who could otherwise cease to endorse your leadership (Ladkin & Probert, 2021). Stray too far from what your followers believe you should be as their leader, and they'll revoke the power that they've voluntarily vested in you (Van Knippenberg et al., 2004). Power dynamics in leadership relations are therefore often unstable, ambiguous, and reversible (Hindess, 1996). You can push people too far and your followers will rebel if they feel that your leadership threatens their freedom beyond what they've willingly subscribed to (Brehm, 1966).

Seek always to use your leadership power appropriately by having positive effects on people and moving your organisation towards its goals in only ethical, responsible, and lawful ways. At the very least, I counsel you to do no harm. Unfortunately, leaders far too often misuse their power and harm those in their charge, bystanders, and those who stand in their way. Before we go any further, let's discuss workplace bullying as an abuse of leadership power.

Workplace Bullying

Bullying is a form of aggressive behaviour in the workplace that's defined as a systematic pattern of repeated harassment over a prolonged period of time, where the target cannot defend themselves, stop the mistreatment, or escape their situation (Nielsen & Einarsen, 2018). Bullying isn't about a single incident of conflict, but the persistent abuse of a person who's in a vulnerable position relative to the perpetrator (Einarsen, 2000).

Workplace bullying is a global issue with serious negative effects on the mental health of employees and the productivity of organisations. Around 15% of employees around the world, on average, are currently experiencing some level of workplace bullying – that's about one in seven people (Nielsen et al., 2010). And it's not evenly distributed; workplace bullying is more common in poorer countries (Van de Vliert et al., 2013), and in larger, male-dominated, manufacturing organisations (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996).

Bullying behaviours are most commonly perpetrated by supervisors against their employees, but can also occur between peers, or even by employees against supervisors (Salin, 2003). Bullying is enabled by a power imbalance between the target and the perpetrator, which as we now know, isn't necessarily tied to either party's position or hierarchical status. What matters is that the victims feel subordinate in the situation and thus unable to defend themselves (Einarsen, 2000).

Workplace bullying can take many forms and includes work-related leadership behaviour such as withholding information, social isolation, ignoring input, refusing to communicate, setting unreasonable deadlines, unmanageable workloads, excessive monitoring, assigning meaningless work, or no work (Einarsen et al., 2020). I trust that you're now starting to see parallels between workplace bullying and the abuse of positional power.

Please be mindful of how you wield leadership power and consider carefully how your actions may be affecting the people around you. Whenever possible seek to inspire, include, and empower people to work cohesively towards shared goals, and always be wary of imposing your own will, even when you're convinced that it's the right thing to do.