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VIOLATING WORK AND INTERPERSONAL RELATIONSHIPS IN ORGANIZATIONS AS A CURRENT PROBLEM OF PERSONAL MANAGEMENT.

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Abstract: *Favourable interpersonal relationships as well as work relationships which contribute to meeting the objectives in an organization are one of the important aspects of personal management. The stress which is activated in working environment by negative socio-pathological phenomena, e.g. bullying, mobbing or bossing, has besides hard physical and mental implications for victims also significant economic impacts. The efficiency and reliability of afflicted employees is slumped deeply and the organizations can lose their competitiveness by fluctuation of the employees. One third of Slovaks have experienced bullying at work. Its elimination is in the hands of managers, personal managers, psychologists, experts for psychology of work as well as the employees. If all possibilities of solving this unwanted phenomenon fail, to defend themselves the employees should turn to personal and legal options of solving it.*

Key words: *employment relations, socio-pathological phenomena, bullying, mobbing, bossing, psychoterror*

Introduction

Where people work long hours together there definitely is not often idyllic atmosphere, but often there are many disagreements which distract us from everyday work routine, creating stormy waves, which need to be sorted out. These conflicts starting from opposite needs and values of each person do not necessarily mean violating the interpersonal relationship in the workplace. The interpersonal relationships at the workplace become dangerous when someone systematically and often unlawfully intervenes the work and private life of someone else. Then we talk about so called psychoterror in the workplace, which can have various forms. It is a serious, all-society, work – legal, but

also psychological aspect, which must be respected by managers of organizations in terms of personal management.

Inner integration and fellowship of employees with the organization in a dynamically difficult economic environment becomes a must. Organizations are more and more required to provide dynamic, flexible and cooperative behavior with the emphasis on inner adaptation of the permanently occurring changes. In such situation the importance of healthy and productive *relationships among employees* and the need of *loyalty* in organization rises.

Everyday situation convinces us about the need to understand the relationships among employees, to know them and to be able to predict and prevent the tension. A big number of conflicts, or misunderstandings in a better

case, which can occur between employees, between employee and employer, subordinate and superior, employee and a group of employees etc. is a proof of that. The area of relationships in the workplace is a dynamic process and therefore we cannot understand it as something definitely defined and closed.

Each organization is based on formal as well as informal relations. Formal structures of organization clearly codify labour relations. Informal relations rise accidentally, spontaneously. They start from personal sympathy and also unsympathy. They have big influence on the moral, motivation, job satisfaction and commitment, overall efficiency of employees in an organization. This is one of the reasons why it is important to watch the *social atmosphere* in the organization, because it represents a set of various external and internal factors affecting and influencing the behavior of individuals and also groups in the organization. People can sense from the first meeting if the atmosphere of trust and cooperation outweighs the frosty atmosphere of fear and doubt of the future.

When watching the social atmosphere in an organization we talk about aspects such as the level of written and common norms of an organization, values of organization, which are related to the organization culture as well as management of the organization. One of the important factors which to a large extent violate the social atmosphere in the collectives are *social – pathological phenomena*. *Social – pathological phenomena* include *bullying, mobbing, bossing*. We can also find the expression *psychoterror*, which includes the mentioned negative phenomena.

Handling and eliminating it is the most difficult area of the employment relations. Individual negative phenomena are difficult to be proved, there often is not the will to make decisive steps to eliminate it. Not even the organization should ignore it. What are the reasons and impulses of mobbing from the site of one of its participants?

The reasons of mobbing by the *management of organization* can have the following features:

- an uncompetent manager in the area of managing human resources,
- excessive pressure on the productivity of work,
- low organization culture,
- organization structures working wrongly.

Reasons of mobbing by the collective of coworkers are characterized by:

- lack of tolerance,
- envy, badmouth etc.

Impulses to mobbing on the side of the victim employee can be:

- problems when solving conflict situations,
- fear of losing the job, which can lead to the tolerance of the attacks,
- specific personality traits.

Just a combination of any of the above mentioned facts can cause stress in less immune and less adaptable individuals. Similar effects can have the deliberate hurting by means of some of the following tools. In this case we also talk about psychoterror.

Since the issue of psychoterror at the workplace is in general well elaborated, we chose just some basic aspects. Firstly we focused on defining some expressions.

Basic expressions and theoretic outcomes of psychoterror in the workplace

The issue of bullying is very old. It was usually connected to schools and basic military service. At present we more and more talk about bullying at work. We consider it important to mention some facts that are well-known in the organizations as well as private lives. According to the surveys of some agencies one third of all Slovaks has experienced bullying. Signs of bullying can be found in every organization. If we look at these negative phenomena from different points of view, we realize that the stress caused by bullying has beside serious physical and also psychical effects also outstanding economic impacts. Production rate and reliability of employees affected by bullying is decreasing very fast and the organizations can



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lose their very important employees due to fluctuation (caused by bullying).

When talking about theoretic outcomes which are related to the given issue, we need to clarify the expressions and definitions connected to it. Firstly it is the expression *social pathology* which describes ill, abnormal, in general unwanted social phenomena. The expression started to be used by the English philosopher and sociologist H. Spencer. He was looking for the connection between human organism and its illness and the society with its illnesses. In our case it is an unwanted, therefore **social-pathologic** phenomenon in the human relationships at the workplaces of organizations. **Social-pathologic** phenomena always have **social-cultural** background and are changeable depending upon time, location and region. Dealing with social-pathological phenomena of organizations means dealing foremostly with *norms*. Norms are the basic element of social existence of a man – they define the anticipated behavior, they determine what should and should not be done, what is or is not correct, what is in line with social needs, goals, interests and values. The boundaries of norms are strictly restricted, behind the boundaries we evaluate the behavior as deviant – turning away from the social norm. Where norms exist, there is also the check-up of following them. The expression social check-up includes all social mechanisms with the task to secure order and stability in societies, organizations, social groups, work teams and other. Social check-up also includes punishment, which enforces following the norms. When evaluating social-pathologic phenomena at work we talk about violating formal and informal norms, which can have various forms, e.g. *mobbing*, *bossing* or *bullying*.

The term „*bullying*“ means evil bothering, harassment, molesting, chasing. It is a bizarre

form of long-term hurting and harming other person by means of threatening and power abusing. Bullying can occur in any type of relationship in any area of social life. Typical signs of bullying include:

- purposeful hurting resulting in physical and emotional stress,
- bullying is abusing the authority, power,
- bullying is long-term type of relation rising gradually,
- the essence of bullying is applying the authority, power in human relationships (using physical power, applying psychological dominion and using social authority) (Kmošena M. 2008 p.83).

The word „*mobbing*“ comes from the English „to mob“ . The free translation is „to attack, ambush, or to crowd into“. Mobbing is psychical terror, chronic, systematic and intense attacks, intrigues and bullying by a larger number of people or the superior against an individual or a smaller group. It is a serious failure of communication or relationships in a group of people, a form of unwanted aggression among people, the most serious deformation of social relationships, roles and norms of life. The experts agree that the launching moment is a conflict and the failure of its solutions.

„*Mobbing or psychological terror includes the unfriendly and unethical communication in the workplace, which is systematically practiced by one or more persons against an individual, who as a result becomes powerless and vulnerable.*„ (Kmošena. M . 2008 p.77).

Bossing is also one of the forms of mobbing and represents *bullying of the subordinates by a superior manager*. To prove a manager guilty of bossing, a new form of humiliations, dictatorship and cult of personality, is not easy. The damages cannot be proved, because the

most serious damage is the hazard with human trust, human abilities and confidence.

Rise, forms and methods of mobbing and bossing.

The first question to be answered when talking about mobbing in organizations is its rise, forms and methods. The matrix of mobbing in the workplace is the location where:

- dullness and boredom rule – the possible perpetrator has enough time for evil thoughts and planning intrigues as well as its realization, wrong style of management
- organization management, managers always determine the moral level of the organization, as well as the acceptance of a specific form of behavior of individual people,
- competition tension and the fear of unemployment rule – fear of losing the job, fear of cleverer colleagues, low self-confidence, various forms of complexes, anger, frustration, desire for power, effort to gain position, dominance or membership in a group often change into aggression,
- certain personal predispositions: pleasure in manipulating people, need to attract attention, pleasure in hurting others, cruelty, aggression, jealousy, rudeness etc.

There are no special conditions needed for the rise of mobbing such as the presence of a pathological sadist, or the lack of discipline in the workplace. It usually rises in a normal group, where the aggressors may seem to be absolutely normal people, very often favourite members. It is not possible to define when a harmless joke becomes mobbing. The relationships of the victims of mobbing have a different Dynamics and development than a joke. We talk about following levels:

1. *Rise of mobbing.* In every group there is someone less favourite, more or less abandoned by the rest, mocked and being a laughing stock. If the victim does not resist and nobody helps them, the pressure gets bigger and aggression grows.

2. *Stiffening up.* It happens when the tension in the group rises due to more difficult tasks and

the outsiders serve as a vent to release the pressure. Another reason of this phase is also the situation when two or more aggressors meet and use aggression as a means of satisfying their needs, sometimes even making the rest of the group happier.

3. *Creating a core.* The leading aggressor is joined by others, they create a group of bullies and systematically affect their victims.

4. *Acceptance.* The majority accept the bullies' norms.

5. *Totality.* Mobbing becomes a normal behavior in the workplace.

Classification and types of bullies should not be ignored. We can divide them into three groups:

Creators – they are determining factors in mobbing

- they create methods and forms of psychological terror,
- they chose their victims,
- they have a sick feeling of satisfaction when hurting their victims.

Accidental perpetrators

- it happens foremostly when a trivial conflicts develops into a permanent argument between two sides and is not sorted out reasonably

Participants

- they actively support the creator in his/her activities or they just passively watch and do not intervene and do not defend nor support the victim.

Concrete manifestations and methods of mobbing may be various and have various forms, for example:

Limiting the victims in their verbalization and expression

- the victim is not allowed to verbalize,
- is constantly shouted at,
- is the target of personal attacks,
- details and little mistakes are searched for,
- victim's privacy is being invaded,
- is verbally attacked,
- is threatened on the phone, via e-mail,
- is deprived of any contact leading to a possible defence.

Limiting the employee in the social relationships

- nobody wants to talk to them,
- it is prohibited to talk to them,
- they are being ignored,



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- they are verbally attacked,
- is the „black sheep“,
- they are being embarrassed,
- their ideas and comments are bagatelised and nobody is interested in them,
- their psychical health is questioned,
- their work and private life are questioned etc.

We could continue in piling up the facts and the list would be very long. The creativity of some perpetrators has no limits.

Bossing has similar characteristics. The question that might be interesting for us is, why do managers mob and what does bossing look like? The manifestations of bossing by managers can have different reasons:

- being angry at the organization, pressure, desire for power, personal reasons, fear of losing control, fear of the dominance of a subordinate, fear of unexpressed ideas, constant feeling of being badmouthed, - these managers suffer from a certain form of paranoia.

The effects of bossing can vary, e.g.:

- victims are assigned with difficult tasks, which are reasonable,
- little requirements – assigned tasks do not correspond with the victim's abilities, qualification, experience,
- unreasonable requirements – victim is assigned with tasks that cannot be successfully achieved and fail,
- victim must deal with mostly the most unpleasant tasks,
- victim is constantly under exaggerated supervision– every step is watched and examined,
- decisions about the victim are done behind their back and the victim has to face the results at short notice,
- competence of the victim and the scope of work are limited,
- victim is excluded from meetings, has no access to important information,
- victim is exposed to isolation,

- victim is forced to perform harmful tasks,
- victim is said to suffer from psychical illnesses and psychiatric diseases.

In general we can say that psychoterror in a workplace can occur only with the help of other participants who offer active or passive support. It sounds as a paradox, but the victims of psychical terror are usually diligent and hard-working people. They are unlucky because they do not match the average and do not blend with the crowd. The impulse can be the above-average work results, exaggerated humbleness, or calmness as well as not getting accepted in the collective and its habits.

The most common victims of mobbing are women between 20 – 30 years old, that do not have a fixed position. Another threatened group are women in the middle level of management when trying to win recognition in the male collective. Mobbing more frequently affects people with a lower degree of education. Very frequent victims of mobbing are very active colleagues who are more productive than others. They are a provocation for others and they cause the fear of competition. Also being different can be a reason of mobbing (sexual orientation, physical disability, belief, religion etc.).

Protection from psychoterror in the workplace

What is the protection from psychoterror? We can answer that from different aspects. We chose two basic aspects, although we are aware that they may not bring the resulting effect. The first aspect is *personal protection* and the second one is *legal protection*, which will be dealt with more in detail.

Firstly every employee has to realise that they are the ones who determine what others can do to them. There is no universal formula

to lead us in such situations. If the employee has the right to speak up, they should. Injustice cannot be tolerated. It is necessary to prevent such situations where injustice can occur, if it is possible. But if somebody wants to have conflicts, there always are means. The question is: What can protection give us and what can protection take from us away? We can offer some advice. In case the victim decides to fight back, they must endure till the end. It is important to be self-confident, to be sure to find some support in the collective. Also family background is important that can offer support.

The employer must understand that the enemy has nothing to lose. If the employer wins, it is a personal defeat and humiliation for the perpetrator. The perpetrator lost what made him unbeatable – creating fear. The surrounding finds out about the perpetrator's weakness. The superiors, who supported him in his activities or secretly tolerated them, back off because of self-preservation. They do not want to bear the consequences. The victim has usually a strong enemy. Except these facts it is also possible that the terrorised employer analyzes the facts – thinks the situation over outside of the workplace, documents the facts and find witnesses of the problem etc.

If the employer finds out about any form of psychoterror at work, they should analyze the situation and the possible reasons of this negative phenomenon. Preventive measurements must be taken to restrict any possible rise of psychoterror. Meeting focused on preventing conflicts in the workplace and determining a useful prevention is advisable. An important factor of prevention is a well-elaborated programme of adaptation process for new employees. Also the ethical codex of the organization is an important value, where we can usually find clear definitions of human behavior in organizations. And finally all people should accept the responsibility for their own activities.

Legal solutions of social – pathological phenomena in organization

The prohibition of discrimination because of any reasons, direct or indirect discrimination is anchored in the Constitution of Slovak Republic and in other legal statutes. In the labour law the very first article on basic norms of labour law there is the Labour Code¹⁾ the individual has the right to satisfying work conditions and this right has no limitations. Furthermore the second article of basic norms determines the rights and obligations resulting from labour relations and must be in line with ethics and nobody is allowed to abuse their rights and obligations in order to harm other participants of labour relations or coworkers. Also the 9th article of basic norms secures the right of the employee to claim the rights in court if violated and consequently there is the protection from being discriminated or hurt after claiming their rights.

Legal protection of an employee whose rights have been violated does not have to be sorted out by legal means. As we have already mentioned, prevention is the best protection from bullying in the workplace. Just a direct and open communication with the surrounding and solving conflicts right at the beginning can decrease the probability of becoming a victim of bullying. If these measures are not sufficient it is necessary that the employer has a concrete system of measures against bullying, with clearly defined rules of behavior in the workplace, obligatory norms, violating of which or not respecting will be prosecuted. When dealing with discrimination the respondent has to prove that there was no discrimination. The Labour Code in the § 13 defines the employer's obligation to perform improvement, eliminate the bullying and eliminate the consequences of bullying in case an employee files a complaint. The victim of mobbing can contact the staff agency of the employer, union trade or labour authorities. The last chance is to claim rights to protection from mobbing in court.

Conclusion

¹ Act No. 311/2001 Coll. Labour Codex



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Good managers should be aware of the relations in their workplaces to be able to notice possible signs of aggression from the start. They must try to prevent them and create an effective group of their subordinates, where justice, fairness, trust, authority, respect and sympathy rule.

A notable number of organizations still ignores the phenomenon of psychoterror. They do not realize that psychical war is expensive and does not prosper. Psychoterror victims usually do not have other chance of eliminating the psychical terror and tension and consequent health degradation and in some situations also psychical health than quitting. Legal solutions of this problem are the last possible solutions. The moral and value failure of a person is an important aspect of this situation.

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