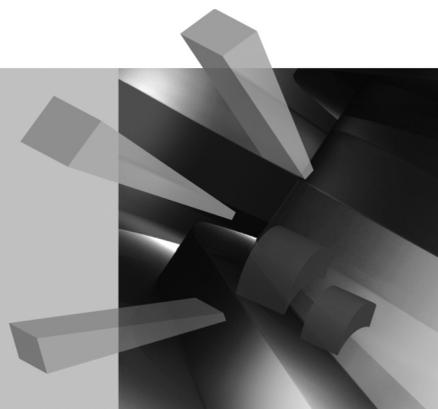


# **Human and work in a changing organisation. Management oriented on the employee interests**



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## **ATTRIBUTES OF AN ATTRACTIVE EMPLOYER IN THE CONTEXT OF INTERESTS ARTICULATED BY EMPLOYEES. RESULTS OF EMPIRICAL STUDIES**

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**Summary:** Attributes of attractive employers are presented, based on the results of empirical studies on employee interests. Structured interviews were conducted in 2010-2011 among non-managerial employees in the companies of the Lower Silesia region.

**Keywords:** employer brand, corporate image, employee interests, stakeholders, Lower Silesia.

### **1. Introduction**

The article aims to present attributes (features) of an employer perceived as desirable from the viewpoint of interests articulated by employees. This study is based on the assumption that it is the employees – as internal company stakeholders [Bukowska 2006, pp. 48-61; Mendel 2001; Pietroń-Pyszczek 2009, pp. 50-57] – that are the most decisive factor in the shaping of corporate image [Leary-Joyce 2007] on internal and external labour market. Consequently, all activities undertaken by company management should be directed towards satisfying employee expectations, which is directly related with the requirement of constant identification of changes within the structure (hierarchy) of employee interests. This approach helps to shift company policy towards corporate image thinking [Pietroń-Pyszczek 2010, pp. 353-370], aimed at construing cohesive course of action by giving up any undertakings that do not offer the prospect of satisfying employee interests – i.e., deemed questionable from the corporate image viewpoint (“low image potential”). Meeting this objective may bring the following practical benefits:

- improving the effectiveness of corporate image policy, by making it more “sensitive” to employee interests;
- constitute a point of reference in evaluation of activities that are in line with interests of specific employee groups.

For the purpose of this elaboration, the results of own empirical studies were analysed, conducted in 2010-2011 using structured questionnaires.<sup>1</sup> Structured interviews involved 313 employees of non-managerial level in the companies operating in the Lower Silesia region.

## 2. Expectations towards employers

In the course of the empirical studies, the respondents were asked to present their individual preferences in satisfaction of the following interests:<sup>2</sup>

- workplace health and safety standards,
- permanent (indefinite) employment,
- wages adequate to the range of duties,
- protection of social benefits,
- good atmosphere at work,
- participation in work time organisation,
- health benefits at employer's cost,
- works councils,
- transparent criteria of promotion,
- transparent criteria for work (task) evaluation,
- deciding on co-worker selection,
- employment protection,
- training at employer's cost,
- proper information flow,
- peer and superior support,
- trade unions,
- lay-off support,
- formal procedures for expressing employee opinions.

The respondent group had relatively equal representation of both sexes, with a slight majority of male population (52%).

As shown in Table 1, the respondents of both sexes reported their marked preference for being remunerated adequately to the level of performed duties – this opinion was present in as much as three quarters of the responses.

Both gender groups put a strong emphasis on “good atmosphere at work”, although this particular attribute was more often reported in female population (69% of the responses – a second position in the hierarchy of interests), than in male population (59% of the responses – third position in the hierarchy of interests). More than half of the respondents reported high value of permanent employment (women – 61%, men – 53%). It may be noted here that the hierarchy of expectations deemed

<sup>1</sup> The research study was conducted within the framework of research grant sponsored by the Ministry of Science and Higher Education, No. NN115 134434, filed under the title: “Interesy pracowników oraz warunki ich respektowania w przedsiębiorstwach” (“Employee interests and their observance in companies”).

<sup>2</sup> Questionnaires adopted a five-grade measurement scale, with responses ranking: “very important”, “important”, “neither important nor unimportant”, “fairly unimportant”, and “decidedly unimportant”. Percentage values presented herein are calculated solely with reference to interests reported as “very important”.

important (i.e., with more than 50% of the responses) is markedly broader among female population. Moreover, female respondents reported considerably high value placed on “employment protection” (51%, compared to 36% in the male population).

**Table 1.** Hierarchy of employee interests by a gender group

Women	Responses (in %)	Men	Responses (in %)
1) Wages adequate to the range of duties	75	1) Wages adequate to the range of duties	70
2) Good atmosphere at work	69	2) Health and safety standards	61
3) Permanent employment	61	3) Good atmosphere at work	59
4) Transparent criteria of task evaluation	56	4) Permanent employment	53
5) Health and safety standards	54	5) Transparent criteria of task evaluation	44
6) Employment protection	51	6) Health benefits at employer's cost	41

Source: author's own research.

Table 2 presents the structure (hierarchy) of employee interests by respondent age group, based on the assumption that the structure may show distinct changes reflecting individual (personal) development.

**Table 2.** Hierarchy of employee interests by an age group

Age	Interests	Percentage of responses	Percentage of persons in an age group
up to 30	1) Wages adequate to the range of duties	74	45
	2) Good atmosphere at work	68	
	3) Health and safety standards	61	
	4) Permanent employment	57	
	5) Transparent criteria of task evaluation	55	
31-40	1) Wages adequate to the range of duties	67	28
	2) Good atmosphere at work	55	
	3) Health and safety standards	42	
	4) Permanent employment	41	
	5) Employment protection	40	
41-50	1) Wages adequate to the range of duties	73	15
	2) Permanent employment	64	
	3) Good atmosphere at work	62	
	4) Health and safety standards	58	
	5) Transparent criteria of task evaluation	50	
51 and more	1) Permanent employment	84	11
	2) Health and safety standards	81	
	3) Wages adequate to the range of duties	78	
	4) Good atmosphere at work	67	
	5) Transparent criteria of task evaluation	63	

Source: author's own research.

Based on the data presented in Table 2, it may be observed that – regardless of the respondents' age – the requirement of being fairly rewarded for the range of duties performed at specific workstation or post is at the top of the list of priorities. Only the age group of above 50 years of age displayed lower priority for this particular requirement. At the same time, it should be noted that it was reported by as much as 78% of respondents in this age group (a marked majority, relatively speaking, since the corresponding figures for the remaining age groups amounted to 74%, 67%, and 73%, respectively, in the increasing age order). The senior group of respondents placed higher value (as judged by percentage of responses) to permanent employment (84%) as well as health and safety standards (81%). Those two types of interests were reported consistently in other age groups, but with a differing rank. Disparities in the structure (hierarchy) of those interests is particularly evident in the age group of 31-40. This group of respondents placed significantly low value on health and safety standards (42% of the responses) and permanent employment (41% of the responses), compared to other age groups.

Hierarchy of interests in the group below 30 years of age showed high preference for “good atmosphere at work” – 74% of the responses, the most pronounced response in this respect across the groups. This group of respondents also placed high value on health and safety workplace standards (61% of the responses) and permanent employment (57% of the responses).

The whole respondent group of the study placed relatively high value on “transparent criteria of task evaluation”, an interest ranked among five most important elements of interest hierarchy in all age groups (with responses ranging between 50% and 63% by group), save for the group between 30 and 40 years of age.

The empirical study was also aimed at examining the relationship between the range and hierarchy of employee interests and their received education. This perspective of research is presented in Table 3.

Also in this cross section of data, the placement of “wages adequate to the range of duties” was found high on the list of priorities among all respondents. At the same time, it must be noted that the analysis of responses by the level of received education uncovered two important items not present on the previous cross sections, namely: “proper information flow” reported by 53% of high-education respondents and “protection of social benefits” reported as important by low-education respondents (55% of the responses).

Working under assumption that the structure of employee interests changes in time, the research findings were examined from the viewpoint of the relationship between employee expectations and their seniority, i.e., time served in a given placement. As shown in Table 4, the role of fair remuneration is still dominant and perceived by the majority of respondents as primary (top priority) interest. The only exclusion to this trend was found in the group of employees with seniority of 15 years and more. In this group, the issues of permanent employment and safety standards were reported more often (94% and 76% of the responses, respectively), which

correlates with findings shown in Table 2, presenting the structure of interests by age group.

**Table 3.** Hierarchy of employee interests by the level of received education

Education	Interests	Responses (in %)	Percentage of persons with education level
higher	1) Wages adequate to the range of duties	78	40
	2) Good atmosphere at work	74	
	3) Transparent criteria of task evaluation	63	
	4) Health and safety standards	58	
	5) Permanent employment	56	
	6) Proper information flow	53	
secondary	1) Wages adequate to the range of duties	66	42
	2) Good atmosphere at work	58	
	3) Permanent employment	57	
	4) Health and safety standards	55	
	5) Employment protection	49	
	6) Health benefits at employer's cost	44	
vocational and lower	1) Wages adequate to the range of duties	74	18
	2) Health and safety standards	62	
	3) Transparent criteria of task evaluation	58	
	4) Protection of social benefits	55	
	5) Good atmosphere at work	54	
	6) Health benefits at employer's cost	50	

Source: author's own research.

Permanent employment is perceived as important employee interest in all groups under study. It must be noted, however, that the largest disparity in this respect was observed among employees with seniority between 11 and 15 years. In this group, the issue of permanent employment placed fifth on the list of priorities, with 45% of the responses. This result varies largely from the findings in the remaining groups, contrasting particularly with the responses among employees with seniority of 15 years and more, where the issue placed at the top of priorities in nearly all the responses (94% of the responses).

High seniority employees – decidedly more often than the remaining groups – reported their interest in receiving health services at employer's cost, and reported *on par* with the category of “transparent criteria of task evaluation” (53% of responses).<sup>3</sup> One characteristic trait of this respondent group should be noted here, namely the apparent lack of interest in supporting the notion of trade unions and works councils as well as marginal interest in the right to present their own opinion through formal procedures (3% of the responses).

<sup>3</sup> This portion of the data is not presented in Table 4 due to the adopted standard of presentation, limited – for the sake of brevity – to five topmost interests reported in each group under study.

**Table 4.** Hierarchy of employee interests by respondent seniority

Seniority (time served with present employer)	Interests	Responses (in %)	Percentage of persons in respective seniority groups
less than a year	1) Wages adequate to the range of duties	81	14
	2) Transparent criteria of task evaluation	65	
	3) Health and safety standards	65	
	4) Good atmosphere at work	61	
	5) Permanent employment	58	
1-2 years	1) Wages adequate to the range of duties	71	14
	2) Good atmosphere at work	67	
	3) Permanent employment	52	
	4) Transparent criteria of task evaluation	50	
	5) Health and safety standards	50	
3-5 years	1) Wages adequate to the range of duties	71	33
	2) Good atmosphere at work	67	
	3) Health and safety standards	56	
	4) Permanent employment	53	
	5) Proper information flow	47	
6-10 years	1) Wages adequate to the range of duties	67	18
	2) Good atmosphere at work	57	
	3) Health and safety standards	56	
	4) Permanent employment	52	
	5) Transparent criteria of task evaluation	46	
11-15 years	1) Wages adequate to the range of duties	76	10
	2) Good atmosphere at work	72	
	3) Health and safety standards	46	
	4) Transparent criteria of task evaluation	45	
	5) Permanent employment	41	
15 years and more	1) Permanent employment	94	11
	2) Health and safety standards	76	
	3) Wages adequate to the range of duties	73	
	4) Good atmosphere at work	61	
	5) Transparent criteria of task evaluation	59	

Source: author's own research.

Employees with lowest seniority (one year or less with present employer) reported their interest in transparent criteria of task evaluation and work safety standards (65% of the responses in both cases). They also expect the employer to provide good atmosphere at work (61% of the responses).

### 3. Conclusions

The objective of identifying attributes of an attractive employer was addressed using the results of research studies. Employees were asked to evaluate individual ele-

ments of their expectations towards an employer. Based on the research findings, it may be observed that companies interested in building and maintaining their employer brand should, in the first place, satisfy the following employee interests:

- wages adequate to the range of duties,
- good atmosphere at work,
- health and safety standards,
- permanent employment,
- transparent criteria of task evaluation.

Based on the research findings in all the respondent groups, these elements of interest hierarchy should be viewed as priorities in respect to employee expectations.

The research also helped identify a range of expectations that – from the viewpoint of employer brand management – can be viewed as secondary or supplementary, namely:

- proper information flow,
- employment protection,
- health benefits provided at employer's cost,
- protection of social benefits,
- transparent promotion criteria,
- training at employer's cost.

Looking at the process of shaping an employer brand as a form of company policy, it may be useful to avoid actions that do not offer the expected results. In the light of this research on employee interests, it may be observed that certain practices adopted in companies offer only limited “corporate image” potential; these include (in the order of ascending importance):

- provision of works councils,
- organisation of trade union structures,
- adopting formal procedures for employees to express their opinions,
- lay-off support,
- employee participation in the process of work time organisation,
- granting employees the right to participate in co-worker selection,
- providing mechanisms for peer and superior support.

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## **ATRYBUTY ATRAKCYJNEGO PRACODAWCY W KONTEKŚCIE INTERESÓW ARTYKUŁOWANYCH PRZEZ PRACOWNIKÓW. WYNIKI BADAŃ EMPIRYCZNYCH**

**Streszczenie:** W artykule przedstawiono cechy atrakcyjnego pracodawcy, wykorzystując wyniki badań dotyczących interesów pracowniczych. Wywiad skategoryzowany prowadzono w latach 2010-2011 w grupie pracowników wykonawczych zatrudnionych w przedsiębiorstwach Dolnego Śląska.

**Słowa kluczowe:** wizerunek pracodawcy, wizerunek przedsiębiorstwa, interesy pracownicze, interesariusze, Dolny Śląsk.