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WORK DETERMINANTS OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN THE SMALL AND MEDIUM-SIZED ENTERPRISES

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Summary: The analysis of the problem of work-life balance (WLB) expanded through the last few years, being transformed from the typically female problem, connected with family life, into more general issue, concerning all the employees. The problem occurs especially with reference to the small and medium enterprises (SMEs), which dominate in the enterprise structure in the world and in a significant way, they decide about the development of economy. At the same time, these organizations represent relatively low standards in terms of realization of the basic rules of HR management, including WLB. It is caused by not only the system and organizational limitations, but it is also a result of a lack of the employers' awareness in relation with a given area. It also seems to be interesting, that the peculiarity of the functioning of a SMEs group at the same time may be recognized as a factor fostering efficient management of WLB in these organizations (greater flexibility in decision-making, greater flexibility in terms of structural and economic matters) in one hand. On the other hand, it may be considered as a factor creating obstacles in implementation of the WLB idea (ad hoc management, lack of knowledge in the area of shaping activities concerning WLB, focus on profit in a short time, lack of strategic management, lack of formal representations of the employees' interests). The aim of the article is to present the conditions of WLB of SME's employees with particular emphasis on results of author's own research.

Keywords: work-life balance, human resource, SME.

1. Introduction: terminology issues of work-life balance

Changes in the functioning of the enterprises, influenced by various social and market factors, and changes in attitudes and social expectations of the employees make the companies look for the best possible solutions in the area of human resources management (HRM). It is accomplished by extensive and complex procedures and tools used in the execution of the HR function. This can be seen especially in large organizations that have developed, formalized personal strategies to further the objectives taking into account the needs of the organization and employees as well. However, in the case of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) personnel function is sometimes performed to a limited extent, often in an intuitive way. Management theorists and practitioners seeking new areas of impact on the motivation of employees recognized the importance of the work aspects, such as job satisfaction, commitment, organizational identity, loyalty and quality of life in the workplace (Czarnecka, 2014; Przewoźna-Krzemińska, 2014). These elements refer to the issue of balancing work and personal life of employees what is the subject of this study. The main aim of this article is to try to identify the key factors influencing the work-life balance (WLB) in SMEs in the light of author's own research results.

The importance of the problems and challenges in a process of building proper relation between work and personal life progresses in the conditions of globalization, increasing competitive pressure, demographic and social changes, deregulation of the labour market, and

especially in the face of a rapid technological development. A significant starting point for the analysis of the WLB is to assume that searching for optimal solutions and their implementation will be in the interest of the employers as well as employees. WLB refers to the workers' ability to decide how much time, where and when will they devote to the activities, so WLB can be understood as an equal distribution of time, energy and engagement in all the areas of life in a way that you achieve satisfaction in all of them (Kirchmeyer, 2000). The possibility of using the autonomy in the same area is referred to the issue of general life quality and promoting of the quality of work and its conditions. (Michol-Zajda, 2008; ed. Sadowska-Snarska, 2008)

In the light of literature, WLB is described as a state which is the closest to some optimum meaning satisfaction with reconciliation between the social and professional roles (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985). This assumption neglects the fact that these relations are very dynamic. They change and are dependent not only on the individual needs of the employee, which evolve over time, but also on the changes in the environment. In connection with it, it is more reasonable to present work-life relationship as a constant process: balancing, harmonization, integration, matching, or reconciliation of the sphere of work with non - professional life. Dynamic approach to WLB also assumes that organizations must conduct uninterrupted monitoring of the needs and expectations of employees and must make changes in the organizational activities in this area. It should be noticed that balancing work with personal life is usually referred to the family responsibilities, especially responsibilities connected with the fact of having little children that is why the notion of WLB is mainly addressed to women. However, it should be noticed that striving for balance in the area of work and personal life refers to all the employees, regardless sex, age or marital status. This assumption implies a broad look on the discussed phenomenon, not eliminating any workers from the circle of interest (e.g. men, singles or elderly people). Their rejection from the discourse about the balancing of the discussed areas of life could be understood as discrimination. WLB assumes the possibility of realization of the needs and desires of all employees, both in the area of private and personal lives, in line with their expectations and interest and possibilities of the organization. Moreover, for the candidates for the employees the declarations of the potential employers concerning possibilities of meeting these needs and expectations are significant decisive factor in a process of employer's choosing.

2. Work determinants of work-life balance in small and medium size enterprises

From the point of view of the organizations, keeping the balance between work and personal life of the employees allows to use the potential of the employees in the most efficient way. In this context, a very significant issue is what kind of organizational activities should be performed in order to help the employees to keep the balance in a way profitable for the employees as well as the employers. The argument for starting the activities fostering achieving of WLB is the fact that it results in measurable financial benefits. The employees who may achieve the work- life balance become more satisfied, which directly influences their productivity, absenteeism, cooperation and loyalty to the employer (Borkowska, 2004; Ratajczak, 2007). Moreover, activities supporting WLB of the employees allow to create positive image of the company as an employer, and in result allows to start cooperation with talented and valuable employees.

Recognition of the essence of the idea of shaping WLB by the organization requires the use of certain financial expenditures and organizational development, from the HRM area. In a group of such organizational activities, being potentially the important instruments allowing

to improve the quality of work and life, we may include WLB programs and family-friendly employment programs, which are directed to the employees having some family responsibilities. Implementation of the programs shaping the WLB is mainly dependent on the employer conviction that the programs may be useful and beneficial for the company. The employer should be also convinced that the construction of the program is faultless and acceptable.

It should be noticed that the organizational activities, based on a multifaceted WLB programs, including a wide range of benefits, are projects requiring financial outlays and organizational engagement. As a result, they are organized mostly by large organizations, in a good economic condition, in which the organizational culture stresses the care for the employee. They require organizational engagement in the process of identifying the employees' needs and adjusting the potential organizational solutions to them. Such programs are therefore treated as a kind of an investment in the image of the organization as the employer.

For most of the SMEs such activities go beyond their organizational capacity, the programs become unavailable and as a result, the issue of balancing work with personal life becomes marginalized, or completely neglected. Especially for this group of the organizations stressing the role of social work environment (understood as shaping positive employee's relations (Kaczorowska-Serafińska, 2011; Korpus, 2006)) as a factor determining the employees' WLB allows taking a low cost action in this area. Building of the positive relationships between the employees is connected with the necessity of understanding the importance of these issues by the company management and shaping the management skills supporting the employees in a process of dealing with such problems. Therefore, this process should begin with raising awareness of the employees to the meaning of the WLB issue, next it should include shaping the managerial competence in this area, and finally, it should be reflected in the managers decisions, referring to everyday behaviour of the employees.

The mentioned above behaviours are connected with cooperation between the employees in terms of work organization and organization of the working time, allowing to play the professional and personal roles successfully. None of these actions requires engagement of significant amounts of money. Moreover, in comparison with the static system solutions, such as work- life programs, shaping of the social work environment, which is sensitive to the workers' needs, allows to take individualized actions adequate to constantly changing employees' expectations. Very often only the employees' awareness itself about the employer's recognition of the worker's needs and about possibility to use the organizational solutions in a given area, has a positive influence on the sense of work- life balance. Therefore, the suggested solutions from social work environment are mainly intended for SMEs, and are the alternatives for formal solutions, such as work-life programs.

Since 2010, the authors of the article have been working on various aspects of the subject of WLB. The questionnaire study conducted in 2012 was aimed at analysing the WLB issues in general, focusing on the role of supervisors in shaping the employees' WLB (Robak and Słocińska, 2012). The next research was conducted in 2013 on the group of 875 professionally active people from the areas of Silesian Voivodeship, Łódź Voivodeship, Lesser Poland Voivodeship and Masovian Voivodeship, employed in production, trading and service companies of various size. The objective of this research was to analyse the meaning of social work environment for WLB. The researches were conducted with the use of questionnaire study technique and a survey. Studies were based on random sampling.

The results of the conducted researches proved that what influences the sense of WLB in a significant way is the social work environment, understood as formal relationships connected with the hierarchical and task dependencies, as well as informal relationships, based on personal contacts between the employees (Robak and Słocińska 2013). Positive evaluation of the relationships with the supervisors and co-workers is a reflection of the overall functioning of the organization at the social level, in which important and significant values are an employee and his needs, open communication, respecting of the workers' rights and friendly atmosphere in a workplace.

The research results confirmed the research assumption, that there are few factors which have significant influence on the employees' WLB. Firstly, there should be mentioned the supervisor's management style and the communication style. The open communication allows employees to communicate their needs connected with personal and professional life to the supervisor. It is connected with the fact that supervisors understand the personal and professional needs of the employee and at the same time employees represent assertiveness in terms of respecting his personal and professional needs and their defence in a situation of their threat in a workplace. Employees' assertiveness in formulating their own needs is connected with the awareness and knowledge of the employee rights and its observance by the employer. The knowledge of the company objectives and the importance of the job performer for their realization also help employees to define their satisfaction level. Another factor that influences employees' WLB is satisfaction with the atmosphere in a workplace and the relationships with the supervisors and co-workers. This relation reflects to worker's sense of safety connected with the possibility to get some help from the employer or supervisor in case of difficult life situations.

The employees satisfied with the relationships in their workplace show greater sense of harmony and control over their own lives. In the researches, it is highly visible that the role of the supervisor and his management style in the process of shaping the employees' WLB is crucial. Based on the analysis of the collected data it may be concluded that there are the two main extreme types of enterprises: one type of workplaces in which the social work environment fosters WLB and the sense of high quality of work. The second type of workplaces includes enterprises in which the social environment has negative influence on this aspect of work.

3. Conclusion, limitation and future study direction

In the analysis of the WLB issues as key organizational activities are indicated flexible forms and systems of work, that are part of the work-life programs. Such actions, although bringing many benefits, are only possible to implement in the form of formal solutions, primarily in large organizations. The specificity of SMEs restricts the use of these instruments of personnel management. However, the practice of SMEs operation indicates a broad potential for the development of WLB in the organization of working time arrangement's, based on informal support arising from the social work environment. These activities do not require a large investment of financial resources and their effectiveness as they depend mainly on:

- perceiving the employees through their subjectivity;
- building of the open relationships between the employees;
- supervisor's management style;
- regular monitoring of the employees' satisfaction and identification of the aspects influencing its level;

- developing the employees' skills, especially in the area of communicating his WLB needs to the supervisors;
- shaping the awareness and knowledge about the employee rights and their execution by the employer.

These aspects certainly do not cover a broad spectrum of issues and problems concerning the development of employees WLB in SMEs. The complexity of the presented issues indicates the need for further research studies in this area to gain additional insight into the problem.

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