

WORK – LIFE BALANCE AND THE MANAGEMENT OF SOCIAL WORK ENVIRONMENT

Robak E., Słocińska A.*

Abstract: Treating the employee in the subjective way is an indicator of the social environment of work supporting the balance between the work and the private life. The subjectivity of the employee cannot however be found in a level half-hearted, used only to form the good corporate image, but should be reflecting to real beliefs of managers all levels which manifest itself in the right employees relations. The main purpose of the article is to present the researches findings, providing author's own studies, concerning to the balance between work and life of employees and their analysis with reference to issues of the social environment of the work and its influence on fuller using the potential of the employed people.

Key words: work-life balance, social environment of work.

Introduction

The main aim of the article is to present the researches findings, providing author's own studies, concerning to the *work-life balance* (WLB) of employees and their analysis with reference to issues of the social work environment and its influence on the process of the use the employees' potential. Therefore, this article at the beginning deals with the theoretical basis of WLB and the importance of the social environment, then its main part provides an overview of researches in this area with particular emphasis on the authors' own research.

The term *work-life balance* (WLB) itself is a source of many definitional difficulties. If one of the side of this balance is work, professional life, on the other side we place interchangeably: non-professional life, personal life, private life, family life. Also the relations between these two areas of the employees' life are defined in various ways as: balance, harmony, integration, a particular way of matching them, reconciliation or joining. It seems to be interesting that a common phrase: "reconciliation of work and personal life" imposes the context of the analysis, in which work is a factor which should be matched to other dimensions of our lives. However the fact that work is in most cases performed within the fixed time frames causes that very often the personal life undergoes the process of fitting it to the professional duties.

Changes in the functioning of the enterprises, influenced by with various social and market factors, as well as changes in attitudes and social expectations of the employees make the companies look for the best possible solutions in the area of management (Dąbrowska-Paulewicz et al., 2014). Social work environment is a specific element of the work environment used to meet the enterprise objectives

* Elżbieta Robak, PhD, Anna Słocińska, PhD Ing., Czestochowa University of Technology, Faculty of Management.

✉ corresponding author: elarobak@wp.pl

and building the social responsibility of the company, especially among the employees at the same time. Because of the fact that the mutual relationships between the employee and his job take the form of the feedback, the analysis of the work environment, especially its social aspects, becomes more significant, not only in terms of shaping of the employee's efficiency and effectiveness, but also in the way the job shapes the employee's personality and attitudes, influences the system of values and his intellectual, social and professional development. Apart from the influence of the social work environment on the satisfaction and dissatisfaction with work aspects, its meaning is especially important for shaping the balance between work and personal life (Ode-Dusseau et al., 2012; Campione, 2008).

The analysis of the problem of work-life balance 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 reason for this situation is that from the perspective of the building of the company competitiveness, defined by means of efficiency of the all employed people, it becomes more significant to create proper work environment for all employees (Hobson, 2013). The benefits from reducing the conflicts between the professional and private areas of life are analyzed at the level of individuals, organizational level and the level of the whole societies. That is why contemporary organizations often have to deal with new challenges, concerning not only noticing the problems of the employees, being a result of lack of work- life balance, but also undertaking action aiming to create the best possible solutions in this area for mutual benefits of employer and employee.

WLB as a research subject so far was analyzed mainly in a work- family relation (Laurijssen and Glorieux, 2013). There were very rarely undertaken attempts to create hypotheses allowing to examine the phenomenon in detail, assuming that all workers (not only mothers with small children) regardless the marital status or family status, occupation or other social and professional factors have the right to expect balance between work and private life. There can be also recognized the studies gap in the presentation of the social work environment, as the main factor shaping the work-life balance in the organizational area. This factor plays a key role in case of small and medium enterprises, which do not have possibility to use significant organizational or financial assets in terms of formal activities connected with WLB.

WLB – terminology aspects

In literature we may find various approaches to the notion of work-life balance. D. Clutterbuck defines the balance between the professional and private lives as a state in which an individual deals with a potential conflict between various requirements concerning her/ his time and energy in a way that her/ his desire of well-being and fulfillment becomes fully met (Clutterbuck, 2005).

Balance between work and personal lives is also described as an ability to join work with other aspects of human life, such as home, family, social activity and

interests. It occurs when work does not overtake the private life, and vice-versa when non- professional life is not developed at the expense of work (Borkowska, 2004). J.H. Greenhaus, K.M. Collins and J.D. Shaw define this phenomenon as an extent to which a person is equally satisfied and equally engaged in his/her roles played at work and at home (Greenhaus et al., 2003). Therefore C. Kirchmeyer (2000) claims that work-life balance, is 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.

Borkowska (2004), in turn, presents the issue of WLB as an ability to manage and combine work and other aspects of human life such as home, family, social activity and personal interests, what is connected with the growing importance of social competences for contemporary employees (Jędrzejczyk, 2013).

Mutual dependencies between the two crucial areas of the employees' lives often makes it difficult to function effectively and achieve satisfaction with functioning in all of them. Balancing between the professional and personal spheres of life is mainly connected with the difficulties with:

- distribution of time devoted to work and other dimensions of non- professional life,
- engagement of energy in performing the professional duties and playing other life roles, including parental roles, marital roles, social roles, etc.

Very often the essence of the work- life balance is a state in which an individual deal with a potential conflict between the requirements connected with his/her engagement in work and playing with other giving the sense of well-being and fulfillment. According to A. Zalewska the origin of the conflict is the fact that there is no cohesion between the requirements of the employer and the requirements resulted from the family responsibilities and the needs connected with work interfere with playing of the next role (Zalewska, 2008). S.C. Clark (2000) perceives work- life balance as satisfying and efficient functioning, both at work and at home, with a minima conflict between the roles. A type of conflict prevailing in literature is a work-family conflict, which is defined as a conflict occurring between the performing the professional and family roles and connected with great requirements of each of these roles. The analysis of the work - family conflict is based on the role conflict theory assuming that people have a limited amount of time and energy, which they use while functioning in various roles (Greenhaus and Beutell, 1985).

Greenhaus and Beutell (1985) claim, that work- family conflict is a result of the three elements: conflict connected with time, tension and behaviour. Conflict connected with time (*time-based conflict*) occurs when the amount of time devoted to one of the roles makes it hard, or impossible to perform duties connected with other roles. Conflict connected with stress (*strain-based conflict*) refers to the state of emotional exhaustion appearing, when stress, tiredness and concerns about the role lower the effectiveness of performing other roles. Conflict based on behaviour

(*behaviour-based conflict*) takes place when the behaviours, which are efficient in one role, are not functional for successful playing of another role.

Management of the social work environment

Many aspects from the area of management theory and practice show that efficiency and effectiveness of the employee to great extent is dependent on proper work environment (Kaczorowska-Serafińska, 2011), but successes of the enterprises are dependent on the personal values of the employees, which are shaped by the environment itself (Korpus, 2006). It is stressed that in fact care for the work environment is not always the source of increasing efficiency and effectiveness of work and does not bring direct, measurable benefits from the organization point of view, but still the dissatisfaction of the employees connected with the area of working conditions create the threat for the survival of the company in case of the crisis (Bartkowiak, 2009).

The term „work environment” in literature is commonly used, but usually not defined. It gives a possibility of free interpretation of this concept. The notion of work environment and working conditions are often identified and used interchangeably (Korpus, 2006). Nevertheless, A. Poczowski distinguishes these two terms indicating that working conditions include all; tangible, psychological and social factors, having their sources in the work environment and influencing people performing given job (Poczowski, 2007).

Therefore, work environment consists of all the conditions in which work activities are taken, dependently on various tangible and intangible factors, which may be classified according to the following categories: tangible work environment, technical, organizational, HR management, social, living and housing, economic, information and safety in the work environment. The above mentioned elements of the work environment are considered in the context of their influence on efficiency and effectiveness of the activities in relation of the objectives of the organization (Korpus, 2006).

Care for working environment is an expression of the subjective treatment of the employee (Robak and Słocińska, 2012) aiming to reduce disorders in the time of functioning of a worker in an organization, which allows to prevent the deterioration of his health. Adjusting the work to its environment and to the employee has an economic significance in a form of obtaining benefits as well as not suffering losses.

WLB researches review

The analysis of the Polish and world literature concerning shaping of the work-life balance show, that this subject, apart from not many publications (Borkowska, 2003, 2004, 2011; Sadowska-Snarska, 2008), is analyzed only fragmentary, very often concerning only specific jobs, without the wider research perspective of working environment and HR management. Actions taken with regard to WLB are

mainly identified in the aspect of family-work relation, and the most often refer to shaping working conditions of women with little children.

What deserves special attention is the publication presenting the analysis of the use of the work-life programs in Poland and the evaluation of the results of their implementation (Borkowska, 2011). In the described study the companies taking action for WLB were compared with the companies which did not take such actions. The researchers assumed that care for the employees WLB is economically viable for the companies; favourably affect their competitiveness and the image of the employer, also having positive influence on the employees' attitudes, contributing to the increase in their effectiveness. The research results include the confrontation of the opinions by the employers about the WLB, with the way of perceiving the organizational activities in this area by the employees. Moreover, the publication includes an interesting collection of the studies of cases describing various proper activities taken by different companies, confirming the importance of supporting of the fostering work-life balance among their employees.

One of the most interesting projects focusing on the subject of WLB was the project entitled „Flexible Employee. Partner Family” (Sadowska-Snarska, 2008), which was an attempt to analyze the theoretical subject comprehensively and comparative research was conducted among the employers functioning in the three UE countries: Finland, Poland and Spain. As a research, the activities taken in terms of WLB were analyzed at the level of the enterprises functioning in three quite different countries, because of e.g. historical, economic, social and cultural conditions. In the research especially interesting was the aspect of the various instruments used, allowing to combine work with personal and family life, such as: proper organization of the time of work, organization of the employees' free time and their family, help in terms of care for the dependent people, including mainly children, but also support for the employees returning to work after the parental leaves. On the basis of the research it may be concluded that the extent to which the flexible forms of work are used, is relatively low in Polish companies, because only 50% of the companies declared the use of them, and very often only in case of a small group of working young parents and pregnant women. In relation to the use of the solutions concerning organization of the free time, care for the dependent people and support for the employees returning to work after parental leaves it appeared that in Poland, in a group of the most common solutions allowing to balance work with private life is the organization of integration events for the employees, in the events the family members often take part, organizing, or financing of the employees' departures (and their family) touring holidays and organizing, or financing of the holiday trips for the employees' children. While such solutions like providing a place in a kindergarten/ nursery is not used, in spite of the real needs of the employees.

In other project „Gender Index” (*Przewodnik Dobrych Praktyk*, 2007) the authors collected examples of proper activities concerning reconciling professional life and family life. The activities analyzed were mostly taken by the large enterprises

functioning in Poland. In these organizations the implementation of the work- life programs was preceded by the diagnosis of the employees' needs, which confirmed a great significance of WLB for the employees. The presented organizational activities were connected with the activities related to promotion and supporting of the solutions, which helped employees, especially women caring for little children or caring for the dependent people, to combine professional career and private life. The experiences of the project „Gender Index” show, that Polish employers still have a lot of work to do in this area.

The analysis of the economic benefits for the companies connected with WLB is conducted by the project BILANCIA presenting the methods of analyzing the costs connected with the fact of starting and realization of activities concerning WLB, as well as the loss connected with lack of initiative in this area (Gliksman, 2008).

As mentioned by E. Gross-Gołacka, quoting the research results concerning the effects of functioning WLB programs in the enterprises functioning abroad, in the 49% of the surveyed companies thanks to the implementation of work-life balance strategy, the increase in effectiveness occurred. Also 85% up to 90% of the employees indicated the increase in effectiveness and satisfaction as an effect of the implementation of the work- life balance strategy. No discrepancy was noticed between the declarations made by the employees and the management staff, all of them were positive (Gross-Gołacka, 2008).

This type of the research conducted in Great Britain is mainly focused on:

- the meaning of knowledge concerning WLB and anticipated benefits (including economic benefits), both among the employees and management staff,
- avoiding of associating the idea of WLB only with a group of working parents, especially mothers,
- eliminating of the reluctance of the employees to report the ideas connected with WLB, which may be connected with instability in the labour market and the threat of loss of employment (Visser and Williams, 2006).

In Germany the researches concerning WLB are focused on mitigation of the conflict between the performance of the professional duties and performing parental functions, which is justified by the demographic situation in Germany and social-cultural factors. These types of researches are focused on the flexible working hours and are realized by various research centers (Kalveram et al., 2005).

An interesting research material is a report of the European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, which systematically conduct „European survey on working time and work-life balance” (*European Foundation...*, 2006), including also Poland. For example a publication „*Working time and work- life balance in European companies*” includes the research results concerning:

- the solutions in the area of flexible working time,
- working overtime,
- part-time employment,

- unusual working hours, parental leaves and other amenities associated with the fact of having children,
- facilitating the return to work after the leaves connected with the birth, or raising children,
- and flexible retirement (phased retirement).

The report presents mainly the perspective of the staff management within the given problem and takes into account only the opinions of the employees' representatives on the solutions preferred by them in terms of WLB. Although the research refers to the experience of many European employees, they concern only formal solutions in the area of working conditions fostering WLB, neglecting the aspect of social work environment.

WLB and social environment - conclusions from authors' own research

Since 2010 the authors of the article have been working on various aspects of the subject of work-life balance (Robak, 2012a, 2012b; Słocińska, 2010). The questionnaire study conducted in 2012 allowed to analyze the generic issues in general, focusing on the role of supervisors in shaping the employees' WLB (Robak and Słocińska, 2012). The next research was conducted 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 companies, trading companies and service companies of various sizes (Robak and Słocińska, 2013). The results of the conducted research show 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. 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 an important and significant value is 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 the significant influence on the employees' WLB have social work environment aspects such as:

- the supervisor's management style,
- employee's ability to communicate his/her needs connected with personal and professional life to the supervisor,
- supervisor's understanding for the personal and professional needs of the employee,
- employee's assertiveness in terms of respecting his/her personal and professional needs and their defence in a situation of their threat in a workplace,
- knowledge of the employee rights and its observance by the employer,
- satisfaction with the atmosphere in a workplace and the relationships with the supervisors and co-workers,

- the knowledge of the company objectives and the importance of the job performer for their realization,
- 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 research it is highly visible that the role of the supervisor and his management style in the process of shaping the employees' WLB are crucial. On the basis of the analysis of the collected data it may be concluded that there function the two main types of enterprises. One type of workplaces in which the social work environment fosters balance 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.

Conclusion, limitation and future study direction

Presented overview of WLB studies and their analysis and conclusions of authors' own research confirms the importance of WLB for human resource management. Recognition of this importance causes that management of the social work environment should be based on the following considerations which include:

- perceiving the employees through their subjectivity, taking into account the importance of their professional and personal functions;
- building of the open relationships between the employees, which gives possibility to communicate their needs both professional and private;
- supervisor's management style, taking into account the need to create relationships between the employees, giving support in difficult life situations;
- regular monitoring of the employees' satisfaction and identification of the aspects influencing its level, mainly the needs in the area of achieving work-life balance;
- developing the employees' skills, especially in the area of communicating his needs to the supervisors, especially connected with his private and professional life;
- shaping the knowledge in the area of the employee rights and their observance by the employer.

These aspects certainly do not cover a broad spectrum of issues and problems concerning the development of employees work-life balance in modern organizations. Therefore, attention to social work environment (good relationships between the employees, especially between the supervisors and their direct subordinate), fostering balance between work and personal life in case of the employees, should be treated as a key assumption of the HR policy of the modern enterprises. However, considerably more research is needed to gain additional insight into the problem.

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Streszczenie: Podmiotowe traktowanie pracowników stanowi wyznacznik społecznego środowiska pracy kształtującego równowagę pomiędzy pracą a ich życiem osobistym. Podmiotowość pracownika nie może być jednak jedynie wyrazem działań zmierzających do polepszania wizerunku organizacji jako pracodawcy, ale powinna odzwierciedlać rzeczywiste przekonania kierownictwa, co w sposób znaczący wpływa na relacje w miejscu pracy. Tak rozumiane społeczne środowisko pracy stanowi istotny element wspomagający budowanie równowagi praca – życie pracowników. Głównym celem artykułu jest przegląd wyników badań, w tym również badań własnych autorki, dotyczących problemów równowagi między pracą a życiem osobistym pracowników oraz ich analiza w odniesieniu do możliwości pełniejszego wykorzystania potencjału zatrudnionych.

Słowa kluczowe: równowaga praca-życie, społeczne środowisko pracy.

工作 - 生活平衡和社會的工作環境管理

摘要：在處理主觀的方式員工的工作支持的工作和私人生活之間的平衡的社會環境的一個指標。員工的主體性卻無法在一個水平三心二意，只用來形成良好的企業形象發現，但應該反映到管理所有這些體現在員工的權利關係水平的真正信仰。文章的主要目的是利用該電位呈現的研究的結果，提供了作者自己的研究，關於僱員的工作和生活中，並參照他們的分析之間的平衡來工作的社會環境及其對更全面的影響的問題的就業人員

關鍵詞：工作與生活平衡，工作的社會環境