Chapter 11

An Organizational Trauma Intervention: A Case From Turkey

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this chapter is to describe a trauma experienced among blue collar employees at the XYZ car factory in Turkey. Demonstrations led to a halt of production after the representative union signed higher salary at another factory. After the consensus among the parties the production was restarted. However, the trauma and its symptoms emerged. Conflicts and polarization rose among the workers and the employer decided to conduct an intervention program. This study focuses on the pre-intervention, pilot intervention and main intervention programs. Descriptive quotations related to the trauma and the implications of the intervention program are discussed in the light of a theoretical framework. In the present paper, a brief background of the automotive industry and labor unions will be presented. The theoretical perspective is put forward, the implemented program is described, and the descriptive findings are presented then the findings and implications are discussed.

INTRODUCTION

The Automotive Industry and Labor Unions in Turkey

The automotive industry in Turkey is quite developed. Both cars and their components are manufactured in Turkey. Most of the factories producing cars and their components are located in Bursa, one of the northwestern cities of Turkey. In this text, the factories and unions involved have been given fictitious names, both because of confidentiality and to allow the author to explain the situation with more details and accuracy. The narration is thus made more convenient for the reader.

In a majority of the factories in the automotive sector as well as in other manufacturing industries, labor unions sign collective labor agreements for a three-year period with the employers. When the last
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contracts were signed in December 2014 by the Representative Union, there were two different labor unions at ABC factory. It was uncertain which of the competing labor unions was going to represent the workers there and therefore a collective labor agreement could not be signed. A court decided in May 2015 that the Representative Union should represent the workers and this union signed the agreement after the court decision. Hence the agreement at ABC factory was signed six months later than the collective agreements signed at other factories.

According to the collective labor agreement signed in December 2014 workers were paid 6 Turkish Lira (TL) (2.25USD) per hour while workers at ABC factory were paid 8 TL (3.00USD) per hour because of their late contract. This inequality created a lot of tension in the labor market and among the workers in Bursa. Demonstrations against the union Representative Union started at one of the factories. The protests then spread to other big factories in Bursa. The production at XYZ factory was suspended for a period of time in 2015. The protests ended after a consensus between representatives of the workers, the union and the employers. They agreed upon a one-time payment of 1000 TL (275USD) to those workers who were receiving the lower hourly salary.

The Organizational Trauma from the Perspective of the Workers

The protests at XYZ factory had started in the cafeteria with workers banging their cutlery on the tables. They later grew bigger and even led to a halt of production in some ateliers. While some workers were very upset over the inequality in pay others joined the protests out of solidarity for their friends. A majority of the senior workers (more than 15 years of employment) preferred not to join the demonstrations as well as some of the younger workers.

Demonstrations were held peacefully and there was no vandalism, no sabotage and no damage done to the factory facilities. After the stop of production for nine days, the workers took up their work again. Conflicts and polarizations emerged among the workers after the production was restarted. The workers were now divided into several groups and subgroups. These groups can be categorized as follows:

1. Broadly we can categorize all workers as the ones who had joined the protests and the ones who did not.
2. Representative Union members,
3. Members of Alternative Union,
4. Those without a union membership,
5. Superiors of blue collar workers, namely Main Production Team Leaders (MTL) and Lean Team Leaders (LTL),
6. Workers joining the protests at first and then returning to their jobs out of fear of losing their employment,
7. Workers taking part of the protests until the end regardless of union membership status.

Workers who had taken part of the demonstration until the end accused their colleagues who had not participated at all or had participated for a while of being traitors. They claimed that they had received the compensation payment thanks to their effort but that the others did not really deserve this payment.

The psychological atmosphere in the factory had again became unproductive and the morale among the workers was low. Upon this the HR department decided that an intervention was needed to restore a positive working climate. A team of social scientists and practitioners were invited to develop and
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