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TOXIC LABOUR RELATIONS: A NARRATIVE CASE STUDY

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Abstract

The dominating trend in the labour sphere development today is a social pollution from the economic activities of companies, which has a negative impact on labour relations. Reducing the social pollution level is hampered by the lack of scientifically grounded information and methodological support for monitoring, analysing and evaluating the social pollution factors and processes. The purpose of this research is identifying through an in-depth study the types and forms of toxic labour relations in countries with different economic models, as well as the development of new concepts and management tools for meeting the challenges of the decline of the social pollution level. In order to identify the scope and characteristics of toxic labour relations, a long-term monitoring study using quantitative and qualitative methods, including narrative analysis was conducted. In 2015–2017 toxic labour relations were examined in separate countries. Based on the results of the comparative analysis of narratives collected in the countries under study, factors of social pollution of the labour sphere in the part of labour relations between employers, managers and employees were identified, and the cause-effect relationships between toxic HRM practices and employees' well-being were investigated. Perception and evaluative judgments of the informants allowed the researchers to get an understanding of the qualitative characteristics of the toxic labour relations.

Keywords: Social pollution, toxic labour relations, employees' well-being, narrative analysis.

1. Introduction

Social pollution is an insufficiently explored phenomenon which occurs in the new reality of labour relations. Modern literature describes the results of a large number of quantitative and qualitative studies on various aspects of the labor sphere, which have an adverse effect on workers, their psychosocial well-being and physical health. Nevertheless, from the point of view of the concept of social pollution, they all have a mosaic character. This attempts to formulate a system of views on this phenomenon.

For this purpose, in our previous work, we developed a classification of social pollution factors as a set of causal components of a decline in the level of welfare and deterioration of the physical and psychosocial well-being of labour resources as a result of internal and external activities of companies.

1.1. Investigation of toxicity at work

In the toxic workplace concept, the terminology of toxicity is used not only for harmful working conditions, but also for characterizing the unfavourable psychosocial aspects of the work environment (Macklem, 2005, Kusy & Holloway, 2009). Numerous publications are devoted to various characteristics of toxic leadership (Frost & Robinson, 1999, Lipman-Blumen, 2005, Goldman, 2009) and toxic personnel (Sue, 2007, Lubit, 2008, Claybourn, 2010). Much research is dedicated to stress in the workplace (Colligan & Higgins, 2005, Blaug, et al., 2007, Mazzola, et al., 2011), the causes of which are related to the toxicity of the organizational environment, which, in turn, is formed not only because of the presence of toxic workplaces, toxic managers and toxic personnel in companies, but also as a result of the use of toxic HRM practices (Gatti, 2014).

1.2. Precarious employment

The phenomena of precarious employment, precarity, precarious work (Kalleberg, 2012, Kalleberg & Hewison, 2013), as well as the precariat referring to the precariazed working class (Standing, 2011) in recent decades are being actively studied by scientists from different countries. Precarious employment is conjugated with a process of deterioration of working conditions, reducing wages, cutting social guarantees, etc. The concept of "precarity" is characterized by a set of unfavourable conditions for the existence of employees in the labour relations that contribute to a decline in the quality of their working life. In the designation of non-standard and unstable forms of employment without social guarantees, the concept of "precarious work" is used, and employees who carry out their professional activities in the precarious work conditions belong to the class stratum called "precariat".

We consider the precarious employment and the toxicity of the work environment as a combination of the system-forming factors of social pollution (Fedorova, et al., 2017).

2. Problem Statement

Despite the presence of a large number of publications devoted to the above issues, they cover only certain aspects of a large-scale phenomenon identified by Pfeffer as social pollution (Pfeffer, 2010). We not only share this point of view, but also consider precarious labour relations and the work

environment toxicity as a totality of system factors of social pollution from economic activities of businesses.

3. Research Questions

We have divided all toxic factors at work into objective and subjective on the principle of separation of objective and subjective elements in its original determination.

The objective toxic factors include: 1) form of the employment relationship with the employer; 2) terms of the employment relationship with the employer; 3) form of monetary remuneration; 4) personnel policy of the company; 5) infringement of the agreements by the employer. Objective factors are external and they do not depend on the wishes, needs and attitudes of the employees.

Among the subjective toxic factors we have identified are: 1) the deterioration of personal well-being of the employees; 2) anxiety and negative emotions in the workplace; 3) potential threats to the future of the current work; 4) the need to perform above permitted standard functions additionally for saving their workplaces.

Thus, the questions under examination at this stage of our on-going study are linked with investigation of the cause-effect relationships between toxic HRM practices and employees' well-being. Perception and evaluative judgments of the informants allow us to obtain an understanding of the qualitative characteristics of the toxic labour relations.

4. Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of our long-term scientific and practical activities in the direction of monitoring the labour sphere transformation, as well as the social pollution factors from economic activities of businesses that have a negative impact on the labour resources' wellbeing, is to develop management approaches to solving problems of social pollution of the labour sphere.

The purpose of this paper is to present an in-depth study of the forms of toxic labour relations in countries with different economic models. Based on the results of the comparative analysis of narratives collected in the countries under study, we identify the social pollution factors in the labour relations between employers, managers and employees, as well as investigate the cause-effect relationships between toxic HRM-practices and employees' well-being.

5. Research Methods

In order to identify the scope and characteristics of toxic labour relations, a long-term monitoring study using quantitative and qualitative methods was carried out. Among the qualitative methods used was narrative analysis used within our on-going monitoring study. The significance of this method is beyond doubt in the development of theoretical and methodological approaches to the social pollution concept. In all countries under study we used the three-phase scheme of a narrative interview.

5.1. Three-phase scheme of a narrative interview

1) The phase of narration: the researcher formulates an "initiating formula" that is a question prompting the respondent to tell a story. It should be a clear, understandable and non-directive question.

The sample of an initiating formula is: *"We kindly ask you to tell us the story from your labour activity, focusing on the events, relationships, circumstances, that ever occurred in your workplace that caused you negative emotions and even influenced your future professional activity."*

2) The phase of narrative questions: the interviewer returns to the respondent's history in order to ask clarifying questions to get a more detailed narrative about various circumstances. Questions that are asked at this phase can be combined by a common narrative formula: *"Could you tell me more about your feelings/thoughts/sensations…"*

3) Analytical phase: in the final part of the interview, the respondent is invited to take the position of an "outsider" regarding his own story where he/she can interpret, analyse, evaluate, and explain causes and effects.

5.2. Sample and form of result of narrative interviews

For this study, 17 people were interviewed: 12 women and 5 men from countries under study. The interviewees worked in different spheres of the economy: education, sales, banking, services, logistics, and transport. Interviews with each respondent took about 40 minutes.

The texts were slightly processed: questions and stories on abstract topics were cut out. However, the narrative style and logic remained unchanged and unformatted in order not to lose the essence of the narrative.

6. Findings

The paper presents the best examples of the narratives we selected, recorded during the interviewing of the workers involved in our research.

6.1. Narrative examples of the Czech interviewees

In all narratives of the interviewees from the Czech Republic there is information about the various forms of destructive relationships with leaders. There are also complaints about the toxic work environment and bad relationships with colleagues.

Jana, 45, a senior lecturer, university: "*I have a full-time employment contract and guaranteed wages... I defended PhD thesis ten years ago, and my professional plan is to apply for the associate professorship... Despite the fact, that I achieved all criteria published on the faculty websites for becoming an associate professor (docent), the head of my department rejected my application three times during last two years arguing that there are others, including him, who the faculty officials perceive as more perspective for the faculty HR strategy. The situation creates my demotivation to do research at this department and even to stay with the university as other universities in the location search for new staff and provide at least the similar working and wage conditions.*"

Alice, 31, a call operator, logistics services: "*I worked for one year as an operator in a call centre of a multinational company that provides payment services and ticketing for logistics enterprises... Data of my performance documented that the performance was 20 % higher than others in the team. Above all, I could substitute my colleagues in the team on different positions. After several negative and public discussions about team performance, I decided to leave. When leaving, I said about the reason of this decision that I had to work more than others in the team and I finished tasks of others. Even though, I always got a negative feedback in front of others at all meetings. My relations with some team members gradually worsened so I had feelings of a daily aversion against my person and lost motivation to continue in such an unfriendly atmosphere. For several months after leaving, I learnt that it was not officially announced by the subsidiary management for several weeks and people thought that I had a long-term illness. In a chat, I wrote that this leave was a necessity but I was satisfied with job and the company and disappointed with the interpersonal relations at the workplace and behaviour of the supervisor.*"

Václav, 38, a customer service specialist: "*I worked in a customer service department... Before, I worked in sales department of this company. After the departure of two colleagues in customer services I asked for a relocation, although my job position worsened, my salary was cut and I lost provisions for sales... The main reason why I wanted to change the department was my supervisor in sales... The HR department at the regional headquarters started to interview online employees in sales asking for any other positions in the company or even leaving the company. The focus was on why and when these employees wanted to change the position or the employer... My supervisor began to pay attention to me as I am direct and open, willing to publicly speak and given feedback. Our relations worsened but I was not his disciplinary subordinate. The moment he became my supervisor, he focused on me and he negatively evaluated me among others. The atmosphere at a workplace was negative and the mentioned manager searched for the proper time to fire me. He explained this decision that I had a long-time insufficient performance and bad communication with others. When I read later about toxic leadership and psychopaths at workplaces, then I realized that I could not be successful to master situations by suggesting any solutions as the head was emotionally programmed against me and wanted to have rights in any cases.*"

Mirek, 38, a shop-floor manager, logistics: "*I have a full-time employment contract and have been working with the company for two years... Based on my good performance and an excellent supervisor′s recommendation I was promoted in 12 months... Nowadays my wages include a guaranteed wage (per the pay grade) and bonuses that depend on three KPIs. The first KPI is sales/turnover, the second one is stock results, i.e. the volume of income and expediture, and the last one is the quality of the work, i.e. the number of complaints. The number of complaints increased by 20 % in each half of year. As I feel responsible for the employer reputation and want to perform well, I suggested a plan how to improve the quality of the work and reduce the number of complaints. I went to the boss – head of the stock and asked him for monitoring workplaces, doing interviews with key workers and providing me official statistics about at which workplaces mistakes are more numerous than others. I was planning to solve it above my working time, i.e. to analyse reasons of mistakes, to do informal interviews with colleagues who are interested in the improvement of the quality and consult prospective measures with other departments in*

the company. During this period my disciplinary supervisor had a long-term illness and a temporary boss rejected to deal with my plan with the argument – it is time and cost consuming matter and I am not competent to solve this... After a few talks with the supervisor about my future, I decided to leave."

6.2. Narrative examples of the Polish interviewees

Polish interviewees shared their negative experiences of destructive behaviour not only with their leaders, but also with their own toxic behaviour in the workplace.

Joanna, 28, a specialist-junior private banker, bank: "*I really enjoyed my work, was number one amongst sales persons, I know that some people were jealous... One day I wrote in my electronic diary that I am going to meet with a client outside the bank in a shopping mall. My boss checked with the client if I met with her. The client said that there was no meeting on that date with Joanna. It was true, I lied. Coming back to work, my boss asked me how was the meeting I told it was fine and presented a broad overview how it went. My boss told me that I had lied and he can't imagine cooperating with me anymore. I submitted a denunciation at work. I learnt a hard lesson. I knew I will never be able to ask my former boss for references. I really regret it, I was angry and disappointed with myself. Did I learn? Yes, of course.*"

Agnes, 40, a HR-manager, transport: "*I started to work in HR department for a company that offered bus connection between city centres and airport. I loved my job, especially as the business was a new one. I have been taking part in building a company from scratch with the owner…. I regarded the company as it was mine. I was happy and fulfilled professionally. It started unexpectedly when my boss was becoming less and less happy with my work. Complaining that he is not pleased with my work, when I asked what I should change, he answered just everything. This was not a concrete answer. I started not to feel welcome anymore. He was adding that my salary is too high as well. One day he came and just simply told me that he did not need me anymore, and he would like to find someone to whom he would pay less. You know how I felt? Like rubbish…*"

Ryszard, 55, a research and development director, brewery company: "*... throughout the 22 years... I worked several hours a day, I have not been seeking for a "pretty" name for my position, I did not care whether the tasks I was performing have been formally within the scope of my duties or not. I just wanted to be useful, to earn my salary, to push the company forward, to see how the company grows and enters new markets. I identified with it seriously. I regarded is as my own company. Somehow I did not think that I will leave a company. The motto of my actions was to act on the basis of hard knowledge, consistency, logic and team work activities. The owner had a different vision for managing the company so we parted in an atmosphere of mutual understanding. How did I feel? I was disappointed and very sad. I spent so many years in the company and the owner, boss let me go like this…*"

6.3. Narrative examples of the Latvian interviewees

The people interviewed in Latvia relate mainly to describing the characteristics of the toxicity of the work environment and working conditions. One of the narratives reflects the anxiety of the interviewee about the instability and uncertainty of the future in work.

Antra, 51, a teacher and vice-director, secondary school: "*I enjoy working at school even it is rather stressful. Recently I have stopped seeing as meaningful some of the activities I am obliged to do– not because of pupils, but because of increasing bureaucracy and pressure from the Ministry. This is the reason the level of satisfaction with my work has dropped. Everything is changing so quickly, nothing is stable. Schools are being required to develop new documentary too often, the requirements change but the changes are not justified and not thoroughly thought out. The majority of time in such circumstances is not devoted to the education of youth, but to managing piles of useless papers. The atmosphere at work is acceptable, but only until the moment I cannot justify the colleagues' expectations, i.e., when following legislation I am required to reduce their workloads. Teachers have an unstable future. There is the so called "money follows the pupil" financial model in Latvia, but since there are fewer pupils every study year teachers never know how big their loads will be when beginning a new school year. The future scares many, no stability.*"

Elizabete, 43, a researcher, university: "*I have been working at the university for about 20 years. Nevertheless, the last couple of years have been very dramatic and stressful; besides the unstable economic situation in the country, there is a sick work environment and the unwillingness or impossibility of the administration to deal with existing and flourishing bossing and mobbing issues. The situation is dramatic; people leave work feeling tired and unable to manage with emotional and psychological pressure. Many prefer their emotional wellbeing instead of constant manipulations. There are also ever-growing demands, cuts in salary, overwork, sleepless nights, and instability. It is not easy to work at the university; one must be competitive. We can never relax as we are re-elected every six years, but recently professionalism of the employee is not being seen as the main criterion anymore. Only marionettes are needed, for this reason some are willing to sell the soul to the devil... I often ask myself if I really want to have such work and life for the rest of my life or it's high time to change something. Even though the salary is too low for such high demands, I would like to continue doing what I do. But the work environment is hardly bearable – it's very sad that in a higher educational establishment there is a lack of ethical and moral values of some employees who are able to influence general environment and spread fear by manipulating and lying.*"

Irina, 23, a teacher, secondary school: "*Working in a small private company as a manager I faced some situations which caused negative emotions. These situations were mainly connected with the tight deadlines at work. Almost every week I received a task that had to be completed in a short period of time. To meet the deadlines, I had to continue my work being at home. Moreover, I was not paid for those extra hours of work. That is why I was constantly experiencing stress and feeling the pressure. Later I noticed that such situations at work affect my relationships and private life. After some time, I decided to change the job and became a secondary school teacher.*"

6.4. Narrative examples of the Italian interviewees

The narratives of the Italian interviewees contain a variety of information on the negative experience of work under a high level of toxicity in management, work environment and working conditions, as well as concern about their professional future.

Flavio, 41, security service: *"The negative aspects at my workplace are various. The first one is the behaviour of managers and coordinators. They do not have the minimum respect for the employees. The managers promise different things and do not keep their promises, respect none of the agreements. They managers only demand without giving anything to the personnel. They make you work like a madman, with no prospects for the future. The dialogue between the company and the employees is non-existent ... There is a lousy environment with low level of safety, hygiene and comfort. Human and labour rights do not exist in the company. The company does not give space to the needs of workers, does not guarantee the full safety of the employees. Very hot workplaces with a huge number of insects are in the summer, and very cold workstations are in the winter. No protection and no warranty... Also, the wages are too low…"*

Bianca, 35, supermarket: *"Hours of work are bad organised. Extra hours are not paid. I was hired for a part-time work, but actually, I work many more hours, so that my work can almost be considered as full-time work. The amazing thing is that I do not have corresponding remuneration... The managers are unable to manage both work commitments and people… They use employees up to make them feel bad, without acknowledging their work. A lot of work must be done in a very short time, and personnel are missing. Working days are stressful and full of physical efforts. The work environment is unpleasant and hostile. Colleagues, instead of helping you, try to command and control you, fearing that you will steal their place of work. A pause for a coffee or bathroom does not exist. If you work on a cash desk, you have to close it to be able to drink a drop of water. You cannot do it there on your work place, but you have to hide from the eyes of the buyers."*

Daniela, 31, education: *"Negative emotions caused mainly by instability and insecurity. Employment contracts are for 1-3 years with no certainty where you will be after this period. Very difficult requirements are from the management without providing the necessary conditions for the results achievement. Lack of funds and time to perform the required indicators related to research activity. There are strong competition and rivalry, sometimes crossing the boundaries of common sense. Hostile atmosphere and very strong sense of individualism there are in the workplace."*

6.5. Narrative examples of the Russian interviewees

A distinctive feature of Russian narratives is presence of information about infringements by managers of their promises and obligations towards employees. Interviewees also point out problems in their relationships with colleagues, poor working conditions and their own destructive behaviour in the workplace.

Olga, 24, an assistant, university: *"Working the first year, as an assistant, I decided that you need to listen to authorities and try to please. Once, the deputy dean asked me to put an assessment to two "very necessary and good" students. I put it and with a sense of "fulfilled duty" continued to work. The next day, 8-10 students came to the dean with the question of why two of their classmates, who had never been in class, had already scored, and they called my name. The deputy dean refused to admit what she had asked me to do. I was shocked by the betrayal and my own irresponsibility. The dean called me and demanded an explanation. Disassembly lasted all day. I was accused of unfairness towards students. I was terribly hurt and ashamed of that fact ..."*

Elena, 41, a deputy director, transport company: "*During hiring interview with a manager, a specific salary was stipulated for me. Later it was found out that two-thirds of wages were official, and the rest was handed out unofficially. What was my perplexity and indignation when, upon receiving the first salary, I learned that the amount of the income tax from the official salary should be returned personally to the director. The director explained this by saying that he does not want to pay for the tax on workers. He also said that he was feeding his staff for free. Indeed, the company organized lunches, but there was no lunch break. Everyone should have had a quick dinner in 10-15 minutes; it was strictly forbidden to stay longer in the canteen!*"

Maria, 22, a shop assistant, perfumes store: "*After the interview, I was sent to a two-day internship. After the end of the internship, the store director said that she does not need employees at all. Outcome: free work and time lost! But later I got a call from this store and they offered me a job. The schedule of work should be 2/2, but in fact often had to work on the schedule 3/1. All day long was on feet! The director did not let us go to dinner or even just sit. The female team is evil! Colleagues constantly gossiped, reported to the director, who often unreasonably scolded in an abusive manner. All the time they threatened that at any time they can deprive us bonuses. The last straw was that we were forced ourselves to buy back the goods that are poorly sold. In the end, after working for 3 years, I left this store and I am very happy!*"

Aleksandr, 22, an administrator, beauty salon: "*At the beginning of my work in the salon everything was great, without any embarrassments and conflicts. Three months later I was pushed to clean the salon and to do many other things that were not prescribed in my employment contract. When I wanted to quit, I was not paid for a long time for the work that I had already done. On my warnings that in case of non-payment of wages, I will complain to the labour inspection, I heard only threats and rudeness in response. I really had to apply to the labour inspectorate, and only after that I was paid the money I earned.*"

6.6. Interpretation of narrative analysis results

Analysis of narratives we obtained in different countries is based on the elicitation in each text of discourses that are close in meaning. The concept of "discourse" in modern linguistics is closest in meaning to the concepts of "text" and "dialogue". Therefore, under the discourse in this case, we understand the linked text, combined specific thematic content. The grouping of similar discourses allows us to identify some toxicity factors in the workplace, which are the main reasons for the interviewees' sufferings.

Table 01. Semantic interpretations in narrative analysis, frequency in interviewees' answers, %

Rating (%)	Interpretation of discourses	Toxic factors at work
1 (58.8)	*Lack of support of employees in their aspirations:* "…the head of my department rejected my application three times during last two years…" "…the temporary boss has rejected to deal with my plan…" *Destructive relationship "supervisor – employee":* "… I was satisfied with job and the company and disappointed with …	Toxic leadership

68	behaviour of the supervisor" "The main reason why I wanted to change the department was my supervisor in sales..." "The owner had a different vision for managing the company so we parted in an atmosphere of mutual understanding." "It started unexpectedly when my boss was becoming less and less happy with my work… One day he came and just simply told me that he did not need me anymore…" *Disrespectful and/or unethical attitude of a leader to subordinates:* "…the head was emotionally programmed against me…" "The first one is the behaviour of managers and coordinators. They do not have the minimum respect for the employees." "… director… often unreasonably scolded in an abusive manner. All the time they threatened that at any time they can deprive us bonuses." *Professional incompetence of leaders*: "The managers are unable to manage both work commitments and people…"	
2 (35.3)	*Stress and psychosocial tension in the workplace*: "…the last couple of years have been very dramatic and stressful… there is a sick work environment and the unwillingness or impossibility of the administration to deal with existing and flourishing bossing and mobbing issues… people leave work feeling tired and unable to manage with emotional and psychological pressure." "…the work environment is hardly bearable, it's very sad…" "…I was constantly experiencing stress and feeling the pressure." "…Working days are stressful and full of physical efforts. The work environment is unpleasant and hostile." "The atmosphere at a workplace was negative… " *Excessive competition between employees*: "…Strong competition and rivalry, sometimes crossing the boundaries of common sense. Hostile atmosphere and very strong sense of individualism in the workplace…"	Toxic work environment
3 (29.4)	*Excessive workload*: "I faced some situations … were mainly connected with the tight deadlines at work… I had to continue my work being at home. Moreover, I was not paid for those extra hours of work." *Adverse hygienic working conditions, infringement of sanitary norms*: "There is a lousy environment… Very hot workplaces with a huge number of insects in the summer, and very cold workstations in the winter. No protection and no warranty..." *Irrational organization of working time*: "Hours of work are bad organised…" "The schedule of work should be 2/2, but in fact often had to work on the schedule 3/1. All day long was on feet! The director did not let us go to dinner or even just sit." *The requirement to perform work in excess of official duties*: "…director began to demand that I perform work that was not part of my administrative duties…"	Toxic working conditions
4 (17.6)	*Hostile attitude from colleagues:* "I had to work more than others in the team… I always got a negative feedback in front of others… I had feelings a daily aversion against my person… I was… disappointed with the interpersonal relations at the	Toxic relationships with co-workers

	workplace..." "…there is a lack of ethical and moral values of some employees who are able to influence general environment and spread fear by manipulating and lying…" *Lack of support and assistance from colleagues*: "Colleagues, instead of help you, try to command and control you, fearing that you will steal their place of work." *Unethical behaviour of colleagues in the workplace:* "The female team is evil! Colleagues constantly gossiped, reported to the director..."	
5 (17.6)	*Cheating in the payment of monetary remuneration to employees*: "…What was my perplexity and indignation when, upon receiving the first salary, I learned that the amount of the income tax from the official salary should be returned personally to the director." "…I was not paid for a long time for the work that I had already done." *Deception in hiring process*: "…After the interview, I was sent to a two-day internship. After the end of the internship, the store director said that she does not need employees at all. Outcome: free work and time lost!"	Infringement by employers of their promises and obligations towards employees
6 (11.8)	*Sufferings about the future due to lack of guaranteed long-term employment:* "Teachers have unstable future… The future scares many, no stability." "…Negative emotions caused mainly by instability and insecurity. Employment contracts are for 1-3 years with no certainty where you will be after this period."	Uncertainty about the future
6 (11.8)	*Destructive behaviour in the workplace*: "My boss told me that I lied and he can't imagine cooperating with me anymore… I really regret it; I was angry and disappointed with myself." "…I was shocked by the betrayal and my own irresponsibility... I was terribly hurt and ashamed of the fact that I so framed myself."	Toxic personnel

The semantic interpretation of the interviewees' discourses allows us to get a picture about the forms of expression of various toxic factors at work, that have a negative impact on the psychosocial well-being and even the state of physical health of workers.

The following table shows how the accents were distributed in the narratives of interviewees from different countries.

Table 02. Distribution of information on toxic factors at work in the interviewees' narratives in countries under study, number of mentions

Toxic factors at work	Czech Republic	Poland	Latvia	Italia	Russia
Toxic leadership	4	2	-	2	-
Toxic work environment	1	-	2	3	-
Toxic working conditions	-	-	1	2	1
Toxic relationships with co-workers	1	-	-	-	1
Infringement by employers of their promises and obligations towards employees	-	-	-	-	2
Uncertainty about the future	-	-	1	1	-
Toxic personnel	-	1	-	-	1

7. Conclusion

7.1. Rating of the toxic factors at work

Using the method of narrative analysis as one of the qualitative research methods of our on-going long-term monitoring project, we have received some empirical estimates of toxic factors at work.

- The first place in the rating by the number of interviewees' mentions belongs to such factor toxic leadership, which is characterized by the lack of support from the leaders, destructive relationships between employees and supervisors, disrespectful and unethical behaviour of managers towards subordinates, and professional incompetence of managers.

- The second place in the ranking is the toxic work environment, which is formed due to the presence of stress and psychological strain in the workplace, as well as excessive competition between employees.

- Toxic working conditions are on the third place of the rating; they are associated with excessive workload, unfavourable hygienic working conditions, irrational organization of working time, and performance of work in excess of professional duties.

- The hostile and unethical behaviour of colleagues, as well as the lack of support and assistance on their part, are identified as toxic relationships with co-workers, which interviewees mentioned less than three previous factors.

- With approximately the same frequency in the narratives we can see the interviewees' complaints on infringements of leaders' promises and obligations to workers, including non-payment or delay in payment of the promised reward, and deception in hiring process.

- Some interviewees shared their negative feelings linked with uncertainty about the future due to short-term employment contracts they have.

- Special attention should be paid to the negative experiences of the participants in our study about their own destructive behaviour in the workplace. Staff, who demonstrate the destructive behaviour, we identify as toxic personnel, the presence of which in a company is also a toxic factor at work.

7.2. Cross-country comparison of the narratives

There are both similarities and differences in the narratives of the interviewees from countries under study. Information about the various forms of destructive relationships with leaders we can find in stories of Czech, Polish and Italian interviewees. Complaints about the toxic work environment are found in narratives from Italia, Latvia and Czech Republic. Also, Czech and Russian interviewees point out problems in their relationships with colleagues. The stories from Latvia, Italia and Russia relate to describing the characteristics of the toxic working conditions. A distinctive feature of Russian narratives is presence of information about infringements by managers of their promises and obligations towards employees. Anxiety of the interviewees about the instability and uncertainty of the future in work are found in Latvian and Italian narratives. Finally, Polish and Russian interviewees shared their negative experiences of destructive behaviour with their own toxic behaviour in the workplace.

7.3. Limitations and further study

The main limitations of the presented study are a small sample size of interviewees, which does not allow for a more complete picture of the diversity of toxic factors at work that cause social pollution of the labour relations. However, the lack of information is not a reason to abandon this method of research, but calls for further efforts to increase the number of the interviewees in all the countries studied. Narrative analysis is an additional method of studying the social pollution phenomenon.

It should be noted in conclusion that we strongly believe that a systematic approach allows to reveal new contradictions in the labour relations between employers and employees, as well as to determine the causal connections between the HRM practices and the level of welfare, physical health and psychosocial wellbeing of the labour resources.

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