

# **Power and change in the RCMP: The role of agency and structure in workplace bullying**

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## **Abstract**

Organizational awareness of workplace bullying is in a state of change and innovation. While employees are gaining awareness organizations are not changing rapidly enough to meet the changing expectations and needs of employees. This paper examines the dynamic between agency and structure as it applies to the ability for management and employees to address workplace bullying. It applies a model that examines the move from the current norms of organizational behaviour to innovation in interpersonal behaviour. A case example involving the Royal Canadian Mounted Police is included to explore the influence of agency and structure in addressing workplace bullying.

## **Introduction**

The Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) is the only large Canadian police force banned from unionizing. In 2007 a group of RCMP officers challenged the legality of the ban imposed in 1919. In its application to the Ontario Superior Court, those fighting for the right to unionize say RCMP officers are subject to harassment, intimidation and poisoned work environments without independent representation (Canadian HR Reporter, 2007). The resistance to this initiative raises questions about the commitment for change in the organization. In 2006 "...directors of the RCMP's in-house staff representative program...tapped a members' legal fund to hire a...lobbyist, Summa Strategies, to persuade federal members of parliament against legalizing the union." Some RCMP employees objected to their fund being used to fight the union effort, calling the act "an abuse." By May 2006 about two dozen current and former RCMP members had filed affidavits supporting the constitutional challenge to the union prohibition. The affidavits suggest a "disturbing tolerance for bad and sometimes borderline criminal behaviour within the force" (Gatehouse and Gillis, 2007).

The RCMP is faced with many recent cases that highlight the need for change in interpersonal dynamics within the organization. In 2004 a Newfoundland trial judge ruled that Bruce Rees, an RCMP jail guard, deserved \$500,000 from the RCMP because the organization failed to stop a fellow officer from harassing him at work. The judgment was overturned in 2005

by the Newfoundland Court of Appeal on the grounds that the case should have been handled by workers' compensation, not by the court. The Court of Appeal concluded that the definition of an "accident" under workers' compensation is broad enough to include gradual onset stress, resulting from willful and intentional acts of someone else, as a compensable injury. In this case the gradual onset stress was due to repeated harassment (Illingworth, 2006). The fact the case went to court suggests changes in the legal view of workplace bullying. There is an increasing willingness to discuss and evaluate harassment cases in court. As well, due to the legal involvement the case was noted by the public and politicians, not just the RCMP.

In 2006, Constable Paul Carty, an RCMP officer of Black, Aboriginal and Caucasian descent launched a \$3.5-million lawsuit against the RCMP alleging that he suffered harassment, discrimination and physical abuse. Carty claims that in 2005 he was told by his superior that "Natives are worse than white trash and are low-lives, gas sniffers, women abusers and drunks" (Mariga, 2006). The constant verbal and emotional abuse caused Carty to sink into a depression and take sick leave (CBC, 2006). In 2006, Constable Luis Cerritos took stress leave due to workplace conditions that he claimed were rife with harassment, racism, bullying and physical intimidation. "I was being called names that I had never heard before. I started being ashamed of not being white" (Gatehouse & Gillis, 2007). The harassment escalated when Cerritos lodged a complaint within the RCMP about the way he was treated. "My wife was pregnant at the time and my unborn baby was called a Mexican motherf---er" (Gatehouse and Gillis, 2007). Corporal Gery Markie and Sergeant Peter Kidd were subject to workplace bullying by the same superior as Cerritos and eventually took sick leave too (Gatehouse & Gillis, 2007). In the same year a former RCMP officer, Nancy Sulz, was awarded damages of almost \$1 million to compensate for suffering due to being harassed by her superior. "The evidence shows that the harassment which the plaintiff experienced between 1994 and 1995 was the proximate cause of her depression; that in turn, ended her career with the RCMP" (Humphrey, 2006:4).

An RCMP report based on 668 interviews of Quebec-based RCMP employees completed in 2007 and 2008 "indicates that the Quebec division of (the RCMP)...is a mess of bad management, poor employee communications and rotten promotion procedures that reward cronyism and sycophants while keeping good officers down" (Marsden, 2009: A5). These management shortcomings can be expressed through poor interpersonal dynamics. The same report noted RCMP managers turn a "blind eye to mediocre performance, incompetence and especially reprehensible actions when it suits them" (Marsden, 2009: A5).

The cases, comments and incidents listed above suggest that harassment is a systemic rather than episodic issue within the RCMP. While these are publicized incidents it is likely there are other RCMP workplace bullying cases, but the employees remain silent due to fear of making matters worse for themselves. The RCMP has an anti-harassment policy, harassment prevention coordinators, and, since 2001 in-house harassment and discrimination training (Mariga, 2006). These efforts, however, appear ineffective within the RCMP. In 2007, an examination of the RCMP revealed "an ethos that permitted the authoritarianism and intimidation by a few to override the principles of the many, and a culture of fear to prevent any effective challenge by subordinates of abusive behavior by superiors" (Paquet, 2007: 6).

The objective of this paper is to examine structural forces, such as organizational culture and hierarchy, that are currently so powerful within the RCMP that change and individual agency in the area of workplace bullying will continue to be thwarted. This paper examines power and the influences of agency and structure in making a workplace bully policy effective.

This paper will start by providing a brief look at how the Canadian legal system is dealing with workplace bullying, also known as harassment. Power, structure and agency will also be discussed in relation to workplace bullying. Finally, the case of the RCMP will be applied to a model of change and innovation that includes the influences of power (agency) and structure.

### **The Canadian Legal System and Workplace Bullying**

There are a number of ways in Canada that an employee can seek legal remedy for workplace bullying or harassment. First, an employee can take action through a provincial or territorial Human Rights Code if he or she has been harassed as a form of discrimination based on race, ancestry, place of origin, colour, ethnic origin, citizenship, creed, sex, sexual orientation, age, record of offences, marital status, family status or disability (Ontario Human Rights Code, 2007). Because this avenue does not address the increasing number of workplace bullying complaints, other means to address bullying/harassment are available.

In 2004, the province of Québec, a jurisdiction under civil code, amended Québec's Labour Standards Act to place greater responsibility for workplace bullying upon employers (Québec Commission des normes du travail, 2006). Psychological harassment or workplace bullying is defined as "any vexatious behaviour in the form of repeated and hostile or unwanted conduct, verbal comments, actions or gestures, that affects an employee's dignity or psychological or physical integrity and that results in a harmful work environment for the employee" (Québec Commission des normes du travail, 2006). In 2006, the Québec Commission des normes du travail settled 2,200 workplace bullying complaints against Québec employers. Of these complaints 825 (38 per cent) were resolved by means of a payment of indemnities and 32 by an out-of-court settlement (Québec Commission des normes du travail, 2006). In the rest of Canada, jurisdictions that are under common law, a number of other options are available.

In contract law, an employee can force a corporation to address harassment through such means as damages for loss of reputation, claims for mental distress and damages for malice or bad faith. The damages awarded in employment law demonstrate that the courts are prepared to compensate employees subjected to unfair and/or offensive workplace conduct (Colson & Milburn, 2007).

Negligence and intentional infliction of nervous shock are other methods harassment or workplace bullying can be addressed legally. For an employee to make a negligence claim they must show four things: 1. the employer owed a duty of care, 2. the employer breached the standard of care, 3. damage resulted from the breach, and 4. the damage was foreseeable and not too remote. In the case of intentional infliction of nervous shock, an employee has to provide evidence of three things: 1. outrageous conduct by the perpetrator, 2. intent, and 3. conduct producing actual harm that is a visible and provable illness (Bernardi, 2001).

In 1994 Clark, an RCMP officer, successfully sued for both negligence and intentional infliction of nervous shock. In October 1986, she filed a complaint of harassment against two of her supervisors after numerous negative comments and reprimands were placed in her file. Her settlement concluded Clark was harassed and subjected to sarcastic and sexist remarks by her male colleagues. Clark was told she was not a real woman, called a "butch" and exposed to pornographic movies being shown in her work area. The work environment began to affect her health but her superiors failed to help her. In 1987, when her condition worsened, she resigned from the RCMP. Harassment was the major cause for her resignation (Clark v. Canada, 1994). The judge concluded there is no doubt that Corporal Mazur, Clark's supervisor, owed Clark a

duty of care and breached that duty consistently. During a lengthy time, it was ruled that Corporal Mazur refused to exercise his authority to end the harassment of which he was well aware and which he participated in, thus condoning that behaviour (Bernardi, 2001).

Another remedy for the bullied employee outside Quebec is constructive dismissal. This third option is how an increasing number of personal harassment (harassment outside the Human Rights Act) cases are being addressed. Under common law, if an employer commits a major breach of a major term of the employment relationship (such as permitting an unmanageable level of workplace bullying) the employee may take the position that dismissal has taken place even though he or she has not received a formal termination notice (Schwind, 2005). “(T)here is a pronounced judicial trend to allow employees to litigate against their employers in circumstances in which they have been abused, humiliated, harassed, bullied or otherwise mistreated at work. These employees have successfully argued that their substandard working conditions have triggered a constructive dismissal” (Rubin and Heeney, 2007). There are certain types of workplace behaviours that qualify as constructive dismissal. These are: An abusive boss, an abusive co-worker, ineffective employer response and human rights violations. Employers can also be liable when they fail to provide employees with a tolerable workplace. This liability occurs in cases of severe abuse, through the awarding of tort remedies. “The potential liability to employers is enormous as liability actually depends on the amount of damage suffered by the plaintiff, rather than an analysis of the obligations an employer owes for breaching the contract” (Rubin and Heeney, 2007). Employees are also using health and safety regulations and through defamation lawsuits to deal with (perceived) mistreatment by their employers.

### **Workplace Bullying: An Organizational Concern**

Employees who have reported workplace bullying to their human resources (HR) department have only had limited assistance. In a study of American employees, 32 per cent said HR staff made the situation worse, 51 per cent said HR did nothing, and only 17 per cent said HR had a positive impact on the situation (Namie and Namie, 2003). A study by Salin (2008) provided some preliminary evidence that organizations are starting to make active efforts to prevent workplace bullying. The study found that the adoption of ‘sophisticated’ HR practices, negative publicity about bullying and the HR manager’s age, all appear to affect the likelihood of preventive measures being applied.

There are recognized costs associated with workplace bullying. Employees subject to bullying are more likely to leave their job. Studies by Rayner (1998) as well as Savva and Alexandrou (1998) found the turnover rate of bullied employees was about 25 per cent. Also, among those experiencing bullying, over 30 per cent said they intended to leave the organization (Rayner 1998, Quine, 1999). According to an American study by Namie and Namie (2003), that examines the fate of the bullied, 38 per cent of employees left their job for health reasons and 44 per cent were terminated. Workplace bullying is also linked to negative working conditions, decreased worker happiness, health and safety issues and reduced organizational productivity (Marais & Herman, 1997). For organizations, workplace bullying can be costly. A University of Manchester Institute of Science and Technology study estimated that workplace bullying leads to one-third to half of all employees’ stress-related illnesses (Personnel Today, 2004).

There is also a link between workplace bullying and the ethical treatment of employees. The majority of workplace bullying is done by a supervisor to a subordinate (Namie & Namie, 2003). “Organizations of all kinds keep a comfortable place for bosses who will do their ‘dirty work.’ Others rely on these individuals to fix a situation without sentimentality, by bulldozing,

screaming, and knocking heads if necessary” (Hornstein, 1996:103). "...many leaders who rule through intimidation have been doing just fine for a very long time (Kramer, 2006: 88)." A little bullying (Kramer, 2006) can muscle a man, or a woman, to the top-and even achieve results. So companies may quietly encourage or reward bullies (Scott, 2007). Aspects of human resource management, such as discipline, may create an environment in which some bullying remains unchallenged, is allowed to thrive or actually is encouraged in an indirect way (Lewis & Rayner, 2003:370). Discipline may initially be dealt with by a supervisor who turns an abuse complaint by an employee into a discipline issue about the employee who complained. The complainant could face discipline for sick days, for being less effective or making errors due to a lack of concentration as a result of stress from the situation.

The issue of power is critical to the discussion of workplace bullying. In particular, the power between employees and power of managers over employees should be examined. Power at the metaphysical level embraces the well-established debate between determinism (structure) and voluntarism (agency) (Clegg, 1989:138). Agency refers to an actors' individual power to control and alter their environment, such as an employee's ability to operate effectively in their work environment when a boss or co-worker wants to prevent or hinder their efforts in an abusive or harassing fashion. Agency (also called power) stresses responsibility and the exercising of reason, choice and will. Recent legal efforts to clarify what workplace bullying is and establish the extent of organizational responsibility have increased individual agency. Organizations are slowly recognizing, through expensive legal cases, the long-term cost of sheltering employee with abusive personalities. The legal system in Canada is providing employees means to contest workplace bullying and organizations are providing workplace policies and training, but this may not be enough.

In an organization, human agency (individual intent) embodied in a workplace bullying policy can be limited by structure - the system of relationships built up over time that makes sense of the social structures and interactions of actors. Examples of structure in the workplace can be found in the organizational design. Is the organizational structure mechanistic and hierarchical so that the individuals at the top are never questioned about their behaviour, particularly in cases of excess force or authority? Structural constraints limit the agent's freedom or power to act by precluding the use of the agent's power. The organizational design (e.g. a heavy emphasis on rules and authority) or history (the way things have always been done) might limit the opportunity for individual influence to change an organization (Lukes, 1977:13) or confront an issue like workplace bullying. To begin this discussion a brief review of the three dimensions of power will be provided.

### **Power Theory – The Three Dimensions of Power**

There are different approaches to the concept of power (Arts & Van Tatenhove, 2005). For some, power is about obtaining resources (Arts & Van Tatenhove, 2005; Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978) or reducing dependence on others (Near et al., 1993). For others the concept is based on relational power - how much power one individual has in relation to another individual in an organization (French and Raven, 1959). There is also a question of political influence and connections (Arts, 1998) in which an organization's survival chances may be linked to political connections (Miner et al., 1990). Agency, also known as power, is linked to an individual's ability to evaluate their social power bases and match their power resources with appropriate influence attempts (Flurry & Burns, 2005). Within the discussion of power concerns of agency versus structure are raised (Goverde et al., 2000).

Power theorists Dahl (1957), Bachrach & Baratz (1962) and Lukes (1974) have identified three levels of interaction between people or organizations, referred to as dimensions of power. These dimensions range from the observable to the subtle and hidden. In the first-dimension of power, the strength of the political players can be determined by who prevails in the organizational negotiation process (Pfeffer, 1981). Dahl (1957) describes power as: A has power over B to the extent that A can get B to do something that B would not otherwise do. The emphasis is on conflict between preferences that are assumed to be consciously made, exhibited in actions, and thus to be discovered by observing people's behaviour (Lukes, 1974). As in workplace bullying, the first dimension of power applies when an organization permits and ignores open acts of aggression from one employee towards another. The behaviour may be undesirable but it is enacted in the open and the players are aware of why they or others are acting the way they are because the behaviours are linked to specific objectives that are openly discussed or expressed.

The second-dimension of power is less obvious, dealing with the exclusion of some participants and their positions on an issue of debate. The second-dimension includes the "mobilization of bias" where some issues are organized into politics and others are organized out (Schattschneider, 1960). This dimension results in suppression or thwarting of a challenge to the values of the decision maker(s) (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962). Those in powerful positions maintain the "means by which demands for change in the existing allocation of benefits...can be suffocated before they are even voiced; or kept covert; or killed before they gain access to the relevant decision-making arena" (Bachrach and Baratz, 1962:44). As with the first-dimension, this mechanism of power stresses acknowledged conflict, be it overt or covert in its application. In terms of workplace bullying the second dimension of power would be seen when an employee complains about workplace bullying, but management is not willing, interested or able to address the issue. A complaint is received by someone in an organization but nothing significant happens or when something happens it is either too late or ineffective.

The third-dimension of power can occur in the absence of actual, observable or acknowledged conflict. The difference between the second- and third-dimension of power is that the powerless in the second dimension of power are aware of their circumstance and are seeking means to create change. In the third-dimension, the powerless are virtually unaware of their circumstance. Therefore, the conflict is latent. To examine power within the third-dimension involves identifying the mechanisms of latent conflict. Such conflict, according to Lukes (1974:23), involves "contradictions between the interests of those exercising power and the real interests of those they exclude." Lukes claims that the third dimensional view deals with the bias of the system in terms of the "socially structured and culturally patterned behaviour of groups, and practices of institutions, which may indeed be manifested by individuals' inaction" (Lukes, 1974:23). This view recognizes the "potential issues" that are kept out of politics through the "operation of social forces and institutional practices or through individual's decisions." Those excluded "may not express or even be conscious of their own interests" (Lukes, 1974:24). They become a silent society.

To understand the latent conflict between people or groups, one needs to examine organizational culture expressed in social myths, language and symbols and consider how they are shaped or manipulated in power processes. This involves studying what is communicated and how it is done (Gaventa, 1980: 15). The culture of silence may preclude the development of consciousness amongst the powerless, thus lending the dominant order an air of legitimacy (Gaventa, 1980:13). The domination by the powerful can be so strong that the powerless act in support of their own domination. Underlying the dynamics of the three dimension of power are issues of agency versus structure. In the case of workplace bullying, the third dimension of power is

observed when employees accept harassment by co-workers. Acceptance involves internalizing the abuse and not questioning the actions of the abuser. In the extreme cases the employee assumes the problem is related to them. Structural influences like an organizational culture or hierarchy may reinforce this assumption. In some organizations a complaint of workplace bullying would lead to a question of employee fit rather than an evaluation of interpersonal dynamics.

### **Agency and Structure**

Central to the debate about the concept of power and change is the concern of providing an analytical specification of the relation between 'agency' and 'structure'. Lukes (1977) and Giddens (1984) argue that agency and structure have to be grasped within a coherent framework. Lukes conceptualizes this framework as a dialectic of power (agency) and structure. Giddens views the framework as a duality in which power and structure are interpenetrated (Clegg, 1989:147). A dialectic is the practice of weighing and reconciling juxtaposed or contradictory arguments for the purpose of arriving at truth through discussion and debate. Dualism is a theory that views reality as two irreducible elements or modes (Webster, 1993), such as agency and structure. Despite these differing perspectives on power held by Lukes and Giddens, power theorists accept that power is a struggle between agency and structure. When organizations try to address workplace bullying, however, there is an overemphasis on the agency/power component and insufficient recognition of the role of structure. In order to link the two influences of agency and structure, within the evolution from awareness of an issue of workplace bullying in an organization to change, a change model is applied that incorporates both these factors (XXXX, 2001).

### **The Model**

The progress of an innovation, along the path of awareness, from low awareness through moderate to high awareness spans the three dimensions of power and includes an interplay between agency and structure as depicted in Figure 1. At the low end of awareness, within the third dimension of power, the "potential issue" regarding workplace bullying is either so submerged within the influence of structure as to be unacknowledged (the duality), or is just acknowledged within the totality - the beginning of the dialectic (i.e. awareness is growing about an issue and individuals are starting to speak up). The transition between the duality and the dialectic is influenced by external environmental factors (e.g. growing awareness in the public of the issue of workplace bullying) internal organizational factors, (e.g. concern for organizational liability), pressures of institutionalized social factors (e.g. government organizations being required to have a policy on workplace bullying or harassment), and the acknowledgment of a possible problem issue (e.g. case examples from the organization of workplace bullying being publicized).

Evolution of a potential issue into an acknowledged issue, that results in organizational change, passes through three dimensions of power originating in the third dimension of power. Workplace bullying issues can exist within the third dimension of power where bias in the system is found in the organizational design and culture. For example, the silencing of information regarding cases of harassment by managers or HR policies can permit biases in the process that favour the organization or its management over the employee. In order to raise to consciousness the need for the organization to innovate or change, the powerless must counter effects of the third dimension of power – bias almost too subtle to identify (Gaventa, 1980:24). This is often where the victim of harassment sees themselves as somehow deserving of the unfair treatment. For example, a new employee who is faced with learning many new tasks assumes blame when criticized for errors or time delays even if that criticism is excessive or unfounded. A poor manager or a deceptive manager

may behave abusively to keep the new employee silent.

The acknowledgment of the issue (shift towards the second dimension of power) arises from pressures within or outside the organization e.g. media coverage of workplace bullying, a speaker talking about the workplace bullying or an internal case of workplace bullying. At some point the momentum for change overrides biases in the system permitting dialogue on the subject and spreading awareness. When awareness is created, the issue can be seen as an organizational innovation as it is introducing to the organization an alternative to the status quo e.g. perhaps the organization has an issue with workplace bullying that needs to be addressed. An innovation is an introduction into a situation of means or ends that are new to that situation. The innovation challenges the institutional beliefs with alternative beliefs (DiMaggio, 1988). For example, prior to a speaker on workplace bullying, employees may not have questioned the actions or behaviours of others in the organization but after the speaker they changed their perspective. In the second-dimension of power, consciousness is raised but there is still the mobilization of bias to confront. This second-dimension assumes that those who are discriminated against (such as shunned for speaking out or for being different) are aware of the imbalances, but have difficulty finding ways to mobilize change. Those experiencing bullying are unable to rally support to address the problem in a meaningful way.

In the first-dimension of power the emphasis is on conflict between preferences that are assumed to be consciously made and exhibited in actions. Once the bias of the second-dimension of power is raised to consciousness, awareness can build along with conflict of perspectives. If this occurs, the innovation (a changing perspective towards abusive behaviours in the organization) moves into the first-dimension of power. In the first dimension of power the players and the positions of the players (for or against change) are clearly stated. Conflict between the players is overt including such things as dialogue around the appropriate use of anger and the exertion of power in the work environment. Shifting from the second to the first dimension of power requires supportive leadership, extensive dialogue with evaluation, transparency and a desire for change at all levels. It also requires adapting structure to make agency initiatives effective.

The process of change is slow and built on events and dialogue. Change is a product of many external environmental and internal organizational factors that evolve over time to facilitate change. The evolution of power is played out in the interplay between structure and agency through the three dimensions of power. To explain this model, an examination of the Royal Canadian Mounted Police and recent interpersonal conflicts will be presented.

### **Application: Change within the Royal Canadian Mounted Police**

The RCMP was established in 1919 by merging the Royal North West Mounted Police and the Dominion Police. Today it has approximately 26,000 employees (Royal Canadian Mounted Police, 2009). It provides a wide variety of public safety and security services such as basic law enforcement, information gathering and analysis, police training, security advice, public education, surveillance, conflict resolution and emergency and crisis response (Murphy and Mckenna, 2007). It has an annual budget of roughly \$4 billion provided through federal, provincial, territorial and municipal funding. The RCMP is led by a government appointed Commissioner who has authority to run the business of the police force under the direction of the federal Minister of Public Safety (RCMP Task Force, 2007: ix).

In 2006, the federal Auditor General noted that the Ottawa police has found “abuses...nepotism, wasteful spending and override of controls by management” of the RCMP pension plan (Doyle, 2007). David Brown, a government-appointed investigator, assigned to look

into the Mounties' pension-fund irregularities and at the RCMP organization, concluded that the force's culture, governance and management structure was "horribly broken" and needed to be restructured (Clark, 2007). Calls for a public inquiry were rejected by the federal government at the time. Instead the new RCMP Commissioner Bill Elliot, who had recently replaced Giuliano Zaccardelli was identified as the solution. Additional allegations, unrelated to the pension fund abuses, also surfaced. These allegations, brought forward through a lawyer representing 12 current and former Mounties, included illegal electronic surveillance, alteration of documents, harassment, and cover-up of criminal investigations (Maccharles, 2007). The pension fund scandal was just one item of mismanagement in a string of events that made the RCMP look bad.

With depressing regularity the RCMP wanders to the dark side. It has burned barns, dipped into federal sponsorship funds, spied on political parties and blinked at internal wrongs. Connect those dots and find two common denominators. One is an unstable relationship with politicians; the other is a cultish, xenophobic cohesiveness that thwarts oversight and reform (Travers, 2007:17).

Confronted with such publicity of mismanagement the Canadian government agreed to strike a task force to examine the RCMP. In 2007, the Task Force on Governance and Cultural Change in the Royal Canadian Mounted Police was established to examine the concerns. The task force has written several reports. One such report by Murphy and McKenna (2007:59) concluded that "traditional 'police' management culture is an inadequate basis for managing the current RCMP mandate and that some of its current problems can be linked to its problematic and limiting qualities." According to Murphy and McKenna, the RCMP's organization is cause for concern.

In this section a model by XXXX (See Figure 1), examining the transformation from innovation to change, will be applied to the challenges confronting the RCMP with organizational culture and hierarchy. Through this application the limitations of agency (such as providing a policy on harassment and whistleblowing) in addressing workplace bullying/harassment, will be highlighted. The purpose of applying this model of change is to identify the progression from a hidden potential issue to awareness and change. It will also consider the impact of power and the dynamic between structure and agency in this effort for change. A real challenge for the RCMP is overcoming the constraint of structural forces such as the organizational culture and hierarchy in order to grant agency to employees to make their concerns known about the way they are being treated and request and participate in change.

### **Potential Issue**

As outlined at the start of this paper, the cases of Rees, Carty, Cerritos, Markie, Kidd and Sulz indicate a problem of workplace bullying at the RCMP. Institutionalized pressures, such as the corporate culture of an enforcement/policing organization has, until recently, blocked out any awareness of a concern. RCMP employees must be tough to deal with criminals so being tough is part of the job. The dilemma employees face is how can name calling and gossip be a problem when you are tough? Traditional police culture is described by the following general core values and qualities: Solidarity, authoritarianism, suspicion, conservative, prejudicial, cynicism and blue collar (Murphy and McKenna, 2007). Solidarity and authoritarianism combined discourages employees from speaking out about the actions of their superiors. The report by Brown criticized former Commissioner Zaccardelli, who was in power from 2001 to 2006 (CBC, 2006b), as an autocratic leader who punished whistleblowers (Clark, 2007). The character of the organizational culture, reinforced by the top RCMP employee, the commissioner, would have discouraged the

recognition of workplace bullying as an organizational issue because it requires people to speak up about the behaviours of others. The RCMP pension fund scandal further identified problems within the RCMP hierarchy. According to government officials, “(RCMP) executives used their power to override rules, investigators were punished, whistleblowers sidelined and evidence was buried” (May, 2007). Authors of one of the reports for the RCMP task force, Murphy and McKenna (2007: 16), noted that:

...recent reform efforts have not fundamentally changed the RCMP’s conventional, military-styled police organization and culture, though it has made it more open to change and reform. The limited impact of recent organizational reforms underscores the importance of effective modern police leadership and management typically not encouraged or developed by traditional police organization and culture.

There is evidence of a problem with harassment in the RCMP but there is also gradual change. To examine this change we begin with a potential issue in the third dimension of power.

### **Third Dimension of Power**

Until recently, the third dimension of power has been expressed within the RCMP in the cases of harassment. To the onlooker it appeared to be just a few isolated cases. With the recent incidents there is an understanding that the problem is more systemic. According to a Member of Parliament “...(T)he whole system broke down and the governance structures just aren’t there” (May, 2007). At the point when there is media coverage and public and government inquiry the potential issue of the presence of workplace bullying within the RCMP is moved to an acknowledged issue and the third dimension of power gives way to the second dimension.

### **Acknowledged Issue**

Once a potential issue, or hidden issue, shifts to an acknowledged issue it becomes an innovation, an idea of change. As an acknowledged issue, the problem is subject to internal and external pressures. The union represents an internal force for change. According to the president of the Canadian Professional Police Association, whistleblowers will never be comfortable raising their concerns until rank-and-file officers have a union. “If we’re talking about a modern structure, it is imperative that they also have an independent association...Let’s say there’s obstruction, or a grievance, or harassment, or sexual harassment...it’s the association that represents the members, so that that person is protected. A union would move the organization along the continuum of power ensuring a voice for those of less power in the lower ranks of the hierarchy” (Clark, 2007). It would create transparency around biases in the system.

A second internal pressure for change includes the assigning of a civilian, Bill Elliot, to be the RCMP commissioner, rather than promoting from within the RCMP. The civilian commissioner is not part of the authoritarian hierarchy (as he did not rise through the ranks) and therefore may be more open to addressing problems in the organization. He also signals to the rest of the organization that the management style could change. The solidarity value within the organizational culture that discouraged internal criticism will likely be challenged as Elliot was selected to change the organization and has the freedom to speak out.

An external pressure on the RCMP is the work of Brown and the task force. According to opening lines in the final task force report (RCMP Task Force, 2007: vii):

...in the last few years, trust in the management of the RCMP has been shaken. As we came to understand the scope and depth of the issues, we realized we would have to challenge traditional concepts and practices in order to identify innovative and lasting solutions.

While these changes are not specifically directed at workplace bullying within the RCMP, they have an impact on the RCMP organizational culture and hierarchy, which are two structural limitations to change and agency. The task force put forward 49 recommendations focused on improving the management of people. Yet, no recommendations dealt directly with the organizational culture or interpersonal dynamics. This oversight will have a limiting factor on long term change.

### **Duality and Dialectic**

When harassment is only a potential issue there are two positions in the organization on the subject with neither sharing information. Those who have been subject to workplace bullying or harassment and want change in the system do not dialogue with those who might change the system such as management and government. In the duality state, the power of some in the organizational environment may discourage such dialogue intentionally. It is also possible systemic structures such as an organizational culture that values being tough might prevent meaningful dialogue. In the RCMP Task Force (2007: 41) report the following quote on barriers to communication depicts the beginning of a duality:

We have observed a number of attitudes and values in the RCMP that affect the way in which decisions are made. For example, we heard more than once that the culture is one of fear and intimidation and that some who are in a position of command use their authority to intimidate others. This has several results. Employees who are concerned about being criticized would prefer to do nothing – or to pass responsibility on to someone else – rather than make a decision which could attract criticism. It also means that bad news does not travel up in the organization. Senior management is not in a position to address developing problems because they are insulated from them by people who do not want to deliver bad news.

It is only when the RCMP Task Force identifies this lack of communication as a problem and makes recommendations that the dialectic begins. The RCMP Task Force notes as well that “...in many instances in the RCMP, the culture of control is choking off the development of collaborative decision making” (2007: 41). The collaborative decision making is a dialectic form of communication in which multiple voices are heard and decisions are made based on the range of input. For a dialectic to be successful, the organization needs to provide a safe forum for expressing ideas. This is particularly true for a subject such as workplace bullying.

### **Second Dimension of Power**

With the shift from a duality to a dialectic, the third dimension of power gives way to the second dimension. No longer is there a bias in the system of which many are unaware. The system may be flawed and biased but the weaknesses in the system are slowly acknowledged. Two of the recommendations of the task force may enhance the dialectic. These recommendations focus on leadership and workplace disclosure. In terms of leadership the task force recommends setting competency measures for leadership positions. This may infuse the

upper ranks with management skills utilizing delegation of authority rather than a command and control structure. The recommendation about workplace disclosure states the following (2007: 31):

The PSDPA (Public Servants Disclosure Protection Act (2007)) provides for the disclosure, investigation and public reporting of wrongdoing that takes place in the federal public sector, and protects those who report possible wrongdoing in accordance with the Act. Wrongdoing in the public sector is defined as: "...a contravention of any Act of Parliament or of the legislature of a province; a misuse of public funds or a public asset; gross mismanagement; an act or omission that creates a substantial and specific danger to the life, health or safety of persons, or to the environment; a serious breach of a code of conduct; and knowingly directing or counselling a person to commit a wrongdoing."

Within the definition of wrongdoing is health or safety of a person. This means that employees can come forward if one individual is threatening another. Such a threat may include workplace bullying but most likely of only the more serious cases.

### **Structural Limitation on Agency**

Missing in the task force report is a direct recommendation to deal with the element of the RCMP culture "of fear and intimidation" and how "some who are in a position of command use their authority to intimidate others" (2007: 41). This is workplace bullying. It is possible that the task force is seeing this problem as a discipline issue. With trained leaders, individuals who intimidate will be disciplined. However, the recommendation about discipline will likely favour the intimidator and only further harm anyone subject to their threats. In terms of discipline the taskforce has recommended that informal avenues be used (2007: 30):

In order for discipline to be effective in an organization, it must be integrated in organizational plans and processes, reporting structures and roles and responsibilities. There should be an emphasis on active involvement by the supervisor to address disciplinary matters at an informal level.

This approach could lead to abuses if the discipline issue is intimidation, the intimidator is the supervisor and the approach to addressing the intimidation is active involvement. The victims may find their situation becomes worse. The approach to discipline is similar to the anti-harassment policy for the RCMP, which states that in the early resolution process "whenever appropriate and possible, a serious attempt at resolving harassment situations informally should be made by all parties without filing a written complaint" (Mariga, 2006: 23). This informal approach may lead to further bullying or harassment. The informal approach is particularly troubling because it discourages documentation. A case that is not documented does not exist. According to the anti-harassment policy "When early resolution fails or is inappropriate, employees can file a written complaint with the human resources officer."

Initially, Carty tried to address the problem of harassment with his supervisors but they refused to respond to the issue. Next he had his lawyer submit a letter to human resources. However, despite the gravity of the complaint, the RCMP human resources officer would not accept a complaint written for Carty by his lawyer, Pieters. Instead, the human resource officer required the letter to be directly from Carty. This requirement can put an employee at a disadvantage because they are emotionally weakened by the experience they are complaining

about. In the case of Carty "...the constant verbal and emotional abuse caused (him) to sink into a depression and take sick leave. He...was also demoted with a pay decrease" (Mariga, 2006: 23). In such a state Carty may not have been able to state his concerns effectively.

This example is an application of the second dimension of power where there is suppression or thwarting of a challenge to the values of the decision makers. The suppression is built into the system because human resources represents management and the hierarchy. This case shows how structure, the hierarchy, prevents individual agency by Carty, to address the issue. While the RCMP has harassment prevention coordinators and in-house harassment and discrimination training (Mariga, 2006), this case indicates weaknesses in this process. It also shows how strong structural influences (hierarchy and organizational culture) are and how these structures negate agency.

### **Hierarchy and Organizational Culture**

The RCMP is a government organization that is bureaucratic. Such a structure is appropriate to ensure accountability, provide training and agreed upon standard operating procedures. This organizational design is built on a hierarchy. To implement change about the way employees treat each other, in particularly the way supervisors treat their employees, the most effective method is to alter the organizational culture rather than change the hierarchy. The increased leadership training for positions of management in the RCMP may not change the individuals currently in the leadership positions. There will always be a multi-layered hierarchy in the RCMP. Also, the current and future employee shortage in the RCMP (RCMP Task Force, 2007) will likely translate into employees being promoted into management positions without adequate leadership experience. Therefore, if the organization wants to reduce the cases of workplace bullying, organizational culture is one of the key structural factors that needs to be addressed otherwise agency will continuously be undermined by the culture of authoritarianism and solidarity.

The institutionalized organizational culture of the RCMP does not support questioning management staff. As a result, efforts at increased agency, with policies designed to give employees the opportunity to speak out (such as the informal discussions about harassment) will remain ineffective. The power of the organizational culture will neutralize efforts at such individual agency. Having a policy allowing one to speak out about their supervisor does not mean the organizational culture supports such actions.

How can employees believe in an informal system that provides the perpetrator with the opportunity to initiate a preemptive strike? In the case of the complaints raised by RCMP employees Cerritos, Markee and Kidd against their supervisor Grimshaw, the matter was taken up by Panchuk, Grimshaw's boss. In the end Grimshaw received a promotion and Cerritos, Markee and Kidd were challenged on procedural issues related to their complaint and ended up on sick leave. Until the organizational culture is changed there will be no further advancement in issues of harassment or workplace bullying. The combined structural impact of the organizational culture and the hierarchy means employees will continuously be subject to overt and covert bullying without adequate recourse. Solidarity within the organizational culture discourages speaking frankly and honestly about individual behaviours especially to employees of a higher rank. The innovation (of addressing workplace bullying) will not move beyond the second dimension of power in the current organizational environment at the RCMP. It will likely take further publicized cases of workplace bullying before there is advancement from the second to the first dimension of power and before organizational culture and the link to workplace

bullying is addressed. Given the increased opportunity within the legal system for employees to seek redress for workplace bullying, the RCMP is going to have to take more concrete steps to allow employees to work with the RCMP process before taking legal action. Otherwise, the worst cases of workplace bullying will continue to be publicized and raise questions about management effectiveness.

## Conclusion

This paper is an initial attempt to separate out the agency and structural influences of organizational change in the area of workplace bullying. A model is applied to the evolutionary change an organization such as the RCMP experiences going from pre-awareness of workplace bullying to where an organization has modified employee behaviour and awareness, limiting destructive interpersonal dynamics. Even though an organization has provided policies on workplace bullying and enhanced awareness through education programs, there are strong structural factors such as organizational culture and hierarchy that limit efforts at change. In the ideal, in the first dimension of power, the organization will continuously explore a healthy dialogue on differing views on the subject of employee behaviours (e.g. discipline and effectiveness). Limiting structural factors, such as culture or hierarchy were addressed in conjunction with efforts at agency. In terms of addressing workplace bullying, the RCMP has moved from the third dimension of power to the second but is unlikely to advance further due to a strong organizational culture and hierarchy that discourages openness to change in the area of interpersonal dynamics.

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**Workplace bullying: From Innovation to Change**  
**Figure 1**

