UNDERSTANDING OF GHOSTING IN RE-EDUCATION OF HUMAN RESOURCES IN AN ORGANIZATION

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In Slovakia, there has been very little attention and research devoted to the issue of ghosting. The aim of the article is to enrich the relatively unknown ghosting issue and to propose a methodology for its assessment and prediction. The GIG methodology consists of 12 items that create a Global Indicator of Ghosting. The paper presents a verification of the methodology applied to identify gender differences. Attention is given to the inclusion of ghosting in the process of human resources re-education.

Keywords: ghosting, communication, company, behaviour

1 Introduction

In today's society, the issue of ghosting is moving forward and assumes a new dimension. In many cases it is associated with self-confidence, frustration, social irritability, emotional stability and, at the same time, it has the potential to penetrate into cognitive deformations in both the personal and working life of an individual (Frankovský, Birknerová, Zbihlejová, 2015, Birknerová and Baranová, 2011). Ghosting can be considered ending any communication with someone you often met, spoke, wrote messages, or sent e-mail, on the ground that a person who lost interest in a contact (ghoster) left the victim of ghosting in a silent struggle with his/her own thoughts and without explanation (Koessler, 2018, Freedman, et al., 2018, UrbanDictionary, 2013, Vagaš, Škerháková, 2018). Simply said, ghosting is when someone who was in (regular) contact with you (like friend or colleague) suddenly unexpectedly interrupts contact with you without any explanation. The term ghosting, that was originally used in the dating world describing a situation "when a person abruptly cuts off all communication with a potential suitor with no previous warning or notice", penetrated into the workplace and causes problems to HR professionals (Sim Esmen, 2018).

Theoretical backgrounds and practical researches in the field of ghosting have found their representation in social relationships between men and women, while they have anchored and neglected working relationships in organizations (Esmen, 2018, Pilita, 2018, Freedman et al., 2018). Thus, the ghosting can be considered a social trend that is familiar to everyone, and is associated with people-to-people communication (Hill, 2018). Eileen (2018) highlights changes in post-conflict behavior at the workplace, where the actors have the problem to continue communicating within the work process. Building good relationships and communication between employees is one of the main pillars of the company. Understanding the phenomenon of ghosting among employees will help us to clarify the reasons for different behavior in the organization.

1.1 The beginnings of ghosting

At current forms of communication, the perception of ghosting as a problematic phenomenon in society has begun when people have mutually acquainted. At the slightest hint of mismatch or lack of communication of one of the parties, communication was interrupted without warning or explanation. (LeFebvre, 2017). Characteristics or descriptions of ghosting were recorded only in non-academic sources, i.e. they were not based on any scientific research or analysis.

Koessler (2018), based on her analyzes on surveys on ghosting in relationships, formulated one of the first definitions of ghosting (supported by the dissertation data):

„Ghosting is a strategy used to end a relationship with a partner with whom romantic interest once existed by ceasing to contact or respond to the recipient either suddenly or gradually in lieu of the disengager providing a verbal indication that they are no longer interested" (Koessler, 2018, p. 25).

Her research is probably the first extensive exploration of the ghosting issue. On a sample of 332 respondents, it was found that 60% of respondents were direct participants of ghosting and up to 70% of respondents had experience with ghosting in past relationships.

Koessler (2018) and Freedman et al. (2018) concluded that the length of the relationship between people affects the level of ghosting among concerned persons. The essence of ghosting explicitly imparts a certain sense of insecurity and ignorance among people, and therefore the ability to build good relationships between employees at the workplace can be distorted as well as social relationships between people. Based on this, we assume that employees who have a serious problem with relationships in the social environment may also have communication deficiencies.

The ease with which ghosting can modify into various forms is enormous. The initial ghosting survey revealed that of 554 respondents, 25.3% of respondents said that they were ghosted, and 21.7% said that some of their past relationships had the features of ghosting. Such a negative behavior tends to increase the likelihood of ignoring the possible consequences that could be devastating for sensitive people (Freedman et al., 2018).

Based on the above, we can conclude that ghosting is generally considered a negative phenomenon in an organization because it is closely related to people (human resources). We believe that it can cause significant damage to human capital (that is considered to be an important element of competitive advantage of each organization) in many areas of the organization. One of the potential solutions of ghosting in the organization is reeducation of human resources.

In large corporations, "whole organization is formed as a big team and its members cooperate and interact together in compiling perspectives, objectives and ways to achieve it, so they may act better when confronting threats and risks and will perform faster than competitor organization in using opportunities" (Asgar, 2013, p. 2825). However, a lot of conversations involve "bad news", while these conversations are often "dreaded, poorly executed, or avoided altogether". It is necessary to find ways to make them less difficult and more productive (Bradley and Campbell, 2014, p. 443).

Odine (2015) points to communication problems in organization and argues that for a success of a company is necessary its employees to have the information and to make an environment with two-way communication. Open and regular disagreements between managers and subordinates, such as open conflict or rejected appraisals are the evidence of the communication problems in organization. Some communication problems are "a direct result of ineffective communication techniques, which include poor listening skills, use of inappropriate medium, poor message conceptualization, and general lack of trust (Odine, 2015, p. 1616).

Problematic communication occurs at all levels of company's management. It should be emphasized that the frequent occurrence of communication problems at the workplace can demoralize employees and also cause an increased incidence of such negative phenomena as ghosting.

In relation to the development and support of human resources - in terms of abilities and communication skills, Utrilla and Torraleja (2013) propose training and mentoring procedures that help organizations grow. Authors, on a sample of 630

companies, identified the relationship between mentoring and performance in family businesses through the method of structural equations. Based on this survey, we can say that family businesses have an acceptable atmosphere to achieve higher performance, which - in our opinion - eliminates the occurrence of ghosting in the workplace and which increases the tendency of employees to work faster and more efficiently.

Hannah (2004) – in her case study – has attempted to prove that coaching can improve employee relationships and their competences in measuring business standards. By using the NVQ (National Vocational Qualifications) assessment that which serves to recognize the skills and knowledge of a person, she has demonstrated that coaching practices have a significant impact on the development of employees in the organization. Applying the NVQ model has increased not only the work performance of employees but also their acceptance of changes in the workplace and also strengthened the original mental models of employees. The correct introduction of coaching at the workplace has resulted in the reinforcement of motivation and the overall personality of the staff, from which we conclude that other negative behavioral influences have been eliminated.

2 Methodology

Ghosting in the work environment is a very negative phenomenon. Neither in Slovakia nor in the world, we do not yet record research on this issue - in terms of the organizational context. There are only a few articles that use ghosting in connection with the process of recruitment respectively with the process of applying for employment. Based on the available theory, we have created a global indicator of (employees') tendency to ghosting. The GIG methodology includes 12 self-assessment items that have been rated on a 6-point scale: 1 - definitely no, 2 - no, 3 - rather not, 4 - rather yes, 5 - yes, 6 - definitely yes. This methodology - based on a Global Indicator of Ghosting - makes it possible to predict ghosting. The aim was to create a methodology that could be applied in the work environment. This methodology can also be applied in the process of recruiting employees. Our research - using the above methodology - reveals a certain degree of general tendency towards ghosting, i.e. a tendency to interrupt communication and/or the tendency to ignore or avoid people. As with other social aspects that affect organizational performance and efficiency, it is essential to predict this phenomenon This methodology is also potentially usable in deciding on human resource re-education, which could be a tool to eliminate the occurrence of ghosting.

3 Research Sample and Results

202 respondents were surveyed, 92 (45.5%) men and 110 (54.5%) women. The average age of respondents was 31.22 years (Std. 9.107 years). The minimum age of respondents was 18 years and a maximum was 61 years. Structure of respondents: 44 (21.8%) managers and 158 (78.2%) general staff. The data were obtained by the questionnaire method and subsequently were processed in IBM SPSS. Ghosting was assessed using the own GIG (Global Indicator of Ghosting) methodology.

- Hypothesis H1: we assume the existence of an internal factor structure of the proposed methodology.
- Hypothesis H2: we assume the existence of gender differences in the Global Indicator of Ghosting.

In our research, our attention was focused on verifying the GIG methodology. Factor analysis of the main components with Varimax rotation was applied to specify the internal factor structure. Based on the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measurement of Sampling Adequacy score - 0.949 and Barlett's Test of Sphericity - 1817.501 (sig. ,000), factor 1 was extracted by factor analysis. The existence of a factor is confirmed by Scree Plot and a Factor Analysis Table. The extracted factor, which we named Global Indicator of Ghosting, explains the 64.52% of variance. The intrinsic consistency of the factor was verified by Cronbach's Alpha (,949). The internal consistency of the items

loading extracted factor is at an excellent level. The average value: Median (3.54) was used to assess the Global Indicator of Ghosting.

Table 1 Principal Component Analysis with Varimax Rotation

Items	*Global Indicator of Ghosting*
1. By ignoring the person I avoid the unpleasant communication.	,766
2. Instead of telling someone some unpleasant information, I'd rather stop communicating and responding.	,796
3. In the social interaction I refuse someone without explanation.	,794
4. Instead of explaining the real reasons, I prefer not to respond to the person.	,829
5. It is typical for me to interrupt communication with someone for a long time and not to reply to him/her.	,797
6. Instead of explaining that I do not have time, I'd rather not answer that person	,842
7. If I do not want to answer, I ignore any communication.	,817
8. It happens to me, that first of all I am interested in someone/something, but later I stop responding.	,863
9. It happens to me, that I first show an interest in the offer in an advertisement, but later I do not respond.	,834
10. I do not respond to some messages, even when I'm contacted multiple times.	,813
11. Sometimes, I interrupt any kind of communication with someone.	,735
12. I answer to some messages after a long time.	,744

(Source: own calculation in SPSS 20)
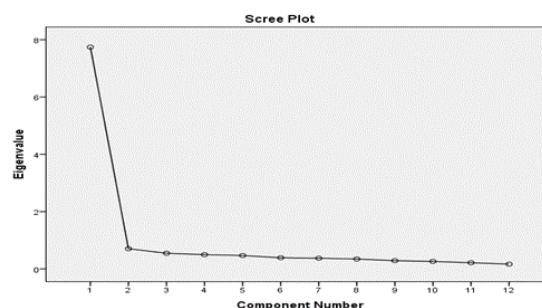
Graph 1 Screen plot of extracted factors
*(Source: own calculation in SPSS 20)*

Given the results of Skewness (-,185, Std. ,171) and Kurtosis (-1,403, Std. ,341), the nonparametric Mann-Whitney U Test is applied to identify gender differences.

Table 2 Gender differences by using Mann-Whitney U

Gender		N	Mean Rank	Median	Mann-Whitney U	Sig. (2 - tailed)
Global Indicator Of Ghosting	Man	92	120,95	4,50	3270,5	,000
	Woman	110	85,23	2,96		

(Source: own calculation in SPSS 20)

The results (Table 2) pointed out that men (median 4.5) achieved a higher average score on the factor Global Indicator of Ghosting than women (median 2.96). Median for Global Indicator of Ghosting is 3.54. Apart from the statistically significant gender differences, women are below average and men above average.

Graph 2 Gender Differences – median
(Source: own calculation in SPSS 20)
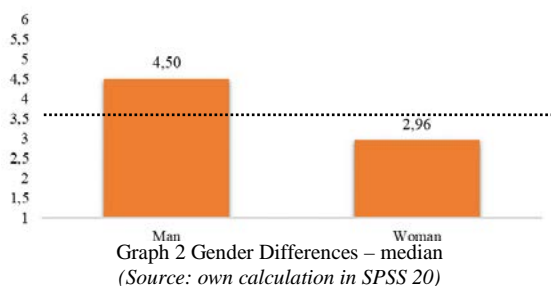
Higher scores of GIG represents a greater tendency toward ghosting behavior. These results needs to be taken into account in the actual re-education of human resources with respect to the aim of prediction and elimination of ghosting in the working environment. Eunson (2012) states that women tend to engage in conversations that enable an understanding as well as empathy. In general, we consider women to be more emotional and relationship-oriented. This is one of the reasons why men have a higher tendency to ghosting. Often they do not care about the working relationships and the opinions of others and therefore tend to ignore a person or interrupt communication with a person. Ghosting in the work environment does not only have a long-term character. This phenomenon also entails minor changes in behavior towards specific colleagues at work such as: physical avoidance at work, brief communication, changed or different communication styles, unwillingness to communicate or even complete interruption of communication. The results of gender differences show that men should be given considerable attention in the context of the issue examined. Men are more often than women in management positions. Even minimal behavioral changes that are typical for ghosting can cause extensive communication problems which can affect business processes in the enterprise.

Ghosting is a problem of socio-communication character. In the survey, 49 respondents (24.3%) indicated that they prefer digital communication and 153 respondents (75.7%) prefer personal communication. The selection of the communication channel can affect the occurrence of ghosting, but it should be noted that ghosting occurs in both digital and personal communications in the social and working environment. However, the result of our study can be considered positive. A favorable working climate as well as the creation of good working relationships can only be done through personal communication.

Out of a total of 202 respondents, 130 (64.4%) respondents said that they participated in development and education activities within their organization and 72 (35.6%) did not undertake any educational and development activity. Most of the respondents participated in teambuilding (40.6%) and coaching (30.3%) as well as in various developmental and educational activities focused on presentation skills. An important finding is that none of these activities were focused on the issue of ghosting. Moreover, employees never heard of this issue even though they encountered it in the work environment. There is no known scientific research on ghosting in Slovakia yet to be supported by data. However, we recommend ghosting to be included in the process of re-education of human resources as a kind of remedy or prevent against inadequate and negative behaviors in organizations.

In view of the results, the H1 hypothesis was confirmed on the existence of an internal factor structure as well as on the hypothesis H2 on the existence of gender differences in the Global Indicator of Ghosting.

4 Discussion and Summary

By verifying the newly created GIG methodology, which consists of 12 self-assessment items designed to detect the presence of interrupting communication, ignoring people, and

avoiding people, we have confirmed the occurrence of ghosting among employees in the organization. We can consider ghosting as a negative behavior of employees in the company. Scree Plot as well as the Factor Analysis Table confirm the existence of one factor named Global Indicator of Ghosting. Loadings of individual items are at a good level. Regarding the Global Indicator of Ghosting, the results of the Man-Whitney test showed higher scores of men (median 4.50) than of women (median 2.96). In general, women are considered to be more emotional and socially oriented. Emotional stability is a personality feature that divides people into strongly emotionally stable, less emotionally stable or emotionally unstable ones, while it is intricately related to the individual's occupational life (Bhagat, Simbak, Haque, 2015) and thus it can influence the way of communication in the enterprise and the social learning of relationships between employees. Since men have achieved higher scores in our research, they are likely to have a greater tendency towards behavior that is typical of ghosting. We recommend using the methodology in the behavior prediction phase to select appropriate re-education activity that would mediate or eliminate ghosting in the work environment.

Ghosting is a socio-communication problem, which is confirmed by our research, that was aimed at human factor within the organization. Without communication in workplace, nothing would be accomplished, i.e. "instructions could not be given, equipment and supplies could not be ordered, progress could not be measured, and products and services could not be delivered to customers". However, in organizations (even though the communication is "so fundamental, so learnable, and so crucial") there are a lot of communication problems, for example some managers' verbal instructions sound like commands from a general; although these messages are understandable, precise and clear, they are not well received and not embraced by employees (Conrad, 2014, p. 105). Poor communication among employees causes most of the workplace problems. The occurrence of ghosting can be influenced by the choice of a communication channel. Odine (2015) points the recognition of situations that are caused by problematic communication. The fact is that some communication problems are the result of the inadequate capabilities of employees. By reinforcing communication and communication channels between employees through various communication techniques, we can stimulate and strengthen those communication factors that lean towards ghosting. The correct implementation of communication techniques into the employees' communication process damaged (affected) by ghosting would help to improve, strengthen and develop socio-communication relationships at the workplace, thus preventing and avoiding further communication barriers (Jones, et al., 2004).

Research also shows that 64.4% of the surveyed employees have completed organizational educational and training activities, and 35.6% did not participate in such activities. 40.6% of them participated in teambuilding, 30.3% in coaching and only a small percentage of employees participated in mentoring. Education and training activities should be available and mandatory for all employees. They are one of the most valuable parts of business management. The training process can be successful only if the employees are motivated enough and encouraged to use their knowledge and skills in the right way (Zahra, et.al., 2014, Ampomah, 2016). The fact is that none of these developmental educational activities directly address the issue of ghosting, although co-operative integration of mentoring and coaching could improve mental models of employees who are damaged by ghosting. By applying the NQV (National Vocational Qualifications) assessment process that was tested in practice, we could achieve synergy of staff personalities, empower employees' motivation, efficiency, flexibility, learning ability. We believe that by introducing NQV it would be possible to eliminate other negative effects of ghosting.

In Slovakia, we are one of the first authors to identify and verify (backed up by data) the issue of ghosting among employees in the company. By verifying the Global Indicator of Ghosting (GIG), we have come to the conclusion that examined modern

phenomenon of ghosting can easily infiltrate among employees, transform and modify into different forms in the organization. It has the potential to cause damage to a human factor that can bring a wave of negativism that affects not only employees but also the organization (enterprise) as a whole. We believe that through re-education of employees, strengthening emotional stability, improving healthy communication, co-operation of mentoring and coaching (with the application of the NQV assessment process) we could partially eliminate the employees' behavior typical of ghosts.

Peagram (2018) provides some steps to avoid ghosting. In modified form, we have selected recommendations that should also be used in the re-education process. To eliminate ghosting we recommend the following:

▪ Respond to emails and respond to colleagues' requests. Be professional and use phrases such as: "Thank you", "I'll do it as soon as possible", etc. Keep your promises, be honest and courteous.
▪ Get as much information as possible. When you are ready, you will have a better chance to respond to the situation.
▪ Do not hide from problems and colleagues at work. Ask for help from a professional who can advise you.
▪ Improve communication channels in your organization. Propose time rules, e.g. all employees must respond to emails within 48 hours.
▪ Explain the importance of communication. Bring in your colleagues ghosting issue.

Create a favorable working climate. Maintain good relationships and support re-education of employees.

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