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Participation of Industrial and Organizational Psychology in Creating Safe Working Environment Taking into Account Flexibility of Employment

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**PARTICIPATION OF INDUSTRIAL
AND ORGANIZATIONAL PSYCHOLOGY
IN CREATING SAFE WORKING ENVIRONMENT
TAKING INTO ACCOUNT FLEXIBILITY
OF EMPLOYMENT**

Introduction

Working environment is an entirety of elements affecting man at work. They consist of social and material dimensions. Social environment is the whole of complicated relations within the group and between the groups in the organization. Material dimension of the working environment means steering the work and receiving the information about the course of work, man's work antropotechnical adjustment, 'time and space' (including organizational problems connected with people and material allocation as well as material environment). Considering the correlation of these working environment elements in the area of man's professional activity, where a higher risk exists, work load and duties put on workers through the conditions and specificity of performed work, it has become indispensable to refer to special psychological knowledge. These actions are taken both on the level of whole organization through supporting the creation and monitoring the atmosphere and safety culture, as well as on the individual level through the interferences and preventions within the man's psychophysical abilities. At present the form of employment is also becoming an important aspect, and as a result the entirety of complicated dependencies between the employer and the employee as far as flexible form of employment is considered.

The definition of flexible forms of employment is used to describe the employment different to the traditional one, which assumes full time job, the employment for the indefinite time, with set one-shift, eight-hours-working day, from Monday to Friday, and the job is performed at the premises of the employer¹. This most popular description of 'flexible form of employment' was introduced to the dictionary as a consequence of courses of flexibilisation of human resources, specificity of employee's functioning in the organization connected with working hours, formal characteristic of performed works and relation with the subject, being the party of the agreement². The definition of commonly known and understood in the traditional work – employer – is no longer possible in the aspect of newly created forms of employment, which have few of them – as a temporary employee – user company and at the same time the agency of temporary work, or those, which do not combine in the definition of employer, as in the example of self-employment, or in general people with proprietorship, social cooperative, working for the contractors, clients³.

This abnormality or non-standardness, since these are another popular definitions, characterize the mentioned specific distinguishing marks of work and their conditions, totally different to traditional form of work, what is more different in the area of individual and not typical forms of employment, totally non-adhering – such as seasonal industry and employment in the sector of social economy. Suburban or outer forms of employment have strengthen their definition as a result of courses of personnel externalization⁴, distinguishing permanent crew and employees core replenishing resources of vacant personnel, depending on needs of the organization – non-residing periodically according to requirements or being a relatively permanent percentage of the personnel not using or using in the limited level the inside profits of employees, which happens, in case of replacing workers, or mentioned earlier temporary workers, employed through the agency of temporary work. Temporary forms of employment refer to specifics of non-traditional forms of employment contracts, which are assumed to be temporary, being in a group of short-term employment forms. And finally the definition, which from my point of view

¹ M. Dobrowolska (red.), *Integracja elastycznych 50+*, (*Integration of flexibles 50+*), Wydawnictwo Naukowe KMB Press, Katowice 2010a, p. 407.

² M. Dobrowolska, *Flexible form of employment in view of unemployment problems in middle age*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego, Kraków 2011.

³ M. Dobrowolska, *op. cit.*

⁴ M. Dobrowolska (red.), *ABC elastycznych form zatrudnienia*, (*“ABC of flexible forms of employment”*), Wydawnictwo Naukowe KMB Press, Katowice 2010b, p. 252.

defines preferably psychological essence of non-traditional forms of making money – alternative with regards to traditional forms of employment⁵.

1. Requirements and work safety in the face of flexibilisation of labour market

Dynamics of changes on Polish labour market implies on constant requirement of needs verification, which want to, and may be satisfied by participants of present labour market. Beside the indubitable chance, that the change of the system gave in 1989, allowing Poles to participate freely in the free-market economy and the development of the enterprise, we can also observe bigger and bigger changes in the form of employment itself, differing from its so-far classical form. This diversity brings both challenges as well as threats. Flexible forms of employment are a chance to many professionally active people, we are, however, familiar with the negative opinions regarding limits in satisfying important to people needs, which realization meets serious limits.

Based on acknowledged values and needs, the way and quality of life is formed. A.H. Maslow (1908-1970) in his conception isolates six basic human needs. The need of security was ranked as one of the lower level needs along with physiological needs. The needs of higher level are: usefulness, adherence as well as acknowledgment and self-realization. According to Maslow's conception, in order to make the higher level needs important to human, it is necessary to fulfil the needs of lower level⁶. Thus, following this conception, before people realize their need of adherence they have to fulfil the need of security. In the face of the number of changes in work environment, which brings the progress of civilization, we cannot forget that still for many workers the fulfilment of the security need is connected with the question of humanitarian attitude of employers to ensure hygienic and ergonomic working conditions. Thus it is to be underlined, that the need of security fulfilled by human occupational activity is at present not only a decent payment or stable employment situation, but also the restriction of health or life lost risk.

In case of employment flexibility possibility of satisfying these basic needs is not always fully possible. Based on results of carried our researches⁷, it can be assumed, that non-traditional forms of employment are the alternative for

⁵ M. Dobrowolska, K. Kaszuba, (red.), *Zatrudnienia tymczasowe sposobem na dobrą pracę i efektywność firm, (Temporary employment as a way for good work and effectiveness of companies)*, Instytut Książki, Rzeszów 2007.

⁶ R.E. Franken, *Discussed conception among others in Psychologia motywacji, (Psychology of motivation)*, GWS, Gdańsk 2006, p. 32.

⁷ M. Dobrowolska, *op. cit.*

traditional employment and become a good solution for certain social groups, in a certain moment of their lives. Desire of confidence in employment in comparison with specificity of non-traditional conditions of employment, is not able to satisfy those human needs. Alternative forms of making money are being repeatedly analysed in connection with their virtues for people 'forced' for many reasons to join professional life with other duties – care of dependent people, studying and other duties. They are also a perfect solution in the situation of lack of offers for traditional employment, allowing legal making money. However only in some cases – they may and become an indication of a lifetime career – as for example for social entrepreneur. Flexible forms of work require, for their specifics, some psychological orders, which are favourable to proper functioning of employees⁸.

Agencies of temporary work are an important personnel background for many enterprises of heavy industry. Cooperation of these subjects in favour of creating the organizational culture, conducting safe behaviour with companies set to workers cooperation who are the core of the crew with those temporary employed becomes one on the most important areas of safety management. Models of the behaviour presented by the employers as well as other members of labourer groups, necessity of proper training, delegating tasks, rewarding and punishing in such diverse from the employment point of view working environment, requires from all participants of this situation reevaluation of so far, traditional forms of relation between employer and employee.

2. Climate and culture of work safety in organization

Edgar Schein (1995, 1998) – distinguishes three levels of organizational culture. First of all the assumptions, being the core of the culture and giving the basis to its other components, e.g. accidents happen, you cannot protect everyone, people are irresponsible. Next standards and values expressed in attitudes and views of members of a given organization e.g. "The occupational safety and health has a fundamental meaning to Arcelor Mittal. For this reason we have only one goal – a total elimination of accidents. We believe, that accidents and occupational diseases can be and should be prevented (...)" Lakshmi Mittal. And last artefacts and products, in other words a material level of organizational culture. There are included procedures, organizational

⁸ M. Dobrowolska, *Postrzeżenie zachowań nieetycznych przez pracowników zatrudnionych w nietradycyjnych formach zatrudnienia*, (*Perception of unethical behaviours at workers employed in non-traditional forms*), [w:] Chudzińska-Czupala A., (red.), *Człowiek wobec wartości etycznych. Badania i praktyka*, (*Man against ethical values. Researches and practice*), Prace Naukowe Uniwersytetu Śląskiego w Katowicach (Scientific Works of Silesia University in Katowice), 2013, No. 3013, p. 173-187.

structure e.g. organization of 'Safety Days', inside procedures of occupational safety and health. The artefacts are in a certain way 'the tip of the iceberg'. The most difficult to be diagnosed are deeper levels, containing standards, values and assumptions. As Barbara Kożusznik⁹ emphasises, we will not understand the behaviour of an worker, if we do not take into consideration the organizational culture at the work place. For the culture has a strong influence on human behaviour, it moulds their values, such as innovation and taking the risk, attitude towards people and team or attitude towards tasks and results. The concept of culture, which was introduced into the literature by A.M. Pettigrew¹⁰ as a consequence of phenomenon described as 'organizational climate'¹¹ is to define a specific for the organization symbols, myths, rituals, values and standards.

The satisfaction of safety needs is connected with the responsibility for own and other people health. This responsibility is connected with the right attitude towards dangers and avoiding them in the working environment. Observed behaviour in the given situation decides every time about the domination of certain attitude. J. Sztumski¹² mentions following attitudes towards work safety: conformist, opportunist and hedonistic. He also quotes essential attitudes after B.H. Horton and R.G. Leslie: indifferent, fatalistic, cynical, religious, sentimental and scientific¹³. Values and attitudes that are promoted by given culture influence the way of organization functioning, the role of workers' behaviour modifier can also be assigned here. In many cases organizational culture reflects standards and values of its establishers. This trend of influence is especially important at the stage of organization creating. When the situation stabilizes, we can observe opposite trend, which is the influence of 'rooted' organizational culture to employee's behaviour. The concept of safety culture itself, derived from general concept of organizational culture, does not have a long history in the area of theoretical researches as well as in practical application. In the report drawn up by the specially called up commission after the Chernobyl catastrophe (1986) the organizational culture was brought up. In that document, as Coc and Flin¹⁴ state, the term safety culture was used for the first time. As

⁹ B. Kożusznik, *Zachowanie człowieka w organizacji*, (Human behaviour in organization), Polskie Wydawnictwo Ekonomiczne, Warszawa 2002, p. 231.

¹⁰ A.M. Pettigrew, *On Studying Organizational Cultures*. 'Administrative Science Quarterly', 1979, No. 24.

¹¹ R.R. Blake, J.S. Mouton, *Managerial Grid*, Gulf Publishing, Houston 1964.

¹² J. Sztumski, *Postawy wobec problemów dotyczących ludzi*, (Attitudes towards human problems), [w:] J. Dębowski, (red.), *Bezpieczeństwo i wolność jako kategorie kulturowe i społeczne*, (Safety and freedom as cultural and social category), Wydawnictwo AP, Siedlce 2004, p. 140-141.

¹³ J. Sztumski, *Postawy wobec problemów dotyczących ludzi* (Attitudes towards human problems), [w:] J. Dębowski (red.), *Bezpieczeństwo i wolność jako kategorie kulturowe i społeczne*. (Safety and freedom as cultural and social category), Wydawnictwo AP, Siedlce 2004, p. 140, based on P.B. Horton, R.G. Leslie, *The Sociology of Social Problems*, New York 1970.

¹⁴ S. Cox, S. Flin, *Safety culture: philosopher's stone or man of straw?*, 'Work&Stress', 1998, No. 3, p. 189-201.

its basic cause as well as the cause of another big catastrophes (explosion on the Pipe Alpha oil platform on the North Sea, Clapham Junction rail catastrophe in London) a low safety culture in the institutions was given. From that moment the term is brought up more often in studies related to occupational safety and health. In the enterprises with high level of safety culture we can observe:

- better individual consciousness in the scope of safety,
- higher morale of the workers,
- higher confidence between management and workers,
- good organizational 'learning',
- high concentration on occupational safety matters,
- acceptance of personal responsibility for safety¹⁵.

Safety culture is a part of organizational culture of a given enterprise. It consists of workers' attitude towards safety, general accepted standards in the field, as well as values, assigned to safety, that is health and life¹⁶. Climate safety in the organization is also becoming an important idea¹⁷. It is connected with the employee's belief, that safety is an important value in the organization. The safety climate is treated as a sign of safety culture. Therefore monitoring and maintaining good safety climate is favourable to high safety culture.

In the organization, where the task are being carried out by the employees of permanent personnel core as well as people hired in the flexible forms it is relevant to notice, that cultural broadcast is accepted by people employed in the given organization automatically. Information about existing customs is provided in every possible moment: through the interview, introduction to the work conditions as well as through formal work regulations, introduction to the team. In a very short time the employee has the knowledge about existing in the company customs and in fact, used safety regulations. It often happens, that primary broadcast, which is visible on decorative boards and the information passed through during the occupational safety and health trainings, do not reflect the truly observed behaviours in the situation itself. It often turns out, that following safety regulations does not apply to all situations and all people, and achieving the desired goals is often accompanied with the need of exposing own health or life. Taking care of behaviour in the atmosphere organization and culture safety require constant monitoring of their state,

¹⁵ M. Milczarek, *Kultura bezpieczeństwa w przedsiębiorstwie – nowe spojrzenie na zagadnienia bezpieczeństwa pracy*. „Bezpieczeństwo Pracy”, (*Safety culture in enterprises – new look to occupational safety issues*. 'Occupational safety'), 2000, No. 10, p. 19.

¹⁶ R. Studenski, *Organizacja bezpiecznej pracy w przedsiębiorstwie*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Śląskiej, (*Organization of safe work in enterprises*), Wydawnictwo Politechniki Śląskiej, Gliwice 1996.

¹⁷ D. Zahar, *Safety climate in industrial organizations: theoretical and applied implications*. 'Journal of Applied Psychology', 1980, No. 1, p. 96-102.

which is an opportunity to engage employees in promoting the idea of safe work, and promotes bilateral communication in the organization giving the highest management the chance to learn the feelings and opinions of workers from the lowest level. Atmosphere and culture of safety help to identify training needs, including actions promoting safe behaviour, are helpful with general assessment of company's functioning, used procedures and schemes of acting and gives possibility to identify hidden problems and proper interference, especially where there is a huge employees' rotation.

3. Work safety and employee's psychophysical fitness

Taking into account specifics of Polish labour market, it is worth noticing, that more common phenomenon is employment of temporary workers in the industries with higher risk of accidents. Agencies of temporary work serve steelworks, coal mines, distributive companies, site constructions etc. In these organizations, working conditions are often connected with accumulation of dangers resulting from the essence of natural habitat, where they are being realised (e.g. mining industry, and other types of underground, underwater works, performed at heights), specifics of technological process (work in gas hazardous zones, areas with very high or low temperatures, or with limited amount of oxygen), necessity of operating complicated machines (operators, traffic, rail, water, air and technological transport users), contact with explosives or dangerous materials (technological area workers, where flammable materials are used, electric service fitters), work in the area of elements (rescuers), high risk of psychological burdens connected with monotony or very quick pace of changes (steering, signal boxes, service of traffic control). Presented parameters of working conditions very often appear in the working areas, creating area of performed works in the harmful conditions, where working people are expected to be of specific psychophysical fitness. As R. Studenski¹⁸ states, the worker has the right to refrain from carrying out the work requiring specific psychophysical fitness, in the case, when he thinks, that he is not able to ensure its safety. Enrolment of this right in many countries' the labour code results from the recorded co-occurrence of changes of emotion level with injuries and causing accidents. With regards to the above mentioned, ensuring of permanent and systematic controls of the predispositions, is essential, and the task is the domain of labour psychology and occupational medicine. From the psychological side, the realization of the above assumptions is carried out through specialist

¹⁸ R. Studenski, *Skutki złej kondycji psychofizycznej. „Atest”*, (Results of bad psychophysical fitness, 'Certificate'), 2009, No. 5.

tests, whose scope and frequency is in accordance with present Polish law regulations and is carried out by psychologists with proper entitlements, given by proper institutions. The basic aim of psychological researches is to optimize reliability, effectiveness and safety of performed work. The main area of diagnosis can be brought here to define proper psychological functions (cognitive actions, intellect and personality) as well as psychomotor functions of the candidate or a person performing work, which requires specific psychophysical abilities, i.e. where it is a threat of life or health to a person performing work or a threat to others. Psychological research is taken according to strictly structural diagnostic procedure. The procedure includes a given scope and configuration of psychophysical orders, required for proper function in working conditions. The level of required for given position psychological ability is connected directly with conditions of work performance. Therefore the description of the position is a methodology of carried out tests, and as a result the diagnosis of required psychological functions for the given position. Methodology of test must allow predicting the usefulness of employee on given position. This issue has strict connection with temporary employees' recruitment for positions requiring special psychophysical fitness. It requires from the representative of the agency of temporary work, who is responsible for selection of candidates, an utter and precise knowledge of the scope of performed on such positions actions, thus his special preparation to run such recruitment projects for positions with higher risk.

The size of risk at work is not characterised by strict stability, its level may differ from recordings in risk estimation card. As R. Studenski¹⁹ states, the probability of accident increases when equipment in bad technical condition is used, or when psychophysical condition of the operator is bad. While analysing accidents in Polish mine industry, A. Vogt²⁰ gives the following factors as the potential causes of accidents – outdoor with regards to working environment (personal situation, relations with the surrounding and social ways of functioning in it), working environment (work organization, working conditions, social working environment), psychosomatic factors (psychological and somatic sphere). With the reference to people employed in flexible forms it is significant, that this type of work is not assessed as an 'ideal state'. As M. Dobrowolska²¹ states, these forms of employment may be a perfect solution allowing to combine

¹⁹ R. Studenski, *Skutki złej kondycji psychofizycznej. „Atest”*, (Results of bad psychophysical fitness, 'Certificate'), 2009, No. 5, p. 4-6.

²⁰ A. Vogt, *Specjalistyczna diagnostyka psychologiczna w górnictwie jako jedna z form redukcji wypadkowości. „Bezpieczeństwo Pracy i Ochrona Środowiska w Górnictwie”*, (Special psychological diagnosis in mining industry, as one of the forms of accidents reduction. 'Occupational safety and environment protection in mining industry'), 2011, No. 5 (201), p. 12-22.

²¹ M. Dobrowolska, *op. cit.*

professional work with family and educational duties. Nevertheless they are a type of temporary solution for employees searching for offers of traditional works – including permanent contracts, allowing better financial stabilization and possibility of improvement and development in the given profession. It can be said, that compilation of factors influencing the man's psychophysical state, the form of employment is essential as well as perception of own professional situation and all factors interfering the adaptation to new and changeable working environment, the necessity of recognition and assimilation to culture of given organization. In the face of such dynamic changes on the labour market as well as diversification of employment forms, sensitivity of employers to this fact is becoming more and more important, especially in the areas of difficult and dangerous works. It is also very important, that the employee provides a work not for his formal employer – agency of temporary work, but for the company of user, where he is under legal directives in the scope of occupational safety and health policy. Therefore it implies the need of very close cooperation of three participants of such situation – the agency of temporary work (the real employer), employee and the organization, where the work is performed (client of the agency of temporary work). There are still many controversies around the perfect employment – self-employed people, sub-contractors etc., even though the legislator introduces gradually to the codes next appearing forms of employment, trying to regulate working conditions for all employed people²².

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²² M. Dobrowolska, *Employee and flexible forms of employment – a theoretical analysis and empirical studies*, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, Warszawa 2012.

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Abstract

One of the specialties of the applied psychology is industrial and organizational psychology. The primary aim of psychological researches within the industrial psychology is to optimize reliability, effectiveness, as well as safety of the performed work. The main area of diagnosis may be brought to determine proper psychological functions (cognition, intellect, character features), as well as psychomotor functions of the work candidate or working person, which demands psychophysical fitness. Human psychophysical fitness, indispensable with safe and effective appliance operating, is a multidimensional construct. It is dependent on interaction between relatively stable parameters of the central nerve system and dynamically changing situation factors. This ability, in a significant way, sets margin of safety when it comes to appliance of technical means used in contemporary work environment. Another area of work of representatives of this scientific discipline is connected with educational activities in order to create safe working environment and shape safety culture in the organization. Whereas flexibility of the employment forms is a challenge both for the employers, in the scope of creating proper working environment for the suburban employees, as well as for the whole speciality of industrial and organizational psychology, where so far described mechanisms and correctness applied to traditional forms of employment, and at present require brand new approach and verification in the face of flexibilisation of the job market (see: Dobrowolska 2012, p. 32-47).

Key words: industry, psychology, environment, employment.