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THE ROLE OF PSYCHOLOGICAL SAFETY IN THE PERCEPTION OF ORGANIZATIONAL CRISIS BY EMPLOYEES (ON THE EXAMPLE OF RA LABOR MARKET)

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In recent years the role of psychological safety in organizations has been studied by authors (A. Edmondson (1999, 2014, 2019); A. Carmeli, D. Brueller, J. Dutton (2008); A. Carmeli, R. Reiter-Palmon, E. Ziv (2010); W.A. Kahn (1990); B. Sanner, J. Bunderson (2013)) and organizations' management teams. It has a significant impact on a number of processes within organization. The aim of this work is to study the possible influence of psychological safety on the process of employee perception of organizational crises and their readiness to overcome it. According to results, there is a positive correlaton between these two variables, a relationship in which if one variable increases the second one increases as well. As a result, in psychologically more safe environment employees have positive attitude towards organizational crises and are better positioned to deal with them. The usage of the data from this study will enable the leadership team to develop effective management approaches for managing pre-crisis and crisis situations and maintain a high level of employee engagement.

Keywords: *Psychological safety, organizational crisis, employee engagement, human resources, personnel management.*

Introduction: In recent years various crises have become an integral part of the organizational life. Economic fluctuations, the coronavirus pandemic and several other crisis events have an impact on the management process in organization, leading to the need to develop new approaches. Management process in crisis situations faces new problems to maintain the activity and performance of the organization. The degree of employee engagement, their performance, willingness to provide support and their attitude towards the company depend on the characteristics of organizational crisis management, which directly affects the

organizations' ability to overcome the crisis. The study of the influence of psychological safety on the employees' attitude towards organizational crises will make it possible to understand the existence of a connection between these two phenomena and will direct the management and human resources teams to invest the necessary resources to create a psychologically safe environment in the organization.

The purpose of the study is to identify the influence of the psychological safety in the organization on the perception of organizational crises by employees. We assume that in psychologically more safe environments employees have a more positive attitude towards organizational crises and are more willing to follow the organizations' strategy and support in the process of overcoming the crisis. To implement the research, we used the survey method.

Psychologucal safety: The issue of psychological safety in organizational activities has been studied since the 1960s, but in recent times attention to it has significantly increased due to the modern person-centered approaches in human resources management (henceforth HRM), new ideas about employee engagement and performance management. American researcher, professor, organizational learning specialist Amy Edmondson describes psychological safety in work environment as a climate in which "people are comfortable expressing and being themselves. … They feel comfortable sharing concerns and mistakes without fear of embarrassment or retribution" [1, p. xvi]. She also defines it "as the belief that the work environment is safe for interpersonal risk taking"[1, p. 8]. Professor William Kahn defines psychological safety as "A sense of being able to show and employ self without fear of negative consequences to self-image, status or career" [3,p. 705]. In his work he found that people are personally more engaging in situations characterized as psychologically safer. In his research data shows that there are 4 main factors directly impact psychological safety. Those are interpersonal relationships, group and inter-group dynamics, management style and process and organizational norms [3, pp. 708-713].

The phenomenon of psychological safety has been studied also by Armenian authors [7, 8]. In her research psychologist L. Petrosyan brought out the components that ensure or hinder psychological safety in the organizations' management process. Managers give higher value to the component of interpersonal relationships, which is a part of persons' social and psychological safety. A cooperative and friendly environment is the basis of warm relations which contributes to productivity at work [8].

Thus, in a psychologically safe environment employees are sincere, they trust and respect each other. Number of studies show that a psychologically safe environment effects on employee engagement, learning activities, acquisition of new knowledge and creative thinking, because in such environment there is no fear of

making mistakes or being blamed, and each employee initiative is valued. Employees feel safer in supportive teams, so they are more willing to change their behavior if needed [1, pp. 1-15; 3, pp. 708-709; 7, pp. 59-62].

Organizational crises: In the conditions of the normal activity of the organization, HRM specialists and the managers try to find solutions to increase productivity and efficiency as well as to promote the organization. As mentioned above, number of studies emphasize the role of psychological safety in this context. However, it is equally important to manage the organization during crises times. Crisis events have an impact not only on the person, but also on the organizations' life. It is important to study and understand the importance of number of organizational phenomena in the management of the organization during crises, in this case, particularly, the role of psychological safety.

Public relations and crisis management specialists S. Kulpers and J. Wolbers describe organizational crises as "threats or negative incidents that require an urgent response by the organization under conditions of considerable uncertainty as to the precise causes and probable consequences of the situation at hand" [4, p. 3]. Summarizing the classifications of organizational crises presented by the authors, we can note that they can be long-term or short-term, they can be unpredictable or predictable, they can be caused by reasons arising from the external environment (economic fluctuations, wars, natural disasters, etc.), as well as internal factors (work errors, damage to reputation, dismission of important employees, technological failures, etc.)[5, pp. 17-22; 6]. In recent years, leaders pay great attention to the organizations' anti-crisis management, develop strategic plans, the use of which in the pre-crisis and crisis phase will make it possible to mitigate the impact and consequences of the crisis, as well as to maintain the normal operation processes of the organization. In times of crisis, effective leadership is an important component. Open and honest communication with employees, effective decision-making, maintenance of a positive atmosphere in the organization and high employee engagement increases the probability of effective crisis resolution.

Selection description: The research sample consists of 50 people aged 18-45 working in the RA. Figure 1 shows the demographic distribution of the respondents according to their gender, age, length of work in the organization and the current position. 52% of respondents are female and 48% are male. 50% of them have been working at their current workplace for 1-3 years, 20% for up to 1 year, 24% for 3-5 years, and 6% for more than 5 years.

Research methods: The research was conducted using the survey method. The questionnaire, which is aimed at finding out the degree of psychological safety in the team and the attitude of employees to organizational crises, consists of 3 main parts:

Demographic and work-related questions,

Questionnaire developed by A. Edmondson for measuring psychological safety in organization [2], Questions aimed at revealing the attitude of towards organizational crises.
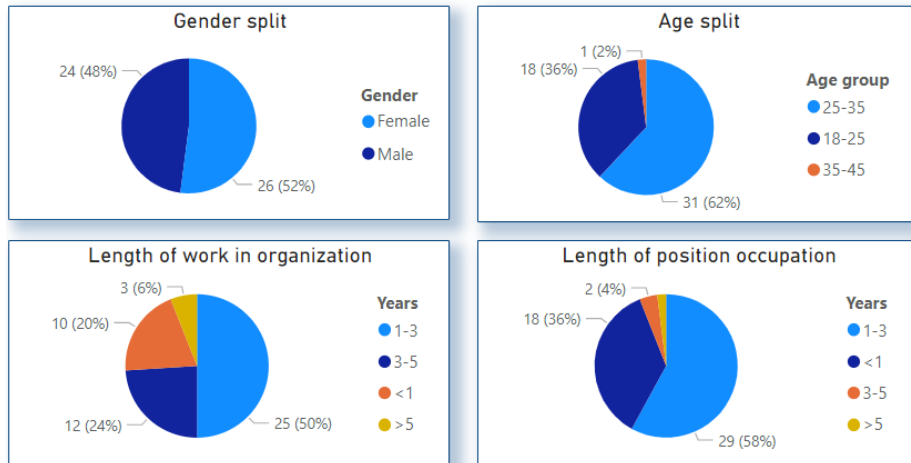

Figure 1. Demographic distribution of research participants.

The questions developed by us, which were aimed at revealing the employees' attitude towards the organizational crises, included 5 questions on 3 aspects of organizational crises:

Communication during organizational crises, since the importance of organizational communication in crisis conditions has recently been in the focus of researchers' attention (E. Asriyan, N. Melkonyan (2021), W. Coombs (2007, 2010), A. Barrera (2014), etc),

Faith in the organization and leadership in the process of overcoming the crisis, as it reflects employees' positive attitude to the organization and managers,

Willingness of employees to support in the process of overcoming crises, because with the help of employees the organization will overcome any crises more easily[See Annex 1].

Survey participants evaluated the level of psychological safety in their organization and their attitude to organizational crises on a scale of 1-5 points, where 1 point represents their absolute disagreement and 5 point- absolute agreement with the presented statement.

Using Pearson's correlation coefficient, we found that there is a positive correlation ($r=0.53$) between psychological safety in the organization and employees' perception of organizational crises (Figure 2). The correlation expresses the degree that two variables change correspondently. Here we have a positive correlation which means if one variable increases the second one increases as well [9]. That is, the

higher the index of psychological safety, the more positive is employees' attitude towards organizational crises and the more they are willing to help company to overcome it. The strength of the correlation between the 3 components of psychological safety and perception of organizational crises varies. The strongest positive correlation was revealed between psychological safety and level of organizational crisis communication($r=0.56$). Figure 2 presents the distribution of survey participants according to the scores of the two variables, as well as the correlation coefficients between the components of psychological safety and crisis perception. The correlation is statistically significant as the P-value, which is the probability that we would have found the current result if the correlation coefficient were in fact 0, equals to 0.000075. Referring to Pearson's coefficient if P-value us lower than the conventional 5%($P<0.05$) the correlation coefficient is called statistically significant [9].
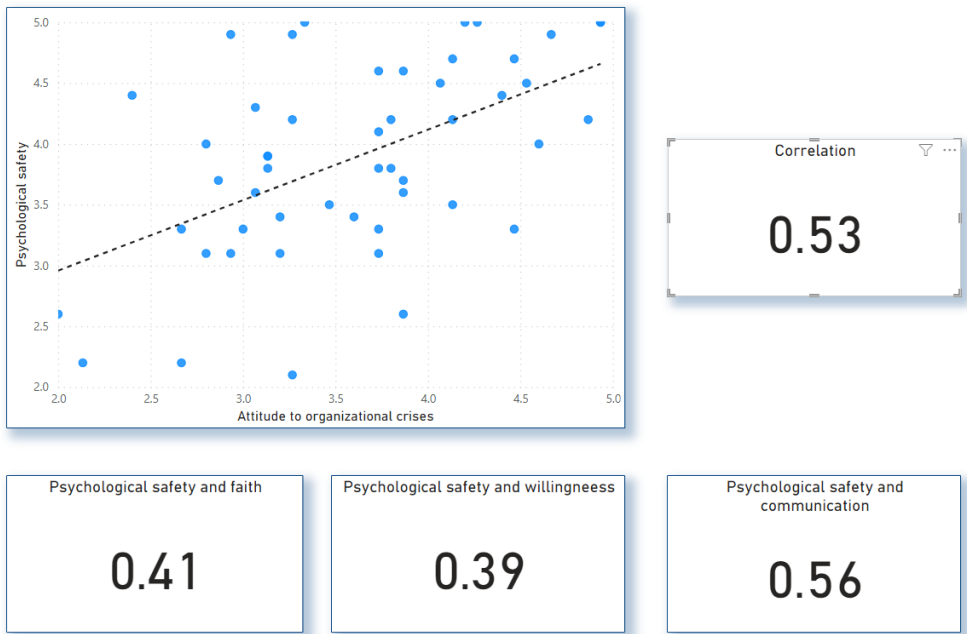

Figure 2. Corelation between psychological safety in organization and employees' attitude towars organizational crisis components.

Analyzing the relationship between the length of work in the organization with other factors, we found that:

Employees who have been working in the organization for a longer period rated the level of psychological safety higher,

Employees working longer in the same organization recorded a higher rate of willingness to support the company in crisis situations,

The level of perception of organizational crises communication is higher among new employees (Figure 3).

Understanding the connection between the feeling of psychological safety at work and the perception of organizational crises by employees will enable HRM specialists to develop the necessary steps to create a psychologically safe environment in company.

● Psychological safety ● Willingness to support ● Communication

Figure 3. Employees attitude to psychological safety, communication during crises and their willingness to support in overcoming organizational crises based on their length of work in the organization.

Conclusions: Thus, in recent years organizational crises have become subject of attention of managers and HRM specialists, as they have an impact on the work productivity and company's performance. Studying organizational crises, their possible impact and connection with other components of organizational activities will enable HRM and management specialists to take effective steps to reduce the possible impact of crises and maintain the work productivity. Assuming that the high level of psychological safety in the organization positively effect on the employees' perception of organizational crises and their willingness in the process of overcoming them, we have conducted this research. Summarizing the results of the research, we can note that:

There is a positive correlation of medium strength ($r=0.53$) between employees' perception of psychological safety in the organization and perception of organizational crises. That is, the higher the level of psychological safety in the organization, the more employees are willing to help their organization in crisis situations, the more they believe in the organization's strengths and rate higher communication in crisis situations. Support and belief of employees helps organizations to maintain their productivity. Therefore, it is important to create a psychologically safe environment in the organization, where employees are sincere, trust and respect each other.

The longer employees work in the organization, the higher they rate the level of psychological safety in the company, and they are more willing to support the organization in crisis situations. Awareness of this can help HRM professionals to develop strategic steps for employee retention. Employee retention is one of the important functions of HRM, because old employees are the carriers of the organization's knowledge and culture. As the results of the research show, they are also more willing to be next to the company and support to overcome crises.

Summary: The conducted research once again emphasizes the importance of ensuring a high level of psychological safety in the organization, especially in crisis situations. In organizations with high psychological safety, employees believe more in the success of the organization during crises and are ready to support to overcome these situations. Taking into account the military-political and economic fluctuations in recent years, which are crisis factors for maintaining operations of organization, it is important for HR professionals to ensure high level of personnel engagement in work and crisis management activities. To achieve that goal, HRM professionals and managers must invest resources in creating and maintaining a psychologically safe climate.

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ՀՈԳԵԲԱՆԱԿԱՆ ԱՆՎՏԱՆԳՈՒԹՅԱՆ ԴԵՐԸ ԱՇԽԱՏԱԿԻՑՆԵՐԻ ԿՈՂՄԻՑ ԿԱԶՄԱԿԵՐՊԱԿԱՆ ՃԳՆԱԺԱՄԵՐԻ ԸՆԿԱԼՄԱՆ ՀԱՄԱՏԵՔՍՏՈՒՄ (ՀՀ ԱՇԽԱՏԱՇՈՒԿԱՅԻ ՕՐԻՆԱԿՈՎ)

Անահիտ Գևորգյան (Երևանի պետական համալսարան, Երևան, Հայաստան)

Վերջին տարիներին կազմակերպությունում հոգեբանական անվտանգու-թյան դերը գտնվում է հետդնակների (A. Edmondson(1999, 2014, 2019); A.Carmeli, D. Brueller, J. Dutton(2008); A. Carmeli, R. Reiter-Palmon, E. Ziv(2010); W.A. Kahn(1990); B. Sanner, J. Bunderson(2013)) և ղեկավարների ուշադրության կենտրոնում: Այն էական ազդեցություն է ունենում կազմակերպության մի շարք գործընթացների վրա: Հետազոտական աշխատանքի նպատակն է ուսումնասի-րել հոգեբանական անվտանության հնարավոր ազդեցությունը աշխատակցի կողմից կազմակերպական ճգնաժամերի ընկալման և դրանց հաղթահարման գործընթացում աջակցելու պատրաստակամության վրա: Համաձայն հետազո-տության արդյունքների, այս երկու փոփոխականների միջև առկա է դրական կորելյացիա՝ փոխհարաբերություն, որի դեպքում մի փոփոխականի մեծացումը հանգեցնում է մյուսի մեծացմանը: Արդյունքում հոգեբանական ավելի անվտանգ միջավայրում աշխատակիցներն ավելի դրական վերաբերմունք ունեն կազմա-կերպական ճգնաժամերին և պատրաստական են աջակցելու կազմակեր-պությանը դրանց հաղթահարման գործընթացում: Այս գիտելիքի կիրառումը հնարավորություն կտա կազմակերպության ղեկավար անձնակազմին կառա-վարման արդյունավետ մոտեցումներ մշակել նախաճգնաժամային և ճգնաժա-մային իրավիճակներում անձնակազմի կառավարման և աշխատակիցների ներգրավվածության բարձր մակարդակի պահպանման համար:

Հանգուցային բառեր՝ *հոգեբանական անվտանգություն, կազմակերպական ճգնաժամ, աշխատակիցների ներգրավվածություն, մարդկային ռեսուրսներ, անձնակազմի կառավարում:*

РОЛЬ ПСИХОЛОГИЧЕСКОЙ БЕЗОПАСНОСТИ В КОНТЕКСТЕ ВОСПРИЯТИЯ РАБОТНИКАМИ ОРГАНИЗАЦИОННОГО КРИЗИСА (НА ПРИМЕРЕ РАБОТНИКОВ РА)

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В последние годы роль психологической безопасности в организации находится в центре внимания авторов (A. Edmondson (1999, 2014, 2019); A.Carmeli, D. Brueller, J. Dutton (2008); A. Carmeli, R. Reiter-Palmon, E. Ziv (2010); W.A. Kahn (1990); B. Sanner, J. Bunderson (2013)) и лидеров. Оно оказывает существенное влияние на ряд процессов организации. Цель исследовательской работы – изучить возможное влияние психологической безопасности на восприятие сотрудником организационных кризисов и готовность оказать поддержку в процессе их преодоления. По результатам исследования между этими двумя переменными существует положительная корреляция – связь, при которой увеличение одной переменной, вызванное каким-либо фактором, приводит к увеличению другой. В результате в психологически более безопасной среде сотрудники более позитивно относятся к организационным кризисам и готовы поддержать организацию в процессе их преодоления. Применение этих знаний позволит руководителям организации разработать эффективные управленческие подходы в предкризисных и кризисных ситуациях для управления персоналом и поддержания высокого уровня вовлеченности сотрудников.

Ключевые слова: *Психологическая безопасность, организационный кризис, вовлеченность сотрудников, человеческие ресурсы, управление персоналом.*

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