

SOCIAL POLLUTION OF THE INTRA-ORGANIZATIONAL ENVIRONMENT IN CZECH AND RUSSIAN ENTERPRISES: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

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Abstract

The debate about the new forms of labour relations emerged in the late 1990's, when the term "precarious work" was formulated to describe the spread of irregular and unstable systems of employment without social guarantees. The flexible, erratic, temporary employment system has become the norm and is gradually replacing the stability of the long-term employment contract. At this new stage of capitalism, labour mobility has been increased, and it legitimizes the reduction of wages, as well as provoking sharp competition among workers. These processes strengthen the power of the employer: there is a gradual transition to the short-term contract, legalizing the right to dismissal without explanation and lowering the level of social security. These developments have an extremely negative impact on employees, causing significant damage to their psychosocial well-being and, as a consequence, to their physical health. Therefore, the use of these flexible forms of labour relations by companies should be considered the social pollution of the inter-organizational environment.

Key words: social pollution, precarious work, labour relations, intra-organizational environment, well-being at work

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Introduction

The starting point for our research is the precarization of working conditions, which have a growing tendency in today's globalized economy. In the process of the theoretical study of the transformation of labour relations between employers and employees we developed the conceptual apparatus, which became the basis of the subsequent empirical research. From earlier literature on the concept of "precarious work", we take our understanding of the living and working conditions pertaining to the partial, temporary, seasonal or intermittent employment. Another term is "precarity", which denotes the set of conditions for the individual's existence in the new system of labour relations in the existential (anxiety, instability) or sociological sense. The term "precarization" means the deterioration of working conditions due to greater reductions

in wages or decline in social guarantees. For instance, the law on raising the retirement age in European countries will lead to increased precarization of the economically active population. The concept of the “precariat” [the precarized working class] is a subject of comprehension of critical theory of the last decade. Sociology began to use the term "precariat" in order to describe the spread of irregular and unstable system of employment without social guarantees. Castel and Bourdieu were among the first who considered the problem of the precariat in connection with the globalization of the economy (Castel, 2000; Bourdieu, 2003). It should be noted, that Castel introduced the term "disaffiliation", which describes the process of disintegration of the individual in society, his falling out from any social group (Castel, 2000). We strongly believe that precarious employment is one of the factors of this disaffiliation.

Standing considers the precariat to be one of the new groups which has emerged in the new global class structure. These groups include millions of people subject to flexible and insecure labour relations (Standing, 2012-2014). It is generally known, that companies and their management practices profoundly affect the human and social environment as well (Dvorakova, Langhamrova, 2013). Pfeffer reviewed the direct and indirect effects of organizations, and their decisions, involving people, on human health and mortality, as well as having identified the phenomenon of social pollution (Pfeffer, 2010). We contributed to the scarce amount scholarship devoted to examining the aggregated elements of the workplace, which create the toxicity at work that has a harmful impact on the psychosocial and physical well-being of workers (Fedorova, Vishnevskii & Dvorakova, 2014). Toxic personnel management practices appear during the whole life cycle of the worker in the enterprise – recruitment, assessment, promotion and termination of employment (Gatti, Fedorova, 2012). Kalleberg believes that one of the factors that decrease the level of worker wellbeing is the growth of inequality in remuneration and benefits, polarization, growth of precarious work and uncertainty. These are all partly responsible for the increase in economic inequality (Kalleberg, 2012). Thus, we consider precarious employment and toxic human resource management practices, used by enterprises, as the system forming factors of social pollution due to the economic activities of organizations.

The aim of this paper is to present current research focused on the following: 1) an in-depth study into social pollution factors of organizational environment; 2) the development of hypotheses on the basis of previous literature and desk-data on precarious work and social pollution due to the economic activities of organizations; 3) verification of the hypotheses by conducting empirical analysis, which consists of a questionnaire survey, which was carried out to reveal the most significant components of the social pollution existent in the intra-organizational environment, and comparing its levels in Czech and Russian companies.

The above mentioned research identifies the social pollution issue, which nowadays takes different forms in relations between employers and employees, and manifests itself in the reduction of the level of employees' psychosocial and physical well-being at work. The theoretical study has allowed us to elaborate on the methodology used to monitor and evaluate the extent, as well as the factors of social pollution of the intra-organizational environment. An empirical study conducted by the authors as a comparison of the social pollution situation existing in Russian and Czech enterprises allows us to verify the given hypotheses: to examine in detail the nature of the social pollution of the intra-organizational environment, and to identify the toxic elements in the labour relations in modern companies.

1 Methods and data of the questionnaire survey

This research analyzes the changes in the Russian and Czech labour spheres which could have an adverse effect on the psychosocial and physical well-being of the workers. The 274 respondents participating in the survey were divided into whose employment status was either precarious, or non-precarious. The research methodology covers the collection of primary data, their analysis and interpretation. Data were obtained from the respondents' answers contained in structured questionnaires. We designed questions for monitoring: 1) how exactly, and for what time period employees' work arrangements formalized with employer; 2) what changes in the personnel policy of organizations have occurred over the past year; 3) what types of infringement of the agreement terms by the employer have ever occurred in the company; 4) what leadership decisions have an adverse effect employees' well-being; 5) what are the sources of employees' anxiety and negative emotions in current job; and 6) what type of threats to workers' future exist in their current job?

In Russia, a survey was conducted with 210 employees from different enterprises which operate in the Ural region, over the period of March, 2015. Distribution of respondents by economic sectors looks like the following: 30.8% work in services; 22.3% are involved with the energy and natural resources sectors; 18.5% are employed in manufacturing; 14.7% are engaged in trade; 7.1% have a job in construction, and 6.6% work in financial institutions. The aggregate sample of the respondents includes: 31.4% of manual workers; 36.2% of specialists; 14.8% of line personnel; 14.8% of middle managers and 2.9% of top managers. The survey covered 50.7% of men and 49.3% of women. The age structure of the respondents can be divided into two groups consisting of 74.9% of youth up to 35 years, and 24.1% of people in the 36-50 age group.

In the Czech Republic the survey was carried out in the same period. 64 employees answered questionnaires, of whom 12.5% were manual workers; 3.1% were trainees; 37.5% were specialists; 21.9% were line personnel, and 25% of respondents belong to the category of middle managers. The respondents are representatives of the following industries: 64.1% from services; 32.8% from manufacturing and 3.1% from trade. Gender distribution of respondents was as follows: 56.3% of men and 43.7% of women. More of them were in the 36-50 age group (73.4%).

2 Identification of precarization elements in the labour relationship

The comparative characteristics of the survey's results of the Russian and Czech respondents were based on the generalization of their responses, and were grouped into tables 1-6. It should be noted, that in the some tables under the heading "total respondents" the amount calculated may exceed 100% because respondents could give certain answers simultaneously.

One of the purposes of the study presented in this article was to investigate the forms of labour relationship that exists between employers and employees. Among other questions, respondents were asked to point out how exactly their work agreements were formalized with their employers.

Tab. 1: The responses given to the question: "How exactly are your work arrangements formalized with your employer?"

Response options	Average for all respondents, %	
	RF	CR
Contract with my primary place of employment	81.5	76.6
Contract with the employer as a natural person	8.1	1.6
On the basis of a verbal agreement with the employer (without the agreement being recorded in writing)	7.1	0.0
Contract for services (i.e., a contracting agreement)	0.9	1.6
Piece work contract	2.4	4.7
Contract of seasonal employment	0.0	1.6
Total responses	100.0	100.0

Source: Authors' own elaboration

The main differences, that we can see, are related to work on the basis of a verbal agreement with the employer and the contracts with the employer as a natural person. Unlike Czech respondents, the Russian workers pointed to these forms of employment relations. On the other hand, among Czech respondents, a greater number of them reported that they are working under such employment agreements as piece work contracts and seasonal employment contracts.

The distribution of respondents' answers about the terms of their existing labour agreements shows significant differences in the situations pertaining in the two countries which were examined.

Tab. 2: The responses given to the question: “For what time period are labour relations between you and your employer formalized?”

Response options	Average for all respondents, %	
	RF	CR
Contract for an indefinite term	85.7	53.1
4-5 years	2.9	17.2
3 years	2.4	0.0
2 years	1.0	10.9
1 year	1.9	18.8
6 months	1.4	0.0
Contractual term is dependent on the time needed to complete the task[s] which is/are the subject of the contract	4.3	0.0
Total responses	100.0	100.0

Source: Authors' own elaboration

While the vast majority of the Russian respondents have contracts of employment for indefinite periods, only slightly more than half of Czech respondents said that they, too, have such contracts. One in five of the Czech workers, who responded, said that they have a one-year contract, while every ninth worker has a two-year contract of employment. Almost a fifth of Czech respondents have a contract with their employers for a period of 4-5 years. At the same time, some of the Russian respondents replied that the duration of their job depends on the term of the completion of the job at hand.

Precarious forms of labour agreements by themselves are one cause of instability in the work place. However, breaches of employment agreements by employers aggravate the situation even more.

Tab. 3: The responses given to the questions: “Have there ever occurred cases of infringement, by the employer, of the terms of your agreement/contract with him/her?” and “If yes, what form, exactly, did these infringements take?”

Response options	Average for all respondents, %	
	RF	CR

Increase in the workload without a corresponding increase in wages	43.3	32.0
Non-payment of additional compensation for overtime	33.3	12.0
Failure to grant holiday time	16.7	12.0
Non-payment of the promised remuneration	30.0	4.0
Unjustified reduction of salary	20.0	0.0
Unreasonable delay in the payment of salaries/wages (period of up to 1 month)	1.7	36.0
Unreasonable delay in the payment of salaries/wages (period of more than 1 month)	10.0	16.0
Wrongful dismissal	6.7	8.0

Source: Authors' own elaboration

The responses of the wage workers who participated reflect the presence of the above mentioned problem of employers' breaches of their promises made to subordinates. The workload increase without a corresponding increase in wages was noted by a third of Czech employees, while more than a third of Russian respondents reported this situation. But Czech employees suffer more from unreasonable delays in the payment of salaries/wages. In Russia we can see complaints of non-payment of additional compensation for overtime, as well as that of the promised remuneration. A fifth of Russian respondents reported experiencing an unjustified reduction in their salaries. From both countries there are reports of some people coming to harm as a result of failure to grant holiday time, as well as from having been victims of wrongful dismissal.

3 Evaluation of the sources of concern in the workplace

There is a causal link between the toxic working environment and the well-being of employees at work. The aforementioned social pollution factors have such adverse effects, that we can only conclude that they are organisational environment toxins.

Tab. 4: The responses given to the question: "What is the source of your anxiety and negative emotions in your current job?"

Response options	Average for all respondents, %	
	RF	CR
Irregular working hours	19.9	40.6
High stress levels in the workplace	22.7	4.7
Excessive levels of stress and tension at work	19.0	35.9
Difficulty in combining work and personal life	16.6	46.9
Professional incompetence of the management	13.7	28.1

The complete absence, or insufficient levels of, company care about its employees	15.2	9.4
Negative (destructive) personality traits of the manager	13.7	12.5
Psychological pressure from the part of management	9.5	17.2
Bad conditions in the workplace	14.2	10.9
High staff turnover in organization	10.4	4.7
The complete absence of, or poor levels of, cooperation with the leader	4.3	3.1
Psychological pressure from the part of colleagues	2.8	9.4
Excessive competition among members of staff	3.8	0.0

Source: Authors' own elaboration

There are significant differences in both groups of respondents' assessments concerning the spectrum of negative emotions felt by employees in respect of some sources of anxiety. Almost a half of the Czech respondents reported difficulty in combining work and personal life. A smaller number of them feels discomfort arising from the irregular working hours, as well as the excessive levels of stress and tension in the workplace. A little less than a third of respondents reported the professional incompetence of the management. In the response options, the Russian respondents gave first place to high stress levels in the workplace. In addition, every fifth Russian respondent is worried about irregular working hours, as well as the excessive levels of stress and tension at work.

A feature of the modern socio-labour sphere is the uncertainty about the future, which is caused by the precarious work. We asked the respondents to share their fears about their professional futures.

Tab. 5: The responses given to the question: “What types of threats to your future exist in your current job?”

Response options	Average for all respondents, %	
	RF	CR
Decline in job satisfaction	24.3	60.9
The absence of professional development	23.8	14.1
Reduction of wages/salaries and other, non-pecuniary, benefits	25.2	32.8
Job loss due to the economic crisis	20.5	17.2
Deterioration of one's physical health in the workplace	24.8	10.9
Loss of psychological equilibrium due to uncertainty in the future	8.1	17.2
Job loss due to the high level of competition among colleagues	3.3	7.8

Source: Authors' own elaboration

There are some obvious differences in the estimates of the two groups of respondents regarding their feelings about the future in their current job. Over half of the Czech respondents are afraid of a decline in job satisfaction. Whereas only one out of four Russian employees expressed the same worry. A third of Czech workers, and one out of four Russian respondents, worried about a reduction of wages/salaries and other, non-pecuniary, benefits. Respondents in both countries have similar estimates of the risk of losing their jobs due to the economic crisis. One fifth of them gave this response. A little over twice as many Russian respondents as Czech respondents reported the possibility of health deterioration at work. Every fourth Russian worker, and every ninth Czech worker expressed anxiety over this possibility. Conversely, twice as many Czech respondents reported fears about the negative impact which uncertainty about the future will have on their psychosocial health.

Some employers use the crisis situation in the labour market to their advantage, forcing the employees to do something over and above normative professional duties by playing on employees' fear of losing their jobs.

Tab. 6: The responses given to the questions: “Do you ever have to do something that you would rather not do, in order to keep your job?” and “If yes, which particular actions have you to take?”

Response options	Average for all respondents, %	
	RF	CR
Carry out assignments are not included in your job description	47.5	47.4
Work overtime (obligatory and unpaid)	44.3	5.3
Improve your qualifications at your own expense	26.2	31.6
Work overtime (obligatory, but for an additional monetary reward)	24.6	31.6
Take part in not always fair competition among your colleagues	4.9	7.0

Source: Authors' own elaboration

Nearly half of Czech and Russian respondents reported the necessity of carrying out assignments that are not included in their job descriptions. One in four respondents in Russia, and one in three respondents in the Czech Republic specified the need for improvement of their qualifications at their own expense, as well as overtime. However, while obligatory overtime is paid in Czech enterprises, Russian employers often do not even consider it necessary to pay financial rewards for it. In any case, it should be noted that a majority of the respondents' aggregate sample is forced to make additional efforts for keeping their workplaces.

Conclusion

The results of the comparative analysis give us reason to assert that, despite some differences in the estimates given by the Russian and Czech respondents, it is possible to identify common patterns: 1) a high proportion of employees faced with breach of the terms of their labour agreement/contract by the employer; 2) most of these infringements are associated with an increase in the workload without a corresponding increase in wages; 3) a high percentage of infringements related to the non-payment of additional and/or promised remuneration, as well as unreasonable delay in the payment of salaries/wages; 4) a large number of employees feel anxiety and negative emotions in their current job; 5) a high percentage of wage workers suffer from irregular working hours, as well as excessive stress and tension at work and difficulty in combining work and personal life; 6) a significant number of workers feel threatened by negative changes in their future professional lives, such as a decline in job satisfaction, and reduction of labour incomes and non-pecuniary benefits, as well as job loss due to the economic crisis; 7) a large share of employees have to carry out assignments which are not covered by their job description, as well as having to perform paid or unpaid overtime work, in addition to having to improve their qualifications at their own expense.

All of these trends can make employees vulnerable in labour relations, adversely affecting their welfare and well-being and, as a result, reducing the quality of their lives. Part of the tendencies under examination we should specify as precarious forms of employment. Among these are the short-term and verbal labour agreements, as well as the reduction and delay in the payment of monetary rewards, as well as their non-payment. We can also discern the toxic human resource management practices that include breaches of the labour contract terms by employers, as well as irregular working hours and forcing employees to exceed their normal workload. We must also mention that the toxic working environment is characterised by excessive stress and tension in the workplace, and difficulty in combining work and personal life, as well as by dissatisfaction with the work itself and uncertainty about the future. All of these given factors in their totality are the factors in the social pollution of intra-organizational environment.

It should be noted, that there is a little research concerning social pollution issue. Hence, this phenomenon requires further elucidation. Therefore, the study contained in this paper shows a lot of promise, for a number of reasons. The dynamic nature of the labour sphere demands consequent monitoring and ongoing search for managerial solutions to reduce the negative impact on the welfare and well-being of hired workers owing to the growing precarization of employment and the toxic working environment.

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