INTERNAL COMMUNICATION AND PERCEPTION OF ETHNIC PREJUDICE OF EMPLOYEES OF DIFFERENT ETHNICITIES IN THE WORKPLACE

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ABSTRACT

This research aims to see how different indicators of internal communication, such as open communication, positive and understandable communication, affect the perception of ethnic prejudices among employees of different ethnic backgrounds. Participants in this study are a total of 390 employees with different ethnicities: Albanian, Macedonian, Turkish, Serbian, Vlach and Roma, of them 229 (58.7%) men and 161 (41.3%) women, including 149 (49.7%) subjects from the private sector and 196 (50.3%) from the public sector. The method used in this research is the quantitative method, respectively the questionnaire technique was used, carried out for the purposes of this research. The findings of this study, despite the high reliability intervals, highlighted a statistically non-significant prediction effect between positive and open communication, in contrast to understandable communication, which was found to be a predictor of ethnic prejudice in employees. From these findings, we can say that internal communication can partially influence the appearance of ethnic prejudices. A non-significant effect was also found in predicting the gender, ethnicity of the employees as well as the work sector.

Keywords: Ethnic prejudice, positive communication, open communication, understandable communication.

INTRODUCTION

Ethnic prejudice in the workplace has been an ongoing legal, social and practical problem. Despite the functioning of the legislative infrastructure on the rights of employees of different ethnic backgrounds in every country, today a large number of companies face problems of this nature, therefore the importance of the problem addressed in this study lies precisely in the solution of different strategic forms at work with the aim of reducing ethnic prejudices. In this study, internal communication is seen as a strategy that will reduce ethnic prejudices within the workplace with different ethnic composition, in which case the need to present any inconsistencies from the results of the studies carried out as well as to open new practical horizons, to solve many problems of a psychological nature in the workplace.

Ethnic prejudices as well as internal communication at work have been the constant focus of many studies in the field of organizational psychology. A study of a meta-analytic nature has identified 508 scientific articles in the Journal of Applied Psychology that talk about discrimination and prejudice at work, documenting these articles in three eras and that era (1917-1969) has been identified as a period of discrimination and high prejudices at work, the era (1970-1989) has been identified as the period affecting the highest discriminatory

pedestals at work and the era (1990-2014) the period where progress has been seen in reducing discriminatory behaviors and prejudiced attitudes (Colella, Hebl & King, 2017).

Based on the findings of the study by Lee et al. (2021), it is emphasized that the strategic management of communication in the organization has an important function in influencing the perception of work relations among employees of different racial and ethnic backgrounds. Also some researches have argued as very important the role of internal communication as a vital element of the management team in shaping the perceptions and attitudes of employees towards their organizations (Verčič et al., 2012).

Kang and Sung (2017), highlight the importance of internal communication not only in preventing ethnic prejudices and maintaining good relations between workers, but also in increasing employee engagement in the workplace.

The importance of the perspective of internal communication in the effect of mitigating employee biases was also seen in Kang and Sung's (2017) study, which aimed to examine how a company's internal communication efforts can affect the perception of employees regarding ethnic prejudice and their relationship with the company. The findings of this research showed a reciprocal relationship between internal communication and employee engagement, which engagement is also related to the reduction of negative reports of ethnic character.

Organizational culture, on the other hand, is a very important element, on the basis of which the level of interethnic relationships among employees depends. In this regard, Kim et al. (2017) found a statistically significant negative relationship between organizational culture with a positive approach to all employees without cultural differences and reduced prejudice among workers, as well as a positive relationship between authoritarian organizational culture and employee ethnic prejudice.

The aim of this study is based on data argued by relevant studies as well as theories that speak about the legitimacy of prejudices and internal communication at work, aiming to see the role of internal communication in the perception of ethnic prejudices among minority employees. ethnicity at work. Concretely, it should be seen how different communication indicators such as open communication, positive and understandable communication affect the perception of ethnic prejudices among employees with different ethnic affiliations. Also, as predictors of ethnic prejudices, the role of gender, the ethnicity of employees, as well as the private and public employment sector were analyzed.

LITERATURE

Communication in general is the essence of the success and progress of any organization. When communication is not effective, then the success and productivity of the organization will be declining. To avoid this consequence, it is required to have an effective communication at work, whether this communication is between the upper echelon with subordinates or employee with employee (Joey, 2002). Boone (1992) thinks that communication interference originates due to partial information, inappropriate communication channel, non-open, non-positive and incomprehensible communication. Pardakhtchi (1994) thinks that lack of communication planning, uncertainty in everyone's duties and responsibilities, barriers of the ethnic nature of employees, technical obstacles,

group incoherence in their attitudes and beliefs, are the most important communication obstacles.

Numerous studies emphasize the continuity of the influence of the role of internal communication in the reports of the positive connection of employees with the organization. The manager's open and positive communication has been characterized as a mediating and important incentive not only in reducing ethnic prejudices among employees, but also in increasing the trust, commitment and satisfaction of employees with the organization and their relationships with colleagues of ethnic origin. different ethnic-cultural (Men & Stacks, 2014).

Indicators of internal communication such as positive, open and understandable communication in some studies are also named as manager's accountability for conveying information whether positive or negative about the organization. This means that by disseminating information, the organization helps the employee to interpret the goals of the organization appropriately and prevent disputes, rumors and confusing situations by reducing the perceived prejudices in the workplace between employees or between the relationship of employees with the organization (Men & Yue, 2019).

Based on the theory of contact by Allport (1954), it is emphasized that different groups of people can reduce their prejudices only when they are in constant contact and communication with other groups. Although many studies in psychology find a positive relationship between prejudice reduction and group communication, some other studies on the contact theory hypothesis in psychology emphasize that it is difficult to interpret since this theory relies mainly on observed data. (Pettigrew, 1998). Based on the fact that contact theory is based on non-experimental data, the opposite relationship has been found, individuals with less prejudice are likely to engage in contact with the other group (Paluck et al., 2019).

Prejudices in general in the workplace are related to discrimination and mistreatment, especially towards ethnic minorities (Colella et al, 2017), this leads to a decrease in the professional well-being of employees as well as to the reinforcement of the view that stigmatized groups are not suitable for work in general, for specific professions and leadership positions (Koenig & Eagly, 2014). In turn, this situation increases the likelihood that stigmatized groups will experience backlash when entering those positions, potentially perpetuating a vicious cycle (Rudman et al., 2012).

Organizations with employees of different ethnicities, in order to achieve their goals and vision, must understand the collegial relations between the workers, but also with the leaders, in order to keep the diversity spirit in the workplace in balance (Ashkanasy et al., 2002).

Employees with negative attitudes toward other workplace ethnicities may be particularly sensitive to initiatives related to affirmative action, including initiatives to increase opportunities, quotas, targets (Harrison, Kravitz, Mayer, Leslie, & Lev-Arey, 2006).

On the other hand, employees with positive attitudes often emphasize the benefits that diversity brings by trying to create a respectful and tolerant atmosphere. They are aware of historical social events as well as the impact of the role of policies that have limited the relations of different cultural diversities, in particular those of ethnicity (Dick & Nadin, 2006). Their tendency is to be cautious in the group, so that the minority groups do not feel in an unenviable situation

METHODOLOGY

The participants

This research included employees of public and private organizations in the cities of Skopje, Tetovo and Gostivar, Republic of North Macedonia. There are a total of 390 participants, specifically employees, of which 48.5% are employees of Albanian ethnicity, 39.2% of Macedonian ethnicity, 6.2 Turks, 1.8% Bosnians, 2.6% Roma and 1.7 % other. Of them, 161 (41.3%) participants belong to the female gender, while 229 (58.7%) belong to the male gender. A total of 194 (49.7%) were included from the private sector, while 196 (50.3%) from the public sector. The participation of the participants was voluntary, taking care to preserve their confidentiality and comfort in completing the questionnaire.

Methods and procedures

The first questionnaire collects data on the role of internal communication between managers and employees, specifically positive, open and understandable communication, which is thought to have an impact on ethnic prejudice in employees. The original version of this inventory was compiled by Dennis (1974). Internal communication is defined as the sum of the points obtained from the answers to each of the questions of this scale. Thus: with 1 (do not agree at all), with 2 (disagree), with 3 (neutral), with 4 (agree) and with 5 (completely agree). The same questionnaire was also used by the author Roberts (2013), Wright State University, in the United States of America, who addressed the impact of communication and communication channels on the organizational commitment of employees. As for the reliability of the questionnaire for measuring internal communication, consisting mainly of 21 questions, the value of Cronbach's Alpha turns out to be a high reliability value of $\alpha=0.97$, respectively of 21 items, 10 of them measure positive communication with reliability $\alpha=0.95$, open communication including 6 items, $\alpha=0.94$ and understandable communication with 4 items and reliability $\alpha=0.91$.

Findings on the report of the employee's ethnic prejudice component were measured through the Universal Diversity Scale, an inventory compiled by Miville-Guzman, M-GUDS (1999), consisting of 29 questions. The component of ethnic prejudice among employees is defined as the sum of the points obtained from the answers to the following questions: with 1 (do not agree at all), with 2 (disagree), with 3 (neutral), with 4 (agree) and with 5 (completely agree). The prejudice component of the M-GUDS has been shown to have a high reliability of $\alpha=0.89$. The same measurement scale was also used by the author Salisbury (2011), who investigated the cognitive component of prejudice in a group of students who pursued their studies in a spirit of diverse culture.

Data analysis

The SPSS statistical package, version 22, was used for the data analysis, first the averages of the variables were presented and then the correlation of the variables between internal communication, respectively between the component of positive, open communication and ethnic prejudices, while the prediction of the effects of internal communication, namely its components, gender, sector of employees and ethnicity of employees was tested using multiple linear regression analysis.

RESULTS

Based on the values from the descriptive data in Table 1, the ethnic prejudice variable has an average of 85, lower than expected (Max=145, Min=46, SD=16.303), positive communication as a component of internal communication results with average 40.74, higher than the expected average (Max=55, Min=11, SD=10.73), also the open communication

component from the collected data turns out to be an average of 21.44 higher than that expected (Max=30, Min=6, SD=21.44), while understandable communication has an average of 14.62, also a lower average than expected (Max= 20, Min=4, SD=14.62).

The results from Pearson's correlation analysis where the relationship between ethnic prejudices and positive communication as components of internal communication during the workplace was sought, the correlation value was found to be (r=-0.257; p<0.01), statistically significant for degrees of freedom 0.01, which indicates that there is a considered negative correlation between ethnic prejudice and positive communication. This means that the increase of positive communication as a component of internal communication affects to a certain extent the reduction of ethnic prejudices among employees. Ethnic prejudice resulted in a negative correlation also with open communication (r=-0.288; p<0.01), and with understandable communication (r=-0.288; p<0.01). This means that the more the employees perceive the open and understandable communication exercised by the leaders, the more the ethnic prejudices decrease and in this way the chances are high that the employees will form positive attitudes with other employees who are of other ethnic origin.

Table 1. Means of variables and correlation between them

Variables	Mean	SD	Max	Min	Correlation			
					1	2	3	4
Ethnic prejudices	85.02	16,303	145	46	-			
Positive communication	40,74	10,73	55	11	**-.257****	-		
Open communication	21,44	21,44	30	6	**-.288****	**.877****	-	
Understandable communication	14,62	14,62	20	4	**-.288****	**.847****	**.852****	-

All correlations significant (p<.01).
Max=maximum; Min=minimum; SD= standard deviation

Multiple linear regression analysis was used to predict the impact of employee ethnic bias based on positive communication, open, understandable communication, gender, employee sector, and ethnicity of subjects in the workplace (Table 2). The findings of this analysis show that, positive communication is not a significant predictor of ethnic prejudice (b= .025, t= .218, p>.05), open communication also appears as a non-predictive component of ethnic prejudice (b= -.044, t= -.363, p>.05), unlike other internal communication components, understandable communication turned out to be a significant predictor of ethnic prejudice (b= .320, t= .3077, p <.01).

From the data in Table 2 we also see that, gender (b= .086, t= 1.701, p>.05), employee sector (b= .005, t= .096, p>.05) and ethnicity (b= .084, t= 1.3709, p>.05), did not turn out to be predictors of ethnic prejudice. Although the correlation findings showed significant statistical significance between the three components of communication, multiple linear regression analysis revealed a significant model only when understandable communication is the predictor variable, [F(6)= 6.531, p <.01, with R²=.079].

Table 2. Correlation between ethnic prejudice, positive, open and understandable communication, gender, sector of employment and ethnicity of employees

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	t	Sig.
	b	std. error	beta		
(Constant)	76.783	4.903		15.662	.000
Positive communication	.037	.172	.025	.218	.828
Open communication	-.109	.300	-.044	-.363	.717
Understandable communication	-1.281	.416	.320	3.077	**.002**
Gender	-2.836	1.667	.086	1.701	.090
Employee sector	.161	1.671	.005	.096	.923
Ethnicity of subjects	1.321	.773	.084	1.709	.088

a. Dependent Variable: Paragjykimet etnike

DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

Based on the purpose and hypothesis of the research that, internal communication, respectively its components such as positive, open and understandable communication influence the way of perception of ethnic prejudice in employees with different ethnic affiliations, where in addition to internal communication as predictor variables of ethnic prejudice, the role of gender, the ethnicity of employees as well as the employment sector in the private and public sector have also been predicted, it was seen that, despite the considered results of the correlation with statistical significance, from the multiple linear regression analysis, only understandable communication between the manager-employee relationship turned out to be an important predictor of ethnic prejudices among employees, so we can say that internal communication can partially influence ethnic prejudices.

There are many other similar studies that also talk about the role of internal communication and ethnic prejudice at work, according to Organ (1988), internal communication with a positive, open and understandable culture affects not only the reduction of ethnic prejudice in employees, but encouraging them even beyond the main job obligations by working voluntarily in order to promote the workplace.

In recent years, the role of internal communication at work has been the main focus of many organizations in order to understand their employees. According to Argenti (2017), during the last two decades it has been observed how the superiors of organizations have made a profound change in the way they have moved from a superficial focus to a strategic one using the right communication channel in order to be close and they all understand the attitudes of employees with different diversity compositions. Even the results of our study, along with other relevant studies, partly testify to an important continuation of the influence of internal communication in the prevention and increase of ethnic prejudices and wrong attitudes.

The findings of our study also showed that the gender and ethnicity of employees did not prove to be predictors of ethnic prejudice, even despite the inclusion of participants with different ethnic identities and with an approximate number between female and male gender, this simultaneously indicates that organizations within the context where the study was carried out account for these issues. It is the opposite of the research findings of

Dhanani (2022), where according to a managerial communication strategy used, which strategy exercised ethnic, racial and gender oppression, all this has influenced not only the intensification of ethnic and racial prejudices, but also the reduction of employee well-being. Taking into consideration the findings of the linear regression of this research, it was seen that the public and private work sector were not important factors in predicting ethnic prejudices among employees, this result may be in the context where the study was carried out as the labor market in the private sphere as well as the public sphere after two decades of inter-ethnic conflicts, respect the legislative infrastructure on the rights of employees against prejudice and discrimination, which means that neither one nor the other sector intensifies ethnic issues at work. Similarities with the findings of this study were also argued by Gregori and Borland (1999), according to their findings, prejudices in general, but also ethnic ones in particular, were not present or influenced by the work sector. Usually the work environment in the public sector due to the political environment tends to be more focused on respecting the rights of employees against prejudice and discrimination as opposed to the private one, but what emerged during these findings is that the sector private company respects its employees without cultural and ethnic differences.

Research limitations/implications
The results of this study also carry limitations, among these limitations may be the generalization of the results, taking into consideration the target population and the one accessed. What can be emphasized is that these results gave important implications for the field of organizational psychology, as well as for the human resource management sector, practitioners and organizational leaders. Findings from this study partially demonstrated the importance of internal communication by supporting the need to adopt a consistent communication approach to understanding how invisible ethnic biases are perceived at work and to inform future theoretical and practical efforts targeting internal communication as a strategy for mitigating ethnic bias in the workplace.

Many other problems arise from this study that need to be solved. One of the problems that arose is that not all types of biases that may be the result of internal communication have been analyzed. Also, other researchers, the impact of internal communication, besides being able to foresee it as a factor of the appearance of prejudices, they can also foresee it as a factor of the commitment of employees in the workplace.

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