

Psychology of Mobbing as a Form of Conflict in the Workplace: Finding and Testing Project-Based Learning in Students' Education

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Project-based learning has long been used in universities when preparing students. However, project-based technologies are currently being increasingly used in work with students. The authors found various options for the application of these technologies in teaching psychological and pedagogical disciplines. The research aims to determine the practice of implementing project-based learning to provide a deeper practice-oriented understanding of academic disciplines. The authors use a set of methods of theoretical analysis and practical psychological techniques. The authors present the research results in the form of several generalizations. The first one concerns the fact that mobbing has recently become a stable trend in teams; a conflict often manifests itself in the form of mobbing. The study of various organizational cultures and their models shows that the optimal and morally oriented model of organizational culture is the barrier preventing the development of mobbing in the company. The practical application of the developed theory provides methodological support for training a successful specialist.

Keywords: mobbing, conflict form, project-based learning

INTRODUCTION

The labor market and competition are two interrelated concepts. Competition between employees, an individual and a group, or a group with a group always leads to conflicts. Mobbing, as a form of conflict, is increasingly observed. These trends are reflected in practice and scientific works (Duffy & Sperry, 2007).

The authors consider mobbing a form of conflict in the workplace.

The problem of mobbing saw a sharp increase in the current context of the coronavirus pandemic. Many enterprises, companies, and institutions were closed, and some people switched to remote work. Evidently, there was a reduction in staff accompanied by mobbing. Therefore, everyone is trying to keep their job, since it is a natural reaction of a person in extreme conditions.

In terms of our research, we consider this problem as the implementation of project-based learning in teaching university students subjects of the psychological and pedagogical cycle. The goals of project-based learning are (1) to give the knowledge of students a practice-oriented nature and (2) form competencies that will ensure the adaptation of current students to new conditions in the labor market and form the skills for overcoming a crisis (Kubrushko & Kozlenkova, 2019).

The implementation of project-based learning begins with the development of the project itself, selecting a company or an enterprise, where students will diagnose the studied problem and implement the chosen project under the guidance of a teacher (Petruneva, Vasilyeva & Toporkova, 2018).

Based on the pilot study, the authors indicated the problem – the psychology of mobbing as a form of conflict in work collectives. The theoretical study (lecture course) of the disciplines “Psychology of Team Management” and “Psychology and Pedagogy” at the Technical University resulted in the development of a project for the prevention of mobbing in the company. The project includes the following sections:

- Project passport;
- Concept of project activities;
- Methodological support for project implementation;
- Expected results;
- Performance evaluation.

The research goal is to (1) substantiate conceptual ideas about mobbing as a form of conflict behavior in the company. Moreover, during the teaching of noncore disciplines “Psychology of team management” and “Psychology and pedagogy” to students of a technical university, it is necessary to (2) develop a project to prevent mobbing in companies.

The implementation of this goal using traditional technologies will not ensure the training of a professional with the competencies of an effective employee aimed at career growth.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

One of the most effective training methods is practical tasks where students are to identify current problems and find solutions to them based on the research (Lysenko & Nazarova, 2019).

At the stage of conceptual substantiation of the problem, we used the methods of scientific analysis and a systematic approach to studying the indicated problem. The conceptual idea of the project is the vector of mobbing prevention in a particular team.

The prevention strategy is developed when studying the features of conflicts in the company. The prevention of mobbing as a form of conflict in the company includes two components: (1) static and (2) variable (Kovalchuk & Tarkhanova, 2014). In different companies, the preventive measures should be based on the problems of specific people, groups, management, individual psychological features of employees, and the concept of motivating employees.

The mediation component of prevention work is an element used continuously in any company. Mediation is the resolution of an arising conflict with the help of third parties (mediators). Mediators are people not interested in a specific solution to the conflict. A mediator’s role can be performed by a specially trained person (e.g., the psychologist of the company). However, not every company has such a specialist.

Mobbing in a work team is the psychological and emotional abuse of an employee in the team or a group of employees in a given team (Celep & Konakli, 2013).

One can distinguish various reasons for mobbing in current labor relations. These reasons are always associated with specific socio-economic changes.

One of the examples of socio-economic changes is the increase in the retirement age in Russia. This decision certainly led to an increase in mobbing. A contradiction arises: young people need to find a job,

and older people (especially those of pre-retirement age) need to keep their jobs until retirement. Moreover, many retired people continue to work due to several reasons: (1) a small pension insufficient for living on or (2) a fear of being left alone, out of work, and experiencing emotional burnout syndrome. In this case, young specialists have a higher proficiency in technology and a modern information base, whereas older people have significant practical experience.

In a pandemic, the younger generation turned out to be more mobile and quickly mastered remote forms of work. The aggressiveness of the older generation toward younger workers increased, reinforcing mobbing tendencies in the workplace (De Clercq, Haq & Azeem, 2019).

One more reason is the aggravation of such personal qualities as hystericalness and aggressiveness, depression, and propensity towards the conflict in extreme and stressful situations. Nowadays, global society faces a pandemic of coronavirus infection.

A very significant cause of mobbing as a form of conflict in the workplace is the desire of employees for personal career growth. In almost every organization, when hired, a person is told about career opportunities. It is considered an important motivating factor. Many employees seek advancement by any means available. In this case, the easiest way is mobbing.

At all times, mobbing was manifested in the workplace due to the incompetence of some employees and the professionalism of others.

Current realities, labor market requirements for the employee, and the value system of people change. Therefore, new reasons can be added to the existing reasons for mobbing. Moreover, new reasons can strengthen or minimize old reasons.

The next stage of the project is diagnostics. This stage uses the methods of interrogation, observation, and testing. Testing was aimed at identifying the atmosphere of conflict in the team and the predisposition of individuals to create conflict situations in the form of mobbing. For this purpose, we use the following methods (Nadezhdina, 2013):

- Methodology “Value Orientations” by M. Rokich;
- Bassa-Darkey questionnaire;
- Questionnaire by K. Thomas.

Regardless of the field of activity, a modern professional must have an idea of psychological diagnostics (Salakhova, Sokolovskaya, Ulyanova, Karina & Terekhova, 2019). Nowadays, psychological testing is mandatory in most organizations when hiring. When problems arise in the team, the head must be able to identify the causes and determine their basis. These reasons often lie in the personality traits of the employee. There are psychologists in some organizations, but in the current economic situation, the workplace is more likely to be left to a production employee than a psychologist. In practical classes in psychological and pedagogical disciplines, our students develop competencies in psychological diagnostics, analysis, and interpretation of the obtained results. They define the range of problems existing in a particular team and the ways to solve them.

Everyone in the labor market wants to find a job that best satisfies them. This is axiomatic, but not everyone understands that other specialists are also striving to satisfy their professional needs and find a job that will allow a person to feel comfortable.

One of the problems identified during the diagnostics of many teams was the problem of mobbing as a form of conflict in the organization (Gates, 2004a; 2004b). A frequent reason for this phenomenon is the lack of such quality as a tolerance among workers. During our research, conducted in 2020 in various organizations of the Yaroslavl region, we interviewed 315 people from 6 organizations aged 26–57. The predominant part of the sample is women aged 30–35. The sample is representative since it reflects the main features of the general population from which it was made. Only 12% of the sample (9% of them are male representatives aged 45 to 57 years) were distinguished by such characteristics as a tolerant perception of colleagues. The next conclusion concerns the understanding of tolerance – 63% of the sample correlated this quality with the concept of patience.

Thus, the problem of mobbing affects the issue of tolerant perception of colleagues in their work collective.

The issues of tolerance are a systemic problem that requires an independent study. In our research, we suggest that the management of the company or organization can establish tolerant relationships within the team as the values and mission of the organization.

The next stage is the actual development of the project and its implementation in a particular organization and a particular team.

We held several four-hour trainings. During these trainings, we discussed the following problems:

- Effective communication in a work collective;
- Team forms of work;
- Influence of the group on human behavior;
- Tolerant communication in a team.

The final stage was the assessment of the obtained results. It was provided by the method of expert assessment. For this method, we developed the following systems:

- Ten-point scale for employees of the organization showing the dynamics of changes in relationships in the team;
- Ten-point scale reflecting changes in the competencies of students formed during educational activities.

The final event is the presentation of their project by a student group in the organization in which it was implemented.

RESULTS

One small article will not describe the fullness of the results obtained over the years of research on the problem of mobbing as a form of conflict in the labor collective and the implementation of project-based learning of students in technical universities. During our research, we performed the following tasks:

- We conducted surveys of various groups of the population;
- We studied value orientation and its features depending on gender, age, place of residence, and direction of training;
- We identified the manifestation of aggressiveness of various age groups;
- We studied and generalized the models of the organizational culture of institutions and organizations of various profiles.

Research results are presented in various publications, scientific journals, and the work cited in the references list (Kovalchuk et al., 2014).

According to the research results, mobbing as a form of conflict in a team has a recent tendency to increase. The main reasons are as follows:

- The desire to keep a job (age group of 50 years and above) (to a greater extent, manifestations of this tendency are observed in female teams);
- The tendency to strive for career advancement by any means (age group of 25–40 years) (no difference by gender).

Over the past three months, against the background of the epidemic of coronavirus infection in Russia, we registered a sharp increase in the population's aggressiveness and the growth of mobbing tendencies in professional activities and social life, without regard to gender and age.

A preliminary pilot study identified the following groups of individuals:

- Individuals with a high level of personality neuroticism, emotional disturbances, and high levels of situational anxiety manifesting various fears (the main of which is the fear of getting infected);
- People adequately assessing the situation and striving to learn how to live and work under new conditions;
- People ignoring the situation. The opportunity not to work causes satisfaction. They perceive life as a "holiday," especially when someone from the family ensures providing life support.

The next generalization concerns the change in the attitude of students to (1) the process of mastering academic disciplines, (2) the formation of competencies that ensure the adaptation of the graduate to the new and rapidly changing conditions of the labor market, (3) the acquisition of skills and abilities to conduct research work, and (4) the ability to build teamwork strategies based on the results of psychological diagnostics.

Working in practical classes in companies, students acquire certain competencies themselves and provide changes in work teams, forming the moral-value potential of the team as a neutralizing barrier to negative external influences. As noted by the students, significant changes can be observed after training on the tolerant perception of colleagues and the surrounding reality. Team members develop an understanding of tolerance as an acceptance of the right of the other to equal opportunities to realize their potential.

Therefore, effective organizational culture is reflected in the values and mission of the organization, which should be known and implemented in the professional activities of each employee, starting with the leaders of the organization and ending with the service personnel. The values of the organization must be based on the generally accepted values of the cultural environment in which the professional life of the organization takes place. As a key position, the mission should include the formation of the ability of employees to work in a team with minimized conflicts and denied mobbing.

The scientific novelty of research on the psychology of mobbing as a form of conflict in a work team lies in developing the conceptual foundations of mobbing as a form of conflict and methodological support for the training of a successful employee.

DISCUSSION

Changes in the socio-economic conditions of public life primarily entail transformations in the field of education. The methods and content of teaching have always been of concern to scholars and practitioners (Kubrushko et al., 2019). The use of project-based learning is a very relevant practice in education. The project-based learning itself already has a certain history of development.

We presented the results of our research and approbation of the implementation of this technology in the practice of teaching students of the Yaroslavl State Technical University in teaching the disciplines of the psychological and pedagogical cycle provided by the Department of Professional Education.

CONCLUSION

Summing up the results of our research on the implementation of project-based learning for teaching university students in solving a specific practical problem included in the range of issues studied by the disciplines of the psychological and pedagogical cycle, we would like to emphasize that without diminishing the importance of traditional teaching technologies, the process of educational activity should be focused on the more widespread use of technologies that develop the independence of students and form the skills of team activity aimed at a specific result and the ability to present this result and reflect on the achievements and mistakes.

At the current stage of the development of higher education, an important issue is a problem of finding new variants for the implementation of technologies proven by experience. One of these technologies is the technology of project-based learning, which we used in the training of students based on the study and solution of one of the key problems exacerbated in institutions and companies of various profiles, the problem of mobbing in labor collectives as a form of conflict.

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