

MOBBING PHENOMENON IN TODAY'S ORGANIZATION

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Summary

The aim of this article is to present the mobbing phenomenon in theoretical view as well as to present a cognitive aspect with the usage of own research which regards an answer to a question whether mobbing is a common and growing phenomenon in organizations or a disappearing one.

Key words: mobbing, mobber, psychological harassment

Introduction

Modern labour market expects from human resources continuous availability and comprehensiveness in performing different tasks. It brings organizations closer to competitiveness in the global market. That is why human resources are exposed to heavy pressure by employers. Mobbing is more and more often considered a factor of occupational risk, which may endanger the health of human resources.

The notion of mobbing in literature

Despite the fact that in the source literature many definitions of mobbing may be found, the very essence of the phenomenon is presented in a similar manner by all authors. The word *mob* means crowd or throng. The term *mobbing* is used i.a. in Poland, Germany or Italy. In Anglo-Saxon countries the word *bullying* is used to describe the phenomenon.

The most popular definition is a definition proposed by Hein Leymann who defines mobbing as a psychological terror occurring at the workplace

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which involves both hostile attitude towards one or several employees and unethical communication between them². Marie-France Hirigoyen presents an interesting definition according to which mobbing is moral harassment understood as every improper behaviour characterized by repeatability and regularity, offending dignity or integrity of human resource which makes them vulnerable to job loss³. According to International Labour Organisation mobbing is malicious and revengeful behaviour which may be expressed in brutal, malicious and even humiliating actions which aim at harming a person or a group of people who are victims of psychological harassment. Mobbing is a mixture of continuous negative comments, critics, isolation of a person from the environment, gossiping and spreading false information about the victim⁴.

Among definitions proposed by the Polish authors the one made by A. Bechowska-Gebhardt and T. Stalewski is worth mentioning. They define mobbing as unethical and irrational (when it comes to aims of the organisation) behaviour which is expressed by harassment of a subordinate by superiors or co-workers. This harassment is of long-lasting, groundless and repetitive nature. The victim is subject to economic, psychological and social violence in order for him or her to be intimidated and humiliated and in order to limit his or her natural defence capabilities. According to the authors mobbing is a phenomenon which is perceived subjectively. However, it can be proved. Mobbing is a multiphase process which consists of many practices of the mobber who at the beginning uses subtle manipulation – it can be unnoticed by the worker. Intense manipulation which is no longer implicit and subtle, makes the victim feel powerless and isolated from the rest of the society. It results in more and more severe stress and in the occurrence of diseases, e.g. mental illnesses⁵.

It is also important to mention how this term is interpreted in Polish law. The following definition of mobbing is presented in Art. 94 § 2 and of the Labour Code: *mobbing means actions or behaviour regarding an employee or directed against an employee which involves persistent and long-lasting harassment or threatening which causes by him or her low professional self*

² M. Drabek, D. Merecz, A. Mościcka, *Mobbing w środowisku pracy. Charakterystyka zjawiska, jego konsekwencje, aspekty prawne i sposoby przeciwdziałania*, Instytut Medycyny Pracy im. prof. J. Nofera, Łódź 2005, s. 7.

³ M. F. Hirigoyen, *Molestowanie w pracy*, tłum. M. Żerańska, „W drodze”, Poznań 2003, s. 11.

⁴ A. Kucharska, *Mobbing. Informator dla pracodawcy*, Państwowa Inspekcja Pracy, Warszawa 2012, s. 5–6.

⁵ A. Bechowska-Gebhardt, T. Stalewski, *Mobbing. Patologia zarządzania personelem*, Difin, Warszawa 2004, s. 15–17.

*esteem, causes or aims at humiliating or ridiculing an employee as well as isolating or eliminating an employee from a co-worker group*⁶

Mobber's victims

Anyone can be a mobber – both an employer and an employee. It should be remembered that mobbing affects not only subordinates. A mobber is usually a person with too high self esteem and too high evaluation of their possibilities. A mobber does not trust other people and does not accept criticism of his or her co-workers. Mobbers usually do not feel guilty about what they do to another person. The very fact of humiliating someone gives them satisfaction and makes them feel more appreciated⁷.

As it has already been mentioned, victims of a mobber are not only subordinates. They may also be superiors or co-workers⁸. Victims of a mobber may be divided into two groups. In the first group there are ambitious people who have interesting and creative ideas and high occupational qualifications. The second group consists of people with quite low self esteem, who are not always able to cope with the tasks assigned to them or are inefficient team members in an organisation or have low assertiveness. It is worth remembering that people who discovered some small or more serious irregularities in the company may become mobbing victims. Such people become dangerous elements in the company. That is why they are subject to some humiliating and frightening practices so that irregularities 'do not come to light'.

Factors contributing to mobbing

Efficient counteracting psychological harassment at the workplace is possible only if the factors are considered which may contribute to mobbing. There is a number of causes of mobbing which may be divided into three groups of factors: individual, social and organisational. From the point of view of the topic discussed, organisational factors seem to be the most important ones⁹. They include inter alia: improper management sys-

⁶ Ustawa z dnia 26 czerwca 1974 r. Kodeks pracy (Dz.U.2014.0.1502 t.j.).

⁷ M. Drabek, D. Merecz, A. Mościcka, *Mobbing w środowisku pracy...*, op. cit., s. 22–23.

⁸ A. Kucharska, *Mobbing. Informator dla...*, op. cit., s. 11.

⁹ K. Erenkfeit, L. Dudzińska, A. Indyk, *Mobbing w środowisku pracy – opis zjawiska oraz jego skutki*, „Medycyna środowiskowa” 2011, nr 14 (4), s. 78–79.

tem in which staff are not entitled to express their opinion, because it is not important for the superiors, organisational disorder, improper organisation of work, bad work atmosphere which is based on conflicts and fight to come to power, bad and insufficient communication between employees, chaotic and inconsistent management, orientation only on achieving economic goals which leads to focusing only on the tasks completed and not on appreciating the staff¹⁰.

Effects and manners of fighting mobbing

Many adverse effects are related to mobbing. These effects may be divided into certain scales. Individual scale is related to the health condition of human resources who are subject to mobbing. Harassment at the workplace may cause deterioration of health. Social scale regards costs which may appear during treatment of people who are exposed to psychological harassment, or benefits resulting from an employee (victim of mobbing) retiring on pension or early retirement. Organisation scale is related to the atmosphere at the workplace. The mobbing phenomenon worsens it. The atmosphere becomes unfriendly and it results in worsening relations between human resources as well as in decreasing motivation to do their job. This, in turn, affects the effectiveness and competitiveness of the organisation as its development is slowed down. Human resources begin to take sick leaves or give up their jobs. It results in implementing new staff which is not advantageous for development of the company. That is why organisations should undertake actions aiming at eliminating psychological harassment of human resources, because – as it can be seen – it is in their interest¹¹.

The following actions may be helpful by counteracting mobbing: proper human resources management, proper selection of human resources already during the recruitment procedure, courses and training related to psychological violence at the workplace. It is also important to implement an anti-mobbing programme in every organisation which is adjusted to the nature of the organisation. The management should propagate ethical behaviour and build organisational culture in which not only superiors are entitled to express their critical opinions towards their subordinates, but also subordinated are free to express their opinion about their co-workers or superiors.

¹⁰ A. Kucharska, *Mobbing. Informator dla...*, op. cit., s. 16-18.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 19-20.

The analysis of results of own research¹²

In view of the theoretical perspective the attempt was made at conducting scientific research which enabled answering the question being the research problem: is mobbing a common phenomenon in organizations or a disappearing one? During gathering research material a diagnostic pool method was used together with questionnaire method and a survey¹³.

Over a half of respondents declared that they were subjects to mobbing (66.7%) which lasted for more than three months. By 83.3% of respondents it involved psychological harassment. It was the most often mentioned form of mobbing. When it comes to the form of mobbing, the group of employees who were subject to the research indicated that it had a form of unjustified and continuous criticism (66.7%). The answer which appeared in the next order (respondents could give more than one answer to the question about forms of mobbing) included: forcing to do additional job (46.7%), ridiculing in the presence of other co-workers (40%), public reprimanding (35.5%), gossiping (33.3%), frightening with termination of the work contract (31.1%).

Such a high percentage of persons affected with mobbing may indicate low awareness of not only superiors, but also of subordinates about individual, social and economic consequences, which are connected with violence at the workplace. It may also indicate lack of awareness regarding eliminating this phenomenon. The most often indicated answer for the question regarding the costs which are incurred by the victim of mobbing (also in this question respondents could give more than one answer) included visible decrease of motivation to perform tasks (71.1%). The answer including sick leaves was also quite popular. The victims cannot cope with pressure and they prefer to provide a sick leave than to show up at work (62.2%). The respondents indicated also lower effectiveness of their activities (46.6%), an increasing number of mistakes (24.4%) as well as material and financial costs (13.3%). While speaking about lack of awareness also benefits should be mentioned which a victim of mobbing may demand from a mobber. About twenty percent of respondents are aware of compensation for

¹² The research was conducted at the Faculty of Economics in the The Jacob of Paradyż University of Applied Sciences in Gorzów Wielkopolski within the framework of preparing the topic of master's thesis of the author of the publication.

¹³ The research was conducted in the companies 'X' (the name 'X' was given due to the lack of consent to use names of the companies) which conduct different types of activity (a logistics company, a construction company, a manufacturing company and a sports team). All of the companies conduct their activity in the Lubuskie voivodeship. Empirical material was gathered on the basis of surveys filled by 45 employees of the companies given.

loss of health and of damages which they can get from the employer if they were victims to mobbing at the workplace and are able to prove it. Knowledge about termination of the work contract is poorer. Only 8.8% of respondents are aware of the fact that if they are victims to mobbing, they are fully entitled to terminate the contract without notice and at fault of the employer.

It is clear that the biggest problem for the victims of mobbing involves proving that the employer is guilty. That is why victims of mobbing very rarely decide to go to court. They are afraid of losing and not being able to prove the guilt of a mobber. That is why as many as 88.4% of respondents would not decide to take the case to court. The remaining percentage of employees would not know what to do in such a situation.

Conclusions

An organisation is created mainly by human resources. Achieving goals of a certain organisation depends on their qualifications and engagement. That is why it should counteract mobbing. The costs of mobbing may be incurred not only by a victim, but also by the whole organisation. A company in which mobbing was discovered may lose trust and good 'public relations' not only among its employees, but also among potential staff, customers and contractors who may not want to cooperate with such a company. Unfortunately, as it has been indicated by the research conducted, mobbing exists in organisations. It is worth mentioning that it is possible to detect mobbing in every sphere of economy. It may be noticed e.g. in a short comment of Mr. Piotr, who has been involved in the football environment for years: *When the team management hires a coach, it puts great pressure on him due to the goals which such a coach should achieve. The higher the goals, the more money is involved (e.g. maintaining the team in the league or promotion to a higher club category). The pressure which is laid on coaches is the job in the club. There were also situations when directors or a director chose the first 11 players – it should not take place – and threatened the coach with losing his job or decreasing his salary.* Mobbing exists to some extent in every place where there is a subordinate and a superior. However, we should remember that the law protects us. That is why all cases of mobbing should be reported. It is the only way to solve the problem.

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