THE CHANGING ROLE OF WORK ENVIRONMENT IN BALANCING WORKERS' PERSONAL AND WORK LIFE

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Abstract
        The aim of the article is to consider the changing role of work environment in balancing workers' personal and work life. This issue has been presented in the context of the idea of sustainable development and corporate social responsibility.

Keywords: Work–life balance, relationships in the workplace, work environment

Introduction
        Personal life and work life are two mutually intertwined areas of one's functioning.The condition which ensures their optimal (positive and harmonious) relations is their mutual *balance*, being the part of the life balance and representing a certain amount of time and energy the individual puts into each of those areas, as well as their feeling of fulfilment resulting from serving many social roles, work ones included. This balance consists of an active balance of diverse activity levels, both those realised in work environment and in personal life (family, social, educational, leisure, religious etc.). However, today's dynamic socioeconomic reality does not favour maintaining synergy between both areas, which often results in *conflict* and perceiving both areas as opposing ones. *Work environment,* consisting of many diverse organisations which employ workers, plays a significant role in counteracting that disharmony. Those organisations may facilitate balancing both areas by creating coherent personal policies aimed at shaping the balance and by eliminating the causes of conflicts between work and personal life.

Work environment as the main area of realizing the sustainable development concept
        When discussing the subject, the Author would like to begin the first part of the article by advancing the thesis that *work environment* – related to

the science, economic and social areas – is a significant area of realizing the concept of sustainable development.

   Sustainable development is defined in two ways. Firstly, it is a process the aim of which is fulfilling this generation's developmental aspirations, in the way it allows the following generations to realize the same aspirations. Secondly, it is a process of changes, in which the resource exploitation, investment patterns, the directions in technical development and institutional changes remain harmonious and keep current and future possibilities of fulfilling people's needs and aspirations. (Our Common Future, 1987). Sustainable development is most commonly seen as the life quality improving strategy, which concerns *society, economics* and *environment*. This idea's most important message concentrates on the need of maintaining balance both in the three areas and in the relations between one another. It is stressed that its aim is to provide high quality of life to today's and future generations; the idea of „life quality" being interpreted as developing and fulfilling consumptive needs to the same extent as one's social, psychological and spiritual needs.

        Thus, *quality of life* is not only the main postulate of the sustainable development's concept, but also the reason for which one works. *Work* is perceived as the most valuable form of one's participation in collective life, through which one realises both one's individual needs and social goals of today's and future generations. The goal of work is to fulfil the needs of community and help it survive, which makes it an activity that is substantial for the existence of both the individual and the whole social groups.

        The common goal of a person's work and sustainable development has been illustrated below.
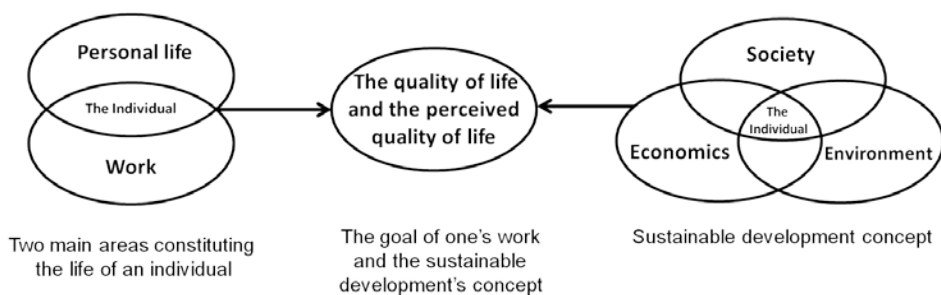

Figure 1. The quality of life as the goal of both one's work and the concept of sustainable development.
Source: R. Tomaszewska-Lipiec, Relations Work–life balance – the way to sustainable development of an individual. Introduction, [in:] Relations Work–life balance – the way to sustainable development of an individual, ed. R. Tomaszewska-Lipiec, UKW, Bydgoszcz 2014, s. 15.

The concept of sustainable development initially focused mainly on the influence of business over natural resources and landscape. Recently it has become the chief principle of the business world, as *work environment*, consisting of many material and social factors, in which there occurs the production of goods and providing socially needed and useful services, is the area in which the concept has been realised the most.

Applying such a broad concept to the microeconomics' level was possible due to prior application of *sustainable business concept* to the economic life practice. *Sustainable enterprise* is an economic entity, that is able to recognise the proper combination of managing all the basic aspects of its activity: environmental, economic and social ones; this combination enabling the business to survive and pay off in the course of time. Environmental perspective means that a business considers environmental aspects as the part of their business strategy and actively includes them in all the basic areas of their functioning. Social perspective means achieving business goals in accordance with ethical standards and in the way which allows to create qualities for the people involved. Finally, economic perspective means that the speed of increasing assets and income is balanced with the business' operational and financial policies (Przychodzen, 2013).

With reference to the aspects of sustainable business described above and describing the *social perspective*, one must remember about the *corporate social responsibility concept.* Generally speaking, European Commission defines the concept as "the responsibility of enterprises for their impacts on society (COM (2011) 681 final). Its main goal is seeking synergy between the three functional business areas: social, environmental and economic, according to the „3P" principle, which stands for „*People - Planet - Profit*". Corporate social responsibility is the managing strategy, according to which enterprises voluntarily take into account social issues, environmental aspects and relationships between groups of diverse stakeholders, particularly employees. Being socially responsible means investing in human resources, environmental protection, relationships with the company environment and informing about those actions, which contributes to creating conditions for sustainable socioeconomic development. In other words, it means the business' responsibility for the impact its decisions and actions have on the worker, society and environment. It is worth mentioning that the socio-political postulates to increase the corporate responsibility have become more and more promoted in the recent years, and the CSR concept, despite there exist no formal obligations to apply it, has gained the rank of a cultural norm in the business world. For instance, United Nations Organization expresses those postulates

through the *Global Compact*[194] movement, and the *ISO 26000 standard*, published by the International Standardization Organization has been a kind of attempt to create and international standard in the field. According to the standard, there exist seven core subjects of the corporate social responsibility: organizational governance, human rights, labour practices, environment, fair operation practices, consumer issues and community involvement and development.

Furthermore, the corporate social responsibility can be considered in the following organizational aspects:

1. External, shown by the attitude towards investors, customers, environmental protection, local community, etc.;

2. Internal, concerning the way the company applies responsibility principles within its internal structure, especially towards their employees.

When considering the second aspect, it must be emphasised that one of the fundamental principles the concept is based on is the concern about workers' interests, exceeding the minimal level determined by law, and satisfying the employees' expectations. One of the business solutions, contributing to the internal organizational aspect of corporate social responsibility, are good sustainable development practices aimed at workers, as they are the most important resource of any modern organization. An example of such practices are activities aimed at balancing workers' private and work life, human resource development programs, e.g. *Work-Life Balance* programs.

Balancing personal and work life as a postulated element of modern work environment

To justify the title of the second part of this article, the first issue one has to explain is:

why is balancing personal and work life of contemporary workers significant, and why is work environment believed to play the leading role in the process?

Although, theoretically speaking, it seems that the amount of free time the workers have should be increasing, due to factors such as introducing paid leave, increasing the number of the days off work a week, formal limiting the length of the working day as well as the technical

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[194] Global Compact, the initiative of then UN-Secretary General Kofi Annan, announced in 2000, is world's largest initiative which encourages corporate responsibility and sustainable development. At present, GC has over 9000 participating companies from all over the world as well as international work environments and non-government organisations. In Poland, the UN- Secretary General's initiative is coordinated by the United Nations Development Programme's Bureau.

development, practically, in economic life one can observe growing disharmony in relations between work and personal life. One of the main reasons for disturbances is the accelerating pace of work life, due to which organizations fall into the „acceleration trap" and begin to display one of the three models of destructive behaviour towards their employees:

- being overloaded with work – the staff does not have enough time to do their jobs, there is a lack of resources needed for doing the job;

- multiloading – asking employees to do too many kinds of activities – the company is unfocused;

- perpetual loading – the habit of constant changes in the organisation (Bruch, Menges, 2010).

As the result of this behaviour, the workers of various economic sectors and branches[195], often experience *conflict* between *work* and *personal life,* which means being overloaded with job responsibilities and as a result, devoting more time and energy to work than to being with one's family, social duties, hobbies and interests, or even taking care of one's health.

It should be mentioned that D. Clutterbuck distinguished "six life streams", which are important, to various extents, for most people:

1. work (the way you earn for your living);

2. career (What you do to progress at work and how you plan to climb the career ladder);

3. domestic / family (the way you build and maintain key relationships outside work);

4. health (What you do to you keep good physical and mental well-being);

5. self-fulfilment (what you do outside work and working career to maintain your intellect);

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[195] According to the employment status at the European Union level in the years 2004-2012, the group which claimed to work the largest number of hours a week were employers. Then, there were the self-employed, workers who help their family members and lastly hired/wage-earning workers. Furthermore, when considering particular occupational groups at the EU level in the years 2004-2012, the workers who claimed to have worked the most hours a week were the government authorities' representatives, executives and directors (46,9–45,4 hours) and farmers, gardeners, foresters and fishermen (46,5–44,3), whilst the fewest – office workers (38,5–38,2) and workers performing simple tasks (39,8–38,9) by: R. Tomaszewska-Lipiec, „Transformations of working time as a factor of labour dehumanization, [in:] Management and Managers Facing Challenges of the 21st Century. Theoretical Background and Practical Applications eds. F. Bylok, I. Ubreziova, L. Cichoblozinski, Godollo 2014 (Hungary), Szent Istvan Egyetemi Kiado Nonprofit Kft.

6.   spiritual / community (what you do in the community beyond yourself, work and career) (Clutterbuck, 2005).

When people feel self-fulfilled in all the six streams, they manage to play their social roles better; they are also able to be true to themselves and the values they hold. It is worth mentioning that although two out of six streams belong to the world of work, whilst four of them concern private life, it is the private life which people have less and less time for. When talking about workers' health it must be noted that research results suggest that stress and psychosocial threats may be responsible for 50–60% sick leaves. In Europe, stress is the second most common health problem related to work, right after musculoskeletal disorders. Over the recent 10 years, almost 28% of European workers complained about psychosocial threats having influenced their psychosocial well-being. It is also a common occurrence that workers come to work but are unable to perform their tasks, the so-called presenteeism (European Agency for Safety & Health at Work, 2013). It must be mentioned that many people who work long hours, more often than other workers, tend to develop unhealthy habits: drinking alcohol, smoking cigarettes, unhealthy eating, no physical activity; all of them contributing to serious health problems (Sparks and others., 1979; Stewart and others., 2003).

When workers show symptoms of conflict between their personal and work life, it generates negative consequences not only of an individual character, but also an organizational one. For the employers, the consequences of the said conflict are closely related to the organization's functioning, e.g.: lower work effectiveness, no motivation for working, lower work quality, lower productivity. Furthermore, workers' stress causes absences and increased employment fluctuation, and as far as the employees who work with the customers are concerned, it often leads to worsening the relationships with them. When the imbalance becomes too significant, it may even result in trained and experienced workers quitting the job, and as a result – in additional expenses for the company (Bogdanowicz, 2010).

Those threats are reflected in the study results, conducted by Randstad[196], for example, according to which the *work-life balance* is the 6th key value that workers in 23 countries taking part in the research seek (after high income, employment security, friendly work atmosphere, interesting job and economic stability). At the same time, respondents think that employers struggle to ensure that the key values of workers are fulfilled. The last, 10th position of work-life balance shows that there exists a significant

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[196] World's largest study of employers' brand, realised by ICMA Group – independent research organization. In 2015 23 countries, representing 75% of world's economics, participated in the study.

discrepancy between the values that are important for workers and how they evaluate their workers as far as fulfilling workers' values is concerned (Randstad Award, 2015).

It is worth emphasizing that work-life balancing solutions offered by work environment have become more and more expected, sought and highly appreciated by workers and candidates searching for a job, regardless of their age and gender.

Work-Life Balance Programs in work environment

Out of consideration for workers' physical and mental well-being, within the third perspective of sustainable enterprise – the social one – it is often postulated that the *Work-Life Balance* programmes should be applied in the economic life, and therefore in the broadly-defined work environment.

This term means systems of complex activities aimed at realization of certain goals, consistent with the organizational strategy and workers' expectations, as the result of which it becomes more friendly for employees and their families. Reasonable time management improves the punctuality of task realization and lowers the absence rate. Giving the employees the feeling of comfort and making it possible for them to balance private and work life relieves them of many everyday worries and enables them to focus on their work, increasing their creativity and inventiveness in realising their tasks (Lendzion, Stankiewicz-Mroz, 2009), which means more income for their organization.

Work-Life Balance programs are usually configurations of various initiatives, like:

- employment and working hours forms, e.g. flexible working forms, remote work, job rotation,
- improving the work environment quality, e.g. by taking care of the atmosphere and working conditions,
- child and dependent care,
- education, e.g. time management, individual coaching, stress coping techniques,
- preventing discrimination, e.g. career support programs for women, career mentoring programs,
- salary systems,
- non-material assistance, e.g. individual assistance program, health care programs, leisure programs (Mesjasz, 2012).

These configurations, meeting various needs of employees, are an important instrument of improving their work quality, which is a part of the overall quality of life, as they are an active assistance form offered by employers through providing work-life balancing tools and services.

This balance leads to redefining one's approach to both areas, positively changes the way social roles are played, and also – which is the most important and valuable for the employers – the way of performing job-related tasks, as well as organizational identification. Thus, those programs may provide significant benefits both to employees and employers, and facilitate sustainable socio-economic development.

The „way" from work-life balance-facilitating culture to the organizational profit has been illustrated below.
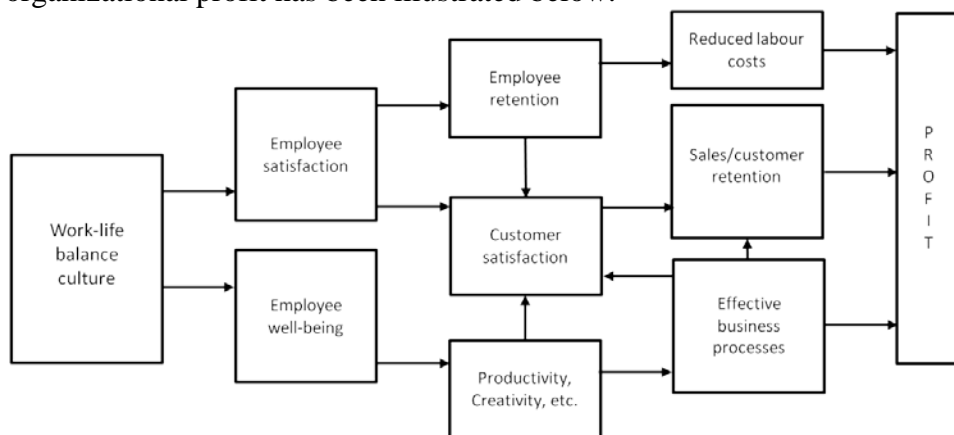

Figure 2. The work-life culture profit chain.
Source: D. Clutterbuck, Rownowaga miedzy zyciem zawodowym a osobistym, Krakow 2005, s. 36.

It must be emphasized that introducing Work-Life Balance programs and their chances of being successful depend very much on if employers and executives believe they may be relevant and beneficial, and if the employees accept them. As it has been already said, the programs should provide benefits for both employers and their staff. One must also take it into consideration that the work-life balance point is not the same for everyone, which shows the need of individualisation of the programs, to a reasonable extent, of course.

It also seems that applying this kind of good practices, being a part of the corporate social responsibility concept and sustainable development idea, needs assistance from the state, e.g. owing to the country-specific regulations of things like flexible working or working time.

It is worth mentioning that the meaning and popularity of Work-Life Balance programs are not equal in all the European Union countries, this being the result of different social policies and labour market regulations. They are most commonly applied in the United Kingdom and in South Europe. They are least commonly introduced in Nordic countries, in Austria and Germany.

Generally speaking, the application of Work-Life Balance programs is more often to be observed in:

- large companies,
- organizations which employ larger percentage of highly qualified workers,
- organizations which employ high percentage of women,
- organizations which show high-level human resource management,
- open and flexible organizations,
- with regard to the executive staff (Borkowska, 2010).

Conclusions

Surely, applying Work-Life Balance programs in work environment creates many dilemmas and is challenging, especially for the resource management departments. Some of the observed dilemmas are, for example: long-term and delayed character of the program's positive effects, thus not focusing on the increase of short-term work effects; furthermore the financial benefits resulting from the program application are sometimes difficult to quantify, as their results depend on many factors, including the quality and level of human resource management within the organization.

However, the financial analysis of the leading companies listed in „Fortune", like Abbott, Allstate, IBM, Deloitte, Johnson & Johnson, Texas Instruments, Pricewaterhouse Coopers, which applied those programs show that introducing workers' work-life balance solutions is justifiable as far as the economics is concerned.

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