

INFLUENCE OF FACTORS OF A HEALTHY WORKING ENVIRONMENT ON EMPLOYEE LABOR PRODUCTIVITY (ON THE EXAMPLE OF HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS OF GEORGIA)

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Received 14 February 2024; accepted 11 April 2024

Abstract. In today's global landscape, human capital stands as the paramount force driving organizational success – a pivotal and irreplaceable asset. The challenges posed by the recent pandemic have underscored the significance of the workforce's commitment, determination, and attitude across diverse sectors and scales. The correlation between these attributes and the quality of work directly influences goal achievement, shaping a company's standing in the external environment. The main goal: this research endeavours to pinpoint key internal environmental factors within organizations that wield influence over personnel productivity. The research methodology: Employing a methodology comprising data collection through interviews and statistical analysis utilizing SPSS, the study aims to unravel the intricate interplay of these factors. While managers grapple with multifaceted considerations to meet organizational objectives, fostering a healthy work environment emerges as a critical challenge. Tailoring conditions to accommodate individuals of diverse cultures, ages, and genders becomes a powerful catalyst for enhancing employee productivity. Our analysis will shed light on the primary factors impacting productivity in conducive work settings. It is crucial to recognize that the same factor holds varying degrees of significance for different individuals.

Keywords: human resource, workplace, personal life, healthy working environment, labor productivity.

JEL Classification C1, D22, D23, E23.

1. Introduction

In a highly competitive environment, managers are faced with quite a lot of challenges. To achieve organizational goals, they need to consider many factors, one of which is important to increase the productivity of employees. Increasing the productivity of employees in multi-environment conditions is quite a difficult task, however, it is clear to everyone that one of the most important requirements for any organization's staff, along with many requirements, is the creation of their desired work environment and harmonious work climate. The purpose of our research was to determine how the employees of the higher education system of Georgia evaluate the working environment conditions and what are the main factors that they consider to be an obstacle to increasing work productivity. Also, our goal was to develop mechanisms to ensure the reduction or elimination of negative events identified as a result of our research.

Without the desired organizational climate for the staff in the organization, it is impossible to raise their satisfaction level. However, it should be taken into account that the organizational climate desired by different employees is perceived differently. But a healthy organizational climate, which is part of the organization's organizational culture, combines universal values, standards of behavior, fair and rigorous regulation and control system.

It was important for us to do an in-depth study of the most sensitive factor affecting the organizational climate. Based on the analysis of the results, we have developed specific recommendations, the consideration of which will contribute to the establishment of the desired climate in educational organizations, the increase in the labor satisfaction of subordinates, and accordingly, their productivity level.

It should be noted that socio-cultural factors play an important role in the formation of stereotypes, which

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often appear as a prerequisite for discrimination. It is quite relevant and important for modern society to fight against various types of discrimination. The process of discrimination in organizations, including in the organizations of the educational system, damages the organizational climate and environment, which leads to quite negative results. That is why it is a field of research interest for many scientists. One of the most essential challenges for enhancing employee labor productivity is the creation of a place to work, where the issue of discrimination plays a significant role (Paresashvili et al., 2023).

It occurs based on stereotypes, according to which a person or a certain group of people are ascribed different views and behaviors, depending on culture, society, age, gender, and race. In the long term, stereotypical attitudes result in self-perceptions, ambitions, and perceptions of personal achievements (Booyesen & Nkomo, 2010). Therefore, often specific stereotypes in society and, accordingly, in organizations have a certain negative impact on the behavior of individuals and, accordingly, harm the work climate.

2. Literature review

The success of any organization in gaining competitive advantage in a fiercely competitive environment largely depends on the role of its employees. It is therefore important for the organization to establish a productive and long-term relationship between employee and employer. Employee performance is a key indicator of an organization's prospects and capabilities, which is why much attention is paid to the study of performance and the factors that affect it. The working environment is the most important factor in this regard, as it significantly impacts employee satisfaction, turnover, career development, involvement in processes, and more (Funmini, 2018). Numerous studies have confirmed this relationship (Kodarihar & Umale, 2020). A healthy work environment results from properly formulated management in any direction, appropriate approaches, and focus on development and progress.

The working environment significantly impacts employee satisfaction, turnover, career development, involvement in processes, etc. Several studies confirm this. And the aforementioned factors are related to performance (Stalmašeková et al., 2017). Based on the research conducted by Kodarihar and Umale (2020), it has been observed that the organizational environment plays a vital role in employee productivity. An environment that encourages employee involvement in processes, reduces communication barriers, provides adequate support, and promotes employee development is more successful. Such an environment leads to fewer staff turnovers, less absenteeism, and creates more opportunities for the organization to achieve success.

Shammout's (2021) research highlights the correlation between organizational behavior and performance. It suggests that organizations that provide employees

with career development opportunities, support from managers and colleagues, fair distribution of tasks and responsibilities to prevent overload, and a conducive organizational environment, tend to have higher performance levels and greater chances of success.

Similarly, Bushiri's (2014) research suggests that a fair approach within an organization can increase motivation among employees. Moreover, a flexible organizational environment, open communication, and appropriate physical characteristics of the workspace can positively impact overall performance. Additionally, focusing on continuous improvement through constructive feedback during performance reviews can help improve the work environment. The work environment can be divided into two parts. One is the physical working conditions such as office layout, lighting, noise, etc., which lead to reduced productivity (Temessek, 2009; Leblebici, 2012) and health-related problems (Hafeez et al., 2019). This has no less impact on performance, and it is a factor to be considered in studying the organizational environment, since it is impossible to create a pleasant environment without appropriate physical conditions, however, it is much easier to establish than a behavioral work environment. The emotional work environment, which is the second part of the organizational environment, and is related to the relationship with colleagues and managers, psycho-emotional state, satisfaction, justice, a feeling of appreciation. Jayaweera (2015) and organizational stress level (Donald et al., 2005) which of course depends on the right management and policies of the organization (Nkuba & Mtebe, 2023). Constant and intense stress may lead to the deterioration of both the psychological and physical health of employees (Paresashvili & Avsajanishvili, 2023). As in other organizations, the work environment in higher educational institutions also affects the performance and staffing of employees (Amjad et al., 2015). In addition, all the factors mentioned above can cause organizational conflict, which, if not managed effectively and in a timely manner, can become destructive, hinder the organization's activities, increase stress and negatively affect performance (Paresashvili et al., 2021).

Creating equal working conditions for all employees, using fair approaches, is the basis for establishing a healthy and fair working environment, which, as we mentioned, contributes to the growth of performance. The formation of stereotypes and the attribution of certain qualities to people are quite common both in society and in the work environment (Berdahl & Min, 2012). It may eventually become the basis of discrimination and has a negative impact on human motivation, productivity (Kunze et al., 2011) emotional state (Cuevas et al., 2020) establishing a healthy work environment (Filut & Carnes, 2020) and health in general. The initial step in managing organizations should be to establish an environment that is devoid of discrimination. This type of environment enables employees to freely express their opinions and ideas when carrying out various tasks. Additionally,

it provides them with an opportunity to showcase their skills and qualifications.

Discrimination in the workplace is a phenomenon characteristic of any field and is the subject of numerous studies, including the education sector. It may be manifested in different aspects, such as cases of discrimination related to hiring, promotion, and career development. To reduce discrimination in higher education, various laws and regulations are drafted at both university and national levels. This is revealed by Hussain's (2023) study, which outlines the current situation in Canadian higher education and the positive aspects of existing policies. However, discrimination in the workplace still exists in both developed and developing countries, Shaukat et al. (2014) research highlights different types of discrimination in higher education, which is more noticeable for those employed in lower positions. A study by Weiss and Blassel (2023) highlights cases of discrimination between employees and students in French higher education institutions. There is a noteworthy study by Paresashvili et al. (2023) regarding gender discrimination in higher education. The study outlines the current situation in this regard and reveals that despite existing laws, cases of gender discrimination are prevalent in the country. Most of these cases occur in the workplace and have a negative impact on the health of employees.

Methodology. The research area included employees of both private and state universities located both in Tbilisi and in the regions. For 2022–2023, according to official statistics, the staff in the higher education system was 10,605, 5,164 in state, and 5,441 in private universities. Based on the number of received questionnaires, we can generalize the research results of 759 respondents who participated in the survey. The responses received from the respondents were processed using the SPSS software package. During the analysis, we used different types of statistical procedures.

3. Discussion and findings

Today, in the footsteps of the processes of implementation of important changes in Georgia, which derives from the important goal of close integration with the modern democratic system of Europe, the establishment of a healthy working environment based on European values for the personnel employed in the educational system remains an important challenge. According to the legal requirement in Georgia, labor relations should be based on the principle of equal treatment of employees. However, as in many countries, there still remains the problem of labor discrimination and inequality based on such personal characteristics as gender, age, religion, sexual orientation, chronic illness and others.

All this has a more or less negative impact on the psycho-emotional state of the employees, on their health and, accordingly, on their work productivity. The role of higher education and its employed professors and scientists in the society is extremely important. They have a

great influence on the level of development of both individual and society and humanity (Szromek & Wolniak, 2020). The role of professors and teachers employed in the higher education system is the most important and the greatest in training competitive, highly qualified, morally perfect specialists who are loyal to the ideals of democracy in the international labor markets. They ensure the progress of the country and meet the educational requirements of the society. That is why it became an important task for us to reveal the factors affecting the productivity and motivation of the staff working in the higher education system organizations.

The success of universities in the international market of higher education is the academic and professional success of their staff. In order to provide university educational services corresponding to modern challenges for students, it remains an important task for them to cooperate with high-level professors and teachers corresponding to the requirements of the local and global labor market. A healthy environment in universities plays an important role in the process of highly qualified educational services. Recently, a number of scientific studies and works point to the fact that the satisfaction of professors with their educational and scientific work and the growth of their work motivation is determined by a healthy, non-discriminatory environment in universities, where labor relations are completely based on the principles of justice and the absence of unjustified privileges.

Creating favorable conditions for the protection and development of labor rights, ensuring and protecting labor equality, are the most important values and principles of a democratic society. Discrimination in the field of employment is a very widespread and large-scale phenomenon, some of which in modern conditions take place indirectly, acquire a disguised form and become less visible. However, the negative consequences that labor discrimination has on a person and his life are becoming more and more extensive.

There are some studies about labor discrimination in Georgia, which are mainly related to gender problems.

The stressful environment formed by the influence of discrimination has a negative impact on the education system, especially on the productivity and motivation of the staff working in the higher education system. That is why, developing a policy for regulating discrimination and establishing a non-discriminatory working environment based on the principle of employee equality should be the main task of an institution functioning in the higher education system.

Management policy uniquely determines the formation of ideals and values in the organization, which determine the type of work climate in the organization. If the organizational climate is formed using such organizational values that do not conflict with personal and group interests, then we get a harmonious working environment for the staff in the organization. This, in turn, ensures an increase in labor productivity. The management in the organization should be focused on

the convergence of individual and group interests, which leads to the realization of the common organizational mission. Solving the mentioned problem largely depends on the right policy of human resources management.

Our research paper focused on how the working environment affects employee productivity, the factors that influence staff harmony, and whether discrimination based on age and field of employment affects work outcomes, personal life, and health. We conducted a general analysis that included an examination of the following issues: the causes and effects of discrimination in the organization, and whether the respondents considered discrimination to cause a stressful work environment. We used variance analysis to test the following hypotheses:

Hypothesis 1: Field of employment and age jointly influence the impact of discrimination on a person's work outcomes, respondents' personal life, and their health.

Hypothesis 2: the impact of discrimination on the work results of the respondents is different in the private and public sectors.

Hypothesis 3: The impact of discrimination on the personal lives of the respondents is different in the private and public sectors.

Hypothesis 4: The impact of discrimination on the health of the respondents is different in the private and public sectors.

Hypothesis 5: The influence of discrimination on the work results of the respondents is different in terms of age groups.

Hypothesis 6: The impact of discrimination on the personal lives of the respondents is different in terms of age groups.

Hypothesis 7: The impact of discrimination on a person's health is different in different age groups.

As for what the discrimination in their organization was related to, 44.5% stated that discrimination was related to the work process, 24.2% of respondents related discrimination to hiring, 18.3% – to dismissal, and 13% believed that discrimination was related to all three cases mentioned above, see Figure 1.

According to the respondents, discrimination in the higher education system is caused by several factors. The most common reasons cited were public stereotypes (25.3%), followed by an ineffective legal system that fails to regulate discrimination in the labor market (23.6%).

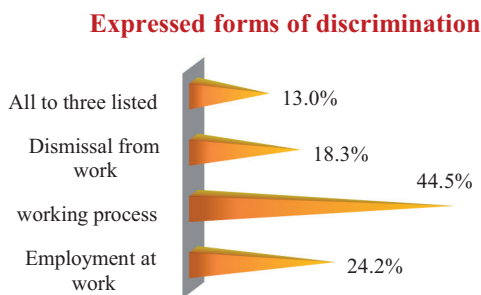


Figure 1. Processes related to discrimination in the organization (source: based on the authors' research)

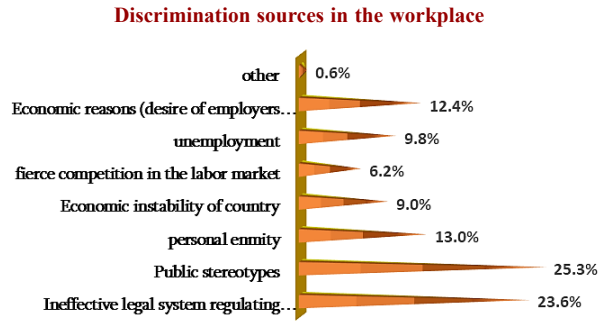


Figure 2. Respondents' opinions about the causes of discrimination in the labor market (source: based on the authors' research)

Personal hostility was also mentioned as a contributing factor (13%). Economic reasons such as employers' desire to reduce expenses and save money (12.4%), unemployment (9.8%), and economic instability in the country (9%) were other factors identified. Finally, fierce competition in the labor market was also cited as a cause for discrimination (6.2%), see Figure 2. It is important to acknowledge that unemployment is a major issue in Georgia's labor market, causing considerable stress for its residents. In comparison to other similar countries, Georgia's unemployment rate is even higher, which was further exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic (Abuse-rizde et al., 2023).

According to the conducted research, the presence of any form of discrimination in an organization leads to a stressful environment. When respondents were asked if there is a stressful environment in their organization due to various forms of discrimination, only 40.9% replied negatively, while 48.8% responded positively (15.5% said yes and 33.3% said partially), see Figure 3.

In our study, we utilized multivariate variance analysis to test our hypotheses. Homogeneity of variances of dependent variables was determined using Levene's test, and the results are presented in Table 1. The data suggests

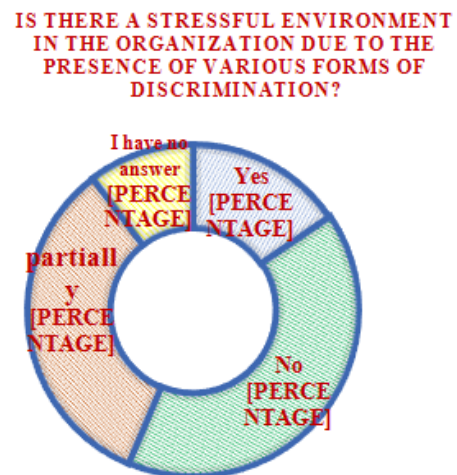


Figure 3. Respondents' opinions about discrimination as a cause of stress in the organization (source: based on the authors' research)

that both age and field of employment have an impact on all three dependent variables. Personal life and health are most strongly affected, followed by work results with a statistical significance level of 0.01. The factors have the most significant influence on personal life, according to the F test.

Based on the data presented in Table 1, we can confirm that Hypothesis 1 is valid. Moving forward, Table 2 and Table 3 provide us with information on individual factors that impact the dependent variables: work results, personal life, and health.

Table 2 focuses solely on the influence of the field of employment on the dependent variables. We can conclude, based on the statistical significance level and F-test results presented in Table 2, that the field of employment has an impact on all three dependent variables. Furthermore, we observe that the strongest statistical relationship exists between health and work results, as well as personal life, at the 0.05 level of statistical significance. As a result, we can confirm that Hypothesis 2, Hypothesis 3, and Hypothesis 4 are valid.

Table 1. Levene's test of equality of error variances (source: based on the authors' research)

	F	df1	df2	Sig.
Discrimination has a direct impact on a person's job performance.	2.296	11	738	.009
How does discrimination in the organization affect your personal life?	7.614	11	738	.000
How does discrimination in the organization affect your health?	6.379	11	738	.000

Table 2. Univariate tests (source: based on the authors' research)

Dependent Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Discrimination has a direct impact on a person's job performance	Contrast	4.614	1	4.614	6.372	.012
	Error	541.700	748	.724		
How does Discrimination affect on your personal life in the organization?	Contrast	7.151	1	7.151	4.283	.039
	Error	1249.016	748	1.670		
How does Discrimination affect on your health in the organization?	Contrast	27.257	1	27.257	14.084	.000
	Error	1447.662	748	1.935		

Table 3. Univariate tests (source: based on the authors' research)

Dependent Variable		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Discrimination has a direct impact on a person's job performance	Contrast	2.451	5	.490	.675	.642
	Error	535.729	738	.726		
How does Discrimination affect on your personal life in the organization?	Contrast	25.662	5	5.132	3.119	.009
	Error	1214.502	738	1.646		
How does Discrimination affect on your health in the organization?	Contrast	48.774	5	9.755	5.198	.000
	Error	1384.878	738	1.877		

Table 3 shows the estimation of the effect of only age on the dependent variables according to the analysis of variance. According to the level of statistical significance and the F test from Table 3, we conclude that age groups do not differ in terms of the influence of discrimination on work results, $P = 0.642$, which exceeds 0.05. Thus, hypothesis 5 is not true, and as for hypothesis 6 and hypothesis 7, the validity of these hypotheses is confirmed, in particular, the impact of discrimination on health has a maximum statistical relationship with the age variable. There is a difference in the age groups in terms of the impact of discrimination on health, and the impact of discrimination on personal life. There is also a difference in age groups, statistical relationship between the given variables at the 0.01 level.

In order to analyze the research results in terms of age, we divided the respondents into three age groups: 18–36; 36–56, 55>. The charts below provide a visual representation of the impact of discrimination by each age group. The results of the analysis of all three tables show that discrimination in the workplace affects the reflection on work results, personal life and health, which actually covers all aspects of people's lives (see Figures 4, 5, 6).

As a result of this research, it was revealed that the organizational climate is directly related to the work results of the staff.

Organizational climate affects the behaviour of staff and therefore their emotions and mood. Therefore, any decision-making should be based on creating the desired work environment for the staff, so that their work life is viewed in a positive light.

As can be seen from the diagrams, the impact of discrimination on work results is almost the same in all age groups. The majority names the categories "always" and "often" in all age groups.

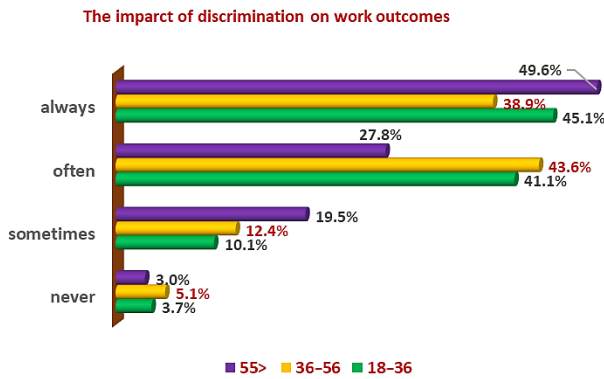


Figure 4. The impact of discrimination on work outcomes (source: based on the authors' research)

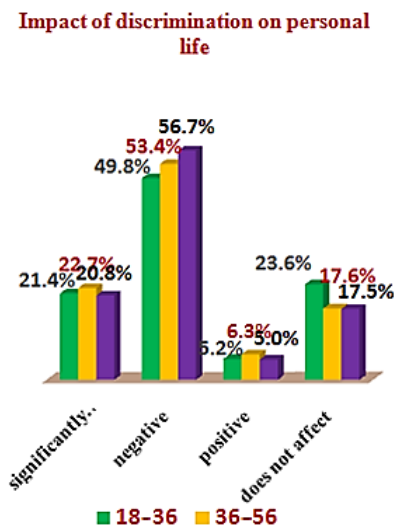


Figure 5. Impact of discrimination on personal life (source: based on the authors' research)

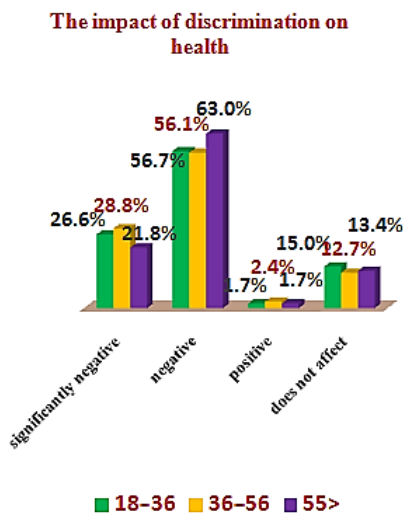


Figure 6. The impact of discrimination on health (source: based on the authors' research)

4. Conclusions

As a result of the research conducted by the authors, it is confirmed that the organizational environment in the educational system plays a decisive role in the achievement of success and competitive advantage of both academic and administrative staff. This is one of the many factors that affect the work results of employees.

It is also important to have a fair and impartial approach to all employees from the representatives of the management apparatus, which is also one of the determining factors of a good organizational environment. Adhering to the principles of fairness gives employees the opportunity to show their skills to the maximum, while at the same time taking care of their development. It also provides incentives to the staff to contribute to the progress of the organization.

It should be noted that although many countries have appropriate legislation aimed at reducing discrimination in the workplace, it still occurs frequently, which causes a lot of problems. The presence of discrimination in the workplace affects the quality of the working environment. One of the issues of our research in higher education institutions was about the impact of discrimination on the work, life and health of employees. The results showed that discrimination has a negative impact on all three aspects mentioned above. It also increases stress levels in the workplace, creating a toxic environment, which significantly reduces the productivity of both academic and administrative staff.

The study was conducted in different age groups to determine whether age had any effect on the negative impact of discrimination. The results showed that regardless of age, discrimination has a negative effect on employees. Such negative effects ultimately hinder the development of the organization and reduce the performance of employees, which negatively affects the productivity of the entire organization.

The negative impact of discrimination is not limited to a specific organization but is harmful to society. This is especially true for higher education institutions, which are responsible for shaping future contributors to the country's development, especially in developing countries like Georgia. Therefore, educational institutions should review existing policies, study the psycho-emotional state of employees, and develop an action plan to improve the organizational environment. Managers must be able to treat everyone fairly, regardless of their gender, age, or individual characteristics.

It is important to note that the results of the study cannot be generalized to all employees of educational institutions. Nevertheless, the findings can serve as a basis for future research in this regard.

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