Relationship between the Perception of Organizational Culture and Ethical Climate and the Perception of Workplace Bullying

Relación entre la percepción de la cultura organizacional y el clima ético y la percepción del acoso laboral

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Abstract

Workplace bullying takes place in many organizations and it has serious consequences on individuals, organizations and economy. The main aim of this study is to contribute to the field of workplace bullying by empirically testing the theoretically defined relation between socio-organizational variables (organizational culture and ethical climate) and bullying, using two theoretical models well-grounded in organizational studies. The findings, from a sample of 984 Portuguese workers, suggest that there is a strong relation between organizational culture/ethical climate and bullying: the "benevolent" and "principled" climates are negatively related (or even an obstacle) to bullying, as well as the cultural orientation of "support". The opposite is the result of the climate "self-interest" and the cultural orientations of "rules" and "goals". As organizational culture and ethical climate explain 20% of the variance of the negative behaviours perceived by the members of the organization, what shows that managers can achieve changes to a significant organizational, individual and societal problem just by manipulating those two variables.

Keywords: Ethical Climate, Ethical Climate Questionnaire, Organizational Culture, Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument, Psychosocial Work Conditions, Workplace Bullying.

Resumen

El acoso laboral se encuentra en muchas organizaciones y tiene graves consecuencias para las personas, las organizaciones y la economía. El objetivo principal de este estudio es contribuir al campo de estudio del acoso laboral probando empíricamente la relación teórica definida entre variables socio-organizacionales (cultura organizacional y clima ético) y acoso laboral, utilizando dos modelos teóricos fundamentados en estudios organizacionales. Los hallazgos, con 984 trabajadores portugueses, sugieren que existe una fuerte relación entre la cultura organizacional/clima ético y el acoso laboral: los climas "benévolo" y "de principios" están relacionados negativamente (o son incluso un obstáculo) con el acoso labroal, así como la orientación cultural de "soporte". Lo contrario sucede con el clima "interés

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propio" y las orientaciones culturales de "reglas" y "metas". La cultura organizacional y el clima ético explican el 20% de la varianza del comportamiento negativo, lo que muestra que los gerentes pueden lograr cambios en problemas organizacionales, individuales y sociales significativos manipulando esas dos variables.

Palabras clave: Clima Ético, Cuestionario de Clima Ético, Cultura Organizacional, Instrumento de Evaluación de la Cultura Organizacional, Condiciones Psicosociales de Trabajo, Acoso Laboral.

Introduction

Workplace bullying can be defined as a destructive process, usually consisting of a chain of varied behaviours perceived by the target as hostile, unwanted, unpredictable, irrational, and unfair (Leymann, 1996a). Although when taken separately they may seem harmless, their constant repetition for long periods of time has pernicious effects, affecting the rights and dignity of the target and leading to degradation of his/her physical and psychological condition, endangering his/her job, economic situation and professional future, degrading his/her working environment and private life, and even generating changes in his/her personality structure (Leymann, 1997). During the process, the target (or targets) feels intimidated, humiliated, frustrated or threatened and experiences great difficulty in defending him/herself because of power differences that exist between him/her and the perceived perpetrator (or perpetrators), seeing him/herself as not having the necessary resources to be able to retaliate (Arroyave, 2012; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2011; Leymann, 1997). Bullying behaviours can be very diverse, such as exclusion from informal activities, withholding information relevant to work performance, dismissing the target through the denigration of everything he/she says, intimidating or threatening the target, diminishing the target through repeated allusion to their physical defects or his/her family members, disqualification of his/her results, yelling at the target, embarrassing him/her in public, withdrawing tasks without a clear reason, not speaking to him/her, assigning him/her tasks for which he/she is clearly overqualified, starting rumours, etc. (Leymann, 1996a).

Bullying frequently causes severe syndromes of combined psychological and physical illness, like low self-esteem, tiredness, nervousness, sleep disturbances, various aches, digestive and other problems, serious cardiovascular disease, depression, psychosis, and even suicide (Arroyave, 2012; Einarsen & Nielsen, 2015; Emdad, Alipour, Hagberg & Jensen, 2013; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012; Verkuil, Atasayi & Molendijk, 2015). But the effects of bullying on targets (and witnesses) transcend physical and psychological health because they impinge on job satisfaction, job performance, job opportunities, family life and general quality of living (Akar, Anafarta, & Sarvan, 2011; Hershcovis & Barling, 2010; Millán, Diaferia, Acosta, & D'Aubeterre, 2016; Nielsen & Einarsen, 2012). They damage the work environment and the organization's efficiency and economic health, as well as the country's economy. These negative consequences of workplace bullying are even more relevant if we look at its high prevalence. Most epidemiological studies show the prevalence of the most serious forms of workplace bullying between 5% and 30% (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Zapf, Einarsen, Hoel, & Vartia, 2003), and some claim that bullying is spreading through organizational life like an epidemic, and that almost everyone seems to be at risk of being severely bullied, perhaps several times along their career (Einarsen, Hoel, & Notelaers, 2009).

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Usually, two major lines of research are used to explain the causes of workplace bullying: personalities involved, those of the targets (Bowling, Beehr, Bennett, & Watson, 2010; Randall, 1999) and/or perpetrators (Seigne, Coyne, Randall, & Parker, 2007), and/or the interaction between both (Hauge, Skogstad, & Einarsen, 2009); and the work environment where it occurs (D'Cruz & Noronha, 2013; Notelaers, De Witte, & Einarsen, 2010; Notelaers, Vermunt, Baillien, Einarsen, & De Witte, 2011). In addition, attempts have also been made to debate factors related to society in general, and political economy (Sheehan, 1999). Although not ignoring other factors, many authors, like Leymann (1996a; 1996b), who laid down the theoretical foundations for bullying, claim that the managerial context is the most important, because it is ultimately the context in which the behaviour occurs that determines whether it can continue or if it is immediately tackled and extinguished (Leymannm, 1996b; Skogstad, Torsheim, Einarsen, & Hauge, 2011).

There are two organizational dimensions that can be changed by management and that are often seen as essential to how individuals interpret and react to their circumstances and to how they decide which behaviours are correct or inadequate: organizational culture and ethical climate. They are powerful forces for shaping organizational members' behaviour, they are used to determine the level of acceptance or severity of bullying and doing this can create a propensity to show positive or negative behaviours. Although the prevailing ethical climate influences workers' decisions about what is wrong or right, the relationship between ethical climate and bullying has not attracted significant attention (Bulutlar & Öz, 2009).

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Organizational culture is a key factor in structuring the way people perceive, feel and act within the organization and the experiences that happen in the organizational context, as is the case with bullying. That is, norms, heroes, rituals and symbols prevalent in the organization can turn bullying behaviour into something not acceptable, acceptable, or even desirable. Several authors (e.g., Leymann, 1996a) consider that bullying only exists, at least at significant levels, if the organizational culture's values and practices stimulate it, or at least tolerate it. In a study by Zapf (1999), 86% of the victims believed that the cause of their bullying resided wholly or partly in the workplace climate. Vartia (1996) found significant relationships between bullying and a competitive and individualistic working atmosphere. In this scenario, each one pursues their own interests, differences of opinion are resolved not through negotiation but through the positions of power and authority or orders, individuals can have little influence over the issues that concern them, the flow of communication is poor and there are deficiencies in listening and tolerance. The study Cisneros I (Mobbing.Nu, 2017) concluded that bullying was higher in individualistic and competitive workplaces or those where authoritarian leadership styles prevailed.

One of the most frequently used models to study organizational culture has been the Competing Values Framework by Quinn and associates (Quinn & Cameron, 1983; Quinn & Rohrbaugh, 1983). There are various studies (for example, Neves & Jesuíno, 1994; Van Muijen et al., 1999) showing that this model is adequate for organizational culture research in Portuguese organizations. This model defines the existence of four orientations of organizational culture: "support", "innovation", "rules" and "goal".

In the "support" orientation, values such as trust and involvement dominate. There is a fairly acute appreciation of people and human relationships (tolerance for difference, consideration for individual needs, participation and cooperation, informality). Leadership tends to support the development of people, fostering teamwork. In organizations

with a "support" orientation culture, the importance that is given to people and to human relations favours a negative perception of bullying, which means it is almost never tolerated. Indeed, when people value happiness, altruism and a low degree of competitiveness, aggression behaviours (such as bullying) are avoided and when aggression begins, the aggressor is immediately punished by the group (Nielsen et al., 2009). In a study on the relation between national culture and bullying, Power et al. (2013) found that in countries with a humane orientation the acceptability of bullying was very weak, as "possessing the value of kindness and consideration for others leads employees to reject bullying" (p. 377). Kwan, Tuckey, and Dollard (2016) found that workers can cope more effectively with workplace bullying in organizations with a strong climate of psychological safety, where senior management values the employees' psychological health and stimulates communication, participation and workers' involvement in issues that affect their psychological health and safety. Vartia (1996) argues that stress is one of the causes of bullying, and Sale and Kerr (2002) say that social support (the helpful social interactions available in the workplace from supervisors and co-workers) acts as a mediator of work stress, protecting against the negative impact of great strain. So, the "support" culture, with the cooperation and preoccupation with the well-being of others that it implies, can decrease the level of stress perceived by workers and therefore decrease one cause of bullying and thus the level of bullying. Hence, we hypothesize:

Hypothesis 1a: The "support" orientation is negatively related to bullying
In the "innovation" orientation, adaptation to internal and external changes is valued, as well as tolerance for ambiguity, innovative ideas, competitiveness, and positive criticism. At the base of motivation is challenge and individual initiative, the ability to innovate; leadership involves taking risks to promote the organization's growth and to have a strategic vision. Constant change, ambiguity and competitiveness are factors favouring bullying (Peterson, 2002). In fact, constant change, instability and competitiveness, with increased workload, cognitive demands, and role conflict, lack of control, job insecurity and strained interpersonal relationships tend to create a stressful work environment. According to the frustration-aggression hypothesis (the frustration can lead to aggression) (Fox & Spector, 1999), this kind of circumstances "may result in aggressive behaviour through individuals' negative affect, and thus encourage perpetrators to engage in bullying behaviours" (Skogstad et al., 2011, p. 479). Several authors (Biallien & De Witte, 2009; Skogstad, Matthiesen, & Einarsen, 2007) found significant relations between organizational change (the "innovation" orientation implies frequent changes) and workplace aggression: harassment towards colleagues as a strategy to cope with negative emotions created by change. In accordance with the social interactionist perspective (Newman & Baron, 2003), stressful work conditions can cause "distressed individuals to violate social norms and transgress role boundaries, and thus provoke negative behaviour in other members of the organization" (Skogstad et al., 2011, pp. 479-480), like bullying. According to the perspective that sees bullying as an escalated conflict (Zapf & Gross, 2001), in workplaces with elevated workloads, like those with frequent and fast changes, there is limited time for conflict management and resolution, which can lead to conflict escalation and therefore to workplace bullying. So, we formulate the follow hypothesis:

Hypothesis 1b: The "innovation" orientation is positively related to bullying
The "rules" orientation emphasizes control, stability, respect for rules, order, hierarchy, security. The bureaucracy, mechanicism, control and dehumanization created by fixed rules, and the requirement of absolute obedience to authority, create favourable conditions for bullying (Samnani & Singh, 2012). Furthermore, bureaucracy implies

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limited latitude for decision (task autonomy and participation in decision-making), and few opportunities for controlling the causes of strain (Karasek, 1979). In fact, several studies show a negative correlation between control and workplace bullying (Einarsen, Raknes, & Matthiesen, 1994; Vartia, 1996): "strain can lead to reduced performance. This may provoke negative reactions from co-workers, which could result in bullying at work." (Notelaers et al., 2010, p. 490). Bullying can also be seen as a way to keep everyone under control, obeying with little resistance. Those who do not obey the rules get bullied until they do, so that next time they will think twice before disobeying a rule. Furthermore, the bullied colleagues work as a warning to those who were thinking about disobeying the rules. Hence, we hypothesized:

Hypothesis 1c: The "rules" orientation is positively related to bullying
The "goal" orientation puts the emphasis on productivity at any cost and the ability to compete and to achieve predetermined ambitious objectives. Bullying can be seen as a legitimate means to an end, an efficient way of increasing performance (Samnani & Singh, 2012). This pressure to attain goals can create high levels of stress and this can lower thresholds for aggression (Fox & Spector, 1999) and it increases the benefits of obliterating those who are seen as threats or burdens:

Hypothesis 1d: The "goal" orientation is positively related to bullying
The ethical climate, that reflects organizational practices with moral consequences, was chosen because bullying is an issue closely linked to ethics, insofar as it involves inflicting pain and suffering on others, whether or not on behalf of a greater good. In some countries, like France and Portugal, bullying is even called moral harassment (*harcèlement moral* and *assédio moral*). Despite its importance, only a small number of studies about bullying involve the ethical dimension (Bulutlar & Öz, 2009; Huhtala, Tolvanen, Mauno & Feldt, 2015). The type of ethical climate in the organization, i.e., the shared perceptions of prescriptions, forbiddances and permissions relating to moral obligations, what is seen as ethically correct or not, can facilitate or hinder the existence of such unethical behaviour as bullying (Victor & Cullen, 1988). Nawar and Dagam (2015) state that an egoistic ethical work climate is positively linked to unethical behaviour (like bullying) and that caring, law and code, and rules are negatively linked to unethical behaviour. For instance, in very competitive cultures, interests of the stronger individuals tend to be above any other interest, such as those of the other members of the group, organization or society, i.e., ethical criteria are basically selfish. As was previously said, in the kind of culture where anything goes, bullying reaches very high levels. A study from Vartia (1996) concluded that where there is bullying, the working atmosphere is seen as competitive and individualistic, with each one pursuing their own interests. That is, the perception of ethical climate of self-interest appears related to the existence of bullying at work. It is therefore expected that depending on the characteristics of ethical climate, hostile and aggressive behaviour towards colleagues may be tolerated, accepted, encouraged or punished, affecting the level of bullying in the organization.

For the study of ethical climate, the well-accepted typology of ethical climate proposed by Victor and Cullen (1988) was chosen: it "is regarded as the dominant framework in organisational studies considering ethical climate" (Grobler, 2016, p. 2). This typology is based on two dimensions, where one represents the ethical criterion used in decision-making in organizational decisions (egoism, benevolence and principle) and the other the locus of analysis (types of referent groups) used in decisions (individual, local, cosmopolitan) (Victor & Cullen, 1988). The egoistic criterion makes individuals handle ethical questions pursing the maximization of self-interest; the

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benevolent criterion leads to attempts to maximize the collective interest and the principled criterion leads to decisions that comply with rules, codes or laws. In the individual locus of analysis, decisions are made using personal ethics; in the local locus of analysis, decisions are made using mainly the moral reasoning coming from the organization and the moral reasoning which originates from outside the individual's group or organization is the cosmopolitan locus of analysis. By crossing the two dimensions, the authors obtained nine archetypes of ethical climates: "self-interest", "company interest", "efficiency", "friendship", "team play", "social responsibility", "personal morality", "rules and procedures" and "law or professional codes" (Table 1). Although Victor and Cullen (1988) consider that each organization had only one ethical climate (the existence of one implies the absence of any other), Parboteeah et al. (2010) argue that there is a tendency to have a dominant, but not exclusive, ethical climate in every organization, although incompatibilities between some climates are more likely than others. In fact, research has found organizations with two climates and even three, thus, some authors prefer to speak of climate dimensions, rather than climates (Rego, 2001). Empirical studies using the questionnaire created by Victor and Cullen (1988) rarely reach a factor solution with the nine archetypes theoretically expected, and typically there are between five and six climate dimensions (Agrawal, 2017; Appelbaum, Deguire, & Lay, 2005; Barnett & Vaicys, 2000; Cullen, Victor, & Stephens, 1989; Grobler, 2016; Nawar & Dagam, 2015; Taştan & Güçel, 2017; Victor & Cullen, 1988).

Table 1. Ethical Climates (Victor & Cullen, 1988)

		Locus of analysis	
	Individual	*Local*	*Cosmopolitan*
Egoistic	Self-interest	Company interest	Efficiency
Benevolence	Friendship	Team play	Social responsibility
Principled	Personal morality	Rules and procedures	Law or professional codes

(*Ethical criterion* labels the rows: Egoistic, Benevolence, Principled)

A caring environment, based on concern for others and their well-being, typical of a "benevolent" climate, is more likely to encourage positive affect among organizational members, as well as cooperation, mutual personal attraction, and group cohesion (Cullen, Parboteeah, & Victor, 2003). Workers are more willing to assist each other, and a positive tone is created among them. When ethical decisions are concerned with the welfare of each individual in the organization and the team as a whole and when organizational members tend to have positive feelings about the organization and each other, bullying, often resulting in damaged health, will almost never be tolerated. In fact, Peterson (2002) found a negative correlation between ethical climates dominated by benevolence and unethical behaviours, and Baillen and De Witte (2009) concluded that social support from colleagues and leaders was negatively related to bullying. As a result, we can expect that in a caring climate, what an individual can gain from bullying behaviours (effects achieved) is very little compared to the bad consequences he/she can face (danger). So, the effect/danger ratio (outputs they get/risks of being prosecuted because of their behaviour), defined by Björkqvist and Österman (1994) as being central when an individual chooses if he/she shows aggressive behaviours (like bullying) or not, is very low in climates dominated by benevolence, and bullying behaviours are too risky:

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Hypothesis 2a: The ethical climate dominated by benevolence is negatively related to bullying

Laws prohibit hostile and aggressive behaviours in the workplace, most organizational rules do the same, so when ethical decisions take laws and rules into account, any kind of dysfunctional behaviour, such as bullying, will not be an option (Parboteeah & Kapp, 2008). Peterson (2002) found that principled ethical climates (where ethical decisions are based on rules) were negatively related to unethical behaviour. As a result, when the climate is dominated by engagement with ethical rules, the danger of receiving negative consequences when showing bullying behaviour (forbidden) is greater than the rewards potentially received from that behaviour – the effect/danger ratio (Björkqvist & Österman, 1994) is too low to risk violating the rules that ban bullying:

Hypothesis 2b: The ethical climate dominated by "principles" is negatively related to bullying

"Bullying is not necessarily an 'irrational' behaviour [and can] be a 'rational' choice, [a] deliberate strategy for improving one's own position, by sabotaging […] competitors, by getting rid of persons considered as threats or burdens" (Salin, 2003, p. 36).

If decisions are based only on the maximization of individual interest, it can be expected that each person will tend to "choose alternatives that benefit himself/herself the most while ignoring the needs of others" (Parboteeah & Kapp, 2008, p. 518). In such a climate, the norm is to boost the focus on individual needs and so nobody cares about the well-being of others, and self-interested behaviours at the expense of other people such as lying, hiding information, stealing and cheating are welcomed and even rewarded. In this kind of climate, cooperation, group cohesion and interest in others, usually seen as needed to avoid or stop bullying, are less likely to be found. So, it is expected that all procedures are valid for achieving individual goals, even bullying: "bullying can be stimulated by workgroups or organizations that normalize abusive or even competitive, behaviour" (Samnani & Singh, 2012, p. 585). Peterson (2002) found that in organizations where the "self-interest" climate was prevalent, the number of unethical behaviours was higher than in other organizations. Promislo, Giacalone and Welch (2012) found that if the organizational environment is less ethical (more selfish), the level of stress tends to rise, and, as said before, stressful workplaces are expected to show higher levels of bullying. In fact, when employees are not concerned about the consequences of their behaviour, that may create a competitive environment that enhances bullying activities, because individuals will do everything to maximize their benefits (Bulutlar & Öz, 2009). Indeed, Vartia (1996) found a correlation between the prevalence of bullying and the existence of a competitive climate in the organization; and Zapf and Einarsen (2003) concluded that the micropolitical behaviour at work used to enhance one's interests is one of the antecedents of workplace bullying. So, "bullying is not necessarily an 'irrational' behaviour [and can] be a 'rational' choice, [a] deliberate strategy for improving one's own position, by sabotaging […] competitors, by getting rid of persons considered as threats or burdens" (Salin, 2003, p. 36). As a result, when a climate is dominated by self-interest, the effect/danger ratio (Björkqvist & Österman, 1994) is very significant and employees see bullying behaviours as legitimate and even a source of organizational or individual rewards:

Hypothesis 2c: The ethical climate dominated by "self-interest" is positively related to bullying

To answer our research question, "What is the relation between both organizational culture and ethical climate, and workplace bullying?", we defined seven hypotheses, as can be seen in Figure 1.
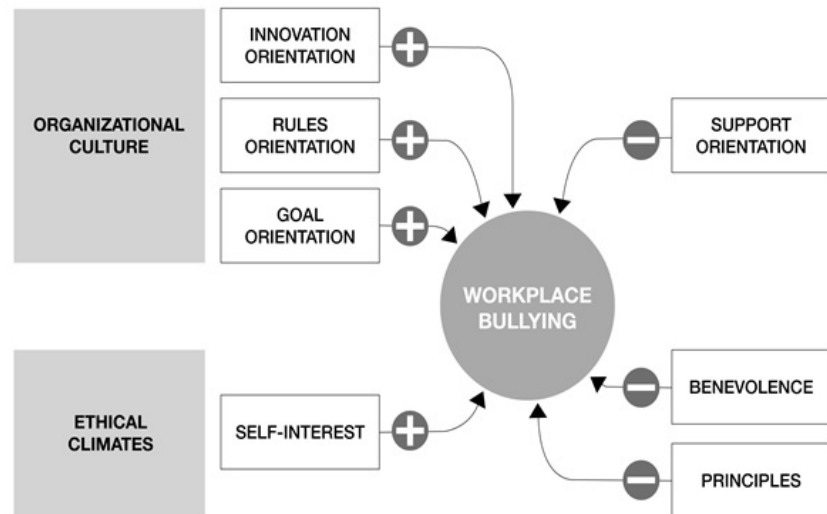
Figure 1. Research framework

This study therefore aims to make an important contribution to the field of workplace bullying, by theoretically deepening the organizational causes of bullying, using theoretical models for the first time which are well accepted in organizational sciences and their instruments.

Methods

Participants

A cross-sectional study was conducted with people living in Portugal, from 14 organizations from various sectors: commercial, manufacturing, insurance, media, healthcare, education, and building. The organizations were selected based on the objective of having as varied a sample as possible, from among the organizations available to participate in the study. Also, the participants were a convenience sample, i.e. the researcher directly or through the human resource directors, contacted as many potential individuals as possible across the company or the sector chosen by the human resources department. The questionnaires were collected personally by the researcher or sent by the respondents to the researcher using the postal services. Of the 1,349 questionnaires distributed, 987 were collected – the response rate was 73%, which can be seen as an adequate result, and better than many other comparable studies (e.g. Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001). Of these, three were rejected because there were systematic errors in their completion.

The study population was mainly male (63% versus 37% female). Most individuals (70%) were between 25 and 45 years old, with an average age of 39 years. 70% of the individuals had education below or equal to high school diploma level. The respondents are distributed almost evenly through three types of jobs: commercial (29%), production (33%) and clerical (38%). 14% had managerial jobs, half of whom coordinated more than four persons. 46% of the respondents came from commercial organizations, 24% from services, 13% from manufacturing, and 17% from the building industry. As for size, 34% of the respondents worked in organizations with fewer than 250 workers and 66% in organizations with more than 250 workers.

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Instruments

As research has shown that the two main methods for measuring exposure to workplace bullying have advantages and drawbacks (Cowie, Naylor, Rivers, Smith, & Pereira, 2002; Einarsen et al., 2011; Nielsen et al., 2011), we have chosen to use both methods: the individual's perception of being exposed to a set of negative behaviours and his/her feeling of being a target of bullying (self-labelling). A person was considered a target of bullying if she/he met the criteria for both methods.

In a *19-item version of the Leymann Inventory of Psychological Terrorization (LIPT)* (Leymann, 1996a), adapted to the Portuguese population, the respondents are asked to mark a list of 19 negative behaviours which they were exposed to in their workplace over the last 12 months. These behaviours range from subtle acts (withholding information needed for the target to do his/her job, personal jokes, etc.) to overt acts (name calling, physical violence, etc.). For each behaviour, they had to mark the frequency with which that behaviour occurs (daily, almost daily, once a week, several times a week, rarely, never) and how long it has been occurring (more than 5 years, between 2 and 5 years, about a year, about half a year, more than 2 months, less than 2 months). It was considered that an individual was a target of bullying if he/she was subject to at least two negative behaviours (Mikkelsen & Einarsen, 2001), once a week or more (Leymann, 1996a), and for a minimum of six months (Einarsen et al., 2009). Exploratory and confirmatory factor analysis rendered support for the scale's construct validity. The reliability was also acceptable (Cronbach's alpha=.79).

The self-labelling method works by providing a definition of bullying and asking the respondent whether or not she/he was in a similar situation over the past 6 months, in the workplace. The definition presented was:

> We talk about bullying when someone is the target of negative behaviour from one or more persons, in a systematic way and repeated over time, thus creating a hostile work environment. The target of these repeated negative behaviours has difficulty defending herself/himself, so it is not a conflict between two ordinary people of equal strength.

To assess the ethical climate, a *14-item version of the Ethical Climate Questionnaire* (ECQ) developed by Victor and Cullen (1988) and adapted to the Portuguese population was used (Rego, 2001). It measures three main ethical climates/dimensions: "benevolent", "principled", and "self-interest". Items include "It is very important to follow the organization's rules and procedures", "What is best for everyone in the organization is the major consideration here" and "In this company, people protect their own interests above all else". Each item is scored on a six-point Likert scale, corresponding to the six response categories, ranging from 1 or "completely false" to 6 or "completely true". The scale has shown adequate construct validity and reliability (Cronbach's alpha=.80).

The scale used to assess the organizational culture was a version of the *Organizational Culture Assessment Instrument* (OCAI) (Cameron & Quinn, 1999), adapted to the Portuguese population (Neves & Jenuíno, 1994), that allows the identification of the organizational culture profile based on the competing values model of organizational culture. The scale has six questions, and for each question the respondent was asked to distribute 100 points among the four scenarios that each question contains, according to their interpretation of how well or badly each scenario reflects the organization they belong to. In the first item, for example, respondents have to distribute 100

points between four scenarios, two of which are: "The organization is a very personal place. It is like an extended family. People seem to share a lot of themselves", and "The organization is a very dynamic and entrepreneurial place. People are willing to stick their necks out and take risks". The organizational culture profile results from the sum of points attributed to each of the four culture orientations: "support", "innovation", "goal" or "rules". The scale showed an adequate construct validity and reliability, with values of Cronbach's alphas between .73 and .83.

Table 2 presents the intercorrelations between scales and the correlations with some sociodemographic variables (age, gender and education).

Table 2. Correlations, means, standard deviations, and Cronbach's of study variables

Variable	Mean	SD	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
1. Age	3.9.1	10.1											
2. Gender [a]	1.4	.5	-.22**										
3. Education [b]	2	.8	-.33**	.2**									
4. OC Support	24.3	15	.15**	-.11**	-.13**	(.83)							
5. OC Inovation	18.5	8.6	.08*	-.05	.06	.15**	(.74)						
6. OC Rules	24.7	13	-.16**	.05	.13**	-.42**	-.36**	(.73)					
7. OC Goal	32.5	16.2	-.05	.1**	-.01	-.67**	-.38**	-.22**	(.82)				
8. EC Principles	4.5	.9	.15**	-.17**	-.09**	.28**	.01	-.15**	-.14**	(.83)			
9. EC Self-interest	3.9	1.3	-.15**	-.19**	-.07*	-.26**	-.08*	.17**	.15**	-.4**	(.89)		
10. EC Benevolcence	4	1.1	.16**	-.2**	-.14**	.4**	.11**	-.24**	-.24**	.73**	-.49**	(.92)	
11. Negative behaviours	1.8	2.4	-.15**	.04	.08	-.27**	-.06	.14**	.17**	-.37**	.31**	-.38**	(.79)
12. Target/not-target [c]	.2	.4	-.14**	.01	.06	-.22**	-.04	.11**	.13**	.27**	.23**	-.31**	.65**

* p < .05 **p < .01
[a] 1 = man; 2 = woman
[b] 1 = basic studies; 2 = highschool; 3 = college studies
[c] 0 = Not target; 1 = Target
Alpha reliabilities are in parentheses

Procedure

The selection of participants was non-probabilistic. All members of the targeted population were invited through personal contact or internal communications from their organizations. As the questionnaires were self-administered, they were distributed directly to the subjects or by their managers. According to the rules of the APA, each questionnaire had a letter attached explaining its objectives, the voluntary filling out and guaranteeing confidentiality. A pre-paid envelope for returning the completed questionnaire directly to the researchers was also distributed to each participant, thus ensuring total anonymity. In some organizations, participants completed the questionnaires during work time (some organizations reserved a room for that purpose) and in other participants completed the questionnaires at home.

Statistical analysis was conducted using SPSS 22, and is divided into two kinds of studies: one aims to check if there is a link between the number of bullying behaviours

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(negative behaviours) perceived by the respondents and the independent variables of organizational culture and ethical climate; and the other analyses the relationship between being and not being a target of bullying and the independent variables considered.

Results

Of the participants, 101 persons (10.3%) can be labelled as workplace bullying targets (they labelled themselves as targets and they perceived themselves as receiving two or more negative behaviours at least once a week during at least six months). No differences in exposure to negative acts due to gender (X^2=3.94; p=.56), education level (X^2=5.97; p=.31), job (X^2=2.83; p=.39) or hierarchical position (X^2=.54; p=.76) are observed. Younger workers are more bullied than their elders (X^2=17.14; p=.002). Concerning organizations, there are no differences in exposure to negative acts due to size (F =.93; df=4; p=.45) and business sector (F=1.64; df=6; p=.13).

The results showed that there were relationships (Pearson's correlation coefficient) between the orientation of the organizational culture and the number of negative behaviours that the individuals perceived. The "support" orientation had a negative relationship with abusive behaviour (r=-.27, p<.01): the higher the prevalence of this orientation, the less frequent were those behaviours. The orientations "rules" and "goal", in turn, exhibit a positive correlation with negative behaviours (r=.14, p<.01; r=.17, p<.01), that is, the stronger these types of culture are, the more negative behaviours occur. There is not a significant correlation with the culture "innovation".

When the differences between targets and non-targets were analysed (Table 3) the conclusions were similar: the non-targets perceived their cultures more as having "support" orientation (t(929)=6.75, p=000), and less as having a "rules" (t(929)=-3.45, p=.001) or "goal" orientation (t(929)=-4.01, p=.000). In "innovation" there were no significant differences between targets and non-targets (t(336)=1.09, p=.277), although the latter tend to have slightly higher values (mean of 17.9 versus 18.7).

Table 3. Mean differences of number of negative behaviours between targets and non-targets depending on organizational culture orientation

Organizational culture orientation	Non-target			Target			df	t	p
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD			
Support	713	26	15.2	218	18.4	13	929	6.75	.000
Innovation	713	18.7	8.45	218	17.9	9.2	336	1.09	.277
Rules	713	23.9	12.6	218	27.4	14.1	929	-3.45	.001
Goal	713	31.3	15.5	218	36.3	17.9	929	-4.01	.000

Hypothesis 1a ("support" orientation is negatively related to bullying) was confirmed, as well as *1c* ("goal" orientation is positively related to bullying) and *1d* ("rules" orientation is positively related to bullying).

In terms of ethical climate, the number of negative behaviours was negatively associated with the "benevolent" (r=-.38, p<.01) and "laws and rules" (r=-.37, p<.01) climates, and positively with "self-interest" (r=.31, p<.01). That means that the greater the concern in making decisions which follow the ethical principles of benevolence, the lower the number of abusive behaviours in the team. As ethical decisions are increasingly based on individual selfishness, the number of negative behaviours also increases.

When considering the differences between targets and non-targets ([Table 4](#)), we can see that, in fact, those who were not targets perceived more than those who were targets that their workplace was dominated by a "benevolent" (t(968)=10.13, p=.000) and "laws or rules" (t(967)=8.68, p=.000) ethical climate, and less by the climate of "self-interest" (t(967)=-7.29, p=.000).

Table 4. Mean differences of number of negative behaviours between targets and non-targets depending on ethical climate

Ethical climate	Non-targets			Targets			df	t	p
	N	Mean	SD	N	Mean	SD			
Benevolent	742	4.2	1	227	3.4	1.13	968	10.13	0.000
Laws and rules	742	4.62	0.81	227	4.05	1	967	8.68	0.000
Self-interest	742	3.75	1.30	227	4.44	1.08	967	-7.29	0.000

It appears that all types of climate are related to bullying, and that climates that foster decision-making based on concern for the welfare of individuals and teams and the ethical rules and laws are negatively related to bullying. Those climates that focus only on selfish interests were positively related to bullying. So, *hypotheses 2* (there is a link between bullying and the ethical climate), *2a* (the "benevolent" ethical climate is negatively related to bullying), *2b* (the ethical climate "laws and rules" is negatively related to bullying) and *2c* (the ethical climate "self-interest" is positively related to bullying) were confirmed.

If we analyse each organization on its own ([Table 5](#)), despite the great diversity of results achieved by each organization in all dimensions, we can see the same tendencies. The results obtained by organization 4 deserve mention for it is the one with the highest values in "benevolent" and "principled" ethical climates and the cultural orientation "support", and it has the lowest bullying rate. On the other hand, organization 6 has the lowest value in cultural orientation "support" and the highest bullying rate.

Table 5. Organizational Culture, Ethical Climate, and Bullying rate for each organization

Organization	Ethical climate			Cultural orientation				Bullying rate
	Benevolent	Laws and Rules	Self-interest	Support	Innovation	Rules	Goal	
1	3.3	4.1	4.7	17.3	18.8	21.7	42.3	28.9
2	4.1	4.7	3.5	24.9	27.2	18.2	29.8	22.6
3	4.0	4.4	3.8	26.0	18.5	26.0	29.5	27.4
4	4.8	4.9	3.6	43.8	20.4	17.8	21.0	12.1
5	4.3	4.7	3.7	21.1	11.8	26.9	40.3	18.2
6	3.6	4.1	4.1	16.2	26.5	20.4	36.9	30.0
7	3.7	4.5	3.8	16.9	24.1	26.7	32.3	14.7
8	4.3	4.7	3.7	24.6	17.4	28.3	31.8	15.8
9	4.0	4.7	3.7	27.9	16.5	28.2	27.4	25.2
10	3.4	4.1	4.7	19.2	12.6	39.4	28.8	26.5
11	4.4	4.7	3.4	23.4	20.4	19.9	36.3	16.7
12	3.4	3.7	3.9	25.2	19.6	30.6	24.6	25.0
13	4.2	4.6	4.0	23.8	17.5	24.1	34.6	19.5
14	3.7	4.7	4.1	41.2	22.5	14.2	22.2	20.0
Mean	4.0	4.5	3.9	24.3	18.5	24.7	32.5	23.2

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In order to determine the effect of the seven independent variables on the number of negative behaviours perceived by respondents (indicators of bullying), the linear regression technique was used. The model found was validated (F(6, 915)=38.2, p=0.000). The independent variables explain 20% of the variance in negative behaviours (Adjusted R Square). We can conclude that there is a relation between organizational culture and workplace bullying, and between ethical climate and workplace bullying.

It can be noted that the variables' explanatory power tends to decrease slightly with the increase in the size of organizations: in companies with up to 50 employees, culture and climate explain 25% of the negative behaviours; in organizations with up to 250 members the explained variance is 20%; in those with more than 250 employees, the variables explain 19.3% of the variance.

In the model with six variables (Table 6), only in one is the relation not significant: "innovation" orientation (p>.05). All the others show a linear relation to the number of negative behaviours reported, which means they have a significant effect on the number of behaviours (*hypotheses 1a, 1c, 1d, 2a, 2b* and *2c*). The Beta coefficients reveal that the climates "laws and rules" (negatively), "self-interest" (positively) and "benevolent" (negatively) are the strongest predictors of negative behaviours.

Table 6. Linear Regression Coefficients (climates and cultures versus negative behaviours)

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	p
	B	Std. Error	β		
(Constant)	2.679	.765		3.501	.000
Climate – Benevolent	-.268	.105	-.120	-2.561	.011
Climate – Laws and rules	-.527	.118	-.193	-4.448	.000
Climate – Self-interest	.283	.064	.150	4.431	.000
Innovation orientation	.017	.010	.059	1.586	.113
Rules orientation	.019	.007	.109	2.792	.005
Goal orientation	.020	.006	.137	3.655	.000

Note: R^2 = .20

The model found with logistic regression predicts the correct definition of targets and non-targets in 77.5% of cases (Table 7). Therefore, the knowledge of the organizational culture and ethical climate is enough to allow us to correctly define who are the targets and non-targets in 77.5% of the cases.

Table 7. Classification table in the logistical regression of climates and cultures in being a target

	Observed	Predicted		
		Non-target	Target	Percentage correct
	Non-target	674	31	95.6
Step 1	Target	177	41	18.8
	Overall percentage			77.5

With this model, the independent variables of organizational culture and ethical climate account for 17.5% of bullying (Nagelkerke R Square). Of the seven dependent variables considered, six entered the regression equation (Table 8). By estimating

the significance test (Wald), it appears that of these variables, two have coefficients that indicate that these parameters are particularly useful for the model ($p<.05$): ethical climate "self-interest" and "support" orientation. It is important to note that the organizational culture "innovation" was eliminated from the equation (as happened in the linear regression).

Table 8. Variables in the regression equation of climates and cultures in being a target

Variable	B	Wald	df	p
Ethical climate – Benevolent	-.319	7.885		.005
Ethical climate – Laws and rules	-.245	3.735		.053
Ethical climate – Self-interest	.248	9.111		.003
Culture – Support orientation	-.020	8.518	1	.004
Culture – Innovation orientation	.007	.398		.528
Culture – Rules orientation	.002	.114		.735
(Constant)	.373	.262		.609

As these results could be overestimated by individual and organizational factors, we carried out a new analysis controlling for some individual (sex, age, qualification, job, management position and years of work experience) and organizational variables (industry and size) to see if the results were very different or not. When the model has only individual variables (step 1), it explains around 3% of the variance (Nagelkerke R Square). In step 2, the organizational variables add around 2% of explanatory power. In step 3, with the culture variables in the model, the explanatory power grows to around 13%. Finally, in step 4, introducing the ethical variables, the model explains more than 22% of the variance.

As was said before, being a target of bullying or not was defined using two methods: a) asking the individuals if they see themselves as targets of bullying; or b) ascertaining if they have been subjected to at least two negative behaviours, at least once a week, during at least the last six months. To see if the results are significantly different if we used only one of these methods, we calculated the regression in each case. Using the first method, the organizational culture and ethical climates explain 20.6% of bullying, a little more than using both methods (17.5%). Using the latter, those variables explain 17.2% of bullying, almost the same as using both methods.

Discussion

With this article, we intend to empirically test the theoretically defined relation between socio-organizational variables and bullying, namely the organizational culture and ethical climate as source for or obstacle to workplace bullying.

Regarding organizational culture, non-targets perceive their organizations as having higher values than targets in "support" orientation, and lower in "rules" and "goal" orientations. In the "innovation" orientation there are no significant differences between targets and non-targets, although the latter tend to have slightly higher values. Those results are confirmed by the correlation between the organizational culture perceived and the number of negative behaviours that individuals report. With logistic regression it is indeed confirmed that the "support" culture emerged

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as a significant obstacle to bullying. Linear regression showed that the "rules" and "goal" orientations are strongly related to the existence of negative behaviours. Thus, organizations that care about the welfare and development of their people, maintaining stability in the structure of work are those where abusive behaviour is not encouraged, but rather discouraged and repressed. On the other hand, cultures with highly bureaucratic organization based on formal authority seem to assemble the elements that favour or unleash bullying.

Multiple authors (Archer, 1999; Ashforth, 1994; Cowie et al., 2002; Diamond, 1997; Einarsen, 1999; Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996; Giorgi, 2009; Glendinning, 2001; Hoel, Cooper, & Faragher, 2001; Hornstein, 1996; Manning, 2001; Mobbing.Nu, 2017) have come to these same conclusions, i.e., that the level of bullying is higher in cultures where people are seen only as easily replaceable instruments without expectations and rights, where dominating others is perceived as something positive, aggression is tolerated and even rewarded, the main concern is for immediate profit, the working atmosphere is competitive and individualistic, the information flow is poor, there is a lack of dialogue about tasks and goals, the objectives are unclear, the attitude to innovation is negative, and there is a negative perception of job characteristics.

If egoistic climates are related to workplace bullying, and the bullying has very negative effects upon individuals, organizations and society, managers that defend self-interest positions in their managerial practices maybe should think more deeply about all consequences of their positioning.

By analysing the results, we can conclude that non-targets perceive their organizations as having higher values than do targets in the ethical climate "benevolent" and "laws and rules", and less in the climate "self-interest". The correlation studies showed that the number of negative behaviours was negatively associated with the "benevolent" and "laws and rules" climates, and positively with "self-interest". That is, the greater the concern in making decisions following benevolent ethical principles, the smaller the number of abusive behaviours among the team. As ethical decisions are increasingly based on individual selfishness, the number of negative behaviours also increases. Logistic regression showed that, indeed, the ethical climate influences the levels of bullying, namely the existence of an internal ethical climate of "self-interest". Linear regression revealed that "benevolent" and "laws" climates emerge as obstacles to the existence of negative behaviours, and that the "self-interest" climate is strongly related to these bullying behaviours. These results are consistent with what one would expect according to most studies (e.g., Bulutlar & Öz, 2008; Leymann, 1996a; Vartia, 1996), which argue that when the ethical values prevalent in work environment are more individualistic and focused on immediate interests, there is a higher prevalence of bullying. Indeed, when ethical criteria are basically selfish, work environments tend to be quite competitive and the interests of the stronger individuals tend to be above any other interest, such as the other members of the group, organization or society. This means that bullying is more acceptable, and even desirable as a strategy for achieving results, and the social control that could lead to its prosecution is lower. This relation between bullying and a self-interest climate goes against what was expected by those who believe that the "aggregate effect of all economic participants acting in their long-term self-interest would benefit all society [...] more effectively than if individuals attempted to address the needs of society directly" (Overall, 2016, p. 113). In fact, if egoistic climates are related to workplace bullying, and the bullying has very negative effects upon individuals, organizations and society, managers that defend self-interest positions in their managerial practices maybe should think more deeply about all consequences of their positioning.

When the climate is predominantly "benevolent", concern focuses on the good relationship between the work team members and also on team interests. Bullying is incompatible with a positive environment and the establishment of good relations within the group. Therefore, it is expected that, when the ethical climate is "benevolent", harassing behaviours are viewed quite negatively, significantly decreasing the effect/danger ratio for bullies. When the climate is focused on fulfilling the organization's ethical rules and legislation, it is also expected that the bullying is reduced because both the company's ethical rules and laws perceive the abusive behaviour negatively inasmuch as, for example, it offends human dignity, targets' rights, and generates clear harm to the victims. Martin and Cullen (2006), studying dysfunctional behaviour, reinforced the liaison between ethical climates and negative behaviours (such as bullying):

[...] various forms of misbehaviour, which fall under our rubric of dysfunctional behaviour, are anticipated to occur in organizations where members perceive an instrumental climate and a lack of principled climate expectations such as might be emphasized through ethical codes. In contrast, research suggests that the social support that results from caring climates deters employee deviance (p. 181).

Given the vast complexity of the workplace bullying phenomenon, with very different sources of causality that span multiple levels of analysis and have a high interdependence and interaction, the fact that organizational culture and ethical climate by themselves explain around 20% of the negative behaviour variance and 17.5% of the bullying variance, emerges as highly relevant. Einarsen et al. (1994) found that the work conditions they studied (role conflict, role ambiguity, challenge, social climate, leadership, work control and workload) accounted for 10% of the variance in workplace bullying. So, it seems that using the two theoretical frameworks, as we did, has a wider explanatory power than studying several unrelated variables.

In conclusion, the major contributions of this study can be found in two dimensions: the theoretical and that of managerial practices. The theoretical contribution to knowledge of workplace bullying results from two theoretically predicted relations being confirmed (culture/bullying, ethical climate/bullying) using two very acceptable theoretical models (and their instruments) in organizational investigation, enforcing the theoretical study of workplace bullying. It is also important to state that the use of strong theoretical frameworks is an innovation, because despite the proliferation of research on workplace bullying, when studying the bullying/organizational culture relation, investigators usually only take into account isolated traits of it, like communication characteristics, working atmosphere, information flow, etc. Disregarding the strong ethical dimension of bullying, the literature has seldom studied the relations between those two concepts. Our study makes a contribution to reducing that gap by analysing how ethical climate influences bullying and using one of the most theoretically and empirically sound frameworks. Another theoretical contribution of this study is the reinforcement of the work environment hypothesis, which states that psychological factors in the work environment can create conditions that can prompt workplace bullying. This study also has a cross-cultural theoretical contribution: it was carried out in a country (Southern European and Catholic) with a national culture different from that of the countries (Nordic and Anglo-Saxon) where studies about bullying, organizational culture and organizational ethical climates usually take place (Hofstede, Hofstede, & Minkov, 2010). Our results show that, despite the differences between national cultures, the relations between bullying and organizational culture and ethical climate are very similar.

Given the vast complexity of the workplace bullying phenomenon, with very different sources of causality that span multiple levels of analysis and have a high interdependence and interaction, the fact that organizational culture and ethical climate by themselves explain around 20% of the negative behaviour variance and 17.5% of the bullying variance, emerges as highly relevant.

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By determining empirically (and not only by "common sense") in which kind of culture and ethical climate bullying increases or decreases, this study can help managers who want to improve their management to change their practices. In order to reduce bullying and its negative effects on their organization, managers should ensure that are no motivating factors that encourage bullying, they should be very attentive to the priorities, values, models, supervisory practices and human resources policies that are common in the organization and try to change them (Lehnert, Craft, Singh, & Park, 2016; Manroop, 2015).

This study also brings practical contributions to management that are particularly relevant due to the paramount negative outcomes of bullying, and that can help management to take appropriate prevention and intervention measures to mitigate it. When planning an intervention, knowing that different organizational cultures view bullying and deal with it differently helps managers define a more effective plan for the specific characteristics of their organizations. By determining empirically (and not only by "common sense") in which kind of culture and ethical climate bullying increases or decreases, this study can help managers who want to improve their management to change their practices. In order to reduce bullying and its negative effects on their organization, managers should ensure that are no motivating factors that encourage bullying, they should be very attentive to the priorities, values, models, supervisory practices and human resources policies that are common in the organization and try to change them (Lehnert, Craft, Singh, & Park, 2016; Manroop, 2015) in the ways indicated by this study: "[As] supervisors are capable of influencing the climate of an organization, [so] it may be feasible for managers to influence the ethical behaviour of employees by altering the ethical climate of workgroups where inappropriate behaviour is prevalent" (Peterson, 2002, p. 313). In fact, authors like O'Leary (2015) or Nalda, Guillén, and Pechuán (2016) hold that leadership has a central role and responsibility in defining organizational ethics. Páez and Salgado, in their study (2016), showed that in ethics (as in many other fields) what managers do is far more important than what they say. For example, to encourage humanistic values and decision-making processes based on concern for others, managers should create rules (perhaps with a code of ethics as described in Painter-Morland, 2010) against all kinds of bullying behaviours and enforce them, being a good model for their employees. In fact, Holtbrügge, Baron and Friedmann (2015) reinforce the managers' role of models in changing the workers' ethical attitudes, and thus changing the way individuals comprehend, create and adapt to organizational conditions. Parboteeah et al. (2010) claim that managers can change the ethical climate of the organization using several practices to embed the values and priorities they want to change in the day-to-day decision-making of their subordinates. In a sample of individuals in high-technology organizations in Taiwan, they concluded that by improving and, above all, increasing formal and informal communication flows, managers can transform an unethical climate into an ethical one. The same happens with the workers' empowerment that they conclude to be negatively related to egoistic-local climates but positively related to benevolent-local climate.

Limitations and future research
The main limitations of this study are related to the sample and the methodology used. The non-representative sample will require future investigation to be done in such a way so that the findings can be expanded in a larger national representative sample. The other limitation comes from the use of a cross-sectional design and a self-report methodology, based on perceptions. There is the risk of common method variance, which can inflate the relationships between variables and weaken our conclusions on cause and effect relations. Some remedial procedures suggested by Podsakoff, MacKenzie, Lee and Podskoff (2003) like including different response formats in the questionnaire, explicitly specifying all the relevant concepts in each question, and guaranteeing response anonymity to avoid social desirability were in place. The problem of all the data resulting from perceptions can be attenuated by one of the strengths of this study: the use of two approaches to identifying bullying targets (asking if they are targets; and concluding they are targets through the negative behaviours they perceive). In fact, this allows "false positives" to be avoided, i.e. individuals that see themselves as targets of bullying, but they have no "objective" reasons to do that (they are not the target of negative behaviours), perhaps due to personality traits (like mistrust). It also allows avoid "false negatives", i.e. those who

are not aware that they are targets (usually in the first phase of bullying) or refuse to see themselves as targets (due to personality variables), but they are subject to negative behaviours, so they are real targets. So, we recommend the use of this approach in the future.

It will be interesting to know if the relations found are the same and with the same strength in countries with significant cultural differences, where, for instance, the manager/workers relation or the humanistic values are different. Another line for future research could be a deeper analysis of the relation between culture/ethical climate and workplace bullying in different industries or in organizations with different sizes, or in different departments from the same organization or in different managerial levels. Future studies should also take into account mediating and moderating factors that influence the relationships between organizational culture/ethical climate and bullying at work. For example, Chen, Tuliao, Cullen, and Chang (2015) concluded that male managers are more willing than females to justify business-related unethical behaviours, and that those differences in ethics become even more pronounced when the national culture has high values of collectivism, humane orientation, performance orientation and gender egalitarianism.

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