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Mobbing: Psychological Harassment!

By Germán Bernate

The 21st Century brings with it novelties on Administration and Management literature. Several Spanish authors are dealing with a very ancient problem of humanity, keeping for its definition the name in the language in which it was initially proposed: **mobbing**. In Spanish this word is read pronouncing letter by letter, as they are written: 'mobbing'. The first reference made by authors is related to the fight described in the "Cantar del Mío Cid" poem when the king Don Alfonso VI prohibited all of the kingdom citizens to accommodate or host Don Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar, 'El Cid Campeador', leader of the armies. What had happened? The other soldiers, his colleagues, set him against the king looking for his exile, which the king finally did. It was not enough merit that "el Cid" had regained kingdoms and lands on king's behalf. On current terms we will say he was exiled all of a sudden and his properties seized, in other words, he was fired. However, the king, his manager, never told him the reason for such hostile behavior. And this took place around year 1072, a little more than nine hundred years ago.

It is worth stating, as a historic reference, that Rodrigo Díaz de Vivar is the 'par excellence hero, the most world famous bourgeois, the one who embodies the knight prototype with the best virtues, strong, loyal, fair and courageous, cautious and calmed, educated warrior,...' In spite of the long distance in years, there are many people acquainted with his life and events, and very few know his manager – excuse me! His King – and they might associate him with any of the managers they had worked for.

Along humanity history and its participation in businesses this phenomenon takes place with a higher frequency than expected. In Colombia it usually happens that a good employee, who has even been rewarded for his outstanding results, as if by magic all of a sudden falls out of favor and his boss, backed by his evil minded close friends and dirty work team, starts to search for any failure in his performance. The employee is devaluated and is made victim of undeserved mockery. Respect principles proclaimed by the organization are infringed and reviled, without care of the Policies and Practices that hang in the pictures used just to decorate the walls of high management offices.

Confused, the harassed employee deeply examines the way in which he is performing. He is unable to determine how, or in what sense, has he failed in such a severe manner to be subject of the total loss of trust by part of his boss. It would not be surprising to receive statements such as 'You have to deliver everything on time in order to regain my confidence in you'. Also, the so-called 'Friendly Warnings' by part of Multinational companies: 'In the Human Resources Area there are around

seventy job applications of people better qualified than you, that will certainly cost less, and that, in addition are not trouble makers.'

In the meantime mortgage debt grows; sons demand higher expenses for their education...

Harassed employee starts to panic and begins to somatize stress through different illness: Allergies, stomach problems, back pains. At the end the boss succeeds and fires that employee who disturbs him. Soon there will be a new employee 'ready to learn' who is the boss. There is, however, one refinement detail to complete... Obviously, who ever calls asking for personal references of the employee will get them, but bad, very bad.

The boss – not “a manager” – transforms itself into a harasser. In doing so he finds there is nothing better than stressing his own accomplishments and multiple skills. He knows everything and needs to be acclaimed at all times for his fantastic ideas. Those who follow his wishes will, most certainly, make part of his selected party of flatterers and will enjoy a pleasant working life, free of troubles... Those who dare to say something unsuitable should take heed and beware: Punishment will be exemplary.

The harasser requests everyone to work for him, not for the organization. There shall be no doubt they all owe him for the little they are – no opportunity shall be lost to brush-off his people. He, who has been considered to be one of the best employees, - excuse me! - The best! He, the one who has inspired the better decisions! But there comes a day, unfortunate day, on which his own boss assesses his performance, under a well known instruction: 'This boaster carries a long time with the organization and costs too much: It's time to get rid of him'.

By means of the compensation rule, everything that he used to perform in such a brilliant fashion starts to run wrong. His former vassals - excuse me! – co-workers – mock openly at his performance and low efficiency. Good Lord! What had happened?

The question is raised by everyone: Shall I wait until the harasser falls out of favor? Or, Am I able to take a different action?

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Germán Bernate is President of the PMI Santafé de Bogotá Chapter in Bogotá, Colombia. Mr. Bernate holds a degree in Electronic Engineering from the Universidad Distrital Francisco José de Caldas. He is General Manager and Founder of ALMAGESTO Consulting Firm. Mr. Bernate has dedicated 45 years of his professional life to the engineering and software industry in the areas of strategic management, Balanced ScoreCard, and Project Management. He worked for more than thirty years at IBM Colombia, where he assumed a wide range of responsibilities in both technical and management areas. He also worked as a Project Manager at NCR Colombia. Mr. Bernate has managed projects in Banks, government, distribution, communication networks, aerial transport, and retail stores. German has published several books, for instance "El año 2000 al acecho" (*2000 Year Coming*) cooperates with the Y2K problem. In 2004 Mr. Bernate was a guest speaker at the congress organized by PMI Madrid Chapter, with the lecture "Triunfos y frustraciones de un Gerente de Proyecto en Latinoamérica" (*Triumphs and frustrations of a Project Manager in Latin America*). In February 2006 he presented "How to Grow in a Different Environment" at the annual congress of the Association for Strategic Planning - ASP- at Los Angeles, CA. In 1992 Germán won the first award of the fourth edition of the literary contest "Dr. Mariano Zumel" in Madrid, Spain. German is actually working in the fields of Project Management, Strategic Planning and Balanced ScoreCard implementation. Germán can be contacted at gbernate@cable.net.co.