

HANDOUT 3

Christine Pratt was the founder of the National Bullying Helpline (no longer operating) but you may recall her as the individual who raised the issue of bullying at Downing Street a few years ago.

Mrs Pratt's view was that:

"I was bullied for two and a half years by a senior level manager. He took it upon himself to belittle and publicly humiliate me, to the point where I had to take leave off work and suffered a breakdown. It was a terrible experience that no-one should have to go through. When the bullying started I thought I would be strong enough but after a while it really breaks you down. I felt like I couldn't cope and had a breakdown"

Below is an extract from the Independent – 23 February 2010.

Between 2001 and 2003, Mrs Pratt was embroiled in an employment dispute with her former employer Sanden International (Europe) Ltd, where she worked as a human resources manager.

An employment tribunal was told she was a "patently hostile" employee who screamed in the face of a colleague. According to documents from the Tribunal Service, Mrs Pratt alleged that Sanden had intentionally discriminated against her on the grounds of sex and race, but her case was dismissed by the original tribunal in January 2002, as was her subsequent appeal in October 2003.

The tribunal heard that her grievances were connected to the appointment of a new human resources general manager, a position for which she had applied before being turned down in favour of Kenneth Roberts, an external applicant.

Relations between the two soured quickly, with Mrs Pratt resisting Mr Roberts' encroachments on her authority. The pair sent each other a series of angry emails, the tone of which were described at the tribunal as "discourteous and hostile". The dispute culminated in a fiery meeting on 6 October 2000, when Mrs Pratt complained that her colleague had failed to communicate sufficiently with her and "at one stage she went over to where Mr Roberts was sitting, thrust her face into his and screamed 'Communicate!' very loudly and directly into his ear". The company secretary Hiroshi Tatsu was asked to mediate between the two, but during a meeting Mrs Pratt was said to have told him, "There's no point in involving you on this issue as you don't have a full understanding of English".

A co-worker told the tribunal she "became very emotional" and demanded that the company buy out her contract. When they declined, she did not return to work and later filed a suit of constructive dismissal against them. In support of her racial discrimination complaint, Mrs Pratt claimed Sanden "has a strong Japanese culture and that all senior managers, apart from two, are Japanese".

Her behaviour "horrified" the company's managing director Tony Noji, but he decided not to take disciplinary action. The tribunal criticised this, saying Mrs Pratt "could and probably should have been formally disciplined for her conduct" towards both Mr Roberts and Mr Tatsu.

Dismissing Mrs Pratt's case, the tribunal concluded: "In our view, the respondent [Sanden] was extraordinarily patient and tolerant in the light of the applicant's [Mrs Pratt's] patently

hostile reaction to any attempts on the part of the respondent to persuade her to work with the new general manager."