

Cross-Cultural Contextualization of Mobbing among Turkish and German Organizations

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Extended Abstract

Definition

Mobbing has been defined as a chronic asymmetric pattern of power relations and a consequent conflict transformed into a systematic discrimination or mistreatment at workplace which is expressed through unethical or aggressive communication and behavior (Leyman, 1996). While mobbing has both psychological and legal implications, it is a problematic concept related to organizational culture and socialization processes, which is based on norms as well as perceptions of employees.

The legal definition by the International Labor Organization (ILO) also states that mobbing is qualified as (Öke & Yüçetürk; 2005):“Offensive behavior through vindictive, cruel, malicious or humiliating attempts to undermine an individual or group of employees ... It involves ganging up on or ‘mobbing’ a targeted employee and subjecting that person to psychological harassment. Mobbing includes constant negative remarks or criticisms, isolating a person from social contacts and gossiping or spreading false information.”

Purpose

This empirical research intends to develop a conceptual understanding of perceived causes for mobbing, in particular impact of cultural factors as well as workplace policies established and enforced in a developing and developed country framework. To achieve this, the exploratory study compares preliminary data collected in Turkish and German work contexts.

Design / methodology / approach

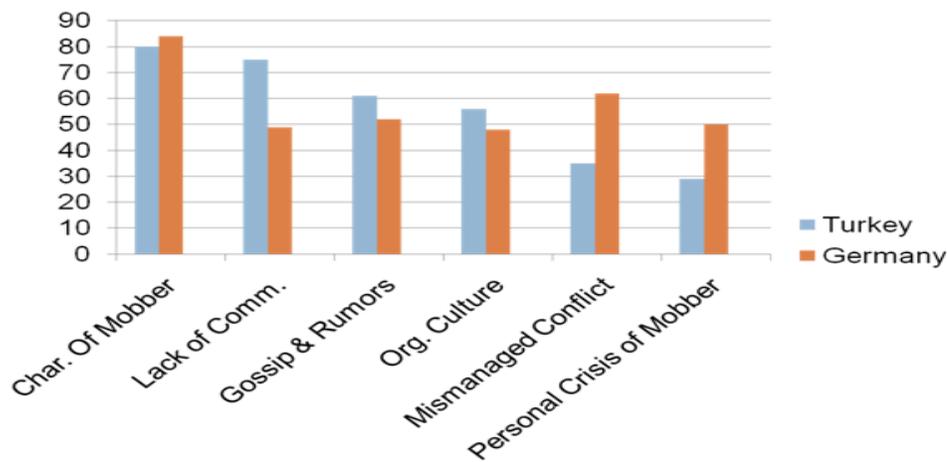
This mixed method design first explores factors impacting the perception of reasons for mobbing based on semi-structured interviews with HR managers, then follows up with a cross-sectional survey, collecting data through scaling and open-ended questions in the work context of both settings.

The questionnaire used was developed based on the prior empirical research employing negative indicators (see the Table 1) and adapted according to our preliminary findings from the interviews. Through indirect negative indicators, examining the extent of mobbing and the cultural antecedents of mobbing among respondents were targeted. The participants were requested to complete a questionnaire with 25 questions comprising of 2 sections.

The first section was about the demographic characteristics of the respondents (e.g. gender, age, position, tenure). The second section included a series of questions on the three aspects of mobbing such as social isolation, extreme demands, and discrediting dimensions like negative gossiping along with a few questions that indirectly address mobbing. A few open-ended questions were either about the general organizational climate *as is* or were hypothetical questions on mobbing such as “what do you think are the root causes of mobbing” (if your colleague was facing such a situation). The five Likert scale between “none to often” was employed for all other questions.

Findings

Preliminary results imply perceived differences in occurrence of mobbing to be rooted in several factors, predominantly the establishment of workplace and employment laws and policies, but also cultural dimensions, in particular power distance, individualism and competencies such as teamwork, conflict management and coping with uncertainty. Additionally, the handling of rumours, open communication culture, and conflict management abilities seem to have an impact on the existence and frequency of mobbing in work contexts.



In Turkey an anonymous paper survey was conducted in a media company, where 77 employees out of 219 responded the questionnaire. In Germany, the survey was conducted online via www.surveymonkey.com by placing it with a convenience sample of different industries, such as media communication, public administration, higher education, defense, service, and producing industry, retail, and IT. While 157 questionnaires were completed, only 119 were filled out by participants being governed by German labor law, which therefore were the only ones considered.

Originality / Value

While there is little research on mobbing in Turkey, the culture comparative field of mobbing also is new research terrain for both nations-particularly Turkey. When cultural differences in the perceived occurrence of mobbing are explored, new approaches and policies to prevent the occurrence of mobbing can be developed.

Discussion on Research Limitations and Implications for Further Studies

The exploratory, mostly descriptive findings are based on convenience samples and need to be further developed and ultimately extended into more thorough research. Additionally, data collection differed, since paper questionnaires were used in one nation, and the other data was collected online.

For further research, the direction of cultural dimensions as well as the concept of “loose” versus “tight” culture may be explored, since German employees seem to have tighter consensus on norms and conformity as compared to Turkish ones despite the fact that both cultures seem to avoid uncertainty. Likewise, the formalized work policies and processes might be considered as important contextual factors to be further researched. Further studies can probe into the details of the differences of antecedents of mobbing in developing versus developed countries and divergent policies or practices.

In sum, while organizational silencing might also demand transformation of organizational culture and structure along with preventive policies and training, in an organizational culture where whistle blowing and other democratic rights of employees are appropriate, solely preventive policies and training which will enhance awareness and responsibility would suffice.

Selected References

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