The Organizational Structure Affects the Occurrence of Mobbing

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Abstract: - Mobbing is a specific kind of pathological behaviour in the workplace which includes psychological abuse by one or more persons, a longer period of time, with intent to endanger human dignity and integrity of the victim of mobbing. Numerous research revealed that there are massive social and economic losses due to frequent absences from work, changes of jobs, premature retirements etc. Our investigation included 412 respondents working in health care organizations. The results indicate that 39% of respondents were exposed to a certain form of mobbing in investigating period. They were exposed to a great extent to mobbing activities which represent an attack on professional status, quality of professional work such as: excessive control by superiors, blaming for failures that hadn’t really happened as well as ignoring suggestions; but also activities which represent an assault on capacity for social relations and activities which represent an assault on personal reputation.

Authors find it important to recognize the organizational and cultural origins of mobbing phenomena in certain countries.

Key -Words: Mobbing, organizational structure, organizational factors, cultural factors

1 Introduction
A modern way of doing business is characterized by a great competitiveness and frequent organizational changes. Those changes are numerous but their common characteristic is that they are always reflected on the employees and their relationships. Regrettably, in many companies the organizational changes are not accompanied by appropriate programs and measures that could assist employees to adopt to new demands of work and to everyday pressures. Employees are often forced to find their own ways of solving interpersonal problems at workplace. Socio-economic situation in countries in transition is characterized by processes of privatization and restructuring of state and social enterprises and all that is accompanied by a great number of business fallers and dismissal of a large number of employees.

General climate and interpersonal relationships are deteriorating, which greatly contributes to the creation of a conflict, that could eventually grow into mobbing at work. Mobbing phenomenon indicates that there is a serious violation of a certain state of balance in the organization, organizational behaviour and human relationships with possible negative effects on the mental, health, social and economic situation of the individual, as well as of the community as a whole. Mobbing is a destructive, affective conflict which is related to personality, personal intolerance, envy and hatred and its consequences can be very negative, often dramatic for an individual. Such a form of conflict is very unhealthy and undesirable in a firm, and consequences are seen in blocking any further action, reducing employee’s motivation and cohesion and therefore, the weak performance of the organization as a whole[1].

Factors that can lead to mobbing are: the working environment with strictly hierarchical structure, the authoritative style of management, weak and unethical oriented organizational culture, poorly planned organizational changes, suppression of conflicts and inability to solve these conflicts, etc. The basic assumption for this research was that conditions for the occurrence of mobbing are present in Serbian companies and relate with dominant culture. According to Hofstede’s findings Serbian national culture is characterized by the high power distance PDI, and that could be associated with authoritarian leadership style and frequent abuse of power.
2 Occurrence of mobbing

Mobbing indicates that there is a serious violation of a certain state of balance in the organization, organizational behaviour and human relationships with some negative effects on the mental, health, social and economic situation of the individual, as well as of the community as a whole. Professor Dr. Heinz Leymann was the first to use the term “mobbing” for certain behaviours in the workplace, determined their characteristics, effects on health, and founded the first clinic to help victims of mobbing [2].

There are different terms in the world literature that denote mobbing. The word “mobbing” comes from the English word “mob” which means an aggressive group, a scum or a blackguard, and the word “mobbish” which means crude, rude, vulgar. The term itself can be accepted without translation into German, Swedish and Italian literature, while in the English speaking countries the word “bullying” is used for the same phenomenon, and in the USA the most often used terms are “work abuse” or “employee abuse”. In Serbian mobbing can be translated as psychological abuse, bullying or mobbing in the workplace often referred to as terror in the workplace [4].

It is a specific kind of pathological behaviour in the workplace which includes psychological abuse by one or more persons, a longer period of time, with intent to endanger human dignity and integrity of the victim of mobbing. More precise determination of the content of mobbing refers to the fact that it is a specific form of pathological communication among colleagues and superiors with the planned actions repeated over a longer period of time in order to “destroy” the victim of mobbing and to force that individual to leave the job. Mobbing is nowadays recognized as the greatest source of stress in the workplace. Deplorable psychosocial conditions in the workplace can lead to a number of stress reactions that are manifested, among other things, in increased employees’ feelings of frustration. Consequently, mobbing is an extreme social phenomenon that leads to a series of negative effects such as: biological and psychological stress reactions which are important risk factors for many psychosomatic disorders of employees such as: chronic post-traumatic stress syndrome, burn-out syndrome, cardiovascular diseases and the like. Mobbing, as a pathological form of behaviour, has a direct negative impact on the working environment, motivation at work and productivity in the organization. It prevents it’s victims from meeting the lowest needs from the “Maslow’s hierarchy of needs” pyramid (physiological needs, security needs, belonging needs) as well as the highest needs on the scale, that is growth needs (esteem and self-actualization). As a result, the victims of mobbing suffer from the accumulation of negative emotions, the lack of motivation, the presence of various mental and somatic diseases that are accompanied by increasing rate of absenteeism and frequent dismissals [4].

From the content and the objectives of mobbing procedures and the fact who is the victim and who is the abuser, mobbing can be vertical and horizontal. Vertical mobbing occurs when a subordinate is mobbed by a supervisor (“bossing”), or if the mobbing is serial then the victim of mobbing is a certain group of employees until the desired goal is achieved (“strategic mobbing”). The manager is usually the one who decides who should be fired from the job and the mobbing is often carried out with the help of the manager’s closest associates. Horizontal mobbing is characterized by the phenomenon of mobbing activities among employees who are on the same positions in the hierarchical structure. The motives for undertaking hostile actions can be of personal nature (dislike, envy, jealousy) or the desire to eliminate the colleague in order to preserve the job or the position [5]. Those organizations which do not solve this problem pay a high price mostly for creating a negative corporative atmosphere, increasing rates of absenteeism at work, the loss of working motivation and productivity of employees, potential court procedures and high financial penalties as well as a bad reputation and a bad image of the organization where mobbing exists.

3 The organizational structure of Serbian companies

The structure is an integral part of any organization. The organizational structure of the company shows how individuals and groups are organized in relation to the tasks which they perform. The importance of organizational structure for the company is equal to the significance of the anatomy of the human race. The structure should be viewed as a dynamic category which establishes the relationship between people, some components and activities in the company. The organizational structure is a dynamic component of the organization and it changes under the influence of external and internal factors. Organizational structure comprises human factors, funds for the work and the object of work [6].
Cultures have an important impact on management approaches, so the cultural differences call for differences in management practices. The culture is perceived as “the collective programming of the mind which distinguishes the members of one human group to another”, and as its building blocks includes “systems of values”. As such, culture is conceptualized and measured through different value dimensions. In order to function properly the structure of an organization must be aligned with the demands and predispositions of the national culture in which the organization is embedded. Based on surveying attitudes of 116,000 employees within subsidiaries of IBM in 40 countries and 3 regions, Hofstede in 1980 proposed four basic cultural dimensions, largely independent of each other: (1) Power Distance, (2) Uncertainty Avoidance, (3) Individualism vs. Collectivism and (4) Masculinity vs. Femininity[7]. Numerous studies have reported that in cultures with a high power distance index PDI (such as Serbian national culture), prevalent type of leadership style is authoritative. In these cultures managers rarely distribute authority to their subordinates and tend to abuse power. High power distance PDI and high uncertainty avoidance index UAI in Serbian national culture, presumably imply a high degree of centralization of decision making, and formalization of roles, which means they are more likely to be a model of full bureaucracy. Such national cultures can be found in Latin American and Latin European countries as well as in the countries of former Yugoslavia. As collectivistic and "female", Serbian national culture focuses on social structure of organization and thus on social control in them. As a result, a dictator and an autocrat can often be seen in Serbian organizations [8].

In accordance with Hofstede’s supposition of correlation between national culture and organizational structure of a company, the structure of Serbian companies shows a tendency to high centralization and the formalization of roles. A typical organizational model of Serbian companies is the model of full bureaucracy. Organizations in Serbia are like pyramids with autocrats at the top of them.

4 Research results discussions
In this study, performed during 2012, there were 412 respondents: 181 respondents were from Health Center Zajecar and 231 from Clinical Centre Nis, Serbia. The sample included 222 females and 190 males. The average age of females was 38 years and for males it was 39.84 years. There were 94 low-qualified respondents (32 females and 62 males), 210 with secondary education (120 females and 90 males), 108 with college or university education (70 females and 38 males). The average work experience for women was 15.27 years and for men 17.43 years. An anonymous questionnaire, designed for this study, was used as the main research instrument. The adopted questionnaire (created by “Centre for prevention, diagnostics and treatment of mobbing” – Clinic in Milan) included questions related to the diagnosis of mobbing, as well as issues related to the general information of the respondents (gender and educational status).

Our results indicate that 39% of respondents were exposed to some form of mobbing. These results are consistent with the results of renowned research conducted in countries such as Finland, Croatia, and Poland [9][10][11]. The structure of respondents’ answers to questions related to mobbing activities that prevent the possibility of maintaining social interactions shows that low-qualified women are mostly ignored by superiors and a highly statistically significant difference (p<0.01) in given answers was determined. A strong correlation was determined between this mobbing activities and the education of respondents (C=0.493). A further analysis of given responses shows that the low qualified respondents were mostly exposed to this mobbing activity with statistically significant difference (p<0.01) in given answers and with strong correlation between mobbing and the educational status of respondents (C=0.479).

The respondents’ answers to the questions related to mobbing activities which represent an attack on professional status show that the low qualified male respondents (p<0.01) were mostly exposed to frequently unfounded criticism by their superiors, with a strong correlation with the educational level of respondents (C=0.454). The structure of responses shows that the low qualified male respondents were often blamed for the failures that had actually never happened and a statistically significant difference in responses (p<0.01) was determined, as well as a strong correlation between this activity and the educational status of respondents (C=0.442). Low qualified female respondents were mostly exposed to degradation of the results of work, and at the same time a statistically significant difference (p<0.01) was determined in given responses, as well as a strong correlation between educational level of respondents (C=0.373). Based on the responses we can conclude that university educated males have often had difficulties trying to advance their careers, i.e. salary increase, and it was found that there was a highly
5 Conclusion

The results of this study have revealed that even 39% of the respondents experienced some kind of mobbing in investigated organizations. Consequently, we can conclude that the initial hypothesis of our research has been proved, because it assumed that in Serbian companies, predominant national culture characterized by high power distance (PDI) creates conditions for occurrence of mobbing. In accordance with Hofstede’s hypothesis of relationship between national culture and organizational structure, mobbing activities represent an attack on physical and psychological health. Male respondents were mostly exposed to mobbing activities that represent an attack on their professional status as well as an attack on personal reputation and on capability of maintaining social interactions. Most of given responses demonstrate that there is a strong correlation between these mobbing activities and educational status of respondents. 

Bureaucratic organizational culture is characterized by authoritative leadership style, where overall authority and decision-making are concentrated in one person who has unlimited power. Communications are vertical and one-way and are operated only in the direction from top to the bottom. In such circumstances of bureaucratic culture, employees are burdened by fear, exposed to intensive stress and don’t have any freedom and independence.

The respondents in this study were exposed to a great extent to mobbing activities which represent an attack on professional status, such as attack on the quality of professional work. It is important to emphasize that more than 50% of the respondents said that the certain mobbing activities happened during a period longer than six months, indicating that it wasn’t just a usual conflict, but a real form of mobbing, which represents a hostile way of communication and psychological abuse in the workplace, that could lead to serious psychosomatic and social consequences for the victim of mobbing. The results of the study show that female respondents were mostly exposed to mobbing activities that represent an attack on their professional status as well as an attack on physical and psychological health. Male respondents were more often exposed to mobbing activities such as attacks on personal reputation and on capability of maintaining social interactions. Most of given responses demonstrate that there is a strong correlation between these mobbing activities and educational status of respondents.

Authors have previously reported findings of association between organizational and cultural aspects in health care organizations, as well as an analysis of mobbing practices in Serbia [12],[13]. We find it important that this and our previous research has been performed in a country which has not been studied frequently. It is a new and exciting area for future investigation to further explore the relations of organizational and national culture in Serbian organizations in different economic sectors, including traditional multinational companies, innovative ICT companies, successful national companies and compare them with findings from public sector organizations.

References:


