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## **BETWEEN HEALTH AND WORK**

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*In this article the concept of work in the context of workers' health is being considered. Different types of employers and their impact on quality and productivity have been analyzed. The authors mentioned also a very important and frequently occurring problem of mobbing or bullying of employees by supervisors or co-workers. Theoretical considerations have been supported by analysis of available empirical studies. Reference was made to the situation in Poland and in other countries. The last part of the article pointed out the relationship between working time and productivity. Authors quoted interesting insights and examples associated with humans' laziness, which can achieve exactly the opposite effect.*

**Keywords:** *work, health, productivity, mobbing, working time, stress, employees, laziness.*

### **Introduction.**

Someone has asked The Dalai Lama (Biuletyn coacha, 1/2015, s.1) what surprises him most: "Man surprised me most about humanity. Because he sacrifices his health in order to make money.

Then he sacrifices money to recuperate his health. And then he is so anxious about the future that he does not enjoy the present; the result being that he does not live in the present or the future; he lives as if he is never going to die, and then dies having never really lived."

The man who stays in the organization for a long time loses his identity and becomes part of the team. He forgets about his

hobbies and desires. However Mother Nature will give him no rest: after a while he will notice that he actually wasted something. Not only the work itself, but also the company structure can take away man's personality. Through the bureaucracy in organization, employees lose their vitality.

Analysis of recent surveys from this scope of its knowledge fluctuated in the face of connected issues from: with the psychophysiology of man, psychology and sociology of the work, the sociology of health and medicine, the labour law, job security, personnel management, styles of control, of the mobbing and the sexual harassment, the productivity and working

hours. The discussed subject matter is very broad and interdisciplinary.

**The purpose of this article** is main being published of chosen problems associated with the health and the work in the changing society.

### **1. Employers as a source of conflict**

Henryka Teodora Bochniarz – President of the Polish Confederation of Private Employers: "The employers are often seen through the perspective of the richest or biggest companies. However, the reality is more ordinary. More than 40 percent of people who have founded a company have no higher education. They often are common workers or clerks. However, all of them decided to take a risk and use their chance. Indeed, they are the "salt of the black soil" today. Without any knowledge or capital they seek to create a new economy. They work with a huge risk in a very unpredictable legal and economic environment. Everyday they struggle for life."

We need to take a look at the National Labor Inspectorate, which has so much work. We commonly report irregularities regarding to salaries, contracts of employment or calculation of working time. On the website [hoga.pl](http://hoga.pl) people were asked in a questionnaire one question: How is my boss like? Among those who took part in it, 39.21% said that their boss is unfriendly and incompetent, 16.22% – friendly and incompetent, 11.14% – unfriendly and competent. Only 33.43 % of the respondents did not have bigger objections, because they had a "lord and master" who is friendly and competent.

Frederick Herzberg, professor of management and psychology

(A.K. Koźmiński, D. Jemielniak, 2011, s. 181-182), depicted a style called by himself "kicking the employee". According to him, such a management style may cause, in the short term, a "movement" in the organization, but it won't become a source of motivation necessary to achieve lasting results. One of the worst possibilities is a chief who is incompetent and neurotic at the same time. According to the well-known principle of Peter (L. J. Peter, R. Hull, 1975) – the employee climbs the ladder of career until he reaches his level of incompetence; if someone fulfills his duties well, he will be promoted until he receives a position which is too big of a challenge for him and he stays there.

A neurotic or paranoid boss, a narcissist and revenge lover may react viciously to any suggestions, even if he is aware that they are to his own interest. Pride occupies the central place in his mind. He is constantly looking for glamor and he wants to surround himself and others with it. Gunter Ogger in the book "Zeros in suits" (G. Ogger, 1994, s. 36) exposed the wickedness, lust for profit, selfishness, careerism, stupidity and corruption of people who are in charge of big corporations. He revealed the seeming success achieved "at any cost" and in accordance with the sentence "the end justifies the means". He proves that it makes German economy weaker and weaker.

The worst possibility is if we hit an inefficient autocrat who is despotic and unpredictable and his attitude towards employees depends on his current mood. It's often a man with low self-esteem, who demonstrates his superiority very loudly. Subordinates have to get over his moods and hear such kind of sentences all the time: "you know nothing and you can do nothing!", "Many would like to replace

you!", "Forget the bonuses and holidays!", "You will get fired in no time!".

In the fight with the criticism we should take Japan for an example. If the boss scolds someone for bad results, this person will be thankful for his valuable time and attention, which can help him to eliminate mistakes in the future. We take any criticism as a personal attack and the conflict with the boss becomes our reality.

When the bosses are unable to discharge tension and cannot keep calm, when nervousness becomes common, when people get criticized in the presence of others, when bosses organize unnecessarily meetings which are a waste of time, when they never listen to employees that have something to say.

In addition, if the boss is ruled by his own stupidity and pride (combined with the conviction about his own genius and happiness), laziness (he met his goal, so the development of the company is no more important), jealousy (due to his own selfish interest, lust for power is associated with stubbornness and unwillingness to bow down before someone), vanity (ignoring the environment, megalomania and focusing on power symbols), then workers often choose the more or less effective way to fight – sabotage. This might be among others: theft; fraud by calculating eg. travel costs; misappropriation and embezzlement of money; mental sabotage, where work is done carelessly or even has devastating impact; public embarrassment by opinion spoiling; stealing of ideas or betraying the secrets of company to the competition.

According to "Psychologie Heute" in Germany (where work is valued the most) 41% of employees pull the calculation of costs to their advantage, 60% steal things from work, 76% use business phone for

private conversations.

We all know that we work better when the boss is not at the office. Research of Office Angels – the consulting company that recruits employees – shows that people work better when the boss is on vacation. 72% of the 1,500 questioned office workers are waiting for the directors' leave (especially for those, who interfere the work), best for long summer holiday. Then they can do their job calmly and rationally.

But if bosses decide to control their employees, they check everything: phone calls, emails and sometimes they even record people on video by CCTV. Bosses are also controlled – by the main unwanted boss/management. We all complain about the control in our companies. There are still almost 40 functioning controlling institutions whose job is often duplicated. For example: the Trade or Sanitary Inspection, or the Agricultural and Food Quality Inspection.

## **2. Bullying – mobbing and sexual harassment – contemporary problems**

Since 2004 employers have to guard against this type of situation in their companies. The amendment to the Labour Code implemented into Polish law a brand new record, which deals with mobbing. Since then the boss has to prevent psychological violence at work and the employee who terminates his contract as a result of mobbing will be able to claim compensation. Those organizations are very active in the last time: Polish Anti-Mobbing Association, National Anti-Mobbing Association and Barbara Grabowska's Anti-Mobbing Association.

The term 'mobbing' was initially used in context of wild animals being aggressive towards each other. Prof. Jerzy Vetulani

notes that aggressive behavior occurs for both invertebrates (eg. fruit fly or lobster) and vertebrates, from fish and to primates.

Mobbing comes from the word "mob" (J. Marciniak, 2006), which means plebs, rabble or rag-tag. From the Latin – "mobile vulgus" means a crowd with changing feelings. Generally mobbing is a long-term harassment, bullying, humiliation, threatening of a selected person by her/his colleagues or supervisors.

In 1984 Heinz Leymann, a Swedish psychiatrist and psycho-sociologist (he comes originally from Germany) defined the concept of 'mobbing' at the workplace for the first time. He wrote that the disruptive behavior involving mental abuse of co-workers is psychological terror. In Leymann's studies the source of mobbing actions are in 44% co-workers, in 37% supervisors, in 10% both – colleagues and supervisors and in 9% cases – subordinates.

CBOS (Centre for Public Opinion Research) conducted a study about "Harassment in the workplace", which shows that 17% of employees has been harassed in the workplace over the past five years, 5% declared frequent cases of harassment and 6% were victims of colleagues' bullying.

The most common forms of bullying used by the superiors are: forcing to work after hours, refusing holiday or days off, blackmailing with dismissal, vicious comments or jokes, arbitrary deprivation of bonuses or rewards, tasks to which workers were not prepared, setting unrealistically short deadlines, punishing subordinates without hearing their explanation, the public criticism and ridicule, forcing to make denunciations, assigning conflictual character, punishment for the investigation of their rights or sexual harassment. The last

phenomenon should be a separate topic, because it is worth a broader consideration.

More often the employees of small companies are being mobbed by their supervisor, while those from large corporations meet with harassment by co-workers.

European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions together with the International Labour Organisation show the range and scale of mobbing in the EU. It turned out that almost 10% of staffs are being mobbed.

According to data obtained from the German labor organizations in Germany alone around 1.5 million people experience daily psychological harassment in the workplace and are considered victims of bullying. Mobbing causes a 15 million euro loss every year. The greatest danger occurs in the Northern European countries: Finland, the Netherlands, Great Britain, and the lowest in the Mediterranean countries. Can we explain it with stereotypical laziness of southern people who are too lazy to harass? Or maybe in the cold North people bully to warm up?

In the European Union mobbing is more common in the public sector than in the private. Economic sectors exposed to mobbing are: public administration and uniformed services – 14%, education, health care – 12%, hotel industry, gastronomy – 12%, transport and communication – 12%, trade (wholesale and retail) – 9%, real estate industry – 7% manufacturing industry, mining – 6%, construction – 5%, financial services – 5%.

A psychoanalysis of the character profiles of major German enterprises, which faced the threat of bankruptcy in the nineties. It was stated, that disregarding their dynamics and mettle, the managers were unable to

cooperate. Driven by the greed of power they found pleasure in humiliating and oppressing their subordinates, they suffered from megalomania, often making decisions which put the future of the firm in threat.

British author Tim Field has published a book called “Bully in Sight” (T. Field, 1996). It is a handbook about recognizing and dealing with a “foe” at work. You may become a victim of mobbing when: you are at the wrong place at the wrong time; you are doing your work excellently; you are liked amongst co-workers, colleagues, you are popular; your knowledge, popularity and engagement uncovers faults and make the bully feel envious and threatened; you are an expert, it is you who is being asked for advice by others; you have the skill of finding compromise, making conflict parties reconcile; you are honest and just; you have a certain type of sensitivity, or say what you think at least. The bully hates people like that.

Let us keep this good advice in mind – it is always the tyrants who are weak. Normal people do not need such methods of cooperation. Only weak people tyrannize others to hide their ineptitude. Speaking of mobbing the topic of so called nonsense pops out. There are examples of students fighting for compensation (examples from Sweden), who did not go to school, because they were not slim, beautiful enough or had freckles. Of course, compensations have been paid generously. The problem also lies within the management systems in firms, where the distance between people in charge and the subordinates is shrinking. The relation to a buddy-boss needs to be completely different. Conflicts result from crossing the so-called intimate zone, fraternizing exceedingly and blown up like balloons fake friendly relationships.

The basic reason for bullying is the lack of a free market, which results in higher employment. It is not only the co-workers who compete with each other but also the entrepreneurs. That is what it is like in the US, where changing ones position at a bully-boss is no problem, because there is no shortage of work. Bad treatment of workers makes them run away and influences financial results of the enterprise. It lies within the best interest of the employer to drop the bullying attitude.

A separate but often connected problem is sexual harassment at work place. In his work “Sexual harassment at work” (J. Warylewski, 1999) adduces one of the first documented cases of sexual harassment. Joseph employed as the head of Potiphar's household. Joseph lost his job and was imprisoned when he refused to provide sexual services for his employees' wife. This is mentioned in the Book of Genesis (39.1-39.20).

The first trial connected with sexual harassment was held in the US in 1976. This phenomenon was regarded as a symptom of sexual discrimination. What is interesting comments and jokes on sexual topics, exposing items and materials with naked women – photographs, calendars, surely the Pirelli one as well – may pass as sexual harassment. We now await law that will prosecute ex officio those who allow women through and kiss their hands. As a poet mentioned once “Kissing women on her hands is a waste of time, but it makes a start.”

Even people not involved in harassment may be aggrieved. The Supreme Court of California ruled that a boss' close relations with his subordinates might make people not involved in a case to be aggrieved by it. Phil Horowitz, member of the California

Employment Lawyers Association, who filed a suit from two aggrieved women, valued this decision as a groundbreaking one. It was the first serious decision, which means, that woman who are not their bosses lovers may sue their superior for being treated worse than others.

A Suntop Media report on American and British firms says that romance at work is a growing phenomenon. 42% of those questioned admitted to have (had) a romance with a colleague. “Would you consider becoming your boss' lover in return for a promised promotion?” – not much, but still 14% would consider this opportunity. Among people under 30 years of age only 41% do not see themselves as their boss' lover. This means that every second young employee of British and American firms is ready to get in a self-interested romance. Staff Management Association and the Wall Street Journal's network CareerJournal.com also made research on personnel officers and employees which shows that the majority of those questioned – both personnel managers and employees (64% and 53% respectively) – pointed out that romancing in their company is allowed but is being discouraged. Almost one third of companies asked allow romancing with no obstacles at all. What stands out, it is two times more workers than personnel officers who follow romances.

Joanna Kostyla writes in her article “Love at lunchtime” (J. Kostyla, 2004, s. 112): “It's exceptionally easy to start a business-affair and supposedly it is the opportunity that makes the thief. According to a survey published by “Fortune” one out of four of 500 chairmen of the biggest firms admits an informal affair at work. Especially in firms employing the so called “young and wild” people allude to the explosion of love.”

Most often it happens to fellows holding the company's highest positions, so it is the chairmen who are most attractive. Women long for a relationship with a higher-stated man, because their instinct tells them that this will help their common offspring succeeding. This has been proved by the research of the psychologist, David Buss. From the Zulu villages to Brazilian cities, women incline towards settled-down and wealthy men (other than man, who are governed by erotic and aesthetic criteria).

### **3. Work time and efficiency**

The bookselling market welcomed the book “Bonjour Paresse” (Hello Laziness) by Corinne Maier. It is said to be the “Bible of rebellious workers” (C. Maier, 2004), it has been sold over 200 thousand times and translated into 25 languages. Janusz Korwin-Mikke writes in his that (J. Korwin – Mikke, 1999, s. 56) “laziness is the motor of progress. Steam-powered machines, horses (as a pulling power and mount), planes and even flints have been invented by someone who did not feel like rubbing two sticks against each other for two hours to strike some sparks. Only lazy people are creative. Workaholics – sure, they might be toiling, but it is them only who profit from it.”

Laziness may have an opposite success due to technical progress. The Inventor's Club writes as follows: “human laziness does not have any boundaries and let us remember how many kitchen robots rest in the depths of cabinets only because they have to be pulled out from there to be used and then washed, etc. Forcing a modern man to make something more than to “push a button or pull a lever once” is seen by the users of “anything” as an attack on civil liberties! Yet it is the era of remote controls

and a growing number of electronic devices we are living in”.

Throughout the Internet the National Party of Lazy has over 300 members. The management of the party does not pay much attention to their duties. Disarmingly sincere they admit to their affiliates: “Do you wonder why this page looks so poor, even though our financial resources are so big? We do not feel like making anything nicer. Maybe we will, sometime.” I do not know if you find this page in the Internet as, on the average, web users type only two words when searching the web and only search two times at each web session. Analyzing the search results is being reduced to clicking on the first link on the list, and the whole process does not even last five minutes.

On the other hand the authors of the newly found web page “Hello Laziness” seem to be workaholics. On regular basis they post articles on laziness, suitable dictionaries, commandments and advice, e.g. how to hide being lazy at work, or how to pretend to work.

Corinne Maier writes in her book “Bonjour Paresse”: “what you do is in fact no good for anything and your place could be taken overnight by any random idiot. Work as little as possible, then”. She herself admits being a “layabout” at work, working at a research center, where she checks economic documentation for a living – rewriting data on European electric companies from the Internet. Making reports no one will ever read. We may be astonished that the employee Electricity of France (Electricite de France) pays her 1600 euros a month for this idleness. The astonishment vanishes once we know this generous enterprise is a public leviathan. Besides her major employment she sees patients as a psychoanalyst, which surely leaves no space

for laziness.

The recent roar on social agreements made between the managements of eight electric companies – the so-called G-8 group, converted to the Energa conglomerate – and their trade unions seizes to surprise, too. The employee obliged himself to keep all workers, including the chairmen and directors, employed for 10 years (120 months). In case of a prior dismissal a wage equivalent for the remaining time – up to 10 years – will be paid out. Feeling sure about tomorrow one could start lazing around in this business right now.

The occurring state of total unwillingness does not always mean laziness, but also a bad mood. Symptoms are chronic drowsiness, tendency to feel tired, ongoing bad mood, bad frame of mind, apathy, sadness, depression, feeling of helplessness and worthlessness and last but not least, pessimism. All of this is caused by a change in hormone concentration. The factors linked to our mood are mostly serotonin and dopamine. A lowered level of those is the reason for feeling sad and depressed.

Recently medical magazines write about laziness coded in genes. Research proofs that there is a direct relation between a bad physical condition and bad health. Researchers have just discovered that there are people, about 10%, who are not able to improve their condition with any exercise. What is more, German researchers say that too much physical activity has a bad influence on our health. So, to live longer, one has to do less in life.

In his work “The Joy Of Laziness: How to slow down and live longer”, doctor Peter Axt and his daughter prove that we all have a certain amount of “vital energy” and that our lifespan depends on how fast we use it.

Laziness is mentioned as one of the seven deadly sins. Lazy people do not succeed. The Bible says: “Idle hands make one poor, but diligent hands bring riches. The son who gathers during summer is prudent; the son who sleeps during harvest is disgraceful”.

Over the span of last 100 years the total work time of an average European has shrunk from 200 to merely 67 thousand hours. Simultaneously the lifespan has increased, on average, from 500 to 700 thousand hours. In one word, making a living takes less and less time, although the crazy speed of life might make us believe that we are the hardest-working generation since Adam and Eve. Meanwhile in 1900 the average worker had at most 100 thousand hours of leisure throughout his life. Today he enjoys four times as much, a quarter of it watching television.

M. Castells points out in his “Network Society” (M. Castells, 2010) that between the years 1973 and 1994 leisure time in the US has shrunk by 37%. The social psychologist Philip Zimbardo has asked Americans what they would do if there was an eighth day during the week. – “I would use it to catch up with backlogs of work” – many of them answered.

The Swedish decided to check if working for only six hours a week one could be as efficient as during a regular day of work (J. Solska). To do so, two departments of the City of Gothenburg ruled by a coalition of social democrats and Greens, will work both full and part time, for the same wage. The coalition assumed, that the employees who worked shorter would be more efficient. The experiment would have been extremely interesting if a private employer had agreed on it. He surely would have counted if workers paid the same wage as previous, work more efficiently, so – they earn their

wage with a 35-hour workweek. Such calculations might not be credible in departments. In France these calculations have failed. The raise of efficiency did not compensate the smaller count of hours worked. This method did not find any followers. I do not believe Gothenburg would start a new tendency any time soon, if only in Sweden.

Poland still is one of the most hardworking countries in Europe. On average the Polish work two hours more than average EU citizens. Quantity does not turn to quality though – we are one of the least efficient countries. Although the efficiency keeps growing in Poland, it is still three times smaller than the European average. In 2012 it was shorter by 67,7% than the European standards. The main reason for this is bad workflow, exceeding bureaucracy and the dishonesty of contract partners. On the other hands it is us who catch up the quickest with the most productive countries – in 2012 Poland reached its highest increase of work efficiency, of 5,6%.

### **Conclusions**

Professional work is important in everyone's life. It is one of the most important activities of an adult. Its influence can be positive or it can be a source of frustration and mental discomfort.

Socio-political changes associated with the process of globalization, the establishment of a free market, the rapid development of information technology, the changing nature of work and demographic changes have an impact on workers and form modern workplaces. Significant changes related to the organization and management of work processes give rise to new threats and challenges in the area of



employment protection.

The environment and nature of work have an impact on workers' health. Stress and violence in the workplace are considered to be the main challenge in the context of health and safety at work. Conducted research on the effects of psychosocial risk factors for workers' health should motivate

policy makers and employers to make an effort to face the challenges of a modern working environment and ensuring the health of workers worldwide.

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