

Analyzing Bullying as an Internal Communication Phenomenon at

Greater Letaba Municipality, South Africa

By

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ABSTRACT

The problem of workplace bullying remains a persistent concern in many organisations including public sector organisations. Different perspectives have been considered in previous work on addressing the issue to include the role of leadership, the influence of organisational culture and work environments, job demands and cultural and societal factors. However, perspectives incorporating the role of internal communication have been limited. This study covers our knowledge and understanding of the workplace bullying phenomenon in public sector organisations by looking at how internal communication practices interact with factors such as power imbalances, organisational culture and work environment to influence workplace bullying.

Using a sample of 79 individuals, the study employed a convergent mixed methods design to examine the experiences of public sector employees and management personnel with workplace bullying in a local municipality setting, and examine the internal communication structures and the power dynamics of the workplace environment that affect the reporting and addressing of bullying behaviour. This approach allowed the study to collect a heterogeneous dataset of perspectives from both frontline and managerial levels on the use of internal communication structures to address workplace bullying in public sector organisations. Thematic content analysis and correlational analysis were used to analyse the qualitative data and the quantitative data respectively. By examining the experiences of public sector employees and management personnel with workplace bullying and exploring the factors that influence the reporting and addressing of this behaviour in a local municipality, this research extends our

understanding of the factors that contribute to the use of communication strategies in addressing bullying.

Findings revealed that workplace bullying is prevalent in the municipality, taking the form of verbal abuse and exclusionary behaviour, and has negative effects on employee outcomes such as the quality of the work environment, the quality of employee organisation relationship, and the quality of management attributes. Five in eleven participants in the qualitative sample (45%) and 32 of the 68 participants in the quantitative sample (47%) had previous experiences of workplace bullying. The bullying was mostly attributed to power imbalances and discrimination while the communication structures and language at the municipality were identified as risk factors for exposure to bullying. However, the study also found that open communication channels can improve key employee outcomes such as quality of employee organisation relationship and quality of work environment, minimising the negative impacts of workplace bullying exposure. The results also indicate that employees associate open communication structures with perceptions of positive management attributes, providing support for the notion that perceived organisational and supervisor support minimises the negative impacts of workplace bullying exposure.

The study recommends interventions that promote inclusive and respectful language, educate employees and management on the signs and features of bullying, and encourage open and transparent communication to report incidents. Each stakeholder has a unique role to play in implementing these interventions: HR can develop policies that support respectful communication, management can receive training on how to recognize and prevent bullying, and employees can report incidents of bullying without fear of retaliation. These recommendations could help create a more positive work environment, where employees can thrive and contribute to organisational success. To further advance research on workplace bullying, future studies could evaluate the effectiveness of open communication programs on reducing exposure to

workplace bullying through program design and follow-up evaluations or comparative designs between organisations with different levels of open communication. These suggestions can help inform future research and interventions to create a more positive work environment where employees can thrive and contribute to organisational success.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

1.1. STUDY BACKGROUND AND RATIONALE

Workplace bullying is a pervasive problem that has been the subject of extensive research in recent years. Despite over five decades of extensive research into workplace bullying in various disciplines, studies have reported mixed conclusions about its prevalence, antecedents, and consequences among public sector employees (Gillen, Sinclair, Kernohan, Begley & Luyben, 2017). For example, estimates for prevalence rates of bullying in the nursing field range from as low as 0.3% to 73.1% (Hawkins Jeong & Smith, 2019). Similarly, Bambi, Foà, De Felippis, Lucchini, Guazzini, and Rasero (2018) as well as Lever, Dyball, Greenberg and Stevelink (2019) reported ranges of 2.4% to 81% and 3.9% to 86.5%, respectively. While there are differences in the reporting of workplace bullying prevalence in the literature, these differences suggest regional and country-level variations in the incidence of workplace bullying and indicate that the sources of violence may vary significantly across the globe. This makes it difficult to accurately understand the frequency and the associated impact of workplace bullying.

Despite abundant research on workplace bullying in the public sector, only a few local studies have reported data on its prevalence in South Africa. For example, Kalamdien (2013) studied the nature of workplace bullying in the Western Cape province of South Africa, finding that 30-50% of respondents had been harassed in the workplace. Cunniff and Mostert (2012) used a cross-sectional field survey to investigate the prevalence of workplace bullying of South African employees and reported that 31.1% of their sample had experienced workplace bullying. Visagie et al. (2012) investigated the prevalence of workplace bullying at a South

African mine and reported that 27% of workers had experienced workplace bullying. De Wet and Jacobs (2014) studied the perspectives of perpetrators of workplace bullying among educators in South African schools, finding that 90.8% of the respondents indicated that they had experienced some form of workplace bullying. None of these studies investigated workplace bullying in local governments and municipalities. Due to the lack of recent local data, it is difficult to accurately understand the true prevalence and associated impact of workplace bullying in South Africa.

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the issue, it is crucial to initiate localised studies that investigate the prevalence, sources, and consequences of workplace bullying. Such studies can help develop tailored interventions that address the issue effectively, given the severe and far-reaching consequences of workplace bullying on employee morale, mental health, and job satisfaction (Han & Ha, 2016; Jeong & Jang, 2019; Lever, Dybal, Greenberg & Stevelink, 2019; Nielsen, Tangen & Einarsen, 2015). In terms of organisational impacts, the consequences include decreased productivity, increased absenteeism, and even the loss of employees due to a hostile work environment (Jones, 2017). Furthermore, it can create a climate of fear, intimidation, and mistrust, leading to decreased job satisfaction, team morale, and organisational performance (Jones, 2017). The financial impact of workplace bullying can also be significant, as victims often require additional resources to address their physical, psychological, and emotional health (Richardson, Hall & Joiner 2016). Therefore, it is vital for employers to take a practical stance in tackling workplace bullying to prevent serious and long-lasting impacts on their organisation and employees.

Researchers from different disciplines, including communications and behavioural sciences, have made significant contributions to understanding and addressing the issue. Behavioural science-based interventions, such as those based on social learning theory and cognitive-behavioural theory, have demonstrated effectiveness in addressing bullying behaviour by teaching employees new skills and behaviours, and by providing rewards or

consequences for certain types of behaviour (Escartín, 2016). Communication-based interventions are also intrinsically linked with behavioural science-based interventions, as effective communication is essential for creating a positive work environment and addressing inappropriate behaviour such as bullying (Salin, Cowan, Adewumi, Apospori, Bochantin, D’Cruz, Djurkovic, Durniat, Escartín Guo, Olivas-Luján & Zedlacher., 2020). Thus, employers could implement communication-based interventions as part of a holistic approach to address workplace bullying.

Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy (2012) highlight the critical role of comprehensive communication research in organizations to effectively identify and mitigate workplace bullying, a prevalent issue impacting nearly 50% of the workforce with significant adverse effects on employee morale and productivity. Gandel (2010) further underscores the necessity of cultivating environments that promote transparent and sincere dialogue, arguing that the absence of such communicative practices may inadvertently perpetuate negative behaviours rather than rectify them. The importance of communication extends beyond mere identification of bullying; it plays a pivotal role in enabling victims to recognize and articulate their experiences of mistreatment, facilitated by engaging in discussions and developing a shared understanding with colleagues (Lutgen-Sandvik & McDermott, 2011; Tracy et al., 2006). Moreover, Bisel, Messersmith, & Kelley (2012) draw attention to the detrimental effect of workplace cultures that discourage open communication, leading employees to prefer silence over the potential risks associated with expressing dissent, thereby stifling the effective management of the issue. These perspectives collectively advocate for communication-based interventions as a potent strategy to confront and alleviate workplace bullying, emphasizing the power of dialogue in fostering a healthier organizational climate and empowering victims to voice their experiences.

On the other hand, prevention and intervention strategies, developed from the field of behavioural sciences, focus on preventing workplace bullying or intervening when it occurs.

These strategies are designed to change the behaviour of individuals or groups, and can be implemented at the individual, group, or organisational level (Salin et al., 2020). An example of a prevention and intervention strategy is training programs. These programs, as suggested by Escartin (2016), aim to improve engagement and open communication through sessions conducted by trusted staff members or outside experts. Such initiatives can significantly raise awareness of bullying, educate employees on how to recognize and report it, and provide them with tools and strategies for effectively dealing with the problem. Additionally, following recommendations by Badenhorst and Botha (2022) to establish an anti-bullying culture and declare bullying behaviour as unacceptable, these training sessions can further operationalize these principles by embedding them into the organizational ethos. The training can be tailored to all employees, supervisors, managers, and organizational leaders, customized to the specific needs of the organization, and include mechanisms for measuring changes in behaviour, attitude, or health over time to assess the effectiveness of the intervention. This comprehensive approach not only addresses immediate concerns but also contributes to the long-term prevention of bullying, aligning with the insights provided by Salin et al. (2020) on the value of educational programs in cultivating a safe and respectful workplace environment.

Another important advancement has been the introduction of support interventions within organisations. Support interventions, such as counselling or employee assistance programs, can be effective interventions to assist victims of bullying. A number of studies have demonstrated a protective role of social support from co-workers and supervisor support in decreasing the negative impact of bullying on the victims (Babu & Franco, 2019; Rossiter & Sochos, 2018). Perceived support can be beneficial not only in helping victims cope with the effects of bullying, but also in providing them with strategies to prevent further bullying and is associated with improved outcomes such as increased employee wellness and reduced burnout (Georgakopoulos & Kelly, 2017; Hayat & Afshari, 2020). Additionally, it has been shown that perceived organisational support is associated with increased organisational

citizenship behaviours (Naseer, Raja, Syed & Bouckennooghe 2018). This is because perceived organisational support is associated with perceptions that the organisation takes matters of bullying and employees wellness seriously, thereby helping create a more positive work environment and an increased sense of belonging (Naseer et al., 2018).

Bystander intervention programs are seen as another important strategy for preventing and intervening in workplace bullying. It has been argued that there are often more bystanders than bullies and victims in bullying situations, and that bullying should be viewed as consisting of the perpetrator, the target and the bystander. Researchers interested in this phenomenon have suggested that bystanders should also be viewed as part of the solution, thereby realising the need to support bystanders in combating workplace bullying. Findings from studies investigating the responses of witnesses to bullying suggest that organisational and supervisor support plays an important role in the decision to intervene (MacCurtain et al., 2018). It has previously been suggested that bystanders' inaction may be due to fear, ignorance, avoidance and powerlessness (Paull, Omari, D'Cruz & Güneri Çangarli. 2020). These programs equip employees with the knowledge, skills, and confidence to intervene when bullying is witnessed. Training for these programs typically includes information about how to recognize bullying behaviour, how to respond appropriately, and how to provide support for those who have been impacted by bullying. In this way, bystander intervention programs can be an important part of a comprehensive approach to addressing workplace bullying.

One approach to addressing workplace bullying that has been explored in various fields of research is the use of organisational policies and procedures. Organisations can create policies and procedures to clearly define bullying behaviours and outline appropriate steps for addressing them (Kalamdien, 2013). These policies and procedures can also help to create a culture of respect and open communication, which is essential for preventing and addressing workplace bullying (Cunniff & Mostert, 2012). Additionally, organisations can use

these policies and procedures to avail employees with the tools and resources they need to identify bullying behaviours and report them to management (Visagie et al., 2012). Finally, organisations can use these policies and procedures to provide employees with ongoing support and resources for those who are being bullied (De Wet & Jacobs, 2014).

From the field of communications research, researchers have focused on communication-based interventions. Earlier, communication-based interventions were identified as a key component of some behavioural science-based interventions. These interventions may include training programs and activities to teach employees respectful and professional communication (Deepak, Narain & Yadav, 2021). Additionally, interventions have been developed to develop the leadership skills of supervisors and managers, such as by teaching them how to model positive behaviours and how to effectively address bullying when it does occur. The focus on the role of leadership in preventing and addressing bullying has been a significant contribution from the field of communications research. Research has shown that leaders can have a powerful influence on the culture and climate of an organisation, and that effective leadership is important for creating a positive and respectful work environment (Glambek et al., 2018).

Communication-based strategies such as open dialogue, regular feedback, and clear expectations can help foster an open and healthy work environment, which can reduce the likelihood and severity of workplace bullying (Hawkins et al., 2019). These strategies can also be used to provide employees with the tools and resources they need to identify bullying behaviours and report them to management (Cunniff & Mostert, 2012). Communication can also be used to educate employees about workplace bullying, provide ongoing support and resources for those who are being bullied, and promote a culture of respect and open communication (Visagie, 2012). Furthermore, communication strategies can be used to help create a safe and supportive work environment, which is essential for preventing and addressing workplace bullying (Jacobs & Wet, 2015).

Despite these contributions, there are still challenges and weaknesses in the field of prevention and intervention strategies for addressing workplace bullying, such as the lack of consistency in definitions and measurement of bullying, which makes it difficult to compare findings across studies and to evaluate the effectiveness of different interventions (Goh, Hosier & Zhang, 2022). Another challenge is the limited research on the long-term effects prevention and intervention strategies and the lack of research on the communication needs and preferences of different stakeholder groups within organisations. Additionally, there is a pressing need for further research on the potential long-term impacts of different interventions that have been proposed. Further exploration into the possible long-term effects of such interventions could provide invaluable insight into their effectiveness, allowing for more informed decisions to be made in the future.

Further exploration is also needed to explore the mechanisms by which these interventions work, and to identify specific elements of these interventions that may be more effective in producing positive employee and organisational outcomes related to workplace bullying. Additionally, further research should be conducted to identify any potential unintended consequences of these interventions and to develop new methods of mitigating them. Such research is needed to better understand the ways in which the interventions engage with the underlying biological, psychological and social processes that influence employee and organisational outcomes in the face of workplace bullying. In the end, the goal should be to create the most effective and efficient interventions that serve to improve individual and organisational outcomes related to workplace bullying.

Another challenge that remains is the lack of research on the long-term effects of communication-based interventions. Many studies have focused on short-term outcomes, such as changes in attitudes or behaviours immediately following an intervention, but there is a need for more research on the sustainability of these effects over time. Another challenge is the lack of research on the communication needs and preferences of different stakeholder

groups within organisation. Different stakeholder groups, such as employees, supervisors, and other stakeholders, may have different communication needs and preferences, and interventions that are effective for one group may not be as effective for another.

The intricate relationship between internal communication strategies and workplace bullying emerges as a focal point of examination across various scholarly contributions, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of this issue within diverse organizational contexts. These insights unveil a foundation for a nuanced understanding of how internal communication practices can either mitigate or exacerbate workplace bullying phenomena.

Leadership orientations and communication styles are underscored by Houghton et al. (2021) as pivotal in shaping workplace dynamics, with democratic and communal leadership approaches linked to reduced perceptions of bullying. This insight aligns with the broader perspective that fostering leadership behaviours emphasizing open communication, collaboration, and inclusivity can significantly impact internal communication quality and reduce bullying incidents. This relationship is further complicated by organizational factors such as hierarchical structures and unclear policies, which can serve as communication barriers, thus potentially facilitating bullying behaviours. The critical role of effective communication in supporting employee well-being and mitigating bullying is highlighted, pointing towards the need for clear communication channels, including conflict resolution systems and transparent policies on bullying.

However, the relationship between internal communication and workplace bullying is not solely determined by leadership styles. Organizational factors such as hierarchical structures and unclear policies can also serve as communication barriers, potentially facilitating bullying behaviours. Richardson et al. (2016) highlight the detrimental effects of inadequate communication on workplace bullying, noting that unclear policies regarding bullying can lead to confusion and hinder staff members' ability to recognize and report

incidents. Additionally, Breuer, Huffmeier & Hertel (2019) emphasize how hierarchical structures and a lack of information sharing can increase susceptibility to targeted conduct and foster mistrust and social exclusion, discouraging witnesses and victims from speaking up and participating in decision-making. Consequently, a culture of silence and impunity for bullies can be fostered by a lack of accessible communication channels, making it difficult for victims to report occurrences or ask for support. This underscores the importance of clear communication channels, including conflict resolution systems and transparent policies on bullying, in supporting employee well-being and mitigating bullying incidents.

McKay (2013) provides further insights into the relationship between internal communication and workplace bullying by examining the dynamic interplay between individual agency and organizational structure. The findings suggest that even with well-intentioned internal communication strategies, the structural forces within organizations, such as bureaucracy and hierarchy, can overshadow individual efforts to combat bullying. This perspective introduces a critical discussion point on the limitations of internal communication strategies in highly structured organizational contexts and calls for a more nuanced understanding of how organizational structures can influence the efficacy of these strategies.

Bulut and Hihi (2021) contribute to the discourse by advocating for the implementation of clear workplace policies and training programs aimed at educating employees about bullying and its adverse effects. The emphasis on official reporting mechanisms and the establishment of supportive communication channels reinforces the notion that structured internal communication strategies can play a significant role in reducing workplace bullying. This approach is echoed in the work of Walker & Stones (2020), who highlight the importance of management support, cultural norms, and the creation of active social communities within the workplace as essential components in fostering a positive work environment that discourages bullying.

These scholarly contributions reveal a complex landscape where leadership styles, organizational structure, and the clarity and effectiveness of communication strategies interplay to influence workplace bullying outcomes. While there is a consensus on the importance of effective internal communication in mitigating bullying, the literature also points to significant challenges, such as overcoming the constraints imposed by organizational hierarchies and cultural norms. Gaps in the literature suggest a need for further research into the specific types of internal communication strategies that are most effective across different organizational cultures and structures. Additionally, the varying impact of individual agency versus structural forces on the efficacy of these strategies warrants deeper investigation.

In short, the analysis underscores the critical role of internal communication in addressing workplace bullying, highlighting the necessity for organizations to prioritize transparent communication, foster inclusive leadership practices, and develop clear policies and reporting mechanisms. At the same time, it calls attention to the need for a nuanced understanding of how organizational contexts can influence the success of these strategies, suggesting a direction for this research to explore effective communication practices that transcend structural barriers in organisations.

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

In scrutinizing the complex interplay between workplace bullying and internal communication, this study observed that the relationship between internal communication and workplace bullying is not directly addressed in much of the existing literature, requiring inference to understand their connection. This observation suggests several implications about the landscape of research in this area.

The necessity to infer relationships suggests that current research provides foundational insights that can inform new insights on the connection between internal communication strategies and workplace bullying. Existing findings about leadership styles, organizational culture, and the effects of workplace bullying provide a base from which to hypothesize how internal communication might play a role in these dynamics. The intersection of internal communication and workplace bullying spans several disciplines, including organizational behaviour, psychology, management, and communication studies. The lack of direct literature may suggest that these topics are often explored within their disciplinary silos, without sufficient cross-disciplinary integration that could offer a more holistic view of how communication strategies impact bullying behaviours.

Thus, there is a notable gap in the literature where the direct impacts of internal communication strategies on workplace bullying are insufficiently studied. This indicates an opportunity for research to explicitly explore and establish the linkages between how internal communication practices influence the prevalence, perception, and resolution of workplace bullying in the context of hierarchical organisational structures. Additionally, the impact of structural forces on the efficacy of different internal communication strategies warrants deeper investigation.

The discourse clearly outlines how workplace bullying is a persistent problem that affects a significant proportion of employees, with negative consequences for both individuals and organisation (Goh et al., 2022). The negative impacts of bullying on employee well-being and organisational performance are well documented, yet our understanding of the experiences of public sector employees with this issue is still limited, particularly in the context of a local municipality setting (Lever et al., 2019). While research has identified a number of factors that are associated with bullying, including power imbalances (de Cieri et al., 2019), organisational culture (Plimmer et al., 2022; Stankov et al., 2022), and communication

practices, our understanding of how these factors interact to influence bullying behaviour in the public sector is still limited.

Internal communication is a critical aspect of organisational functioning and has been identified as a potential key factor in the prevention and management of workplace bullying. In the public sector, effective internal communication is particularly important, given the complex and hierarchical nature of these organisation and the need to balance a range of stakeholder interests (Leijerholt et al., 2022). However, our understanding of the specific internal communication practices and structures that are most effective in addressing bullying in the public sector is still limited. It is crucial to understand which communication strategies are most effective in addressing bullying in these contexts, as well as the factors that contribute to their success. Moreover, it is important to consider the potential effects of communication strategies on different stakeholders, such as employees, management, and other members of the organisation, in order to ensure that the strategies are effective in addressing workplace bullying.

The purpose of this study is to examine the experiences of public sector employees and management personnel with workplace bullying in a local municipality setting, and to explore the power dynamics of the workplace environment that affect the reporting and addressing of bullying behaviour. The study will also examine the perspectives and experiences of these individuals in relation to the use of internal communication to address workplace bullying in the public sector. Using a combination of qualitative and quantitative research methods, this study will analyse data from a sample of public sector employees and management personnel in a local municipality to identify the specific experiences, power dynamics, and communication practices and structures that are associated with workplace bullying in this context.

This study will contribute to a more comprehensive understanding of the role of internal communication in the prevention and management of workplace bullying in the public sector. By examining the experiences of public sector employees and management personnel with workplace bullying and exploring the factors that influence the reporting and addressing of this behaviour in a local municipality, this research will provide a nuanced understanding of the factors that contribute to the success or failure of communication strategies in addressing bullying. The findings of this study will be of interest to a range of stakeholders, including scholars, policymakers, and HR practitioners, and will provide insights into developing interventions to prevent and address bullying in the public sector workplace. Moreover, this study will add to the existing body of knowledge about workplace bullying by providing a more in-depth and nuanced understanding of the experiences and perspectives of employees and management personnel in a municipality setting and will contribute to the development of more effective communication strategies for addressing this persistent problem.

1.3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The purpose of this study was to examine the experiences of public sector employees and management personnel with workplace bullying in a local municipality setting, and to explore the power dynamics of the workplace environment that affect the reporting and addressing of bullying behaviours. The study examined the perspectives and experiences of these individuals in relation to the use of internal communication to address workplace bullying in a municipality setting. In order to achieve this purpose, the following research questions served as a guide during the research process:

- How do public sector employees in a local municipality setting experience bullying in the workplace and what impact do bullying experiences have on the municipality personnel?

- How do the power dynamics of the workplace environment affect the reporting and addressing of workplace bullying?
- What are the perspectives and experiences of public sector employees and management personnel in relation to the use of internal communication to address workplace bullying in a local municipality setting?
- How do the internal communication structures in a local municipality setting support or address workplace bullying and what is the effectiveness of the communication channels used in the municipality to address workplace bullying?

1.4. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Using the above-mentioned research questions as a guideline, the research objectives of this study were formulated as follows:

- To understand the experiences of public sector employees in a local municipality setting with regard to workplace bullying, including the impact of these experiences on the municipality personnel.
- To explore the power dynamics of the workplace environment that affect the reporting and addressing of workplace bullying in the municipality.
- To examine the perspectives and experiences of public sector employees and management personnel in relation to the use of internal communication to address workplace bullying in the municipality.
- To identify the internal communication structures and practices that support or address workplace bullying in the municipality, and to assess the effectiveness of these communication channels in addressing bullying behaviour.

1.5. THE THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Workplace bullying is an increasingly common and serious phenomenon that has damaging consequences for both individuals and organisation alike. As such, it is important to understand the dynamics that contribute to bullying in the workplace. The muted group theory is a useful framework for doing so.

The muted group theory, also known as the "muted voice" theory, was developed by Shirley and Edwin Ardener in the late 1960s as a way to understand how language and communication can be shaped and impacted by social identities and power dynamics (Wall & Gannon-Leary, 1999). According to the theory, certain groups, or "muted groups," may be disadvantaged or marginalized in a society and may have their voices, experiences, and perspectives muted or suppressed by dominant groups and the dominant cultural norms and values of the society (Ardener, 1975b; Ardener, 1978).

The muted group theory was originally intended to explain the lack of anthropological data available on women and to encourage researchers to pay more attention to the communication and modes of expression of overlooked groups (. Ardener, 1975b). The thesis of the argument is that there are "dominant modes of expression in any society which have been generated by the dominant structure within it," and that in order to be heard and understood, individuals in muted groups may be expected to suppress their own modes of expression in favour of the dominant mode (Ardener, 1975: 20). The theory suggests that in situations where gender is a consideration, women are often the muted group.

The muted group theory has been a cornerstone of feminist research, particularly in its application to understanding gender and other social identities in communication contexts, including workplaces and interpersonal relationships. This theory has shed light on how gender, race, and other identities can shape individuals' experiences and interactions. For example, Ardener (1975) explored how these identities influence perceptions and treatment in communication contexts. Additionally, Wall & Gannon-Leary (1999) discussed how

marginalized groups may use alternative communication strategies, like humour or art, to express themselves and challenge dominant cultural norms. Funderburke (2012) referenced Maccoby's idea that males belong to a dominant culture, while females are part of a subordinate culture, as outlined in the muted group theory. This concept has been further illuminated on a study on miscommunication between men and women that found that differences in interactive styles, learned from spending significant time in semi-separate environments, often underlie these miscommunication challenges (Maccoby, 2000).

The muted group theory can be applied to this study's research questions to help understand how power dynamics and social inequalities may shape and impact the experience of workplace bullying in a local municipality setting. The theory contributes to the argument of the dissertation by providing a critical lens for understanding how power dynamics and social inequalities may shape and impact the experience of workplace bullying in a local municipality setting and how internal communication structures and channels may support or address this issue. The theory suggests that certain groups, or "muted groups," may be disadvantaged or marginalized in a society and may have their voices, experiences, and perspectives muted or suppressed by dominant groups and the dominant cultural norms and values of the society (Ardener, 1975a; Ardener, 1975). By applying this theory, the research aims to shed light on the ways in which marginalized groups may be silenced or dismissed in the workplace and how communication structures and channels may be used to address these power imbalances and promote a more inclusive and equitable workplace culture. It may also shed light on how the effectiveness of these communication channels may be impacted by power dynamics and social inequalities.

The strength of the muted group theory with regards to internal communication in addressing workplace bullying is that it provides a framework for understanding the power dynamics that are at play. By recognizing the groups with less social power, it is possible to create an environment in which all individuals are respected and given the attention they

deserve. This can help to combat bullying, as those with less social power can be given the resources and support they need to be heard (Hodgins, MacCurtain & Mannix-McNamara, 2020). However, it is important to account for the limitations of this theoretical lens. The muted group theory does not account for the complexities of workplace dynamics. It is important to acknowledge that there are multiple sources of power, and that these can interact in different ways in different contexts. To address this potential limitation, this study also considered perspectives from the stakeholder theory.

The stakeholder theory is an incredibly useful tool that can be employed when considering workplace bullying. This theory posits that organisations are made up of a variety of stakeholders with distinct interests that need to be taken into consideration (Dmytriyev, Freeman & Horisch., 2021). In other words, the stakeholder theory emphasizes the importance of considering the interests of all stakeholders, regardless of their social position, in order to create a workplace atmosphere that is equitable and respectful of all individuals. This is particularly important in the case of workplace bullying, as it is crucial to recognize the interests of all parties in order to ensure that everyone is treated with respect and dignity. Through taking into account the interests of all stakeholders, organisations can create a safe and supportive environment for employees, thus helping to prevent workplace bullying and showing that everyone is valued and respected (Bundy, 2019; Crilly, 2019).

The stakeholder theory has several strengths that make it an effective tool for addressing workplace bullying. Firstly, it emphasizes the importance of considering the interests of all stakeholders, regardless of their social position or status. This ensures that everyone's interests are taken into consideration and that decisions are made in an equitable manner, hence the focus on both employees and their managers at the municipality. Secondly, it emphasizes the need to create an atmosphere of respect and dignity for all individuals in the workplace. This is an important factor when it comes to creating an effective internal communication system that is capable of addressing workplace bullying. The study therefore

focused on the effects of experiences of workplace bullying on employee outcomes such as their perceptions of the quality of the work environment, their perception of power dynamics and the use of open communication to address workplace bullying.

Overall, the muted group and stakeholder theories are particularly useful for gaining an understanding of the power dynamics and respect that exist within a workplace. By recognizing how these theories inform the dynamics of an organisation, employers and employees can work together to create a workplace environment that is both positive and equitable for all individuals. It is important to consider the interests of all stakeholders within the organisation, and to ensure that everyone is treated with respect and dignity. Furthermore, by promoting a culture of civility and understanding, organisation can ensure that all members are valued and that bullying behaviour is prevented. With an understanding of the implications of muted group and stakeholder theories, employers and employees can strive to create an environment in which all individuals are respected and valued, and in which bullying is not tolerated.

Glaso, Vlie Holmdal and Einarsen (2011) conclude that this theory indicates what happens between work events and subsequent employee attitudes and behaviour by focusing on the role of personality and emotion. The AET argues that employees' attitudes towards the environment follow a cognitive as well as an affective route.

1.6. OVERVIEW OF THE ORGANISATION OF DISSERTATION

In Chapter 2, the literature review on workplace bullying will be discussed in detail. This chapter will provide an overview of the current research on the topic of workplace bullying, including its definition, causes, effects, and possible interventions. The review will also

overview the various forms of workplace bullying, conflicts in organisations, the acceptance of workplace bullying, and other factors related to workplace bullying in the public sector.

Chapter 3 will focus on the literature review of internal communication in the workplace. This chapter will explore the various perspectives on internal communication such as strategic communication, communication channels, communication models used in communication research, and their relevance to addressing workplace bullying. The chapter emphasises the role of internal communication in creating a positive and inclusive workplace culture, and the importance of effective communication between employees and managers in addressing workplace bullying.

In Chapter 4, the research methodology used in this study will be discussed in detail. This chapter will include an explanation of the research design, data collection methods, and data analysis techniques used in the study. The chapter will also discuss the sample selection process, and the limitations and potential biases of the study.

Chapter 5 will present the results of the study. This chapter will include a description of the findings from the data analysis and will provide an overview of the key findings related to workplace bullying and internal communication in the local government context.

In Chapter 6, the findings from the study will be discussed and interpreted. This chapter will provide a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of workplace bullying in the public sector and the role of internal communication in addressing it. The chapter will also discuss the limitations of the study and explore the implications of the findings for future research and practice. Finally, the conclusion and recommendations for future research and practice will be presented, summarising the key findings and providing recommendations for addressing workplace bullying in the public sector, with a focus on internal communication.

CHAPTER 2

BULLYING IN THE WORKPLACE

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of this chapter is to discuss literature related to workplace bullying. Workplace bullying is a prevalent and destructive phenomenon that has been widely studied in recent years. This literature review will examine the current state of knowledge on the topic, with a focus on the prevalence, causes, and consequences of bullying in the workplace. Additionally, the literature review will explore the factors associated with creating a positive and respectful work environment where bullying may not thrive. These factors include leadership, organisational culture, and interventions to address workplace bullying including individual, organisational, and legal interventions. The purpose of this literature review is to provide a comprehensive overview of the literature on workplace bullying, and to identify gaps in the current research in order to inform future studies.

2.2. DEFINITIONS AND DEFINING CHARACTERISTICS OF WORKPLACE BULLYING.

For a long time, there has been confusion and disagreement over the use of terms and definitions related to workplace bullying. Some have even expressed doubt over the possibility of a universally accepted definition. This is because of the complexity of the phenomenon emanating from different cultural influences coupled with differences in interpretations by different stakeholders such as scholars, practitioners in the private sector, unions, and legal practitioners. For instance, Saunders, Huynh, and Goodman-Delahunty (2007) point out that definitions of workplace bullying used by professionals, labour unions, and private companies are usually more general and focus on the type of behaviour and the consequences for the target of the behaviour. Examples of such definitions

define workplace bullying as “repeated, unreasonable behaviour directed toward an employee or group of employees that creates a risk to health and safety” (Saunders et al. 2007: 22). By comparison, legal definitions tend to be more detailed, emphasizing the harmful conduct, the regularity and intensity of the behaviour, and the consequences and damage inflicted on the victims.

Calitz (2022) argues that there is no universal definition of bullying and different terms are used for the phenomenon in different countries. Moreover, the terms harassment and bullying are often used interchangeably, or in other instances to denote different types of conduct. Calitz gave reference to several countries’ definitions of bullying stating that In Brazil, the term "moral harassment" is used. In Europe, authors prefer the term bullying, in the United States of America (USA) both mobbing and bullying are used while in Sweden it is commonly referred to as victimisation.

In the scholarly literature, definitions also tend to be similarly detailed, albeit with disparities in the precise language used. Despite some differences of opinion, scholars tend to agree on the main factors that characterize this phenomenon. The consensus emanates from the universally recognised essential definitional components which researchers have empirically demonstrated to have the most support. Saunders et al. (2007) summarises the core definitional elements as the perpetration of negative behaviour, the negative effect on the target, the persistence of the unwanted negative behaviour, power imbalance between the perpetrator and the target, and self-labelling by the target. A definition that encompasses all these definitional elements that has been adopted in many studies was offered by Matthiesen and Einarsen who defined workplace bullying as “a situation in which one or more persons systematically and over a long period of time perceive themselves to be on the receiving end of negative treatment on the part of one or more persons, in a situation in which the person(s) exposed to the treatment has difficulty in defending themselves against this treatment” (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2010: 50).

Nevertheless, debate amongst researchers and practitioners continues to be a source of contention as to whether each of the components of bullying constitute a critical and essential behavioural component that differentiates bullying from other forms of negative interpersonal behaviour in the workplace. This is because workplace bullying is a complex phenomenon that presents in a variety of forms and contexts and the components of bullying may not always be present in every incident. Branch et al. (2013) notes that the two elements of workplace bullying that have the most empirical support are the perpetration of negative behaviour and the negative effect on the target. Other researchers have proposed that other components, such as persistence, power imbalance, and self-labelling, are also important elements to consider when discussing the concept of bullying. This school of thought considers that while these elements have been demonstrated in research, the empirical evidence is not as conclusive as that provided for the previously mentioned two components (Rayner & Keashly, 2006). Therefore, while these components are certainly worth considering when examining the issue of bullying, others have labelled them as non-essential.

2.2.1. Negative behaviour

One key characteristic of workplace bullying is the presence of negative verbal or non-verbal behaviour. According to accounts from victims, this can take many forms, from subtle actions such as dirty looks or snide comments, to more overt acts of aggression like physical threats or objects being thrown. Studies have shown that employees often experience subtle forms of bullying more frequently than overt forms (Saunders et al., 2007). A study that looked at bullying in various industries found that many employees reported experiencing more subtle forms of verbal aggression, such as being belittled or having others gossip about them behind their back (Baron & Neuman, 1998). This type of behaviour is often less dramatic than more overt forms of bullying but can still have a negative impact on the employee. The findings suggest that these subtle forms of verbal aggression were more prevalent than overt forms of bullying. Regardless of whether the behaviour is subtle or blatant, the key factor is that the

target perceives it as negative and inappropriate (Ciby & Raya, 2015). This is a fundamental aspect of any definition of workplace bullying.

2.2.2. Negative effects of bullying

Researchers and practitioners generally agree that negative treatment, or significant, inappropriate, negative or unreasonable behaviours, is a key component of bullying (Ciby & Raya, 2015; Saunders et al., 2007). However, it is difficult to reach a consensus on which specific behaviours can be considered bullying, as context, intensity, and patterns of behaviour all play a role, as well as the individual's perception of the behaviour. The inducement of harm is an essential and necessary component in all definitions of bullying (Saunders et al., 2007). The target of the behaviour must experience some form of psychological, emotional or physical harm as a result of the behaviour (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2010). Studies have shown that bullying can have a wide range of negative effects on employees, including stress, anxiety, depression, and decreased job satisfaction (Hassan et al., 2015; Jeong & Jang, 2019; Lever et al., 2019). The experience of being bullied can be life-altering and traumatic, and the subtle forms of bullying can have the same negative effects as the more overt forms, especially if they are frequent (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2010). Therefore, the criterion that the target must experience harm is central in any definition of workplace bullying.

2.2.3. Self-labelling of the bullying experience

There is ongoing debate among researchers and practitioners about whether targets of workplace bullying must recognize and acknowledge that they have been bullied for the experience to be considered bullying. Some argue that an individual's subjective perception of the behaviour as negative and harmful is the most important factor in determining if an experience constitutes bullying because it is the target's experience that is most relevant (Einarsen et al., 2009). It is the target who is affected by the behaviour, and it is their perception of the behaviour that determines the impact it has on them.

This debate is further complicated by the varying degrees of subtlety in bullying behaviours, ranging from overt threats to more covert forms of mistreatment. Felblinger (2008) highlights this wide range of behaviours that fall under the umbrella of workplace bullying, making it challenging to substantiate instances of bullying. Therefore, a comprehensive understanding is necessary to identify and manage workplace bullying effectively, particularly in environments like South Africa where the phenomenon may not be openly acknowledged or demonstrated, as noted by Pietersen (2007). Additionally, targets of workplace bullying may exhibit similar traits to those who perpetrate bullying, and employees may be dishonest about their personality traits, such as anger or neuroticism, further complicating efforts to understand and address workplace bullying (Hershcovis & Reich, 2013).

On the other hand, objective validation or verification by third parties provides varied perspectives of individuals who have been involved in different roles in recent bullying incidents, whether as victims, bullies, or bystanders (Cowie et al., 2002). It can also be a way to control for bias in the self-report of the target, and to ensure higher reliability by pooling and comparing multiple perspectives from many individuals (Cowie et al., 2002).

Additionally, objective validation or verification by third parties or observers can provide an independent assessment of the behaviour and the context in which it occurs, which can help to identify patterns or trends in the behaviour that may not be immediately apparent to the target. In some cases, the target may be reluctant to acknowledge or label their experiences as bullying, and objective validation or verification can help to identify bullying even in cases where the target is not aware of it or does not acknowledge it (Cowie et al., 2002; Saunders et al., 2007).

Studies have found that many employees who are subjected to frequent and persistent bullying may not label themselves as bullied, which may be due to the negative connotations of the label, the subtlety of the behaviour, or a mismatch between the definition provided and

the individual's personal experience (Hoprekstad, Hetland, & Einarsen, 2021; Way, Jimmieson, Bordia & Hepworth, 2013). Additionally, perceived severity of the bullying interaction can also influence whether the conduct is deemed sufficiently severe to warrant the "bullied" label.

While objective validation or verification by third parties or observers is important in determining if an experience constitutes bullying, it is important to keep in mind that this approach may not be completely neutral and may be influenced by factors such as economic dependency or power dynamics (Einarsen, Hoel & Notelaers, 2009). It is also important to consider the target's subjective experience, as it is their perception of the behaviour that determines the impact it has on them and leads to negative mental and physical health outcomes. A multi-modal approach is therefore recommended (Cowie et al., 2002, 47–49) to consider both subjective and objective experiences when defining and understanding workplace bullying for a comprehensive understanding of the issue.

2.2.4. Persistence of workplace bullying

Many definitions of workplace bullying include the criterion that the behaviour must occur more than once and must be experienced by a target on a frequent and persistent basis to qualify as bullying. This persistent conduct is seen as an important defining characteristic of workplace bullying, as it separates the severe and negative impact of bullying from less severe consequences associated with one-off conflicts or incivilities (Einarsen et al., 2009). However, there is ongoing debate among researchers about how frequently and persistently behaviours must occur to be considered bullying, as it differs from other forms of negative and inappropriate but less harmful workplace interactions (Gupta et al., 2020a; Saunders et al., 2007).

In an associated ongoing debate, researchers and practitioners argue about the regularity and interval of negative behaviours that must occur for an experience to be deemed

as workplace bullying. Some studies define bullying as behaviours that occur at least monthly, while others define it as behaviours that occur at least weekly (Ciby & Raya, 2015; Cowie et al., 2002; Einarsen et al., 2009). Additionally, studies have used different timeframes, such as the past 6 or 12 months, or open-ended, unconstrained periods (Einarsen et al., 2009). The varying definitions of workplace bullying and the inclusion or exclusion of different definitional components such as frequency and persistence have made it difficult to compare studies and draw firm conclusions. Therefore, there is a need for a standardised definition that includes an appropriate standard of the frequency and persistence of behaviour before it qualifies as bullying. This would enable more consistent and comparable research and a better understanding of the impact and prevalence of workplace bullying.

2.2.5. Power imbalance

Powerlessness experienced by the target is a frequently cited component in workplace bullying definitions. Workplace bullying is a complex issue that is often characterized by a sense of powerlessness experienced by the target (Saunders et al., 2007). Some researchers argue that in order for an individual to feel bullied, they must perceive that they are unable to defend themselves against the perpetrator, cope with the behaviour perpetrated against them, or change the situation (de Cieri et al., 2019). This sense of vulnerability and lack of control serves to increase the perceived severity of the experience, thereby increasing the likelihood that the target will define the negative workplace experience as bullying. Additionally, the frequency and duration of negative acts can drain the target's coping resources, further reinforcing their feelings of powerlessness (Saunders et al., 2007).

An imbalance of power between the parties involved is considered to be a defining feature of bullying. This imbalance of power can be formal, such as when the perpetrator holds a higher position in the organisational hierarchy, or informal, such as when the perpetrator has more knowledge, experience, or access to social support (Pradhan et al., 2022). The

imbalance of power limits the target's ability to retaliate or defend themselves and contributes to their sense of vulnerability.

A majority of studies have found that bullies are mostly reported to be supervisors, to a lesser degree co-workers, and to an even smaller degree, subordinates (Busby et al., 2022; de Cieri et al., 2019; Pradhan et al., 2022). One possible reason for this is that targets feel more defenceless and vulnerable if bullied by someone who possesses more formal power than themselves (de Cieri et al., 2019). Moreover, where the bully possesses less formal power than the target, other forms of power, such as knowledge and experience, or social affiliations within the workplace, may contribute to the target's sense of vulnerability and inability to defend oneself, increasing the likelihood that the experience will be labelled and reported as bullying (de Cieri et al., 2019).

Smit (2014) mentioned that fascinating power scenarios—often referred to as the “power phenomenon”—can arise at all organisational levels. It is important to comprehend the power component that bullying research frequently mentions, particularly in relation to horizontal and upward bullying. Although the legal recognition of power imbalances makes it simple to imagine a boss abusing a subordinate, power is not limited to positions of formal appointment or hierarchy (Smit, 2014)

Branch and associates (2013) as well as Einarsen and colleagues (2009) think that access to knowledge that one's peers might not have or to unofficial sources of power, like information sharing, acquired expertise, or authority bestowed through social networks, can be sources of one's own personal power. Bullies can access the official or informal sources of power that exist in the workplace, as bullying is defined as a dynamic interaction of social and organisational interactions rather than interpersonal conflict. This can result in both upward and horizontal bullying.

Although there is consensus that power imbalance is a key characteristic of bullying, debate continues as to whether a power imbalance is an essential defining feature of workplace bullying. To date, only formal power has been considered when evaluating whether a power imbalance exists between the bully and the target. Only considering formal power when evaluating power imbalances in bullying experiences limits our understanding of the complex dynamics at play. It is crucial for researchers and practitioners to consider both formal and informal sources of power when examining and addressing workplace bullying.

2.3. PREVALENCE OF WORKPLACE BULLYING

Workplace bullying is an unfortunately prevalent issue in many different regions and contexts, and studies have found that it occurs in workplaces across industries and sectors, with rates varying depending on the unique context (Ciby & Raya, 2015; Goh et al., 2022). Calitz (2022) argues that despite the prevalence of this issue, it is still a problem that is often overlooked and underreported. It is important to study workplace bullying on a global level in order to gain a better understanding of the prevalence, impact, and potential solutions. The varying prevalence rates reported in different contexts indicate that this is an issue that needs to be addressed and better understood. On the gender front, studies have revealed that women are more likely to be bullied than men (Cunniff and Mostert, 2012; Motsei, 2015). By studying the prevalence of workplace bullying on a global level, we can gain a more comprehensive understanding of this issue and develop solutions to address it in a more effective and efficient manner. This literature review assessed the prevalence of bullying on a global level in order to better understand the impact of bullying in the workplace. The discussion explores the prevalence of workplace bullying in different regions and discusses potential reasons for the variations in reported rates.

In terms of geographic regions, research has indicated that bullying is more common in some countries, particularly in Asia and South America. Malaysia is one of the Asian

countries where the prevalence of workplace bullying has been extensively researched, and studies from the country commonly report high prevalence rates. For example, a Malaysian study on bullying in public sector organisations reported a prevalence rate of 83.2% in the selected public service agency in 2015 (Omar et al., 2015). The study further classified the victims into three clusters of employees experiencing occasional bullying (43.7%), regular bullying (21.8%), and severe bullying (34.5%). Similarly high incidences were reported in other studies from the country, with another study reporting a prevalence rate of 66.7% in shared human resource service centres of multinational corporations in Malaysia (Samanthar et al., 2022). An earlier study had also reported high incidence rates (above 80% each) for the three different forms of bullying that were investigated which were assigning to the victim tasks with unreasonable deadlines (82.3%), spreading gossip about the victim (82.2%), and withholding information that affected the victim's performance (81.4%) (al Bir et al., 2014). Other studies however, reported lower prevalence rates. For example, a recent study on the factors associated with the prevalence of workplace bullying at a Malaysian public university hospital, reporting a prevalence rate of 11.2% in the sample (Awai et al., 2021). In the same fashion, Samsudin (2021) study on workplace bullying among Malaysian junior doctors a prevalence of 13% (Samsudin, Isahak, Rampal, Ismail, & Zakaria 2021).

Similarly, high prevalence rates are common in studies from other Asian, African and South American countries. For example, a Pakistani study reported that 78% of employees reported experiences of workplace bullying in a sample of Pakistani employees (Anjum & Shoukat, 2013). In a separate study, annual and lifetime prevalence of workplace bullying among Chinese employees in Hong Kong were 39.1% and 58.9%, respectively (Ng & Chan, 2021), and another study on bullying against Ghanaian Certified Registered Anaesthetists reported rates ranging from 56.5% to 74.2% (Ati & Abubakari, 2022).

From a local perspective, Kalamdien (2015) compared a public sector organisation (SANDF) and a private sector organisation in the Western Cape, finding that 30-50% of

respondents had been bullied in the workplace. Cunniff & Mostert (2012) reported that 31.1% of their sample of South African employees had experienced workplace bullying. From the South African mining sector, Visagie (2012) reported that 27% of mine workers had experienced workplace bullying. Jacobs & Wet (2015) studied the perspectives of perpetrators of workplace bullying among educators in South African schools, finding that 90.8% of the respondents indicated that they had experienced some form of workplace bullying.

The high prevalence rates reported in these studies contrast those reported in Western countries. In a cross-sectional study of workplace bullying in the Finnish public sector, Venetoklis and Kettunen (2016) reported that 20.3% of employees surveyed across twelve Finnish ministries experienced work task–related bullying multiple times per month (Venetoklis & Kettunen, 2016), whereas el Ghaziri et al. (2020) cross-sectional survey reported a prevalence of 10% among unionized public sector workforce from the United States. Using data from a random sample of 206 municipalities, a German study reported that only 2.9% of employees experienced severe workplace bullying, although the overall bullying prevalence was estimated as 17.1% (Lange et al., 2019). Similar findings for workplace bullying prevalence in municipalities and local governments were reported in (Varhama & Björkqvist, 2004), who reported a prevalence rate of 16% from a survey of Finnish municipal workers.

The regional differences in prevalence rates reported in studies are confirmed by studies that attempted to establish the pooled mean prevalence of bullying by region. For example, a recent study estimated the pooled mean prevalence of bullying by region, with Asia having the highest prevalence at 47.1%, followed by Australia (36.1%), Europe (18.4%), and North America (24.5%) (Lever et al., 2019). The study suggested a global pooled mean prevalence rate of 26.3% in the healthcare industry, indicating that nearly one in three employees will experience bullying at some point in their career (Lever et al., 2019). These numbers indicate that workplace bullying is clearly a problem that is faced all over the world, and that the different regions have different levels of impact. Furthermore, the prevalence of

workplace bullying can be hard to measure accurately due to underreporting and a lack of consistent definitions and methodologies across studies (Goh et al., 2022). Under-reporting could be due to some countries or cultures trivializing or paying little attention to the problem, while different definitions and measurements of bullying, and inconsistent research methods could also contribute to vast variations in the reported figures (Goh et al., 2022).

It is important to note that different studies may use different methodologies to measure workplace bullying prevalence. For example, the Omar et al. (2015) study used the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ) (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997), which is based on the behavioural experience method of assessment to measure workplace bullying (Nielsen et al., 2010). The survey consists of 29 questions, focusing on two types of workplace bullying: person-related (16) and work-related (13), and inquires about how often respondents were exposed to negative behaviour in the preceding 6 months. On the other hand, the Samsudin et al. (2021) study on workplace bullying among Malaysian junior doctors used the Negative Acts Questionnaire-Revised (NAQ-R) (Einarsen *et al.*, 2009). While the NAQ-R and the original NAQ-Are may provide similar results in some contexts (Einarsen et al., 2009; Notelaers et al., 2007), the two instruments are limited in that they are generally tailored to different cultural contexts. The NAQ-Are was specifically tailored for the Anglo-American cultural context to overcome the limitations of the original NAQ's validity which was limited within the Scandinavian cultural context (Einarsen *et al.*, 2009).

Other original scales include the Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terror (LIPT) (Leymann, 1996) and the WAR-Q instrument (Keashly & Neuman, 2004), both of which have been criticised for being excessively long. Other studies used instruments that are derived from, expanded, or shortened versions of other original scales. This allows studies to use instruments that may be better suited to a specific population or research question. For example, a shortened version of a scale may be more appropriate for use with a specific subgroup, such as employees in specific sectors or industries such as health, education or

local government, whereas derived or expanded versions of a scale are likely to have similar properties to the original scale, making it easier to compare results across studies (Einarsen *et al.*, 2009).

There are also several disadvantages and limitations to using scales or research instruments that are derived from, expanded, or shortened versions of other original scales. One disadvantage is that the new scale may not have been validated or tested as thoroughly as the original scale. Additionally, the new scale may not perform as well in measuring the construct of interest, which might lead to inaccurate or imprecise results. Another limitation is that the new scale may not be generalizable to other populations or samples. For example, if a scale is shortened for use with a specific subgroup, it may not work as well with other populations. Additionally, derived or expanded versions of scales may not be fully compatible with the original scale, which can create confusion when trying to compare results across studies.

2.4. WORKPLACE BULLYING AND THE LAW

Regulating workplace bullying is a complex task globally as different countries have varying interpretations of what constitutes as bullying in the workplace. Currently, there is no worldwide agreement on the definition of workplace bullying and no common jurisdiction with similar laws in place to protect employees from such behaviour (Akella, 2020a). The majority of countries lack specific laws addressing the issue of workplace bullying, making it difficult to establish consistent regulations and protections for employees on a global scale. For instance, countries like Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom addresses bullying primarily on the occupational health and safety continuum, while countries like Sweden and France have passed specific legislation to address the issue. This review evaluated the legal laws that can be applied to workplace bullying in various countries, with a focus on countries that have strong regulations in place such as Sweden, as well as those that are making progress,

like the United Kingdom and the United States. Additionally, it highlighted South Africa as an example of a country in the African continent that has been identified as taking steps to address workplace bullying.

2.4.1. Brief overview of the Legal Framework for Workplace Bullying in Sweden

In 1994, Sweden passed the Victimization at Work Act, making it the first country in the world to have a law against bullying and mental violence in the workplace (Akella, 2020c, 210–212). The law is enforced by the National Board of Occupational Safety and Health. This law aimed to protect employees from behaviours such as bullying and mental violence in the workplace. Under the provisions of this law, the employer is responsible for preventing victimization at work, designing work to reduce employee stress and mental illnesses, developing written organisational policies on victimization at work, and communicating and educating employees about these policies and processes (Akella, 2020c, 210–212). Additionally, the Discrimination Act 2008 prohibits discrimination in the workplace on the grounds of gender, transgender identity, ethnic origin, religious or other beliefs, disability, sexual orientation, or age (Cobb, 2017, 126–131). The employer is required to investigate all discrimination complaints filed by employees and to implement preventive measures to prevent future harassment. The employer is also required to develop policies to prevent sexual harassment and to conduct a pay equity analysis every three years.

The Swedish legal and legislative response to workplace bullying has received international acclaim as it is often considered exemplary in contributing to raising awareness about the workplace bullying problem, converting attention and political will into legislative action. However, there have been critiques against the Swedish regulation against bullying, particularly amongst Swedish researchers, which have pointed out the shortcomings of the laws; in that they frequently fail those it was meant to protect (Hoel & Einarsen, 2009). Hoel and Einarsen discuss the challenge of creating laws to manage human interaction and

possibility to regulate 'intangible' matters such as bullying. Despite this apparent difficulty, they admit that legally acknowledging workplace victimization and bullying is necessary and beneficial as it brings legitimacy to the issues of workplace bullying (Hoel & Einarsen, 2009).

2.4.2. Brief overview of the Legal Framework for Workplace Bullying in The United Kingdom

In the United Kingdom, bullying is considered a form of harassment under the Protection from Harassment Act (PHA) 1997. Although this approach has not been entirely successful because PHA was not specifically designed to address workplace bullying, PHA and other laws such as The Health and Safety at Work Act 1974, Enterprise and Regulatory Act 2013, the Equality Act 2010, and the Employment Equality Regulations Act 2006 have been effectively used to provide relief to bullied victims (Akella, 2020b, 210–212). For example, the Enterprise and Regulatory Reform (ERR) Act 2013 requires employers to take reasonable steps to protect their employees from harassment by third parties, such as customers or clients, and can be held liable if they fail to do so. Additionally, there is a push by labour unions to make into law provisions which aim to impose civil liability on employers who engage in offensive, abusive, malicious, and insulting behaviour towards employees, specifically addressing workplace bullying, sexual, and racial harassment (Cobb, 2017, 134–139).

2.4.3. Brief overview of the Legal Framework for Workplace Bullying in The United States

The United States tends to lag behind other nations where workers have been provided protections through various legislative measures. The American legal system hasn't done much to stop workplace bullying or to uphold workers' dignity at work (Akella, 2020d). Employers' abusive behaviour has been justified by the notion that healthy rivalry and high performance standards lead to workplace bullying. Nonetheless, fundamental human rights

necessitate legislation that vehemently opposes mistreatment and abuse of employees. Legal laws can protect workers from the negative effects of workplace bullying, which is often rationalized by corporations as managers exercising their managerial prerogative to effectively handle people.

The American laws in this regard are mostly informed by Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 which prohibits employers from discriminating against their workers on the grounds of their race, colour, religion, sex, or national origin (Akella, 2020d). It prohibits employers from using these characteristics to make decisions about hiring, firing, or promoting an individual and prohibits employers from categorizing employees or job candidates on the basis of colour, race, religion, or gender. In 1991, Congress further broadened and strengthened the Civil Rights Act (CRA) of 1964 by adding an amendment pertaining to equitable relief. Equitable relief refers to losses faced by the victim in the form of attorney's fees, court expenses, lost benefits, and loss of weekly or monthly pay checks (Akella, 2020d). Judges may also grant punitive and compensatory damages under the CRA of 1991 if it is demonstrated in court that the plaintiff suffered unlawful discrimination. Financial compensation for the victim's grief, suffering, and psychological harm is known as compensatory damages.

Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which forbids employers from discriminating against their employees on the basis of their race, colour, religion, sex, or national origin, serves as the primary source of inspiration for American regulations in this area (Akella, 2020d). Employers are not allowed to classify workers or job seekers based on their gender, ethnicity, colour, or religion. Nor are they allowed to use these traits as a factor in hiring, terminating, or promoting someone. The Civil Rights Act (CRA) of 1964 was improved and expanded further in 1991 when Congress added an equitable redress amendment to it. Equitable redress is the term used to describe the losses incurred by the victim, such as missed benefits, legal bills, court costs, and weekly or monthly paychecks. Despite being

introduced in 30 states and two territories, none have passed laws on workplace bullying (Akella, 2020d). Despite this, there is growing support for implementing workplace bullying laws in the country, but some in the corporate sector continue to protest against the implementation of the bill, arguing that it has been legitimized as a control tactic. It remains to be seen if a comprehensive legislation on workplace bullying will be passed in the United States in the near future.

2.4.4. Brief overview of the legal framework for workplace bullying in South Africa

In contrast, the South African legal framework does not officially recognize bullying as a cause of action (Smit, 2021). While the Constitution guarantees the right to dignity and fair labour practices, and other laws like the Employment Equity Act prohibits discrimination, bullying is not specifically mentioned. For example, the Protection from Harassment Act 2011 can be used to address some aspects of workplace bullying, it does not provide specific protection against it. The law provides protection to individuals from unwanted behaviour causing harm, including sexual harassment. This law was originally intended to curb stalking and other forms of harassment with sexual undertones and allows victims to obtain a protection order against the perpetrator (Akella, 2020b). The Employment Equity Amendment Act and Employment Equity Regulations 2014 are comparable in that they forbid discrimination on the grounds of race, religion, gender, sexual orientation, national or ethnic origin, sex, disability, and colour. Additionally, they mandate that employers adopt affirmative action plans and guarantee equal compensation for comparable work. The Promotion of Equality and Prevention of Unfair Discrimination Amendment Act 2000 is an additional legal framework that forbids discriminatory treatment of workers based on race, gender, or disability. It also outlaws hate speech and harassment, fosters equality, and ends workplace discrimination (Akella, 2020b).

Smit (2021) notes with concern that the courts have been hesitant to acknowledge it as a cause of action, requiring victims to prove that the alleged bullying impaired their dignity or affected their rights in a serious manner. Smit, however, argues that one potential avenue for addressing bullying in South Africa is through occupational health and safety laws. Employers have a legal duty to take reasonable care of their employees, including both physical and psychological well-being. There is a variety of legislation in place that regulates employee safety and provides compensation in the event of an injury or accident. However, while these laws have the overall objective of protecting employees, they each serve different purposes. Employers are required under Section 5(1) of the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA) to create and maintain a workplace free from hazards to workers' health. Although bullying isn't expressly covered by health and safety laws, While bullying has not specifically been addressed in health and safety legislation, Smit (2021) contends that OHSA victims shouldn't be prevented from filing claims. Every person has the constitutional right to a safe and healthy workplace, and the OHSA was created to protect these rights. Thus, it is possible that a victim of bullying might invoke the provisions of the OHSA; however, this idea has not been put to the test in South Africa.

2.5. THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN CONFLICTS IN ORGANISATIONS AND WORKPLACE BULLYING

Conflict is considered an inevitable part of life, especially in organisation where individuals and teams with diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and goals come together to achieve a common goal (Meyer & Surujlal, 2013, p. 101). As organisations become more open and diverse, conflicts can become more complex and difficult to manage (Roy & Perrin, 2021). Effective management of conflicts is crucial for organisation to function smoothly and achieve their goals.

Studies conducted by Pondy (1992) indicate that conflict is rife in organisation, and as a result, conflict analysis and conflict management are crucial. Due to globalization trends and worldwide corporate re-structuring procedures, there is an increasing possibility of conflict in internationally operating organisation. Meanwhile, management scientists have become increasingly interested in analyzing organisational and managerial conflict scenarios because of ongoing, global scientific study on conflict and its management (Coleman, 2003). (Francis, 2003; Pondy, 1992; Rahim, 2001; 2002). In the organisational framework of Southern Africa, this has hardly ever happened (Mayer, 2008a).

The inability to address conflicts can lead to poor communication, low productivity, and high turnover rates (Davidson, 2021). On the other hand, understanding and addressing conflicts effectively can lead to stronger relationships, effective negotiation, and problem-solving (Davidson, 2021). This review explores the complexity of conflicts in organisation, the causes of conflicts, and strategies for addressing them effectively in the context of workplace bullying.

As organisation become more open and diverse, conflicts can become more complex and difficult to manage. This is because individuals and teams with diverse backgrounds, perspectives, and goals come together in organisation, increasing the likelihood of conflicting opinions and interests. Odetunde (2013) states that conflicts can be caused by personality clashes, combatant egos, poor leadership, dissatisfaction caused by management style, insufficient line management, poor communication, weak performance and lack of openness within an organisation. Additionally, in a diverse organisation where individuals come from different cultural backgrounds, there may be a lack of understanding and appreciation of different cultural views and communication styles, leading to misunderstandings and conflicts. Research has also shown that in an open organisation where decision-making is decentralized, different teams may have competing interests, leading to conflicts over

resources. The lack of understanding and effective management of conflicts can have a significant negative impact on organisation.

Ineffective conflict management can lead to poor communication, low productivity, and high turnover rates. Moreover, conflicts in the workplace can often lead to bullying if not addressed effectively (Khan, 2017). For example, a personality clash between two employees can escalate into bullying if the conflict is not resolved. Similarly, a team's competition for resources can lead to bullying if the conflict is not addressed effectively. By understanding and addressing conflicts early on, organisation can prevent them from escalating into bullying situations by implementing interventions that address the causes of conflicts. For example, if an organisation identifies a personality clash between two employees, they can address the conflict by providing mediation or coaching for the employees involved. Similarly, if a team is competing for resources, the organisation can address the conflict by providing additional resources or redistributing resources.

Addressing conflicts effectively is crucial for organisation to function smoothly and achieve their goals. Lutgen-Sandvik and Tracy (2012) argued that most of the strategies used to respond to bullying fail to change the situation and can even worsen the target's dilemma, therefore it is essential for issues to be addressed using multiple perspectives. Effective strategies for addressing conflicts include open communication, active listening, and understanding different perspectives. This is consistent with the proposition of Paterson (2000) who stated that for organisation to overcome communication challenges, employees and employers must be aware of the messages conveyed by their body languages and the tone of their voice. For example, it is advisable to speak calmly, maintain eye contact, smile if appropriate and maintain an open and relaxed posture (Paterson, 2000).

In order to implement these strategies in real-world settings, organisation can provide training and resources for employees to develop effective communication and conflict

resolution skills. Additionally, organisation can create a culture that encourages open communication and diverse perspectives and provides a safe space for conflicts to be addressed. Leadership plays a key role in shaping organisational culture and setting the tone for how conflicts and bullying are addressed within the organisation. Effective leaders create a culture that values open communication, inclusivity, and respect for diversity. They set the example for how conflicts should be handled and provide support and resources for employees to address conflicts effectively. Additionally, they are able to identify and address conflicts and bullying early on, before they escalate into larger problems.

The role of leadership in shaping the organisational culture, on the other hand, cannot be understated. This is because organisational culture encompasses the shared values, beliefs, and practices that shape the behaviour of employees within an organisation. A positive and inclusive culture values open communication, inclusivity, and respect for diversity. It encourages employees to address conflicts and bullying and provides support and resources for employees to do so effectively. Additionally, it fosters a sense of community and belonging among employees, which can help to prevent conflicts and bullying. This is especially important when considering the impacts of conflicts on groups vulnerable to workplace bullying.

Employees from marginalized backgrounds, such as those from racial or ethnic minorities, women, or individuals with disabilities, may face additional barriers in the workplace. Conflicts in the workplace can exacerbate these barriers and make it even harder for these employees to succeed. For example, a conflict between an employee from a marginalized background and a manager may lead to discrimination and bias. Similarly, conflicts between employees with disabilities and their colleagues may lead to ignorance and lack of understanding about their abilities. Organisation can adopt a perspective that prioritizes the needs and perspectives of these groups in order to prevent and address conflicts and bullying. This includes creating a culture that values and respects diversity, providing training

and resources to employees on how to work effectively with colleagues from diverse backgrounds, and taking targeted action to address conflicts and bullying that disproportionately affect vulnerable groups.

Additionally, organisations can ensure that their policies and procedures take into account the specific needs and perspectives of vulnerable groups. This entails developing organisational policies and procedures to address conflicts and preventing bullying. In order to effectively address workplace bullying, it is important to develop a better understanding of the different forms of bullying that exist in the workplace.

2.6. TYPES OF WORKPLACE BULLYING

In the literature on workplace bullying, several taxonomies have been proposed to classify the different types of bullying that can occur in the workplace. Tehrani (2004) identifies three types of workplace bullying: predatory bullying, dispute-related bullying, and escalating bullying. Predatory bullying occurs when the target of the bullying has done nothing to deserve the negative behaviour, such as showing off power to others or attacking individuals who belong to out-groups. In contrast, dispute-related bullying develops out of a conflict that has been allowed to get out of hand, leading individuals to become angry, fearful, suspicious, and resentful. Escalating bullying is a result of the way people attribute reasons for their own and others' behaviours and actions. As a perceived negative action occurs, a player will respond according to their attribution of the intention behind the act.

Glaser, Matthiesen, Nielsen and Einarsen (2007) studied predatory bullying at a certain organisation and found that victims were bullied because of their personalities such as having emotional instabilities and not agreeing with some of the things that bullies may suggest. Some of the victims belonged to different cultures that varied from those of the bullies. They suggested that organisations must focus more on the organisational factors, than personality factors when preventing workplace bullying.

Zapf (1999) also proposes a classification system for workplace bullying, identifying five categories: work-related bullying, social isolation, personal attacks, verbal threats, and spreading rumours. Work-related bullying can include situations where an employee is given an excessive workload, unrealistic deadlines, or is deliberately excluded from important meetings or projects. For example, an employee may be given a project with a tight deadline and then criticized for not completing it on time, even though the deadline was unrealistic to begin with. Social isolation, on the other hand, involves employees being excluded from daily communication and daily events. This can include being left out of group conversations, not being included in team-building activities, or not being invited to important meetings. For example, an employee may be purposely excluded from team meetings and then criticized for not being aware of what is happening within the company.

According to Zapf (1999), personal attacks involve ridicule and insulting remarks. This can take the form of name-calling, belittling, or mocking. For example, an employee may be called "stupid" or "incompetent" by a co-worker or supervisor, and this can have a negative impact on their self-esteem and job performance. Verbal threats which include criticism, telling-off, and humiliating others in front of colleagues, can take the form of yelling or screaming or making threats to fire or demote someone. A common occurrence in the literature is when a supervisor may publicly berate an employee in front of their colleagues, making them feel embarrassed and humiliated. Finally, spreading rumours is another form of bullying and it involves an attack on the social reputation of others. This can take the form of spreading false or malicious rumours about an individual, which can damage their reputation and relationships with co-workers. For example, an employee may spread rumours that another employee has been stealing company property, which is not true.

Comparing these different types of bullying, it can be seen that work-related bullying and social isolation are more focused on the work environment and tasks, whereas personal attacks, verbal threats, and spreading rumours are more focused on the individual and their

reputation. Work-related bullying and social isolation can have a more direct impact on an employee's job performance and can make it difficult for them to complete their work, whereas personal attacks, verbal threats, and spreading rumours can have a more profound impact on an employee's mental and emotional well-being.

To support the above, Alharty, Mutairi, Alsahli, Alshehri, Almatrafi, Mahah, Alswailem, Philip and Qureshi (2017) studied the prevalence of workplace violence, either verbal or physical among emergency medical services workers in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. They discovered that verbal abuse (61%) was the most reported type of violence with most of the perpetrators being the relatives of the patients followed by other patients themselves. The younger patients reported a higher volume of violence than the older patients. Workers also experienced violence from both patients and their relatives. The types of physical abuse included pushing, punching, strangling and stabbing while the verbal attacks included insults, cursing, and threats to harm or kill the victims. The victims were scared to report the violence because they felt it was useless and unimportant.

Liefooghe and Mackenzie Davey (2001) mention that there is interpersonal bullying and organisational bullying. Bullying is an interpersonal phenomenon that involves two parties and is displayed by one or more individual directed towards another individual, who then reacts to this bullying. Organisational bullying involves a situation where organisational practices are perceived to be oppressive to employees, if these practices are frequently employed, they may make employees feel victimised. Bronsky (1976) state that excessive work pressure is also seen as a form of bullying in the workplace.

Matthiesen and Einarsen (2010) propose several subtypes of workplace bullying, including scapegoating, sexual harassment, humour-oriented bullying, work-related stalking, judicial derelicts, and whistleblowing. Each of these subtypes has unique characteristics and impacts on individuals and the workplace. For instance, scapegoating is a type of work

harassment where a group points fingers at a target who is less powerful and uses them as a scapegoat for their own problems or mistakes. For example, a group of co-workers may blame a new employee for their department's poor performance, even though the new employee had nothing to do with it.

Sexual harassment involves exposure to repeated and unwanted sexual attention by a co-worker who may be more powerful or older. This type of harassment can be directed towards a younger female co-worker and can include unwanted advances, comments, or physical touch. For example, Sagwan and Thakre (2018) studied the prevalence of sexual harassment in the public and private sectors in India, concluding that women experienced sexual harassment in the workplace more than men. This pattern of results is consistent with the findings of Vettori and Nicolaidis (2016) who studied sexual harassment in the hospitality industry, confirming that the victims of sexual harassment in the industry are mostly women. Similarly, Robb (2014) interviewed female employees of a five-star hotel on the Gold Coast, and found out that out of the 46 women who were interviewed, at least 44 had gone through mistreatment and sexual harassment from a male guest or co-worker who would make jokes and assault them.

Sexual harassment is also closely associated with work-related stalking. Stalking is a course of conduct which one individual imposes upon another, leading to the victim fearing for their life. This can include behaviours such as sending gifts or letters, making calls, or waiting outside someone's home or workplace. Stalking can have serious psychological and emotional impacts on victims, leading to feelings of fear, anxiety, and depression. Stalking and sexual harassment are usually addressed using similar regulations. For example, in South Africa, the Protection from Harassment Act of 2011 provides essential protection to individuals from behaviour that causes harm, such as stalking and sexual harassment. This legislative measure is an important step towards protecting individuals from these experiences, which can often be alarming and distressing. This law allows victims to obtain a protection order

against the perpetrator, which can be used as a form of legal recourse should the unwanted behaviour persist. The Act provides a vital source of help for those who are subject to such behaviour, as it enables them to take action against the perpetrator and to seek justice.

Humour-oriented bullying involves teasing, ridiculing or interpersonal humour between colleagues. When it occurs between colleagues who are part of an in-group, it may create job satisfaction or work commitment, but if it is targeted towards a person who is an out-group, they may perceive it as bullying. Mills and Keller (2018) studied how humour is used at a health facility, its acceptance by patients and staff, and its association with reports of workplace bullying. The results showed that people who appreciate humour report fewer acts of bullying; whereas those who do not appreciate humour, reported high acts of bullying. These results suggest that there is a complex relationship between perceptions of humour, and the subjective and objective perceptions of bullying in the workplace. It is important to enhance our understanding of this complex phenomenon in order to help create a safe and supportive environment where workers feel comfortable discussing any issues that they are facing and establish a clear process for dealing with any bullying incidents. Lastly, it would inform guidelines on how to provide training to staff on identifying humour-oriented bullying, how to respond, and how to create a workplace culture that is free from bullying.

Judicial derelicts take place when an individual perceives themselves to be bullied, but not by a specific person or group. The victim feels bullied by the system, such as bureaucrats and the decisions they make or the legal system itself. For example, an employee may feel that they are being bullied by the HR department or management because of the way they have been treated during an investigation.

Whistleblowing is an act that occurs when a worker witnesses wrongdoing at the workplace from a fellow colleague or a superior. The whistle-blower then tries to stop the wrong acts by telling someone who is then expected to stop the wrongdoing. They may voice

their concerns internally (to a superior) or externally (legal authorities or media). The whistle-blower becomes victimised and bullied by others within the organisation as a form of retaliation or silencing. Park, Bjorkelo and Blenkinsopp (2018) studied whistle-blowers' experience of workplace bullying by their superiors or colleagues. They found out that whistle-blowers were frequently bullied by their superiors and colleagues which led them to become more stressed and traumatised. Appropriate organisational measures to support and protect whistle-blowers and implementing elaborate and decisive policies to swiftly address the matters reported by whistle-blowers are considered crucial in reducing the frequency and impact of whistle-blowing related bullying (Park et. al, 2018). He suggested that governments must develop strategies to protect the whistle-blowers from being bullied in the workplace.

2.7. CAUSES AND ACCEPTANCE OF WORKPLACE BULLYING

One study indicated that organisational factors are the main drivers of workplace bullying (Magee, Gordon, Caputi, Oades, Reis and Robinson, 2014). To effectively solve these conflicts, it is important to first know the factors that trigger these conflicts (Deep, Salleh & Othman, 2016). Einarsen, Matthiesen and Mikkelsen (2000) argue that a single occurrence of bullying behaviours may become normal and common in the everyday working life, these encounters may be more or less harmful. When these encounters are continually aimed at the victim, they trigger the victim to become defenceless against these actions or against the bully, which leads to increased workplace bullying. Manning (2014) argued that poor communication decreases productivity and is a leading cause of conflict between employees in the workplace. Zapf, Einarsen & Varcia (2003) stated that there is a higher rate of workplace bullying in the public sector as compared to the private sector.

The diversity of employees can also cause conflicts in the workplace, if employees fail to accept each other's differences, there will be a mockery of character and experiences of other employees (Ameen, 2013). Deep, Salleh and Othman (2016) stated that an unhealthy

workplace competition can lead to conflict among employees, discourages teamwork and leads to isolation within an organisation. On the other hand, Montes, Muniz, Montero-Simo and Araque-Padilla (2013) mentioned that age, gender, and seniority increase the chances of bullying or conflict in the workplace, and it is mostly women and junior employees who experience workplace bullying.

Yamada (2000) states that supervisors who emotionally abuse subordinates are one of the most common and severe issues that employees face in the modern workforce. According to Rayner and Hoel (1999), forms of bullying can include threats to professional status, personal standing, isolation, overwork, and destabilization. Power distance is a key factor that contributes to workplace bullying, as it allows for an unequal distribution of power, giving those in higher positions more authority and control over their subordinates. Bullies tend to target individuals with less power as they are less able to defend themselves, which creates a vicious cycle that further reinforces their power and control. Research has shown that managers are often the ones responsible for workplace bullying (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Hoel *et al.*, 1999; Zapf *et al.*, 1996). This is supported by the fact that they have the power to implement rules and regulations, as well as the authority to punish and reprimand those who do not comply with their demands. These factors contribute to a hostile and intimidating workplace environment, which can lead to further bullying and abuse. In addition, a lack of appropriate training can leave employees feeling unsupported and unable to stand up to bullies. This can create a situation in which workplace bullying is allowed to continue unchecked.

According to Yamada (2008: 105), "Employees pay a heavy price for workplace bullying." Workplace bullying normally occurs in stressful work environments with a weak leadership, and lack of clear policies on workplace bullying and has poor communication. Furthermore, Magee Gordon, Caputi, Oades, Reis and Robinson (2014) found that victims of workplace bullying experience a huge rate of depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress

disorder and physical health problems like cardiovascular diseases, migraines, and obesity. The consequences occur to younger males, or employees who have less social support at work and work in stressful environments. Magee et.al (2014) argues that it is not only the victims of bullying are at risk but also the perpetrators may experience mental and physical health problems, career disruptions and poor job performances.

Rousseau (2014) states that it is not only individual differences that cause workplace bullying, in fact, the organisational environment provides many factors that contributes to workplace bullying. Rousseau (2014) discovered that when employees lack trust in their managers, the perceptions of bullying increase and work overload can cause employees to perceive themselves as targets of bullying. Van Heugten (2010) identified the following factors that lead to workplace bullying and conflicts among employees: The bully may be envying the target's position in the company, competition among employees, poor implementation of organisational policies, Lack of proper training, poor leadership, poor managerial and communication skills.

The Guide for Preventing and Responding to Workplace Bullying (2016: 11) highlights several factors that can increase the chances of workplace bullying or conflicts within an organisation. These factors include availability of work stressors such as high job demands, inadequate job control, organisational change, role conflict and ambiguity, job insecurity, and unreasonable workplace behaviours. These stressors can create a climate where bullying is more likely to occur, particularly if leaders are not actively working to address them.

Organisational culture and leadership play a crucial role in shaping the acceptance of workplace bullying. A positive organisational culture, characterized by open communication, mutual respect, and a strong ethical foundation, can help to prevent and address bullying behaviour. On the other hand, a negative culture, marked by a lack of transparency and accountability, can foster an environment where bullying is allowed to flourish. Organisational

culture is also inherently tied to organisational leadership. Certain leadership styles, such as autocratic leadership, can contribute to the acceptance of bullying behaviour. Autocratic leaders, who exclude workers from decision-making processes and engage in abusive behaviours such as offensive language and hateful criticism, can create an environment where bullying is allowed to flourish.

It is also important to note that systems of work, such as lack of resources and training, inappropriate work schedules, and unreasonable performance measures can contribute to the acceptance of bullying. Poor workplace relationships, including poor communication, increased isolation, and lower levels of support, can also contribute to the prevalence of bullying. The role of leadership and organisational culture in this regard cannot be understated. Actively working to address the factors that increase the chances of workplace bullying or conflicts within an organisation, such as work stressors, leadership styles, systems of work, poor workplace relationships, and workforce characteristics can help create a culture and environment where bullying is not accepted and where all employees feel safe and respected.

Furthermore, certain groups of workers, such as young workers, apprentices, and workers in minority groups, may be at a higher risk of experiencing workplace bullying. Research has shown that individuals who hold less power in the workplace, such as women, people of colour, or lower-ranking employees, are more likely to be targeted by bullies. These power imbalances can create an environment where bullying is not only more likely to occur, but also more likely to be accepted by others in the organisation. Moreover, when the bully is a person in a position of power, such as a supervisor or manager, it can be difficult for the target to report the bullying or seek help, as they may fear retaliation or not being believed. Examining the impact of power imbalances on the acceptance of workplace bullying is an important perspective to take when looking at this issue. This highlights the importance of organisations to take into account the specific needs and vulnerabilities of these groups when developing policies and interventions to address bullying.

2.8. Consequences of workplace bullying

Although countering workplace bullying has been a part of employee communication strategies, Lutgen-Sandvik and Tracy (2012) argued that strategies that are used to respond to bullying are not effective in changing the situation and can even worsen it, therefore it is essential to address issues using multiple perspectives. Furthermore, Magee et.al (2014) state that organisations also suffer the consequences of workplace bullying. These consequences include lower job satisfaction, turnover rates, reputational harm, lost productivity, and a high rate of absenteeism. Workplace bullying can harm the organisation's reputation if it is not managed timely and in an appropriate manner. Additionally, it is estimated that in the United States, companies spend amounts in excess of billions on workplace bullying related healthcare costs and claims (Richardson *et al.*, 2016).

Deep et.al (2016) discovered the following consequences of workplace conflicts: bad performances, large number of resignation and firing of employees, lack of trust and respect among employees, jealousy, dissatisfaction, and unhealthy professional environments. Jones and Hayes (2018) state that women are more likely to experience stress and psychological problems than men.

The Guide for Preventing and Responding to Workplace Bullying (2016) lists the following impacts of workplace bullying on individuals: distress, anxiety, panic attacks, sleep disturbances, physical illness such as headaches and fatigue, low self-esteem and self-confidence, feelings of isolation, weakening relationships with colleagues and friends, loss of work performance and concentration, depression and thoughts of suicide. Furthermore, the business is also affected by workplace bullying in the following ways: low morale and motivation, increased absenteeism, high staff turnover, low productivity, high counselling and support related costs, increased workers' compensation claims, reputational damage of the business. Park and Ono (2016) state that workplace bullying affects the work engagement

among employees since the mistreatment and abusive behaviours lead to low work engagements.

2.9. LEADERSHIP AND WORKPLACE BULLYING

Leadership plays a significant role in workplace bullying dynamics. Rayner, Hoel, and Cooper (2002) note that managers are often perceived as perpetrators of bullying. Additionally, Hoel, Cooper, and Faragher (2001) highlight that bullying can occur across all hierarchical levels of an organization, including among managers and workers. In South Africa, where there is a tendency for managers and leaders to heavily rely on positional authority, supervisors, regardless of gender or race, often emerge as the primary perpetrators of bullying (Mangolothi & Mnguni, 2022). However, the landscape is complex, as radical politics in South Africa can challenge managers' positional power, leading to instances where management themselves experience bullying from subordinates and labor unions (Makhubela, 2020).

The impact of leadership styles on workplace bullying is significant. Frost (2004) argues that workers can experience emotions such as pain, suffering, and despair due to interactions with insensitive and autocratic bosses or leaders. Various leadership styles have been linked to workplace bullying behaviours, including transformational, transactional, authoritarian, and ethical leadership (Ertureten, Cemalcilar, Aycan, 2012). The interplay between leadership approaches and the prevalence of bullying in organizational settings warrants a deeper interrogation, starting with transformational leadership.

The interplay between leadership approaches and the prevalence of bullying in organizational settings warrants a deeper interrogation, starting with transformational leadership. Research indicates that transformational leadership is associated with positive organizational outcomes, including increased job satisfaction. Transformational leadership has been identified as a key factor in influencing workplace bullying behaviours and outcomes. Research has shown that transformational leadership styles are negatively associated with

exposure to bullying behaviour among subordinates (Nielsen, 2012). This type of leadership empowers employees, encourages personal development, and inspires them to work towards the organization's goals, fostering a positive work environment (Ahmad et al., 2021). Transformational leaders set high performance standards and promote positive change within the organization, which can create a culture that is resistant to bullying (Appelbaum et al., 2012).

Transactional leadership, characterized by its focus on exchanges and rewards for meeting organizational goals, plays a significant role in workplace dynamics, particularly concerning the occurrence of bullying. This leadership style, as described by Raziq et al. (2018), operates through a contingent reward system where leaders actively manage performance, correcting deviations when necessary. This approach emphasizes task-oriented goals and the implementation of rules, aiming to maintain organizational stability (Athukorala et al., 2016).

The relationship between transactional leadership and workplace bullying is nuanced. On one hand, transactional leaders are keen on maintaining performance standards and rewarding compliance (Novera et al., 2022). However, this focus on rewards and punishments can create a culture where bullying behaviours are tolerated or even encouraged as a means of achieving performance targets. Rodrigues & Ferreira (2015) highlight this aspect by noting the emphasis on rewarding appropriate behaviours and punishing counterproductive ones, which could inadvertently lead to a toxic work environment.

Despite the potential for negative outcomes, transactional leadership has been linked to positive effects on employee performance and organizational commitment (Winingsih, 2022). Some studies even suggest that transactional leadership is more effective than transformational leadership in achieving organizational goals and enhancing commitment (Ahmad et al., 2015). However, conflicting findings, such as the negative association with

organizational commitment reported by Toh et al. (2019), indicate a need for deeper exploration into the dynamics of transactional leadership and its impact on workplace behaviour. While transactional leadership can enhance performance and commitment, its potential to inadvertently foster bullying behaviours highlights the importance of a nuanced understanding of leadership styles and their implications for organizational behaviour in the context of workplace bullying.

The negative impact of authoritarian leadership on workplace bullying, as evidenced by its emphasis on control and dominance, contrasts with the nuanced effects of transactional leadership, highlighting the varying implications of different leadership styles on organizational behaviour. Authoritarian leadership, characterized by its emphasis on control, dominance, and unilateral decision-making, has been consistently linked to workplace bullying. Studies have shown that authoritarian leaders tend to exhibit behaviours where they believe they know best and insist on having things done their way (Cao et al., 2022). This leadership style can create a toxic work environment where bullying thrives, as employees may feel powerless and vulnerable to abuse (Feijó et al., 2019).

Research has also indicated a positive relationship between authoritarian leadership and workplace aggression and deviant behaviour (Dussault & Frenette, 2015). Authoritarian leaders may suppress subordinates, forcing them to accept their opinions, and may even encourage negative behaviours, contributing to a hostile work environment conducive to bullying (Tsuno & Norito, 2015). Additionally, authoritarian and laissez-faire leadership styles have been found to be positively associated with workplace bullying (Nielsen, 2012). The study by Holmgren et al. (2022) highlights the need to understand the nuances impacting the efficacy of authoritarian leadership, as this style can significantly impact organizational dynamics. The detrimental effects of authoritarian leadership on workplace bullying underscore the importance for organizations to address leadership behaviours that may contribute to hostile work environments (Faeq et al., 2022).

In addition, Appelbaum, Semerijan and Mohan (2012) mention another type of leadership style, called ethical leadership. This leadership style involves leading in a manner that respects the rights, needs and dignity of other people and promotes team interest over self-serving interests. Ertureten et.al (2012) concluded that transformational and transactional leadership styles decrease the chances of workplace bullying or conflicts to occur, whereas the authoritarian increases it. In addition, the participative leadership style has been considered a positive leadership style whereby the leader values employee involvement and participation. This leadership style is associated with the creation of more conducive work environments and helps reduce factors that facilitate workplace bullying (Frischer and Larsson (2000).

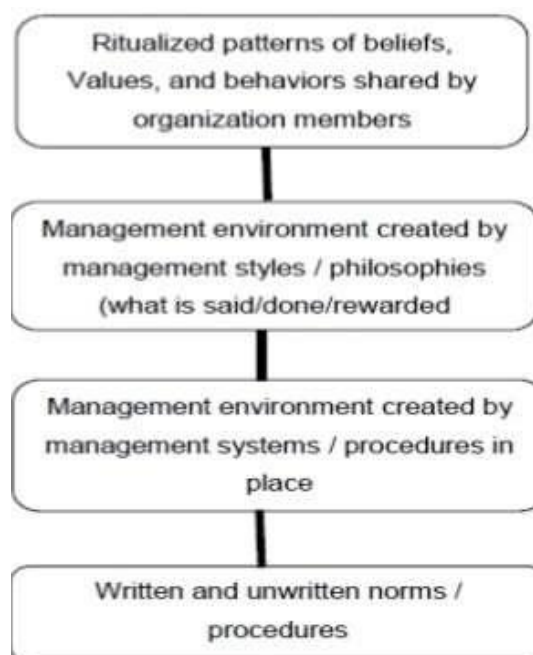
Furthermore, Frisher et.al (2000) explain the laissez-faire leadership style where leaders are physically present but fail to carry out their daily duties which leaves the subordinates feeling neglected and ignored. Such managers are described as uninspiring and passive, showing lack of interest in the affairs of the employees. Zaumane (2019) found that managers that do not accommodate employees in issues regarding the organisational values and objectives were associated with poor organisational performance and employee outcomes. Such leaders are also associated with the practice of Laissez-faire and authoritarian or autocratic leadership styles (Zaumane, 2019). Einarsen, Hoel and Notelaers (2009) state that the autocratic leadership style strongly increases bullying in the workplace and can also lead to low employee performance. It is easy to see how this leadership style contributes to workplace bullying since the leaders fail to intervene when there is conflict and could even turn a blind eye to these conflicts.

It is important to highlight the significant influence of leadership theories on leadership styles, particularly concerning workplace bullying and communication practices within organizations. The contrasting effects of transactional and authoritarian leadership on workplace bullying, and the lack of consensus on the efficacy of transformational leadership

in workplace bullying contexts underscore the importance of understanding and implementing appropriate leadership styles to foster a positive work environment. Moreover, the impact of leadership styles extends to communication practices within organizations, especially regarding workplace bullying. Effective communication about bullying requires leaders to adopt a transparent and supportive approach, which may be challenging under authoritarian leadership but more feasible under transformational or participative leadership styles. Overall, these insights underscore the need for organizations to critically evaluate their leadership styles and communication practices to mitigate the risk of workplace bullying and foster a positive and inclusive work environment.

2.10. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE AND WORKPLACE BULLYING

Organisational culture emerges from shared beliefs, attitudes, values and norms of behaviour among employees within an organisation (Davies, Nutley & Mannion (2000). According to Sherriton and Stem (1996), there are four aspects that explain organisational culture:



Source: Sherriton and Stem (1996)

The definition of organisational culture includes the aspects of management environments which are vital in the development of an organisational culture. The management styles and systems prescribe how internal communication is applied and the levels at which employees are engaged. Procedures and systems within an organisation can be written or unwritten norms that guide how employees must conduct themselves within an organisation.

Grunig, Grunig and Dozier (2002) differentiate between authoritarian culture and participative culture. An authoritarian culture involves the making of decisions by the head of the organisation together with a few senior managers. In this type of culture, employees believe that only the senior managers have interest in them, not as whole people. As a result, employees may fear their seniors within the organisation. Organisations practicing authoritarian culture are also resistant and not open to new ideas from outside the organisation. In contrast, a participative culture is characterized by teamwork. Departments work together towards achieving similar organisational goals and objectives. In this type of culture, employees believe that they are valued by their managers, not just as employees but as whole people. Organisations practicing this culture are open to ideas from inside and outside of the organisation. A further a comparison between authoritarian and participative culture is presented in Table 0-1 below.

Table 0-1: Comparison between authoritarian and participative culture. Adapted from (Grunig, Grunig & Dozier, 2002)

Authoritarian culture	Participative culture
Supports specialisation (individual responsibility)	Encourages collective responsibility
Caters for individual decision making by high-level managers	Promotes collective decision-making arrived at through engagement
Lacks genuine concern for workers	Upholds holistic concern for employees
Adopts an authoritarian style of management	Adopts a participative style of management
Operates as a closed system that is resistant to ideas and changes emanating from the external environment	Operates as an open system that is influenced by both internal and external environments
Takes a dominant approach to relationships with its publics	Takes a cooperative and engagement approach to its relationship with its publics

In addition, Butt, Naaranoja and Savolainen (2016: 1580) discuss the different types of cultures that can be found within organisations: developmental or innovation culture, group culture, hierarchical project culture, rational culture, and dysfunctional culture. The developmental or innovation culture is one in which organisations focus on developing tasks and finding new solutions to challenges. In contrast, group culture is characterized by organisational decisions being reached at a lower level. Hierarchical project cultures, on the other hand, have communication routines that are constrained or limited to certain individuals. Organisations that have a rational culture focus on achieving goals as fast and as efficiently as possible. Lastly, dysfunctional culture is characterized by internal competition being harder

than external competition, a high level of bureaucracy, and a lack of value placed on innovation.

In their thesis, Moiseev and Koroleva (2012) studied the power of innovative culture within organisations, they chose a global company called Flexlink in Sweden. The company is based on the following statements: they thrive for change, they create customer value, they build and operate networks, they value honesty, openness, teamwork and trust. The company stated that their customers are an integral part of the life of the company, they always create values based on the customers' views and they believe that change brings new opportunities and makes profit for the organisation. Employees at Flexlink can voice out their opinions, provide feedback with leaders inspiring and supporting their employees and they believe that every employee can make a huge impact on the company.

The relationship between communication and culture is reciprocal, that is, culture influences communication and communication influences culture. A major dimension of cultural variability called individualism-collectivism is identified, in individualistic cultures, individuality is more important than group memberships within the workplace. Collectivistic cultures value group memberships more than individuality, they value the goals, needs and views of the group rather than of individuals (Gudykunst, 2004).

2.11. STRATEGIES TO RESOLVE CONFLICTS/ WORKPLACE BULLYING

Anyonje (2004) provided the following strategies that can be used in resolving conflict: arbitration (a third party is asked to solve the conflict and decides on behalf of the parties); conciliation (fighting parties come together and talk about how to resolve the conflict); negotiation (parties sit down to discuss a conflict in order to reach an agreement); mediation (involving a third party in the conflict resolution with parties having control over the outcome); problem-solving workshops (conflict parties meet with facilitators without confronting each other); media interventions (using newspapers, television and radio to disseminate information

about conflict issues) and advocacy (using democracy to resolve war). Katz, Lawyer and Sweedler (2011:2) mentioned seven steps of solving problems in an organisation: “(1) Define the problem, (2) Identify solutions to the problem, (3) Evaluate alternative solutions, (4) Decide on one option or solution, (5) Develop an action plan, (6) Develop a process for evaluating the results and (7) Talk about the experience of problem solving).”

Based on Bradshaw and Figiel (2012) the following strategies must be used to prevent and respond to conflicts in the workplace: introduce policies that prohibit workplace bullying and inform employees annually about policies. Implement procedures and practices to respond to workplace bullying, these include taking all reports seriously, communicating directly with employees and reminding them of the zero-tolerance to workplace bullying and lastly develop a system to track data on all workplace bullying reports. It is vital for employers to work on improving the workplace environment by minimising stress, communicating clear roles to avoid role confusion, and rewarding good work. In her study, Tehrani (2014) mentioned that when conflict is well handled in an organisation, it can yield interesting and creative solutions. Lavan and Martin (2008) stated that employers must create a zero-tolerance anti-bullying policy, respond immediately to bullying reports, take complaints seriously and investigate them thoroughly, hold awareness campaigns and encourage open-door policies.

Furthermore, Bradshaw and Figiel (2012) stated that employers must require professional development for employees on an annual basis in order to educate them on how to identify signs and symptoms of workplace bullying, how to report bullying and what is the prevalence, risk factors and the consequences of workplace bullying. In their study, Bradshaw and Figiel (2012) recommended strategies for employees to respond to workplace bullying. They advised that victims must know their rights and be familiar with the policies and laws on harassment and bullying. Employees must work on improving their workplace environment by treating each other with respect and fostering healthy methods of coping with stress. It is

always important for employees to educate themselves and others around them about the process of reporting workplace bullying and how to recognise if you are being bullied at work. According to Thurlow and Jaworski (2010), English is the most used language in the world and is dominantly used in the workplace to negotiate and solve conflicts.

Vartia and Leka (2011) state that organisations use a wide range of interventions to deal with conflicts in the workplace, these include primary interventions, secondary interventions, and tertiary interventions. Primary interventions involve policy implementation and training of staff, secondary interventions include using informal attempts to resolve conflicts, grievance processes and target support while tertiary interventions include counselling and psychotherapy.

Kadiak (2014) states that organisations that emphasise healthy relationships between managers and employees, emphasise collective problem solving and allow people to voice their concerns, are usually the ones that benefit in cost and productivity because they operate in a healthy environment. Einarsen *et.al* (2009) states that negative experiences and relationships among employees lead to workplace bullying and conflicts, therefore, employees have to be offered social support and the organisational environment must be one that discourages autocratic leaderships and negative employees' behaviour such as absenteeism, turnover and low performance.

Based on Zapf and Gross (2001), targets of workplace bullying can confront the bully, ask help from a supervisor, and request a sick leave when they feel threatened by the bullies. Van Heugten (2010) further mentions that the targets of bullying resort to alcohol and drug abuse to cope with the bullying that occurs in the workplace. Lelosa (2019) studied conflicts management at StatsSA (Statistics South Africa) and found that the respondents who are employees at the company, mentioned that their management avoid problems instead of

addressing them. Therefore, it is important for the senior managers to get training on how to actively engage in matters affecting employees.

The Guide for Preventing Workplace Bullying (2016: 19) provides guidelines on how to respond to reports of workplace bullying. It encompasses principles that should be applied when dealing with cases or reports of workplace bullying. Some of the key principles are discussed next. It is important to act promptly and treat all matters seriously, while maintaining confidentiality and ensuring procedural fairness. Emphasis is made on the importance of clear communication with relevant parties of the progress and timeline for response, as well as taking reports seriously and assessing them on merits and facts, respectfully listening to the person reporting and treating their reports as credible and reliable. The guide also advises to explain the opportunity for decisions to be reviewed and to ensure impartiality throughout the process. Additionally, it is important to inform parties involved of support available and allow a support person to be present, protect all parties from victimization, and inform parties of the process, timeline, and expected outcomes. Lastly, it is important to explain the reasons for actions taken and recording the crucial aspects of the reports such as the issue reported, actions taken, and further actions required, as well as any conversations, meetings, and interviews, and agreed outcomes.

2.12. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented literature reviewed in relation to workplace bullying. The literature on workplace bullying has also revealed that workplace bullying has a negative impact on both the organisation and the individuals. This section summarises the key themes that emerged in the review, emphasising several key findings relevant to the literature on workplace bullying in the public sector, specifically in a local municipality setting.

Firstly, despite ongoing debate on the definitional components of workplace bullying, a consensus seems to agree on five core definitional elements which include the perpetration

of negative behaviour, the negative effect on the target, the persistence of the unwanted negative behaviour, power imbalance between the perpetrator and the target, and self-labelling by the target. "A situation in which one or more persons systematically and over a long period of time perceive themselves to be on the receiving end of negative treatment on the part of one or more persons, in a situation in which the person(s) exposed to the treatment has difficulty in defending themselves against this treatment" (Matthiesen and Einarsen 2007: 735) is the definition that was adopted by the study, and it includes all of these definitional elements.

Secondly, the literature review has shown that workplace bullying is a prevalent problem globally, but with varying prevalence rates reported in different regions. These variations may be due to cultural differences in interpretation of bullying across regions, with some cultures possibly trivialising the issue. Additionally, methodological issues associated with inconsistencies in the measurement of bullying are also responsible for variations in the reported prevalence rates. The methodological debate is largely centred on the frequency of measurement and timeframes in measuring prevalence, as well as on the use of objective versus subjective measures of bullying. Regarding the debate on objective versus subjective measures, the review highlighted the significance of both, and emphasised the importance of considering the contextual needs of a study's objective and population when making the choice to use either objective or subjective measures.

Thirdly, the review has shown that the laws of many countries hardly address workplace bullying directly. Instead, aspects of bullying are commonly addressed on the health and safety and anti-discrimination continuum. Regarding South African law in particular, the country does not have any specific laws addressing workplace bullying, but Smit (2021) proposes an interesting prospect that has not yet been tested, of the potential for appropriate legal recourse and redress for victims of workplace bullying under the provisions of the constitution and the Occupational Health and Safety Act (OHSA).

The literature also highlighted the importance of power dynamics in the workplace environment and their impact on the reporting and addressing of workplace bullying. This includes the role of leadership and the development of organisational policies and procedures, as well as cultivating a respectful and positive organisational culture in preventing and addressing workplace bullying.

In terms of the significant literature gaps, the review noted that research on bullying in the public sector is dominated by work focusing on specific industries such as health and education. The research literature on this issue in the context of local governments and municipalities settings is lacking. This highlights the importance of this study in terms of enhancing our understanding of the specific factors most relevant in reducing prevalence and impact of workplace bullying specifically in local government or municipality settings. In light of this, it is therefore important to understand the perspectives and experiences of public sector employees and management personnel in relation to the use of internal communication to address workplace bullying in a local municipality setting. Furthermore, it is crucial to investigate the internal communication structures in a local municipality setting to support or address workplace bullying and evaluate the effectiveness of the communication channels used to address this problem. The next chapter focuses on the literature on internal communication. In the discussion, internal communication is viewed in the perspective of its role in addressing workplace bullying given organisational contexts such as the power dynamics involved with the different stakeholders associated with local governments and municipalities.

CHAPTER 3

THE SCHOLARSHIP ON INTERNAL COMMUNICATION IN THE WORKPLACE

3.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter examined the current state of knowledge on the concept of workplace bullying and highlighted the key organisational and environmental factors associated with bullying in the workplace. This chapter reviews the literature on the concept of internal communication in relation to the purpose of the study - to examine the experiences of public sector employees and management personnel with workplace bullying in a local municipality setting, and to explore the power dynamics of the workplace environment that affect the reporting and addressing of bullying behaviours.

These objectives include analysing how managers and employees use internal communication to resolve conflict; finding out what communication strategies they use to address workplace bullying or conflicts and to determine the perceptions that employees have about workplace bullying and conflict. The review overviews how internal communication plays a role in combating workplace bullying within the public sector. This literature review chapter will focus on literature that covers the intersection between workplace bullying and the following aspects of organisational communication: internal communication; contributing organisational factors such as models of communication; leadership styles and organisational culture. This chapter also outlines the theoretical framework of the study, which comprises of the two theories: muted group theory and stakeholder theory.

3.2. IMPORTANCE OF COMMUNICATION STRATEGY

Effective communication is critical for the success of any organisation, and it is essential to have a communication strategy in place (Njomo, 2013). A communication strategy involves identifying appropriate communication objectives and developing a brand awareness and brand attitude strategy (Cook, Lally, McCathy & Mischier, 2007). Strategic communication, as defined by (Hillan et al, 2007), is the use of communication to achieve an organisation's mission. This definition is consistent with the definition used in (Sison, 2013). Hillan et al (2007) stated that the term 'strategic' is associated with power and decision-making, and it also implies a one-sided, top-down form of communication. However, this term is often associated with a modernist view of management, which emphasizes upper management's goals for the organisation and aims to transfer information from supervisors to subordinates to gain compliance and power within the organisation (Holtzhausen, 2002). Strategic communication is related to internal communication as it involves communicating with staff about ways to achieve organisational goals, leading to successful internal communication. A strong internal communication strategy is crucial for organisations to achieve effective communication with their employees and overcome challenges they face (Njomo, 2013).

A strong communication strategy links with internal communication to achieve a cohesive organisational culture. According to Stegariou and Talal (2014), corporate communication strategy guides organisational functions, and decisions made by senior management regarding the management of, and communication with stakeholders shape the processes that foster a cohesive organisational culture. ComRes research (2017) recommends aligning the function with the strategic goal of the organisation while being sensitive to cultural and practical barriers. It is important to build employee advocacy and trust

in the organisation's reputation (Steyn, 2003). Furthermore, internal communication helps organisations create brand advocates and align employees with the organisation's purpose and strategy (Agrawal, Schaefer & Funke 2018: 165).

Communication strategy plays an important role in addressing workplace bullying. As mentioned earlier, behavioural science-based interventions for addressing workplace bullying often involve communication strategies as a key component.

DEFINING INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Internal communication is a vital aspect of organisational functioning and has been the subject of much research and discussion in the literature. The concept of internal communication has been defined in various ways by different authors, with each definition highlighting different aspects of the phenomenon. For instance, Frank and Brownell (1989) define internal communication as a process that is intended to design or re-design organisations, implement designs, and co-ordinate day-to-day activities. This definition emphasizes the role of internal communication in organisational design and implementation, and the coordination of day-to-day activities. Internal communication is defined as "all formal and informal communication taking place internally at all levels of an organisation" by Kalla (2005: 40), while Erlier (2003: 76) defines it as the "flow of information and exchange of ideas and viewpoints between managers and employees, as well as communication between individuals and groups on different levels and in different units or parts of the organisation."

These definitions differ in scope and focus, and a similar pattern is observed in the literature on internal communication. The diversity of definitions used by researchers in the field over the years is summarised in Table 0-1 below entails definitions of internal communication by different authors in various years. These definitions demonstrate that internal communication is a complex concept that encompasses a wide range of activities and processes within an organisation. The definitions also highlight the importance of

communication flow, the use of formal and informal communication methods, the promotion of commitment, understanding, and a sense of belonging, and the dissemination of information to internal audiences. Additionally, the different definitions provide different perspectives on the concept of internal communication, emphasizing different aspects of the phenomenon, such as the role of managers and employees, the use of communication technology, and the importance of understanding the organisation's changing environment.

Table 0-1: Definitions of internal communication used in the research literature over the years.

Author(s) and year(s)	Definition
Welch and Jackson (2007:186)	“A process between an organisation’s strategic managers and its internal stakeholders, designed to promote commitment to the organisation a sense of belonging to it, awareness of its changing environment and understanding of its evolving aims.”
Blundel and Ippolito (2008:11)	“Communication which takes place within the boundaries of an organisation in the form of one-way, interpersonal and non-verbal exchange.”
Carrier and Bourquee (2009:31)	“The full spectrum of communication activities, both formal and informal, undertake by an organisation’s members for the purpose of disseminating information to one or more audiences within the organisation.”
Bove and Thill (2010:7)	“The exchange of information and ideas within an organisation.”
Mazzei (2010:221)	“The communication flow among people within the boundaries of an organisation.”
Cornelissen (2011:258)	“All methods (internal newsletter, intranet) used by a firm to communicate with its employees.”

The above table did not include all definitions of internal communication but has only mentioned some of the definitions. Despite the different perspectives and nuances in the definitions provided above, there are several common themes that emerge. One of the most prominent themes is the idea that internal communication is an essential process that takes place within the boundaries of an organisation. It involves the exchange of information, ideas, and viewpoints among individuals and groups at different levels and in different areas of specialization. The definitions also emphasize the importance of formal and informal communication methods, such as newsletters, intranets, and interpersonal communication.

Another important theme that emerges from the definitions is the role of internal communication in promoting commitment, understanding, and a sense of belonging within the organisation. This is particularly highlighted in the definition provided by Welch and Jackson (2007), which emphasizes using internal communication to promote commitment and understanding of the organisation's evolving aims. The definitions also make reference to the dissemination of information to internal audiences within the organisation. Carrier and Bourquee (2009) define internal communication as the "full spectrum of communication activities, both formal and informal, undertaken by an organisation's members for the purpose of disseminating information to one or more audiences within the organisation". This highlights the importance of effective internal communication in ensuring that employees are well-informed and have access to the information they need to carry out their duties.

Drawing from the core themes that emerge from these definitions, internal communication can be defined as the process of exchanging information, ideas, and viewpoints through formal and informal methods within an organisation, between individuals and groups at different levels and in different areas of specialization, for the purpose of disseminating information to internal audiences and promoting a shared sense of commitment, understanding, and belonging. It includes all the formal and informal communication that takes place internally, and the communication flow among people within the organisation. It is a

managed communication system where employees are regarded as an internal stakeholder group. This definition provides a comprehensive understanding of the concept and its significance within the field of study, which is particularly relevant when it comes to addressing and preventing workplace bullying, as effective internal communication can play a key role in fostering a positive and respectful work environment.

In summary, internal communication plays a crucial role in addressing and preventing workplace bullying. By creating an environment of open communication, promoting a shared sense of commitment, understanding and belonging, and providing employees with the necessary resources and information, internal communication can help to create a positive and respectful work environment where all employees feel safe and valued. Next, the role of internal communication is discussed in more detail.

3.3. THE ROLE OF INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Hayase (2002) emphasised that internal communication is important for big or small organisations which are undergoing change or transformation. Furthermore, Hayase, (2002) states that internal communication roles will differ for each organisation based on the challenges they face and how it can help them to overcome these challenges. Karanges et. al (2014) discovered the importance of internal communication and find it crucial to support these communication functions in a strategic way. They also provided evidence that internal communication creates positive relationships between supervisors and employees. Fitzpatrick (2016) identified six factors that relate to organisations and employee-related objectives: ensuring the company recognises the need to talk to employees; supporting huge changes; promoting a sense of community at work; promoting external advocacy; encouraging employees to stay and making sure they are aware of what is expected of them and how to achieve this.

Jolibert and Gibbs (2012: 278) argue that internal communication serves several key objectives, including the managerial, commercial, cultural, humanist, political, and institutional constituents. According to their perspective, the managerial constituent views internal communication as a tool for facilitating the flow of information to direct operations and making employees more dynamic. They suggest that the commercial constituent focuses on marketing and promoting the company both internally and externally, while the cultural constituent aims to integrate employees into the organisational culture. The humanist constituent emphasizes the development and consideration of employees, and the political constituent involves using internal communication to prevent conflict and as a component of social strategy. Lastly, the institutional constituent views the organisation as a social institution, in which individuals have the right to receive information about the organisation and participate fully in its activities. All these constituents work together to create a well-structured and logical internal communication system within an organisation.

Manning (1992) mentions that internal communication is an important tool for binding an organisation, enhancing employee morale, promoting transparency and reducing attrition. Lewis (2007) argues that employees who are well informed are more satisfied and ultimately contribute more to the organisation's success. Erasmus-Kritzinger (2002) agrees with Lewis by stating that when employees are satisfied with internal communication, their job performance also increases which then leads to the success of the organisation. Heil, Parker, and Stephens (1999: 21) discovered that very few employees are willing to take on additional responsibilities or learn more, as they are afraid of the risks and potential failure that come with responsibility. Similarly, Van Heerden (as cited in Steyn, 2011: 132) suggests that internal communication policies should promote regular, transparent, job-related, and mutual communication between managers and employees. Verghese (2012) state that internal communication creates an atmosphere of respect, commitment, belonging, and engagement between employees with the aim of achieving organisational goals. Furthermore, internal

communication ensures effective planning and framework, structuring of messages, flow of content and influences organisational outcomes. The roles discussed above show that internal communication is at the centre and the organisation depends on it in order to operate.

3.4. MODELS RELATED TO INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Several authors have come up with theories, frameworks, and models of internal communications. A model is a description of concepts that may serve as building blocks for theory (Thomas, 2015). Models such as the Steyn and Puth's (2000) model for developing a corporate communication strategy and Welch and Jackson's (2007) internal corporate communication model, have been implemented to explain internal communication. Mellor and Dewhurst's framework for an effective internal communication function (2008) identifies audience/stakeholders, infrastructure, leaders and managers, line of sight, research, and measurement as the five elements for an effective communication function, however this model was disregarded in this study as it does not involve a symmetrical communication between employees and managers, and it does not show that internal communication is shaped by the organisational culture.

Ahmed and Rafiq (2002) provided the Leonard Berry's model of internal marketing and the Christian Gronroos' model of internal marketing. The Leonard Berry's model of internal marketing emphasises that employees must be treated as customers as this will eventually change their attitudes, the management has to consider the needs and wishes of both new and old employees. This model was disregarded because it does not show how employees are motivated, how they communicate with their leaders and how their relationship is affected by this communication. The Christian Gronroos's model of internal marketing emphasises that employees must be involved in the decision-making process, new employees have to undergo training in terms of how they must treat clients, and that employees have a right of access to information. The researcher also disregarded this model because it only focuses on the

employees and how they must engage with clients, and it does not have an approach to motivate employees from a marketing point of view. This study however focuses on the transactional model of communication and Asif and Sargent's model of internal communication.

3.4.1. A transactional model of communication

The transactional model of internal communication is an important perspective to consider when studying the role of internal communication in addressing workplace bullying in public sector organisations. The transactional model is visualised in Figure 0-1. This model emphasizes the interaction and negotiation of meaning between the sender and receiver, as well as the impact of context on the communication process. As workplace bullying is a complex issue that requires effective communication and collaboration among employees, the transactional model can provide valuable insights into how internal communication can be leveraged to prevent and address this issue in public sector organisations. This discussion will explore the key concepts and implications of the transactional model in the context of addressing workplace bullying in public sector organisations.

Pham (2014) argues that scholars often see communication as simply the exchange of messages. Steinberg (1995) goes further to say that communication is a transaction where meaning is negotiated between the sender and receiver. This model is different from others as it places emphasis on the relationship between the communicator and the recipient. According to Steinberg (1995), the context—which includes things like culture, values, experiences, attitudes, knowledge, feeling, and occupation—determines how the message is encoded and understood. According to the transactional model, noise has an impact on communication at many stages and is a continual process.

Steinberg further emphasizes that the key to this model is the role of the participants and the context in which communication takes place. The Transactional model of

communication is relevant to the study in the sense that it indicates how communication occurs, how it is transmitted from one person to another, how the receiver provides feedback and the type of channels used to communicate, as well as some of the factors that may disrupt this communication.

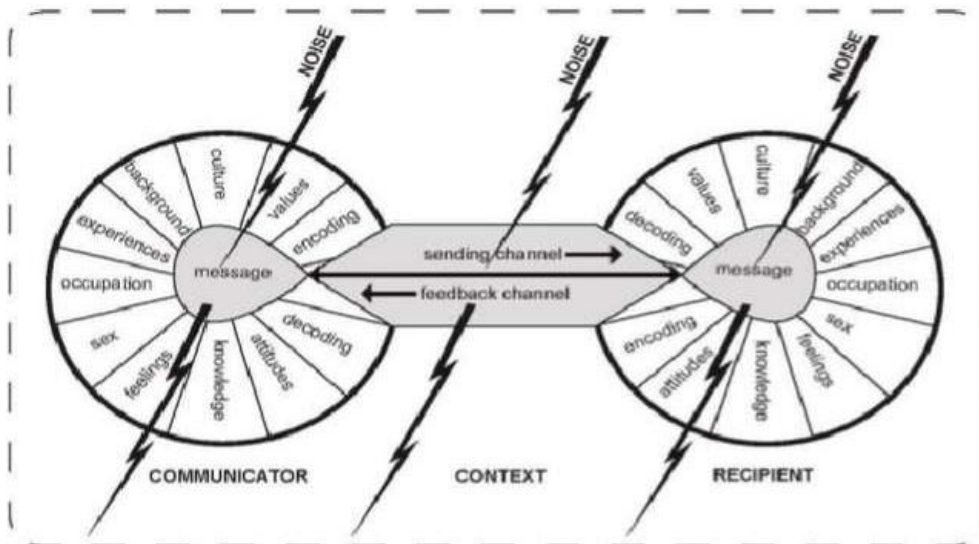


Figure 0-1: The transactional model of communication

(Source: Steinberg, 1995)

The transactional model of internal communication is particularly relevant to workplace bullying research because it emphasizes the importance of the relationship between the communicator and the recipient. In the context of workplace bullying, this relationship is often characterized by power imbalances, where the bully holds more power than the victim. The model highlights the importance of understanding these power dynamics and how they affect communication within the organisation. Furthermore, the model emphasizes the role of context in communication. In the context of workplace bullying, this includes factors such as organisational culture, values, and policies. The model suggests that these contextual factors can either enable or inhibit effective communication and the ability to address workplace bullying. For example, a culture that values assertiveness and competition may create an

environment where bullying behaviour is normalized. In contrast, an organisational culture that promotes respect and collaboration can help to prevent and address bullying.

Additionally, the transactional model views communication as a continuous process that is affected by noise at different levels. In the context of workplace bullying, noise can refer to factors such as lack of communication channels, unclear policies and procedures, or lack of support from management. These noise factors can make it difficult for employees to report bullying behaviour or for management to effectively address it. The transactional model highlights the importance of identifying and addressing these noise factors in order to improve internal communication and address workplace bullying.

Lastly, the transactional model emphasizes the roles of participants in the communication process. In the context of workplace bullying, this includes the role of management, employees, and union representatives. It is important to understand the different roles and responsibilities of each participant in order to effectively address workplace bullying. For example, management has the responsibility to create an environment where employees feel safe to report bullying behaviour and have trust in the process, while employees have the responsibility to communicate respectfully and understand the policies and procedures related to workplace bullying.

In summary, the transactional model of internal communication is relevant to workplace bullying research as it emphasizes the importance of the relationship between the communicator and the recipient, the role of context in communication, the impact of noise on communication, and the roles of the participants. Understanding these concepts can help organisations to improve internal communication and effectively address workplace bullying.

3.4.2. Asif and Sargent's (2000) model of internal communication

Asif and Sargeant (2000) proposed a model of internal communication that delves deeper into the various components of the process. This model is visualised in Figure 0-2. The centre of the model represents the intended audience, while the smaller circles depict the desired outcomes of communication with the audience, such as shared vision, service focus, empowerment, commitment, satisfaction, and loyalty. The middle circle illustrates variables that can affect the effectiveness of internal communication, including the style of management and communication, and the amount of communication received. The outer circle represents the internal communication planning process, with internal marketing segmentation being a key component. Asif and Sargeant (2000:303) also emphasized the importance of internal market segmentation in organisations, as it allows managers to tailor communication to specific groups of employees, instead of sending the same information to everyone, which can lead to information overload.

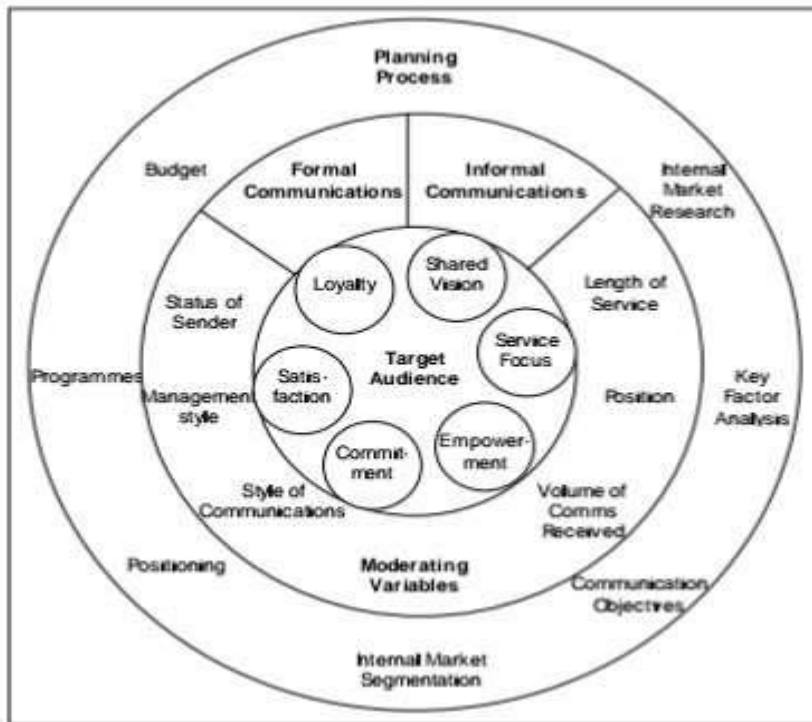


Figure 0-2: Model of internal communication. Source: Asif & Sargeant (2000:306)

This model is relevant to the study because it indicates how communication can be used to achieve certain outcomes within an organisation. It shows that both formal and informal communication can be used to achieve the organisational objectives and goals. The study also emphasises that Greater Letaba Municipality achieves the following outcomes as mentioned in the model: shared vision, desired outcomes on the model which are: Shared vision, service focus, empowerment, commitment, satisfaction, and loyalty. It is therefore important for the municipality to use this model in helping them to reach their goals and objectives.

3.4.3. Quirke’s model of progression of internal communication objectives

Quirke (2002) identified a progression of internal communication objectives. The first step is to create awareness among employees of the values, goals, and strategy of the organisation. This is achieved through one-way communication. The next step is to ensure that employees understand the information they are receiving. This involves incorporating

more feedback to ensure clear understanding. The third step is to gain employee support for the organisation's goals. According to Quirke (2002:170), this involves providing more information and explanation about the reasoning behind organisational decisions to help employees accept and support them. The fourth goal is involvement, which involves an engagement and dialogue between individuals, in order to share thought processes and come up with the best strategies to implement organisational goals. Commitment is the final goal, involving communication among employees reviewing the pressure on the organisation and finding strategies to ease this pressure.

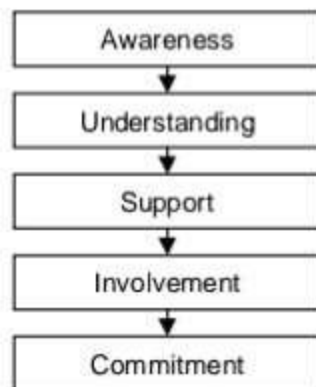


Figure 0-3: Quirke's model of progression of communication objectives. Source: Quirke (2000:169-170)

3.5. INTERNAL MARKETING

Internal marketing involves an interaction process between the organisation and its employees within a given business context (Morsi, 2016: 50). According to Morsi (2016) communication with employees is one of the most important aspects of internal marketing. Employees must be viewed as valued customers. Ferdous (2008) argued that it is important for organisations to take good care of their employees and maintain good relationship with them. Ficiu and Dumitrescu (2016) mentioned that the internal marketing process has become

a useful tool in developing the quality of services for many organisations. Employees are considered as loyal internal clients.

According to the study by Ficiu and Dumitrescu (2018: 61-62), the internal marketing approach has several advantages and disadvantages. One advantage is that the company is well-known by the employees due to the training they receive during recruitment. This helps employees to consider themselves as part of the company and its mission, principles, and values. Additionally, internal marketing ensures that the needs and desires of employees are met, leading to more satisfied employees who typically deliver better quality services. Another advantage is that employees are free to participate in the decision-making process, which can strengthen the relationship between employees and customers. This, in turn, leads to an easier and faster resolution of problems and complaints. However, the internal marketing approach also has some disadvantages, such as its heavy reliance on internal communication, high implementation costs, and the need for marketing managers to delve into human resources management. Furthermore, internal marketing requires continuous care, attention, and adjustments in its strategies to be effective.

3.6. COMMUNICATION CHANNELS USED IN ORGANISATIONS

It is important to select an appropriate communication channel to be used within an organisation. Two types of communication channels are identified: Verbal and non-verbal communication. Verbal communication refers to spoken or written words to share information with others. It involves face-to-face meetings between members of an organisation to share views and opinions. Nonverbal communication is the sharing of information without words involved (Stegaroiu & Talal, 2014). Furthermore, these authors argue that face-to-face communication is the most effective form of communication channels for communicating with the employees. In addition, Lee (2010) agreed that face to face communication allows the

receiver to listen and observe the non-verbal cues by the sender and be able to provide immediate feedback.

According to Miller (2009), written communication encompasses a range of printed materials like newsletters, brochures and annual reports, and online content on platforms such as intranets, e-forums, chat rooms, emails and social media platforms. Jethwaney (2011) highlights the various social media platforms that organisations are utilizing in the modern age to achieve their internal communication objectives. One such platform is blogs, which provide employees with a sense of belonging and encourage them to share information in a creative manner. Another platform is wikis, which are websites that allow teams working on a single project or document to add new content. Additionally, in-house social networks such as LinkedIn allow employees to remain in contact with one another and securely exchange information. Social networking sites (SNSs) such as Facebook, Twitter, Myspace, and LinkedIn promote the public image of the company and have a wide reach. Lastly, YouTube is a cost-effective way for organisations to advertise their services creatively and reach a large audience. The success of a communication method is determined by its alignment with the overall communication strategy and its impact on achieving the business objectives (Kalla, 2005).

In contrast to the classification that groups communication channels into verbal and non-verbal, Stevanovic and Gmitrovic (2016) suggest two types of communication within an organisation: formal and informal communication. Formal communication occurs within the organisation and can be divided into vertical, horizontal, downward, and upward communication. Vertical communication is communication between employees of unequal organisational levels with the aim of sharing information and decision-making. Horizontal communication is communication between employees of the same organisational level with the aim of improving teamwork and increasing employee satisfaction. Downward communication is the flow of information from managers to employees about business

policies, guidelines, and plans, while upward communication is the flow of information from employees to managers about their ideas and suggestions.

Stevanovic and Gmitrovic (2016) describe informal communication as the transmission of information in an unofficial or informal way, connecting employees in all possible directions. They further describe the following informal communication networks: the single chain, chains of probability, cluster chain, and grapevine model. The single chain is the transmission of information from one person to another, which can change its original shape. The chains of probability are created by one person sending selected work-related information to certain people spreading it further in the same manner. The cluster chain aims to spread an atmosphere of friendship and trust, and the grapevine model is the spreading of information that is just hearsay and has not yet been approved by a senior within an organisation.

When it comes to public sector organisations, governments often establish clear guidelines for the communication channels used by different agencies and departments. The goal is to ensure a consistent and uniform approach to communication across all departments. For example, The Government Communicators Handbook (GCIS) (2017) lists several internal communication channels commonly used by government departments in South Africa. These channels can be classified into five main categories: physical channels, visual channels, electronic channels, interactive channels, and social channels.

Physical channels include Notice boards or bulletin boards, Newsletters/ in-house magazines, Letters. These channels are usually used for making announcements that are less important and can easily be ignored by the staff. Visual channels include Video and in-house television. These channels are used to introduce new organisational products and policies but are passive in nature and do not allow for dialogue between the audience and the organisation. Electronic channels include emails and intranets, and employee-attitude surveys. These channels allow for rapid messaging and give recipients the opportunity to have a dialogue with

the sender. Interactive channels include presentations, team briefings /group meetings, face-to-face meetings with managers, and focus groups. These channels are used to achieve qualitative feedback and allow for employees to ask questions. Finally, social channels include such as social events are usually used to provide public briefings on topics such as human rights, HIV and AIDS, and women's rights.

The different constituents that constitute the objectives of internal communication in public sector organisations are diverse and varied, and it is important for governments to establish clear guidelines for the communication channels used by different agencies and departments based on the objective of the communication transactions, and the needs and characteristics of the audience. The importance of paying attention to the needs and characteristics of the intended audience is demonstrated in Aidoo and Freeman (2016) who examined the use of informal communication among rural farmers in Ghana. They found that most farmers were illiterate, had poor technical skills and lacked electricity in their homes. As a result, the farmers rely seniors or on other farmers for information, using oral communication. Information was transmitted during home and farm visits, informal conversations, and group meetings. The effectiveness of these channels can be attributed to their sensitivity to the needs and characteristics of the audience. The farmers found it easier to have these oral conversations and the information was useful for them to improve on their agricultural skills, and they could share the information through word of mouth.

Govender and Rampersad (2016) studied how the Higher Education system changed after the apartheid era and the types of communication channels that are being used currently. The university's staff members found electronic media to be an effective internal communication channel while other members of the staff preferred the management to have a face-to-face communication with them. Grapevine was also the most popular communication tool used in the organisation. Rensberg, Conradie and Dondolo (2017:71) studied the effectiveness of communication channels during a crisis at a University of Technology. It was

evident that the university management preferred using the website whereas the staff preferred to get communication through SMSs and WhatsApp. About 88% of respondents chose WhatsApp and SMSs as the most effective channels that should be used to communicate crisis at the university. Sixty-four (64%) of the respondents preferred the University's website. Facebook was the least preferred channel with just 60% respondents.

Zondi, Cassim and Karodia (2015) investigated the types of internal communication channels used at Transnet Freight Rail. Since the organisation has over 20 000 employees, therefore, the e-mail is used for important announcements, events and news, as well as messages from the CEO (Chief Executive Officer). It is difficult for the organisation to communicate using face-to-face due to many employees. The only time face to face is used is when the management briefs the supervisors and offer training to employees. Internal magazines are distributed around the organisation containing information about huge events and important business matters, these allow employees to read them at their own time. Transnet Freight Rail however acknowledged that issuing internal magazines can be costly.

Zhang and Abitbol (2016) conducted a survey to find out what communication channels are effective in enhancing interpersonal trust and engagement in an organisation. The results showed that face-to-face meetings have a positive impact on interpersonal trust. The organisation's internet and social media sites would have a positive impact on the interpersonal trust after controlling the influence of demographic variables such as the age, gender and the location of the individuals since some of them do not have access to the internet or cannot use the internet.

3.7. EFFECTIVE COMMUNICATION

Most studies have studied the effectiveness of communication in resolving conflicts. The process of transferring ideas, thoughts, knowledge, and information such that the goal is achieved as effectively as feasible is known as effective communication (Eylachew, 2003;

Brower & Darrington 2012 & Prachi, 2018). Effective forms the basis of the achievement organisational objectives (Eylachew, 2016: 823). In addition, Robbins (2000) argued that poor communication is a possible source of interpersonal conflict and poor group performance. Because miscommunication is an integral element behind conflict, effective communication is one key to resolution” (Hynes, 2005: 217). Brower and Darrington (2012) added that negative patterns of communication can lead to a higher frustration and an increase of conflict in the workplace. Evidence from these studies suggest e relevance of effective communication in addressing workplace bullying, as it can be effective in preventing the escalation of once-off conflicts into persistent bullying.

Effective communication, according to Prachi (2018), is characterized by several key elements. First and foremost, the message must be clear and easy to understand. This means that the sender must convey a simple message that can be easily understood by the recipient. Additionally, the message must be correct and free from errors. Vague or false messages can lead to confusion and wrong decisions. The message must also be complete, providing all necessary information to ensure that the recipient can make the right decision. Furthermore, the message must be precise and brief, so that the recipient can easily interpret it and take the desired action. Reliability is also important, as the sender must ensure that the message they convey to the audience is accurate and trustworthy. This instils trust from the recipient and ensures that they can rely on the message. Additionally, the sender must take into consideration the attitude, language, knowledge, and education level of the recipient when choosing a medium to convey the message. Lastly, the message must be crafted in a way that reflects the sender's courtesy, humbleness, and respect towards the recipient.

The research literature suggest that the effectiveness of different communication styles affect team performance. Sarhadi (2016) found that teams with a mix of communication styles and flexible communication arrangements tend to have better performance than teams with the inflexible and static communication styles. Marlow Lacerenza, Paoletti, Burke and Salas

(2018) conducted a meta-analysis of research evidence on team communication and performance and concluded that communication quality, in terms of information elaboration has the strongest relationship with performance. The study concluded that while frequency of communication is also an important consideration, communication quality is more important than communication frequency for team performance. These findings on communication quality provide support for the importance of shared communication.

Shared communication is important for the exchange of knowledge among team members and for the integration of knowledge (Barker & Slabbert, 2018). When team members have equal opportunities to speak and share their ideas, they may feel valued and heard. Morgan, Ahn, Mosser, Harrison, Wang, Huang, Ryan, Mao and Bixby (2021) found that shared communication and informal meetings are associated with increased team satisfaction and increased productivity in a research team. It is argued that this type of communication fosters openness and respect among colleagues, which helps to create a sense of psychological safety and trust (Morgan et al., 2021). This leads to greater creativity, risk-taking and innovative solutions, as well as increased satisfaction with the team experience (Guenter., Gardner, Davis McCauley, Randolph-Seng & Prabhu, 2017). These findings suggest that communication quantity, quality, and styles are important factors than communication formality for team performance.

Understanding communication styles, quality and frequency is relevant for workplace bullying research as it can help to identify potential bullying behaviours and understand the impact on the target. For example, if research shows that a particular communication style, such as aggressive or passive-aggressive behaviour, is associated with bullying, this can be used to identify potential bullies and take action to address the behaviour. Unfortunately, there is a literature gap in terms of research focusing on the effect of different communication styles on the likelihood and severity of workplace bullying. The majority of research has focused on the relationship between leadership styles (Hoel, Glasø, Hetland, Cooper, & Einarsen, 2010;

Kaushik, 2021; Tsuno & Kawakami, 2015), leadership support (Blomberg & Rosander, 2022), organisational culture (An & Kang, 2016; Han & Ha, 2016; Jeong & Jang, 2019; Pheko, Mointero & Segopolo 2017; Pilch & Turska, 2015), and stressful work environments (Notelaers et al., 2019; Tuckey, Dollard, Hosking, & Winefield, 2009; van den Brande, Baillien, de Witte, vander Elst, & Godderis, 2016) on the likelihood and severity of workplace bullying. Additionally, research on the quality and frequency of communication can provide insight into how bullying behaviours may be impacting the target, such as causing feelings of isolation or decreased job satisfaction. This information can then be used to develop interventions and support systems to address the issue and improve the overall communication culture within the workplace.

3.8. STAKEHOLDERS AND THEIR ROLES

Internal publics (stakeholders) and workers are the most strategic assets within an organisation, they act as ambassadors of the companies and create a competitive advantage when they are engaged in the organisation's decision-making process (Bowen, 2015). Amason (2011:44) explains that a stakeholder is someone or an entity that holds an interest in the future and performance of an organisation. Furthermore, Amason (2011) points out that stakeholders can have an impact on the success or failure of an organisation, and they have a vested interest in the organisation, even if the organisation does not have an interest in them. In other words, stakeholders are those who have something to gain or lose as a result of the organisation's actions. Managers must play a role in adopting an open communication style and discussing important issues with employees and stakeholders, whereas employees must be brand ambassadors, promote the products and services of the company, share information with colleagues and communicate with leaders (Mazzei, 2014).

The communication function can help deal with crises and reputational damage within an organisation by considering the interests of the public (Bowen, Rawlins & Martin, 2010).

Public relations professionals are a group of seniors who work with the CCO (Chief Communications Officer) and are responsible for crisis management, organisational leadership, media relations and decision-making. According to Schafer and Zhang (2016), the government uses stakeholders for two reasons: first, stakeholders provide valuable information that is helpful in lowering the risk and costs to government when faced with a difficult challenge. Secondly, stakeholders help to reduce a conflicted political environment. Bingham, Nabatchi and Lokkesmoe (2005) state that feedback given by stakeholders is useful to public administrators, who then ensure that there is a responsible and representative governance. Therefore, public administrators must engage stakeholders to fulfil their own self and strategic interests. Bingham *et.al* (2005) further mention argue that stakeholder engagement builds trust, develop learning and inspire confidence in public processes.

3.9. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORKS

In view of the extent literature on workplace bullying and internal communication, it is important to discuss the relevant theories that may be helpful in achieving the aims of this study. The muted group and stakeholder theories were identified as particularly useful for gaining an understanding of the power dynamics and respect that exist within a workplace. These theories inform the dynamics of organisational culture, environments, leadership and the role of internal communication and different stakeholders in the context of workplace bullying. With an understanding of the implications of muted group and stakeholder theories, this research can add to our understanding of how to create work environments in which all individuals are respected and valued, and in which bullying is not tolerated.

3.9.1. The stakeholder theory

In the beginning, stakeholder theory was created as a theory of strategic management, or more accurately, as a viewpoint on it (Freeman, 1984). R. Edward Freeman established

and extensively detailed the Stakeholder Theory of organisational management and corporate ethics in 1984. This theory considers morality and values when managing an organisation.

Jones, Harrison & Welfs (2018) state that stakeholder theory is an umbrella term for all sorts of theories that help academics and managers understand relationships between businesses and their stakeholders, as well as the outcomes of those relationships. Freeman, Harrison and Wicks (2007) mention that stakeholder theory promotes an effective and ethical way to manage a business in a complex environment. Philips (2003) states that effectively managing stakeholder relationships contributes to the survival of the business and raises questions of values, choice, potential harm and benefits for both groups and individuals. Stakeholder theory suggests that if we treat the relationship between the business, groups, and individuals as a unit, we have a better chance of addressing certain problems within an organisation (Parmar, Freeman, Harrison & Purnell, 2010).

According to Marcoux (2000), stakeholder theory is mainly about who receives the resources of the business, leading to a conflict between stakeholders in terms of who gets what. Freeman et.al (2003) argues that stakeholders must have a say in how resources are allocated, this will lead to consensus and create new opportunities within the organisation. Harrison, Freeman, and Abreu (2015) argue that when stakeholders are treated well, they tend to have positive attitudes and behaviours towards the organisation, like sharing information with all stakeholders, working hard and remain loyal to the company, even during difficult times. Furthermore, stakeholder theory emphasises treating all stakeholders fairly, honestly and generously. In addition, Harrison, Bosse & Phillips (2010) state that it is the responsibility of the manager to ensure that stakeholders' needs are met and be able to solve any conflicts that may arise between the stakeholders.

Stakeholder theory, as described by Donaldson and Preston (1995: 67), offers four approaches: descriptive, instrumental, and normative. Firstly, the theory is descriptive in that

it offers a model that describes what a company is, depicting it as a collection of co-operative and competitive interests. Additionally, the theory is instrumental in that it establishes a framework for examining the connections between the practice of stakeholder management and the achievement of various business goals. Furthermore, the theory is normative in that it accepts the idea that stakeholders are individuals or groups with legitimate interests in all procedures of business activity and that the interests of all stakeholders are of intrinsic value, meaning each group of stakeholders consider their own needs and not because of its ability to further the interests of other groups, such as the shareholders. Lastly, the theory is managerial in that it not only focuses on cause-effect relationships, but it also recommends attitudes, structures and practices that constitute stakeholder management. It should be noted that the theory does not imply that all stakeholders should be equally involved in all corporate decisions and processes and that managers are not the only rightful personnel for corporate control and governance.

Stakeholder theory is relevant to the study as the researcher is interested in the relationship that employees have with each other and with their employees and what are the outcomes of these relationships. It is also relevant in examining the conflicting interests of the employees and how they reach consensus during such conflicts. Stakeholder theory, internal communication, and workplace bullying research are all interconnected in the sense that they all play a critical role in the overall functioning and success of an organisation. Stakeholder theory emphasizes the importance of taking into account the interests and needs of all stakeholders, including employees, in the decision-making process and management of a company. Internal communication, on the other hand, is the process by which an organisation communicates with its employees and vice versa. It is a crucial aspect of maintaining a positive and productive work environment.

In the context of workplace bullying research, internal communication plays a vital role in addressing and preventing bullying behaviour. Effective internal communication can create

a culture of transparency and accountability, where employees feel comfortable reporting instances of bullying and where managers can take appropriate action to address the issue. Additionally, when employees feel that their needs and concerns are being heard and addressed, they are more likely to feel satisfied with their work and less likely to engage in bullying behaviour.

In conclusion, stakeholder theory, internal communication, and workplace bullying research are all interconnected in that they all contribute to creating a positive and productive work environment. By considering the interests and needs of all stakeholders, including employees, and by effectively communicating with them, organisations can prevent and address instances of workplace bullying, leading to a more positive and productive work environment for all stakeholders.

3.9.2. Muted group theory

As discussed in the theoretical overview in the introduction chapter, the muted group theory, which was developed by Shirley and Edwin Ardener in the late 1960s, was created to explore how language and communication can be shaped by different social identities and power dynamics. This theory suggests that certain groups, such as women, are often muted and their voices are not heard in public discourse. It also examines how language can be used to reflect and reinforce existing power relations within society. By exploring these ideas, the Ardeners were able to gain a better understanding of how language and communication can be used to express, construct and maintain social identities.

According to Funderburke (2012), the concepts that 1) society is composed of several groups or cultures, each of which has a distinct perspective on life, and 2) not all groups within a society are equal, are the two main tenets of muted group theory. The fact that these ideas support social hierarchies makes them significant.

An unequal social structure with some groups dominating and others subservient is produced by a hierarchy. In that society, dominant groups usually possess greater income, influence, and social standing than other groups (Jianghe & Rosenthal, 2009). Additionally, they are more inclined to voice their opinions because they will almost certainly be the widely held viewpoint at the moment. People who do not share the opinion that is “popular of gaining favour” in their culture feel less comfortable expressing their opinions (Hayes, 2007).

The theory was originally conceived as a means of addressing the scarcity of anthropological data on women and other marginalized groups, and to encourage researchers to take a more active role in researching and understanding the various modes of communication and expression of these groups. It was also intended to serve as a critical reminder of the importance of acknowledging and respecting the diversity of experiences expressed by such groups and to ensure that their voices, perspectives, and contributions are not ignored.

As such, the theory has had a lasting impact on the field of anthropology and continues to serve as a vital reminder of the need to include the voices of all individuals in research. It was later adopted by communication scholars to address the barriers to communication of traditionally marginalized groups such as women and African American men (Lutgen-Sandvik 2003). Waldeck (2013) argued that Muted Group Theory explains the social representation and communication methods of non-dominant groups such as women and other minorities.

The Ardeners suggest that within any society, there are dominant forms of expression that are created by the overarching structure of that society, and that those who belong to marginalized groups often choose to repress their own modes of expression in order to abide by the dominant mode. This repressing of one's own modes of expression is referred to as 'muting' and can be seen as a means of conforming to the expectations of the dominant structure. Such an act of conforming can be seen as a way of ensuring that individuals do not

stand out too much and are accepted within the societal structure, even if they are a member of a marginalized group. According to Spender (in Lutgen-Sandvik 2003:6), people structure their experiences, interactions, and realities through language, this is known as the linguistic muting which is common to employees in the workplace.

Lutgen-Sandvik (2003) proposed that in power dynamics, the people in control are the ones who largely influence the language used in organisations. Being a member of a dominant group in society has several advantages, ranging from improved professional performance to being seen as trustworthy by other groups (Niut & Rosenthal, 2009). In addition, Sultana (2011) stated that power is often dispersed unevenly and is associated with a culture's hierarchy, which could explain this. This is also evident in the relationship between gender and power. When it comes to the unequal distribution, distribution, and utilization of resources between men and women, power is closely linked to gender.

Lutgen-Sandvik (2003) also argued that in the workplace, all employees are muted to some degree, expected to follow directions from more powerful or experienced colleagues as they learn how to act, communicate, and behave through orientation and socialization. Additionally, superiors may use mute as a form of control, and employees may experience further silencing due to abuse. Muted Group Theory (MGT) is useful for understanding the power differences that are reflected in the language of those in higher and lower positions.

Kraemar (1991) uses this theory to explain communication between managers and employees in the workplace. This theory shows how power imbalances affect communication. The muted group theory assumes that meanings are made based on the culture of an individual; and that men are raised to occupy positions of power and be dominant in all situations while women are raised to be submissive. Women are not allowed to make their own decisions and to express their views (Kraemar, 1991).

Pörhölä, Karhunen and Rainivaara (2006) state that the muted group theory is based on four main grounds: (1) different people have a variety of experiences and perceive the world differently; (2) societies have bias over certain groups and do not allow them to express their opinions; (3) subordinates have to accommodate dominant groups in their communication; and that (4) resistance and change are possible. to support the above, Aquino and Bradfield (2000) mention that since everyone views the world differently, perpetrators may not be aware of their actions' consequences on the victim, this also applies to eyewitnesses of the negative behaviours, their worldview may hinder them from seeing what is actually happening or recalling what has occurred. Other people believe that victims are partially responsible for the harm inflicted upon them. In addition, Din, Cheng and Nazneen (2018) studied the effects of culture, society and masculinity in women working in the accounting sector and found that women are still oppressed and discriminated against in the accounting sector, they are often blamed for everything that goes wrong in the business. Furthermore, Aquino and Bradfield (2000) believe that women report abuse more than men because they are perceived as less aggressive while men are perceived as being more aggressive, therefore are not easily abused.

Muted Group Theory (MGT) is based on the premise that members of certain groups do not have the freedom to express their opinions freely and need to modify their ideas in order to be accepted and understood in a work setting (Ardener, 1993). According to Barkman (2018: 3), the theory consists of three main components: dominance, acceptability, and subordination. Dominance speaks to the varying experiences of dominant and sub-dominant groups, with the former having the power to define terms. Acceptability refers to the lack of recognition and respect for the expressions of sub-dominant groups. Finally, subordination implies that sub-dominant groups must either adopt the dominant group's mode of communication or become 'bilingual' in order to be heard. As a result of these conditions, the voices of non-dominant groups are minimized, and their presence is effectively muted.

It is easier for the dominant group to communicate with those in both the dominant and non-dominant groups, while it can be more challenging for the non-dominant group to effectively express themselves in a way that is understandable by the members of the dominant group (Martin, Weber and Cole, 2008). This theory explains how the dominant group controls language, and what the muted group must do in order to express themselves in terms that are comprehensible to the dominant group and to prevent being oppressed. This study focuses on how employers communicate with employees to reduce or prevent workplace bullying and if this type of communication is successful in preventing or eliminating workplace bullying.

Furthermore, according to Martin, Weber, and Cole (2000: 11), the dominating group must refuse to listen to the muted group in order to preserve their control. They need to prevent the muted group from participating in the formation of the language and from having their experiences expressed in it. This theory centres on the notion that language is power and if those in power want to keep their dominance they must hold tightly to their control of the language. MTG is relevant to the study because it is focused on the muting or silencing of subordinates (employees) by their superiors (employers). As mentioned earlier, the linguistic muting blends well with the study as it looks at the effectiveness of internal communication in fighting workplace bullying as it involves the type of language used by the superiors towards the employees and how this affects them.

The theory is applicable to the study as it looks into the impact of the language used by superiors towards their subordinates. Furthermore, Martin, Weber and Cole (2000) posit that in order for the dominant group to retain their power, they must not listen to the muted group and must not let them influence the language system. The theory places emphasis on the idea that language is a form of power and if those in power want to maintain their dominance, they must maintain control of the language, providing insight into how language is used as a form of power, and how the dominant group uses language to maintain their

power and dominance. This helps to understand the power dynamics of workplace bullying and how internal communication can be used to either address or support workplace bullying, depending on how the dominant group chooses to use language.

There are other theories related to workplace bullying:

- Dual concern Theory & Human Needs Theory

In his study about managing conflict at institutions of higher learning, Lukman (2021) highlighted that the Human Needs Theory and the Dual Concern Theory are of essentiality. According to Williams (1998:3), the Human Needs Theory emerged in the 1970s and 1980s as a thorough and inclusive theory of human behaviour. According to this theory, a peaceful society cannot exist unless basic human needs are satisfied. Conflict arises from the beliefs, interests, and concerns of the parties involved in interactions (Behrman, 2012). Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs states that humans have an innate tendency to struggle with meeting their proximal and distal needs. Maslow's theory states that a person's actions in life are determined by their basic or physiological needs. Maslow (1943: 86) postulated further that in order for people to live in harmony and peace, these needs must be satisfied. According to these beliefs, expectations, worries, and needs are the things that typically lead to conflict in higher education settings (Lukman,2021).

Furthermore, the Dual Concern Theory works well for settling disputes between leaders and subordinates in the workplace. The Dual Concern Theory divides conflict management approaches into two primary groups, according to De Dreu, Van Dierendonck, and Dijkstrap (2004): high or low concern for others and high or low concern for oneself. High levels of self- and other-care are present at the level that fosters a problem-solving atmosphere (De Dreu & Van Dierendonck, 2004 and Rahim, 2002).

- Affective Events Theory (AET)

It is critical to comprehend the dynamics of employee emotions and how they affect attitudes and behaviors at work in the dynamic, ever-evolving world of organisations (Bunk & Magley, 2013). The Affective Events Theory (AET) is a foundational paradigm that investigates the role of emotions in the workplace. It provides managers, scholars, and practitioners with useful information. Within the topic of organisational behavior The Affective Events Theory (AET) is a significant and well-known theory in organisational behavior that provides valuable insights into how emotions function in the workplace. This abstract provides an overview of the history, fundamental concepts, and contributions of the Affective Events Theory to our understanding of how emotional reactions impact employees' attitudes, behaviors, and overall organisational outcomes. Ashockababu (2022).

One of the ideas supporting the idea of workplace bullying was presented by De Cuyper, Baillien, and De Witte (2009) in the form of the Three-Way model, which consists of intrapersonal, interpersonal, and intra-group aspects. Bullying occurs on an intrapersonal level as a result of an individual's handling of issues they have within the organisation. Workplace stress, work pressure, job unhappiness, and institutional changes are a few examples of frustrations. Consequently, if these annoyances are not addressed or removed, they could make it more likely that workers will become victims or offenders.

According to De Cuyper et al. (2009), management conflicts and interpersonal conflicts form the foundation of the interpersonal level. Employees' personal or work-related issues, or even the presence of both, can lead to interpersonal confrontations. According to Longo (2013), the degree of formal or informal authority controls how much ineffectual conflict resolution is mixed with increasingly aggressive conflict resolution techniques. This would turn workers in positions of authority into bullies. Therefore, developing a strategy to lessen conflict management will eliminate the likelihood of bullying behaviour and the possibility that an employee may engage in bullying themselves or become a victim of bullying.

3.10. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter examined the literature on internal communication in relation to workplace bullying. This study proposes that internal communication is a key contributing factor to the effective management and prevention of workplace bullying. The chapter also emphasised that internal communication is essential in creating positive relationships between employees and their managers in the workplace and enables them to achieve their intended organisational goals. Effective communication has also been highlighted as an important factor in ensuring employee involvement, commitment, focus as well as to strive to contribute to the success of the organisation. The chapter also examined various models and theoretical frameworks relevant to this study. Various communication models were included to support the concepts used in the study. The muted group theory as well as the stakeholder theory were also examined. Complimenting each other, the two theories provide utility that can help explain the dynamics of organisational culture, work environments, power and leadership, and the role of internal communication and different stakeholders in the context of workplace bullying. The literature reviewed in this chapter supports the research questions and problem and provides a solid foundation for further exploration of the experiences of public sector employees and management personnel with workplace bullying in a local municipality setting, as well as the power dynamics of the workplace environment that affect the reporting and addressing of bullying behaviours. The next chapter spells out the methodology that the study used for this purpose.

CHAPTER 4

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

4.1. INTRODUCTION

Research methodology refers to the overall approach to conducting research, including the theoretical and philosophical foundations that shape the research process. It involves decisions about the research questions, the research design, the data collection and analysis methods, and the ethical considerations that guide the research – the details of which are discussed in this chapter. The chapter details the research design considerations that informed the research process for this study. The purpose of this research was to describe and explore the phenomenon of workplace bullying in the public sector, and to explore the role of internal communication in addressing workplace bullying with a focus on employees and their managers in a local government context such as a municipality setting. With the focus of the study on the role of internal communication in addressing workplace bullying in public sector organisations, the objectives of the study were:

- To understand the experiences of public sector employees in a local municipality setting with regard to workplace bullying, including the impact of these experiences on municipality personnel.
- To explore the power dynamics of the workplace environment that affect the reporting and addressing of workplace bullying in the municipality.
- To examine the perspectives and experiences of public sector employees and management personnel in relation to the use of internal communication to address workplace bullying in the municipality.

- To identify the internal communication structures and practices that support or address workplace bullying in the municipality, and to assess the effectiveness of these communication channels in addressing bullying behaviour.

To address these research objectives, a convergent mixed methods design rooted in the pragmatist philosophical paradigm was used, combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods. The rationale for using a mixed methods design was informed by the research objectives, the nature of the research problem, and the characteristics of the study site. The convergent design allowed for the comparison of different data types and sources while accounting for the contextual differences in the data sources and enabled the simultaneous achievement of objectivity and subjectivity in the data collection process. The data collection methods included a quantitative survey questionnaire administered to a randomly selected sample of employees, and a qualitative questionnaire administered to the managers. The data analysis techniques included content analysis for the qualitative data and statistical analysis for the quantitative data. This chapter will provide further details on the research design, sampling strategy, data collection methods, and data analysis plan, as well as limitations and ethical considerations of the study.

4.2. RESEARCH PARADIGM

This study used the pragmatist worldview as the underlying research paradigm underpinning the entire research process. Creswell (2009) describes a worldview or paradigm as beliefs that guide action, and these are dependent on the area of research, beliefs of the participants and past research experiences. Based on Rehman and Alharthi (2016: 51) “a paradigm is a basic belief system and theoretical framework with assumptions about ontology, epistemology, methodology and methods”. Considerations for these concepts and how they are related were taken into account when choosing the research paradigm for this study as these choices and assumptions must be relevant to the study needs and the research questions. Ontology and epistemology have a strong influence on

methodology and research methods, as they are concerned with the fundamental assumptions that underlie research. Ontology is the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of reality (Richards, 2003:3). It is concerned with questions about what exists and what it means for something to exist. In the context of research, ontology refers to the researcher's assumptions about the nature of reality and the kind of knowledge that is possible. Different ontological assumptions shaped the way that research is conducted, as they will influence the types of questions that are asked, the methods that are used to collect data, and the way that data is interpreted.

Ontology is closely related to epistemology, which is the branch of philosophy that deals with the nature of knowledge. It is concerned with questions about what we can know and how we can know it. In the context of research, epistemology refers to the researcher's assumptions about the nature of knowledge and the relationship between the researcher and the knowledge being studied (Gall & Borg, 2003:13). Different epistemological assumptions shaped the way that research is conducted, as they will influence the kinds of data that are collected and the way that data is interpreted. The choice of methodology will therefore be influenced by the ontological and epistemological assumptions of the research, as these assumptions shaped the types of questions that are asked and the way that data is collected and analysed.

The choice of research paradigm was decided upon after considering the different options that were applicable to this research. Creswell (2009) details four main types of research paradigm namely: the postpositivist, the constructivist worldview, the transformative worldview as well as the pragmatic paradigm. The taxonomy of worldviews presented by Creswell is well accepted with several other authors discussing the pros and cons of the individual paradigms, the details of which will not be the focus of this discussion. This discussion therefore focuses on the choice of the pragmatist paradigm which was based on these key criteria: alignment with research question, suitability of research methods, and the strengths and limitations of the research paradigm.

The research questions required an understanding of the complexity and dynamism of real-world situations such as workplace bullying in the public sector, and the pragmatist paradigm was chosen because of its ability to take into account these factors and its alignment to the philosophical beliefs underlying this study. This study subscribes to the belief that there are multiple constructed realities with regards to the phenomenon of workplace bullying as the experiences and effects of bullying and the meanings individuals attach to those experiences are subjective. For instance, in this study, when considering the issue of workplace bullying in a municipality setting, it is important to consider the perspectives of multiple stakeholders such as frontline employees, line managers and senior managers. It is also important to consider the complex nature of the organisational and managerial structures in a municipality and their complex relatedness, such as the complex relationship between the administrative, operational, and political wings in a municipality. Perspectives from third parties such as labour unions and members of the public should also be considered as they also have vested interest in matters affecting a municipality such as workplace bullying and organisational culture. The principles of the pragmatist research paradigm proved useful in shaping how this research sought to collect and understand these multiple perspectives.

The pragmatist approach emphasizes the importance of process and relationships, agents and the environment, and was well-equipped to deal with the relationships between and amongst municipality employees and their managers, and how they interact with one another and with organisational structures, policies, and procedures to shape their work environment in relation to bullying as a workplace phenomenon. This included how they interacted and used internal communication structures to address the bullying in the workplace. Additionally, pragmatism emphasizes the importance of context, and the role that social and cultural factors play in shaping knowledge and understanding, and their influence and significance particularly with regards to the antecedents and consequences of bullying in the workplace. This aligns with the research question, which is concerned with understanding the perspectives and experiences of public sector employees

and management personnel in relation to the use of internal communication to address workplace bullying in a local municipality setting.

This study also subscribes to calls to emphasise evidence-based approaches to conflict resolution and measures of mitigating the negative effects of workplace bullying through effective communication strategies. Owing to the objectivity required by evidence-based approaches and the subjective lens required to understand the multiple constructed realities of workplace bullying and the different meanings humans attach to their experience, it became apparent that pragmatism favours the purpose and objectives of this study more than the other research paradigms. The pragmatist paradigm is not limited to the duality of rational and structural approaches. The pragmatist paradigm was chosen because it provides a 'third way' between rational and structural approaches and offers a more realistic view of human behaviour. Its focus on problem-solving and practicality made it particularly well-suited to addressing the research question, which was concerned with understanding the practical implications of the role of internal communication in addressing or supporting workplace bullying. A pragmatist approach allowed the research to examine the practical application of internal communication in addressing bullying, and how it shaped the experiences of public sector employees and management personnel.

In addition, pragmatists tend to emphasize the research problem, enabling them to utilise various methods to address the problem rather than being limited to specific methods. The research process for this study was guided by the principles of pragmatism (Kelly & Cordeiro, 2020). The research collected and analysed data using a variety of methods. To be specific, the research used a convergent mixed methods approach to collect both qualitative and quantitative data to understand the experiences of public sector employees with regards to workplace bullying, the impact of bullying on municipal personnel, and the role of internal communication in addressing bullying. The researchers also sought to understand the perspectives and experiences of both employees and management personnel in relation to the use of internal communication to address bullying (Langos, 2014).

The choice of the pragmatist worldview was also influenced by the previous research in the fields of communication studies and organisational research. The research fit within the broader context of existing literature on workplace bullying and communication in the public sector. Previous studies had identified bullying as a significant problem in the workplace, but there was still much to be learned about how to effectively address it, particularly in the context of a local municipality. By adopting a pragmatist approach, the researchers hoped to contribute to this body of knowledge by providing a more in-depth understanding of the practicalities of using internal communication to address bullying in this setting (Morgan, 2014).

One potential limitation of a pragmatist approach was that it may not have allowed for the examination of more abstract or theoretical concepts. However, the researcher believed that the focus on practicality and real-world application made this approach particularly well-suited to the research questions. The researchers addressed this potential limitation by also considering the broader theoretical frameworks related to workplace bullying and communication such as muted group theory and stakeholder theory, to situate the findings within a larger context.

4.3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGICAL APPROACHES

Following the adoption of a pragmatist philosophical paradigm for this research, a mixed methods research approach was taken. Considerations for the three main research approaches, namely qualitative research, quantitative research, and mixed methods research, were taken into account in making the choice. According Adedoyin (2020), qualitative research methods involve the collection and analysis of non-numerical data such as words, images, or sounds. This approach is often used to explore subjective experiences and perspectives, and to gain in-depth understanding of complex phenomena. Qualitative data can be collected through various methods, including in-depth interviews, focus groups, observation, and content analysis. Qualitative research is particularly useful for exploring subjective experiences and meanings, and for gaining insights into the underlying meanings and motivations behind people's actions and behaviours. These considerations made this

approach a likely candidate for the purposes of this research owing to its ability to draw on human perspectives and experiences to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of bullying in the workplace. However, one limitation of qualitative research is that it is often subjective and relies on small sample sizes, which can restrict the generalizability of the findings. This potentially limits the ability to achieve objectivity when evaluating the prevalence of and examining the impact of workplace bullying in a municipality setting.

On the other hand, quantitative research methods involve the collection and analysis of numerical data. This approach is often used to test hypotheses and to examine relationships between variables. Quantitative data can be collected through various methods, including experiments, surveys, and observational studies. Quantitative research is particularly useful for testing hypotheses and examining relationships between variables, and for providing objective and generalizable findings. Nonetheless, this approach is not without limitations (Apuke, 2017).

One major limitation of quantitative research is that it is often limited by its reliance on numerical data, which can be restrictive in terms of capturing the full range of human experiences and behaviours. Quantitative research can provide valuable information about population-level behaviours and trends, but it cannot provide a full understanding of the complexities of individual experiences. Moreover, it may fail to capture the nuances of different contexts and the myriad of factors that can impact the way in which people perceive and act on information (Almeida, 2017). This limited the suitability of quantitative research for this study as it was considered that the approach may not be able to provide a full understanding of the complexities involved in studying the role of internal communication in either supporting or addressing workplace bullying. It cannot capture the nuances of different contexts and the myriad of factors such as social and cultural factors that may impact the way in which people perceive the phenomenon of bullying in the workplace.

To address these limitations, mixed methods research involves the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data. This approach allows for the triangulation of data and the

incorporation of multiple perspectives, enhancing the validity and reliability of the findings. The research questions for this study focused on understanding the experiences and perceptions of public sector employees and management personnel in the context of workplace bullying in a local municipality setting, as well as the impact of bullying on municipal personnel and the role of internal communication in addressing this issue. In order to adequately address these research questions, it was necessary to consider the subjective experiences and perspectives of employees and managers, as well as the objective data on the prevalence and impact of bullying in the municipality.

4.3.1. Mixed methods research

Mixed methods research is an interdisciplinary approach to inquiry, combining the collection and analysis of both quantitative and qualitative data in a single study or series of studies to understand a phenomenon. As described by Cresswell and Cresswell (2017: 41), mixed methods research combines distinct research designs that may involve different philosophical assumptions and theoretical frameworks. This involves combining the rigorous methods of both qualitative and quantitative research in response to research questions or hypotheses and using systematic methods of handling both types of data in terms of data collection, analysis, integration and interpretation. Various techniques, including merging, explaining, building from one database to another, and embedding the data inside a wider framework, are used to combine the two types of data in the design and analysis. These protocols are integrated into a unique mixed methods design that specifies the particular protocols that will be employed in the investigation.

The main goal of this approach is to gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of a research problem or phenomenon by integrating the insights gained from both types of data. The core assumption of mixed methods research is that combining qualitative and quantitative data can provide additional insight beyond what can be obtained from either type of data alone, and that by integrating the two methodologies, the limitations of either methodology are addressed and compensated for by the other methodology's strengths.

Mixed methods research has been referred to by a variety of terms, including integrating, synthesis, quantitative and qualitative methods, multimethod, mixed research, or mixed methodology. However, in recent years, the term mixed methods has become the most widely accepted and recognized term for this approach to research (Almeida, 2017). This is reflected in the titles of influential publications such as the SAGE Handbook of Mixed Methods in the Social & Behavioral Sciences and the SAGE Journal of Mixed Methods Research. In these publications, mixed methods is consistently used as the term to describe the approach of collecting and integrating both qualitative and quantitative data in a single study. This is in contrast to other terms such as multimethod, which implies the use of multiple methods but not necessarily the integration of both qualitative and quantitative data.

Mixed methods research has a long history, having emerged as a recognized approach in diverse fields during the late 1980s and early 1990s. Over the decades since then, it has undergone several phases of development and growth, and it continues to be a dynamic field of study, with new procedures and applications being developed and explored. While the fundamental principles of mixed methods research remain the same, its application and usage have become increasingly sophisticated and varied, underscoring the importance of this type of research in social science.

There are several texts available that provide a comprehensive overview of the development of mixed methods research. Creswell and Plano Clark's (2011, 2018) book "Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research" and Teddlie and Tashakkori's (2009) edited volume "Foundations of Mixed Methods Research" stand out as two of the most comprehensive and informative works on the topic. In addition to outlining the history and evolution of mixed methods research, these texts also detail the various key figures and milestones that have been instrumental in the development of the field. For instance, Creswell and Plano Clark's book provides an in-depth look at the pioneering work of Robert K. Yin and John W. Creswell and how their efforts have helped shape the field, while Teddlie and Tashakkori's volume offers a comprehensive overview of the works of John Williams and Patricia Leavy, as well as other influential researchers. Both texts also provide

a detailed analysis of the various mixed methods research designs that have emerged over the years and the ways in which they can be used to inform research. Ultimately, both texts provide invaluable insight into the history and evolution of mixed methods research, making them essential reading for anyone interested in the topic.

In recent years, the research community has begun giving more and more recognition and importance to mixed methods research. This is seen through the numerous funding initiatives which support mixed methods research, the growing number of dissertations that utilize mixed methods approaches, and the increasing number of articles in discipline-specific journals which discuss mixed methods research in the social and health sciences. This increase in popularity in the research community has also gained attention from researchers in the communication and organisational research fields due to the potential benefits to both fields of research.

One of the primary benefits is that it allows researchers to triangulate their findings, which means they can compare and contrast results from different sources or methods, allowing them to fully explore and understand the complexities and nuances of communication and organisational phenomena. For example, it allows researchers to combine quantitative data, which can provide objective and reliable measures of various aspects of communication or organisational behaviour, with qualitative data, which can provide rich and detailed insights into the subjective experiences and perceptions of participants. This can help researchers to better understand the experiences, perspectives, and motivations of different stakeholders within organisations, and to identify patterns and trends in communication and organisational behaviour.

In addition, mixed methods research can help to bridge the gap between theory and practice in communication and organisational research. By combining different research methods, researchers can identify and test theories about communication and organisational behaviour and generate practical recommendations for improving communication and organisational performance. This can

be especially useful in applied fields such as public relations, where researchers are often called upon to provide guidance and recommendations to practitioners.

4.3.2. Rationale for choosing mixed methods research

In light of the aforementioned factors, the researcher employs an explanatory mixed method research design to examine workplace bullying and internal communication using both quantitative and qualitative approaches.

A mixed methods approach allowed for the collection and analysis of both qualitative and quantitative data, enabling a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the research problem. Boru (2018) Stated differently, the technique assists the researcher in addressing issues that cannot be resolved by relying solely on qualitative data or qualitative approaches. By identifying patterns and generalizations along with in-depth understanding of participants' viewpoints, mixed approaches offer a more comprehensive picture.

The use of qualitative data allowed for the exploration of the subjective experiences and perceptions of employees and managers, providing in-depth and descriptive narrative data on the phenomenon of workplace bullying. The use of quantitative data, on the other hand, allowed for the examination of the objective data on the prevalence and impact of bullying in the municipality, as well as the effectiveness of internal communication in addressing this issue.

Overall, the mixed methods approach was the most suitable for the simultaneous achievement of the diverse goals of this research, including the exploration of subjective experiences and perspectives of municipality employees and their managers, the examination of objective data on the prevalence and impact of bullying, and the comparison of different data sources and contexts. This allowed the study to explain the role of internal communication in addressing in ways that would not be possible with either qualitative or quantitative research methodologies. Furthermore, a mixed methods approach allowed for a more comprehensive and nuanced understanding of the role of

internal communication in addressing workplace bullying and was therefore the most appropriate approach for addressing the research questions and hypotheses of this study. However, this study was not blind to the other research methodologies available to communication and organisational researchers including action research, case study research, and ethnographic research approaches. Action research, which involves the systematic study of a problem in order to identify and implement solutions is often used in applied settings to improve practices and policies and involves a collaborative and participatory approach to research. This was another possible candidate given the focus of the pragmatist research philosophy of solving real life problems. However, action research was not suitable for this study because it requires a collaborative and participatory approach, which was not possible given the scope of the research and the time and resource constraints of the research project. Also, action research was not suitable for this study because its participatory approach was not applicable to the research questions being asked.

Another potential candidate that was considered was case study research, which involves the in-depth investigation of a single case or a small number of cases. Case study research is particularly useful for examining complex phenomena in their entirety, and for providing detailed and contextualized insights (Priya, 2021). Despite these characteristics which make case study research attractive for the needs of this study, the mixed methods approach was favoured owing to the researcher's experience and preferences, and considerations for the methodological limitations associated with case study research approaches. In particular, the case study approach is critiqued for the challenges in replicating and generalising results, as well as the lack of control over the external environment which may complicate the research process (Sibbald, Paciocco, Fournie, Asseldonk & Scurr, 2021). Finally, ethnographic research was also considered. According to Ploder and Hamann (2020) ethnographic research approach involves the systematic study of a culture or group of people through observations and interactions. They further state that ethnographic research is particularly useful for gaining insights into the cultural practices and norms of a particular group or community, and for examining the context in which behaviours and experiences occur. However,

ethnographic research is often time-consuming and requires the researcher to immerse themselves in the culture or group being studied, which can present challenges in terms of objectivity and reliability.

In short, there are several different research methodologies that can be used to address the research questions, each with its own strengths and limitations. The choice of methodology should be guided by the nature of the research problem and the research questions being asked, as well as the philosophical assumptions and epistemological perspectives of the researcher. Mixed methods research is a particularly useful approach for addressing complex research problems that require both subjective and objective perspectives, and for examining relationships between variables in a naturalistic setting (Taherdoorst, 2022). However, it is important to carefully consider the limitations and challenges of mixed methods research, and to design and implement the study in a way that maximizes the validity and reliability of the findings.

4.4. RESEARCH DESIGN

A research design is defined as a plan, framework or blueprint for conducting a research study that outlines all the methods and procedures used for collecting and analysing research the data that informs the research outcomes (Akhtar, 2016; Van Wyk, 2012) There are several types of mixed methods designs, which can be categorized in several different ways. For example, mixed methods designs can be categorised in terms of the timing of data collection. Under this framework, mixed methods designs can be concurrent, with both quantitative and qualitative data being collected at the same time, or sequential, with one type of data being collected and analysed before the other. Alternatively, this can be done in terms of the integration of data. Mixed methods designs can involve separate analysis of quantitative and qualitative data, or an integrated analysis of both types of data.

4.4.1. Mixed methods design

Mixed methods designs vary in terms of the orientation of the research. In terms of research orientation, mixed methods designs can be qualitative-dominant, with a focus on understanding the meaning and experiences of participants, or quantitative-dominant, with a focus on testing hypotheses and making generalizations to a larger population. Mixed methods designs can also be classified based on their purpose, such as explanatory, exploratory, or transformative. According to Creswell and Creswell (2017), the choice of the appropriate mixed methods design should be based on the research question being addressed and the goals of the study. They note that the convergent design, explanatory sequential, and the exploratory sequential designs are the three main designs used in the mixed methods field, but they also note the existence of more complex and specialised designs such as the mixed methods experimental, evaluation, case study, or participatory designs and others that embed what they refer to as the core designs. The following discussion will focus on the three core mixed methods designs: convergent parallel, explanatory sequential, and exploratory sequential designs. The core phases of these three designs are shown in Figure 0-1.

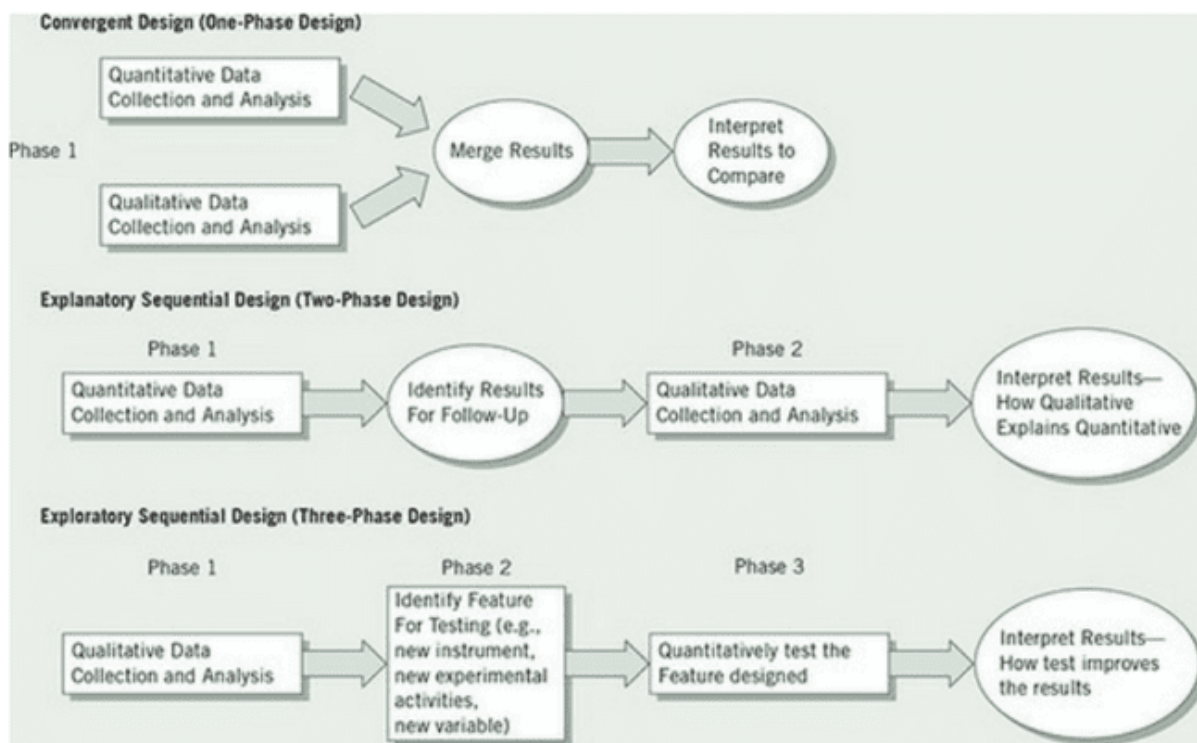


Figure 0-1: Core mixed methods designs (adopted from Creswell and Creswell, 2017)

Convergent parallel design involves collecting both quantitative and qualitative data at the same time and analysing the data separately before combining the results. This approach is particularly useful when the research question is complex and requires the integration of multiple perspectives. One strength of the convergent parallel design is that it allows for the collection of a large amount of data, which can increase the reliability and validity of the findings. However, this design can be time-consuming and resource-intensive, as it requires the simultaneous collection and analysis of two different types of data. Additionally, researchers using convergent parallel design must be careful to ensure that the data collected are comparable and can be integrated effectively.

Moving on to explanatory sequential design, this approach is a two-phase data collection inquiry that involves collecting and analysing quantitative data first, followed by collecting and analysing qualitative data to explain the quantitative findings. Researchers typically use the results of the first quantitative phase to plan or build on to the second, qualitative phase. A typical procedure might involve collecting survey data in the first phase, analysing the data, and then following up with structured qualitative interviews that focus on the quantitative results and any unexpected responses. They can do this by selecting participants for the qualitative phase based on their responses to the quantitative survey and by formulating questions for the qualitative interviews that give deeper insights about the quantitative results. By using this approach, researchers can gain an in-depth understanding of the quantitative results and gain clarifying insights into any confusing, contradictory, or unusual survey responses.

Lastly, the exploratory sequential design is a reverse of the explanatory sequential design, starting with the collection and analysis of qualitative data first, followed by the quantitative phase. This approach is useful when the research question is poorly defined or when the goal is to generate new insights or ideas by using a more exploratory approach. By starting with a qualitative phase, the researcher can gain a better understanding of the issue and tailor the subsequent quantitative phase to the specific needs of the study population. A popular approach is the use of a three-phase exploratory sequential design whereby insights from a first exploratory qualitative phase are used to

develop a feature such as a new survey instrument, program, experimental procedure, product, process or even new variables and constructs in a second phase that will subsequently be tested in a quantitative third phase. The exploratory sequential design therefore offers a flexible and nuanced approach to mixed methods research, but Creswell and Creswell (2017) warn that it is important to carefully consider the research question and goals when deciding if this design is appropriate.

4.4.2. Rationale for a convergent mixed methods design

A convergent mixed methods design was chosen for this study on workplace bullying in the public sector because it allowed for the collection and integration of both quantitative and qualitative data, providing a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. The concurrent collection of both types of data allowed for the exploration of the experiences of public sector employees in a local municipality setting with regard to workplace bullying, including the impact of these experiences on municipality personnel. It also allowed for the examination of the power dynamics of the workplace environment that affect the reporting and addressing of workplace bullying in the municipality, and the perspectives and experiences of public sector employees and management personnel in relation to the use of internal communication to address workplace bullying in the municipality. Additionally, the convergent mixed methods design allowed for the identification of the internal communication structures and practices that support or address workplace bullying in the municipality, and the assessment of the effectiveness of these communication channels in addressing bullying behaviour. Overall, the convergent mixed methods design was well-suited to the research question and objectives of this study, allowing for the comprehensive exploration of the phenomenon of workplace bullying in the public sector and the role of internal communication in addressing it.

4.5. STUDY POPULATION AND SAMPLING PROCEDURES

The study population for this research consisted of public sector employees and management personnel in a local municipality setting. The study focused on employees of the Greater Letaba

Municipality of the Mopani District Municipality of Limpopo province, South Africa. The municipality, housed at Modjadjiskloof, serves the towns of Modjadjiskloof, Ga-Kgapane, and Senwamokgope as well as 132 rural villages. The subject-population for this study therefore comprises the employees and management of the municipality. According to the municipality annual report, the municipality had a staff compliment of 340, however, only 258 positions were filled as of 30 Jun 2021. Figure 1 shows the employment profile of the organisation as of 30 June 2021.

Occupational Levels	Male				Female				Total
	A	C	I	W	A	C	I	W	
Top management	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	1
Senior management	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	4
Professionally qualified and experienced specialists and mid-management	25	0	0	1	17	0	0	1	44
Skilled technical and academically qualified workers, junior management, supervisors, foremen, and superintendents	27	0	0	0	24	0	0	0	51
Semi-skilled and discretionary decision making	32	0	0	0	30	0	0	0	62
Unskilled and defined decision making	50	1	0	1	44	0	0	0	96
TOTAL PERMANENT	137	1	0	2	117	0	0	1	258
Temporary employees	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
GRAND TOTAL	137	1	0	2	117	0	0	1	258

Figure 0-2: Workforce profile of the Greater Letaba Municipality as of 30 June 2021 (source: Annual Report, GLM (2021))

Employees were included in the study if they were currently employed within the municipality and had at least 6 months of experience in their current role. Employees who were on leave or unable to participate in the study due to health reasons were excluded. The target population for the study included a variety of job levels and departments within the municipality, and two samples were selected for the qualitative and quantitative components of the study. The smaller qualitative sample enrolled management personnel only, while the larger quantitative sample enrolled the frontline

employees as study participants. The rationale for the inequality between the sample sizes for this study was due to the fact that the qualitative sample was limited to management personnel only, while the larger quantitative sample included frontline employees. The target population for the study included a variety of job levels and departments within the municipality, and it was necessary to include frontline employees in the larger sample who comprise a larger proportion of the organisation's population to ensure adequate representation of the employee population.

4.5.1. Quantitative sample

A two-stage sampling approach was employed to choose study participants for the quantitative aspect of the investigation. Stratified sampling was employed at the initial phase of the sample procedure to guarantee that various departments and job levels within the municipality were represented. Using stratified sampling, a sample is chosen from each stratum after the population is divided into subgroups (or strata) according to attributes like department or employment level. By doing this, it is guaranteed that the sample is representative of the various population subgroups. The population of management staff and public sector workers in the municipality was stratified for this study according to department and employment level (e.g., entry, mid, and senior).

For the second stage of the sampling process, convenience sampling was used to select the specific employees who would participate in the study within each department. Convenience sampling involves selecting the most readily available or accessible individuals as the study sample. Employees were selected based on their availability and willingness to participate in the study, with the goal of obtaining a sufficient number of participants to meet the sample size goals for the study. This two-stage sampling procedure allowed for a representative and diverse sample of the target population while also ensuring a sufficient number of participants for the study.

The demographic characteristics of the survey participants are presented in **Error! Reference source not found.** The table shows the distribution of the participants by gender, age, years of service in the municipality and level of education. As shown in **Error! Reference source not found.**,

men comprised the majority of participants who responded to the survey making up 60% of the responses. The gender distribution of the study sample roughly estimates gender distribution of the workforce population at the municipality (56% males versus 44% females (Annual report, 2021)). A significant proportion of the respondents have been in long term service at the municipality, with the majority having served for between five and ten years (22.1%) and more than 10 years (32.4%). These figures suggest that the sample included in the analysis is probably well versed with the policies, practices and operations of the municipality and will likely provide reliable results with regards to the handling of workplace bullying in the municipality.

Table 0-1: Demographic characteristics of the respondents of the quantitative employee survey

Demographic Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
<i>Gender (N =68)</i>		
Male	41	60.3%
Female	27	39.7%
<i>Age (N =68)</i>		
18 – 35	20	29.4%
36 – 45	27	39.7%
46 – 55	15	22.1%
55 years and above	6	8.8%
<i>Years of service (N =68)</i>		
A month	1	1.5%
A year	2	2.9%
2 -5 years	28	44.2%
6 - 10 years	15	22.1%
More than 10 years	22	32.4%
<i>Level of Education (N=68)</i>		
Grade 12	26	38.2%

Bachelor's degree, BTech degree	18	26.5%
Honours degree or Postgraduate Diploma	9	13.2%
Masters	2	3.9%
Other	13	19.1%

4.5.2. Qualitative sample

A similar two-stage approach was used for the qualitative component of the research, employing the same strategy for stratifying the population based on the different departments in the municipality. In the first stage of the sampling process, stratified sampling was used to ensure representation of different departments within the municipality. In the second stage of the sampling process, however, a different method was used to select the specific participants for the study. Instead of convenience sampling, which was used in the quantitative component, purposive sampling was used to select management personnel from different departments for inclusion as participants in the qualitative component of the study.

According to Hassan (2024) purposive sampling is a method of selecting participants based on specific characteristics or experiences that make them particularly relevant or knowledgeable about the research topic. In this study, purposive sampling was used to select management personnel who had experience with addressing workplace bullying in the municipality and who could provide valuable insights and perspectives on the use of internal communication in this context. By using purposive sampling to select these participants, the research was able to focus on a specific group of individuals who had relevant knowledge and experiences related to the research question.

In this study, the criteria for selecting participants using purposive sampling was based on the participants' knowledge and experience related to the research question, specifically their experience

with addressing workplace bullying in the municipality and their perspective on the use of internal communication in this context. These included:

- Position or job level: Participants were selected based on their position or job level within the organisation, with the goal of including a range of perspectives from different levels of management such as front-line supervisors, mid-level managers, and senior executives.
- Department or unit: Participants were selected based on the department or unit in which they worked, with the goal of including a range of perspectives from different areas of the organisation.
- Experience with workplace bullying: Participants were selected based on their experience with addressing workplace bullying in the municipality, with the goal of including individuals who had first-hand knowledge of the issue and the challenges and successes of addressing it.
- Perspective on internal communication: Participants were selected based on their perspective on the use of internal communication in addressing workplace bullying, with the goal of including a range of views on the effectiveness and potential limitations of different communication channels. For example, the study aimed to include participants who had experience using different types of internal communication, such as face-to-face meetings, emails, or online platforms, and who could provide insights on the pros and cons of each approach.

No particular order was used to prioritize the criteria; the researcher relied on their judgement, discretion, and prior knowledge and experience with the municipality to purposefully select participants for inclusion in the study. It is important to acknowledge that this may introduce potential bias that could influence the outcome of the study and the interpretation of the results. However, attempts were made to minimize these potential biases by using a convergent mixed methods approach that allowed for data triangulation from multiple sources, and by relying on peer review from the study supervisor to reduce any bias.

Error! Reference source not found. presents the descriptive statistics describing the demographic characteristics of the participants who responded to the open-ended questionnaire in the qualitative sample. **Error! Reference source not found.** shows that the majority of the respondents were male (just over 81%). Most respondents also had considerable years of experience working with the municipality. Only a small proportion (a little over 36%) of respondents had less than five years of service at the municipality, with the rest having served for more than 10 years at the municipality. The respondents were also asked to detail their highest academic qualifications. All but one had a bachelor's degree equivalent or higher qualification. Of the seven respondents holding honours' degree qualifications, only one was a masters' candidate.

Table 0-2: Demographic Characteristics of Respondents of open-ended questionnaire

Demographic Characteristic	Frequency	Percent
<i>Gender (N =11)</i>		
Male	9	81.8%
Female	2	18.2%
<i>Years of service at the municipality (N =11)</i>		
0-4	4	36.4%
5-9	1	9.1%
10-14	4	36.4%
15 and above	2	18.2%
<i>Level of Education (N=11)</i>		
National Diploma	1	9.1%
Bachelor's degree, BTech degree	3	27.3%
Honours degree or Postgraduate Diploma	7	63.6%

4.5.3. Reflections on the sampling strategy

There are several potential limitations that may be associated with the sampling procedure used in this research study. This discussion focuses on some of the limitations that may be relevant to a two-stage sampling procedure that includes both stratified sampling and convenience sampling or purposive sampling as was the case for this study.

One potential limitation of the sampling procedure was that the sample may not have been fully representative of the target population due to the combination of stratified sampling and convenience sampling or purposive sampling. Stratified sampling only represents a subset of the population, and convenience sampling or purposive sampling may not adequately capture the diversity of the population. Additionally, convenience sampling and purposive sampling are both non-

random sampling procedures and are more prone to bias than other random sampling methods. Random sampling is a method of selection where all members of a population have an equal chance of being chosen. Non-random sampling, on the other hand, is a method of selection in which the members of a population are chosen in a non-random manner, such as convenience sampling or purposive sampling. Non-random sampling is more subject to bias than random sampling as the selection process is not determined by chance. This could have meant that the sample was not reflective of the population and may not have captured the full range of experiences or perspectives of the target population. As a result, the findings from the study may have been limited in terms of their generalizability. However, this potential limitation was minimised by using a two-stage sampling procedure that was designed to ensure adequate representation of different groups from the population.

Despite these limitations, the two-stage sampling procedure that was chosen for the study was still the most appropriate choice for several reasons. One reason was that it was more practical and efficient in terms of time and resources than other sampling methods. Additionally, it was considered that the two-stage sampling procedure would still be sufficient to answer the research questions, even if it was not completely representative of the population. Additionally, purposive sampling was used specifically to select participants who were particularly knowledgeable or had unique insights on with addressing workplace bullying in the municipality and their perspective on the use of internal communication in this context. In this case, the limitations of generalizability may have been less of a concern.

4.6. MEASURING INSTRUMENTS

A mixed methods approach was employed in this study, comprising both quantitative and qualitative data collection and analysis. The primary data collection instruments were a close-ended survey and an open-ended questionnaire, which were administered to the participants. The purpose,

administration, and sample of these instruments are described in this section, along with a comparison of their strengths and limitations in relation to the research question and objectives.

4.6.1. The close-ended survey instrument

The close-ended survey was used as the quantitative data collection instrument in the study (see Appendix C). This survey instrument consisted of a set of standardized questions with predetermined response options that were administered to a sample of employees in the municipality.

The close-ended survey had two sections. Section A focused on demographics and general characteristics of the participants. This included information such as age, gender, educational level, and years of service in the municipality. Collecting this information was important for several reasons. First, it allowed for an understanding of the characteristics of the sample and how they may relate to the study variables. For example, if the prevalence of workplace bullying was found to be higher among certain age groups or educational levels, this could inform further research and intervention efforts. In addition, this information was useful for ensuring the representativeness of the sample and adjusting for any potential confounding factors in the analysis. For example, if the sample was disproportionately skewed towards one gender or certain educational levels, this could impact the generalizability of the findings. This allowed for a more complete and nuanced understanding of the experiences and perceptions of employees with regard to workplace bullying and internal communication in the municipality.

Section B of the survey was designed to gather information on the experiences and perceptions of employees with regard to workplace bullying and internal communication in the municipality. Examples of specific survey items and response options include:

- "Have you ever experienced workplace bullying?" (Multiple choice: yes, no)
- "If yes, what measures did you take afterwards?" (Multiple choice: Reported it to my manager, only told my colleagues, reported it to my union, decided to keep quiet)

- "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'The communication channels used to address workplace bullying are sufficient?' (Likert scale: strongly agree, agree, neutral, disagree, strongly disagree)
- "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statement: 'The workplace has proper communication channels to address workplace bullying?' (10-point Likert scale: 1 = not sufficient, 10 = very sufficient)

The close-ended survey was self-administered by the participants, who were given hard copies of the survey to complete. This self-administered format allowed for a more convenient and flexible data collection process, as participants were able to complete the survey at a time and location of their choosing.

4.6.2. The open-ended questionnaire instrument

The open-ended questionnaire was an important data collection tool in this study, as it allowed for a more in-depth exploration of the experiences and perspectives of management personnel in relation to workplace bullying and the use of internal communication in addressing this issue. The questionnaire was designed to be administered through in-person interviews, which were to be conducted by the researcher. The interviews were designed to last between 30 and 45 minutes and were to be conducted at a location convenient to the participant (like their workplace or a quiet conference room). However, as discussed in the proceeding section on qualitative data collection, circumstances beyond the control of the researcher meant that it was impossible to conduct in-depth interviews with the managers. The interview guide was then converted into an open-ended questionnaire that was eventually used for qualitative data collection.

The questionnaire included a series of open-ended questions designed to elicit detailed responses from participants. Unlike the close-ended questionnaire, these questions were designed to probe for further elaboration and clarification of issues surrounding workplace bullying at the municipality, how it is addressed, and the role of internal communication in this matter. and were

structured to allow participants to fully express their thoughts and experiences. Examples of specific questions that were used include:

- Which measures are used to prevent workplace bullying at the Municipality?
- What consequences do the victims normally face and how does this affect the organisation?
- What do you do when your employees report that they are being bullied? Take us through the process.
- How do you deal with workplace bullying and what measures do you find significant in dealing with it? Please elaborate.
- What channels of communication do you use to communicate with employees and how effective are they in addressing issues of bullying in the workplace?

By using a collection of these questions, participants were asked about their experiences with workplace bullying, their perceptions of the power dynamics in their workplace, and their views on the effectiveness of different internal communication channels in addressing bullying behaviour. The complete questionnaire is attached in Appendix B.

4.7. DATA COLLECTION

This study used a close ended survey and an open-ended questionnaire for the quantitative and the qualitative components of the research respectively. The two approaches were used in a convergent parallel strategy. As previously mentioned, a convergent parallel design is a mixed methods approach that involves collecting and analysing data concurrently from both quantitative and qualitative sources, and then integrating the results to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the research problem. This type of design is often used when the research question requires a multi-faceted or holistic approach, and when the results of the two methods can be meaningfully compared and combined. A convergent parallel design was appropriate because the research question was focused on understanding the experiences and perspectives of public sector employees and management personnel with regard to workplace bullying and internal communication in a local

municipality setting. This research question required a multi-faceted approach that considered both the individual experiences and the broader context of the workplace environment. A convergent parallel design allowed for the simultaneous collection and analysis of data from multiple sources, specifically the perspectives and experiences of both frontline workers and their managers.

Additionally, the convergent parallel design allowed for the integration of the results from the quantitative and qualitative components of the study, which provided insights that may not have been possible from either method alone. By comparing and combining the results from both components, the researcher gained a more nuanced understanding of the research problem from multiple perspectives and identified any areas of agreement or disagreement between the two methods. This provided valuable insights and enhanced the validity and reliability of the study findings. The following discussion details the data collection procedures that were followed for the qualitative and the quantitative procedures.

4.7.1. Qualitative data collection

The study used an open-ended self-administered questionnaire strategy for collecting the qualitative data for the study. The questionnaire was sent to individuals holding management positions at various departments of the municipality ranging from communication, risk management, human resources, corporate services, town planning, administration, and other functional divisions. In the initial data collection plan, the researcher was supposed to conduct in-depth interviews of between 30 to 45 minutes. In-depth interviews are preferred because they allow the researcher to collect rich and descriptive information about the phenomenon being researched (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). Unlike open ended questionnaires, in-depth interviews allow the researcher to ask open-ended questions and follow-up questions to probe for deeper narratives and clarity from the interviewees (Rubin & Rubin, 2016).

However, on negotiating access to the interview participants, the gate keepers at the municipality informed the researcher that they did not have time to accommodate in-depth interviews

in their busy schedules. As a compromise, the interview guide for the managers was converted to an open-ended questionnaire. Considerations for the time constraints involved in identifying a suitable study site and the time frame for completing this research project necessitated the need to use an open-ended questionnaire instead. Although not ideal, the open-ended questionnaire strategy was considered sufficient for this study as it aligned with the initial research objectives. In addition, the questionnaire strategy was an appropriate supplement of the extensive survey data that was collected from the municipal employees as part of this mixed methods study.

The questionnaires were then delivered to the municipal offices and distributed to the 12 managers that were identified during the sampling process. A purposive sample was used based on the researcher's experience and knowledge of the municipality personnel gained during an internship episode prior to the beginning of the study. Informants were chosen based on the researcher's judgement of who would provide useful information in line with the objectives of the study. The sampling strategy was also purposively wide to capture insights from managers of different departments.

Of the 12 questionnaires that were distributed, a total of 11 responses were returned (92% response rate). The responses were returned after a week. For data storage and management, a dual backup strategy was implemented comprising of physical and digital storage strategies (Marshall & Rossman, 2016). After the responses were returned, the original completed questionnaires were scanned and stored in a password protected computer. In addition, the scanned files were also stored in a secure cloud storage service that is protected with two-factor authentication. The hard copies were also stored in a secure location as the fallback option in case the digital copies are compromised through corruption or erasure from their storage locations.

Although some respondents did not complete the entire questionnaire ($n = 2$), those two cases were included in the analysis. The two cases were analysed on the completed sections, and it was observed that on one of the questionnaires that was incomplete, the missing sections were in the

middle sections of the questionnaire. This suggested that data loss was the reason for the missing responses. It is possible that some of the questionnaire pages were lost during the handling of the completed questionnaires and returning them to the researcher. The other case showed that the respondent completed just over half of the first questions, suggesting that they probably ran out of time to complete the entire questionnaire. It was therefore decided that the completed sections provided useful insights for analysis, hence all the cases were included.

4.7.2. Quantitative data collection

For the quantitative data collection, a close-ended survey instrument was used. The close-ended survey was specifically designed to target those frontline municipality employees who did not hold any management or supervisory positions. This instrument was self-administered by the participants, as hard copies of the survey were distributed, and each individual was responsible for completing the survey under the supervision of the researcher. The self-administered format provided for a much more convenient and flexible data collection process, as the participants had the freedom to complete the survey at a time and from a location of their own choosing. This was advantageous for the participants, as it enabled them to complete the survey at their own pace and a location of their choosing to ensure privacy where required. Additionally, the self-administered format allowed for the collection of data in a timely and efficient manner, as the survey completion did not require any additional resources or personnel.

The survey data was collected over a period from 25 June to 2 July 2022 at the municipality head office. Each survey took no more than 15 minutes to complete. Participation was encouraged, however, employees only participated on a voluntary basis, and were informed that they could withdraw their consent at any moment during the survey. No incentives, payments or agreements were offered to convince employees to participate, except the study objectives and the potential benefits of contributing to the study through participation were explained. Respondents were assured

that their responses would be kept anonymous and that their personal data and confidentiality would be protected.

The population for this study included a sample of 258 individuals employed in management and nonmanagement positions at the municipality. A total of 68 nonmanagement employees (line-level staff) participated in the qualitative component of the study. The total of 258 people employed at the municipality excluded political appointments. A total of 60 management employees were excluded from the quantitative study. Of the 198 eligible nonmanagement employees, 68 (34%) completed the survey, and all responses were used in the analyses.

As mentioned previously, the sample for the survey component of the study was selected using a combination of stratified sampling and convenience sampling. This was done to ensure adequate representation of different job levels and departments within the municipality, while also allowing for a sufficient number of participants to meet the sample size goals for the study. Convenience sampling was used to recruit respondents who had reported for work in different departments at the municipality headquarters at Modjadjiskloof during the two-week period of data collection. No participants were forced to participate in the study, and only a small number of individuals (three) who were approached declined to participate. The sample included 20% entry level employees, 50% mid-level employees, and 30% senior level employees.

4.8. QUANTITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

In the quantitative component of this study, a correlation analysis was used to examine the relationship between open communication and key employee outcomes. The statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS software. The procedures followed for data analysis included data cleaning, coding, and variable construction. In the process of cleansing the data, missing numbers, outliers, and inconsistencies were looked for. The paired deletion technique was used to handle missing values, and any mistakes or inconsistencies were fixed. The data was then coded and labelled

appropriately, and the variables were constructed according to the study's operationalization. The construction of the variables used in the correlation analysis is discussed in the proceeding section,

4.8.1. Study variables

In this study, the relationship between open communication and key employee outcomes was analysed using correlation analysis. Three employee outcomes were measured, including the work environment, management attributes, and employee-organisation relationship. All variables were measured using scales, and the items in the scales were adapted from previous studies and some were custom-made for this study based on literature findings. The association between exposure to bullying experience (BE) and the key employee outcomes was also analysed. The study used the question B1: *"Have you ever experienced workplace bullying?"* and the response options were "yes" coded as 1 and "no" coded as 2.

The variable Workplace Environment (WE) was a scale representing the respondents' perceptions of their workplace environments, constructed from the questionnaire items B11B, B11C, and B12I. The scale was based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree") and included the following questionnaire items: questionnaire item B11B was *"I feel at ease in my workplace"*; questionnaire item B11C was *"The entire workplace is toxic"*; and questionnaire item B12I was *"All my needs and desires are met"*. The reliability of the WE scale was established with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .690. This suggests that the items on the scale were internally consistent and that the scale was measuring a single underlying construct.

The variable Management Attributes (MA) scored the management attributes of the managers at the municipality based on the perceptions of the survey respondents. The MA scale was comprised of questionnaire items B12A, B12B, B12C (recoded in reverse), B12D, B12E (recoded in reverse), and B12F. The scale was also based on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree") and included the questionnaire items B12A: *"Manager is helpful towards achieving goals"*; B12B: *"Manager rewards good performance"*; B12C: *"Manager uses power, control and authority over*

workers"; B12D was " *Manager respects rights, needs and dignity of workers*"; B12E " *Manager ignores and neglects workers*"; and B12F " *Manager provides employees with all information they need*". The reliability of the MA scale was established with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .765, indicating that the items on the scale were internally consistent and that the scale was measuring a single underlying construct.

The variable Open Communication (OC) represented how respondents perceived the open communication practices at the municipality. The OC scale comprised of items B11D, B11E, B11G, B11H, and B11I. The questionnaire item B11D was " *The workplace has proper communication channel to address workplace bullying*" with a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"). The questionnaire item B11E was " *I am open towards my manager*" with a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"). The questionnaire item B11G was " *I can freely exchange information and opinions*" with a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"). The questionnaire item B11H was " *Employees are encouraged to be open and candid with each other*" with a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"). The questionnaire item B11I was " *I am involved in all decision-making processes*" with a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree"). The reliability of the OC scale was established with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of .658, indicating that the items on the scale were internally consistent and that the scale was measuring a single underlying construct.

Finally, the employee-organisation relationship scale was operationalized by calculating the mean of the Z scores of the questionnaire items B7, B12H, and B12I. The questionnaire item B7 was " *Based on your experience, how likely are you to recommend your workplace to your friends*" with a 10-point scale (1 = "very unlikely" to 10 = "very likely"). The questionnaire item B12H was " *I consider myself as part of the company and its mission*" measured on a 5-point Likert scale (1 = "strongly disagree" to 5 = "strongly agree") and item B12I: " *I am proud to work in this organisation*" was also measured with the same 5-point Likert scale. The reliability of the employee-organisation relationship scale was established with a Cronbach's Alpha coefficient of 0.455, indicating that the items on the

scale had moderate internal consistency and that the scale was measuring a single underlying construct.

4.8.2. Correlation analysis and diagnostic tests

The assumptions underlying the correlation analysis included normality and independence of the data. Independence was assumed based on the nature of the study. The study used non-overlapping samples and recruited employees in different departments, therefore it is reasonable to assume that the responses are independent of each other as the participants were not likely to overlap. Furthermore, the study used an anonymous self-administered survey, making it a reasonable assumption to assume that the responses are independent of each other as the participants were not likely to know each other's responses and therefore not likely to influence each other. However, in order to ensure that any violations of these assumptions did not greatly impact the analysis, the study used non-parametric correlation tests (such as Spearman's) as well. Normality was assessed using histograms and normality tests, such as the Shapiro-Wilk test. Preliminary analyses of the relationships between the variables Workplace Environment, management attributes and open communication are presented in the scatter plot matrix in Figure 0-3.

From the results, there appears to be a positive relationship between the variable considered, that is Workplace Environment and Management Attributes, Workplace Environment and Open Communication, and Management Attributes and Open Communication. On inspection of the scatter plots, it can be observed that the variability in the scores on the horizontal and vertical axis for all the pairs of variables is similar, suggesting that the assumption of Homoscedasticity is satisfied. The next step in the analysis was to test the assumptions for normality using descriptive statistics.

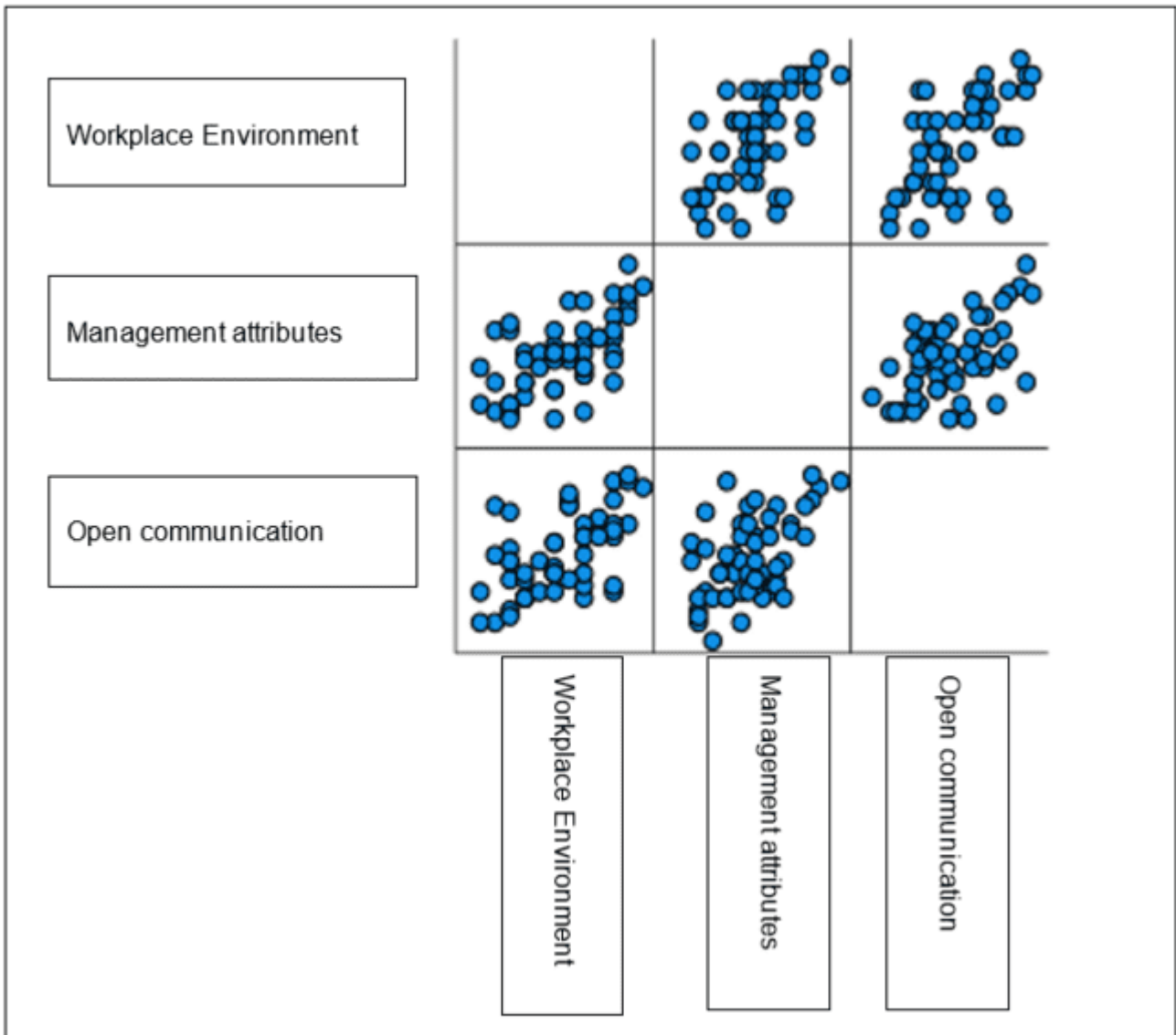


Figure 0-3: Scatter matrix showing the relationships between respondents' perspectives of workplace environment, workplace, management attributes, and the extent of open communication at the municipality.

Management Attributes: The Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic was used for this purpose, and the results showed a non-significant result ($p = 0.2$) suggesting normality (Pallant, 2020). The histogram was also assessed. The shape of the histogram slightly deviated from the shape of a normal distribution. However, the assumption of normality is supported by the normality probability plot and the de-trended Normal Q-Q Plots. The normal probability plot (Figure 0-4) shows a

reasonably straight line of the observed variable plotted against the expected values of a normal distribution (Pallant, 2020). These results indicate a strong correlation between the observed variable and a normal distribution. The Detrended Normal Q-Q Plot (Figure 0-5) shows that there is minimal deviation from the straight line indicating minimal deviation from normality, supporting the assumption of normality.

Open Communication: A non-significant result of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic ($p = 0.189$) suggests normality. On analysis of the shape of the histogram, it can be observed that the variable Open Communication slightly deviates from the shape of a normal distribution. However, the assumption of normality is supported by the normality probability plot (Figure 0-6) and the Detrended Normal Q-Q Plots (Figure 0-7) which respectively show a reasonably straight line and minimal deviation from the straight line in support of the assumption of normality.

Perceptions of Work Environment: Similar tests were performed for the Perceptions of Work Environment variable. The non-significant Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic suggests a normal distribution ($p = 0.161$). Despite the shape of the histogram deviating from a normal distribution, the normality probability plot (Figure 0-8) and the Detrended Normal Q-Q Plots (Figure 0-9) support the assumption of normality. The results of the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test for normality are shown in Table 4-3.

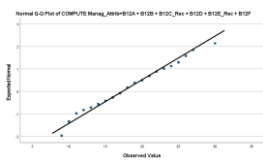


Figure 0-4: Normality plot of Management Attributes

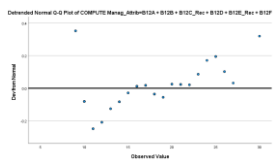


Figure 0-5: De-trended Normality plot of Management Attributes

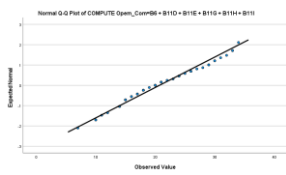


Figure 0-6: Normality plot of Open Communication

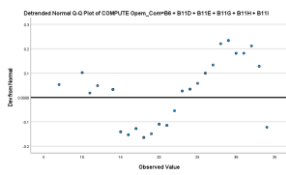


Figure 0-7: De-trended Normality plot of Open Communication

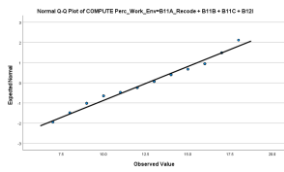


Figure 0-8: Normality plot of Perceptions of Work Environment

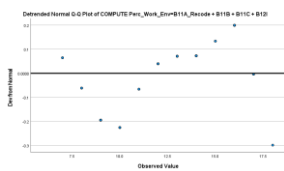


Figure 0-9: De-trended Normality plot of Perceptions of Work Environment

Table 0-3: Summary of key Descriptive statistics

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov statistic			Mean	5% Trimmed Mean
	Statistic	Df	sig		
Management Attributes	0.082	60	0.2	17.3333	17.2037
Open Communication	0.105	56	0.189	20.7321	20.6865
Perceptions of Work Environment	0.107	57	0.161	12.5965	12.6267

In order to proceed with correlation analysis, it is also important to evaluate the influence of outliers on the variables of interest (Pallant, 2020). To this end, **Table 0-3** also shows a comparison between the Mean and the 5% Trimmed Mean. The results show that the mean values and the 5% trimmed mean values of the three variables are virtually similar, suggesting that the outliers have minimum impact on the variables (Pallant, 2020).

4.9. QUALITATIVE DATA ANALYSIS

In this study, thematic content analysis was used to analyse the qualitative data collected through the open-ended questionnaire instrument. Thematic content analysis is a method used to identify patterns, themes, and trends in qualitative data, such as text, images, and audio. It is a way of identifying meaning in the data by breaking it down into smaller, manageable segments and analysing each segment for themes or patterns. A coding framework was established to ensure consistency and accuracy in the thematic content analysis of the data collected through the open-ended questionnaire. The coding framework consisted of the following steps.

The data analysis process began with a thorough reading of all the responses to the open-ended questions in the questionnaire. During this initial reading, the researcher identified key phrases and words that appeared frequently in the responses, which were then used to create initial codes. These codes were then grouped into broader themes that emerged from the data. The coding was done manually by the researcher. The next step in the analysis process involved a detailed

examination of each theme to identify patterns and relationships between the themes. This was done by reviewing the responses to each question, looking for connections between different responses, and identifying any sub-themes that emerged. The final step in the analysis process involved the interpretation of the themes and patterns that emerged from the data. This was done by connecting the themes and patterns to the research questions and objectives, and by interpreting the meaning of the themes and patterns in relation to the phenomenon of workplace bullying in the public sector and the role of internal communication in addressing this issue.

The data collected through the open-ended questionnaire provided rich and detailed information about the experiences and perspectives of management personnel in relation to workplace bullying and the use of internal communication in addressing this issue. The thematic content analysis method allowed for a thorough examination of this data and provided insight into the ways in which workplace bullying is addressed, the consequences faced by victims, and the effectiveness of internal communication in addressing this issue. It is worth noting that the thematic content analysis method has certain limitations, such as being subjective to the researcher's interpretation which may limit the generalisability of the study results. To mitigate these limitations, the study established a clear coding framework, and the study supervisor reviewed the analysis process to ensure reliability. Additionally, the study's results were compared to previous studies in the field in the discussion chapter to enhance the validity of the findings.

4.10. ENSURING TRUSTWORTHINESS OF THE STUDY

It is not an easy task to carry out a naturalistic investigation in general. Qualitative studies are more complex in several ways than traditional research (Noble & Smith, 2015). A structured, static, pre-set model follows quantitative research using all defined methods. Planning and execution are concurrent in naturalistic investigations, and the nature of the study can change or emerge (Silverman, 2016). Qualitative work is repeatedly criticized for lack of intellectual rigor, with little support for the methodology embraced, lack of certainty in analytical techniques and findings being simply a set of

personal views subject to research bias. This is more likely in the case of researchers that lack experience (Cypress, 2017).

It is difficult to prove rigor in the conduct of qualitative research since there is no validation (Mohajan, 2017). While the expectations and factors used to verify the accuracy and reliability of quantitative research cannot be broadened to qualitative research, there are ongoing debates as to whether principles such as validity, reliability and generalizability are applicable to the assessment of quality of the data collected in the context of qualitative research (Smith & MacGnnon, 2017). Some have argued that these merely apply to quantitative research, not qualitative research. Furthermore, where qualitative methods are intrinsically different from quantitative methods in terms of philosophic positions and objectives, alternative frameworks for qualitative researchers can be adopted (Dikko, 2016).

Qualitative research relies on several key concepts to ensure its validity and reliability. Trustworthiness, integrity, reliability, and transferability are crucial elements in this regard (Cope, 2014). Trustworthiness is built on the foundation of reliability, which depends on the researcher's confidence in the accuracy of their findings. To enhance reliability, researchers are advised to use multiple data sources, such as interviews, observations, and existing literature (Gray, 2019). Validity, on the other hand, is the instrument's ability to measure the intended variables accurately (Brink, 2006). Credibility is closely related to validity, focusing on the alignment of findings with reality (Cameron, 2011). Researchers ensure credibility by aligning interview questions with research objectives and grounding their work in established theories.

Transferability, as defined by Cameron (2011), is about providing enough context and data for others to assess whether the findings can be applied to different situations. Researchers achieve transferability by using various analytical methods and ensuring that their findings are applicable beyond the original study context. Dependability refers to the ability to replicate the study based on the information and documentation provided (Cameron, 2011). Researchers ensure dependability by

remaining open to new insights throughout the research process and continuously analysing data to inform future research. Confirmability, the last concept, is about ensuring that research findings are the direct result of participants' experiences (Cameron, 2011). Researchers achieve confirmability by accurately capturing participants' perceptions and experiences, which are then used to develop themes.

Several measures were taken to ensure the validity, reliability, and trustworthiness of the study findings. Firstly, triangulation was employed as a key strategy to enhance the validity of the research findings. This was achieved by using multiple data sources, methods, and theories, allowing the ability to cross-verify findings, thereby reducing the risk of bias and increasing the robustness of our results.

Secondly, the study implemented member checking to ensure the reliability of the data. This involved returning the preliminary findings to the participants for review and confirmation. This iterative process allowed the refinement of study interpretations and ensure they accurately represented the participants' perspectives. According to Bulmer and Warwick (1993), for an instrument to be reliable it should yield the same results when the research is done by different people and under different conditions. To this effect, guidelines on effective interview techniques like rephrasing and avoiding asking leading questions were followed to ensure that respondents would respond in a similar manner if the in-depth interviews were repeated by a different interviewer. In addition, Interviews were tape recorded to ensure that all data was correctly recorded. To ensure the reliability of data collected, the researcher ensured objectivity and notes were taken of anything that was relevant to the study. Thirdly, an audit trail was maintained throughout the research process. This involved keeping detailed records of all research processes and decisions, including data collection and analysis procedures, methodological decisions, and reflections on the research process. This transparency enhances the reliability of our research by allowing others to trace the progression of our research and understand how we arrived at our conclusions.

Lastly, peer debriefing sessions were held between the study author and the study supervisor throughout the research process during consultation sessions. These sessions involved discussions focussed on providing critical feedback on the assumptions, research techniques used, relevant theories and interpretations. This rigorous review process helped to enhance the trustworthiness of the research by ensuring the findings were grounded in the data and resonated with broader theoretical and empirical insights.

4.11. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics is the branch of philosophy concerned with assessing the effects of decision- making processes in the context of what is right or wrong (Fouka & Mantzourou 2011:44). Ethical considerations in any kind of research are important to mitigate any harmful impacts that might ensue from conducting the said research (Eisenhauer & Wynaden 2001: 01). Every stage of the research process can be burdened with potential conflicts between the greater good of others and the objectives of the research. Considerations have to be made concerning the privacy of the participants, and ensuring no harm is inflicted on the participants or any individuals due to the research process or the impact of the research (refer to Appendix C). Additionally, ethical concerns also focus on eliminating biases held by both the researcher and the participants that could affect the outcomes of the research.

4.11.1. Participant consent

In order for a participant to make a logical, informed decision to participate in a study, the concept of informed consent demands that all relevant information regarding the study be supplied before participating in the study. The fundamental objective of informed consent is for individuals to freely choose whether or not to participate. They should not be forced to participate in any way (Gravetter and Forzano, 2011: 118). To ensure that the participants gave informed consent, the researcher provided the participants with a Participant Information sheet (refer to Appendix A), that detailed the objectives of the study and explained their right to withdraw from the study if they decided

not to participate. In addition, the participants were asked to sign the consent form after the researcher had repeated the information on the Participant Information sheet to emphasise that their participation in the study was voluntary (refer to Appendix D).

4.11.2. Privacy, confidentiality, and anonymity

Saunders, Huynh, and Goodman-Delahunty (2012) state that there is a possibility of psychological as well as bodily injury for research participants. For example, participants may be reluctant to answer questions honestly during an interview if they feel that taking part in the study could compromise their integrity and connections with others, both personally and professionally. Participants were made aware that their involvement in the study was voluntary, confidential, and anonymous in order to prevent this from happening (see Participant information sheet in Appendix A that was given to all study participants). Cottrell and McKenzie (2010) state that two tactics are employed to protect study participants' privacy: anonymity and confidentiality. When a study participant's identity and personal information are related, but the information is kept secret from others, that relationship is considered confidential. Anonymity arises when there is no connection between a participant's identity and their personal information. Throughout the data gathering process, no derogatory or discriminatory language was used in order to avoid further harm. The researcher further explained that their information will not be shared with other sources but will only be used for academic purposes only. the participants got into the whole interview process knowing that they are going to be part of the research.

4.12. CHAPTER SUMMARY

The methodology chapter of this dissertation outlines the overall approach and decisions that informed the research process for the study on workplace bullying in the public sector and the role of internal communication in addressing it in a local government context such as a municipality setting.

The chapter details the research design considerations and the objectives of the study, which are: to understand the experiences of public sector employees in a local municipality setting with regard to workplace bullying, to explore the power dynamics of the workplace environment that affect the reporting and addressing of workplace bullying in the municipality, to examine the perspectives and experiences of public sector employees and management personnel in relation to the use of internal communication to address workplace bullying in the municipality, and to identify the internal communication structures and practices that support or address workplace bullying in the municipality, and to assess the effectiveness of these communication channels in addressing bullying behaviour. The research design used is a convergent mixed methods design combining both qualitative and quantitative data collection and analysis methods. The chapter further discusses the data collection methods including the use of survey questionnaires and qualitative questionnaire, the data analysis techniques, limitations, and ethical considerations of the study. The chapter concludes by providing an overview of the research methodology adopted for the study.

CHAPTER 5

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter describes the key findings and results presented in response to the research questions. This research focused on the role of internal communication in addressing workplace bullying, and the purpose was to describe and explore the phenomenon of workplace bullying in the public sector, and to explore the role of internal communication in addressing workplace bullying in a local government context such as a municipality setting. The study objectives were:

- To understand the experiences of public sector employees in a local municipality setting with regard to workplace bullying, including the impact of these experiences on municipality personnel.
- To explore the power dynamics of the workplace environment that affect the reporting and addressing of workplace bullying in the municipality.
- To examine the perspectives and experiences of public sector employees and management personnel in relation to the use of internal communication to address workplace bullying in the municipality.
- To identify the internal communication structures and practices that support or address workplace bullying in the municipality, and to assess the effectiveness of these communication channels in addressing bullying behaviour.

Chapter 4 presented the details of the mixed methods research approach that was chosen for this research. This chapter presents the key findings of the research. The mixed methods research was based on the pragmatist research philosophy, allowing for the use of multiple data collection methods and data sources relevant to the study's research questions. Qualitative and quantitative

methods were therefore used in a convergent mixed methods design. For the quantitative aspect of the research methodology, a close-ended survey was distributed to the employees of the municipality to gather their perspectives on the topic of workplace bullying at the municipality. An open-ended qualitative questionnaire was employed for the qualitative aspect of the research, collecting data from individuals in management positions at the municipality. The study results are presented below.

5.2. QUALITATIVE FINDINGS

This section presents the key findings gathered from the data collected from the open-ended questionnaire responses that were received from management. The data collection efforts and the questionnaire were designed to answer the research questions and help contribute to understanding bullying as an internal communication phenomenon. The findings are presented following a thematic organising framework.

5.2.1. Workplace bullying at the municipality: prevalence and salient features

In order to understand the phenomenon of bullying and its effects at the municipality, it was necessary to establish the prevalence of bullying at the research site. The respondents were asked whether they had experienced bullying in the workplace. The specific question was stated as follows in the questionnaire: *'Have you experienced bullying in the workplace in anyway? Please elaborate.'* A significant number of respondents in management had experienced bullying in one form or another. Five of the eleven managers who responded to the questionnaire indicated that they had experienced bullying in the workplace. Four of the managers who indicated that they had previous experience with workplace bullying provided further information to elaborate on their experiences, and in all instances, the bullying was attributed to their superiors. However, there was a varied response on the forms of bullying that the respondents reported, as indicated in the following statements.

Respondent 3 who is a manager in the town planning division alluded to issues of unfair and unequal treatment: *"Yes, I was not treated equally in the workplace by management."* Respondent 8

from the communications and events division also cited issues of unfair treatment and disregard of his opinions:

Yes, I used to have a boss who always wanted to enforce "instructions" without caring how you feel and what your opinion is" (Respondent 8)

The sentiment of unfair treatment was also echoed by Respondent 11 who complained about being bullied with workloads not correlate with their remuneration: "Yes, the responsibilities that I carry outweigh the remuneration package that I am being offered and I feel it is another form of bullying." Respondent 11 further explained the effects in this statement: "Yes, it is. Especially on management level because we are being bundled with a lot of job and yet less remuneration and are not even allowed to complain (sic)."

On the other hand, Respondent 4 cited issues of accusations in the workplace: "Yes, being accused of aligning to a political party other than the ruling party." It is interesting to note how the influence of political pressure on Respondent 4's role in the internal audit department translates to bullying as it has a negative effect on their job performance and wellbeing.

Yes, it affects performance and productivity levels as it reduces or hinders the communication among colleagues, which is key to teamwork." (Respondent 4)

The incidences of workplace bullying that can be gathered from the responses returned by the respondents satisfy the key criteria for defining bullying identified from the literature review. All the incidences in these responses exhibit elements of negative workplace behaviour, negative effects on the target of the negative behaviour, power imbalance, persistence and self-labelling of the bullying behaviour by the target. According to Saunders, Huynh, and Goodman-Delahunty (2007: 340-354), these are the five definitional elements that are generally agreed upon in scientific research on workplace bullying. However, negative behaviour and the negative effects on the target are two undisputed elements of the operational definition of bullying (Saunders *et al.*, 2007: 342). The

researchers however cautioned that employees may include other criteria that is not included in the criteria of the operational definitions of workplace bullying (Saunders *et al.*, 2007: 340-354).

Regarding the prevalence of workplaces bullying amongst employees in the municipality, there was a consensus from all the respondents from the management questionnaire that reports of workplace bullying are rare. In the instances reported by the four respondents who participated in the management questionnaire, it appears that none of the cases were formally reported to the organisation despite some of the issues persisting. Two such examples that have not been resolved include the case of unfair remuneration (Respondent 11) and accusations based on political affiliation in the workplace (Respondent 4). In practice, these two cases would not normally be defined as bullying under the operational definitions provided by workplace policies, yet the targets self-label the negative behaviours as bullying because they are persistently experiencing the negative behaviours and their negative effect on their workplace performance. This observation could suggest the reasons why workplace bullying is underreported. In addition, it appears that power imbalances have a role to play in the under reporting of bullying as all the four cases involved an individual in a more senior position.

The questionnaire also sought to establish the types of workplace bullying that are mostly observed at the municipality. There were varied responses on the different forms of harassment and unwanted behaviour from the responses. These range from insults, intimidation, abuse, various forms of discrimination and unfair penal sanctions. The range of responses is demonstrated in the statements in

Table 0-1:

Table 0-1: Types of workplace bullying

Respondent 3	<i>“Management being harsh in terms of wanting them to do work in a specific manner”</i>
Respondent 4	<i>“Insults undermining each other based on levels.”</i>
Respondent 5	<i>“Manager may be talking down its subordinates continuously or swearing.”</i>
Respondent 6	<i>“Intimidation. Abuse.”</i>
Respondent 8	<i>“Strict and directive behaviour. Unreasonable workplace behaviour discrimination against ethnicity.”</i>
Respondent 9	<i>“Undermining by supervisor, isolation for work activities.”</i>
Respondent 10	<i>“Managers intimidating subordinates. Shouting and belittling employees.”</i>
Respondent 11	<i>“Neglect by management. Disapprovals of benefits, including leave and allowances.”</i>

Source: Own conceptualisation

5.2.2. Interventions

In line with the aims of this study and the focus on how communication structures help address or facilitate bullying in the workplace, it was also necessary to consider the measures that were put in to prevent workplace bullying at the study site. To understand the role of the managers in addressing bullying at the municipality, and how the organisation addresses such issues, the study analysed responses to the following two questions:

‘What do you do when your employees report that they are being bullied? Take us through the process.’

‘How do you deal with workplace bullying and what measures do you find significant in dealing with it? Please elaborate.’

The responses from the management questionnaire revealed that the municipality mainly relies on organisational policies, disciplinary processes and employee wellness initiatives as the main preventative measures against workplace bullying. There is no specific policy addressing workplace bullying, however issues relating to bullying are addressed in the organisation’s Human Resources (HR) Policy that addresses employee misconduct. The municipal employee policies are considered as the foundation for any preventative measures as they guide the acceptable conduct of municipal employees, stipulate the types of conduct that would equate to violation of policy, and define the corrective measures that should be followed to address misconduct and policy violations. This following statement from Respondent 7 demonstrates this:

“The municipalities got series of policies. Any application of workplace policies can prevent bullying. Bullying will be tantamount to violating the policies. Adherence to workplace policies prevent assortment of bullying.” (Respondent 7)

The employee wellness division of the municipality is also vital to the indirect efforts to combat workplace bullying through the various employees wellness initiatives to support employees. In addition, the division is also responsible for facilitating an engagement platform to address issues

affecting employees, which includes workplace bullying. The following statement from Respondent 2 describes the nature of some of the support that employees expect to receive from the employee wellness division, *“We have an office where we report any social or emotional encounters at work.”* Finally, the employee wellness division facilitates other initiatives to promote employee engagement through activities such as sport.

In addition to establishing the preventative measures that are in place to curb workplace bullying, it was then important to establish the processes involved when an employee reported an incident of workplace bullying. To this end, responses to the following questions were gathered:

- *‘What do you do when your employees report that they are being bullied? Take us through the process.’*
- *‘How do you deal with workplace bullying and what measures do you find significant in dealing with it? Please elaborate.’*

The findings reported in the subsequent paragraphs represent the process from the perspective of the managers who responded to the management questionnaire. This section of the management questionnaire also serves to evaluate the awareness levels of how workplace bullying reports should be addressed. The structures and processes in place to address workplace bullying are summarised in Figure 0-1.

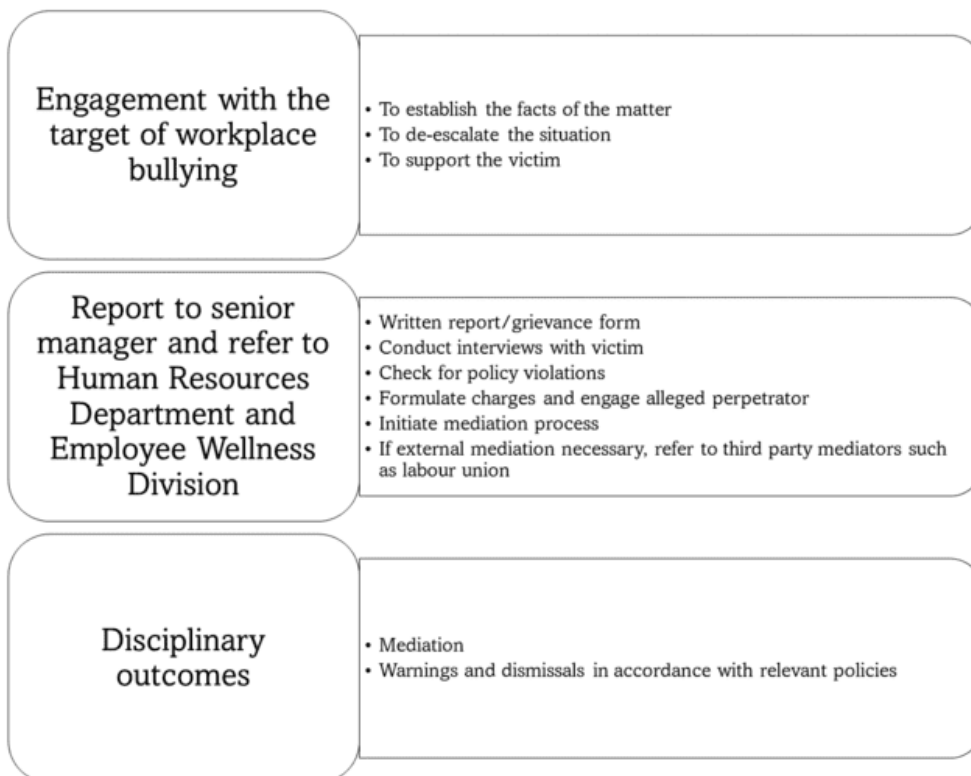


Figure 0-1: Structures and measures to address workplace bullying at the municipality.

A significant proportion the respondents (seven) indicated that the first step would be to engage with the employee who has been the target of bullying. The initial engagement seems to serve two purposes. Firstly, to support the victim and provide emotional support as well as to deescalate the situation as indicated in the following statement by the respondents, Respondent 3: *“Advised employee to calm down and understand that they must work properly and not fight.”* A similar response was received by Respondent 1: *“It is firstly to calm them down and ask them to appreciate that people are irrational and then refer them to Wellness officer.”* Secondly, the initial engagement with the target of the bullying serves to establish the facts of the situation. The respondents also indicated that they would try to engage with the alleged perpetrator in the bullying incident to establish the facts of the matter from the other party.

“Allow them to explain themselves thoroughly and ask them what they would want to see being done and how they would want to see the situation being resolved. Later, invite the perpetrator to hear the other side of the story.” (Respondent 11)

This would typically be followed by an informal mediation session before escalating the report for intervention as demonstrated in the following response: *“Mediate, see progress. If necessary, reach out to corporate department for intervention,” (Respondent 5).*

The other half of the responses from the management questionnaire suggests that other managers typically prefer a different approach to dealing with reports of bullying in the workplace. This approach typically follows more formal process as stipulated in the company policies, as demonstrated by the following responses: *“Request a report in writing and then interview the aggrieved,” (Respondent 6); “Inform the senior manager and thereafter report the matter to HR for hearing,” (Respondent 9); and “Report the matter to HR, fill in a grievance form. Get mediation session,” (Respondent 8).*

The process is typically followed by a formal disciplinary process:

“Firstly, we will check if there is any policy which has been violated, then formulate charges and call the perpetrator to explain their side of the story.”
(Respondent 7)

Respondent 7 further explained the processes involved when a bullying case has been reported as per the following statement:

“We formulate charges upon confirming that violation of policies has occurred, then arranged disciplinary hearing.” (Respondent 7)

Other formal processes that can be followed to address workplace bullying at the municipality were also gathered from the responses collected from the management questionnaire. These include

the processes that are initiated with disciplinary procedures following a disciplinary hearing including mediation, written warnings, and dismissals in accordance with the requirements set out in the relevant policies. In some cases, it may be relevant to involve third parties such as labour unions in the mediation process: *“Labour union through complaints reported by employees,”* (Respondent 4). Crucially, it appears that the role of the employee wellness office and the relevant employee wellness policy is significant in this process, as suggested by the following statement by Respondent 11:

“Apply the services and employee health and Wellness practitioner to cancel the victim and if there is a case to answer, refer the perpetrator to disciplinary process.” (Respondent 11)

The respondents were also asked to share their perspectives on the effectiveness of the processes and measures in place to prevent workplace bullying at the municipality. The responses to the question: *‘How effective are the Municipality’s policies on dealing with cases of bullying?’* revealed varied perspectives regarding the effectiveness of the measures and processes to prevent and or address bullying in the municipality. Three groups of perspectives emerged from the management questionnaire. The first group considered that the municipal structures were not effective at all in addressing or preventing workplace bullying at the municipality. This perspective is reflected in responses such as: *“They are not effective, and not implemented,”* (Respondent 3); and *“Not effective. No policy dealing with bullying,”* (Respondent 4)

The second group held the perspective that the structures would be effective if implemented. For example, Respondent 11’s response underscores the question of whether the mechanisms are effectively implemented:

“They are effective, but the problem might be the implementation by employees. The policy has even led to the appointment of employee health and awareness practitioner to assist victims.” (Respondent 11)

This sentiment is reflected in the response by Respondent 6 who stated that “Policies are in place but not followed to the letter.” This is in direct contrast to the earlier claim by Respondent 4 that there is “No policy dealing with bullying.” However, gathering from the responses of the other respondents, it is evident that there is no specific workplace bullying policy at the municipality, but the existing policies address general employee misconduct and employee wellness. The scope of these policies also addresses issues of workplace bullying in general. For example, the responses from Respondents 7 and 9 reference existing policies whose scope also covers workplace bullying:

“The policies are aimed at curbing all sorts of misconduct. We don't have a policy specifically to deal with bullying per se,” (Respondent 7); and *“Policies are there and ready for implementation once someone conduct bullying at workplace,”* (Respondent 9)

These two responses are representative of the third perspective that believes that the mechanisms in place at the municipality are effective in as much as preventing and addressing workplace bullying at the municipality is concerned. This perspective considers the existing mechanisms as enforceable and effective deterrents to prevent workplace bullying. This view is exemplified in the following statement from Respondent 10.

“They are enforceable, written warnings and dismissals are some of the mechanisms put in place by management” (Respondent 10)

From the responses obtained from the questionnaire, it can be concluded that the management personnel at the municipality hold varying perspectives in the effectiveness of the existing mechanisms and processes in preventing and addressing workplace bullying at the municipality. The responses revealed varying perspectives on the effectiveness of the measures, ranging from those who consider the structures as not effective at all, to those who believe the structures would be effective if implemented. Ultimately, the collective view of the respondents was that the municipality has the necessary structures and processes in place to prevent and address

workplace bullying, and that the existing mechanisms are enforceable and would be effective deterrents if implemented.

5.2.3. The role of management communication in addressing bullying at the municipality

In order to address the research question on how internal communication structures support or address workplace bullying at the municipality, it was necessary to first address the communication strategies that are used in the organisation. Sections E and F of the management questionnaire addressed this question from the perspective of the managers who participated in this study. This section entailed questions such as:

- *What channels of communication do you use to communicate with employees?*
- *How often do you use these channels of communication?*
- *How effective are they in addressing issues of bullying in the workplace?*

The management perspective was crucial in this regard because it is the management and the elected officials in the municipality who are jointly responsible for the messaging that is communicated within the municipality. The communication channels used in the municipality are summarised in Table 0-2

Table 0-2: Communication channels

Formal communication channels	Informal communication channels
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Scheduled meetings • Memorandums • Notices • Emails • Website 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whatsapp group chats • Text messages • Phone calls

Source: Own Conceptualisation

In addition to establishing the communication channels used at the municipality, the study also considered employee involvement in the decision-making processes in the municipality. All the managers who participated in the management questionnaire indicated that they consulted with the employees in the decision-making process. The nuances to how different managers operationalise employee engagement are best represented in the following statements: *“Yes, there are scheduled meetings that take place and employees are allowed to participate in decision making process of the division and directorate,”* (Respondent 11) and *“I always communicate, teach, and involve them and their opinions about management decisions and [consider their] comments,”* (Respondent 5).

The respondents were also asked if they make decisions on behalf of the employees. Of the nine respondents who provided a response to this question, only one respondent (Respondent 8) indicated that they sometimes make decision on behalf of the employees. While the following statement indicates that Respondent 7 does not make decisions on behalf of employees, the statement also shows cases where such decisions can be made without consultation:

“No decisions are based on consultation, but there are times where correct decisions can be taken by the authority without consultations.” (Respondent 7)

The rest of the responses (nine) indicate that decisions are made through some form of direct consultation with employees: *“Consultation in the spirit of Batho Pele together with basic conditions of employment is key,”* (Respondent 5) and *“No. Subordinates are always held accountable for their work, so they are always consulted,”* (Respondent 10). There are also instances where employees are consulted indirectly through employee representatives: *“Employees are consulted through Labour Union Forum,”* (Respondent 4). The dominant leadership style can therefore be characterised as collective leadership that is open to engagement and feedback from employees. The following statement from Respondent 11 embodies this aspect of the dominant leadership style at the municipality:

“No, I believe in the collective leadership style where employees are given the opportunity to participate in decision making.” (Respondent 11).

Despite the dominant collective leadership style portrayed in the responses of the management, one could also characterise the leadership situation as situational leadership dominated by collective leadership, suggesting that other leadership styles are also present at the municipality. Situational leadership allows for responsiveness that is needed in the dynamic operating environment that the municipality operates in. This allows the municipality to appropriately respond to different situations. As an example, consider the following response from Respondent 1: *“They use situational leadership coupled with autocratic style when they are under pressure with reports to prepare.”*

If anything, the previous statement from Respondent 1 is confirmation that it would be naïve to assume that the leadership situation at the municipality is not complex. The responses reported in this research report were collected from individuals holding management positions in the administrative and operational divisions of the municipality. Managers and other leaders from the political wing of the municipality were not included in this study (for logistical reasons concerning acquiring the required ethical clearance to collect data on the study aspects relating to political leadership at the municipality. For these reasons, aspects relating to political leadership at the municipality are beyond the scope of this study). However, drawing from the responses of members of the operational and administrative management divisions, it is highly probable that complex power relations and leadership dynamics exist between the political, operational, and administrative wings of the municipal leadership with significant knock-on effects on the workplace bullying as well as on the employees holding subject-ordinate positions in the municipality.

To close this section, the question on the effectiveness of the communication channels in the municipality to address workplace bullying is considered. The respondents weighed in on the effectiveness of the communication strategies to address bullying with some arguing that they are not

effective and have *“minimal impact”* (Respondent 8) in addressing workplace bullying. Others hold the perspective that other aides are required such as *“A standalone policy on bullying”* (Respondent 4) and *“workshops”* (Respondent 10). However, the dominant perspective is that the open communication channels in use at the municipality are effective as they facilitate a feedback loop that ensures issues affecting employees such as employee wellness and workplace bullying are adequately addressed. This sentiment is exemplified by the following statements from Respondent 11: *“They are effective because employees are able to raise issues even before they get worse,”*; Respondent 3: *“They are 100% effective as I am able to get feedback,”*; Respondent 5: *“Communication and meeting is effective and yields results if done correctly,”*; and Respondent 6 *“They are very effective as employees are able to explain their situation.”*

The data collected in this section suggests that the communication channels used in the municipality are effective in addressing workplace bullying. This is evidenced by the respondents' statements indicating that these channels facilitate a feedback loop that ensures all issues affecting employees, including employee wellness and workplace bullying, are adequately addressed. Furthermore, the respondents believe that these channels are effective in allowing employees to raise issues before they get worse. The majority opinion is that open communication channels are effective in addressing workplace bullying.

5.3. QUANTITATIVE FINDINGS

For the quantitative component of the study, a close-ended survey instrument was distributed to the employees of the municipality. The quantitative component of the research study was designed to complement the qualitative findings as presented in the previous sections in line with the purpose of this study of analysing how managers and employees at the municipality use internal communication to resolve workplace bullying. The following sections present the findings that were drawn from the quantitative component of the research.

5.3.1. Prevalence of workplace bullying

It was necessary to establish the prevalence of bullying at the research site. The respondents were asked whether they had experienced bullying in the workplace. The results relating to the prevalence of workplace bullying amongst the respondents are shown in Figure 0-2.

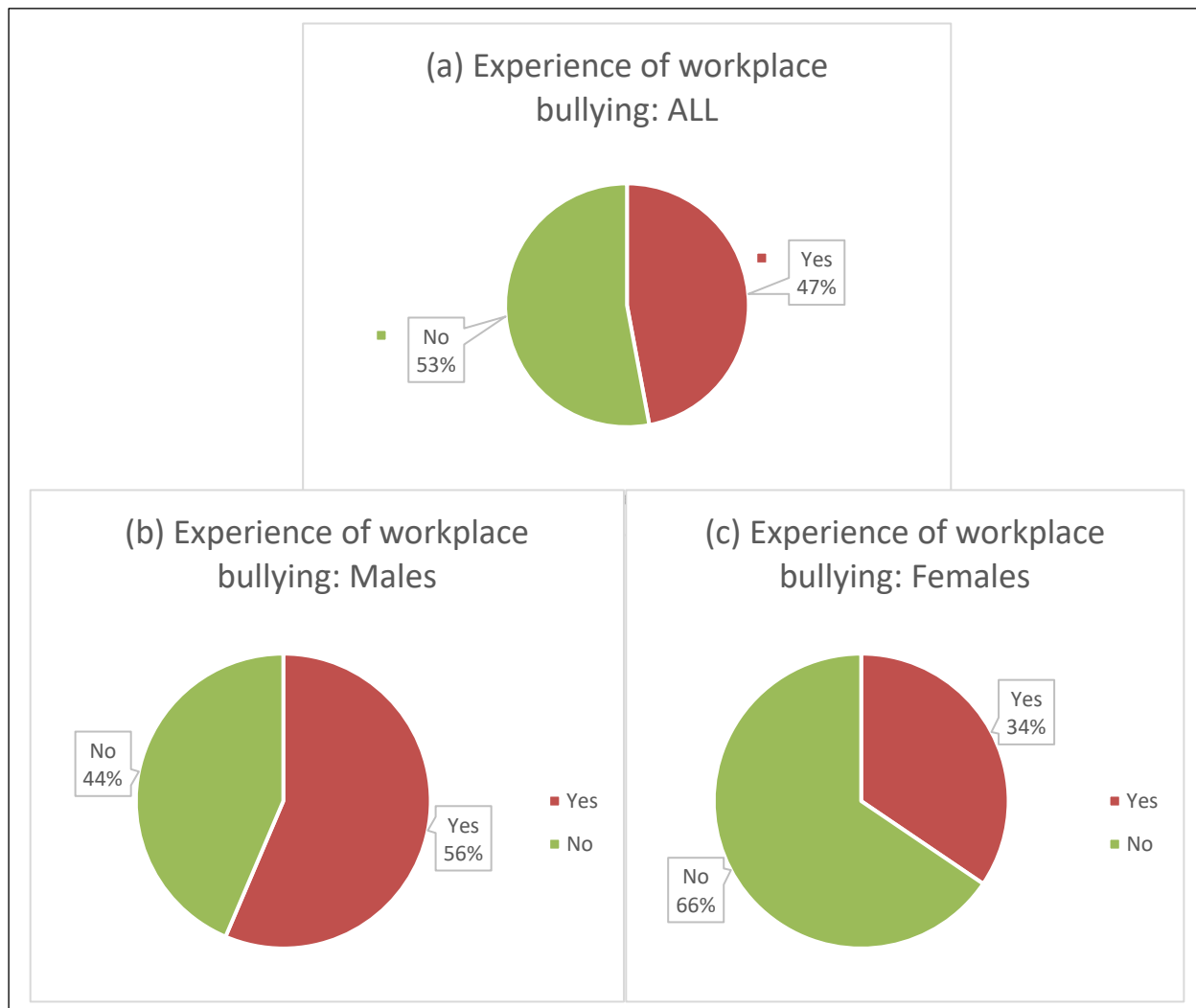


Figure 0-2: Proportion of respondents who have experienced workplace bullying at the municipality. (a) All respondents (b) Males (c) Females

Figure 0-2 shows the proportion of respondents who indicated to the study that they had experienced workplace bullying at the workplace for: (a) all the respondents, (b) male respondents,

and (c) female respondents respectively. Firstly, the survey data suggests that workplace bullying is more prevalent in the municipality. Secondly, the data provides insights on the difference in the prevalence rates of workplace bullying between males and females. The results suggest that experiences of workplace bullying were more prevalent amongst male participants. The prevalence rate was 56% compared to 34% for females.

The Chi-Square Test for independence was used to test if there is any association between gender and experiences of workplace bullying to ascertain whether there is a difference between the proportions of males who experienced bullying and the proportions of females who experienced bullying. The results of the Chi-Square Tests for independence with Yates' Continuity Correction are presented in Table 0-3. These results suggest no significant association between gender and experiences of workplace bullying ($X^2 (1, n =68) = 2.39, p = 0.122, \phi = -0.217$).

Table 0-3: Chi-Square Tests for independence between gender and experiences of workplace bullying

	Value	df	Asymptotic Significance (2-sided)
Pearson Chi-Square with Continuity Correction ^b	2.390	1	0.122
N of Valid Cases	68		

a. 0 cells (0.0%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 13.65.

b. Computed only for a 2x2 table

5.3.2. Responding to workplace bullying

Table 0-4 presents the measures taken by the respondents who indicated that they experienced bullying in the workplace. As shown in the table, an overwhelming majority of

respondents who were targets of workplace bullying neither reported the incidences to management nor their unions, indicating that under reporting of workplace bullying incidences at the municipality.

Only a quarter of the respondents who experienced workplace bullying at the municipality reported the incidences to either management or their unions.

Table 0-4: Measures taken by respondents who experienced workplace bullying

Action	Total		Females		Males	
	N	Percent	N	Percent	N	Percent
Reported it to the manager	4	12.5%	1	9.1%	3	14.3%
Reported it to my Union	4	12.5%	1	9.1%	3	14.3%
Only told my colleagues	14	43.8%	5	45.5%	9	42.9%
Decided to keep quiet	10	31.3%	4	36.4%	6	28.6%
Total Valid	32	100.0%	11	100.0%	21	100.0%

Source:

Chi-Square Tests for independence were used to test whether the proportion of male respondents who did not report incidences of bullying to either their union or managers was different from the proportion of females who did not report workplace bullying incidences. However, on checking the assumptions of the Chi-Square Tests, it was observed that only 75% of cells had expected frequencies of five or more. This value is lower than the recommended threshold of at least 80% of cells, therefore, the Fisher's Exact Test statistic is reported (Pallant, 2020). The Fisher's Exact Test statistic indicated no significant association between gender and non-reporting of workplace bullying incidences ($p = 0.483$) using the one-sided test at 95% confidence.

Table 0-5: Chi-Square Test for Independence and Fisher's Exact Test for association between gender and non-reporting of workplace bullying

	Value	df	Asymptotic Sig (2-sided)	Exact Sig (1- sided)
Pearson Chi-Square	.260 ^a	1	.610	
Fischer's Exact Test				.483
N of Valid Cases	31			

a. 1 cells (25%) have expected count less than 5. The minimum expected count is 2.58

5.3.3. Reasons for bullying

Next, the participants were asked their opinions about why they think they were bullied in the workplace. The participants were asked the following question: *'What do you think caused the bullying? Please tick one or more answers.'* The results of the reasons for bullying are presented in a bar chart in Figure 5-3. The bar chart suggests that a large proportion of the participants indicated that they were targeted because the perpetrator had more power over them (n = 9), but an equal number of the survey respondents did not know the reasons why they were targeted with bullying at the workplace. A significant number of survey respondents indicated that the reason for them being a target of workplace bullying was because they were new at the workplace. This result also suggests that these respondents were targeted because of the power imbalance between the perpetrators and the new recruits who fell victim to bullying.

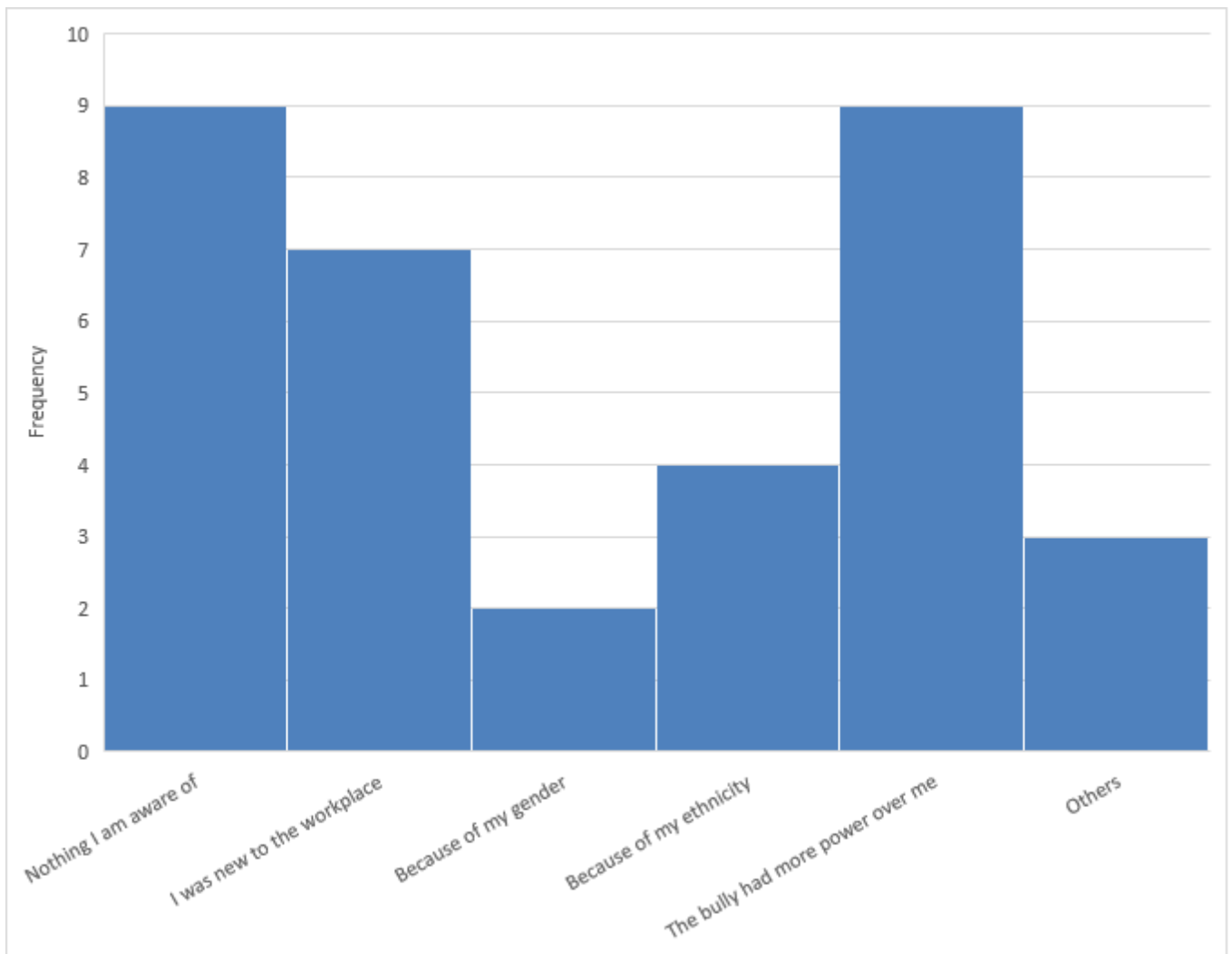


Figure 5-3: Participants' opinions on the reasons why they experienced workplace bullying

These results could also provide a possible explanation for the reasons why bullying was underreported, helping to explain the difference between the qualitative and quantitative findings on the prevalence of workplace bullying at the municipality. The most common reason for underreporting is the fear that speaking out will result in negative consequences for the person who is being bullied or harassed, and/or for the person doing the reporting. The fear of being negatively impacted by reporting can come from multiple places, and it is heightened if there are power imbalances between the target and the perpetrator as is the case between new employees and older employees, or

employees and their superiors. If the person being harassed is a direct report to you, for example, he/she may fear you will be less inclined to support him/her or be more critical if he/she makes a mistake.

Another place people are afraid to report bullying and harassment is with their peers. When a peer is bullying another person, the person being harassed may feel like his or her reputation will be negatively impacted if he/she reports the incident. Similarly, the person witnessing bullying and harassment who has the ability to report the incident may worry that he/she will be viewed negatively by colleagues. This may be especially true if the incident is between two peers, and the witness is higher in the organisational hierarchy. This fear of negative consequences may be even more pronounced if the person witnessing or being targeted by bullying and harassment does not have a good relationship with the person perpetrating the behaviour. By extension, the opinions of the other participants who did not experience workplace bullying were also queried in respect to the causes of bullying at the workplace. The results for all the participants are shown in Figure 5-4.

The bar chart in Figure 5-4 shows some of the most common causes of workplace bullying at the municipality, confirming some of the findings reported in past literature. Another reason for workplace bullying is poor management practices. If there is no clear line of authority at work, it can create confusion and uncertainty among employees. When this happens, it is easy for one person to take advantage of the situation and bully others, resulting in unreasonable work behaviours. This is supported by the results that show that unreasonable work behaviours is cited as one of the common causes of bullying at the municipality.

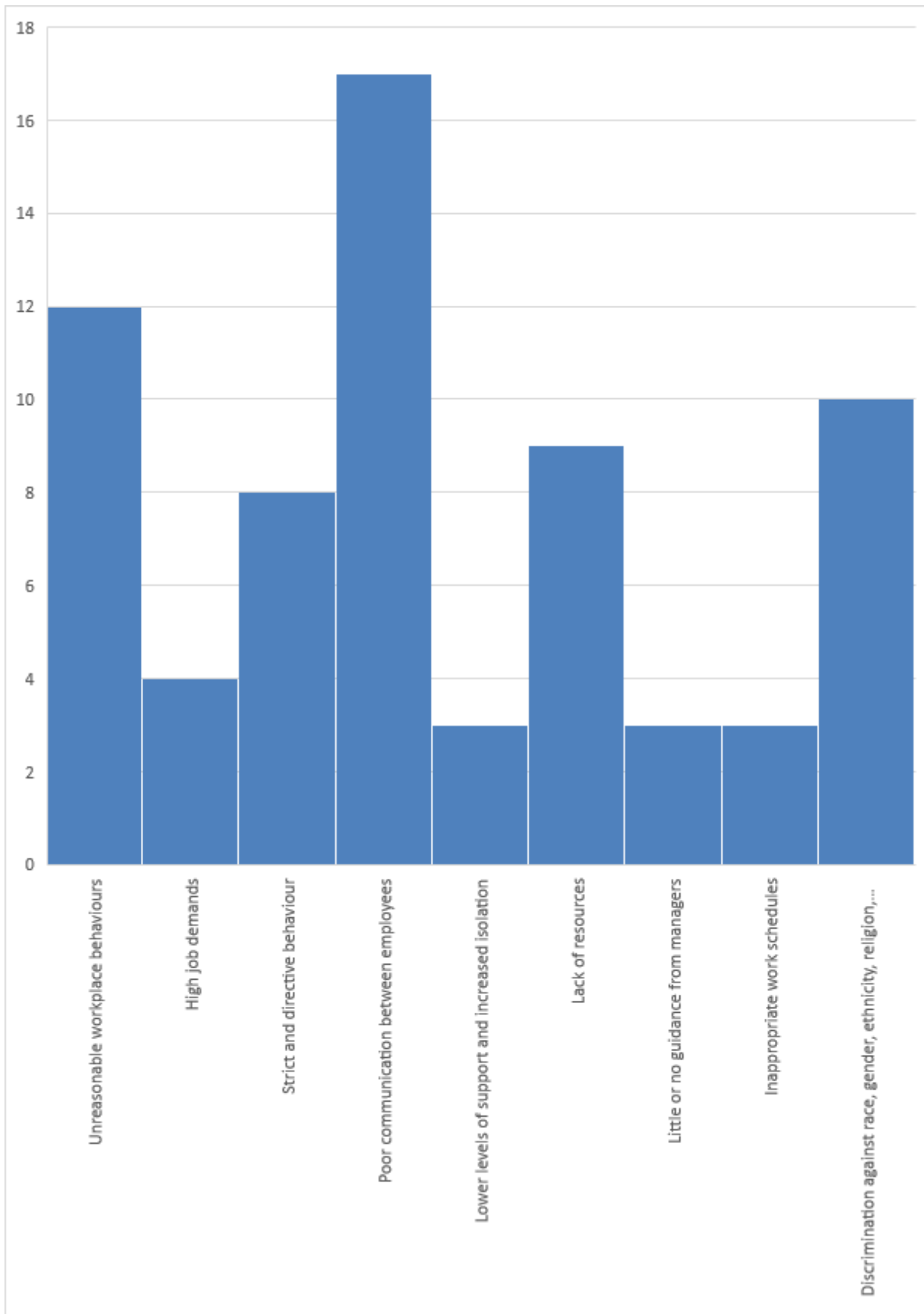


Figure 5-4: Causes of workplace bullying at the municipality.

The majority of the respondents (17) hold the perspective that workplace bullying is caused by poor communication between employees, suggesting that good internal communication practices have a role in addressing and resolving bullying in the workplace. Workplace bullying can also occur when people feel like their co-workers do not respect them. Lack of respect can also result in poor communication and disrespectful language between employees. It was therefore crucial for the study to explore further the relationship between workplace bullying and communication in line with the objectives of the study of exploring how internal communication addresses or promotes workplace bullying.

5.3.4. The relationship between open communication and employee outcomes

Correlation analysis was used to analyse the relationships between open communication (OC) and the key employee outcome variables - quality of the work environment (WE), quality of management and leadership attributes (MA), and quality of employee organisation relationship (EOR). Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis was suitable for this purpose because firstly, all the variable scores were measured on the interval scale. Secondly, the measures for these scores did not violate the assumptions for parametric correlation analyses. Specifically, the measures were tested for the assumptions for normality, linearity, Homoscedasticity, independence, and the influence of outliers in the quantitative data analysis section of the methods chapter and it was decided to proceed with the correlation analysis. The results of the Pearson Product-Moment Correlation analysis are presented in Table 0-6. The results show that there are strong positive correlations between the variable pairs as shown in Table 0-6.

Table 0-6: Pearson Product-Moment Correlations between Perceptions of Work Environment, Management Attributes and Open Communication

Scale	1	2	3	4
1. WE	-			
2. MA	.624**	--		
3. OC	.568**	.528**	--	

4. EOR	.663**	.667**	.753**	--
--------	--------	--------	--------	----

**Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Further analyses were performed to analyse the effect of workplace bullying experiences on the relationship between employees' perceptions of the quality of open communication and the key employee outcome variables (quality of work environment (WE), quality of management and leadership attributes (MA), and employee organisation relationship (EOR)) while controlling for workplace bullying experiences (BE). Preliminary assessments were performed to ensure no violation of the assumptions of normality and linearity before performing partial correlation analysis. The partial correlation coefficients are presented and compared with the zero-order correlation coefficients reported in Table 0-6 in the proceeding sections:

A medium positive correlation between quality of open communication and quality of the work environment was observed, controlling for experiences of workplace bullying ($r = .44$, $df = 54$, $p = .001$). When compared with the zero-order correlation coefficient ($r = .568$), a difference is observed between the two correlation coefficients suggesting that controlling for experiences of workplace bullying reduces the strength of the relationship between perceptions of the quality of open communication and quality of the work environment. A strong positive correlation between quality of open communication and quality of management and leadership attributes was observed, controlling for experiences of workplace bullying ($r = .517$, $df = 54$, $p = .000$). Comparing this value with the zero-order correlation coefficient ($r = .528$) suggests that controlling for experiences of workplace bullying has little effect on the strength of the relationship between the two variables. The final partial correlation analysis showed that a strong positive relationship exists between quality of open communication and employee organisation relationship, controlling for experiences of workplace bullying ($r = .7$, $df = 54$, $p = .000$). The zero-order correlation coefficient reported for this relationship was .753, suggesting that controlling for experiences of workplace bullying slightly reduces the strength of the relationship between the two variables.

The results of the partial correlation analyses are confirmed a comparison by groups analyses comparing the correlation coefficients of the relationships between quality of open communication and the key employee outcome variables for these two groups, that is, employees who experienced workplace bullying versus employees who did not experience workplace bullying. The cases were split into the two groups. Thereafter, correlation analysis was performed to see the differences in the correlation coefficients for the two groups. Fisher's r-to-z transformation was then performed to test the statistical significance of the differences observed between the two groups of employees. The results for these analyses are presented in Table 0-7, allowing the comparison of the correlation coefficients for the two groups, the z values, and the p values for the respective relationships. The reported p values are all greater than .05 (2-tailed), suggesting that the differences in the correlation coefficients for the two groups are not statistically significant.

Table 0-7: Comparison of correlation coefficients between employees who experienced workplace bullying and those who did not experience workplace bullying.

		1. OC → WE	2. OC → MA	3. OC → EOR	
BE	Yes	R	.520**	.435*	.608**
		sig. (two-tailed)	0.008	0.034	0.001
		N	25	24	26
	No	R	0.303	.373*	.712**
		sig. (two-tailed)	0.133	0.043	0.000
		N	26	30	30
Fisher r-to-z transformation					
	Z	.88	0.25	-.65	
	sig. (two-tailed)	0.3789	0.8026	.5157	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

5.4. Impact of workplace bullying on employee outcomes

Ancillary analyses were performed to explore the impact of workplace bullying on employee outcomes. Nonparametric correlation analysis was performed to analyse the associations between

bullying exposure and quality of work environment, quality of management and leadership attributes, quality of open communication, and employee-organisation relationship. Table 0-8 reports the results of nonparametric correlation showing the spearman's rho correlation coefficient, the number of cases used in the analyses, and the p values at specified significance levels for the respective analyses.

Table 0-8: Nonparametric correlation between the main study variables

Scale		1	2	3	4	6
1. WE	rho	--				
	Sig.					
	N	57				
2. MA	rho	.597**	--			
	Sig.	0.000				
	N	55	60			
3. OC	rho	.542**	.461**	--		
	Sig.	0.000	0.000			
	N	51	54	56		
4. EOR	rho	.644**	.626**	.769**	--	
	Sig.	0.000	0.000	0.000		
	N	57	60	56	66	
5. BE	rho	-.432**	-0.185	-.506**	-.420**	--
	Sig.	0.001	0.156	0.000	0.000	
	N	57	60	56	66	

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The results of Table 0-8 show that significant negative associations between workplace bullying experiences and perceptions of a healthy working environment ($r = -.432$); workplace bullying experiences and perceptions of quality of open communication ($r = -.506$); and workplace bullying experiences and quality of employee organisation relationship ($r = -.42$) were observed. The surprising result was that the negative association between exposure to bullying experiences and the

employees' perceptions of management and leadership attributes was non-significant ($r = -.185$, $p = .156$).

5.5. CHAPTER SUMMARY

This chapter presented the key findings of this research study. The study site where data was collected was the Greater Letaba Municipality described in detail in the methodology chapter (Chapter 4). The main research question for this research was to determine how managers and employees at the municipality use internal communication to resolve workplace bullying. Qualitative and quantitative methods were therefore used in a convergent mixed methods design. For the quantitative aspect of the research methodology, a quantitative questionnaire was distributed to the employees of the municipality to gather their perspectives on the topic of workplace bullying. The study used an open-ended questionnaire strategy for collecting qualitative data. The quantitative analyses that were performed include descriptive statistics. Correlation analysis of key variable such as perceptions of the Work Environment, Management Attributes and Open Communication were performed in efforts to analyse the relationships between key factors pertaining to workplace bullying, internal communication and the work environment at the municipality. The subsequent interpretation and discussion of the results presented in this chapter will be discussed in the next chapter, examining this study's findings in the context of the study's research questions and the extant body of literature on the subject of workplace bullying.

CHAPTER 6

DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

6.1. INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter presented the key results informing the findings of this study. The subsequent interpretation and analysis of the study results are presented in this chapter. Chapter 6 is organised as follows. The chapter opens by reflecting on the research problem and research questions. This is followed by reflections on the methodological approach of the study and its relevance and utility in helping achieve the study objectives. Next, the key findings of the study are discussed in relation to the research questions, past literature and implications for practitioners in the fields of communication, human resource management and public relations. Finally, the theoretical contributions and limitations of the current study and potential areas of consideration for future studies are presented before concluding the study to mark the end of this dissertation.

6.2. REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH PROBLEM AND RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Recent conversations about bullying, harassment, mistreatment, and discrimination have taken centre stage owing to the increased impetus to drive transformation, diversity and inclusion in all aspects of society. These important conversations have captured the attention of various stakeholders from governments, organisations, scholars, media, and individuals from all over the world. Although the global coverage of these issues is unprecedented, issues of bullying, harassment, and discrimination in the workplace have been a concern for employees, employers, researchers and practitioners from various fields such as psychology, sociology, management and communication for years. Despite the years of research into the phenomenon of workplace bullying and harassment in particular, the problem remains persistent in various levels of organisations with significant negative impacts on organisations and individuals. A comprehensive review of literature on the negative effects

of workplace bullying on individuals and organisations was presented in the literature review chapter (Chapter 2). Communication researchers have been interested in the application of different communication strategies to address workplace bullying in organisations and various issues have been highlighted by past researchers. Researchers have emphasised the need to intensify research on how communication structures and systems can be used to either support or address workplace bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012; Liefoghe & Mac Davey, 2001).

The study aimed to investigate workplace bullying as an internal communication phenomenon among the managers and employees at Greater Letaba Municipality. The main research question for the study was: What is the role of internal communication in addressing or supporting workplace bullying at the Greater Letaba Municipality. A convergent mixed methods research methodology was employed to answer the main research question by addressing the following sub research questions: RQ1: How do managers and employees at greater Letaba municipality use internal communication to resolve bullying? RQ2: What are communication strategies used by both managers and employees to address workplace bullying at the municipality. RQ3: How do the internal communication structures in the Greater Letaba Municipality support or address workplace bullying? RQ4: How effective are communication strategies used by both managers and employees to address workplace bullying at the municipality? This chapter presents a discussion and interpretation of the results presented in Chapter 5 in order to address these research questions.

6.3. REFLECTIONS ON THE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Details on the research methodology that was employed for this study are presented in Chapter 4. This included the reasoning behind the methodological choices that were involved in selecting the appropriate data collection strategies, population and sampling procedures, and the analytical techniques that were used to analyse the data and results that inform the findings of this research. The research objectives, nature of the research problem, and the nature of the study site realised the appropriateness of a convergent mixed methods strategy.

Internal communication as an organisational phenomenon is a two-way process involving the interaction between managers and employees. Also, employees and managers experience workplace bullying in different ways, as it is mostly subordinates who are targeted by their superiors. For these reasons, it was important to consider opinions from both the managers and the employees, realising the need for an extensive and in-depth data collection strategy.

Workplace bullying is a complex issue that necessitates an emphasis on human experiences; hence, qualitative approaches were appropriate for gathering descriptive narrative data. However, qualitative research methods often involve small sample sizes. Therefore, the generalizability of the results would be constrained because the opinions gathered from small samples may not be indicative of the opinions of the total populace. Additionally, the study's ability to quantify the degree to which bullying is pervasive in the case organisation may be constrained by the subjectivity and small sample sizes of qualitative data. This further restricts the study's ability to objectively comprehend workplace bullying and how internal communication may be utilized to combat the issue. Therefore, both qualitative and quantitative approaches were more suited to the simultaneous achievement of objectivity and subjectivity while maintaining the goals of extensive and in-depth data collection. A convergent mixed methods design was a more suitable approach to the simultaneous achievement of these diverse goals than would be possible with either qualitative or quantitative methods alone. In addition, a convergent design allowed the comparison of different data types and sources while accounting for the contextual differences in the data sources. In other terms, the study was able to explore and compare the opinions of managers and employees on the subject of workplace bullying and the application of internal communication while accounting for the situational and contextual differences that may affect the opinions of managers and their employees.

For the quantitative aspect of the research, a quantitative survey questionnaire was administered to a randomly selected sample of the employees of the municipality. For the qualitative component of the research, an open-ended qualitative questionnaire was administered to the managers. Initially, it was considered desirable to conduct in depth qualitative interviews with the

management, but this was not possible due to circumstances outside the researcher's control. Nonetheless, the qualitative questionnaire was an acceptable compromise that allowed the collection of descriptive narrative data from the small cohort of managers that participated in the research. In retrospect, this was an appropriate choice to balance the difference in the proportion of the managers compared to the large proportion of employees who are not in management positions. Details of the nature of both data collection instrument were presented in the methodology chapter of the research (Chapter 4).

6.4. DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS OF KEY FINDINGS

As illustrated in the previous section, the convergent mixed methods methodology that was employed for this research was considered appropriate for the purposes of this study. Various data analysis techniques were employed to analyse the data to uncover the key insights underpinning this study. These included qualitative thematic analysis of the responses from the managers who participated in the qualitative questionnaire and content analysis of relevant policies pertaining workplace bullying such as the human resources management, communications, language, labour relations, employment equity, sexual harassment and discrimination policies. Descriptive and inferential statistics such as correlation analysis were used to analyse the quantitative data collected from the employee survey. The results from these analyses were presented in the previous chapter. The following sections will discuss the key results in detail organised by the key findings and themes. Coverage will include comparison and integration of results and additional key qualitative and quantitative findings that could not be compared or integrated.

6.4.1. Finding 1: Prevalence and the salient features of workplace bullying at the municipality

Analysis of the individual cases from the qualitative data suggested that experiences of workplace bullying were considerably prevalent among the municipal managers. Five of the eleven managers who participated indicated that they had been targets of workplace bullying at the municipality. Respondents attributed their workplace bullying experiences to unfair and unequal

treatment from their superiors, and some of the cases of unfair discrimination were formalised. Examples include cases of unfair remuneration, being denied benefits and being denied a just recourse through silencing of complaints and concerns. Other bullying experiences were related to abusive behaviours and disrespectful language, insults and undermining subordinates, unfair discrimination based on ethnicity and unfair accusations of associating with opposition political parties.

The quantitative results also suggested that workplace bullying was considerably significant at the municipality. Data collected from the employees indicated that 47% of the employees had experienced workplace bullying. The prevalence rate was higher for males: 56% of males indicated that they had experienced workplace bullying compared to 34% for females. Despite a higher prevalence rate for males than for females, this study found no statistically significant difference between the proportions of males who experienced bullying and the proportions of females who experienced bullying, suggesting no statistically significant association between gender and experiences of workplace bullying.

Findings from both data sets suggest that workplace bullying experiences are significantly prevalent at the municipality. The majority of workplace bullying experiences are attributed to power imbalances between the bully and the victim. Managers were more likely to be bullied by their superiors and the bullying was more likely to be formalised or institutionalised (qualitative). The employees were more likely to be bullied by someone who had more power than them (quantitative): either the employees were new to the workplace when they experienced workplace bullying or they were bullied by someone in a superior position. Other than power imbalances, bullying experiences were also associated with unfair and unequal treatment and discrimination based on ethnicity, age, and gender (both qualitative and quantitative).

These findings are consistent with previous literature on the persistence of workplace bullying, discrimination, harassment, and other unfair practices in modern day workplaces (Darko et al., 2019;

Plimmer *et al.*, 2022; Smit, 2021). Despite a global effort to combat prevalence of workplace bullying and other forms of discrimination and workplace violence, various forms of harassment, violence and bullying continue to be reported in studies from all over the world (International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2019: 23 - 26). These findings have implications for intervention planning to minimise the negative effects associated with workplace bullying, which may help improve outcomes for the employees, the organisation, and society and the broader economy in general. Interventions to address workplace bullying, violence and harassment are critical as the negative effects do not only impact the victims but have implications for the organisation and the broader society as well (Smit, 2021: 32 - 34). A more detailed coverage of the effects and consequences of workplace bullying follows.

6.4.2. Finding 2: Effects and consequences of workplace bullying

The perceptions of the managers (qualitative) and the employees (quantitative) showed a consistent treatment of the effects and consequences of workplace bullying suggesting that the effects thereof are perceived in the same way regardless of position in the hierarchy of the organisation. Consensus was reached across the board that workplace bullying was an issue of concern to the municipality because of the harmful effects on individual wellness: Respondents indicated that bullying caused depression, affected their self-esteem, caused high levels of anxiety, loss of concentration and negatively affected motivation levels. These effects also extended to impact the organisation through loss of productivity and a bad reputation.

The findings also substantiate the claims that workplace bullying also has wider implications for society (International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2019; Motsei & Nkomo, 2016; Plessis & Smit, 2016; Smit, 2021). A workforce whose wellbeing is negatively affected by workplace violence can mean negative consequences on the wellbeing of the society due to the interactions between social influences of interpersonal violence and workplace violence (Smit, 2021: 35), as previous research has suggested that interpersonal violence from outside the workplace can be transferred to the

workplace and vice versa (International Labour Organisation (ILO), 2019; Motsei & Nkomo, 2016). As an example, the connection between intimate partner violence in domestic relationships and cases of violence, discrimination, and mistreatment at the workplace are increasingly being recognised by labour organisations and unions as workplace cultures often mirror the dominant culture in broader society (International Labor Organisation (ILO), 2017: 55 - 61).

Also, productivity in the workplace is reduced if employee wellness is low. This has negative consequences on the economy due to low production. In the case of the public sector, it would not be inappropriate to consider the negative effects of workplace bullying on service delivery as is the case of this case study and other public sector agencies and institutions. The negative effects of workplace bullying such as loss of concentration and motivation to perform work duties may affect the quality of service rendered to the public by public sector employees like municipality workers who suffer from workplace bullying. These findings are congruent with past research on the implications of workplace bullying in other public sector settings. For example, it was found that workplace bullying amongst teachers had negative effects on the social relations of teachers and students, teachers and co-workers, which negatively affects effective collaboration for better education outcomes (Jacobs & Teise, 2019: 1 -9).

6.4.3. Finding 3: Effects of workplace bullying on employee outcomes

The coverage of the effects of workplace bullying addressed in the previous section consider the general effects on the employee, organisation and society that have been widely covered in literature. In addition to these general consequences, the findings of this research furthered our understanding of the impact of workplace bullying on key employee outcomes for human resource management, corporate communications and public relations practice. The key outcomes that were considered in the current research are perceptions of quality of communication, management and leadership attributes and employee organisation relationships.

The study found that experiences of workplace bullying were negatively associated with perceptions of quality of the work environment. These findings suggest that employees who have experienced workplace bullying are less likely to perceive the workplace as a high-quality work environment. This is not a surprising finding considering that as previously shown, the negative effects of workplace bullying experiences include low self-esteem, and loss of concentration and motivation to perform work duties. Employees are more likely to consider the environment as toxic because of unpleasant behaviours such as abusive and disrespectful language, insults and the demeaning and dehumanising of employees. These findings are consistent with past research on the effects of workplace bullying on employees (Darko *et al.*, 2019; Nguyen *et al.*, 2017; Plimmer *et al.*, 2022; Saunders *et al.*, 2007).

The statistical significance of the negative correlation between workplace bullying and perceptions of the quality of management attributes could not be confirmed. However, when compared with previous research, various researchers have shown that it is usual for employees to associate exposure to workplace bullying with poor leadership qualities of the management. For example, in a recent study by Plimmer *et al.*, (2022), a significant negative correlation between exposure to workplace bullying and constructive leadership behaviours of immediate supervisors was observed, where constructive leadership was considered a measure of good quality leadership. Constructive leadership is a transactional leadership style whereby leadership provide clear guidance and adequate support for their subordinates to meet performance expectations while catering to their subordinates' needs, work conditions and expectations (Cooper-Thomas *et al.*, 2013; Ekvall & Arvonen, 1991; Nielsen, Skogstad, *et al.*, 2015). It is therefore not surprising that bullying exposure is negatively associated with constructive leadership because managers and supervisors who adopt this leadership style are actively engaged in creating environments where positive employee outcomes and wellness are prioritised, making it difficult if not impossible for bullying to thrive in such environments. In contrast, a significant negative correlation between exposure to workplace bullying and laissez-faire leadership behaviours of immediate supervisors was observed, where laissez-faire

leadership behaviours were considered as negative leadership attributes (Plimmer et al., 2022: 215). Laissez-faire leadership is a style of leadership that is considered a significant bullying risk factor because managers and supervisors who adopt this leadership style are highly limited in their abilities to act decisively on sensitive issues such as interpersonal conflicts, choosing avoidance which in turn a sentiment that bullying is acceptable (Nielsen, Skogstad, et al., 2015).

The third employee outcome that was considered for this study is employee organisation relationship. This outcome is strongly related with the previous two outcomes considered in the study, that is, quality of work environment and quality of management and leadership attributes. As expected, the study found a strong negative association between workplace bullying exposure and employee organisation relationship. This finding is consistent with previous research that has shown that experiences of workplace bullying may negatively affect the relationship between employer and the employee. Possible explanations include the possibility that the employee may feel disgruntled against the employer for supporting undesirable work behaviours and failure to provide adequate protections against such behaviours. This is usually the case in organisations that support structures that silence employees as is this case in the current study where some participants indicated that they were not allowed to complain. Implications for organisations include low employee turnover and bad reputation.

These negative organisational outcomes can negatively impact the sustainability of the organisation as they affect the organisation's ability to retain and attract quality talent. The effects are also exacerbated by the increasing costs of recruitment and on boarding of new talent. For the municipality, this can have negative effects on financial performance and the quality-of-service delivery due to the respective labour costs and the risks of failure to attract and retain quality talent associated with a low employee turnover. The socio-economic environment in South Africa where the labour market is characterised by high unemployment rates and high employee desperation may neutralise these effects.

6.4.4. Finding 4: Overlap between the effects of workplace bullying and other forms of harassment

Not only did the study find a significant negative association between workplace bullying and perceptions of the quality of work environment, but this study also found an overlap between the effects of workplace bullying and other forms of harassment on key employee outcomes. Although the statistical significance of the negative relationship between other forms of harassment and perceptions of the quality of open communication, and the significance of the negative relationship between other forms of harassment and perceptions of the quality of the employee organisation relationship could not be confirmed, a statistically negative relationship between other forms of harassment and perceptions of the quality of work environment was found. The study also found that there is a significant negative relationship between other forms of harassment and perceptions of the quality of management and leadership attributes, confirming the overlap between the effects of bullying and other forms of harassment that may not necessarily be perceived as bullying (Hutchinson & Jackson, 2015; Plimmer et al., 2022; Saunders et al., 2007; Smit, 2021).

This overlap between what is and what is not considered bullying has implications for efforts to address workplace bullying. Researchers have addressed the potential risks arising from the dilemmas that are created by differences in the application of definitions and interpretations by employees, employers, researchers, law makers and labour and human management practitioners. For example, operational definitions employed by governments, employers and labour organisations and unions may include and exclude different criteria that may have important implications for employees and vice versa (Saunders et al., 2007). Some of the implications have been that different jurisdictions treat workplace bullying on different continuums of occupational health and safety and criminal law provisions, while currently in South Africa, the legal framework has been hesitant to treat bullying as a legitimate cause for action (Smit, 2021: 34 - 35).

The problem of a lack of a unifying operational definition and the subsequent implications has led to various deliberate efforts for a unifying definition or framework for defining workplace bullying. Although some parts of academia seem to agree on a single framework of criteria to define bullying (Saunders et al., 2007: 340 - 354), consensus has not yet been reached on a single unifying definition or framework that is widely accepted across the entire spectrum of employees, employers, labour organisations and researchers. The resulting implication is that more work needs to be done to communicate, educate, and sensitise the different stakeholders on the issue of workplace bullying in order to encourage dialogue that may result in a consistent treatment of bullying in the workplace. The expectation is that if there is a consistent treatment and interpretation of workplace bullying across the board, interventions to address the issue and improve the quality of work environments may be more successful.

6.4.5. Finding 5: Role of open communication in improving employee outcomes in the face of bullying

The previous findings focused on the prevalence, dominant forms, salient features and effects of workplace bullying at the municipality. But perhaps of more importance to employee and organisational outcomes and the field of communications research is understanding the role of communication in addressing the problem of workplace bullying. It is on this rationale that the main research question for this study was formulated, that is, how do internal communications structures support or address workplace bullying? As a response to the main research question, the study sought to find evidence of how internal communications systems and structures either supports or addresses workplace bullying at the municipality.

The study found that the quality of open communication was strongly related with employee outcome variables such as quality of the work environment, quality of employee organisation relationship and the quality of management attributes. Previous research had suggested that certain communication structures or lack thereof support workplace bullying e.g., silencing employees'

complaints and abusive, disrespectful, discriminatory and exclusionary language (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003; Lutgen-Sandvik & Tracy, 2012). In the current study, evidence of cases of both silencing and the use of abusive, disrespectful, discriminatory, and insulting language where participants were exposed to incidences of workplace bullying were found. The implications of these findings are that the communication structures and language at the municipality are risk factors for exposure to bullying at the workplace. This calls for interventions to firstly, encourage inclusive and respectful language and behaviours at the municipality. Such interventions could have a high impact on employee and organisational outcomes as the study found that bullying exposure was highly associated with discrimination based on age, gender, and ethnicity at the municipality.

Establishing communication structures that better address the issue of workplace bullying can be done in one of three ways. Firstly, by encouraging inclusive and respectful language. Secondly, by educating employees and management of the signs and features of bullying, implications and measures to prevent bullying at the workplace to include applicable work policies and laws. And thirdly by encouraging open and transparent communication of matters concerning workplace bullying, especially encouraging reporting incidences instead of silencing complaints. Openness and transparency in addressing workplace bullying could also increase confidence and security that the municipality is decisive and committed to employee wellness, and that bullying is not tolerated. The findings substantiate the implications that establishing open and transparent communication structures could have on employee wellness at the municipality.

6.5. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, several recommendations are proposed to address the issue of workplace bullying at the municipality. These recommendations aim to improve employee outcomes and create a work environment that fosters respect, inclusivity, and communication.

6.5.1. Recommendation 1: Encouraging inclusive and respectful language and behaviours

This recommendation involves encouraging employees and management to use language and behaviours that are inclusive, respectful, and free from discriminatory practices. This recommendation is important because it addresses one of the key risk factors for exposure to bullying at the workplace. By promoting a culture of inclusivity and respect, the municipality can create a more positive work environment that supports employee wellness. However, a potential barrier to this recommendation is that some employees may resist change or find it challenging to adapt to new language and behaviours. Strategies for overcoming this barrier include providing training and education programs and ensuring that there are consequences for those who continue to use discriminatory language or behaviours. The effectiveness of this recommendation can be evaluated by conducting surveys or focus groups to assess the extent to which employees feel that the work environment has become more inclusive and respectful.

Relevant stakeholders for this recommendation include human resources, management, and employees. The involvement of human resources in this regard is important because of human resources' role in promoting and maintaining a positive work environment, as well as ensuring that the workplace is free from discrimination and harassment. Regarding the municipality management, management's crucial role in setting the tone for the workplace culture and implementing policies are critical for promoting a healthy work environment and inclusive work culture to prevent bullying. Finally, employees are key players in creating a positive work environment. Employees can contribute to a more positive and supportive workplace culture and they can also hold management and each other accountable for ensuring that the workplace is free from discriminatory practices and bullying behaviours.

6.5.2. Recommendation 2: Educating employees and management on the signs and features of workplace bullying

This recommendation involves providing education and training to employees and management on the signs, implications, and prevention of workplace bullying, including relevant

policies and laws. Human resources and management are the key stakeholders for this recommendation. By educating employees and supervisors, the municipality can create a more informed and proactive workforce that is better equipped to address workplace bullying. However, a potential barrier is employees or management may not prioritize attending training or may not find it relevant to their work. Overcoming this barrier includes ensuring the training is mandatory, scheduling the training at a convenient time, and demonstrating the relevance of the training to specific job functions.

6.5.3. Recommendation 3: Encouraging open and transparent communication about workplace bullying

This recommendation involves encouraging employees to report incidences of workplace bullying instead of silencing complaints. Human resources, management, and employees are relevant stakeholders. It is important because it can create a work environment that supports open and transparent communication and helps prevent instances of workplace bullying from going unreported. By encouraging reporting, the municipality can demonstrate its commitment to employee wellness and show that bullying is not tolerated. However, a potential barrier is employee fear of retaliation or mistrust of the reporting system. Overcoming this barrier includes ensuring that employees have access to anonymous reporting channels, providing clear guidelines on how reports will be handled, and ensuring those who report instances of workplace bullying are protected from retaliation. Evaluation measures include tracking the number of reports received and assessing the level of trust employees have in the reporting system.

In short, the recommendation to encourage open and transparent communication of matters concerning workplace bullying should be prioritized as it addresses the most immediate issue of unreported bullying incidents. In addition, encouraging inclusive and respectful language and behaviours addresses one of the key risk factors for exposure to bullying at the workplace. Finally, education and awareness provides a proactive approach to identifying and preventing instances of

workplace bullying. By equipping employees and management with knowledge on the signs and features of bullying, relevant stakeholders will be equipped with the necessary resources to intervene appropriately when bullying is witnessed, and to prevent bullying from happening in the first place.

6.6. STUDY LIMITATIONS AND SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER STUDY

It is worth noting some limitations. Although the key study findings could be supported statistically, other outcomes such as the statistical significance of the differences in the correlation coefficients between the group of employees who reported exposure to workplace bullying and those who did not. Also, the influence of open communication on reporting workplace bullying incidences could not be supported. It is not possible to rule out the possibility that these relationships could not be confirmed due to the limitations arising from the relatively small sample size and the respective statistical methods used for this study.

Secondly, the study focused on the impact of open communication on improving employee outcomes for individuals who have been exposed to bullying at the workplace. It cannot be claimed with certainty that no other variable or interventions could also improve employee outcomes for victims of workplace bullying. Future studies could explore other interventions and variables such as exposure to bullying outside of the workplace, coping strategies, perceived control, proclivity to stress etc. and possibly evaluate which of these other variables are better predictors of employee outcomes for victims of workplace bullying.

Thirdly, while the study showed the role of open communication in improving employee outcomes such as quality of work environment and employee organisation relationships, this cannot be interpreted as proof of the effectiveness of open communication on reducing workplace violence. Further studies could include program or intervention design with follow up to evaluate the effectiveness of open communication programs on reducing exposure to workplace bullying. Alternatively, comparative designs could consider organisations with different scores of open communications and compare the exposure to workplace bullying.

6.7. CONCLUSION

This dissertation responded to the need to address our understanding of how internal communications structures help to support or address workplace bullying using the case of a local municipality in the province of Limpopo, South Africa. As a key component of organisational structures, internal communication has a key role to play in achieving the objectives of an organisation, and in addressing key issues that may be challenging an organisation. This study therefore sought to understand how internal communication may improve employee outcomes in the face of exposure to workplace bullying.

Using a convergent mixed methods research design, this study confirmed the persistence of workplace bullying in modern day workplaces by showing that the prevalence of workplace bullying is relatively high at the municipality. The relevance of this issue was also confirmed regarding the negative effects of exposure to workplace bullying, and the relevant implications for the employees, the municipality, and the society were discussed. The implications of significant risk factors such as power imbalances, discrimination, and communication structures such as abusive languages and silencing of complaints were also discussed. By focusing on open communication, the study was able to show that effective and open transparent communication structures improve key employee outcomes like quality of work environment, perceptions of management attributes and quality of employee organisation relationship for employees who experience workplace bullying. This may be attributed to the possibility that open communication promotes confidence and trust in the organisation's ability to protect the employee from further bullying and the ability to afford the necessary assurances and measures of redress. These guarantees can therefore help the employees with coping, resulting in improved employee outcomes.

Drawing from these key premises, it is concluded that this research indicates that open communication structures are influential in cultivating an open and respectful work environment that is crucial in preventing workplace bullying. This is because information flow between different

stakeholders does not only help in directing operations; it also facilitates knowledge sharing on issues related to workplace bullying such as organisational policies on employee conduct, employee wellness and support programs, and can help to raise awareness on the issue and support the reporting of workplace bullying incidents. Second, open information flow and employee participation in decision making may help artificially reduce the power distance between different stakeholders in a hierarchical structure by allowing all stakeholders to have their perspectives taken into account in decision making. This may improve with outcomes such as cultural integration and employee citizenship or employee organisation-relationship. Emphasis is made on the artificial reduction of power distance because open communication structures do not automatically dissolve the hierarchical structures in an organisation. Rather, open communication structures allow the organisation to operate as a social institution that gives due consideration to all stakeholders' right to give and receive information and to fully participate in the organisation's activities. Consequently, this is relevant to the prevention of workplace bullying because it signifies adequate organisational support for victims and encourages the reporting of bullying incidents.

The suggested implications of the findings hope to offer recommendations that the municipality in particular can implement to improve employee outcomes in the face of exposure to workplace bullying. These recommendations can also be considered by the broader community of corporate communication, human resource management and public relations practice. In short, the study recommends communication structures that encourage inclusive and respectful language, promote educating employees and supervisors about the signs and consequences of bullying at work, as well as the prevention methods and applicable practices. Finally, by encouraging open and transparent communication about workplace bullying, open communication systems encourage employees to report rather than silencing complaints because they make employees feel more secure and confident about the organisation's decisiveness and zero tolerance position on workplace bullying.

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Appendix I: Editorial letter

24 August 2023

To Whom It May Concern

Re: Editing of Masters Study

This letter certifies that the Masters study titled *Analyzing Bullying as an Internal Communication Phenomenon at Greater Letaba Municipality, South Africa* by Ms. Linah Motsatsi Rabothata has been edited. I am satisfied that the study meets the editing criteria of clarity, consistency, correctness, conciseness, and comprehensibility.

Kind regards,



TN Mphahlele

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APPENDICES

Appendix A: Participant information sheet

PARTICIPANT INFORMATION SHEET

Ethics clearance reference number:

Research permission reference number:

20 January 2022

Analysing bullying as an internal communication phenomenon at Greater Letaba Municipality.

Dear Prospective Participant

My name is Linah Motsatsi Rabothata and I am doing research with Hadji Mutambuli, a lecturer in the Department of Communication Science towards a Masters (MA) at the University of South Africa. We are inviting you to participate in a study entitled **“Analysing bullying as an internal communication phenomenon at Greater Letaba Municipality.”**

I am conducting this research to find out to how employers and employees use internal communication to resolve conflict at your Municipality. Communication strategies used by both employers and employees to address workplace bullying at the Municipality. To determine the perceptions that employees and employers have about workplace bullying and communication strategies used to address it.

As part of the employees at the Municipality, we saw it fit to involve you in the study. However, we did not specifically choose you only. It is open for all employees. The study involves both interviews and surveys. Open ended questions will be asked in the interview and it will only take 20 minutes for the interview to be done. Those participating in the survey will also be given time (approximately 30 minutes) to go through it.

Participating in this study is voluntary and you are under no obligation to consent to participation. If you do decide to take part, you will be given this information sheet to keep and be asked to sign a written consent form. You are free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason.



You will be able to understand workplace bullying in full details and the strategies that you can use to combat workplace bullying in your workplace. The topic is overly sensitive and might cause psychological and emotional discomfort. You have the right to insist that your name will not be recorded anywhere and that no one, apart from the researcher and identified members of the research team, will know about your involvement in this research. Your answers will be given a code number, or a pseudonym and you will be referred to in this way in the data, any publications, or other research reporting methods such as conference proceedings.

Your answers may be reviewed by people responsible for making sure that research is done properly, including the transcriber, external coder, and members of the Research Ethics Review Committee. Otherwise, records that identify you will be available only to people working on the study, unless you give permission for other people to see the records. Your anonymous data may be used for other purposes, such as a research report, journal articles and/or conference proceedings.

Hard copies of your answers will be stored by the researcher for a period of five years in a locked cupboard/filing cabinet at UNISA for future research or academic purposes; electronic information will be stored on a password protected computer. Future use of the stored data will be subject to further Research Ethics Review and approval if applicable. Indicate how information will be destroyed if necessary [e.g. hard copies will be shredded and/or electronic copies will be permanently deleted from the hard drive of the computer through the use of a relevant software program. There will be no payment or reward for participating in the study.

This study has received written approval from the Health Research Ethics Committee of the College of Human Sciences, Unisa. A copy of the approval letter can be obtained from the researcher if you so wish.

If you would like to be informed of the final research findings, please contact Linah Motsatsi Rabothata on 0794747360 or email leenahmotsatsi@gmail.com. Should you require any further information or want to contact the researcher about any aspect of this study, please contact Hadji Mutambuli on 0124292881 or email hadjimj@unisa.ac.za.



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Should you have concerns about the way in which the research has been conducted, you may contact the research ethics chairperson of the CAES Health Research Ethics Committee, Prof MA Antwi on 011-670-9391 or antwima@unisa.ac.za if you have any ethical concerns.

Thank you for taking time to read this information sheet and for participating in this study.

Thank you.

Rabothata Linah



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CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN THIS STUDY

I, _____ (participant name), confirm that the person asking my consent to take part in this research has told me about the nature, procedure, potential benefits and anticipated inconvenience of participation.

I have read (or had explained to me) and understood the study as explained in the information sheet.

I have had sufficient opportunity to ask questions and am prepared to participate in the study.

I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw at any time without penalty (if applicable).

I am aware that the findings of this study will be processed into a research report, journal publications and/or conference proceedings, but that my participation will be kept confidential unless otherwise specified.

I agree to the recording of the <insert specific data collection method>.

I have received a signed copy of the informed consent agreement.

Participant Name & Surname.....(please print)

Participant Signature.....Date.....

Researcher' s Name & Surname.....(please print)

Researcher' s signature.....Date.....



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Appendix B: Open ended questionnaire

Open ended questionnaire

I am Linah Rabothata, studying towards my Master's degree at the University of South Africa. My research topic is 'Analysing workplace bullying as an internal communication phenomenon at Greater Letaba Municipality'. The objectives of the study are to explore different communication strategies applied in addressing workplace bullying and secondly, to determine the perceptions of employees towards workplace bullying. The interview is strictly anonymous, and participants have a right to opt out and will not be forced to participate if they do not feel like it. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes. The interviews will only be completed by employers and supervisors.

1. DEMOGRAPHICS INFORMATION

A. Tell me about yourself (tell us about yourself and your occupation)

- Gender: Male or Female
- What is your current occupation?
- How long have you been with the organisation?
- What qualifications do you have?

2. WORKPLACE BULLYING EXPERIENCES

B. Bullying

- Have you experienced bullying in the workplace in anyway? Please elaborate.
- Do you think workplace bullying is a serious issue and why?
- Which measures are used to prevent workplace bullying at the Municipality?

3. PREVALENCE, CAUSES AND TYPES OF WORKPLACE BULLYING

C. This serves to understand the prevalence, causes and types of workplace bullying at the Municipality.

- How often do employees report issues of being bullied?
- What types of bullying are normally being reported by employees?
- What do you think causes workplace bullying at the Municipality?
- What consequences do the victims normally face and how does this affect the organisation?

4. MEASURES TO PREVENT WORKPLACE BULLYING

D. The aim is to understand your role as a senior in workplace bullying issues.

- How effective are the Municipality's policies on dealing with cases of bullying?
- What do you do when your employees report that they are being bullied? Take us through the process.
- How do you deal with workplace bullying and what measures do you find significant in dealing with it? Please elaborate.

5. TYPE OF LEADERSHIP STYLE USED

E. This aims to understand the type of leadership style used and how employers or seniors interact with employees.

- Do you involve your employees in decision making process and allow them to voice out their views and opinions?
- Do you make decisions on behalf of your employees without consulting them and why?

6. CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION USED

F. The researcher aims to understand the type of communication used within the Municipality.

- What channels of communication do you use to communicate with employees?
- How often do you use these channels of communication?

How effective are they in addressing issues of bullying in the workplace?

7. CLOSURE

G. Do you have any comments?

Appendix C: Close-ended questionnaire

CLOSE-ENDED QUESTIONNAIRE

I am Linah Rabothata, studying towards my Master's degree at the University of South Africa. My research topic is 'Analysing workplace bullying as an internal communication phenomenon at Greater Letaba Municipality. The objectives of the study are to explore different communication strategies applied in addressing workplace bullying and secondly, to determine the perceptions of employees towards workplace bullying. The survey is strictly anonymous, meaning that the participants true identities will not be revealed in the research report. Participants have a right to opt out and will not be forced to participate if they do not feel like it. The survey will take 35 minutes to complete and is to be completed by employees only.

A. DEMOGRAPHICS

Respond to the following questions by marking the space provided with an 'X'.

1. **Age:** Please mention your age.

18-35	
36-45	
46-55	
55 years and above	

2. **Ethnic origin:** Please specify your ethnicity.

Black	
White	
Asian	
Prefer not to say	
Other	

Others, please mention them:

3. **Gender:** Please specify your gender.

Male	
Female	
Prefer not to say	
Other	

Others, Please mention them:

4. Education: Educational qualifications

No schooling obtained	
Grade12	
Degree	
Honours	
Masters	
PhD	
Other	

Others, please mention them:

5. How long have you been employed at your current workplace?

Less than a month	
A month	
A year	
2 – 5 years	
6 - 10 years	
More than 10 years	

High job demands	
Strict and directive behaviour	
Poor communication between employees	
Lower levels of support and increased isolation	
Lack of resources	
Little or no guidance from managers	
Inappropriate work schedules	
Discrimination against gender, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, gender or sexual preference	

Others, please mention them:

5. Which communication channels are used by the Municipality to solve bullying related issues? Please tick one or more answers.

Notice boards	
Letters	
Team briefings	
Employee-attitude survey	
Face to face meetings	
Email	
Workplace workshops	
Union meetings	
Intranet	
Whatsapp	
Others	

Others, Please mention them:

6. Do you think the communication channels used to address workplace bullying are sufficient?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not sufficient					Very sufficient					

7. Based on your experience, how likely are you to recommend your workplace to your friends?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very unlikely					Very likely					

8. Have you experienced the following in the past six months? Please tick one or more answers.

Treated disrespectfully by a colleague	
Treated disrespectfully by a manager	
Shouted at by the managers	
Excluded from important discussions	
Gossiped by colleagues	
Given demeaning or heavy tasks	
Insulted and humiliated in front of colleagues	
Sexually harassed by colleague or manager	
Pushed, punched or strangled by a colleague	

Others, Please mention them:

9. How do you think bullying affects your workplace? Please tick one or more answers.

It causes low morale and motivation	<input type="checkbox"/>
It increases absenteeism	<input type="checkbox"/>
It causes low productivity	<input type="checkbox"/>
It ruins the reputation of the organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>
It causes low employee engagement	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others	<input type="checkbox"/>

Others, please mention them:

10. How has your experience of workplace bullying affected you? Please tick one or more answers.

Felt isolated	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experienced stress, anxiety and panic attacks	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experienced physical illness such as headaches, fatigue	<input type="checkbox"/>
Loss of work performance and concentration	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experienced low self-esteem	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experienced depression and suicidal thoughts	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was not affected at all	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others	<input type="checkbox"/>

Others, please mention them:

11. Please choose the most appropriate options about the organisational culture at the Municipality.

A Likert scale is a rating scale used to assess opinions, attitudes or behaviours. Below is a five-point Likert scale whereby you have to specify your level of agreement to a statement. It consists of these five points: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree and Strongly agree.

Please put SA, A, U/N, D or SD in the boxes.

	Strongly agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Neutral / Undecided (U/N)	Disagree (DA)	Strongly disagree (SD)
Employees are hostile towards their managers.					
I feel at ease in my workplace.					
The entire workplace is toxic.					
The workplace has proper communication channel to address workplace bullying.					
I am open towards my manager.					
I feel safe at work.					
I can freely exchange information and opinions.					
Employees are encouraged to be open and candid with each other.					
I am involved in all decision-making processes.					

12. Which leadership style would you say is applicable to your municipality? Please tick the most appropriate from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

A Likert scale is a rating scale used to assess opinions, attitudes or behaviours. Below is a five-point Likert scale whereby you have to specify your level of agreement to a statement. It consists of these five points: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree and Strongly agree.

Please put SA, A, U/N DA or SD in the boxes.

	Strongly agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Neutral (U/N)	Disagree (DA)	Strongly disagree (SD)
Manager is helpful towards achieving goals.					
Manager rewards good performance					
Manager uses power, control and authority over workers.					
Manager respects rights, needs and dignity of workers.					
Manager ignores and neglects workers					
Manager provides employees with all information they need.					
I know the company well enough.					
I consider myself as part of the company and its mission.					
All my needs and desires are met.					

13. What do you think should be done about bullying at your workplace? Please tick one or more answers.

Get perpetrators arrested	
Get victims proper counselling	
Fire perpetrators	
Others	

Others, please mention them:

Appendix D: Completed open-ended questionnaire

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

I am Linah Rabothata, studying towards my Master's degree at the University of South Africa. My research topic is 'Analysing workplace bullying as an internal communication phenomenon at Greater Letaba Municipality'. The objectives of the study are to explore different communication strategies applied in addressing workplace bullying and secondly, to determine the perceptions of employees towards workplace bullying. The interview is strictly anonymous, and participants have a right to opt out and will not be forced to participate if they do not feel like it. The interview will take approximately 60 minutes. The interviews will only be completed by employers and supervisors.

1. DEMOGRAPHICS INFORMATION

A. Tell me about yourself (tell us about yourself and your occupation)

- Gender: Male or ~~Female~~
- What is your current occupation?
Head: communication & Events
Management officer
- How long have you been with the organisation?
12 years
- What qualifications do you have?
National Diploma

2. WORKPLACE BULLYING EXPERIENCES

B. Bullying

- Have you experienced bullying in the workplace in anyway? Please elaborate.
yes, I used to have a boss who always wanted to enforce "instructions" without caring how you feel and what your opinion is.

- Do you think workplace bullying is a serious issue and why?

it is a very serious issue

- it takes down work morale
- it takes away your self confidence
- it demoralizes you
- and it can lead to stress and anxiety

- Which measures are used to prevent workplace bullying at the Municipality?

- Disciplinary system

3. PREVALENCE, CAUSES AND TYPES OF WORKPLACE BULLYING

C. This serves to understand the prevalence, causes and types of workplace bullying at the Municipality.

- How often do employees report issues of being bullied?

- Hardly

- What types of bullying are normally being reported by employees?

- Strict & Directive behavior
 - Unreasonable work place behavior
 - Discrimination against ethnicity

- What do you think causes workplace bullying at the Municipality?

- Lack of Leadership skills

- What consequences do the victims normally face and how does this affect the organisation?

- None so far.

4. MEASURES TO PREVENT WORKPLACE BULLYING

D. The aim is to understand your role as a senior in workplace bullying issues.

- How effective are the Municipality's policies on dealing with cases of bullying?

- Due to the low reporting of bullying cases, little experience is had.

- Policies are speaking to the matter.

- What do you do when your employees report that they are being bullied? Take us through the process.

- Report the matter to HR

- Fill-in a Grievance form

- Get mediation session.

- How do you deal with workplace bullying and what measures do you find significant in dealing with it? Please elaborate.

- Mediation always works because the person is made aware and asked to change.

5. TYPE OF LEADERSHIP STYLE USED

E. This aims to understand the type of leadership style used and how employers or seniors interact with employees.

- Do you involve your employees in decision making process and allow them to voice out their views and opinions?

- Yes

- Do you make decisions on behalf of your employees without consulting them and why?

- Sometimes

6. CHANNELS OF COMMUNICATION USED

F. The researcher aims to understand the type of communication used within the Municipality.

- What channels of communication do you use to communicate with employees?

- Emails
- Notice boards
- Whatsapp

- How often do you use these channels of communication?

- Weekly or as and when there is a need.

- How effective are they in addressing issues of bullying in the workplace?

- Minimal impact

7. CLOSURE

G. Do you have any comments?

- Work place bullying is real & has seen many people hospitalized, rest at the workplace or self morale taken down.
- More needs to be done in creating awareness so that people can easily identify whether they are being bullied or not.

Appendix E: Completed survey females

SURVEY

I am Linah Rabothata, studying towards my Master's degree at the University of South Africa. My research topic is 'Analysing workplace bullying as an internal communication phenomenon at Greater Letaba Municipality. The objectives of the study are to explore different communication strategies applied in addressing workplace bullying and secondly, to determine the perceptions of employees towards workplace bullying. The survey is strictly anonymous, meaning that the participants true identities will not be revealed in the research report. Participants have a right to opt out and will not be forced to participate if they do not feel like it. The survey will take 35 minutes to complete and is to be completed by employees only.

A. DEMOGRAPHICS

Respond to the following questions by marking the space provided with an 'X'.

1. **Age:** Please mention your age.

18-35	
36-45	
46-55	X
55 years and above	

2. **Ethnic origin:** Please specify your ethnicity.

Black	X
White	
Asian	
Prefer not to say	
Other	

Others, please mention them:

3. **Gender:** Please specify your gender.

Male	
Female	X
Prefer not to say	
Other	

Others, Please mention them:

4. Education: Educational qualifications

No schooling obtained	
Grade12	f
Degree	
Honours	
Masters	
PhD	
Other	

Others, please mention them:

5. How long have you been employed at your current workplace?

Less than a month	
A month	
A year	
2 - 5 years	
6 - 10 years	f
More than 10 years	

Please complete the following:

1. Have you ever experienced workplace bullying?

Yes	
No	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

2. What measures did you take afterwards?

Reported it to the manager	
Only told my colleagues	
Reported it to my Union	
Decided to keep quiet	

Others, please mention:

3. What do you think caused the bullying? Please tick one or more answer.

Nothing I am aware of	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
I was new to the workplace	
Because of my gender	
Because of my race	
Because of my ethnicity	
The bully had more power over me	
Others	

Others, please mention them:

4. What causes workplace bullying at your workplace? Please tick one or more answers.

Unreasonable workplace behaviours.	
------------------------------------	--

High job demands	
Strict and directive behaviour	
Poor communication between employees	
Lower levels of support and increased isolation	
Lack of resources	
Little or no guidance from managers	
Inappropriate work schedules	
Discrimination against gender, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, gender or sexual preference	f

Others, please mention them:

5. Which communication channels are used by the Municipality to solve bullying related issues? Please tick one or more answers.

Notice boards	
Letters	
Team briefings	
Employee-attitude survey	
Face to face meetings	f
Email	
Workplace workshops	
Union meetings	
Intranet	
Whatsapp	
Others	

Others, Please mention them:

6. Do you think the communication channels used to address workplace bullying are sufficient?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not sufficient					Very sufficient					

7. Based on your experience, how likely are you to recommend your workplace to your friends?

0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very unlikely					Very likely					

8. Have you experienced the following in the past six months? Please tick one or more answers.

Treated disrespectfully by a colleague	
Treated disrespectfully by a manager	
Shouted at by the managers	
Excluded from important discussions	
Gossiped by colleagues	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Given demeaning or heavy tasks	
Insulted and humiliated in front of colleagues	
Sexually harassed by colleague or manager	
Pushed, punched or strangled by a colleague	

Others, Please mention them:

9. How do you think bullying affects your workplace? Please tick one or more answers.

It causes low morale and motivation	<input type="checkbox"/>
It increases absenteeism	<input type="checkbox"/>
It causes low productivity	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
It ruins the reputation of the organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>
It causes low employee engagement	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others	<input type="checkbox"/>

Others, please mention them:

10. How has your experience of workplace bullying affected you? Please tick one or more answers.

Felt isolated	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experienced stress, anxiety and panic attacks	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experienced physical illness such as headaches, fatigue	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Loss of work performance and concentration	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experienced low self-esteem	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experienced depression and suicidal thoughts	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was not affected at all	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others	<input type="checkbox"/>

Others, please mention them:

11. Please choose the most appropriate options about the organisational culture at the Municipality.

A Likert scale is a rating scale used to assess opinions, attitudes or behaviours. Below is a five-point Likert scale whereby you have to specify your level of agreement to a statement. It consists of these five points: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree and Strongly agree.

Please put SA, A, U/N, D or SD in the boxes.

	Strongly agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Neutral / Undecided (U/N)	Disagree (DA)	Strongly disagree (SD)
Employees are hostile towards their managers.	SA				
I feel at ease in my workplace.	SA			DA	
The entire workplace is toxic.			U/N		
The workplace has proper communication channel to address workplace bullying.				DA	
I am open towards my manager.	SA				
I feel safe at work.		A			
I can freely exchange information and opinions.	SA				
Employees are encouraged to be open and candid with each other.		A			
I am involved in all decision-making processes.		A			

12. Which leadership style would you say is applicable to your municipality? Please tick the most appropriate from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

A Likert scale is a rating scale used to assess opinions, attitudes or behaviours. Below is a five-point Likert scale whereby you have to specify your level of agreement to a statement. It consists of these five points: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree and Strongly agree.

Please put SA, A, U/N DA or SD in the boxes.

	Strongly agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Neutral (U/N)	Disagree (DA)	Strongly disagree (SD)
Manager is helpful towards achieving goals.	SA				
Manager rewards good performance		A			
Manager uses power, control and authority over workers.			U/N		
Manager respects rights, needs and dignity of workers.		A			
Manager ignores and neglects workers					SD
Manager provides employees with all information they need.		A			
I know the company well enough.				DA	
I consider myself as part of the company and its mission.		A			
All my needs and desires are met.		A			

13. What do you think should be done about bullying at your workplace? Please tick one or more answers.

Get perpetrators arrested	
Get victims proper counselling	
Fire perpetrators	X
Others	

Others, please mention them:

14. Any comment?

Appendix F: Completed survey males

SURVEY

I am Linah Rabothata, studying towards my Master's degree at the University of South Africa. My research topic is 'Analysing workplace bullying as an internal communication phenomenon at Greater Letaba Municipality. The objectives of the study are to explore different communication strategies applied in addressing workplace bullying and secondly, to determine the perceptions of employees towards workplace bullying. The survey is strictly anonymous, meaning that the participants true identities will not be revealed in the research report. Participants have a right to opt out and will not be forced to participate if they do not feel like it. The survey will take 35 minutes to complete and is to be completed by employees only.

A. DEMOGRAPHICS

Respond to the following questions by marking the space provided with an 'X'.

1. **Age:** Please mention your age.

18-35	
36-45	X
46-55	
55 years and above	

2. **Ethnic origin:** Please specify your ethnicity.

Black	X
White	
Asian	
Prefer not to say	
Other	

Others, please mention them:

3. **Gender:** Please specify your gender.

Male	X
Female	
Prefer not to say	
Other	

Others, Please mention them:

4. Education: Educational qualifications

No schooling obtained	
Grade12	X
Degree	
Honours	
Masters	
PhD	
Other	

Others, please mention them:

5. How long have you been employed at your current workplace?

Less than a month	
A month	
A year	
2 – 5 years	
6 - 10 years	X
More than 10 years	

Please complete the following:

1. Have you ever experienced workplace bullying?

Yes	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>

2. What measures did you take afterwards?

Reported it to the manager	<input type="checkbox"/>
Only told my colleagues	<input type="checkbox"/>
Reported it to my Union	<input type="checkbox"/>
Decided to keep quiet	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Others, please mention:

3. What do you think caused the bullying? Please tick one or more answer.

Nothing I am aware of	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was new to the workplace	<input type="checkbox"/>
Because of my gender	<input type="checkbox"/>
Because of my race	<input type="checkbox"/>
Because of my ethnicity	<input type="checkbox"/>
The bully had more power over me	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Others	<input type="checkbox"/>

Others, please mention them:

4. What causes workplace bullying at your workplace? Please tick one or more answers.

Unreasonable workplace behaviours.	<input type="checkbox"/>
------------------------------------	--------------------------

High job demands	
Strict and directive behaviour	X
Poor communication between employees	
Lower levels of support and increased isolation	
Lack of resources	
Little or no guidance from managers	
Inappropriate work schedules	
Discrimination against gender, race, ethnicity, religion, disability, gender or sexual preference	

Others, please mention them:

5. Which communication channels are used by the Municipality to solve bullying related issues? Please tick one or more answers.

Notice boards	
Letters	
Team briefings	
Employee-attitude survey	
Face to face meetings	
Email	
Workplace workshops	
Union meetings	
Intranet	
Whatsapp	
Others	

Others, Please mention them: N/A

6. Do you think the communication channels used to address workplace bullying are sufficient?

0	X	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
Not sufficient						Very sufficient					

7. Based on your experience, how likely are you to recommend your workplace to your friends?

0	1	2	3	4	X	5	6	7	8	9	10
Very unlikely						Very likely					

8. Have you experienced the following in the past six months? Please tick one or more answers.

Treated disrespectfully by a colleague	
Treated disrespectfully by a manager	
Shouted at by the managers	
Excluded from important discussions	X
Gossiped by colleagues	
Given demeaning or heavy tasks	
Insulted and humiliated in front of colleagues	
Sexually harassed by colleague or manager	
Pushed, punched or strangled by a colleague	

Others, Please mention them:

9. How do you think bullying affects your workplace? Please tick one or more answers.

It causes low morale and motivation	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
It increases absenteeism	<input type="checkbox"/>
It causes low productivity	<input type="checkbox"/>
It ruins the reputation of the organisation	<input type="checkbox"/>
It causes low employee engagement	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others	<input type="checkbox"/>

Others, please mention them:

10. How has your experience of workplace bullying affected you? Please tick one or more answers.

Felt isolated	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experienced stress, anxiety and panic attacks	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experienced physical illness such as headaches, fatigue	<input type="checkbox"/>
Loss of work performance and concentration	<input type="checkbox"/>
Experienced low self-esteem	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Experienced depression and suicidal thoughts	<input type="checkbox"/>
I was not affected at all	<input type="checkbox"/>
Others	<input type="checkbox"/>

Others, please mention them:

11. Please choose the most appropriate options about the organisational culture at the Municipality.

A Likert scale is a rating scale used to assess opinions, attitudes or behaviours. Below is a five-point Likert scale whereby you have to specify your level of agreement to a statement. It consists of these five points: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree and Strongly agree.

Please put SA, A, U/N, D or SD in the boxes.

	Strongly agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Neutral / Undecided (U/N)	Disagree (DA)	Strongly disagree (SD)
Employees are hostile towards their managers.				X	
I feel at ease in my workplace.		X			
The entire workplace is toxic.			X		
The workplace has proper communication channel to address workplace bullying.				X	
I am open towards my manager.		X			
I feel safe at work.			X		
I can freely exchange information and opinions.	X				
Employees are encouraged to be open and candid with each other.		X			
I am involved in all decision-making processes.			X		

12. Which leadership style would you say is applicable to your municipality? Please tick the most appropriate from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

A Likert scale is a rating scale used to assess opinions, attitudes or behaviours. Below is a five-point Likert scale whereby you have to specify your level of agreement to a statement. It consists of these five points: Strongly disagree, Disagree, Neutral, Agree and Strongly agree.

Please put SA, A, U/N DA or SD in the boxes.

	Strongly agree (SA)	Agree (A)	Neutral (U/N)	Disagree (DA)	Strongly disagree (SD)
Manager is helpful towards achieving goals.			X		
Manager rewards good performance				X	
Manager uses power, control and authority over workers.		X			
Manager respects rights, needs and dignity of workers.			X		
Manager ignores and neglects workers			X		
Manager provides employees with all information they need.				X	
I know the company well enough.			X		
I consider myself as part of the company and its mission.			X		
All my needs and desires are met.			X		

13. What do you think should be done about bullying at your workplace? Please tick one or more answers.

Get perpetrators arrested	X
Get victims proper counselling	
Fire perpetrators	
Others	

Others, please mention them:

14. Any comment?

Bullying should be condemned in all necessary means
participatory at workplace. Non-attendance of bullying
behaviour to a certain extent demoralise workers
and as a result production is compromised.

Appendix G: Ethical clearance



COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES RESEARCH ETHICS REVIEW COMMITTEE

29 March 2022

Dear Ms Linah Motsatsi Rabothata

Decision:
Ethics Approval from 29 March 2022
to 29 March 2025

NHREC Registration # :
Rec-240816-052
CREC Reference # :
64005917_CREC_CHS_2022

Researcher(s): Name: Ms Linah Motsatsi Rabothata
Contact details: 64005917@mylife.unisa.ac.za
Supervisor(s): Name: Dr MJ Hadji
Contact details: [0124292881](tel:0124292881)

Title: Analysing bullying as an internal communication phenomenon at Greater Letaba Municipality.

Degree Purpose: MA

Thank you for the application for research ethics clearance by the Unisa College of Human Science Ethics Committee. Ethics approval is granted for three years.

The *low risk application* was reviewed by College of Human Sciences Research Ethics Committee, in compliance with the Unisa Policy on Research Ethics and the Standard Operating Procedure on Research Ethics Risk Assessment.

The proposed research may now commence with the provisions that:

1. The researcher(s) will ensure that the research project adheres to the values and principles expressed in the UNISA Policy on Research Ethics.
2. Any adverse circumstance arising in the undertaking of the research project that is relevant to the ethicality of the study should be communicated in writing to the College Ethics Review Committee.
3. The researcher(s) will conduct the study according to the methods and procedures set out in the approved application.
4. Any changes that can affect the study-related risks for the research participants, particularly in terms of assurances made with regards to the protection of participants' privacy and the



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confidentiality of the data, should be reported to the Committee in writing, accompanied by a progress report.

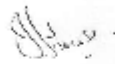
6. The researcher will ensure that the research project adheres to any applicable national legislation, professional codes of conduct, institutional guidelines and scientific standards relevant to the specific field of study. Adherence to the following South African legislation is important, if applicable: Protection of Personal Information Act, no 4 of 2013; Children's act no 38 of 2005 and the National Health Act, no 61 of 2003.
6. Only de-identified research data may be used for secondary research purposes in future on condition that the research objectives are similar to those of the original research. Secondary use of identifiable human research data require additional ethics clearance.
7. No fieldwork activities may continue after the expiry date (28 March 2025). Submission of a completed research ethics progress report will constitute an application for renewal of Ethics Research Committee approval.

Note:

The reference number 84006917_CREC_CHS_2022 should be clearly indicated on all forms of communication with the intended research participants, as well as with the Committee.

Yours sincerely,

Signature: pp



Prof. KB Khan
CHS Research Ethics Committee Chairperson
Email: khankb@unisa.ac.za
Tel: (012) 429 8210

Signature: PP



Prof. K. Masemola
Executive Dean: CHS
E-mail: masemk@unisa.ac.za
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Appendix H: Researcher acknowledgement



THE COLLEGE OF HUMAN SCIENCES

RESEARCHER ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Hereby, I Linah Motsatsi Rabothata, ID number 9611130474088, in my personal capacity as a researcher, acknowledge that I am aware of and familiar with the stipulations and contents of the

- Unisa Research Policy
- Unisa Ethics Policy
- Unisa IP Policy
- SOPs on ethical clearance risk assessment

And that I shall conform to and abide by these policy requirements

SIGNED: *Rabothata Lm*

Date: 31 January 2021

