

HOW PSYCHOLOGICAL TERROR AFFECTS INDIVIDUALS AT A WORKPLACE AND WHO IS AFFECTED

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ABSTRACT

Currently, insults at the workplace can affect anyone. Mobbing refers to often repeating psychological terror, which lasts at least half a year and comprises of an act or series of acts that take place at least once a week, and for those who have to endure it, can cause psychological and physical symptoms. In the present year, in addition to last year, the authors of the report carried out a survey in order to assess how this phenomenon can be seen in Hungarian workplaces and how frequently it takes place. In addition, the assessment also sought to answer the question as to what kind of personality traits are possessed by people who suffer as a result of these insults, how they react to psychological terror and whether this can be linked to their personality traits. Using one and multiple variable analyses, which through the use of questionnaires analysed the data of 500 participants, the authors sought to answer the question above.

1. A Brief Summary of Relevant Literature

The topic of workplace harassment has been examined since the end of the 1970s. The first major studies were conducted in Scandinavia. One of the earliest researchers was the Swedish Heinz Leymann (Leymann, 1986). Since then, it is clear that this is a complex phenomenon and multiple types of terminology are applied accordingly. Prevention and intervention have become increasingly important. Although research in this field started at the end of the 1970s, one of the earliest references to the topic and the expression ‘workplace bullying’ can be

found in literature dating back 15 years earlier, e.g. ,Summerskillnél (Summerskill, 1965), but can be found in other contemporary sources as well (Frankel, 2004).

Multiple definitions have been created for this phenomenon. For some (Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2011) the length and frequency (weekly, at least for six months) were seen as the most important aspects, while for others (Boddy, 2011) it was the repetition of this phenomenon. According to the definition of the Workplace Bullying Institute (WBI, 2007), an organisation that has been conducting in-depth research on the topic every three to four times a year, since 2007, this phenomenon is characterised by a repeating negative behaviour towards one or multiple targets, carried out by one or more perpetrators, which has negative (physical and/or psychological) effects on the victims. Some authors differentiate between work-related mobbing and that relating to the individual. The previous being carried out by the manipulation of the job's terms and conditions, in addition to the manipulation of information (Escartín, Rodríguez-Carballeira, Gómez-Benito, & Zapf, 2010). There is, however, a broad spectrum regarding individual acts of aggression: mocking personal characteristics or attributes, verbal assault, targeting private life, threats, ostracism, and the complete absence of communication (Zapf, Knorz & Kulla, 1996).

Studies have been carried out regarding the frequency of the attacks, in addition to their total length. These studies showed that the total length of the harassment is inversely proportional to the amount of time that elapsed between the two episodes (Einarsen & Skogstad, 1996). For this process, the shortest time period measured was one year (González & Graña, 2009), while the longest measured was over 5 years, or 62 months (Kudielka & Kern, 2004). Multiple possible conflict management models have been born. Perhaps the most aggressive one being Vliert's Office Wars theory (van de Vliert, 2014), according to which, if the general atmosphere at work is aggressive, then the only option available to individuals is to completely annihilate their opponent. Regarding the consequences of bullying, both latitudinal and longitudinal analyses took place. The goal of the latitudinal studies is to find the prevalence of this phenomenon. Because these studies use numerous techniques, from surveys to face-to-face interviews to phone surveys, one set of data cannot always be compared to other sets (Feveile, Olsen, & Hogh, 2007). At the same time, they are very good at highlighting the variety and complexity of causes for this phenomenon. It is certain, that bullying is related to the personality of the parties involved. (Nielsen & Knardahl, 2015)

The longitudinal studies follow various indicators selected by researchers, comparing them at different points in time and, thereby, assessing the process itself (Hogh, Henriksson, & Burr, 2005). Lastly, according to certain authors, both the perpetrator's and the victim's personality play a defining role in the development and escalation of the events (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007). According to Ashfort (Ashfort, 1994), it is the victim's role which decides the outcome, as if he or she does not react in a confident manner to the harassment even the very first time, this

will encourage the perpetrator (predator theory). These studies are what lead the authors to examine what kind of personality traits those who become victims possess, and how people deal with psychological terror.

Nowadays researchers examine not only causes, but also effects of mobbing. Based on a review of the academic literature shows that workplace bullying is an important factor by decreasing performance and productivity, such as reduced creativity as well as increasing turnover rates. (Glambek, et al., 2015) It could cause also higher absenteeism rates associated with reduced health and well-being. (Asfaw, et al., 2014) Employers forced to bear significant costs associated with workplace bullying. (Samnani & Singh, 2014) There are both related to reduced performance and productivity of working force and also negative healthcare outcomes. (Laschinger, 2014)

It would be important to develop and test a model that is provided by the HR process theory to prevent and apply HR practices against harassment that employees may experience. (Ostroff & Bowen, 2016). Line managers are often hesitant to take part in resolving bullying issues and frequently adopt informal approaches. They frequently lack the skills required to handle complex workplace bullying issues and may pass them over to the HR to resolve. Training on anti-bullying policies and practices is considered an appropriate strategy to enhance their competence and will provide practical assistance to prevent and manage problems of bullying, sexual harassment and physical violence at the workplace. (Woodrow & Guest, 2016) Climate for conflict management (CCM) may be related to less bullying (Ståle Einarsen, et al., 2018). The authors mean based on a cross-sectional survey among 312 employees, that organizational measures are appropriate way to prevent bullying and even affect also how employees react when subjected to bullying. There is significant literature outlining recommended HR policies and practices for the management of bullying, but less attention has been paid to their effective execution. (Russo, et al., 2016) Where used practices are effective, employees share a common interpretation of what behaviours are expected and rewarded. Effective implementation will facilitate the collective perceptions in organisational climate and also individual perceptions in psychological climates. Thereby reduce the variability among employee perceptions in a problematic situation. (Sheehan, et al., 2017)

2. Material and Methods

The research was conducted in 2018. The main objective of the research was to identify the characteristics of psychological terror in Hungary. 492 participants took part in the research, who filled out an optional online survey. The method used for collecting the data was the snowball method, therefore, the sample analysed cannot be seen as representative. The survey used in the research was constructed in the following way. The first topic focused on the specification of

the sample, that is the questions focused on gender, age, place of residence, qualifications, employer and position within the company. The second section focused on personality traits. The third section dealt with the definition of psychological terror at the workplace, its causes and circumstances. Lastly, the questions shifted to ask about the methods that can be used to handle such situations.

The questions were essentially closed questions, built on nominal and metric variables, and within that, on the 5 point Likert scale. The results were analysed with the use of the program SPSS 23. The evaluation consisted of statistical methods with one or more variables, such as frequency, average, standard deviation, crosstabs, Chi-squared test, cluster and factor analysis.

From the 492 participants, 309 were women and 183 were men. The average age was 33.5 years old. According to location and address, the largest proportion of participants (64.8%) lived in the Central-Hungarian Region, while the second largest was the Northern-Hungarian region (17.9%). Regarding qualifications, those with Matura accounted for 16.7% of the sample, while the number of those with degrees accounted for 71.5%. According to the results obtained from those asked about the size of their workplace, 13.4% worked at micro-companies, 16.7% worked at small-sized enterprises, 16.1% worked at medium-sized enterprises, while 53.9% worked at large enterprises. According to the ownership of the company providing the employment, 58.1% of those asked worked at Hungarian-owned companies, 30.1% had foreign employers, while 11.8% were employed at a joint venture. 72.8% of the participants were employees, 8.9% were in junior management, 12.6% were in middle management, 4.3% were in senior management, while 1.4% were company owners.

3. Results and Discussion

The work examines the following hypothesis: According to the data gathered from the participants, the more open-minded personalities are affected less by psychological terror at the workplace than those who are more introverted.

In the second part of the research, the participants had to state to what extent certain personality traits and habits were true for them. Selecting 'one' meant that it was not true at all, while 'five' meant that it was entirely true for them. The summary and analysis of the metric scales, in addition to the averages and standard deviation can be seen in the first table (Table 1). From the answers, it is clear that the participants view themselves as having predominantly the following characteristics: reliable regarding their work, helpful, hard-working and the ability to cope well with a large workload. The standard deviation was also the smallest for these characteristics, therefore, the sample was most likely uniform regarding such characteristics. The participants were least likely to view themselves as egotistical, having difficulty coping with stress, pessimistic and easily deceived.

Regarding these characteristics, the standard deviation was quite large and, therefore, so were the average deviations from the average results for such questions.

The authors were, in light the fact that it was essentially the negative characteristics which got a low average value, required to ask the question how self-critical were the participants, could they realistically see their faults, or did they know their personality perfectly well? This would have been difficult to deduce during the course of the study, therefore, the authors continued their calculations using the obtained results. Because the participants evaluated themselves using the 23 variables, for further analysis, a reduction of these variables was necessary, for which factor analysis was used. Two variables could not be used to form factors: ‘worrying a lot’ and ‘difficulty coping with stress’, therefore, these were not included in the further analysis. The remaining variables were suitable for forming factors. KMO value: 0.826 Barlett-test: approx. Chi-square: 3621.36 df: 210 sign.: 0.000. The variamax method was used to create the 5 factors, where the given percentage was 58.224%.

The factors were given the following names:

- F1. A valuable, hard-working and loyal employee of a company –
- F2. Extroverted, sociable individual –
- F3. Patient, tolerant, not egotistical -
- F4. Optimistic, naturally confident –
- F5. Does not cope well with failure or defeat, gets offended easily and is easily misled.

The factors created were used for all further analysis. The participants were asked whether they had experiences of psychological terror at the workplace. 57.5% stated that they did not have such an experience, whereas 3.9% stated that it was a daily occurrence, 11.6% stated that it occurred at least once a week, and 27% went through this at least once a month. The authors analysed whether the above factors and having to experience psychological terror at the workplace could be linked in any possible way. The results of the analysis can be seen in Table 2. From the results, it could be established that a correlation for the above exists for three factors: being extroverted, optimistic and being easily offended, which are visible in those who have difficulty coping with failure or defeat. Psychological terror is not commonly experienced for extroverts and optimistic individuals, whereas, for those who have difficulty coping with failure or defeat, the extent this attribute is present determines the frequency of the psychological terror experienced. This is not particularly affected by whether somebody is seen within the company as a loyal and valuable employee, or how patient he or she is.

How the participants reacted to ‘psychological insults’ at the workplace was also examined. The participants could choose from a variety of reactions. The most

common ones were the following: often feeling tension, impatience and an increase in blood pressure. During the analysis, the authors sought to establish whether there was any correlation between specific symptoms and certain personality traits (ANOVA analysis was used). The researchers found a significant relationship between an increase in blood pressure and the characteristics of patience. For those who are very patient, an increase in blood pressure is uncommon. Often feeling stressed, optimism and having difficulty coping with failure or defeat were also found to be related. Feeling stressed was primarily identified in those persons who had difficulty coping with failure or defeat. Impatience, however, was not found to correlate significantly with any of the factors. Finally, despite the fact that over 40% of the participants have experienced some form of psychological terror, only 7% of the organisations which were examined took actions to combat and deal with this issue. The primary solutions proposed by the participants are the following (Table 3).

4. Conclusions

The report presented some of the results obtained from a study carried out this year, which explored the prevalence of psychological terror at Hungarian organisations. The report, based on the results above, can establish that there is a clear link between one's personal traits and being affected by psychological terror and, therefore, the authors also accept the initial hypothesis. For open-minded, optimistic individuals, psychological terror at the workplace is less identifiable than for those who have difficulty coping with failure or defeat. Similarly, the symptoms that arise from experiencing 'psychological insults' also occur in multiple forms for different personalities. Extroverted people are more able to cope with workplace insults and provocations easier, than introverted ones.

Based on the results of the study, it can be stated that the personality traits of the individual suffering from psychological terror must be taken into account both for identifying and resolving the problem, as only then can a sufficient and adequate complex solution be created to address this problem.

APPENDIX

Table 1: Personality Traits (average, standard deviation)

Personality Traits	N		Mean	Std. Deviation
	Valid	Missing		
Introvert	492	0	2.67	1.149
Extrovert	492	0	3.22	1.127
Difficulty coping with stress	492	0	2.32	.997
Patient	492	0	3.56	1.073
Pessimistic	492	0	2.36	1.097
Optimistic	492	0	3.69	.994
Easily offended	492	0	2.65	.993
Low self-esteem	492	0	2.69	1.093
Perfectionist	492	0	4.16	.809
Reliable employee	492	0	4.48	.720
Copes well with a large workload	492	0	4.25	.753
Hard-working	492	0	4.27	.751
Helpful	492	0	4.41	.735
Team player	492	0	4.10	.917
Expert in his/her field	492	0	4.20	.701
Loyal	492	0	4.15	.797
Sociable	492	0	3.68	.981
Tolerant	492	0	3.82	.870
Worries a lot	492	0	2.98	1.124
Honest	492	0	4.22	.757
Easily deceived	492	0	2.52	1.010
Egotistical	492	0	2.12	1.035
Difficulty coping with failure or defeat	492	0	3.40	1.058

Source: Own table

Table 2: ANOVA (factors and experiencing terror at the workplace)

	Sum of Squares		df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
REGR factor score 1 for analysis 1	Between Groups	3.667	3	1.222	1.224	.300
	Within Groups	487.333	488	.999		
	Total	491.000	491			
REGR factor score 2 for analysis 1	Between Groups	15.967	3	5.322	5.468	.001
	Within Groups	475.033	488	.973		
	Total	491.000	491			
REGR factor score 3 for analysis 1	Between Groups	7.766	3	2.589	2.614	.051
	Within Groups	483.234	488	.990		
	Total	491.000	491			
REGR factor score 4 for analysis 1	Between Groups	11.625	3	3.875	3.945	.008
	Within Groups	479.375	488	.982		
	Total	491.000	491			
REGR factor score 5 for analysis 1	Between Groups	11.075	3	3.692	3.754	.011
	Within Groups	479.925	488	.983		
	Total	491.000	491			

Source: Own table

Table 3: Proposed Solutions

Consulting with HR.
For employees to be able to use a workplace portal/intranet in order to express their opinion and report what happened to them. Following this, the HR department would examine the case.
Individual and group discussions and assistance. Changing of positions at the workplace.
One-to-one discussions.
We organise team building parties, so that the teams learn how to collaborate better.
The management pays attention to the groups' atmosphere and harmony. If they feel any tension, they should immediately try to discuss it and resolve the issue.
Online ticket can be opened to report misconduct.
Possibility to make a complaint at the trade unions, opportunity to see a professional psychiatrist.

Source: Own table

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