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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

1.1   INTRODUCTION

Human resource (HR) practitioners in any organisation are the strategic partners linking employees with the strategic goals of the organisation in order to maximise employee performance and gain competitive advantage through people (Kleynhans, Markham, Meyer & Van Aswegen, 2009; Johnson, 2009; Nel et al., 2011). HR practitioners in South African organisations have many important organisational responsibilities and roles, and are routinely tasked with people management, recruitment and selection, training/learning and development, promotion and transfer, investigation, monitoring and evaluation, health and employee wellness, and employee relations, including dealing with employee disputes, dismissal, liaising between employee and employer, drafting and enforcing permitted organisational policies and procedures (Brewster, Carey, Grobler, Holland & Warnich, 2009; Kleynhans et al., 2009; Nel et al., 2011). The role of an HR practitioner has changed (Brewster et al., 2009) but overall the responsibility for liaising between the employee and the organisation, ensuring employee wellness and drafting and operationalising HR related policies and procedures as approved by top management, have remained core to HR practitioners' responsibility (Bohlander & Snell, 2007; Swanepoel, Erasmus & Schenk, 2008).

Employee wellness has been reported as imperative to constructive performance behaviour in the organisation and to the benefit of overall organisational effectiveness (Hillier, Fewell, Cann & Shephard, 2005; Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2012). Any conduct that is harmful to employees or to the organisation can be classified as counterproductive workplace behaviours and constitutes a threat to employee wellness (Fox & Spector, 2005). Bullying is one example of counterproductive work behaviour (Fox & Spector, 2005) and the focus of this thesis. The phenomenon of bullying in the organisational context directly affects employee and organisational wellness (Agtervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Smit, 2014) and by implication addressing bullying is part of the responsibility of the HR practitioner, when putting into practice organisational policies and procedures aimed at effectively managing human resources. The organisation in turn needs to ensure that HR practitioners are empowered and skilled to perform their functions, which

is essentially directed at delivering on the organisation's strategic goals (Armstrong, 2006).

This thesis reports on research on workplace bullying in a higher education institutional context from an HR practitioner perspective. The first chapter provides a background to and motivation for the research, a statement of the research problem, the research objective, research questions, the potential contribution of the study, and a layout of the chapters in this thesis.

1.2   BACKGROUND AND MOTIVATION OF THE RESEARCH

It is increasingly acknowledged worldwide that workplace bullying is a malignant scourge in organisations (Cilliers, 2012; Ncongwane, 2012; Pietersen, 2007; Rayner, Hoel & Cooper, 2002) and a chronic workplace stressor (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008). Workplace bullying is a widespread phenomenon in the South African work context that is too costly to ignore, with negative consequences for work performance, organisational wellness and workplace relations. Bullying as a form of counterproductive work behaviour has been widely researched (Cilliers, 2012), yet still requires attention in organisations, specifically in terms of relevant HR policies and how such policies are put into practice (Cunniff & Mostert, 2012; Daniel, 2006; Smit, 2014; Steinman, 2009a; WorkTrauma, 2010; Wright, 2008).

Generally, workplace bullying is regarded as an extreme, negative and persistent form of workplace emotional abuse achieved primarily through verbal and non-verbal communication (Keashly & Jagatic, 2003; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008). According to Jerkins (2011) in reference to Lutgen-Sandvik (2005), bullying constitutes a pattern of persistent, malicious, insulting, or exclusionary intentional or non-intentional behaviours that a person perceives as intentional efforts to harm, control, or drive a colleague from the workplace. The perpetrator or the bully is mostly regarded as an individual in a position such as a supervisor, manager or leader who is hierarchically superior to the position held by the victim or target of the abusing behaviour (Cilliers, 2012). For HR practitioners, understanding bullying is potentially much more complex to pin down, because in their HR role they serve different client constituencies with expectations that are frequently in opposition, for instance, employee and senior manager. The different clients within organisations deserve not only regular services from HR practitioners but also excellence and impartiality in addressing work-related issues. Neuman and Baron

(2003) found that when employees' expectations of their employer are violated they invest less effort in goal accomplishment and their trust in the HR practitioner declines. The pressure to attend to the expectations of employees, yet also be responsible to the organisation and to management, frequently causes HR practitioners not to act in bullying situations, or when they do to find their actions are not necessarily effective (Lewis & Rayner, 2003; Namie & Namie, 2003).

Overlap with similar concepts, such as harassment, workplace violence or conflict, of which only some are covered by law and organisational policy (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2011; Notelaers, Birkeland & Einarsen, 2010; Yamada, 2010), furthermore does not assist HR practitioners to clearly determine when bullying is occurring. Conceptual confusion (Cowan, 2012; Botha, 2008; Caponecchia & Wyatt, 2011; Smit, 2014) and limited policies (Steinman & Van Rooij, 2012; Namie, 2013; Salin, 2009) complicate decision-making on who the HR practitioner can engage with when dealing with bullying and confuses the practitioners' understanding of their roles and ethical boundaries in the bullying situation. Who the HR practitioner can consult during allegations of bullying and to whom they can refer the target will depend on how bullying is defined and understood in the organisation. It has been argued that, in their functional roles, HR practitioners have extensive involvement in workplace bullying situations (Branch, Ramsay & Barker 2007a; Cowan, 2009; Salin, 2009) and are "an integral actor in the bullying situation because they are tasked with assisting targets with complaints of workplace bullying, investigating bullying situations and enforcing organisational policies" (Salin, 2008, p. 225).

Acknowledging that HR practitioners are integral actors in workplace bullying situations, and realising the particular dilemmas they potentially face in this regard, my interest in the topic developed during a time when I was consulted by HR practitioners in this regard. In my role as an HR academic I had some interactions with HR practitioners seeking my advice from an academic HR management (HRM) perspective on how to deal with reported violence and abusive behaviour, as well as conflictual relationships between them and their superiors. As an academic I have become more aware of bullying occurrences and HR practitioners have sensitised me to workplace bullying. Ortega, Elipe, Mora-Merchan, Calmaestra and Vega (2009, p. 200) found that "the more pervasive the workplace bullying, the more pronounced its effects", whilst for Smit (2014) early intervention is of the utmost importance. Consequently, in my consultations with HR practitioners I became increasingly concerned about their understanding of workplace

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bullying, their roles in bullying situations and related challenges they faced when confronted by such situations in the organisation. An HR practitioner related to me the challenge of becoming entangled in the bullying situation, a dilemma confirmed by Lewis and Rayner (2003) and Namie and Namie (2003), who found that when HR practitioners do act in a bullying situation their actions are frequently perceived as making it worse. Therefore, the bullying dilemma with which HR practitioners are confronted requires greater understanding and is one which I translated into a research topic, leading to the development of this study.

1.3   PROBLEM STATEMENT

Workplace bullying is increasingly acknowledged globally as a significant organisational problem (Cilliers, 2012) which can have direct and indirect effects on the productivity of employees and managers and on the organisation's economic condition (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008). In considering why bullying is such a contentious subject, Harvey, Heames, Richey and Leonard (2006a) noted that the psychological study of issues below the surface in organisations had become significant in the previous 65 years. From research undertaken in Scandinavia, Austria, the United Kingdom (UK) and South Africa it appears that in the professional sphere workplace bullying takes on a more subtle form and includes discrediting, humiliation, insults, intimidation, withholding information, impossible deadlines and meaningless tasks (Agtervold, 2007; Bjorkqvist, Osterman & Hjelt-Back, 1994; Botha, 2008; Cilliers, 2012; Cunniff & Mostert, 2012; Einarsen et al., 2003; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Pietersen, 2007; Steinman, 2007). Targets generally tend to accept this state of affairs because they need the job, feel embarrassed and think it would be unprofessional to complain (Salin, 2008). Research conducted by Agtervold and Mikkelsen (2004) also indicates that workplace bullying can be detrimental to the victim's health and wellbeing. Employees who experience frequent episodes of bullying reported significantly greater psychological stress, burnout and psychosomatic symptoms, and take more sick leave than their counterparts.

Pietersen (2007) believed that the significance of workplace bullying had not yet been fully realised in South Africa, and as Steinman (2007) noted, since the early 1990s organisations had not been giving the required urgent attention to the phenomenon. Steinman (2007) pointed to a report by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) on workplace violence (physical and emotional) in 1999 which indicated that this phenomenon was one of the most serious problems that had to be confronted in the new

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millennium. Workplace bullying is also costly for an organisation since it leads to reduced work performance, less job satisfaction and poorer interpersonal relationships at work and in private life, decreased motivation and morale, greater staff turnover and increased absenteeism (Botha, 2008; Smit, 2014; Steinman, 2008). The prevalence of bullying and the serious consequences thereof necessitate increased awareness of its nature and dynamics (Ncongwane, 2010; Pietersen, 2007; Steinman, 2008).

Newspaper reports and popular magazines[1] have perhaps increased public awareness about bullying in the workplace, whilst overt physical violence has generally become less acceptable, forcing bullies to conceal their aggression and act in subtle, less noticeable forms (Botha, 2008; Harvey et al., 2006a). Another possibility suggested by the same authors is that this kind of subtle bullying existed before but that the phenomenon had only recently received attention from scholars. Addressing and managing workplace bullying is one of the most challenging issues facing South African organisations (Cunniff & Mostert, 2012; Ncongwane, 2010; Smit, 2014), therefore they should be ready to address the phenomenon by developing policies and strategies to prevent and manage it effectively.

Despite increased research focussing on workplace bullying in recent decades (Cilliers, 2012), considerable confusion exists as to what it is and how it differs from, or is similar to, other forms of counterproductive behaviours in the workplace, for example, harassment (Branch, 2008; Cunniff & Mostert, 2012; Gilioli, Fingerhut & Kortum-Margot, 2003; Lutgen-Sandvik, Tracy & Alberts, 2007; Smit, 2014). Given the complexity of incidents, some researchers question whether it is even possible to achieve a uniform definition (Rayner, Hoel & Cooper, 2002) as most are reflective of one perspective, namely that of the target (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf & Cooper, 2003; Niedl, 1996; Porhola, Karhunen & Rainivaara, 2006). Although there is not a consistent definition being used in academic research to date, the various ones do have some reoccurring themes. Academic definitions refer to the forms in which bullying manifests itself, such as negative verbal and non-verbal communicative behaviours, and aspects such as persistent abuse, intentionality, escalation, power issues, and adverse effects, which make it distinct from similar concepts (Keashly & Jagatic, 2003; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2005, 2007). Although some researchers argue the definition and the defining elements are

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[1] Newspaper reports and popular magazines are highlighted in Chapter 3.

becoming more solidified, there is still much variation in research and issues with these definitions.

Some researchers highlight the idea that the target is adversely affected by bullying (Hoel & Cooper, 2003; Keashly & Harvey, 2006; Namie & Namie, 2003), whereas others point out adverse effects for the organisation and workgroup as well as the target (Branch, Ramsay & Barker, 2007b; Einarsen et al., 2003; Porhola et al., 2006; Smit, 2014; Smith, Singer & Tehrani, 2004). These inconsistencies and conflicting ideas make it difficult for HR practitioners to identify and deal with workplace bullying and to help the organisation and target deal with it. The target's voice is important when engaging the issues, however, current research has generally ignored two important actors in bullying situations, namely, the bully[2] and the HR practitioners. To date, there has been research into the bully's perspective, with self-reported cases admitting to being egocentric, aggressive, assertive, and showing little concern for others (Cowan, 2009; Seigne, Coyne, Randall & Parker, 2007). In addition, they reported a tendency to strive for social dominance (Parkins, Fishbein & Ritchey, 2006). Although there are a handful of studies that do reflect the voice of the bully (see Seigne et al., 2007) it is unlikely that research will fully understand it because bullies do not interpret their behaviour as bullying (Namie & Namie, 2003), and, if they do, most would not admit it as such (Seigne et al., 2007).

A valuable voice to engage is that of the HR practitioner, since the HR practitioner's role includes addressing bullying in the work context, whilst facing unique dilemmas when servicing different client constituencies and expectations in this regard. By engaging an HR practitioner perspective, organisations should gain an understanding on the manner in which bullying in the workplace negatively impacts the HR practitioners' and enables the organisation to better equip the practitioner to manage bullying-relevant situations. I therefore undertook this study to add clarity to the concept of workplace bullying from the HR practitioner's perspective.

Based on the introduction and background, the problem statement for this study is formulated as follows: The lack of HR practitioners' voices in handling workplace bullying situations has a negative influence on their capability to understand and handle bullying, exacerbating the dilemmas faced by organisations in this regard. This problem statement

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[2] In this thesis, the word *bully* or *perpetrator* will be used to refer to one or more individual employee(s) who directly or indirectly are in a more dominant position and abuse/abuses power or influence to hurt or intimidate targets with less power.

serves as a guide to formalise the research objectives and questions.

1.4   RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

Given the above problem statement, the objectives of this study are formulated as follows:

a) To explore workplace bullying from the point of view of HR practitioners tasked with identifying and dealing with bullying in the workplace

b) To develop a substantive theory[3] of workplace bullying from an HR practitioner perspective.

1.5   RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Against the identified research problem and research objectives above, the study attempted to address the following research questions:

a)   How do HR practitioners define and understand workplace bullying?

b)   How is workplace bullying dealt with in the organisation?

c)   How do HR practitioners handle workplace bullying situations and what is their role in managing them?

d)   Which policies are applicable to deal with workplace bullying in the organisations?

e)   How do HR practitioners interpret and understand these policies?

f)   What can be done to reduce the impact of workplace bullying on the HR practitioners?

1.6   ENVISAGED CONTRIBUTION OF THE STUDY

Industrial and Organisational Psychology (IOP) focuses on the applications of psychological theories and principles in organisations to increase workplace productivity (Munchinsky, 2000), and related issues, such as the physical and mental wellbeing of employees (Wuang, 2007). In this regard, this study is concerned with advancing knowledge about HR practitioners' perspectives regarding bullying at work and the application of scientific knowledge to solve real problems, such as the generally termed

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[3] Substantive theory is explained in chapter 2 section 2.3.3.

"psychological terror" (Leymann, 1996), "chronic workplace stressor" (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2008) or "workplace cancer" (Ncongwane, 2012; Pietersen, 2007) that constitute workplace bullying.

It is evident from the problem statement that a scientifically developed workplace bullying theory is necessary for the HR practitioners to address and handle the widespread problem. This theory could be of great importance and beneficial to HR practitioners and to management when engaging with and authorising and training others about the phenomenon. The theory would also bring to the attention of line managers the strategic role they are expected to play in rectifying the perception held by some line managers that all work-related problems, for example, workplace bullying, are addressed and handled by the HR practitioners (Salin, 2008). This would be accomplished by studying the HR practitioners' perspectives on workplace bullying situations.

In spite of a wealth of literature on workplace bullying no theory exists in a South African context from the HR practitioner perspective. Consequently, this study will attempt to make a significant positive contribution in the field of IOP and the sub-field HR.

1.7   CHAPTER DIVISION

The chapters of this study are demarcated as follows:

Chapter 1 has presented the background and motivation of the research along with the problem statement, the general objectives of the study and research questions, and the contribution of the study.

Chapter 2 details the research journey, discussing the research design that directed methodological choices and considerations in this study. It aims at presenting a clearer understanding of how I conducted the research.

Chapter 3 provides a literature review of workplace bullying behaviour, dynamics, issues and related concepts.

Chapter 4 focuses on the human resource practitioners in the organisation: the context for managing workplace bullying, discussing the HR function, the HR practitioners' role dynamics in relation to managing workplace bullying and then HR practitioners' wellbeing at work and concludes with reflection on how workplace bullying can be addressed and managed in the organisation to ensure a bullying free workplace.

Chapter 5 presents findings with regard to HR practitioners' perspectives on workplace bullying.

Chapter 6 presents the significance of substantive theory development, an integrative framework encapsulating the main themes that emerged from the data, followed by a discussion of the themes and their sub-themes in relation to the findings and concludes in presenting the substantive theory on workplace bullying from an HR perspective. The findings of the current study are integrated here with relevant research and literature on workplace bullying.

Chapter 7 concludes the study by presenting the conclusion to the study, including a precis of the findings, the potential contribution and value of the study, a reflection on the potential limitations and my recommendations for future research. It concludes with self-reflection of the doctoral journey in this research and the experiences and challenges I encountered.

In the next Chapter 2, I discuss the research journey and the manner in which I conducted the research.

CHAPTER 2

PLANNING THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

2.1   INTRODUCTION

As outlined in Chapter One, the purpose of this study was to explore and describe HR practitioners' perspectives on bullying in the workplace. The purpose of this chapter is to explain important elements which determined and directed the research journey and the manner in which the research plan was operationalised. The chapter commences with a discussion on the disciplinary boundaries of the study, then continues to present the research design as a road map encompassing the main decision points in the study. The research design involves analysis and explanation of the way the research was conducted, from the theoretical foundation underlying the inquiry to the predominant methodology employed to direct the methods used for collection and analysis of data (Dawson, 2002; Hussey & Hussey, 1997). As part of the research design the philosophical underpinning of the study, its qualitative nature and the research methodology is described. Thereafter the specific methods used for data collection and analysis, congruent to the constructivist grounded theory methodology chosen for this study, are discussed.

2.2   THE DISCIPLINARY RELATIONSHIP

The focus of the study is on workplace bullying within the discipline of IOP with HRM as sub-discipline and field of application. The study of any negative acts or behaviours directed by one or more employees against another employee is an area of IOP (Aquino & Lamertz, 2004). IOP is an applied science directing HRM strategies to promote efficiency, improve morale and achieve organisation goals. IOP is, according to Spector (2011, p. 4), "the scientific study of human behaviour and psychological conditions in the production, distribution and consumption of goods and services, which attempts to use this knowledge to minimise problems". IOP tasks include:

> ...running human resource departments, working to improve staff morale and attitudes in order to increase job performance, satisfaction and productivity, examining organisational structures and procedures, and making

recommendations for improvements (Cascio & Aguinis, 2008, p. 1074).

Workplace bullying is pertinent to the field of IOP because it has performance implications for the organisation and employee (Devonish, 2013; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Treadway, Shaughnessy, Breland, Yang & Reeves, 2013) and has been shown to affect employees' quality of working life (Bruk-Lee & Spector, 2006; Hauge, Skogstad & Einarsen, 2010; Ncongwane, 2010; Pietersen, 2007).

Workplace bullying happens between employees or between employees and superiors, for example, a senior staff member, a supervisor, a line manager or someone in top management. Bullying in the workplace is a growing problem and has detrimental effects on individual effectiveness, efficiency, absenteeism, productivity, happiness and overall workplace climate (Barrow, 2012; Kelly, 2006). If not identified or dealt with it can destroy a person's reputation, career and even life (Chapman, 2009; Rossheim, 2011). As it focuses on people as employees, HR has an important role to play in responding to complaints, eradicating bullying behaviour and promoting dignity at work, as well as building employees' positive attitudes to their organisation and work. HR is often perceived as being ineffective, especially if bullies are in the top management (Namie, 2013). Within IOP, employee performance, wellbeing and quality of work-life are addressed in order to minimise the occurrence of workplace damaging behaviour, which include bullying, and improving the working environment as well as encouraging personal development at work (Cascio & Aguinis, 2008; Gerard, Hodgkinson & Ford, 2010; Robinson & Bennett, 1997). Studying the phenomenon of workplace bullying is therefore relevant within the IOP discipline's conceptual and scientific boundaries and falls within HRM as sub-discipline and field of application. Problems relating to workplace bullying is relevant to employees' wellbeing, working relations and performance as well as the organisation's bottom line.

2.3   RESEARCH DESIGN

The research design is a plan of how the researcher intends to conduct the research to ensure focus on a particular planned purpose with an adequate sample rather than attempting to study a broader issue with an inadequate sample (Mouton, 2002; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2004). The research design includes the theoretical perspective or philosophical underpinnings of the research, the methodology, process and methods employed to collect and analyse the data. Figure 2.1 presents the foundational plan followed throughout the study in which I employed qualitative research strategies and

methods.
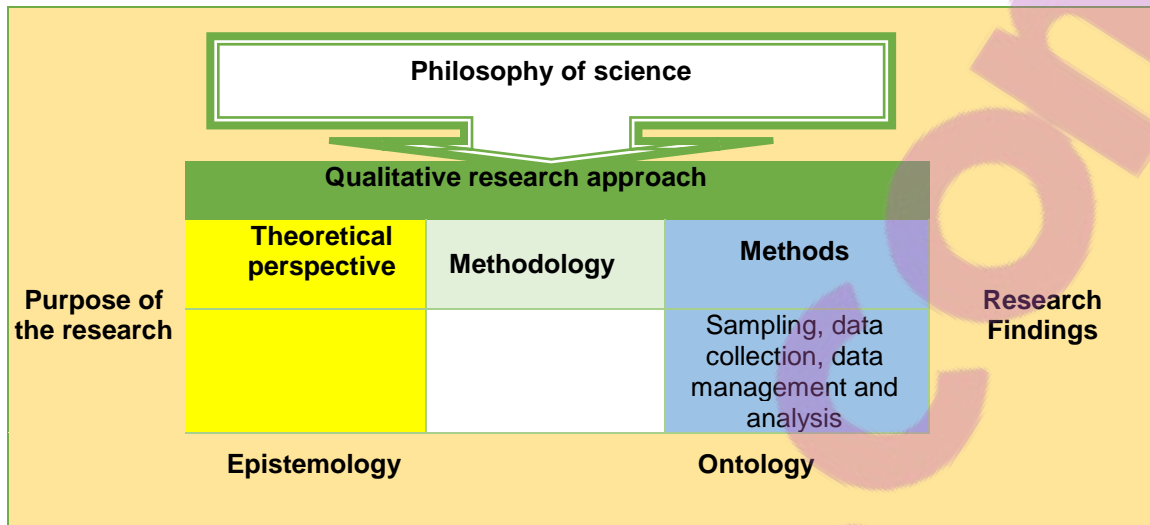
Figure 2.1. The research design detailing the foundational plan of the study.

The figure shows the foundational plan or research design which guided the methodological choices, decisions and actions followed in executing this study, a model adapted from that of Barnard (2008). From the figure it is evident that the research design first includes an explanation of my philosophy of science, how it relates to the overall purpose of the research and how it manifests in a particular theoretical perspective to the study. An explanation for conducting a qualitative inquiry follows, after which I present the methodology foundational to the study. Lastly, I describe the methods employed in the research in congruence with the foundational theoretical and methodological perspectives.

2.3.1 Philosophy of science

My philosophical premises, that is, ontological, epistemological and theoretical, with ethical values, are central to the research design. They (philosophical premises) are grounded deeply in views about human experience, researcher beliefs about the nature of the social world, ways to find the truth, and the methodology required to obtain the knowledge (Barnard, Schurink & De Beer, 2008). These philosophical premises of science underscore multiple ways of carrying out qualitative research and are therefore important as a way of clarifying my methodological choices. Below I structure my

scientific beliefs according to the ontological and epistemological assumptions I hold and explain how this culminated in a particular theoretical orientation to the research.

2.3.1.1 Ontological assumptions

Ontology specifies the nature of the social reality or phenomenon that is to be studied and what can be known or believed about it (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Mason 2002; Patton, 2002). According to Ritchie and Lewis (2004, p. 13), one of the key ontological debates centres on "whether there is a captive social reality, and how it should be constructed. In broad terms, there are three distinct ontological orientations, namely realism, materialism and idealism". Realism involves a belief that there is an external reality which exists independently of people's beliefs or understanding of it, whilst materialism claims that values, beliefs or experiences arise from the material world but do not shape it (Ritchie & Lewis, 2004). Idealism claims that no external reality exists independently of our belief and understanding, and reality is only knowable through the human mind and socially constructed meanings (Ritchie & Lewis, 2004).

Three other ontological stances, namely, critical realism (Maxwell, 1992), subtle realism (Hammersley, 1992) and relativism (Collins, 1981) have also emerged, with Ritchie and Lewis (2004, p. 16) explaining "critical or subtle realism and relativism as a variant of realism, influenced by idealism". Cohen and Crabtree (2006, p. 1) write that critical or subtle realism emphasises the existence of a reality that exists independently of human conception and that is subject to wide critical examination to achieve the best understanding of that reality. On the other hand, relativism holds that reality can be explained through a series of socially constructed meanings because there is no single reality outside human understanding of it (see Ritchie & Lewis, 2004). The central point of an ontological orientation is the question as to whether social entities can and should be considered objective ones that have a reality external to social actors (Ritchie & Lewis, 2004), or whether they can and should be considered social constructions built from the perceptions and actions of social actors (Maxwell, 2002; Krauss, 2005; Nel, 2007).

For the purpose of this study I relate to subtle realism (Hammersly, 1992), a combination of elements from a modernist and postmodern (interpretive) school of thought. The modernists hold to an objective reality which often inspires quantitative methods and regards the researcher as detached from the social world, because evidence and values are definite and independent of the researcher (Lee, 2000; Snape & Spencer, 2003). A postmodern stance underlies qualitative methods and is aimed at understanding the

social world through insisting on a continuing process of sense-making, interpretation and social construction of people's world and lives, in real-life research settings (Lee, 2000; Snape & Spencer, 2003). Thus, a subtle realist perspective enables researchers to "maintain 'truth' as an ideal, whilst recognising that it was impossible to be certain that truth had been achieved in any given situation" (Seale, 1999, p. 26). I argue that HR practitioners' workplace bullying experiences and the shared understanding of the phenomenon provide leeway for the expression of diverse views, opinions, beliefs and interpretations which were known through meanings socially constructed in their specific world and life context. Dynamics of workplace bullying can be understood within the context in which it occurs, without compromising what oneself believes to be truth. Subtle realism maintains that "external reality exists independent of our beliefs and understanding and reality is only knowable through the socially constructed meanings" (Ritchie & Lewis, 2004, p. 16), and so is compatible with a constructionist epistemology (Crotty, 1998).

2.3.1.2 Epistemological assumptions

According to Krauss (2005, p. 758), epistemology "is intimately related to ontology and methodology; as ontology involves the philosophy of reality, epistemology addresses how we come to know that reality while methodology identifies the particular practices used to attain knowledge of it". Two main epistemologies are identified, objectivism and constructionism. The former is based on the ontological position that knowledge and truth exist independently of human experience and are determined by the structure of the real world. There is thus an assumption that such a reality can only be accessed through objective measurement. The latter asserts that human beings construct meanings and interpret the world through interacting with others (Bryman, 2012; Watson, 2009).

After considering the epistemological stance highlighted above, I identify with constructivist assumptions in the belief that both I as the researcher and the participants, the HR practitioners, are part of the research and co-created an understanding of the research phenomenon, workplace bullying. In an effort to create meaning from HR practitioners' perceptions and experiences a new understanding was thus constructed between myself as the researcher and the participants. It is not possible for a researcher to hide his or her presence in the study but the voice need not transcend participants' experiences, rather re-envisage them (Charmaz, 2001). I consciously allowed HR practitioners' opinions, views and experiences or exposure to workplace bullying as a form of expression when constructing meanings of their organisational setting, thus they

are integral to the empirical analysis and its presentations (Charmaz, 2008). Integrating the ontological and epistemological beliefs underlying my research approach culminates in an interpretative theoretical orientation foundational to my inquiry.

2.3.1.3 Theoretical orientation: interpretivism as founded in the symbolic interactionist tradition

One's theoretical orientation is the general framework that guides understanding and interpretation in all aspects of research and is the culmination of ontological and epistemological assumptions. Patton (in Schwartzel, 2008, p. 17) explains that a theoretical orientation is important because it "shapes public arguments, giving people the concepts they use and shaping the alternatives they consider". Interpretivism, as a theoretical orientation is a "way to gain insights through discovering meanings by improving our comprehension of the whole" (Schwandt, 2000, p. 191). In this study I seek to understand the lived experience from those who live it rather than abstract generalisation from the specific conditions (Charmaz, 2011b; Crotty, 2005; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003), which is congruent to an interpretive theoretical orientation. In order to appreciate participants' lived experience, qualitative researchers must engage with and participate in the research process, as well as actively interpret it (Locke, 2001). Interpretivists believe that "reality is not objectively determined, but is socially constructed" (Husserl in Kelliher, 2005, p. 123). By its nature, interpretivism promotes the value of qualitative data in pursuit of knowledge (Kaplan & Maxwell, 1994).

In this study I describe the experiences of the HR practitioners and make sense thereof without denying my own preconceptions, formed through my experience as an HR academic to enhance understanding of bullying in the workplace. As such, the researcher and participants interact and shape a new understanding of bullying as the research phenomenon. The structures of interaction between myself as researcher and the participants were determined by our shared ideas to deconstruct and reconstruct versions of perceptions, experiences and expectations of participants' own real-life settings. Such meaning-making and reconstruction is essential to interpretivism and in essence, interpretivism represents a theoretical perspective congruent to a constructivist epistemology (Blaikie, 2000; Charmaz, 2000; Crotty, 2005).

Various research approaches have been aligned with interpretivism, each based on particular foundational questions, each with its own internal logic and assumptions, including:

... positivist realist and analytical induction approaches (ethnography, auto-ethnography and evocative forms of inquiry, truth and realty-orientated correspondence theory), social construction and constructivism, phenomenology, heuristic inquiry, qualitative heuristics, ethnomethodology, symbolic interaction, narratology or narrative analysis, ecological psychology, a systems perspective and systems theory, chaos and complexity theory, grounded theory and feminist inquiry and critical theory (orientational qualitative inquiry) (Patton, 2002, p. 134).

Within an interpretive orientation my research assumptions resonate with those of symbolic interactionism, a term coined by Blumer (1969) and originated by Mead (1964). In the symbolic interactionist tradition, an interpretive orientation is based on an assumption that meaning arises and is transformed in the context of communication with others (Blumer, in LaRossa & Reitzes, 1993). Individuals are motivated to verify their sense of self in the eyes of others (Burke & Stets, 2009). According to Plummer (in Schwartzel, 2008, p. 17), there are three basic aspects of meaning in symbolic interactionism, namely, "meaning is extrinsic, it is behavioural and it arises out of communication and social interaction". Meaning is thus created by an interpretive process, using symbols and signs, and is constructed by people. Moreover symbolic interactionism has been foundational to the development of grounded theory as a research methodology (Charmaz, 2011a), which is discussed in section 2.3.3 as the directive methodology chosen in this study.

2.3.2   A qualitative research approach

Two research approaches are frequently identified as fields of inquiry in their own right, namely, quantitative and qualitative research. Although both are used to study problems and interpret research findings there is typically a difference in research focus. Denzin and Lincoln (2000, p. 8) explain that "qualitative researchers often seek to answer questions that stress how social experience is created and given meaning whereas quantitative studies emphasise the measurements and analysis of casual relationships between variables, not process". The former approach emphasises subjectivity and the latter measure frequencies and cause-and-effect relationship. The two approaches are not necessarily in opposition but complement each other (Mason, 2002), as most quantitative data techniques follow a procedure that is strictly formalised and explicated in order to see the wider picture. Whilst qualitative methods contain procedures that are not as strictly formalised and explicated their aim is to elicit data to see aspects of

phenomena more clearly (Allan & Skinner in Niemann, 2005; Miller & Brewer, 2003). Thus, qualitative research involves "a naturalistic and interpretative approach in understanding of human experience" (Nelson, Treichler & Grossberg, 1992, p. 4).

The study followed a qualitative research approach because of my siding with a constructivist epistemology and an interpretivist orientation, to create exploratory knowledge and understanding. Qualitative research is suitable and relevant for exploring sensitive issues such as workplace bullying (Devine, 2013; Fahie, 2014). De Vos Strydom, Fouche & Delport (2005), Henning (2004) and Neuman (2006) describe the primary goals of qualitative research as including interpretation rather than quantification, subjectivity rather than objectivity, process rather than outcome, and context regarding behaviour and situation. In this regard, "reality is not 'discovered', but generated from the interactive process between the researcher and the subjects", thus creating expressions of different beliefs and worldviews (Charmaz, 2006, p. 131).

I opted for this approach because it is conducted in a natural setting, that is, concern for behaviour and situation, and involves a process of building a holistic complex picture of the phenomenon of interest (Creswell, 2003). It also allows participants to display their own words in reports and give their own critical reflection on the phenomenon under inquiry (Schurink, 2005). I was able to construct meanings of the HR practitioners' perspectives by accessing their subjective experience.

2.3.3   Research methodology: constructivist grounded theory

Grounded theory was first articulated by Glaser and Strauss in 1967, as a new foundation of investigating the topics of a social world. It was a move from natural science (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) that "later branched into different perspectives of the same theory" (Barnard, 2008, p. 63 in reference to Charmaz, 2000; Dey, 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). However, both Glaser and Strauss separated early in their theoretical development (Glaser, 2001; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Glaser was initially a proponent of quantitative social research methods and Strauss an advocate of qualitative research (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Robrecht, 1995) rooted in the symbolic interactionist tradition (Charmaz, 2011a). In spite of their different research perspectives, Glaser and Strauss (1967, p. 2) define grounded theory as: "the discovery of theory from data systematically obtained from social research". In reference to Glaser and Strauss's definition, grounded theory can be described "as a qualitative method employing a systematic set of

procedures to derive an inductive theory on a particular phenomenon" (Barnard, 2008, p. 63), while simultaneously grounding the account in empirical data (Jones & Alony, 2011). Grounded theory methodology was introduced into constructionism by Charmaz (1995, 2000), because of its focus on making sense of the world of lived experience of those who live in a specific substantive area. Constructivism can be defined as a framework that seeks to explain social construction or creation of meanings, knowledge and understanding as well as how people interact and make sense of meanings in their world or social lives (Charmaz, 2006; Crotty, 2005; Onuf, 2002). The definition of constructivism is consistent with subtle realism that posits "external reality exists independent of our beliefs and understanding and reality is only knowable through the socially constructed meanings" (Ritchie & Lewis, 2004, p. 16).

Grounded theory comprises coding data from the beginning of collection, using comparative methods for identifying conceptual categories and their properties, writing memos, and conducting theoretical sampling as the conceptual categories are enriched through integration to make them robust in developing theory (Calman, 2012; Charmaz, 2009; 2012b; Hughes & Jones, 2003). The importance of theory in qualitative research cannot be underestimated. It consists of "plausible interaction and relationships proposed among categories and sets of categories with changes of conditions either internal or external to the process itself" (Strauss & Corbin, 1994, p. 274). Theory can be defined as a system of statements that are logically linked together to explain and understand phenomena (De Vos et al., 2005; Thornberg & Charmaz, 2012).

When embarking on a grounded theory study, there are the two different kinds of theory that need to be considered. The two types are substantive and formal, and understanding the distinction between the two types is critical when conducting research aimed at developing theory. Corbin and Strauss (1990) argue that substantive theory is tailor-made from the study of a phenomenon situated in one particular (specific) social setting or the subjects being studied. On the other hand, a formal theory is less specific to a social setting, and it has a greater claim on generalisation of research results which might be adapted to many contexts or other experiences (Remenyi, 2014). A single grounded theory research study would not be expected to generate formal theory (Gasson, 2004). Formal theory emerges over time (Glaser, 1978) and with reflection (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). For a theory to be accepted as formal it needs to have previously been considered substantive across multiple research studies (Remenyi, 2014). Both the substantive and formal elements can inform each other to varying degrees, yet grounded theory studies aim to develop substantive theories on context

specific research phenomenon. Having distinguished the aim of grounded theory as developing a substantive theory, it is important to note that any theory, a substantive one in particular, provides useful but limited explanations of studied phenomena or a social world (Remenyi, 2014). Its theoretical assumptions and explanations are likely to change over the years and across different research (Remenyi, 2014).

Grounded theory was employed in this study as a methodological approach with the intention of developing a substantive theory of workplace bullying. I used it because:

- It provides an expedient model that illuminates a research area characterised by ambiguity and taxing circumstances, through qualitative inquiry (Hughes & Jones, 2003).
- It assists conceptually in the understanding of a research area with no pre-formed knowledge or reality, and provides flexibility and freedom for socially constructed experiences to emerge (Bryant, 2002; Charmaz, 2003; Glaser, 2001).
- It is interpretive and is influenced by symbolic interactionism (Blumer 1969; Locke, 2001) in that people respond to situations based on what they face or interact with at that particular time, and their meanings are socially constructed and interpreted on the basis of that situation (Calman, 2012).
- It was found useful and successful in providing in-depth insights and understanding of social life in organisational and management studies both internationally and in South Africa (Barnard, 2008; Beyleveld & Schurink, 2005; Galt, 2006; Williams, Crafford & Fourie, 2003).

Another consideration regarding the importance of theory in research is the manner in which existing theory influences the study and how literature on the research phenomenon is approached. A constructivist-interpretivist perspective on research emphasises interpretation and the development of co-constructed abstract understanding, "when theory is developed such an approach to managing existing theory in research includes a range of perspectives to understand meanings and actions and how people construct them" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 231). The manner in which I approached existing theory in this study, is discussed in section 2.3.5, but here it is pertinent to point out that through following a grounded theory methodology I ultimately attempted to link my substantive findings (i.e., from data collected from interviews) to formal theoretical issues relevant to bullying found in literature. Thus, the findings of this study are primarily inductively presented.

2.3.4   Research methods

The following methods were employed in this study within the disciplinary, paradigmatic and methodological boundaries set out above.

2.3.4.1 Sampling

A sample is a sub-unit of a population or characteristics of the population selected to estimate the behaviour being researched (Babbie & Mouton, 2001; Mason, 2007). According to Babbie (2004) there are four different units of analysis frequently used by the research community, namely, individuals, groups, organisations and social artefacts. The primary unit of analysis for this study is workplace bullying from HR practitioners' perspectives, hence they constituted the primary target population. HR practitioner's perceptions, viewpoints, attitudes, feelings and experiences of workplace bullying constituted insightful and enriching data sources congruent to the set research objective.

My intention was to use a combination of non-probability sampling techniques, namely, purposive and snowball sampling. The latter "yields a study sample through referrals made among people who share or know of others who possess some characteristics that are of research interest" (Lindloff & Taylor, 2002, p. 124). Ultimately, however, I used only purposive sampling as participants were unwilling to refer me to any person(s) involved in bullying situation(s) due to the sensitivity of the phenomenon. According to Babbie (in Branch et al.*,* 2007a, p. 109), purposive sampling "is suitable when it is not appropriate or feasible to interview all members of the population group." This method enables the selection of participants based on the researcher's judgement about the suitability of the participant to the purpose of the study (Davoudi et al., 2016). It is chosen because, a) it places emphasis on in-depth understanding and analysis of the research phenomenon (Patton, 2002); b) it does not draw on large or random samples, in accordance with the grounded theory (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2004); c) the sampling process is guided by the ongoing theory development (Gorra, 2007); and d) it has elements of theoretical sampling, that is, desirable participants are selected based on criteria specified by the researcher and the purpose of the study to build and expand on the substantive theory (Babbie, 2004; Henning, 2004; Silverman, 2005), either upfront or progressively (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Thus, qualitative purposive sampling is congruent with a grounded theory methodology, especially since it resonates the principles of theoretical sampling, which is a core grounded theory strategy. I explained what theoretical sampling means and also described how theoretical sampling was applied in this study in section 2.3.4.4 (iii).

Nine participants were interviewed to gain their perspectives, insight and understanding of workplace bullying in two tertiary institutions in South Africa. Application letters requesting permission to conduct the study were sent to both institutions for approval. Both institutions' management and appropriate College Ethics Committees granted their permission in writing to conduct the study. In one institution, a list of HR practitioners' contact details (names, levels, telephone numbers and email addresses) was obtained from the office of the HR Executive Director. I then recruited them through telephone and emails, explaining the research intention and requesting a meeting. In the other institution, HR practitioners were known to me and I approached them individually, either telephonically or in person, to ask if they would take part in the study. I then sent them a formal invitation[4] via email. Nine HR practitioners in total, from the two institutions, agreed to be interviewed.

Eligibility to participate as HR practitioners in this study was guided by pre-determined purposive sampling criteria, known as exclusion or inclusion criteria which represent the defining characteristics specified by the researcher that identify suitable participants to be included in the study (Meline, 2006; Omona, 2013; West, Gartlehner & Mansfield, 2010). The exclusion or inclusion criteria could include factors such as employment status, position or organisation tenure, the participants' work roles and history, desired understanding of phenomenon under study, age, gender and race (Van Spall, 2007). To be eligible for participation in this study, the HR practitioners had to be permanently employed in an HR position, with a minimum of three years of HR experience and performing general HR responsibilities. They were selected on the basis of relevance and acceptability (Robey & Dalebout, 1998). Table 2.1 shows the profile of research participants.

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[4] See Appendix C: Email invitation to participants.

Table 2.1

Profile of research participants (n=9)

ID	Gender	Race	Job title / Position	Organisational tenure	Qualification	Professional body / Membership
TS1	Male	Black	Team Leader	8	Honours Degree	SABPP
NK2	Male	White	Manager	15	Masters Degree	SABPP
AD3	Female	White	Manager	18	Doctoral Degree	SABPP
TO4	Female	Black	Team Leader	12	B.Tech Degree	SABPP
ET5	Female	Black	Practitioner	6	Honours Degree	SABPP
PI6	Female	Coloured	Practitioner	3	Diploma	SABPP
LU7	Male	Black	Practitioner	18	Diploma	IRASA
NM8	Male	Black	Team Leader	20	Degree	IRASA
ES9	Female	Indian	Practitioner	5	Degree	SABPP

The sample of participants interviewed was fairly balanced between males (four) and females (five). Five participants were Blacks, followed by two Whites, one Coloured and one Indian. All the participants had some form of educational qualification, ranging from a Diploma to a Doctoral degree. Two of the nine participants reported were managers of the sub-units within the functions listed above. Three were team leaders reporting to HR managers and the remaining four were practitioners reporting to team leaders and/or managers. The majority of participants had been in HR positions for 11-20 years, two reported three to five years, two reported six to 10 years, five reported between 11 and 20 years. Most of the participants were members of the South African Board of People Practice (SABPP) as they were required by their institutions to register with HR-related professional bodies. The only exception to being registered with the SABPP were two practitioners who were members of the Industrial Relations Association of South Africa (IRASA).

With regard to purposive sampling within grounded theory, some qualitative researchers reiterated that researchers must have a smaller number of interviews rather than increasing the sample size to avoid the problem of running out of time and failing to analyse the data content appropriately (Bonde, 2013; Charmaz, 2014; Guest, Bunce & Johnson, 2006; Mason, 2010; Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). According to Bonde (2013) in reference to Romney, Weller and Batchelder (1986), to obtain a satisfactory sample size, participants must be homogenous and possess expertise, experience or knowledge in relation to the phenomenon under inquiry. In the literature, some studies posit that homogenous participants with both common knowledge and experience about the research topic may lead to adequate sampling and data saturation occurring earlier in interviews (Bryman, 2012; Charmaz, 2014, 2012; Mason, 2010; Newman, 1957). On the contrary, Bonde (2013, p. 2) argues that participants "could also be made up of people with highly dissimilar characteristics (e.g., race, age, gender and so forth) who think and behave quite differently in relation to phenomenon of interest".

2.3.4.2 Data collection

To draw valid conclusions from a research study, it is essential that the researcher has sound data to analyse and interpret (see Christensen, 2001), and data that should reflect the meaning of what the researcher is observing. Positivist researchers prefer to use quantitative measures that predefine the objects to be studied. In contrast, interpretive researchers maintain that the meaning of phenomena varies across settings, and they adopt a more inductive approach to data collection, observing how categories of observation emerge in a specific setting (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Patton, 2002; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2004). Positivist research aims to attain measurement reliability and validity, while qualitative researchers favour credibility and trustworthiness as quality criteria (Schurink, 2003; Silverman, 2005; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2004).

The qualitative researcher is the instrument of observation, with data collected either by interviews, for example, structured, semi-structured and unstructured, direct observation, life stories, case studies, recoding of human behaviour in contexts of interaction, document analysis and the study of artefacts (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Silverman, 2005). Thus, qualitative research is pragmatic, interpretive, and grounded in the lived experiences of people (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). As such, in this study I employed two methods of data gathering, firstly the interview and secondly by means of analysing existing organisational documentation. I discuss these in detail below.

i.   The interview

Interviews are favoured by researchers working within interpretive and constructionist paradigms (Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2004). Frey and Fontana (in Watson, 2009, p. 128) describe interviews as:

> ...a powerful and flexible research tool for understanding other people, allowing difficult topics to be investigated. Interviews can access people's feelings, thoughts, intentions and motivations to provide insights into how they organise their world and give meaning to it.

This research tool can be applied to describe and interpret a particular phenomenon in the real life-world of the subject, and the way in which the subject relates to it (Marshall & Rossman, 2006; Rubin & Rubin, 2005; Silverman, 2005), therefore I opted for interviews as an appropriate and valid method for gathering data.

Three main types of interviews that are frequently used in qualitative research include the in-depth interview, semi-structured and group interviews such as focus groups. These types of interviews are often employed interchangeably or simultaneously and each has strengths and limitations. Mason (in Hollowa, 2005, p. 39) asserts that "no research interview can be entirely devoid of structure, even if that structure is the use of a single open question to prompt thought and discussion". Focus groups were not used in this study because the HR practitioners preferred to remain anonymous, for fear of humiliation by their colleagues or superiors. It was easy to arrange individual interviews at one institution and more difficult at the other, where it took participants a long time to accept interview requests. The HR practitioners often preferred to be interviewed at their place of work during working hours, but the great majority preferred a venue away from their offices or work stations. Following the assertion by Mason (in Hollowa, 2005) I opted for the semi-structured interview, in particular the in-depth interview type.

In-depth interviewing involves conducting individual interviews and the interviewer posing some open-ended questions with relatively few people to explore and gain insights into their personal experiences (Boyce & Neale, 2006; DiCicco-Bloom & Crabtree, 2006). This interview method retains maximum flexibility and adaptability (Robson, 2002), simply starting with an opening question or request, such as '*Tell me a little more about yourself*', then progressing upon the initial response. The strengths of in-depth interview include generating rich detailed data, information and ideas, and people feeling more comfortable, that is, a rapport with humour and humility, having a conversation on the given topic. However, it can be time-consuming, often lasting several hours, difficult to

standardise across different people, and difficult to manage, analyse and compare the data (Gill, Stewart, Treasure & Chadwick, 2008; Rubin & Rubin, 2005). Using in-depth interviews allowed me to start to understand the HR practitioners' meanings and opinions associated with workplace bullying, and encouraged a sense of empowerment by framing the interview as a conversation in which participants were encouraged to ask questions and raise issues not covered. A semi-structured interview consists of both structured (closed questions) and unstructured interview (open questions or closer to observation). It is a non-standardised form of interview in which the researcher will have a pre-prepared list of themes and questions to be covered, allowing the participants to detail experiences in their own words and the researcher to further explore responses (Green & Thorogood, 2004; Ritchie & Lewis, 2004; Saunders, Lewis & Thornhill, 2012).

In this study, the in-depth semi-structured interview included open and structured questions to garner in-depth information associated with workplace bullying in an open and narrative manner. The characteristics of this interview method proved valuable for accessing subjective experiences focused on the research phenomenon of workplace bullying in that it afforded a balance between being focused, yet remaining flexible, as noted above.

An interview guide[5] was prepared to give structure and guidance to the interview. The interview questions were arranged in a logical order so that easier, less threatening questions were placed at the beginning of the conversation and more sensitive ones towards the end (see recommendations by Henning, 2004; Patton, 2002; Stroh, 2000). According to Rubin and Rubin (2005), a researcher must design questions only as possible guides, and should change them as s/he communicates with the participant, which is a strategy I employed with increasing confidence as my interviews progressed.

All nine interviews were conducted face-to-face and took place during normal working hours. They lasted between 50 and 55 minutes and I asked the participants to detail behaviours they considered to be bullying in the workplace. I asked these questions first to get a better understanding of the HR practitioners' sense-making and experiences with bullying. I then asked a series of open-ended questions to gain an even deeper understanding of how they had made sense of the idea of workplace bullying and how they understood and interpreted these situations. Each interview varied and the manner

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[5] See Appendix A: Interview guide.

in which the participants responded to initial opening questions determined the follow up questions asked. I immediately recorded my thoughts on our conversation after each interview (Charmaz, 2006) and soon started seeing reoccurrences of particular areas, including bullying behaviours, investigation processes, and roles the HR practitioners felt they occupied in bullying situations. The interview questions were designed in a manner that allowed a biographical interpretation of the HR practitioners (see Hollway & Jefferson, 2000) during data collection to gain insight into their unconscious motivations and anxieties (see Clarke, 2002). The biographical interpretative method is an interview strategy that allows participants to freely associate and to tell stories and narratives about their real-life situations with as little input as possible from the researcher (Clarke, 2002). Following the assertion by Clarke (2002) and Hollway and Jefferson (2000) I applied the biographical interpretative principles in data collection as a part of my in-depth semi-structured interviewing method. According to Hollway and Jefferson (in Clarke, 2002, p. 177), there are four guiding principles underlying the biographical interpretative method, namely: (1) the use of open-ended questions, which allowed me to explore meaning with reference to the participant's life experience; (2) eliciting a story that provided me with a portrait about the participant and thus allowing me to identify unconscious communications; (3) the avoidance of 'why' questions, discouraging stereotypical and rehearsed responses; and (4) the use of the participants' ordering and phrasing, which avoids imposing inflexibility on the structure of the interview, and lessens the risk of analysis taking place in the interview environment. A fifth principle, the use of 'free association' by allowing the participant to structure and guide the interview, can be added (see Clarke, 2002).

Data was collected until saturation was considered to have been reached, that is a point at which sampling discontinues because no new insights are being generated from further data in the case of interviewing (Bryman, 2012; Charmaz, 2014, 2003; Creswell, 1998; Donna, 2013; Guest et al., 2006; Morse, 1995; Patton 2002). The term 'data saturation' was pioneered by Glaser and Strauss (1967), originating from the terms 'theoretical sampling' and 'saturation of categories' within grounded theory (Charmaz 2000; Gibson & Brown, 2009). This concept of saturation is used interchangeably in qualitative research with thematic saturation, theoretical saturation and conceptual saturation (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Guest, 2012) and it is important because it addresses whether a study is based on an adequate sample to demonstrate content validity (Francis et al., 2010, as cited in Real, 2014). In grounded theory:

the researcher(s) develop theory through the collection and analysis of data and base their sampling on the emerging theory, termed 'theoretical sampling', and continue to collect data until they achieve 'theoretical saturation' whereby no new or relevant insights seem to be emerging from the data being collected (Real, 2014, p. 5).

Data saturation is considered important in qualitative research to ensure the quality of data collected and analysed and credibility of the study through its systematic inductive process (Bryman, 2012; Charmaz 2008; Donna, 2013).

In this study I felt confident that data saturation had been reached because the last three interviews reinforced many of the previously related experiences and perceptions by other participants. I felt confident closing the data gathering because I was experiencing what Lindloff and Taylor (2002) refer to as 'interpretive confidence', which occurs when the researcher feels confident to end the interviews, as no new explanations are emerging from participants but only repetition of information. The final decision was informed not by the amount of data but rather by its richness, through constant comparison of the detailed descriptions of participants (Carey, 1995; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Guest et al., 2006). I concur with Cutcliffe and McKenna (2002) and Tuckett (2004), that the decision to end interviews to a certain extent is influenced by an element of faith, driven by a desire to learn in-depth detail about the experience and opinions of subjects studied.

ii.   Analysis of relevant documentation

Punch (2014, p. 158) noted that the analysis of official documentation is important for the researcher "to determine how he or she will record the information gained from the analysis and how the information will be analysed, interpreted and used". After closing of data gathering through the interviews I sensed the need to obtain additional data, taking into account especially how the HR practitioners claimed that limited or even no direction and structure was provided to them in the organisation in terms of their roles in handling workplace bullying. I therefore decided to proceed seeking and exploring official or policy documentation in their places of work regarding bullying. This is related with qualitative research and a fundamental way that helped me to establish connections about the actual environment of the organisation in which the study was being conducted (Bush, Kiggundu & Moorosi, 2011; Punch, 2014). According to Hammersely and Atkinson (2007, p. 356), official documentation involves "careful and systematic planning of what the researcher will achieve with information gathered". The analysis of official policy

documents was important in understanding the influence on the HR practitioners' roles, and handling of workplace bullying situations.

The value of analysing official documents in this study emerges in presenting results in Chapter 5.

2.3.4.3 Recording, transcribing and managing the data with ATLAS.ti

Schurink (2005) and Rubin and Babbie (2011) list three main characteristics that should be followed when capturing data, namely: (i) it can be easily retrieved; (ii) necessary precautions should be taken to ensure that data loss does not happen; and (iii) the identities of the subjects need to be protected, so that the readers cannot identify a given response with a specific participant. I utilised the following methods to capture data, namely audio recording, and observational or field notes.

Interviews were recorded with a digital recorder, after having gained permission from each participant. I used the device because it provides better sound quality and could be replayed on any digital audio play compact, for example, cellular telephone or computer, supported with WMA or MP3. During and after interviews, brief notes were made about the overall impression of the interviews in terms of how open they were, whether there were any difficulties such as interruptions or other aspects disrupting the communication flow. Most HR practitioners mentioned that they were under pressure during working hours, and interviews were conducted early in the morning or towards lunchtime so that they could continue to attend to their day-to-day business. Each recording was assigned a code as a reference to protect the anonymity of data. In some instances I corrected grammar of participants' reflections or responses, whilst meticulously paying attention not to compromise the meaning.

Easton, McComish and Greenberg (2000, p. 706) note that there are several errors that can occur during the transcription process, namely, "inaccurate punctuation, misunderstood or misinterpreted words and mistyped words, all of which can change the meaning of the phrase". I conducted the interviews and employed the services of a professional transcriber, who signed a formal confidentiality agreement[6] to demonstrate that she understood the ethical issues involved in the research. In order to ensure reliability of the transcriptions and to overcome the abovementioned pitfalls, I personally

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[6] See Appendix D.

checked the congruence of each with the audio version by reading and re-reading through it. I also attempted to ensure that transcribed verbal responses and non-verbal sounds were accurately captured (Easton et al., 2000). Although this was a lengthy process it gave me insights into potential emotive reactions, such as how strongly HR practitioners felt about bullying issues and whether they were confident in discussing them. It also aided my immersion in and familiarity with the data.

The field notes, that is, recorded impressions of interviews described above, and memos were used to record and organise ideas and captured my specific thoughts, experiences, interpretations and perceptions throughout the research process of data collection, data reduction, conclusion drawing and final reporting, in an attempt to arrive at an explanation of the data and to generate propositions. I used ATLAS.ti 6.0, qualitative coding software to help organise the volume of data generated in this study through interviews, field notes and memo writing, because the software is easy to learn, present data in a user friendly manner and logically organise emerging categories and memo's (Kelle, 2007; Lutgen-Sandvik, Namie, & Namie, 2009; Seale, 2010). It allows users to choose an individual approach and more easily see connections between categories. Lastly, this software allowed me to generate reports and to print all of the quotations associated with a particular category. In Figure 2.2 I present a photographic record of interview notes. With ATLAS.ti providing structure and manageability to the generated data, I discuss below the grounded theory data analysis strategy I followed.
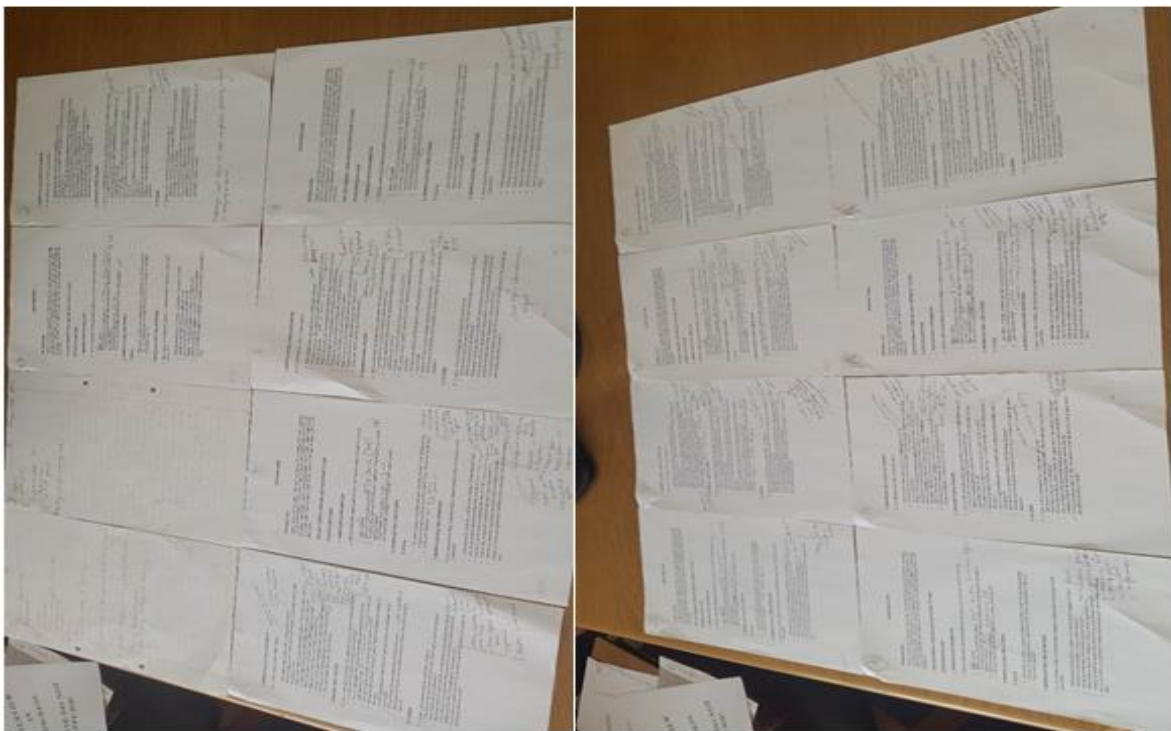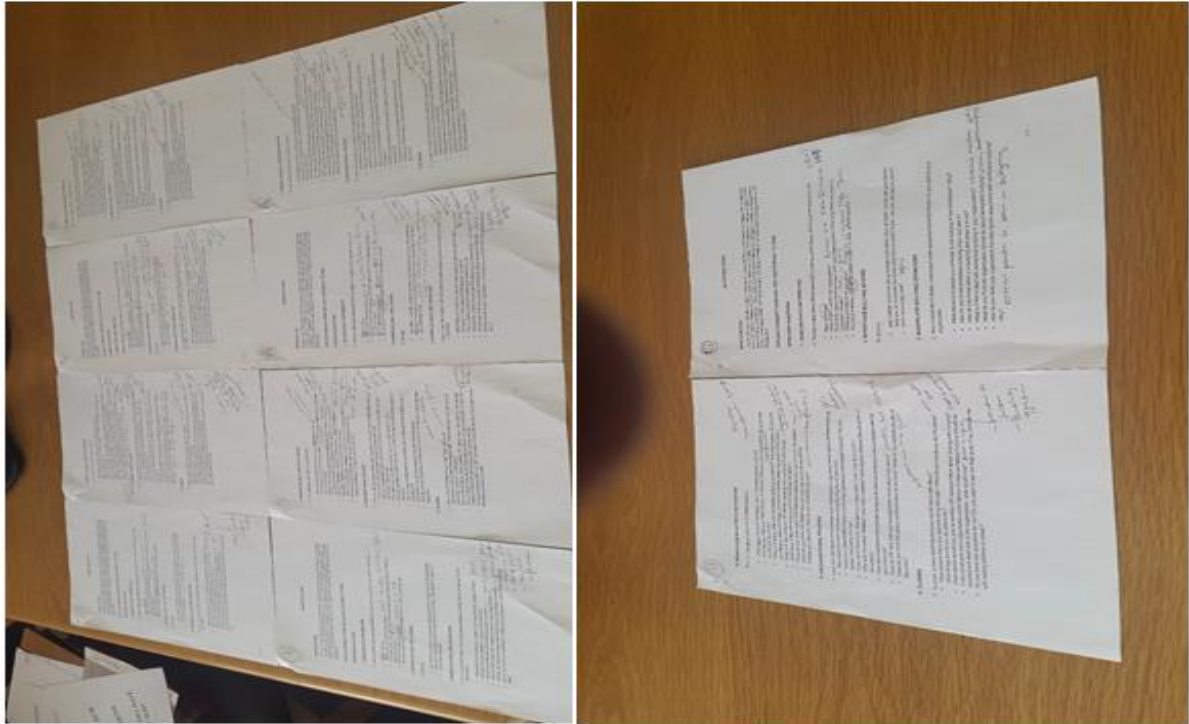
Figure 2.2. Record of interviews notes.

2.3.4.4 Data analysis

Data analysis refers to the process of systematically searching and arranging the interview transcripts, field notes and data from the other relevant documents that the researcher consider important to enhance an understanding of the participants' subjective experiences (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Struwig & Stead, 2004) and to enable the researcher to present what has been discovered. It further embraces working with data, arranging it, separating it into manageable units, synthesising it, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what can be used to build detail understanding of it (see Charmaz, 2006; Silverman, 2011). I followed a constructivist grounded theory approach during data analysis, developed by Charmaz (1995), based on the classical grounded theory perspectives of Glaser and Strauss (1967) and Strauss and Corbin (1990).

The constructivist grounded theory is data-driven, taking into account different views from objectivist to subjectivist or socially constructivist, and meaning is shared. Strauss and Corbin (1990), also in the development of grounded theory, emphasised the importance of a multiplicity of perspectives of reality. According to Charmaz (2008), constructivist grounded theory entails a specific constructivist orientation to grounded

theory which is different from the classical grounded theory founded by Glaser and Strauss, however similar data analytic strategies can be employed. The coding processes work best with interview data to see and further to confirm and disconfirm categories as well as ensure the systematic development and verification of theory (Charmaz, 2011b; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

Grounded theory data analyses entails three analytic strategies. Firstly, the data analytic practice of grounded theory is mainly a process of ascribing meaning to data through the method of *constant comparison* (Locke in Barnard et al., 2008, p. 80). Constant comparison is a process that is applied throughout various coding stages in grounded theory data analysis. *Coding* therefore constitutes the second predominant grounded theory analytic strategy. *Memo writing* is the third core strategy underlying grounded theory data analysis and occurs prior to and throughout the coding stages in the analytic process. Miles and Huberman (2002, p. 376) describe memos as "little conceptual notes" to oneself and according to Corbin and Strauss (2008, p. 120) they are written records of analysis related to theory construction and assist in identifying relationships and similarities between the categories. Three types of memo writing were employed, namely code notes, theoretical notes and operational notes (see Charmaz, 2006). Code notes are memos containing the actual products of the two types of coding (Babbie & Mouton, 2001), whilst theoretical notes are written theoretical questions. Coding summaries were used to monitor and stimulate coding, whilst operational notes contain the directions the researcher could pursue with regard to sampling, questions and comparisons (Babbie, 2012; Creswell, 2011).

Below I discuss how I applied an approach of constant comparison through the different coding phases I followed, as well as how memo's formed part of the analytic process. Lastly I explain how I operationalised the principle of theoretical sampling in the analytic process.

(i)   Coding

Coding is a "process of transforming raw data, such as interview transcripts, field notes, diaries, archival materials, reports, newspaper articles, art and so forth) into a form suitable for analysis" (Babbie, 2012, p. 335 in reference to Glaser & Strauss, 1967) and is the process of examining and defining what the data is about. In applying the constructivist grounded theory approach, data was analysed following Charmaz's (2006) and Glaser & Strauss's (1967) coding approaches. They both suggest that a preliminary analysis begins immediately after each interview has been conducted to record thoughts

of conversation. Thereafter, all interviews and memo writing were advanced to the grounded theory stages of coding analysis that comprises open, axial and selective coding. In this study I followed the grounded theory coding strategy of Glaser and Strauss (1967). These stages of coding are separate yet complementary because, "they often overlap and happen more or less simultaneously" (Henning, 2004, p. 130). The three coding stages were used to put data into different units of statements and paragraphs, and determine them as meaningful concepts, then to organise the concepts into categories in a coherent order, and lastly to separate and relate categories to explain the phenomenon researched. I could thus establish the core categories and compare with similarities, differences or contradictions, before integrating all other categories to the core one until no new themes or categories were emerging (Babbie, 2012; Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Jones, Kriflik & Zanko, 2005; Priest, Roberts & Woods, 2009; Punch, 2014; Taylor & Bogdan, 1998). Lastly, I built a detailed theoretical understanding from the data to form the basis for the development of a substantive theory on bullying in the workplace.

Next I describe the three coding stages in detail.

(a) Open coding

Open coding aims to "uncover, define, name and develop concepts and categories" and make sense of the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, as cited in Babbie, 2012, p. 398). Strauss and Corbin (1994) explain the term 'categories' as concepts that embody the phenomena. The process of organising the concepts to abstract categories is described as categorising in the grounded theory methodology (Koekemoer, 2008). According to Charmaz (2011, p. 169), researchers using grounded theory should start open coding by engaging in "line by line, paragraph by paragraph, story by story coding to realise the power of grounded theory". I followed Charmaz (2003) by asking myself questions related to the research objective, such as what bullying means to HR practitioners and how this meaning impacts on how it is dealt with in organisations, that is, research questions 1 and 2. With these two questions in mind I read through the transcripts and began identifying and labelling emerging categories related to them. Along with my interview notes I used the ATLAS.ti software to help me organise the concepts I saw emerging into what I refer to as categories. The categories identified represent the primary outcome of the open coding phase. No sub-categories were identified at this stage.

First, I labelled all of the behaviours that the HR practitioners talked about as being bullying and what made them bullying or what turned them to it. This process generated 32 open categories related to research question 1, and 13 related to research question 2. Often, with the behaviours seen as bullying I was able to label them with a term used by the HR practitioners. For example, "*finding mistakes*", "*too much workload*", "*too much attention to minor petty things*", *"push their way around to get what they wanted"*, "*busing other employees because of their difference"* and "*threats*" were some of the behaviours mentioned by name. Others I labelled seemed to represent the behaviour being described, including, "*non-verbal*", "*verbal*", "*being isolated*", and "*absent from work*". Additionally, categories for the issues that turned these behaviours into bullying included "*perception is what matters*". I then applied the same process to open code research questions 3 to 6.

After reading through the transcripts and labelling all of the behaviours that were seen as bullying, what turned them into bullying and how bullying was dealt with by the HR practitioners, I read through the transcripts again, paying more attention to the HR practitioner's bullying dilemma and the positional dynamics in the organisations (research question 3). This process resulted in 48 total categories associated with research question 3, of which 22 were about the HR practitioner's bullying dilemma in the institutions and 26 their role dynamics in bullying situations. Examples were "*bullying is a personality issue*", "*targets are sensitive*", *"enforces or facilitators of management decisions"*, "*bullying is a lack of communication skills*", "*manager's style"*, "*bullying is about power*", "*bullying is manager's culture"*, *"bullies are highly educated, some too important to lose"*, "*bullying is about people diverse background*", "*bullying difficult to describe"*, *"enforces or facilitators of management decisions"* and *"figure it out by yourself".* After reading though the transcripts several times again and labelling areas that seemed to be associated with research question 3, I began reading with research questions 4 to 6 in mind. This resulted in six categories associated with research question 4, four with research question 5, and 13 with research question 6. Examples of these categories were "*no bullying policy*", *not aware of bullying policy",* "*policies are used to intimidate employees*'", *"have no power to fix it* or *make it go away", "bullying should be addressed by managers"* and "*policies are designed to protect employees*". Table 2.2 presents an example of the categories and outcomes that emerged from open coding phase in the analysis.

Table 2.2

Example of the categories and outcomes that emerged from open coding phase

Research questions	Categories
Q1. Meaning of bullying to HR practitioners and Q2. Meaning impacts on how bullying is dealt with	*Finding mistakes* *Too much workload* *Perception is what matters* *Non-verbal communication* *Verbal communication* *Being isolated* *Too much attention to minor petty things* *Threats* *Abusing other employees because of their difference* *Absent from work* *Bullies push their way around to get what they wanted*
Q3. Bullying dealt with by the HR practitioners and HR practitioners position in bullying	*Bullying is a personality issue* *Targets are sensitive* *Aggressive manager's style* *Bullying is manager's culture* *Bullying is about power* *Bullies are highly educated, some too important to lose* *Bullying is about people diverse background* *Bullying difficult to describe* *Enforces or facilitators of management decisions* *Figure it out by yourself*
Q4. Policies applicable to deal with bullying Q5. HR practitioners interpretation and understanding of policies Q6. Reducing the impact of workplace bullying on the HR practitioners	*No bullying policy* *Not aware of bullying policy* *Policies are used to intimidate employees* *Have no power to fix it* or *make it go away* *Bullying should be addressed by line managers* *Policies are designed to protect employees*

In summary, during open coding it was easier for me to handle the large amount of data by analysing it as relevant to the research questions (see chapter 1, section 1.5). Despite categories relevant to the different research questions identified, connections between them were thus far not yet clear, which led me to the next step in the analytic process, namely axial coding.
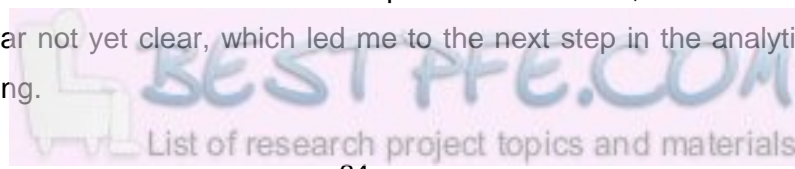
(b) Axial coding

Axial coding is the second stage after open coding, aimed at relating categories identified during open coding in a structural order, by denoting the "relationships and similarities, and differences and contradictions between a category and its sub-categories to give precision to a category or sub-category" (Priest et al., 2009. p. 34). During this stage different categories I identified during open coding were scrutinised and systematically grouped together. As such, the categories initially derived from open coding constituted the sub-categories that became definitive of the categories developed in this axial coding phase. Thus, open coding categories were combined in this axial coding phase as sub-categories under different categories according to their relationships or similarities (Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 1967).

I focused on the research questions 1 and 2 and looked for relationships and similarities as well as differences and contradictions between the 64 open categories. Huberman and Miles in Branch (2006, p. 119) assert that "categories should be related to one another in a logical manner and be part of a governing structure". I followed Huberman and Miles (2002) by printing out the quotations associated with each category and more precisely articulating the category, determining if there were sub-categories and relationships with other categories. I divided all 64 categories into three groups, namely, behaviours, characteristics (what turned the behaviours into bullying), and how bullying was dealt with. I went through each group separately, asking myself questions such as, "Are these categories the same?", "If they are the same, how are they the same?", "Are they different? "If so, how?" (Strauss & Corbin in Neuman, 2006, p. 462). Some of these relationships were readily apparent, for example, the open coding process revealed a few different types of power related to bullying: "*power because of success*", "*power because of mobbing*", "*power through relationship with power people or connections*", "*power through knowledge*", "*power through experience*", "*power because of expertise*", "*power through position*", and "*power through tenure*".

Power became a category related to how HR practitioners defined bullying and the above were found to be sub-categories in the power category. The relationships between other categories were not as clear as the power example above. categories such as "*bullying situations are different", "bullying has to do with individual differences", "bullying is subjective", bullying is hard to define",* and *"bullying is hard to pin down*" all seemed different at first glance, but as I started reading through the quotations associated with each category it became apparent these were all similar in defining bullying. I repeated

this process, looking for the relationships between the other categories. This axial coding process resulted in 12 bullying behaviour categories, six categories related to bullying characteristics, and three categories related to dealing with bullying. I then repeated this axial coding process for research questions 3 to 6.

As with research questions 1 and 2, I printed out all of the quotations associated with each open code related to research questions 3 then read through all of the quotations, asking myself how these open categories were similar or different, were they talking about the same things but in different ways, and if so what was this more general idea and how should it be labelled? For example, many of the open categories referred to bullying as a management issue, organisational culture issue, or diversity issue, but in slightly different ways. Because of these issues, the open categories, "*manager's style", "manager's culture", "bullying is a management issue*" were combined under a more general category I labelled, "*bullying perpetuated through management style issue*". I repeated this process going through all four of the groups mentioned above, resulting in five general categories associated with HR practitioners' bullying dilemma and understanding bullying situations. Five categories related to the HR practitioners' role dynamics, five to how HR practitioners felt top management saw their position, and two to how they felt the targets saw their position. I repeated this process for research questions 4 to 6.

The emergent categories were confirmed and the items within each one adjusted. I check-coded the categories from the transcripts, following views of Glaser and Strauss (1967), Strauss and Corbin (1994) and Miles and Huberman (1994) that check-coding of transcripts takes place from the initial coding through two-third of the analysis, to allow the researcher to understand the context the interview was discussing. For this reason transcripts were constantly compared during the coding stages. Related themes identified during open coding were integrated and reduced by arranging categories in relation to larger categories and emerging new ones grouped under existing categories. Charmaz (2006) noted that coding shapes the analytic framework and provides an abstract plan for the analysis. I thus attempted to reach an understanding of what workplace bullying is and what it is not from the perspective of HR practitioners. Table 2.3 outlines an example of the categories and sub-categories that emerged from axial coding phase in the analysis.

Table 2.3

Example of the categories and sub-categories that emerged from axial coding

Categories	Sub-Categories
Power	*Power because of success*
	Power because of mobbing
	Power through relationship with power people or connections
	Power through knowledge
	Power through experience
	Power because of expertise
	Power through position and power through tenure
Define and deal with bullying	*Bullying situations are different*
	Bullying has to do with individual differences
	Bullying is subjective
	Bullying is hard to define bullying is hard to pin down
	Perception is what matters
Bullying perpetuated through management style issue	*Manager's style*
	Manager's culture
	Bullying is a management issue

(c) Selective coding

Selective coding is the third stage following open and axial coding, during which I established the core category and thoroughly integrated all other categories to it (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Analysis during selective coding validates the statements of relationships among categories and sub-categories, ultimately becoming the basis for the grounded theory (Babchuk, 1996; Darke, Shanks & Broadbent, 1998). According to Neuman (2006, p. 464), during selective coding, "the researcher reorganise specific themes identified in previous coding and elaborate more than one major theme". As a constant comparison strategy, I used open categories as a starting point to verify the suitability of the initial outcomes, then axial categories reviewing the abstracted categories to sub-categories to select overall themes and their sub-themes that represent the participants' voice with regard to bullying in the workplace. Thus the grounded theory analysis process often involves moving up and down levels of analysis, to understand categories in a general sense (Lowe in Gasson 2004).

During the selective coding stage, the following sub-themes were identified in an attempt to explain the studied phenomenon, namely, participants' definition and understanding of workplace bullying, workplace bullying power dynamics, participants' role dynamics in workplace bullying situations, participants' dilemma in dealing with workplace bullying in the institutions, and participants' understanding and application of organisational policies to deal with workplace bullying. Further analysis of the sub-themes during the selective coding stage led to the identification of the four key themes, identified in an attempt to elucidate the phenomenon of the study, namely, the manifestation of workplace bullying, power relations as core element in the workplace bullying dynamic, the elements of workplace bullying, and organisational context issues of the bullying dynamic. These themes are presented in detail in Chapter 5, with presentation of interview findings and the development of categories from concepts.

A few participants were first emailed the draft copies of interview transcripts and later the abridged analyses of the findings for comments to ensure understanding, accuracy and trustworthiness thereof (Denzin, 2001; Flick, 2002; Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Miles & Huberman, 1994) that is, member checking. Thus, the majority of the data was collected and analysed and the trustworthiness of grounding the findings in the verbatim data established (Scott in Jones et al., 2005). This selective coding process reinforces a constructivist-interpretivist stance of allowing the participants and researcher roles in the research from the initial-to-final stage, thereby ensuring transparency. Fossey, Harvey, McDermott and Davidson (2002) believe that such transparency enhances the quality of the research and ensures that the findings represent the participants' voices and are contextualised accurately.

(ii) Memoiing

Memo writing refers to the detail written record of analysis throughout the research process starting with the first interview related to the formulation of theory (Egan, 2002; Locke, 2001; Martin & Turner, 1986; Strauss & Corbin, 1990). Memos are a quick way of capturing thoughts that transpire throughout "data collection, data reductions, data display, conclusion drawing and final reporting" (Lawrence & Tar, 2013, p. 33). Memos helped me to remember and arrange thoughts, feelings, insights and ideas for coding, and to develop categories and determine relationships between them during data collection and all data analysis stages. I began writing memos during the open coding phase of each interview as well as throughout my engagement with the data analysis process. They were written first-hand then typed and saved on a computer so I could

access them easily and use them.

The ATLAS.ti software was used to abstract field notes and memos and group-related concepts into categories, and to add the categories to the core category. During this stage, direction of the investigation seemed clearer and as a result no new insights were generated, thus the core category became saturated, after which I assumed it was pragmatically mature (Jones & Alony, 2011, in reference to Glaser & Strauss 1967). In order to ensure that my insight in interpreting data was not altered or prejudiced I checked the congruence of abstracted memos and whether categories were accurately reflected therein. Throughout this stage I followed my supervisor's advice to take into account the importance of memo writing and that "I should not hesitate to write any idea or experience that I come across and my memos will mature as theory develop" H.A Barnard (personal communication, March 13, 2013). In Figure 2.3 I present an example of hand-written memos during analysis.
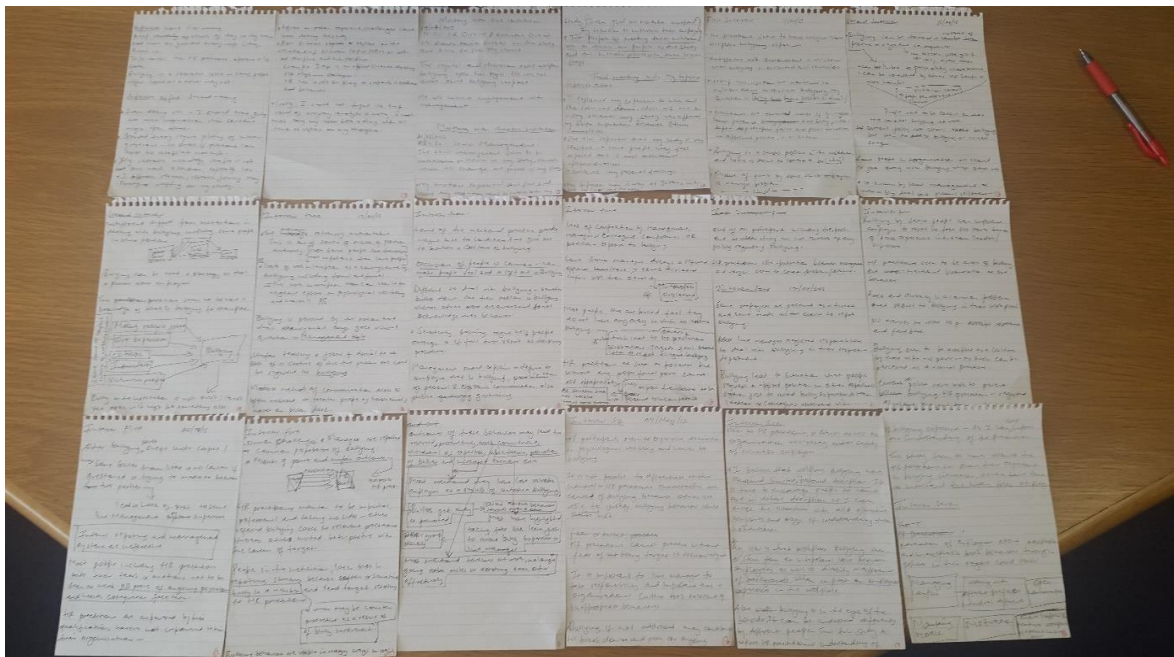
Figure 2.3. Written memos.

(iii)   *Theoretical sampling*

Theoretical sampling is "... for development of a theoretical category, not sampling for participants representation" (Charmaz, 2012a, p. 3). Theoretical sampling is an important analytic strategy in the development of grounded theories and is based on the notion of

analytic induction (Glaser & Strauss, 2012). It is integrated in the systematic process of collecting data, coding and analysing data throughout the research process up to the generation of the grounded theory (Glaser & Strauss, 2012). Whereby the researcher seeks incidences of the phenomenon under study, decides what data to collect next, where to find it and for what theoretical purpose, to further describe the research phenomena (Remenyi, 2014) in this case, bullying. The process of data collection in theoretical sampling is controlled by the emerging theory, whether substantive or formal[7] (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967). It is important to note that in theoretical sampling the researcher is not looking towards the verification of preconceived theory or finding solutions. Rather the researcher is seeking incidences of a particular phenomenon that will provide the appropriate and relevant data which can be used to explain the phenomenon (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 2012; Remenyi, 2014).

The idea is that the researcher begins to comprehensively enhance the understanding of category and concepts (Remenyi, 2014) that are developing to the point where no new theoretical categories are emerging (Charmaz, 2006). Since further collection of data (theoretical sampling) cannot be planned in advance, I was cautious to further collect additional data in support of the emerging theory (Glaser & Holton, 2004; Saunders et al., 2012). Remenyi (2014, p. 14) held similar views and maintained that "if data is found which does not support the theory, especially contradictory evidence, it should prompt the researcher to explore further as to why they are contradictions". With this view in mind, I was sensitive to possible other sources of data. The possibilities of multiple comparisons thus describe why theoretical sampling has been found as having some of the characteristics of triangulation congruent with a grounded theory methodology (Remenyi 2014).

The influence of theoretical sampling in this study was thus reflected also in my decision to explore other data sources apart from interviewing the participants. This decision was in particular directed by me becoming aware from the interviews of participants' conviction that they were not supported adequately to address bullying in the work context due to a lack of relevant existing policies applicable to deal with workplace bullying. I became aware during the interviews and data analysis of issues that I needed more data on, hence the decision to also scrutinise organisational policy documentation. Consequent to the interviews and well into the data analysis process I asked and

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[7] Explained in section 2.3.3 above.

received HR policy documents from some participants and I also requested and received permission and access from the relevant HR departments to browse the intranet in both organisations,[8] for relevant policy documents. I examined written policy documents to gain a deeper understanding and description of the participant's convictions, conduct, and experiences (Bodgan & Biklen, 2006; Kolb, 2012). Analysis of written policy documents provided a source of information corroborating participants' views and generating further credibility among data. For me such a presentation reflects the theoretical sampling as evidenced in the data collection and the analytic stages of the study. Theoretical sampling is congruent with a grounded theory methodology, especially since it resonates an iterative data collection and analysis process guided by the ongoing theory development.

During data analysis, I managed and organised the raw data, "logically coded it, interpreted meaning in uncovering and discovering findings" (O`Leary, 2004, p. 184). The "core category becomes saturated and no new categories are emerging" (Jones et al., 2005, p. 107), so coding in grounded theory is important in highlighting a link between empirical reality and the researcher's view of it (Charmaz, 2006). In a quest to discover new insights I became increasingly confident that I had compelling data affirming my categories, thus through constant comparison during coding, memoing and theoretical sampling, I was convinced that saturation in theoretical sampling was reached and the principal themes identified that related to bullying in the workplace. I was at a point at which I believed that the main themes could be used to develop the intended substantive theory relevant to this study's research objective.

Having presented the research methods followed in this study I now outline the manner in which I approached theory and the research procedure followed.

2.3.5   Manner of approaching theory

As explained in section 2.3.4.4 above, a constructivist grounded theory approach was adopted in the research process. Glaser and Strauss (1967) identified grounded theory as an inductive form of inquiry because theory develops inductively from the data. Generally, induction is used when a new theory is being developed (Charmaz, 2006; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Remenyi, 2014; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). I followed an inductive

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[8] See Chapter 5 section 5.5.1.5.

approach to data analysis, as the theory developed from the data. Ultimately, however, I recognise that awareness of both induction and deduction was inescapable in this grounded theory study and I agree that qualitative research includes some deductive notions in its operationalisation (see Barnard, 2008; Kelle, 2005). An aspect related to deductive thinking is that the process of reasoning for this study was inevitably influenced by prior theoretical knowledge and expertise (Charmaz, 2011b). I entered the study with prior knowledge of workplace bullying in order to gain in-depth insights and understanding of HR practitioners' organisational real-life setting. I had to conduct a preliminary literature review for the postgraduate research proposal purposes as a prerequisite of the university before I could register for the doctoral degree. This preliminary literature review inevitably influenced my thinking about bullying and how I wanted to study the phenomenon. In writing my research proposal I developed an understanding of and inclination towards grounded theory as a research methodology and attempted to limit further literature review to after having gathered data and having started with open coding.

Consistent with Glaser and Strauss's (1967) constant comparison, Remenyi (2014) explains that when seeking theoretical understanding from data the researcher needs to set up a series of constant comparison that includes comparison with existing literature. The researchers should remain self-conscious of any bias that results from their pre knowledge and of how their theoretical understanding is developing. Thus, theoretical sensitivity is central in generating grounded theory. Constant comparison lies at the heart of the grounded theory and theoretical sampling (Glaser & Strauss, 1967), driving the collection of additional data until the researcher feel that "theoretical saturation" has been reached (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). The principle of constant comparison in grounded theory analysis however entails comparing across concepts, categories and data as well as across new data and existing theory, compelling me to further my reading soon after I engaged in data analysis.

According to Glaser (1978, p. 42), theoretical sensitivity "sensitises a researcher to understand what is going on with the phenomenon under study not only to use analytical process, personal and professional experience, but also literature". I therefore continued my reading on relevant bullying literature during and after data analysis. To reflect the influence of theory in this study I decided to present the literature review as chapters 3 and 4, preceding the data and results in chapter 5. Such a presentation reflects the integration of the literature as evidenced in the preliminary literature review, before the research project commenced and during writing up of the research proposal, and the

continued review during the analytic stages of the project. In particular, chapter 3 represents an integration of my reading in preparation for the study as well as the reading in which I engaged during data analysis. Chapter 4 focusses on the role of HR in the organisation and how management should establish a work environment not conducive to bullying but also empowering the HR practitioner and line managers to manage bullying situations. My reading in this regard was in particular instigated by my increasing awareness during data collection and analysis that HR practitioners seemed to have little direction in the organisation in terms of how to manage bullying. The interviews and data analysis thus created a theoretical sensitivity, inspiring me towards reading further on the role of HR and on how organisations should respond to bullying and relevant issues. Thus theoretical sensitivity "is the ability to understand and define phenomena in abstract terms to demonstrate abstract relationships between studied phenomena" (Charmaz, 2014, p. 161). In chapter 6 I attempt to reflect an integration of the data with existing theory.

My presentation of the literature review also reflects how important I regard existing theory to be. A literature review is an important part of research because it provides unambiguous points of view in a scientific study (Bryman, 2012), and involves the systematic review and analysis of the existing body of knowledge published by other scholars within a logical frame (Creswell 2014; Mouton, 2002; Neuman, 2006). Thus, a literature review forms the foundation on which to learn how to conceptualise analysis of the known definitions, research, key concepts and theories that surround and support the study. It assisted me with identification, classification and comparison of previous and recent research studies and theories, research strategies and theoretical articles relevant to workplace bullying. I found such an approach acceptable in grounded theory research, despite Glaser's (1978) warning against reliance on preconceived theories. Charmaz (2011) emphasises the difficulty of avoiding the influence of existing literature on any study. An analysis of predominant workplace bullying research was also undertaken to demonstrate the importance, yet lack of HR practitioners' voices in the handling of workplace bullying situations in organisations. This study can, therefore, be regarded as unique in that it should offer new scientific knowledge with regard to the development of a substantive theory from the point of view of HR practitioners' workplace bullying experiences.

2.3.6   Research procedure

The research process is generally tailored to the specific research problem (Creswell, 2014), including a sequential procedure followed by a researcher when conducting scientific research (Punch, 2014; Tischler, 2010). The research process focused on defining the research problem, the HR practitioner setting, review of literature, sample, research design, analysis and interpretation of data in order to develop new knowledge of the workplace bullying phenomenon.

The following steps were followed to complete this study and to create new knowledge, not only for scientific purposes but also as the best theoretical understanding forward in preventing and managing workplace bullying in the organisations under study:

- A preliminary literature review was undertaken for research proposal purposes and to select a suitable research strategy for the phenomenon under investigation;

- Application letters requesting permission to conduct the study and engagement with the selected HR practitioners were sent to the couple of institutions for approval and for ethical clearance purposes through the appropriate institutions' Research Ethics Committees;

- Interview guides and consent forms were developed with the assistance of the supervisor and presented to the participants to consent to their participation and shared insight into workplace bullying experiences;

- In-depth semi-structured interview questions were conducted to explore the HR practitioners' perspectives on workplace bullying;

- Data analysis commenced applying constant comparison through three coding stages, memoing and theoretical sampling;

- Policy document review was undertaken to gain a deeper understanding of issues that needed more information on and description of the participant's point of view. Policy document review provided valuable information corroborating participants' views and generating further credibility among information.

- A literature review undertaken to establish the contents of relevant concepts and relevant organisational theories on preventing and managing conflict situations.

The literature helped to identify the problem regarding the HR practitioners' voice on bullying context in their organisations;

☐ Insight into HR practitioners' perspectives and understanding of workplace bullying emerged and was presented;

☐ Constructed on the interview data and literature review, a substantive workplace bullying theory from an HR perspective was proposed for possible implementation by the organisations and to improve management of workplace bullying.

My final considerations in relation to the organisation of interview questions and data analysis pertain to how I approached and ensured quality, credibility and ethical awareness in this study.

2.3.7 Ensuring quality, credible and ethical research

In order to ensure quality and ethical research I was motivated to consider relevant quality and ethics criteria in relation to the study and plan various strategies in an attempt to achieve required quality. I also conducted pilot interviews in lieu of preparing for the empirical part of the study and thus enhance its quality. These strategies are discussed in this section.

2.3.7.1 Pilot study

The purpose of a pilot study is to improve the success and effectiveness of the interview questions and guide in order to ensure ease of use, credibility and dependability of the study (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). By success and effectiveness I refer to the objectiveness, correctness and relevance of the content areas, the appropriateness of the level of difficulty of the interview questions, and the time an interview can take to complete and review the questions (see Creswell, 2011). The pilot study is also important in ensuring that modifications can be made before the actual interview and that participants should be individuals with expertise in the relevant area of service, with a willingness to share knowledge and skills with the researcher (De Vos et al., 2005; Padgett, 2008; Van Spall, 2007; West et al., 2010).

Before pilot interviews, interview questions were submitted to my supervisor to scrutinise with a view to identifying unclear, difficult and ambiguous questions that might signify

discomfort on the part of participants. The comments from my supervisor were further taken into account in order to enhance the interview process and the quality of the data to be collected. I conducted a pilot study with two HR practitioners to pre-test the interview questions to identify any uneasiness or ambiguously framed questions, and to ensure that the questions elicit relevant and rich information regarding workplace bullying. The participants were recruited individually in their workplaces and both agreed to cooperate. The consent form[9] expounding the purpose of the study was meticulously explained and guaranteed both confidentiality and voluntary participation, and before the interview commenced they were asked to sign the consent forms. One interview was recorded on a digital recorder, but the other was not because the participant asked not to be recorded due to the sensitive nature of the phenomenon. Thus, the first interview was not recorded and lasted for 30 minutes, the second was recorded and lasted for 55 minutes. I took notes during both interviews and the second interview was included in the study.

Marshall and Rossman (2006) assert that the execution of a research study relies on the interpersonal skills of the researcher. The pilot exercise was helpful in polishing my interviewing skills and presenting myself appropriately as a researcher. Subsequently, my interviewing skills on the second interview were much better than in the first interview. I attempted not to restrain the participants during the interviews but to give them time to talk about how they understood and described their experience of bullying in their places of work. The pilot study provided me with a good opportunity to test the relevance of the questions, their sequence and duration. Also, it provided valuable leads to be pursued later in the study in order to garner in-depth information. At the end of pilot interviews I decided to ask both HR practitioners to comment on the wording and order of the interview questions, so I could make adjustments and revisions. They believed that the interview questions were well formulated and would prompt comprehensive feedback from participants.

2.3.7.2 Quality considerations

All research must respond to standards or criteria of quality in qualitative research to enhance the trustworthiness or credibility of the research findings (Guba, 1981; Lincoln, 1995; Merriam, 1998). The term *trustworthiness* refers to "the extent to which the data

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[9] See Appendix B: Consent form.

and data analysis are believable or trustworthy" (Thomas, 2010, p. 319). Credibility is determined by "validity and reliability" in qualitative studies (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) and one of most important factors in establishing trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004). The term 'validity' refers to "measuring what I intend to measure rather than something else and reliability is consistency of findings, if duplicated by more than one researchers" with similar participants in similar settings (Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998, p. 80). Both validity and reliability consist of internal and external forms. In qualitative research, however, terms such as 'internal validity' are replaced by 'credibility', 'external validity /generalisability' by 'transferability', 'reliability' by 'dependability' and 'objectivity' by 'confirmability' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985, p. 290; Schurink, 2005, p. 43; Shenton, 2004, p. 64). These terms are the criteria that were used to optimise the quality of the research for this study and I employed the following specific tactics and strategies to operationalise them.

☐   *Credibility*

Credibility concerns whether the study's findings ring true for the participants. Lincoln and Guba (1985, in Meyers & Sylvester, 2006, p. 5), maintain that "truth is established through confirming it with people's experiences" (originally collected), referring to this as 'intersubjective knowledge'. They argued that the researcher's interpretation is in synchronisation with their experiences, seen as a reflection of the study's credibility, in a process is called 'member checking' (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). This study should be judged as credible if the participants, after reading the findings, feel I have correctly articulated their experiences. In order to determine if my analysis rang true for the HR practitioners I spoke with and emailed participants the copies of transcripts and a condensed version of the findings for comments and/or corrections. None disagreed or recommended changes and I concluded that they were satisfied with the abridged content of analysis.

☐   *Transferability*

The second criterion, transferability, refers to the degree to which the researcher provides plentiful detail regarding the context of study and the phenomenon under investigation to enable the reader to make conclusions about whether the findings can be applied or transferred to other settings or groups (Denzin in Sinkovics, Penz & Ghauri, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 2003; Trochim, 2006). This study sought an adequate sample size, and provided thorough descriptions of categories emerging from the analysis, representing fullness of the HR practitioners' studied perceptions and experiences based

on the interview data. I attempted to detail the research methods and procedure followed in the study as comprehensively as I could. In this regard, the reader judges and determines transferability of the findings.

For the reader who aspires to transfer the findings to other settings I have included some extracts and examples of each of the categories derived from the different coding stages to provide a detailed methodological description (Lincoln & Guba, 1985 in Shenton, 2004). Moreover, this thesis will be submitted to external examiners whose feedback will be incorporated to improve the quality of the research. Charmaz (2006) emphasises that a combination of credibility and dependability enhances the transferability and confirmability.

☐   *Dependability*

The third criterion of dependability is concerned with whether an external check can be conducted on the study. The reader should be able to see in detail how data was collected and how the methodology used will challenge, extend and refine current ideas and categories or themes, if necessary (Babbie & Mouton, 2001). According to Merriam (in Thomas, 2010, p. 321), if the following few strategies are followed the findings should be seen as dependable, namely if the study can "explain the theory behind the study, explain in detail how data was collected and analysed to allow for an audit trail if necessary and an external check can be made on the analysis process". To demonstrate the dependability of this analysis I included detailed documentation of data, methods and decisions made during the study and the analysis of data (cf. Seale, 1999). As the primary researcher I also attended ATLAS.ti 6.0 training to enhance my competence in qualitative analysis and the use of instruments or techniques that are reliable, valid and current, enhancing the methodological credibility of the study to provide sufficient evidence to the reader of my research findings and interpretations (see Babbie, 2004; Terre Blanche & Durrheim, 2004).

☐   Confirmability

The final construct, confirmability, refers to the degree to which findings can be confirmed and the extent to which they are shaped by the participants and researcher together on the process of constructing reality (Charmaz, 2006; Cohen & Crabtree, 2006). Lincoln and Guba (1985) stressed the need to ask whether the findings could be confirmed by another. I provided detailed descriptions of each of the categories that emerged from this analysis, including detailed categories associated with how the HR

practitioners defined and understood workplace bullying, how they made sense of bullying situations and their position in them, which policies were communicated, and what HR practitioners felt they were communicating. My interpretations are confirmed with examples of verbatim extracts from the data (see Chapter 5). In this way the reader judges and confirms the rich descriptions grounded in verbatim data (Ritchie & Lewis, 2004).

2.3.7.3 Ethical considerations

Ethics in research refer to "the concerns and dilemmas that arise over the proper way to execute research, more specifically not to create harmful conditions for the subjects of inquiry, humans, in the research process" (Schurink, 2005, p. 15). Ethical commitment towards participants was demonstrated in the form of respect of private space, rights, needs and desires of participants, sensitivity, voluntary participation and informed consent (Creswell, 2003; Silverman, 2005).

Informed consent was obtained from participants by requesting them to sign a consent form. Prior to this they received a clear explanation of the purpose and scope of the study and of the tasks expected of them, so that they could make an informed choice to participate voluntarily in the research. I encouraged confidentiality and took appropriate actions to ensure that the research participants' identities were carefully protected. It was emphasised that they could withdrew from the study at any time. Also, this research was grounded on consent. For instance, permission to record all interviews was obtained in person prior to each interview session, as well as through the consent form which was signed by each participant before interviews started. The way the recordings would be handled was clearly communicated.

The relationship with the participants is of great importance because of their involvement in the scientific study (Silverman, 2005). According to Babbie (in Botha, 2008, p. 83), "since participants can be harmed psychologically during social research, researchers have to be aware of possible dangers (e.g., reflecting on aspects of themselves that may arouse old wounds or emotions) and guard against them". The participants were assured of an opportunity to pause the interviews should they experience distress when narrating their personal experiences and encouraged to keep in touch with me (the researcher) should they need to talk further. In the interests of health, mental and emotional wellbeing, I assured them of a referral to the available employee assistance programme (EAP) in each organisation if they seemed to need it, but none did. Also, no gifts or financial incentives were given to participants.

Next, I conclude with presentation of the evolving roadmap that guided my research journey from the initial plan proposed in figure 2.4.

2.4   CONTINUING ON THE ROADMAP THAT GUIDED MY RESEARCH JOURNEY

The research methods and process were added and linked to the final stage of the roadmap initially presented in Figure 2.1, to give the reader an opportunity to understand how this research process unfolded. The evolving roadmap in Figure 2.4 provides an extended explanation of the research journey I followed, depicting how the elements in the research process, my philosophy of science, qualitative research approach, theoretical perspective and methodology and the methods employed in the research, were operationalised in a congruent manner. Grounded theory methodology was applied in directing sampling decisions, data collection and data analysis. I used in-depth semi-structured interviews to collect data and ensure that interviewees felt free to discuss their experiences. During this process I used digital recordings, memos and field notes for capturing and storing data and the ATLAS.ti coding software helped to organise data and interpretations.
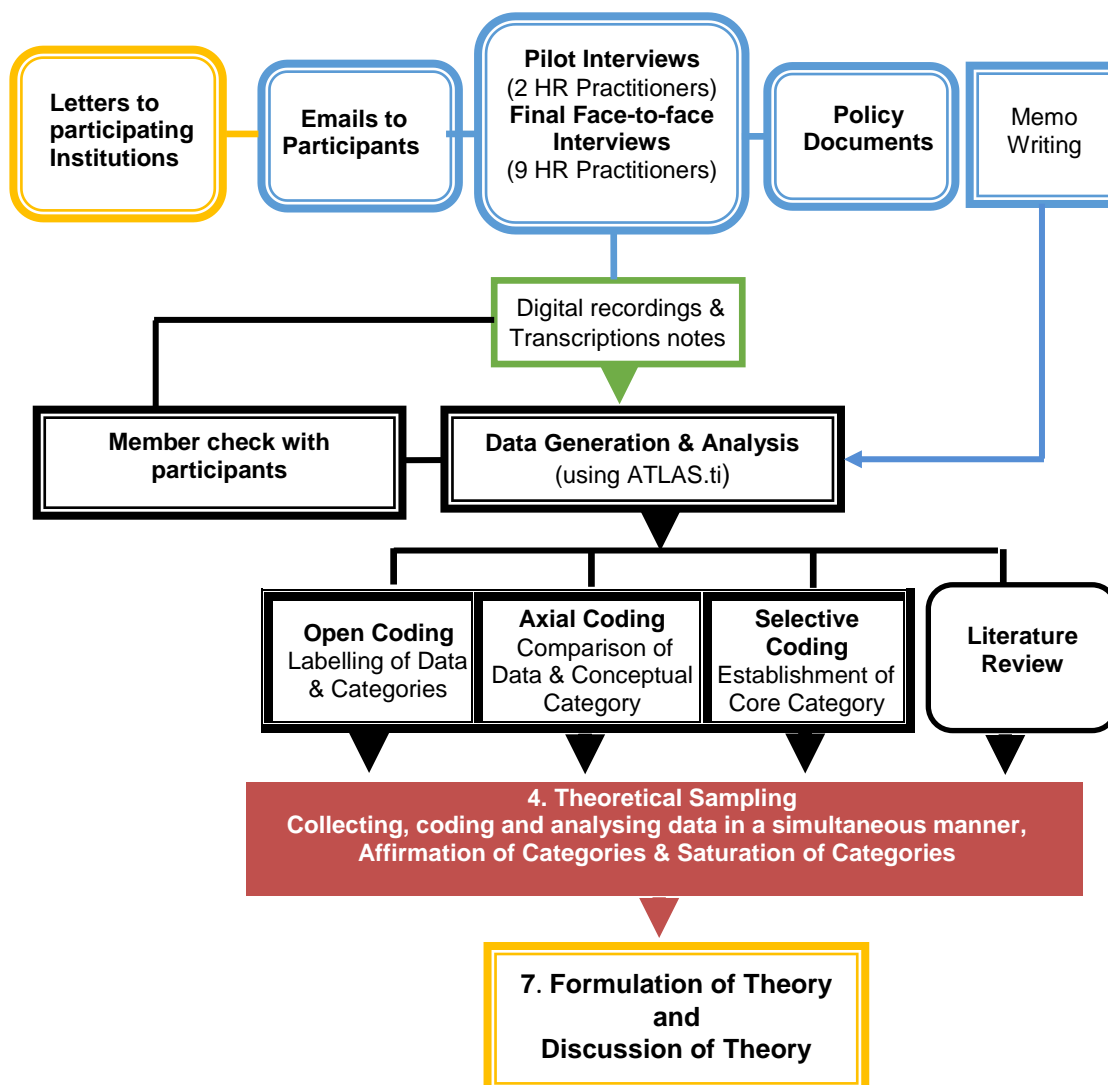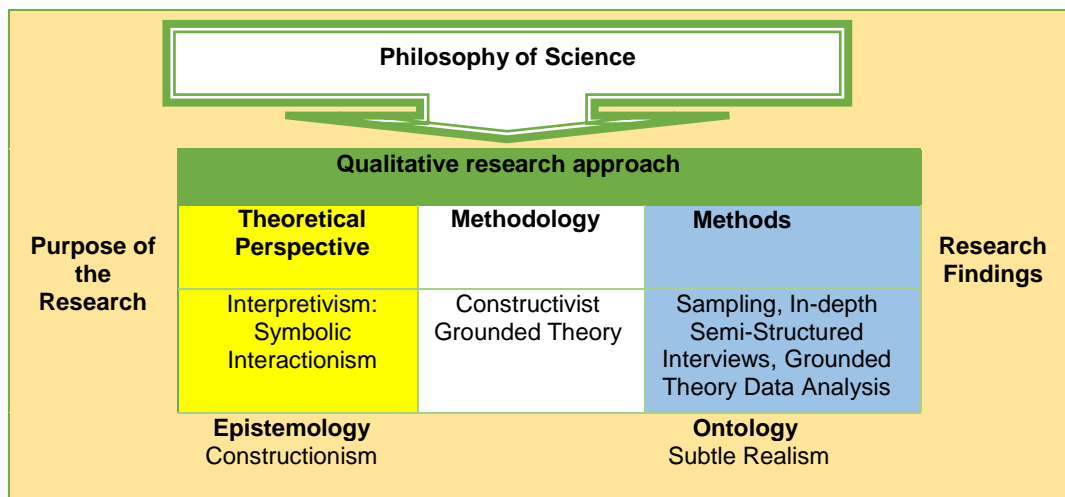
Figure 2.4. Qualitative research roadmap relevant to this research.

2.5   CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter I presented a discussion of the research design that directed methodological choices and considerations in this study. It led me on a path of self-discovery that as a novice qualitative researcher I should be consistent with my claimed ontological and epistemological assumptions throughout all elements and phases of the research project (Crotty, 2005; Durrheim, 2004). I am confident that my knowledge in qualitative research was advanced and I continued questioning, exploring and growing.

In the following chapter I explore literature on workplace bullying behaviour, dynamics, issues and related concepts.

CHAPTER 3

WORKPLACE BULLYING: BEHAVIOURS, DYNAMICS AND RELATED ISSUES

3.1   INTRODUCTION

Bullying in the places of work in South Africa and other countries is not new. Workplace bullying is prevalent and a problematic phenomenon not confined to any organisation, sector or industry (Agtervold, 2007; Pearson & Porath, 2009) and stems from multiple causes that are linked to targets, bullies or organisations (Ashforth, 1997; Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel & Vartia, 2003; Namie & Namie 2003). For this reason both employees and organisations can be negatively affected if bullying is rife and not effectively addressed (Smit, 2014). This chapter aims to discuss the background of workplace bullying, previous and recent literature, including a review of existing definitions of workplace bullying, followed by a discussion of the focal points pertaining to workplace bullying, and the antecedents of workplace bullying. It concludes with a conclusion and summary.

3.2   BACKGROUND OF WORKPLACE BULLYING

Systematic research into workplace bullying began in the 1970s, most notably in Scandinavia, Australia, Japan, United States of America (USA) and other countries (Adams, 2000; Bjorkqvist et al., 1994; Leymann, 1996; McCarthy & Mayhew, 2004; Namie & Namie, 1999; Olweus, 1978; Zapf & Einarsen, 2010). Dan Olweus, was one of the first researchers to systematically study school bullying behaviour among children and adults in the 1970s (Olweus, 1978) in Sweden and Norway. Olweus's studies examined possible long-term consequences of regular bullying or victimisation by peers in school, to explain why some schoolchildren were bullied and others victimised. His studies focused exclusively on a victim's perspective and did not indicate that bullying was intentional harm-doing, according to Rigby (2002). Based on the conclusion that bullying could be significantly reduced in schools through an anti-bullying intervention programme, Olweus (1999) developed the Olweus Bullying Prevention Programme (OBPP) model, endorsed by the Norwegian government in the 1980s as a blueprint or evidence-based approach to addressing bullying in Norway (Jimerson, Swearer & Espelage, 2010). Rigby (2011, p. 282) maintained that the model could be offered on a

large-scale basis as a "foundation of epidemiological, basic, and applied research in which theory and practical application are thoughtfully integrated".

In the early 1980s, Heinz Leymann began studying bullying amongst schoolchildren in Sweden, focusing on aggressive behaviour of learners in traditional schoolyard bullying. Later he focused on the context of human beings at work, moving his perspective to adult bullying (Leymann, 1990). The literature reveals that adult bullying in the workplace was compared to the act of mobbing, a term coined by Leymann (1990), defining bullying of an employee by a group of employees in the workplace (Duffy & Sperry, 2012; Farmer, 2011).

A decade later the term 'adult bullying at work' was formulated as 'workplace bullying' by Andrea Adams in 1990, a British broadcaster with the BBC and freelance journalist in the UK who died in November 1995. Adams is revealed by studies as the first person to identify, label and publicise the significance of bullying at work and its hostile influence on people's lives and personalities (Fisher-Blando, 2008; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2009). In 1992, Adams and Crawford co-wrote the insightful book titled *Bullying at Work: How to Confront and Overcome*, to help many men and women overcome this stressful isolating experience or situation at work and outside work (Fisher-Blando, 2008; Rigby, 2002). Since then, bullying was no longer perceived as a problem for schools and for learners only, but the perspective was extended to the workplace.

The phenomenon has generated interest among academics, practitioners and professionals in quite different ways, some aim at understanding its underlying causes (Aquino, 2000; Hoel & Salin, 2003; Skogstad, Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007; Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel & Vartia, 2003); at the destructive effects it has on both organisations' and individuals' wellbeing (Agtervold, 2007; Djurkovic, McCormack & Casimir, 2004; Hoel, Einarsen & Cooper, 2003; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002); at the direct and indirect financial costs thereof (McCormack, Casimir, Djurkovic & Yang, 2009); at relevant education (Blase & Blase, 2004); at antecedents to violence such as perceived injustice (Price-Spratlen, 1995); at the bullying phenomenon itself (Einarsen et al., 2003; Namie & Namie, 2003; Rigby, 2002); at related constructs such as mobbing and psychological terror (Adams, 1992; Davenport, Schwartz & Elliott, 2002; Field 1996; Leymann, 1990, 1996); at workplace victimisation and harassment (Aquino, 2000; Aquino & Thau, 2009; Einarsen & Rakens, 1997); at workplace violence or harassment (Cunniff & Mostert, 2012; Hockey, 2002; Momberg, 2011; Pietersen, 2007); at workplace incivility, aggression or victimisation (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Pearson, Andersson & Porath,

List of research project topics and materials

2000); at psychological harassment (Salin & Hoel, 2010); at personality traits of the individuals (Adams, 2000; Balducci, Fraccaroli, & Schaufeli, 2011); at workplace aggression (Baron & Neuman, 1998; Pearson et al., 2000); and at emotional abuse (Koonin & Green, 2005; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2003). Despite different constructs used to describe workplace bullying, the number of studies reiterated that targets[10] or victims[11] are humiliated and demotivated, and that productivity and the organisation bottom-line suffers (Davenport et al., 2002; Pearson et al., 2000; Namie & Namie, 2003). Others have indicated an increase in the likelihood of depression and cardiovascular diseases as a result of bullying behaviour at work (Juvoven & Gross, 2008; Kivimäki et al., 2003; Moayed, Daraiseh, Shell & Salem, 2006).

The awareness of workplace bullying in South Africa was first created by Susan Marais-Steinman in July 1994, considered a pioneer in the field for identifying it in various occupational sectors in 1998 and in the health sector in 2003 (see Cunniff & Mostert, 2012). Subsequently, the phenomenon began to gain attention of scholars, as discussed below. Naidoo (2000 in De Wet, 2010, p. 1450) explored the "symptoms of victims of workplace bullying and suggested guidelines for addressing the problem on a personal and organisational level". Burton (2001) described workplace bullying as a subset of workplace violence whilst Rothmann and Rothmann (2006) explored it as a form of employee health and wellness in a private organisation. Pietersen (2007) examined it from academic perspectives whilst Momberg (2011) investigated the reliability of using grievance reporting as an indication of workplace bullying trends in the South African public service. Cunniff and Mostert (2012) and Denton and Van Lill (2007) investigated the prevalence of workplace bullying among employees from industry's perspective whilst Botha (2008) developed an understanding of bullying targets' experience of and coping with abusive workplace situations. Cilliers (2012) examined organisational bullying experiences from the system psychodynamic perspective and De Wet and Jacobs (2013) explored workplace bullying from teachers' or educators' perspectives. Smit (2014) investigated the legal phenomenon of bullying in the workplace and the existing potential legal avenues available to protect victims in South Africa from this

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[10] Target refers to one or more individual employee(s) who has been bullied or victimised (targeted) or repeatedly experienced negative verbal or non-verbal bullying actions at work.

[11] Victim or victims refers to one or more individual employee(s) who had been exposed to or experienced negative verbal and/or non-verbal bullying behaviour(s) at work.

conduct.

These studies emphasise that in the South African work context, workplace bullying is a contentious phenomenon and costly for an individual and organisation with negative consequences for work performance, employee and organisational wellbeing, and workplace relations as well as personal life. Pietersen (2007) believes that the significance of bullying is not yet fully realised in South Africa. The prevalence of bullying and its grave consequences necessitate increased awareness and it is evident from newspaper reports and popular magazines that there is increasing awareness about bullying in the workplace. For example, *City Press* (2011) reported that 37% of South Africans had experienced some form of bullying during their careers, *You* (2010), reported 55% and Worktrauma (2011) 77.8%. Steinman (2009b) points out that the ILO published a report on workplace violence (physical and emotional), indicating that this phenomenon was one of the most serious problems that had to be confronted in the workplace in the new millennium. South Africa has been referred to "as a society, which endorses and accepts violence as an acceptable and legitimate means to resolve problems and achieve goals" (Momberg, 2011, p. 45), whilst Cunniff and Mostert (2012, p. 1) found that over 31.1% of South African employees had experienced more workplace bullying and "the phenomenon has negative physical and psychological effects on employees and several negative effects on organisations".

It should be noted that the terms 'victim' and 'target' are used interchangeably throughout this study. In the next section, I present several definitions of workplace bullying[12] in a table format and discuss the focal points identified in the definitions to enhance an integrated understanding of workplace bullying.

3.3   DEFINING WORKPLACE BULLYING

A number of definitions are presented in Table 3.1 to afford the reader the opportunity to fully understand the phenomenon of workplace bullying, as an attempt to achieve a common understanding of the phenomenon.

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[12] In this thesis I used the term *workplace bullying* to refer to the phenomenon under study, widely used in the literature when referring to adult bullying or bullying at work.

Table 3.1

Definitions of workplace bullying

Author	Definition of workplace bullying	Focal points of workplace bullying
Olweus (1993, p. 9)	"A student is being bullied or victimised when he or she is exposed, repeatedly and over time, to negative actions on the part of one or more other students".	Repeated or over time and negative actions.
Leymann (1996, p. 165)	"Psychological terror involving hostile and unethical communication directed in a systematic way by one or a few individuals mainly toward one individual".	Psychological terror, hostile and unethical communication and systematic or regular.
Field (1996, p. 46)	"Persistent, unwelcome, intrusive behaviour of one or more individuals whose actions prevent others from fulfilling their duties"	Persistent, unwelcome or intrusive behaviour and power.
Andersson and Pearson (1999, p. 455)	"Any injurious or destructive behaviour, in violation of social norms" and can include behaviours such as vandalism, sabotage, harassment and physical abuse.	Injurious or destructive behaviour.
Lutgen-Sandvik's (2004, p. 472)	"A repetitive, targeted and destructive form of communication directed by more powerful members at work at those less powerful".	Repetitive, destructive form of communication and power differences.
Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik and Alberts (2006, p. 152)	"A combination of tactics and manipulation in which numerous types of hostile communication and behaviour are used and also tactics of control and manipulation such as verbal, non-verbal, psychological, physical abuse, humiliation, sabotage or some combination of the all and so forth".	Hostile verbal, non-verbal communication, psychological and physical abuse.
Lutgen-Sandvik et al. (2007, p. 839)	"Persistent verbal and non-verbal aggression at work that includes personal attacks, social ostracism, and a multitude of other painful messages and hostile interactions."	Persistent, verbal and non-verbal aggression or hostile interactions.
Namie and Namie, (2009, p. 13)	"Repeated, health-harming mistreatment, verbal abuse, or conduct which is threatening, humiliating, intimidating, or sabotage that interferes with work or some combination of the all".	Repeated, health-harming and verbal abuse.
Bulutlar and Oz (2009, p. 274)	"Work abuse, workplace aggression, workplace harassment and psychological harassment and a power imbalance (not necessarily hierarchical power)".	Power imbalance (formal or informal), harassment, work abuse and aggression.

Mattice and Garman (2010, p. 2)	"A systematic aggressive communication, manipulation of work, and acts aimed at humiliating or degrading one or more individual that create an unhealthy and unprofessional power imbalance between bully and target(s), result in psychological consequences for targets and co-workers, and cost enormous monetary damage to an organisation's bottom line".	Systematic, aggressive verbal and non-verbal communication, power imbalance and psychological consequences.
Zapf and Gross (2001, p. 498)	A "consistent exposure to persistent, oppressive, offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious, or insulting behaviour by a manager/supervisor or co-worker".	Persistent, verbal and non-verbal abuse, and power disparity.
Einarsen et al. (2010, p. 22)	"Harassing, offending, or socially excluding someone or negatively affecting someone's work repeatedly and regularly (e.g., weekly) and over a period of time (e.g., about 6 months). Bullying is an escalating process in the course of which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position and becomes the target of systematic negative social acts".	Repeated, regularly, systematic negative social acts, power imbalance and negatively affecting.
Einarsen et al. (2011, p. 21)	As "overt or covert and either emotional or unemotional, and is a process whereby aggressive behaviour escalates to stigmatisation and victimisation, and eventually, severe trauma for the bullied victim".	Overt or covert, emotional or unemotional, aggressive behaviour and severe trauma.

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Rothmann and Rothmann (2006, p. 14)	"Repeated actions and practices that are directed to one or more workers, which are all unwanted by the victim, which may be done deliberately or unconsciously, but clearly cause humiliation, offence, and distress, and that may interfere with job performance and/or cause an unpleasant working environment".	Repeated, unwanted actions, deliberate or unconscious (cause humiliation, offence, distress and unpleasant working environment).
Von Bergen, Zavaletta and Soper (2006, p. 16)	"Harassment that inflicts a hostile work environment upon an employee by a co-worker or coworkers, typically through a combination of repeated, inappropriate and unwelcome verbal, non-verbal and/or low-level physical behaviours that a reasonable person would find threatening, intimidating, harassing, humiliating, degrading or offensive".	Repeated, inappropriate and unwelcome verbal, non-verbal or physical behaviours and hostile or negative work environment.
Le Roux , Rycroft and Orleyn (2010, p. 53)	"Unwanted conduct in the workplace which is persistent or serious, and demeans, humiliates or creates a hostile or intimidating environment or is calculated to induce submission by actual or threatened adverse consequences".	Unwanted or hostile conduct, persistent or serious and threatened adverse consequences.
Cunniff and Mostert (2011, p. 2)	"As conflict that lasts for a long period, occurs regularly and where the victims are not able to defend themselves because of the unequal distribution of power between the victims and the perpetrators".	Duration of time, occurs regularly and power disparity.

The definitions described in Table 3.1 seem to be more or less similar and the understanding of the concepts of workplace bullying, are mostly reflective of the target's voice as victim and present a subjective perception of the bullying action. The lack of a consistent definition of workplace bullying poses its own problems and complicates agreement on forms, characteristics or behaviours that can be labelled as workplace bullying (Botha, 2014; Einarsen & Nielsen, 2015). Among other things, the lack of a common definition could also be a reason bullying is so rife and difficult to pin down in the workplace. Interestingly, Cunniff and Mostert (2011) as shown in Table 3.1 described workplace bullying as conflict that lasts for a long period and victims are unable to defend themselves because of the power imbalances between the victims and the perpetrators. Strandmark and Hallberg (2007) noted that the struggle of power at work often results in conflict which is transformed into bullying and the target becomes defenceless.

Early studies assert that bullying may come to light immediately after a conflict event or it can develop over time (Leymann, 1996). Similarly, Adams (1992), writes that a once-off hostile act can damage the relationship between the subordinate and superior and escalate into a conflict, which could be considered as bullying. On the contrary, Kumar, Jain and Kumar (2012, p. 131) in reference to Einarsen et al. (2003) state that "a conflict cannot be called bullying if the incident is an isolated event or if two parties of approximately equal seniority are in conflict". Salin (2003, p. 1216) also argues that "the characteristic power disparity presented in bullying as the "victim-perpetrator" dimension and, thus, does not view conflict between parties of equal strength as bullying". This implies that people can have differences and disagreements in the workplace. Engaging in *repeated*, unreasonable behaviour is prerequisite for conflict to be seen as workplace bullying. Furthermore, a power imbalance in the bully-target relationship is an important distinguishing criterion for conflict to be regarded as bullying.

Conflict is regarded as a harmful counterproductive behaviour at work and it includes similar extreme negative behaviours that can be related to workplace bullying behaviours (Marcus & Schuler, 2004; Notelaers et al., 2010; Spector & Fox, 2010). The boundary line between conflict and bullying can sometime be blurred, because the duration of or long-lasting conflict behaviours can escalate to workplace bullying overtime. It is not surprising that conflict and bullying are interlinked and reflexive, and workplace bullying-conflict dynamics can be understood within the context in which it occurs. Uniform understanding of this problem in South Africa is necessary and vital, the implication for organisations being that the management must be strategic and proactive in rooting out and handling workplace bullying. In particular, management must put in place strategies

and measures to counter any form of destructive and inappropriate workplace behaviour that can be labelled as bullying.

Despite the lack of a uniform definition of workplace bullying highlighted above, the literature has provided the world with immensely important knowledge of workplace bullying. Many different behavioural forms and characteristics have been used to describe workplace bullying, with conflicting ideas on the issue of power in the bully-target relationship. Most emphasise the adverse effects in definitions of workplace bullying. However, there exists general agreement about the inclusion of and importance placed on forms and characteristics within the definitions of workplace bullying. These are further discussed within the focal points of workplace bullying in the section that follows, which aims to provide an enhanced understanding in terms of what workplace bullying entails and how it manifests.

From the literature review it seems that the following elements are essential in understanding and defining workplace bullying: any intentional or unintentional repeated and persistent hostile and malicious action(s) directed by more powerful employees at work at those less powerful, typically through a combination of repeated and regular (e.g., daily, weekly, or over six months or more) inappropriate and unwelcome overt or covert, verbal and non-verbal behaviours that a reasonable person would find distressing, threatening, intimidating, manipulating, humiliating, abusing, sabotaging, degrading or offensive, harassing, stigmatising and victimising, or some combination of these, manifesting over a period of time.

This definition makes it possible to explore workplace bullying dynamics and related issues in organisations from the depicted focal points of workplace bullying as shown in Table 3.1, which provide a general understanding of workplace bullying and how it could possibly be differentiated from other types of destructive workplace behaviours, such as harassment or counterproductive behaviour. The focal points of workplace bullying are further detailed below.

3.4   FOCAL POINTS OF WORKPLACE BULLYING

This section discusses the focal points of workplace bullying, and expounds how, if understood and effectively prevented, they could enhance the wellbeing, working relations and performance of employees and the organisation.

3.4.1 Verbal and non-verbal communication behaviours

Studies have described various inappropriate and undesirable verbal and non-verbal behaviours in which workplace bullying is manifested (e.g., Farmer, 2011; Koonin & Green, 2005; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007), but reaching absolute agreement on what bullying behaviours are or might be, remain open to debate. Smit (2014, p. 45) in reference to Zapf (1999), categorised bullying behaviours into the following five categories, namely: (1) work-related bullying, which may include changes to work to make tasks difficult to perform; (2) social isolation and exclusion; (3) direct and indirect personal attacks or attacks on the private lives of victims; (4) being yelled at in public; and (5) physical violence or threats thereof. Bartlett and Bartlett (2011) extended the work-related bullying category in terms of workloads such as refusing leave, removing responsibilities and delegation of menial tasks; work processes such as stifling opinions and overruling decisions; and evaluation and advancement, such as excessive monitoring, judging work wrongly, giving unfair criticism and blocking individuals from promotion.

Studies have shown that the majority of bullied employees reported that none of the work-related problems had affected their life more severely or lowered their promotional prospects, and ability to work effectively so much as workplace bullying (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2004; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2002). Thus, workplace bullying is more acute than other work-related problems and some workplace bullying behaviours manifest through workloads, work processes, and evaluation and advancement. However, Guerrero (2004), as cited in Botha (2008, p. 207), caution that workplace bullying "must not be confused with the employee's right to constructive criticism or reasonable changes in an employee's tasks". These bullying behaviours can be committed vertically, from superior to subordinate or vice versa (Dzurec, Kennison & Gillen, 2017; Escartin, Zapf, Arrieta & Rodrigues-Carballeira, 2011), or horizontally: between colleagues (Pietersen, 2007), or both vertical and horizontal (Branch, Ramsay & Barker, 2013; Wright & Hill, 2015).

The literature indicates that most unwanted verbal and non-verbal behaviours in the workplace can be exerted by an employee(s) or colleague(s) over another, due to power derived from internal networks or interdependency of job tasks (LaVan & Martin 2008), while subordinates can derive their power from group-based support, such as trade unions or relations with influential people (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011). The following were found to be common covert or overt behaviours within organisations that perpetuate workplace bullying due to competition and sometimes pressure from the management:

withholding information from another person (Rayner et al., 2002); intimidation, undervaluation of skills, belittling someone's opinion (De Wet, 2010); unfair or unmanageable workload, assignment of demeaning work tasks, impossible deadlines, excessive monitoring of work, consistent harsh email or nasty notes, constant reminder of past mistakes, work interference or sabotage (Branch, Ramsay & Barker, 2006); public humiliation and yelling (Fevre, Robinson, Jones & Lewis, 2010); persistent threats, insults or offensive remarks, persistent criticism, and personal or even physical attacks and abuse as examples of bullying; taking credits due to other (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Nielsen, Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2010); interpersonal issue between two or more employees (Glaso, Nielsen & Einarsen, 2009; Liefooghe & Davey, 2010; Namie, 2013; Pietersen, 2007), social isolation or ostracism (Agtervold, 2007; Gamian-Wilk, 2013; Yildirim, 2009); and organisation climate (Glaso et al., 2009; Hutchinson, Vickers, Jackson & Wilkes, 2010).

The workplace bullying behaviours provide cues to behaviours that can be considered bullying at the places of work. How bullying manifest at places of work is complex and subjective, understood and interpreted differently based on the situation in which people find themselves. Some may have difficulty identifying abuse or harassment or personality clashes, racial discrimination or victimisation, or physical violence experiences as bullying (Zapf & Gross, 2001). Others have trouble defending themselves or reporting the bully to avoid being harassed, stigmatised and victimised (Tracy, Lutgen-Sandvik & Alberts, 2006). According to Branch et al. (2013, p. 2), in order to interpret and agree on what bullying behaviours are or might be it is important to understand the "context, intensity and the existence of patterns of behaviour". Other studies show that workplace bullying behaviours depend on the nature of the behaviour, cultural differences, field of study and the country or organisation in which bullying is being investigated that can contribute to the complexity of it (Einarsen & Nielsen, 2015; Smit, 2014).

Despite their different positions in the bullying continuum, I attempt to include similar constructs concerning behaviours that can be considered as workplace bullying and expand little on some and where applicable differences are highlighted. The question remains, does workplace bullying constitute harassment and vice versa? However, the challenge in South Africa is that although any form of harassment is specified and regulated, workplace bullying is not legislated and commonly specified across sectors, and as such it does not conform to the global idea of bullying, which requires the behaviour to be repetitive and persistent. Therefore, there is motivation for organisations to directly or indirectly prevent workplace bullying effectively to ensure a fair, healthy and

safe workplace, as bullies would fear becoming victims of counter-attacks or severe punishment by the organisation.

3.4.2   Persistence

'Persistence' refers to prolonged existence of effects, behaviours or acts that are difficult to overcome (*Cambridge English Dictionary, 2014*). Some researchers use the term in relation to defining workplace bullying as a pattern of continuing abusive, hostile, malicious, negative attacks or actions to which the target is subjected (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2004; Rayner et al., 2002). In order for undesirable verbal and non-verbal behaviours to be considered as bullying, many researchers agree and emphasise that they must be demonstrated persistently and continuously; repeated over time with intention (Einarsen et al., 2003; Namie & Namie, 2003; Rayner & Cooper, 2006; Salin, 2003). Most studies found that repeated and persistent negative verbal and non-verbal behaviours can escalate to a point in which the person confronted ends up in an inferior position. Bullying is directed by more powerful work members at those less powerful (power issues) and the targets become adversely affected by negative social actions over time (Cowan, 2009; Einarsen et al., 2010; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2007).

According to Hoel and Cooper (2001, p. 4), "the long-term nature of the phenomenon is one of the most salient features of the problem". Therefore, the duration and regular occurrence of the behaviour highlights the intensity of a bully's actions as well as negative effects on the target to be considered bullying. Previous and recent studies are consistent with the frequency and duration of the behaviours, such that it can be experienced on a weekly basis for at least six months to be labelled as bullying (Leymann, 1990; Rayner et.al, 2002). Zapf et al. (2003) write that bullying can last even longer that two years and the bully becomes more powerful in continuing bullying actions, consequently rendering the target defenceless.

Additionally, other scholars went as far as to employ different timeframes of behaviour, such as "quite often" and "extremely often" or "now" and "daily" or "weekly" over the last "six months" or more than 12 months in order to label the behaviour as bullying (Fox & Stallworth, 2010; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2007). In South Africa, Pietersen (2007) found that most incidents of workplace bullying happened over a prolonged period of nine months to three years. However, Nielsen et al. (2009) argue that studies which explore the occurrence of bullying acts over a long term, compared to six months or less, probably yield a higher prevalence rate and explain the impact of workplace bullying. According to

Salin (2001), the duration and frequency of bullying depend on the way the behaviour is measured. Similarly, Agtervold and Mikkelsen (2004) emphasise that when participants or respondents are provided with a clear operational definition with duration and frequencies scales used, they are able to respond positively, whether they are being victims of or exposed to bullying acts daily or weekly, or over six months. The differences in the timeframes with regard to the duration and frequencies of behaviour remain debatable.

The persistence of and prolonged exposure to negative behaviours characterise bullying and the intensity of the attacks increases, which often assist in explaining the escalation of bullying behaviours over time (Branch et al., 2013; Smit, 2014). According to Einarsen et al. (2010), the escalation of bullying has severe negative consequences for the targets or victims which could lead to increased absenteeism, depression, anxiety and stress disorder, which in turn affect productivity. Thus the bully may use threatening or aggressive acts to escalate bullying behaviours and the targets perceive themselves as being bullied consistently. However, Adams and Crawford (1992) note that early studies of workplace bullying indicated that a once-off or single undesirable negative behaviour or act could be understood as bullying. Similarly, Rigby in Branch (2006) assert that it is possible that a single event of bullying and the continuing threat remain with targets for a long time.

Notwithstanding the ongoing debate, I agree with some researchers that workplace bullying is not about a single deed or an isolated event, but rather a pattern of repeated and persistent unwelcoming, offensive, intimidating, malicious, insulting, and/or exclusionary discursive and non-discursive behaviours directed towards one or more employees, which involve a perceived power imbalance and create a hostile environment (Branch et al., 2013; Einarsen et al., 2011). Consequently, the duration and frequencies of negative behaviours possibly escalate bullying which can contribute to personal wellbeing concerns in places of work (Nielsen et al., 2009). Einarsen et al. (2011, p. 21) further state "bullying is a gradually evolving process, which at first may be subtle, devious and immensely difficult to recognise". Fox and Stallworth (2010, p. 931) agree with this view and contend that "a prolonged exposure to negative acts is imperative to be labelled bullying, in that it would then enable actions that are intentional or unintentional, civility or incivility to be distinguished from bullying, which would limit frivolous claims". With the idea of persistent negative acts, intentionality has also been seen as one of the defining characteristics of workplace bullying.

3.4.3 Intentionality and perception

Scholars differ on whether bullying is an intentional or unintentional act. Some are vague on the elements that constitute bullying, contending that bullying is purposeful but it is not recognised as a prerequisite (Einarsen et al., 2011; Hoel, Glaso, Hetland, Cooper & Einarsen, 2010; Visagie, Havenga, Linde & Botha, 2012), while others argue that whether the target's perception of these acts is as if it is being enacted purposefully, will categorise a situation as bullying (Georgakopoulos, Wilkin & Kent, 2011; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2005; Rothmann & Rothmann, 2006; Samnani, 2013). Intentionality remains unclear in the definitions of workplace bullying.

In the early 1990s, bullying was described as an intention to harm, researchers arguing that it was the result of negative acts and the tyrannical personality of the bully, and the bully targeting the victims with the intention of getting rid of them, punishing or harming them (Ashforth, 1997; Einarsen et al., 2003; Field, 2009). However, according Hoel, Rayner and Cooper (1999), it is not possible to confirm the existence of intent in behaviours that are perceived by the target as negative. This view suggests that the intent to harm can be experienced and understood from the target's perspective. Agtervold (2007, p. 163) argues that "an employee might feel they are being bullied, even if the bully has no intention of bullying them". In support of Agtervold, Jerkins (2011, p. 20) argues that "what may be reasonable, although unpopular managerial practices, such as transferring an employee or managing poor work performance, may be perceived as bullying even if there is no intent". These views suggest that other behaviours of workplace bullying may or may not be intentional, so caution is advised in dealing with complaints of workplace bullying in order to determine its impact.

According to Lewis, Coursol and Wahl (2002, p. 110), "aggressive workplace behaviour incorporates the element of intent, as the intimidating behaviour is designed to demean the targets." Aquino and Thau (2009, p. 719), contend that "it is reasonable to classify a behaviour as aggressive if the targets perceive some more possibility that it was performed with the intent", while Einarsen et al. (2011) highlight that intentionality is not necessarily a criterion for a definition of workplace bullying, as it is difficult to determine the intent of bullying cases. They emphasised that the persistent use of negative acts, be they regularly, short-term or long-term, is rather essential to describe bullying. Visagie et al. (2012, p. 63) stress that intentionality "may be an element of bullying at times, since bullying implies the wilful or conscious desire to hurt or threaten someone but it is not recognised as a prerequisite".

Notwithstanding the aforesaid opposing views on intentionality, I agree with Einarsen et al. (2011, p. 21) and Smit (2014, p. 16) that workplace bullying could be overt or covert and either emotional or unemotional, and is a process whereby aggressive behaviour escalates to stigmatisation and, eventually, severe trauma for the bullied victim. Therefore, when addressing workplace bullying at places of work, the intention of the bully and the perception of the targets should be taken into consideration, because they reflect an individual view of reality.

3.4.4 Power dynamics

Power relationships in any organisation are fundamental for viability and productivity. People in an organisation use power differently, some to further organisational goals, while others use it for their selfish interest at the expense of others. Generally, power within organisations results from competition for limited resources or opportunities, from technology to people. The term 'power' has been defined in different ways and at times related to authority (formal power) and influence (informal) in literature (see Bacharach & Lawler, 1981; Field, 1996; French & Raven, 1959; Merchant, 2005). Authority is the power or right given to a line manager or supervisor by an organisation to achieve its objectives, to give orders to the subordinates and to get obedience from them (Branch et al., 2006; Keltner, Gruenfeld & Anderson, 2003; Schein & Greiner, 1988). Influence occurs when one person has technical, knowledge, skills and competences (Schein & Greiner, 1988) to manipulate others' emotions, opinions or behaviours to comply (obedience), identify (liked and respected) and internalise (accept belief) with the person in power (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Keltner et al., 2003). Therefore, authority (rigid and overtly defined) and influence (not strictly specified) are often interrelated in organisations and essentially different to a great extent. They both give a person ability to influence, reward and impose sanctions on others.

For the purpose of this study, I define power as the ability to directly or indirectly, formally or informally influence others, gain favourable outcomes at the expense of another person, provide or withhold valued resources and administer punishment within an organisation (Anderson & Berdahl, 2002; Lovaglia, Mannix, Samuelson, Sell & Wilson, 2004; Mechanic, 2003). Depending on how it is used, it can lead to positive or negative outcomes in an organisation (Merchant, 2005).

Bullying in the workplace can be attributed to people (bullies) who are interested in power and control through negative acts diminishing rather than enhancing a person(s) (Query & Hanley, 2010). Cunniff and Mostert (2012, p. 3) contend that it is commonly acknowledged that the perceived power imbalance between targets and bullies "lies at the heart of this phenomenon, and bullying often sees the victim ending up in an inferior position". Salin (2003) sees the concept of power as pervading workplace bullying and differentiates it from other workplace transgressions.

Bullying in the workplace can occur horizontally (between subordinates) or vertically (top-down or bottom-up), as highlighted above. Kaplan (in Smit, 2014, p. 34) states that "the bullying of subordinates by supervisors is different to that between co-workers or bullying of supervisors by subordinates, mainly due to the relative status of the bully and the victim". This power difference can be directly or indirectly linked to bullying, amongst others. Hutchinson et al. (2010) and Torres (2008) claim that often bullying involves line managers and factors such as power tripping (abuse of power), making the workplace hostile, insulting employees, or other forms of denigration and harassment due to workplace error, religious and sexual intolerance. The consequence of both horizontal and vertical bullying, if not managed properly, can persuade subordinates to rally or gather enough power to bully a supervisor (Salin, 2003). Raven (2008. p. 8) contends that the target may also have "various motives to either accept or reject influence from the superiors or others, some of which may involve personal factors, such as a need for independence, for power, for self-esteem, and for personal feelings-positive or negative-toward the influencing agent". However, Bulutlar and Oz (2009) and Samnani and Singh (2012) believe that not only hierarchical positional power are prerequisite to workplace bullying, but that other sources of power can contribute to bullying. Similarly, Salin (2008) states that the power disparity is not only attained from the organisational hierarchy structure but can be achieved from less formal structures, for example, access to information, knowledge and expertise or support by influential people.

Researchers (e.g., Branch et al., 2013; Einarsen, Hoel & Notelaers, 2009; Salin, 2008; Smit, 2014) believe workplace bullying pervades every workplace and every sphere of life, since it symbolises a dynamic interaction of organisational and social interactions as opposed to interpersonal conflict. There are several formal and informal or less formal sources of power. The informal or less formal sources of power were identified to play a potent role in bullying (see Hutchinson et al., 2010). These sources of power that characterise the relations between people within the organisation (subordinates and superiors), are reward power, coercive power, legitimate power, expert power, personal

(referent) power and informational power (see French & Raven, 1959; Raven, 1992). According to Aquino (2000) and Quine (2003), colleagues with equal positional power may bully one another. Although it was cautioned that legitimate or positional power is limited to the amount of power (influence or authority), everyone has the ability to acquire and use more power than they might reasonably expect to have. However, it is also possible for a person with authority and/or influence over others, to feel powerless, mainly due to the perceptions others have of them (Branch, 2006).

Power imbalance and abuse of power by an organisation, line manager or supervisor, individual employee or a group of employees, have been previously and recently emphasised by several researchers to permeate bullying, amongst other aspects, in the workplace in which the target lacks the power or resources to successfully defend himself or herself (Branch et al., 2013; Bulutlar & Oz, 2009; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2005; Momberg, 2011; Pietersen, 2007; Samnani & Singh 2012; Walden & Höel, 2004). According to Raven (2008), the victim might have tried to analyse what sources of power the bully might attempt to use and have prepared to counter these one by one or resort to powers of third parties to assist in their resistance. Momberg (2011) believes that abuse of these powers has become widespread in the workplace and is used as a strategy to bully or harass employees or create a hostile environment. In addition, the abuse of these powers with intent to harm or humiliate someone can also be gained from quoting rules that do not exist or misquoting rules by overstating or understating their meaning (Morgan, 2006).

Vega and Comer (2005) argue that power imbalance and abuse of power often make the targets "start to feel incompetent to combat or even confront the bully, which of course makes it all the more difficult to utilise existing grievance procedures, and the targets might give up or resign or suffer in silence". Momberg (2011) showed that most South African organisations have grievance procedures in place, but often the process is dominated by bully line managers and supervisors and they often abuse their powers by not investigating grievances timeously. "The ineffective grievances structure or patronage of wrongdoers "provide 'rogue' line managers with the opportunity to mistreat employees" (Harvey et al., 2006a, p. 2). According to Einarsen (2000), the bullied employee may even be censured by line management and/or the HR department when he or she lodges a complaint. When this is experienced, targets become vulnerable, lose faith in the grievance process and will not use it to resolve their issues of concern. Similarly, Tepper (2000) believes that employees exposed to routine abusive supervision or management often resort to inactive unsympathetic behaviour, such as ignoring the

team leader or supervisor or working less than they are capable. Adopting passive unsympathetic behaviour at work by an employee or a target, however, could lead to confrontation that may escalate the conflict between the bully and the target and also escalate into a cycle of reciprocal aggression (Aquino & Thau, 2009). Jerkins (2011, p. 16) asserts that often hostile behaviour from others is "likely to be met with counter-aggression from targets", whereas, at times such retaliation or reverse discourse can also escalate the bullying (Lee & Brotheridge, 2006) and have the potential to separate targets from their colleagues or peers and support from others (Vaillancourt, McDougall, Hymel & Sunderani, 2010).

Lutgen-Sandvik (2006) writes that bullied employees or targets are not necessarily defenceless, but have some power to stop or oppose the workplace bullying attacks. Scholars proposed strategies that targets can employ to overcome bullying, such as confronting the bully with intent to resolve the matter; reporting the behaviour if the bully is egotistical; and fighting back against the bully with all means available in the organisation or leave the organisation (Branch et al., 2013; Lee & Brotheridge, 2006; Vaillancourt et al., 2010).

3.4.5   Negative effects of workplace bullying

Researchers argue that workplace bullying negatively impact and impose direct costs on both the individual and organisation as a whole (Cowan, 2009; Einarsen et al., 2011; Lopez, Hodson & Roscigno, 2009; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2005; Namie, 2013; Smit, 2014; Tambur & Vadi, 2012). According to Lutgen-Sandvik (2005, p. 15), the salient effects of workplace bullying "are damage or impairment to targets and workgroups, and obstruction of organisational goals and processes". Further, the overall nature of the negative effects indicates "a deterioration or disabling of the target, the people around him or her, and the organisation" (Keashly & Jagatic, 2003, p. 53). Also, workplace bullying impacts general employee health and job satisfaction (Hoel, Einarsen & Cooper, 2003; Rayner et al., 2002). The following section motivates the reasons why workplace bullying negatively impact on both employee and organisation.

3.4.5.1 Negative effects of workplace bullying on employees

A number of researchers have reiterated in different ways that employees who experience or witness repetitive workplace mistreatment or frequent episodes of workplace bullying can suffer severe long-term physical, emotional, psychological

(Einarsen et al., 2011; Keim & McDermott, 2010; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007; Yamada, 2009), and financial consequences; such as increased health-care costs (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Jerkins, 2011).

The negative effects of workplace bullying can lead to the following deleterious consequences:

(a) General and mental stress reactions and feelings of low self-esteem (Quine, 2001); fatigue and lack of self-esteem (Lewis, Sheehan & Davies, 2008); distress and workplace stress (Farrell & Geist-Martin, 2005; Momberg, 2011; Nielsen et al., 2010) and stress and emotional exhaustion (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2004).

(b) Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), depression, cardiovascular disease and musculoskeletal disorders (Yamada, 2009; Ylipaavalniemi et al., 2005).

(c) Absenteeism, job satisfaction, poor performance, abuse of power (Asfaw, Chang & Tapas, 2014; Momberg, 2011; Porath & Erez, 2007) and increased turnover rates (Berthelsen, Skogstad, Lau & Einarsen, 2011; Glambek, Skogstad & Einarsen, 2015).

(d) Taking more sick leave than their counterparts, poor relationship with other employees and lowered group cohesion, career and promotional threats, and lowered performance (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Branch et al., 2007a; Namie & Namie, 2011); reduced creativity (Mathisen, Einarsen & Mykletun, 2008) and afflicts work engagement (Crawford, LePine & Rich, 2010).

Field (2009) noted that targets of workplace bullying demonstrate similar symptoms as victims of PTSD and depression. Vega and Comer (2005) in reference to Leymann (1996) argued that PTSD and depression are related to workplace bullying. PTSD is as severe as depression because it can cause long-term health problems such as flashbacks of bad experiences in dreams or thoughts, anxiety, fatigue, headache, migraine, eating and sleeping disorders, loss of humour; increased reliance on drugs, suicide and thoughts of suicide, burnout, insecurity, withdrawal, mood swings, trauma, shattered self-confidence and self-esteem (see Hoel, Faragher & Cooper, 2004; Yildiz, 2007).

Juvoven and Gross (2008) and Kivimäki et al. (2003) further argue that prolonged exposure to workplace bullying significantly exposes employees to the greater risks of cardiovascular disease and depression, though sometimes this may be attributable to age or overweight. Targets of bullying were found to develop more annoyance, distress, depression, worry, aggression, and persecution mania compared to those who observed

bullying (Björkquist et al., 1994; O'Moore, Seigne, McGuire & Smith, 1998; Strandmark, 2013).

Farrell and Geist-Martin (2005) found that workplace stress can be linked to workplace bullying because bullying has negative effects that are associated to poor psychological and physical health. Similarly, Momberg (2011) found that employees who were repetitively stressed due to bullying at work often experience psychological distress which in turn leads to them being absent from work, either to avoid the situation or seek medical attention. Rayner et al. (2002) found that abuse of power can lead to chronic stress and nervous breakdown, gradually making employees lose belief in themselves as a result of impaired psychological and physical health. Bullied employees were consistently found to develop low-levels of self-esteem and be perceived as behaving strangely and differently from normal by their peers (Strandmark & Hallberg, 2007).

Einarsen et al. (2011), with reference to Leymann (1996), contend that bullying can be associated with substance use and suicide, because severely bullied employees experience suicidal thoughts and at times commit suicide. For example, workplace bullying related suicide was recently reported in the State of Victoria in the USA, when a young adult employee in the fast foods industry committed suicide because of bullying pervaded by her two colleagues, ignored by the manager, who was aware of mistreatment. Successfully, the two colleagues were prosecuted by the State of Victoria's Occupational Health and Safety Compliance Agency (see Jerkins, 2011).

Notwithstanding the detrimental effects of workplace bullying on employee(s), Carter and Vandersteen (2014), Salin (2008) and Einarsen et al. (2003) maintain that some bullied employees or targets generally tend to stay silent, accept or tolerate bullying and feel alone because of a fear of losing their job, feeling embarrassed or humiliated, dislike of confrontation or thinking it would be unprofessional in the eyes of beholder. This is a reflection of state of employees trapped in bullying ambiance that creates a climate of harassment and fear. It is important for employees to be mindful that bullying at work should never be tolerated (Kearns, 2013). Table 3.2 presents a summary of the consequences of workplace bullying on employees.

Table 3.2

The consequences of workplace bullying on employees

Work	Psychological Health	Physical Health	Affective Domain
• Absenteeism • Burnout • Errors in workplace • Income loss • Career impact • Concentration loss • Lowered morale • Intolerance of criticism • Job dissatisfaction • Lowered performance /productivity • Quit / thinking of quitting • Social interactions inside work • Work hours • Loss of time (hours cut)	• Depression • Psychological health / psychological affects • Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) • Suicide	• Cardiovascular disease • Chronic disease • Headaches • Health decrease • Increased smoking, alcohol, and drug use/abuse • Higher body mass • Medical costs • Physical health • Sick time • Sleep disruption • Sleep-inducing drugs	• Anxiety • Anger • Easily upset/ • tenseness • Fear • Exhaustion • Humiliation • Impatience • Powerlessness • Motivation • Isolation feeling • Concentration loss • Powerlessness • Sadness • Self-confidence • Social interactions outside of work • Stress

Note. Adapted from Bartlett and Bartlett (2011, p. 77).

3.4.5.2 The negative effects of workplace bullying on organisation

The negative effects of workplace bullying on organisations, such as reduced productivity, paralysed communication, lack of trust and respect, increase in absenteeism (lost employee work hours), increased staff turnover and recruitment, medical costs and lawsuit risks were identified and supported as having serious negative effects on an organisation's profitability (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Winefield, Saebel & Winefield, 2010). According to Gonzalez (2012, p. 53), organisations may suffer indirect management costs "when abusive workplaces lead employees to become fearful, mistrusting, resentful and at times, even hostile".

Employees who experience repeated workplace bullying tend to waste time at work defending themselves and networking for support (Fisher-Blando, 2008) thinking about the situation and becoming stressed (Kivimaki et al., 2005; Von Bergen et al., 2006), and are demotivated or take sick leave due to stress-related illnesses (Namie & Namie, 2011; Wilkin, 2010). Similarly, a some studies reiterated that increased absenteeism is common among targets of workplace bullying and their morale and performances decline (Baillien, Neyens, De Witte & De Cuyper, 2009; Yildirim, 2009), it negatively results in

loss of valuable employees (Fox & Spector, 2005).

Rayner and Keashly (2005) found that the replacement costs of potential employees due to bullying or having witnessed bullying is estimated to be high. The negative effects of workplace bullying can be related to increased workplace errors as a result of the target's poor physical and psychological wellbeing (Paice & Smith, 2009). Also job dissatisfaction, physical stress symptoms and debility in psychological health as a result of becoming the victim or being exposed to bullying over time has a negative effect on workplace productivity (Namie & Namie, 2003).

Branch et al. (2013, p. 14) contend that once a "hostile working environment has been established, bullying will affect optimal organisational functioning, through loss of productivity and potential employees, increase in absenteeism and the cost of intervention programmes". Griffin (2010, p. 311) argues that retention of employees is both important and costly for organisations, and that there "is a direct correlation between the intention of individuals to stay and actual turnover due to workplace bullying". In support of these views, Smit (2014) states that the intention of individuals to stay in an organisation is important and employer should effectively manage it to minimise loss of valuable employees or other work related costs.

The unwillingness of organisational leaders to prevent workplace bullying was reported as negatively contributing to a toxic organisational climate and targets being unable to relate well with peers and supervisors (Glaso et al., 2009; MacIntosh, 2005). Also, the breakdown of communication between subordinates and superiors leads to conflict and counterproductive behaviours central to workplace bullying, which can add additional strain to the target's emotional and mental health, and reduce morale and organisational commitment (Baillien et al., 2009; Momberg, 2011). Yildiz (2007) argues that in an organisation where bullying is left unchecked the environment is widespread with paralysed relations between subordinates and superiors, lack of respect and even possible litigation. The inability of management to address negative effects of workplace bullying effectively can lead to incivility spirals that can contribute to a toxic organisational culture (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Ismail, 2011).

The prevalence of workplace bullying not only affects organisational costs but can also tarnish reputation, public image or bring organisation into disrepute (Namie & Namie, 2011; Smit, 2014), affect the efficiency and integrity of the organisation (Hoel, Sheehan, Cooper & Einarsen, 2011) and these consequences commonly persist even after the bullying experience has ended (Icenogle, Eagle, Ahmad & Hanks, 2002; Hallberg &

Strandmark 2006). The implications of a damaged reputation due to higher incidents of workplace bullying can lead to increased turnover, lower customer relationships (Johnson, 2009), lower employee creativity and productivity (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011).

Namie and Namie (2011) believe that in organisations where workplace bullying is indirectly or directly tolerated, the impacts are severe and employees would tend to dislike, disrespect and be apathetic towards the organisation, with a negative effect on workplace productivity and posing a risk of violence or conflict. Branch et al. (2013) maintain that in turn, conflict will have a definite impact on the productivity of an organisation as a whole. Kumar et al. (2012) and Glenndinning (2001) found that if organisations do not take positive position to address workplace bullying, conflict can intentionally or unintentionally harm an employee or organisation and sometimes lead to costly wrongful litigation. Other studies stated that once symptoms of workplace bullying are ignored they can contribute to increased health costs, and compensation claims (Harvey, Treadway & Heames, 2007; MacIntosh, 2005). Table 3.3 displays a map of the effects of workplace bullying on organisations.

Table 3.3

The effects of workplace bullying on organisation

Productivity	Cost	Culture	Litigation	Reputation
• High absenteeism • Decreased performance • Employees use of time • Loss of creative potential employee(s) • Missed deadlines • Workplace errors	• Medical costs increase • Recruitment & training • Turnover / retention • Employee attrition • Employee compensation claims • Company internet usage	• Toxic climate • Abuse of electronic communication • Ineffective interpersonal relationships (peers / supervisors) • Ineffective teamwork • Lowered morale • Organisational commitment • Work environment	• Wrongful discharge lawsuits	• Customer relations

Note. Adapted from Bartlett and Bartlett (2011, p. 76).

To this end, I provide insight with regard to the antecedents of workplace bullying relating to the individual, group and organisation which relate to the negative effects discussed above.

3.5   ANTECEDENTS OF WORKPLACE BULLYING

The various antecedents of workplace bullying manifesting on individual, group and organisational level, have been highlighted in the literature to have a key influence in the development and perpetuation of bullying in the workplace (Agtervold, 2009; Hauge, Skogstad & Einarsen, 2007; Samnani & Singh, 2012, Scott, 2015). These antecedents are discussed below.

3.5.1   Individual (target or bully) antecedents

Workplace bullying stems from multiple causes that are linked to variables relevant to both targets or bullies such as personality traits (Moayed et al., 2006; Seigne et al., 2007; Zapf & Einarsen, 2010), legitimate position (Aguino et al., 2001; Salin, 2003); bullies' roles (Rayner, 1997) and interpersonal phenomena (Einarsen et al., 2003). Leymann (1996) as cited in Botha (2008), asserts that personality is insignificant as a cause for bullying and that scholars could not establish a deeper relation between bullying and individual personality. Similar findings were reported by Balducci et al. (2011) that personality is not a sufficient factor for understanding bullying at work. Rather, there are other factors beyond personality that provide fertile ground for workplace bullying to occur such job demands, job resources and work stressors (Balducci et al., 2011). On the contrary, other studies consistently identified personality characteristics as an important reason for workplace bullying (see Bowling, Beehr, Bennett & Watson, 2010; Field, 2009). Individual related antecedents to bullying behaviour is discussed under two headings: target and bully characteristics (which relates to personality), and education and career.

3.5.1.1 Target and bully characteristics

An early study by Thylefors (1987) conceptualised the bully and the victims as embodying similarities in terms of narcissistic, authoritarian and mistrustful personality characteristics. Mostly however the targets of bullying are depicted as introverts, sensitive, conscientious, organised and submissive compared to the non-bullied employees (Coyne, Seigne & Randall, 2000). Bullies demonstrate masochism, sadism, narcissism, rivalry and envy (Cilliers, 2012; Kets de Vries, 2007; White, 2007). Aquino and Bradfield (2000) recognise both sides of the coin when it comes to the target's personality. They categorised the targets of bullying as being either cooperative and submissive personality types (inactive, insecure, rejected by peers, and unlikely to

defend themselves against proactive bullying attempts), or displaying a more provocative personality type (highly aggressive and likely to provoke attacks by others).

In order to examine and understand the target's personality traits in the bullying situation, studies argue that in many instances it is not simple for the targets to accept that their own behaviours might have contributed to the occurrence of bullying at work and the impact they are having on others (Branch, 2006; White, 2007). In most situations, individuals who are exposed to bullying are cooperative and submissive to avoid confrontation or conflict (Salin, 2008; White, 2007). Namie and Namie (2003), maintain that victims of bullying are cooperative and submissive to avoid confrontations and may even blame themselves. However, bullied employees who manage to deal with or cope with workplace bullying effectively are affirmed to be better at identifying and avoiding undesirable behaviours that may escalate to violence, conflict or another bullying situation in the work environment (Zapf & Gross, 2001). Zapf (1999) found that being too aggressive, having poor social skills and performing poorly were the reasons the targets believed they were bullied. Duffy et al. (2006) assert that aggressive people have difficult personalities and struggle to foresee the consequences of their actions. They are more susceptible to being bullied by others with the same difficult personalities. According to Von Bergen et al. (2006), it is common for an ordinary employee to be targeted by the bully usually using indirect threats to test whether the employees (old or new) could take jokes and be part of the group. Consequently, the indirect threats presented as jokes could be perceived as physical or psychological bullying.

Individuals regarded as perpetrators or bullies often take advantage of target weakness in performance or personality and make the target feel powerless (Einarsen et al., 2003). Bullies are able to adapt their inappropriate behaviour to an extent that they are not blamed as tormentor, transgressor, aggressor, harasser or perpetrator (Smit, 2014). Bullies are perceived to violate norms of courtesy or challenge others' social identities by expressing different opinions and when they feel vulnerable resort to hostile behaviour such as victimisation or violence (Aquino & Byron, 2002). Arsenio and Lemerise (2001), believe that bullies often lack ability in social reasoning and use aggression as an alternative means to obtain any resources they deem desirable and achieve psychological outcomes, even when it requires victimising and harming others. Field (1996) as cited in White (2007, p. 1) argues that a person who is unable to conform to the norms of courtesy and rules of the organisation, has an inability to embrace individual differences or tolerate minor frustrations and "has a tendency to act impulsively or recklessly, has an incapacity for forming stable relationships and fails to learn from past

experiences, however unpleasant". Field indicates lack of awareness, emotional control and self-esteem on the side of bullies (White, 2007).

Bullies' lack of awareness, emotional control and self-esteem (emotional intelligence) is a key factor for escalating workplace bullying (Zapf & Einarsen, 2010). Workplace bullying is a consequence of the bully's inability to acknowledge and take perspective of others (Parkins et al., 2006), leading to inconsistency in demands and deterioration in interpersonal relationships (Botha, 2008). Self-awareness, emotional control, self-esteem and empathy are aspects of emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995) implying that bullies may be prone to lower emotional intelligence. Randall (2003) argues that bullies continue to perceive themselves as being superior and powerful and demonstrate an inflated opinion of themselves. Crawford (1999, p. 90) argued that the bully behaves as the tyrant boss or leader and emphasise that

> ...tyrants depend on people giving up; feeling so demoralized that they cannot be bothered to fight. In the cycle of demoralisation, the doubts about oneself, one's motives, what course of action to take, undermines confidence. This plays into the tyrant's hands. They rely on the victim feeling that it is not worth bothering to take action.

This view reveals the individual's interpersonal dimension rather than the perspective of the individual's personality. Ferris, Zinko, Brouer, Buckley & Harvey (2007) caution that bullying behaviours can be used as a deliberate tactic by some individuals to influence others in a quest to accomplish personal and organisational goals.

Throughout the literature there is a consensus that the majority of bullies are in senior position and few are colleagues (Steinman, 2008; Namie & Namie, 2011). It is not uncommon that emotional blackmail is parallel to tactics or manipulation (Smit 2014) and can be considered another form of bullying (Mischke, 2012). For instance, Tehrani (2003) as cited in (Branch 2006) noted that when work relationships are perceived as undesirable, reprimanding an employee for poor performance, late-coming or petty issues such as passing a person without extending greetings may be interpreted as a hostile act, whereas targets of bullying might think that the bully's difficult personality was the reasons for them to be mistreated or bullied (Seigne, 1998). Therefore, it is important to understand both the target's reactions and bully's actions within context (Hoel & Salin, 2003).

3.5.2.2 Educational status and career

An individual's level of education and career were found to create circumstances in which individual employees are bullied. Studies in Canada (McKay, Arnold, Fratzl & Thomas, 2008), Finland (Vartia-Väänänen, 2013), New Zealand (Raskauskas, 2006), United Kingdom (Boynton, 2005) and Turkey (Farley & Sprigg, 2014) found that highly educated and cerebral people experience persistent and long-term workplace bullying more than their colleagues with lower entry qualification, irrespective of hierarchical level in organisations. Individual employees with higher levels of educational status have much more pressure to advance their career in a competitive environment than their counterparts with lower educational status (Farley & Sprigg, 2014).

On the contrary, in South Africa, Cunniff (2011) showed that individuals with lower education status and skills or no formal education experienced more frequent workplace bullying than their counterparts with higher education status and skills. Cunniff (2011) confirms Ortega et al.'s (2009) study in Norway, which found that those employees with lower educational status reported more long-term exposure to the prevalence of bullying than their colleagues with higher level of education and skills. However, Botha (2008) in South Africa contends that most career oriented and professional individuals have higher expectations on how they should be treated and appreciated at work. Once their career and professional expectations are frustrated, it may lead to deterioration in interpersonal relationships, inconsistency in demands and stress, and the main reasons for workplace bullying to rise (Botha, 2008). Similarly, Raskauskas (2006) in New Zealand found that when individuals' career expectations are frustrated, destructive behaviours are used as an alternative source of stimulation and may inflict bullying to affirm personal control. According to Zapf and Einarsen (2010), these alternative destructive behaviours may prompt some employees to conspire against one another or make conscious or unconscious decisions that will favour them personally, and as such bully others to protect their own position, sovereignty and dignity. Keim and McDermott (2010) maintain that conspiring against one another can lead some employees to emotional and physical distress, such as depression, anxiety, lack of appetite and insomnia, because they are on the receiving end.

Nonetheless, there is insufficient literature in South Africa linking educational status and career with the experience of workplace bullying, but the connection is not yet clear. Interestingly, studies assert that individuals who become targets of workplace bullying might be emotionally intelligent, resourceful, dependable, and thriving at work. The

implication is that these positive qualities make the bully feel inadequate, jealous and unable to work or relate well with others, thus anyone can become a target. The target and bully relationship is not straightforward to describe and individual characteristics are not a single cause of bullying. Rather, there are other factors or circumstances beyond beyond individual's control that provide fertile ground for overt or covert workplace bullying to occur. I agree with Steinman (2008) that everyone is capable of evil deeds, depending on the situation that confronts them. Conversely, everyone, regardless of levels, race, age or status, is a potential target and not immune to workplace bullying (Zoller, 2015). In addition to individual antecedents, pervasiveness of bullying by group is also seen as an antecedent of workplace bullying.

3.5.2 Group bullying

Group bullying in literature has been described as mobbing or ganging-up in the workplace and refers to bullying of an individual by a group in the workplace context (Adams, 1992; Leymann, 1996), through continuous malevolent actions such as gossip, rumour, public discrediting, isolation, unfounded accusations, humiliation, general harassment, emotional abuse and/or terror (Davenport et al., 2005; Koonin & Green, 2005). Undesirable group behaviours and other organisational social factors were considered to create a power imbalance conducive to workplace bullying experiences (see Branch et al., 2007a). Organisational social factors include the expectations, attitudes, beliefs and values, that group members establish and share (Schein, 1985) and are different from organisational standard beliefs and values (Ramsay, Troth & Branch, 2011). Generally, these organisational social factors are informal in the organisation and are conveyed to group members (Jerkins, 2014). When the target challenges or complains about these social factors he or she may be victimised or harassed (Leymann, 1996), or even become isolated when seeking assistance from group members (Hoel & Salin, 2003). A group in such a context can include a superior, a subordinate or a colleague, or a combination of all.

Group characteristics such as a competitive work environment (Bulutlar & Unler Oz, 2009; Hutchinson, Vickers, Jackson & Wilkens, 2006), internal competitions for resources and promotional prospects (Salin, 2003), envy and scapegoating or witch-hunting by dominant powerful group members (Coyne, Craig & Chong, 2004; Gravois, 2006), voracity and incompetent line managers or supervisors (Vartia, 2002 in Botha, 2008), conflicting rank and roles between two or more individuals (Heames, Harvey &

Treadway, 2006), interfering with work activities (Von Bergen et al., 2006), ethinicty (Fox & Stallworth, 2005) and increased diversity (Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Bond, 2004; Crawford, 1999), have found to be the sources of conflict, causing problems during interpersonal communication and the main potential circumstances that trigger group relevant workplace bullying.

Samnani and Singh (2012) noted that group bullying can lead to other cognisant or incognisant group members imitating the behaviour of the bully, for fear of being the next who will be targeted or feeling isolated by group. According to Heames et al. (2006), antisocial group behaviours which include direct bullying such as verbal abuse and possible violence or indirect bullying such as acts of sabotage and other organisational social factors are mimicked or adopted by employees as a tactics trying to "fit in" with diverse groups. Samnani and Singh (2012) and Heames et al. (2006) confirm social learning theory (Bandura, 1973), stating that less powerful or lower status people in the workgroup might mimic same [bullying] behaviour, especially if the [bullying] behaviour is perceived as rewarding. This supports the predictions of the social identity theory (Tajfel & Turner, 1979), that individuals become part of a group and act collectively with fellow group members to improve their social identity if there is chance of achievement or advancement, and if not they try to distance themselves from the group to be seen as an individual.

I concur with Luzio-Lockett (1995, p. 13), that

> ...the involvement of people within an organisation, people with different attitudes, values, and beliefs, seems to create a "natural" environment for conflicts to break out, as there will be "naturally" a difference of opinions, a competition for power and territoriality, jealousy, prejudice, envy, and problematic group dynamics and that these aspects are foundational to workplace bullying.

Understanding group members' acts is of great importance to understand whether bullying emerge of group norms or group lack of diversity embracement (Robinson & Bennett, 1997; Zapf, 1999). Having presented the individual and group level precursors to workplace bullying, the organisation also contains antecedents of workplace bullying.

3.5.3   Organisational antecedents

An organisation comprises of a macrocosm of people from diverse cultural backgrounds,

with different beliefs, backgrounds, attitudes and values. Organisations habitually present and influence the environment in which diverse people interact with one another vertically and horizontally, and such interaction, if not properly managed, allows them to exercise too much control over one another (Harvey, Treadway & Heames, 2006b). Harvey et al. (2006b) further noted that too much control over one another is a potential risk that could give rise to conflict, which may in turn escalate into workplace bullying.

Research suggests that bullying stems from three levels in an organisation, namely: micro-level individual personality characteristics (as discussed in previous section); meso-level departmental factors, such as team leader's, supervisor's or line manager's behaviour and macro-level environmental factors, such as organisational and societal attitude as a whole (Oade, 2009; Visagie et al., 2012). Thus, workplace bullying is a multifaceted phenomenon triggered by individual and group characteristics (Cilliers, 2012), toxic work environment and anti-social behaviours (Salin, 2008), work structures, processes and systems interacting together (Fox & Spector, 2005; Keashly & Harvey, 2006). The organisation does not 'bully' employees, but rather the organisational working and social environment legitimises the bullying behaviour to occur from the individual's (target or bully) perspectives (Salin & Hoel, 2010).

Workplace bullying is a major concern that appears to be tolerated or overlooked (Holt, 2004). The literature suggests that leadership and management style (Einarsen, Aasland & Skogstad, 2007), demoralising organisational climate (Baillien et al., 2009; Fox & Spector, 2005), work environment (Roscigno, Lopez & Hodson, 2009; Salin & Hoel, 2010), organisational policies, structure, processes and systems (Visagie et al., 2012), job design, role conflict and ambiguity (Avergold, 2009), and situational factors (Samnani & Singh, 2012; Smit, 2014) are the main causes allowing workplace bullying to infliltrate the organisation. Botha (2008, p. 222) in reference to Leymann (1996) maintains that workplace bullying "occurs in organisations that are not able to manage conflict and organise work adequately". Bullying in organisations happens for a specific reason, intentionally or unintentionally, to dominate the target directly or indirectly over time (Jerking, 2011).

Leadership and management style differ from organisation to organisation and are indicated and supported in the literature as a root cause of workplace bullying (Agtervold, 2009; Skogstad, Einarsen, Torsheim, Aasland & Hetland, 2007a). Mayhew et al. (2004) found the relationship between superior and subordinate can increase the possibilities of workplace bullying to occur. Hoel and Cooper (2000) as cited in Botha (2008) revealed

that 75 percent of bullies are senior and middle management with legitimate powers and their autocratic management styles in particular is a direct precursor of bullying. Leadership and management style, such as the autocratic or laissez-faire styles adopted by some line management, were branded antecedents of persistent workplace bullying (Salin, 2009; Skogstad et al., 2007a). In an organisation in which autocratic or laissez-faire styles are preferred, targets' voices are overruled by domineering decision making and bullies often are unprepared to resolve conflict through discussion (Hoel et al., 2010).

The autocratic or laissez-faire styles are showed in the literature to be the strongest cause of role conflict, role ambiguity and the perception of low-quality interpersonal treatment by the leader (Kelloway, Sivanathan, Francis & Barling, 2005; Skogstad et al., 2007a), and abuse of legitimate power (Botha, 2008), which in turn lead to workplace bullying. The role conflict, role ambiguity, low autonomy, high workload and a laissez faire leadership style have been found by several studies to give rise to workplace bullying (Agtervold & Mikkelsen, 2004; Hauge et al, 2007; McKay et al., 2008). Notelaers, Baillien, De Witte, Einarsen & Vermunt (2012), Balducci et al. (2011) and Ramsay et al. (2006) noted that job demands such as aspects of the job that require physical or psychological effort, work stressors such as tension and work uncertainty and their interplay cause conflict at work, which may make employees susceptible to short-or long-term workplace bullying. The implication of these styles is that they foster workplace bullying and increase the likelihood of bullies to get away or go unpunished. Furthermore, they could create a toxic environment in which individuals or group members might mimic bullying behaviours from others, perhaps leading to an increase in bullying (Samnani & Singh, 2012).

Namie and Namie (2011, p. 66) hold that line management often perpetuates workplace bullying "because they are either simply following orders from top or senior management to clean up the 'mess' in their departments or they think it is the right thing to do, i.e. an accepted management style". Salin (2003) stated that following top management orders and succumbing to pressure from management may be seen as an effective means of accomplishing tasks and encouraging workplace bullying. Ironside and Seifert (2003) noted that some employees often misuse the delegation from top management to bully others and justify their own actions as having acted in the best interest of the organisation. Cilliers (2012, p. 3) in reference to Rayner et al. (2002) and White (1999) agree with Ironside and Seifert's view and contend that at

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macro level systemic competition for power, privilege and status played out as an interpersonal and intergroup behavioural dynamic (on the meso level) between a bully and a victim, with valences to become involved in a process of testing and matching power against others to establish, enhance and protect a place in a system.

Botha (2008) and Lee, 2002 and Hoel and Cooper (2000) found that management practices and systems such as disciplinary and grievance procedures and outcomes, performance appraisals, promotion decisions, monetary awards and bonuses are a possible basis of workplace bullying. Salin (2003, p. 1224) stated that supervisors or line managers may perceive a talented professional and assertive employee "as a rival and a threat for their career progression and therefore may try to expel or sabotage the work performance of the subordinate or give lower score rating". This may lead to a situation in which other subordinates develop a lack of respect for superiors. It may further lead to high levels of anxiety in the organisation and job insecurity, which encourages workplace bullying (Cilliers, 2012; De Cuyper, Baillien & De Witte, 2009), therefore, workplace bullying is used as a means to satisfy some individual's own interest, "which may in turn be rewarded by the organisation through promotion" (Branch, 2006, p. 29). The destructive nature of organisational bullying systems were found to have a negative impact on individual employees' work, physical and emotional health (Stapley, 2006) and affective domains such as motivation and morale (see Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011). Gamian-Wilk (2013, p. 137), found that employees exposed to destructive nature of organisation bullying display "a lower level of compliance than their non-bullied counterparts, and were reluctant to agree to both task-related jobs and social requests, which invariably led to further bullying" and, eventually, they leave the organisation.

3.6   CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

Workplace bullying affects everyone in the organisation as a whole, relations with family members and friends and society at large. It is a problem that will not "just go away". It should not be seen merely as a moral issue or personality clash, or diversity issue, to mention a few, but rather as unethical behaviour and an occupational hazard that may cause short-term and long-term human emotional, physical and psychological harm with side effects and financial constraints for both employee and organisation. Many studies support this view and affirm that workplace bullying is immoral (Crowford, 1999), a violation or infringement of human rights and an unethical form of communication (Gilioli

et al., 2003; Marais-Steinman, 2003), that may produce toxic behaviour and cause severe physical and psychological sickness. Henceforth, bullying at places of work should be approached with caution because it is often not clear if it is being used as a singular or multidimensional strategy or to describe subtle types of behavioural patterns (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Branch, 2008). The potential benefits if an organisation effectively prevents and addresses workplace bullying include a more peaceful and productive workplace with better decision making, increased job satisfaction, higher quality work, less time lost to sick leave, less time lost to documentation and paperwork, higher staff retention, and a lower risk of legal action (Ismail, 2011; Namie & Namie 2009; Voss, Flodenius & Diderichsen, 2008).

In Chapter 4, which follows, I present the review of the literature on the HR practitioners in the organisation: the context for managing workplace bullying.

CHAPTER 4

HUMAN RESOURCE PRACTITIONERS IN THE ORGANISATION: THE CONTEXT FOR MANAGING WORKPLACE BULLYING

4.1   INTRODUCTION

The previous chapter provided a detailed literature review of workplace bullying behaviours, dynamics and related issues. As explicated in Chapter 1, HR practitioners play an increasingly important role in the organisation, since their practices support employee behaviour that is critical for accomplishing organisational processes and goals, with the HR function contributing to retaining employees as valuable assets (Abbott, Goosen & Coetzee, 2013; Du Plessis, Paine & Botha, 2012; Nel et al., 2011). However, HR practitioners face many obstacles in their attempt to address and prevent unacceptable and inappropriate workplace behaviour (Fox & Cowan, 2015), while simultaneously striving to maintain optimal employee relations (Dzansi, 2014; O'Brien & Linehan, 2014).

Despite the substantial literature on workplace bullying little is known about HR practitioners' role therein and their perspective of the bullying phenomenon in the organisation (Fox & Cowan, 2015). The overall purpose of this chapter is to discuss the HR practitioners' role in the organisation, how their function is relevant to managing workplace bullying situations effectively, and how certain dynamics in the organisation may affect their ability to do so. The chapter also aims to discuss how management should address the wellbeing of the HR practitioner and establish a work environment that is not conducive to bullying and that is empowering the HR practitioner and line managers to manage bullying situations. Bullying is actually the responsibility of the organisation (Cunniff & Mostert, 2012; Kumar et al., 2012; Namie & Namie 2009; Smit, 2014; Workplace Bullying Institute, 2010), and by implication that of top management, particularly preventing its occurrence as much as possible and enabling its fair and effective management.

I first provide an overview of the HR function, and HR's role and responsibility in the organisation. The dynamics underlying the HR practitioner's role in the organisation are discussed thereafter as a point of reference to highlight the challenges HR practitioners

face in managing bullying and its effect on their wellbeing in the workplace. Lastly, in this chapter I reflect on how workplace bullying can be addressed in the organisation to enable better management thereof.

4.2   THE HUMAN RESOURCE FUNCTION

Organisations cannot function without people, and HR is often regarded as the most important organic component of people management to meet desired organisational goals (Grobler, Warnich, Carrell, Elbert & Hatfield, 2012; Jackson, Schuler & Jiang, 2014). The HR department is regarded as a strategic partner that provides support to management, line managers and employees on all HR matters (Heizmann & Fox, 2017; Kleynhans et al., 2009; Jackson, Schuler & Jiang, 2014; Nel et al., 2011; Sheehan, De Cieri, Cooper & Shea, 2016). The main responsibility of HR departments is in overseeing HRM philosophies, managing people and developing organisational policies and procedures relevant to people management in alignment with government legislation (Bohlander & Snell, 2007; Jackson et al., 2014; Sparrow, 2013). HR responsibilities therefore include facilitation of the values that inform an organisation's management approach, people management and development, monitoring and evaluation of HRM practices, management of discipline, and employee relations. The HR department's responsibilities are typically charged to HR practitioners who play a key role in advising, supporting and ensuring health and employee wellness, enforcing organisational policies and putting procedures into practice (Sheehan et al., 2016).

It is evident from the literature that the HRM functions reside not only in the HR practitioner but also with the operational or line managers and supervisors, since they have to execute people management practices in the workplace (Currie, Gormley, Roche & Teague, 2016; Jackson et al., 2014). This implies that line managers or supervisors at all levels within the organisation should share in the HRM responsibility. Strydom (2008, p. 232) described HRM functions as involving "planning, organising, leading, motivating and controlling an organisation's human resources". These management functions also enable line managers to plan, recruit, select, train, develop, remunerate and retain employees to ensure that the organisation's goals are achieved (Aswathappa, 2005). This means that HR practitioners no longer have sole responsibility to guide and manage employee behaviour, motivation and satisfaction, but share this responsibility with line managers since they are in constant and direct contact with the employees and best understand their area of responsibility and related issues. Terhalle (2009) and Purcell

and Hutchinson (2007) argue that line managers play an important role in influencing employee attitudes and behaviours by the way in which they translate the designed HRM policies and procedures into practice. Therefore, it is logical to define line managers as the operational heads who manage a group of employees on a day-to-day basis and who are responsible for performing HRM activities at the operational level (Nehles, Riemsdijk, Van Kok & Looise, 2006). However the focus here remains that of the HR practitioner.

Mindful of the discussion above and for the purpose of this study I use Dzansi's (2014, p. 11) definition of an HR department as a unit that provides "strategic and proactive management of employees in a manner that guarantees optimal fit between employees, their jobs and the organisation, so that employees can reach desired levels". Bearing in mind the purpose and role of the HR department in the organisation, next I turn to the role requirements of the HR practitioner within the organisation and specifically highlight how certain dynamics underlying the role of HR practitioners challenge their ability to manage workplace bullying.

4.3 HR PRACTITIONERS' ROLE DYNAMICS IN RELATION TO MANAGING WORKPLACE BULLYING

Literature shows that an HR practitioner is a person who works within the HR department of an organisation and is tasked with people management and development in order to enhance internal effectiveness and improve the organisation's competitiveness (Abbott et al., 2013; Davis, 2017; Galang & Osman, 2016; Jackson et al., 2014). According to Ulrich and Brockbank (2005), there are four key roles underlying the role of an HR practitioner, regardless of the organisation's size or nationality, namely, human capital developer, employee advocate, functional expert, and strategic partner. A fifth role, as leader of change, can be added (see Sheehan et al., 2016), because HR practitioners' focus is to allay employees' fears and ensure that any change process runs smoothly. According to Rennie (2003) and Ulrich and Brockbank (2005), HR practitioners' roles are multifaceted and integrated and must be held in balance with one another to achieve organisational outcomes and for them to perform them effectively. Similarly, HR practitioners' roles are complementary and help to achieve organisational outcomes (Galang & Osman, 2016), highlighting the strategic HR role in addressing workplace issues such as bullying in the organisational context (Fox & Cowan, 2015; Heizmann &

Fox, 2017). In their overall objective to maintain employee relations (Sheehan et al., 2016), HR practitioners have a variety of work activities[13] to perform if they are to effectively address employees' specific work-related issues[14] such as workplace bullying. To understand how the HR practitioner deals with difficult situations such as bullying in the workplace, this section focus on clarifying the challenging dynamics that underlie the multifaceted roles typically expected from an HR practitioner. The discussion highlights in particular the dynamics that potentially cause role conflict and emotional labour for the HR practitioner. Next, the influence of line management is argued as an important dynamic in understanding the challenges faced by HR practitioners in their day-to-day functioning. An autocratic management style in the context of the low power position of the HR practitioner and the absence of a bullying policy is presented thereafter, as further dynamics challenging the HR practitioner's competence to address bullying in the workplace. The last dynamic highlighted here is how employees' expectations and perceptions of fairness are directed at the HR practitioner.

4.3.1   Role conflict and emotional labour

Jamrog and Overholt (2004) noted that management often expects HR practitioners to go beyond their normal day-to-day administrative services and provide expertise on how to resolve difficult workplace issues, leading to role conflict or other negative work-related consequences for the HR practitioner. In the light of HR practitioners, role conflict can be described "in terms of the dimensions of congruency-incongruency or compatibility-incompatibility in the requirements of the role, where congruency or compatibility is judged relative to a set of expectations" (Sheehan et al., 2016, p. 357). Applying this definition to HR practitioners' multifaceted work and role expectations (O'Brien & Linehan, 2014; Sheehan et al., 2016), Du Plessis et al. (2012, p. 17) contend that any "person performing HR roles need to be equipped with distinct capabilities that support the expectations, challenges and requirements of their roles and responsibilities".

The HR practitioners' role is complicated by them having different constituencies to serve, namely, the employees, line managers and top management, each with unique and frequently conflicting expectations and power differences. To navigate the 'power

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[13] See Chapter 1 section 1.1

[14] Ibid.

differences' was found to affect the quality of employees, HR practitioners and top-line management relationships, adding to HR practitioners' role conflict (Heizmann & Fox, 2017). Having different constituencies to serve, create role conflict and ambiguity for the HR practitioner (Sheehan et al., 2016), because of the competing demands by top management, line managers and employees, which Ulrich and Brockbank (2005) and Gratton and Truss (2003) maintain should rather be consistent and coherent with each other if they are to add value to the organisation. HR practitioners also have to protect the organisation from litigation and bad reputation, with a responsibility to support the organisation's customers (Cascio & Aguinis, 2008; Gerard et al., 2010; Jerkins, 2011; Lewis & Rayner, 2003) which is a further constituency expectation they serve. According to O'Brien and Linehan (2014), the complex duality and paradox underlying the HR practitioner's role stem from serving different stakeholder demands, creating emotional challenges in their daily functioning that are often ignored. The HR practitioners' role is therefore complicated by them having different constituencies to which they have to account, with conflicting expectations, having the potential to impact negatively on their ability to perform at work, on their overall emotions, health, wellbeing, and career goals. It should be noted that the idea of wellbeing is discussed under heading 4.4 "management of workplace bullying in the organisation", to be discussed below. I now discuss emotions underlying HR practitioners' role.

Emotions in the workplace and HR practitioners' role seem interlinked, particularly taking into account the different constituencies HR practitioners have to serve. Different organisations' constituencies operate through their thoughts and feelings and are expected to regulate their emotions during interactions (Grandey & Melloy, 2017), while at the same time their emotions affect the HR practitioner's roles and feelings (O'Brien & Linehan, 2014). The term 'emotions in the workplace' refers to a positive or negative event, experience or occurrence that is associated with states of feeling that result in a subjective experience, cognitive processes and expressive behaviour, with physical and psychological changes that influence behaviour (Daniel, 2011; Schacter, Gilbert, Wegner & Hood, 2011; Hochschild, 1983; Myers, 2004). Positive emotions (either from personal life or workplace) have beneficial effects on the working relations, creativity, productivity, wellbeing and increases in team spirit (Ouzouni, 2016). Negative emotions have the opposite effect, such as the absence of willingness to work together. Poor working relations and the lack of guidance or support are possible causes of conflicting roles and expectations, stress, frustration and aggressive behaviour (Grandey & Melloy, 2017; Ouzouni, 2016).

Building on Hochschild (1983, 1993), O'Brien and Linehan (2014) make a distinction between 'emotion work' and 'emotional labour' underlying the role of an HR practitioner. The former describes people's "everyday interactions to create a publicly observable facial and bodily display", while the latter defines a process of management within the organisational context and "occurs when rules and guidelines defining the appropriate display of feelings and expressions dictate an outward response that conflicts with the emotion felt inside" (O'Brien & Linehan, 2014, p. 1259). HR practitioners are expected to manage and regulate stakeholders' emotions and at the same time encourage self-regulation, that is, feelings and expression, and abide by the emotional display rules and guidelines of their roles, which are sometimes contradictory. Sideman and Grandey (in Grandey & Melloy, 2017) noted that when employees responsible for mediation and resolution management interacted with hostile employees the requirement to regulate emotions decreased work satisfaction and performance, compared with employees whose emotion regulation was under personal control. Achieving emotional balance is a challenging pursuit for the HR practitioners, putting pressure on them to abide by emotion display requirements or to display a wide variety of emotions, depending on the particular situation (O'Brien & Linehan, 2014). This view demonstrates how emotional labour may influence and add to HR practitioners' role conflict and dilemmas in addressing and managing work-related issues such as workplace bullying. Grandey and Melloy (2017, p. 894) further explain that the "purposes of emotion regulation are reduction of subjective distress and reduction in the frequency of unacceptable emotion related behaviours", gaining social support and cooperation.

The influence of emotional labour is argued as critical, *inter alia*, to the HR practitioner's role and wellbeing as well as to an organisation's success (O'Brien & Linehan, 2014). Given the nature of HR practitioners' role, a low power position in organisations and the emotion engendering the duality and paradox they face, emotional labour (i.e., management of emotional expression and feeling) is a piece of puzzle missing in HR practitioners day-to-day requirements and functioning. Despite the paucity of research on the emotional challenges inherent in HR roles, I agree with O'Brien and Linehan's view that management of feeling and emotional expression is a useful approach that seems to be applicable to different constituencies, regardless of demographics, diversity, levels or status in handling the role conflict and ambiguity that arise out of the duality, and is even an important aspect of HR practitioners' role in achieving emotional balance.

People who work in an environment characterised by the conflicting expectations of employer and employee, extends the challenging effect of emotional labour and can

result in higher absenteeism and staff turnover, high medical or insurance costs (Duffy & Sperry, 2007; Keashly & Harvey, 2006; Lewis & Orford, 2005), and reduced promotional opportunities and professional status (Namie & Namie, 2011). The HR practitioners' role in addressing employees' wellbeing-related issues, such as workplace bullying, is thus challenged, in particular due to role conflict emanating from different and often paradoxical expectations.

4.3.2   The influence of line management

Generally, most organisations' policies and procedures charge the line managers or supervisors with the responsibility of handling an employee's complaint because they are at the frontline of their departments. As such, Currie et al. (2016) emphasise the need for higher involvement of line managers in managing workplace conflict. The managers may however be reluctant to deal with employee complaints from the onset and are frequently unprepared to resolve complaints such as bullying (Hoel et al., 2010). Moreover, the bullying situation may involve line managers themselves (Branch et al., 2013; Einarsen et al., 2011). Heizmann and Fox (2017) argue, and as McGregor and Budeli (2010) highlight, some line managers or supervisors fail to operationalise or act consistently on the consequences of relevant bullying policies and procedures, with which they are familiar. According to the Heizmann and Fox (2017) and McGregor and Budeli (2010) the probability of such inaction or inconsistent action may increase when the bullying situation involves one or more persons in powerful positions or who are related to powerful individuals. This can potentially contribute to the bullied employee's complaints being minimised, criticised or reframed as conflict, and to be ascribed to a personality clash or performance issue by line managers or supervisors (Aquino & Thau, 2009; Einarsen et al., 2003; Zapf et al., 2003).

Several scholars of workplace bullying argue that line managers often deliberately construe the bullying allegation as a management problem, conflict, performance or personality conflicts, amongst others, rather than acknowledging that it is workplace bullying, thus diverting the issue away from reality (Branch et al., 2013; Bulutlar & Oz, 2009; Einarsen et al., 2011; Namie & Namie, 2011; Samnani & Singh 2012). The dilemma caused by line managers being involved in bullying implies that it is important for management to ensure that the line managers or supervisors collectively support HR practitioners (Davis, 2017), as HR departments require line managers' contribution to the management of people and the achievement of organisational goals (Grobler et al.,

2012; Heizmann & Fox, 2017). When line managers and HR practitioners execute their functions collectively it can enhance employees' wellbeing, working relations and performance as well as the organisation's profitability. However, a lack of line managers' support can, *inter alia*, reduce HR practitioners' effectiveness and add to conflict in dealing with organisational issues such as bullying (Currie et al., 2016; Dzansi, 2014).

4.3.3   Management style and the power position of HR practitioners

An autocratic and domineering management style has been reported as either tolerating or ignoring workplace bullying, regarding it as a scandal not to be spoken about (Agtervold, 2009; Hoel et al., 2010; Skogstad et al., 2007). The key components of management style[15] are attitudes and behaviours, including: what a manager says; how he or she says it; the example set; the body language; and the general conduct and demeanour (CMI, 2015). An autocratic style is, for example, evident when management push HR practitioners to implement fair or unfair decisions without taking into account the HR practitioner's voice or opinion (Namie & Namie, 2011). Perry and Kulik (2008) examined management decisions operationalised by the HR practitioners in organisations and found that they had a negative effect on their role, effectiveness and wellbeing, often being delayed or not tailored to individual circumstances.

Adding to the challenge is the lack of adequate decision-making power in the organisation to manage differential expectations. Looking at the HR department as a strategic business partner and taking a rational approach to managing the organisation's most valued assets, there is a general premise that HR practitioners have as much power as top management to resolve all employees' work-related problems (Namie & Lutgen-Sandvik, 2010; Salin, 2008; Sheehan et al., 2016). HR practitioners' decisions however have to be ratified by top management to achieve their mandated role of providing excellent quality services and maintain a safe work environment for employees (Cowan, 2009; Nel et al., 2011; Swanepoel et al., 2008). Previous studies reported that, in dealing with most workplace issues, the HR practitioner inhabited a low power position in organisations (Bohlander & Snell, 2007; Namie & Namie, 2011) and HR is still negotiating its legitimacy in the organisational strategic value chain (Davis, 2017; Heizmann & Fox, 2017; Sheehan et al., 2016). In reality, HR departments merely

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[15] See Chapter three section 3.5.3

implement management decisions that influence the relationship between the organisation and its employees (Gregory, Harris, Armenakis & Shook, 2009; Grobler et al., 2012; Swanepoel et al., 2008). Due to a lack of decision-making authority and having to report to top or line management whilst empathetically addressing the employee's bullying complaint, further complicates the HR practitioner's role in addressing and handling workplace bullying.

4.3.4 The value of policy

Lutgen-Sandvik and Tracy (2012), Jenkins (2011) and Fox and Stallworth (2009) have asserted that in the absence of a clear policy legitimising the reality of workplace bullying and defining the role of the HR practitioner, line manager and senior management in the bullying context, it is difficult for the HR practitioner to address and manage workplace bullying. The organisation empowers the HR practitioner through its organisational policies governing specific areas of employee conduct and practices by guiding their actions in dealing with employee issues (Bolander & Snell, 2007; Galang & Osman, 2016). For example, some organisations may have policies that address physical violence in the workplace, with bullying behaviour being strictly defined and with clear guidance on the disciplinary actions to which offenders should be subjected. The organisational policy gives the HR practitioner the authority to address and deal with the behaviour according to tangible rules (Namie & Lutgen-Sandvik, 2010; Namie, 2013; Salin, 2009). Without a policy or other work-related response strategies to guide action HR practitioners have little authority to deal with counterproductive behaviours (Fox & Cowan, 2015), therefore it is essential to develop formal policies to deal with bullying in the workplace, "as it threatens the physical and psychological health and wellbeing" of not only HR practitioners, but also of the employees and the organisation for which they work (Smit, 2014, p. 13). Whether the policy on workplace bullying should be integrated with or separated from other HR policies remains contested terrain[16]. Workplace bullying is a multidimensional problem and it is generally in employees' best interest that "their employers put preventative measures in place to ensure fair and dignified treatment at work with a guarantee that complaints will be dealt with fairly and speedily" (Yamada, 2004, p. 482).

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[16] See chapter 7 section 7.4 (6).

4.3.5 Employees' expectations of fairness

The term 'fairness' is largely used in the literature to explain a subjective construct which captures the common expression of the social structure (Jerkins 2011), while 'justice' is used in more specific descriptions when unfairness occurs (Esterhuizen & Martins 2008; Poole, 2007). In an organisational context the construct of justice has been defined as the manner in which employees perceive workplace procedures, interactions and outcomes to be fair in nature (Baldwin, 2006) or the just and fair manner in which organisational management treat their employees (Greenberg & Cropanzano, 2001). In this regard, the terms are used interchangeably in this thesis, highlighting principles of equity.

As a guiding principle, that of equity coined by Fayol (1917) focuses on fairness and justice, in support of which Adams (1963) found that people compare their inputs and outcomes against perceived ones of others. These views posit that people strive for fairness and justice in their social and employment environments. When an employee perceives inequity and injustice or a state of distress, he or she may withdraw emotionally, physically and psychologically (Adams, 1963; 1965), leading to lower performance or reduction in quality of work (Al-Zawahreh & Al-Madi, 2012), lower job satisfaction (Arnold, 2005), increase in absenteeism and even resignation (Greenberg, 1999; Moses, 2000). However, others (such as the HR practitioner) act to correct the perceived injustice to restore equity (Adams, 1965) and address the grievance an employee may have in order to retain and restore him/her to the required level of motivation and performance.

In the context of the HR practitioner's roles, when employees notice that they have been treated unfairly by either their colleagues or superiors they expect the HR practitioners to intervene to ensure fairness and justice (Fox & Cowan, 2015). Employees expect HR practitioners to care for and champion their needs in the organisation (O'Brien & Linehan, 2014). As a result, aggrieved (by bullying circumstances) employee(s) become impatient and frustrated, and in turn vent their frustration on HR practitioners, a situation that can lead to HR practitioners being perceived as worsening the situation or being partisan. A complainant is more likely to find the outcomes fair if the conflict management and disciplinary and grievance process followed are perceived to be impartial (Farndale, Hope-Hailey & Kelliher, 2010; Matlala, 2011). HR practitioners play a major role in employees' perceived fairness of outcomes in the organisation, therefore, fairness and justice in the workplace is important for the employees to feel dignified, respected and

protected. Such employee expectations, when also in the context of the other dynamics discussed above, exacerbate the HR practitioner's capability to manage workplace bullying in an effective manner.

Having explicated the dynamics underlying the role of the HR practitioners and how these challenge their ability to address workplace bullying, I now reflect on wellbeing as an important contributor to HR practitioners' overall sense of happiness about their work role, career and their organisation as a whole.

4.4   HR PRACTITIONERS' WELLBEING AT WORK

Work or roles have long been recognised as "having both positive and negative influences on employees' health and wellbeing" (Litchfield, Cooper, Hancock & Watt, 2016, p. 2). HR practitioners play a key role in supporting management creating the conditions that promote a healthy and productive working environment (Donaldson-Feilder & Lewis, 2016) and support people-focused behaviour for high performing organisations (Houghton, 2016). The HR practitioners' role dynamics and functions in relation to managing workplace bullying as outlined above all have potentially damaging effects on their wellbeing. Implementing HR practices to address and manage organisational issues such as workplace bullying "has sometimes resulted in work intensification without providing HR practitioners with the resources to cope with" (Grote & Guest, 2017, p. 24). Resources can be any means perceived by an HR practitioner to help accomplish an end or goal (Halbesleben, Neveu, Paustian-Underdahl & Westman, 2014). An organisation's resources enable HR practitioners to successfully execute their roles and functions, and to achieve their goals as a way of enhancing their wellbeing and capacity to perform effectively (see Nielsen et al., 2017).

The quality of employees' psychological, physical and emotional health at work has been described as happiness or wellbeing (Howard, 2013; Jeffrey, Mahony, Michaelson & Abdallah, 2014; Litchfield et al., 2016), with happiness referring to "the meaning and purpose of life, the whole aim and ending of human existence" (Aristotle in Howard, 2013, p. 1). Therefore, work and a happy life are generally good ingredients for healthy working relations, satisfaction with work and organisational profitability (Grote & Guest, 2017; Howard, 2013; Jeffrey et al., 2014; Litchfield et al., 2016; Nzonzo, 2017). The HR practitioners' quality of health, sense of purpose, happiness at work and positive interaction with their work roles (Grote & Guest, 2017; Jeffrey et al., 2014; Litchfield et al., 2016; Nzonzo, 2017) should be seen as critical in fulfilling the multiplicity of their roles

effectively.

There are various antecedents, drivers and interventions of wellbeing, and from the literature review these aspects are essential in understanding employees' wellbeing that may benefit the line managers, HR practitioners and organisation to promote a psychologically healthy workplace and foster collaboration with different constituencies.

Several studies maintain that wellbeing in the organisation is influenced positively or negatively by organisational factors and individual characteristics (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007; Biggio & Cortese, 2013; Day & Randell, 2014; Grant, Christianson & Price, 2007; Grote & Guest, 2017; Litchfield et al., 2016; Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2012; Schaufeli, Bakker & Van Rhenen, 2009; Van de Voorde, Paauwe & Van Veldhoven, 2016; Warr, 2007). An integrated analysis of these studies reveals the following antecedents:

- Positive organisational factors can include working relations climate, role clarity, respect and flexibility, clarity and strategy sharing, supportive cultures, supportive management and colleagues, organisational functioning, transparency and exchange of information, and work-life balance. Positive discipline such as counselling should be applied for improved psychological wellbeing.
- Positive individual characteristics include positive individual attitude, collaborative relationships, transparency in communication between colleagues, empathic communication, control over own work, openness towards the new challenges or roles, leadership, management of difficult situations and conflicts, self-motivation and energy, knowing how to defuse tense situations, valuing differences and socio-emotional skills.
- The negative factors and characteristics include employees' lack of control over their own work, role ambiguity, lack of support from colleagues, communication breakdown, organisational climate, absenteeism, aggression, distress, conflict and bullying.

These organisational factors and individual characteristics illustrate the value and importance of wellbeing practices (IIP, 2014) and can assist in investigating perceptions of wellbeing among the employees across all tiers in order to provide useful monitoring to the HR department and instigate organisational change (Biggio & Cortese, 2013). Jeffrey et al. (2014) explain that people who achieve good standards of wellbeing at work are likely to be more creative and loyal, relate well with others, be more productive, and manage work-related problems more effectively than individuals with poor standards of

wellbeing at work. In this regard, both the organisation and the employees benefit, thus having mutual gains from an HRM perspective. The mutual gains perspective is a key component of wellbeing (Böckerman, 2015; Howard, 2013; Nielsen et al., 2017; Ogbonnaya, Daniels, Connolly & Van Veldhoven, 2017; Van de Voorde et al., 2012), meaning that wellbeing of an organisation and the wellbeing of its employees are inextricably linked (Litchfield et al., 2016). Understanding of these antecedents influencing HR practitioners' wellbeing could be of great importance and beneficial to the organisation's management in the construction of wellbeing practices. It may furthermore be beneficial to enable line managers and HR practitioners in particular to address and manage bullying situations, improve and sustain a state that allows all different constituencies to thrive and flourish.

For the purpose of this study, I define 'wellbeing' as a positive interaction between the factors and characteristics of the employees, management and HR practitioners, and those of the organisational context within which they operate. It is characterised by optimal physical health, psychological health and social functioning (Biggio & Cortese, 2013; Böckerman, 2015; Jeffrey et al., 2014; Jorgensen, Nel & Roux, 2013; Maynard, Mathieu, Gilson, O'Boyle & Cigularov, 2013; Miller & Suff, 2016; Mininni, Manuti, Scardigno & Rubino, 2010; Nielsen et al., 2017; Nzonzo, 2017). An integrated analysis of this definition reveals four tenets of wellbeing:

(a) Psychological and physical health, such as happiness, 'feeling good', joy and job satisfaction;
(b) Personal resources such as living healthily, self-confidence, resilience, optimism, self-esteem, creativity and career development to enable the individual to cope with the demands of the job and perform well.
(c) Organisational context, such as material conditions, management style, position of power, job design, diversity and inclusion, culture, social interactions between management and employees, social value of their work and valuing difference.
(d) Social functioning such as to be autonomous, competent, a quality exchange of information and interaction with others within the workplace, dignity and respect, and involvement in decision-making.

Figure 4.1 presents the foundational tenets of wellbeing impacting on HR practitioners and organisation. The following figure is adapted from (Miller & Suff, 2016, p. 17).
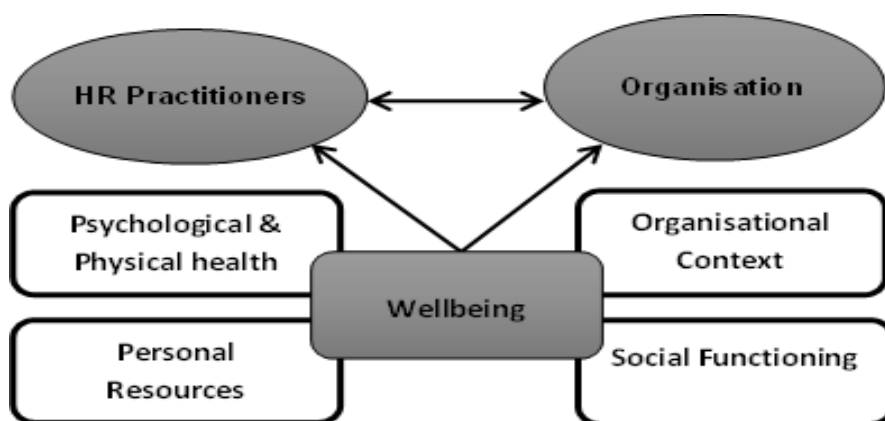
Figure 4.1. Foundational tenets of wellbeing.

These basic tenets together impact on HR practitioners' wellbeing and comprise a flourishing work environment and organisation outcomes (Jeffrey et al., 2014; Nielsen et al., 2017; Nzonzo, 2017). Nzonzo (2017) integrated four basic tenets of wellbeing identified above and classified them into two drivers, namely, *exogenous* (external sources) and *endogenous* (inherent internal source). These have direct consequences for HR practitioners' physical, emotional, psychological and behavioural wellbeing, as well as productivity, performance and organisational outcomes (see Nzonzo, 2017). The *exogenous drivers* can include: "policies and regulations, occupational, workplace environment and social health, while *endogenous drivers* include emotional, physical, spiritual and psychological health" (Nzonzo, 2017, p. 37).

The antecedents and drivers identified above play a significant role in creating a healthy organisational context and determining employees' positive wellbeing, such as better working relations with colleagues, higher performance, job satisfaction; organisational commitment, work engagement, retention and sense of purpose (Bailey et al., 2015; Houghton, 2016; Litchfield et al., 2016; Nielsen et al., 2017), reduced absenteeism and tiredness, and positive psychological climate (Colling, 2013; Houghton, 2016; Shuck & Reio, 2014), employee-manager cooperation, employee involvement in decision-making, role clarification and career prospects (Beer, Boselie & Brewster, 2015; Böckerman, 2015; Grote & Guest, 2017). Numerous studies have shown that failure to address employees' wellbeing can result in induced stress, emotional exhaustion and absenteeism (Böckerman, 2015; Nielsen et al., 2017; Redman, 2015), dissatisfaction, anxiety, depression, negative attitudes and behaviour (Grote & Guest, 2017), tiredness, reduced trust, lower performance, an in ability to work together (collaborative relationships) and to respond to tense situations (Houghton, 2016; Nzonzo, 2017).

The improvement of wellbeing in the workplace could strengthen the HR practitioners' attitudes to flourish and enable them to take pride in their roles within organisation. As Litchfield et al. (2016) and Jeffrey et al. (2014) argue, putting wellbeing at the heart of the organisation's people agenda enables employees at all levels to be more effective in problem-solving and increases employees' propensity to be cooperative and collaborative and have a positive overall experience of work. Litchfield et al.'s (2016) and Jeffrey et al.'s (2014) views could be beneficial for the HR practitioner's and line managers' relationship in addressing and managing workplace bullying.

Next, I conclude this chapter with a discussion on how workplace bullying can be addressed in the organisation to establish a work environment not conducive to bullying but empowering the HR practitioner and line managers to manage bullying situations.

4.5   MANAGEMENT OF WORKPLACE BULLYING IN THE ORGANISATION

Organisations differ in the way they respond to specific work-related issues, depending on what they believe is the right way and their ability to do so. Any counterproductive behaviour, such as workplace conflict or bullying, is considered bad for organisations and needs to be kept to a minimum (Hauge et al., 2010; Paludi, 2015). The management of counterproductive behaviour such as bullying in the workplace cannot be "fully operationalised without considering HR functions, their interrelationships with other tiers of management in an organisation to which it is inextricably bound" (Jackson et al., 2014, p. 4). The interdependencies link and bind employees, line managers and the HR function to the internal work environment in which they are embedded (Denise et al., 2016; Jackson et al., 2014). The line managers are faced with the challenge of, *inter alia*, ensuring fair conflict management and disciplinary and grievance proceedings for positive interaction between themselves, their subordinates and the HR practitioners in particular.

Studies conducted in various countries, such as South Africa (Botha, 2008; Cunniff & Momberg, 2011; Mostert, 2012; Rothmann & Rothmann, 2006; Le Roux et al., 2010; Smit 2014; Steinman, 2009; Von Bergen et al., 2006), Zimbabwe (Awoniyi & Ndlovu, 2014), Nigeria (Owoyemi, 2010, 2012), Australia (Caponecchia & Wyatt, 2007; Jerkins 2011; McCarthy, Mayhew, Barker & Sheehan, 2003); Belgium (Baillien et al., 2011), the United Kingdom (Heizmann & Fox, 2017; Rayner & McIvor, 2008), Finland (Salin, 2009), Germany (Zapf & Einarsen, 2010), Norway (Einarsen, 2006, 2011) and the USA (Fox & Cowan, 2015; Glendinng, 2001; Namie & Namie, 2015) produced similar findings

regarding the main organisational problems in addressing workplace bullying. An integrated analysis of these studies reveals that:

- In many cases, line managers or superiors were aware of the policy and procedures to follow, but not implementing them consistently or not being properly trained on conflict-resolution and a lack of appropriate conflict-resolution skills for line managers was found to pervade bullying.
- There was no specific policy to address workplace bullying.
- Employees tasked with dealing with workplace bullying complaints were powerless in such complex situations.
- Line managers lack trust in the competence of HR practitioners, which affects the quality of line management and HR relationships.

Problems highlighted challenge the HR practitioner's role and ability to handle workplace bullying and often cause them to be perceived as supporting or protecting the bully, thus making the situation worse.

The purpose of the section is to present recommendations from literature as to how management can ensure a bully-free workplace. The following sections explore support for a greater focus on HR practitioners' wellbeing, management of workplace conflict in dealing with organisational issues such as bullying; and the training of line managers and HR practitioners to understand, manage and address workplace bullying effectively.

4.5.1 Management of wellbeing in the workplace

Employees' wellbeing and wellness activities are integrated into the responsibility of organisation management in a quest to maximise potential and reduce the negative workplace issues (Bailey et al., 2015; Biggio & Cortese, 2013; Houghton, 2016; Nzonzo, 2017). Grote & Guest (2017) found that HR practices based on enhancing employees' abilities, motivation and opportunity to contribute, can lead to positive organisational outcomes such as perceived fairness, collaboration between line managers and their subordinates, trust in employees and enhanced wellbeing. Similarly, Nzonzo (2017) and Page & Vella-Brodrick (2012) explain that employees engage positively and work much better with different people in the organisation when they have a sense of personal wellbeing, supporting structures and resources, thus benefitting organisational functioning. Therefore, it is important to ensure that organisations' line managers engender HR practitioners' wellbeing, which serves to help HR practitioners achieve their work goals and reduce manifestation of negative behaviours (Howard, 2013). I concur

with Biggio and Cortese (2013, p. 11) that wellbeing in the workplace requires a bottom-up and top-down approach, and could be

> ...promoted not only from above through objective action by management, for example, the promotion of organisational welfare policies, but also from below, through the transformation of individual traits and behaviours that are manifested in people's activities.

Therefore, empowered, motivated, supported and healthier (physically and psychologically) HR practitioners could engage and perform their roles exceptionally in managing work-related issues or acts that manifest in bullying.

There is a growing body of evidence to show which interventions can be adopted to influence wellbeing at work. Some studies agreed on the interventions that support employees, top-line management and HR practitioners in particular to develop and implement interventions that engender employee health, work behaviour, wellbeing and effective people management practices (Biggio & Cortese, 2013; Donaldson-Feilder & Lewis, 2016; Page & Vella-Brodrick, 2012; Nzonzo, 2017). The wellbeing interventions are associated with a set of HR policies and practices to enhance wellbeing and focus directly on a more positive work relationship (Biggio & Cortese, 2013; Fox & Cowan, 2015; Heizmann & Fox, 2017), rendering HR practitioners' wellbeing as an important issue in addressing workplace issues such as bullying in the organisational context. An integrated analysis of these studies reveals that organisations should foster wellbeing related policies and practices that:

(a) promote a supportive organisational culture where there is open dialogue, respect, recognition for all, and fair and consistent handling of conflict and problems;

(b) provide a long-term management and leadership development programme that uses a range of different methodologies;

(c) provide continuous education and training (e.g., on self-efficacy) for employees at all levels; self-efficacy can build and sustain a constructive collaboration and collegial working relationships between employees across three tiers of management;

(d) encourage an organisational culture that fosters senior managers to be role models and lead by example, thus enhancing job satisfaction and improving performance;

(e) identify and use employee character strengths, leading to increases in wellbeing

through intentional, individual effort or greater self-esteem; and

(f) provide health and counselling centres aimed at improving proactive adaptation to the workplace.

HR practitioners are the vital link between different constituencies in the organisation, and line managers also are pivotal in shaping their subordinates' work behaviour and bringing people management policies to life (Miller & Suff, 2016). Miller and Suff (2016) assert that without the support and continuing commitment of line managers to inspire and address work-related issues, mutual benefits of wellbeing is unlikely to be achieved. Therefore, there is motivation for the organisation's management to encourage line managers to play their part in optimising employees' positive behavioural capacities and making healthier workplaces that provide a competitive advantage.

4.5.2   Distinctive approaches to address and manage workplace conflict

They are various approaches to address and manage workplace conflict in dealing with organisational issues such as workplace bullying. These approaches have been highlighted as having a major influence in minimising conflict, harassment or bullying, and a positive impact on enhancing employee wellbeing, working relations, willingness to work together, commitment and performance (Budd & Colvin, 2014; Currie et al., 2016; Godard, 2014; Lipsky, Avgar, Lamare & Gupta, 2014; Purcell, 2014). Building on various workplace conflict management approaches in the literature, Currie et al. (2016, pp. 8-13) described four distinctive approaches that delineate between and prioritise particular sets of workplace conflict management and resolution practices:

1. The adoption of a strategic approach to conflict management practices. This approach involves the diffusion of innovative alternative dispute resolution practices. The alternative dispute resolution innovations should be vertically and horizontally consistent with other conflict resolution practices and sets of HR functions and practices (Lipsky et al., 2014).

2. Review of conflict management-resolution procedures and practices. The approach aims to foster top management to strategically be innovative and view any workplace counterproductive behaviours or acts as bad and deleterious for organisational wellbeing, manager-employee-HR relationships and performance (Currie et al., 2016).

3. Line managers should play a stronger role in supporting the HR department in

solving work-related problems informally. The idea of informal conflict management support such as mentoring and coaching, allows the organisation to use formal conflict management procedures sparingly (Budd & Colvin, 2014). The use of informal conflict management has the effect of deterring different constituencies if they are engaging in counterproductive behaviours or acts (Currie et al., 2016). The involvement of line managers in conflict management implies that it is important for them to receive formal training in conflict management and resolution to perform their role effectively. This approach makes HR functions more strategic in an orientation, ensuring that the line managers become strategic supporting partners to HR practitioners and vice versa. This view is supported by Heizmann and Fox (2017), who argue that line managers across tiers of management should take more responsibility for implementing HRM practices, to manage their people better and get most out of them.

4. Prevent the incidence of deleterious organisational issues such as bullying or conflict largely by attempting to socialise it out of the organisation. This approach involves fostering a psychological alignment between employees at all levels at work, and leads to internalising the mission and values, rules and procedures of the organisation (see Currie et al., 2016; Godard, 2014). The strategy is to cultivate a positive attachment, commitment, collaboration, respect and working relations between the top-line management, their subordinates and HR in particular so that any counterproductive behaviour such as workplace bullying is considered foreign in everyday organisational life (Currie et al., 2016; Godard, 2014; Purcell, 2014).

4.5.3 Training as strategy in addressing and managing workplace bullying

Training interventions to address workplace bullying should, however, not be limited to HR practitioners (which are the focus of this study), but should embrace line management in organisations. The line management interact with employees on a continual basis and have a key problem-solving role to play in diligently assessing the wellbeing of their employees, offering empathetic and confidential support (Currie et al., 2016; Haughton, 2015), and discouraging workplace bullying activities (Barrow, 2012). Currie et al. (2016) explain that training line managers and their supervisors in problem-solving management will provide them with several opportunities:

(1) to be good listeners and communicators and even to help their subordinates develop their communication skills and competences;

(2) to identify whether employees are unhappy with any aspects of the organisation or whether they are encountering other workplace problems;

(3) to understand the strengths and weaknesses of the organisation and its employees, thus sense-making;

(4) to assess and explore all possible solutions and/or early interventions to a problem; and

(5) to act in a manner that encourages trust, communication and cooperation of those involved in the conflict and HR practitioners in particular.

With regard to trust, Heizmann and Fox (2017) maintain that trust and respect are important elements in strengthening line managers' and HR practitioners' ability to perform problem-solving roles effectively as strategic partners.

Conflict resolution, sensitivity diversity management, coaching and mentoring and emotional intelligence training, amongst others, could enable line managers or supervisors to take appropriate steps and reasonable actions to both prevent bullying and manage complaints of workplace bullying fairly and promptly (Fox & Stallworth, 2009; Namie & Namie, 2011; Salin, 2009). Training the line managers and their superiors was found to be important in increasing self-confidence and cognitive ability (Kim & Glomb, 2010), and improving their emotional intelligence (Einarsen et al., 2011; Salin, 2008) when dealing with workplace bullying issues. Training as part of strategy to improve line management's understanding to manage bullying situations places HR functions in a comfortable position and enhances the HR practitioner's role, wellbeing and ability to handle workplace bullying.

The HR practitioners can be trained, reskilled, authorised and supported by management to take punitive rather than restorative measures (Salin, 2009). This stance could send a strong message that negative behaviours or acts cannot be tolerated, but addressed systemically, regardless of the employee's position, level, or status. Some studies have affirmed that total management commitment of a bullying-free environment support punitive disciplinary action that can deter line managers from viewing workplace bullying complaints not as conflicts or personality issues but rather as violations of employee health and safety rights (Gonzalez, 2012; Jerkins, 2011; Marais-Steinman, 2003; Winefield et al., 2010). Ferris (2004) refers to this approach as a 'do no evil' approach that can demonstrate dignity and respect for all employees in the organisation, thus an

HR practitioner's role could be enhanced and strengthened to prevent and stop workplace bullying, harassment or unwanted behaviours. Dignity and respect for employees and their sense of fair treatment, according to Dzansi (2014) and Grobler et al. (2012), could collectively contribute to wellbeing, positive working relations, improved productivity and better reputation.

Additionally, Fox and Cowan (2015) noted that the use of the workplace bullying checklist is a useful diagnostic tool that corresponds with the experiences and HR practitioners' multiple roles in identifying and addressing workplace bullying. Fox and Cowan (2015) further argued that a workplace bullying checklist can also enable HR practitioners to "(a) have a voice in determining what kind of workplace bullying complaint is being alleged (occasional or pervasive bullying), (b) what types of behaviours are present, and (c) who is doing the bullying (peers, supervisors, clients or others) and determining if disciplinary action is needed if policies have been violated" (p. 117). The checklist can be used to examine how workplace bullying influences important individual outcomes such as health, and wellbeing issues such as stress, general happiness about work, burnout, satisfaction, turnover intention and commitment, and organisational outcomes such as productivity, quality of working relations and stakeholders service, reputation and costs associated with turnover, absenteeism, health care and potential litigation (see Fox & Cowan, 2015).

Wellbeing management, workplace conflict management and training interventions as articulated above, relate with social exchange theory (Blau, 1964; Blau & Scott, 1962; Homans 1961), so that when top-line management supports and safeguards the interest, welfare and wellbeing of their employees "through the HR practices they implement, different stakeholders reciprocate by improving their conduct and performance to benefit the organisation" (Galang & Osman, 2016, p. 1345). Similarly, Jackson et al. (2014) found that a zero counterproductive tolerant environment that embraces willingness to work together with other functions is one in which different stakeholders each with unique and opposite expectations, bloom and cross-pollinate in translating HR roles into action.

In sum, attention needs to be paid to HR practitioner's needs and employee differences as well. The insight gained from the HRM literature discussed above could serve as a reference point for top management to classify workplace bullying as an occupational health and safety issue[17], adopt strategic interventions to counteract workplace bullying

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[17] Because of the potential health consequence and harmful emotional, psychological and physical effects reported in chapter 3 section 3.4.5

and pay more attention to the HR practitioners' voice, wellbeing and nature of their job in handling workplace bullying. Since organisations differ in cause and consequences of workplace bullying behaviour, design and implementation of strategic interventions it is important to customise training in its specific needs (Bulutlar & Oz, 2009; Fox & Stallworth, 2009; Jerkins, 2011). Top management, line managers and HR practitioners should receive adequate training concerning their roles and responsibilities in relation to the policy and complaint procedures to the best interests of the organisation (Agtervold, 2009; Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Lutgen-Sandvik & Namie, 2009; Visagie et al., 2012). HR practitioners must not only be empowered but also reskilled with different capabilities to meet the considerable challenges, expectations and requirements of their evolving role because of different clients they serve and to show how their role is adding value to the employees and organisation (Du Plessis et al., 2012). The same applies to the line managers and employees in the organisation.

4.6   CONCLUSION AND SUMMARY

In this chapter I presented an overview of the role and function of the HR function and discussed the HR practitioners' role dynamics in the organisation and their wellbeing in the workplace. Lastly, I discussed how bullying can be addressed and managed to ensure a bullying free workplace. The HRM literature revealed that if top management and line managers do not collectively execute their roles and responsibilities properly to complement the HR practitioners' role, that is, address workplace bullying impartially and objectively, it would remain a critical challenge for the HR practitioners to handle workplace bullying effectively. The various clients' conflicting expectations have the potential to contribute to the onset of workplace bullying, potentially leading to an HR practitioner's distress, discomfort, physical and/or psychological harm. The chapter concludes by asserting that a clear description and assessment of both the HR practitioner's and line manager's roles, and fair and just management of employees in addressing organisational issues, such as workplace bullying, is critical to employees' and organisational wellbeing and success, and is likely to prompt positive attitudes and behaviour from the employees at all levels.

The following Chapter 5 reports on the findings of the study.

CHAPTER 5

FINDINGS

5.1   INTRODUCTION

Previous and recent literature recognised that workplace bullying has become a problem to organisations that is too costly to ignore (Ashforth, 1997; Coyne et al., 2000; Cunniff & Mostert, 2012; Einarsen et al., 2016; Marais-Steinman, 2003; Momberg, 2011; Namie & Namie 2009; Salin, 2003; Steinman, 2009; Yandrick, 1999). In this study I employed in-depth semi-structured interviews with nine HR practitioners to explore workplace bullying from the perspective of the HR practitioner. A constructive grounded theory analysis (cf. Charmaz, 2006) was applied in analysing the data following the process of open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). The purpose of this chapter is to report on the findings that resulted from the grounded theory analysis. The findings are proposed to be useful for understanding participants' perspectives on workplace bullying and its impact in the workplace. It sheds light on how organisations should place greater emphasis on addressing workplace bullying with the aim of establishing an organisational culture reflecting a zero tolerance of it.

From the data, four key themes related to the participants' accounts of workplace bullying experiences emerged, namely: The manifestation of workplace bullying, power relations as core element in the workplace bullying dynamic, the elements of workplace bullying and organisational context issues as other sources of the bullying dynamic. The four key themes were structured in a manner that provides in-depth insight into the participants' perspectives on workplace bullying, detailed below.

5.2   THEME 1: THE MANIFESTATION OF WORKPLACE BULLYING

The participants talked about multiple undesirable verbal and non-verbal cues from managers they considered to pervade the bullying dilemma in the workplace. These consisted of unfair treatment, withholding information, rumours or gossiping, undermining and humiliating others, teasing or joking, ostracism of employees, petty behaviour and intimidation behaviour. The data affirm that these behaviours are reflected on in the experiences of the participants. I labelled this theme manifestation of workplace bullying.

The sub-themes that emerged, pointed me to craft an understanding of how workplace bullying manifest in verbal and non-verbal ways and in the different forms of workplace bullying behaviour that were described by participants. As such the two sub-themes related to the manifestation of workplace bullying include verbal and non-verbal cues, and different forms of workplace bullying behaviour.

5.2.1   Verbal and non-verbal bullying cues

Screaming, yelling, offensive teasing, talking with a raised voice and arguing emerged from the data as verbal cues reflective of bullying behaviour and regarded by the participants as destructive spoken communication to the target. RP7, for example, said *"use of abusive and offensive language like fuck off or kaffir or stupid…"*. RP2 referred to *"talking to you harshly"* and RP3 identified bullying as when the *"person speaking to me too loudly looking at me"*. In the words of RP9, *"humiliating someone in meetings or in front of colleagues"* constituted bullying behaviour.

In reflecting on examples of bullying experiences, RP1 talked about the manner in which instructions were given, such as receiving instructions in a demeaning and authoritarian manner: *"the use of authoritative statements like you will do as I tell you, I am your manager"*. Similarly, RP4 gave an example of an authoritarian instruction style: *"I am your team leader and you will do as I told you"*. The participants experienced instructions in this manner as inconsiderate or disrespectful and regarded this as bullying. RP1 and RP6 also highlighted the use of offending names as a bullying issue. RP1 said: *"they call you 'mandlebe' which refers to big ears, 'Employment Equity employee' meaning disadvantaged employees employed in terms of equity in the workplace etc.".* RP6 stated *"I am big and people call me with funny names behind my back like 'udombolo' or 'spencer', meaning fat person and mostly by female employees".*

Non-verbal communication, such as tone of voice, facial expressions and dismissive body language emerged from the data as non-verbal cues of bullying. RP4 said: *"the way people pose talking"* and RP6: *"how they respond to the other person you can see and feel bullying".* RP1 said: *"the way a person stares at you".* From the data it emerged that bullying lay in the experience of how people said and did things and not always necessarily in the content. For example, in the view of RP2, *"bullying is in the transfer delivery…".* Similarly, RP7 stated: *"how people say things, sometimes is not what the person says but the person's facial expression".*

5.2.2   Different forms of workplace bullying behaviour

5.2.2.1 Unfair Treatment

In South Africa, unfair treatment at work refers to treating person(s) less favourably than others or differently, directly or indirectly, without obvious reason (Employment Equity Act, 1998). According to Thorpe (2008, p. 1), "unfair treatment at work makes more problems than it solves, breeds animosity and distrust among employees, and creates an extremely uncomfortable work environment". All research participants considered unfair treatment to be related to bullying, namely, undermining personal integrity, deliberate exclusion and withholding information. Two research participants mentioned two situations they felt constituted bullying, for example, RP4 said: "*where a team leader singled out one practitioner and treating her differently because she did not like her",* and RP7: *"he has no trust in these individuals, because they do not believe or feel things a team leader says are true always".*

Most research participants mentioned that: some management has a race dislike and will require them to do more than what they would normally have to do and extra work compare to others (i.e., White, Indian, black, male or female) person(s) or favoured person(s). For example, in the view of RP4, *"workload allocation is seen as being inconsistent with others in similar positions and some team leaders push work on employees instead of doing it themselves".* Whilst RP6 said: *"work is unfairly shared or distributed to them especially if you are a target or a person less speaking your mind".* RP6 further said they: "*purposely delay applications for training, leave or promotion",* and RP1: *"putting more pressure on the employees, like nit-picking" and* RP7 *"not giving credit where it is due".* For RP8, "*the worst part is when team leaders do not find ways to share and handle work fairly".* Unfair work allocation, impeding and impossible deadlines, disharmony in the workgroup, blocking applications for training and leave were identified by the participants as bullying behaviours.

5.2.2.2 Withholding Information

Withholding information refers to colleagues or superiors purposefully not disclosing information or resources needed by person(s) to do their job effectively and efficiently. In this case, participants spoke about withholding information as bullying. For example in the context of the story being told by RP7: *"the projects with beneficial opportunities or rewards they purposely withhold that information, availability and their expertise".* This demonstrates how painful the experience is of working in bullying situations and that

these participants in particular perceived themselves to be victims. RP1 said: *"they go to the person and say hey I could have helped with that if you had just asked",* and RP8: *"think that person was providing very passive obstacles to the completion of projects".* All research participants revealed diverse views on what constituted bullying behaviours, with four (i.e. RP1, RP4, RP7 and RP8) mentioning that colleague(s) and/ or supervisor withholding information is a bullying behaviour. Three (i.e. RP1, RP3 and RP5) reported the bullying style they had seen over the years had more to do with lack of sharing available information between white versus black and black versus black.

Two participants (i.e. RP4 and RP5) also emphasised that "*withholding of information is practised deliberately to make life hard for the target or others",* as stated by RP4 and RP5: "*withholding of information is done intentionally to sabotage and set you up for failure".* The majority of the participants linked withholding information with power play, for example RP8 stating that "*withholding of information is a tactic to prove that the target or others are less powerful than the bully".*

5.2.2.3 Rumour or gossip

Rumour or gossip occurs when person(s) purposefully spread unverified and irrelevant information about someone to hurt or damage a person's feelings or integrity or lead to person(s) feeling unhappy or angry. This was highlighted as a major form of bullying behaviour by participants. In response to what they considered bullying, two related similar events to explain rumours. RP4 said: "*if female colleague(s) continuously saw you with a handsome male colleague during lunch or coming to your work station, they send that information through emails and telephones spreading rumours and gossip".* On the other hand, RP6 said: *"if a colleague(s) saw you over the weekend may be in bizarre situation like your boyfriend or husband screaming at you in public or vomiting at a party – they make it their personal business and spreading rumours and gossip".* The question asked in this instance was what behaviours would be considered as bullying in the workplace and why? The bullying experiences reveal that talking behind someone's back, making him/her look bad or stupid, or undermining another person at work with peers is discourteous to their feelings and regarded as bullying. Such behaviours make the target feel undermined, humiliated and uncomfortable at work.

5.2.2.4 Undermining and humiliation

Undermining a person's confidence, integrity, reputation or profession, performance and

position was seen as bullying behaviours that were intended to weaken the target's ability to function optimally in the workplace. The participants stressed that such behaviours led them "*to look incompetent*" told by RP1, whilst RP5 would "*think that it set up for failure as if they did not know what they are doing or could not handle the job*". RP3 viewed undermining and humiliation to be worsened by "*poor communication and regard it as a bullying*". Further, RP3 said the victim might be "*held accountable for things communicated at the last minutes (e.g., two minutes before knock of time)*". RP6 pointed to being held responsible for: "*things that are not in their job description*," and RP7 highlighted that "*they have to do things for other people while others in the same position are let free*". In the view of RP8, "*making sarcastic comments behind participant back is humiliating and bullying*".

Additionally, RP6 stated that a "*colleague will agree to execute some of your work while on leave or absent from work and you find it pilling when you come back*". In this instance a colleague could be the bully and the participant the target. RP2 said "*some staff members submit incorrect filled and incomplete forms with completed forms and rush you to sign*" whilst for RP3, "*should you pick those incomplete or incorrect filled forms and confront them they will belittle, criticise, or ridicule you*".

5.2.2.5 Teasing or joking

One of the participants, RP2 explained that teasing "*can result to a positive (good) or negative (bad) behaviours. Positive behaviour - could involve friendly joking to uplift person mood or flirting, while negative behaviour irrespective of the intention it makes person to feel hurt and look foolish for example teasing about person appearance, weight, intellectuality, race, religion, affiliation, performance or other personal characteristics…*"

Asked what was considered bullying behaviour at work, RP1 talked about "*negative or hurting teasing or joking about person's marital status, race and performance*," about "*affiliation and intellectuality*" (RP6) and "*making fun of another person at their expense or jokes not seen as funny by the target*" (RP4). Most participants understood persistent teasing or telling other people of a person's past or current mistakes as bullying and described these behaviours as belittling and bullying. For example, RP6 reported that "*sometime they will make a joke and then depending on your reaction they will say, well I am just teasing, lighten up*".

5.2.2.6 Ostracism of employees

Ostracism of employee(s) and 'bottlenecking' were seen as bullying behaviour that was intended to push down a person or frustrate or isolate the target in the workplace. RP1 indicated that "*being ignored or avoided in meetings or at an official gathering and even going to lunch is bullying*". RP2 said: *"when you decide to be part of them they change a topic or ignore you or decide to leave at once - that is bullying because you feel isolated*". For RP6, *"ganging up against you can be bullying because you feel threatened and scared to face or oppose them"*. Also, two participants believed that "*shifting tasks with less or no benefits to them, is bullying"* (RP5). RP8 said: "*being excluded from work or task groups that could possibly help them to be recognised by the line manager or team leader is also bullying".*

Consistent with the above comments, RP7 stated that "*you can see bullying especially where the employees or line manager or team leader are trying to cut you off from others such that you do not have a way to express your concerns".* According to RP9, *"being excluded from people you work with or teamwork could have a stronger effect on your mental state",* whilst in the view of RP3, *"being excluded from work or task groups is a threat to self-esteem and that is bullying".*

5.2.2.7 Petty behaviour

The participants detailed heterogeneous petty behaviours such as showing little concern for participants, disrespect and impoliteness, self-serving, ignorance based on position, inflexibility, resentfulness, and belittling as possibly contributing to bullying. They were of the view that showing no respect in front of other practitioners, regardless of how they felt, was bullying. Through this study whilst exploring the participants' perspectives on bullying experiences, it became evident that in their addressing bullying and in performing other HR-related functions, HR practitioners in effect felt that they were becoming the targets of bullying themselves.

5.2.2.8 Intimidation

The participants underlined the following threatening behaviours as infusing bullying, namely consistent disapprovals, yelling, harsh threatening emails or short messages on the office table or door, aggressiveness, lack of respect, and promoting oneself as being powerful or important. RP1 described aggressive behaviour as "*being horrible or unkind*",

and RP4 said it *"gives a position of power over the other person and can be threatening"*. RP5 explained intimidation through aggressive behaviour as bullying, for example, "*when you are in a meeting with the line manager or team leader and you feel uncomfortable with the discussion or the way he or she is looking at you and want to leave but won't let you leave*".

The participants also pointed out that these behaviours inculcated fear and they had often found themselves in a position of not denying or defying their colleagues, line managers or team leaders' requests. For example, RP6 reflected that "*employees are intimidated on numerous occasions and have seen others being intimidated too by their colleagues or line managers or team leaders".* RP4 said: *"some co-employees are favoured by their superiors because of belonging to the same affiliation and that is bullying",* and RP8: *"some of superiors and co-employees are rude, like patronising and threatening employees to do certain things we do not feel comfortable with*". The concept of affiliation in this context of the study, referred to the trade union, religion, culture or sport fraternity.

RP6 reported: "*taking credits due to someone work or credit at the expense of other person, it hurt and annoys"; RP9: "slamming table or hall or throwing pages at person if not satisfied with my work"; RP5: "yelling and storming out of meeting"* and *"yelling and storming out of office"* (RP5). All these comments were regarded as bullying, because the intent was to intimidate and to get what he or she wanted. Interestingly, two participants described a situation in which "*their superiors often remind them of the fear of God and quote certain verses in the bible, and that is bullying because they do not share the same Christianity belief"* (RP7), whilst RP8 said*: "make them uncomfortable every time they have to meet to discuss work related issues".*

The findings are consistent with other literature that undesirable verbal and non-verbal cues are important features of workplace bullying (Einarsen, 2001; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2009; Peterson & Ray, 2006; Pietersen, 2007; Zapf & Einarsen, 2010).

To this end, I present power as a theme, highlighted by the participants as central to the bullying dynamic, demonstrating that the target or others are less powerful than the bully.

5.3   THEME 2: POWER RELATIONS

Power was highlighted as core element in the workplace bullying dynamic by the participants, all of whom concurred that bullying was a common phenomenon in their places of work and the bully target a person with lesser or no power than those of equal power. Mikkelsen and Einarsen (2001) and Zapf and Einarsen (2010) have argued that HR practitioners in general by virtue of their position are confrontational by nature in trying to understand reasons for bullying situations, but because of difference in power, participants tend to avoid confrontations or conflict with bullies, so as not to jeopardise their future work opportunities by complaining about bullying.

RP8 said: *"power is used to apply pressure to the people of the same or lower level"*, and the participants referred to line managers who often intimidated them by reminding them of a personal hierarchy status. For example, RP4 said: "*I am your team leader and you will do as I tell you".* RP6 indicated: *"continued behaviour of threatening individuals' job and deliberately making them feel on edge about the promotional prospects or whether their job are secured or not, is part of bullying tactic".* In other words, power encompasses fear tactics and power plays in terms of the participants.

Consistent with the above comments, four participants stated that they had to change jobs in the same organisation because of previous line managers who enjoyed bullying employees, yelling at them until he or she got the work done. In their perception, the reality was that their work was up to date. RP4 commented: *"this behaviour induced employees to take fake sick leaves just to avoid being pushed around by that line manager".* Therefore, lack of power exposes participants to perform certain actions or comply with requests with a fear for punishment by their team leader(s) or line manager(s). Additionally, lack of power and a fear for punishment compels participants not to stand up against the perpetrator or confront the bully or avoid conflict. Power disparity permeates bullying in the organisations and participants mentioned signifying aspects of power relationships, namely: job hierarchy or relationships with influential or powerful people, tenure, mobbing and experience and expertise. These power dynamics are presented in Figure 5.1 and elaborated on below as they emerged from the data, reflected on in the experiences of the participants.

5.3.1   Hierarchical position

All participants concurred that bullies used their power bestowed by the legitimate

position or rank to bully their targets. The majority said bullying had to do with having the power to reward or punish and bullying generally took place from top to lower level, not the opposite. Bullying seldom occurred against those on the same level. For example, few participants revealed unfair similar cases. RP4 said: *"if you are not a favourite to the line he or she ignore bullying complaints especially, if it involves one or more of them or their protégées",* whilst in the view of RP5: "*if an employee(s) questions lot of things in their department the line manager sometime ignore your complaints and that is bullying".* RP5 said: *"employee earning more salary than others on the same level think they have more power and they disrespect others".*

The majority of participants indicated that some line managers or HODs and colleagues ignored bullying symptoms or concerns at an early stage, until they reached an excruciating stage. For example, subsequently, RP7 said: *"when I try to intervene – I am told the investigation is underway and you will be informed of the outcome and you will never hear from them".* On the other hand*,* RP5 reported: *"if one or more of the line manager or protégées are bullied, they are very quick to take disciplinary actions against and ensure they chair disciplinary meeting".* Similarly, RP8 said: *"it becomes problematic to deal with and there is nothing we could do in the situation and that often makes us become victims and targets become bullies themselves".* Most participants mentioned that they had witnessed these bullying behaviours several times. For example RP7 said: *"bullies use the power and influence of their position to stay powerful and often they get away with bullying or negative behaviours".*

These views suggest that the bully or bullies' hierarchical power position could thwart how participants dealt with and managed the situation and also deepened intimidation of the target. The views explain why participants often become victims of bullying themselves, notably if the outcome favours the perpetrator. The target could perceive participants as siding with the perpetrator and label them incompetent, thus the participants' credibility and reputation are at stake.

5.3.2   Relationships with influential or powerful people

Most participants felt that bullies used their relationships with people in influential or powerful positions in their places of work, as a power platform to bully targets. RP2 commented: "*I know line managers and colleagues who had relationship or connections with management, top politicians and business leaders and these individuals believe*

they are untouchable, they criticise and often send harsh emails to targets". RP9 said: "these people lack respect and often defy their superiors' requests with no actions taken against them". RP6 said:

> a bullying colleague who always says you will do things my way or else I will tell so and so in the management. I know two colleagues who are close to some individual in the top management, they bully people around and even the line manager goes easy on them. They send harsh emails to targets or wait for a target to make a mistake and they snap at the target, and that is not fair we are here to build and assist each other.

However for RP8: "myself and other colleagues are careful in responding to such bullying colleague because he or she knows how to push the line manager's weight around". Hence, the participants thought this power demonstrated how some people used certain power affiliations and dimensions to their advantage, and this allowed bullying behaviour to surface in the workplace.

5.3.3 Tenure

In using tenure as a power platform to bully others, tenure refer to a person working for the same organisation or department for a longer time than the target. The participants reported that those with long service or years of service (tenure) on the position and in the organisations had the power to bully others. RP1 said: "*tenure is mostly used by those who do not have legitimate position power to bully",* and for RP9: "*these people never target their peers but new people as a way of proving themselves. For example if a new employee knows better than them, they feel threatened and keep telling the new employee, well we know better than you".* RP5 said: *"we know how things are done here and we have more institution experience than you".* RP4 said: *"this behaviour was more visible and developing since the merger of our institution with other institutions".* Thus, participants experienced bullying as a power dynamic and that power for them was defined by position and tenure.

5.3.4 Mobbing or ganging-up

According to Branch (2006) and Matthiesen and Einarsen (2004), mobbing makes the

bully or bullies more powerful if surrounded by others on their side and it might impact negatively on targets' self-esteem and social skills, producing social isolation, anger, poor sleeping patterns, nervousness, and disrupted wellbeing. Mobbing, or ganging-up on the target(s), was mentioned as a prevalent element to bulling by participants, who pointed out that employees came together into a group to victimise target(s). The group became a more powerful force that could gang up against anyone, including the team leader or line manager. RP5 talked about "*colleagues mobbing or bad mouthing other employee(s) and manipulating them to separate from other employees to join them and even their colleague friends*". Interestingly, RP6 said:

> *A day I will never forget when two colleagues invited everyone in their section to a lunch on the garden except her and afterwards other colleagues were making unwelcoming remarks like, 'she wears cheap make-up, clothes' and 'she looks like a Christmas tree'. I felt outcasted and the only way to be part of the group is to say weird or nasty stuff about people, which is not my style.*

5.3.5 Experience and expertise

Experience and expertise were seen by the participants as contributing to bullying behaviours, as the bullies used it as a power platform to bully others at work. They usually got away with it, as RP3 reported: *"these bullies always demonstrate good behaviour to gain trust and respect and strategically manipulate others to do work for them in order to achieve their work-related objectives".* RP5 said: *"bullies are often regarded as someone valuable in their departments or the institution because of their experience, credentials and expertise".* I asked a few participants to explain what they meant when they said "someone is valuable", to which RP6 responded, *"a person with lots of experience and highest qualifications".* RP9 said: "*person with highest qualifications, achievements and specialist in their field"*, and RP8: "*bullies typically get away with bullying because of their more experienced, have qualifications, achievements or credentials and so forth…".* In terms of RP2: *"bullies are people who are very important to lose because of their experience and expertise to generate more revenue for the institution".*

The question arose as to whether all people with qualifications, experience and expertise were bullies and used these strengths to bully? The answer was in the negative, based on the abovementioned comments as participants might refer to some employees on the

same level or higher position using the bullies' qualifications, experience and expertise to their strengths to bully others. Thus, bullies abused their hierarchical position to bully others.

Figure 5.1 illustrates a summary of themes one and two and their sub-themes. I labelled theme one, the manifestation of workplace bullying above the surface, due to the sub-themes emerging, characterised by forms or behaviours that are more easily witnessed, such as physical assault, verbal threats, offensive language, teasing, name-calling, behaviour or language that intimidates, humiliates, and negative facial expressions, body language, gossiping, ostracism, unfair treatment and so forth. The first sub-theme, "verbal and non-verbal behavioural cues" and the second sub-theme, "different forms of bullying behaviour", discussed above explains the behavioural cues in the organisation that enhances the participants' assessment and understanding the manifestation of workplace bullying behaviour. The verbal and non-verbal behavioural cues as well as the different forms of behaviour seem to be an overt manifestation of bullying behaviour and presents examples of how bullying is recognised directly or indirectly in the behaviour of people in the organisation.

From the data, I labelled theme two power as a key element in any bullying dynamic, describing it as something less tangible and observable. The power discrepancies that is fundamental to a bullying situation therefore manifests under the surface so to speak, as the unobservable or covert behavioural dynamics that underlie bullying. These covert power dynamics added to the HR practitioners' challenges when dealing with and managing bullying situations more effectively. Figure 5.1 present theme one, the manifestation of workplace bullying and theme two, power relations dynamics.
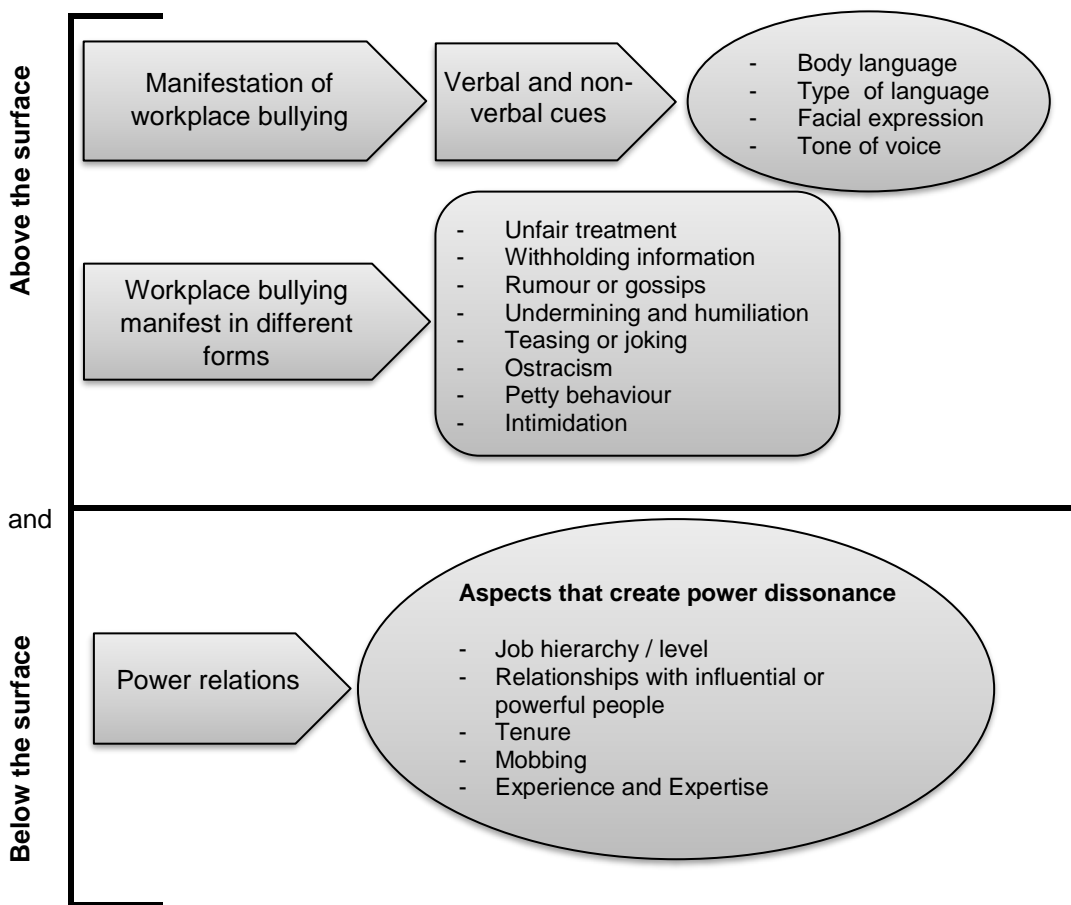
Figure 5.1. The manifestation of workplace bullying and power relations dynamics.

5.4   THEME 3: THE ELEMENTS OF WORKPLACE BULLYING

The participants noted several elements that might help them identify and understand bullying in the workplace, namely, bullying either as a matter of intent or as the experience of the target; persistent behaviour; negative effects, and third-party evidence. According to scholars, behaviour has to be purposefully demonstrated by the bully to create undesirable acts as a crucial factor of the phenomenon (Agtervold, 2007; Einarsen, Raknes & Matthiesen, 1994; Keashly & Jagatic 2003; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2005; Namie, 2007; Rayner et al., 2002; Salin & Hoel, 2010). The elements of workplace bullying are shown in Figure 5.2.

Figure 5.2 demonstrate the intent of the bully (A) and the target's perception (B) of workplace bullying, the effects of bullying on the individual, group and organisation (C), third-party evidence (D) and the level of occurrence evidence (E).

Figure 5.2. The elements of workplace bullying.

5.4.1 The bully's intent and the target's perspective or experience (A + B)

The intention of the bully and the target's perception of workplace bullying behaviours were recorded by all the participants as important elements instrumental in identifying a bullying situation. From the data, bullying behaviours can be recognised from two perspectives, namely, the bully's intent and the target's perspective or experience. These perspectives are also discussed in detail in chapter 6 section 6.4.3.

The participants made dissimilar comments regarding when a situation or act was regarded as bullying. For instance, RP1 commented: *"I focus on the purpose or intent"* and RP5 *"I think I know and can feel when they are bullying"*. RP4 said: *"well I looked for the intention though sometimes it is complicated to determine intentionality",* and RP2 stated, *"I think there is very thin line between bullying and perceived bullying, people should be very carefully to make distinctions about intended bullying behaviour or misconduct or personality traits and look on the intention of an act or situation before they can determine it as bullying".* For RP8: *"I do not think if we are given more workload or pressure or impossible demands so we can meet the deadlines, it makes it bullying,*

just the perception of the receiver but if they continuously repeat the same actions, then it can be regarded as bullying".

Most participants believe that bullying was purposefully used by the bully to maltreat and/or gain something. RP7 said that: *"the intention of the bully was to somehow mistreat or maltreat the intended person",* and for RP9: *"the intention of the bully was purposefully trying to hurt somebody and gain something".* For example, six participants shared a similar story of employees being bullied by their team leaders or line managers, RP7 *"felt the intent was deliberately to harm the employee and hold him or her back professionally".* RP1 and RP5 believed these bullying behaviours were *"deliberately done to intimidate and gain something out of them".* RP4 reported: *"such people are less confident of their worth and so bullying behaviour is a leeway for them to be noticed".* RP5 said: *"most bullies are preferred by the management and stay long on their positions or move around the departments"* and RP8 responded: *"bullies always want to be at the forefront of any project or team so they can bully others*".

The participants felt that any direct or indirect intentional bullying should be reported, investigated and addressed so corrective action can be taken. RP8 indicated: *"this process often requires the HR practitioner(s) to investigate and consult the witness to validate or confirm the alleged intention or perception".* This investigation will assist the participant(s) in determining whether a situation is bullying and if not they might recommend corrective action or disciplinary action. Based on the above comments it is challenging for the participant(s) to identify when a situation is bullying.

5.4.2 Negative destructive effects on individual, group and organisation

The majority of participants stressed that these bullying behaviours could have destructive effects on individual employee's psychological health, on staff synergy, morale, team effectiveness, employee and departmental performance. A bully or bullies often made sure that target(s) felt their presence. RP3 commented that: *"I feel uncomfortable around bullies".* RP4 said: *"I feel uncomfortable and unsafe around bully or bullies because anything could happen"* whilst for RP8: *"bullies make you feel afraid by inculcating fear in the workplace".* The negative effect of these behaviours on the target or to others impacts the distinction of behaviour as bullying behaviour, particularly if individual employee(s) begin to feel uncomfortable or emotionally disturbed as a result of the behaviour.

Four participants described how these destructive effects were experienced by some colleagues who were on par with work. RP4 said: "*their morale is low, they take leave very often (ie every week or month) and they now come to work and do less work and no longer do extra work for colleagues because their work is overlooked".* For RP6: *"they worry about coming to work and complain of chronic illness such as stress, eating disorder and insomnia",* and significantly, RP6 and PR9 said: *"some colleagues think of quitting work".* The majority of participants had lost valuable and experienced employees across sections through resignation due to unnoticed repeated bullying behaviours by other employees, team leaders or line managers. They experienced bullying as a frequent reality, harmful to the organisation with diversely damaging effects on individual employee wellbeing and performance. These bullying behaviours could hurt people if unnoticed, and slowly impair the organisation's culture by creating an unpleasant and unproductive work environment.

5.4.3 Third-party evidence

The participants were expected to investigate and confirm through interviewing and collecting the evidence with a third party or witnesses to determine if indeed bullying happened or not. RP7 stated that *"for this process to be successfully undertaken and completed thoroughly it depends, namely: on the tenure of a person in the institution, experience dealing with people and reading between the lines".* Yet as explained by RP8, *"witness is sometime nervous to come forward to confirm if bullying happened or if overheard others previously complained about the accuser for fear of being targeted by the bully".* The witness can be referred to as one or more persons other than the targets willingly to confirm the allegations.

Confirmation by witness or a third party plays a robust role in determining when a situation constituted bullying. On the other hand, RP8 pointed out: *"not all bullying situations require the witness or third party – you can talk to both targets and/or accused together or separately and let the bullying matter to rest".* RP5 said: *"I talk to the target and then the accused - depending on a situation I ask the accused to agree to at least call the target and apologise or invite them together to my office and resolve the matter".*

5.4.4 Level of occurrence

Level of occurrence can be referred to as the persistent repeated bullying behaviour occurring more than once by one or more persons. Participants believed that for behaviour to be considered bullying it needs to be persistent and vary according to the individual situation(s). Therefore, if it happens once and stops it cannot be regarded as bullying.

On how many times bullying behaviour(s) were recurring, participants reported that counting was not an appropriate way to identify and explain it. RP1 said: "*when you receive or hear more same complaints".* RP4 *"when you are regularly visited or hear same or other people complaining about the same person(s)".* RP5: *"the witness confirms what happened",* and RP7: *"others confirming they were treated the same way by the bully",* while RP2 said: *"some time it takes time to know and understand people or groups' moral standards to establish some of the situations as bullying".* RP7 and RP8 were entrusted to conduct investigations on staff grievances in their respective places of work and both emphasised that the consistent and continuous occurrence of bullying behaviour can help to identify and explain bullying. Participants repeated that for bullying behaviours to be considered bullying it had to happen *"frequently"* (RP5), *"often"* (RP3), *"everyday"* (RP4), *"ongoing"* (RP7, RP5), *"consistently"* (RP8), *"continuous"* (RP6) and *"now and again"* (RP1, RP2).

Most participants believed that whether this behaviour occurred from one person to another or to others, and no matter how small they seemed, it was repetitive, persistent or consistent and so made a person or people feel uncomfortable or terrified of the bully or bullies in the workplace. Thus, the participants did not quantify how often these behaviours occurred to be considered as bullying. In bullying situations there are often more than one person involved and there are other people knowing what is happening. However, bullying behaviours are considered bullying if they are experienced consistently and persistently.

5.5   THEME 4: ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT

Organisational context impacts on how workplace bullying is perceived and managed by participants (i.e. the HR practitioners) in their places of work. The majority of participants affirmed that all complaints that included bullying were given immediate attention and appropriate action was taken to correct and discourage any unpleasant behaviour that

could adversely affect employees' functioning in the workplace. RP7 said: *"we consult with the witnesses or explore parties' interaction and records in their department in order to determine if the situation was bullying".* The interviews however also made it clear that managing bullying situations was a difficult task and various aspects in the organisational context emerged from the data as being helpful or not to the HR practitioners in fulfilling their role. RP8 said: *"resolving a bullying issue is a mammoth and daunting task to complete. Because we have to consult and understand both parties involved (i.e. target and bully), and determine what the situation is, and if that situation warrants investigation, then starts the investigation".* I labelled this theme organisational context due to the sub-themes emerging, pointing me to craft an understanding of the aspects within the organisational context that added to the HR practitioner's difficulties in managing bullying situations and also those aspects that in fact assisted them and empowered them to fulfil the task more effectively. The first sub-theme, "issues and dilemmas in handling workplace bullying" discussed below, explain the contextual aspects in the organisation that enhances the participants' capability to deal with and manage workplace bullying. The second sub-theme discussed below pertain to the HR practitioner's role dynamics in the organisational context, and how these role dynamics establish a challenging context for the HR practitioner when dealing with bullying situations. This sub-theme is called "HR practitioners' role dynamics in the organisation". An understanding of these role dynamics made me more aware of the challenges HR practitioners face in particular when dealing with bullying situations and their need to be empowered by the organisation to fulfil their role.

5.5.1   Issues and dilemmas in handling workplace bullying

The participants emphasised several issues that had an influence on their role and which added to their dilemma in handling workplace bullying. The negative consequences of these issues often make them become victims of bullying themselves, yet when positively experienced, empowered them to manage bullying situations. Due to the overwhelming negative evidence in most participants' accounts in this regard, I phrased these issues mostly in a negative manner. The issues include: (a) bullying permeates the organisational culture; (b) bullying is perpetuated through management style, (c) bullying perpetuated through diversity, (d) bullying perpetuated through poor communication and (e) lack of policy on bullying. These issues and dilemmas are presented and discussed below.

5.5.1.1 Bullying permeates the organisational culture

The majority of participants reiterated that their organisational culture espoused humanity, consultation, and respect, but indirectly promoted bullying behaviours in the manner of instruction and management of employees. The majority of participants openly asserted that bullying is infused in the organisational culture as a way of doing things, a way of management and a way of establishing hierarchical operations. For instance, RP1 said: *"bullying is used as a strategy espoused in organisational culture and that culture originates from the top".* RP3: *"bullying is used as power to command a respect and get their personal or work objectives achieved, making it a continued bullying conduct".* RP8 felt *"bullying behaviours are features of an institution's culture and are twisted by those leading the departments and institution, because a culture is developed, endorsed and instructed by the top management. And this determines how their employees are managed".*

Surprisingly, some participants confirmed that they knew some individuals in the top management who seemed to have more power or influence than others at the top*.* RP3 said: *"these individuals meddle with every day-to-day business of departments and do as he/ she says or else…"* RP2 said: *"such individuals like get things done their way at the expense of others and you cannot defy or confront them because of their top position".* Consistent with these comments, most participants felt that their view of the organisational culture, allowing bully behaviour from management, put more strain on them when having to deal with and address bullying issues – to such an extent that they had no choice but to play along within the system. In this manner a bullying culture is perpetuated and extended across the departments by those entrusted to develop, approve and implement culture.

The participants felt that culture enabled bullying behaviour through power and intimidation, making it continuous. RP6 felt that *"bullying is important to note and should be addressed accordingly but the institutional culture seems to indirectly tolerate bullying behaviours*". Similarly, participants agreed that the organisational culture should protect employees against bad behaviour or conduct and provide bullies with remedies to correct or change their behaviours. Instead, the organisational culture allows bullies to get away with their intimidating behaviour at the expense of others and the bullies remain thinking that their behaviour is acceptable. When workplace bullying thus permeates the organisational culture, it creates a toxic work environment as an environment that often

harm the participants' wellbeing and an organisation's bottom line.

5.5.1.2 Bullying is perpetuated through management style

Management style "impacts" workplace bullying, as it can either enhance or hinder bullying. Of the participants who believed bullying is perpetuated through management style, RP4 said: *"bullying is a management style because during induction programmes and throughout the year we tell employees to follow the grievance structures to report any uncomfortable acts. They are told to firstly approach their immediate supervisors or line managers with any uncomfortable situation to resolve, then if not solved they should move to the next higher level of the grievance structure until all levels are exhausted".* Two participants from both organisations noted similar situations within which employees felt uncomfortable and intimidated when they had to follow the grievance procedure through management, especially because the alleged bullies were part of the grievance structure or close to their immediate superiors. Instead, target(s) approached participants face to face, by e-mail or telephone. RP4 said: *"they would sometimes request a meeting with both parties if the plaintiff feels comfortable or refer them back to their immediate line managers to resolve it".* Yet, as explained by RP5, plaintiffs frequently opt to drop their complaint because: *"the latter option often made employees to give up because of unwillingness of the line managers to resolve it or fear of becoming target"*.

The participants' experiences in bullying situations indicated that team leaders, line managers or supervisors were in most cases the perpetrators of bullying. RP4 said that: *"the majority of line managers prefer to work with certain race of employees than others and make it difficult for that other race to prosper in their department and that could make the affected race to quit their jobs".* RP6 said that: *"some black or Indian or white line managers make work life unbearable for some black employees and that is bullying".* RP9 said *"I was bullied several times by the line manager after refusing to sleep with him or let him touch my buttock. He is seductive and threaten my job if I speak – his superiors never believed me, they said I am sensitive and misconstrue him because the line manager is cheery to everyone, one superior advised me to keep quite or otherwise…".* In view of such comments, it seems that the team leader, line managers or supervisors allow an atmosphere in which participants or other employees felt antagonised, reluctant to exploit work opportunities because they fear unfair treatment and barriers erected against them.

Many of the participants concurred that it was the responsibility of the line managers or department leaders to address problems or issues such as bullying, with sober attention and also to work together with participants on an everyday basis. However, dealing with bullying issues or complaints at an early stage can help to halt it before it develops into something that could cause a very serious problem, in terms of the participants. RP7 commented: *"if this channel is paralysed or not active then a target would report a bullying situation to the relevant person to address or investigate"*. RP2 felt *"respectable or better line managers are the ones who make employees feel comfortable to approach them with any situations before they resort to HR"*. Schultz (2005) and Werner (2007) contend that line managers should foster harmony, communicate professionally and understand one another at work and adapt their management style to facilitate different situations such as bullying that people experience at work, and to react appropriately and with confidence. Thus, line managers are in a position to demonstrate a dignified management style and create a conducive organisational climate.

The majority of participants believed that most of the old line managers and some young ones were still applying old domineering management styles and their style conflicted with a democratic style which was supposed to be used to manage employees. RP8 commented: *"they hate to deal with bullying situations they rather postpone it or justify it as a misunderstanding or personality difference to get rid of it"*. Further, "*If you report a bully to the management or a person above, they tell you this matter will be investigated and then you never hear from them. Subsequently, this person gets away with it*" (RP4). In the literature, management styles such as authoritarian and laissez-faire are highlighted as a root cause of bullying in the workplace (Di Martino, Hoel & Cooper, 2003; Hoel & Salin, 2003). Authoritarian figures adopted bullying as a strategy to motivate employees, while management then do nothing to address bullying or worsen the situation when employees report being bullied (Lutgen-Sandvik & Sypher, 2009; Namie, 2007). Therefore, a laissez-faire style might be a problem that could distort perceptions about the intent and encourage bullying behaviour to continue.

In asking participants how management responded to bullying complaints, the majority of participants felt that they mostly seemed interested in quick solutions. RP4 stated: "*we are told to deal with it but how we get to the bottom of it, is not their business",* whilst RP5 said: *"management is not interested in what is happening on the ground, they are interested in quick solutions"*. RP3 believed: *"they are interested in quick solutions - who gets hurt in the process is none of their business, HR should deal with it."* RP1 said *"on paper they are committed… but practically they are not".* In one organisation some

participants reported that the management had been made aware of bullying situations by the trade unions but was dilatory in acting upon it. RP7 said: *"it depends on who you are, those in senior positions are treated differently and complaints against them are overlooked because of their status"*. RP9 said: *"in this institution I have witnessed several times some employees in management positions getting away with bullying, they excuse it as misunderstanding".* When HR practitioners do not feel supported and backed by management when dealing with bullying situations, they find their role difficult and challenging to fulfil and deduce the lack of support from management as a form of bullying, with themselves becoming its target. As such in their view, bullying is perpetuated through management's style.

5.5.1.3 Bullying perpetuated through diversity

Diversity is another organisational context issue which was seen to trigger bullying in the workplace by the participants. The majority felt diversity contributed to workplace bullying and this dynamic made it more difficult to deal with bullying. RP2 suggested some characteristics of diversity could result in indirect bullying, for example *"joking about a person or making that person look foolish in terms of the person's appearance, weight, intellectuality, race, religion, affiliation, performance or other important characteristics…"*. Also, RP2 said: *"bullying is another complicated issue because our institution comprises of people from diverse cultural or traditional backgrounds from all around the globe and this might conflict over time"*. RP8 said: "*lack of sharing available information between white versus black and black versus black contributes to workplace bullying"*.

RP5 said that *"diversity is another issue that contribute to bullying in our institutions because of inability of other employees to maintain trust and happiness over others",* while RP8 felt that "*some people because of their internal recognitions, achievements or educational status in the institution they develop annoying personalities and mislay their empathy".* Additionally*,* RP9 suggested that *"irrespective of rank or position, lack of respect and appreciation of individual differences at work deepen workplace bullying because some of the line managers or employees get carried away immediately they become members of bullying mob".*

The participants' accounts of their bullying experiences suggest that increased diversity dynamics commonly influence the prevalence and nature of bullying, making it very difficult for the HR practitioner to manage such situations.

5.5.1.4 Bullying perpetuated through poor communication

A few participants highlighted poor communication as perpetuating bullying in their workplace. For example, RP6 said: *"the way some colleagues speak to each other or another in the workplace – to some it is acceptable and to others not"*. RP6 said: *"a bullying colleague who always says you will do things my way or else I will tell so and so in the management"*. RP2 described bullying in fact as: *"when line managers and employees are unable to communicate constructively with each other"*. Consistent with RP2's comment, participants revealed that often targets approached them first with a bullying complaint instead of their immediate supervisor or line manager, due to the manager's unwillingness to resolve the problem. Significantly, RP8 asserted that: *"some bullies attended several trainings for example, on interpersonal skills to improve their communications and people management skills but still decide to act the other way"*. These responses suggest that the manner in which employees spoke to one another or others at work was not appropriate or encouraging and determined the participants' accounts of their bullying experiences. The manner of communication between colleagues, superiors and reports and between managers and their subordinates provides evidence of potential bullying behaviour (as suggested in theme 1). If such a manner of communication is allowed and regarded as acceptable in the organisation, it will perpetuate bullying and the experience of being bullied. In this manner workplace bullying was ascribed to poor communication by the participants.

5.5.1.5 Lack of workplace bullying policy

This study found that 100% of the participants were unaware of a bullying policy in their organisations, but a definition is crucial to enable all people in the workplace to understand what bullying is in terms of their organisations (Richards & Daley, 2003). According to Steinman in Cunniff and Mostert (2012, p. 15), "policies need to clearly identify the teams and staff members who drive the programmes as well as the reporting structures to enable employees to report on bullying".

A policy on workplace bullying can help the participants and top management to make impartial and informed decisions about bullying situations that are often difficult to prove objectively. Consistent with the abovementioned view I asked all participants to tell me about their organisations' policy to deal with bullying behaviours at work and how they interpreted and understood the policy. All participants however concurred that their organisations had no bullying policy to deal with or address workplace bullying, and that

there were no guidance within the existing HR policies available to address the handling of bullying situations. RP2 for instance indicated: "*I am not aware of bullying policy to the best of my knowledge and never saw it. The management sometimes use the harassment policy and/or code of conduct or the employee disciplinary code to address misconducts but with bullying problems these documents fail to address bullying objectively and often the decision taken are not fair*". RP8, who was entrusted to investigate employees' grievances, also stated that: "*top management thinks one policy can fix all the problems in the workplace. After I have learned about a number of bullying related incidences, I searched for the definitions of bullying and made recommendations to the senior management committee to amend and add certain terms to the harassment policy to include harassment part A and bullying part B. But the response I got from the management committee was negative*". As a result I decided to explore the matter further to determine what policies and procedures were available to HR practitioners to empower and direct them in managing bullying in their organisations. After interviews I asked and received HR policy documents from the participants and received permission and access from the HR departments to browse the intranet in both organisations. I could not find a specific policy addressing bullying nor did I find a reference to the issue of bullying in any of the HR policies I perused (see discussion on the harassment policy and the code of conduct below*). It even seemed to me that the HR practitioners were not aware of the importance and value that a bullying policy would provide them with, just because they did not have any experience of such guidance. RP2 told me that: "*I was aware of bullying incidences there and there but not knowing is growing at a fast pace in the institution but now as we talk I realise how perilous bullying can be to an employee and the need for the bullying awareness and policy*".

HR practitioners struggle to manage bullying situations as a result of a lack of formal guidance in the organisation, as there are no policy directions. RP4 explained his exasperation in this regard:

> *…no bullying policy, I handled bullying cases using the code of conduct guidelines and it worked once at an early stage face to face with two parties, but when the bullying behaviours became persistent and repetitive, the code of conduct could not be helpful. Because the accused's legal representative mentioned that the so called 'code of conduct' lacks substance to deal and address bullying. And when I report back to my seniors who insisted I use the code of conduct - which this piece of document is about respecting others and it must be revised, they took me for*

granted. I wish your study will make them realise how important it is to have a bullying policy.

RP6 confirmed the difficulties experienced due to a lack of policy: *"no bullying policy exists in this institution. All HR policies are on the intranet, such a policy is needed to address some of these behaviours because it make us uncomfortable each time I meet with these colleagues and employees do not stay long, they come and resign, sick of bullying attitudes that goes without punishment".* Most participants believed that the absence of a bullying policy or formal guidelines made it difficult to identify and handle bullying situations and that one was needed. RP8 explains: *"the problem is for example, if a bully employee is well acquainted with law interpretation, he/she will challenge the harassment policy in a court of law if fired or suspended but a lay employee who have no clue will accept the dismissal or suspension. We are here to ensure balance between an employer and employee, and this faces us with a huge challenge and a waste of institutional money for wrong decision taken".*

Interestingly, some of the participants seemed to be aware of bullying behaviours or what was needed to be incorporated in the bullying policy. For example, RP8 commented: *"the bullying policy should indicate steps to be taken against all persons from lower to top management levels accused of bullying activities and the protection for target and witness…".*

I requested and received HR policy documents from the participants and received permission and access from the HR departments to browse the intranet in both organisations to peruse and I analysed these meticulously. I analysed them paying attention to the harassment policy and the code of conduct as directed by the participants. I found that the harassment policy and code of conduct emphasise harassment and physical violence in the workplace as constituting a criminal offence but no reference was made in either documents to workplace bullying. Some excerpts from the harassment policy and the code of conduct are presented as follows:

Harassment was defined "a*s directly or indirectly engaging in conduct that the respondent knows or ought to know-*

(a) causes harm or inspires the reasonable belief that harm may be caused to the complainant or a related person by unreasonably-

(i) following, watching, pursuing or accosting of the complainant or a related person, or loitering outside of or near the building or place where the complainant or a related person resides, works, carries on business, studies or happens to be;

(ii) engaging in verbal, electronic or any other communication aimed at the complainant or a related person, by any means, whether or not conversation ensues; or

(iii) sending, delivering or causing the delivery of letters, telegrams, packages, facsimiles, electronic mail or other objects to the complainant or a related person or leaving them where they will be found by, given to, or brought to the attention of, the complainant or a related person; or

(b) amounts to sexual harassment of the complainant or a related person. Although harassment may be persistent occurrence, a single incident of harassment may also equally constitute harassment under this policy".

This definition is similar to that of the other research organisation, with the exclusion of subsection (b). In this definition I found one set of behaviour of bullying such as "verbal" but not specifying whether it constitutes verbal abuse or harassment. I also found in the code of conduct one set of bullying behaviours, such as "intimidation". Intimidation was defined *"as conduct by an employee with the intent to compel another person within the institution to act or not to act against that person's will"*. This definition is vague and does not specify which forms of intimidation are considered misconduct.

Surprisingly, in early January 2014, while navigating the intranet of both organisations so I could update after the December 2013 vacation I found that one had inserted a workplace bullying definition under the harassment policy and was approved towards the end of the year 2013: *"offensive, abusive, intimidating, malicious or insulting behaviour, abuse of power or unfair penal sanctions, that is targeted and/or persistent by a person who knows or ought reasonably to know that such attention and would make the recipient(s) experience fearful, a threat, humiliation or feel vulnerable, and which may which undermine the self-confidence of the receiver and/or cause him/her to suffer stress"*. I telephonically called three participants in the organisation to find out if they were aware of this new insertion. RP4 said: *"no, I am not aware of that",* and RP6: *"no, I am not".* RP2 said: *"yes, I was made aware in January 2014, my senior … called and briefed us all (line managers) and I think HR practitioners might be briefed probably this year, meaning 2014"*.

Looking at afore mentioned policies workplace bullying was not vividly expounded and these HR policies and codes of conduct cannot be affirmed to address or prevent bullying in the workplace because it does not provide clear alternatives in bullying situations. This explained why it is difficult to address and prevent bullying in both organisations. However, in one organisation they had begun with workplace bullying awareness since I discussed the study and conducted the interviews in May 2013, which indicated that they might develop a clear workplace bullying policy by the end of 2014.

Apart from the issues and dilemmas HR practitioners face within the organisational context, as discussed above as the first sub-theme of theme four, the HR practitioner's role dynamics also affect how they handle bullying in the organisation. This is discussed below as the second subtheme in theme four.

5.5.2 HR practitioners' role dynamics in the organisation

The participants' roles in the bullying situation are interlinked with the top, middle or lower management and the target in the bullying situation, as depicted in Figure 5.3.

Figure 5.3. Participants' roles dynamics

From the data emerged multiple roles HR practitioners perform in order to address and manage bullying in their places of works, which I have labelled: trustworthy listener, impartial investigator, management advisor and facilitator or enforcer of management decisions. Additionally, the majority of participants emphasised that their role is to manage employees' resources, to advise both employees and management and also to partner with line managers to ensure the smooth implementation of HR policies and practices. The relationships among and between the roles emerging from the data,

influenced how participants dealt with and managed bullying at work, and provided some understanding and explanation of the participants' role dilemma. Figure 5.4 categorises the different participants' roles that have emerged from data and these are discussed below.
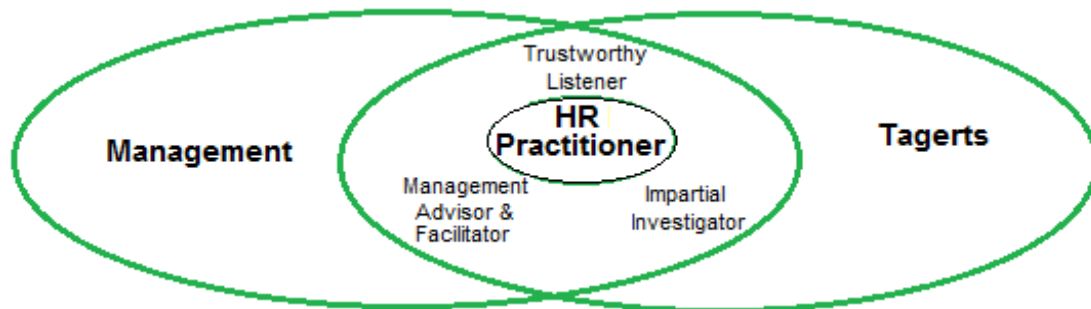
Figure 5.4. The HR practitioners' roles that have emerged from data.

The participants said that in dealing with a bullying complaint an employee must first lodge it with the line manager, after which it is brought to the attention of the HR practitioner. An HR practitioner is expected to be a trustworthy person, to act impartially, to determine if the situation warrants investigation (if the situation permits, then initiate investigation) and thereafter consult with management to advise further action. After further action has been decided, the HR practitioner acts as facilitator of the management decision. The HR practitioner's roles, as depicted in Figure 5.4, indicate the pressure to attend to sometimes mutually exclusive or opposing expectations and thus being torn between management and the targets.

5.5.2.1 Trustworthy listener

Some participants said that their role is to listen in a way that instils trust on the part of the employee who brings the complaint. It is however also important that the HR practitioner listens to all parties involved in a manner that will allow the parties involved to disclose as much information as possible. RP4 explains in this regard: *"sometimes a complainant prefers to talk and be comforted, and not acted upon - in this way I could get as much information as possible. But if the target opens a report file and agrees further I impartially consult with both parties and resolve a matter or refer the matter to another person entrusted to investigate".* RP1 also indicated that *"collecting as much information*

as possible while listening is very much important in order to determine if the matter should be reported or addressed on hand or investigated further". RP7 and RP8 were entrusted to investigate employee grievances. RP7 stated that "*I accurately listen and read, and compare the relationship of information gathered to other practitioners who previously dealt or investigated similar issue*" and RP8 said:

> "*this process demands skills to relate information, act impartially and maintain confidentiality, in this way I could gain trust of employees, take rightful informed actions and avoid a prolonged lawsuit. For example, if the alleged employee or complainant is your co-employee or a friend or someone close to us or anyone we know – we need to protect all employees and maintain confidentiality because if this is not handled truthfully it can ruin someone's reputation and ours too*".

5.5.2.2 Impartial investigator

Maintaining impartiality or objectivity in dealing or handling bullying situations, RP1 said: "*not taking sides is a point of departure, because people at work experience awful or deplorable events that could affect a person's feelings or emotions easily if not careful*". RP5 also emphasise impartiality as an essential part of the investigation: "*affording both parties the opportunity to state their side without judging either target(s) or accused*". Similarly RP7 commented: "*as an investigator being impartial or neutral it is expedient to detect and assess the gist of the situation because people will do anything or use any means available to defend themselves or others in order to skew your conclusion to their favour*". RP8 in particular emphases impartiality as essential because of the very subjective nature of the bullying experience:

> "*as an investigator you need to find the truth or get to the bottom of a problem because bullying is subjective and difficult to prove sometimes - some people at work will do anything to get a person out of their way for good and some because of their inferiority position they tend to support bad behaviours not because they want to, but for fear of reprisal if go against. However, some do support bad behaviours because they want to gain something*".

Unexpectedly, RP2 indicated that "*fairness in decision-making is not always practiced here, I have witnessed employees who were suspended or fired for wrong reasons*". RP4 "*in cases where senior employees or their favourite staff are involved decisions taken are biased*". Having to listen with empathy to the target whilst also having to respond to

management and serving the organisation's best interests, the HR practitioner finds him/herself in a difficult position to maintain impartiality. The emotional nature of interpersonal conflict is core to any bullying situation and it is difficult for the HR practitioner not to become involved. When not feeling supported, it is even more difficult to deal with the bullying situation to the extent that the HR practitioner run the risk of starting to feel victimised, responding impartially, as is evident in the reflection by RP8: *"maintaining impartiality in this institution is not always conceivable because if bullying involve subordinate(s) or just employees the line managers are quick to act in the best interest of the institutions but if it involves one or more of the middle or top management or their protégés they act otherwise or become a hyena in a sheep skin"*. These comments denote the role conflict or confusion that HR practitioners are frequently confronted with when having to address the bullying situation, leaving them to feel as if they too have become a target of being bullied by the organisation or by management.

5.5.2.3 Management advisor and facilitator of management decisions

The participants previously in their comments mentioned their role was to receive complaints and provide reliable undivided attention to the complainant(s), institute investigation should it be necessary, and submit a report to the management for further actions then facilitate them. HR practitioners are therefore also responsible to advise the management of the findings of their investigation. Management then takes decisions and delegates the decision to the HR practitioner to facilitate or enforce. The majority of participants reiterated that they had no last say in these situations as management has the decision making authority. Participants reflected that the lack of the HR practitioner's power to make decisions make them appear to be siding with the management in the eyes of targets - especially if actions or decisions went against the targets. Employees or targets expect the HR practitioners to help solve their problem, which is not always possible because participants do not have the authority to take certain decision regarding bullying. HR practitioners are only entrusted to provide fair advice and make sure all employees were comfortable and safe in their organisations. RP4 mentioned this with sadness on her face: *"very often targets complicate our role and they do not understand when you say I have played my part or I spoke with the accused and the accused is impolite or the problem is beyond me and I am now referring it to the next level. They feel frustrated or shuttered because they expected us to stop it just like that"*. Not being able to adhere to the expectations of complainants, whilst still retaining his/her trust is a very difficult situation for the HR practitioner.

Participants concurred that management (i.e., line managers to management) should deal with bullying because of the power entrusted to them and that the main task of the HR practitioner is in an advisory role. RP2 said: *"my role is to advise employees and the management based on formal documents or guidelines available and that's it"*. RP8 stated: *"my main role is to advise employees and the management based on formal guidelines available to them"*. However, when combined with a lack of formal guidelines, it becomes difficult to remain impartial and fair in the advice given, as RP7 stated "*above all, the absence of bullying policy made this role difficult because other HR policies available are vague to deal with bullying"*. Similarly, when not feeling supported by the organisation and by management RP4 asserted that "*in some situations where the management is biased or retributive and does not want to be seen as biased or retributive, the management see us not as advisors to them"*. Whilst RP9 said: "*on other situations which they do not implicate bullying, we are recognised as advisors to the management and the management heed our advice*".

In view of these findings, the participants felt that it was important for the **top management to trust and support** them and pay attention to their recommendations as this would strengthen participants' roles and empower them to deal with bullying situations. For example, RP8 commented: *"if they are able to use their position to influence an ordinary employee to refrain from bad behaviours – what stops them to apply it beyond"*. However, HR practitioners' level of authority does not allow them to give instructions or take decisions over their seniors or another person in the same rank or position as them - a common and consistent practice in organisations. According to Keashly and Jagatic (2003, p. 48), such power distribution was created and perpetuated by "a dominant top management-subordinate structure in the relationship".

In addition, two participants, RP7 and RP8 were entrusted to investigate employees' grievances, one noting that: *"availability of a bullying policy will give them power to deal with bullying situations and also leverage to hold top management accountable should they overstep the policy"* (RP8). Similarly*,* RP2, in a line management position, said that: *"I have powers to discipline employees who violate institutional policies but not to fire, firing is awarded by a senior management disciplinary committee after recommendations from the line managers and employee relations office"*. Later, after an interview, RP2 confirmed to me informally that he knew one bully who was a "*senior chap who was fired due to bullying or harassment related behaviours but the chap took the institution to court and the court ruled in favour of the chap because the institution could not produce any*

bullying policy or documents as evidence to support their decision. And this matter was kept secret and the senior chap was given a golden handshake, so a bullying policy is urgently needed to maintain a balance in the institution".

To this end, I present a summary of the main grounded theory themes and their sub-themes developed from empirical findings as shown in Table 5.1, to give the reader an opportunity to understand how this data analysis process unfolded.

Table 5.1

The main grounded theory themes and their sub-themes developed from empirical findings

	Theme 1: The manifestation of workplace bullying	Theme 2: Power relations	Theme 3: The elements of workplace bullying	Theme 4: Organisational context
Sub-themes	Verbal and non-verbal cues	Job hierarchy / level	Intent of the bully	Issues and dilemmas in handling workplace bullying
	Different forms of bullying behaviour	Relationships with influential or powerful people	Target's perception	HR practitioners' role dynamics in the organisation
		Tenure	Effects on individual, group and organisation	
		Mobbing or ganging-up	Third party evidence	
		Experience and expertise	Level of occurrence evidence	

5.6   CHAPTER SUMMARY

The findings of this study, suggest that participants were aware of bullying as a phenomenon and its existence in their organisations. In this chapter, themes and sub-themes related to workplace bullying were presented and discussed. I presented certain verbal and non-verbal behavioural cues which participants considered to display bullying and different forms of bullying behaviour was considered. Power relations was identified and considered a key element in any bullying dynamic, describing it though as something less tangible and observable. Several elements of workplace bullying that might assist the participants to assess and understand the manifestation of potential bullying situation in the workplace were also presented. Due to the fact that bullying is a subjective experience it is difficult to ascertain whether a complaint actually constitutes bullying. These elements include the intent of the bully and target's perception of workplace bullying; the effects on individual, group and organisation; third-party evidence and level of occurrence evidence; and can assist the HR practitioner to assess the extent of the bullying complaint.

Lastly, I described how the organisational context impacts on participants' roles in defining, understanding and handling workplace bullying in their organisations. HR practitioners considered workplace bullying to continue to permeate the organisational context which impacts on their role dynamics and establishes a challenging context for the HR practitioner when dealing with bullying. Due to the fact that HR practitioners' role is torn between management and targets, the challenges HR practitioners face in particular indicated their need to be empowered by the organisation to fulfil their roles.

"You can kill a person once, but, when you humiliate him/her,

you kill him/her many times over"

The Talmud

The next chapter will discuss these findings of the study themes in relation to the literature.

CHAPTER 6

TOWARDS A SUBSTANTIVE THEORY ON WORKPLACE BULLYING: AN HR PERSPECTIVE

6.1   INTRODUCTION

Work plays a critical role in people's lives and is regarded as a way of contributing to the field of giftedness and passion (Becker, De Wet & Van Vollenhoven, 2015), intimately linked with maintaining human dignity (Awoniyi & Ndlovu, 2014; Heap & Harvey, 2012). Workplace bullying is a complex phenomenon faced by many employees worldwide (Fahie, 2014; Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Zapf, Escartin, Einarsen, Hoel & Vaartia, 2011) and has the potential for violating one's dignity and physical and psychological integrity, jeopardising a future career and creating an intimidating, hostile, degrading, humiliating or offensive work environment (Awoniyi & Ndlovu, 2014; JILPT, 2013; Lerouge, 2010). The amount of time people spend at work makes the environment an ideal breeding ground for acts of bullying (Browne & Smith, 2008; Smit, 2014), with workplace bullying an issue that merits action in organisations for many reasons, including potentially devastating effects on HR practitioners' wellbeing and its ability to make them victims or perceived as incompetent by target(s) in carrying out their responsibilities to different clients. Velázquez (2010) argued that the prevalence of workplace bullying in an organisation does not necessarily require a focus on ways of disciplining perpetrators but does show the need for credible intervention, for example, mediation, dispute resolution and conflict management, emphasising a demand for developing unique ways to protect those at risk. It is imperative to meet the challenge for early interventions to combat this destructive phenomenon and create a working environment that empowers HR practitioners to manage workplace bullying.

The study employed a constructivist grounded theory methodology to understand the meaning participants give to the workplace bullying phenomenon and develop a substantive theory from an HR practitioner perspective. The main purpose of this chapter is to present an integrative framework that was constructed on the main findings presented in Chapter 5. The integrative framework forms the foundation of a substantive theory to provide a better understanding of HR practitioners' perspectives on workplace bullying. The nature and significance of substantive theory development is confirmed in

this chapter, followed by a presentation of the integrative framework encapsulating the main themes that emerged from the data. In presenting the framework I discuss the thematic findings in relation to the relevant literature on workplace bullying and critically demonstrate how they support or contradict the literature already discussed in this thesis. Finally, I propose a substantive theory on workplace bullying for the research organisations, highlighting the practical value for empowering the HR practitioners to manage it in the workplace.

6.2   SIGNIFICANCE OF A SUBSTANTIVE THEORY

Substantive theory[18] seeks to describe reality of scientific research endeavours in management and organisations (Punch, 2014). It reflects an abstract representation of reality to understand phenomena being studied (Charmaz, 2011b; Jaccard & Jacoby, 2010) which here applies to how HR practitioners address and manage workplace bullying in the organisational context. In this regard, insights and understanding of HR practitioners' real-life setting are socially constructed and represented by means of a pragmatic substantive theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). Substantive theory is useful in explaining and understanding behavioural phenomena in the workplace (Remenyi, 2014) (such as workplace bullying) and in influencing employees' lives and the organisations in which they work (Mothupi, 2014).

A substantive theory is context specific (as opposed to a general theory) and can be constructed to recommend specific types of interventions and to present an organisation with a meaningful operational framework providing guiding principles to address phenomena of interest (Mothupi, 2014; Petro, 2013). In an organisation a substantive theory offers a reference point to guide the organisation and its management in the implementation of intervention strategies and how the phenomenon (e.g., workplace bullying) can be addressed (Einarsen et al., 2011; Gamian-Wilk, 2013). Substantive theory development was the intent of this grounded theory study, and the proposed integrative framework in Figure 6.1 is offered as a foundation to a substantive theory of workplace bullying from the HR practitioner perspective.

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[18] The definition of substantive theory and theory are discussed in chapter 2 section 2.3.3.

6.3   AN INTEGRATIVE FRAMEWORK OF WORKPLACE BULLYING

The findings of this study have been integrated in a schematic diagram, depicting a proposed integrative framework on workplace bullying from the HR practitioner's perspective. Figure 6.1 presents the relationship of the key themes and their related sub-themes that emerged from the data, integrating my understanding of how the themes interrelate to explain the complex dynamics that HR practitioners have to contend with in managing workplace bullying.

Communication style   -   **Organisational Context**   -   Management Style

Organisational context impacts on how workplace bullying is perceived and managed by HR practitioners
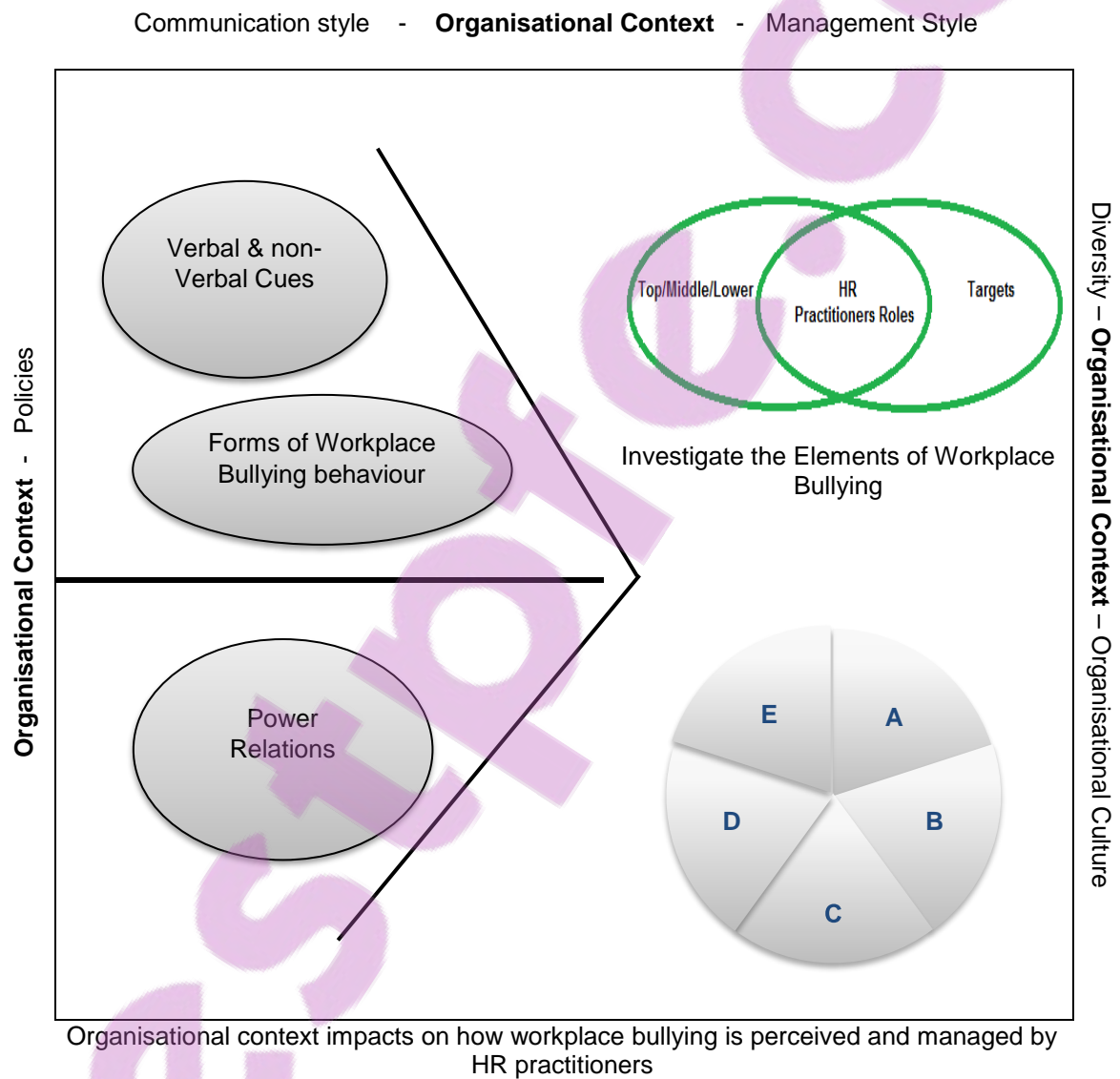
Figure 6.1. An integrative framework on themes and their sub-theme relationships.

The proposed integrative framework is based on four key themes. The first theme is labelled the manifestation of workplace bullying and is divided into two sub-themes:

verbal and non-verbal bullying cues, and the different forms of workplace bullying behaviour which are cited by HR practitioners as clues to observe the potential that bullying has occurred. The second theme, power relations, was identified as a key element in any bullying dynamic and explains bullying as a relational phenomenon that is essentially constructed on the power imbalances that exist in the relationships between targets and bullies. Power relations identified include imbalances in interpersonal relationships due to job hierarchy or level, relationships with influential or powerful people, tenure, mobbing and expertise. The third theme relates to elements of workplace bullying that might help HR practitioners confirm and assess the extent thereof. These workplace bullying elements include the intent of the bully (A); the target's perception (B); effects on the individual, group and organisation (C); third-party evidence (D); and the level of occurrence evidence (E). The last theme refers to organisational context factors that impacts on how bullying is perpetuated in the organisation, challenging HR practitioners' ability to manage workplace bullying. These factors include: (a) permeating the organisational culture; (b) being perpetuated through management style; (c) being perpetuated through diversity; (d) being perpetuated through communication; and (e) lacking a policy on bullying.

Figure 6.1 shows workplace bullying factors, behaviours and power relations (dynamics) that add to the HR practitioners' dilemma and depicts the challenging context in which HR practitioners are required to manage workplace bullying. The unique and central theoretical idea that emerged thus reflects the challenging organisational context dynamics that often render HR practitioners as victims of the workplace bullying dynamic and reduce their efforts and voice in managing workplace bullying. This dilemma is epitomised by the paradoxical nature of the HR practitioners' role, being torn between management and the targets of workplace bullying. Additionally, Figure 6.1 depicts the constant interaction between management, their subordinates and the HR practitioners as fundamental to the challenges underlying workplace bullying.

An integrative framework in itself however does not provide sufficient detail to guide management to solve the HR practitioner's dilemma and challenges in addressing workplace bullying (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Gonzalenz, 2014; Mothupi, 2014). As such, an integrative framework should be amplified by "a narrative that clarifies and relates the framework to the problem and the phenomenon under inquiry" (Gonzalenz, 2014, p. 5). Such a narrative is presented next, aiming to clarify and explain the proposed integrative framework on workplace bulling from the HR practitioner's perspective in Figure 6.1.

6.4   AN INTEGRATIVE EXPLICATION OF WORKPLACE BULLYING

Leedy and Ormrod (2014) and Annenberg (2005) argue that a researcher must ensure that the framework or model proposed is sufficiently comprehensive to describe accurately the phenomenon under study and to show its roots in the empirical data analysed. In this regard, I now critically conceptualise in greater detail the various elements, themes and sub-themes of the integrative framework.

6.4.1   The manifestation of workplace bullying

Several researchers have asserted that bullying in the workplace can manifest itself in many ways and be understood differently (Einarsen et al., 2016; Fevre et al., 2010; Smit, 2014; Zapf et al., 2011). The manifestation of workplace bullying in this study seems to be plausibly explained by verbal and non-verbal cues, and specific forms of behaviour or any combination thereof. The verbal and non-verbal cues could include the perpetrator's body language, the type of language used, facial expression and/or tone of voice insinuating demeaning and hurtful communication. Specific forms of behaviour indicative of potential bullying were identified, including unfair treatment, withholding information, rumour or gossip, undermining and humiliating, teasing or joking, ostracism of employees, petty behaviour and intimidation. Studies explain that unwelcome and inappropriate verbal and non-verbal behaviour are the root causes of workplace bullying (Gonzalez, 2012; Lutgen-Sandvik, 2009; Pietersen, 2007) and are used at work to create hostile interactions and abusive environments (Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Bulutlar & Oz, 2009; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007), affecting psychological health and threatening self-esteem (Cilliers, 2012; Hitlan, Cliffton & DeSoto, 2006).

HR practitioners' perspectives are similar to what scholars define and understand workplace bullying to be and how to recognise bullying when it happens. The nature of the underlying verbal and non-verbal behaviour provides cues to the HR practitioners that workplace bullying is happening, albeit there is still uncertainty because of the subjective nature of perception. Different forms of workplace bullying however become clearer as a result of the verbal and non-verbal cues and can be identified, yet uncertainty remains whether one can claim that the behaviour does actually constitute bullying, again because of the perspectival and subjective nature of people's experiences. Although the perspectival and subjective nature of behavioural judgement makes it difficult for HR practitioners to pinpoint bullying, this finding demonstrates the

first level of awareness of bullying cues and evidence of its potential manifestation. The cues and evidence however still need to be confirmed because they hold doubt in terms of subjectivity and perspectival judgement, complicating how the HR practitioners see and understand workplace bullying and how it is handled and dealt with in their organisations.

6.4.2   Power relations (dynamics)

Power relations have been investigated vigorously by researchers and are a defining component of workplace bullying (Bulutlar & Oz, 2009; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007; Von Bergen et al., 2006; Zapf et al., 2011). These studies support the perspective reflected by the HR practitioners in this study, that power dynamics can create a hostile work environment that allows bullying to manifest. Due to power relations, bullies get away with their acts at the expense of others, leaving them incapable of mitigating or stopping bullying. In this study, power dynamics are understood as power imbalance in relationships which manifest through the following five sub-themes, namely: job hierarchy, tenure, mobbing, experience and expertise, and relationships with influential or powerful people. These sub-themes all point to different types of relationship of which the one party takes advantage, notably the power imbalance implicit therein, manifesting in workplace bullying. Power imbalance is tangible and observable in job hierarchy, tenure, and experience and expertise, but not readily observable in overt behavioural dynamics that underlie mobbing and relationships with influential or powerful people. The findings of this study demonstrate that understanding observable and covert power dynamics is important in understanding HR practitioners' experiences of bullying in organisations.

Power is not constant as attributes of individuals or groups of individuals can vary (Dzurec et al., 2017). Power flows through day-to-day interactions, shaping individuals and getting them to do what they otherwise would not (see Hutchinson & Jackson, 2015). Workplace bullying is a relational phenomenon (Cunniff & Mostert, 2012; Dzurec et al., 2017; Hutchinson & Jackson, 2015; Johnson, 2013) in that relationships which portray power imbalances are prone to elicit workplace bullying. Notably, one of the findings of this study is that the power relation sub-themes are relevant to the relationship of the HR practitioners in the organisation, with top and line management and with clients. It is difficult for the HR practitioners to work with the bully, which adds to conflicting role

dynamics. Their conflicting roles, for example as advisor or listener, are a result of power relations under the surface in the organisational context, making them more susceptible to bullying themselves. It should be noted that the idea of conflicting role dynamics relates to the sub-theme of the HR practitioner's role conflict under "organisational context", to be discussed below.

Taking the first two main themes together in developing a theoretical idea leads to considering workplace bullying as a relational dynamic that involves a power imbalance and presents itself through verbal and non-verbal cues, and in different forms of behaviour. Power play ensues in a bullying relationship, when the more powerful in the relationship is meant to manipulate the relationship, undermine, humiliate and/or intimidate the other party in their desire to consistently achieve higher status (Johnson, 2013; Namie & Lutgen-Sandvik, 2010; Ritzman, 2014). HR practitioners said that this power imbalance makes the target perceive the HR practitioner as siding with the perpetrator and label him or her as incompetent. Consequently, HR practitioners become victims of bullying themselves. Johnson (2013) and Samnani and Singh (2012) demonstrate that a power imbalance in a relationship is a problem that provides an opportunity for bullying to manifest itself and continues to create environments not conducive for working. Misuse of power happens subconsciously, yet it still needs to be confirmed as such, adding to the HR practitioners' challenges when dealing with bullying. Congruent with the findings of this study, the literature asserts that in situations in which power imbalance is a critical influence on workplace bullying, either directly or indirectly, mediation involving the HR department can be perceived by the targets or bullies as worsening the situation (Cowan, 2009; Keashly & Nowell, 2011; Ritzman, 2014). It can even lead to an escalation of verbal and non-verbal forms of bullying behaviour (Johnson, 2013; Namie & Lutgen-Sandvik, 2010; Samnani & Singh, 2012).

The findings of this study provide enlightening insights into the manifestation of undesirable and undermining verbal and non-verbal cues, and different forms of behavioural components of workplace bullying, especially bullying that might be inflicted by power imbalance. The findings further coincide with Aquino and Lamertz's (2004) relational model of workplace bullying [victimisation], which demonstrates how dyadic interactions between employees occupying certain roles within an organisation's social system can be prone to either narrow-minded, episodic (a discrete or relatively isolated situation) or institutionalised patterned (ongoing) bullying interactions. The occurrence of such workplace bullying is influenced by power imbalances as well as organisational

context factors. It should be noted that the idea of organisational context factors is the sub-theme under theme four, "organisational context", to be discussed below. It is not obvious to HR practitioners to separate occurrences of relational or indirect workplace bullying when some power relations interplay. Relational bullying at times goes further than non-verbal bullying (Raskauskas & Stoltz, as cited in Johnson, 2013) and is permeated by emotional and psychological attacks, such as manipulation of relationships, ostracism from a social event, intimidation and/or humiliation of peers (Cunniff & Mostert, 2012; Escartin et al., 2011; Salin & Hoel, 2013).

Evident from the data in this study is the finding that cues and forms of workplace bullying cannot be detached from power relations (dynamics), either directly or indirectly. Understanding the bullying phenomenon is a priority for HR practitioners because it is a sensitive and subjective issue to deal with, involving more than one person, and it entails relational behaviour that can adversely affect employees or organisations. These findings demonstrate hope that in the organisations, addressing the power imbalance dynamics could help line management and HR practitioners in particular to feel more empowered and in control of mediating or stopping bullying behaviour regardless of job hierarchy, tenure, experience and expertise.

6.4.3   The elements of workplace bullying

The purpose of distinguishing elements of workplace bullying in this study is to describe ways to confirm the manifestation of potential bullying. Because of the subjective and perspectival nature of peoples' experiences it is difficult to ascertain whether a complaint actually constitutes bullying. Such elements include the bully's intention; target's perception; effects on individual, group and organisation; third-party evidence; and level of occurrence evidence, as illustrated in Figure 6.1 and discussed in chapter 5 section 5.1. These elements provide important benchmark criteria to help the HR practitioners to assess the level and extent of the perceived workplace bullying.

Scholars differ on what constitutes bullying, whether as an element of the bully's intent or the target's subjective perception, as discussed in Chapter 3 section 3.4.3. The intent (the bully) and perception (the target) of bullying behaviour were mentioned by all the HR practitioners as an important issue instrumental in workplace bullying. The question is how these two perspectives relate to the study. From the data, bullying behaviour is recognised from two perspectives, the bully's intent and the target's perspective or

experience. Because the bully's intent is sometimes difficult to ascertain, manifesting in covert power dynamics or behaviour below the surface of consciousness (see Cilliers, 2012), the target's perspective becomes of paramount importance. The behaviour is experienced as bullying by the target and therefore the participant (i.e., the HR practitioner in this study), has to deal with the reality of the target on a concrete level or what can be referred to as above-the-surface behaviour. Cilliers (2012) describes workplace bullying as a damaging unconscious dynamic that works below the surface of its conscious behavioural manifestation affecting individuals and organisations in ways that they are frequently not aware of. This is important to the whole organisational dynamic of bullying, because the unconscious dynamics thereof is one of the primary reasons it is so difficult for HR practitioners to ascertain the reality and scope of the bullying situation and ultimately manage it effectively.

Workplace bullying is outlined as a counterproductive interpersonal behaviour and the occurrence is often attributed to a taxing work environment (Van den Broeck, Baillien & De Witte, 2011). The elements of workplace bullying dynamics influence how HR practitioners define, understand and manage bullying at work. HR practitioners have asserted that in ascertaining the bullying situation it is important to investigate the level of occurrence for evidence of negative verbal and non-verbal cues, as different forms of behavioural interactions with power imbalance are a prominent element they see as counterproductive. Some researchers have reported that the level of occurrence of bullying at work demonstrates a pattern of repetitive and persistent occurrence of the negative behaviour and experiences (Bentley et al., 2012; Ritzman, 2014) that makes a person feel uncomfortable or terrified of the bully in the workplace (Samnani & Singh, 2012; Vogelpohl, 2011).

Unclear from previous and recent literature on workplace bullying is the issue of intent (the bully) and perception (the target). HR practitioners' views follow investigation of the elements of workplace bullying, no matter how minor or major cues and forms of behaviour seem to be. It is the intentional and perception, repetitive and persistent occurrence that could help to identify, define and understand the perceived workplace bullying occurrence or to ascertain whether behaviour constitutes bullying. Additionally, it differentiates workplace bullying from other negative work-related problems, such as harassment or stress.

6.4.4 Organisational context

Workplace bullying is often framed as an individual or dyadic phenomenon, encompassing interaction between the target and perpetrator (Dzurec et al., 2017; Einarsen et al., 2011; Sumner, Scarduzio & Daggett, 2016), yet overlooks the organisational context and systemic factors that perpetuate the problem (Einarsen et al., 2011). The manifestation of undesirable verbal and non-verbal, and forms of behaviour with power relations (dynamics) interplay, as discussed above, emerged from the data as fundamental to understanding and recognising workplace bullying. The influence of the organisational context is however also of paramount importance in understanding the challenging expectation of HR practitioners to handle bullying in the work context. The organisational context elucidates the connections between role dynamics and factors in the work environment that perpetuates bullying, based on two sub-themes, namely, HR practitioners' role dynamics in the organisation, and organisational context factors that perpetuate workplace bullying.

6.4.4.1 HR practitioners' role dilemma in the organisation

HR practitioners described the multiple roles they played in bullying situations, such as being trustworthy listeners, impartial investigators, management advisors and facilitators, as discussed in Chapter 5 section 5.5.2. They sit with the role dilemma of having to serve different constituents with sometimes opposing expectations. HR practitioners were also to partner line managers for the smooth implementation of HR policies and practices. The targets expect them to care and support their complaints, whilst the employer expects the HR practitioner to report to management and have business goals at heart. How powerful the bully is in the organisation complicates the HR practitioner's efforts to handle workplace bullying situations (as explained in theme two above). Because people in senior positions or those related to them were treated differently on allegations of workplace bullying, some senior figures accused of bullying often got away with bullying behaviour.

It is not surprising that the majority of the HR practitioners openly reiterated the view that targets were dealt with quickly, but if the senior figures or protégées were implicated in bullying a delayed investigation ensued or the senior person chaired the disciplinary meeting. As a result, HR practitioners found themselves exposed as a target of bullying at work, unable to adhere to the opposing expectations of the clients, that is, the targeted employee and the senior manager perceived to be the bully, thus, the HR practitioner's

roles is torn between management and the targets for each role. O'Brien and Linehan (2014) also highlighted the duality of expectations that HR practitioners experience and emphasise the emotional consequences thereof to the practitioners. Cunniff and Mostert (2012, p. 14) argued that overt or covert bullying by senior people or top management tended to be more hurtful than bullying by colleagues. Such unbalanced terrain in which HR practitioners potentially need to function could furthermore be detrimental to targets of bullying (Hoel et al., 2001; Namie & Namie, 2003), because the HR practitioners are unable to address the bullying situation effectively as a result of their own disempowerment in the hierarchy. The disempowerment of the HR practitioner is paradoxical, as there is an expectation that HR should contribute to the strategic goals of the organisation (Galang & Osman, 2016) and facilitate a continuous debate on the legitimisation of HR in the organisational structure of influence (Sheehan et al., 2016).

The HR practitioners are expected to intervene in workplace bullying situations but they struggle to act in the way targets, bullies or management expect. Consequently, being torn between management and the targets challenge the HR practitioner's ability to identify, interpret and handle workplace bullying (see also Fox & Cowan, 2015). HR practitioners are expected by targets or others to help solve all their problems regarding bullying, however, it is improbable because HR practitioners are not empowered and do not have the necessary authority to take certain decisions related to workplace bullying and thus challenge the situation more. This finding is congruent with that of Namie and Namie (2015) and Fox and Cowan (2015), that targets expect the HR practitioner to pay attention and help solve all their problems, including bullying. If misinterpreted or ignored the bullying situation can have adverse effects on individual interpersonal relations, wellbeing and on the success and health of the organisation (Burnes & Pope, 2007; Einarsen et al., 2011; Lutgen-Sandvik et al., 2007). These findings reveal why targets often feel that HR practitioners do little or nothing to address bullying situations, a complexity that is escalated by targets or bullies feeling frustration which could be exacerbated by the impression that bullying is allowed and could lead to perceived job insecurity or the target being dismissed from work (De Cuyper et al., 2009; Einarsen et al., 2011). It exposes the HR practitioners as victims and targets label the HR practitioners as incompetent and/or taking the side of the bully or management (Fox & Cowan, 2015).

How HR practitioners responded to and managed conflicting roles and contradictory expectations of their clients affected how they handled workplace bullying. This finding is

confirmed in the assumption underlying sense-making theory (Weick, 1995) that people give meaning to the experience of different situations or events as they address either uncertain or ambiguous situations. This provides flexibility to disclose how HR practitioners have made sense of their real-life situations or events after they happened to guide understandings and interpretations. The sense-making theory is driven by curiosity to make sense of a divergent external world (Weick et al., 2005) and plausibility over accuracy in accounts of situations and contexts (Abolafia, 2010). HR practitioners found themselves with the role conflict of having to serve different constituents with sometimes contradictory or ambiguous expectations related to workplace bullying. Through sense-making theory I was able to make sense, interpret and give meaning to HR practitioners' role dilemmas and bullying experiences in their real-life organisations. It resonated with a constructivist-interpretive[19] approach in that it helped to organise, understand and interpret situations, experiences, meanings and actions and how people constructed them (Charmaz, 2014) and convey the sense HR practitioners have made of their real-life settings. It thus focuses on continuing interactions with self and with others, and a retrospective sense of what happens (Weick, 1995; Weick et al., 2005) to reduce complexity in the context (Kumar & Singhal, 2012).

The majority of HR practitioners were aware of how and why bullying happened in their organisations, and felt that it should be the responsibility of the line managers or department leaders to deal with problems or issues before they develop into something that could cause a serious problem. The finding on workplace bullying being the responsibility of the line managers is twofold: on one hand it could help to discourage bullying at the onset and encourage working relations among subordinate and superiors, while on the other hand it might deepen the target's frustration, especially if the line manager is the bully or part of the bullying reporting structure.

6.4.4.2 Organisational context factors that perpetuate workplace bullying

The purpose of organisational context factors identified in Figure 6.1 is to delineate those factors that could potentially enhance (encourage) or inhibit (discourage) the manifestation of workplace bullying. For the HR practitioners these factors included organisational aspects that needed to be in place to ensure a work context that was not conducive to workplace bullying and that empowered them to address it with more

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[19] Discussed in chapter 2 section 2.3.1.3 and also 2.3.2.

confidence and efficiency, for example, management style and organisational culture, diversity, communication and lack of policy, as presented in chapter 5 section 5.5.1. The organisational context factors impact on how workplace bullying is perceived and managed by HR practitioners, stated by the HR practitioners and supported by previous and recent studies demonstrating that they have a significant influence on perpetuating workplace bullying if not managed properly (Avergold, 2009; Cassell, 2011; Einarsen et al., 2007; Fox & Spector, 2005; Salin, 2003; Samnani & Singh, 2013; Visagie et al., 2012; Yamada, 2008).

In this study, HR practitioners felt that the organisation's contextual factors increase or decrease the likelihood of a bully or bullies going unpunished. Most HR practitioners felt that the factors identified above put more strain on them and added to their difficulty in handling workplace bullying situations. At times they had no choice but to play along within the system. These factors are evident in making HR practitioners become victims of bullying themselves and are discussed below.

(a) Bullying is perpetuated through management style and permeates the organisational culture

The HR practitioners believed that the management style and organisational culture could be an enabling and even motivating factor in bullying if the behaviours were accepted, and tolerated as the way people interact in the organisation. Yamada (2008) contends that top management has a significant influence if bullying is perpetuated in organisations. The management style and organisational culture impact on HR practitioners' perceptions and psychological understanding of workplace bullying, and add to their role conflict (as discussed above in section 6.3.4.1) and dilemma in investigating elements of it. However, bullying may occur because HR practitioners are simply following management orders, therefore HR practitioners are not supposed to be blamed for enforcing management orders. This finding confirms why it is often difficult for (i) the HR practitioners to address and handle workplace bullying; and (ii) the targets to report a bullying complaint to their line managers rather than turning to the HR practitioners for help. Conversely, it is easy for a bully or bullies to get away with their behaviours, and even be rewarded with voice and promotion. This finding is consistent with that of Samnani and Singh (2012) and Fogg (2008) that the inability of those in leadership to recognise workplace bullying and deal with it often make it difficult to pin down and allow the bully to get away or encourage targets to keep quiet rather than come forward. In this

way management style and organisational culture appear to increase the likelihood of workplace bullying. Management should foster an awareness of workplace bullying and what it entails and should demonstrate strategic support, curbing any attempt at bullying in the workplace rather than smoothing it over, thus creating an organisational culture not conducive to workplace bullying (Branch & Murray, 2015; Namie & Namie, 2015; Quigg & Martin, 2016; Ritzman, 2014; Salin & Hoel, 2013).

(b) Bullying perpetuated through communication style

Communication concerning interaction of homogenous or heterogeneous people is described as an area linked to relational wellbeing related to the organisational context (Biggio & Cortese, 2013). Van Cleemput, Vandebosch and Pabian (2014) maintain that bullies often use communication that vaguely represents some perceived half-truth about the intended target. For the HR practitioners poor communication is the factor that often leads to a relational bullying in the workplace and they concurred that bullying in their organisation was ascribed to poor communication. They felt that workplace bullying happened because the manner in which employees spoke to one another or others at work was inappropriate and unprofessional, a finding supported by studies that poor communication often exposes targets because of their inability to communicate appropriately or express their views in a respectful manner (Cowan, 2009). This poor communication could be attributed to the power imbalance in the relationship between the target and the bully, from the HR practitioners' points of view, however, poor communication could also be related to a strategy targets use to defend themselves against the bully. This explains the HR practitioners' accounts of their experiences and the negative impact on their own wellbeing, work, reputation, role and even personal life.

(c) Bullying perpetuated through diversity

HR practitioners mentioned diversity as another critical factor in the organisational context that influences workplace bullying. They ascribed acts of bullying to managers who were intolerant and unjust with regard to employees of different race, gender and age. If not the perpetrator themselves, managers tend to turn a blind eye to bullies if they were similar to themselves with regard to demographics such as race, gender and age and the target differed in this regard. It seems easier for people to understand and side with someone similar to themselves, although this may happen unconsciously. Some superiors made it difficult for people of other races or gender to prosper in their department, by rather siding with bullies with whom they had better interpersonal relations due to demographic

similarities and thus avoided dealing with bullying situations. Instead, management justified bullying situations as misunderstanding between team leader or line manager and target, a perspective that could be ascribed to power relation interplay located within diversity dynamics in organisations. Similarly, in the literature, workplace bullying has been described as an emotion-based response triggered by diversity (Harvey, Treadway, Heames & Duke, 2009). In this study it was found that diversity dynamics commonly influence the bullying experience, and inappropriate or unwelcome verbal and non-verbal cues and forms of behaviour are experienced more sensitively across difference and perceived as bullying at work.

Given the unique diversity dynamics of the workplace bullying experience, I do not propose diversity as a definite cause, but rather suggest that diversity may trigger experiences of workplace bullying when diversity is not tolerated or celebrated in the organisational context. There are other individual or group demographics, for example, education level, economic status, family, and marital status that are core potential circumstances for bullying to manifest, confirming previous and recent research (Bond, 2004; De Frutos, 2013; McGuire & Bagher, 2010; Rajalakshmi & Gomathi, 2015; Zapf & Einarsen, 2010). Ultimately, diversity dynamics perplex the HR practitioners' ability to clearly distinguish bullying behaviour and make it challenging for them to manage workplace bullying. Additionally, targets label HR practitioners as incompetent or do little to assist them, therefore diversity sensitivity training and coaching could be undertaken on an individual level and/or group level as interventions to embrace diversity.

(d) Lack of policy on workplace bullying

The HR practitioners concurred that they were unaware of any workplace bullying policy and only speculated on how bullying could be handled and dealt with in their places of work. HR practitioners felt that the absence of a workplace bullying policy in their organisations made their roles difficult and exposed them to being seen as doing little or worsening the situation. Sheehan et al. (2016) argue that the HR function has the substantial potential to address negative behaviours in the workplace, such as bullying, but when the HR practitioners are experiencing role conflict or competing expectations of their roles their power of meaning is low and the opportunity to contribute to decision-making is diminished. The view and findings of Sheehan et al. (2016) about HR practitioners are not surprising, taking into account the reality that HR practitioners do not have the necessary power to act in workplace bullying situations.

One reason HR practitioners do not have this power is that they were unaware or had no policies to guide their actions and empower themselves. This finding is in agreement with other studies that the absence of a workplace bullying policy can promote a management style and culture that allows bullying to flourish, creating opportunities for bullying acts and rendering HR incompetent in addressing negative behaviours in the workplace (Harvey et al., 2006b; Hoel et al., 2010; Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007). Lack of policy demonstrates a lack of commitment from top management and imbues their influence in perpetuated bullying behaviour in the organisation (Salin, 2009; Tracy et al., 2006). Therefore, the absence of a workplace bullying policy in any form undermines the very essence of HR practitioners' roles (see also Fox & Cowan, 2016; Sheenan et al., 2016). The challenge in a workplace bullying policy would be to empower HR practitioners to be influential not only through authorising them to deal with matters but also to skill them to manage these situations. Also, based on the responses the policy should explain specific processes and steps to be taken to address the difficulty of ascertaining whether a situation constituted bullying as well as alternative ways of addressing it.

The potential route of intervention could be to compel adherence to policies and procedures (Meglich-Sespico, Faley & Knapp, 2007; Rayner & Lewis, 2011) in interactions between management, their subordinates and HR practitioners in particular, apart from a traditional HR standard in managing employees. Policies, procedures and awareness training or skills training interventions constitute the main preventative tools of organisational support in the management and prevention of workplace bullying (Branch & Murray, 2015; Einarsen et al., 2016; Hodgins, Maccurtain & Mannix-McNamara, 2014) and reduce its potential negative outcomes (Bond, Tuckey & Dollard, 2010; Notelaers et al., 2012). Organisational support interventions could include training and an employee assistance programme (EAP) aimed at covertly assisting HR practitioners to handle and manage workplace bullying. If it is lacking in the organisational context then bullying will be perpetuated because HR practitioners will not be empowered to manage it well. If it is there it will communicate to employees and to HR top management's support in curbing workplace bullying in the organisation.

This study establishes that HR practitioners require significant organisational support interventions, for example an EAP, counselling or coaching through any complaint reporting and investigation process, just as a bully or bullied employee requires support. Nzonzo (2017) and Day and Randell (2014) assert that an EAP is of paramount importance in enhancing employees' psychological wellbeing in managing workplace

counterproductive behaviours. The findings of this study are supported by some studies that have found organisational support is of paramount importance in ensuring that organisations have a healthier, dedicated and competent crop of HR practitioners to guide and maintain a healthy balanced work environment (Bond et al., 2010; Branch & Murray, 2015; Einarsen et al., 2016; Hodgins et al., 2014; Notelaers et al., 2012; Rayner & Lewis, 2011). Therefore, since workplace bullying happens in a working environment regulated by formal rules and guidelines it is the responsibility of the management to put in place measures to address and prevent it or any counterproductive behaviours (Giorgi, 2009, p. 35). A workplace bullying policy as another form of intervention could authorise the HR practitioners to act within the framework of the policies, procedures and practices, helping to clarify the HR practitioner's role and ensure equitable employee relations in managing potential bullying the workplace. The development of a clear and concise zero workplace bullying policy could empower the employees to resist bullying in creative ways and prevent the HR practitioners from becoming victims themselves. The findings of this study are in agreement with other studies, that a workplace bullying policy must be clear and concise for an ordinary employee to understand, and that bully employees could be determinedly held responsible and accountable for their behaviours or actions (Namie & Lutgen-Sandvik, 2010; Salin, 2014; Salin & Hoel, 2013).

Lastly, South African labour legislation and regulations do not describe how an organisation workplace bullying policy should be drafted. This study suggests that management, employees and HR practitioners should collaborate in drafting a zero-tolerance bullying policy to combat workplace bullying. Similarly, this view is supported and extended further by Namie and Namie (2015), Smit (2014) and Hoel (2013), namely that policies alone would not prevent bullying in the places of work but invite organisations across sectors to collaborate, with joint ownership to ensure a work environment free of bullying. Fox and Cowan (2015, p. 119) further contend that HR practitioners as the management advisors and facilitators can take "an active role in developing anti-bullying practices to prevent future bullying behaviours and to create an anti-bullying company culture". A workplace bullying policy should explain specific processes and steps to be taken to ascertain whether a situation constitutes bullying and propose alternative ways of addressing it. I therefore suggest the following aspects that should be written into a policy or response strategies that might benefit HR practitioners and/or targets in workplace bullying situations:

- a statement of the organisation's commitment and support to eliminate bullying at work;
- a shared definition of bullying;
- differentiation between what is bullying and is not bullying;
- clarity on roles, duties and responsibilities of line managers and HR practitioners;
- remedial education and integrative training;
- a coaching approach;
- a robust formal and informal procedure (i.e., provide alternative avenues for HR practitioners, targets or others to choose, for example, debriefing and employee assistance programme, counselling or coaching);
- clear grievance and investigation process;
- comprehensive disciplinary or resolution structure; and
- internal and external interventions for employees at all levels, irrespective of position, level or status to prevent workplace bullying, such as ombudsman, arbitration, or an external investigator.

A unified upward commitment and support to foster a zero-tolerant bullying culture is critical to change the HR practitioners and employees' perceptions and ensure that HR practitioners' voices of reason are respected and heard by the top management.

6.5 A SUBSTANTIVE THEORY OF WORKPLACE BULLYING FROM AN HR PERPSEPCTIVE

The themes discussed in this thesis describe my understanding of HR practitioners' experience and perceptions of bullying situations in their places of work. From exploring the themes in more depth, in particular how the themes each contribute to a holistic understanding of workplace bullying, has led to the construction of a central theoretical idea conceptualising workplace bulling from the HR practitioners' perspectives. The themes emerging from the data were integrated with a broad spectrum of trends identified in research literature focussing on workplace bullying. Whereas most studies identify critical issues that pertain to targets' and bullies' perspectives, rather than the HR practitioners' perspectives, various similarities were found that helped me to explain the workplace bullying phenomenon from the HR perspective.

To this end, in this section, I present the emerging central theoretical conceptualisation and understanding that emerged from the findings as a possible substantive theory on workplace bullying, as well as conceptual framework to this effects.

6.5.1 Constructing a central theoretical understanding of the workplace bullying dynamic

The findings of this study, reveal that HR practitioners were aware of workplace bullying as a phenomenon and its existence in their organisations but it was difficult to determine precisely. My analysis showed that workplace bullying is a sensitive and subjective phenomenon, as it has different meanings for different individuals and varies in different situations, experiences and elements that turn behaviours into bullying. According to HR practitioners, the participants in this study, subjective experiences of workplace bullying could mean different things, depending on the situation and severity. This finding supports studies undertaken by different researchers, which found that bullying at work is described and understood differently, depending on the personal experiences, background differences, situations and the organisational culture and climate of the specific work context (e.g., Bartlett & Bartlett, 2011; Einarsen et al., 2016; Steinman, 2008; Namie & Namie, 2015; Power et al., 2013; Smit, 2014; Zapf et al., 2011).

It is in the verbal and non-verbal cues, and forms of undesirable interpersonal behaviour that HR practitioners were able to identify possible bullying behaviour. These cues and forms of interpersonal behaviour is observable or overt as it manifests on what Cilliers (2012), from a psychodynamic perspective, refers to as *above-the-surface behaviour*. Bullying is however undoubtedly rooted in *below the surface behaviour* (see Cilliers, 2012) exacerbating doubt about the extent of workplace bullying and how it should be addressed because it is not always readily observable. In particular, the below surface behaviour of bullying is rooted in power and role dynamics that are not readily observable and not necessarily in the conscious awareness of the HR practitioner.

With workplace bullying having been established as a relational phenomenon, bullying surfaces as a result of underlying power imbalances (as discussed in section 6.3.2). If below the surface in the organisational context, the cues and forms of workplace bullying seem to be inaccurate, baseless or irrational (Berlingieri, 2015; Kennison, 2013), is communicated as implausible, subtle (Dzurec et al., 2017), or manifest as non-verbal behavioural dynamics favouring only one in the relationship, it is more difficult for the HR practitioners to differentiate the target from the bully. So, the cues and forms of workplace bullying as identified or understood above-the-surface through plausible and often verbal acts, such as belittling remarks, public humiliation, threatening behaviour and intimidation (Cunniff & Mostert, 2012; Einarsen, Hoel & Notelaers, 2009; Escartin et

al., 2009) in combination with an understanding of potential power imbalances (Dzurec et al., 2017) may be directive to the HR practitioner in identifying workplace bullying. Misuse of power frequently happens covertly, as it may appear, and usually still has to be confirmed as a bullying act, adding to the HR practitioners' challenges when dealing with and in managing bullying situations. For example, power play is used to manipulate a relationship, undermine, humiliate and/or intimidate someone in the desire to achieve higher status (Johnson, 2013; Ritzman, 2014). HR practitioners can use the elements of bullying as criteria to construct the workplace bullying situation in order to understand and address it objectively and with confidence.

In addition to subconscious power dynamics, the HR practitioners' conflicting role dynamics reveal a duality of paradoxical nature, which not the practitioner, management or the organisation seem to be consciously aware of. As a role, HR practitioners are torn between their responsibility to the business goals, to management and to support and champion the case of the targets in potential bullying situations. When expected to address a bullying situation, HR practitioners are moreover suddenly confronted by their own power imbalance in the organisational context as they find themselves insufficiently authorised to deal with the matter. As a possible cause of having to serve different constituents with opposing expectations and in the context of being disempowered, the HR practitioners face the dilemma of becoming victims of bullying themselves, especially if the organisational context is not characteristically supportive in this regard.

Factors in the organisational context similarly incorporate conscious or unconscious forces and psychological setups that exert an influence on the way an organisation as a whole behaves (Cilliers, 2012). As such, the organisational context contributes to the HR practitioner's dilemma of working with the bullying behaviour, above-the-surface if the necessary training, support interventions, communication channels, policy and procedures are not in place and below-the-surface if the management style and organisational culture do not support interpersonal trust and diversity sensitivity and integration. The factors in the organisational context entail systems and systemic dynamics that either facilitate or curb opportunities for relational workplace bullying. Positive constructive organisational context focuses on achievement of organisational goals (Hutchinson et al., 2010), enhancement of diversity, trusting working relations, inclusion and accountability (Dzurec et al., 2017) and the physical, psychological, spiritual, social functioning and performance of employees (Hogh, Mikkelsen & Hansen, 2011; Nzonzo, 2017; Salin & Hoel, 2013). A constructive organisational context

represents above and below surface systems and processes that empower the HR practitioner to apply the identified elements of bullying in their assessment of complaints. HR practitioners can use elements of bullying (as discussed in section 6.3.3 above) as benchmark criteria of how bullying is recognised directly or indirectly in the behaviour of people and the effects thereof on individuals, groups and organisations on the surface.

The central substantive theoretical understanding that emerged from the findings in this thesis are formulated summatively in the following two paragraphs, integrating the empirical and theoretical perspectives discussed up to this point. In this regard and in light of the above discussion, it is clear that the phenomenon of workplace bullying is a complex dynamic incorporating variable conscious and unconscious behaviour, manifesting in the interrelationships of people and in the organisational system as a whole. The complexity of the bullying dynamic is foremost situated in uncertainty as to the real manifestation thereof and second in the covert power dynamics underlying work relationships. The complexity of managing workplace bullying for the HR practitioner is further exacerbated by the conflicting role demands situating the practitioner in a paradoxical relationship triad with employees, managers and the organisation, without adequate authorisation and decision-making power. The complexities of the bullying phenomenon coupled with the paradoxical role of the HR practitioner in the organisation is further set against an organisational context characterised by several factors that are not always conducive to curb workplace bullying successfully.

The conscious and unconscious behavioural dynamics and organisational contextual factors interwoven with imbalanced power relations and the duality of the HR practitioner role set against undesirable factors in an organisational system, have an adversarial effect on the HR practitioner's ability to manage bullying effectively and competently. Taken together the bullying dynamic and the organisational context complicate the HR practitioners' role and challenge their competence in handling and investigating the elements of a potential bullying situation. Consequently, the HR practitioner feels disempowered, victimised and experiences work commitments in this regard as distressing. In addition, such a combination of the factors at play here, make employees mistrustful and resentful of HR practitioners. The findings of this study confirmed Branch and Murray's (2015, p. 289) finding that workplace bullying is "multi-dimensional with individual characteristics of targets, perpetrators and bystanders as well as the work environment itself all contributing, synergistically, to its occurrence and escalation". Workplace bullying is a phenomenon that must be prevented in organisations and

management should ensure that they have the necessary prevention and communication methods in place.

6.5.2   Constructing a conceptual framework of the workplace bullying dynamic

Visualising the central theoretical conceptualisation of workplace bullying in a conceptual framework may assist practitioners, management and organisations to become more consciously aware of the intricacies of the phenomenon and enable more directed and holistic thinking with regard to preventative measures. In Figure 6.2 I present a conceptual framework of the workplace bullying dynamic, explaining the emerging conceptualisation of the phenomenon and the dynamic faced by the HR practitioner when required to manage bullying in the workplace. Although the themes derived from the results are depicted in the framework, the interrelations between themes presents a dynamic process that enhances an in-depth understanding of the critical behavioural, role and contextual components of the bullying phenomenon. It shows manifestations of workplace bullying and organisational contextual factors in handling bullying, which added to the HR practitioner's role dilemmas in addressing and managing the bullying situation effectively, and the elements of workplace bullying as criteria or a methodology that the HR practitioners can use to assess, confirm and resolve workplace bullying situations.
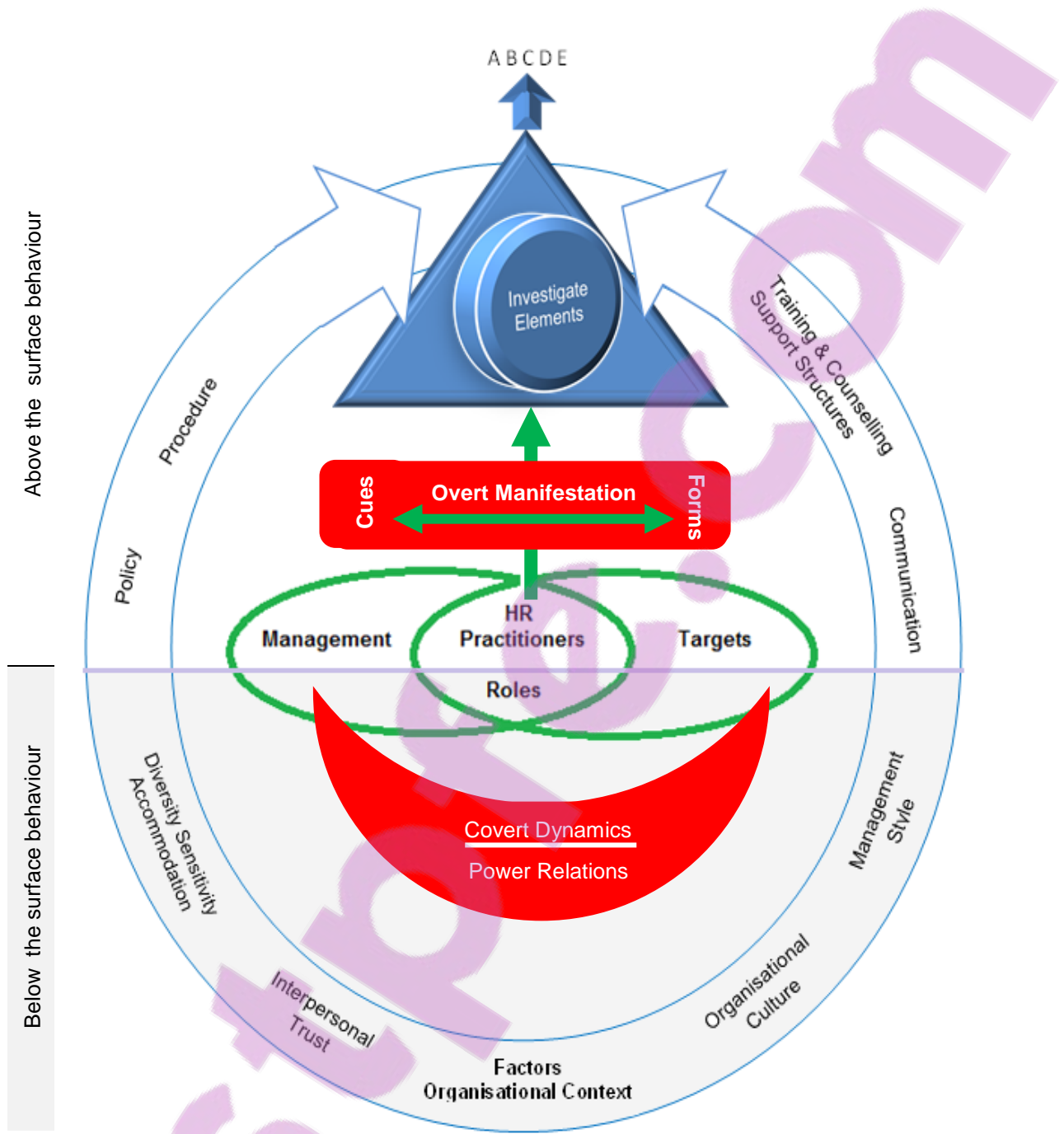
Figure 6.2. Workplace bullying framework.

From the framework it is clear that ultimately the HR practitioner's role in the workplace bullying dynamic should be to: i) recognise its overt behavioural manifestations, ii) understand its underlying and covert power and role dynamics and iii) investigate complaints against the elements of workplace bullying as a benchmark of its extent. The framework furthermore depicts the role of the organisation in establishing an

environment that supports and empowers HR practitioners to perform their role in the workplace bullying situation. In this regard the organisation's role is to: i) establish an organisational culture through its management style that reflects a zero-tolerance of bullying behaviour and rather promotes interpersonal trust, diversity sensitivity and integration and constructive employee-manager-HR relationships; ii) establish clear and transparent communication channels and opportunities; iii) provide relevant training and counselling interventions and support structures; and iv) have a workplace bullying policy and procedures in place. Lastly, the framework illustrates above and below surfaces on which behavioural dynamics manifest – both in the organisational, group and individual systems of the organisation. Behavioural dynamics above and below the surface have a mutual influence on each other and one surface (above or below) cannot exist without the other (Norris, 2012). Taken together, the dichotomous interaction of above and below surface dynamics (Norris, 2012) may enable the HR practitioner to make sense of, gain a deeper understanding of and address more confidently a workplace bullying situation.

In summary, the challenge remains for this theory to be interpreted in a consistent and predictable manner in order to add value through the different periods of good organisational practice. Despite this challenge, in my opinion the top and line management are important precursors in comprehensively fostering a zero workplace bullying culture and moving beyond tolerance to recognising and embracing individual differences. In this manner it could reduce the risks of HR practitioners, torn between management and targets, becoming the target of bullying and helping all employees feel comfortable and protected. This would provide impetus for the development of strategies and interventions to overcome bullying through educating, sensitivity training and coaching, irrespective of position or skills and orientation, about the negative impact of bullying on the individual and the organisation's profitability, and to manage bullying at work effectively.

6.6   CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter I was able to present an integrative framework that forms the foundation of substantive theory, then discuss the themes and their sub-themes in relation to the findings from the HR practitioners' perspectives on workplace bullying, which were then used for the development of a substantive theoretical understanding of workplace bullying from an HR practitioner perspective. Finally, I presented a conceptual framework

to guide understanding and propose the substantive workplace bullying theory for the organisations highlighting the practical value for empowering the HR practitioners to manage workplace bullying in organisation. The conceptual theory and the framework identify interrelations of aspects perpetuating workplace bullying and the outcomes in achieving a seamless culture of zero-tolerance for bullying and moving beyond tolerance to recognise and embrace individual differences. The integration of the findings with relevant research and literature on workplace bullying identified in Chapter 3 were highlighted and discussed throughout this chapter. I am confident that this study addressed the general objectives to explore workplace bullying from the HR practitioners' perspectives and developed a substantive theory to understand and handle it in the workplace.

This study should help organisations to be more knowledgeable, mindful and effectively communicate and accelerate transformation, understanding, tolerance and management of bullying, create bullying advocacy and awareness, dialogue and debate to foster quality workplace relationships and a zero-tolerance culture for bullying. As a result, line management would be empowered to take responsibility for their actions and support the HR practitioners and others in dealing with bullying issues, instead of ignoring or relating bullying issues as misunderstanding or a mere personality clash.

"I've learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel."

Maya Angelou

In the next chapter 7, I present conclusionary thoughts to the study reported on in this thesis.

CHAPTER 7

CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

7.1   INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this chapter is to present conclusive thoughts to the study reported on in this thesis, including a summary and findings, a critical reflection on its implications and potential contribution, a review of possible limitations, and recommendations for practice and future research. The chapter concludes with a self-reflection on my evolvement during the course of this doctoral journey. The term 'evolvement' refers to maturation and growing positively through different stages from novice researcher to capable researcher.

7.2   PRECIS

This section will provide a precis of each chapter. The thesis consists of seven chapters, each of which has a clearly defined objective in explaining and providing information.

Chapter 1 provided an orientation to what could be expected from this study. I set the background to and rationale for the study by highlighting the prevalence and important effect of workplace bullying in the workplace. In illuminating a problem statement I exposed a gap in literature on the perspective of the HR practitioner. Most previous and recent studies reflected more on the voice of the bully (see Seigne et al., 2007) and target (Lutgen-Sandvik, 2005; Namie & Namie, 2003) than that of the HR practitioner. A valuable voice I have engaged was that of the HR practitioner, since his or her role includes addressing bullying in the work context, whilst facing unique dilemmas when servicing different client constituencies and expectations. Literature indicates that the experience of workplace bullying affects physical, emotional, psychological and social wellbeing of employees, and has several negative effects on organisations. This chapter also set out the research questions and objectives of this study. The first main objective was to explore workplace bullying from the point of view of HR practitioners tasked with identifying and dealing with it. The second main objective was to develop a substantive theory of workplace bullying from HR practitioners' perspectives. The theory is of great importance and necessary for HR practitioners to address and handle the phenomenon and is also beneficial to management when engaging with and authorising and training

others about workplace bullying in the South African context. This theory highlighted the potential contribution of the study. Finally, a chapter division of this study was presented.

Chapter 2 discussed the disciplinary boundaries of the study, the research design and methodology as a reflection of how I planned and executed the study empirically, and the quality of qualitative research and ethical considerations that I applied in this study. In chapter 2, I established the value of qualitative inquiry in addressing the current research objectives and I specifically motivated the use of a constructivist grounded theory methodology. The methodological underpinnings to constructivist grounded theory were explained in detail and constructivist grounded theory provided a systemic set of processes and procedures to develop an inductively derived theory, that is, grounded in data, on the phenomenon of the study. In presenting constructivist grounded theory methodology I provided detail in order to establish an audit trail of how I operationalised it and how I actually executed the study. The sampling of the participants and criteria for their selection were stipulated. Qualitative data was further gathered by means of in-depth semi-structured interview and interview notes, which were accompanied by official policy documents. Data was transcribed verbatim, analysed and interpreted using grounded theory coding strategies, memo writing and theoretical sampling. The strategies that were applied to ensure the quality of the qualitative study were also briefly discussed. Ethical clearance, informed consent, voluntary participation, anonymity and confidentiality, and the right not to be harmed, were discussed as considerations that applied to this study. Finally, a qualitative research roadmap (depicted in figure 2.4) that guided my research journey from initial to final stage of the study was presented. This roadmap introduced and built my knowledge as I continued questioning and exploring in qualitative research, and also helped me arrive at a conceptually sound understanding of and development of a substantive theory on workplace bullying.

Chapter 3 reviewed the existent literature and provided an analysis of workplace bullying behaviour, dynamics, issues and related concepts. It focussed on the conceptualisation and understanding of the phenomenon and the problems that arise from it. Workplace bullying was discussed as a phenomenon that is characterised by intentional or unintentional repeated and persistent hostile and malicious action(s) directed by more powerful employees at work, typically through a combination of repeated and regular inappropriate and unwelcome, overt or covert, verbal and non-verbal behaviours that a reasonable person would find distressing, threatening, intimidating, manipulative, humiliating, abusive, sabotaging, degrading or offensive, harassing, stigmatising and

victimising, or some combination of these, manifesting over a period of time. Workplace bullying was also epitomised as an escalating and systematic process that starts with conflict then is transformed into bullying as the target becomes defenceless. Verbal and non-verbal communication behaviours, persistence, intentionality and perception, power dynamics, and negative effects of workplace bullying were defined as focal points. This chapter concluded with various antecedents of workplace bullying that might play a salient role in facilitating and sustaining it, namely, individual, group and organisational levels.

Chapters 4 focussed on the relevant literature regarding the HR practitioners in the organisation, which constitutes the context for managing workplace bullying in the workplace. Specifically, the chapter elucidated the role and function of the HR function and discussed the HR practitioners' role dynamics in the organisation and their wellbeing in the workplace. It argued that HRM functions reside not only in the HR practitioner but also in the operational or line managers and supervisors to guide and manage employee behaviour, motivation and satisfaction, with the HR function contributing to retaining employees as valuable assets. The dynamics underlying the HR practitioner's role in the organisation and how certain dynamics may affect their ability and wellbeing in managing bullying were presented. HR practitioners' wellbeing at work was also argued to be critical in understanding employees' wellbeing that may benefit the line managers, HR practitioners and the organisation to promote a positive healthy workplace and foster collaboration with different constituencies. This chapter was concluded with a theoretical perspective providing recommendations from literature on how management can ensure a bully-free workplace and explore support for a greater focus on HR practitioners' wellbeing. The management of workplace conflict in dealing with organisational issues such as bullying, and the training of line managers and HR practitioners to understand, manage and address workplace bullying, were presented and discussed. The articles and books used in both chapter 3 and 4 provided a rich source of data.

Chapters 5 and 6 were about presenting and discussing the findings of the study. Chapter 5 presented the findings obtained through analysis of the participants' transcribed interview data, which constituted four key grounded theory themes. In presenting these themes and their sub-themes I provided rich data on which to ground the findings in the voices of the participants. The themes and their sub-themes were also supported by verbatim excerpts that represented HR practitioners' experiences of workplace bullying and its effects on their wellbeing and work. The four themes were

summarised in Table 5.1 and formed the basis for the concluding grounded theory framework (presented in chapter 6 and as depicted in Figure 6.2) of the study. Chapter 6 critically integrated and conceptualised the four main grounded theory themes and their sub-themes identified in chapter 5, in relation to the objectives of the study, and presented a substantive theory and conceptual framework on workplace bullying grounded in the HR practitioners' perspectives and insight. It was shown that a proposed substantive theory can be used to establish meaningful insight and make recommendations towards the handling of workplace bullying in the organisations under study. Chapter 7 provides conclusive thoughts on the study, with focus on the quality of the research and the contribution to the body of workplace bullying knowledge that has been made through the study.

The following section will discuss the conclusions with regards to the set objectives of this research study. It will also provide a synthesis of the theory of workplace bullying and what has been reported in practice.

7.3   CONCLUSIONS

The study was concerned with the research problem, namely, the lack of HR practitioners' voices in handling workplace bullying situations has a negative influence on their capability to understand and handle bullying, exacerbating the dilemmas faced by organisations in this regard. As such, the research objectives of the study were formulated as follows: a) *To explore workplace bullying from the point of view of HR practitioners tasked with identifying and dealing with bullying in the workplace; and b) To develop a substantive theory of workplace bullying from an HR practitioner perspective*.

The following conclusions were drawn regarding the research problem and objectives of the study and research questions of this study.

The manifestation of workplace bullying in this study seems to be explained by verbal and non-verbal cues, and specific forms of behaviour or any combination thereof. Different forms of workplace bullying however become clearer as a result of the verbal and non-verbal cues and can be identified (refer to chapter 6). Then again cues, forms of behaviour and evidence still need to be confirmed because they hold doubt in terms of subjectivity and perspectival judgement due to the different clients that HR practitioners have to serve with conflicting expectations in the organisations. Because of the

subjective and perspectival nature of peoples' experiences it is difficult to ascertain whether a complaint actually constitutes bullying. Again, the occurrence of undesirable and undermining verbal and non-verbal cues, and different forms, are influenced by power imbalances as well as organisational context factors (refer to chapter 6). The power imbalances highlighted that cues and forms of workplace bullying cannot be isolated from power relations (dynamics), either directly or indirectly, therefore making it not obvious to HR practitioners to separate occurrences of relational or indirect workplace bullying when some power relations interplay. This finding confirms Raskauskas and Stoltz, as cited in Johnson (2013), that relational bullying at times goes further than non-verbal bullying. The whole dynamic of conflicting expectations complicates how the HR practitioners see and understand workplace bullying and how it is handled and dealt with in their organisations. Thus, their experience seems to make them sound negative and their voices of reason are only sometimes heard by their top management.

As revealed by the findings of this study, the HR practitioners are required to investigate and to ascertain whether a complaint actually constitutes bullying, which is difficult because of the subjective and perspectival nature of peoples' experiences. It became clear in this study that understanding workplace bullying is imperative because it is a sensitive and subjective issue with which to deal and involves more than one person. This study described ways to confirm the manifestation of potential bullying, including intention; target's perception; effects on individual, group and organisation, third-party evidence, and level of occurrence evidence, as important benchmark criteria to help the HR practitioners assess the level and extent of the perceived workplace bullying. The intent (the bully) and perception (the target) of bullying behaviour were reiterated by all the HR practitioners as an important issue instrumental in workplace bullying, thus the behaviour is recognised from two perspectives. Because the bully's intent is sometimes difficult to ascertain, manifesting in covert power dynamics or behaviour below the surface of consciousness (see chapter 6), the target's perspective becomes of paramount importance. The behaviour is experienced as bullying by the target and therefore the HR practitioner has to deal with the reality of the target on a concrete level or what can be referred to as above-the-surface behaviour. The workplace bullying has a damaging unconscious dynamic that works below the surface of its conscious behavioural manifestation affecting individuals and organisations in ways of which they are frequently unaware (Cilliers, 2012). This is important to the whole organisational dynamic of bullying, because the unconscious dynamics thereof is another primary

reason it is so difficult for HR practitioners to ascertain the reality and scope of the bullying situation and ultimately manage it effectively.

It can be concluded that the HR practitioners' roles are torn between their responsibility to the business goals, to management and to supporting the case of targets in bullying situations. The challenges HR practitioners face in particular indicated their need to be empowered, reskilled and supported by the organisation to execute their roles effectively. The study provided a workplace bullying theory that has a robust conceptual framework that could redress the whole dynamic of conflicting expectations and consequent role dilemmas in the HR practitioner's places of work. The conceptual framework (as depicted in chapter 6 Figure 6.2) provides insight into the workplace bullying dynamic, explaining the emerging conceptualisation of the phenomenon and the dynamic faced by the HR practitioner when required to manage bullying in the workplace. The interrelations and interaction of individual factors with system factors in the organisation above-and-below surface, present a dynamic process that enhances an in-depth understanding of the critical behavioural, role and contextual components of the bullying phenomenon. It shows manifestations of overt bullying behavioural cues, its underlying and covert power and role dynamics and organisational contextual factors in handling workplace bullying, which added to the HR practitioner's role dilemmas in addressing and managing the bullying situation effectively, and the elements of workplace bullying as criteria or a methodology that the HR practitioners can use to assess, confirm and resolve workplace bullying situations. Workplace bullying can therefore not be understood or managed if approached solely from an individual level of analysis.

In addressing the set research problem and objectives the study I provided a substantive theory on workplace bullying from an HR perspective, as well as a conceptual framework of the workplace bullying phenomenon, that is, not only informative but functional in its use. The substantive theory and its conceptual framework extend current understanding of the HR practitioners' roles in the workplace bullying conundrum and sufficiently answered the research questions of the study. The interrelations of aspects perpetuating workplace bullying and the outcomes identified in achieving a seamless culture of zero-tolerance for bullying may strengthen collaboration between different stakeholders and make management become more consciously aware of the intricacies of the phenomenon and enable more directed and holistic thinking with regard to preventative measures. This study shed light on the lack of potential response strategies and interventions as well as a workplace bullying policy in the organisation, encouraging the

line management to be reluctant to deal with bullying situations, disempowering the HR practitioner and letting bullies get away with their behaviour. It can be concluded that the conceptual framework of the study provides helpful practical theory which could improve management's understanding of workplace bullying cues, behaviours and forms, role conflict and dilemmas.

The framework provides a comprehensive approach that is needed to support and enhance the HR practitioners' roles between business goals, management and targets, thereby empowering and reskilling HR practitioners in handling workplace bullying situations. Furthermore, it reduces the risks of HR practitioners becoming the target of bullying and helping all employees feel comfortable and protected. The substantive theory and conceptual framework of the study provide a strategic view of the use of HR practitioners in achieving a seamless culture of zero-tolerance for bullying, formulating and establishing a workplace bullying policy, and moving beyond tolerance to recognise and embrace individual differences.

7.4   IMPLICATIONS AND POTENTIAL CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

My intention in conducting this study was to contribute to the limited body of knowledge of HR practitioners' perspectives on workplace bullying within the South African context. Practically, I also intended to assist the HR practitioners and management in research organisations with guidance on managing workplace bullying. I trust the usefulness and relevancy of this study will be confirmed by the reader who will be engaging with this thesis to understand the bullying phenomenon better from the perspective of the HR practitioner. Patton (2002, p. 485) argues that "pragmatic validation of qualitative research means the perspective presented is judged by its relevance and use to whom it is presented". The theoretical, methodological and practical contributions relating to this study are presented below.

7.4.1 Theoretical contribution

This study adds in-depth understanding to HR practitioners' insights, constructions and conceptualisations of workplace bullying. The substantive grounded theory on workplace bullying from an HR practitioner presented in chapter 6 section 6.5 could be helpful as a foundation for a scientific framework to establish a conceptual understanding of the

phenomenon. This includes individual level issues above-and-below the surface, such as verbal and non-verbal behavioural cues, power and role dynamics, and organisational level issues, such as management style, organisational culture, diversity, communication and lack of policy. The implication is that workplace bullying cannot only be understood or addressed from a singular perspective on the individual or from the organisational level of analysis. It is a systems approach that I am proposing, for example, looking holistically at the individual interaction with the organisational system, the incompatibility of individual differences and the organisational context. These are factors that complicate the role of the HR practitioners in terms of the whole workplace bullying dynamic, *a duality of paradoxical nature*. A comprehensive approach is needed, in which the individual factors in interaction with system factors in the organisation are analysed. System factors account to a conceptual framework in this study, including systemic issues in the organisation such as culture, management, leadership and policies, capable of recognising and embracing individual differences.

Of note, this study demonstrates that the target's experience becomes paramount in a bullying situation because the behaviour is experienced as bullying by the target and therefore the HR practitioners have to deal with the reality of the target. This is important in the whole organisational dynamic of bullying and the difficulty in managing it from an HR perspective. HR practitioners have to ascertain the reality and scope of the workplace bullying situation which notably maximised the impact of workplace bullying and exposed the HR practitioners as victims of bullying themselves. Consequently, this approach influences how HR practitioners define and understand workplace bullying and the extent to which they are able to deal with it impartially and rationally. The findings of this study demonstrate that workplace bullying should not only be perceived as a subjective interpersonal experience but also seen to be intensified by the lack of management support, response and abuse of legitimate position, hindering HR practitioners addressing workplace bullying situations. This finding concurs with others (Reyes, 2013; Smit, 2014; Visagie et al., 2012), that workplace bullying is significantly related to a lack of management response and misuse of positional power in organisations, amongst others.

With this understanding, the theory presents a conceptual framework that enhances an in-depth understanding of the critical behavioural, role and contextual components of the bullying phenomenon (see Chapter 6). The framework (as depicted in Figure 6.2) shows manifestations of workplace bullying and organisational contextual factors in handling it,

which added to the HR practitioner's role dilemmas in addressing and managing the situation effectively, and the elements of workplace bullying as criteria or a methodology that the HR practitioners can use to assess, confirm and more confidently resolve. The implication is that the theory and the practical use of it cannot be split. The theory I present helps to understand but the understanding only becomes valuable when it is implemented in practice. It can be concluded that the framework could enable the HR practitioners to recognise its overt behavioural manifestations, understand its underlying and covert power and role dynamics and investigate complaints against the elements of workplace bullying as a benchmark of its extent. The theory draws attention to the HR practitioners' perceptions and experiences in workplace bullying situations, how they understand and label bullying, and the potential effects of work-related and personal-related bullying on HR practitioners' wellbeing.

A conceptual framework describes the logical process for understanding and handling workplace bullying, and with development and implementation of interventions, initiatives and response strategies in the organisation. While I may not be able to make claims about workplace bullying in other organisations I believe that the theory and framework essentially are a point of reference for guiding and motivating an organisation's management to enable the HR practitioners in handling and addressing bullying and in achieving the goal of a zero bullying environment.

This study has contributed to the workplace bullying literature in a number of ways. First, the study provided a foundation to understand the phenomenon, *workplace bullying*, from HR practitioners' perspectives above-and-below the surface[20], a previously under-explored voice, as discussed in Chapter 1. Secondly, through the theoretical exploration and application of the workplace bullying and HRM literature I have strengthened our conceptualisation of the concept of workplace bullying from HR practitioners perspectives. Thirdly, it further shed light on the distinct connection between harassment and workplace bullying. Olsen (2010) opined that workplace bullying includes four elements: unwanted, unwarranted, repeated and detrimental behaviour. I agree with Basson and Botha (2012, p. 2) that workplace bullying and harassment effects can include the following, namely: "the negative effect on the target, the frequency of the behaviour, the persistence of the behaviour and the power imbalance that is created".

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[20] Explained in chapter 6 section 6.5.

Also, workplace bullying and harassment "has the potential to turn people who are thriving and flourishing in their careers to being demotivated, distressed and disgruntled at work" (Clements, 2013, p. 1). It is a complex process to ascertain or distinguish inappropriate vague behaviour(s) as workplace bullying or harassment as they unfold in the primary stages, because by the time a person feels unable to cope and the experience is established as characteristic of workplace bullying, the power has shifted in favour of the bully (Ayoko, Callan & Hartel, 2003; Dawn, Cowie & Ananiadou, 2003; Lewis, 2006).

7.4.2 Methodological contributions

The research design pertinent to this research and its application was expanded on in Chapter 2. The constructivist grounded theory approach, procedures and methodological strategies, were employed, providing a clear explanation of the process. The iterative process I followed in data collection and analysis were detailed throughout the study. The development of categories, themes and interpretation of data proved that it is possible that another researcher may conduct the same study, develop and label themes differently and interpret data differently.

The application of constructivist grounded theory as a methodological approach to exploring the reality of bullying in the workplace provided insightful understanding of the phenomenon and HR practitioners' perspectives. At first I struggled to execute grounded theory, thinking it was complicated, but my supervisor advised me to create a roadmap for myself, referred me to qualitative research sources from the outset, and discussed constructivist grounded theory as an alternative application of classical grounded theory methodology. I then followed Charmaz (2006), Crotty (2005) and Glaser and Strauss (1967) on how to execute grounded theory (as explained in Chapter 2) and my inspiration grew, with constructivist grounded theory methodologies and approaches. Thus, I recognise that qualitative grounded theory is not necessarily a suitable approach for some as it requires a researcher to exhaustively engage, explore and reveal unknown meaningful information about the subject under study and be able to set out personal thoughts and emotions (Charmaz, 2006; Strauss & Corbin, 1994).

Reflecting on the potential methodological contribution, grounded theory coding analysis was used to ascertain themes and patterns of interrelationships identified because they captured insightful and meaningful aspects of the data and linked with the research

objectives. I applied the coding framework in the following way, which may be slightly different from those used by other qualitative researchers:

(i)   in open coding - categories identified represented the primary outcome of the open coding phase,

(ii)   in axial coding - open coding categories were combined in this axial coding phase as sub-categories under different categories, and

(iii) in selective coding - categories identified in axial coding phase were organised as sub-themes.

(iv)   theoretical sampling was used as a strategy to explore other data sources that would provide appropriate and relevant data which could be used to explain the phenomenon and build new substantive theory.

There are several avenues present when analysing and interpreting from a constructivist grounded theory methodology perspective (Charmaz, 2006, 2011) and is meaningfully supported by qualitative researchers (Bryant, 2002; Dey, 1999; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Whilst I chose to follow the methodological guidance of Charmaz (2011) and Glaser and Strauss (1967) to analyse data, I agreed with Dey (1999, p. 23) that there is "no single correct interpretation but a plurality of interpretations". This study also highlighted the importance of the iterative cycle of deduction-induction in the collection of data and in the constant comparison between results and relevant literature (Remenyi, 2014), in order to guide me further between coding, synthesis and data collection (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

I strove to explain the HR practitioners' experiences as they are narrated, how they thought and what influenced their thoughts or views in relation to bullying in their places of work and what actually transpired throughout the study. This approach is meaningfully supported by qualitative researchers (Barnard, 2008; Bogdan & Biklen, 2006, Strauss & Corbin, 1990) in accordance with a grounded theory study, and also aimed to accomplish a better understanding of the area of inquiry. The findings of this study are informed by exploration of workplace bullying based on constructivist-interpretive research orientation to provide a meaningful basis for scholars and practitioners to understand and accomplish a better management of workplace bullying in terms of HR practitioners' perspectives in the organisations. I agree with qualitative researchers that reality indeed is transparent and consists of unsolidified and independent or non-sequential and flexible sets of social constructions, created by perceptions and meaning of people's experience

or beliefs and subject to wide critical examination to achieve the best understanding of phenomena (Cohen & Crabtree, 2006; Denzin & Lincoln, 2003; Duncan, 2004; Ritchie & Lewis, 2004; Terre Blanche & Kelly, 2004).

I am confident that this thesis is aligned to the following attributes considered key to grounded theory research, namely: "the research focusses on theory development; there is a dataist attitude towards the field work and its understanding; the literature review is conducted with care to minimise any preconceptions; and the principle of theoretical sampling is applied" (Remenyi, 2014, pp. 161-162). An aspect related to being 'dataist' in this grounded theory study is that data was collected throughout the study and I recorded personal reflections on the data and the research process in the form of memos which became important elements in the final theory development. Continuous collection of data often blurs the differences between data collection and data analysis due to a more intense emphasis on a new insight that might transpire at any point throughout the study (Remenyi, 2014).

Other novice researchers may benefit from recognising the many challenges they could face when embarking on a project in a terrain of different and opposing ontological viewpoints and epistemological orientations in the same methodological field of grounded theory. I trust that a qualitative research roadmap presented in chapter 2 (as depicted figure 2.4) may prove useful to guide other masters and doctoral students on how to execute a constructivist grounded theory study. The methodological contribution of this qualitative study produced a framework and inspiration for other novice researchers wishing to explore and explain workplace bullying further. This study could help them understand how to execute a qualitative research method such as grounded theory as a research methodology. Despite grounded theory being criticised, studied and commended, this study legitimises the value of using it in its own right, because it places emphasis on understanding logical subjectivity rather than verifying a theory. In turn, insight expanded from this study guides theoretic knowledge development.

7.4.3 Practical contribution

This study has relevance in highlighting the importance of how insight shared by HR practitioners is interpreted. The HR practitioners were aware of workplace bullying cues and behaviours but not sure of how to deal with them, especially when a senior employee was implicated, since there were no clear formal guidelines or policies

addressing workplace bullying in particular. Notably, other HR policies, for example, harassment and code of conduct, were unclear in addressing workplace bullying, and that increased the complexity of dealing with and rooting out bullying in their places of work.

HR practitioners are expected to be impartial, irrespective of the severity or person implicated in the bullying situation, but that was not the case in this study. Occupying a middle ground in a bullying situation seemed unhealthy for the HR practitioners, who were living or working in a world fraught with contradictory role expectations. The implication for management is to foster a safe, positive and nurturing environment and it is important for management to ensure that bullying becomes a priority in the organisation's overall strategy, however, how they recognise, reward, reprimand and discipline people will indicate the culture of transformation and the extent to which bullying is not tolerated.

An implication is that in South African organisations little is done in the area of workplace bullying policy development, as it is not legislated for or defined in law. The establishment of awareness of workplace bullying by means of national legislation to encourage organisations to respond effectively to combat it, is supported by both South African and international scholars (e.g. Awoniyi & Ndlovu, 2014; Botha, 2008; Caponecchia & Wyatt, 2011; Cunniff & Mostert, 2012; Einarsen et al., 2011; Harthill, 2011; Momberg, 2011; Namie & Lutgen-Sandvik, 2010; Smit, 2014; Steinman, 2012; De Vos, 2013; De Wet & Jacobs, 2013; Upton, 2010; Yamada, 2010).

The theory could improve moral standards but effort should be taken to provide a healthy conducive work environment in which the HR practitioners (participants in the study) understand and handle workplace bullying appropriately and effectively, without fear or threat of being exposed as victims or being perceived as targets of bullying themselves. The theory and bullying policy could enhance relationships, communications, embracement of individual differences, diversity embracement, culture transformation, respect and trust among employees of diverse backgrounds, trust in the HR practitioners and grievance structure, as well as in line management. Subsequently, it could enable the entire organisation to be aware of and ensure that failure to prevent, monitor and evaluate risks associated with bullying in the workplace.

Given the exploratory nature of the study, the participants' work environment was evidently a breeding ground for the manifestation of multiple undesirable verbal and non-

verbal behavioural cues as well as the different forms of behaviour that can directly or indirectly traumatise a person, reducing sense of self-worth and forming the major root cause of workplace bullying. I reported findings in a manner pertaining to how I approached and ensured quality and credibility[21] of research findings congruent with the reflexive and contextual nature of qualitative research (Ellis, 2004; McMillan & Schumacher, 2001). This is despite the continuing challenge in addressing bullying within organisations and attaining high standards of diversity management and embracement. Bogdan and Biklen (in Barnard, 2008, p. 96) assert that the goal of qualitative researchers is "to purposefully take into account who they are and how they think, what actually went on in the course of the study, and where their ideas came from. They are dedicated to putting this on record in order to accomplish a better study." I am confident that this study is unique in its exploration of HR practitioners' perspectives on workplace bullying that has sought to develop a substantiated theory that could facilitate a better understanding of the phenomenon in a South African context of higher education.

7.5   CONSIDERING POSSIBLE LIMITATIONS

A number of potential limitations are reflected on here, in the context of this study.

The first limitation is that this study sampled participants in only two organisations in South Africa and therefore these findings have limited transferability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). The suitable sample of participants were based on their experience in dealing with reported workplace violence-related issues, and conflictual relationships between them and their superiors, and therefore these findings cannot be generalised. However, in exploring participants' perspectives, the criteria and suitability sampling were deemed reasonable and acceptable.

The second limitation is that focus groups were not utilised due to participants being fearful of their work environment and reprisals. A focus group has the ability to produce insight that would be less accessible and as a follow-up methodology to clarify, discuss, refine and confirm preliminary findings with the selected participants, exploring further interpretation of the findings and understanding of the phenomenon of interest (e.g.,

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[21] See Chapter 2 section 2.3.7.2.

Barbour, 2007; Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Kidd & Parthall, 2000; Lindlof & Taylor, 2002; Morgan, 2006; Patton, 2002; Strauss & Corbin, 1994; Tracy et al., 2006). The focus group as one of the data collection methods is an inherent methodological limitation to studies of this nature.

The third limitation of this study is that participants' experiences, emotions and feelings were provoked and demonstrated during the interviews, which may have been triggered by the questions I asked. Because the participants were informed that the findings would be presented to their top management for further action to address and prevent bullying at work this may have influenced their approach and attitudes to the interviews, either positively or negatively. Ensuring participants of ethical research including anonymity and confidentiality, as well as following a transparent and rigorous methodology, was my attempt at addressing any discomfort participants may have experienced in the interviews. Respecting the participants was essential in this study due to the sensitive nature of the research phenomenon.

Despite the limitations set out in this study, there was enthusiasm displayed by the participants and their organisations and data collected for the findings provided in Chapter 5. As previously discussed, I recommend that, despite the lack of a workplace bullying policy in the organisations, one possible option to address bullying in organisations and building employees' positive attitudes at work could be through addressing diversity issues, and focussing on skilling people in diversity management skills, as well as transforming organisational culture values on workplace bullying behaviours in terms of enhancing relationships and trust among employees with differences.

7.6   RECOMMENDATIONS

This section will be presented under the following subheadings: recommendations for practice, and recommendations for further research.

7.6.1   Recommendations for practice

The findings here suggest that workplace bullying has strong implications for the organisation with regards to an employee's work, career, reputation, dignity and integrity,

satisfaction and commitment, performance and wellbeing. It has revealed workplace bullying as a widespread chronic problem adding to the HR practitioners' challenges when dealing with workplace bullying when the organisation does not have the appropriate support or structures in place.

Based on the conceptual framework (as depicted in Figure 6.2) and its practical implications discussed above, I recommend, first, a workplace bullying policy to be developed that includes or addresses: innovative and supportive organisational culture and management style; procedures to address and manage overt manifestation of cues, behaviours, and forms, and covert power relations dynamics; clear roles of management, HR practitioner and target relations; workplace bullying response initiatives and enhancement of communication; an enforcement process and structure; and support structure through which top management would support and demonstrate regard for employee dignity and occupational health and safety.

Secondly, organisations could use the substantive theory and framework presented in chapter 6 as the origin for a scientific framework to guide the line management and their supervisors' employees to realise the significance of communication, value of interpersonal trust, transformation and diversity sensitivity. This framework further indicates the importance of a remedial education, training, counselling and coaching approach of equipping line management and employees in terms of their roles and responsibilities in relation to a workplace bullying policy, process and practices. It should delineate HR practitioners' authority without any fear, favour or prejudice to effectively respond to complaints, eradicate bullying behaviours and promote dignity at work. Salin (2008) explained that education and training sharpens employees' and managers' competence in dealing with bullying and implementing policies, whilst Fox and Stallworth (2009) noted that the prevalence of workplace bullying differs across organisations, therefore remedial education, coaching and training should be tailored according to specific needs of organisations. Sensitivity and diversity management training and coaching of leaders, line managers and employees with regard to the nature of a workplace bullying policy, and organisations' interventions are dominantly supported by scholars to intensely improve interpersonal relationships and trust, and communications and clarify HR practitioners' roles and responsibilities as well as line managers' roles in managing and preventing bullying (Branch, 2006; Richards & Daley, 2003; Vartia, Korppoo, Fallenius & Mattila, 2003; Zapf & Gross, 2001).

Thirdly, to address bullying in the places of work, organisations ought to recognise it as an occupational health and safety issue so that all members, regardless of their position or level, status, power or relationship, will influence people to understand the policy. Such a policy would encourage employees' understanding of what bullying entails, the role of the HR practitioner and recourses available to them when having to deal with bullying behaviour.

Fourthly, workplace bullying and harassment might require an external intervention by investigators to examine complaints that involve a particular person occupying a senior position (Einarsen et al., 2011; Lutgen-Sandvik & Sypher, 2009, Smith, 2014). Other literature suggests that a workplace bullying policy should be separated from the harassment policy (Richards & Daley, 2003), because of the practical implication of how the conceptual difference is applied. This notion seems to be relevant or applicable to those countries in which both workplace bullying and harassment are regulated. Despite this notion, I am of the opinion that a workplace bullying and harassment policy should not be separately developed but integrated into one, distinguishing their identification and management processes. Workplace bullying policy should be enforced and managed as any other HR policy to bring about a zero-tolerance culture.

Lastly, this study could add value to HR practice and IOP by broadening their theoretical and applied knowledge base pertaining to the dynamics of bullying in the workplace. The study also provides a rich ground to HR practitioners and IOP psychologists in particular to come to know workplace bullying and help management to improve the commitment of their staff to the achievement of organisational goals. Insights gained from this study will have positive implications for working relations, employee satisfaction, commitment, morale, absenteeism and performance, as well as organisational wellness and, in particular, guiding management to proactively minimise workplace bullying.

7.6.2 Recommendations for future research

This study provided insights into HR practitioners' perspectives, future research may focus on the comparative study or extend the present study further in other organisations not defined here.

A future study is suggested to assess the problems, challenges and prospects of the proposed workplace bullying theory. There is a clear need for future research to focus on

the impact and consequence of a workplace bullying policy or strategies on the HR practitioner's conflicting role and how this can be remedied and managed to meet the opposing expectations of clients. HR practitioners' emotions are often provoked and should be taken into account.

Furthermore, future researchers could focus on exploring specifically the HR practitioner's physical and psychological symptoms they may have developed from being a target of workplace bullying behaviours, including stress, depression, loss of sleep, feelings of shame, embarrassment and loss of self-esteem.

In this study I have not looked at social system issues such as diversity and stereotypical norms related to workplace bullying, for example, race and gender that may impact how people view and experience bullying and how such societal norms affect how things are done by the people in the organisation. Therefore, future research will make a significant contribution to the literature on workplace bullying.

The future studies would help to provide a more complete picture of HR practitioners' perspectives. I concur with Strydom, Fouché and Delport (in Monga, 2010) that further exploring HR practitioners' perspectives would assist other researchers to study the same phenomenon in different ways and see more aspects of workplace bullying. In addition, research of this nature would help to ensure that researchers develop a more complete understanding of workplace bullying cues, behaviours and forms, role conflict and dilemmas, to develop more tailor-made initiatives and response strategies to eradicate bullying in organisations.

Next, I present highlights of the self-reflection, experiences and challenges I encountered during my research journey.

7.7   SELF-REFLECTION ON THE RESEARCH JOURNEY

Reflexivity in qualitative research was introduced by Thomas (1923) and popularised in various management disciplines, including personnel and HRM (Gowler & Legge, 1986; Kamoche, 1991), organisational change (Collins, 1998), management research (Schon, 1983) and research into workplace bullying (Vickers, 2007). Reflexivity is a research strategy that addresses subjectivity of researchers and enhances their ability and understanding of how their positions and interests as researchers affect all stages of the

research process (Hertz, 1996; Primeau, 2003; Schurink, 2005).

The application of the term reflexivity in this study seems:

> to embrace the ontological and epistemological commitment that it is possible for the researcher to autonomously and *rationally* scrutinize the relationship between the researcher and the object of research . . . [as] . . . part of the empirical evidence for (or against) the claims advanced (Harding in Johnson & Duberley, 2003, p. 1281).

Initially, I learnt about concepts of quantitative and qualitative research for the first time as a third-year undergraduate. Qualitative research is an extensive task and the researcher seeks to answer questions on how reality is created and focusses on interactive processes or life experiences or events. On the other hand, quantitative research emphasises the measurements and analysis of cause-effect relationships between variables, involving numerical data and statistical data analysis with the researcher being detached.

As an honours student I was not knowledgeable about research and chose a quantitative approach because of its ability to reach many subjects at a lower cost and completed a mini-dissertation and my honours studies within a record time (2002). More interest gradually grew when I was a guest postgraduate student at the University of Oslo (UiO), the Institute of Psychology in Norway in August to October 2005, where I completed a module on cognitive psychology, while studying for a Master's Degree at the University of Limpopo (2004-2005). Most of their research work in UiO was qualitative and my interest increased when I started to lecture the research methodology modules for second-year students at the University of Venda (March 2007 to July 2010) and the University of South Africa for third-year and postgraduate students (May 2012 to 2014).

As an academic I had to read as many books as I could so that I could recommend or prescribe user-friendly research books that might benefit and unleash ordinary students' potential in the research area. It was both challenging and stimulating as a novice to qualitative research, and I began reading books by De Vos et al. (2005), Strauss and Corbin (1990), Denzin and Lincoln (2002), and Crotty (2005), which I believe were too detailed for a novice to understand, owing to the differences in research paradigms underlying various perspectives on grounded theory. Thereafter I continued reading more qualitative research books, such as Crotty (2005), Glaser and Strauss (1967),

Mouton (2002), Patton (2002), Ritchie and Lewis (2004), Terre Blanche and Durrheim (2004).

Major events and experiences in my life impacted on my personal view of workplace bullying. I have worked in various institutions of higher learning and still work as an academic and HR consultant; spending time analysing people's behaviour at work and how it impacts on HR practices in the organisation. Academic life is dynamic and ever-changing, yet perseverance and passion kept me going. As part of my core services I was required to teach and conduct research to publish scientific article(s), to educate and contribute to the scientific research community.

I am often invited by HR practitioners seeking my advice on how to deal with issues related to workplace violence, and with conflictual relationships between them and their superiors. Thus, I became aware of bullying as a potential threat to constructive workplace relationships, as some HR practitioners in my clients' organisations mentioned it as a major problem. With this in mind I pursued a doctoral study in IOP to critically explore the HR practitioners' perspectives of bullying situations and to develop answers to important questions that have been raised in chapter one. The study was conducted in two institutions of higher learning in South Africa and I built up a relationship with these institutions' HR practitioners. At both institutions I gained great insight into the underlying workplace dynamics of the institutions, although this also led me to have feelings of discomfort at times.

During this study my emotions heated up, cooled down then heated up again. In the one institution I found senior management to be supportive of the research project and in the other institution not. I initially felt poignant with disbelief and also experienced anger, yet in consultation with my promoter I realised that I had to persevere and found solace in my study being approved by both institutions' Research Ethics committees. I realised that the study topic was of a sensitive nature and that I would have to approach it with cautious professionalism, ensure confidentiality and maintain balance between my personal and professional convictions. Subsequently, I was able to recollect my aims, subduing my personal feelings, attitudes and perceptions about this study about which I felt passionately. I feel that the emotional turmoil made me wiser and I managed to recruit participants for the study, and though some were sceptical others were not and their eagerness to share their experiences spurred me on.

During this time I became a father, blessed with a daughter, a second child in the family. It was challenging to balance my roles and responsibilities, which overstretched me. I realise that my studies and parenthood were incompatible and I would need to make personal sacrifices. Successively, I took three months break from my studies in order to fulfil fatherhood roles and responsibilities. Later, I was able to harmonise parenthood and my studies in keeping with my life's purpose. Success in my studies is important and this kept me focussed and content.

I kept a diary of events, experiences, processes and achievements related to my study, as I felt the documentation thereof were emphasised and reinforced by promoter on the first day we met and every time we met thereafter. This helped me as I constructed the study and allowed space for readers to judge the credibility and dependability (Lincoln & Guba, 1985) of my work and the decisions I made which impacted on the research process. I followed the advice of Moustakas (1998, p. 85) that the researcher should "listen attentively, write and record accurately, remove personal feelings, attitudes and perceptions regarding issues and clearly hear the essence of the experiences of the subjects". I believe that a reflexive approach, such as the one I followed here, was consistent with my role as a narrator in my research journey through "an analytical lens of how theoretical and biographical perspectives may impact on relationships with research subjects, interpretations and presentation of research" (Elliott, 2006, p. 155). Reflexivity is an "ongoing process" (Nadin & Cassell, 2006, p. 212) and I hope that it will make my subjective inclinations in this study transparent, thus enhancing the potential authenticity and credibility thereof.

Interviewing has been described as a challenging activity when about sensitive issues, in particular workplace bullying (Elmir, Schmied, Jackson & Wilkes, 2011; McGarry, 2010), requiring specific and specialised skills (Mertens, 2010). As I page through my diary I realise how I felt at particular stages, which if I were to rely solely on memory I would not be able to recall. Seeing my thoughts after each interview particularly helped to re-contextualise each interview setting and atmosphere when at the analysis stage. An interview may be a positive interaction, but at the same time "anxiety provoking" and able to evoke defence mechanisms in both interviewee and interviewer (Kvale, 1996, p. 35). In diarising my interview experiences after each one I could retain my experiences of the dynamics in the interaction and duly consider them during data analysis.

Putnam (in Hussein, 2009, p. 51) emphasises multiple readings that involve participants, readers and audience, with the aim of acknowledging that the research account is one

possible version among many. So, engaging in reflexive practices accounts for my role as a participant and opens up discussions of my own interests. This process acknowledges the power I hold as a researcher, or the skills to execute the study necessary (Fahie, 2014; Mertens, 2010; Vidich & Lyman, 2000). This permitted me as researcher to draw attention to the research participants and the potential influence I might have on them and vice versa. The researcher must skilfully and diplomatically negotiate the complex power dynamics which shape the relationship between the researcher and participant interaction (see Fahie, 2014). I was conscious of the use of power, but through being transparent about my experiences I wished to ensure that the reader and research participants were more actively involved in the interpretation of meaning. As Nadin and Cassell (2006, p. 210) warn, there is a "thin line between interesting insights and self-indulgence". Thus, I acknowledge and vividly recognise the part I have played in this study.

Reflecting on the impact of literature on my understanding and working with the research phenomenon has taught me much. A literature review inevitably inclined my knowledge and thinking about workplace bullying that evolved prior to and during the research transparently in the thesis, therefore I presented a literature review in chapter 3 and 4. This study has followed the advice of Charmaz (2011) and has carried out a preliminary literature review before the first data collection (see chapter 2 section 2.3.5). My reasons for prior knowledge of literature were:

(a) to gain in-depth insights and understanding of HR practitioners' organisational real-life setting
(b) to learn whether any similar research had already been conducted in this area and lastly
(c) to satisfy requirements for the postgraduate research proposal purposes as a prerequisite of the University before I could register for the doctorate.

In my view, I research because I am interested in others, but in the process I learn about myself and add this to the account in order to provide a richer picture of the research journey. It tells me something about the status of the research and situations in which the research subjects, for example, may not want their voices to be heard.

I took a tour of inner-self, questioning my place in the research process, which changed continually. Cassell (2008, p. 193) argues that "identity in a single interview situation continually shifts and identity changes in the whole research process are complex".

Through the research process I learned of the perceptions, values and attitudes of the research subjects, thereby building identity through the process. As a facilitator, I often felt like an imposter, especially when conversing with participants who were directly affected or involved. Many told me stories in personal conversations aside from scheduled interviews, which I felt were important to make a note of.

The participants all appeared to be inquisitive about my research and were relatively interested in taking part. My relationships with them varied greatly and were difficult at times. Some gave me the impression that their seniors were not fully supportive of their participation in the research and I often wondered whether my familiarity was affecting reactions towards me as a researcher. I felt unsure of my role on a number of occasions. Moustakas in Tengimfene (2009, p. 1) writes that the researcher "is tasked with uncovering the dynamics involved in the experiences of the subjects, which concerns understanding their emotions, perceptions and thoughts associated with their experiences". It seemed to me that many participants were unwilling to refer me to any other person who was involved in bullying due to the sensitivity of the phenomenon and for fear of victimisation or reprisal by the employer for breaching employee confidentiality and infringing the right to privacy and dignity. At the end of each interview session I asked the participant informally whether he or she was willing to participate in a focus group to share experiences with others. They refused to be known by others and wished to remain known only to me, because they feared '*moles'* who might report or reveal who said what. Researching sensitive issues such as workplace bullying can prove upsetting for both the researcher and the participants (Elmir et al., 2011, Fahie, 2014; Jehn & Jonsen, 2010) and the researchers must at all cost protect the research participants (Basit, 2010). This further established my realisation that bullying is an unpleasant topic about which to talk, especially in the workplace. It only stimulated in me a feeling of responsibility to write about the phenomenon, in order to inspire people to talk about it willingly and to offer mutual support.

Bullying is viewed as a major problem in these organisations, especially between line managers and team leaders to subordinates, and less so between subordinates, but people fear to come forward or report it. All reported that the management was aware of it but in one organisation it was reactive (interested in a quick solution) and in the other it was starting to gain management attention, though no policies were available or plans put in place for awareness workshops. This finding draws attention more strongly to my role as a researcher in these institutions, advocating the consequence of the

phenomenon to improve employee satisfaction, performance, and wellness as well as maximising staff commitment to the achievement of organisational goals.

This research journey cultivated my qualitative research expertise to understand and acknowledge how important it was to explore and explain participants' subjective experiences of the external world. Thus, qualitative research is flexible to capture HR practitioners' real-life experiences', it is lodged without being judgmental or imposing interpretative categories so the reader can see participants' views as clearly as possible (Mertens, 2010). Also, through the reflexive process highlighted above I was able to acknowledge my position as a researcher and take the participants into account during the research process. I contend that constructivist grounded theory was the best suited methodology to achieve the research objectives of this study and I enjoyed excavating the methodological strategies and their implications as I went along.

7.8   CONCLUDING NOTE

This chapter was presented as a critical conclusion to the study with an overview and evaluation of the research conducted here. In it, the reflection on the implications and potential contribution of the study were discussed, a review of possible limitations and recommendations for practice and future research were also explicated. It can therefore be concluded that the purpose of the study, to present conclusive thoughts to and formulate recommendations for HR as sub-field and IOP, has been achieved. Herewith the study is concluded.

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APPENDIX A: INTERVIEW GUIDE

INTRODUCTION

Thanks so much for taking part in this study. I believe this is very important research, especially from the Human Resource (HR) point of view, but to date little attention has been paid to HR practitioner's experiences. This study is being conducted to try and gain a better understanding of the ideas associated with bullying and the experiences in dealing with bullying from a HR perspective.

EXPLAIN CONSENT FORM AND ASK PARTICIPANT TO SIGN
INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. DEMOGRAPHICS INFORMATION

   A. **Tell me a little more about yourself** (covering some basics about yourself and your job)
- Male or Female
- What is your current job title/position?
- How many years have you been with your organisation? How long have you been in education industry?
- What qualifications do you have?
- Are you a member of SABPP/SHRM/HPCSA? If other, please specify?

2. WORKPLACE BULLYING STORIES

   B. Bullying.
- Do adults bully each other at work? As an HR practitioner, have you or someone you know seen this at work? If yes, can you tell me the story?
- Is bullying such a big deal?

3. WORKPLACE BULLYING DEFINITIONS

   C. Now I would like to better understand what workplace bullying means to you and to your organisation.
- What behaviours would you consider to be bullying in the workplace? Why?
- How do you know workplace bullying when you see it?
- How do you know when it is bullying and when it is not?

- What is it like to deal with workplace bullying in your organisation?
- What do you think the organisation should do about workplace bullying?
- How do you think your organisation handles issues associated with workplace bullying? Why?

4. WORKPLACE BULLYING & HR POSITION

D. Let's talk about your role in these situations.
- What happens when someone has a complaint about bullying?
- How do you see your role in these situations? What are you supposed to do and what would you like to do?
- What is it like to deal with workplace bullying situations? How much power do you feel you have to deal with these situations? Where does this power come from?
- What is it like being an HR person dealing with complaints of bullying?
- What does it feel like to be a part of a bullying situation?
- What do you think upper management sees as your role in these situations?
- What do you think the target sees as your role in these situations?
- If these are different, how do you reconcile the two?

5. ORGANISATIONAL POLICIES

E. Let's now talk about any policies your organisation may have which would address bullying.
- How does the term *workplace bullying* sound with you?
- Does your organisation have a policy that addresses workplace bullying? Can you explain that policy for me? Can I have a copy?
- If you don't have one, why don't you have one?
- How are organisational policies designed to address bullying in the workplace utilised and enforced?
- What do HR reps (not just management) think about this issue?
- What do you think the policy communicates to workers? What do the workers say about the policy?

6. CLOSING

F. To close, is there anything else you would like to talk about?
- What lessons have you learned along the way? What things would you do the same? What things would you do differently?

- What advice would you give to another HR representative about dealing with bullying?
- If you could give your organisation some advice on how workplace bullying should be handled and dealt with in the organisation, what would it be?
- Do you have any questions for me? Do you want to see the final study (if so, provide me with mailing address or email)?

APPENDIX B: CONSENT LETTER TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

Researcher: Mokgolo MM

Lecturer: Human Resources Management

Dear Participant

You have been asked to participate in a research study that will be investigating the Human Resource (HR) practitioner's experiences in dealing with bullying behaviour, dynamics and situations as well as existing organisational policies designed to address bullying in the workplace. You were selected to be a possible participant because you are a HR practitioner. The purpose of this study is to understand the HR practitioner's understanding and management of bullying in the workplace and if you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in an audio-taped interview. This study will take up to one hour. The risks associated with this study are very minimal however, interview questions could evoke feelings of discomfort or negative memories. The benefits of participation are the opportunity to share your experiences.

You will receive no monetary reimbursement for your participation. This study is confidential. The records of this study will be kept private. No names linking you to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records, including audio-recordings and interview transcripts, will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. The audio recordings and interview transcripts will be kept for three years in a locked file cabinet in the researcher's office. After three years, the audio-recordings and transcripts will be destroyed.

The information received during the project will only be used for research purposes and will not be released for any employment-related performance evaluation, promotion and/or disciplinary purposes. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the organisation. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw or refuse to answer any of the questions that may make you uncomfortable. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance from the XXX University and YYY University Research Ethics Committees. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: ███████████████

STATEMENT OF CONSENT:

I acknowledge that, I have read the <u>ABOVE EXPLANATION OF THE RESEACH</u> and understand the ways the research data may be used and how my privacy will be protected. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction and I agree to participate in this study. I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I can withdraw from the research at any time without prejudice. Signing this form does not waive any of my legal rights. I have been given a copy of this form.

Name of Participant …………..…………Date ………………. Signature ………………….

Name of Researcher...…………..…………Date ………………. Signature ………………….

APPENDIX C: EMAIL INVITATION TO PARTICIPANTS

Manasseh Mokgolo

From:	Manasseh Mokgolo
Sent:	▮ April 2013
To:	▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
Subject:	INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE RESEARCH STUDY

Dear Participant

You have been asked to participate in a research study that will be investigating the Human Resource (HR) practitioner's experiences in dealing with bullying behaviour, dynamics and situations as well as existing organisational policies designed to address bullying in the workplace. You were selected to be a possible participant because you are a HR practitioner. The purpose of this study is to understand the HR practitioner's understanding and management of bullying in the workplace and if you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to take part in an audio-taped interview. This study will take up to one hour and is confidential.

The records of this study will be kept private. No names linking you to the study will be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records, including audio-recordings and interview transcripts, will be stored securely and only the researcher will have access to the records. The benefits of participation are the opportunity to share your experiences. You will receive no monetary reimbursement for your participation. The information received during the study will only be used for research purposes and will not be released for any employment-related performance evaluation, promotion and/or disciplinary purposes. You are not waiving any legal claims, rights or remedies because of your participation in this research study. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the organisation.

This study has been reviewed and received ethics clearance from the ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮ and ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ Research Ethics Committees. If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, contact: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

If you are willing to participate please suggest a day and time that suits you and I'll do my best to be available. If you have any questions please do not hesitate to ask.

Regards

MM Mokgolo (Researcher)
Lecturer: Human Resources Management

APPENDIX D: CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT BETWEEN TRANSCRIBER

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

THIS AGREEMENT is made between... *MOLEGOLO MLANASE* ...
Company Name... *UNIVERSITY OF SOUTH AFRICA* ...of
Address... *BOX 392 UNISA 0003* ...
... *MUCKLENECK PRETORIA* ...

and

... *Monica Dempers* ...
Company Name ... *Private* ...of
Address... *P.O. Box 13416, Sinoville, 0129* ...

It is hereby agreed as follows:

Definitions

1. For the purposes of this Agreement, 'Confidential Information' means all information in respect of the business of the researcher, including, but not limited to, any ideas, business methods, prices, finance, marketing, research, development, manpower plans, processes, market opportunities, intentions, design rights, research and participants information, participants lists or details, employees, trade secrets, data, computer systems and software source documents, know-how or listings imparted by researcher, and other matters connected with the products or services produced, and without limitation, information concerning research, experimental work, marketed, provided or obtained by researcher, and information concerning contractual relationships with actual or potential participants and the needs and requirements of such participants operations.

2. Transcriber(s) agrees to treat as confidential all information supplied by or on behalf of researcher in connection with researcher's business and all other confidential aspects of the business as defined in 'Confidential Information' above.

3. This obligation of confidentiality does not apply to:
   • any information received from a third party who was legally free at the time of disclosure to disclose it; or
   • any information already in the public domain.

4. Employee/ Transcriber shall not, without the prior written consent of researcher, permit any of the Confidential Information:

   • to be disclosed to any person except the researcher; or
   • to be copied or reproduced; or
   • to be commercially exploited in any way; or
   • is required to be disclosed by applicable law.

5. Transcriber will keep a record of Confidential Information received and of the people holding that information and will make that available to researcher on request.

6. Employee/Transcriber will return to researcher all documents containing Confidential Information and all copies of those documents on demand which are in their possession or under their control, and for this purpose the term 'documents' includes computer discs/flash drives and all other materials capable of storing data and information.

7. The rights and obligations of the parties under this Agreement may not be sold, assigned or otherwise transferred.

8. Recipient acknowledges that Recipient's breach of this Agreement may cause irreparable harm to Researcher for which Researcher is entitled to seek injunctive or other equitable relief as well as monetary damages.

In WITNESS WHEREOF, authorized representatives of the parties hereto have executed this Agreement effective upon date of last signature.

SIGNED:
... Date 10 / 05 / 2013
Principal researcher

SIGNED:
... Date 13/ 05/ 2013
Employee/Transcriber/Recipient