



# chapter 12

## employee health, safety and wellness

### HRM in Practice

#### Workplace bullying on the rise

The reported incidence of workplace bullying has received more attention among workplace researchers, policy makers and the media. Academics emphasize that workplace bullying is a complex social phenomenon and, as such, is a significant issue for managers (Oade, 2009). Ten per cent of employees experience workplace bullying and harassment, according to the conciliation service ACAS. This article reports a link between workplace bullying and the present recession:

Fraser Younson, head of employment at the law firm Berwin Leighton Paisner, said: "In the last year or so, as running businesses has become more difficult, the way managers interface with their staff has become more demanding. Managers are chasing things up, being more critical. If they are not trained to deal with increased levels of stress, then we are seeing them do this in a way that makes staff feel bullied."

Samantha Mangwana, an employment solicitor at Russell Jones & Walker, said: "We are getting a very high level of cases. Most of the people who come to us with a problem at work talk about bullying. It frequently arises in people's line-manager relationship." Employment lawyers say allegations of bullying have become a frequent feature of claims for unfair dismissal and discrimination. "We see some cases of bullying in discrimination where the employer invokes what we

colloquially call the 'bastard defence'," said Mangwana. "Their defence is that they were a bastard to everyone, so it's not discriminatory."

The defining characteristics of bullying at work are persistent inappropriate behaviours that involve a power imbalance (Einarsen, 2000; Oade, 2009). The economic recession has witnessed a significant increase in the incidence of workplace bullying. Preventing and managing bullying at work is important because of the myriad negative impacts it has on the recipients, other co-workers and organizations. For individual employees, research shows a strong association between bullying at work and the occurrence of stress-related symptoms (Mikkelsen and Einarsen, 2001). Workplace bullying impacts negatively on those employees witnessing the inappropriate behaviours and thereby creates an abusive and toxic work culture (Einarsen and Mikkelsen, 2003). At organizational level, a study of hospital employees found an association between bullying at work and absenteeism, lower work motivation, and higher operating costs (Kivimaki, et al. 2000).

**Stop!** What factors contribute to workplace bullying? How can managers prevent or reduce bullying in the workplace?

#### **Sources and Further information**

The extract is taken from A. Hirsch's article, " 'Bullying in the workplace on the rise', *The Guardian*, 4 January, 2010.

For a comprehensive and practical guidance to prevent, reduce and manage workplace bullying, see Aryanne Oade (2009) *Managing Workplace Bullying*, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan