

PRELIMINARY

SUMMARY ONLY

**A Content Analysis of Bullying Definitions in Australia:
Instrumental and Operational Implications
and Recommendations**

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Recommendations constitute general advice only – they may not apply to your circumstances
Exercise your own judgment and take expert advice on your organisation's specific needs and
circumstances before implementing any recommendations

Key Points and Recommendations

1. Eliminate value-based terms.
2. If you choose to use such terms,
 - Specify the reference point for definition – for example the organisation’s or profession’s code of Conduct, Ethics, Values or Expected Behaviours; Customer Service Charter, Contract of Employment, Professionalism etc.
 - Define the terms behaviourally.
3. Eliminate reference to intent in definitions and policy.
4. If you choose to include such reference, explain the organisation’s policy in regard to similar types and/or patterns of behaviour in the absence of intent, where there is benign intent, or where intent cannot be substantiated.
5. It is valid and important to acknowledge individual feelings and perceptions when investigating the impact of bullying especially since the impact of bullying can be profound and is always personal.
6. When defining bullying, heavy reliance on subjective experience should be avoided.
7. Definitions should include reference to impact but bullying should not be defined solely or principally in regard to reported experience or belief.
8. The benefits of including direction in the definition of bullying far outweigh the risks.
9. Definitions of workplace bullying should include the directed nature of behaviour.
10. The repetitive or patterned nature of the behaviour is a key differentiating feature of bullying and must be acknowledged in any definition.
11. Coercion is a key differentiating feature of bullying and must be acknowledged in any definition.
12. Since managers are given coercive power and expected to utilise discretion in exercising this power, in the absence of compliance and in order to achieve work objectives,
 - Bullying must not, for the sake of simplicity, be defined as coercion
 - Useful definitions will make explicit the difference between bullying and the legitimate use of coercion in management.
13. References to the risks of detriment to well-being and/or safety should be included since they strengthen definitions and compel organisations to act to prevent and stop bullying.
14. References to detriment to employees’ right to dignity at work may mislead and may not find the support desired in Australian law and should be excluded.
15. Although some definitions assume the existence to ‘right to dignity at work’ such a right is neither enshrined in legislation, nor clearly established in Australian industrial law. We recommend leaving it out (even though we believe employees have such a right!).
16. The failure of 89% of definitions to include reference to the detriment caused to business is astonishing given the overwhelming research evidence regarding
 - the negative impact of bullying on productivity, safety and service quality, error rates, initiative, absenteeism, turnover and the organisation’s ability to attract and keep talented employees;
 - the link between bullying and counter-productive behaviour including purposeful waste and neglect, sabotage and damage to equipment,
 - the cost (\$\$and time) of grievances, industrial disputes and worker’s compensation claims, and
 - the links to workplace corruption and fraud.
17. The inclusion of such references in only 11% of bullying definitions may
 - Help to explain the lack of interest organisations and managers exhibit in regard to the prevention and elimination of bullying in the workplace, and/or
 - Reflect the origin of definitions in HR departments, helping professions rather than line management.
18. Explicit reference to detrimental impact on performance is recommended in defining workplace bullying in order to get line manager and executive support of prevention and intervention.
19. Definitions should clearly differentiate bullying from other forms of discrimination, harassment, unacceptable, unprofessional and illegal behaviours.
20. Definitions should clearly differentiate bullying from legitimate management (and the use of coercive power in the management of non-compliance).

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