

“Please, bring me some coffee”: Illegitimate tasks as the explanation for the relationship between organisational sexism and occupational well-being

Zusammenfassung

„Bringen Sie mir bitte einen Kaffee“: illegitime Aufgaben als Erklärungsansatz für den Zusammenhang von sexistischem Betriebsklima und Wohlbefinden am Arbeitsplatz

Während offensichtliche Formen des Sexismus in Organisationen zurückgehen, werden verdeckte Formen zur Regel. In diesem Artikel wird argumentiert, dass illegitime Aufgaben eine versteckte Form geschlechterspezifischer Diskriminierung und Belästigung darstellen. Zur Untermauerung dieses Arguments werden Belege für die Auswirkungen von Sexismus auf das berufliche Wohlergehen vorgelegt, die durch illegitime Aufgaben hervorgerufen werden. Insbesondere analysieren die Autorinnen den Zusammenhang zwischen sexistischem Betriebsklima und illegitimen Aufgaben sowie deren Auswirkungen auf die Arbeitszufriedenheit und die psychische Befindensbeeinträchtigung (Irritation). Die für die Analyse verwendeten empirischen Daten stammten aus einer Querschnittstudie mit einer Stichprobe deutscher Psycholog*innen. Auch nach Kontrolle des Effekts der Geschlechtszugehörigkeit belegen die Daten die negativen Auswirkungen von sexistischem Betriebsklima auf Irritation und Arbeitszufriedenheit, die durch die Übernahme illegitimer Aufgaben entstehen.

Schlüsselwörter

Sexistisches Betriebsklima, Illegitime Aufgaben, Irritation, Human Resources, Arbeitszufriedenheit, Wohlbefinden am Arbeitsplatz

Summary

While overt forms of sexism in organisations are on the decline, covert ones are becoming the norm. This article argues that illegitimate tasks are a disguised form of gender-based discrimination and harassment. To support this argument, evidence is provided about the effects of sexism on occupational well-being that are caused by undertaking illegitimate tasks. The authors focus on the relationship between sexist organisational climate and illegitimate tasks and the resulting effects on job satisfaction and irritation. The empirical data used in the analyses were obtained from a cross-sectional study of a sample of German psychologists. After controlling for the effects of gender, the results provided evidence of the negative effects that a sexist organisational climate has on irritation and job satisfaction, mediated by illegitimate tasks.

Keywords

sexist organisational climate, illegitimate tasks, irritation, human resources, job satisfaction, occupational well-being

1 Introduction

From the 1980s onwards, organisational scholars have tried to explain and counteract sexual harassment against women in the workplace. Pioneers like Till (1980) and Fitzgerald (Fitzgerald et al. 1988) demonstrated that harassment was a *problem* and that its negative consequences *existed*. Today, it is politically incorrect to question the negative effects of sexual harassment (although post-feminist backlash is increasing, see McRobbie 2011). In addition, there is greater acknowledgement of the negative consequences of sexual harassment against men who do not conform to stereotypical masculinity (Stockdale/Visio/Batra 1999) and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, and queer (LGBTQ) employees (García Johnson/Otto 2019). The gain in rights and legal coverage related to gender discrimination and harassment invites to think about the improvements achieved in gender-equality matters. Nevertheless, sexism, rather than disappearing, has changed its expression and adopted subtler forms that can be as damaging as overt ones (Leskinen/Cortina 2013).

In this paper, the negative link between organisational sexism and occupational well-being is explained through the mediation effect of *illegitimate tasks*, a task-level stressor.

2 Theoretical background

In this section, the study model and hypotheses are defined, and their relationships are explained.

2.1 Organisational sexist climate and occupational well-being

In this paper, two constructs were chosen to account for occupational well-being. *Irritation* refers to subjectively perceived strain derived from uncertainty thoughts and feelings about the accomplishment of important goals in occupational contexts (Mohr/Rigotti/Müller 2005). In addition, irritation plays a key role as mediator of the relationship between social stressors at work and depressive symptomatology (Dormann/Zapf 2002). *Job satisfaction* describes how satisfied an individual is with different aspects of their own work, such as career opportunities and social climate (Neuberger/Allerbeck 1978). It has been found to predict performance (Judge/Bono 2001), and organisational commitment (Culibrk et al. 2018; Judge/Bono 2001).

In an organisation with a highly *sexist climate*, sexism permeates most of what is said, thought of, and done (Franke 1997). In such contexts, gender harassment against women and LGBTQ individuals is tolerated or promoted (Leskinen/Cortina 2013; Rabelo/Cortina 2014). In addition, men who appear as feminine or non-compliant to traditional masculinity are also susceptible to the negative effects of organisational sexism (Stockdale/Visio/Batra 1999). Hence, considering the available evidence, it is probable that a sexist climate negatively influences employees' well-being.