

## IDEA OF THE BEST WORKPLACE IN THE CONTEXT OF IMPROVING TEAM PERFORMANCE

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**Abstract:** A friendly working environment contributes to the growth of efficiency and to organizational development, but primarily to an increase in satisfaction and welfare of the employed workers. The idea of the best workplace refers to shaping high quality current workplaces. It is described, among others, by its subsequent dimensions of flexibility, development, employee relations, teamwork and health promotion. The purpose of this article is to present the possibility of using the idea of the best workplace to model such a workplace. In doing this, the outline of the general concept and ways of its implementation are presented via reference to empirical tests illustrating the good practices.

**Keywords:** workplace, welfare, teamwork.

### 1. Introduction

Economic development can be characterised not only by quantitative features such as increase in production (GDP growth), but also in qualitative changes such as structural, systematic and institutional. Human potential is the mutual and overriding factor in the performed transformations, whereas organisation competitiveness depends on the efficiency of individual business processes and management systems working on the basis of an anthropocentric designing paradigm. On analysing the complexity of multi-dimensional interactions in the working environment of each organisation, it should be stressed that ... *probably for the first time starting from the era of industrial revolution, the success in business is getting completely dependent on the optimising of human potential management, ... and, ... that there is no possibility in functioning in the competitive future environment if the company is not adapted to the needs and expectations of humans* (Hamel, 2007, after: Karwowski, 2010, p. 11).

The organisation prepared for the challenges of the future, thanks to considering the professional requirements and aspiration of the employees, is able to obtain potential benefits. This notion results from a report concluding the research of the American Society for Quality (ASQ) (Krzykowski, 2011) drawn up in the basis of expert opinions<sup>1</sup> representing the majority of significant sectors of the global economy. In this report, key forces that will determine the approach to the quality problems in the organisation and thus will indicate the frames of best functioning were identified. These factors included: complex responsibility of the company, growing awareness of external and internal clients, change of the perception of globalisation which implies greater numbers of competitors and cheap sources of labour, the growing pace of change and significance of knowledge, training of employees, significant changes referring to the way and place of work performance, and the ageing society (which has influence on healthcare).

It may be assumed on the basis of the analyses above that the problem of quality including the quality of professional life must be met and enhanced, and widely understood innovations in the work system must be enacted to ensure business survival. It is also assumed that the problem of quality will extend its meaning and innovations will be defined as forecasting the needs of not only external clients, but also internal needs and recognised and unrecognised expectations. Hence, innovation in the workplace will become necessary for an organisation to survive. It is worth noticing that the results of research conducted by the IBM Global CEO Study (Karwowski, 2010) confirm that the most important identified attributes of the enterprise of the future will be connected not only with the ability to form the company strategic objectives on the basis of the paradigm of globalisation of all business functions, or transformation of a simple manufacture of products into a complex system of services concentrated on facilitating all processes in the whole lifecycle of a given product, but firstly, they will refer to the development of competence and the harnessing of employee creativity.

Such ideas shed light on the role of the holistic, anthropocentric approach in the process of shaping a friendly working environment that will contribute to the increase in productivity, quality as well as, the increase in satisfaction and welfare of employees. The approach focuses on human contributions to the facilitation of business processes, the designing of tasks, positions, products, environments, work systems, by their harmonisation with the needs, possibilities and limitations (cognitive, physical, sensual and organisational) of all employees. Thus, the purpose of this paper is the presentation of the best workplace idea in the context of modelling a friendly and supportive working environment that can be the pillar of the organization that holds the possibility of achieving permanent competitive advantage.

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<sup>1</sup> At first 270 experts were asked to give their opinions, finally 150 experts from 33 countries took part.

## 2. Basic dimensions of the best workplace – first level numbering

In theory and in practice, the flexibility paradigm is used to describe the category of the labour market (e.g. flexurity concept), companies (flexible human resources management, flexible work processes, flexible forms of employments) and employees (the balance work – life, individual career). Flexibility as the source of organisation success is identified with creating higher value by harnessing mobile-nomadic human potential, through stressing the ability to take new challenges, performing a change of attitudes, as well as active anticipation, initiation and implementation of innovative solutions, i.e. it is the ability to deal with the complexity and diversity of the surroundings (Kasiewicz, et al., 2009). The term flexibility also refers to the description of the work organisation, characterising it as a way of modelling the contents of work, time and place and forms of work provision which guarantee immediate, effective (time criterion), adequate to circumstances (diversity criterion) and economically profitable (criterion of resources and effects) pursuances aimed at maintaining the dynamic balance in work performance in the context of obtained measurable financial results, as well as non-measurable economic or social effects. The growing diversification of tasks and activities at workplaces, the increase in the new tele-information technologies enabling the transfer of information and knowledge or the offering of products and services in real time are the arguments in favour of rejecting the strongly hierarchic organisational structures for flattened and highly flexible work organisation. Herein, Todorut (2008) notes that the more flexible an organisation becomes, the more efficiently it reacts to turbulent changes in the surroundings (Todorut, 2008). In consequence, the taken forms of work organisation have to be adapted to the dynamic changes of the work demand attempting to use the work resource in the most productive way so as to achieve the assumed goals of an organisation. Further aspects of the flexible work organisation should be distinguished. As stated by Skowron-Mielnik (2012), these are: work content, work time, work space and work status. The fundamental conditions to make work more flexible (Fryczyńska, 2016) are based on the use of cost mechanisms (work cost rationalisation), social mechanisms (influence of the labour market, individual needs of employees) and efficiency mechanisms (facilitation of organisational processes to achieve better economic effects).

Assuming that the employees' freedom in the way of performing their work (work content) is a dimension of work flexibility, this implies that the approach is based on the empowerment of the executive rank (EMP – Empowerment). This concept consists in the participation of executive employees in the decision-making process, delegating the rights and responsibility for the work performed by them and guaranteeing them the knowledge and abilities and skills necessary in the work process. The employees, using their knowledge and being equipped with the decision-making rights, may notice and react to production problems at their workplaces quickly which leads to a decrease in losses, as well as increases in the number of innovative

solutions in the area of quality (Armstrong, 1994). Empowerment may be defined as ... *letting employees think independently, use their knowledge, experiences and motivation to meet the requirements arising from three key things for the company and namely: being supplier of choice, employer of choice and investment place of choice* (Randolph, Blanchard, 2007, p. 57). Thus, empowerment means both empowering someone to do something, as well as supporting employees in releasing the power being hidden in their knowledge, experience and internal motivation by creating an inclusive organisational climate.

The fundamental components of this conception are (Czajkowska, 2008): feelings of self-efficacy; feelings of self-determination; personal consequences; feeling of the meaning; trust. Blanchard quotes empirical effects of using the empowerment force in the organisation in a form of economic profits of the company. He confirms that the organisations in which the scope of employees' control and responsibility was increased obtained higher increases in sales (10.3%) than did the organisations that failed to release the employees' engagement (6.3%) (Randolph, Blanchard, 2007).

The priority is to organise the work process in such a way that it is possible to integrate the executive employees' needs and expectations with the characteristics of tasks and activities and the working conditions of a given organisation in order to increase the effectiveness, to improve the results of its functioning and to enhance the employees' satisfaction. Thus, freedom of action, employee independence and autonomy are very important elements. The analysis of literature provides evidence that employees allowed to perform work in small groups show greater loyalty and personal responsibility for mutual commitments, which determines better work results (Beardwell, Holden, 2001). Herein, ... *highly engaged employees are, on average, 50% more likely to exceed expectation than the least-engaged workers. And companies with highly engaged people outperform firms with the most disengaged folks – by 54% in employee retention, by 89% in customer satisfaction, and by fourfold in revenue growth* (Goffee, Jones, 2013, p. 4).

Management paradigms applied to develop functioning of the current organisations focus on joining the performers' needs with the task peculiarity and conditions of the working environment, initiation of operating freedom, independence, and autonomy of a worker who performs the work in small working groups. They characterise such situations as generating high morale and self-responsibility. Taken to the full, this notion is called 'jobsculpting' – coming about by adapting workplaces to "the expression of deep passions" of workers (Skowron-Mielnik, 2010) understood as the long developed, emotional professional drives contributing to the feeling of happiness and leading to positive engagement in work productivity and stability.

### 3. Workplace as “friendly area” – practical examples

The results of the studies conducted by R. Goffee and G. Jones on the basis of the analysis of the opinions of hundreds managers about the attributes of the ideal organisation, the ‘organisation of their dreams’, provide valuable information about creating the best organizational workplace. Stressing the differences arising from the specifications of company, sector, branch operation, size, organisational and legal form or longitude in which the organisation operates, the mentioned researchers identified six common features of organisation that they called the ‘imperatives of the dream company’. The indicated, universal attributes characterise the ideal organisation. This is one that can use the possessed potential fully by creating a friendly and supporting working environment, while, at the same time, guaranteeing the performance of the workers’ tasks in the best possible way by using the potential possessed by them.

The model of “the dream organisation” with the best workplaces is described as follows ... *individual differences are nurtured; information is not suppressed or spun; the company adds value to employees, rather than merely extracting it from them; the organization stands for something meaningful; the work itself is intrinsically rewarding; and there are no stupid rules* (Goffee, Jones, 2013, p. 4). Despite the fact that the presented organizational model is referred to as an ideal, it is possible to find numerous examples of good practices concerning the implementation of particular dimensions of this idea in the reality of economic life.

The need of creating a strong human bond in the work process generates a significant motivational growth that contributes to the feeling of pride in belonging to a given organisation (Nohria, et al., 2008). The practical example of the statement above, in the context of one of the basic dimensions of best place, i.e. team work, may be shown in the functioning of the self-ruling groups of employees working in Boeing company or General Foods company (Nelson, 2006).

The airline giant Boeing with its seat in Seattle has enabled groups of workers to take independent decisions by adapting the rule of “no intermediaries” in their work process. Thanks to it, the workers do not have to report and submit their approaches and decisions to their superior each time they encounter a bottle-neck, or find best-practice applications. The exercising of this rule has brought about a situation in which twice less defects were noticed in fabricating the 777 airliner, than in constructing previous models.

The example of one of the dog food factories from Topeka in Kansas, belonging to the General Foods company comprise an interesting solution of giving the power to the groups of workers. In 1996, all obligations related to the factory management were delegated to the groups of workers. This was connected with abolishing the position of manager in the workplace, and the groups received the rights to independent work organisation (specification of their working hours, tasks and activities) and the rights to recruit new members into their groups. Moreover,

common access to information concerning the factory finances and the possibility to perform various tasks in the area of the whole factory were additional factors motivating to effective work activity. As the result of such a reorganisation, the absence indicator decreased to 2% and the factory in Topeka was the most productive in the general Foods empire.

Good practices concerning implementing the idea of the best workplaces can be seen in the enhanced efficiency of work potential management which comprises work time and human potential (Gableta, 2006). Time is non-renewable resource and to overcome time limitations, human energy may be increased systematically. This can occur if the ability to work that involves the four dimensions of the human existence: body, emotions, mind and spirit, is restored. The worker's energy can be managed by an appeal to each dimension and the related resources can be renewed all the time by practicing new behaviours or rituals. Therefore, the approach to human resources management based on investment in humans and not exploiting them is important in any organisation.

The introduction of a personal regeneration programmes is a condition contributing to higher and sustainable performance, but the degree of this, not to mention the possibility, depends on the support and engagement of the executive management in the initiation of the new behaviour. Thus, organisational support should cover changes in the organisational culture (Collins, Porras, 2013) that will become set into the main principles in the company, and which do not require external justification, while reflecting internal views. Good practices of management cover investing in the development of skills, knowledge and professional competences, and the release of held ability to achieve performance of a greater number of tasks in a shorter time, with the maintenance of high level of engagement in the work process.

The dependencies between productivity of particular workers and the results obtained by organisations can be seen in the case study of American Banks creating the Wachovia network (Schwartz, 2007). The study consisted of training a pilot group created from the workers of twelve regional banks in the area of energy management and comparing the achievements of the programme participants with a control group consisting of workers at a similar level in the organisational hierarchy who were not been trained to cultivate healthy habits and behaviour. The participants from the group trained in four areas of energy management obtained better results at work than did members of the control group, taking into consideration the value of sold credits, better relations with customers and higher level of satisfaction both from work and personal life. The energetic audit including questions in each of four dimensions (body, emotions, mind and spirit) and was carried out in the area of physical energy management in order to indicate the sources of the biggest energy deficits. The examined employees often indicated the problem of quality of work breaks as a factor contributing to the regeneration of forces and easier to maintain work performance. From the physiological point of view, the fatigue and negative emotions which make it impossible to think in a logic, reflexive way take energy from people and leads to tensions in interpersonal relations that are the effect of the lack of proper rest during work time.

The next barrier decreasing performance that was mentioned by respondents was doing many tasks at the same time. Concentration on one task for about 90 – 120 minutes and then a break is a good solution to avoid distraction in the work process. Sony Europe exemplifies an organisation that initiated the rules of workers' energy resources regeneration. The organisational support of the company for workers at all levels consists, among others, in such actions as: individualisation of work breaks, gymnastics during the day, responding emails only in indicated hours. Thus, no actions aimed to the management and regeneration of employee's energy to work contributes to the occurrence of the professional burnout in the long run. The organisations which invest in their workers in all areas of their lives, both physical and mental, helping them to build the hierarchy of priorities and adhere to their system of values in the long term, obtain loyal and engaged employees, and brings mutual benefits, creating the effect of synergy of activities.

The ideal of the best place to work is also implemented more and more often in the arrangement of the office space. This approach was applied in Procter & Gamble Polska (Petryga, 2013) in which the flexibility relates to working hours, as well as the place of its performance, the possibility of work from home, the management of the office space enabling the change of the workplace arrangement quickly. The conditions supporting this consist, among others, in a system of mobile desks and furniture situated in an area called 'open space', where the workers can rearrange the office furniture to enable most efficient use. The company also has rooms to work on projects requiring attention and concentration, the so-called *silent rooms*. To manage the stress in the company, the workers may use places for rest and relaxation, e.g. relaxation rooms, rooms for active rest in which there are video game consoles, table football, a massage room and a gym.

The examples above are a part of the Danish *hygge*<sup>2</sup> concept that has been applied successfully to improve the quality of current workplaces. *Hygge*, being a synonym of welfare, feelings of comfort and happiness, has been used in Scandinavia for a long time. In adopting it, the peculiarity of an organization, variety of performed tasks, individual expectations of workers are included in shaping the workplace with the use of this idea<sup>3</sup>. This idea is an integral part of a given organizational culture determining the quality of social relations (Linnet, 2011) and contributes to the promotion of such values as mutual respect of all workers, ennoblement of teamwork, care for the transparency of a decision-making process, efficiency of an interpersonal communication system and stimulation of creativity, spontaneity, innovativeness

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<sup>2</sup> According to the ranking included in the World Happiness Report about the welfare/social capital balance (real GDP per capita, health life expectancy, level medical care, workers' security, civil liberties) drawn up by Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) every year, for many years, the residents of Denmark have taken first place among the most satisfied people (Helliwell, et al., 2018).

<sup>3</sup> The seat of Allegro company in Warsaw Q22 in which it is possible to find both the elements of a classic office, as well as the environment of a cozy flat is an example of the work place organization based on the *hygge* idea (Parzyszek, 2018). Another example of good practices connected with *hygge* are office complexes Business Garden drawn up at the level of designing works by the developer company Vastin Poland. One of this complexes is situated in Warsaw, the second in Poznań and the third in Wrocław (Łydowska, 2017).

of all members in the organization. The modern work space designed according to the rules of this concept not only enhances the efficiency of work processes, but also contributes to the creation of good social relations in the workplace, better work/personal life balance and thus to the high position of the company brand as a potential employer. In the area of professional life, the *hygge* concept is connected with the arrangement of the workplace by taking into consideration workers' integration, group work process, as well as separating recreation and rest zones with the properly chosen ambiance (e.g. soft lighting, soft fabrics, carpets, natural upholstery, wood, numerous flower compositions). The workers may use the zones to work as groups or individually in peace, and use rooms to meet with customers and tele-conferences. Additionally, coffee islands, spacious kitchenettes and places to have meals together contribute to integration, allow informal meetings, build positive relations and exchange knowledge. At the same time, all workers participate actively in the process of designing workplaces, while interviews, surveys or special workshops enable their voices to be heard so as to best shape the internal surroundings of an organization together, while comprising a research tool to identify workers' expectations and needs.

#### **4. Conclusion**

Modern companies notice the lack of cohesion between the dynamic technological progress and new work methods connected with it and management and organisation of the working environment especially in relation to a new generation of workers employed in nomadic systems (mobile work, smart working, blurring the borders between work and free time, work and relax space) more and more often. These changes imply looking for new solutions including proper work/life balance, care for social relations, appreciation and creating friendly surroundings that determine positive atmosphere and pleasant mood while in the work place.

The properly organised working environment increases not only the efficiency of workers' activity, but also the brand attractiveness of a potential employer in the labour market. The friendly office well adapted to the workers' needs is a strong asset in the processes of recruitment and keeping the best specialists. Indeed, it seems to be as strong magnet as attractive remuneration systems and participation in ambitious professional projects. The high quality of working environment conditions contributes to higher staff morale and support strong engagement of the employees. Modern organisations, noticing the dependencies presented above, have focus their actions on designing, shaping, organising, implementing the idea of creating the best workplaces more and more often.

Each company, without exception, independently of organisational and legal form, sector, branch in which it operates, possesses unique features determining the environment in which the employed staff perform their tasks. The individual perception of this working environment,

worker's conviction about the support received from the organisation (Eisenberger, 1986), in the context of structure, culture, implemented management practices and existing climate affects the work results of all the employees in the organisation. The subject literature presents the identified main factors of effective and efficient functioning of workers in an organisation, in any structure (Ford, 1992). The distinguished necessary elements comprise: steady worker motivation to achieve indicated goals; skills necessary to adapt and perform the scheme of proceedings leading to these goals; necessary biological features and predispositions of a worker which contribute to taking action and using best personal potential; and support which the worker should receive from the environment which makes it easier for to accomplish work or at least does not disturb in achieving goals.

This shows that the efficiency, productivity, efficacy of the whole staff in the company, as well as individual employees depend on the level of the environment conditions in which the worker functions. The staff of the company is often treated as the most important element of strategic resources because people in the organisation contribute to the permanent, assured success in creating the company position in the global market.

It is necessary to understand the needs, desires, ambitions of the employees and in consequence, to shape a friendly and supportive environment, this being the pillar of the organisation that props up the future in order to achieve a permanent competitive advantage of the company that is resistant to external factors.

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