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THE IMPORTANCE OF WORK-LIFE BALANCE

ZNACZENIE RÓWNOWAGI MIĘDZY PRACĄ A ŻYCIEM PRYWATNYM

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Streszczenie. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie znaczenia równowagi między życiem zawodowym a prywatnym. W artykule zdefiniowano równowagę między pracą a życiem osobistym oraz przedstawiono konsekwencje jej ewentualnego braku. Ponadto podano definicje konfliktu występującego między pracą a życiem prywatnym oraz opisano jego trzy główne formy. W artykule scharakteryzowano również politykę przyjazną rodzinie, przy czym szczególną uwagę poświęcono elastycznym formom zatrudnienia. Uzupełnieniem artykułu jest przedstawienie programów niezbędnych do osiągnięcia równowagi między pracą a życiem osobistym wdrażanych w polskich firmach oraz charakterystyka strategii potrzebnych do osiągnięcia równowagi między tymi dwiema sferami.

Key words: family-friendly policies, flexible work arrangements, work-family conflict, work-life balance.
Słowa kluczowe: elastyczne formy zatrudnienia, konflikt między pracą a rodziną, polityka przyjazna rodzinie, równowaga między pracą a życiem osobistym.

INTRODUCTION

The process of globalization has drastically changed the lives of working people. Nowadays, employees face many pressures in their jobs. First of all, they have to work more hours during the day than once or in distant locations. Meanwhile, excessively long hours can have a number of detrimental effects such as reduced quality of work and a higher rate of errors, reduced efficiency, increased levels of sickness absence, increased job-related tension and high turnover of staff (Thompson et al. 2008). What is more, employees very often have to handle bigger workload, postpone their holidays and acquire new skills in order to keep their jobs. Maintaining a balance between work and private life is becoming much more difficult. That is why employers should support employees in achieving work-life balance.

One method of facilitating work-life balance is to offer family-friendly policies that can be divided into four categories: compressed workweeks, flexible work arrangements, family leave policies and employee assistance programs. Policies that support the balance between work and private life are not only beneficial to the individual but also to the organization. There are many benefits of good work-life balance to employees such as ability to control work, improved balance of work and family life and multiple psychological benefits. Benefits of work-life balance to the organization include reduced absenteeism and sickness, improved productivity, increased employees' engagement, loyalty, motivation and commitment to the organization.

The aim of the article is to present the importance of maintaining an equilibrium between work and family life.

WORK-LIFE BALANCE DEFINITIONS

There are many definitions of the term work-life balance. Clark (2001), for example, defines work-life balance as "satisfaction and good functioning at work and at home with a minimum of role conflict", while Greenblatt (2002) characterizes work-life balance by "the absence of unacceptable levels of conflict between work and non-work demands". Work-life balance may be also defined as follows: "work-life balance is about being able to achieve a balance between working life and life away from work that is acceptable to the individual, a balance which allows the successful fulfilment of potential in both domains with minimal stress" (Waumsley et al. 2005). According to Jyothi and Jyothi (2012) work-life balance is the term used to describe "practices in achieving a balance between the demands of employees' family (life) and work lives". What is more, work-life balance is about adjusting work patterns to achieve overall fulfilment. A good work-life balance enables the business to thrive and at the same time enables the employees to easily combine work with other aspirations and responsibilities. Work-life balance can be also defined as "being aware of different demands on time and energy, having the ability to make choices in the allocation of time and energy, knowing what values to apply to choices, and making choices" (Raju 2012).

DEFINING WORK-FAMILY CONFLICT

Work-family conflict is defined as a type of inter-role conflict in which performance of one role (e.g. work) makes it difficult to perform the other role (e.g. family). Work-family conflict has been further divided into work-to-family conflict and family-to-work conflict. Work-to-family conflict occurs when a person's career interferes with his/her family life (e.g. a manager who is required to attend a late meeting at the office and as a result misses his son's violin recital). Family-to-work conflict occurs when family life interferes with work life (for example a manager who goes to work too tired to focus because he spent the night awake with his sick child) (Warner and Hausdorf 2009). There are three major forms of work-family conflict (Mitchelson 2009, Jyothi and Jyothi 2012):

– Time-based conflict – occurs when time devoted to one role makes it difficult to fulfil the requirements of another role.
– Strain-based conflict – occurs when stress experienced in one role is transferred to another role; it usually occurs when the demands from one domain cause tension, anxiety or fatigue for the employee thereby reducing his/her personal resources of energy and physical and mental capacity.
– Behaviour-based conflict – occurs when there is incompatibility between the behaviour patterns that are desirable in the two domains and the employee is unable to adjust his/her behaviour when moving from one domain to another; in other words, it occurs when a behaviour developed in one domain interferes with the role performance in another domain.

In my view, increased work-family conflict has negative impact on physical health and well-being. What is more, increased work-family conflict is related to greater distress, depression, fatigue, nervous tension, anxiety and mood disorders. Work-family conflict can also translate

into alcohol abuse and fatty food consumption. Finally, additional consequences of an increase in work-family conflict can be lower job and family satisfaction. In general, conflict between work and family may decrease organizational commitment and increase burnout. The consequences of the lack of balance between work and private life are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. The consequences of work-family conflict

For societies at the macro level (national, regional, etc.)	For organizations	For employees, as well as for unemployed and their families
– decreasing number of births – postponing the birth of a first child – increasing number of divorces – increasing number of single-parent families – growing social inequalities – unemployment – increasing incidence of heart disease and cancer – inadequate care of children and the elderly	– absenteeism – an increase in fluctuations – less commitment to work – stress – lower concentration at work – poor quality of work – lower productivity – poorer relationships with the customers – less creativity and innovation	– stress – conflicts in the family – worse childcare – divorce – alcoholism – drug addiction – nicotine addiction – appetite disorder – insecurity at work and family

Source: Borkowska 2010, p. 17.

FAMILY-FRIENDLY POLICIES

Family-friendly policies are broadly construed as a group of complementary benefits and programs designed to support employees who are faced with balancing the conflicting demands of work, family and personal time in today's complex environment. In general, increased demand for family-friendly policies has been regarded as a practical response to the increasing number of women in the workforce. These family-friendly policies are formulated and implemented because they benefit both employers and employees – Table 2. In terms of employees' needs, the underlying purpose of the programs is to offer employees flexibility in time at work, place of work and leave options (Lee and Hong 2011).

Table 2. Benefits of family-friendly policies to the organization and employees

Benefits to the organization	Benefits to employees
– reduced absenteeism and sickness – increased employees' engagement, loyalty, motivation, and commitment to the organization – improved productivity resulting from using time efficiently – supports recruitment and retention – increased ability to attract new employees – extended hours of operation for departments such as customer service – develops image as an employer of choice with family friendly policies	– reduced absenteeism and sickness – increased motivation and wellbeing – increased energy and creativity – improved job satisfaction, morale, and productivity – improved balance of work and family life – increased feeling of personal control over schedule and work environment – flexibility to meet family needs and personal obligations – reduced anxiety, stress, and burn out due to overload – increased energy, happiness, passion, and enjoyment – avoids traffic and the stress of commuting during rush hours – reduced consumption of employee commuting time and fuel costs – better concentration – improved focus because of preferred working times – improved focus because employees work in quieter environments (at home)

Source: own elaboration.

Nowadays, there is an increasing tendency for organizations to implement family-friendly policies to improve productivity by reducing turnover and absenteeism. Family-friendly policies can be defined as any working conditions that organizations offer their employees to help them balance work and personal lives. It can be a good business practice not only in building loyalty but also in promoting job satisfaction among employees. It is believed that employees who have access to family friendly policies show greater organizational commitment and express lower intention to quit their jobs. What is more, employees have more positive attitudes toward an organization that is perceived as treating employees fairly. Family-friendly programs are related to job satisfaction and the mental well-being of employees (Bilal et al. 2010).

According to British researchers, there is a high level of support for work-life balance amongst employers (Woodland et al. 2003). More than nine in ten employers (94%) were of the view that people work best when they can strike a better balance between work and the rest of their lives. What is more, the majority of employers agreed that everyone should be able to balance their work and home lives in the way they want (65%). A high proportion of employers reported a positive effect on their workplace performance from supporting working parents. Around three-quarters or more employers reported a positive effect on their employee relations (79%), labour turnover (73%) and employee motivation and commitment (72%) – Figure 1.
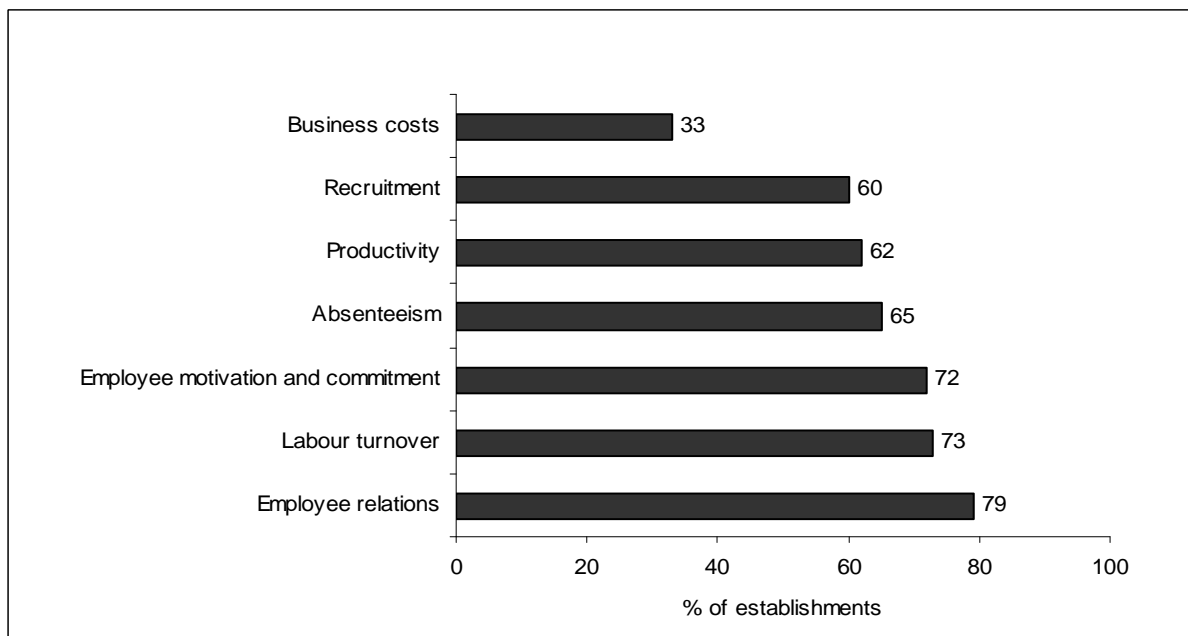

Fig. 1. Positive impact of support facilities for working parents on workplace performance – Figures are weighted and based on responses from 208 managers (in %)
Source: Woodland et al. 2003, p. 192.

Figure 2 presents selected benefits from providing work-life balance practices. The most often reported benefit was a "happier staff / workforce" with just under a third (29%) mentioning this. Other benefits included, for instance, positive effects on the retention of staff (13%), higher levels of staff motivation (10%), and higher flexibility of staff (9%).
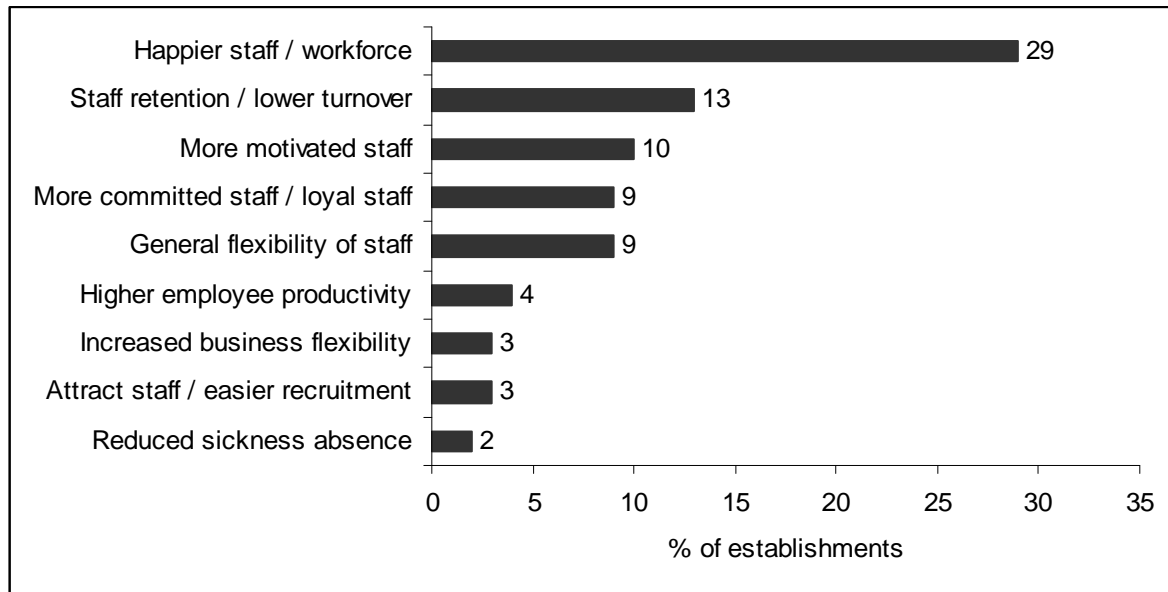
Fig. 2. Benefits from having work-life balance practices – Figures are weighted and based on responses from 1507 managers (in %)
Source: Woodland et al. 2003, p. 245.

Family-friendly policies can be divided into four categories: compressed workweeks, flexible work arrangements, family leave policies and employee assistance programs (Bilal et al. 2010).

Compressed workweeks. A compressed workweek is an arrangement according to which employees work the standard number of hours in a one or two week period, but compress those hours into fewer workdays thereby staying longer hours at work. This solution is suitable for employees sharing the same position or do not need to deal with incoming work on a daily basis.

Flexible work arrangements. Flexible work arrangements take many forms such as flexitime, telecommuting, part-time work, job sharing and special summer or holiday work hours (Smith 2010).

Flexitime. Under flexitime there is typically a core period of the day when employees must be at work, while the rest of the working day is "flexible time" in which employees can choose when they work. The employees may be expected to work a certain number of hours daily or weekly or may be required to realize a specific task. In other words, flexitime allows employees to choose, within certain set limits, when to begin and end work. Table 3 describes individual challenges associated with using flexitime, whereas Table 4 describes general challenges.

Telecommuting. Telecommuting, often referred to as teleworking, is a flexible work arrangement in which employees can work from locations other than the office. A person who telecommutes is known as a "telecommuter", "teleworker", and sometimes as a "work-at-home" employee. Many telecommuters work from home, while others use mobile telecommunications technology to work from coffee shops or other locations.

Part-time work. A part-time work is a form of employment that carries fewer hours per week than a full-time job. A part-time worker is someone who works fewer hours than a full-time worker. There are many reasons for working part-time. In general, part-time workers are unable to find full-time job.

Table 3. Individual challenges associated with using flexitime

Subthemes	Associated meaning or explanation
Having to maintain productivity or performance	– maintaining productivity whilst using flexitime – achieving deadlines and outputs – maintaining performance or productivity equal to those who work regular hours and do not use flexitime – not being able to compare or compete with the productivity of those who do not use flexitime
Disengaging from work	– having difficulty disengaging mentally from work when participating in non-work activities – constantly working – working longer and more hours
Infrastructure of alternative work locations	– a lack of critical resources at home (like no connectivity) – an unsupportive work environment at home (like difficulty in working with children present)
Managing and maintaining balance between personal life and work	– finding it difficult to balance children with work or career responsibilities – mothers who want to be at home and pursue a career – maintaining or pursuing personal life and career goals
Time management	– employees struggle to plan, juggle and meet work and non-work demands and responsibilities successfully when they are participating in both domains at the same time

Source: Downes, Koekemoer 2011, p. 7.

Table 4. General challenges associated with using flexitime

Subthemes	Associated meaning or explanation
Inconsistent understanding or knowledge of flexitime	– poor communication and information on what is meant by flexitime in the organization – unclear information about how employees should use flexitime – unclear information about who qualifies for flexitime – poor and inconsistent information about managing employees' flexitime – misconceptions and misunderstandings about employees' use of flexitime
Possible misuse of flexitime	– no disciplinary procedure for employees who abuse or misuse flexitime – misuse of flexitime because of employees' poor discipline – perceptions that junior staff tent to misuse flexitime
Managing perceptions	– assumptions or beliefs that one must be seen working to be working – misconceptions about who should use flexitime (there is a perception that only women with children should use flexitime)
Unstructured and informal policies	– an unstructured and informal policy makes it difficult to monitor and control how some employees use it
Managing the productivity or outputs of employees	– controlling and managing employees' productivity when they are not at their desks or in the office – difficulties about knowing whether employees are working or not – controlling teams and team productivity – trust in employees' commitment when they are not present
Availability of employees	– infrequent access to employees – expectations of face-to-face availability – employees not always available for urgent matters – non-availability of employees for consultation with clients
Ineffective communication between employees	– poor and inconsistent communication between managers, employees and colleagues – employees not always present or contactable to discuss working schedules – location and task progress or completion
Differences in the nature of work	– departments and positions with specific expectations and requirements for face-to-face availability limit employees' ability to work from home or alternative locations

Source: Downes and Koekemoer 2011, p. 7.

Job sharing. An innovative method of work arrangement is job sharing. This is a form of part-time working where usually two people are retained on a part-time or reduced-time basis to perform a job normally fulfilled by one person working full-time. There are some advantages and disadvantages of job sharing. Working with this method enables employees to manage their time and catch up with all their responsibilities by making a good plan. What is more, this method enables employees to know their jobs better because they have the opportunity to gain

knowledge from their partner. There is a wide range of skills, experiences, opinions and viewpoints in a job at the same time. Applying job sharing, it is possible to keep the process of a job while an employee is sick or on holiday. Moreover, this method brings down stress and sickness absence rates, as well as improves employees' commitment to the organization and boosts employee retention rates. Despite many advantages, there are also some disadvantages of job sharing such as high expenses, hardship of managing and coordinating people, expecting job sharing in all occupations and ambiguity in taking responsibility (Gholipour et al. 2010).

Special summer or holiday work hours. Summer or holiday hours are different from the normal work schedule.

Family leave policies. Employees are able to be away from the workplace for some time in order to deal with family duties such as caring for a newborn baby or newly adopted child, an ill child, spouse or parent, and for oneself in the event of serious illness.

Employee assistance programs. Employee assistance programs (EAPs) are employee benefit programs offered by many organizations. EAPs are intended to help employees deal with personal problems that might negatively impact their job performance, health and well-being. EAPs usually include short-term counselling not only for employees but also for their family members. The typical examples of EAPs included providing assistance in the areas of personal issues, childcare, eldercare, alcohol or drug abuse, harassment, stress and family violence. Some organizations also offer other services including lay-off or retirement assistance, fitness, wellness and health programs. Employee assistance programs can help employees in managing stress and resolving individual problems. There are many examples of family-friendly policies implemented in Poland – Table 5.

Table 5. Examples of family-friendly policies implemented in Poland

The company	Actions taken
Dr Irena Eris	task work time for pregnant women and on maternity leave
Xerox Polska	the ability to use a fitness club for pregnant women and young mothers, and creation of a special supplement to the company's quarterly "Xerox Mother"
IBM Polska	support for young mothers in integrating with the working environment after returning from maternity/parental leave through program "We'll be in touch" – prepared specifically for this purpose
Masterfoods Polska	introduction of flexible work arrangements to reconcile the roles of mother and worker (one day a week work from home – when there is a character position)

Source: Mazur-Wierzbicka 2012, p. 150.

STRATEGIES TO ACHIEVE WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Maintaining balance between work and family life is always a challenge for working people. According to Edralin (2013), in order to harmonize work-life demands, the following strategies should be adopted: stress management, time management, support from spouse and family, social network, work structure and assertive communication.

Stress management. Stress is a normal part of life. Stress is sometimes good. It can motivate you and help you become more productive. However, too much stress or a strong response to stress can be harmful. How we perceive a stress-provoking event and how we react to it determines its impact on our health. We may be motivated and invigorated by the events in our

lives, or we may see some as "stressful" and respond in a manner that may have a negative effect on our physical, mental and social well-being. If we always respond in a negative way, our health and happiness may suffer. By understanding ourselves and our reaction to stress-provoking situations, we can learn to handle stress more effectively. In the most accurate meaning, stress management is not about learning how to avoid or escape the pressures and turbulence of modern living; it is about learning to appreciate how the body reacts to these pressures, and about learning how to develop skills which enhance the body's adjustment. To learn stress management is to learn about the mind-body connection and the degree to which we can control our health in a positive sense (Klinic Community Health Centre 2010).

Stress management interventions are activities/programs being put into practice by organizations to reduce the existence of job stressors or help individuals in minimizing the negative outcomes resulting from being in contact with such stressors. Stress can be avoided within the organizations before it causes such damages like absenteeism, turnover, accidents, injuries and other hidden costs (including negative PR, employee relations disputes, insurance premiums) through the agency of putting into practice four broad themes of behaviour that are important for managers which are as follows: respect and responsibility, managing and communicating existing and future work, managing the individual within the team, reasoning/managing difficult situations (Matin et al. 2014). Stress management refers to many techniques and psychotherapies aimed at controlling a person's level of stress. Dealing with stress can take many forms of relaxation activities such as spending time in nature, listening to certain types of relaxing music, watching movies, engaging in a hobby, having a massage and practicing yoga.

Time management. Time management is the process of planning the amount of time spent on specific activities in order to increase efficiency, effectiveness or productivity. You can improve your time management skills by using a range of tools and techniques used to accomplish specific tasks, projects and goals. People who practice good time management techniques often find that they are more productive, have more energy for things they need to accomplish, feel less stressed, are able to do the things they want, relate more positively to others, and feel better about themselves (Chapman and Rupured 2008).

Support from spouse and family. It is extremely important to receive support from family members in terms of taking care of the children or offering mental support. Especially the spouse should share the family responsibilities and should provide the essential support required in handling any problems in the work and non-work domains.

Social network. A social network is used to describe a social structure determined by interactions between individuals, groups, organizations or even entire societies. People befriended through social networking can be the source of emotional strength and support. People use social networks to fulfil a variety of social needs including self-presentation and self-expression. As a result, using the social network can enhance self-esteem and positively affect well-being.

Work structure. Structuring work is organizing and delegating work in the most efficient and effective way. Efficient work structure can include job rotation, job enrichment, job enlargement, teamwork and flexible work schedules.

Assertive communication. Assertiveness is defined as a person's general tendency to be interpersonally dominant, ascendant and forceful (Schullery 1999). Assertive communication is

the straightforward expression of your thoughts, needs and feelings. It is important to communicate with family members on a regular basis. Tell them what you expect from them and celebrate your success with them.

CONCLUSIONS

There are many definitions of work-life balance. In general, work-life balance is a state of equilibrium achieved between employees' primary priorities of their employment position and their private lifestyles. Undoubtedly the term work-life balance has become increasingly important over the past years. Conflict occurs when there is no balance between work and family. Work-family conflict can be defined as an inter-role conflict, a conflict between work and family. Work-family conflict is associated with employee burnout due to overload, substance abuse or mental health issues. Moreover, work-family conflict has a detrimental effect on productivity, job satisfaction, absenteeism and organizational commitments.

Organizations should create a work environment that advocates the combination of work and private life. Nowadays work-life balance ought to be an important part of corporate social responsibility. Healthy work-life balance results in improved quality of work, increased productivity, increased commitment to the organization and reduced absenteeism. What is more, healthy work-life balance is related to job satisfaction and the mental well-being of employees. Employers should offer a variety of family friendly policies to help employees in managing work and family demands. Family-friendly policies provide employees with a better ability to balance work and non-work responsibilities. Policies that support the balance of work and life are not only beneficial to the employees, but to the organization as well. By implementing family--friendly policies and practices organizations are able to retain quality people who can make valuable contributions to their company and the society.

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