

ORGANIZATIONAL PATHOLOGIES: ARE THEY OVERLOOKED IN ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT SCIENCE?

Introduction

This article is an attempt to answer the question related to the reasons for the relatively small number of studies on situations that we treat as dysfunctional or pathological in organizations. This issue is crucial because it can be assumed that pejoratively perceived organizational behaviors occur extremely often – after all, they result from the nature of human beings (both the employer and the employee). It is worth emphasizing that they do not have to be related exclusively to employee behaviors – for example, J. Staniszkis analyzed pathological organizational structures, including impersonal regulations conditioning the conduct in the organization, hindering the flow of information, routine and traditionalism in “shaping” structures, etc. [Staniszkis, 1972: 87]. The contribution of the article to the development of management science is related to two issues: distinguishing a separate group of phenomena called organizational pathologies from counterproductive behaviors, as well as showing a very large research gap in this area.

The first chapter aims to demonstrate the prevalence of behaviors referred to as pathological or dysfunctional. The second and third chapters define the concept of organizational pathology and highlight the challenges associated with conducting research in this area, particularly the terminological issues at the intersection of

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organizational pathology and counterproductive behavior. The fourth chapter aims to explore the high degree of complexity of this research area, while the fifth highlights the relatively low level of publications in this area. The research method applied in the study is a literature review – specifically a narrative review supported by bibliographic analysis (chapter 4) and scoping review (chapter 5). The scoping review aimed to determine the number and topics of publications on organizational pathologies published in recent years. Database searching in the Web of Science Core Collection identified 188 records; after applying the predefined inclusion/exclusion criteria and manual screening, 175 records were excluded and 13 peer-reviewed journal articles were retained for the final analysis.

1. The origins of organizational pathologies: their perception of wicked behavior over the centuries

From the earlier stages of development, humans are shaped in terms of individual and group behavior. It is evolution that has created the cognitive apparatus, the structure of needs and emotions, which enable creative problem-solving and have supported – and continue to support – the expansion of our species. Consequently, when analyzing human behavior, we should always be on the lookout for the so-called “second bottom”, the unseen and unconscious stimuli that push people to act. These are usually dominated by the empowerment of the individual, the group to which the individual belongs, as well as procreation. Modern society or organization is seen through the prism of millions of years of human experience in hunter-gatherer groups. People’s needs, fears, phobias, perceptions, stereotypes, metaphors and emotions are therefore rooted in that space and time [Sułkowski, 2010: 43]. The behavior of people in organizations – both positive and negative ones – often stem from the very nature of humans as part of the animal world. It is the kinship bond (genetic proximity) that can be at the root of pathological phenomena such as nepotism and cronyism [Erdem, Karatas, 2015: 57]¹. In contrast, altruism without kinship may be the result of the reciprocity rule. The social group expects reciprocity from the individuals to whom help is provided. Social species have been equipped with elaborate mental modules to detect and punish cheaters unwilling to reciprocate favors [Axelrod, 1984].

Already in antiquity, attention was drawn to the presence of wicked behavior in societies. In his treatise *On Virtues and Vices*, Aristotle distinguished the chief vices of human nature, which included imprudence, impetuosity, cowardice, promiscuity,

¹ Crony – a buddy, close companion, comrade; in this context, the term is defined to the privileging and appointment of personal associates to political positions.

lack of self-control, injustice, greed and small-mindedness [Aristotle, 1996: 500–504]. Cicero, in his philosophical work *On Duties*, undertakes to explain the varieties of injustice – namely, the injustice of those who cause harm and that of those who could prevent it but fail to do so [Cicero, 1960: 338]. He further stresses that one's duty to the state/nation (as an organization), as well as to one's parents, is the most essential in human life. Interestingly, he also distinguished between righteous and disgraceful (wicked) organizations. To the latter group, he included, for example: usurers, tax collectors, tradesmen (who only undertake the business of quickly reselling goods previously acquired), most craftsmen. He made an equally interesting distinction between honorable and dishonorable organizations based on their size. Trade, if it is petty, is to be regarded as a derogatory occupation; but if it is extensive and deals in great resources, brings in many goods from all sides and delivers them to many people without deception, it is not subject to significant reproach [Cicero, 1960: 408–409]. During the Renaissance, a work emerged that was based on observations of social relations in France, the Netherlands, England, Italy, Switzerland and Germany. *The Praise of Folly* is a colorful and humorous portrayal of the decline of individuals, science and organizations, all of which fail due to the incompetence of advisors. It also stigmatizes merchant guilds because: “their occupation of all is the filthiest, and by the filthiest means performed; they, though wherever they can, lie, perjure, steal, cheat and counterfeit” [Erasmus of Rotterdam, 2001: 91–92]. A few years later, *Libellus aureus nec minus salutaris quam festivus de optimo Reipublicae statu de que nova insula Utopia* is published. The motivation for writing the work was the image of England at the time, a country suffering economic disaster, overpopulated, with high levels of unemployment, poverty and crime. The author identifies capitalism (understood as the reign of money and the institution of private property) as the root cause of most socio-economic pathologies, destroying the countryside, creating unemployment, poverty and increasing crime [More, 2001: 123]. The Renaissance is also the time when Niccolo Machiavelli publishes the work *The Prince*. The main breakthrough in the author's thought, as revealed in *The Prince*, is the recognition that the history of states and societies is 'controllable', because history, treated as a kind of process, is subject to specific laws that can be grasped and named. It is thanks to the above-mentioned work that Machiavellianism came to be defined as a personality trait characterized by a lack of higher feelings, instrumental treatment of others, the use of manipulation in interpersonal relations (including business context), etc. Moral attitudes were furthermore analyzed by Adam Smith. In *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, the determinants of people's motivation to avoid poverty and multiply wealth, stinginess and ambition, the pursuit of wealth and power and human possessiveness are highlighted. The author concludes that human vanity is the underlying source of these phenomena.

However, are wicked attitudes and behaviors the core of organizational pathologies? Do scholars consider unethical and anti-social organizational behavior to be pathological?

2. Contemporary understandings of organizational pathologies and the challenges in studying them

‘*Pato*’ constitutes the root of terms related to pathological phenomena, such as: pathophysiology, pathogenetic, pathogenia, pathogens, pathomorphology, etc. The origin of these words can be traced to the Latin understanding of the word *pathos* [Sobol, 1996: 836], meaning suffering. A closely related term, often treated as a synonym of pathology, is dysfunction (dysfunctional behavior), which refers to a lack of proper functionality or adaptation to specific goals, needs, or to a functional disorder (in this medical context – abnormal functioning of a part or of the whole organism) [Sobol, 1996: 257]. Generally speaking, it can be assumed that everything that deviates too far from the average can be treated as abnormal, pathological. In the context of further considerations, it is also worth highlighting the fact that organizational pathology constitutes a form of social pathology (i.e., pathology of social behavior), since every organization, regardless of its size, is a collection of social units (individual people, who are most often its employees). In this understanding, organizational pathology is synonymous with all situations that contradict the worldview and/or principles, values, to which the ‘society’ of an organization adheres. Some of the most common manifestations of organizational pathology include mobbing, employment discrimination, workaholism as well as the often associated phenomenon of burn-out, employee theft, workplace aggression, manipulation, nepotism and many others. The major difficulty in analyzing pathological phenomena occurring in organizations is the assumption that, knowing the basic worldview values and the social understanding of various institutions, customs, human behavior, etc., one can determine what constitutes organizational pathology. However, such assessment is only valid on the condition that the analysis is limited to a single community (or, in other words, to a single social system). The multiplicity of determinants influencing the perception of a given phenomenon, action, entity as pathological or not, does not allow us to clearly distinguish ‘axiomatic’, universal features of organizational pathology. This problem also arises in the field of so-called identity economics², which is characterized by an emphasis on individual-social preferences in people’s behavior. Individuals’ decisions are influenced not only by personal motives, but also different perceptions

² Rachel Kranton and George Akerlof (Nobel laureate) proposed identity economics as a separate field of research that examines market behaviour driven by group norms and social values.

of a particular individual's behavior within a group (more broadly – in a particular society). This generates a certain problematic question – how to draw a sharp line between an exemplary and a pathological organization given the perception of the group? In different societies, the same behavior may be perceived as typical, natural, consistent with accepted norms, or as inappropriate, undesirable, deserving condemnation. In Western European societies, people are treated as equal before the law (but not in caste-based India), as equal irrespective of race, origin and religion (but not in Rwanda, a Tutsi and Hutu country) and as equal irrespective of gender (but not in some Muslim countries). In many parts of the world to this day, women are publicly beaten, they do not have the privilege of getting an education, leaving the house on their own, voting, owning any private property or opening a bank account. And all of this passes for fairness in these countries [Błaszczak et al., 2018: 49]. Thus, one may be inclined to provide additional definition of the concept of organizational pathology, as formulated by W. Kieżun. In his view, organizational pathology constitutes a permanent inefficiency that results in economic and/or moral waste exceeding the limits of social tolerance [Kieżun, 2008: 41]. But even this definition, unfortunately, remains incomplete – it does not indicate how to measure the limits of the aforementioned social tolerance. This highlights a fundamental problem in the study of pathological behavior and phenomena within organizations – the lack of a definition, widely recognized in the scientific community that takes into account the boundary between what is pathological and what is non-pathological.

The second problem, directly related to the first, concerns the lack of consistency in the terminology concerning the situations/activities called organizational pathology. In the literature review one can find many terms for this kind of phenomenon, as well as different definitions of it. Among the terms used synonymously with the phrase organizational pathology is the concept of deviance. Deviance is understood as any individual or collective behavior that goes beyond the area of social indifference and evokes condemnation (repulsion) or strong approval. The former may be called negative deviancy, the latter may be called positive deviancy [Kwaśniewski, 1982: 219–235]. Organizational pathologies can also be characterized through the prism of crisis situations taking place in institutions. A crisis situation is a state which arises as a result of the occurrence of unfavorable phenomena, which, however, is not a direct threat to the completion of tasks, but signifies an unsatisfactory evaluation of project activities from the point of view of benchmark evaluations. A crisis, on the other hand, is the result of a crisis situation and represents a significant threat to the successful completion of project activities [Kral, Zabłocka-Kluczka, 2003: 20]. These considerations can be illustrated as a certain cause-and-effect sequence, sometimes referred to as a triad of phenomena [Lachiewicz, Walecka, 2011: 111]:

single dysfunctions → accumulation of dysfunctions → crisis.

Since the mid-1990s, the term counterproductive behavior has been increasingly used to group together employee behaviors of a negative nature. The definition of counterproductive behaviors refers to voluntary actions that violate basic and commonly accepted moral principles in the workplace [Trevino et al., 2006: 951–990]. Organizational pathology is also referred to as anomie. The concept of anomie was introduced into the language of sociology through Emil Durkheim's *The Division of Labor in Society*, *Suicide*. Anomie is a state in which the norms of a given social system or society have lost their binding force in the eyes of those to whom they apply (or in which respect for these norms has been significantly weakened). Anomie results from a frustrating gap between culturally acceptable goals and the lack of permitted means to achieve them [Podgórski, 1969: 282]. Some of the more common practices of anomie include stealing the employer's resources, pretending to work, using the employer's property for personal purposes, among others.

Another difficulty in conducting research is the reluctance of potential respondents to provide truthful responses to sensitive, or personally uncomfortable questions. Answering embarrassing or shaming questions can result in distorting the information received or giving an untruthful answer, skipping questions, and dropping out of the study. These problems are often compounded by the unprofessional design of the survey instrument or circumstances of the survey that are not conducive to respondents' concentration and sense of confidentiality. Even overcoming the above problems, we encounter further challenges. The analysis of unethical, pathological, counterproductive behavior requires looking at the phenomenon from at least several different perspectives. Researchers of this topic should not limit themselves to one category of respondents. There is then a need to amplify the research efforts, for example, in order to know the objective position, it is sometimes necessary to include victims, perpetrators and observers of dysfunctional actions in the study. This generates additional, often considerable, costs for conducting the study. Moreover, going further, we may obtain multiple self-analyses of perceptions of a given behavior, which may in some cases exclude each other.

3. Organizational pathologies and counterproductive behaviors

In the literature, pejorative behaviors occurring within organizations are most commonly described as counterproductive, pathological or dysfunctional, with these terms frequently used interchangeably as synonyms. However, the authors of the present study do not fully endorse this view, arguing that the phenomena in question are characterized by two subtle yet analytically significant distinctions. Drawing on W. Kiežun's definition discussed in the previous section, organizational pathology

is understood here as any action directed at an organization and/or its stakeholders that entails the repeated violation of organizational norms, values and rules. The latter are shaped by legal and/or ethical factors specific to the broader social system – such as the state – in which the organization is established and/or operates. Crucially, such actions invariably diminish the organization's value and may ultimately result in its collapse.

The concept of organizational pathologies is frequently subsumed within definitions of counterproductive behaviors. Ch. Pearson, L.M. Andersson and Ch.L. Porath [2005: 191] define these types of behavior as actions that violate organizational and social norms or are undertaken to the detriment of other organizational participants. Similarly, A. Sharma and K. Thakur [2016: 13–27] describe them as practices that breach key organizational norms and threaten the well-being of the organization, its stakeholders or both. J. Hogan and R. Hogan [1989: 273–279] adopt an even more stringent perspective, conceptualizing counterproductive behaviors as a form of organizational crime – a syndrome characterized by the rejection of organizational rules, conventions and norms as well as the attitude of hostility towards authority. In contrast, K. Kelloway, L. Francis, M. Prosser and J. Cameron [2010: 18–25] are less restrictive in their interpretation of the term, viewing counterproductive behaviors as a form of employee protest against perceived organizational injustice.

However, a closer examination of the behaviors typically classified as counterproductive reveals that this category also encompasses actions whose impact on the organization's functioning is relatively limited or marginal. Many of them can hardly be classified as 'organizational crime', nor do they cause substantial harm either to organizational members or to the organization itself. Examples of such forms of organizational misbehavior include arriving late to work or taking longer breaks [Spector, Fox, 2006: 446–460], impression management [Vardi, Weitz, 2004: 45], complaining and avoiding social functions or interactions [Stocki, 2005: 55], behaviors signaling disrespect towards others [Wachowiak, 2011: 58], gossiping [Bowling, Gruys, 2010: 54–61], manifestations of employee narcissism [Kowalewski, Moczyłowska, 2020: 185–186], rude or cynical conduct towards co-workers [Mann et al., 2012: 143], mocking others [Kanten, Er Ülker, 2013: 149], claiming credit for others' work [Collins, Griffin, 1998: 219–242], passivity [Martinko, Gundlach, Douglas, 2002: 43], attending to personal matters during working hours [Wu, Lebreton, 2011: 595], and many more. It should also be emphasized that certain counterproductive behaviors may never result in actual harm to the organization. As noted by D. Szostek [2019: 44–45], this harm does not have to materialize, as it is sufficient that it remains hypothetically possible. In other words, counterproductive behavior must be potentially and predictably harmful, but it does not necessarily have to lead to immediate or observable negative outcomes [Marcus, Schuler, 2004: 648].

W. Kieżun employs a particularly vivid analogy to capture the essence of organizational pathology and highlights its distinctiveness from other forms of counterproductive behavior. He compares organizational pathology to the clinical death of a patient: a condition in which the organization is almost non-functional, exhibits clear symptoms of systemic failure, yet remains potentially reversible [Kieżun, 2013: 14]. This comparison illustrates the conceptual boundary between organizational pathologies and other forms of counterproductive behavior. While not every counterproductive action threatens the organization's survival or continuity, every manifestation of organizational pathology significantly increases the risk of organizational collapse.

The second key distinction concerns the persistence and repetitive character of organizational pathology, as opposed to the often incidental nature of other counterproductive behaviors. D. Lewicka [2020: 17] explicitly says that organizational pathology is both enduring and structurally more complex. It represents a relatively permanent dysfunction manifested through repeated actions embedded in organizational practice [Dobrowolski, Ignatowski, Sułkowski, 2015: 59] rather than a one-off or isolated deviation from accepted norms [Szostek, 2017: 63].

The analysis clearly demonstrates that organizational pathologies should be treated as a separate category of pejorative organizational behavior. This perspective is also increasingly reflected in the work of other scholars. For example, S.L. Robinson and R.J. Bennett [1995: 556] differentiate between minor (favoritism, gossiping) and severe counterproductive behaviors (sexual harassment, theft, verbal abuse). Similarly, H.N. Wheeler [1976: 235–243] distinguishes between serious and non-serious offences. C. Aubé, V. Rousseau, C. Morin and E.M. Morin observe that typologies of counterproductive behavior are often overly broad, as they encompass any conduct with potentially negative repercussions for the organization and its members, regardless of how work is organized [Aubé et al., 2009: 352]. At the same time, these authors note that other researchers emphasize differences in the degree of counterproductivity for such behaviors [deLeon, 2001: 7–19; Keyton, 1999: 491–518; Locke et al., 2001: 501–528]. Using the criterion of collective versus individual action, P.R. Sackett and C.J. DeVore [2001: 145–164] propose a hierarchy of counterproductive behaviors, which highlights both their internal differentiation and potential interconnections. D. Turek explicitly identifies pathological forms of engagement – such as corruption, use of psychoactive substances or gambling in the workplace – within the broader category of counterproductive behaviors [Turek, 2012: 25–26].

The foregoing diagnosis demonstrates that, although organizational pathologies are frequently included within the broader category of counterproductive behaviors, they merit separate analytical consideration, particularly in light of their profound implications for the organization's functioning and survival. Organizational pathologies may therefore be understood as a distinct subset of behaviors or actions within

the wider spectrum of counterproductive behaviors. They can also be interpreted as the result of an intensification and accumulation of one or more counterproductive behaviors which, in their initial or isolated forms, exert only a limited impact on the organization. From this perspective, the concept of organizational pathologies serves a specific purpose: it directs analytical attention exclusively to those actions and processes that pose a genuine and systemic threat to the continued existence of the organization.

4. Assessment of organizational pathologies

Many profit and non-profit organizations in the USA, Europe, Asia, and other regions eventually cease to exist. While some fail at early stage of development, others close down after many years of successful operation. Scholars of organizational behavior specified that organizational survival is dependent on health and resilience, while organizational pathologies (deficiencies, malfunctions, abnormalities) constitute a primary threat to the existence of organizations [Morales Allende et al., 2017: 107]. Organizations collapse due to their deficiencies and inability to effectively handle internal and external pressures. Knowledge of the antecedents of organizational deficiencies, malfunctions, and abnormalities as well as an accurate assessment of organizational pathologies and their consequences may help foresee organizational difficulties in advance, assess their scope and related challenges, and apply appropriate interventions to avoid crises [Kuipers, Wolbers, 2021; Pasieczny, Glinka, 2016: 213–223].

Previous research has indicated that organizational pathologies manifest through various symptoms, including dysfunctional behaviors, maladaptive beliefs (such as attitudes, values, schemas), and destructive interactions that hinder corporate performance [Boyle, 2013: 329–345; Schoeneborn et al., 2013: 435–450]. These signs also include sustained fear, intellectual decoupling, communicative disruptions, unethical behavior, corruption, mobbing, or excessive cost-cutting practices, resulting in a loss of pro-development potential and a decline in trust within the organization and its external relationships [Pasieczny, 2017: 21–30; Polińska et al., 2018: 105–122]. Organizational pathologies associated with the breakdown of ethical standards can result in reputational failures, negatively affecting social capital as well as employees' psychological well-being and overall attitudes towards work [Cardoso Castro, Espinosa, 2020: 285–312; Yankina, Rachipa, 2022: 84–96]. As toxic work environments have a significant negative impact on organizations, leading to decreased employee engagement, increased absenteeism, higher turnover rates, loss of talent, inappropriate behavior, lack of trust, and limited support among team members, detecting organizational pathologies is crucial for proposing the necessary interventions to address

the underlying deficiencies and improve organizational functioning [Acar, Aupperle, 1984: 157–166; Carlock, 2013: 13–48]. Interventions such as fostering a collaborative work culture and non-violent communication, increasing psychological capital, promoting employee well-being, self-compassion, and mindfulness, and implementing social responsibility as well as ethical guidelines can help transform organizational environments, creating healthier organizations.

Recent research on organizational pathologies highlights the disadvantageous impact of dysfunctional behaviors within private and public sector organizations [Yankina, Rachipa, 2022: 84–96]. Numerous studies have highlighted the significance of addressing issues such as work intensification, demotivating leadership styles, technophobia, or mobbing/bullying as key pathogenic factors in organizational settings. This body of research underscores how human error, low morale, and diminished human, social, and psychological capital (manifested through lack of knowledge, communication, self-efficacy, resilience, optimism, and hope) can hinder positive organizational transformation. Previous studies underscored the associations between leadership styles, employee morale, job satisfaction, and organizational pathologies, and provided insights into fostering healthier work environments [Plimmer et al., 2022: 202–227].

Scholars suggest two main approaches to assess organizational pathologies. The first one proposes to analyze predictive variables such as the organizations' age, size, industry, and ownership, and the second one focuses on variables such as leadership and management, culture, behavioral patterns, employees' values, beliefs, etc. Numerous scholars on organizational pathologies highlighted the significance of the second approach: studying internal organizational and psychological variables and conducting psychosocial diagnostics to identify pathologies within commercial and non-profit organizations [Azizollah et al., 2015: 195–202; Cardoso Castro, Espinosa, 2020: 285–312; Polińska et al., 2018: 105–122]. Many studies assessed the risks, causes, and consequences of organizational pathologies through analysis of leadership styles considered to play a crucial role for organizational health in private and public sector organizations [Basran et al., 2019: 1–13; Di Fabio et al., 2016: 1–11; Özsungur, 2019: 73–88; Rahaman et al., 2021: 73–88]. However, many other constructs directly or indirectly related to organizational pathologies have been developed and studied, as indicated by the American Psychological Association (APA) PsycNet database (Table 1).

Overall, many studies underscore the importance of studying the phenomenon of organizational failure more broadly and deeply, focusing on various psychological aspects to diagnose and address organizational pathologies. Based on the APA PsycNet database, scholars emphasize the importance of assessing key dysfunctional factors within organizations. These include dysfunctional leadership (such as autocratic, narcissistic, or laissez-faire leadership styles which can lead to poor communication,

low morale, and high employee turnover), ineffective communication (resulting in misunderstandings, lack of coordination, and conflicts among employees and departments), low employee well-being and burnout (manifested in high levels of stress, burnout, and low job satisfaction stem from excessive workloads, inadequate support, insufficient recognition and rewards, excessive red tape, rigid procedures, and an overemphasis on hierarchy, ultimately contributing to counterproductive workplace behavior), resistance to innovations (due to entrenched interests, fear of the unknown, or a lack of effective change management practices), toxic work environments (characterized by conflict and competition among employees, high turnover, absenteeism), as well as decreased performance (reflected in counterproductive behavior, drops in productivity, and overall performance), unethical behavior (leading to scandals, legal issues, and loss of reputation). Overall, research indicates that assessment of these factors is significant for maintaining organizational vitality and organizations that address these issues are more likely to foster a healthy, productive, and sustainable working environment.

Table 1. Constructs and the number of test records in the APA PsycNet database

Attitudes Toward Work (1)	Burnout (11)	Burnout Syndrome (4)
Business Ethics (5)	Career Adaptability (41)	Compassion Fatigue (4)
Corporate Social Responsibility (56)	Counterproductive Work Behavior (13)	Destructive Leadership (3)
Employee Attitudes (49)	Employee Coping Strategies (1)	Innovative Work Behavior (4)
Employee Performance (14)	Entrepreneurial Orientation (7)	Ethical Behavior (3)
Firm Performance (20)	High-Commitment Work System (2)	Human Resource Management (14)
Innovation (7)	Innovation Capability (5)	Job Burnout (8)
Job Performance (46)	Job Satisfaction (110)	Leadership (41)
Managerial Competence (1)	Mobbing Victimization (1)	Moral Harassment in Organizations (1)
Occupational Burnout (13)	Occupational Safety (12)	Occupational Stress (53)
Organizational Behavior (43)	Organizational Commitment (53)	Organizational Culture (41)
Organizational Innovation (18)	Organizational Performance (25)	Organizational Support (3)
Personal Values (2)	Professional Ethics (3)	Psychological Terror (1)
Team Performance (13)	Unethical Behavior in the Workplace (2)	Unethical Pro-Organizational Behavior (2)
Unethical Workplace Behavior (3)	Work Engagement (9)	Work Environment (3)
Work Ethics (2)	Workplace Mobbing (2)	

Source: own study.

5. Review of recent research on organizational pathologies

This section is mostly based on the analysis of records on the keywords “organizational pathology” and “organizational pathologies” in the Clarivate Web of Science Core Collection database. The criteria for inclusion were as follows:

1. the type of publication (peer-reviewed articles),
2. the language of the article (English),
3. publications issued between 2020 and 2024,
4. Web of Science categories, including economics, management, business, psychology, behavioral sciences,
5. citation topics (meso-level analysis): economics, management, political science, economic theory, communication, operations research and management science, social psychology.

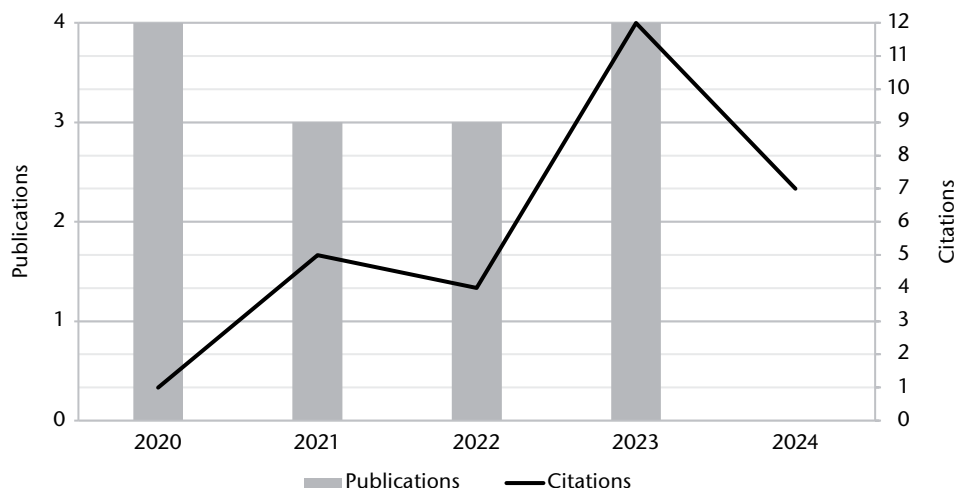
The criteria for exclusion were as follows:

1. the type of publication (book chapters, conference proceedings, doctoral dissertations),
2. languages other than English,
3. publication date prior to 2020,
4. Web of Science categories other than economics, management, business, psychology, behavioral sciences,
5. excluded keywords: “workplace mobbing”, “organizational innovation”, “performance-based rewards”, as suggested by the search engine.

By focusing on the inclusion/exclusion criteria and conducting a manual selection of the relevant articles, a final total of 13 articles was obtained. These articles were cited 28 times total (excluding self-citations), with an average of 2.15 per item, H index = 3 (Figure 1).

The recent research on organizational pathologies covers various disciplines, mostly management (n=8), multidisciplinary psychology (n = 3), and business (n = 2), with equal distribution of articles (n = 1) in the fields of development studies, ergonomics, economics, health policy services, industrial engineering, interdisciplinary social sciences, industrial relations and labor, and applied psychology. The most recent cited article by Ahmadzadeh, Safari, and Teimouri introduced the concept of “collective stupidity” [Ahmadzadeh et al., 2022: 1257–1295]. The authors aimed to develop a model of the factors affecting and influenced by collective stupidity. Using a mixed-method approach (qualitative and quantitative), they identified individual, group, and organizational factors as both antecedents and consequences of collective stupidity. The phenomenon was found to be related to one-sidedness, non-strategic thinking, organizational injustice and weakness in the management of key personnel.

Figure 1. Number of articles and citations specifically on organizational pathologies in the Web of Science Core Collection, 2020–2024



Source: own study.

The second most cited article on this topic by G. Lemmon et al. [2020: 220–235] conceptualized engagement as a privilege and disengagement as a pathology. The researchers analyzed how changes in the modern work roles restrict engagement in ways that do not align with the traditional view. Next, a study by Hancock suggested that internal pathological tendencies towards reification, disrespect and compelled identification result in employee recognition programs undermining the ontological conditions necessary for recognition to flourish, threatening both individual and organizational harm [Hancock, 2024: 381–401]. Subsequently, a study by Roth et al. presented a work-centered approach, focusing specifically on the design of work-centered questionnaires intended to diagnose how specific system elements support – or fail to support – work process [Roth et al., 2021: 155–174]. Furthermore, interesting research was conducted by Bourlier-Bargues, Gond, and Valiorgue; the authors documented a set of governance practices used by executives to prevent cooperativization: general assembly disempowerment, board neutralization, and executive committee entrenchment [Bourlier-Bargues et al., 2024: 455–483]. Their study expanded the repertoire of pathologies in worker cooperatives and offered political and organizational levers to limit the phenomena of cooperativization prevention and executives' capture of governance structures. Besides, Ramírez-Gutiérrez, Cardoso-Castro, and Tejeida-Padilla presented a protocol that establishes the complementarity between Soft Systems Methodology (SSM) and the Viable System Model (VSM) for the analysis of viability in organizations and consists of six steps used to diagnose or design a viable organization that includes a questionnaire for

detecting organizational pathologies [Ramírez-Gutiérrez et al., 2021: 331–357]. The recent research by Ruggieri et al. was focused on risk conditions due to work-related stress [Ruggieri et al., 2020: 1–13]. Anastasiadis and Spence analyzed the effect of organizational pathology on maintaining and repairing organizational legitimacy in sports governing bodies [Anastasiadis, Spence, 2020: 24–41]. Meanwhile, a study by Bloom proposed an extremely interesting approach: the author argues that “to lead any organization in a time of significant change means leading a revolution in understanding human nature and the fundamental causes of human pathology that are endangering all life on this planet and then helping organizational members develop skills to positively influence the changes necessary” [Bloom, 2023: 1–22]. The author also briefly presents an online educational program *Creating Presence* (TM) that is being used in organizational context as a method for fostering and supporting the development of biocratic, trauma-informed organizations. A study by Kottek et al. [2021: 2–11] showed the significance of upskilling existing administrative staff with the necessary training to prevent organizational pathology. The research by Jammulamadaka [2024: 405–421] delineated the importance of critical strategic thinking for NGOs. A very interesting study was conducted by Rabani et al. [2023: 43–60], who analyzed pathology of organizational crisis management based on hazard and operability analysis. Finally, Lanini, Tringali, and Grotto [2022: 1–8] provided insights on the psychological needs and resources of staff in a pediatric neurosurgery ward. On the whole, the recent research on organizational pathologies has followed several directions, with scholars examining antecedents, consequences, correlated variables, assessment tools, and interventions aimed at maintaining organizations healthy and alive.

However, a literature review should also cover the so-called grey literature, particularly books and articles not published in peer-reviewed scientific journals (i.e., those not included in databases such as Scopus or Web of Science) [Adams et al., 2017: 432–454]. The following section presents selected findings from this type of literature. This analysis further reinforces the belief that the aspect of organizational pathologies is complex, highlighting the challenges associated with studying this phenomenon, including its inherent ambiguity and terminological confusion.

The first publication contains the analysis of a study related to the impact of the sense of justice (or lack thereof) on the creation of pathological behavior in organizations. As M. Macko points out, the sense of justice can be defined as a generalized, non-objective (but rather subjective) assessment of the extent to which the basic principles of justice are fulfilled by the employees of an organization. This assessment is formed on the basis of employees’ perceptions of managerial decisions, the impartiality of the decision-making process and the way in which employees affected by these decisions are treated. The main survey was based on a survey method – questionnaire

technique and included employees of organizations operating in Poland and Norway. The survey involved 492 respondents who were employees of companies operating in Poland and 167 working in companies in Norway. When analyzing the individual components of the sense of justice, the strongest relationships with dysfunctional behavior were observed for retributive justice (i.e., the perceived fairness of punishments and sanctions for committed offences), interpersonal justice (i.e., the way the employees are treated by management and the quality of relationships within the work group) and procedural justice (i.e., the fairness of the procedures used in the organization) [Macko, 2009: 199–202].

A. Chudzicka-Czupała, in her study, aimed to identify the most and least frequently experienced unethical behaviors among employees, as well as the type and frequency of such behaviors from the perspective of both the victim and witness. The survey was conducted in 2012 on a sample of 725 employees working in various types of organizations in Poland. The findings indicate that the most common unethical behaviors include interrupting others' speeches, being treated from a position of authority, and not being informed about joint meetings at work. On the other hand, the least frequently reported behaviors include, *inter alia*, gender-biased discrimination, health-related discrimination, sexual propositions [Chudzicka-Czupała, 2013: 205–206]. In another study, A. Chudzicka-Czupała together with B. Makselon-Kowalska aimed to diagnose unethical behavior in the context of the following three perspectives: perpetrator, victim and observer, as well as to verify, among other things, the organizational climate and psychological gender on shaping such behaviors. Additionally, the researchers analyzed the level of Machiavellianism and the level of the individualism-collectivism index in the organizations participating in the study. A total of 210 employees were surveyed, of whom as many as 79% were managers. Significant findings of the study include the revelation of socio-demographic and personality traits that are related to unethical behavior in interpersonal relationships at work:

1. Age – younger employees are more likely to feel abused, overburdened with responsibilities, treated from a position of power, forced into performing additional tasks, e.g., work overtime,
2. Gender identity – individuals characterized by higher level of femininity (both women and men) are more likely to experience and witness bullying behaviors,
3. Machiavellianism – this personality trait is associated with greater tendency to engage in behaviors such as insulting others, laughing at people and even making sexual proposals, as well as demonstrating power and authority; at the same time, people characterized by a high rate of Machiavellianism have a sense of being discriminated against because of their age and experiencing neglect and lack of recognition from their colleagues [Chudzicka-Czupała, Makselon-Kowalska, 2004: 243].

From the perspective of counterproductive work behavior among blue-collar and white-collar employees, M.A. Anjum and A. Parvez identified an interesting relationship. Manual workers are characterized by higher levels of counterproductive activities compared to white-collar workers. The average score for such activities at work (including abuse, deviations from the norm, sabotage, theft and withdrawal) among blue-collar workers is 3.060, corresponding to a frequency of “once or twice a month”. The most frequently reported types of these activities among blue-collar workers are bullying, theft and interpersonal conflicts in the workplace. In contrast, counterproductivity among white-collar workers is minimal, with an average score of 1.484, corresponding to “never” on a five-point scale. The most commonly reported types of counterproductive behavior in this group are withdrawal and violence towards others [Anjum, Parvez, 2013: 423, 428–429].

Conclusion

If we assume that in every organization, which is a larger or smaller social system, a phenomenon characteristic of organizational pathology inevitably emerges in the long term, the deduction from this assumption is that these phenomena are common in socio-economic life. This is why it is so important to address these aspects – their identification, analysis of the impact on the functioning of organizations, methods/techniques for eliminating/minimizing them. Focusing in management science only on efficiency-enhancing issues makes our perception of organizations incomplete and consequently inappropriate in terms of, among other things, educating future managers. In addition, the research results show the complicated nature of the subject under consideration. The lack of perceived fairness within the organization and constant stress can significantly increase the occurrence of dysfunctional behaviors, within which phenomena such as interrupting others during discussion, exercising authority inappropriately, or failing to inform employees about joint meetings at work tend to dominate. These phenomena do not belong to the category of counterproductive actions significantly disturbing the functioning of the organization, which is probably the result of the large number of legal regulations determining the behavior of people in and outside the organization. The research also confirms the thesis that organizational dysfunctions depend on socio-cultural conditions, varying across different geographical areas.

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ORGANIZATIONAL PATHOLOGIES: ARE THEY OVERLOOKED IN ORGANIZATIONAL MANAGEMENT SCIENCE?

Abstract

The aim of this article was to explain the reasons for the very limited attention paid to organizational pathologies by researchers. To achieve this goal, there was a need to define the above term, along with providing examples of key organizational pathologies, as well as to distinguish the differences between this concept and the concept of counterproductive behavior (the analysis presented in the third section of the article proves the need to differentiate between both terms). An assessment of the impact of pathologies on organizational functioning, including psychological aspects, combined with an analysis of the Clarivate Web of Science Core Collection database, and a review of the so-called gray literature, demonstrates the complexity of these phenomena and the enormous difficulty associated with conducting research on this topic. Furthermore, the results of the literature review in the aforementioned database identifies only 13 articles directly related to this topic, which indicates a research gap.

KEYWORDS: ORGANIZATIONAL PATHOLOGIES, ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR

JEL CLASSIFICATION CODES: D23, D73, J28, M12

PATOLOGIE ORGANIZACYJNE: CZY SĄ POMIJANE W NAUCE ZARZĄDZANIA ORGANIZACJĄ?

Streszczenie

Celem artykułu było ukazanie przyczyn bardzo rzadkiego podejmowania się przez badaczy tematyki patologii organizacyjnych. Na drodze do osiągnięcia tego celu stanęła potrzeba zdefiniowania powyższego terminu, wraz z egzemplifikacją głównych patologii organizacyjnych, jak również ukazania różnic tego pojęcia w stosunku do koncepcji zachowań kontrproduktywnych (analiza przedstawiona w sekcji trzeciej artykułu dowodzi o konieczności rozróżnienia obydwu terminów). Ocena wpływu patologii na funkcjonowanie organizacji, z uwzględnieniem aspektów psychologicznych, analiza bazy danych Clarivate Web of Science

Core Collection oraz przegląd tzw. szarej literatury, dowodzą złożoności tego typu zjawisk i ogromnej trudności w prowadzeniu badań naukowych na ten temat. Z kolei wyniki z przeglądu literatury w wyżej wskazanej bazie wskazują na istnienie jedynie 13 artykułów wprost związanych z tą tematyką, co świadczy o istnieniu luki badawczej.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: PATOLOGIE ORGANIZACYJNE, ZACHOWANIA ORGANIZACYJNE

KODY KLASYFIKACJI JEL: D23, D73, J28, M12

