

Mobbing and Business Ethics: A Research on Municipal Employees

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Abstract: This study will first present some descriptive information about mobbing, and then provide an assessment of municipal employees' top to bottom mobbing practices in the workplace. Views of both subordinates and their superiors in administrative positions on mobbing are analyzed. Including both parties of the mobbing behavior is important for the scope and consistency of the research. A total of 322 employees, 54 of which are in administrative positions were reached and asked to fill in the "Scale of Psychological Mobbing at Work". 17.5% of the participants (47 people) expressed that they suffer from mobbing in the workplace. 20.4% of the superiors (11 people) expressed that employees suffer from mobbing. Victims of mobbing are generally expected to quit the institution (resignation, transfer, etc.). 31.2% (83 people) of the employees who participated in the study said they want to quit their jobs. Among those who described themselves as victims of mobbing, the number of those who want to quit is 21. However, only 10 participants expressed their intention of quitting is caused by mobbing. In addition to this, 15 people who mentioned they have been mobbed think that this is a routine and ordinary workplace behavior.

Key Words: Mobbing, Violence, Bullying, Conflict, Victim.

Mobbing in the workplace involves hostile and unethical communication which is directed in a systematic and continuous manner by one or a few people mainly toward one individual, who, due to mobbing, is pushed into a helpless and defenseless position. These actions occur on a very frequent basis (at least once a week and over a period of at least six months' duration). Low moral standards are considered as a cause of mobbing (Einarsen, 2000, p. 388; Harvey, Treadway, Heames, & Duke, 2008, p. 36; Rhodes, Alison, Margaret Stewart, & Clegg, 2010, p. 103; Yaman, 2010, p. 562).

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Mobbing and Distinctive Features

“Mobbing” is derived from the word “Mob”. Mob denotes a crowd, often in a destructive or hostile mood, and comes from the Latin phrase *mobile vulgus* for “unstable crowd”. Mob as a verb means “gather around, attack, or disturb” (Davenport, Schwartz, & Elliott, 2003, p. 3; Seyyar & Selek Öz, 2007, pp. 265-266). The concept of mobbing was first used by Konrad Lorenz in the 1960s for describing the behavior of animals (Tınaz, 2008, pp. 10-11).

In the 1970s, Peter Heinemann applied Lorenz’s conceptualization to the collective aggression of children against a targeted child, and used the term to describe a behavior he had noticed among school children, where a group of children physically or mentally attack a single child, resembling this to the behavior of animals and birds (Thompson, Arora, & Sharp, 2002, p. 51; Zapf & Einarsen, 2002, p. 238). In Turkey, mobbing, as well as other concepts such as bullying, emotional harassment, emotional abuse, psychological violence, and psychological terror are used in the literature (Baykal, 2005; Çabuk, 2010; Çobanoğlu, 2005; Gün, 2009; Güngör, 2008; Minibaş-Poussard ve İdiğ-Çamuroğlu, 2009; Tarhan, 2009; Tınaz, 2008; Tutar, 2004; Yaman, 2009a).

Dr. Leymann who is widely recognized in the field for his extensive research on aggressive behavior in the workplace used this concept in the 1980s for events other than sexual harassment in the workplace, to identify group aggression. He noticed that employees who are labeled as «difficult people» are exposed to all kinds of hostile behavior so that they would eventually end up resigning consensually. This practice is defined as mobbing by Leymann (Davenport et al., 2003, p. 3; Yaman, 2009a, p. 3). Leymann’s research could be summarized as such: Mobbing means exhibiting unwanted, degrading, humiliating and damaging behavior in the workplace towards an employee or a group of employees (Vega & Comer, 2005, p. 103).

Exhibiting hostile and non-ethical behavior is generally tried to be justified with victim’s incompatible personality. It is thought by the mobbing person or people that the victim deserves to be treated this way (Elliott, 2003, p. 5; Yaman, Vidinlioğlu, & Çitemel, 2010, p. 1138). The main purpose of mobbing behavior is to cause psychological harm to the victim by attitudinal, behavioral, and emotional assaults (Yaman, 2009b, p. 969).

Although there are many studies about the concept of mobbing, it is not always easy to make a clear identification. This may explain why in some studies the rate of victims of mobbing is as high as 50% and above (Aksoy,

2008, p. 1; Fettahlıođlu, 2008, p. 273). Based on the studies on mobbing, an accurate description and a clear framework of the concept should be established (Caponecchia & Wyatt, 2009, p. 440; Ege, 2010, p. 234; Einarsen, Hoel, Zapf, & Cooper, 2010, p. 18; Hutchinson, Vickers, Wilkes, & Jackson, 2010, p. 28; Ryan, 2006, p. 288; Tınaz, 2009; Toker Gökçe, 2008, p. 32; Yürür, 2009).

Not every negative behavior in the workplace should be considered to be mobbing. These behaviors may unintentionally result from stress, or conflict environments in the workplace, as well as lack of empathy between the personnel who are assumed to exercise bullying or mobbing and those who are considered to be the victims of such acts. Another point to consider is the regularity, sometimes a one-off behavior may be mistakenly identified as mobbing (Kelly, 2007, p. 113).

The Relationship between Mobbing and Business Ethics

As working life gets more complex, dynamic and highly competitive, there is a greater need for business environments that have a sound work ethic (Yıldız, 2007, p. 34). Moral values will curb negative feelings such as jealousy, greed and the urge to suppress others and help create a conscious and systematic working environment (Arslan, 2007, p. 45; Bulutlar & Öz, 2009, p. 276). Businesses will gain respect and dignity through honesty by making morality the first priority for each employee (Beyster, 1998, p. 318). Thus, an organization with high ethical standards, trust and honesty will thrive and earn prestige in the community. This is important for the survival and the longevity of the organization (Dündar, 2010, p. 48; Uçar, 2007, p. 12).

Institutions that place an emphasis on moral values will be unlikely to witness mobbing practices. Low moral standards are considered to be a cause of mobbing and bullying (Einarsen, 2000, p. 388; Harvey et al., 2008, p. 36; Rhodes et al., 2010, p. 103; Yaman, 2010, p. 562).

Mobbing which is caused by jealousy of others' good performance, successful career, beauty, and so on is an indicator of deprivation of moral principles in the workplace (Bilgel, Aytaç, & Bayram, 2006, p. 230; Zapf & Einarsen, 2002, p. 250-251; Tengilimođlu & Akdemir Mansur, 2009, p. 78). Employees' desire to perform their brutal ambitions may lead them to ignore moral principles (Zapf & Einarsen, p. 251).

Mobbing should not be mistaken for simple disagreements or conflicts, and should be prevented in the workplace through appropriate managerial approaches. Employees should be discouraged from bullying behavior by adoption of a participatory management style (Yaman, 2008, p. 93), and buildup of a healthy organizational culture (Yaman, 2010, pp. 564). Organizations must create a work environment that embraces moral values.

Method

Purpose of the Study

Workplace mobbing behavior can be seen in three levels, upwards, downwards and horizontal (Yaman, 2009a). Downward mobbing, which comes from a superior to the subordinate, is the most common type in workplaces (Can, 2007, p. 205; Cemaloğlu & Ertürk, 2008, p. 79; Namie & Namie, 2009, p. 25; Yıldırım & Yıldırım, 2007, p. 1449). Assessing downward mobbing through metropolitan municipality employees and administrators' views sets the objective of this research.

“Most bullying behavior is often a subjective perception and results from the differences in subordinates' and superiors' perspectives” (Ryan, 2006, p. 288). This statement should not be ignored, and we should conduct more research on this problem, because in some cases, actions which are not intended as bullying and mobbing may be regarded as such by employees (Matthiesen & Einarsen, 2007, p. 737).

Population and Sample

The population of the study is subordinates and their superiors of 16 metropolitan municipalities in Turkey. The research data is not sufficient to be able to make generalizations about the whole population of metropolitan municipality employees. A total of 322 participants, 268 subordinates and 54 administrators were reached for the study, which is insufficient to generalize the research data over all metropolitan municipality employees. The municipality that was the selected for this research will be kept confidential and its corporate identity will not be identified in the paper. The employees of the institution were selected by convenience sampling method. In this widely used technique, all those who responded to the survey are included,

because the most available subject is the most ideal one (Altunışık, Coşkun, Bayraktaroğlu, & Yıldırım, 2004, p. 129).

Data Collection and Interpretation

The data of the study was collected by a questionnaire. “Psychological Abuse in the Workplace Scale” which consists of 4 (four) factors (Job Oriented Behaviors, Reputation Impairing Behaviors, Excluding Behaviors and Oral-Written-Visual Attacks) and 28 criteria was used (Tınaz, Gök, & Karatuna, 2010).

Employees were asked to evaluate mobbing, in particular, top to bottom mobbing practices. The administrators were also asked to evaluate the downward mobbing practices in the workplace. Subordinates and superiors were given the same questionnaire; with some differences in the predicates of the statements of the scale.

Findings

Evaluation of Mobbing Behavior by Subordinates and Administrators

17.5% of employees participated in the study expressed they suffer from mobbing in the workplace, while 82.5% reported not being mobbed. The same question was also asked to the administrators and 20.4% of them mentioned that employees experience mobbing. 79.6% of the administrators stated that employees do not experience mobbing.

Employees are most uncomfortable with “being monitored stealthily”. 20.8% of the subordinates participating in the study expressed that their work is monitored in disguise “almost every day”, 10% “twice a week”. The victims of mobbing in regard to this aspect are 80 people, which constitute 30.8% of the total number of participants.

According to the administrators, “being monitored stealthily” is also considered to be the most distressing bullying behavior. 32.1% of administrators expressed this behavior takes place “almost every day”, and for 7.6% of them, the frequency is “twice a week”. The number of victims of this mobbing behavior is 21 (39.7%).

16.4% of the subordinates expressed they were mobbed in the past six months, while, the ratio was 21.2% among the superiors. 7.3% of the subordinates stated that they were exposed to mobbing 1 year ago. 25.2%

of them told that this mobbing behavior lasted for more than 3 months. 23.6% of the administrators indicated that the behavior of mobbing lasted 3 months or more.

31.2% of the employees and 26.4% of the administrators have thought about quitting the institution. Approximately one third of surveyed employees and management personnel want to quit their jobs. 17.8% of surveyed employees' think that mobbing is a routine behavior of the workplace. 23.4% of the administrators assess negative workplace attitudes as routine behaviors.

14.7% of the employees mention that organizational procedures do exist to solve the problems in the workplace, whereas 85.3% of them do not believe there are such procedures. The vast majority of employees in the workplace (49.6%) expressed that administrators solve mobbing issues in the workplace by getting involved in it personally and with the help of their legal powers. When administrators were asked the same question, 40.8% of them stated that they solve the negative behaviors in the workplace personally, but make sure they are fair.

Results and Discussion

Mobbing behaviors were evaluated by both staff and administrators in this study. 17.5% of the subordinates (47 participants), and 20.4% of the superiors (11 participants) expressed that mobbing takes place in the workplace. The ratios of responses given by staff and administrators are close to each other, which means mobbing practices are perceived in a similar manner by both parties. This is an indication of the consistency of the data they have provided.

The number of people who consider themselves as mobbing victims in the last six months is 43, however, according to the administrators this number is 11. It is important to note that these figures are close to those who expressed the existence of mobbing behavior in the workplace.

25.2% of the employees participating in the study mentioned they were exposed to mobbing behavior for more than 3 months. For administrators, this figure is 23.6%.

The number of employees who want to quit the institution is 83, which corresponds to 31.2% of the participants. The ratio of administrators who wish to leave is 26.4% (14 participants). Research data do not point out to

a relation between mobbing and the intention to leave the institution. The reasons for intending to quit are mentioned as “lack of opportunities for promotion and advancement” and “individual career planning”.

The participants were asked whether mobbing behavior that occurs in the institution is a routine of the workplace. 17.8% of the employees and 23.4% of the administrators stated that mobbing is a routine behavior.

Organizations that have not institutionalized, are not managed professionally and lack qualified administrators will be dominated by the individual initiatives of the management. This may lead to subjective practices in the workplace, such as discrimination and favoritism, which will impede merit based performance evaluation of the employees (Aksakal & Kaymakçı, 2008, p. 238-239).

Parameters determining mobbing behavior need to be considered while analyzing employee perceptions in mobbing studies in order to obtain objective data. A study conducted in 2009, among employees in the private sector put forward that 46.1% of the participants see themselves as a victim of psychological bullying (Karavardar, 2009). Similarly, another study among academics in 2008 revealed that 54% of the participants were subjected to, or witnessed psychological violence (Fettahlıoğlu, 2008).

Bullying and mobbing behavior seems unlikely to occur in organizations that value business ethics (Einarsen, 2000, p. 388; Harvey et al., 2008, p. 36). This problem can be solved without disturbing the peace in the workplace with the help of correct findings. Identification of the mobbing behavior should not be only based on employee views, simply asking whether they were exposed to mobbing or not. Mobbing may seriously lead to quitting one’s job, and if the personnel have resigned, it will be too late to help the victims.

Another point that needs emphasizing is mobbing behavior is generally so intense that it cannot simply be considered as a routine of the workplace. An attitude that is regarded as a routine behavior of the workplace is either not mobbing or mobbing that has become a part of the organizational culture, which is really difficult to produce solutions for. The desired solution to the problem requires correct definition and interpretation of the data. In this context, unlike other studies in this area, this study is believed to offer significant contributions to the literature with the data it contains about both subordinates and their superiors.

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