

RECOGNITION OF THE VALUE OF LABOR – A SUCCESSFUL PRACTICE FOR REINFORCING THE WELL-BEING AT WORK

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Abstract: The problems with the work-life balance touch two of the basic pillars of human life – family and professional realization. The issue of family and employment dates from the beginning of the industrial era. It was followed by massive entering of the women in the labour market. Since then these problems are treated as a public responsibility. It is realized through legal bided labour and social rights and financially supported public expenses which are traditionally implemented by the state institutions.

Another enormous change stays unrevealed from the focus of public attention and is usually underestimated by researchers and sociologists. Through production of values people have built their value system and succeeded to train and teach these values to the younger generation. In the preindustrial era this happened in the family. Today, in the industrial era and with development of technologies this should happen in the companies. So the role of companies in creation of values, skills and employment are equally important for the growth of a healthy society.

The paper will illustrate this statement through presentation and analysis of the results of the successful collective project “Proud of my parents’ work”, implemented in 2013. The project aimed to demonstrate that labour is a necessity and value; that every person is necessary and useful to society nevertheless what is his profession and occupation. More than 420 children participated visiting their parents at their working place in twelve pilot Bulgarian companies. The project impact was assessed through a standardized questionnaire among the HR experts of the pilot companies.

Key words: corporate social responsibility, well-being at work, value of labour, employee satisfaction

PRIZNAVANJE VREDNOSTI DELA – USPEŠNA PRAKSA ZA KREPITEV DOBREGA POČUTJA PRI DELU

Problemi z ravnotežjem med delom in življenjem se dotikajo dve temeljnih stebrov človeškega življenja in njegovega uresničevanja v družini in v poklicu. Vprašanje družine in zaposlitve je odprto od začetka industrijske dobe. Potem je prišlo še množično vključevanje žensk na trg dela. Od tedaj veljajo ti problem za odgovornost javnosti. Le-ta se uresničuje s pravno dogovorjenimi delovnimi in socialnimi pravicami, finančno ga podpirajo javni izdatki, kar tradicionalno izvajajo državne institucije.

Druga ogromna sprememba ostaja izven središča javne pozornosti in jo običajno podcenjujejo raziskovalci in sociologi. Z ustvarjanjem vrednot so ljudje gradili svoj sistem vrednot in so uspešno privajali in usposabljali o the vrednotah mlajše generacije. V predindustrijski dobi se je to dogajalo v družini. Danes, v industrijski dobi in ob razvoju tehnologij, bi so naj to dogajalo v organizacijah. Tako so vloge organizacij pri ustvarjanju vrednot, spretnosti in zaposlovanju enako pomembne za rast zdrave družbe.

Prispevek bo ponazoril to ugotovitev s prikazom in analizo spoznanj iz uspešnega skupnega projekta 'Ponos na delo mojih staršev', izvedenega v letu 2013. Namen projekta je bil pokazati, da je delo nujno in vrednota; vsaka oseba je potrebna in koristna za družbo ne glede na poklic in delovno mesto. Več kot 420 otrok je sodelovalo; obiskali so svoje starše v službah v 12 pilotnih podjetjih v Bolgariji. Vpliv projekta smo vrednotili s standardiziranim vprašalnikom za kadrovske strokovnjake pilotnih podjetij.

Ključne besede: družbena odgovornost podjetij; dobro počutje pri delu; vrednost dela; zadovoljstvo zaposlenih

1. Introduction

The problems with the work-life balance touch two of the basic pillars of human life – family and professional realization. The issue of family and employment dates from the beginning of the industrial era. It was followed by massive entering of the women in the labour market. Since then these problems are treated as a public responsibility. It is realized through legal bided labour and social rights and financially supported public expenses which are traditionally implemented by the state institutions.

2. Theoretical background

The term "work/life balance" was marked in 1986, although its usage in every day language could be found for a number of years. Interestingly, work/life programmes existed as early as 1930's. Before World War II, the W.K. Kellogg Company created four six hour shifts to replace the traditional three daily eight-hour shifts, and the new shifts resulted in increased employee morale and efficiency (Lockwood, 2003). Work life balance refers to the effective management of multiple responsibilities at work, at home, and in the other aspects of life. It is an issue that is important both to the organizations and to employees. In the current economic scenario, organisations are hard pressed for higher productivity and need employees with improved work-life balance as an employee with better work-life balance will contribute more meaningfully towards the organisational growth and success (Naithani, 2010).

There is a special trace of women for which was a life challenge to perform multiple roles. According to Barnett and Baruch (1985) the psychological distress is connected to the balance of rewards and concerns generated by individual women's multiple roles as paid worker, wife and mother. They found that positive role quality – more rewards than concerns experienced in a given role – was related to low levels of role overload, role conflict and anxiety. Based on their researches they defined role balance as a "rewards minus concerns" difference score which could range from positive to negative values.

It is generally agreed that work-life balance is important for an individual's psychological well-being, and that high self-esteem, satisfaction, and overall sense of harmony in life can be regarded as indicators of a successful balance between work and family roles (Clarke et al., 2004; Marks and MacDermid, 1996). More recent views about work-life balance can be classified into the overall appraisal approach to work-life balance, and the components approach to work-life balance (Grzywacz and Carlson, 2007). Overall appraisal refers to an individual's general assessment concerning the entirety of his or her life situation. For example, work-family balance has been defined as "satisfaction and good functioning at work and home, with a minimum of role conflict" (Clark, 2000), "equilibrium or maintaining overall sense of harmony in life" (Clarke et al., 2004), and "global assessment that work and family resources are sufficient to meet work and family demands such that participation is effective in both domains" (Voydanoff, 2005). Reiter (2007) categorized definitions of work life balance (WLB) according to a framework of ethical ideologies. According to him, definitions of WLB can be considered according to the extent to which the definition implies universal rules of what balance "is" versus definitions that are relative to an individual as well as the idealism of the definition. Idealism refers to the extent to which a definition infers that with the right conditions, the desired outcome can always be achieved, versus definitions that accept that this cannot always be the case. When these two dimensions are dichotomized and crossed, they yield a 2×2 classification of ethical ideologies: situationists, absolutists, subjectivists, and exceptionists. Following these developments, Rantanen, Kinnunen, Mauno and Tillemann (2011) propose four types of work-life balance; beneficial, harmful, active, and passive.

In conclusion, the different views of work-life balance suggest it has at least three important aspects. First, it seems that work-life balance is closer to a conglomeration of multiple measurable constructs. It consists of high rewards, resources and enhancement combined with low concerns, demands and conflict experienced by individuals across their life roles (Barnett and Baruch, 1985; Frone, 2003; Grzywacz and Carlson, 2007; Tiedje et al., 1990;

Voydanoff, 2005). Second, in addition to role-related resources and demands over which individuals may not always have control, work-life balance seems to stem also from individuals' own actions and attitudes. It is assumed that acting with equal devotion and being equally satisfied with one's life roles reflects a work-life balance that produces the ability to manage multiple roles successfully (Greenhaus et al., 2003; Marks and MacDermid, 1996). Third, the achieved balance between work and nonwork roles is expected to lead to satisfaction and well-being in life.

3. Situational background

In Bulgaria the phenomenon of the work-life balance was neglected until recent times. The first national research on the "Problems and policies in the work-life balance" was performed in 2012 by the Confederation of the independent syndicates in Bulgaria and "Fridrich Ebert" Foundation. In the profound empirical work on the economical effects of the implementation of measures for coordinating the professional and family engagements the working team used the methodology of cost-effectiveness analysis. The most important outcomes refer to the following:

First. The main international source of regulation comes from the EU. Looking into the execution of the Pekin Platform for Action the Council of Europe calls for the states to activate their efforts for effective support for balance of the professional and family life, including through popularization of not-standard forms of employment, as not full time job, or flexible forms of employment – working time, shifts, projects as well as legal norms for parents leave and caring for ill people. The other important policy document is the „Europe 2020“Strategy. It refers to the integrated implementation of measures for gender equivalence, as fostering the systematic usage of indicators, built in the context of the Pekin Platform for Action, and more concretely – in the balance of professional and family life with all connected areas and processes of the policy.

Second. The equality in rights as the decade practice shows does not lead to real equality of the two genders in employment. There are both hidden forms of discrimination and serious barrier in front of the complete realization of women in the business life and social engagements towards the family and mainly, caring for the kids and/or dependant family members.

Third. If a policy of real equivalence on the labour market needs to be reached, the state policy shall be in direction to build social infrastructure: 1/ encouraging paid leave for kids from the father (adopter); 2/ opportunities for selection of a working regime according to the family needs; 3/ financial and material support (additional payment to the salary, taking over the expenses for the kindergartens, centres for out-school care during vacations, home services, etc); 4/ encouraging the business schemes for its participation and measures for better balance of the family and work life.

Fourth. Without neglecting the social importance on the issue and its legal regulation, a definite weight is given for the microeconomic and corporate level. In the new realities and perspectives of the employment, enterprises and organizations are not only passive participants of the process. As human capital, the employee' professional competence turns into a key factor and competitive advantage then the resolving of the social problems has not only social dimensions but also generates adequate economic effects for the companies.

Exploring the evidences from the practice researchers defined that employers look for sustainable solutions for balancing the work and family engagements in 2 main directions: 1/ organizational solutions focused on the introduction of flexible forms of employment; and 2/ labour/working time organization and financial schemes for organizing social measures, initiatives, innovations for assistance of the employees with family problems.

Usually enterprises limit themselves to policies and implementation of the word of legislation. Only company pioneers draft policies that are focused on building and performing own social program. Mainly the company social programs provide policies and measures for the balance of family and professional life applying individual approach in search of concrete solutions. A good illustration on this individual approach is the structure and content of the social expenses: expenses for transport, food subsidies, and healthcare; cultural and sport events expenses, co-funding the specific needs of the employees - kindergartens, kids' camps, green schools, scholarships and additional paid leave for students. Unfortunately, only few enterprises have such programs and subsequently provide information for its content and financial equivalence.

The detailed results from the company performance are of key importance for the further development of business practices. According to the researchers the company reporting is not enough reliable source of information for the disclosure the frequency, character and complexity of the family problems of the employees which require looking for solutions for balancing the professional and family life. The employers still neglect these problems and do not introduce the gathering information for the family status of their employees as a regular practice. On one hand, the company information for the applicable flexible forms of employment shows that these irregular organizational solutions apply moreover on the basis of production necessity and employer interest. On the other, the scale in which the employers' policies and measures are taken for application of organizational solution to believe the family and professional engagements are too modest. This is not the most relevant indicator and it cannot demonstrate the

sizes of the problem as both the companies and the families search and apply other solution – ensuring public access to public services, funding of market social services, etc.

4. Case study

In a situation of industry fragmentation and profile differentiation of the Bulgarian companies a few formed a leaders' core and the majority stayed far behind in the social programs implementation. Nevertheless, the presented case is a pilot example of collective project in the field of employee engagement and work-life balance. It has started as an original idea of the members of UN Global Compact Local Network Bulgaria. In the implementation of the GC Principles they put their efforts to identify common local problems and find sustainable business solutions for them. One of the most problematic zones they pointed was the missing value system in the social relationships. In the post-communist development some of the primary values were lost and were not replaced. This, at first place, was the value and self-realization through of work.

Logically, "Proud of my parents' work" was formulated as an answer to the missing recognition of the value of labour. Its overall objective was to demonstrate that work is a virtue and a value; that every person is necessary and useful for the society regardless the profession he/she practices. The initiative aimed to: 1/ create compassion with the virtues of labour and advancement of life on the basis of personal qualities, capabilities and knowledge; 2/ remind that to succeed a person is expected to learn through his whole life; 3/ place the kids on the territory of our working places to show them the real working environment and orient them in the selection of education and profession; 4/ give an opportunity for the companies to demonstrate that they appreciate their employees' contribution in front of their most important audience – their children.

The methodology of the project did not offer an innovation in the approach because enterprises need to be confident in their abilities to meet kids in the working place. The companies participated in the project as:

1/ organizing an event, type "Day of open doors" /the employees' kids visited their parents on the working place and participate in a special contest; 2/ presenting the core of the business and various professions involved in the company; 3/ introducing the kids some interesting issues like money and their role, safety at work and in Internet, healthcare, environmental protection, etc; 4/ joint event of all participating companies.

The leading organization, UNGC Local Network Bulgaria was coordinating both the phases of implementation in the company and the final event management. The voluntary team drafted special Guidelines on the project implementation – phases, most common mistakes, FAQs on the kids' age and physiological portrait, basic features of the most popular professions (HR manager, accountant, PR expert, marketing and sales, office manager, etc). The piloting business participants participated in a preliminary training and regular organizational meetings during the preparatory phase of the project. They planned a joint contest "Proud with my parents' work" and a follow-up event – national forum „CODE: CHARGING" to present the results of the project. Companies also received technical support and expert assistance in the measurement of the project results.

5. Results

The pilot implementation of the "Proud of my parents' work" project was impressive. In the initiative participated 12 Bulgarian companies from the banking, IT, engineer, TV, mining and extraction, electrical, legal and auditing industry. They covered 5 Bulgarian towns (Sofia, Gulubovo, Panagyurishte, Pirdop and Ognjanovo). More than 420 kids from the age of 6 to 18 years visited their parents on their working places and were introduced to 71 professions altogether. The coordinating persons from the companies were appointed from the HR (50%) and PR departments (50%). Almost 120 volunteers from various departments met the kids. They played and worked with them. The companies had 2 budget lines – the first amount was for the in-company implementation and the other line – a participatory fee that was granted to the leading organization.

The main accents of the kids' visit were: 1/ introduction to the core activity of the company and the professions practiced there; 2/ interaction between the company and the society it operates in; and 3/ labour as a virtue. The most useful elements of the day program were – welcoming meeting and preliminary orientation of the participants; study visit on the working place; introduction of the various professions; and interactive games for the small visitors in order to better understand the value of the company.

After the joint evaluation based on the follow-up questionnaire from the in-company coordinators and the resume of the feedback of their performance, the leading organization (UNGC Local Network Bulgaria) came with the following outcomes:

First. Companies register benefits in the field of employee engagement: 1/ raising the motivation and loyalty to the company values (100%); 2/ improving the satisfaction as workers demonstrated their skills and profession in front of

their kids (100%); and 3/ rewarding employees who can become symbols of positive change in the organization (60%).

Second. Companies register higher appreciation among their external audiences: 1/ using an innovative approach and presenting differently the role of the company in society (100%); 2/ creating an opportunity for external and internal communication (75%), 3/ presenting the products and services in a non-traditional way (65%); and 4/ affirmation of the company's image as a good employer (40%).

Third. Companies contribute to the overcoming the gap between business and education: 1/ kids have a better idea on several new professions – what qualities, competencies and skills are needed to practice them (100%); 2/ kids better understand the meaning and usefulness of their parents' professional and how they interact with other professions in the borders of the company (100%), and 3/ interpret and think over what they have seen through various means of art, game and practical tasks (100%).

6. Conclusion

The pilot project "Proud of my parents' work" was successful in every sense of this word. More than 30 other companies already applied for the second edition. In order to further strengthen the employee engagement and building sustainable communities within the companies' borders current participants will organize it for a second time. The leading organization will further fill the gap between the formal education and real professional practice through an exchange of groups among the companies. The interaction with the first kids will continue and they will get information on other professions in the hosting companies. Last but not least, this successful story may raise the trust into the collective approach towards social and ecological challenges thus improving the business health and culture as a whole.

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