MOBBING AND HARASSMENT IN THE STEEL ENTERPRISES

Mobbing and harassment are widely analysed in organizations providing various services but are little studied in the companies undertaking industrial activities. Therefore, the aim of the paper is to diagnose the prevalence of mobbing and harassment in the steel enterprises. The case study analysis of the largest steel producer in the world, and specifically its division in Poland was used to determine the prevalence of these phenomena. It was found out that the said company is the example of the ethically and socially responsible organization. However, the interviews indicate that single cases of mobbing and harassment activities (though relatively rare) were also observed. They were distributed among three groups of employees: 1) those who do physical work (are directly engaged in the production process); 2) employees involved in the administrative activity and sales; and 3) managerial staff.

Key words: steel enterprises, employees, mobbing, harassment, production activities

INTRODUCTION

Steel enterprises generate a significant number of jobs, both directly and in the areas of economic activities related with this industry; therefore, psychological and physical well-being and safety of employees strongly affect not only the performance indicators of certain companies, but also make a wider impact on the overall social and psychological background of the society. On the one hand, very dynamic changes and increasing uncertainty in organizations promote the changes; on the other hand, they cause tensions and conflicts in relationships between employees, which often turn into mobbing and harassment. Often organizations, especially those declaring corporate social responsibility, include measures directed against harassment in employees' relationship into their policy, but mobbing remains a latent problem, which is accompanied by poor, insecure psychological climate, employees' injuries, diseases, absenteeism, or unfair dismissals.

The term 'mobbing' is more frequently used in German speaking countries, Scandinavia and Italy, while in English speaking countries 'bullying' is a more popular term. While in the Northern (primarily in Sweden) and Western European countries mobbing has been researched in various aspects for three decades, this phenomenon is still relatively little known and studied in societies of some post-communist countries. Particularly little knowledge is available about the prevalence of mobbing and forms of its occurrence in the steel enterprises, which are extremely large and complex organizational structures from the perspective of human resources and interests of enterprise stakeholder groups in a safe working environment.

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Therefore, the aim of the paper is to diagnose the prevalence of mobbing and harassment in the steel enterprises. The case study analysis of the largest steel producer in the world, and specifically its division in Poland (analysis of the literature, as well as interviews and discussions with the managers) were used to determine the prevalence of these phenomena.

MOBBING AND HARASSMENT: THEORETICAL INSIGHTS

It is estimated that workplace bullying is a severe problem in contemporary working life, affecting up to 15 percent of employees [1]. Therefore, it is no coincidence that workplace mobbing is considered by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work as one of the emerging psychosocial risk factors that could negatively affect workers' health [2].

Workplace mobbing is distinguished from many other negative, unethical relationships between employees by several specific features of violence against the victim. The attack on the victim, directed against the person that lasts for at least 6 months and is repeated at least once a week is considered as mobbing [3]. This kind of harassment is related to specific aims of a terrorizing individual and/or group, therefore, mobbing is often held as a precursor of expulsion in working life [1]. It is often difficult to recognize mobbing at the initial stage because of subtle verbal and non-verbal hints and psychological manipulations. In addition, it was noticed that in the beginning, harassment occurs as subtle, indirect actions, and over time it is getting stronger [4] and becoming a source of permanent stress in employees.

Studies carried out in various countries show that mobbing as long-term stress adversely affects employees' quality of life and work, i.e. it is associated with

poorer psychological well-being of the employees and lower job satisfaction [5], with anxiety disorder and depression [6] and may lead to thoughts of suicide [7]. Analysis of studies carried out in European and English speaking countries, which covers the period from 1990 to 2013, showed that there is substantial empirical evidence that employees, both men and women, who report lack of decision latitude, job strain and bullying, will experience increasing depressive symptoms over time. Depressive symptoms are potential outcomes of poorly functioning work environments. Such symptoms are frequent and cause considerable suffering for the employees as well as financial loss for the employers [8]. This is an important psycho-social risk factor associated with emotional burnout and workplace physical injuries [9, 2], which, on the one hand, draws attention to the spheres of professional activities associated with higher risk of injury, (e.g. steel industry); on the other hand, the employer faces the risk of not only financial claims, but also poorer quality of work, lost working hours, although the negative financial consequences may vary depending on the country.

Analysis of the causes of mobbing in different areas of occupational activities has shown strong relationship between mobbing, insecure work environment and leadership [10]. The latter aspect is important as leadership is an intermediary factor leading to occurrence of mobbing and in aiming to improve the relationship between employees. Studies have shown that transformational and transactional leadership decreased the likelihood of mobbing, whereas authoritarian leadership increased it. Paternalistic leadership was mildly and negatively associated with mobbing [5]. However, although workplace policies and procedures may lessen the prevalence and incidence of bullying, but often competing interests of senior management, human resources personnel, supervisors and workers may mitigate any anti-bullying interventions [11]. Another research carried out in Finland has shown that the organisations surveyed relied heavily on reconciliatory measures for responding to workplace harassment and that punitive measures were seldom used [12]. Therefore, it is not enough for organizations to declare the intolerance of mobbing and harassment. They also have to provide for specific responsibility for the malicious actions in respect of colleagues and actively apply the measures in practice. All of this provides specific references to the development of the organizational system, as well as the areas of training of the management and employees.

A CASE STUDY ANALYSIS

The case study analysis concentrates on ArcelorMittal group, the world leader in steel industry and more specifically its Polish division – ArcelorMittal Poland (AMP). The research object was selected due to the following reasons. Firstly, AMP is a wide capital group, with its divisions in a variety of countries. It requires a constant transfer of knowledge, information and data, including those related to the ethics within the whole group [13]. Secondly, the group has developed the original solutions related to business ethics, and anti- mobbing activities are regarded as one of the most important aspect of these activities. And thirdly, AMP controls approx. 70 percent of Polish steel sector capacity. Therefore, it can be assumed that the results achieved can be applied to the whole steel industry in Poland.

The case study analysis was conducted in two phases. Firstly, the company's documents which are devoted to the anti-mobbing sphere were analysed [14]. In order to make an in-depth analysis of the case study, based on the theory and assumptions of the Labour Code, a group of several factors (criteria) which are fundamental to the effectiveness of anti-mobbing policy, were selected and compared with the situation existing in ArcelorMittal Poland (Table 1).

The analysis of Table 1 shows that ArcelorMittal Poland has met all the criteria of effective anti-mobbing policy. In one case, however, it was not possible to state

Table 1 Key factors of effective anti-mobbing policy: theory vs. practice

Factors	ArcelorMittal Poland
Existence of anti-mobbing procedure	Yes, it is expressed in several documents adopted by the company: – the company signed Diversity Charter; – it is a part of Diversity & Inclusion Policy; – it is expressed in Code of Business Conduct – some clauses of Human Rights Policy relate to anti-mobbing procedures, too.
Introducing the rules of conduct in the event of mobbing	Yes, it described in Diversity & Inclusion Policy
Holding regular trainings	Yes, the rules are described in Diversity & Inclusion Policy. – Organization of different trainings, e.g. „Femininity and masculinity in business", "Different generations in the workplace". – Every employee is obliged to participate in the training on "Business ethics" every 3 years. – "Compliance officer" as a person responsible for business ethics in the group
Carrying out periodical surveys among employees to assess effectiveness of anti-mobbing policy	It is not stated in the company's documents; one should assume it is performed periodically
Implementing and promoting standards and Codes of Conduct and ethical work environment	Yes, the company implemented a Code of Business Conduct
Promotion of relationships based on trust and respect	Yes, the company implemented a Code of Business Conduct
Implementing the principles of CSR in the dimension of responsibility for employees and building human capital	Yes, the company realizes the idea of " a responsible company" through supporting the local society in the spheres of culture and art, education, health, ecology, sport, employees volunteering

clearly whether such activities exist. It doesn't change the very positive picture of the company in question.

Diversity Charter and Diversity & Inclusion Policy belong to the most important documents implemented by AMP. The former document was signed on October 1, 2012. It is a written commitment that can be signed by an organization which undertakes to implement the policy of equal treatment and diversity management, as well as to actively counteract discrimination and mobbing in the workplace. The Diversity Charter can be signed by any organization that voluntarily undertakes to respect the diversity of all its employees and to never discriminate anyone on grounds of sex, age, disability, health condition, nationality, gender identity, family status or way of life. It obliges its signatories to [15]:

– establish an organizational culture and atmosphere that ensures respect for diversity;
– introduce institutional, internal solutions aimed at developing the equal treatment policy;
– develop and implement the policy of equal treatment and diversity management in the workplace;
– implement anti-discrimination and anti-mobbing monitoring, as well as periodic educational activities on how to counteract discrimination and mobbing;
– conduct a dialogue with employees on the adopted diversity management policy, and inform stakeholders, business partners, subcontractors and customers on the implementation of the diversity management model.

In turn, the selected key principles of Diversity & Inclusion Policy include [14]:

– eliminating discriminatory behaviour at every step of work life and at every hierarchical level;
– giving the right to all employees to a workplace free from harassment;
– creating a supportive and understanding workplace environment in which all individuals can realize their full potential regardless of their race, colour, sex, age, religion, ethnic or national origin;
– adapting internal processes and procedures to support diversity and inclusion.

It confirms the thesis that the company in question approaches very seriously the issues of mobbing and harassment.

Analysis of the company's documents and reports allows to state that from the theoretical point of view, the situation looks very good. Due to this, the second phase of the surveys, i.e. discussions and interviews with several managers of different levels, as well as the managers from external companies who cooperate very closely with AMP were carried out. In contrast to the theoretical assumptions expressed in the company's documents, the situation doesn't look so perfect in practice. The interviews indicated that single cases of mobbing and harassment activities (though relatively rare) are observed. One person stated even that there were at least two cases that the 'money for silence' was given to employees. In turn, another one knew about one case of sexual molestation, albeit it took place several years ago. Generally, almost everybody heard about some cases of mobbing (it is possible that they were related to the same incidents) and these mobbing activities were distributed among three groups of employees: 1) those who do physical work (are directly engaged in the production process); 2) employees involved in the administrative activity and sales; and 3) managerial staff. According to the managers interviewed, it may be a result of a decreasing number of employees, especially in the production sphere, merged with the same number of duties.

CONCLUSION

The aim of the paper was to diagnose the prevalence of mobbing and harassment in the steel enterprises. The study was based on the analysis of the literature, as well as a case study analysis of ArcelorMittal Poland. As it was supposed on the basis of other studies and surveys, though the internal documents of the company protect employees against mobbing and harassment, practice shows that some single cases of mobbing exist. In other words, the steel industry is not free from mobbing activities and harassment. However, the scale of such incidents is relatively small, given the range of activity of the group analysed (over 12,7 thousand employees in Poland). Therefore one may state that the said company is the example of the ethically and socially responsible organization. On the other hand, based on these findings it is rather difficult to describe the whole steel industry through the prism of AMP only. One should remember that the group is the world leader and, therefore, its solutions are ahead of the practices adopted by the other players in the steel industry in Poland.

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Note: The responsible translator for English language is Jerzy Grządziel