recurring theme of the study was the subjectivity associated with the interpretation of behaviours that may constitute bullying. Individual thresholds for the behaviour vary, as does the notion of what is ‘appropriate or inappropriate’ behaviour in a particular context. This introduces significant challenges in studying bullying. Here, two contributions were made: the first a definition and a model, and the second a framework of bullying identifying the researcher’s variables that describe its antecedents and consequences.

Bullying is a complex behaviour with multiple interrelated antecedents and consequences. Effective preventative strategies therefore need a multi-pronged approach involving organisational leaders, managers, policy makers, HR practitioners, and the involvement of employees at all levels. There is also a need for congruence between anti-bullying policies and other regulatory mechanisms within organisations, including HR policies. Such policies should form the framework for implementing anti-bullying strategies.

This study provides a small step towards better understanding and addressing bullying in the Australian context, and more specifically in the public sector environment. It has, however, raised many new questions for research. These invite more studies with diverse methodologies, subject matters, different perspectives, and in different environments and cultures, to provide a more complete picture. It is through the expansion of this knowledge base that effective policies may be developed and implemented to ameliorate bullying in the workplace, ensuring dignity and respect exist for all at work.
REFERENCES


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Kellahan, K. (n.d.). Beating the bullies: If you thought the last time you'd have your hair pulled was in the playground, think again. Retrieved May 5, 2003 from: http://www.bulliesdownunder.com/beatting.htm


Lowry Miller, K. (2000). They call it 'mobbing'; a new kind of workplace harassment, or an old one with a new name? Either way, Europeans are upset. *Newsweek*, 44.


APPENDIX 1

THE APS CODE OF CONDUCT & VALUES

APS Code of Conduct

APS employees are required, under the Code of Conduct, to behave at all times in a way which upholds the APS Values.

The Code of Conduct requires that an employee must:

• behave honestly and with integrity in the course of APS employment;
• act with care and diligence in the course of APS employment;
• when acting in the course of APS employment, treat everyone with respect and courtesy, and without harassment;
• when acting in the course of APS employment, comply with all applicable Australian laws;
• comply with any lawful and reasonable direction given by someone in the employee's Agency who has authority to give the direction;
• maintain appropriate confidentiality about dealings that the employee has with any Minister or Minister's member of staff;
• disclose, and take reasonable steps to avoid, any conflict of interest (real or apparent) in connection with APS employment;
• use Commonwealth resources in a proper manner;
• not provide false or misleading information in response to a request for information that is made for official purposes in connection with the employee's APS employment;
• not make improper use of:
  (a) inside information, or
  (b) the employee's duties, status, power or authority, in order to gain, or seek to gain, a benefit or advantage for the employee or for any other person;
• at all times behave in a way that upholds the APS Values and the integrity and good reputation of the APS;
• while on duty overseas, at all times behave in a way that upholds the good reputation of Australia; and
• except in the course of his or her duties as an APS employee or with the Agency Head's express authority, not give or disclose, directly or indirectly, any information about public business or anything of which the employee has official knowledge.
Values in the APS

The APS Values provide the real basis and integrating element of the Service, its professionalism, its integrity and its impartial and responsive service to the government of the day.

The APS Values

The Australian Public Service:

- is apolitical, performing its functions in an impartial and professional manner;
- is a public service in which employment decisions are based on merit;
- provides a workplace that is free from discrimination and recognises and utilises the diversity of the Australian community it serves;
- has the highest ethical standards;
- is openly accountable for its actions, within the framework of Ministerial responsibility to the Government, the Parliament and the Australian public;
- is responsive to the Government in providing frank, honest, comprehensive, accurate and timely advice and in implementing the Government's policies and programs;
- delivers services fairly, effectively, impartially and courteously to the Australian public and is sensitive to the diversity of the Australian public;
- has leadership of the highest quality;
- establishes workplace relations that value communication, consultation, co-operation and input from employees on matters that affect their workplace;
- provides a fair, flexible, safe and rewarding workplace;
- focuses on achieving results and managing performance;
- promotes equity in employment;
- provides a reasonable opportunity to all eligible members of the community to apply for APS employment;
- is a career-based service to enhance the effectiveness and cohesion of Australia's democratic system of government;
- provides a fair system of review of decisions taken in respect of employees.

Agency heads are bound by the Code of Conduct in the same way as APS employees and have an additional duty to promote the APS Values.
APPENDIX 2

THE FOCUS GROUP PLAN

Information Letter for Focus Groups

Maryam Omari
School of Management
Faculty of Business and Public Management
Edith Cowan University
Joondalup Campus
100 Joondalup Drive
Joondalup W.A. 6027
Date

Subject: A Study of Workplace Dignity and Respect

Dear APS employee

Thank you for volunteering to participate in a focus group. This focus group has been designed to collectively identify the variables of interest in the study of bullying in the workplace, and gain a more shared understanding of the associated issues. I would like to assure you that, all personal and organisational information will remain completely confidential and anonymous. If you are no longer interested, I’d like to take this opportunity to thank you again for your previous input.

As you know, the work environment of employees has a significant impact on job satisfaction, commitment, productivity and the general quality of work and personal life. Your help will be invaluable in building a representative picture of individual behaviours and interactions at work, and the consequences of these. The aim of my study is to identify the root causes of inappropriate conduct in order to minimise and eventually eradicate these behaviours. This in turn is hoped to create a work environment in which dignity and respect can exist for all.

I would like to ask you a number of broad questions relating to this area. Please feel free to provide as much detail as possible in your answers. Please note that all information collected will be completely confidential and anonymous, only aggregate results will be reported. As such no individuals and/or agencies will be identified in the research findings. I’d ask that you refrain from mentioning any names, or identifying characteristics of any individuals or organisations.
In terms of the study findings, I would like to inform you that only aggregate results will be reported in the final thesis document and/or any subsequent publications.

I will like to inform you that it is anticipated that the focus group will take around 2.5 hours. Please note, you are welcome to refuse to answer any of the questions you are not comfortable with, or withdraw from the focus group process at any stage should you decide to do so.

On a final note, should you have any concerns relating to this study and/or the relevant research processes you may contact: The Research Ethics Officer, Edith Cowan University, 100 Joondalup Drive, Joondalup WA 6027, Tel: (08) 6304 2170, email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au.

Please don’t hesitate to contact me on [redacted] or m.omari@ecu.edu.au, or my principal supervisor, Associate Professor Peter Standen on 6304-5283 or p.standen@ecu.edu.au should you have any further queries relating to the study, or your involvement.

Yours sincerely

Maryam Omari
Consent Form for Interviews/Focus Group

Maryam Omari
School of Management
Faculty of Business and Public Management
Edith Cowan University
Joondalup Campus
100 Joondalup Drive
Joondalup W.A. 6027
Date

Subject: A Study of Workplace Dignity and Respect

Dear APS employee

After reading the ‘Information Letter’, if you are still willing to participate in the interview/focus group [insert whichever is appropriate] I’d ask that you review the list below prior to providing your consent to participate in this study by of your signature.

- I have been provided with a copy of the information letter, explaining the research study.
- I have read and understood the information provided.
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.
- I am aware that if I have any additional questions I can contact the research team.
- I understand that participation in the research project will involve an interview/focus group process [insert whichever is appropriate].
- I understand that the information provided will be kept confidential, and that their identity of participants or participating organisations will not be disclosed.
- I understand that the information provided will only be used for the purposes of this research project, and understand how the information is to be used.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from further participation at any time, without explanation or penalty.
- I agree to have this interview tape recorded. [only for interviews]
- I freely agree to participate in this study.

---------------------------------------------
Signature of participant

Please don’t hesitate to contact me on [redacted] or momari@ecu.edu.au, or my principal supervisor, Associate Professor Peter Standen on 6304-5283 or p.standen@ecu.edu.au should you have any further queries relating to the study, or your involvement.
## Instrument

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>TIME</th>
<th>Session</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td><strong>Administrative Details &amp; Study Brief</strong></td>
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<td>- Welcome and introduction (first name basis only)</td>
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<td>- Toilets</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Breaks</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Anonymity &amp; confidentiality</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td><em>(no names mentioned, no individual or organizations to be identified)</em></td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Format for the 2.5 hours</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Questions from the group?</td>
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<td>45 minutes</td>
<td><strong>What does bullying mean (based on personal experience)</strong></td>
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<td>- Participants to write down on post-it-notes 5-10 words or phrases they</td>
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<td>associate with bullying behaviour (individual activity)</td>
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<td>- In three to four groups (of 3-4) come up with a consolidated list (wi</td>
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<td>th any additions)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Brainstorm</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Group and categorise</td>
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<tr>
<td>30 minutes</td>
<td><strong>Consequences of bullying behaviour (on the individual and organisation)</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Participants to write down on post-it-notes 5-10 words or phrases that</td>
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<td></td>
<td>describe the impacts of bullying (individual activity)</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- In three to four groups (of 3-4) come up with a consolidated list (wi</td>
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<td></td>
<td>th any additions)</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- Brainstorm</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Group and categorise</td>
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<tr>
<td>10 minutes</td>
<td><strong>Break</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>45 minutes</td>
<td><strong>Drivers and Deterrents for bullying behaviour</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>- In 3-4 groups (of 3-4) identify factors (personal or organisational)</td>
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<td>that were drivers &amp; deterrents for the bullying behaviour</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Share work with the rest of the group</td>
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<td></td>
<td>- Categorise</td>
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<td>5 minutes</td>
<td><strong>Close</strong></td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Subject: A Study of Workplace Dignity and Respect

Dear APS employee

The work environment of employees has a significant impact on job satisfaction, commitment, productivity and the general quality of work and personal life. I am conducting a study to assess the work environment, and experiences of APS employees in Western Australia. Your agency is one of a number of APS agencies that has volunteered to participate in this study. Therefore, this survey form is being sent to all officers in your organisation.

Your help will be invaluable in building a representative picture of individual behaviours and interactions at work, and the consequences of these. The aim of the study is to identify the root causes of inappropriate workplace conduct in order to minimise and eventually eradicate these behaviours. This in turn is hoped to create a work environment in which dignity and respect can exist for all.

The attached questionnaire aims to collect relevant information for this study, it should take around 15 minutes to complete. I would like to reassure you that all responses will remain completely anonymous and confidential. If you have any questions regarding the survey or the study please do not hesitate to contact me on m.omari@ecu.edu.au or [redacted], or my supervisor Associate Professor Peter Standen on 6304-5283 or p.standen@ecu.edu.au.

There may be opportunities to participate further in this study if you are interested. Information relating to the subsequent phases of the study and what these may entail can be found on the last page of the survey.

On a final note, should you have any concerns relating to this study and/or the relevant research processes you may contact: The Research Ethics Officer, Edith Cowan University, 100 Joondalup Drive, Joondalup WA 6027, Tel: (08) 6304 2170, email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au.

I look forward to learning of your experiences and opinions. I would be very grateful if you could return the questionnaire in the enclosed pre-paid envelope by XXX.

Yours sincerely

________________________
Maryam Omari
# Instrument

## Dignity and Respect at Work Questionnaire

Please answer the following questions to the best of your abilities by circling the relevant option or placing your response in the space provided. If the question does not apply to your situation please leave it blank. Please note you are not obliged to answer any questions you are not comfortable with. All responses will remain anonymous and will be treated with utmost confidentiality — at no stage will any individuals or agencies be identified as part of the research findings. Thank you in advance for your cooperation and input.

### SECTION A – Work Climate

Please indicate which of the following best describes your work setting.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Definitely Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Agree</th>
<th>Definitely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>In this organisation the rewards and encouragements you get usually outweigh the threats and the criticism.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>I feel that I am a member of a well functioning team.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>In some of the projects I’ve been on, I haven’t been sure exactly who my boss was.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Around here management resents your checking everything with them. If you think you’ve got the right approach, you just go ahead.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>In this organisation, people are rewarded in proportion to the excellence of their job performance.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>The jobs in this organisation are clearly defined and logically structured.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7.</td>
<td>In this organisation we set very high standards for performance.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8.</td>
<td>People in this organisation don’t really trust each other enough.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9.</td>
<td>In this organisation, it is sometimes unclear who has the formal authority to make a decision.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
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<tr>
<td>10.</td>
<td>Our management believes that no job is so well done that it couldn’t be done better.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11.</td>
<td>Generally, I am highly committed to the goals of this organisation.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12.</td>
<td>Around here there is a feeling of pressure to continually improve our personal and group performance.</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION B – Organisational culture

Each question in this section has 4 alternatives. Please divide 100 points amongst these alternatives depending on the extent to which each is similar to your work environment. Please give the higher points to the one that is most similar to your work area.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Score</th>
<th>1. Dominant Characteristics</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>The organisation is a very:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>a. personal place. It is like an extended family. People seem to share a lot of themselves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>b. dynamic and entrepreneurial place. People are willing to stick their necks out and take risks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>c. very results orientated place. A major concern is with getting the job done. People are very competitive and achievement orientated</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>d. controlled and structured place. Formal procedures generally govern what people do.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>100</td>
<td>TOTAL</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>13. We don’t rely too heavily on individual judgement in this organisation; almost everything is double-checked.</th>
<th>Definitely Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Agree</th>
<th>Definitely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>14. You don’t get much sympathy from higher-ups in this organisation if you make a mistake.</th>
<th>Definitely Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Agree</th>
<th>Definitely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>15. Around here we take pride in belonging to this organisation.</th>
<th>Definitely Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Agree</th>
<th>Definitely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>16. When I am on a difficult assignment, I can usually count on getting assistance from my boss and co-workers.</th>
<th>Definitely Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Agree</th>
<th>Definitely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>17. There is not enough reward and recognition given in this organisation for doing good work.</th>
<th>Definitely Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Agree</th>
<th>Definitely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>18. Our philosophy emphasises that people should solve their problems by themselves.</th>
<th>Definitely Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Agree</th>
<th>Definitely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>19. We have a promotion system here that helps the best person rise to the top.</th>
<th>Definitely Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Agree</th>
<th>Definitely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>20. Our productivity sometimes suffers from the lack of organisation and planning.</th>
<th>Definitely Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Agree</th>
<th>Definitely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>21. I don’t really care what happens to this organisation.</th>
<th>Definitely Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Agree</th>
<th>Definitely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>22. You don’t get ahead in this organisation unless you stick your neck out and try things on your own.</th>
<th>Definitely Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Agree</th>
<th>Definitely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>23. As far as I can see, there isn’t much personal loyalty to the organisation.</th>
<th>Definitely Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Agree</th>
<th>Definitely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>24. In this organisation people don’t seem to take much pride in their performance.</th>
<th>Definitely Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Disagree</th>
<th>Inclined to Agree</th>
<th>Definitely Agree</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Organisational Leadership
The leadership in the organisation is generally considered to exemplify:

- mentoring, facilitating, or nurturing.
- entrepreneurship, innovating or risk taking.
- a no-nonsense, aggressive, results-orientated focus.
- coordinating, organising, or smooth-running efficiency.

### Management of Employees
The management style of the organisation is characterised by:

- teamwork, consensus and participation.
- individual risk taking, innovation, freedom and uniqueness.
- hard-driving competitiveness, high demands, and achievement.
- security of employment, conformity, predictability, and stability in relationships.

### Organisation Glue:
The glue that holds the organisation together is:

- loyalty and mutual trust. Commitment to this organisation runs high.
- commitment to innovation and development. There is an emphasis on being on the cutting edge.
- emphasis on achievement and goal accomplishment. Aggressiveness and winning are common themes.
- formal rules and policies. Maintaining a smooth running organisation is important.

### Strategic Emphases:
The organisation emphasises:

- human development. High trust, openness, and participation persist.
- acquiring new resources and creating new challenges. Trying new things and prospecting for opportunities are valued.
- competitive actions and achievement. Hitting stretch targets and winning in the marketplace are dominant.
- permanence and stability. Efficiency, control and smooth operations are important.
Score

6. Criteria for success:
The organisation defines success on the basis of:

a. the development of human resources, teamwork, employee commitment, and concern for people.

b. having the most unique or newest products. It is a product leader and innovator.

c. winning in the marketplace and outpacing the competition. Competitive market leadership is the key.

d. efficiency. Dependable delivery, smooth scheduling, and low-cost production are critical.

= 100 TOTAL

SECTION C – Your Workplace Experience
Please relate the answers below to your most significant experience of mistreatment.

1. Have you ever been bullied at your current place of employment by a co-worker? Yes No (go to Sec. D)

2. What form did the bullying take? Please explain.

3. Who was the perpetrator/bully? Peer Superior Subord. Other _______

4. What was the gender of the bully? Male Female

5. How frequently did the bullying take place? Weekly Monthly Rarely Other _______

6. How long did it go for? Once only Days Weeks Months Years

7. Was the bullying taking place? In public In private Both Other _______

8. Did you make a formal complaint? Why or why not? Yes No
9. Why do you think the bullying behaviour was taking place? Please explain.

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

10. How did the bullying behaviour affect:

You personally:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

Your work:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

The organisation:

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

________________________________________________________________________

**SECTION D - Personal and Work Details**

1. Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Male</th>
<th>Female</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>&lt;20</td>
<td>20-29</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

2. Age bracket

3. Is English your 2nd language?

   Yes  No

4. Highest level of education achieved

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year 10</th>
<th>Year 12</th>
<th>Diploma</th>
<th>Bachelors</th>
<th>Post Grad.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level 1</td>
<td>Level 2</td>
<td>Level 3</td>
<td>Level 4</td>
<td>Level 5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level 6</td>
<td>EL 1/2</td>
<td>Graduate</td>
<td>Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

5. Substantive APS classification/equivalent

6. Type of job

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Client service</th>
<th>Specialist</th>
<th>Manager</th>
<th>Other</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. Years in current place of employment

   _________ Years

8. Number of employees in your agency:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>&lt;50</th>
<th>50-100</th>
<th>101-250</th>
<th>251 – 500</th>
<th>&gt;500</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
SECTION E - Your Story

In order to better understand the context, your experiences, what happened, and how you felt, I would be grateful if you could provide a brief description/story of the situation (i.e. who did what, why do you think, when and how). Please feel free to be as descriptive as possible, I’d ask that no names be mentioned. Please feel free to attach additional pages to the questionnaire if you need to.
Thank you again for your co-operation and input.
Would you be interested in participating further in this research? I am interested in conducting interviews with individuals who have been accused of displaying bullying behaviour in the workplace to gain a better understanding of the relevant issues from their perspective. If you are interested, please either email me separately at m.omari@ecu.edu.au mentioning ‘interview’ or provide your email address &/or alternative contact details below.
## APPENDIX 4

### THE COMPETING VALUES FRAMEWORK

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Clan</th>
<th>Adhocracy</th>
<th>Hierarchy</th>
<th>Market</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Facilitator</td>
<td>Innovator</td>
<td>Coordinator</td>
<td>Hard-driver</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mentor</td>
<td>Entrepreneur</td>
<td>Monitor</td>
<td>Competitor</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Parent</td>
<td>Visionary</td>
<td>Organizer</td>
<td>Producer</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Effectiveness Criteria</th>
<th>Cohesion</th>
<th>Cutting-edge output</th>
<th>Efficiency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Morale</td>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>Timeliness</td>
<td>Smooth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Development of</td>
<td>Growth</td>
<td>functioning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>human resources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Management Theory</th>
<th>Participation</th>
<th>Innovativeness</th>
<th>Control fosters</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>fosters commitment</td>
<td>fosters new</td>
<td>efficiency</td>
<td>fosters productivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>resources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Quality strategies</th>
<th>Empowerment</th>
<th>Error detection</th>
<th>Measuring</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Teambuilding</td>
<td>Surprise &amp;</td>
<td>Measurement</td>
<td>customer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee involvement</td>
<td>delight</td>
<td>Process control</td>
<td>preferences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human resource</td>
<td>Create new</td>
<td>Systematic problem</td>
<td>Improving</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>development</td>
<td>standards</td>
<td>solving</td>
<td>productivity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Open</td>
<td>Anticipate needs</td>
<td>Applying quality tools (e.g. Pareto charting, fishbone diagramming, etc)</td>
<td>Creating</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>communication</td>
<td>Continuous</td>
<td></td>
<td>partnerships</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>improvement</td>
<td></td>
<td>Enhancing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>creative solution finding</td>
<td></td>
<td>competitiveness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Involving customers and suppliers</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HR role</th>
<th>Employee</th>
<th>Change agent</th>
<th>Administrative</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>champion</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>specialist</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

| HR means              | Responding to   | Facilitating          | Aligning HR with   |
|-----------------------| employee needs  | transformation        | business strategy  |

| HR ends               | Cohesion        | Organizational        | Bottom line        |
|-----------------------|-----------------| renewal               | impacts            |
| Commitment            |                 |                       |                    |
| Capability            |                 |                       |                    |

| HR competencies       | Morale          | Systems analysis      | General business    |
|-----------------------|-----------------|-----------------------| skills              |
| assessment            | Management      | Organizational change | Strategic analysis  |
| development           | change skills   | Consulting &          | Strategic           |
| Systems                |                 | facilitation          | leadership          |
| improvement           |                 |                       |                    |
APPENDIX 5

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH HR MANAGERS

Information Letter for Interviews

Maryam Omari
School of Management
Faculty of Business and Public Management
Edith Cowan University
Joondalup Campus
100 Joondalup Drive
Joondalup W.A. 6027
Date

Subject: A Study of Workplace Dignity and Respect

Dear APS employee

You were a participant in earlier survey phase of this study and voluntarily provided your contact details to indicate that you may be interested in participating further in this research. I have now commenced the next phase and am would like to ascertain if you are still interested in participating in the interviews. As before, I would like to assure you that should you decide to participate, all personal and organisational information will remain completely confidential and anonymous. If you are no longer interested, I’d like to take this opportunity to thank you again for your previous input.

As you know, the work environment of employees has a significant impact on job satisfaction, commitment, productivity and the general quality of work and personal life. Your help will be invaluable in building a representative picture of individual behaviours and interactions at work, and the consequences of these. The aim of my study is to identify the root causes of inappropriate conduct in order to minimise and eventually eradicate these behaviours. This in turn is hoped to create a work environment in which dignity and respect can exist for all.

I would like to ask you a number of broad questions relating to this area. Please feel free to provide as much detail as possible in your answers. Please note that all information collected will be completely confidential and anonymous. As such no individuals and/or agencies will be identified in the research findings. I’d ask that
you refrain from mentioning any names, or identifying characteristics of any individuals or organisations.

Do you have any questions of me at this stage?

I would also like to ask you if it is ok to audio tape this interview. This would allow me to more closely listen to what you say, and in future it will allow me to capture all important and relevant points mentioned. I would like to reassure you that this conversation will remain completely confidential. If funding allows, I may seek to have the audiotapes transcribed by an appropriate person who will also be required to maintain the confidentiality of the data. The audiotapes and notes from this interview will be kept in secure lockable storage, and will only be accessed by the researcher. All identifying labels (i.e. names or organisations) will be removed from the data. The information will be stored for the duration of the study, and the required timeframe for the PhD award after which it will be destroyed as per ECU guidelines. [If approval is not given to tape record the interview, notes will be taken].

Just before we start I will like to inform you that is anticipated that the interview will take around 30 minutes. Please note, you are welcome to refuse to answer any of the questions you are not comfortable with, or withdraw from the interview at any stage should you decide to do so.

On a final note, should you have any concerns relating to this study and/or the relevant research processes you may contact: The Research Ethics Officer, Edith Cowan University, 100 Joondalup Drive, Joondalup WA 6027, Tel: (08) 6304 2170, email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au.

Do you have any other questions at this stage? [If not, the Consent Form will be given to the participant, if consent is given the interview will formally commence.]

Please don’t hesitate to contact me on or m.omari@ecu.edu.au, or my principal supervisor, Associate Professor Peter Standen on 6304-5283 or p.standen@ecu.edu.au should you have any further queries relating to the study, or your involvement.

Yours sincerely

Maryam Omari
Subject: A Study of Workplace Dignity and Respect

Dear APS employee

After reading the ‘Information Letter’, if you are still willing to participate in the interview/focus group [insert whichever is appropriate] I’d ask that you review the list below prior to providing your consent to participate in this study by of your signature.

- I have been provided with a copy of the information letter, explaining the research study.
- I have read and understood the information provided.
- I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and have had any questions answered to my satisfaction.
- I am aware that if I have any additional questions I can contact the research team.
- I understand that participation in the research project will involve an interview/focus group process [insert whichever is appropriate].
- I understand that the information provided will be kept confidential, and that they identity of participants or participating organisations will not be disclosed.
- I understand that the information provided will only be used for the purposes of this research project, and understand how the information is to be used.
- I understand that I am free to withdraw from further participation at any time, without explanation or penalty.
- I agree to have this interview tape recorded. [only for interviews]
- I freely agree to participate in this study.

-------------------------------
Signature of participant

Please don’t hesitate to contact me on [redacted] or m.omari@ecu.edu.au, or my principal supervisor, Associate Professor Peter Standen on 6304-5283 or p.standen@ecu.edu.au should you have any further queries relating to the study, or your involvement.
Instrument

Before we start, can I please ask you to confirm that you are still happy to progress with this interview, and to have the session tape-recorded? Please note, you are free to withdraw from the interview at any stage should you decide to.

1. Can you please tell me a little about the changes your organisation has been through in the last few years? How have these changes affected staff?

2. How much publicity and/or information has the issue of bullying behaviour received in your organisation in the recent past?

3. What are your thoughts as HR Manager about studying issues associated with bullying behaviour in the workplace?

4. What do you believe are the main contributing factors to this behaviour based on your professional and personal experience?

5. What are the consequences of bullying behaviour?

6. What do you believe can be done to address the issue? How easy is this to do?

7. Anything else you would like to add that you believe is important to the understanding of issues associated with bullying behaviour in the workplace.

Many thanks again for your participation and input in this study.
APPENDIX 6

SEMI-STRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH POLICY STAFF

Information Letter and Consent Form

As per forms provided in Appendix 5.
**Instrument**

Before we start, can I please ask you to confirm that you are still happy to progress with this interview, and to have the session tape-recorded? Please note, you are free to withdraw from the interview at any stage should you decide to.

1. Can you please tell me a little about the changes that have happened in the APS in the last few years? How have these changes affected staff?

2. How much publicity and/or information has the issue of bullying behaviour received in the APS in the recent past? What has been/is the role of the APSC with this regard?

3. How aware and active do you believe the APS agencies are in addressing this issue?

4. What are your thoughts about studying issues associated with bullying behaviour in the workplace?

5. What do you believe are the main contributing factors to this behaviour based on your professional and personal experience?

6. What are the consequences of bullying behaviour?

7. What do you believe can be done to address the issue? How easy is this to do?

8. Anything else you would like to add that you believe is important to the understanding of issues associated with bullying behaviour in the workplace.

*Many thanks again for your participation and input in this study.*
APPENDIX 7

UNSTRUCTURED INTERVIEWS WITH ALLEGED PERPETRATORS

Information Letter and Consent Form

As per forms provided in Appendix 5.
Instrument

Before we start, can I please ask you to confirm that you are still happy to progress with this interview, and to have the session tape-recorded? Please note, you are free to withdraw from the interview at any stage should you decide to.

1. I understand that you have been accused of bullying behaviour in the workplace. In order to better understand the context, your experiences, what happened, and how you felt, I would be grateful if you could provide a description/story of the situation. That is, what happened, why do you think, when and how? Please feel free to be as descriptive as possible, however I’d ask that no names be mentioned.
Subject: A Study of Workplace Dignity and Respect

Dear APS employee,

During 2003 I won a Fellowship sponsored by The APS Commission, The Commonwealth Heads Executive Committee, Curtin University of Technology and The Institute of Public Admin Australia (IPAA). The Fellowship involved a three month study of workplace dignity and respect; it was conducted in WA with the assistance of a number of volunteering APS agencies and the support of the APS Commission.

You were a study participant in the research conducted in 2003, and voluntarily provided your contact details to indicate that you may be interested in participating further in this research. I have now commenced the next phase of the study and am writing to you to find out whether you are interested in assisting in fine-tuning the survey instrument to be used. As before, I would like to assure you that should you decide to participate, all personal and organisational information will remain completely confidential and anonymous. If you are still interested, I’d ask that you complete the enclosed anonymous survey, providing any feedback on the content, process and questioning style, and return in the postage paid envelope. If you are no longer interested, I’d like to take this opportunity to thank you again for your previous input.

Study background

As you know, the work environment of employees has a significant impact on job satisfaction, commitment, productivity and the general quality of work and personal life. Your help will be invaluable in building a representative picture of individual behaviours and interactions at work, and the consequences of these. The aim of my study is to identify the root causes of inappropriate conduct in order to minimise and eventually eradicate these behaviours. This in turn is hoped to create a work environment in which dignity and respect can exist for all.

Please don’t hesitate to contact me on [redacted] or m.omari@ecu.edu.au, or my principal supervisor, Associate Professor Peter Standen on 6304-5283 or p.standen@ecu.edu.au should you have any queries relating to the study, or your involvement. Should you have any concerns relating to this study and/or the relevant research processes you may contact: The Research Ethics Officer, Edith Cowan University, 100 Joondalup Drive, Joondalup WA 6027, Tel: (08) 6304 2170, email: research.ethics@ecu.edu.au.

Looking forward to your response.

Yours sincerely,

Maryam Omari