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Attitudes Toward Workplace Mobbing in Slovenian Research Organisations

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Creating a “mobbing-safe” working environment can be a real challenge; to achieve it, a better understanding of related constructs is necessary. To obtain insight into researchers’ attitudes toward workplace mobbing and behavioural intentions, we used a case scenario method. The results show that respondents, on average, consider the mobbing cases presented in a questionnaire to be very serious. Their attitudes and behavioural intentions depend more on their opinion about colleagues’ attitudes and related intentions and less on their own, which shows a lower integrity than desired. Low willingness to report the violator, lenient discipline sanctions and the absence of proper organisational rules create favourable conditions for workplace mobbing in Slovenian public research organisations. This paper also proposes measures based on the research findings of various authors and identifies new questions that could be addressed in further research.

Key words: workplace mobbing, organisational culture, integrity, public research organisation, researcher.

1 Introduction

The working conditions in which researchers are employed are also important to the European Commission^{1,2}. Researchers are members of one of the professions most frequently exposed to workplace mobbing³. Slovenian employers are obliged, by Slovenian legislation, to ensure a safe and attractive working environment^{4,5}. With workplace mobbing, this obligation can present a true challenge to employers due to the covert nature of mobbing.

Workplace mobbing has been very difficult to conceptualise due to its covert nature (Leymann, 1990); because of this, prevention measures are not easy. Mobbing can happen to anybody (Yildirim and Yildirim, 2010). In spite of its cov-

ert nature, it cannot remain unnoticed by co-workers. This is also the reason why the attitudes toward workplace mobbing and related behavioural intentions of employees, including top management, have or could have a crucial role in its prevention. This paper, therefore, explores the attitudes toward workplace mobbing cases in public research organisations, the willingness to report the violators, and related factors. It also explores the existence of organisational rules defining mobbing behaviour as a violation and respondents’ beliefs about fair sanctions applied to mobbers. We have searched different electronic databases (Web of Science, SAGE, Science Direct, Elsevier) and have not found any research on such a narrow topic as workplace mobbing in research organisations at national levels that would be comparable to ours. This is also

- 1 European Commission (2005). The European Charter for Researchers and The Code of Conduct for the Recruitment of Researchers, <http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/index.cfm/rights/europeanCharter>.
- 2 Commission Of The European Communities (2008). Communication From The Commission To The Council And The European Parliament. Better Careers And More Mobility: A European Partnership For Researchers, <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=CELEX:52008DC0317:EN:NOT>
- 3 European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions (2005). Violence, bullying and harassment in the workplace, <http://www.eurofound.europa.eu/pubdocs/2006/98/en/2/ef0698en.pdf>.
- 4 Republic of Slovenia (2007a). Zakon o delovnih razmerjih [The Slovenian Labour Code], http://zakonodaja.gov.si/rpsi/r00/predpis_ZAKO1420.html.
- 5 Republic of Slovenia (2007b). Zakon o varnosti in zdravju pri delu [Law on Safety and Health at work], <http://www.iusinfo.si/Register/Besedilo.aspx?SOPI=Z99A5CHT&Datum=2001-08-18%2000:00:00&Doc=Zakoni>.

the reason direct comparisons of our findings with the findings of many respected authors in this field are not reliable due to differences in research questions, population, sample and methodology.

Public Research Organisations in Slovenia and Status of Researchers

Current legislation defines public research organisations as bodies governed by public law, established by the Republic of Slovenia or public bodies authorised by law. That embraces public research and infrastructure as well as higher education institutions. A researcher is a person engaged in research or development activities (Republic of Slovenia, 2006).

Workplace Mobbing

Leymann (1990) describes workplace mobbing as psychological terror in a workplace caused by individual or a group on almost a daily basis, for at least six months, until the victim leaves the organisation or becomes incapable of practicing of his or her profession. Leymann claimed that co-workers or management are responsible for such tragic situations. Different authors used different concepts to describe workplace mobbing. Ståle (1999, 2000) found that different concepts describe same phenomena: the systematic attacking of colleagues, superiors or subordinates.

It can also be said that workplace mobbing is actually a form of deviant or antisocial behaviour, which can be understood as the voluntary behaviour of groups or individuals,

Table 1: Mobbing - definition and terms used by different researchers (Ståle, 2000, pp. 382)

Reference	Term	Definition
Brodsky (1976)	Harassment	Repeated and persistent attempts by a person to torment, wear down, frustrate, or get a reaction from another person; it is treatment that persistently provokes, pressures, frightens, intimidates or otherwise causes discomfort in another person.
Thylefors (1987)	Scapegoating	One or more persons who during a period of time are exposed to repeated, negative actions from one or more other individuals.
Matthiesen, Raknes & Rrökkum (1989)	Mobbing	One or more person's repeated and enduring negative reactions and conducts targeted at one or more persons of their work group.
Leymann (1990)	Mobbing/ Psychological terror	Hostile and unethical communication that is directed in a systematic way by one or more persons, mainly towards one targeted individual.
Kile (1990a)	Health endangering leadership	Continuous humiliating and harassing acts of a long duration conducted by a superior and expressed overtly or covertly.
Wilson (1991)	Workplace trauma	The actual disintegration of an employee's fundamental self, resulting from an employer's or supervisor's perceived or real continual and deliberate malicious treatment.
Ashforth (1994)	Petty tyranny	A leader who lords his power over others through arbitrariness and self-aggrandisement, the belittling of subordinates, showing lack of consideration, using a forceful style of conflict resolution, discouraging initiative and the use of non-contingent punishment.
Vartia (1993)	Harassment	Situations where a person is exposed repeatedly and over time to negative actions on the part of one or more persons.
Björkqvist, Österman & Hjelt-Bäck (1994)	Harassment	Repeated activities, with the aim of bringing mental (but sometimes also physical) pain, and directed towards one or more individuals who, for one reason or another, are not able to defend themselves.
Adams (1992b)	Bullying	Persistent criticism and personal abuse in public or private, which humiliates and demeans a person.

harmful to organisations or employees. Such behaviour is conscious, of different intensities, and always presents the opposite of pro-social and ethical behaviour (Lobnikar et al., 2000). Lobnikar et al. (2000) used the social undermining definition by Duffy (1998; in Lobnikar et al., 2000), who differentiated between social undermining as process and social undermining as behaviour. This description referred to as a process fits the mobbing concept, because it represents the exchange of negative interactions at the workplace and has a gradual, cumulative effect on the attenuation of individual self-confidence, effectiveness, and the ability to achieve organisational goals (Lobnikar et al., 2000).

Mobbing is also similarly defined by Slovenian labour relations law, i.e. as repeated or systematic reprehensible, obviously negative or offensive behaviour, directed against individual employees at the workplace or in relation to work. This paper discusses workplace mobbing in the sense of the aforementioned Slovenian labour relations law definition.

Anyone can become a target of workplace mobbing (Yildirim and Yildirim, 2010). Long-lasting repeating mobbing can cause to a target a great deal of social, psychological and psychosomatic (Leymann, 1990; see also Duffy & Sperry, 2007; Yildirim, Yildirim & Timucin, 2007; Gul et al., 2010; Escartin et al., 2009; UK National Workplace Bullying Advice Line (2006)), economic organisational problems, economic problems of families as well as wider society (Sheehan, 1999; Sheehan, 2004; cf. Enache, 2010). The costs of mobbing can extend to 1-3.5% of the GDP of a country (Hoel et al., 2001).

The consequences of workplace mobbing are the reason this phenomenon has become the subject of so much research in different working environments and contexts. Employees in public, education, health and social organisations are most often exposed to mobbing (Zukauskas and Vveinhardt, 2009; European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007). This includes researchers in public research organisations. In Turkey, research showed that 90% of academic respondents have spotted workplace mobbing while 17% of them had been mobbed. Because of that, 7% of them think of suicide occasionally and 2% almost always (Yildirim and Yildirim, 2010).

Research on organisational reasons for workplace mobbing show that it is most often a consequence of poor management, high stress levels at the workplace, a low level of decision-making authority (Dolinar et al., 2010, see also Zapf, 1999, Roscigno et al., 2009; Balillien, 2009), negative organisational culture and weak moral principles (Yaman, 2010). Research covering about 1,000 workplaces in the United States of America (Ståle, 1999) shows that for workplace mobbing to appear, it is necessary that the favourable organisational culture allowing and rewarding mobbing behaviour be present. Many other researchers also confirmed the close connection between the organisational culture and climate (Blase and Blase, 2003; Bren and McNamara, 2004; DiMartino, 2003; Davenport, Schwartz, and Elliott, 2003; Einarsen, 1999; Einarsen, Raknes and Matthiesen, 1994; Vartia, 1996; Vickers, 2006; Zapf, 1999 in Yaman, 2010). Vandekerckhove and Commers (2003) had similar findings, concluding that among most important reasons for workplace mobbing were dysfunctional organisational structures and cultures. Particularly

interesting, from the public research organisation's point of view, is a three-year study of 212 mobbed employees in the Australian public sector who eventually left their organisation (Shallcross et al., 2010). The interviewed respondents admitted that they had not shared the same culture with dominant group or they have not been ready to get involved in what they have perceived as destructive, in some cases illegal, behaviour.

An organisation's views about mobbing are communicated by the imposed sanctions, or their absence, for those who are breaking norms and values together with the existence and enactment of anti-mobbing organisational politics (Ståle, 1999). Data collected for the Great Britain show that 85% of managers and 15% of co-workers are mobbers (violators); 84% respondents included in research were convinced that violators had caused mobbing before, and 73% respondents were convinced that the management had known about it (Rayner, 2009). We have not found a report with these kinds of data for Slovenia.

The abovementioned research findings show that organisational culture accompanied by poor management is the key factor of mobbing. This is also the reason that the preparation of measures of any kind, should they be successful, must be based on knowledge about an existing organisational culture (Bluedorn and Lundgren, 1993; in Parker and Bradley, 2000). As in approaches for prevention of corruption, which may be linked with workplace mobbing (Kečanović, 2008) and in which the responsibility for creation of environment that encourages integrity and professional culture with no tolerance for corruption is emphasised (Haberfeld et al., 1999), we can similarly say that it is the obligation of organisations to create an environment that encourages integrity and professional culture, with no tolerance for workplace mobbing.

Existing research has contributed enormously to the understanding and conceptualisation of the mobbing phenomena, and the understanding of causes, consequences as well as mobbing frequency and risk groups in different environments. Review of existing research gave insight into three organisational dimensions, which reflect organisational culture, similar to those that have been examined in cases of corrupt behaviour in Slovenia and internationally (Haberfeld et al., 1999; Pagon et al., 2003; Mevc, 2005), namely: the existence of organisational rules (rules communication and understanding), the approach to control (organisational actions, prevention activities) and the existence of informal rules. All three of these could be used to protect potential mobbing victims and to increase the willingness to report mobbing. Our research is informed by approaches used in the research of corruption; both mobbing and corruption are actually forms of deviant behaviour that match the aforementioned definition of deviant behaviour as a process (Lobnikar et al., 2000). Mobbing, as well as corruption, cannot remain unspotted while the management is obliged to prevent it.

This paper explores whether organisational culture in Slovenian public organisations protects mobbers, which factors and how influence the respondents' attitudes about workplace mobbing, their behavioural intentions and their integrity. It examines willingness to report the violators, i.e. whistleblowing.

It first gives a basic description of related theoretical concepts, important for a proper understanding of the research results and the recommended actions. Related concepts are only briefly presented, since a broader presentation would exceed the space limits of this paper.

Ethical Organisational Culture, Ethical Climate and Ethical Behaviour

There are many different definitions of organisational culture: as the way that groups of people are solving problems (Trompenaars, 1993; in Smit and Schabracq, 1997); a glue that binds organisations together (Baron, 1994; in Lomas, 1999); that which incorporates the beliefs and behaviours that are existing in different levels and manifest itself in different forms of organisational life (Hofstede et al., 1990; in Rashid et al., 2004); they refer to a number of commonly shared beliefs, assumptions and practices that form and direct the attitudes and behaviour of organisational members (Davis, 1984; Denison, 1990; Kotter and Heskett, 1992; O'Reilly and Chatman, 1996; Wilson, 2001; in Rashid et al., 2004); organisational cultures are complex combinations of formal and informal systems, processes and interactions (Cohen, 1993; in Ardichvili et al., 2008). A deeper level of cultures is reflected through stable ways of solving problems and interpersonal relations among employees on various hierarchical levels (Rothwell and Scedl, 1992; Kanter et al., 1992; in Brunetto, 2001).

Ethical organisational culture stimulates the organisational environment, which is directed by common values and beliefs (Trevino, 1990; in Ardichvili et al., 2008). Moreover, it is not expected that employees distinguish between what is right or wrong as a basic minimum, but also, most importantly, to explore and perform ethical decisions even when all possible decision options seem correct (Ardichvili et al., 2008). Accordingly to Ardichvili et al. (2008), in ethical organisations managers walk their talk and are role models to the other organisational members, who (when ethical issues are discussed) gather facts and act without retaliation while the construction and maintaining of ethical culture entirely depends on top management, who require ethical behaviour on each hierarchical level.

The ethical climate is the abstract of individually perceived ethical norms in an organisation (Cullen, Victor and Bronson, 1993; in Rothwell and Baldwin, 2006). It is an ethical dimension of organisational culture, which is perceived by organisational members as an organisational ethical identity (Victor and Cullen, 1988, in Rothwell, Baldwin, 2006).

Cultures that accept improper or illegal acts as normal ensure the logic of corruption (Misangyi et al., 2008; in Miceli et al., 2009). The creation and maintaining of a positive culture in the long term can be roughly described as achieved by human resources policies and systems for examining and responding to appeals (Miceli et al., 2009).

At this point, we must also mention the mistaken notions of leaders regarding the sense and usefulness of ethics and morality in business environment (Cooke and Ryan, 1988; in Pagon and Lobnikar, 1996):

- a) Ethical behaviour is not compatible with economic profit;
- b) Ethics deals with higher, absolute standards of good and evil, which is why it is useless for daily decision-making in uncertain situations;
- c) Business ethics is the same as corporate social responsibility, which is why the moral responsibility of managers is shown particularly in what and how much a company contributes to the development of the environment in which it works;
- d) A line can be drawn between private and business life, which is why someone can be highly moral in his private life while in his professional one he is subordinated to "game rules", which are valid in certain circumstances;
- e) Business ethics and morality cannot be learned; a person either has moral values or does not, which is why education in field of ethics is pointless.

As one of the main reasons for the persistence of the abovementioned mistaken notions, Pagon and Lobnikar cite a lack of education and training in the field of ethics and morality. Students should be taught not only managerial skills but also principles about what is right and wrong (Palmer, 1986; in Pagon and Lobnikar, 1996). Not only students, but also managers should be trained in ethical decision-making in daily work.

Ethical Whistleblowing

Whistleblowing is the willingness to report violators, those who might be co-workers, organisational members, in cases when his or her actions deviate from existing norms, while in practice the complainant is viewed with more suspicion than the reported alleged violator (Gadlin, 1998). This is understandable, because the whistle blowing policy is often in conflict with three assumptions of organisational life: the accountability of professional standards, the culture of collegiality, and the loyalty to institution (Gadlin, 1998). After reporting a violation, it is possible that the report is not taken into account at all or that a management take appropriate actions corresponding to report; or it is also possible that management can reward the informant or take retaliatory measures against him or her (Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran, 2005). Retaliatory measures can be different: movements between different jobs or different forms of social undermining (Alford, 2001; De Maria, 1999; Dempster, 1997; Glazer and Glazer, 1989; Hunt, 1995, 1998; Miceli and Near, 1992; Miethe, 1999; Vinten, 1994, in Brian, 2003; Parmerlee et al., 1982; in Mesmer-Magnus, Viswesvaran, 2005). Observers in organisation are most affected by the events that follow the report (Near and Miceli, 1986; in Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran, 2005). Different organisational cultures have different impact on the willingness to report violations; the most important are the consequences of the reporting (Miceli et al., 2009).

Integrity

"Integrity" is often used in management literature as term with a different meaning than that in philosophy and other

areas (Palanski and Yammarino, 2007). Integrity is especially important in the environments in which people work or live together (Kaptein, 1999). The Slovenian Integrity and Prevention of Corruption Act⁶ defines integrity as “the conduct and responsibility expected of individuals and organisations in the prevention and elimination of risks related to the use of any authority, office, mandate or any other decision-making power contrary to the law, legally admissible objectives and codes of ethics”. In this paper, integrity is understood in sense of Vicchio’s view: firstly, that individuals have reasonably consistent and relatively stable sets of moral virtues; secondly, that these moral virtues are reflected in the deeds and speech of these individuals (Vicchio, 1997; in Pagon et al., 2003). Rules give concrete meaning to integrity: they explain which behaviour is unacceptable and which one is desired (Paine, 1994, in Kaptein, 2003).

Ethics Position in Research and Among Researchers in Slovenia

The question of ethics is of extreme importance, both in research and among researchers. The commission of the Republic of Slovenia for Medical Ethics, and the Ethics Commission for Animal Experiments deal with questions related to ethics in research. The rest of areas related to research activities are at least partially subject to further codes of moral integrity and good practice in science (Resolution of Research and Innovation Strategy of Slovenia 2011–2020; in continuation: ReRISS)⁷. One of the many ReRISS tasks to be accomplished by 2020 is ensuring a high level of ethics among researchers at their work as well as in broader context.

2 Method

We have explored the respondents’ perceptions of severity of workplace mobbing in public research organisations, their knowledge of related organisational regulations, whether the mobbers are protected by the ‘code of silence’ (in other words, the respondents’ willingness to report mobbing), what their attitudes regarding disciplinary measures for workplace mobbing are, and if, in their opinion, the mobbers are properly sanctioned.

A scenario method has been used to avoid questions about concrete cases, which respondents have witnessed or taken part in. A more detailed description of the method used is presented in continuation.

2.1 Sample

The researchers who anonymously took part in this research were employed in Slovenian public research organisations, which are legal entities (Republic of Slovenia, 2006) and whose founder is Republic of Slovenia (including universities). The data of the Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia show that 8,077 researchers were employed in such public research organisations in 2008⁸, which represents more than half (55.28%) of all Slovenian researchers, including experts and technical personnel involved in research activities.

We randomly selected 2,060 e-mail addresses, some of which were published on web pages of different public research organisations or published in the Slovenian Current Research Information System (SICRIS). Some of the collected e-mail addresses were incorrect, which is why we asked for the support of the three largest Slovenian universities. They responded positively and distributed the questionnaire among their research personnel with a request to forward it to their colleagues as well. That is the snowball principle, which is why it is impossible to define the percentage of response.

In whole or in part, 898 questionnaires were completed, which represents 11.12% of the population of researchers. 511 completed questionnaires were used in subsequent analyses, which represent 6.32% of the total population (8,077). We are convinced that we would have received many more completed questionnaires if we would have had a higher number of possible simultaneous accesses to the computer server where the questionnaire database was hosted. We increased the number of possible simultaneous accesses from 15 to 35 after we received the e-mails stating that the access to the questionnaire was not possible. Our assumption is that respondents answered the questions truthfully according to their best knowledge.

Demographic features of the sample are presented in Table 1 below.

Table 1: demographic features of the sample

Demographic features	Frequencies	Percentages
Gender		
Female	263	51.5
Male	248	48.5
<i>N</i>	511	100.0
Education		
Bachelor’s degree	144	28.2
Specialisation	6	1.2

6 Republic of Slovenia (2011). Zakon o integriteti in preprečevanju korupcije [Slovenian Integrity and Prevention of Corruption Act], <http://www.uradni-list.si/1/objava.jsp?urlid=201169&stevilka=3056>.

7 Republic of Slovenia (2011). Resolution of Research and Innovation Strategy of Slovenia 2011–2020 [Resolucija o raziskovalni in inovacijski strategiji Slovenije 2011–2020], <http://www.uradni-list.si/1/content?id=103975>.

8 Republic of Slovenia, Statistical Office of the Republic of Slovenia (2010). Statistični letopis [Statistical Yearbook 2010], http://www.stat.si/letopis/2010/07_10/07-03-10.htm.

Master's degree	67	13.1
Doctorate	294	57.5
<i>N</i>	511	100.0
Working period (in years)		
0–9	209	40.9
10–19	140	27.4
20–29	94	18.4
30–39	60	11.7
40–49	7	1.4
50+	1	0.2
<i>N</i>	511	100.0
Age		
20–30	127	24.8
31–40	169	33.1
41–50	128	25.1
51–60	72	14.1
61–70	15	2.9
<i>N</i>	511	100.0

2.2 Instrument

As the basic instrument of our research, we have used a modified version of the questionnaire that had been previously used for the study of police integrity in the United States of America, Croatia, Poland, and Slovenia (Haberfeld et al., 1999) and later adjusted for the examination of corrupt behaviour in Slovenian public administration (Mevc, 2005). We have added those factors that we believed were related with the attitudes of researchers toward workplace mobbing. The factors are divided into general and special factors.

General factors are:

- gender,
- education,
- age,
- total amount of work experience,
- work experience in a public research organisation, and
- job title (position).

Special factors are:

- respondent's own experience of workplace mobbing,
- respondent's opinion about co-workers' experience of workplace mobbing,
- attitudes toward violation of organisational rules,
- attitudes toward deserved sanctions,
- attitudes toward sanctions that would actually be assigned,
- respondent's own willingness to report the violator, and
- respondent's opinion about co-workers' willingness to report the violator.

The questionnaire contains six cases of workplace mobbing (Table 2). The cases refer to a case of a hospitalised researcher, allegations of plagiarism, an attempt to stop the cooperation of a researcher with a foreign research organisation, the allocation of a course to a less appropriate candidate with the simultaneous rejection of the more appropriate one, the systematic social undermining of six researchers and the denial of their promotion, and the termination of a researcher's employment and the ignoring of a court verdict.

The cases used in research are based on stories that have been recounted by researchers' from their own experience. During collection of completed questionnaires, many researchers who participated in research confirmed that presented cases were unfortunately similar to events that very often occur in their organisations. One researcher said that so many cases of mobbing had been swept under the carpet that it "looked like the Alps".

Each of the six cases was followed by questions regarding the following attitudes and intentions of respondents:

- **Respondents' belief about severity of workplace mobbing.** This variable was measured with the question: "How severe is such behaviour in your opinion?" Possible answers of the respondents were presented on a five-point Likert scale (1– Very Mild, 5 – Very Serious). In the context of studying mobbing, we considered the replies to these questions as an indirect measure of respondents' moral standards. We are convinced that for individuals with higher moral standards such behaviours and phenomena are perceived more seriously than for those with lower moral standards.
- **Respondents' belief regarding co-workers' opinions about the severity of workplace mobbing.** For the purposes of measurement of this variable, we used the question: "How severely would, in your opinion, the majority of your co-workers evaluate such behaviour?" Possible replies were same as with the previous question.
- **Respondents' willingness to report the violator.** This variable was measured with the question: "Would you report the superior?" Possible replies were introduced on a five-point Likert scale (1– Definitely Not, 5 – Certainly). The obtained result was counted as a measurement of the behavioural intent of the respondents about reporting mobbing and, by doing so, protecting the mobbing target(s).
- **Respondents' belief about co-workers' willingness to report the violator.** This belief was measured with the question "Would, in your opinion, the majority of your colleagues report the superior?" Possible answers were same as with previous question.
- **Belief about violation of organisational rules of respondent's organisational unit.** This variable was measured with the question: "Would such behaviour be considered a violation of rules in organisational unit where you are employed?" The respondents answered according to a five-point Likert scale from 1 (Not at All) to 5 (Very Much), or with "No, because such rules do not exist."
- **Belief about appropriate discipline.** In order to measure a belief about proper discipline, we used the question:

Table 2: *Mobbing cases used in questionnaire*

No.	Description
1	A researcher works for more than one year in increasingly difficult working conditions. The superior gives her more and more obligations with unreasonably short deadlines. During the fulfilment of assigned obligations, in which also other co-workers were included, she encounters intractable barriers. The superior does not help her, although able to do so. In time, visible signs of physical exhaustion appeared, accompanied by increasing psychophysical difficulties, about which her superior is insensitive. The researcher is hospitalised due to health issues. When she receives a bouquet of flowers from her superior, as a form of silent ridicule, her health condition worsens. Please, evaluate the behaviour of researcher's superior.
2	A researcher receives a fellowship for research work in Japan. His superior tries to ruin his relationship with the Japanese partner, accusing him of plagiarism of published scientific research works, while sending the researcher's superior in Japan documentation supposedly proving the accusations. Upon his arrival from Japan, his superior refuses to recognise his excellent research results at deserved habilitation and promotion. The superior also prevents the payment of contractual funding of costs incurred by related activities of the research work in Japan. The superior also degrades the researcher with a document that supposedly proves students' negative opinions about his teaching work. The students' opinion is related to the period of the researchers' work in Japan. Please, evaluate the behaviour of the superior.
3	After two-and-a-half years, a researcher returns to his home research organisation with excellent, financially significant results, which makes his superior jealous. When researcher submits his application to obtain the title of Assistant Professor, his superior calls him to a conversation in which he recommends the researcher withdraw the application and rather apply for research position. The researcher insists on his application for the title of Assistant Professor, to which his superior replies that would be better for him not to apply for this title otherwise he will be meeting him in "many faces and forms". At first, the researcher cannot grasp what his superior really means. Soon he discovers that the superior's forecast relates to individuals they both have in common on more important positions in different local research organisations and individuals in organisations that are suppose to protect the researcher. Please, evaluate the behaviour of the superior.
4	The application of a researcher for election to a teaching position is (despite fulfilling all necessary criteria) denied by commission, the chair of which is his superior. Following the instructions of same superior, it is also decided that application for a subject area be denied, despite of the fact that researcher's results in scientific research are very high, even according to international benchmarks. Furthermore, the subject is assigned to a person with insufficient knowledge of it. This person frequently asks for help from the abovementioned researcher. Please, evaluate the behaviour of the superior.
5	A researcher occasionally notices that his co-workers do not feel comfortable talking to him and that they are noticeably avoiding him. He helplessly observes how more and more rumours, lies and accusations are spread about him. Slowly, he determines their source: his superior. In the entire research organisation: he finds only five researchers with whom he can have a conversation without visible discomfort on their part. He notices over time that these five are sharing with him a similar destiny of lack of recognition of research achievements, rumours, destroying of partner relationships and a general undermining of their research and teaching work, rejections of applications for deserved position progress. He recognises that research achievements for deserved promotion are not sufficient and that they are much less important than the readiness to cooperate, support and agree with all superior's activities. If a researcher does not agree with him or refuses to work outside the contractually defined volume of work, the superior immediately recognises such a researcher as someone who is "against him" with which the researcher becomes a target of workplace mobbing. Please, evaluate the behaviour of the superior.
6	A day before Christmas Eve, the superior gives a researcher a work booklet as symbolic gift and that seems to be a silent mockery of his moral values. With this, without a real reason, he suspends the working relationship and ends years of degradation, the devaluation of research achievements in international benchmarking, social isolation, the spreading of rumours and the inciting of co-workers. The researcher decides to press charges against employer in court. Soon afterward, he notices that he is being followed by a car. He also notices the same car during the night close to his home. He writes down the licence plate number. The next day, he notices the same car in the parking place of his ex-employer. Appalled, he discovers that his ex-co-worker is stalking him. Later, this co-worker admits that he has been stalking him because he has been told to do so by his superior. The next shocking finding for the researcher is that his attorney has been working for him since very beginning because the researchers' superior told him to. The superior has been kept informed about all confidential information about researcher. The researcher also finds out that even the trade union representative who had helped him to "get a good attorney" is following orders by the same superior. He changes his attorney. The court decides in favour of the researcher and orders his ex-employer to immediately re-employ the researcher. The ex-employer does not recognise the court's verdict and does not re-employ the researcher. Please, evaluate the behaviour of the superior.

“Which sanctions, in your opinion, should the superior receive?” The possible answers were: 1 – None, 2 – Verbal Warning, 3 – Written Warning, 4 – Financial Penalty, 5 – Suspension, 6 – Termination of Employment. These sanctions are reflections of the Law on State Employers⁹ and the Law on Civil Servants.¹⁰

- **Belief about actual discipline.** As measurement of this belief, we used the question: “Which punishment, in your opinion, would the superior actually receive?” Possible answers were same as with previous question. Replies to this question helped to estimate the respondents’ conviction if punishments for such behaviour existed and if they were fair.

The Chronbach’s Alpha coefficients, presented in the Table 3 below, show an acceptable internal consistency of the questionnaire.

Table 3: Chronbach’s Alpha coefficients

Special factors:	Chronbach’s a
Respondent’s own experience of workplace mobbing	0.789
Respondent’s opinion about co-workers’ experience of workplace mobbing	0.882
Attitudes toward violation of organisational rules	0.884
Attitudes toward deserved sanctions	0.905
Attitudes toward sanctions that would actually be assigned	0.895
Respondent’s own willingness to report the violator	0.830
Respondents’ opinion about co-workers’ willingness to report the violator	0.820

For each question, we have calculated the average value of the responses for all cases and in this way obtained seven derivative variables, which we then used in all subsequent statistical analysis. We have analysed the replies with the statistical program SPSS, version 18.0; this paper presents the results of descriptive statistics and regression analyses.

It should be mentioned here that some of our variables are ordinal in nature (such as discipline sanctions). We included them in our regression analyses anyway, in line with the claims of several authors (e.g. Allan, 1976; Borgatta, 1968; Kim, 1975, 1978); Labovitz, 1967, 1970; O’Brien, 1979 – all cited in Winship and Mare, 1984) that multivariate methods for interval-level variables should be used for ordinal variables, because the power and flexibility gained from these methods outweigh the small biases that they may entail. As not everybody agrees with this assertion, our results regarding the ordinal variables should be treated with caution (see Winship and Mare, 1984, for an in-depth discussion).

3 Results

The results show that, on average, researchers in public research organisations consider mobbing to be very serious. The average for respondents’ own opinion is almost five (on a scale from 1 – 5).

The failure to respect a court verdict in the case of a fired mobbed researcher is recognised as the superior’s worst violation. Closely following were the cases of false accusations of plagiarism of research work and spreading slanderous rumours to foreign partners of the aforementioned research work.

The average scores for severity, as assigned to their co-workers by the respondents, are lower in all six cases. Differences in the average of the respondents’ own perception of mobbing and levels that respondents believe their co-workers perceive mobbing are statistically significant in all six cases. The same results also show in the comparisons of respondents’ own willingness to report violators and their beliefs about their co-workers’ willingness. Respondents believe that their willingness to report a violator is higher than

Table 4: The average scores, standard deviation, t-test results – presented by individual cases and for all cases together:

- Respondents’ own perceptions of mobbing severity in comparison to their beliefs of co-workers’ perception,
- Respondents’ own willingness to report the violator in comparison to their beliefs of co-workers’ willingness to report,
- Respondents’ belief of actual discipline in comparison to deserved discipline.

Case No.:	Own belief of mobbing severity		Perception of co-workers’ belief		t-test		Own willingness to report the violator		Perception of co-workers’ willingness		t-test		Belief of actual discipline		Belief of deserved discipline		t-test	
	Average	Std. dev.	Average	Std. dev.	t	p	Average	Std. dev.	Average	Std. dev.	t	p	Average	Std. dev.	Average	Std. dev.	t	p
1.	4.35	0.89	3.59	1.08	14.959	0.000	3.05	1.16	2.21	1.04	17.980	0.000	1.45	0.76	3.91	1.31	39.663	0.000
2.	4.80	0.62	4.10	1.09	15.877	0.000	3.90	1.13	2.92	1.24	20.426	0.000	1.98	1.22	4.95	1.13	46.204	0.000
3.	4.47	0.82	3.60	1.14	17.587	0.000	3.32	1.16	2.40	1.12	18.381	0.000	1.5	0.99	4.22	1.36	40.384	0.000
4.	4.49	0.78	3.60	1.13	17.205	0.000	3.42	1.18	2.51	1.12	17.352	0.000	1.57	0.96	4.19	1.32	36.940	0.000
5.	4.41	0.82	3.43	1.19	16.631	0.000	3.20	1.19	2.41	1.08	14.526	0.000	1.49	0.94	4.19	1.35	37.504	0.000
6.	4.89	0.43	4.29	0.98	12.933	0.000	4.40	0.99	3.36	1.28	17.874	0.000	2.71	1.71	5.56	0.89	32.188	0.000
Average	4.57	0.73	3.77	1.01	19.973	0.000	3.55	1.13	2.63	1.15	22.026	0.000	1.78	1.09	4.50	1.22	49.989	0.000

9 Republic of Slovenia (1990). Zakon o delavcih v državnih organih [Law on State Employers]. http://zakonodaja.gov.si/rpsi/r00/predpis_ZAKO280.html.

10 Republic of Slovenia (2002). Zakon o javnih uslužbencih [Law on Civil Servants]. http://zakonodaja.gov.si/rpsi/r07/predpis_ZAKO3177.html.

that of their co-workers. We can say that respondents are convinced that they are morally more sensitive in comparison to their co-workers. However, as showed by regression analysis, their willingness to report the violator is influenced mostly by the opinions of those who are, in their eyes, less morally sensitive, i.e. their co-workers. The more sure they are about their co-workers' willingness to report the superior, the more ready they are to report the violator.

In all six cases, the disciplinary actions that the violator in the presented cases would receive are (in the opinion of respondents) lower in comparison to the sanctions that the respondents believe that violator should receive. On average, the violator would receive a written warning while respondents believe that they should be suspended.

Table 5: The average scores and standard deviations for organisational rules violation

Case No.:	Average	Std. dev.
6	3.75	2.17

2	3.20	2.07
4	2.66	1.88
3	2.57	1.86
1	2.30	1.78
5	2.25	1.67
Average	2.80	1.91

Almost half of the respondents replied that the described behaviour would not present violations of organisational rules because they do not exist. The average for all cases is 2.80, while the scores for individual cases are rather dispersed (standard deviation is 1.91).

We further performed regression analysis, to examine which factors most influenced attitudes toward workplace mobbing; the willingness to report the violator and what proportion of variance was explained by factors, which were

Table 6: Hierarchical regression analysis for own beliefs about workplace mobbing severity as a dependent variable – average for all cases

Factor – variable	β values and ΔR^2 models	
	1	2
Gender	-0.16 ^b	-0.07 ^d
Age	0.52 ^c	0.28 ^d
Education	0.01	0.03
Years of service	-0.48 ^c	-0.33 ^c
Years of service in public research organisation	0.00	0.12
Job title (position)	-0.13 ^d	-0.09 ^d
How severe would, in your opinion, the majority of your co-workers view such behaviour?		0.44 ^b
Would, in your opinion, your co-workers report the superior?		-0.33 ^b
To what extent would such behaviour be a violation of the rules in your organisational unit of employment?		-0.01
What punishment, in your opinion, should the superior receive?		0.41
Which punishment, in your opinion, would the superior actually receive?		-0.14 ^b
Would you report the superior?		0.34 ^d
R2	0.04^c	0.50^b
ΔR^2	0.04^c	0.46^b

^a $N=511$

^b $p < 0.0001$

^c $p < 0.01$

^d $p < 0.05$

Table 7: Hierarchical regression; own willingness to report the violator as a dependent variable – average for all cases

Factor – variable	β values and ΔR^2 models	
	1	2
Sex	0.08	0.05
Age	0.35 ^d	0.12
Education	-0.01	-0.04
Years of service	-0.07	0.14
Years of service in public research organisation	-0.28 ^c	-0.18 ^c
working post/title	-0.03	0.02
How severe is such behaviour, in your opinion?		0.36 ^b
How severe would, in your opinion, the majority of your co-workers estimate such behaviour?		-0.30 ^b
Would, in your opinion, your co-workers report the superior?		0.66 ^b
To what extent would such behaviour be a violation of the rules in your organisational unit of employment?		0.04
What punishment, in your opinion, should the superior receive?		0.14 ^b
Which punishment, in your opinion, would the superior receive?		0.04
R2	0.04^c	0.67^b
ΔR^2	0.04^c	0.63^b

^a $N=511$

^b $p < 0.0001$

^c $p < 0.01$

^d $p < 0.05$

divided in two groups: demographic factors and specific factors (beliefs).

4 Discussion

Similar to findings of other researchers about the severity of different kinds of workplace mobbing (Escartin et al., 2009; Rodríguez-Carballeira et al., 2010) and in accordance to our expectations, the researchers in our study considered workplace mobbing to be very serious. The ignoring of a court verdict was perceived as the most severe; closely followed by false accusations of plagiarism of research and slandering of a researcher to foreign partners. The perceived severity of other mobbing cases was, on average, only slightly lower. Despite that, the willingness to report the violator was lower. Respondents' perceptions depended on their beliefs of how

their co-workers would perceive the severity of cases. The violators were not, according to the respondents, sufficiently punished; with the increasing perceptions of the severity of cases the punishment even declined. Almost a half of the respondents believed that there were no organisational rules by which the presented cases would constitute a violation of workplace rules, while the rest of them were convinced that cases did not present a serious violation of existing organisational rules.

The demographic characteristics of the sample of researchers in public research organisations accounted for 4% of variance, while specific factors (beliefs) accounted for 46% of variance of the dependent variable "own belief of severity". Results show that women, on average, perceived mobbing more severely, which is probably related to their position in organisations¹¹ and sense of security. Such results were expected, since Eurofound research shows that, irrespective of age, women are mobbed more often than men (European

¹¹ The position of women in science is monitored by the Slovenian Commission for Women in Science, established at the Ministry for Higher Education, Science and Technology (http://www.mvzt.gov.si/si/delovna_podrocja/znanost_in_tehnologija/dejavnost/zenske_v_znanosti/dejavnosti_komisije/).

Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2007).

Older respondents in public research organisations (on average) perceived mobbing more severely than younger respondents; those in less-valued working posts perceived described mobbing cases more severely than those in higher-valued working posts. Respondents' perceptions of mobbing severity declined with increasing of total number years of service, which is quite surprising.

On basis of results of attitudes toward mobbing severity, we would have expected that those who most severely perceived mobbing were also the most ready to report the violator: women, older workers and respondents in lower-valued working posts. The results show that those demographical factors actually did not have statistically significant influence on the willingness to report the violator. All demographic factors together only explained 4 % of variance of dependent variable "own willingness to report the violator", while specific factors (beliefs) explained 63% of it.

The willingness to report the violator declined with increasing of years of service in the same public research organisation. The respondents' attitudes might be influenced by the experience of their own social weakness or safety. Gadlin (1998) found that in practice the one who reports is viewed with more suspicion than a violator who is reported; furthermore, the willingness to report the violator is in contrast with the culture of collegiality and loyalty to the institution as assumptions of organisational life. In case of longer working period in the same public research organisation, social networks are naturally developed in different circles of the public and private sectors, since a researcher's profession offers variety of possible career opportunities¹². The next possible factor is that respondents with experiences in such cases within their organisation determine over time what the actual management responses to the applicant and to the reported violations are. The influence of different factors on lower willingness to report by those with longer working periods in the same public research organisation should be examined in further research.

Demographic factors only explained 4% of variance of dependent variable "own willingness to report the violator", while special factors (beliefs) accounted for 63% of variance.

While respondents perceived themselves to be more morally sensitive compared to their co-workers, regression analysis shows that respondents' opinions were mostly influenced by their opinion of their co-workers' beliefs and behavioural intentions. This finding could be used for increasing the workplace mobbing awareness and the willingness to report mobbing. We can expect a higher willingness to report the violator if we enforce the severity beliefs about co-workers and their willingness to report workplace mobbing. It is important to emphasize the right information about the seriousness and consequences of workplace mobbing, as well as desired behavioural intentions, while we must not neglect the importance of management reaction and support mechanisms that

prevent retaliation (Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran, 2005, Miceli et al., 2009, Near and Miceli 1986, in Viswesvaran, 2005).

On basis of replies to the questionnaire, as well as comments received by e-mail, we can assume (on average) inappropriate management responses to workplace mobbing cases. In the respondents' opinion, the actual discipline was declining with severity of workplace mobbing; their own beliefs of severity and of actual discipline were significantly negatively correlated. Violators were, in the respondents' opinion, not disciplined properly, which also explains why actual discipline was not significantly related to respondents' willingness to report the violator; perceived differences between the punishment that violator deserved and actually received were also confirmed by significant t-test results. On the other hand, the higher the punishment that (in the opinion of respondents) the violator should receive, the higher was the respondents' willingness to report the violator.

The perceived reason for overly mild discipline of violators should be examined in further research. However, it might be possible that managers know that workplace mobbing is happening and they tacitly consent or they even cooperate in it (Rayner, 1999). The organisational attitude to workplace mobbing is communicated by the sanctions that would be assigned to the violator of norms and values together with the existence and enactment of organisational politics against mobbing (Ståle, 1999), which can be indirectly seen in the indulgent attitudes that public research organisations and their management have in relation to violators. Almost half of the respondents in our research said that there were no organisational rules by which the presented cases would be seen as violations; where such rules existed, the cases would not be considered severe violations. It is also possible that respondents were not informed about those rules. Furthermore, it is possible that respondents believed that workplace mobbing was practically allowed since violators would not receive proper sanctions or that violator's benefits were higher than costs or received punishment (Bjorkqvist, 1994; Rayner and Hoel, 1997; in Rayner, 1999). Speculating in this direction, even on the basis of research implemented abroad, is also meaningful because of the comments received by e-mail to the address published in the questionnaire. During the survey, many various responses arrived. While many reacted out of their distress, looking for help and asking what they could do to alleviate their long-term suffering, of even greater concern were the diametrically opposite responses. Some were convinced by their own experiences that mobbing was the only way to keep only the best personnel and to get rid of inappropriate employees. That suggests that workplace mobbing already is the part of organisational culture, and is wrongly perceived as strong management and as an effective way to get things done and problems solved.

Mobbing is anything but effective workplace management; rather, it is a very costly management response to leadership and organisational problems. Cultures that normalise

12 Commission of the European Communities (2003). Communication from the commission to the council and the European parliament. Researchers in the European research area: one profession, multiple careers, http://ec.europa.eu/research/fp6/mariecurie-actions/pdf/career-communication_en.pdf.

illegal behaviour ensure the logic of corruption, which is best addressed by outsourcing the task to consultants to review top management, to eliminate such behaviour and to prevent the appearance of new ones (Misangyi et al., 2008; in Miceli et al., 2009).

Organisations that encourage "moral muteness" do not encourage the development of moral integrity (Weaver, 2006; in Miceli et al., 2009), which would lead to more moral interpersonal relationships among employees. If we want to increase the willingness to report violators, we have to create appropriate environment and culture, which will build positive moral identity among employees in the long term (Miceli et al., 2009; cf. Haberfeld et al., 1999) and which will not be tolerant of workplace mobbing. The creation and maintenance of ethical culture depends on top management, which requires ethical behaviour in single hierarchical level (Ardichvili et al., 2008).

The extent, to which the respondents' own beliefs are influenced by their perception of their co-workers' opinions, is a reflection of lower than desirable integrity. That is probably a reflection of the general situation, since few organizations are dealing with education and training programs that would encourage the integrity of employees. It would be ideal if employees' own perceptions of severity and their own willingness to report violators were most strongly correlated. In such a case, the behavioural intention would reflect actual attitudes and beliefs, respondents' moral norms and the integrity of individual (Vicchio, 1997; in Pagon et al., 2003), which have a special meaning where people work together (Kaptein, 1999). In order to gradually come closer to this condition, it is necessary to create an organisational environment and culture in which the integrity of the individual is encouraged and in which the individual is protected from retaliation. As it has already been mentioned, integrity is given a concrete meaning by rules that explain which behaviour is acceptable and which not (Paine, 1994; in Kaptein, 2003).

A quite interesting connection revealed by regression analysis is that respondents' beliefs regarding co-workers' opinion on the severity of mobbing cases were significantly negatively related to their own willingness to report the violator, which means that the higher the perceived co-workers' opinion about the severity of mobbing case was, the less they were willing to report the violator (and vice versa). This negative relationship should be investigated by further research.

One of the reasons for these findings might be a lack of on-the-job training related to a system of values and integrity development in public research organisations (cf. Mevc, 2005). Training is also insufficiently linked to workplace mobbing awareness, its consequences for violators, mobbing targets, organisations and wider society.

Despite the fact that we have modelled a research approach for workplace mobbing on corruption research in police forces (Haberfeld et al., 1999; Pagon et al., 2003) and in Slovenian public administration (Mevc, 2005), our results are not compared with results of that research because of differences in the nature of the examined phenomena of workplace mobbing and corruption as well as differences in the observed populations.

Recommendations

We would recommend that public research organisations prepare policies and systems of human resources management that establish and maintain a positive ethical organisational culture and climate as well as systems for the prevention of and responses to received reports of mobbing (Miceli et al., 2009). Because the establishment and maintenance of ethical culture depends on top management, who should require ethical behaviour at each organisational level (Ardichvili et al., 2008), management training for ethical decision making in everyday work is highly recommended (Pagon and Lobnikar, 1996) as well as developing leadership and managerial skills, especially in the field of emotional intelligence (Sheehan, 1999).

On the basis of research findings, we would also recommend, similarly to other authors (Yildirim, Yildirim and Timucin, 2007; Escartin, 2009; Roscigno et al., 2009; cf. Mevc, 2005; Dolinar et al., 2010), increasing the awareness of employees at all levels about possible forms of workplace mobbing and the implementation of strategies and codes that will define procedures involved in dealing with workplace mobbing in different roles and at all levels. All messages, written and verbal, but especially acts, should express zero tolerance for workplace mobbing, since organisational mobbing attitudes are expressed with sanctions for violators together with the existence of preventive, anti-mobbing politics and strategies (Ståle, 1999). It is very important to put into practice what is written for (at least) two reasons: first, in this way violators can get the message that workplace mobbing simply does not pay off, since sanctions will not be mild or merely symbolic; second, because the management response to reports on mobbing as well as the events that follow have strong impact on observers in the organisation (Miceli et al., 2009; Mesmer-Magnus and Viswesvaran, 2005).

During the preparation of prevention actions aimed at raising awareness about the severity of workplace mobbing, special attention should be given to younger workers and those employed in higher-valued work positions as well as those with longer work experience. It would be useful to use the statistically significant relationship between perceptions of co-workers' beliefs and respondents' own beliefs, and enforce the beliefs of these target groups that their co-workers also perceive work place mobbing as a very severe phenomenon.

Another issue that should also be considered in designing appropriate measures is whether or not organisations have support mechanisms that prevent retaliation; this could be answered by further research. If these mechanisms are missing, then this lack should be met with the establishment of the abovementioned mechanisms, prior to implementation of activities for the stimulation of workplace mobbing reports. As already mentioned, it is important to carefully set actions, strategies and policies, since the reporter can easily become a target of retaliation (Alford, 2001; De Maria, 1999; Dempster, 1997; Glazer and Glazer, 1989; Hunt, 1995, 1998; Miceli and Near, 1992; Miethe, 1999; Vinten, 1994 in Brian, 2003). Along with measures for the protection of reporters, measures of the sanctions for misleading and false reports should also be determined (Gadlin, 1998).

5 Conclusion

Research reveals that the attitudes of Slovenian researchers toward workplace mobbing are quite serious, but that they are less ready to report violators. Both factors are significantly influenced by respondents' beliefs about their co-workers' attitudes, which reveals a lower integrity of researchers than desired. Discipline for violators is too mild, according to respondents' opinion. Almost half of respondents replied that there were no organisational rules under which the scenario cases would be defined as violations. The rest of respondents' answers showed that none of the cases would represent a very serious violation of organisational rules in the unit of their employment.

The study opens new questions for further research; for example, the reasons for the lowering of perceived severity of workplace mobbing with the increase in total years of work experience. It would also be interesting to reveal the reasons for lower willingness to report violators among researchers with longer tenure in the same public research organisation; the existence of organisational formal rules and mechanisms that protect reporters from retaliation. Last but not least, knowing more about the factors causing at least some of researchers to find workplace mobbing to be an acceptable way of solving problems would additionally contribute to our understanding of the reasons for the existence of workplace mobbing in public research organisations. It is possible that one of these factors is the conviction that workplace mobbing is an allowed behaviour (Rayner, 1999).

We can summarise on the basis of our research findings that the organisational environment of public research organisation protects violators, thereby offering favourable conditions for the existence of workplace mobbing. The reasons for this are most probably in the insufficient qualification of employees for proper responses and reactions, as well as in a lack of training and education in the fields of ethics and building integrity, difficulties with collecting evidence of workplace mobbing and the fact that Slovenian legal practice regarding this is still developing.

The practical value of this paper is in recognising factors that influence attitudes toward workplace mobbing as well as behavioural intentions of researchers. Knowing that, we can gradually direct them to a higher level of integrity of individuals and organisations, with the help of organisational actions and measures based on the aforementioned significant relations.

Let us conclude with the conviction that the most efficient weapons against all kinds of deviant behaviours are the ethical behaviour and personal integrity of individuals (Pagon, 2000).

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