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DENISE SALIN

WORKPLACE BULLYING AMONG  
BUSINESS PROFESSIONALS  
PREVALENCE, ORGANISATIONAL ANTECEDENTS  
AND GENDER DIFFERENCES

Helsingfors 2003

## Workplace Bullying among Business Professionals: Prevalence, Organisational Antecedents and Gender Differences

Key words: bullying, mobbing, harassment, workplace aggression, organisational behaviour, business professionals, work life, gender

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Denise Salin

# Workplace Bullying among Business Professionals: Prevalence, Organisational Antecedents and Gender Differences

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- II) Salin, D. (2001): Prevalence and forms of workplace bullying among business professionals: a comparison of two different strategies for measuring bullying. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 10 (4), 425-441.
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# 1 Introduction

## ***1.1 Bullying – A Serious Problem in the Work Environment***

During the past few decades far-reaching changes have taken place in the Finnish work environment. Whereas the number of employees in service and information work has rapidly increased, a corresponding decline has been seen in the more traditional industrial sector (Kauppinen, Heikkilä, Lehtinen, Lindström, Näyhä, Seppälä, Toikkanen, & Tossavainen, 2000). Similarly, the pace of change has increased and global competition has resulted in increased flexibility and adaptation requirements, insecurity and demands for efficiency.

These changes are also reflected in the risks that employees are exposed to at work and in the conceptualisations of what is seen as threats to a ‘good work environment’. For example, whereas the risk for traditional, physical work-related accidents has decreased by almost 60-70% during the past 30 years in Finland, psychosocial risk factors have received growing attention (Kauppinen et al., 2000). New risks result, for example, from increased time pressures, information overload and increased interaction with both clients and colleagues. In addition, violence or the threat of violence have emerged as growing risks in many sectors, in particular in health care, social work and the service sector (Kauppinen et al., 2000; Piirainen, Elo, Hirvonen, Kauppinen, Ketola, Laitinen, Lindström, Reijula, Riala, Viluksela & Virtanen, 2000).

These changes in work life are also reflected in the new Occupational Health and Safety Act (738/2002), which entered into force in Finland in January 2003. In the Act increasing attention has been given both to the prevention of violence and psychosocial risk factors at work. A good work environment is seen to involve not only traditional health and safety issues, but also the psychological and social well-being of employees.

The aim of this thesis is to explore in more detail one aspect of the psychosocial work environment, i.e. the occurrence of bullying, which involves the systematic mistreatment of a subordinate, colleague or superior (cf. Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf &

Cooper, 2003). In particular, the thesis aims to describe the prevalence and forms of bullying among business professionals and to analyse the role of the work environment in bullying. This kind of mistreatment has also received attention in the new Occupational Health and Safety Act and it is acknowledged that inappropriate treatment at work, including bullying, can have detrimental effects on the health of employees. What is more, as reported below, studies show that such treatment does not only result in health problems for the concerned individuals, but can also lead to high costs for organisations.

As for the effects on the individual, bullying has been reported to result in lower levels of job satisfaction (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997), increased psychosomatic symptoms and physical illness (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Niedl, 1995; O'Moore, 2000; Zapf, Knorz & Kulla, 1996), and greater expulsion from the labour market (Leymann, 1996). Health symptoms include, for example, anxiety, depression, headache and musculoskeletal problems (Einarsen, Raknes, Matthiesen & Hellesøy, 1996; Vartia, 2001). What is more, studies show that not only victims, but also observers report higher stress reactions and less job satisfaction than non-observers (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Sutela & Lehto, 1998; Vartia, 2001).

In addition, research has indicated that abusive supervision and bullying may lead to lower commitment and high perceived levels of injustice and unfairness (Tepper, 2000). In line with this, it could also be argued that employees who are bullied and mistreated at work may feel betrayed and perceive that the psychological contract has been broken. A psychological contract is typically defined as an employee's beliefs about the reciprocal obligations between the employee and his or her organisation, where the promises are based on perceived promises and not necessarily recognised by agents of the organisation (Levinson, Price, Munden, Mandl & Solley, 1962; Morrison & Robinson, 1997). If an employee is mistreated at work and management does little to stop this, the employee is likely to perceive that the organisation has not been able to live up to its implied promises. Research has shown that such perceived unfairness and violations of the psychological contract can have severe negative consequences. For example, it may decrease employees' trust towards their employers, their job

satisfaction, their perceived obligations and contributions to the organisations and their intentions to stay (e.g. Robinson & Rousseau, 1994; Turnley & Feldman, 1999).

All this implies that bullying and other forms of mistreatment at work may have a severe effect on the financial bottom-line for businesses, due to many negative effects reported (cf. Hoel, Einarsen & Cooper, 2003; Rayner, 2000; Sheehan, McCarthy, Barker & Henderson, 2001). First of all, it can be argued that bullying is time consuming, and may lead to suboptimal allocation decisions (e.g. Kräkel, 1997). Secondly, the negative effects on victim health, commitment and perceived fairness suggest that bullying can be expected to be associated with higher levels of absenteeism. A positive relationship between bullying and absenteeism has also been confirmed by some studies (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Kivimäki, Elovainio & Vahtera, 2000; Vartia, 2001; Voss, Floderus, Diderichsen, 2001). However, this link has typically not been demonstrated as strongly as expected, which might partly be explained by the fact that some victims may use hard work and presenteeism as means for trying to end the bullying (Hoel et al., 2003). In addition, turnover, and in particular intention to leave, are positively related to bullying (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Rayner, 1997; Sutela & Lehto, 1998). This may lead to costs particularly in the form of lost competence and replacement costs. What is more, studies seem to indicate that bullying does not only affect the work performance of victims. Rather, studies indicate that also observers report higher absenteeism, higher intentions to leave and decreased work performance, although the effects are not as strong as for victims (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Sutela & Lehto, 1998).

The severe negative outcomes of bullying have made workplace bullying and related phenomena issues of great public interest and have led a growing number of researchers to study them both in the UK (e.g. Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Lewis, 2002; Liefoghe & Mackenzie Davey, 2001; Randall, 1997; Rayner, 1997) and in other countries and continents. In the Nordic countries the concept of workplace 'mobbing', or bullying, was introduced in the 1980's by Leymann (e.g. 1986), and since then a number of researchers (e.g. Björkqvist, Österman & Hjelt-Bäck, 1994a; Einarsen, Raknes & Matthiesen, 1994a; Hogh & Dofradottir, 2001; Kivimäki et al., 2000; Mikkelsen &

Einarsen, 2001; Vartia, 1996) have contributed to bullying research. Similar research has been undertaken in Germany, although researchers there have shown a preference for using the term 'mobbing' to describe the phenomenon (e.g. Knorz & Zapf, 1996; Neuberger, 1999; Niedl, 1995), and in Australia (e.g. McCarthy, 1996; Sheehan, 1996). Related terms such as 'employee abuse' (e.g. Keashly, 1998), 'workplace aggression' (e.g. Allen & Lucero, 1998; O'Leary, Griffin & Glew, 1996; Neuman & Baron, 1998), 'victimization' (e.g. Aquino, Grover, Bradfield & Allen, 1999) and 'workplace incivility' (e.g. Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina, Magley, Williams & Langhout, 2001) have gained growing attention in the U.S. All of these concepts refer to closely related forms of mistreatment at work.

As for the contents of recent research, researchers have made several attempts to more precisely define the concept and nature of workplace bullying (e.g. Einarsen, 2000; Keashly, 1998; Leymann, 1996), to describe the prevalence and forms of bullying (e.g. Björkqvist et al., 1994a; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Leymann, 1992a; O'Moore, 2000; Niedl, 1995; Vartia, 1996), and to identify personality traits and organisational factors associated with workplace aggression and bullying (e.g. Coyne, Seigne & Randall, 2000; Einarsen et al., 1994a; Einarsen, 2000; Neuman & Baron, 1998; Vartia, 1996; Zapf et al., 1996). However, although a number of empirical studies have been conducted to examine the correlation between bullying and certain work environment factors, few studies have discussed in detail the organisational mechanics behind bullying, i.e. how and why these conditions and processes may contribute to it. Thus, this is one of gaps that this thesis aims to contribute to.

What is more, studies on bullying have typically been conducted in the public sector and among employees in non-managerial, often non-career-oriented jobs. For example, several studies have been undertaken fully or partially in the health care sector (e.g. Einarsen, Matthiesen & Skogstad, 1998; Kivimäki et al., 2000; Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001; Niedl, 1995; Ouden, Bos & Sandfort, 1999). Some other studies have been conducted among municipal or local council workers, mostly in administrative, fairly routine-type of jobs (e.g. Ouden et al., 1999; Vartia, 1996), or among industrial workers (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Leymann & Tallgren, 1989). In contrast, highly educated

employees in managerial positions in private companies have received little attention in bullying research. This thesis is thus an attempt to address some of these gaps in earlier research and the aims of the thesis are presented in the subsequent section.

## **1.2 Purpose and Limitations**

The aims of this thesis are to describe the prevalence and forms of bullying experienced by business professionals and to further increase the understanding of bullying by analysing factors and processes in the work environment that may contribute to bullying in knowledge-intensive and career-oriented jobs. More precisely my aims are:

- 1) to measure the prevalence and to describe the forms of bullying among business professionals. This thesis thus aims to describe how bullying is expressed among professionals, i.e. what kind of negative acts professionals report and what kind of acts they perceive as bullying. In addition, differences between different groups of employees are analysed. Due to the large gender differences in prevalence found in the study conducted, the links between gender and victimisation in the male-dominated business environment are explored in more detail.
- 2) to analyse the role of the work environment in bullying among business professionals. In particular, this thesis aims to analyse how the fact that the respondents work in career-oriented jobs, which often are characterised by high internal competition, may affect the presence of bullying. In connection with this, the thesis introduces a political perspective on bullying, i.e. it argues that acts of bullying can in some instances be used as a micro-political strategy; a perspective which has largely been missing from the English-speaking literature on bullying.

The findings of the study are presented in five papers, which are included as appendices. Below a summary of the specific subaims of the separate papers are presented. The subaims of the specific papers all relate to the global aims of the thesis presented on page 5.

Paper	Subaims of the papers:
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to review literature on workplace bullying and to identify organisational factors explaining workplace bullying</li> <li>• to discuss how aspects of the changing nature of work, work organisation, leadership and culture may affect workplace bullying</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to describe the prevalence and forms of bullying among business professionals</li> <li>• to analyse if there are particular risk groups with respect to gender, formal position, and sector</li> <li>• to compare two different strategies for measuring bullying</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to describe gender differences in the prevalence, forms and perceptions of bullying in a male-dominated work environment</li> <li>• to explain gender differences in bullying and explore how gender is linked to bullying and victimisation.</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to analyse the role of the degree of perceived organisational politics and internal competition on the occurrence of bullying among business professionals</li> <li>• to analyse to what extent respondents discuss bullying in terms of organisational politics</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• to explain how different structures and processes in the work environment contribute to bullying</li> <li>• to build a model explaining how factors in the work environment contribute to bullying.</li> </ul>

**Figure 1- Subaims of the papers.**

As for the limitations of the thesis, the first important observation is that the thesis is focused on expressions and antecedents of bullying, rather than on outcomes of bullying. Furthermore, it is important to emphasise that bullying can best be explained as the result of an interaction between factors on many different levels, as briefly described in Chapter 2. Although these interactions are important to bear in mind, the focus of this particular thesis is on the organisational and, to some extent, the societal level.

Secondly, this thesis is limited to examining bullying in a certain occupational group, i.e. highly educated employees in a professional context. The work context of the respondents can thus be characterised as both fairly knowledge-intensive and career-oriented. What is more, the sample is limited to business professionals. Studies have shown that the business environment in Finland, especially when focusing on middle management and management, is still a relatively male-dominated environment (Hearn, Kovalainen & Tallberg, 2002), despite the relatively high level of gender equality in Finnish society as a whole (UNDP, 2001). As different factors may contribute to bullying in different contexts (e.g. Einarsen et al., 1994a), the particular characteristics of the business environment need to be taken into account when discussing and trying to generalise the results.

Thirdly, it should be pointed out that this thesis has been limited to Finland and that the Finnish context may have affected the results. In terms of long-term growth performance the performance of the Finnish economy has been outstanding and during the past one hundred years only Japan and Taiwan have reported higher economic growth rates (Sengenberger, 2002). Despite a very deep recession of the economy in the early 1990's, the economy has recovered remarkably and Finland was ranked as the leading country in global competitiveness in 2001 (Schwab, 2002). Information and communication technology has played an important part in the Finnish economy and Finland has become one of Europe's most important exporters of high technology (Sengenberger, 2002). In addition, in 2001 the United Nations ranked Finland as world leader in Technology Achievement, which measures creation and diffusion of technology and human skills (UNDP, 2001).

Furthermore, Finland represents a variant of the Nordic welfare state, where taxation levels are relatively high and where the public sector plays an important role in providing health and social services to all residents (Sengenberger, 2002). Trade unions have also played an important role in the Finnish economy and union membership has traditionally been high. By international comparisons Finland ranks high on equality in income and consumption (UNDP, 2001), and as for national culture Finland has been described as a country with a fairly low power distance (Hofstede, 1980). What is more, Finland ranks among the 10 top countries in terms of Human Development, which measures life expectancy, level of education and GDP (UNDP, 2001). However, following a recession in the early 1990's, the unemployment rate has remained fairly high, around 9% (Sengenberger, 2002). All these aspects, including the restructuring of the Finnish economy since the early 1990's, provide the context for bullying behaviour among Finnish business professionals and thus need to be taken into consideration when trying to generalise the findings of this study to other countries.

### **1.3 Structure of the Thesis**

In Chapter 1 the aims of, and the motivations for, the thesis have been presented. Chapter 2 continues with defining the concept of bullying and by contrasting it with other terms used to describe aggressive and hostile interpersonal behaviour in the workplace. After a general presentation of what bullying is, results from some large-scale studies on the prevalence of bullying are presented to give the reader an overview of the magnitude of the problem. Subsequently, the attention is shifted to explaining bullying and Section 2.3 is focused on factors that have been shown to be associated with bullying. For clarity, in this review these factors are divided into four different categories: individual factors, dyadic/group level factors, organisational factors and societal factors. Finally, interaction effects between factors on these different levels are discussed, in order to establish for the reader the connections between the different levels and thereby producing a background understanding for the later discussions on organisational and societal factors in Chapters 4 and 5.



In Chapter 3 the empirical study conducted among business professionals is presented. First of all, the overall design of the study and the different parts are presented. Secondly, the population and sample are described, followed by a discussion on the collection of data.

In Chapter 4 results from the empirical study are summarised. This chapter is divided into three different sections. In the first subsection the prevalence and forms of bullying among business professionals are examined. In the second subsection the significance of gender in bullying is further explored. Finally, in the third subsection the relationship between organisational politics and bullying is discussed.

Chapter 5 aims to summarise the theoretical insights gained through the study and the project. In particular, the chapter focuses on in what ways organisational factors may contribute to bullying. A categorisation into enabling, motivating and precipitating structures and processes is thus implemented. Secondly, the chapter also elaborates on the role of power in bullying. Instead of merely focusing on interpersonal power imbalances in bullying, the attention is shifted towards larger power structures in society.

Finally, in Chapter 6 the main results of the study are summarised and critically discussed. In addition, implications for management and suggestions for further research are discussed.

In this thesis five papers are included as appendices. These papers are also summarised in the thesis itself. The first paper, a book chapter on organisational antecedents of bullying written in cooperation with Helge Hoel is drawn upon in Sections 2.3.3 and 2.3.4, where organisational and societal level factors contributing to bullying are discussed. The main findings from Papers 2, 3 and 4 are summarised in Chapter 4, where the empirical findings of the study are presented. Finally, the fifth paper is presented in Section 5.1, where a new and modified attempt to explain how the work environment may contribute to bullying is discussed.

## 2 Workplace Bullying

### 2.1 A Conceptualisation of Workplace Bullying

In previous research several different definitions of bullying have been put forward. However, there are certain elements that most researchers seem to agree upon (cf. Einarsen, 1996; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Zapf et al., 1996). First of all, researchers seem to agree that bullying consists of (psychologically) aggressive and hostile acts that are perceived by the subject in a negative way. Secondly, most researchers stress a certain pattern in the behaviour, in other words that it is characterised by a certain duration and frequency, rather than consisting of isolated, single incidents. Finally, a power imbalance is often implied when defining bullying, in the sense that the target typically feels that he or she cannot defend him or herself on an equal basis. To summarise, in this thesis bullying is thus defined as *repeated and persistent negative acts* towards one or more *individual(s)*, which involve *a perceived power imbalance* and create a *hostile work environment*. The different elements of this definition and some differences compared to related concepts are discussed in more detail in the subsequent paragraphs.

All in all, bullying can be classified as a particular subform of anti-social or deviant behaviour in the workplace. Robinson and Bennett (1995) have presented a typology of deviant workplace behaviours and classified the behaviours according to two dimensions: 1) severity of the behaviour, ranging from minor to serious, and 2) target of the behaviour, i.e. organisation-directed versus interpersonal (social) deviant behaviour. What is typical for bullying is that there is a clear recipient, i.e. bullying is interpersonal in nature. However, in terms of severity it should be noted that bullying can encompass a plethora of different negative, deviant behaviours, which differ in severity. As for the contents of bullying, it may consist of and encompass a number of different negative behaviours such as social isolation or silent treatment, rumours, attacking the victim's private life or attitudes, excessive criticism or monitoring of work, withholding information or depriving responsibility, and verbal aggression (Einarsen, 1996; Keashly, 1998; O'Moore, 2000; Zapf et al., 1996). Bullying may in some instances involve physical violence or threats of such; however, rather few of the victims seem to

report such behaviours (Einarsen et al., 2003). Although some of the behaviours typically occurring in bullying, such as gossiping or blaming co-workers may seem minor as separate acts, they may have serious effects on the victim when occurring as part of a larger pattern. All in all, bullying can thus be classified as ‘personal aggression’ or serious interpersonal deviant behaviour in the scheme developed by Robinson and Bennett (1995).

What needs to be stressed is that the severity of bullying and the major difference between a ‘normal’ conflict and bullying do not necessarily depend only on what and how it is done, but rather the frequency and longevity of what is done. Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) and Vartia (1996) stress that bullying is repeated, persistent and continuous behaviour; typically single negative acts are not considered bullying. In early operational definitions of bullying, particular criteria of frequency and duration were sometimes mentioned. For example, Leymann (1992a, 1996) argued that only instances where the negative behaviours were repeated at least weekly for a minimum duration of six months were to be classified as bullying. However, due to the apparent difficulties in establishing such criteria and the fact that some acts can have very serious and longstanding effects, although taking place more seldom (e.g. being deprived of important tasks or being the target of a persistent rumour), such exact criteria have often been abandoned in later research.

In contrast with US literature on workplace aggression (e.g. Neuman & Baron, 1998) and social undermining (e.g. Duffy, Ganster & Pagon, 2002) intent is often not included in the definition of bullying. First of all, it is difficult to prove the existence of intent on the part of the perpetrator (Hoel, Rayner & Cooper, 1999). Secondly, even when a perpetrator is consciously showing a certain behaviour it is difficult to establish whether it is actually intended to harm another or whether it is merely intended to elicit a certain desirable behaviour, for example, higher performance (Einarsen et al., 2003). Thus, instead of stressing the perpetrator’s intentions, the subjective evaluation of the victim has been in focus. In other words, bullying is often defined in terms of the experience of the victim, rather than in terms of the actual behaviours involved. This is motivated by the fact that many of the reported consequences of bullying, such as ill-health, reduced

commitment and decreased productivity, can be assumed to be strongly associated with the victim's own evaluation of the situation.

Moreover, bullying is typically targeted towards one or a few selected victims. In much European research, and in particular in Scandinavia and Germany, a particular victim who is singled out and thereby stigmatised has been a key element of the concept of bullying (Einarsen et al., 2003), distinguishing it from, for example, the broader US concept of generalised 'workplace incivility' (e.g. Andersson & Pearson, 1999; Cortina et al., 2001). What is more, not all bullying activities are necessarily negative per se (cf. Leymann, 1996). However, they become negative when they are used in a systematic manner over a longer period of time, resulting in an unpleasant and hostile work environment. Furthermore, bullying shows many similarities with sexual harassment in workplace, albeit the sexual element is typically missing. The concept of 'hostile work environment' has been adopted from existing definitions of sexual harassment (cf. Pryor & Fitzgerald, 2003), showing that both phenomena are, to some extent, overlapping forms of work harassment, which have severe consequences for the well-being and job satisfaction of the victim.

Moreover, bullying has been seen as involving a power imbalance or a 'victim-perpetrator' dimension, i.e. the target is subjected to negative behaviour on such a scale that he or she feels inferior in defending him or herself in the actual situation (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Keashly, 1998; Vartia, 2003). Conflicts between parties of perceived equal strength are thus not considered bullying (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996). Formal power differences are a possible source of such an imbalance in power, but in contrast to, for example, 'petty tyranny' (Ashforth, 1994) or 'abusive supervision' (Tepper, 2000), bullying is not limited to vertical aggression from supervisors towards subordinates. As power imbalances can also be the consequence of other individual or situational or contextual characteristics (cf. Cleveland & Kerst, 1993), the required power differences can also arise among peers. In some cases even subordinates, especially if acting in a group and 'ganging up', may muster enough power to bully a superior. In addition, it should be noted that power imbalances may also evolve over time and that the bullying process itself may give rise to further increasing power

imbalances. For instance, it has been hypothesised that spreading gossip can under some circumstances enhance a gossiper's perceived coercive, expert or referent power in an organisation (Kurland & Pelled, 2000).

## **2.2 Prevalence of Workplace Bullying**

A number of studies have been undertaken in order to examine the prevalence of workplace bullying in different countries and occupations (e.g. Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Leymann, 1992a; Niedl, 1995; O'Moore, 2000; Ouden et al., 1999; Vartia, 1996). However, there are several factors that make direct comparisons between different studies difficult. First of all, the lack of a commonly accepted definition of 'bullying' makes it difficult to compare different studies on prevalence. Secondly, different strategies for identifying victims of bullying, and different criteria regarding minimum frequency and duration have resulted in different estimated victimisation rates. What is more, whereas some studies have examined how many people have been bullied at some point in their working life, others have examined how many have been bullied within a specific time frame. In addition, the response rate has varied considerably across the studies. As analyses of non-respondents have shown that the non-bullied appear to be somewhat overrepresented among the less active respondents (Leymann, 1992a), the varying response rates make it even more difficult to compare the studies.

Two of the early large and highly representative studies were carried out in Scandinavia in the early 1990's. Based on interviews with more than 2,400 Swedish employees, representing the entire Swedish working population and with an unusually high response rate of 70%, Leymann (1992a) concluded that approximately 3.5% had been bullied during the past twelve months. In this study Leymann (1992a) used a strict criterion that only persons who had been subjected to at least one of 45 items included in the Leymann Inventory for Psychological Terrorization at least weekly for a minimum period of six months were classified as bullied. Despite differences in definition and operationalisation, a Norwegian study by Einarsen and Skogstad (1996)

yielded rather consistent results. Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) surveyed almost 8,000 Norwegian workers representing different unions and organisations and of them 1.2% felt that they had been bullied weekly, and an additional 3.4% now and then during the past six months. Later large-scale studies in the UK and Ireland have indicated somewhat higher rates, in particular for bullying taking place 'now and then'. Hoel and Cooper (2000) reported that 2.4% of the respondents in their UK sample had been bullied at least several times a month, and altogether 8.6% at least now and then. However, in an Irish survey as many as 23% had at least occasionally or more often been bullied, and 6.2% reported the bullying to be frequent (O'Moore, 2000). Similarly, Dutch and Austrian studies have revealed bullying rates of 13.5% and 17.5% respectively (Ouden et al., 1999; Niedl, 1995). Nevertheless, these differences should not necessarily be seen as national differences, as the different studies have made use of different definitions and different strategies for measuring bullying, which may have affected the reported prevalence rates.

As for Finland, many of the studies focusing on bullying have been conducted in specific groups or occupations and have not been representative of all employees. For example, visitors at local health service centres (Paananen & Vartia, 1991), Finnish municipal employees (Vartia, 1996), health care workers (Kivimäki et al., 2000), employees at a university (Björkqvist et al., 1994a) and prison officers (Vartia & Hyyti, 2002) have been surveyed populations. In these studies the reported victimisation rates have varied between approximately 5% (Kivimäki et al., 2000), 10% (Paananen & Vartia, 1991; Vartia, 1996) and 20% (Vartia & Hyyti, 2002) of the surveyed. However, some larger studies on general work conditions in Finland, which include more representative samples of Finnish employees, have also included single questions on bullying or psychological violence at work. In these studies the reported prevalence rates have been lower: for example, Piirainen et al. (2000) reported that 4.3% and Sutela and Lehto (1998) reported that 3.0% of all respondents were at the time of the study subjected to 'psychological violence or bullying'. However, again differences in research design and operationalisation of bullying need to be considered when comparing the various studies.

To summarise, it can be concluded that the numbers reported in the Finnish studies focused on bullying seem to indicate somewhat higher bullying rates than in Scandinavia, but somewhat lower rates than, for example, in Austria, Ireland and the UK (cf. Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel & Vartia, 2003). However, due to differences in definition and operationalisation in different studies these numbers need to be interpreted with caution.

### **2.3 Explaining Workplace Bullying**

A number of attempts have been made to explain the occurrence of workplace bullying. Whereas some researchers have focused on personality traits of perpetrators and victims (e.g. Coyne et al., 2000), others have emphasised the role played by deficiencies in the work environment (e.g. Einarsen, 1996; Leymann, 1992a; Vartia, 1996; Zapf et al., 1996). Moreover, group processes and societal forces have been included by other researchers (cf. Lee, 2000; McCarthy, 1996; Neuman & Baron, 2003; Thylefors, 1987). The need to acknowledge factors on all levels has been emphasised by a number of researchers (Einarsen, 2000; Einarsen et al., 2003; Hoel & Cooper, 2001; Zapf, 1999a).

In the subsections below different attempts to explain bullying are summarised. The discussion is divided into four parts. First of all, explanations on the individual level, for example, personality, perception and attribution processes, are discussed, followed by a discussion on factors on the dyadic or group level. In the third subsection organisational factors, which are the main focus of this thesis, are discussed. Subsequently, societal forces which may affect bullying are briefly presented. Here it should also be noted that subsections three and four draw on and summarise insights from a book chapter by Hoel and Salin (2003), which is included as an Appendix in this thesis (see Paper 1). Finally, in the last subsection a framework explaining workplace bullying developed by Einarsen and colleagues (Einarsen, 2000; Einarsen et al., 2003) is presented. The purpose of including this framework is to provide a broader understanding of how organisational factors may interact with factors on other levels in the complicated and multi-level bullying process.

### 2.3.1 Individual Level

When looking at the explanations for bullying at the individual level, the personality of victims and perpetrators seems to have received most attention. However, discussing victim personality as a contributing factor in bullying has been a heavily debated issue. Although some early researchers, such as Heinz Leymann (1992d, 1996), strongly opposed the idea that victim personality may be part of the explanation, many researchers today seem to argue that victim personality cannot be ignored (e.g. Coyne et al., 2000; Zapf & Einarsen, 2003).

Drawing on classic studies in criminology and studies of bullying in schools, Aquino et al. (1999) hypothesised that two groups of employees were particularly at risk of becoming victimised at work: on one hand, the 'submissive' employee, and, on the other hand, the 'provocative' employee. Empirical studies have produced some support for both hypotheses. In Section 2.1. it was argued that bullying is not a conflict between parties of equal strength, i.e. the victim feels inferiority in the conflict. Thus, it is not surprising that some of the characteristics described in victims are related to anxiety, low social competence, low self-esteem and low self-determination (Aquino et al., 1999; Coyne et al., 2000; Einarsen, Raknes, Matthiesen & Hellestøy, 1994b; Vartia, 1996), i.e. the characteristics of a 'submissive' victim. On the other hand, there are other results which seem to support the profile of a 'provocative' victim. For example, Coyne et al. (2000) found that victims were often highly conscientious, and more traditional, rigid and moralistic than the non-victims. Such qualities may thus clash with established group norms (Zapf & Einarsen, 2003), causing frustration among colleagues who might then respond with hostility.

In addition to examining victim personality, some researchers have also aimed to examine the characteristics of a typical perpetrator. Ashforth (1994) studied the antecedents of 'petty tyranny' in organisations and found that the perpetrators typically had low tolerance of ambiguity and held Theory X beliefs. Managers with Theory X beliefs hold the view that the average person dislikes work, lacks ambition and avoids responsibility (McGregor, 1960). Negative views of employees in combination with a



lack of social competencies are thus particular risk factors. The importance of low social capabilities was stressed by Zapf and Einarsen (2003), who argued that both lack of emotional control and 'thoughtlessness' could be contributing to abusive behaviour. Similarly, Sheehan and Jordan (2003) argued that inability to take responsibility for the expression and control of emotions may contribute to bullying and emphasised the need for bounded emotionality and personal mastery training as means for preventing bullying.

Furthermore, demographic characteristics may also shed light on why certain employees are more likely than others to become victimised. In particular, being different or belonging to a minority appears to be risk factors. For example, both members of 'non-white' ethnic groups (Hoel & Cooper, 2000) and employees with disabilities, whose salaries are being subsidised by the state (Leymann, 1992c), show higher victimisation rates. Similarly, belonging to an underrepresented sex seems to be an additional risk factor. Whereas women have reported higher victimisation rates than men in male-dominated professions or organisations (e.g. Björkqvist et al., 1994a; Niedl, 1995; Nuutinen, Kauppinen & Kandolin, 1999), men working in the very female-dominated child care sector have reported abnormally high victimisation rates (Lindroth & Leymann, 1993). As for age and education, results still seem to be contradictory and inconclusive (cf. Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Leymann, 1992a; Piirainen et al., 2000; Sutela & Lehto, 1998; Vartia, 2003).

As shown above, individual factors, both personality and demographic factors/social status may affect who is more likely to become a victim or perpetrator of aggression. In addition, perception and attribution processes may affect bullying. For example, Cortina, Magley and Lim (2002) showed that ethnic minorities, who are perceived to have less social status, appraise uncivil behaviour as more stressful than non-minority respondents. Similarly, individuals characterised by high negative affectivity, i.e. experiencing high levels of distressing emotions such as anger, hostility, fear and anxiety, are more likely to perceive the behaviour of their colleagues as hostile and do thus report more bullying (Aquino et al., 1999). What is more, some authors have also stressed the importance of attribution processes and in particular the importance of the

fundamental attribution error in explaining bullying (e.g. Hoel et al., 1999). The fundamental attribution bias, which reflects one's tendency to attribute another person's behaviour to his or her personal characteristics as opposed to situational factors (Jones & Davis, 1965), may thus lead to targets increasingly blaming their counterparts while simultaneously taking less responsibility themselves when involved in escalating conflicts.

### **2.3.2 Dyadic and Group Level**

On the dyadic level it is emphasised that bullying consists of interaction between a victim and a perpetrator (or several perpetrators). The victim is thus not construed as a mere passive recipient of acts of bullying, but rather as an active agent (Einarsen et al., 2003; Niedl, 1995). It is acknowledged that the way the victim perceives the actions and responds may affect the bullying process. The responses by the target may thus, at least in the early phases of conflict, either act to neutralise or escalate the conflict. However, acknowledging that victim responses may be of importance should not be confused with blaming the victim (cf. Zapf, 1999a).

When discussing the role of the victim and the interaction between victim and bully a distinction between two forms of bullying can be made: on the one hand predatory bullying, and on the other hand dispute-related bullying (Einarsen, 1999). Einarsen (1999: 22) has defined predatory bullying as cases 'where the victim personally has done nothing provocative that may reasonably justify the behaviour of the bully'. The victim may thus be attacked merely because the perpetrator wants to demonstrate power or because the victim is part of an out-group, for example, a representative of an underrepresented sex or ethnic group. On the other hand, dispute-related bullying typically grows out of intense work-related conflicts that get out of control and where one of the parties acquires a disadvantaged position (Einarsen, 1999). Conflict escalation models may thus provide insights into the dynamics of how dispute-related bullying develops. For example, a conflict escalation model consisting of nine steps proposed by Glasl (1994) has been extensively used by several researchers to explain

bullying (Einarsen et al., 1994a; Neuberger, 1999; Zapf & Gross, 2001). What is more, Anderson and Pearson (1999) have described conflict escalation in terms of ‘incivility spirals’.

When analysing bullying on the dyadic level, another factor that needs to be considered is power differences. Already in the definition of bullying it was argued that bullying involves a victim, who feels inferiority in defending him or herself. In line with this it has been argued that a conflict cannot be called bullying if two parties of equal ‘strength’ are in conflict (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Vartia, 1996). It is thus relevant to analyse different sources of interpersonal power differences and theories of power are of relevance for understanding bullying. What need to be stressed are the many different sources of power. Thus, the necessary power imbalances are not necessarily due to the formal position of victims and perpetrators, but may be based on other situational and contextual characteristics (cf. Cleveland & Kerst, 1993 on sexual harassment). What is more, some of the personality characteristics discussed in Section 2.3.1 may also contribute to the development of such power imbalances between victim and perpetrator.

When trying to explain bullying from a group level perspective, aggression theories may also provide additional insights. Neuman and Baron (2003) have examined the social antecedents of bullying and argued that violations of norms of reciprocity and fairness are of utmost importance. They concluded that injustice perceptions, frustration, stress and blows to individual dignity and self-worth may be conducive of aggression, and bullying, in work groups. They further argue that since aggression towards the actual instigator of the perceived injustice (who often is a superior) may be risky, employees are likely to displace this aggression and take it out on victims who are weaker and more defenceless instead. Displaced aggression is also related to another phenomenon, which often is used to explain bullying, i.e. scapegoating or ‘witch-hunts’ (Thylefors, 1987). Thus, by projecting feelings of failure and frustration on a defenceless, weaker member of the group, the rest of the group is trying to protect itself.

### **2.3.3 Organisational Level**

Several factors on the organisational level have been shown to be associated with bullying. In this section three specific areas of the organisational context will be examined in more detail: 1) organisational culture and climate, 2) leadership and 3) work organisation and job design. It should be noted that this section draws primarily on Paper 1 and to some extent on Paper 5, which are included as Appendices. Papers 2 to 4 are summarised in Chapter 4 and the main contribution of Paper 5 is summarised in Chapter 5.

#### ***2.3.3.1 Organisational Culture and Climate***

Organisational culture refers to the customary ways of doing things in an organisation, i.e. patterns of basic assumptions and norms that have been proved to work and are to be transferred to new members of the organisation (cf. Schein, 1985). In some organisations bullying can in a way be seen as part of the culture, i.e. bullying is more or less accepted as part of getting the work done. Brodsky (1976: 83) stated that 'for harassment to occur, harassment elements must exist within a culture that permits and rewards harassment'. Thus, in organisations where bullies feel they can 'get away with it' due to a lack of policies or punishment, bullying seems to flourish (Einarsen, 1999; Rayner, Hoel & Cooper, 2002). Similarly, some cultures may even celebrate the appearance of toughness (Neuman & Baron, 1998). This appears to be the case especially in 'total institutions', such as the army (cf. Ashforth, 1994) or 'paramilitary' settings, such as the fire service (Archer, 1999). Bullying also seems to flourish where new managers are socialised into a culture that treats bullying and other forms of anti-social behaviours as a 'normal' and acceptable way of getting things done (cf. Robinson & O'Leary-Kelly, 1998).

In addition to 'permitting' bullying and 'tough' management, in some organisations the organisational culture may be characterised by a heavy reliance on jokes and banter, which may border upon bullying. In some organisations humiliating forms of teasing

and practical jokes can be a way of testing new members and of ensuring compliance with shared norms. This seems to be the case particularly in 'tough' male-dominated shop floor environments, where harsh humour appears to be part of everyday life and an accepted part of the culture (Collinson, 1988; Einarsen & Raknes, 1997). For example, in a study among male industrial workers Einarsen and Raknes (1997) found that 'funny' surprises were among the most frequently reported negative acts. However, there is a risk that these kinds of 'jokes' escalate and turn into bullying, especially if the perpetrators feel that the target cannot defend himself or take the jokes 'as a man' (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997). This is thus also an example of how victim responses may affect the development of bullying (cf. Section 2.3.2).

As for the organisational climate there are some additional factors that need mentioning. First of all, Einarsen et al. (1994a) and Vartia (1996) found a significant correlation between bullying and low satisfaction with the social climate, i.e. poor cooperation relationships and a high degree of envy and internal competition. Similarly, a strained and competitive climate seems to make an organisation particularly prone to bullying (Sutela & Lehto, 1998; Vartia, 1996).

### **2.3.3.2 Leadership**

In the section on organisational culture it was stressed that a very 'tough' and autocratic culture could be conducive of bullying. Similarly, a very autocratic style of leadership has been shown to be correlated with higher reports of bullying (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; O'Moore, Seigne, McGuire & Smith, 1998; Vartia, 1996). Ashforth (1994) has discussed potential destructive sides of leadership and identified what he refers to as 'petty tyrants', i.e. leaders who exercise a tyrannical style of management, resulting in a climate of fear at the work place. Such abusive leadership styles would thus be closely related to vertical bullying, i.e. superiors bullying their subordinates.

However, certain leadership styles may also be conducive of bullying among colleagues on the same hierarchical level. Several researchers have shown that a laissez-faire style

of leadership is associated with higher levels of bullying (Einarsen et al., 1994a; Hoel & Cooper, 2000). Thus, the reluctance of superiors to recognise and intervene in bullying episodes may convey the impression that bullying is acceptable. Similarly, Einarsen et al. (1994a) reported a relationship between higher levels of bullying and dissatisfaction with the amount of and quality of guidance, instructions and feedback given. Thus, bullying and leadership style seem to follow a curvilinear relationship, so that bullying is particularly frequent in cases of either very 'weak' or very 'tough' management styles.

### **2.3.3.3 Job Design and Work Organisation**

In addition to culture and style of leadership, job design and work organisation also have been reported to affect the prevalence of workplace bullying. Dissatisfaction and frustration with the work situation and job design may thus be conducive of bullying. In particular, unclear demands and structures appear to be risk factors. Two of the aspects of job design that have been most strongly associated with high levels of bullying and other forms of anti-social behaviour are role conflict, which refers to the degree to which employees feel contradictory expectations and demands in their jobs, and role ambiguity, which refers to the degree to which employees feel uncertainty about job duties and expectations (Einarsen et al., 1994a; Spector, 1997). Other findings indicate that unclear expectations, deficient internal communication, and unclear roles are highly conducive of bullying (Leymann, 1996; Vartia, 1996). In addition, organisational constraints and a lack of control over one's own job are associated with higher levels of bullying and anti-social behaviours (Einarsen et al., 1994a; Spector, 1997; Vartia, 1996; Zapf et al., 1996).

A high degree of stress is an additional factor that may provide fertile ground for dissatisfaction and bullying. A number of studies have thus indicated a positive relationship between a high workload and a hectic work environment, on the one hand, and high rates of bullying and interpersonal conflicts on the other (Appelberg, Romanov, Honkasalo & Koskenvuo, 1991; Einarsen et al., 1994a; Hoel & Cooper,

2000; Sutela & Lehto, 1998). Similarly, Spector (1997) reported a positive relationship between workload and frustration, which in turn may lead to anti-social behaviour. Several explanations can be proposed to explain the relationship between stress and bullying. First, it can be argued that stress decreases job satisfaction and lowers aggression thresholds for the concerned individuals, thereby resulting in more bullying. Secondly, in a hectic work environment there is little time for problem-solving, which increases the risks of normal conflict turning into 'dispute-related' bullying (cf. Einarsen, 1999) over time. However, stress does not explain bullying fully, as it can be assumed that not only perpetrators, but also victims of bullying report high levels of stress.

In addition, certain reward systems may also in some instances provide fertile ground for bullying. For example, Sutela and Lehto (1998) reported that bullying was particularly prevalent in workplaces that had introduced performance-related pay systems. Similarly, Klein (1996) concluded that performance-related reward systems might affect group cohesion negatively, as group members perceive each other competing. It can be thus be argued that performance-related pay systems increase competition, which some researchers have argued might be conducive of bullying (Sutela & Lehto, 1998; Vartia, 1996). In some organisations collective bonus systems might also lead to bullying, as these systems might reinforce some workers' concern to discipline their colleagues (Collinson, 1988).

Finally, changes in the organisation, such as restructuring and crises, have often been associated with bullying. For example, downsizing, lay-offs and pay cuts or freezes have been shown to be positively related to expressions of hostility, obstructionism and bullying (Baron & Neuman, 1998; Sutela & Lehto, 1998). Similarly, several researchers have stressed the effects of organisational changes and restructuring (Baron & Neuman, 1998; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; McCarthy, 1996; Sheehan, 1996). It can be argued that since restructuring and downsizing lead to the elimination of layers and positions, thereby compressing promotion opportunities, these phenomena also increase workloads and internal competition, and lower job security. This in turn might lead to higher pressures, more stress, and lowered thresholds for aggression.

### **2.3.4 Societal Level**

In the previous section organisational changes were mentioned as potential causes of workplace bullying. What needs to be acknowledged is that many kinds of changes, for example, restructuring and downsizing, are affected by larger changes and trends in society as a whole.

There are several trends and changes in society that have been hypothesised to have an effect on the prevalence of bullying in the workplace. Increasingly, researchers are pointing to the effects of globalisation and the liberalisation of markets, the increasing struggle for efficiency, work intensification, and reliance on performance-related reward systems, and arguing that these changes may lead to an increase in bullying and abusive conduct by managers and co-workers (Lee, 2000; McCarthy, 1996; Sheehan, 1996; Wright & Smye, 1997). For example, McCarthy (1996: 48) argues that ‘pressures generated by these forces lower the threshold at which managers, particularly those operating at the limits of their skills competencies, might adopt bullying behaviours - even if involuntarily.’ Further, Sheehan (1999: 58) points to the risks with the mentality of restructuring and increasing managerial responsibility for performance and argues that the risk of bullying may increase as managers are to an increasing extent perceived to ‘have a mandate to use whatever techniques or behaviour is deemed necessary in the deployment of human resources’. In highly competitive environments it is thus not surprising to see that managers may resort to more or less bullying tactics in order to accomplish their tasks. Thus, bullying may take on an instrumental character, i.e. become a means to an end (Hoel & Cooper, 2001).

What is more, in the 1990’s marketplace philosophies were also imported into new sectors, for example schools and hospitals, with the aim of making them more efficient and more responsive. However, some researchers have argued that these changes have had negative effects on the well-being and motivation of some employees, thereby fostering an atmosphere of bullying (Lee, 2000; NASUWT, 1996).

When considering societal forces, Neuman and Baron (2003) highlight the existence of norms emphasising ‘toughness’ and ‘survival of the fittest’ in contemporary society.



The increasing pressures for efficiency, which may cause managers to move even profitable operations and dismiss hardworking and loyal employees, violate old conceptions of psychological contracts and norms of reciprocity and may result in environments where hostility and 'aggressive' behaviour is the norm, rather than the exception.

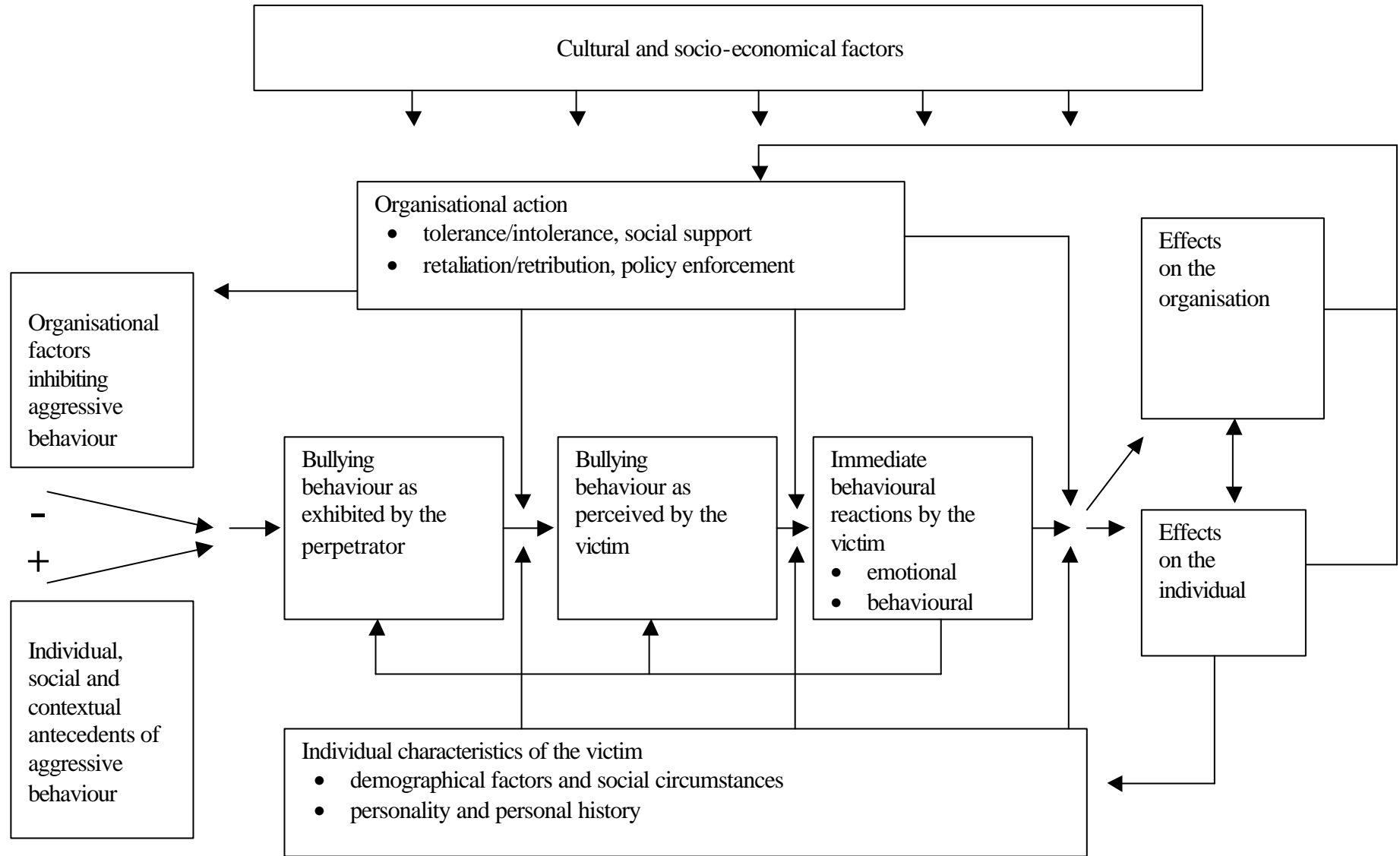
When considering the effects of societal forces on bullying, it is important to notice that most of this research has been undertaken in the UK, the US or Australia. In these countries bullying is most often depicted as negative behaviour directed from superiors towards their subordinates i.e. the focus is on vertical bullying. However, in Scandinavia and Finland, where approximately half of the victims report being bullied by colleagues on the same level (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Leymann, 1992a; Vartia, 2003), horizontal bullying has also received much attention. However, it can be hypothesised that societal trends, including restructuring, increased struggles for efficiency and work intensification, may also have negative affects on the relations between peers.

### **2.3.5 Interaction Effects**

To a growing extent researchers are acknowledging that bullying and related phenomena often are the result of an interaction between individual and situational factors (e.g. Aquino et al., 1999; Ashforth, 1997; Einarsen, 1999; Neuman & Baron, 1998; Zapf, 1999a). Thus, several factors have been hypothesised to cause, or at least contribute to, bullying. Bullying is seldom explained by one factor only, but is rather described as a multi-causal phenomenon (e.g. Zapf, 1999a). Bullying can also often be described as a self-reinforcing or spiralling process, building on vicious circles (cf. Andersson & Pearson, 1999).

Einarsen and his colleagues (Einarsen, 2000; Einarsen et al., 2003) have presented a framework for studying bullying at work, which is presented in Figure 2 (see p. 27). This figure gives an overview of how factors on different levels may interact at different

stages in the complex bullying process. It thus draws attention both to individual factors in victims and perpetrators, and to contextual, organisational and societal factors. In addition, the model draws attention both to factors affecting a perpetrator's actual 'objective' bullying behaviour and to factors affecting a victim's 'subjective' perceptions and responses to this. This model thus serves as a starting point for a deeper understanding of the role of the organisation in the process. In the remainder of this thesis the emphasis is thus on the upper left-hand corner of the figure. In other words, individual characteristics of bullies and victims and the effects of bullying are largely outside the scope of the present study.



**Figure 2 - A framework of workplace bullying (Einarsen et al., 2003: 23). Reprinted by permission of Taylor & Francis.**

## **3 The Empirical Base**

### **3.1 Research Design**

The empirical study, which provided the basis for Papers 2, 3 and 4, was conducted as a cross-sectional survey among employees with a university degree in business studies. As a sensitive topic, studying bullying poses challenges both in terms of contacting possible respondents and obtaining access to data. In this study, the collection of data was conducted in cooperation with The Finnish Association of Graduates in Economics and Business Administration (SEFE), and a questionnaire was sent to 1,000 randomly drawn members. In order to obtain additional qualitative data to provide in-depth understanding on the process and perceptions of bullying the respondents were also encouraged to write down their stories in their own words. All in all, the project was thus based on a multi-method approach, combining both quantitative and qualitative data. The reasons for this are discussed below.

So far, the majority of studies on workplace bullying have been conducted as survey studies, typically measuring the respondents' exposure to pre-defined negative behaviours by using scales such as the Negative Acts Questionnaire (Einarsen & Hoel, 2001; Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Hoel & Cooper, 2000), the Leymann Inventory for Psychological Terrorization (Leymann, 1992a; Zapf et al., 1996), the Work Harassment Scale (Björkqvist et al., 1994a), or the Workplace Incivility Scale (Cortina et al., 2001; Cortina et al., 2002). Only a few qualitative studies on bullying and hostile interpersonal behaviours have been carried out (e.g. Archer, 1999; Knorz & Zapf, 1996; Lewis, 1998, 2002; O'Moore et al., 1998; Sheehan, 1996). Although large surveys provide reliable and generalisable information on prevalence and organisational correlates, it should be remembered that they have several drawbacks. For example, quantitative surveys make it difficult to capture patterns and escalation processes, and surveys seldom provide enough data to identify the subjective meanings and experiences of the targets (cf. Keashly & Jagatic, 2003; Lewis, 1998). In addition, the fact that most studies of bullying have relied on cross-sectional data and correlational designs makes it difficult to separate antecedents from consequences and to examine the importance of vicious

circles (cf. Einarsen et al., 1994a). The combination of quantitative and qualitative data in this study is thus an attempt to overcome some of the problems inherent in previous research.

In this study, both the quantitative and qualitative data were collected at the same time and from the same group of respondents. The priority was towards the quantitative data. This form of combining quantitative and qualitative data, where the data were collected simultaneously, but where there was a predominant method that guided the project, can be described as a concurrent nested strategy (Creswell, 2003). The combination was used to gain a broader perspective on bullying and the qualitative data were collected to enrich the picture of bullying provided through the quantitative data. Whereas the quantitative data primarily aimed to describe the general work environment and the negative behaviours that the respondents had been subjected to at work, the qualitative data aimed to capture richer data on the respondents' experiences of bullying. In addition to getting a representative picture of the prevalence and forms of bullying among business professionals, the study thus also aimed to uncover the respondents' subjective perceptions of bullying.

### **3.2 Population and Sample**

Data collection was conducted in cooperation with The Finnish Association of Graduates in Economics and Business Administration (SEFE) and was thus limited to employees who had graduated from a business school. Altogether 1,000 questionnaires were distributed and 385 (38.5%) questionnaires were returned, of which 377 were usable. Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, guaranteeing anonymity was seen as crucial. Therefore a decision was reached not to number the questionnaires, which made it impossible to send a reminder to the non-respondents. However, the high number of non-respondents makes it important to interpret the results with caution, as discussed in more detail in Section 6.3.

The respondents were employed in a variety of organisations, the majority of them (82%) within the private sector. As for position, 13.6% classified themselves as managers, 30.7% as middle managers, 37.1% as experts and 16.8% as officials/clerks. Further, the respondents represented a variety of sectors, with the majority of respondents representing the sectors of manufacturing (23.4%), wholesale and retail trade (16.2%), business services (15.4%) and financial intermediation (12.7%). Of the respondents 57.3% were women and 42.7% men, meaning that women were slightly overrepresented among those responding compared to the overall gender ratio of SEFE, which is close to 50-50. Of the respondents approximately one-fifth belonged to the Swedish-speaking minority in Finland. The age range was from 24 to 64, with a mean age of 39.2. Mean job tenure was 6.9 years, ranging from two weeks to 36.9 years. The vast majority, 97.6%, worked full-time.

There were several reasons for choosing to focus on business school graduates. First of all, it can be noted that so far most of the studies on bullying have been conducted among employees in routine jobs in administration, manufacturing and health care. Few studies have been targeted at studying bullying among employees with a higher education and in career jobs, where the internal competition and stress can be assumed to be fairly high. Given the lack of research among professionals and given the researcher's interest in bullying as a possible micro-political behaviour business graduates appeared to form a suitable group of respondents.

Secondly, although some studies have explored gender differences in bullying (e.g. Björkqvist, Österman & Lagerspetz, 1994b; Leymann, 1992b; Vartia & Hyyti, 2002) findings regarding gender differences in prevalence are still contradictory and inconclusive. Thus, in order to be able to study also gender differences it was important to find a group of respondents where both men and women are represented in almost fairly equal numbers.

Finally, regular interaction with co-workers was put up as a further criterion when selecting a suitable group. Thus, professions where most of the work is done

independently of others, for example, teachers and privately practicing physicians or lawyers, were seen as less interesting for this type of study.

After the decision had been made to focus on business professionals, contact was made with The Finnish Association of Graduates in Economics and Business Administration (SEFE), who agreed to cooperate in the data collection. A total of 1,000 members were randomly chosen from the member register of approximately 30,000 members. However, when drawing up the sample certain groups were excluded from the search. First of all, entrepreneurs were excluded as many of them have only very few or no employees. Secondly, student members were excluded, as not all of them are employed and therefore might not be able to answer the questions. Finally, those who were not active in working life at the time of the study (e.g. due to unemployment or maternity leave) were excluded. The reason for this is that many of the questions relate to the daily life in their organisations over the past 12 months, questions that these persons might not be able to answer.

As for the written stories, informants were primarily contacted in connection with the survey study. Those classifying themselves as bullied in the questionnaire were encouraged to write down their experiences in their own words. Similarly, observers of bullying were encouraged to write down their experiences. This provided useful additional insights as observers of bullying are a group of informants that seems to have been largely neglected in previous studies. Altogether 79 victims and observers chose to write about their experiences. However, most of the stories were fairly short. In addition, attempts were made to contact additional suitable victims and observers of bullying through an article in a 'Forum för ekonomi och teknik', a professional magazine for business and technical people (Salin, 2000). However, this resulted in only two replies, which were not used in the further analyses.

### **3.3 Data Collection and Measurement Issues**

The questionnaire employed in the study consisted of four parts. The first part of the questionnaire consisted of background questions concerning the respondent, the employing organisation, the respondent's tasks, and the work group. The second part measured different aspects of the general work environment, for example work overload and perceived degree of organisational politics. In part three and four exposure to specific negative acts and bullying were measured.

In the second part of the questionnaire, which measured the general work environment, respondents were asked to rate 21 statements on a Likert-type of scale from 1 (strongly disagree) to 5 (strongly agree). The first five questions in the second part measured work stress, or more precisely work overload. The items were taken from Reichel and Neumann (1993), who derived them from Gmelch, Lovich and Wilke (1984) and included statements such as 'I have job demands that interfere with my other activities (family, recreation)', and 'I have insufficient time to carry out all my tasks'. In addition, the perceived degree of organisational politics was measured using the Perceptions of Organisational Politics Scale (POPS) developed by Kacmar and Ferris (1991). However, minor revisions in phrasing suggested by Nye and Witt (1993) were made. Twelve items were included and the scale included statements such as 'Favoritism not merit gets people ahead' and 'Some build up themselves by tearing others down'. The internal consistency of both scales was high: Cronbach's alpha was 0.88 for organisational politics and 0.85 for work overload.

Parts three and four in the questionnaire dealt with the actual bullying experiences of the respondent. In previous survey studies bullying has been measured in different ways. Whereas some researchers have measured bullying by particularly developed bullying scales asking the respondents how often they have been subject to a range of negative acts and potentially harassing behaviours (e.g. Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Leymann, 1992a), others have relied on subjective victim self-perception of being bullied versus not-bullied (e.g. Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; O'Moore, 2000; Vartia, 1996). The advantages of relying on victim self-perceptions are that the victim responses have been



assumed to be more closely correlated with victim perception than with the actual behaviours involved and that such an operationalisation does not limit bullying to a specific pre-determined set of behaviours. On the other hand, self-reports may lead to an underestimation of the bullying prevalence and thus leave out the 'milder' forms of bullying (see Einarsen, 1996 for a thorough discussion). In this questionnaire both methods were used (cf. Hoel & Cooper, 2000). This allowed for an examination of the overlap between victim self-assessments and more objective measurements. In addition, an increased understanding of what acts are associated with the perception of 'feeling bullied' were obtained.

In part three the respondents were asked to indicate how often they had experienced 32 different negative acts over the past 12 months (see Appendix in Paper 2). Most of the questions were taken from the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ) (Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Einarsen & Hoel, 2001). Some minor changes were made, for example, questions that were not considered relevant for this particular group of respondents were left out (e.g. practical jokes), some questions were combined into one (e.g. questions about being ignored), and some questions split into two (e.g. 'insulting e-mails' and 'other insulting written messages or insulting phone calls' as separate questions). In addition, two items were adopted from the Leymann Inventory for Psychological Terrorization (LIPT) (Leymann, 1989): 'Somebody causes you economic or material damages' and 'You are physically isolated'. After reviewing other bullying literature two additional acts were included: 'Somebody tries to sabotage your work', and 'You are excluded from social events'. The respondents were asked to indicate how often they had experienced each act on a scale from 1 (never) to 5 (daily). In addition, the respondents were also asked to indicate the perpetrator(s) for each act they had experienced. The respondent was asked to choose between 'superior', 'colleague' and 'subordinate'.

The fourth and final part of the questionnaire dealt with the respondents' own perceptions of being bullied or not. Respondents were given a short definition of bullying and asked to determine themselves whether they have been subjected to such behaviour. A similar approach has been taken by Einarsen and Skogstad (1996) and

Vartia (1996). For those considering themselves bullied there were follow-up questions regarding the frequency of bullying, the perpetrator(s), and the duration of the bullying. In addition, all respondents were asked whether they had observed bullying at work or taken part in bullying themselves during the past 12 months.

As for the language, the questionnaire was available both in Finnish and Swedish. The questions from the Negative Acts Questionnaire were translated into Swedish by the researcher. The questionnaire was then further translated into Finnish and cross-translated back to Swedish by bilingual research colleagues. In the member register of The Finnish Association of Graduates in Economics and Business Administration there was information about the native language of all members (Finnish versus Swedish), and the questionnaire was then distributed to each respondent in accordance with the information in their file. Ensuring that the respondents received the questionnaire in their own language was used as a way of trying to increase their willingness to reply and take part in the study. Before sending out the questionnaire the Swedish and Finnish versions were also tested by persons who provided comments on the clarity and comprehensibility of the questions.

### **3.4 *Written Stories***

In connection with the questionnaire, all those who had been subjected to, observed or taken part in bullying in the workplace were encouraged to write down their stories in their own words. These stories thus constituted a qualitative element in the study. Respondents were asked to describe typical bullying situations that had occurred and ponder upon what might have contributed to bullying in that case. In addition, the respondents were asked to provide some background information, for example, regarding the work environment and the work group. Respondents who had been bullied earlier were also asked to write about how and why the bullying ended. In the questionnaire it was stressed that all stories and reflections were welcome and that the information was to be treated with confidentiality. In the questionnaire some space was

reserved for the stories. However, in the text respondents were encouraged to freely continue their stories on the back of the page or on a separate sheet of paper.

Altogether 79 out of a total of 385 persons responding to the survey did write down stories or reflections on the topic. Compared with other ways of collecting stories on bullying, collecting the stories in combination with the survey study may have had some advantages and disadvantages. As for the advantages, this way of collecting stories ensured a rather broad range of views on bullying. Also people who did not feel strongly affected by bullying themselves or who even felt that victims of bullying were to blame themselves were represented. These persons would probably not volunteer to provide their views on bullying if approached through an ad in a newspaper or through other forms of direct self-selection. In addition, as the stories were collected in combination with the questionnaire, it was also possible to use the background information provided in the questionnaire when analysing the stories. On the other hand, as not all of those writing stories felt strongly engaged in the issue themselves, this resulted in some of the stories being fairly short. In addition, the earlier questions in the questionnaire may have affected the respondents' views on what was to be considered bullying or not.

In this study, the stories were used mainly to increase the understanding of what the respondents perceived as bullying and what factors, in particular what work environment factors, they perceived that had contributed to bullying. Above all, the stories provided useful information when trying to explain the large gender difference in reported prevalence rates of bullying.

Denzin and Lincoln (2000: 3) argue that 'qualitative researchers study things in their natural settings, attempting to make sense of, or to interpret, phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them'. However, using only the above mentioned short stories instead of incorporating, for example, interviews and observations, did pose some limitations on the study. First of all, although qualitative research typically stresses the importance of the setting and the context, in this case the researcher got rather limited information on the context. Secondly, the researcher remained an outsider, rather than

an insider immersed in the settings under study. Thus, the relationship between the researcher and the informants was more of a subject-object relation, than that of a subject-subject relation, found in some qualitative research (cf. Eneroth, 1984).

Furthermore, what should also be noted is that although the material collected reflected many different views on bullying, each specific case was described by only one respondent. In qualitative research it is often argued that there is no one 'correct' telling of the event. The image of a crystal has sometimes been used in qualitative research to illustrate this phenomenon: just like crystals are prisms that 'reflect externalities *and* refract within themselves', each telling of a story reflects a different perspective (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000: 5). To get a deeper understanding of the different bullying episodes described in the stories, it would thus have been desirable to have several accounts on each situation. On the other hand, these stories and their analyses provided different perspectives on bullying as a phenomenon, as both victim and observer accounts were represented, with observer accounts being slightly overrepresented.

When analysing these stories or narratives, attention was drawn to the complex relationship between facts and stories. Gabriel (2000: 5) argues that 'stories interpret events, infusing them with meaning through distortions, omissions, embellishments and other devices, without, however, obliterating the facts'. In other words, stories can be seen as part of a sense-making process, indicating that stories are influenced both by facts and the meanings and interpretations that the teller gives them. Instead of being seen as mere factual descriptions dealing with 'facts-as-information', they thus rather represent 'facts-as-experience' (cf. Gabriel, 2000). Thus, although stories may convey some insights into the actual behaviours involved in bullying, they also convey information about perceptions of bullying and meanings attributed.

Gabriel (2000) distinguishes between eight poetic tropes, i.e. mechanisms through which an underlying set of meaning is generated in a story. These are attribution of motive, casual connections, responsibility, unity, fixed qualities, emotion, agency and providential significance. In this study, particularly when analysing the significance of gender in perceptions of bullying, the emphasis was on two of them: attribution of

motive and attribution of responsibility. Thus, when the stories were analysed attention was given to whether the respondent perceived that a particular act was aimed at achieving a specific outcome or if the outcome was not intended. Just as motive is vital in the interpretation of criminal cases, where the intent of the perpetrator decides, for example, whether a homicide is to be classified as murder, manslaughter or product of negligence (cf. Gabriel, 2000), attribution of motive may affect whether an employee perceives a negative act as bullying or simply as 'thoughtless' behaviour. Secondly, analyses were conducted on whom the storyteller perceived the 'villain' to be in the story, i.e. who was to be blamed. Was the alleged victim actually 'innocent' or simply a 'scapegoat' or had he or she done something inappropriate (e.g. been lazy or arrogant) to 'deserve' his or her fate? Was the perpetrator actual 'evil' or was he or she only a victim of the circumstances him or herself? The respondents' attributions of blame and responsibility were thus assumed to affect perceptions on what was bullying.

The analysis of the written stories thus supplemented the quantitative data and provided useful insights into the perceptions of bullying. The stories were used in both Paper 3 and Paper 4. In Paper 3 gender differences in perceptions and explanations of bullying were analysed, whereas in Paper 4 the stories were mainly used to provide illustration on how bullying was sometimes perceived to be a tool for improving one's own position and on how it was associated with a politicised climate.

## **4 Summary of the Empirical Results**

In this chapter the results from the three papers written based on the empirical study are summarised. The paper on the 'Prevalence and forms of bullying among business professionals' (Paper 2), was published in *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology* in 2001. The subsequent paper 'The significance of gender in the prevalence, forms and perceptions of bullying' (Paper 3) was published in *Nordiske Organisasjonsstudier* (Nordic Organisation Studies) in the autumn of 2003. Finally, the paper on 'Bullying and organisational politics in competitive and rapidly changing work environments' (Paper 4) was published in the *International Journal of Management and Decision Making* in Spring 2003.

### **4.1 Prevalence and Forms of Bullying Among Business Professionals**

The aim of this paper was to analyse the prevalence and forms of workplace bullying among business professionals holding predominantly managerial or expert positions. In addition, in the paper two different methods for measuring bullying were compared. The paper was based on the quantitative data collected in the survey among members of the Finnish Association of Graduates in Economics and Business Administration.

As for the reported prevalence of bullying it can be noted that when provided a definition of bullying, 8.8% of the respondents reported that they had at least occasionally been bullied during the past 12 months. 1.6% reported that they had been bullied at least weekly. A considerably higher number had been affected by bullying at least indirectly. Of all the respondents, 30.4% reported that they had witnessed bullying in their present workplace during the past 12 months. This thus clearly shows that bullying is a widespread and visible problem also among highly educated professionals.

However, in this study self-classifications of being bullied or not were also compared with another strategy for measuring bullying. When using a slightly modified version of

the Negative Acts Questionnaire (Einarsen & Hoel, 2001), containing a list of 32 predefined negative and potentially harassing acts, as many as 24.1% of the respondents reported that they had been subjected to at least one of the negative acts on a weekly basis. The respondents had experienced predominantly work-related negative acts, for example, that their opinions and views were ignored, that they were given unreasonable deadlines or that information was withheld. As for particular risk groups it could be noticed that women reported significantly higher victimisation rates than men (11.6% versus 5%) and that managers and experts reported lower prevalence rates than clerks and officials.

As illustrated in the numbers above, this study demonstrated that different ways of measuring bullying can give very different results and that great care therefore should be taken when comparing studies that have relied on different ways of operationalising and measuring bullying. However, what should be noted is that although the prevalence rates reported with the two strategies varied considerably, there was still consistency between the two strategies in the sense that those who had classified themselves as bullied also reported higher exposure rates to most of the negative acts included. In addition, of those classifying themselves as bullied on a daily or weekly basis, all were identified when using the criterion of having been subjected to at least one of the predefined negative acts at least weekly. Similarly, the vast majority of those who had experienced several ( $\geq 4$ ) of the negative acts on a weekly basis had also classified themselves as bullied. Thus, a conclusion is that, ideally, both methods should be used in combination to provide insights on both what negative acts respondents are subjected to and when these acts are perceived as bullying.

When comparing with previous studies on bullying, this study yielded two rather surprising findings. First of all, in contrast with most other bullying studies in the Nordic countries (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Leymann, 1992b; Vartia, 2003) women were significantly overrepresented among victims in this group. This finding emphasised the need for an in-depth analysis of gender differences in both exposure to and perceptions of bullying and the results of these analyses are presented in Section 4.2. Secondly, compared to other studies (e.g. Einarsen & Raknes, 1997; Hoel &

Cooper, 2000) the respondents in this study reported higher exposure levels to work-related acts and lower exposure levels to non-work-related acts. As some of these work-related acts of bullying, for example, withholding information and ignoring views and opinions, are also described as tactics of micro-politics, this further emphasised the need for studies on the relationship between bullying and organisational politics. This issue is further explored in Section 4.3.

## ***4.2 The Significance of Gender in the Prevalence, Forms and Perceptions of Workplace Bullying***

In the previous section a significant gender difference in bullying was reported. Thus the aim of the following paper (Paper 3) was to further describe gender differences in bullying among professionals and try to explain these differences. The focus was on the prevalence, forms and perceptions of bullying, and the extent to which these interactions and perceptions can be understood as gendered.

The paper on the significance of gender made use of the data collected in the survey study conducted among Finnish professionals with a university degree in business studies. In addition, the written stories collected in connection with the survey were analysed to explore gender differences in perceptions and explanations of bullying.

In this sample 11.6% of the women compared to 5% of the men classified themselves as bullied. However, when measuring exposure to specific negative acts the gender difference was notably lower, 26.4% versus 21.1%. As for the perpetrators of bullying the results showed that men were typically bullied by their superiors, whereas women were bullied by superiors and colleagues in approximately equal proportions. What is more, only female respondents reported being bullied by subordinates. In addition, women reported significantly higher exposure rates than men for 7 of the listed 32 negative acts, whereas men did not report significantly higher rates than women for any of the acts.



When discussing and trying to explain bullying the written stories indicated that men were more likely than women to emphasise the role and responsibility of the victim. In contrast, women seemed to emphasise the personality of the perpetrator and group dynamics. What is more, women were more likely than men to see bullying as intentional and as related to internal competition, whereas men tended to see it as an unintended consequence of stress.

Several possible explanations for the higher bullying rates reported by women were put forward in the paper. First of all, the fact that women still are underrepresented in managerial positions in business life and thereby more visible and exposed might make them more exposed to negative acts. Secondly, the stories written by women also indicated that they felt more defenceless when confronted with hostility and less able to 'pay back'. What is more, women seemed more willing than men to use the label 'bullying' to describe abusive behaviour. This might partly be explained by the fact that women tended to see hostile perpetrators as the main reason for bullying, whereas men explained it in terms of weak victims. Men's propensity to emphasise the role and responsibility of the victim would make them more likely to consider bullying a 'personal failure' for themselves. What is more, it was also argued that claiming victim status might actually be associated with positive outcomes for women under some circumstances.

In brief, the higher rates reported by women were thus understood as the result of an interaction between higher actual exposure rates to negative behaviours, lower perceived possibilities to defend themselves, and less reluctance to classify negative experiences as bullying. All of these explanations were also argued to be mediated by gendered perceptions of power.

### **4.3 *Bullying and Organisational Politics in Competitive and Rapidly Changing Work Environments***

In this paper it was argued that workplace bullying can in some instances be a form of organisational politics, i.e. it can be seen as a competitive rent-seeking strategy from the perspective of the individual perpetrator. It was thus argued that under certain circumstances acts of bullying can be a deliberate attempt to eliminate very high or very low performing colleagues and subordinates, who are perceived as threats or liabilities.

In bullying research several different explanations have been put forward for explaining workplace bullying. However, typically bullying has been described as an irrational behaviour and the micro-political or rational aspects brought up by some German researchers (Kräkel, 1997; Neuberger, 1999) have largely been missing from the English-speaking literature.

This paper made use of the same data set as the two previous papers, i.e. the survey among employees holding a university degree in business studies. In the questionnaire, the degree of organisational politics was measured using the Perceptions of Politics Scale (POPS) developed by Kacmar and Ferris (1991). In addition, internal competition was measured with a single-item question and work load was measured with items from Reichel and Neuman (1993). The analyses confirmed that there was a relationship between bullying, on one hand, and a politicised climate, on the other. It was thus found that those who had been subjected to bullying, who had been subjected to negative acts or who had observed bullying reported higher levels of perceived organisational politics than the unexposed respondents.

The written stories collected from the respondents were also analysed for the existence of references to organisational politics or internal competition. The qualitative data supported the existence of a positive relationship between bullying on one hand and a politicised and competitive climate on the other. Observers of bullying also confirmed this relationship. This is illustrated by the examples below:

In a company of consultants, situations often arise, where seemingly equal colleagues compete for the same jobs. Since recognition is given primarily based on billing, it is natural that elbow tactics are used to boost one's own position, which in turn easily leads to the perception that somebody is standing in the way, and therefore gets bullied. [Woman, expert position]

A supervisor, who is a colleague of mine, got a new subordinate, whom she obviously experienced as a threat to her own career. The new subordinate was not invited to common meetings, was publicly scoffed at, etc. When the subordinate had risen to the same hierarchical level, it was payback time. The former supervisor was slandered, was excluded from the work community, and it was generally considered that she was not capable of handling her work tasks. [Woman, middle management]

The examples above illustrate that acts of bullying can be used as a way of obstructing or trying to eliminate rivals. In line with this, the paper further argues that globalisation, increased pressure for efficiency, and restructuring, which limit the number of management positions and thereby contribute to increased internal competition, may lead to more bullying.

As for the practical implications of the findings it is emphasised that the results have implications for preventing and stopping bullying. For example, the possible political aspects of bullying must be taken into account when designing both performance appraisal and reward systems.

## **5 Explaining Bullying Revisited**

In Chapter 2 different approaches to explaining workplace bullying were presented. In addition, the framework developed by Einarsen and colleagues (Einarsen, 2000; Einarsen et al., 2003) was introduced to give an overview of how individual, organisational and societal factors may contribute during different stages of the bullying process. In this chapter the aim is to return to the issue of explaining bullying and make some additions to the model presented in Section 2.3.5.

The chapter begins by analysing organisational structures and processes in more detail and by proposing a model, which more precisely discusses the role of organisational factors and how they may contribute to the bullying process. This summary is based on the last paper included in this thesis, i.e. 'Ways of explaining workplace bullying: a review of enabling, motivating and precipitating structures and processes in the work environment' (Paper 5), published in *Human Relations*. Secondly, the chapter addresses in more detail the relationship between power and bullying and special emphasis is put on structural power differences, which so far have received little attention in bullying research. Finally, the new insights are summarised and added to the framework developed by Einarsen and colleagues (Einarsen, 2000; Einarsen et al., 2003).

### **5.1 *Enabling, Motivating and Precipitating Structures and Processes in the Work Environment***

The aim of the last paper was to return to the subject of work environment factors explaining workplace bullying. The main contribution of this paper is that organisational antecedents of bullying are not merely identified, but that their different roles and the dynamics of the process are explored in more detail. The paper is thus an attempt to give a broader view on how different organisational factors may contribute to the bullying process. In order to better understand the dynamics behind bullying, a model distinguishing between different types of explanations is put forward. Thus,

explanations for and factors associated with bullying are classified into three groupings, i.e. enabling structures and processes, motivating structures and processes, and finally precipitating processes (see Figure 3, p. 46).

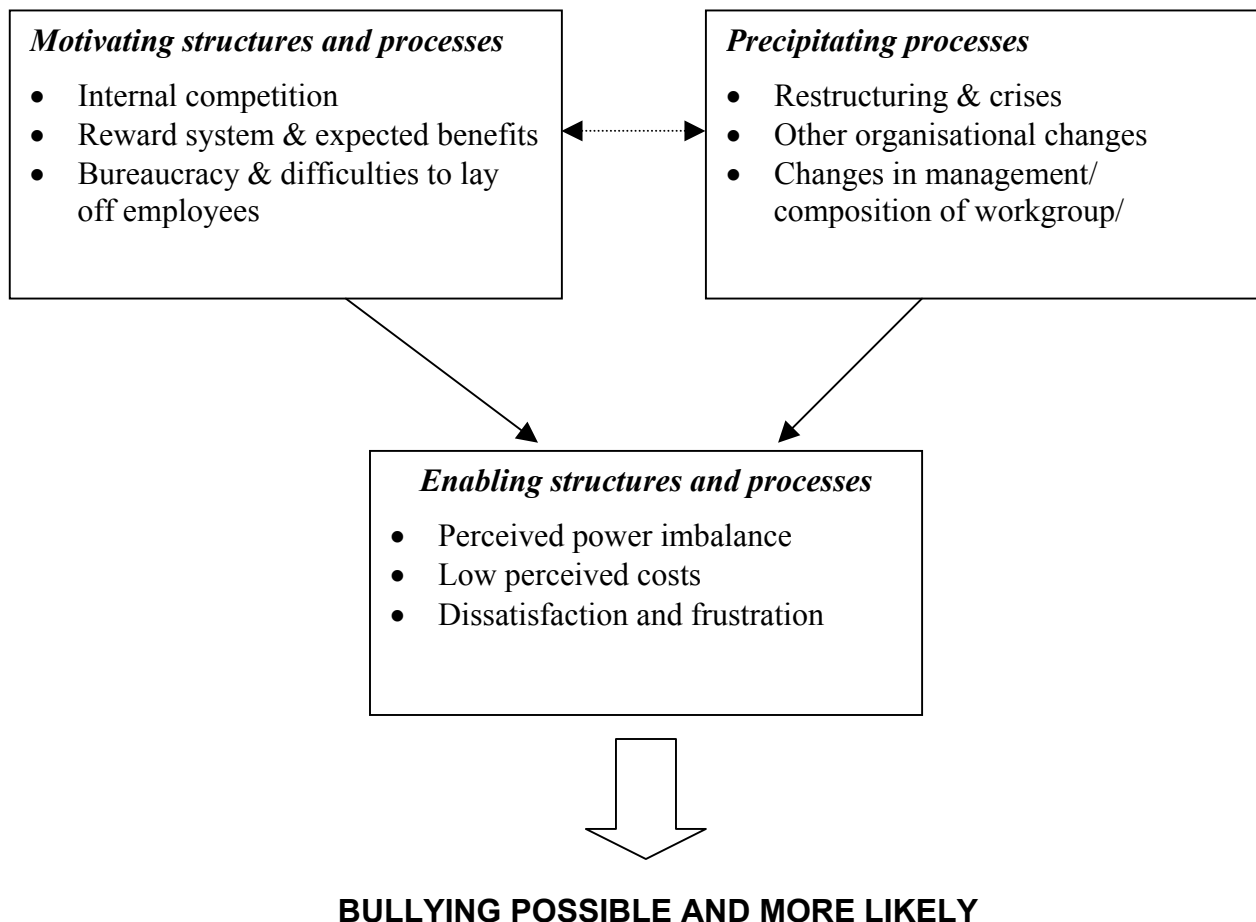
This classification has been inspired by Boddewyn (1985), who originally used a similar framework to classify theories of foreign direct investments. She argued that most theories in that field implicitly emphasised one of three types of explanations: conditions - i.e. prerequisites or necessary antecedents; motivations – i.e. goals or incentives that influence a person to do or act in a certain way; and precipitating circumstances – i.e. elements that trigger or hasten a certain process. Based on Boddewyn's argument a similar classification was made for explanations of bullying and was originally presented in Salin (1999). Based on further literature studies and the empirical study described in this thesis the framework has been further revised (Salin, 2003c). Although a similar classification of the explanations has not been done before and although these categories of explanation have not been used in previous research on bullying, they seem to fit the material and do not contradict previous findings. However, the framework and the three grouping presented below still remain to be tested.

The first grouping, i.e. the enabling structures and processes, include a perceived power imbalance (e.g. formal power differences, 'total' institutions), low perceived costs (e.g. weak leadership, a permissive or 'tough' organisational culture), and dissatisfaction and frustration (e.g. role conflict and ambiguity, lack of clarity, stress). These enabling structures have a double significance in the sense that they simultaneously act as a foundation and as a filter. The enabling factors can provide fertile soil for bullying, making the environment conducive to bullying. In addition, when there are motivating and/or precipitating structures or processes present, the existence or lack of enabling conditions in the organisation will affect whether bullying is possible or not.

The second grouping consists of incentives, i.e. motivating structures or processes. This category is associated with Paper 4 (see Section 4.3), which indicated that sometimes bullying is used as a micro-political behaviour and prevalent in organisations with a politicised climate. This grouping thus introduces a political perspective and identifies

under what circumstances it might actually be ‘rational’ for an individual to bully someone. It is thus argued that high internal competition and certain reward systems may make it rewarding to ‘eliminate’ colleagues and subordinates, or to ‘put obstacles’ in their way.

Finally, the third grouping consists of precipitating processes. These precipitating processes can be seen as the actual triggers and typically involve changes of the status quo. Examples of such changes include restructuring and downsizing, other organisational changes, and changes in the composition of the workgroup and management.



**Figure 3 - Enabling, motivating and precipitating structures and processes in the work environment (Salin, 2003c).**

Bullying can thus be understood as the result of an interaction between these three groupings of explanators, or at least two of them. It is argued that: ‘something [...] does not usually happen unless it is possible, beneficial and triggered’ (cf. Boddewyn, 1985). Conditions in themselves may not usually lead to bullying, but act as enabling factors if there is an additional motivator or trigger present. The enabling factors can provide fertile soil for bullying, making the environment conducive to bullying. In addition, when there are motivating and/or precipitating structures or processes present, the existence or lack of enabling conditions in the organisation will affect whether bullying is possible or not.

Although this model is focused on the work environment factors, it is also pointed out in the paper that there are other factors that contribute to bullying and affect bullying dynamics (cf. Einarsen et al.’s [2003] framework). To gain a more complete understanding of bullying, individual and societal factors must also be taken into consideration. For example, certain target and perpetrator characteristics may lead to or reinforce perceived power imbalances, thereby enabling bullying. Certain personality traits, such as dependence, instability, introversion, may make an employee particularly vulnerable (cf. Coyne et al., 2000). Furthermore, as demonstrated in Paper 3, gender and the gender system in society may be examples of factors that affect perceived power imbalances in organisations. In addition, larger societal forces, such as the globalisation of markets and competition and an increasing struggle for efficiency, may contribute to bullying. It can be argued that these forces reduce the risks and costs of bullying by turning it into ‘normal’ behaviour, that they increase the ‘value’ of eliminating ‘burdens’ and ‘threats’ and that they increase stress, thereby further lowering the threshold for aggression. Thus, an examination of societal forces, which affect all three groupings of explanations, is an important avenue for further research in the area.

## **5.2 Bullying and Power**

The concept of power is important when studying bullying for several reasons. Firstly, a perceived power imbalance is important when defining bullying, since a perceived inability to defend oneself successfully is seen as an important element in the definition of bullying (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Vartia, 1996). Secondly, power is important also in establishing what is perceived as bullying at a given time in a given context. Finally, in addition to being a means of enforcing power and control, bullying can also be seen as a form of power and control in itself (cf. Hearn, 1998 on violence).

As discussed in Section 2.1 the affinity between power and bullying has been addressed in definitions of bullying and researchers have argued that it is not bullying if two parties of approximately 'equal' strength are in conflict (e.g. Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996). However, despite this argument little attention has been devoted to what is actually meant by 'equal strength' and how the power imbalances implied in bullying actually are created.

When discussing power imbalances in bullying, much attention has been drawn to the personal characteristics of victims and perpetrators. For example, certain personality traits such as submissiveness and low esteem have been associated with victims (e.g. Aquino et al., 1999; Coyne et al., 2000), as employees with these traits are less likely to be able to defend themselves successfully or retaliate. In addition, several studies have examined the organisational status of the bully and victim and found that in most countries, for example, the UK, Ireland, Germany, and the USA the majority of bullies or instigators of incivility are supervisors (e.g. Cortina et al., 2001; Hoel & Cooper, 2000; Knorz & Zapf, 1996; O'Moore, 2000; Rayner, 1997; Zapf et al., 1996). In most of the studies of bullying power is thus implicitly understood as the result of individual characteristics, such as personality or formal position held.

However, what little attention in bullying research has been paid to is how societal structures may lead to some groups of employees being perceived to have less social power than others. It needs to be acknowledged that organisational power differences are often connected with societal power differences and bullying often overlaps with



related phenomena such as sexism or racism in the workplace (cf. Hearn & Parkin, 2001). Both sexual and racial harassment can be seen as particular subforms of bullying, which is also demonstrated by the fact that items regarding sexual or racial harassment are often included in questionnaires used to measure bullying (cf. Negative Acts Questionnaire, Einarsen & Hoel, 2001). In these forms of harassment the importance of social divisions is particularly visible. However, social divisions may also be important for explaining other forms of bullying, where sexual or racial aspects are not the main focus.

This thesis drew attention to how gendered notions of power may make women both more likely to be subjected to negative acts in the workplace, and less likely to feel that they can defend themselves successfully in such situations. The degree of gender equality in a country is thus likely to affect the significance of gender in victimisation. For example, whereas Scandinavian and Finnish studies typically report only minor gender differences in bullying (e.g. Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Leymann, 1992b; Piirainen et al., 2000; Vartia, 2003), studies in Germany and the US reveal stronger gender differences (Aquino & Bradfield, 2000; Cortina et al., 2001; Zapf, 1999b).

In the empirical study presented in this thesis the significance of gender and power in bullying was analysed. However, although not examined in this thesis it may be assumed that other social divisions associated with perceived power differences, such as race and class, may have similar effects, both on exposure to negative acts and perceived ability to defend oneself successfully in such situations. This is supported by the finding that members of 'non-white' ethnic groups show higher victimisation rates (Hoel & Cooper, 2000) and by the finding that ethnic minorities appraise uncivil behaviour as more stressful (Cortina et al., 2002). General power structures in society, in particular those related to social divisions, such as gender, race and class, thus need to be acknowledged in a complete framework of bullying.

However, in addition to analysing how power and power imbalances may lead to victimisation and lower perceived possibilities to defend oneself, we also need to acknowledge that power plays an important role in defining what is perceived as a

violation or bullying in organisation. Hearn (1998: 15) argues that violence, and what is meant by violence, is ‘historically, socially and culturally constructed’. Similarly, Lewis (2002) draws attention to the social construction of workplace bullying and the potential role of media in creating awareness around the area. What kinds of violations are problematised and what behaviours are recognised as bullying are thus dependent on social relations and power aspects of these relationships.

Lukes (1974), who identified three dimensions of power, argued that power also includes the power to ‘produce reality’ and manage meaning. The dominant can thereby set the norms or the rules of the game. When members of organisations internalise such norms it can thus lead to unquestioned compliance with organisational practices, even though they might be discriminatory or disadvantage certain groups (cf. Fulop, Linstead & Frith, 1999). This is likely to be the case particularly in total institutions, such as the army, prisons and the fire service, where dominance, power imbalances and a strong need for conformity are emphasised (cf. Archer, 1999; Ashforth, 1994; Ireland, 2000). Structures of power are thus also important in establishing what ‘counts as bullying’ in a certain organisation.

### ***5.3 Additions to the Framework Explaining Workplace Bullying***

In Section 2.3.5 the framework for explaining bullying developed by Einarsen and colleagues (Einarsen, 2000; Einarsen et al., 2003) was presented. The framework presented both antecedents and outcomes of bullying and factors on different levels, i.e. individual, organisational and social, were acknowledged.

The aim of this section is to summarise some of the main findings from this thesis and incorporate them into this framework (see Figure 4, p. 53). In line with the aims of this thesis these modifications are limited to the antecedents of bullying and not the outcomes of bullying, i.e. the left part of the model. What is more, as personality factors are outside the scope of this thesis the modifications are limited to the parts dealing with organisational and societal factors.

As for the effects on organisational factors in bullying they were discussed in two different parts of the model. First of all, organisational factors inhibiting bullying were discussed. In addition, the model acknowledged that organisational actions in terms of tolerance/intolerance and possible retaliation may affect bullying. In other words the focus is on what would be labelled enabling/disabling factors in the terminology of this thesis. In particular, attention is drawn to what would be labelled low versus high costs, for example, organisational tolerance and risk of retaliation.

However, this thesis has drawn attention to the fact that organisational factors may have multiple roles in the bullying process. In addition to acting as a filter that determines whether bullying is possible or not, organisational factors may play other roles in the process, i.e. act as motivating and precipitating factors. For example, in Paper 4 it was argued that bullying can sometimes be a micro-political strategy and that internal competition and certain reward systems may actually act as incentives for bullying. What is more, in Paper 5 it was argued that certain changes in the organisation might act as precipitating factors or triggers of bullying. Both the motivating and precipitating/triggering roles of certain organisational factors are thus proposed to be more clearly highlighted in the model. Instead of merely emphasising the inhibiting effects of organisational factors, i.e. the ‘minus factors’, it thus stressed that certain organisational factors, such as the reward system and restructuring, may also have a ‘plus-effect’ on bullying, i.e. motivate and trigger bullying.

What is more, in the model attention was also drawn to cultural and socio-economical factors that may affect both the prevalence of negative acts and how these are interpreted by the victim. In other words, it was acknowledged that societal factors may be of relevance. This thesis has also drawn attention to how power structures in society may affect bullying behaviour. In Paper 3 the affinity between power and gender was emphasised. In similar ways other researchers have emphasised the links between power and other social divisions, for example, race and class (e.g. Zack, Shrage & Sartwell, 1998). In order to understand bullying and victimisation it is thus also important to understand power structures and perceptions in society. To some extent such power structures and perceptions are reflected in cultural factors (e.g. power distance and

masculinity in Hofstede, 1980). However, due to the importance of power and power imbalances in bullying, ‘power structures in society’ are proposed as another addition to the model.

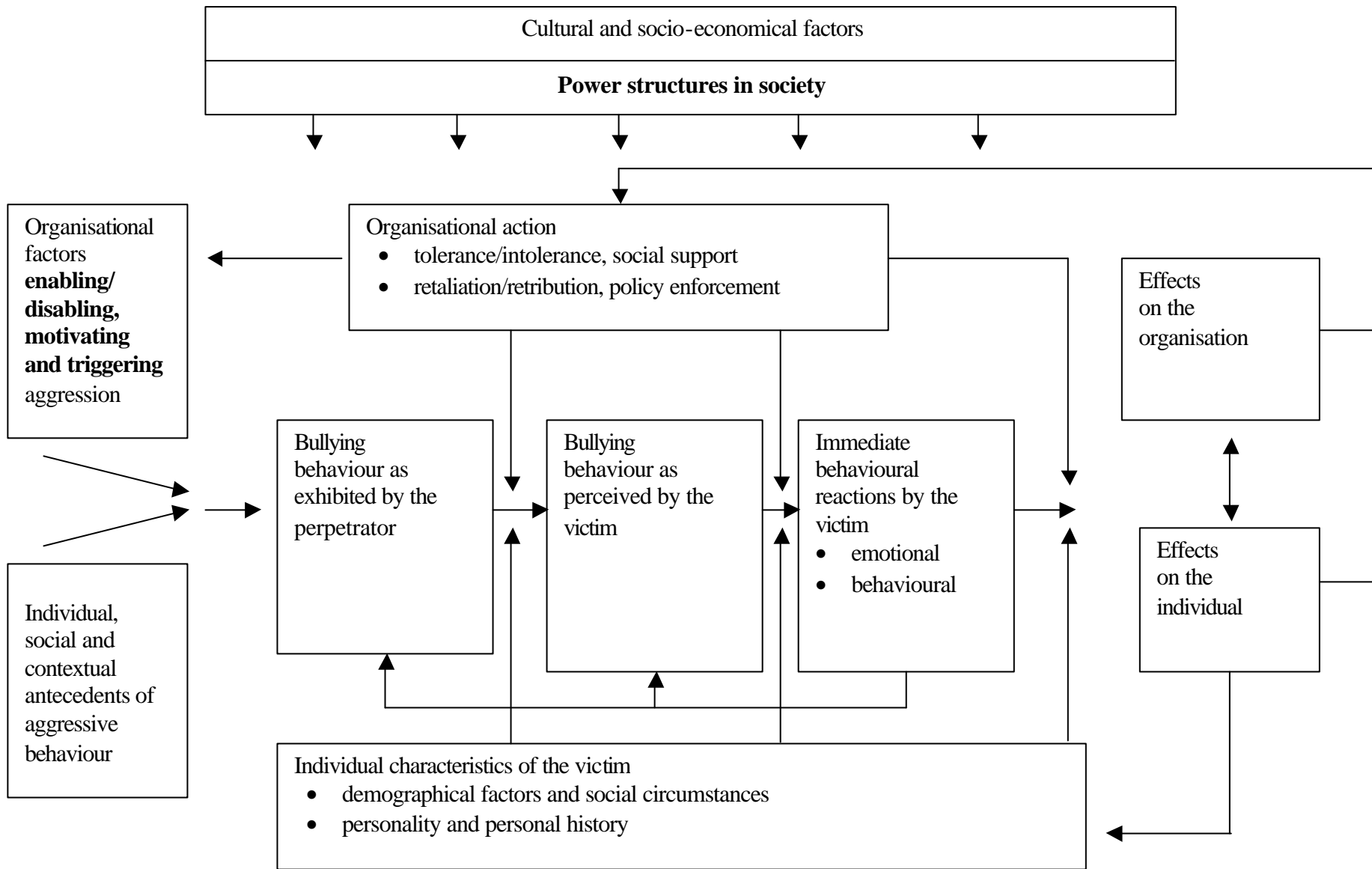


Figure 4 - A revised framework of bullying, based on the original framework by Einarsen et al. (2003).

## **6 Discussion and Implications**

### **6.1 Main Findings and Contribution to Research**

The aims of this thesis were, first, to describe the prevalence and forms of bullying experienced by business professionals, and, second, to increase the understanding of bullying by analysing factors and processes in the work environment that may contribute to bullying in knowledge-intensive, career-oriented jobs. The thesis thus addresses an issue that has lately awoken growing interest in the popular press, among trade unionists, and among organisational researchers. However, although the issue has received growing attention in the popular press, the empirical evidence on bullying has until lately been relatively scarce. This has especially been the case in certain occupational groups, for example, among business professionals. This thesis thus seeks to address some of the gaps in the existing knowledge base on workplace bullying.

The thesis has been based upon five individual papers. The first paper consisted of a literature review, where organisational factors explaining workplace bullying were identified based on previous research on bullying. In the second paper the prevalence and forms of bullying among business professionals were described and two different methods for measuring bullying were compared. The third paper elaborated on the significance of gender in the prevalence, forms and perceptions of bullying in a male-dominated work environment. In the fourth paper the relationship between bullying on the one hand and a highly politicised climate characterised by high internal competition was studied. Finally, in the fifth paper a classification of how different organisational factors may contribute to bullying was presented. A summary of the main contribution of each of the five papers included in the thesis can be found in Figure 5 (see p. 55). Below, the overall main contributions of the thesis are summarised.

The first contribution of this thesis is that it confirmed that bullying also occurs among professionals and that a high education does not provide protection against bullying. Since this population has been less studied than, for example, populations within health care and education, this thesis adds to our knowledge on the prevalence of bullying and

Paper	Main research findings/contribution
1	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewed literature on organisational factors explaining workplace bullying</li> <li>• Discussed the changing nature of work, work organisation, organisational culture and climate and leadership as organisational antecedents of bullying</li> </ul>
2	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Showed that 8.8% of Finnish employees with a university degree in business studies had been bullied and that work-related negative acts were the most typical bullying acts in this group</li> <li>• Showed that there was a certain consistency between self-reports of bullying and using scales, such as the Negative Acts Questionnaire (NAQ), although using the scale seemed to lead to somewhat overestimated bullying rates</li> </ul>
3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Showed that women in business life reported higher exposure rates to bullying and pre-defined, negative acts and only females reported being bullied by subordinates.</li> <li>• Argued that the higher victimisation rates reported by women can be seen as the result of an interaction between higher actual exposure rates to negative behaviours, lower perceived possibilities to defend themselves, and less reluctance to classify negative experiences as bullying.</li> </ul>
4	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Showed that there was a positive relationship between a politicised environment and bullying and argued that bullying can be a form of organisational politics.</li> <li>• Argued that globalisation, increased pressures for efficiency, and restructuring, which limit the number of management positions and contribute to increased internal competition, may lead to more bullying.</li> </ul>
5	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reviewed literature on work environment factors explaining bullying and proposed a model distinguishing between three types of explanations: enabling structures or necessary antecedents, motivating structures or incentives and precipitating processes or triggering circumstances.</li> <li>• Concluded that bullying is typically an interaction between structures and processes from all three groupings.</li> </ul>

**Figure 5- A summary of the main contribution of each paper.**

the prevalence of different negative acts in different organisational groups. As for the forms of bullying, the study showed that work-related acts of bullying were particularly prevalent among business professionals. In particular, the respondents reported that their opinions and views were ignored, that they were given impossible tasks or deadlines, that they were ordered to do work clearly below their level of competence and that someone was withholding information, which affected their performance. Although such acts were reported also by non-victims of bullying, the results showed that victims reported significantly higher exposure rates to these behaviours.

A second contribution of the thesis is that it highlighted a political perspective on bullying, which has largely been missing from English-speaking literature on bullying. The study conducted confirmed a positive relationship between a high degree of perceived organisational politics and workplace bullying. It can thus be argued that in some instances bullying may be motivated by political aspects, at least among professionals who may be highly career-oriented. As reported earlier, many of the negative acts reported by the victims of bullying were work-related and some of them could be closely linked to what has been referred to as 'micro-political' behaviour in organisations. For instance, both withholding information and ignoring somebody's views and opinions have been reported as possible means for improving one's own position (Allen, Madison, Porter, Renwick & Mayes, 1979). However, Zapf and Einarsen (2003) argue that micro-political behaviour should not be equated with bullying. It is important to remember that the primary goal of micro-political behaviour is to enhance one's own positions and self-interest, not to destroy others. However, there may be situations when it is in the self-interest of an employee to eliminate or obstruct the work of a subordinate or colleague, who is perceived to be a threat or a liability. In such cases, micro-political aspirations may take the form of bullying. What is more, as micro-political behaviour seems to be particularly prevalent in management and on higher levels in organisations (e.g. Gandz & Murray, 1980), bullying by using micro-political behaviours may also be seen as relatively 'safe' among professionals, since the acts are generally accepted and the risks of the perpetrator being identified or perceived as a bully are thereby reduced.



A third contribution of this thesis is that it provided a broader understanding of how organisational factors may contribute to bullying and what role they may play. This thesis thus follows up on a tradition among Nordic researchers, who typically have argued that the psychosocial work environment affects the prevalence of bullying. The thesis also aimed to incorporate the political perspective described in the previous paragraph in this model. In this thesis it has thus been argued that bullying can best be understood as the result of an interaction between three groupings of explainers: enabling factors (e.g. power imbalance, low costs and dissatisfaction and frustration), motivating factors (e.g. internal competition and the reward system), and precipitating factors (e.g. restructuring and other changes).

Fourth, in addition to contributing to the bullying debate, this thesis also aimed to contribute to the gender debate, which has received growing attention in organisation studies in the past few decades. The thesis thus analysed how the gendered nature of organisations may contribute to the bullying of women, especially in the male-dominated business world. It was thus argued that due to lower perceived levels of social power women are somewhat more likely than men to be subjected to negative acts, but also to interpret these in a negative way and feel less able to defend themselves successfully. What is more, due to gender stereotypes women may also feel less hesitant to use the label bullying and may under certain circumstances even gain short term benefits from claiming victim status. In addition to contributing to our understanding of bullying, this thesis thus also provides insights into the more general processes of power, authority and inequality in organisations.

Fifthly, in terms of methodological contribution it should first of all be noticed that the study made use of both quantitative and qualitative data, whereas the vast majority of previous studies have relied on quantitative data only. This allowed for a more in-depth analysis of what employees perceive as bullying, how they contribute motive and responsibility and gender differences in perceptions of bullying. In addition, as for the research design, what needs to be mentioned is that the perspective of observers of bullying was also sought. Data collected from observers of bullying were thus used both

to confirm the relationship between a highly politicised climate and the occurrence of bullying and to analyse gender differences in perceptions of bullying.

What is more, in the quantitative part of the survey two different methods were used for measuring bullying, i.e. both exposure to predefined negative acts and the respondent's own classification of being bullied or not. An important methodological contribution of this thesis is that this allowed for a comparison of the two widely used techniques and showed that although some consistency was found, using lists with predefined acts seems to overestimate the prevalence of bullying. An important implication of this is that great care needs to be taken when comparing studies based on different ways of measuring bullying and that ideally the two methods should be used in combination.

## **6.2 *Implications for Management and Human Resource Professionals***

The empirical findings and conclusions of this thesis have several implications for management. First of all, in the thesis it was argued that organisational structures and processes can play an important role in bullying. These factors thus need to be taken into consideration when taking appropriate prevention and intervention measures. As for enabling/disabling structures in the work environment, managers first of all need to ensure that employees perceive the costs associated with bullying someone as high. Thus, management needs to have a clear policy on bullying and show that perpetrators are both identified and not allowed to continue such behaviour. What is more, when trying to take appropriate prevention measures management needs to ensure that there are no motivating factors in the reward system that may directly or indirectly encourage bullying. In other words, bullying and sabotaging the work performance of rivals must not be accepted and certainly not rewarded. For example, care should thus be taken not to promote employees who have succeeded by using bullying tactics towards others. In addition, human resource professionals and managers may have an important role in providing or arranging for mediation and counselling for victims and perpetrators in

bullying situations. If such mediation or counselling is not successful, disciplinary action towards perpetrators may be necessary.

What is more, the results showed that managers need to be aware that bullying can also occur at higher levels in organisations. In particular, managers need to be aware of the risks associated with a political climate, where everybody pursues their own interests, even at the expense of others. When encouraging competition in order to increase efficiency and reduce costs, managers need to be aware of the possible detrimental effects on co-worker relations, possible even resulting in bullying. As discussed in the beginning of the thesis, the prevention of bullying is important, as bullying can have severe consequences both for the individuals and organisations concerned. Bullying can also be seen to have a detrimental effect on trust and identification with the organisation, aspects of the relational dimension of social capital (Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998). As social capital, including trust, is increasingly acknowledged as an important competitive advantage (cf. Nahapiet & Ghoshal, 1998), measures to prevent dysfunctional behaviour such as bullying become even more important.

The findings on the significance of gender in bullying also have important implications for management and human resource professionals. First of all, both managers and human resource professionals need to be aware of how current organisational practices and gender stereotypes may favour men and put women in both more exposed and vulnerable positions. Secondly, the results highlight the importance of gender differences in perceptions of negative acts. Thus, male managers need to be aware that women and men may perceive certain acts differently and that women may be more likely to feel defenceless when subjected to abusive leadership or negative acts from colleagues. Organisational policies and practices regarding discrimination of women and minorities are thus important in the creation or prevention of power imbalances in the organisation.

Furthermore, we should remember that although many men who are subjected to negative acts do not classify themselves as bullied, this does not necessarily mean that they are not negatively affected by such acts. In fact, recent studies have shown that the

non-labellers subjected to negative acts also report similar negative effects on health and job satisfaction as the labellers (Hoel & Cooper, 2000; also see Landrine & Klonoff, 1997, cited in Hearn & Parkin, 2001). In other words, in order to avoid such negative effects it is an important challenge for managers and human resource professionals to identify and offer assistance to men subjected to negative acts, even when these persons do not classify themselves as bullied or actively seek help.

### **6.3 *Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research***

Although this thesis has shed new light on bullying in a group that has been neglected in previous research, there are several limitations that must be kept in mind. First of all, the study was fairly small scale and the response rate was only 38.5%. Although the study does give indicative results about bullying among business professionals, the high number of non-respondents has implications for interpreting the results. Previous studies of non-respondents have indicated that the number of victims may be somewhat lower among the non-respondents than among the respondents (Leymann, 1992c). However, the difference has not been reported to be very large. What is more, an analysis of late responses in this study indicated a higher prevalence rate of bullying among late responders. This could indicate that not only not feeling concerned by the study, but also having strong personal experiences, may make persons hesitant to take part in this kind of study.

Secondly, it should be remembered that this study has been undertaken within a particular profession and the possibilities to generalise the findings to other professions and occupations are limited. For example, it should be remembered that Finnish business life, especially on higher managerial levels, is still fairly male-dominated and heavily influenced by traditionally 'masculine' norms. To gain a deeper understanding of the relationship between gender and bullying, similar studies would need to be undertaken in more gender balanced or female-dominated work environments.

Thirdly, like most other studies on bullying this study has mainly relied on a victim perspective and the victim's subjective perceptions of being bullied or not. However, to some extent the study has also aimed to use observer accounts to verify the prevalence of bullying and to confirm, for example, the relationship between a high degree of perceived organisational politics and the occurrence of bullying. Similarly, observer accounts have been analysed when trying to establish what business professionals perceive as bullying and how they explain the occurrence of bullying. This study has not offered the possibility of comparing victim and observer accounts for the same bullying situations. Studies that actually aim to incorporate victim and observer reports on the same episodes should thus be encouraged in the future. Similarly, Bennett and Robinson (2003) have argued that peer reports may provide additional useful, in-depth data for increasing our understanding of hostile interpersonal behaviours.

However, when conducting studies on bullying it is important to remember the highly sensitive nature of this kind of inquiry. This also poses limitations for conducting studies on bullying. The highly sensitive nature of bullying makes it difficult to get access to 'objective' data on bullying, as the stories of victims are often coloured by the fact that the victims are very strongly emotionally engaged in and affected by the bullying. Guaranteeing anonymity to victims also makes it impossible to get access to the other sides of the story, i.e. the view of the perpetrator(s) and bystanders. Although some studies have aimed to increase our understanding of bullying by also including observers' reports on bullying, the perspective of the perpetrator is almost completely missing in bullying research. Again, the sensitivity of the issue and the perpetrators' lack of willingness to label themselves as bullies make it extremely difficult to obtain the perpetrator perspective. This study originally included a question about having bullied/having participated in bullying someone. However, this angle had to be abandoned due to the fact that few respondents replied to this question. The fact that this question was the item left unanswered by the highest number of respondents may also be seen as an indication of the sensitive nature of the issue.

All in all, this thesis has provided additional insights into the dynamics of workplace bullying among professionals and into the factors that may contribute to bullying. This

thesis thus provides insights on what aspects in the work environment managers need to give attention to in order to prevent workplace bullying. However, so far almost no research has been undertaken on different prevention and intervention methods used in companies. Although some studies have included questions about the respondents' own action when confronted with bullying and the results of these actions (e.g. Knorz & Zapf, 1996; Rayner, 1997; Zapf & Gross, 2001), little is known of how management and human resource professionals handle these kinds of situations. An important avenue for further research, is therefore, to examine what measures companies have taken to handle bullying situations and the effectiveness and success rates of these measures.

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