

TOXIC ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENT ON THE ITALIAN AND RUSSIAN ENTERPRISES: AN INTER-COUNTRY COMPARISON

Alena Fedorova^{1*}, Yurii Vishnevskii², Maria Menshikova³

¹ Assoc. Prof. Dr., Ural Federal University, RUSSIA, a.e.fedorova@urfu.ru

² Prof., Ural Federal University, RUSSIA, soc_stu@e1.ru

³ PhD cand., Sapienza University of Rome, ITALY, maria.menshikova@uniroma1.it

*Corresponding Author

Abstract

The concept of the organizational toxicity, which is considered by authors to be the phenomena of social pollution, is based on the study and synthesis of research results on the destructive aspects of the culture and working environment inside the organization. Toxic elements of the organizational environment have a negative impact on employees and cause a deterioration in their health and well-being that ultimately leads to a decrease in the efficiency of the use of human resources, in particular, and financial losses as a whole. Thus, there is underestimated the social aspect of a negative impact of the organization's economic activities on psychosocial health at work. The given research deals with the issue of the organizational toxicity, expressed in reducing the level of well-being and deterioration of physical and psychosocial health of workers caused by the economic activities of the company. The theoretical study has allowed us to formulate hypotheses about the toxic management practices and their negative impact on workers' psychosocial health. An empirical study conducted by the authors in comparison between Russian and Italian companies has permitted to verify the given hypotheses: to examine in detail the nature of the organizational toxicity and to identify toxic elements of the socio-labour relations in the company. An important feature of the current research is studying the toxic elements of working environment from the employers and employees points of view. The comparative studies possess an increasingly important cognitive function in the development of theories of labour and the science of management, as well as their practical applications. Inter-country comparisons allow us to approach the problem from a more common position, to the disclosure mechanisms of action, as well as forms of manifestation of separate regularities in various socio-economic systems.

Keywords: Social pollution, organizational toxicity, health and well-being at work.

1. INTRODUCTION

There are some research findings formed the basis of our study. Jeffrey Pfeffer said that "...some of the management practices that would increase organizational performance might also be related to employee health... When companies do not care about employees and the employees' work environment, you have higher incidences of cardiovascular disease, health problems, workplace-related stress, psychiatric problems and workplace violence" (Pfeffer, 2013). Pfeffer calls this phenomenon "social pollution", the adverse effects of which are no less (and perhaps more) significant than environmental pollution (Pfeffer, 2010, pp. 34-45).

The number of researchers discusses different aspects of the health at work issue. The studies confirm the clear links between work-related stress and a variety of physical and mental disorders, despite the difficulty of proving a direct causal link, since the majority of diseases and syndromes commonly attributed to stress have multiple causes (Blaug, R., Kenyon, A. & Lekhi, R., 2007).

Causes of the work-related stress are often rooted in the intra-organizational toxicity. Many researchers of management and organization speak about this toxicity, which may lead to dysfunction and pathology in the organization (Goldman, 2008; Lipman-Blumen, 2005, pp. 29-36; Lubit, 2004, 2008, p. 368), as well as damaging individuals, teams, and entire systems (Frost & Robinson, 1999, pp. 96-106).

This negative effect of the workplace toxicity generally affects both managers and subordinates; each of them can be the reasons for, and/or the victims of, this phenomenon. One of the reasons for the occurrence of toxic management practices are crisis and companies' efforts to reduce labour costs (Frost, 2004). Thereby, toxic management practices spread quickly and widely, resulting in the high degree of toxicity in the organization becoming unmanageable (Fedorova, et al., 2013, pp. 388-397).

We believe that social pollution due to toxic methods of human resources management makes no economic sense for the organizations that create toxic workplaces. Toxic workplaces contain all dysfunctional factors of working environment that impact of which on the employee can cause health problems like, for instance, worsened adaptation of human organism, increase in frequency of somatic and infectious diseases, temporary or permanent reduction in performance capacity, growth in professional diseases (Gatti & Fedorova, 2013, pp. 56-63).

Thus, the identification of the theoretical framework was formed in account of researches carried out by scientists in different fields. They described certain characteristics of the working environment, which are the factors of toxicity in the workplace. But we believe that toxic workplace is not the only reason of toxicity at work. The toxic intra-organizational environment is generated due to a combination of factors among which we distinguish toxic management practices, toxic leadership and toxic employees.

2. METHODS AND HYPOTHESES

As a result of theoretical study, we have elaborated the research agenda. The problem statement includes: 1) in-depth study into the affecting factors of organizational environment on the psychosocial health of workers; 2) development of research on the basis of previous literature and desk-data on toxic management practices having a negative impact on psychosocial well-being in the workplace; 3) conducting an empirical analysis, which embraces structured interviews and a questionnaire survey carried out to reveal the most significant components of the toxicity of intra-organizational environment, which require control in order to promote psychosocial health and enhance workers' well-being inside organization.

The methodology of our research is based on the using of triangulation method:

- triangulation of data (extracting data from various sources – secondary (desk data, statistical data) and primary (empirical data) to form one body of data;
- triangulation of research team (Russian-Italian research group);
- theoretical triangulation (different theoretical positions in the interpretation of data);
- methodological triangulation (different methods of data collection – semi-structural interview and survey).

We have developed the following hypotheses:

H1 – organizational activities have both positive and negative effects on psychosocial health of employees;

H2 – adverse effects are connected with the negative factors (toxins) of the working medium;

H3 – toxins in the working environment are a consequence of the use of toxic HR-management technologies, the presence of toxic managers and staff, as well as toxic workplaces;

H4 – there is a causal link between toxins adverse impact in the organizational environment and deterioration of psychosocial health at work.

The data were collected by structured interview and questionnaire. As a target for structured interview were middle-management of medium and large enterprises (comparability Italia and Russia). The goals of

the structured interview include: a) preliminary step analysis for main toxins revelation to verify the typology of toxins classification, which was developed based on previous literature, b) quantitative measure tool preparation.

We have designed 2 groups of questions for measuring 1) the level of employees' psychosocial health and well-being and 2) key factors affecting psychosocial health of the personnel. Measured indicators are follows: a) the impact of the organizational performance on the state of psychosocial health of workers, b) toxins within the organizational environment adversely affecting the employees' health.

3. RESULTS

For our study, it is of interest descriptive statistics obtained in the Mobbing Dispensary in the Hospital Complex Sant'Andrea (Italy). As the object of that statistics were 1545 patients, among which men account for 50.7%, women – 49.3%. Distribution of patients by level of education as follows: 51% have a full school education, 31% – higher education, 12% –secondary education and 2% – primary schooling. Most of the surveyed work in the private sector (64.7%), working in public institutions 26.1%, did not specify the scope of their professional activities 9.2%. Surveyed patients are divided into follows groups: employees / workers – 68.4%, executives / managers – 21.3%, unemployed / laid-off – 6%, not specified – 4.3%.

Based on the patients' responses was composed typology of oppressions in the workplace (Tab. 1). We can note such oppressions as threats, isolation, marginalization, demotion, discrepancy between tasks and qualification, deskilling as the most common on the Italian organizations.

Table 1: The responses given by patients of the Mobbing Dispensary in the Hospital Complex Sant'Andrea (Italy).

Types of oppressions	Men	Women
Demotion	169	132
Isolation	189	179
Marginalization	179	155
Deskilling	159	137
Discrepancy between tasks and qualification	165	159
Lack of access to information	125	108
Threats	179	193
Exclusion from meetings	118	86
Inactivity	128	94
Absence of tools	128	100
Absence of feedback	124	95
Exception from additional education	105	78
Excessive control	124	130
Structural inadequacy	78	67
Damaged the image	122	133
Displacement	73	65
Excessive requests	45	57
Exorbitant tasks	91	80

Distribution of psychiatric diagnoses of patients, who consulted a doctor by reason of mobbing, is as follows: adaptation disorders – 59%, anxiety – 7%, depression – 6%, mixed anxiety-depressive disorder – 5%, other pathology – 5%, absence of pathology – 4%, is not defined – 12.9%, post-traumatic stress disorder – 0.1%.

There is no in Russia such type of research, as well as similar medical institution. But we conducted the survey embraced the inhabitants one of the Russian urban district, who employed in various industrial branches. The aggregate sample of the surveyed respondents includes 207 workers. In the structure of respondents are dominated specialists (42.5%), almost equally represented manual workers (28%) and managers (22.7%) and the lowest proportion belong to operating personnel (6.8%). The aggregate sample of the respondents includes: 20.3% – aged 20-29; 31.4% – aged 30-39; 30.4% – aged 40-49; 17.9% – aged 50-59;

1.0% – aged over 60. Gender distribution of the respondents reflects the significant predominance of men (64.3%).

Physical and psychosocial levels of health are closely linked and complement each other. Among other questions, respondents were asked to give their own assessment of the work’s impact on their physical health (Fig. 1). It should be noted, that in the tables, under the heading “total respondents” the amount calculated may exceed 100% because respondents could give certain answers simultaneously.

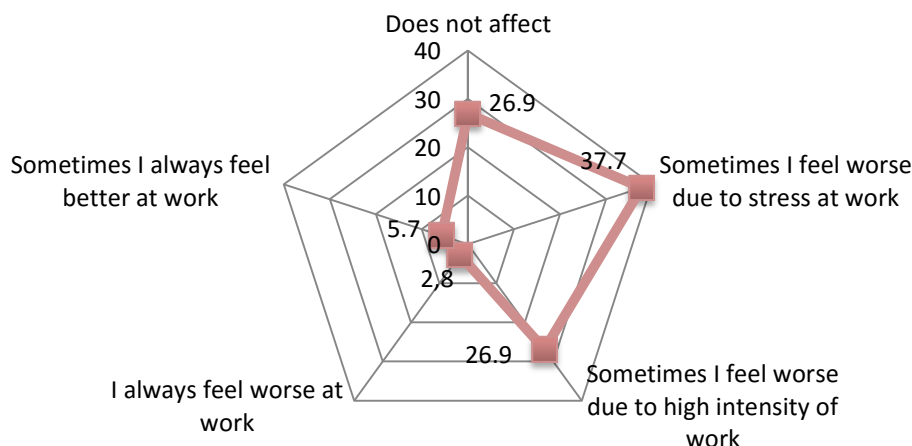


Fig. 1. The responses given to the question: “How does your work affect your physical health?”

Aggregated result allows us to make the next ranking: negative impact on their physical well-being at workplace noted by more than two thirds of the respondents (67.4%), quarter of the respondents do not feel any impact (26.9%), a positive impact on physical well-being at work sense just about 5.7% of answerers.

At the next step the respondents concretized a causal link between the deterioration of their physical well-being at the workplace and the forms of its manifestation (Fig. 2).

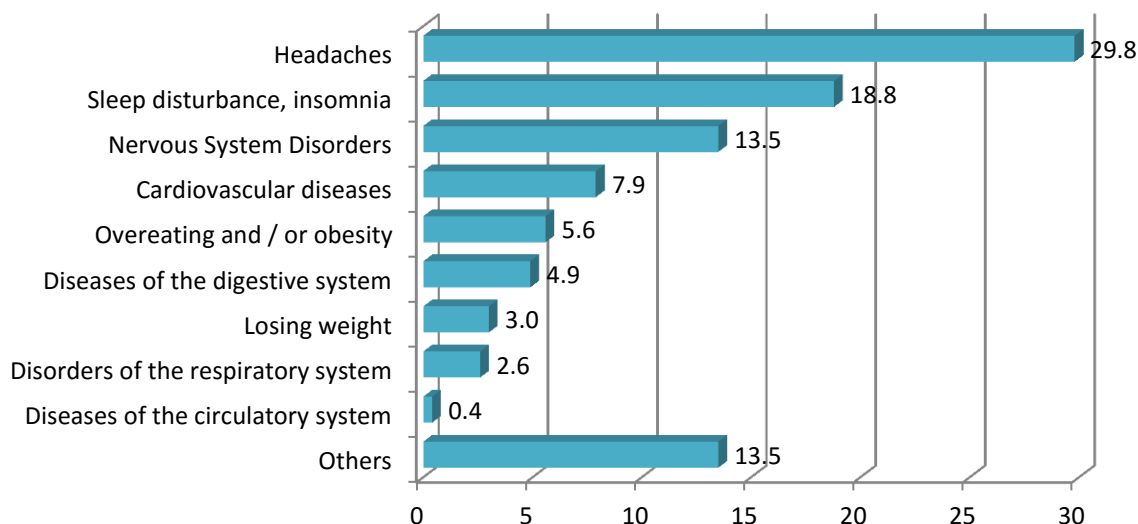


Fig. 2. The responses given to the question: “How exactly does the deterioration of your health manifest itself?”

This information may be used by organizations in formulating programs for Health Promotion and well-being of workers, allowing them to make it well targeted and effective.

Also our respondents were asked questions to figure out their perception of a causal link between work and health (Fig. 3). More than half of the surveyed people indicate the presence of small and significant health problems due to work (54.9%). The third of the respondents claimed that they have no any health problems owing to work (29.6%). But each fifth says that there is a direct connection between their work and health problems (15.5%).

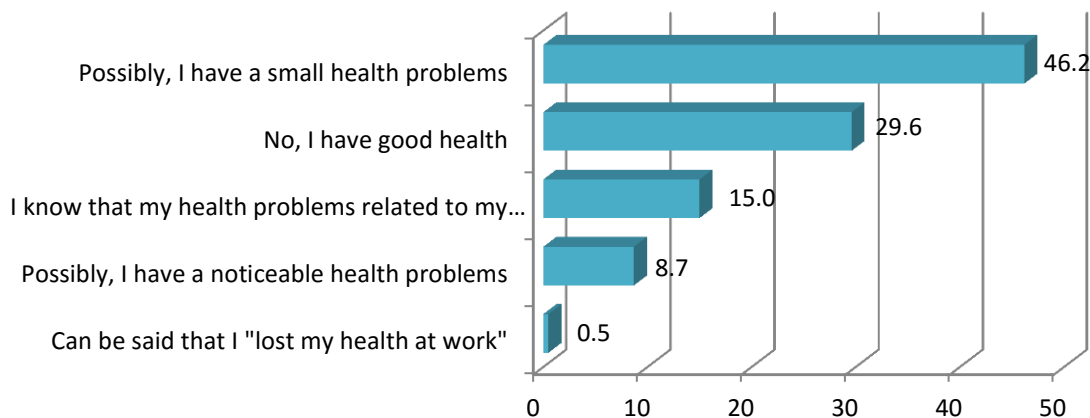


Fig. 3. The responses given to the question: "Do you consider your current state of health to be the result of your work?"

We proposed to evaluate the level of social pollution from economic activities of enterprises in aspect of workers psychological well-being on the background of their satisfaction in such basic human needs as a sense of protection and confidence in the future (Fig. 4). Combining the results of the survey provides insight about the respondents' opinion regarding impact of work on their psychological well-being.

In the sum, almost half of those surveyed people meet their needs psychological safeness and confidence in the future at the workplace in varying degrees (49%). However, slightly more than half of the respondents do not get this (51%), feeling all sorts of negative emotions: every sixth are under psychological pressure of the constant feeling an anxiety at work and some people sense the fear and hopelessness.

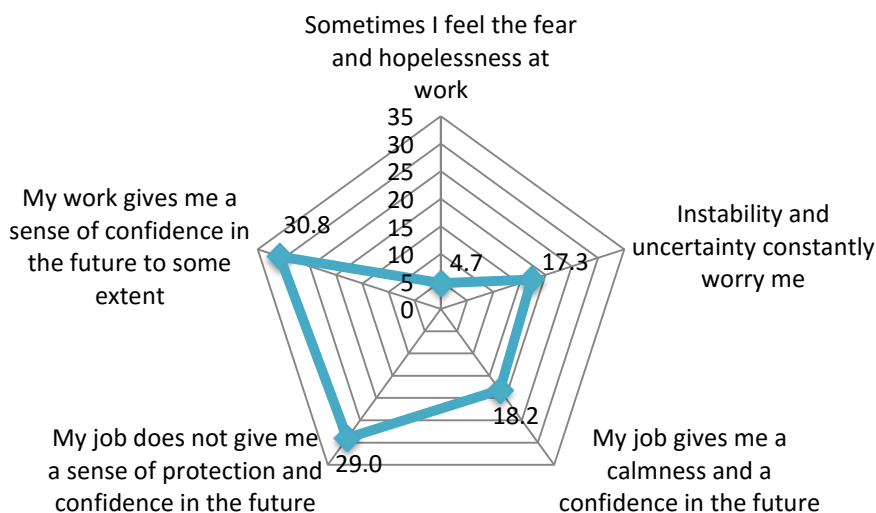


Fig. 4. The responses given to the question: "How does your work affect your psychological well-being?"

Also respondents were asked to select those frustrated situations in the working environment that the most often lead to worsening of their health (Fig. 5). More than a third of respondents deny the presence the frustrated situations in their life (39.6%). Among other answers there are different sorts of conflict situations

(43.5%). Further go situations connected with the dismissal and displacement of personnel for various reasons (11.5%).



Fig. 5. The responses given to the question: "Which situations have negatively affected your personal state of health?"

Obviously, the majority of these destructive situations are manageable. In other words, reducing the extent of their toxic effects on the personnel socio-psychological well-being is not only possible, but necessary.

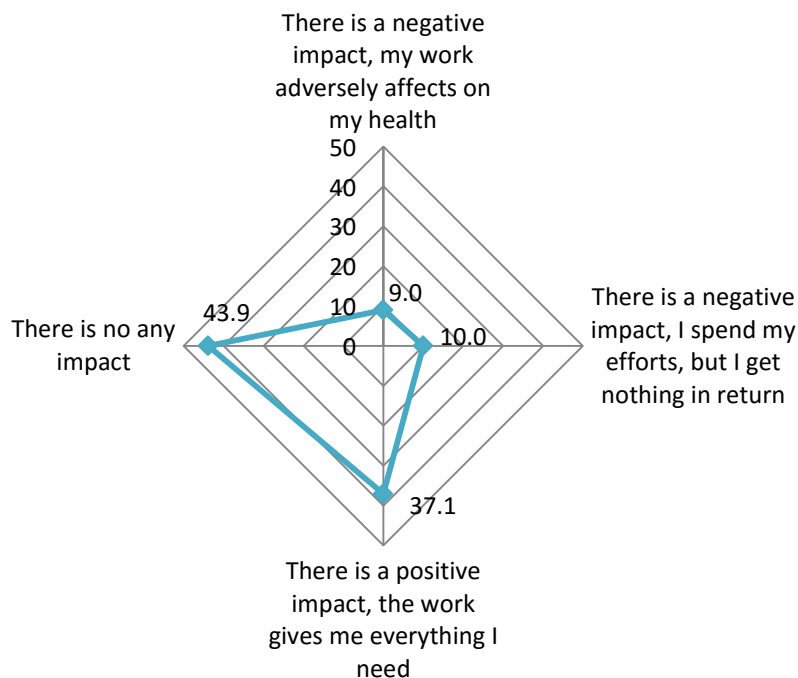


Fig. 6. The responses given to the question: "What impact does the company, in which you work, have on your quality of life?"

Evaluation of the sustainability of impacts on the psychosocial well-being of workers in long term is based on the analysis of the responses to the question that allow us to obtain the understanding how the organizations can effect on the quality of respondents' life on the whole (Fig. 6). The fifth part of respondents believes that the work in the organization is detrimental to quality of their life. This entails worsening of their social and psychological well-being.

3. CONCLUSION

As a result of the generalization of empirical data obtained in Italy and Russia, we can make the following conclusions:

- a large proportion of employees perceive the negative impact of work on their physical state;
- many of employees believe that their health problems are a direct consequence of work;
- the majority of employees correlate such violations health as headaches, insomnia and nervous system diseases with adverse factors of work;
- consequences for victims of mobbing can manifest in the form of adaptation disorders, have mental and physical symptoms;
- a large number of employees feel the negative emotions associated with the inability to satisfy such basic psychological needs as a sense of protection and confidence in the future at work;
- the high percentage of workers suffer from severe feelings on a background of instability and uncertainty of the future, under the pressure of fear and hopelessness.

There are some limitations, which are challenges for our current and future joint research: 1) limited sample in preliminary study analysis (sources of data collection); 2) differences in the existing possibilities and instruments of research in different countries makes it difficult to cross-national comparative analysis of the results (necessity of techniques unification); 3) sample expansion (quantity and quality criteria for clusterization possibility, as well as investigation of other areas).

Nevertheless, on the grounds of the data obtained in the study process, we have discovered some features of toxic intra-organizational environment that facilitate negative changes in physical and psychological health of the personnel in their perception. We are at the very beginning of the research aimed at understanding social pollution phenomena and elaboration managerial means to reduce the detriment for employees.

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