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A company social policy in the Slovak Republic — current state and prospects

Abstract: In this contribution we analyse the current state and prospects of company social policy in the Slovak Republic. We specify the notion of company social policy, its main objective, realms and functions in the introduction. The characteristics of the company social policy possibilities in connection with the disabled employees' care and achieving harmony with working and family life of the employees constitute the heart of the present paper.

Key words: social policy, social work, company, company social policy, company social work, employee, disability, family, work

Introduction

Company social policy is one of forms of the active social policy both at present and in the immediate future. It represents a combination of company social activities that is designed to improve life and working conditions of the employees (or their relatives) and to secure or preserve the social autonomy, social self-confidence, social safety and social securities within the economic possibilities of a company. According to Stanek et al.¹, company social policy aims to generate favourable working conditions for employees and at the social activities of the employer in relation to his/her own employees as well as their relatives and sometimes also to other subjects outside a company.

¹ V. Stanek et al.: *Sociálna politika*. Bratislava: Sprint, 2008, p. 293.

The main objective of company social policy² is to influence work attributes and working processes in the company the way that most of the stressful and demotivating factors should be gradually transformed into the contentment and the positive-oriented and psycho-social tendencies of stabilisation should be progressively reinforced.

According to Žilová,³ the main domains of company social policy should be the following:

- To generate favourable working conditions (e.g. working environment modification and working hours adjustment, health and hygiene work conditions, increasing employees proficiency, etc.).
- To improve employees living conditions and quality of their life (e.g. health care, boarding, transport, accommodation, leisure-time activities, employees' family background care, etc.).
- To increase the standard of care about selected groups of employees (e.g. top-management of company, disabled employees, long-separated employees and the like).

We understand the company social work to be the important tool of company social policy. As Žilová⁴ claims, the company social work consists of management, communication, social order, social atmosphere, working process effects and social behaviour, hierarchical structure (superior / inferior) and its social effects, external relationships between the company on the one hand and branch and society on the other, conflicts, leisure-time activities, retraining, etc.

The impact of company social policy on the conditions of free-market economy may be assessed by means of fulfilling the following functions:⁵

1. Preventive function (injuries prevention, illness prevention, staff turnover prevention, individual retirement program).
2. Stimulating function (favourable working conditions and working hours, recovery, hygiene and safety at a place of employment).
3. Charity function (a helping hand to the employees that are in personal or family difficulties, disabled employees, dangerous places of employment).

We will focus on two possible ways of practical application of social work within the framework of company social policy in this paper – disabled employees care and achieving harmony between working and family life of the employees.

² J. Hála: *Vnitropodniková sociální politika*. Praha: VÚPSV, 2000, p. 6.

³ A. Žilová: "Podniková sociální politika". In: *Sociální politika pre sociálnych a misi-jných pracovníkov*. Ed. P. Jusko. Banská Bystrica: PF UMB, 2004, p. 80.

⁴ A. Žilová: "Základné druhy sociálnej práce". In: *Sociálna práca*. Eds. I. A. Tokárová et.al. Prešov: FF PU, 2003, p. 43.

⁵ V. Stanek et.al.: *Sociálna politika*. Bratislava: Sprint, 2008, p. 293.

Disabled employees care as an element of company social work process

The main objective of the active employment policy is to find an appropriate occupation for the disabled and the disadvantaged. The necessary measures to fulfil this objective may be specified the following way: the General Measures of Employment Policy, which are intended for the whole group of job candidates or job applicants as well as for their employers. The Specific Measures of Employment Policy, which are intended for the defined group of disabled job candidates or job applicants and/or for their employers.⁶ The Specific Measures have been implemented by means of programmes for the selected groups.

There are two laws dealing with the issue of the disabled employees care in the Slovak Republic:

- Law No.311/2001 – The Labour Code
- Law No. 5/2004 – (on the Employment Services)

The status of the disabled employees is adjusted by the Law No. 311/2001 in § 158—159. According to this law, every employer is obliged to generate favourable working conditions for disabled employees and to enable them to training or study to obtain the necessary qualifications and also care for their increasing. The employer should make it possible for disabled employees to gain theoretical background or retraining to maintain, improve, extend or alter the existing qualifications or to adapt to technological developments in order to retain workers in employment. Employer according to the Labour Code shall discuss with an employee representatives on measures of creating conditions to hire employees with disabilities and fundamental questions about the care staff.

The Law No. 5/2004 on the Employment Services divides people with disabilities into the categories of disadvantaged in their application to the labour market. Eighth part of this law “Support for the employment of people with disabilities” provides facilities to help these people in the context of company social policy. This includes the establishment of sheltered workshops and workplaces, providing benefits for citizens with disabilities to self-employ, support employment agencies, as well as the action called assistant required to work and share the employment of persons with disabilities.

Supported employment, according to Tomeš,⁷ is a time-limited social work method and is designed for people who want to find ordinary job in an open labour market, and for various reasons are unable to do this. Supported employ-

⁶ I. Tomeš: *Úvod do teorie a metodologie sociální politiky*. Praha: Portál, 2010, p. 294.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 295.

ment gives people with a disadvantage in the labour market the opportunity to work, and allows them to find a job that matches their ideas, education and personal opportunities. The goal is not only to find an employment for people with disabilities or handicaps, but also strengthen its capabilities necessary to find and maintain a stable job and thus increase their autonomy and independence.

By synthesis of the basic legal possibilities of company social policy in relation to employees with disabilities in social work as a profession, we gain several alternatives to company social work with disabled employees:

- creating favourable conditions for work performance of employees with disabilities,
- organizing educational activities aimed at improving the situation of disabled employees in the company,
- providing services to citizens with disabilities in the supported employment agency, which includes for example assistance to employees with disabilities to address inappropriate or worse conditions of employment, or cooperation with employers in solving problems related to employment of people with disabilities,
- organizing independently or alternatively conducting the activity or work assistant.

Possibilities of social work in reconciling work and family life of the company employees

One of the areas of company social policy is also care about family background of employees. The complexity of this issue and frequent contradiction between work and family life represent serious obstacles to the efforts of combining the roles of parents and staff members. Ability and willingness of employers to contribute to the gradual solution of this problem is determined by the perspectives of economic benefits, especially by employers in the commercial sector (from the aspect of labour productivity).

Since the year 2000, a “Family Friendly Employer” competition has been organised in the Slovak Republic by the initiative of the Ministry of Labour, Social Affairs and Family and the Centre for Work and Family Studies. The registered employer’s organizations are judged in three categories:

1. Family policy, where dimensions taken into account are: record keeping and flexibility in working hours, personal development of employees, assistance in housekeeping, encouraging leisure-time and recreational activities, family or relationship to the organization.

2. Equal opportunities for men and women, which is monitored as the overall structure of employees, compensation of employees, the structure of labour contracts, working accidents, recruitment, and professional staff development and career advancement.

3. The most original measure for the family, where the measures to promote reconciliation of work and family responsibilities of employees, and the overall family policy organization are taken into account.

The proposal of the Government of the Slovak Republic to help combine work and family life is the preparation of strategic solutions in this field for different stages, so as to encourage increased employability and employment of persons with family responsibilities, reduce the risk of discrimination in the labour market to care for family, reduce services for the family and create space for coping with unfavourable demographic changes in the Slovak Republic. Proposals for measures to reconcile work and family law relating to three areas:

1. The measures for the analysis of existing legislation — this includes in particular the issue of parental contribution. Under the proposal would be to shorten the period of parental contribution for two years with an increase of 50%, which is about 220 euro.

2. The measures to create conditions for the functioning of institutions and pro-family organizations, including the collection and analysis of information and statistics in favour of family. This includes simplification of procedures to claim family benefits (for example child benefit) through electronic means, or the creation of flexible and adequate child-care system.

3. The measures to increase availability, flexibility and quality of education system and lifelong learning. This includes, for example, raising awareness among employers and their professional associations, and greater use of flexible forms of employment and organization of working time.

The content of existing strategies for fulfilling this role in relation to the use of social work in the companies gradually establishing themselves, in particular help companies address the problem of housing for young workers entering the marriage and child care for workers in the form of company pre-school age child care facilities, the possibility of subsidized recreation for employees and their family members, and organizing cultural, social and sports events for them.

If we are realistic and going to practically implement the reconciliation of work and family life (RWFL) to company social policy we should take the following steps:⁸

⁸ M. Barošová: “Ako reálne a prakticky zaviesť zosúladenie pracovného a rodinného života do fungovania organizácie”. In: *Práca verus rodina — dilemma alebo súlad?* Bratislava: Konzorcium Urobme TO!, 2005, pp. 5—9.

1. Justify implementation of the RWFL to company social policy.
2. Creating company project team for the RWFL.
3. Create a baseline strategy (project) within a given enterprise implementing the RWFL.
4. Assessing the financial performance and benefits stemming from realization of the RWFL.
5. Develop a pilot project implementing of the RWFL strategy in practice.
6. Realize a pilot RWFL project in practice.
7. Evaluate a pilot RWFL project regularly.
8. The RWFL introduction in permanent strategy of company social policy.

Also other areas of company social policy are taken here into account, for example mode of working time and rest and treatment for parents with young children, meals for staff, provision of transport to work, or social policies in favour of employees long separated from their families. Since 1993, an interesting way of contributing to the overlapping of family and staff in some EU countries, the event called “Take Your Child to Work Day”. During this day, parents take their children to work to familiarize them with the world of work and also to know their parents on the job. Unintentionally, those kinds of initiatives may open a different dimension useful for both children and parents and, last but not least, for the firm itself, because modern companies understand these types of activities as a part of their positive image.

Conclusion

Poor use of the profession of social worker in business and corporate sector can be caused by a certain contradiction. There is an existing, or sometimes imaginary, conflict between ensuring satisfaction of the employees’ social needs and cost-effective company prosperity. Solving this problem contributes to the popularization of company social work and its consequent higher utilization to the full.

In establishing of company social policy, the so-called company social responsibility as a new instance of social and economic theory and practice must not be forgotten. According to the European Parliament resolution on company social responsibility, it can be defined as the integration of voluntary environmental and social issues in business beyond the legal requirements and contractual obligations. Company social responsibility should be implemented in a form of lifelong learning, work organization, in creating

equal opportunities, social inclusion in sustainable development or in business ethics.

Company social work practice has a very broad definition, which can be divided into several areas:

- provision of social services staff;
- initiation and promotion of non-commercial employee benefits;
- preparation and implementation of incentive programs (social enterprise);
- application of middleman legitimate work-related entitlements of employees in the social field;
- care and working environment of employees and total social environment of business;
- anticipation, prevention, mitigation and eventual elimination of corporate and non-corporate social problems of its employees.

Developed countries introduce the concept of flexible system. It enables a worker to choose from the services offered by the company those that suit him/her best, which means that social programs are adequately tailored. It is so-called “cafeteria” since the employee chooses from the offered benefits.⁹

The disabled employees care in large or medium-sized companies, from the human, philosophical, ethical, social and legislative viewpoint, is “responsibility” into a society of applied company social policy, or company social work. Evaluate the maturity of the company in this field means to use social criteria of profitability, social risks and social efficiency. Social profit in this context means moving handicap disability in social position, or into economic benefit, if necessary. Employing the disabled bring social risks, especially in terms of adverse events accompanying their employment. Resultant application of these criteria is the social efficiency, which, owing to increased interest by companies employing people with disabilities had a social gains prevail over social risks.

In conclusion, helping employees with young children in the context of the applicability of social work in an enterprise should be a part of the company social policy. If the strategy is understood as a series of concrete objectives and measures for stabilization of staff and also as a part of the company culture and image,¹⁰ the alignment of work and family life is one of the best examples of strategic actions in the social enterprise field. Due to the prolonged nature of the enforcement of such measures in the enterprise accent the importance of social (strategic) planning, the result should be long-term business prosperity.

⁹ V. Stanek et al.: *Sociálna politika*. Bratislava: Sprint, 2008, p. 294.

¹⁰ J. Hála: *Vnitropodniková sociální politika*. Praha: VÚPSV, 2000, p. 11.