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ACTIONS FOR PROMOTING WORK–LIFE BALANCE AS AN ELEMENT OF CORPORATE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

Summary: Enterprises can undertake socially responsible activities towards many stakeholders. Company employees are certainly among the most important groups of strategic supporters of a firm. It is employees who, to a large extent, shape the success of an organization as well as its competitive position and image. CSR activities towards employees apply to all the spheres of human resources management: from the moment employees start their job until they leave their firm. Companies might take advantage of various schemes aimed at helping their workers maintain a balance between professional and private life. The purpose of this paper is to shed some light on the nature of such schemes and to prove that nowadays it is of particular importance for companies to pursue this kind of activity.

Keywords: corporate social responsibility, stakeholders, work–life balance.

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1. Introduction

Social responsibility is a concept based on the assumption that enterprises do not function in isolation. They are part of networks of interdependent entities and must build intra-organizational relationships. Consequently, the activity of an enterprise has a tremendous impact on a number of related entities. That is why a socially responsible firm must strive to achieve a balance between its own interests and those of other participants of the market play. Additionally, it should support their stakeholders in the pursuit of their aspirations and goals.

Socially responsible activity of every enterprise must, however, begin from an identification of the needs of those interested. Only after the aims, aspirations and motivations of the personnel members are identified, is there a basis for any socially responsible HR practice. Therefore, a socially responsible enterprise is first and foremost observant of the needs of its employees and then ready to respond to those needs.

Such responsiveness to the needs of employees is observed in companies which implement work–life balance policies. Growing problems with reconciling these two spheres, which lead to negative consequences both for firms and employees, have prompted many companies to become interested in this field of social responsibility, which did not use to be regarded as a labor relations issue.

The purpose of this paper is to investigate the problem of work–life balance from the point of view of corporate social responsibility. The aim of the article is to illustrate the essence of these actions and present examples of good practice in this area, based on the efforts carried out by selected firms operating in Poland. The thesis which the author has set out to prove is that work–life balance is an important field of the entire concept of social responsibility, and that at present it is particularly urgent that each company puts its recommendations into practice. The paper makes use of the available literature on the subject as well as Internet sources.

2. Responsible labor relations as part of corporate social responsibility

Corporate social responsibility has become a very popular concept, discussed by experts in many different fields. In spite of this, no common definition of CSR exists as yet. The definition included in the ISO 26000 standard was an attempt at finding a uniform interpretation of the notion, but failed to be accepted by all the theoreticians and practitioners of CSR. This is due to the fact that each author seeks a definition that would be relevant to discussed problems, whereas corporate social responsibility is such a wide and multifaceted term that it is indeed difficult to arrive at a consensus.

Also the definition adopted in this paper is divergent from the one found in ISO 26000. Here, corporate social responsibility is understood as a concept at whose core is dialogue between a company and its environment, and shaping its relationship with stakeholders in such a way that makes it possible for all the parties to realize their justifiable aspirations [Gołaszewska-Kaczan 2009]. This approach emphasizes the importance of dialogue, communication and recognition of needs in order to fully satisfy the demands of particular groups of those concerned.

If dialogue and need identification are to be the starting point, it is first necessary to define the wishes of stakeholders who participate in the dialogue. The present paper focuses on employees since they are the fundamental group of stakeholders without whom no enterprises can function. In various classifications, employees are described as first degree stakeholders, basic stakeholders or internal stakeholders. The ISO 26000 standard places employee-related issues under the heading of labor relations [*ISO 26000 Odpowiedzialność społeczna*], but some of them can also concern other areas such as, e.g., organizational governance or human rights.

The relationship between employers and employees has been analyzed by many theories of management, which, however, focused mainly on employers' objectives,

treating employees instrumentally, as a tool for accomplishing certain tasks. Recently, a change of perspective has taken place: it is employees with their knowledge, skills, involvement, and values that are becoming a key resource of every company. For this reason, it is vital that the relationship with this group of stakeholders is constructed in a way that is consistent with the idea of social responsibility.

The increase in the importance of human resources is caused, among other things, by [Lewicka 2010]:

- strong influence of workers on productivity and innovation, which determines the competitiveness of companies and their market position;
- growing belief that the creative capabilities of workers should be adequately utilized;
- greater sensitivity of employees to improper treatment and heightened awareness of their own rights;
- influence of HR practices on the shaping of organizational culture and organizational strategies in firms.

The staff of each company plays a pivotal role in its development, survival and further success. A. de Geus looks at this question from an interesting angle. He claims that the only enterprises with a chance to exist and prosper are the “living” ones, i.e. those which are sensitive to the surrounding world, conscious of their identity, tolerant of new ideas but, at the same time, financially conservative. Additionally, firms of this kind: value people more than material assets, reduce the degree of control and supervision, and place emphasis on learning and organizing community relations [Kotler, Caslione 2009].

Because of the great significance of human resources for the development of a company, the efforts at shaping the relationship with this group of stakeholders are crucial. In fact, socially responsible policies towards employees should be a point of departure of all CSR activities. Involvement in other issues but ignoring those directly concerning the staff makes pro-social activity of a company inauthentic, or even provokes the resistance of both employees and business environment.

The significance of correct relationships with workers is confirmed by research conducted by PARP (Polish Agency for Enterprise Development). As many as 72% of the surveyed firms indicated these relationships as important for their development. Among large companies, this indicator reached 79%, in small firms – 78%, micro-firms – 68%, and medium-sized ones – 72% [PARP 2011]. Also 80% of surveyed Poles confirmed the association of social responsibility with the problem of labor relations, according to a 2009 study entitled “Corporate social responsibility as an element of the positive image of entrepreneurs” [GFK Polonia 2009]. Moreover, a 2012 pilot study on internal communications and corporate social responsibility conducted by Akademia Kalitero among the members of trade unions demonstrated that as many as 89% of them regarded the adoption of CSR by employers as necessary (2% of the respondents believed it unimportant, another 2% – redundant in times of crisis, and 6% had no opinion on the matter) [*CSR w oczach pracowników...*].

How to understand corporate social responsibility in this respect? According to ISO 26000, labor relations comprise not only the relationships with workers but also with, broadly understood, co-operating entities. However, as far as employees are concerned, the following areas of activity should be mentioned: working conditions and social welfare, health and safety standards, social development (professional training), the need for constant social dialogue, as well as open and honest relations with employees, of course exceeding the scope of existing legal obligations [ISO 26000].

The approach represented by ISO 26000 actually confirms the to-date interpretations of the issue under discussion. Back in the 1990s, G. Johnson and K. Scholes claimed that corporate social responsibility towards workers should consist in: employee welfare (health care, assistance in debt management, sick leaves), working conditions (workplace environment improvement, above-standard social benefits) and designing the responsibilities of employees in such a way that they are oriented towards greater satisfaction of workers and not merely towards increased economic efficiency [Johnson, Scholes 1993]. As far as the Polish literature of the subject is concerned, S. Sudoł assumes that internal social responsibility towards employees involves creating appropriate working conditions and ensuring fair remuneration as well as the satisfaction of other legitimate needs of workers. Enterprises should attempt to strike a balance between the interests of owners and employees [Sudoł 2002].

It is worth mentioning that, for instance, the reports by Forum Odpowiedzialnego Biznesu (Responsible Business Forum) discuss labor relations practices under the following headings [*Raport odpowiedzialny biznes w Polsce 2013...2014*]:

- dialogue with employees,
- employee participation,
- parent-friendly firm,
- work–life balance,
- employee health,
- employee training and development,
- recruitment and adaptation,
- integration of employees,
- employee support,
- corporate volunteering.

Having analyzed the particular approaches, one can conclude that the issue is extremely broad. It seems important that, in fact, all the aspects of HR management require close attention: beginning from recruitment to departure of employees, require close attention.

As J. Męcina aptly sums up, social responsibility in labor relations should involve strict compliance with the obligations prescribed by the labor law and implementation of voluntary practices which are beyond the scope of legal obligations, but are based on constitutional values and international soft law norms [Męcina 2011].

The complexity of the question of responsible practices towards employees makes it necessary to focus on only one selected aspect of the problem. Therefore, the focal point of this paper will be what is commonly referred to as work–life balance.

3. The nature of work–life balance

Changes in the environment, including advancements in knowledge, technological progress, cultural and social evolution or growing competitiveness, force companies to search for suitable workforce capable of facing these challenges. Apart from possessing specific competences, experience, willingness to learn, and appropriate motivation, employees are expected to be fully committed and dedicated to the goals of their company. Unfortunately, in order to earn the approval of their superiors, staff members have to work overtime, forgo their holidays and other days off, prioritizing work over personal and family life. Many firms even create an organizational culture based on absolute sacrifice of personal interest for the benefit of a company, where unpaid overtime is the norm, while leaving work on time, as specified in the employment contract, is a departure from the norm.

In their book, W. Cascio and J. Boudreau remark that people used to believe that spending 60 hours a week at work was a road to glory; whereas these days this seems to many persons but a part-time job. The time one can devote to one's family, friends, prayer and sleep, indispensable for a sense of well-being, has been shrinking, as ever longer working hours have become a priority [Cascio, Boudreau 2011].

This situation gives rise to negative consequences, not only for employees themselves, but also for their firms, and even for society as a whole. As regards employees, the lack of work–life balance affects their professional and non-professional roles, increases the risk of substance abuse, and lowers the overall sense of security. This takes its toll on companies: the costs of absence and fluctuation of workers rise, productivity and quality of work decline (due to diminished motivation), involvement of employees in their tasks becomes lesser, relationships with customers deteriorate, creativity and innovation dwindle, inclination to unethical behavior grows, which consequently decreases the value of human capital and competitive capability. As for the social aspect of work–life imbalance, the downsides include: unemployment, deepening social inequalities, higher rate of illness and related social costs, increasing number of divorces, dropping birth rates, difficulty in providing child and elderly care, the occurrence of social pathologies [Pocztowski 2008].

It is therefore crucial that companies undertake actions to restore a balance between work and private life. The law, however, does not oblige them to do so. Such activities are part of the idea of corporate social responsibility. As T. Schwartz stresses, the success of each firm depends on whether they realize that it is their duty to foster the energy of employees and create conditions in which it can be recovered [Jak zyskać na odpowiedzialności... 2012].

W. Cascio and J. Boudreau present very interesting results of interviews conducted with CEOs of companies listed in the Fortune 500 ranking. And namely [Cascio, Boudreau 2011]:

- 84% of the interlocutors wished their working conditions allowed them to both fulfill their professional aspirations and devote time to non-professional pursuits;
- 55% declared they would gladly sacrifice part of their income in order to have more time for non-job related activities;
- 73% believed that it was possible to rearrange their work in a way that would increase workers' productivity and, at the same time, allow them to spend more time outside the office;
- 87% claimed that employees who would make such changes possible would gain competitive advantage by attracting talented persons to work in their companies;
- 98% admitted that they were sympathetic to their employees' requests associated with work–life balance;
- 70% of American workers were convinced that the balance between work and private life was completely askew.

Does the problem of work–life imbalance occur in Poland as well? The results of a study conducted by Regus prove that it does. According to the research, in 2013 the indicator for work–life balance in Poland stood at 115. The result for 2012 amounted to 136, the global average being 120 (the highest indicator was recorded in Mexico – 149, India – 138, and Brazil – 137). The indicator for Poland's business owners reached 113, while for the surveyed representatives of generations X and Y (born after 1965), it equaled 121 [*Polskim pracownikom coraz trudniej...* 2014]. We are thus lagging behind the rest of the world when it comes to the ability to maintain the equilibrium between personal life and career.

The purpose of implementing the idea of work–life balance is to enable people to achieve self-fulfillment in all the fields of human activity. This requires a perfect harmony of all the aspects of life. S. Borkowska believes that an equilibrium between private and working lives happens when one's work does not encroach on one's private time, and particularly the recreation time; and, conversely, when non-job related activities are not pursued during working hours [Borkowska 2010]. According to A. Poczowski, work–life balance means that a person successfully handles the potential conflict between the demands of their job commitments and the fulfillment of other roles which give one a sense of well-being and fulfillment [Poczowski 2008]. It should be stressed here that this does not only apply to the most frequently indicated work–family balance, but also to the balance between work and personal interests, time for friends or recreation time. The work–life balance philosophy advocates seeking a “golden means” and maintaining a healthy distance to each sphere of life. According to V. Rama Devi and A. Nagini, “Work–life balance is defined as a state of equilibrium achieved by an employee when he or she is able to meet the demands of both his or her job and personal life comfortably. Nowadays with increasing demands in the workplace employees are experiencing more stress

which is invading their personal life. In this context, finding an appropriate balance between work and daily life is a challenge for the employees” [Rama Devi, Nagini 2013/2014].

“Phrases and words serve as cultural signposts to explain where we are and where we are going. The term *work/life balance* was coined in 1986, although its usage in everyday language was sporadic for a number of years. Interestingly, work/life programs existed as early as the 1930s. 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. (...) In the 1980s and 1990s, companies began to offer work/life programs. While the first wave of these programs were primarily to support women with children, today’s work/life programs are less gender-specific and recognize other commitments as well as those of the family” [Lockwood 2003].

What specific actions are undertaken to address the problem of work–life imbalance? According to researchers from Worklifebalance.com Inc., companies usually introduce: flexi-time working systems, teleworking, job-sharing, child care and elderly care schemes, access to leaves, aid programs and fitness schemes [Żemigala 2013].

Generally speaking, the programs cover five broad areas [Cascio, Boudreau 2011]:

- benefits for children and other dependants,
- flexible conditions of employment,
- leaves,
- information services and HR policies,
- issues related to organizational culture.

In various firms, the practices concerning the particular areas can be combined into firm-specific solutions. This depends on the needs expressed by employees, which obviously can only be identified through dialogue and consultation.

In the first of the mentioned areas, enterprises can, e.g., offer additional benefits or subsidies for childcare, increase maternity benefits or adoption payments, establish workplace nurseries or other employer-provided childcare facilities. As far as the second area is concerned, women are offered flexible working arrangements after their maternity leave, e.g. the opportunity to work part-time or, if the nature of the job allows that, to work from home, telecommute or work flexi-time. The question of additional days off and leaves is an important one. Employers can grant their staff extra, paid or unpaid, family leaves, parental leaves (on the same conditions as maternal ones), additional leaves for parents of pre-school and early school-age children. Also those persons who are not young parents, provided they have a sufficient length of service, can take advantage of additional leaves in order to look after elderly or disabled family members [Balcerzak-Paradowska 2008].

Activities regarding information services and HR policies include: programs for developing parental skills, health education programs, professional and personal

counseling schemes, or cafeteria remuneration packages. In terms of organizational culture, it is possible to undertake actions to foster the development of culture favorable to balancing work and private life, to promote mutual support in these efforts, etc. [Cascio, Boudreau 2011].

Companies which implement work–life balance programs gain numerous benefits, which include [Król, Ludwiczynski (eds.) 2006]:

- prevention of excessive fluctuation of workers,
- increase in productivity,
- higher level of creativity and commitment,
- enhanced satisfaction with employee performance,
- better financial results and stronger competitive advantage.

Efficient work–life balance programs facilitate daily life and reduce stress, thanks to which employees are healthier, more resilient and more productive. Another advantage is boosted morale and greater resourcefulness of workers. Research reveals, moreover, that balancing personal and working lives helps redefine one’s attitude to both areas of life, has a positive impact on the way in which employees perform their duties and is beneficial for their attitude to an employer and organization. The financial indicators published by leading American companies ranked in the Fortune lists (e.g. Abbott, Allstate, IBM, Deloitte & Touche, Johnson & Johnson, Texas Instruments, Pricewaterhouse Coopers) prove that the work–life balance programs they implement are a useful, and economically justified, instrument of strategic management [<http://www.grupatempo.pl/pl/czytelnia/drukuj/87>].

M. Żemigła provides a number of specific examples to confirm the benefits of supportive policies that nurture the work–life balance of employees. It should be pointed out that [Żemigła 2013]:

- firms which offer work–life balance programs earn higher dividends, while their workers are more motivated if they can work from home at least one day a week;
- potential for maintaining work–life equilibrium is a key criterion for choosing an employer by the most talented candidates;
- in firms where there is a time pressure culture and which do not undertake work–life balance practices, the creativity and innovative performance of employees considerably suffer;
- flexible employment time, family care assistance and extra employee benefits improve the relationships between staff and employers and have a positive influence on labor quality.

The findings of J. Blazovich, K. Taken Smith and L.M. Smith suggest that there is a link between the success and financial stability of a company and being employee-friendly. The authors analyzed a selection of firms from Fortune’s “100 Best Companies to Work For” ranking and discovered that employee-friendly businesses compared favorably to the control group in terms of performance, where they surpassed the latter in three out of four tested criteria (market value of equity, return on assets, return on equity). The employee-friendly companies also had better

risk measures (current ratio, leverage level and Altman Z-score) [Blazovich, Taken Smith, Smith 2014].

According to S. Borkowska, the extent to which work–life balance schemes benefit companies and their employees depends on the choice of instruments used since they must be selected according to the reasons for the imbalance [Borkowska 2011]. That is why the identification of the needs of employees is so essential.

4. Work–life balance practices in selected firms in Poland

When analyzing the question of work–life balance activity, it is worth taking a look at some of the companies where measures in the field are adopted. The first among these is Tchibo.

In order to implement the idea of work–life balance, Tchibo Warsaw has launched a program entitled “Balance Work Family.” It has a wide scope and the employees can select those features that best suit their individual needs. They can choose from the following:

- employment and working hours: part-time work, job-sharing, telecommuting;
- family care: additional special leave days, the “2 Hours for Family” scheme, a training-counseling program to help employees develop personal competences useful in both private and professional life, baby layette sets, social benefits, unpaid leaves;
- fringe benefits: additional medical care, fitness packages, preventive medical schemes, seasonal fruit and juices;
- organizational culture reinforcement: good employee and managerial practices.

The company believes that these measures combine the perspectives of the employee with that of the employer. The benefits which the firm gains from these policies are numerous, e.g.: greater commitment and loyalty of the employees, higher labor efficiency, reduced rotation and strengthening of the employer’s image. The above-mentioned activities also help to improve the state of health of the firm’s workers, allow them to make rational use of their working time and increase their own and their families’ sense of security [*Raport odpowiedzialny biznes w Polsce 2013... 2014*].

Another company, BASF bases its work–life balance philosophy on the premise that working in a large organization brings challenges which might be difficult to handle. The multitude of duties and hectic pace of events, make employees forget about the need for healthy eating or physical activity or make it difficult for them to wind down after a stressful day. The firm is aware of the fact that contentment and well-being are important factors which enhance not only labor efficiency but also the entire corporation culture, atmosphere in the organization and integration among employees. The BASF Company launched a project called “Work–Life Balance Days.” Within its framework, the entities comprising BASF Polska undertake initiatives to promote healthy lifestyle and encourage their employees to discover

new activities and interests. The purpose of the scheme is to improve the well-being of the firm's workers. The meetings are held once a month. In 2013, 12 meetings took place, attended by about 150 staff members [*Raport odpowiedzialny biznes w Polsce 2013... 2014*].

NIVEA is yet another firm which undertook similar measures. The project was entitled “WFB (Work Family Balance)” as it was largely focused on the equilibrium between professional and family obligations. The company noticed that women who became pregnant, quickly started to take advantage of sick leaves lasting up to several months. Return to work after such long periods was for them a major challenge and source of extra stress. The company resolved to find a comprehensive solution to the problem. Responsibilities began to be allocated on an individual basis, pregnant women were allowed to phone in sick (for 1–3 days without having to provide a doctor's verification), the working hours for expecting mothers were reduced and interns were invited to stand in for them, the return to work after maternity was phased to help women re-adapt gradually to professional activity after the significant change in their personal situation. Young parents, including fathers, were given the option to take additional days off after they had used the statutory limit. They were allowed to work from home (so-called home office). The company kindergarten is a flagship of the firm's WFB policy: it has existed since 2009 and can look after of 75 children. It is worth mentioning that in the German headquarters of the firm, a similar kindergarten for employees' children has been functioning for over 70 years [Mazur 2014].

As can be seen, companies seek individual solutions that would meet the needs of their staff. What specific steps are taken to address the reported needs and problems only depends on the creativity and resourcefulness of an organization.

5. Conclusion

It was stated in the introduction to this paper that work–life balance is a crucial sphere of corporate social responsibility and that nowadays all business entities should pay special attention to the realization of its demands. The hypothesis can be regarded as confirmed. The changes in the environment influencing the nature of work and the attitude of employees to professional commitments cause an imbalance between working and private lives. This, in turn, forces companies to take measures to restore the balance. These measures do not stem directly from legal solutions, but rather from the initiative of responsible employers, conscious of the importance of the matter, being therefore a tremendously important field of socially responsible entrepreneurship.

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DZIAŁANIA NA RZECZ RÓWNOWAGI PRACA–ŻYCIE JAKO ELEMENT SPOŁECZNEJ ODPOWIEDZIALNOŚCI PRZEDSIĘBIORSTWA

Streszczenie: Przedsiębiorstwo może podejmować działania społecznie odpowiedzialne w stosunku do wielu interesariuszy. Z pewnością jedną z najważniejszych grup kłobiców strategicznych są pracownicy firmy. To od nich w dużej mierze zależy sukces organizacji, jej pozycja konkurencyjna, a także wizerunek w otoczeniu. Działania CSR w stosunku do pracowników związane są ze wszystkimi obszarami zarządzania zasobami ludzkimi – od momentu pozyskania pracownika po jego odejście z firmy. Jednym z instrumentów, które wykorzystują firmy w tym zakresie, są programy mające na celu równoważenie zaangażowania w pracę i życie prywatne. Celem artykułu jest naświetlenie istoty tych działań i dowiedzenie, że w chwili obecnej aktywność przedsiębiorstwa na tym polu jest szczególnie ważna.

Słowa kluczowe: społeczna odpowiedzialność przedsiębiorstwa, interesariusze, równowaga praca–życie.