MANAGEMENT OF PSYCHOSOCIAL RISKS IN THE EDUCATIONAL SECTOR OF LATVIA

Antoņina Jemeļjanenko
University of Latvia, Latvia

Andrejs Geske
University of Latvia, Latvia

Abstract. *Risk management is gaining acknowledgement in organisational management due to the benefits it brings with it, such as ability of managers to forecast possible threats and plan the most appropriate prevention measures. Psychosocial risk group is one of the largest risk group types and is related to the aspects of staff overburning, lack of employee motivation, health problems due to stress, etc. Study carried in Latvia about risk management showed that psychosocial risks are significant for educational institutions. Empirical research carried out in Latvia has shown that the top risks perceived by the education sector professionals in Latvia are overloading of employees and lack of employee motivation. Hypothesis of this study is that psychosocial risks, such as overloading and lack of motivation, are not dealt well with due to low awareness of effective psychosocial risk management techniques. There was no profound research performed on this topic in Latvia in the last ten years. The aim of this study is to explore different methods researched by other authors how the risk can be managed, analyse causes of these risks and provide the recommendation on how to deal with the psychosocial risks in the educational sector.*

Keywords: *risk management, psychosocial risks, motivation, overloading of employees, management of education, Latvia*

Introduction

Rapid developments in the job market caused by globalisation and technological revolution resulted in changed risk factors in the work environment. For example, nowadays teachers in addition to classroom work have to be able to provide all resources digitally via special dedicated online study platform, have to be able to operate well with technology and constantly update their knowledge about latest tools (Souto, Pereira, Brito, Sancho, & Jardim, 2018). Inability to meet job requirements or control circumstances at the workplace may cause work-related stress that takes the form of emotional and physical reactions (Kaļķis, 2008, 191; Fernet, Trépanier, Austin, & Levesque-Côté, 2016; Souto et al., 2018). As a consequence of psychosocial risk realisation, employees are taking long periods of sick leave, underperform at work or constantly arrive late, burn out, in

addition there are possible work related incidents, damage of employer's image and reputation, often it is employer's responsibility to pay out compensations (Kaļķis, 2008, 192; Souto et al., 2018; Guadix, Carrillo-Castrillo, Onieva, & Lucena, 2015).

Psychosocial risks at work bring the highest threats for educational institutions, due to high probability and severe impact. In Latvia the problem is further amplified by employee's inability to recognise these problems or lack of courage to openly discuss it with the direct manager in order to find mutually beneficial solution. This further leads to distress and its related problems, such as alcoholism, neurosis, oncology, psychosomatic disorders, theft, etc. (Kaļķis, 2008, 191-192).

Upon performing profound desktop study about risk management in the sector of education, the most notable risks were formulated and based on it the questionnaire was developed for educational sector stakeholders in Latvia, where respondents were asked to rate criticality of the formulated risks and level of controls for these risks according to provided methodology. Questionnaire was place into online platform SurveyMonkey.com and distributed via social networks and e-mails. Returned fully completed results were examined for this research. It is important to analyse whether there is any correlation between the criticality of risk and its control risk level, as perceived by educational sector stakeholders, in order to draw the conclusion what is the most appropriate way for management of particular risk. The aim of this research was to explore different methods how the risk can be managed presented by different researchers, analyse causes of psychosocial risks and provide the recommendation on the most effective means for dealing with the psychosocial risks in the educational sector.

Literature review

Psychosocial risk factors as identified by multiple researchers are frequent overtime, not involving employees in management decision-making, not ensuring sufficient information exchange for employees, unfavourable working conditions and organisational design of work (Kaļķis, 2008, 192; Souto et al., 2018).

Work related stress can be caused by increasing job demands, employee's inability to cope with those, as well as employee may be lacking required skillset or motivation to perform at work according to set expectations. In addition to that, psychoemotional type of work related stress can be caused if workplace does not meet employee's needs or there are unsatisfying relationships with colleagues and/or manager. For example, employee may be subject to psychological terror at work, bossing or mobbing, which are types of bullying at work, caused by employee's manager or colleagues respectively (Kaļķis, 2008, 191).

Work stress usually is cased by overtime work and can take two forms – physical (headaches, breathing problems, voice disorder, dry mouth, muscle tension, cardiovascular disorders) or psychological (aggression, concentration difficulties, fear, apathy, depression, increased number of incidents) (Kaļķis, 2008, 192; Souto et al., 2018).

According to Self-Determination Theory (Fernet et al., 2016), employees engage in activities for a certain motive, which further affect their psychological state of well-being. Within the scope of Self-Determination Theory, employee motivation takes two forms of motivation: autonomous, when employees perform their job with pleasure out of intrinsic willingness connected to internal values and own feeling of importance of the performed job duties, and controlled, when duties are performed under external or internal pressure, such as for reward or to avoid certain unpleasant consequences (Fernet et al., 2016). Autonomous motivation is positively correlated with psychological health, job satisfaction, high commitment to work; in the contrast, controlled motivation is associated with emotional exhaustion, work-related stress, burnout and workaholism (Fernet et al., 2016). Self-determination theory states that work environment plays the key role in determining the employee motivation. Looking from the perspective of Job Demand-Resource Model (Hakanen, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2005), job demands, which are aspects of the job obstructing completion of tasks and resulting in employee's personal costs, such as disrupting behaviour of students, mainly cause controlled motivation, whereas job resources, which are aspects of the job boosting employee's ability to complete tasks and develop professionally, such as job recognition, cause autonomous motivation (Fernet et al., 2016).

Teachers are particularly vulnerable to emotional exhaustion, which frequently leads to overburning, anxiety, chronic fatigue and sense of helplessness and reduction of autonomous motivation. According to the study of Fernet et al. (2016), teacher burnout was positively correlated with job demands, such as high workload and misbehaviour of students, and negatively with job resources, such as supervisory support. Commitment of teachers shows their degree of autonomous motivation that takes form of emotional attachment, association and involvement with their profession. In addition to that, it was established that level of teacher satisfaction with their occupation and relative psychological investment in the job led to higher attentiveness of students and student achievements (Fernet et al., 2016). Controlled motivation, on the other hand, through obstructing basic psychological needs, leads to psychosomatic problems and work-related stress, reducing the commitment and performance of teachers (Fernet et al., 2016).

Dombrovskis, Guseva, & Murasovs (2011) distinguish intrinsic and extrinsic motives, where intrinsic are equivalent to autonomous motivation causes and extrinsic motives are corresponding with controlled motivation causes. Empirical study performed by Dombrovskis et al. (2011) revealed that in Latvia secondary

school teachers are predominantly motivated by extrinsic motives, with economic motives taking the first place out of seven on the provided motives scale, indicating job dissatisfaction among secondary school teachers (Dombrovskis et al., 2011). Furthermore, significant positive correlation was found between economic motives of teachers in Latvia and level of their emotional exhaustion. This hinders the intrinsic motivation of teachers, leads to more formal relationships at work, professional de-valuation, inability to value professionalism of colleagues and instead perceiving colleagues more as competitors. Teachers perceive their profession to have low social status, what leads to further loss of intrinsic motivation, reduced performance and increased work-related stress levels (Dombrovskis et al., 2011).

Another risk, which is caused by psychosocial risk factors, to which teachers are particularly exposed, is voice disorders, especially in large classes with higher amount of students. With length of service this problem becomes more actual, thus elder more experienced teachers are more disposed to vocal tissue injuries (Trinite, 2016). Voice disorder is occupational risk especially related to teacher profession. The risk factors leading to it are inadequate job resources, such as poor classroom acoustics, overfilled classes, air quality, stressful situations requiring loud speaking, overtime work requiring voice overload, as well as emotional well-being of teachers at work (Trinite, 2016). The most exposed to this risk are music and sports teachers, according to the study performed by Trinite (2016). In addition, it was found that background noise level in the classroom is directly related to the teacher's stress level, leading to two-way explanation, that increased background noise raises stress level in teacher and increased stress level in teacher transfers to students and in return increase the noise levels. Thus, workload and level of stress have impact also on teacher's vocal health (Trinite, 2016).

Methodology

Comprehensive questionnaire was developed based on prior desktop research about risk management in educational sector, where respondents were asked to rate 32 risks most relevant for educational sector on a scale 1 to 5 on two criteria: criticality of risk and level of risk control. Table 1 provides detailed scale characteristics:

*Table 1 **Risk rating scale methodology in research questionnaire** (developed by author)*

Criticality of risk		Effectiveness of management	
1	Risk is not at all significant	1	Risk is not managed at all
2	Risk is neutral	2	Risk is very poorly managed
3	Risk is slighly significant	3	Risk is managed, but very weakly
4	Risk is very significant	4	Risk is well managed
5	Risk is critically significant	5	Risk is managed to the highest standard

Questionnaire was placed into online platform SurveyMonkey.com generating online link and allowing participants to stay anonymous. Link to the survey was distributed via social networks and e-mail to the Association of Education Leaders in Latvia. In addition, 10 printed questionnaires were completed by students of Pedagogy and Psychology Faculty at the premises of the University of Latvia.

A total of 95 stakeholders, having direct relation to educational sector from different parts of Latvia, majority of whom were managers and leaders of educational institutions, fully completed and returned the questionnaire. Detailed sample characteristics can be seen in Table 2.

Upon collection of results, risks were grouped according to their type, e.g. psychosocial risks, economic risks, political risks, etc. In this paper only results for the psychosocial risk type are presented.

Ratings allocated by respondents for each risk on two dimensions were assumed as individual risk scores for each dimension and average score from all responses was taken as final risk score for each risk.

Data was analysed mainly by use of MS Excel to perform comparative evaluation of risk criticality and management and whether there are any relationship trends between the two dimensions.

*Table 2 **Participant characteristics** (developed by author)*

Characteristics		Number (n)
Gender	a. Male	a. 10
	b. Female	b. 85
Role in educational sector	a. Manager of education institution	a. 44
	b. Teacher	b. 25
	c. Nanny	c. 1
	d. Parent	d. 5
	e. Employee of educational institution	e. 16
	f. Other (e.g. children's sport coach)	f. 4
Type of educational institution	a. Pre-school, Nursery	a. 18
	b. Primary or Secondary School	b. 44
	c. College, gymnasium, high school	c. 21
	d. Professional / vacation education institution	d. 6
	e. University	e. 4
	f. Other (e.g. extracurricular activity provider)	f. 2

Research results

The results revealed that psychosocial risks are considered as significant, but not critical by the respondent sample. Notably, that level of controls for majority of risks was rated opposite in proportion to risk criticality: the more significant is

the risk, the weaker are the controls, and vice versa. Several psychosocial risks received the highest scores among all other risk types, for example risk of employee overloading rated as second highest among the all 32 risks evaluated.

Average score of "Overloading of employees" risk is 3.8, what means that majority of respondents marked the risk as very significant. Overloading of employees usually results in exhaustion, overburning, problems with health and decrease in autonomous motivation. Average score of risk control is 2.6, what means that educational institutions manage this risk quite poorly.

"Lack of employee motivation" risk was rated 3.3 (significant), confirms the above and most probably is the consequence of work overload risk. Dombrovskis et al. (2011) revealed in their research that teachers in Latvia are lacking autonomous motivation, what has been further confirmed by this research results. The level of control for this risk was rated at 2.9, what means that the management of this risk also is quite weak.
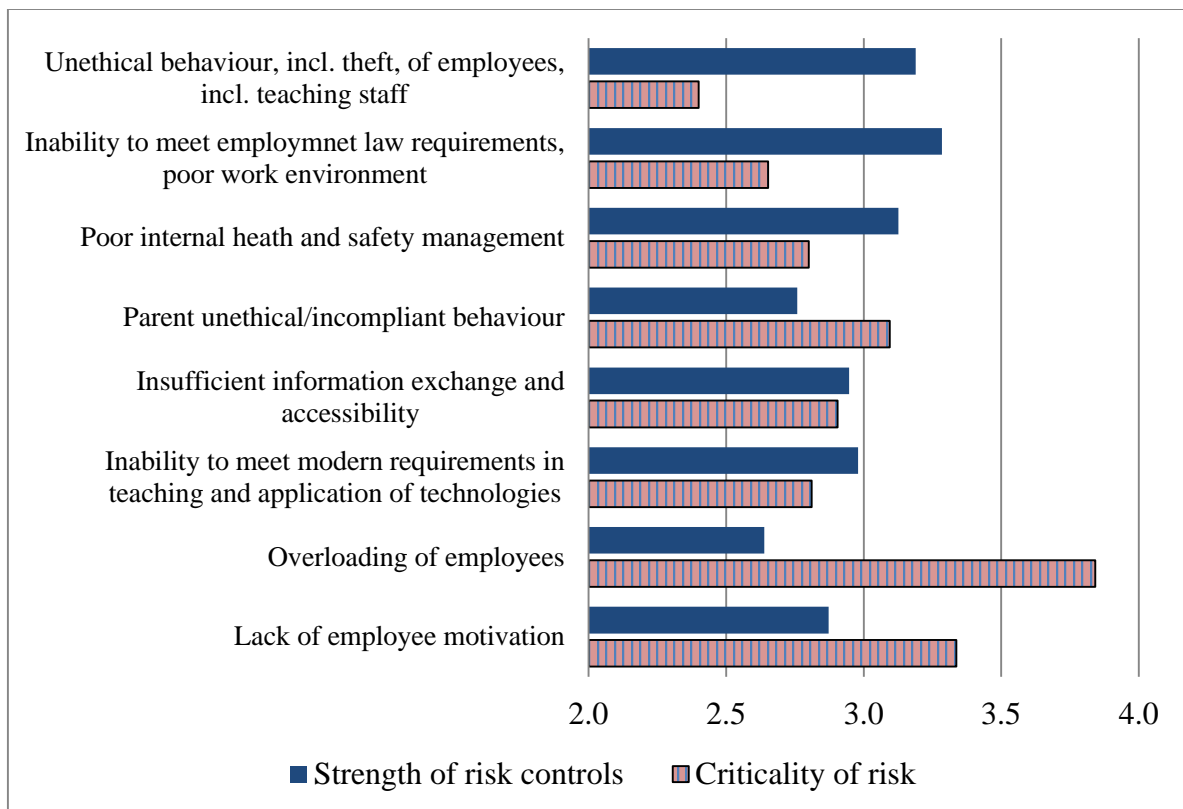

*Figure 1 **Comparison of criticality of risk and risk control scores** (developed by author)*

The least significant (2.4) and most controlled (3.2) risk, according to view of the respondents is "Unethical behaviour of employees". This can be interpreted as that social climate at work is not at its worst in Latvian educational institutions and employees feel quite emotionally safe at work. On the other hand, risk of

"Parent unethical/incompliant behaviour" is rated on average as 3.1 (risk is slightly significant), what means that employees feel more threatened by behaviour of parents rather than by behaviour of colleagues. Risk of unethical behaviour of parents also is poorly controlled (2.8), whereas risk of employee unethical behaviour is controlled more effectively (3.2). This can be explained by fact that behaviour of employees is internal risk, which is easier to control, whereas behaviour of parents is external risk, which is more difficult to control. Internal health and safety risk was rated as having slightly significant criticality (3.1) and weak control (2.8), what means that there is space for developments in this area for educational institutions. Health and safety aspects are the job resources that provide to employees feeling of safety and being cared about. This risk includes the quality of air in the classrooms that affect teachers' vocal health. This risk should have strong controls by way of implementing required by law policies and checks.

Level of risk management and controls for meeting internal law requirements in relation to work environment was rated as the highest among psychosocial type of risk controls. Although the controls are still considered to be weak (3.3), the criticality of risk is quite low (2.7).

Accessibility and exchange of information received the same score for criticality of risk and level of risk control (2.9 – risk is slightly significant, risk is managed, but very weakly). It can be interpreted that the risk is not having a high priority and therefore it is not expected to invest a lot of energy in its management.

However, information provision and exchange increases organisational transparency and serves as job resource for employees. Thus this factor should be paid more attention to and the risk controls should be increased by way of sharing information more openly and allowing employees to share their feedback, when there is such.

Similar situation is with "Inability to meet modern requirements in teaching and modern requirements". Risk criticality is rated as quite low (2.8) and the risk controls are also considered to be quite weak (3.0). According to research this risk has increased daily burden of responsibilities for nowadays employees in educational institutions and is attributed to the job demands. This risk should have stronger controls, which can be provided through dedicated trainings to employees and self-development events in modern requirements area.

Conclusions and recommendations

Overloading of employees is the category of job demands, if looking from the perspective of Job Demand-Resources Model. In combination with low job controls on the employee side and lack of recognition of employee's effort it causes work-related stress and burnout (Hakanen et al., 2006). The research has

proved that psychosocial risks, such as overloading of employees and lack of motivation, are not dealt well with, what is provided by empirical study results, where risk controls were rated as very low mainly for those risks, which were rated as very significant. Risks should be minimised by applying effective psychosocial risk management techniques and increasing awareness. For example, to minimise the risk, high workload can be combined with increased job resources, such as job controls, appraisals and supervisory support. These controls, if well organised, should minimise the risk of job stress, overburning and loss of motivation (Guadix et al., 2015).

There are a number of tools developed for employers for management of psychosocial risks and assessment of employee stress levels, which should be used as preventative measures for psychosocial risk treatment. For example, just to mention a few: Kessler Psychological Distress Scale (K10) – a brief, but reliable 10-item scale, used to determine psychological distress; Copenhagen Psychological Questionnaire (COPSOQ) – systematically assesses relationship between psychosocial environment and health, is used to evaluate eight of the most important psychosocial dimensions and helps to evaluate also risk to employee's health (Souto et al., 2018).

Health and psychological well-being of teachers should be of foremost importance in management of education, as it has direct impact on the quality of education and the main affected stakeholders are students.

Specific policies addressing workload of teachers should be designed, implemented and regularly checked. Perception of teaching job and social status should be raised and promoted, to attract more students to pursue teaching job with intrinsic motives.

By replacing frontal instruction with group and individual work and presentations would take the burden of voice overload off the teachers. Decreasing and balancing workload should lead to reduced stress level and voice load.

Increased job demands and decreased job resources are the direct indicators of employee overburning and exhaustion, on the other hand balancing increasing job demands with strengthening job resources would mitigate the psychosocial type of risks. Hence, different types of job demands and resources can be regularly measured by managers of educational institutions and evaluated in tandem by way of conducting risk assessment workshops involving the employees.

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