

Restructuring and moral harassment

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Last year's press reports stated that the former President of France Telecom, Didier Lombard, and six other former executives have gone on trial for accusations of moral harassment leading to 19 suicides, 12 suicide attempts and eight reported cases of serious depression of employees over the past three years. His restructuring plan consisted of laying off 22,000 jobs. However, since most jobs were held by civil servants, they were largely protected from layoffs. Some employees were transferred away from their families or left behind when offices were moved or assigned demeaning jobs.

Lombard attributes the suicides and depression to local difficulties with no link to work issues. However, evidence including a note left about why one employee who decided to end his life, blames it on "the permanent sense of urgency, overwork, absence of training, the total disorganization of the company, "plus "management by terror." Lombard's lawyer claims he is innocent because there was no way for him to know what was going on with over 100,000 employees. He admits, however, that the restructuring upset employees, but he rejects the idea that it led to people taking their own lives.

The public France Telecom became a private company now named Orange which is also on trial for the same offence, as 35 staff took their lives between 2008 and 2009. Notes were left blaming France Telecom and its managers.

There are many parallels with experiences in our large and diverse organizations that regularly undergo restructuring that leads to staff facing similar anxieties and stress. These articles outline the importance of proper protection for staff, as well as their empowerment through staff representation. We should all be active in properly addressing perceived moral or psychological harassment, staff anxieties and threats of job insecurity, tough restructuring plans, mismanagement, mobility and other related issues.

The FICSA website has a wealth of information available for you to use in discussions with your administrations when devising and implementing new policies.

FICSA also prepares you through professionally-led training courses on a variety of issues. You can contact ficsa@un.org for more information or consult our website: ficsa.org

