

**MEDIOCRITY AND THE ‘NO CHANGE’ PRINCIPLE
A RECIPE FOR MOBING**

DR JOCELYNNE A. SCUTT

‘Mobbing gegen chefs’ is the term coined for describing upward mobbing, or ‘high end’ or ‘top end mobbing’.¹ The politics of ‘high end’ mobbing are important to fathom, because this type of bullying is generally directed at change makers or change agents. If change agents are halted in their tracks, change will be stultified and the hopes we have for a different world, where bullying, abuse, discrimination, prejudice and bias become of historical interest only will be stymied. The hopes we have for construction of a world where disadvantaged and dispossessed groups are elevated to equality, and the misuse and abuse of power is ended, will not be fulfilled.

How does ‘high end’ or ‘top end’ mobbing occur? What elements serve to construct a mobbing environment?

Construction of a Mobbing Environment

The trigger for upward mobbing is downward or horizontal mobbing. Those at the top, or horizontal with the target, take abusive, vicious and bullying action against the target. Others at the top, or horizontal, with the responsibility to intervene, provide support, and take a stand against the abuse, fail to do so. This signals that bullying, abuse and viciousness will be tolerated, rendering the target vulnerable.

Subordinates then have the signal, that if they engage in attack, the manager or supervisor, etc whom they attack will not be supported, and their bullying conduct will not be stopped. Indeed, they have the message ‘full team ahead’ or ‘go for it’, in the most primitive and patently obvious way.

Yet the target, concentrating on what is important –

- Being effective as change agent;
- Getting on with the job;
- Attending to ‘what is important’,

does not realise immediately what is happening.

Often, the target does not realise for some time that –

- The message is out;
- Attack will not be prevented or stopped;
- The attack has effective and often real support (even connivance) from the top.

¹ My term, particularly apposite in the Australian context.

Deconstruction of a Mobbing Environment

Bullying happens:

- Because a person exists;
- Because a person believes s/he has a right to exist;
- Because a person believes others have a right to exist.

The first type of bullying is generally about someone who is identified as 'different' in a 'non-political' sense. The person is of a different sexual orientation or sexuality; is of a different race/ethnicity; is of a different sex/gender; is of a different religious affiliation or belief; is of a different political affiliation or belief; etc.

The second type of bullying is generally about someone who takes a personal political stand:

- With a disability, they are 'out there' about their rights, lobbying for access at their educational institution or workplace, upfront about their needs, and determined not to be intimidated into being invisible;
- Being homosexual, they are 'out there' about their rights, and do not 'tone down' their assertions about their right to express their sexuality outwardly, rather than hiding it away;
- Being a woman, they believe they have a right to be in a male-dominated industry, and that their being a builder's labourer, or working in the 'male' jobs in the car manufacturing company, or taking on 'male' legal work at the Bar or as a solicitor, or going into surgery rather than working as a general practitioner is their entitlement, and that they have an accompanying right to be outspoken about it;
- Being of a minority race/ethnicity, they express their views about their rights not to be discriminated against in work or educational institutions, or in provision of services, and are 'up front' about it.

The third type of bullying is generally about someone who takes a political stand about the rights of others. S/he may be appointed to a position where the brief is to advance human rights or the cause of minorities and disadvantaged or dispossessed groups, or s/he interprets the responsibilities of her/his position as bringing with it the need to ensure that the rights of minorities and disadvantaged or dispossessed groups are treated fairly rather than subjugated to the powerful and powerful interests. For example:

- A manager, supervisor or head of an agency, department or business who is concerned to ensure that policies about diversity, equal opportunity, anti-bullying and the like are taken seriously and properly implemented.
- A judge who believes that the law should be interpreted to ensure that power groups and powerful interests do not 'get their own way' so as to subvert the rule of law and the rights of minorities and the disadvantaged or dispossessed;

- An Anti-Discrimination Commissioner or Equal Opportunity Commission who takes the role seriously, believing it should be maintained with integrity and that decision-making should not be based upon the demands of the powerful or powerful interests;

Top end or High end mobbing happens to the latter group, those who believe others have a right to exist, in accordance with a number of factors.

First, governments and business harbour within them contradictory principle's, practices, policies and people. Sometimes, some of polices, principles, practices and people are on the ascendancy; sometimes others are. Contradictory views, beliefs and perspectives within individuals and organisations can have ascendancy at different times.

The 'progressive' pull can lead to a change agent's being appointed or employed – ostensibly to effect change. The regressive push engenders surprise in the appointer or employer, when the change agent acts according to type – namely, gets down to doing the change s/he has been appointed or employed to effect.

Those who want no change at all, and are threatened by someone acting with integrity and commitment, react strongly against the change agent. The appointer or employer, now seeing that change is a 'good thing' when thought about, but problematic in action, lacks the integrity, will or commitment to follow through in supporting change and the change agent.

The threat to those who do not want change lies not only in 'change', but in the reality that the change agent is not, and will not be, controlled by them. This is more than unsettling. It is in the realm of 'lese majesty' to those who are 'important', or believe they are, and who are accustomed to having their power remain unchallenged, and to getting their own way whether through overt or covert bullying, or using others to do their bullying for them.

The appointer or employer not only sees that change is problematic in action as 'change', but is discomfited at the change agent's not being controlled by them, either – the party who employed or appointed them. People who have the power to appoint and employ probably have to work hard, at least on some occasions, to withstand an element within themselves that says they have a 'right' to control the appointee or employee, and many will not even challenge this element or may not recognise it is inappropriate or wrong, or as abusing or misusing their power. If they live in a culture of bullying and power exploitation, they won't see it as wrong. Rather, they will see it as 'right' and their right, in particular.

The appointer or employer, albeit in their own mind (possibly) sincere about change', cannot tolerate the change agent's *necessary* independence, commitment and strength of integrity. *Control* – and the loss of control – are essential to the reactions of those *not wanting* change, and to those who have (may have) believe/d they did want change, *but not like this*.

Inability to control the change agent is at the heart of the attack from the bullies, those in power who do not want change. Inability to control the change agent is at the heart of the lack of support for the employer/appointer, who thinks s/he wants change, but does not want to give up the power to control.

The change agent operates from a position of egalitarianism – this is the nature of the change agents who wish to effect positive change in a society which is based in dominance and submission, class and hierarchy, power and powerlessness. It is this egalitarianism, the focus **outward** on the task of changing power relationships *outside* – to effect egalitarianism *outside* – to end dominance and submission, class and hierarchy, power and powerlessness *outside*: in other words, the *belief that others have a right to exist*, that portends loss of control for the employer/appointer.

Hence, when the reactionaries unleash their bullying, they are able to do so without any reproof – the appointer or employer ignores it, goes along with it, or joins in. The first base of the foundation for mobbing is set.

The change agent, believing they were appointed to do the job they were appointed to do, continues to effect change, addressing directly or moving around the bullying obstacle (sometimes doing both), believing that reason and logic will prevail. However, bullies operate according to a dysfunctional paradigm. Reason and logic don't work. The change agent, not operating dysfunction ally nor understanding the dysfunctional paradigm, does not have the immediate resources to deal with dysfunction.

However, reason and logic *do* infuriate the bullies, because dysfunction sees danger and threat in reason and logic. Hence, the battering against the change agent must be pushed up a notch.

In march the apparatchiks, one by one. The mobbing begins.

Mobbing is characterised by reversing the roles of the mobbed and the mobber, the bully and the bullied. The prime cry of the mobber is that s/he is being 'bullied' by the change agent. This is designed to undermine the change agent's authority and standing, because it tears at the heart of everything the change agent stands for.

Change agents have high energy levels. Change agents have high performance standards. This is used against the change agent, as if high energy levels and high performance standards are wrong – a fault in themselves.

This is ridiculous!

Yet it is used perniciously to seek to undermine, by suggesting that high energy levels and high performance standards are an 'abuse' to others.

This is nonsense!

Change agents have high energy levels and high performance standards that *they recognise as their own, and demand of themselves accordingly*. The reality is also that

change agents have a great capacity for appreciating and valuing the contributions of others. Change agents have good teamwork orientation.

Change agents ask only for commitment and fairness, and supportive teamwork between and amongst all workers. This is, however, anathema to those who do not want change, and to those who are lazy or not up to the task because they do not want change themselves, and are not prepared to make a commitment to working fairly and effectively in supporting it. It is anathema to those who seek to undermine change, prevent it, obstruct it, resist it, to effect not only 'no change', but to ensure the (un)great and (in) glorious continuation of **stultification, suffocation, denial of dynamism.**

This involves the derogation of the human duty to engage with new thinking, acknowledge and value difference, and truly live in the world. This derogation of human duty ensures the (un)grand and (un) glorious continuation of mediocrity.

Mediocre –

a. Of middling quality, neither good nor bad; fairly bad ...

Concise Oxford Dictionary

Those who do not want to change, and are lazy or not up to the task because they do not want change themselves and are not prepared to make a commitment to working fairly and effectively in supporting it, will seek out excuses for themselves. Those who choose to be reactionary, obstructive and ungiving will seek out excuses for themselves. Sensing or explicitly knowing that their actions against the change agent will be encouraged and condoned by those at the top, they choose bullying-up.

Lack of leadership in high-level positions leads to nonsense contentions on their part as to no responsibility extending to the target who is being mobbed, no duty of care owed to them, no right of the mobbed to natural justice or procedural fairness.² Without the lack of leadership, mobbing could not occur or, if it did, could not prevail.

End Results

The mobbed is left to deal with the mobbing and the mobbers without support from the top, from where it should come. The effects are longreaching.

Evil prospers when good men (or women) doing nothing.

Edmund Bourke

² Some are even foolish enough to put this in writing. I have seen letters which actually state that there is no duty of care owed, and no right of the mobbed to natural justice or procedural fairness.

Evil prospers when bad men (or women) do evil.

Jocelynn A. Scutt

Yet, at the same time:

Truth is always good.

Iris Murdoch

Honesty ... is the result of strength, hypocrisy is the result of weakness.

Lenin

The power of truth can never be challenged:

In the end, great ideas and principles cannot be crushed and exterminated. Not with weapons, cruelty or prisons. Sometimes it appears that it has been achieved but life-giving ideas come through, live on and are strengthened.

Alan Marshall, 1970

End results are, that the power of truth can never be challenged. The change agent moves on to new challenges. A genie has, however, been released from the bottle. Those who have worked with the change agent know that there is a better way to be. Those who have worked with the change agent have had support for working with integrity. Being supported, they know that the better way to be is possible. They know that integrity in work and decision-making is possible.

They know, too, of course, that change brings with it a fury, which demonstrates itself through mobbing. They are therefore forewarned and forearmed.

Some will retreat, but even they will have been affected by the knowledge that another way is possible, that change can be effected:

The fabric of society is changed forever.

Karen Buczynski

However much there is a regression to 'what was', the core effect of the work of the change agent's impact and her/his effect remains. The price will always be high, because this is the nature of change, in a society where bullying and abuse are supported and applauded by too many of those 'at the top'. The price will always be high, because those 'at the top' are too often adherents to the bullying' principle' that might is right. But:

Might is Not Right.

Jocelynn A. Scutt

Mediocre

- a. Of middling quality, neither good nor bad; fairly bad.**

Concise Oxford Dictionary

Change does not allow what was to remain still. The mediocre must give way to the dynamic, excellence, commitment and the power to change have their own dynamism that flows on.

Society is changed forever.

Karen Buczynski

JAS, September 2004