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## BUILDING EMPLOYEE ENGAGEMENT THROUGH PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*The purpose of the article is to show the importance of professional development for the level of engagement, as an important argument justifying the interest of employers in professional career management, including investment in development. An important role is also played by the appropriate organisational culture enhancing the creation of effective professional development programs. The article presents theoretical considerations and the results of the own research.*

*Мета статті полягає в тому, щоб довести важливість професійного розвитку для підвищення рівня залученості персоналу як важливого інструменту, який визначає інтерес роботодавців до професійного управління кар'єрою, у тому числі до інвестування у розвиток. Важливу роль відіграє також відповідна організаційна культура, що сприяє формуванню ефективних програм професійного розвитку. У статті представлено теоретичні міркування і результати власних досліджень.*

*Цель статьи состоит в том, чтобы доказать важность профессионального развития для повышения уровня вовлеченности персонала как важного инструмента, который определяет интерес работодателей к профессиональному управлению карьерой, в том числе к инвестированию в развитие. Важную роль играет также соответствующая организационная культура, способствующая формированию эффективных программ профессионального развития. В статье представлены теоретические рассуждения и результаты собственных исследований.*

**Keywords.** Organizational engagement, engagement gap, determinants of commitment, overeducation, professional competences, the plateau syndrome, talent, critical talent, organisational culture.

**Ключові слова.** Організаційна залученість, «провал» залученості, детермінанти прихильності, надосвіченість, професійні компетенції, таланти, визначальні таланти, організаційна культура.

**Ключевые слова.** Организационная вовлеченность, «провал» вовлеченности, детерминанты лояльности, сверхобразование, профессиональные компетенции, таланты, определяющие таланты, организационная культура.

**Introduction.** The classic arguments justifying the need for continuing professional development involve the dynamic development of production technology and methods of organisation, the emergence of new types of products and services, changes in the labour market, all in a volatile conditions and increasing competition. The impact of employees' attitude to the possibility of the development of their approach to work, referred to as organisational commitment is an equally important reason of the area of interest of employers and managers. Such attitude means an above-average willingness to act, where the interests of the organisation are as important as individual interests, passionate engagement, identification with the company and willingness to stay in the organisation. Managers working in different organisations and at all levels, intuitively sense the phenomenon of «engagement gap», that is, discrepancies between actual attitudes of employees and potential use of human capital, possessed by organisations in the second decade of the twenty-first century. This phenomenon proves the existence of high potential, the use of which poses a serious challenge to the contemporary management.

It turns out that one of the reasons for the engagement gap is the negative assessment of development opportunities.

**Engagement gap on a global scale.** According to recent studies 60% of workers around the world are considered to be engaged, 40 % of workers are passive or actively disengaged. This means that on a global scale four out of ten employees are still not engaged. It has been a permanent trend since 2008<sup>1</sup>.

### Figure 1: Global Trends in Employee Engagement Scores

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<sup>1</sup> 2013 Trends in Global Employee Engagement, Aon Hewitt, www.aon.com



Source: 2013 *Trends in Global Employee Engagement*, Aon Hewitt, www.aon.com

The scale and shifts in the size of engagement gaps are of course varied. The most significant increase in engagement took place in Europe (an improvement of 5 percentage points) and Latin America (an improvement of 3 percentage points). Engagement in North America decreased slightly by 1 percentage point, particularly in the United States, where engagement has dropped by 3 percentage points — and in the Asia-Pacific area remained at the same level.

Table 1: *Employee engagement distribution on a global scale in 2012 /in%/*

Scale	Highly engaged	Moderately engaged	Passive	Actively disengaged
<b>Global</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>40</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Asia-Pacific</b>	<b>16</b>	<b>42</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Europe</b>	<b>18</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>19</b>
<b>Latin America</b>	<b>33</b>	<b>41</b>	<b>17</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>North America</b>	<b>24</b>	<b>39</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>17</b>

Source: 2013 *Trends in Global Employee Engagement*, Aon Hewitt, www.aon.com

Similar results were given by research conducted by Towers Watson in 2012. Within 3,100 surveyed organisations a slight improvement in employee engagement could be observed. Among 32,000 full-time employees only 35 % were assessed as highly engaged.<sup>2</sup> The indicator of organisational engagement is an important measure of the quality of human resources management and evaluation of the quality of human capital. Therefore, quantitative analysis of the organisational engagement level, and not just work efficiency, carried out in individual industries and organisations should become a regular management tool<sup>3</sup>.

**The importance of professional development for employee engagement.** Undertaking effective measures to increase organisational engagement requires an analysis of determining drivers. The table below illustrates the results of a meta-analysis of 2,560 organisations, representing over 3.8 million employees worldwide.

Key engagement drivers in the world and Europe are career opportunities. The research results indicated that only 47 % of employees believe that they have suitable development opportunities in their organisations. Also, 82 % of Polish specialists consider care for staff development as one of the main challenges of modern human resource management.<sup>4</sup>

Table 2: *Key factors increasing employee engagement*

<sup>2</sup> Sharma R., *Top 5 Trend HR 2013*, www.shrmindia.org

<sup>3</sup> See: Juchnowicz M., *Zaangażowanie pracowników. Sposoby oceny i motywowania. (Employee engagement. Ways of evaluation and motivation)* PWE, Warszawa, 2012

<sup>4</sup> *Elastyczność i zmiana horyzontów. Trendy HR 2013 (Flexibility and change of perspectives. HR Trends in 2013)*, www.deloitte.com

Factors	2011 Global	2012 Global	Significance change of 2012 to 2011	Europe
<b>Career opportunities</b>	1	1	^ 3%	1
<b>Organisation reputation</b>	3	2	^ -2%	2
<b>Pay</b>	6	3	^ 2%	3
<b>Recognition</b>	2	4	^ 5%	
<b>Communication</b>	4	5	^ 7%	
<b>Managing performance</b>	5		^ 5%	
<b>Innovation</b>			^ 5%	5
<b>Work processes</b>			^ 2%	4
<b>Brand alignment</b>			^ 4%	

Source: *2013 Trends in Global Employee Engagement*, Aon Hewitt, p.17, www.aon.com

In order to verify the above statements, a survey among 1,000 people employed on the basis of work contract in the service sector of Polish companies was conducted. The survey was carried out via computer-assisted telephone interviews (CATI), guaranteeing the principle of anonymity. The basis of theoretical research tool was a WIGOR model by M. Juchnowicz, which involves five groups of drivers determining the level of employee engagement: (1) work organisation, (2) development opportunities, (3) the principles and mechanisms of pay, (4) relationships with co-workers, (5) relationships with an immediate supervisor.<sup>5</sup> In addition, the study includes the impact of job satisfaction. These drivers have been expressed by specific statements included in the questionnaire interview with the respondents. In order to analyse the importance of drivers for building employee engagement, the Partial Least Squares (PLS) method has been used. From a statistical point of view it shows correlation between the studied areas of the model in an optimal way.

Table 3: *Effect of various factors determining the involvement*

Factors	Engagement
Work organisation	0,37
Relationship with superiors	0,18
Development opportunities	0,21
Interpersonal relationships	0,05
Pay	0,02
Job satisfaction	0,28

Source: own research

A conducted research indicates that the most important influence on the level of employee engagement in companies providing services is primarily exerted by factors related to the work organisation and the satisfaction level achieved by employees. Employees mention «career opportunities» as the third most significant factor. Taking into account the impact of this factor on the level of job satisfaction, the presented results confirm its significant direct and indirect relevance to the attitude of organisational commitment.

**Building employee engagement through professional development — cultural context.** Organisational culture is considered as a high-value resource for the organisation. R. Krupski even uses the term «super-resource»<sup>6</sup>, due to its attributes such as rarity and unique combination of the

<sup>5</sup> Juchnowicz M., *Zaangażowanie pracowników (Employee engagement)* ...op.cit. , p.57—61

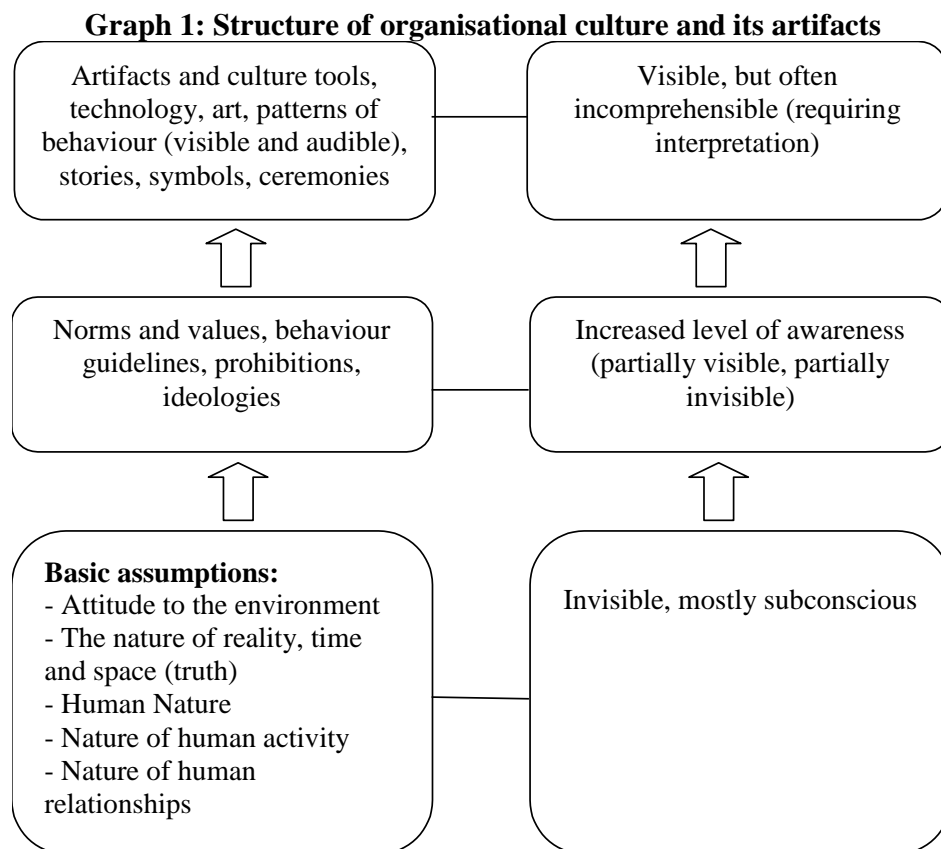
<sup>6</sup> Krupski R., Stanczyk S., *Strategia przedsiębiorstwa w wymiarach kultury organizacyjnej*, /w:/ Wachowiak P. /red./, *Kulturowe i kadrowe problemy internacjonalizacji przedsiębiorstw (The company's strategy in the dimensions of organisational culture /w:/ Wachowiak P. /ed./, Cultural and staffing problems of the internationalisation of enterprises)*, Szkoła Główna Handlowa w Warszawie, Warszawa, 2008, p. 21—22.

organisational values or specific ways of reaching it. This super-resource determines the feasibility of professional development programs in a way that may affect the increase of employee engagement.

The authors often refer to the deliberations of E. Schein, who defines organisational culture as the set of rules of conduct, discovered, established and developed by a group while solving the problems of external adaptation and internal integration — the rules so reliable that for all new members they are an indicator of the proper way of perception, reasoning and feeling<sup>7</sup>.

E. Schein emphasizes the multi-layered and multi-structure character of culture. However, in accordance with the fundamental aspects of human existence the organisational culture can be divided into five basic aspects (Graph 1)<sup>8</sup>:

1. Attitude to the environment — the perception of the environment by the employees and its impact on the company; company representatives may behave passively, taking into consideration the fact that the organisation is isolated and independent from the environment or they may take an active attitude, if they perceive the impact of the environment on the company (cooperate, compete etc. with other entities outside the organisation).



Source: An own study based on: Zbiegień-Maciąg L, *Culture in the organisation. Identification of cultures of well-known companies*, PWN, Warsaw, 2005, p.22.

2. The nature of reality — awareness of the foundations of the organisation (history and tradition, talent, brand, style of management, quality of work, etc.),

3. Human nature — awareness of how individual workers function, including their character, temperament, possibility to trust, willingness to develop and other aspects affecting the way people are managed,

4. human activity — identification of employee activity and initiative, their methods of operation, willingness to take on responsibilities, etc.,

5. relationships — awareness of structured social relations (or lack of them) in the company, both formal and informal.

<sup>7</sup> Schein E.H., *Coming to a New Awareness of Organizational Culture*, «Sloan Management Review», Winter 1984 Issue, p.3.

<sup>8</sup> Zbiegien-Maciąg L, *Kultura w organizacji. Identyfikacja kultur znanych firm (Culture in the organisation. Cultural identification of well-known companies)*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa, 2005, p.20-21.

All of these elements are not independent of one another, they correlate with one another, some of them are created subconsciously in the company, employees can consciously impact on other elements in order to achieve certain results — all these elements create the organisational culture. The effectiveness of professional development programs (which should benefit the company, but also employees if it is supposed to be one of the elements increasing their engagement) can rise, provided that the diagnosis of these elements of organisational culture and the adaptation of appropriate policies and tools within the area of professional development are applied.

Requirements of modern economies pose challenge to companies and their employees associated with the continuous development of competencies. This emphasis on development is the result of two kinds of needs. First, companies strive to provide the flexibility to respond to changes in the turbulent environment thanks to competent personnel. Second, employees want to strengthen their position in the labour market, where candidates are required to be ready to develop themselves, be open to change, creative, have broad knowledge which will translate in everyday work into solving tasks. According to A. Sajkiewicz, organisational culture increasing the interest of employees in the professional development is shaped, among others, thanks to<sup>9</sup>:

- management based on creative concepts,
- decentralisation of decision-making powers,
- open communication systems,
- the use of varied motivational tools,
- deepening the role of managers as the instigators of the professional development of their subordinates.

**Contemporary challenges for managers in the field of employee career development.** The condition of the positive impact of professional development on the level of employee engagement is not only the extension of different forms of education, or the increase in company spending on development. The challenge for managers is also to:

- - create the conditions to use potential competence,
- minimise the scale of the plateau syndrome,
- optimally manage career paths of particularly gifted people.

The problem of the modern labour market is the expanding phenomenon known as overeducation, i.e. the excess of the employee's level of education and skills in relation to the actually used. People aged 21—30 years are particularly vulnerable to perform work below their qualifications. The representatives of this age group negatively evaluate the inability to exploit their existing potential in the workplace, which they have wished to develop having invested their time and financial resources. Among the five most important factors affecting job satisfaction in the global research, «job security» has remained in the first place since 2002 (for the fourth consecutive year) (63 %), and just behind it there are «opportunities to use skills and abilities» (62 %) <sup>10</sup>. Its importance has been rising in this period steadily. This particularly applies to employees with high professional competences (knowledge, skills, attitudes). Therefore, it is becoming increasingly important to recognise qualifications and skills, in order to adjust to their type of work, to the mutual benefit of the employee and the employer.

A significant barrier to the development is the stagnation of professional development among middle-aged workers. After several years of work their performance begins to drop, they fail to get promoted, begin to feel the adverse mental states. All this negatively affects their level of organisational engagement. The stagnation of professional development may be an element or effect of burnout or broader psychosocial phenomenon, which in an everyday language is often referred to as a midlife crisis. The factors which cause the plateau syndrome include three phenomena:

- -the emergence of feeling of boredom and lack of inspiring challenges
- the tension associated with a sense of lack of opportunities for promotion,
- the awareness of the declining capacity of skills development and maintenance of distinctive performance.

The plateau syndrome has two dimensions: the objective one, that is, the actual barrier of opportunities for promotion and / or actual «sterilisation» of the working environment, and the

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<sup>9</sup> Sajkiewicz A., *Zmiany w kulturze kierowania*, /w:/ Makowski K. /red./, *Zarządzanie zmianami w zasobach pracy przedsiębiorstwa (Changes in management culture*, /w:/ Makowski K. /ed./, *Change management of company labour resources*), Oficyna Wydawnicza Szkoły Głównej Handlowej, Warszawa, 1997, p.9.

<sup>10</sup> Badanie Satysfakcji i Zaangażowania w Prace Pracowników w 2011r., Raport Badawczy SHRM (Employee Satisfaction and Employee Engagement Survey in 2011, SHRM Research Report)

subjective one, i.e. psychological consequences of this state. If no appropriate preventative steps are taken by managers, a peculiar spiral reaction can arise, reducing strongly the value of an employee to the organization. Such an employee ceases to develop professionally and advance, even though his work performance has not yet shown a downward trend. There are at least five ways to counteract the effects of the plateau syndrome:

- the organisation may create opportunities different from promotion to recover employee's self-esteem,
- the assignment of brand new responsibilities,
- the introduction of competition elements,
- the shift to an equivalent position that requires slightly different competencies,
- the increased interest in the tasks delegated by the organisation may be induced by exposing their importance for the organisation general objectives.

An important role in diagnosing and overcoming the plateau syndrome is played by direct superiors through:

- helping people understand the need for continuous education and raising awareness of the benefits an individual receives,
- assisting in identifying potential opportunities, strengths and weaknesses of employees and their objective assessment,
- assisting in preparing a personal career plan, i.e. an individual career path
- informing about development opportunities in the company,
- constant stimulation of self-actualisation need through a variety of HR management tools (e.g. creation of back-up personnel, the use of succession plans, preparation of circulation plans), forms of training (e.g. mentoring, coaching) and tools from the wages sphere.

For contemporary organisations it is particularly important, valuable, to have people with talentship, and therefore desirable professional skills that lead to the achievement of results consistent with the strategic projects. From the organisation perspective people with professional specialisations are also important, creating a value required for the company to succeed /critical talent/. Meanwhile, people with these characteristics are particularly susceptible to decreased satisfaction with working conditions and volatility. The prospect of development, self-actualisation, tasks which pose challenges are dominant in the hierarchy of needs of these employees. Interest in their professional development on the part of the employer is perceived as a sign of appreciation for their potential and confidence in them<sup>11</sup>. Obtaining their high engagement, and therefore efficiency, identification with the company and stability, requires the use of special solutions in the organisation — development programs dedicated to the exceptionally talented employees with high potential.

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Стаття надійшла до редакції 20.08.2014 р.

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