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Katarzyna Weinper
k.weinper@pollub.pl

Stanisława Pietrzyk-Leonowicz
Technical University of Lublin, s.pietrzyk@pollub.pl

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Strategic human resource management as exemplified by the Centre of Scientific and Technical Information of the Lublin University of Technology

Katarzyna Weinper

Stanisława Pietrzyk-Leonowicz

k.weinper@pollub.pl, s.pietrzyk@pollub.pl

Centre of Scientific and Technical Information, Lublin University of Technology

Abstract

So far, there has been no study on strategic management issues at the Library of the Lublin University of Technology. The article presents the main elements of the strategic management of the unit, i.e., the methods and techniques of employee recruitment, staff adaptation and turnover, the employee evaluation system, as well as incentives and motivation. It presents a training strategy supporting professional development and defines the problem of pathology and dysfunction in a unit.

Keywords: academic libraries, strategic management in a library, elements of strategic management, strategic planning, human resource management

1. Introduction

Lublin University of Technology is one of the five universities in Lublin, and the only technical university. It was established as the Evening Engineering School in 1953 at the initiative of Lublin engineers and technicians, then in 1965 it was transformed into the Higher School of Engineering, and in 1977 it was renamed to the Lublin University of Technology. The university educates engineering staff and conducts scientific research, mainly for the needs of the Lublin region. The result of its scientific activity are numerous publications, patents and protection rights. A public scientific library is at the disposal of scientists, students and all interested parties.

The library was present in the structures of the University from its very beginning and developed with it. At first, it was run by one person who focussed mainly on collection building. As the years passed, its structure expanded and the staff increased.

In the 1970s, departmental libraries were established and organisational changes took place. Apart from purchasing magazines and books, the library initiated information and teaching activities. Another breakthrough came in the 1990s, when the computerisation process began. The library joined the nationwide VTLS consortium and started implementing this system. The reading room of the Scientific Information Department was equipped with computers with access to the local network and the Internet (1995). 1999 saw a complete transition to a computerised book ordering system. The changing position of academic libraries and the impact of technology development is mentioned extensively by McNicol: “Libraries no longer occupy the secure position which they did in the past and in these circumstances, it is vital that they actively demonstrate their contribution to institutional aims and outcomes.” (McNicol, 2005).

The following years 2000–2010 were full of many changes. The structure of the Library was transformed, new departments were created, others merged. This was mainly due to the tasks entrusted to the Library (e.g. incorporating the Publishing House of the Lublin University of Technology into its structure and transforming it into the Centre for Publishers and the Digital Library). There were new areas of activity, including: organising conferences, exhibitions, establishing a Digital Library of the Lublin University of Technology, creating a Bibliography of Employees of the Lublin University of Technology (publishing a printed version and registering the scientific achievements of employees in an on-line database).

The last decade has been the period of the greatest and fastest changes that once again affected the structure and location of the Library. The current Director, who has held this position since 2008, initiated processes related to strategic management.

Strategic management in academic libraries appeared in the 1990s (McNicol, 2005). It is closely related to the development of their environment. Kemp and Wildhardt, in their book: “Library Management: Recent Trends in British Librarianship...” define an academic library as an organisation that facilitates the interaction between people and the information needed. “[...] [A library] exists to meet the information needs of all of its employees: students, teachers, management and support staff. [...] It serves the education process as a learning centre and information centre.” (Kemp, Wildhardt, 1998). The Library adapts to changing teaching methods, becomes more flexible, focussed on the student and his or her involvement in the learning process. Additional functions that it began to perform meant that in many institutions it was included in the combined system of services (Learning Resources).

The functioning of the Library in the university network made it necessary to take steps to establish a mission consistent with the mission of the home university and to take into account its organisational structure. About the importance of mission and vision and their creation by the leader write Harland, Steward and Bruce: "...Library Director, as chief executive officer (CEO) of the university library, can ensure the library's relevance to its stakeholders in the face of rapid changes to its environment. [...] includes responsibility for defining the library's strategic direction, articulating its vision and participating in the academic life of the university." (Harland, Stewart and Bruce, 2017). The next step in our Library was to perform a SWOT analysis and outline the vision and goals of this unit by library director. The Library carried out its tasks in accordance with the current needs of the University (Hijji, 2014). There is no doubt that the role of the director who is a change agent, person modelling the values and vision to others is indisputable, but the input of other library staff needs to be embedded into the process.

Recent years have brought new directions of development, resulting, among others, from the introduction of Act 2.0. and the recommendations of the European Commission on Open Science. In order to handle these tasks, the Library was transformed into a Centre of Scientific and Technical Information. It consists of: the Library as a unit of basic activity, which is the basis of the library and information system (its task is to create a research and educational workshop tailored to the needs of students and research and teaching staff), the Publishing House whose task is to implement the publishing process and to promote and disseminate the academic achievements of the University and the Centre for Bibliometric Analyses, whose main task is to support the process of evaluation of the University. This made it possible to redefine the mission, involving all library employees in the process (Kemp, Wildhardt, 1998).

Recruitment and selection (methods, techniques, problems and good practices)

The recruitment policy is part of the strategic human resource management of the organisation (Dolot, 2019), both in operational and long-term strategic management. More and more often, it is emphasised that employees are an important factor in achieving a competitive advantage, creating a brand and acquiring qualified staff. In the case of a library, it is all the more important as it is a service unit, and contacts with users affect the image of the entire University.

Until 2010, graduates of the Faculty of Library Studies and Scientific Information constituted the majority of employees. Libraries needed qualified staff that could efficiently participate in the processes of computerisation and retroconversion. It was also a time when new tasks required staff who were needed for promotion, image building, sales and culture-building activities. Therefore, the employees of the Centre of Scientific and Technical Information form a diverse group. In addition to librarians, there are also administrative staff, IT specialists and academic teachers.

In 2013, the Act amending the acts regulating the performance of certain professions entered into force, which significantly influenced the opening of the library to graduates of other faculties. Along with the changing needs of the University, increased international exchange among students and employees, there came a need for people with linguistic education, who became responsible for preparing materials related to the library in other languages, but also undertook the training of the staff. Next to librarians, editors started working in the Publishing House.

Currently, the process of employee recruitment at the Centre of Scientific and Technical Information is divided into three stages. The first is the preparation of the selection, i.e. the creation of the requirements profile (job description), the second – the selection itself, i.e. the recruitment activities (selection of applications and interview), the selection of the candidate and introduction to work. The third stage involves control of the selection process, assessment and verification of expectations towards the candidate (Dolot, 2019).

There are two strategies for employee recruitment and they depend on the type of position for which we are recruiting. In the case of the Library, the demand most often concerns young employees, full of initiative, open-minded, with ideas for promotion, culture-building activities and efficiently navigating social media in order to reach the largest group of users (mainly students). The second group of recruited employees are highly specialised people, employed, for example, to work for the Publishing House (editor) or other teams (IT specialist, promotion specialist), who are able to quickly and independently carry out their goals and tasks. It is worth noting that the process of employee recruitment is two-sided, and as Dolot writes, “both the employer and the potential employee assess the willingness and possibilities of cooperation” (Dolot, 2019). From the candidate’s point of view, the company’s image is important, and often it is the recruitment process that affects its positive or negative image (Employer Branding), and further the employment or non-employment of

an employee. In the case of an academic library, stable employment and a chance for development are its undoubted assets for a large group of those recruited.

In the case of the Centre of Scientific and Technical Information, the management and the head of the department in which the employees are to be employed participate in the recruitment and selection process. After the interviews and the presentation of the candidates who have passed the recruitment process, they are introduced to the entire team. Initially, they meet their closest associates, then, together with the manager or a designated person, they are introduced in individual branches of the Centre of Scientific and Technical Information. The undoubted advantage of this practice is to evoke a sense of belonging to a group, a sense of acceptance in the team and familiarisation with the environment and organisational culture of the company. An additional solution that functions in the unit is the new employee implementation card, which is an important element of the adaptation process.

2. Staff adaptation and turnover (new employee card)

Adaptation in the company begins with a positive result of the recruitment and selection process. “This process – as Ober and Karwot write – may have a different duration, because it depends, inter alia, on professional experience, the type of work performed, the degree in which the organisation is prepared to accept new employees from the outside, as well as on the culture of the organisation and thus on the new employees getting to know it. The success of the adaptation process and subsequent employee integration depends on a properly conducted induction process” (Ober, Karwot, 2017). This is crucial because good adaptation is based on the proper communication of behaviour patterns that will be expected of them in the future. At the Centre of Scientific and Technical Information, employee induction cards are used as an aid in the process of environmental adaptation. One of them covers the scope of duties of employees of the department to which the newcomer is admitted, the other discusses the organisational culture of the University, presenting the duties and rights of the employee. As part of the adaptation activities, the newly employed person becomes acquainted with the tasks, basic working conditions, the incentive system and the training system. For this purpose, in their first days, the employees are required to learn the regulations, and they are also shown around the administration department.

Turnover at the Centre of Scientific and Technical Information can be understood in two ways: as activities related to personnel policy, aimed at the best selection of candidates for positions, and turnover resulting from employees’ decisions.

38 persons are employed at the Centre of Scientific and Technical Information. In the last 10 years, 6 persons retired, 3 employees changed the unit within the University, 2 persons came from other departments of the University, 6 persons left their job, and employment contracts for 5 persons were not renewed after the trial period. In the last 10 years, 11 persons were hired under an employment contract for an indefinite period.

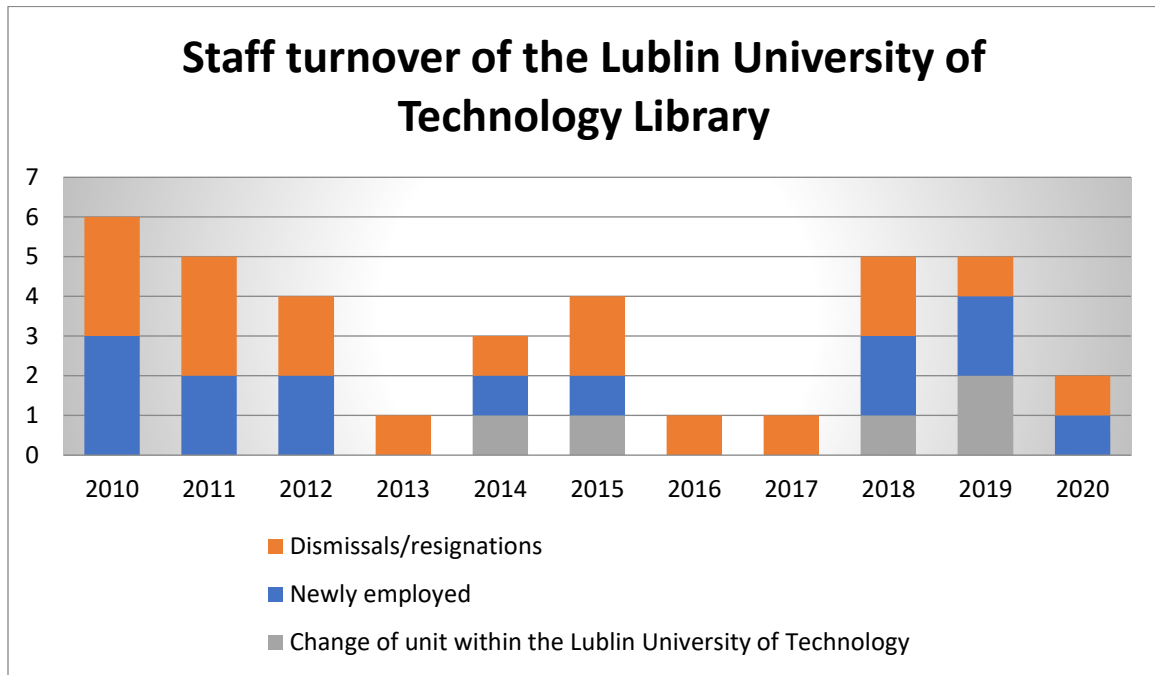


Fig. 1 Staff turnover of the LUT Library

Turnover at the CSTI is closely related to the specific number of vacancies in a unit and employment opportunities at the University. Nevertheless, staff turnover is at a stable level, which allows for the efficient implementation of the unit's tasks.

At the Centre of Scientific and Technical Information, in recent years, we have observed an increased internal rotation resulting from new tasks in the Library, the desire to improve the qualifications of employees as well as their flexibility and effective motivation.

3. Employee performance appraisal

The concept of employee performance appraisal is broadly defined in the literature. The appraisal is a view that evaluates personal characteristics, behaviour and work effects expressed in oral or written form (Kusio, 2019). From the point of view of the goals and mission of the organisation, the following definition of Kopeć is important: “appraisal is a judgemental evaluation and the result of the process of evaluating attitudes, personal characteristics, behaviour and the level of task performance” (Kusio, 2019). It is

supplemented by the definition of Kulisa which recognises employee performance appraisal as a tool for the appropriate management method, by using the methods and techniques adopted in a given unit [appraisal] determines the implementation of tasks resulting from the scope of duties and the degree of suitability of the employee in the organisation” (Kusio, 2019). Appraisal should not be an end in itself, but serve the organisation’s decision-making process. It should facilitate the proper selection of staff, the placement of the employee in the structure, setting the path of professional development, providing motivation and adequate remuneration, clear criteria for promotion, and, as a result, the shaping of employment.

So far, there were two employee performance appraisal cards at the Lublin University of Technology. The division depended on the grading into academic teachers (AT) or non-academic teachers (NAT). The performance of academic teachers was appraised every four years or at the request of the head of an organisational unit, but not more frequently than once a year. Only in the case of a negative appraisal was the manager obliged to repeat it after a year. In the case of non-academic teachers, the appraisal took place every four years.

Both forms were used at the Library because persons from both groups were among the employees. The NAT form also included a self-appraisal. Final appraisals were made by the unit’s superior.

Currently, the new authorities of the University are preparing a different performance appraisal system. This also applies to the employees of the Centre of Scientific and Technical Information. As is known, an appraisal is also the result of observed activities and measurement of compliance of the activity with applicable norms or standards: “the standard is verified from time to time and may be changed based on changes in the environment” (Kusio, 2019). At the Lublin University of Technology (including at the Centre of Scientific and Technical Information), the appraisal will be combined with the incentive and evaluation system. For this purpose, a new employee appraisal form and a special web application supporting the appraisal of researchers are being prepared.

Periodic appraisal of the performance of the employees of the Centre of Scientific and Technical Information will cover the following areas: knowledge and professional skills, competences, work results and personality traits, behaviour and attitudes.

The unit also operates an annual appraisal conducted on the basis of monthly work sheet reports. In the report, employees register their activities and participation in trainings, speeches, tasks beyond the scope of duties and self-education. On the basis of the

sheet, heads of department together with the management make decisions regarding promotions and awards for individuals and teams.

Periodic appraisal will translate directly into the amount of remuneration or its change, and it will constitute an important element of building self-esteem, subjective determination of one's own value for the company and determine the position of the employee in the environment. Its results are often a starting point for planning further development and may provide motivation for changes in behaviour or the need to modify the incentives applied to the employee.

4. Incentives and motivation

Motivation is considered as one of the basic management functions aimed at awakening and directing individual motivation (Piotrkowski, 2006). It consists in optimising the behaviour of employees with the help of appropriately selected tools. At the Centre of Scientific and Technical Information, we deal with two forms of motivation: one is material (financial), the other is non-material, expressed in encouraging the employee to act (e.g. participation in training or conferences).

From the point of view of the Library, the social aspect is very important, influencing the involvement of employees and the atmosphere in the workplace. At present, the traditional incentive model based solely on financial gratification is not sufficient. The good atmosphere and subjective treatment made it possible to extend duties, and increase employee involvement, giving them, on the one hand, a strong sense of participation in processes and activities within the Library, but also an increased level of satisfaction with the tasks performed. This allowed the transition to a more modern model where appraisal and motivation are part of the strategy, thus shaping the systemic approach.

Financial rewards

Until now, financial rewards have been given for outstanding attitude and additional activities for the Library, co-creation of culture-forming events, and promoting not only the unit, but also the University. As part of the Science Festival, Open Day, and Job Fair, employees of the Centre of Scientific and Technical Information prepare original projects promoting science, technology, and reading. Many of them are involved in the organisation of exhibitions held at the Centre for Innovation and Advanced Technologies, cooperating with employees of other units. As part of the promotion of scientific

achievements, the employees of the Publishing House, in cooperation with the Library, organise book promotions and Q&A sessions with authors for the academic community. For students – activities such as evenings of board games, events as part of the University's Open Day and other reading activities were organised.

Scientific activity is a very important aspect of work that is financially rewarded. It includes publishing texts in magazines, monographs, speaking at conferences and conducting various types of research.

Another accepted form of motivating and rewarding employees is enabling them to participate in national or foreign conferences. Before their professional promotion, several of the employees had the opportunity to do internships in scientific libraries in Poland and abroad.

Until recently, the CSTI applied a choice of career path document: librarian or academic librarian. Choosing the library path, the employees decided to follow the traditional path of promotion, i.e. they had to meet the criteria of seniority and basic guidelines. The academic librarian had to also demonstrate scientific achievements, organisational activity, performance of a managerial function or team management. Currently, due to a number of organisational changes at the University, the introduction of new standards and appraisal documents, the choice of career path document will certainly be verified against the University's standards.

The Centre of Scientific and Technical Information, being a part of the University, also takes advantage of a number of benefits as part of the social package, e.g. Multisport card, holiday subsidy and day camps for children, as well as the possibility of additional health insurance.

5. Employee training (techniques, methods, development)

Due to technological development, which is strongly felt at the University, continuous professional development is a natural need of employees. This process is of a continuous nature and is present throughout the professional life. Employee development can be defined as “activities aimed at preparing them during the period of employment in an organisation to perform work and occupy positions of greater responsibility” (Dolot, 2019). At the same time, apart from meeting the needs of the organisation in the context of performing duties, there is also self-fulfilment of the employee, achievement of a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction with work. Emphasis on employee development is an important element of strategic management, because it optimises employment both in terms of the quality of services and the number of employees. It is directly connected with the recruitment and selection process,

because companies that care about the development of staff are increasingly often chosen by employees who see their future in a company that is aware of their needs. Trainings are often seen as a highly motivating factor that satisfies the need for recognition and self-fulfilment.

One of the elements of the strategy is to identify training needs – both at the level of the University and the Centre of Scientific and Technical Information. After determining the training and development needs of individual employees and the company as a whole, their analysis takes place – that is, determining appropriate and effective ways to meet them. However, one should remember to distinguish between a need and a “whim” (Rae, 2001) – that is, to determine whether the training will actually improve the results of work, established and carried out precisely thanks to ensuring the possibility of development.

Training strategy at CSTI

The employees of the Centre of Scientific and Technical Information are a group that actively participates in training, and this necessity is related to the mission, vision, strategy and organisational culture of the company. The tasks specified in job descriptions define the areas of employee training.

The periodic appraisal sheet, which is a valuable source of information about employee needs in the context of their development should be helpful (Dolot, 2019). The appraisal contains information about the effects of work in relation to the expectations to be fulfilled by the employee – thus it can show a development gap. It is also a visualisation of the development itself.

So far, we have divided training into internal and external. The internal training strategy was born at the turn of 2015/2016: “a strategy for training users and improving the qualifications of employees of the Library was prepared. This strategy included a training offer (E-resources, E-services, Tools) for individual user groups.” (Pietrzyk-Leonowicz, 2017). As part of internal training sessions, the so-called 08–09 – weekly Friday meetings were held for all employees. Their subjects concerned, among others: the tasks of individual departments (each of them presented the specificity of their position), and reports on trips and external training (sharing knowledge with colleagues) were presented. In the last year, due to the epidemic, the trainings have moved online and are conducted online. Librarians participate in webinars organised, among others by the Open Education Cooperative in the Library, the Elsevier and Clarivate, consortia, cultural institutions or other universities (Open Science Week).

Offsite training sessions taking place so far were temporarily suspended, but they constituted a very important aspect of training due to the possibility of exchanging experiences, participating in discussions and completing internships in a different mode. These were very inspiring sessions – they made it possible to present the activities of the CSTI employees through conference presentations, which gave the opportunity to build an image of the unit and the University themselves. Employees participated in co-organised seminars and workshops as well as trips abroad as part of the Erasmus project and more.

Year after year, we observe an increasing involvement of employees in training and the need to improve professional qualifications.

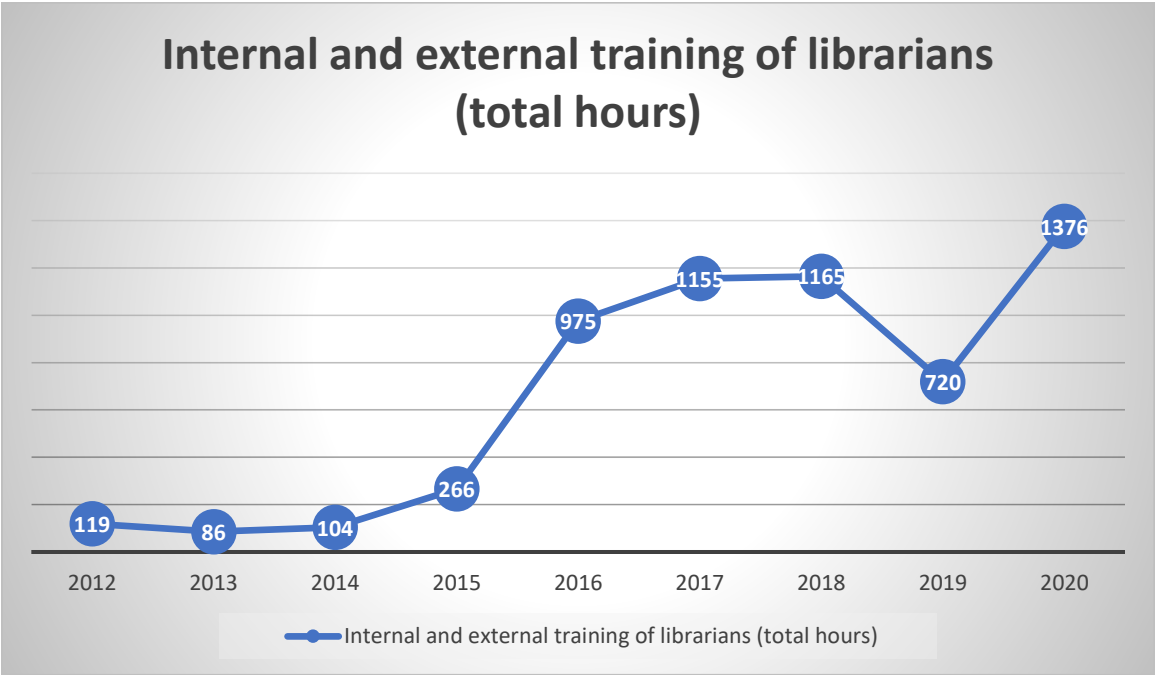


Fig. 2 Internal and external training of librarians (total hours)

From 2016, librarians also started language training sessions. They were held as individual and group lessons as part of a project carried out jointly with the Faculty of Management of the Lublin University of Technology. Some employees also took advantage of certified language courses (TOEIC, TELC) in the integrated development programmes of the Lublin University of Technology. Employees, depending on the position held, increase their competences thanks to postgraduate studies in Library and Information Science and Human Resource Management, for which they were sent by the University.

6. Pathologies and dysfunctions in the workplace

Pathologies and dysfunctions in workplaces, understood as violations of generally accepted norms in the organisation, are an increasing phenomenon (Szostek, 2017). It would seem that the development of civilisation should inhibit or eliminate them, while research mainly in Western countries proves that they are becoming one of the most common factors disturbing the proper functioning of the organisation. The more so as social pathologies can occur at any stage of employment – from the recruitment process, accepting an employee into the team (adaptation), appraising, motivating or performing day-to-day duties.

Polanowska points out that these days management is responsible for social pathologies in the workplace. It also has a duty to counteract them. It should be interested in the problems of employees, support them in difficult situations, not only professional, but most of all observe ethical standards and enforce the performance of the tasks entrusted to the employees. It is important because – as Wołk and Dzierżon write – it is the lack of precisely constructed principles of appraisal and promotion, bad organisation of work and secret decision-making – that constitute the main source of pathology (Polanowska, 2018).

At the Centre of Scientific and Technical Information, there are problems similar to the above-mentioned ones: information void, inconsistency in the requirements of the top management, reluctance of the employees to accept responsibility, which in turn causes the formation of cliques, resigning from a job or a feeling of insecurity. In recent years, 4 people resigned due to dissatisfaction, the feeling of inability to develop professionally and burnout.

Regardless of the internal causes, one should often look for the formation of dysfunction in external factors. An example of this are career paths of librarians, which became obsolete following the entry into force of Act 2.0. The problem is complicated because the interpretation of the Act does not provide a clear answer on how to classify librarians and scientific documentation staff within academic teachers, how they should account for themselves and what requirements should be met in order to be able to take the career path of an academic teacher. This situation is all the more difficult as the librarian community itself is not unanimous on this matter and has not worked out a systemic solution despite many months of talks. The situation was reflected in the mood of all employees: some felt anxious about maintaining their position, others felt frustrated due to the lack of clear rules and regulations. Such moods very often lead to dysfunction, cause conflicts, negative atmosphere, lack of agreement about team tasks and work demotivation.

The observed causes of pathological behaviours in the workplace also include but are not limited to: unequal treatment of employees, lack of superiors' control, low remuneration, inability to deal with emotions and stress, letting personal issues impact work, reluctance to share knowledge, excess of projects and increased responsibilities, emotional immaturity. The effects may include: departure of talented employees or specialists, lack of motivation to work, slowing down of work, lack of a friendly atmosphere or reduction of commitment and creativity. The occurrence of pathologies and dysfunctions has consequences that affect not only the institution, but also the employees themselves. For an employee, a direct consequence may be a burnout syndrome (mental sphere), but also a threat to health or life of oneself or others. For the company – malfunctioning results in reduced efficiency, loss of image and reputation, and thus loss of competitiveness.

The group most exposed to dysfunctions are young people who, if they fail to cope with induction and adaptation, may feel reluctant to fulfil their duties, therefore it is necessary to prevent them from adopting bad habits, by clearly showing the organisational culture of the company and adhering to cultural and ethical standards. Any kind of abuse should be immediately addressed through an individual conversation in order to shape the correct attitudes of behaviour in employees and management.

Social pathologies and dysfunctions in the workplace are an important aspect in the strategic management process. Unfortunately, the literature on the subject is not rich in publications analysing this issue in depth. Few institutions conduct research on this subject, marginalising a common problem. Perhaps this is due to the fact that it is much more difficult to talk about problems in an organisation than about its successes. Nevertheless, properly conducted strategic management processes will be able to counteract this phenomenon, and facing problems will facilitate finding effective solutions.

7. Summary

The implementation of the adopted assumptions of strategic management in the company and its elements must be gradually evaluated and assessed. Its effectiveness should be verified at every stage, and the mission and vision, which change with the university environment, should be reevaluated. The management process is complex, dependent on many factors, and always takes place in dynamically changing circumstances. The Centre of Scientific and Technical Information, carrying out tasks in accordance with the adopted strategy, will

measure and analyse individual elements from time to time, so as to strengthen those that work, create new ones – if necessary, and eliminate those that are harmful and ineffective.

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