

EMPLOYEES' ADAPTATION AS A CRITICAL ELEMENT OF HUMAN RESOURCES MANAGEMENT – A CASE STUDY

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Abstract: The aim of the paper was to identify factors influencing employees' adaptation, and evaluate the process in a selected company. The present study aims at establishing answers to questions on the need for the realization of adaptation, its course, and effectiveness of adaptive actions in the assessed company. While searching for answers to such questions, a review of literature and an empirical study were conducted. In order to carry out the empirical study, a case study method was employed, which constitutes a fundamental method of qualitative studies. Research results indicate that there is applied controlled adaptation in the present company. It resulted from benefits for the newcomer and the organization as well. It was observed that both the owners and the management of the assessed company devote particular attention to supporting newcomers in swift and positive adaptation.

Keywords: employee's adaptation, human resources management (HRM)

1. Introduction

Human resources management (HRM) constitutes an area which is widely discussed in the literature of the subject. However, when analyzing research results, the fact that the issue of newcomers' adaptation is not as popular as other HRM aspects, can be observed. On the other hand, it is stressed that proper adaptation contributes to newcomers' entering work environment and taking over their duties more effectively, facilitates communication in organizations, reduces stress associated with a change of the workplace, boosts employees' engagement, and as a consequence, provides companies with tangible financial gains (Bauer et al., 2017).

The subject matter of the present paper pertains to employees' adaptation in organizations. The objective of the paper was to identify factors influencing employees' adaptation, and evaluate the process in a selected company. The literature of the subject highlights that employees' adaptation exerts a significant impact upon proper human resources management.

However, in business practice of many organizations, adaptation is managed spontaneously, and even disregarded altogether. Therefore, the present study aims at establishing answers to questions on the need for the realization of adaptation, its course, and effectiveness of adaptive actions in the assessed company.

2. The subject in the literature

Employees' adaptation constitutes an element of human resources management. It follows recruitment and selection process, which, in a narrow sense, is concluded when an employment contract determining employment conditions has been signed. However, the literature of the subject raises a broad understanding of the process. It maintains that recruitment and selection conclude only after the adaptation process has been completed. Adaptation is to facilitate newcomers' (or those transferred to other positions in the organization) adjustment to new working conditions. Adaptation revolves around introducing new employees into the company, providing them with fundamentals of the company's operations, familiarizing them with the work environment and their new colleagues. Adaptation may be analyzed with regards to two areas: (1) professional, and (2) social. As far as the professional area is concerned, the employee is to relatively swiftly adapt to working conditions and requirements associated with the position, become familiar with the organizational structure, division of duties, and organization of tasks. On the other hand, social adaptation is associated with becoming familiar with and accepting norms, mission, values and rules followed in the organization and by a particular team (Golnau, 2007).

The following are considered as the key objectives of adaptation:

- adapting new employees to working conditions and requirements associated with their position, and achieving the required level of efficiency in the shortest time possible,
- facilitating, and sometimes enabling, the newcomer to begin work in a new environment (organizational adaptation),
- shaping the newcomer's knowledge on the company and position,
- adapting the newcomer to norms and customs of the organization (social adaptation),
- developing a proper approach to responsibilities, friendly attitude towards the company, fostering employees' engagement in order to reduce the risk of the newcomer resigning.

Moreover, the reduction of stress resulting from occupying a new position, boosting work satisfaction and motivation, and enhancing the feeling of belonging to an organization, constitute critical objectives of adaptation. It is in the organization's best interest to properly manage adaptation due to the fact that it eliminates the need for further recruitment and

selection, which lowers costs and time devoted to the process, reduces the risk of excessive fluctuation of human resources and low work efficiency and quality (Gajda, 2015).

Despite several advantages offered by adaptation, many organizations in their economic practice believe that employees will acclimatize and adjust to their responsibilities themselves, hence there is no particular need for supporting them with adaptive actions (Behrends, 2007). In such a case, the so-called spontaneous adaptation emerges. It is characterized by an independent acquisition of knowledge regarding work environment, norms, customs, and values present in the organization. At times, such information is fragmentary or false. As a consequence, when internalized, it may lead to the emergence of a false picture of the organization.

Much better results are achieved by means of controlled (organized) adaptation. In such a process, the organization's management plan and execute actions aiming at reducing the risk of the newcomer's non-adjustment. The introduction of such a process requires a program of employees' adaptation to be developed beforehand. It is best if such a program is made-to-measure in order to suit the particular employee's needs, and then is consulted with their direct superior. Naturally, such an approach generates costs, but it also works positively on adaptation's efficiency and shortens adaptation time (Bauer et al., 2017).

Adaptation commences with the formal decision regarding the newcomer's employment. All required documents are compiled on the basis of this decision. Next, the documents are delivered to the newcomer so that they can become familiar with fundamental regulations and working conditions, the organization's procedures, health and safety issues, competences' development, and job description. In a subsequent stage, the newcomer is introduced to their position by the direct superior who introduces them to colleagues and explains the scope of cooperation. The superior presents new responsibilities and offers guidelines helpful in their realization in accordance with standards, and facilitates the emergence of positive attitudes in the newcomer.

The third stage of adaptation encompasses the selection of a mentor to support the newcomer. It is a responsible function because the mentor is tasked with offering advice and assistance in dealing with duties and responsibilities.

The fourth stage encompasses induction training (attended by all newcomers) and on-the-job training (adjusted to the needs and tasks associated with a particular position). Upon the conclusion of these trainings the newcomer's utility to the organization is evaluated (Golnau, 2007). The evaluation forms the basis for the decision regarding further cooperation (i.e. extension or cancellation of the contract).

Results presented in the literature of the subject indicate that socialization practices are positively perceived by newcomers, who consider these as a form of support offered by the organization. It contributes to their greater engagement in responsibilities, thus, has a direct influence upon the organization's results (Allen, and Shanock, 2003). Results featured in the

literature emphasize the positive influence of psychological contract's fulfillment upon employees' socialization (Lee et al., 2011).

The newcomer's behavior in the organization is determined by several factors, both internal (characteristics of an individual e.g. personality, experience, competences) and external (the organization itself, its employees, surrounding environment; Gajda, 2015).

Employees' characteristics i.e. personality, potential (abilities), perception (cognition and interpretation of reality), and qualifications (knowledge, skills, attitudes necessary for conducting tasks associated with a particular position) influence the individual's adaptability, rate of learning, and determine the accuracy of decisions made and methods applied to solve problems. Therefore, these have vital significance in the adaptation process (van den Heuvel et al., 2014). The literature of the subject highlights the significance of employees' personality. As a consequence, matching the candidate's personality with requirements of a particular position would offer the most favorable solution from the perspective of the organization (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, 2008).

When considering socio-professional adaptation, it may be observed that recognizing and understanding the potential candidate, accepting their distinctness and adopting a suitable approach by the management, facilitates efficient induction to the organization, and constitutes a significant factor in developing the superior-subordinate relationship. The literature of the subject presents results of several studies acknowledging a positive influence of the relationship upon employees' engagement, improvement in the quality of work and higher involvement in the life of the organization (DeBode et al., 2017).

Among organizational factors determining the course of adaptation, organizational culture, communication, appropriate motivation system, the form of work organization, and selected human resources functions, ought to be enumerated.

Newcomers' acceptance of fundamental values, familiarity with the mission, vision and strategic objectives facilitate the understanding of the organization's functioning in general, and accelerates integration with colleagues. Communication constitutes a further factor determining adaptation. Especially in the initial weeks of work, close attention ought to be paid to information originating from newcomers. Clear understanding of messages ought to be ensured. Successful communication creates convenient working conditions, reduces stress and fosters the feeling of safety.

Adaptation is also influenced by an appropriate motivation system, especially as far as the content of work, objectives, roles and tasks, remuneration, development, trainings, promotion, employees' participation, work hours, etc. are concerned. Initially, setting particular objectives, charging with responsible tasks whose realization is convergent with the newcomer's capabilities, may provide motivation. In addition, such activities being accounted for fairly and in accordance with clearly established criteria, is equally important (Beck-Krala, 2013).

Selected human resources functions also constitute a factor determining the course of adaptation. These encompass introduction to work, and training methods i.e. coaching and mentoring in particular, which smoothen the process. The literature of the subject highlights the impact of successful coaching and mentoring upon the growth of employees' departments, and finally, organizations' efficiency (Longenecker, 2010).

Feedback on work performance plays a vital role in the course of the career. As a consequence, an adaptation program must include newcomers' reviews. Such an assessment ought not to be postponed until final days of the trial-period contract. Instead, any alarming signals ought to be instantly discussed and explained. This may help to eliminate any possible shortcomings or errors at an early stage.

3. Methodology of the own study

The subject matter of the present paper pertains to employees' adaptation in organizations. The objective of the study was to identify factors determining employees' adaptation and evaluate the process in a selected company.

The following research questions were posed:

- What is the course of adaptation in the evaluated company?
- What factors determine the process of adaptation?
- How is the efficiency of employees' adaptation verified?

While searching for answers to such questions, a review of literature and an empirical study were conducted. In order to carry out the empirical study, a case study method was employed, which constitutes a fundamental method of qualitative studies. The method entails a study of a selected subject characterized by a large complexity and extensive relations with the surrounding environment, by means of diverse information sources (i.e. documents, observations, interviews) while taking the context of the studied case into consideration (Creswell, 2007).

The case study method enables considerable amount of detailed information pertaining to complex relationships to be accumulated. This allows for the uncharted issues to be described and explained. When analyzing a case, a researcher makes a premise that results will be determined by the situational context, immediate and distant surrounding of the subject, its internal characteristics, etc. Therefore, the method is employed when a research problem encompasses a significant number of inter-related variables, and the researcher has little control over the subject. In particular, the case study approach is preferred when cause-effect relationship, which is too complex for a survey, requires to be examined, actions undertaken and a program's efficiency evaluated, and in-depth outcomes of actions whose results are difficult to predict assessed (Patton, and Appelbaum 2003; Czakon, 2013).

Such an approach was applied in the present paper. It resulted from a premise stipulating that, in this particular case, the application of a highly standardized survey questionnaire may result in too far-reaching simplifications and only scratch the surface of the issue.

Empirical studies were conducted by means of a partially categorized interview. The interview questionnaire was designed as a result of observations of the company's operations, initial discussions with the head of the Office and employees. Interviews were conducted in 2016 in the premises of the Office of Forensic Analyses in Lublin. Four people were interviewed – the head of the Office and three team managers. The study was supplemented with observations and documents' analysis.

The study required the questionnaire to be custom built. The following thematic areas were isolated:

- specifics of the company's operations,
- the course of adaptation,
- factors determining the effectiveness of adaptation.

4. Adaptation of employees in the Office of Forensic Analyses in Lublin

The Office of Forensic Analyses in Lublin prepares expert opinions and analyses for courts in various fields of forensics. The company provides services both to judicial bodies (police, courts, prosecutor's office) and natural persons, as well as institutions and privately-owned companies. The Office is the largest institution of this type in eastern Poland, and one of the largest in the country. At its disposal, the Office has own laboratories and specialist workshops where court expert opinions are elaborated.

The company provides services encompassing (1) professional medical reports (medical legal in character), (2) forensic accounting (expert reports on accounting, bookkeeping, economy, and finances based on analyses of documents of various business entities), (3) digital forensics (analysis, recovery, and interpretation of data by means of specialist software and hardware), (4) phonoscopy (stenographic records, transcripts of conversations, validation of authenticity of recordings, voice recognition), (5) monitoring and vision technologies (analyses of video recordings, evaluation of authenticity), (6) identification of individuals (based on audio and video recordings, DNA), (7) reconstruction of road accidents, (8) analyses of texts and documents (graphology, documents' analyses and evaluation of authenticity), (9) physical and chemical studies (DNA analyses, identification of prohibited substances), (10) appraisal of assets and immovables, (11) expert reports, (12) trainings in forensics, (13) consulting on reports for law enforcement.

Interdisciplinary teams comprised of experts possessing specialist knowledge and competences play a critical role in the assessed company. Such teams distinguish the

company on the market. Therefore, when employees meeting a particular set of criteria have been recruited and selected, adaptation commences. Its effectiveness may play a decisive role in the newcomers' staying on or resigning.

The first of the research questions pertained to the type of adaptation in the company. Research results indicate that it is controlled adaptation. This fact is acknowledged by the existence of a procedure pertaining to newcomers' induction, tasks realized by individual employees in the process, documentation, and the course of the process itself.

When asked about the reason behind applying controlled adaptation, employees of the company indicated that it resulted from benefits for the newcomer and the organization as well. The main advantage for the newcomer includes the feeling of security, fluent transition, swift familiarity with responsibilities, and development of positive relations with colleagues and the organization. As a consequence, the risk of possible resignation is diminished, motivation for work increases, and time required for adaptation to be completed shortens.

In case of this particular company, it is the head of the Office, managers of individual departments, and the Board, who are in charge of the process. Adaptation commences with the decision on employment made and employment contract signed. Therefore, adaptation constitutes the final stage of recruitment and selection. The newcomer's direct superior is always involved in the process. It ensures that employees possessing appropriate competences and personality features, sought after in a particular team, are selected.

Documents associated with adaptation are prepared by the head of the Office in cooperation with department managers. Next, these are reviewed and approved by the Board.

According to respondents, the course of adaptation consists of stages outlined in Table 1.

Table 1.

The course of employees' adaptation in the evaluated company

Stage I	familiarisation of the newcomer with the organisation's history, mission, vision, and main objectives
Stage II	familiarisation with all colleagues
Stage III	appointment of a mentor responsible for introduction to responsibilities and assistance in problematic cases, presentation of regulations, provision of induction and on-the-job trainings
Stage IV	presentation of career development paths, development opportunities encompassing courses and vocational trainings

Note: Own study on the basis of research results.

Establishment of factors determining the course of adaptation in the assessed company proved interesting. The newcomer's initiation is determined by both internal (the newcomer's features, their personality, qualifications, experience) and external factors (communication, organizational culture, trainings, motivation system).

According to respondents, adaptation is positively influenced by such personality traits as openness and extroversion in particular. Owing to these two characteristics, the newcomer eagerly asks questions, acquires information and develops relationships with colleagues. Swift adaptation is also facilitated by qualifications and experience.

Factors determining the newcomer's motivation during adaptation are also worth considering. According to respondents, the greatest motivating factors encompass remuneration, development opportunities and flexible working hours.

On the other hand, according to respondents, as far as external factors are concerned, communication is significant. Successful communication is determined by personal contacts with the newcomer. It enables swift transfer of messages and feedback, which enables any doubts and misunderstandings to be dealt with immediately. In cases when personal contacts are hampered, telephones and emails come to assistance. In addition, information brochures, websites, multimedia presentations pertaining to the company's operations prove to be useful tools in the process.

Adaptation is also facilitated by trainings pertaining to health and safety, fire protection, labor law, personal data protection, confidential information, procedures on handling court files and evidence, on-the-job trainings.

Trial period, usually synonymous with adaptation, runs for three months in the assessed company. The trial is concluded with the newcomer's review conducted by the manager of the particular department (direct superior) and the head of the Office. The following areas are evaluated: outcomes of actions undertaken by the newcomer, the way responsibilities were managed, the newcomer's behavior and attitude. In addition, characteristics and skills, teamwork, motivation, intentions for development and competence improvement are also reviewed.

Moreover, the review enables the effectiveness of adaptation to be assessed. However, the company has not developed specific criteria to evaluate the process. According to respondents, the efficiency is reflected in the number of people staying on in the company after their trial period in comparison with the number of those who resign or whose contract is not renewed. 90% of those who complete the trial period are employed further. Their contracts run for an indefinite period or a fixed period of two years. In addition, cases of long-term employees resigning are rare (one person a year on average). However, even then, such a person maintains a relationship with the company as a consultant or a partner.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The subject matter of the present paper was the analysis and evaluation of adaptation in the Office of Forensic Analyses in Lublin. Results of the study indicated that the process runs in an organized manner. The management plan and undertake actions associated with the introduction of newcomers into the organization in order to minimize the risk of them resigning, ensure a high level of safety, develop positive relations with newcomers since their initial days at work. The newcomer's direct superior is involved in the selection process since

its onset in order to match the employee with the particular team the most efficiently as far as their competences and personality are concerned. Terms of cooperation having been agreed upon, the direct superior appoints a mentor for the newcomer. The mentor's task is to maintain constant and direct contact with the newcomer, introduce them to new duties and responsibilities, monitor their progress, and assist in problematic cases and explain possible doubts. Research results in this area correspond with those featured in the literature of the subject. Controlled adaptation is considered as the most effective way of introducing newcomers both to the organization and responsibilities, and as far as social matters are concerned (Bauer et al., 2011; Allen, and Shanock, 2003; Gajda, 2015). An additional asset presented by controlled adaptation encompasses reduction of psychological burden. A newcomer who has not been properly inducted is bound to make mistakes more frequently, is characterized with insecurity and apprehension as far as the consequences of their actions are concerned. Therefore, such a person is stressed, ineffective, and is unable to conduct their duties independently. This results in the person's engagement and willingness to undertake further actions being diminished. Ultimately, the contract with such a person is not renewed upon the conclusion of the trial period. Therefore, reduction of staff fluctuation and improvement of motivation constitute significant advantages originating from the controlled adaptation implemented by companies (DeBode et al., 2017).

Research results indicated factors determining effective adaptation. Communication (direct, open contact with the newcomer, feedback information), and selected aspects of motivation system (attractive salary, flexible working hours, trainings) were highlighted. In addition, the impact of organizational culture upon the course of adaptation ought to be mentioned. The results feature references to values such as openness, mutual respect, the right to be wrong, a drive towards development and competence improvement. However, adaptation would not be successful without a set of features characterizing an employee. The set of characteristic features is established during the development of the competence profile associated with a particular position. Candidates are evaluated against particular expectations. Not all predispositions and features may be verified in documents' analysis and during interviews. Newcomers can be evaluated further during the trial period. Then matching the particular team and tasks are assessed at that time. In addition, they undergo trainings, participate in teambuilding exercises, become familiar with regulations, and have sufficient time to verify the decision regarding their future in the organization. The current study's results acknowledge observations featured in the literature of the subject. Employees who passed a multistage adaptation which featured both organizational and social aspects, remain in the company much more frequently, they identify with objectives and tasks, realize their duties more swiftly and efficiently, and feel more motivated (Kowalewski, and Sawicki, 2014; Zaleśna, 2015; Sveiby, and Simons, 2002).

In conclusion, it may be observed that both the owners and the management of the assessed company devote particular attention to supporting newcomers in swift and positive

adaptation. Such an approach is motivated by advantages for both parties of the process. The involvement of the direct superior as well as the appointment of a mentor exert critical impact upon the process. These result in the newcomers' developing relationships more easily, building positive relations in the group, and identifying with the organization. As a consequence, time and resources devoted to adaptation constitute an investment, and bring long-term tangible benefits. According to the literature of the subject, organizations managed in that way achieve a lasting competitive advantage owing to their employees' engagement (Tang et al., 2014; Longenecker, 2010).

In order to improve the course of adaptation and be able to evaluate its results effectively, the implementation of criteria enabling such an assessment seem worthwhile. At present, the assessed company evaluates the effectiveness of adaptation, and consequently recruitment and selection, solely on the basis of the number of employees continuing their employment in the company. The assessment of factors motivating employees to continue employment or to resign would also be feasible. Such assessments would enable the management to determine reasons behind newcomers' decisions regarding their future in the company. Becoming familiar with employees' opinions regarding possible limitations of adaptation would also prove beneficial.

Results featured in the present paper offer a glimpse into the adaptation process in economic practice. The authors of the study are aware of its limits and suggest it is considered as a starting point in the discussion on the relevance of the process. In-depth studies encompassing a larger number of companies, which would enable results and effectiveness of other companies to be compared, are worthwhile.

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