

Labor security as a life quality factor

Bezpieczeństwo pracy jako czynnik jakości życia

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Key words: employment structure, flexible labor market, labor security

Abstract

The article presents the factors affecting labor security in terms of the quality of life. Author's own study results were presented, over the perception of changes at work, occurring as a result of the emergence of information society as well as their effects on labor security and the quality of life.

Słowa kluczowe: struktura zatrudnienia, elastyczny rynek pracy, pewność zatrudnienia

Abstrakt

W artykule przedstawiono czynniki wpływające na bezpieczeństwo pracy w kontekście jakości życia. Zaprezentowano wyniki badań własnych nad postrzeganiem zmian w obszarze pracy zachodzących pod wpływem wyłaniającego się społeczeństwa informacyjnego oraz ich skutków dla bezpieczeństwa pracy i jakości życia.

Introduction

The safety is one of the natural needs of a human being. In A. Maslow's classical hierarchy of needs, the need for safety is just after physiological needs and is the most important value in terms of securing stability (in all aspects of life), which makes it the necessary condition not only for survival, but also for the development of a human being. A modern view of safety includes, apart from traditional values, the quality of life consisting of the standard of living, the level of socio-economic development, the rights and freedoms, cultural system, "national way of life", the natural environment, the opportunities and perspectives for further development [1].

The safety is an integral factor in the quality of life, just as work associated with employment, which provides economic base for existence and development. In the modern society, described as a "risk society" [3], numerous new threat sources have emerged, as a result of the dynamically developing technology, used in all areas of human activity. In the past, safety was usually associated

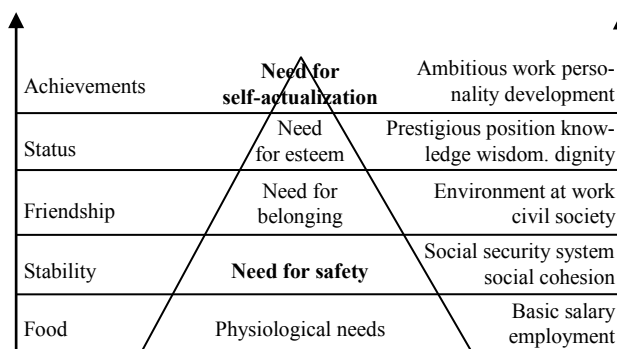


Fig. 1. A diagram of the pyramid of needs by Maslow, in an interdisciplinary view [2]

Rys. 1. Schemat piramidy potrzeb wg Maslowa w ujęciu interdyscyplinarnym [2]

with military threats. Nowadays, the list of threats has grown by previously unknown threats, e.g. the ones related to the emergence of information society and its effects, globalization of economy, environmental degradation caused by the dynamics of technological processes and unwise human behavior.

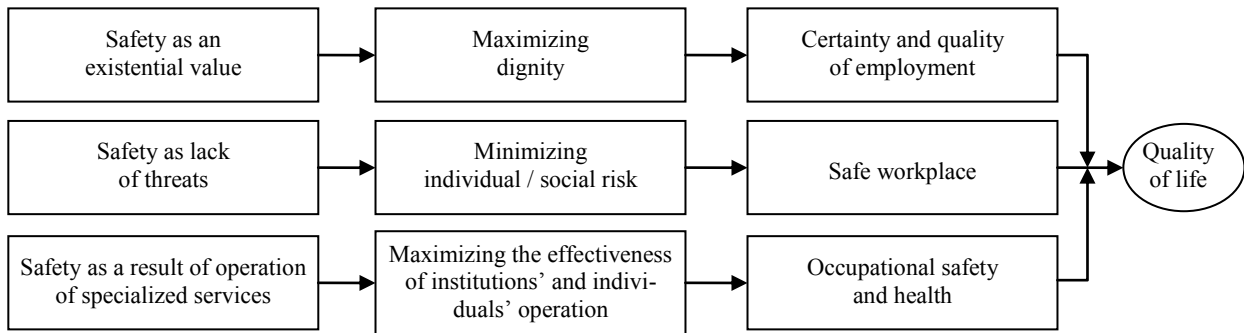


Fig. 2. Level of value aspiration depending on the safety definition

Rys. 2. Poziom aspiracji wartości zabezpieczanych w zależności od zdefiniowanego bezpieczeństwa

The category of safety, just as the category of the quality of life, is interdisciplinary, since they both regard numerous areas of human activity and can be examined on various levels: from an individual point of view to the global level of security and quality of life.

The significant interest in the problems of safety is evidenced by the development of education in this area. The issues of safety and ecological education are raised in primary schools and high schools, many new faculties were also formed in advanced studies over security: national, internal, workplace safety, etc. This expresses the will to restrain the increasingly unpredictable institutional – and social – environment.

Quality of life

The effects of the modernization of the society, mainly as a result of the progress made in IT, which is a technology of processing and transferring data, caused the turn of attention towards the study over

the quality of life. The notion of quality of life changed along with the development of civilization, which brought about prosperity to the society [4].

Various models of research over the quality of life exist in science and in practice. Depending on the adopted research model and on the area, in which the analysis is being made, research categories may include: living conditions, standard of living, quality of life, dignity of life (Table 1).

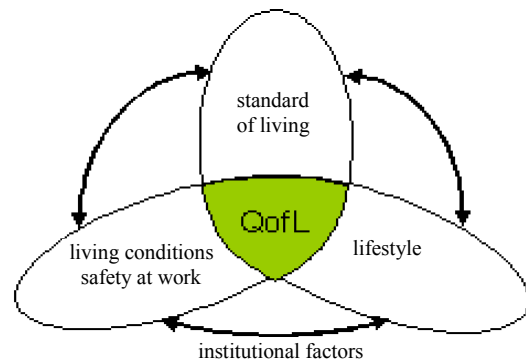


Fig. 3. A model of life's quality, taking into account the non-economic factors of life's quality [5]

Rys. 3. Model jakości życia uwzględniający pozaekonomiczne czynniki jakości życia [5]

Table 1. Research categories [4]

Tabela 1. Kategorie badawcze [4]

| Category | Category description |
|--------------------|--|
| Living conditions | – Material situation of households (financial situation, wealth, degree of meeting basic needs, use of social care); – nonmaterial aspects of life (health, professional situation, sense of social integration, ways of spending free time). |
| Standard of living | – Degree of meeting the needs resulting from consumption of human-made goods and services; – degree of satisfying material and cultural needs with the existing infrastructure allowing such satisfaction. |
| Quality of life | – All elements of human life, related to the fact of their existence, being somebody and experiencing various emotional states, related to e.g. the fact of having a family, colleagues, friends. |
| Dignity of life | – Lack of sense of deprivation, which could result from negative aspects of the population's life in the changing economic reality. |

The quality of life is influenced by social and physical environment, which includes economic system, information system, legal system, etc. Enhancing the notion of the quality of life beyond elementary needs gives it new meaning, due to assigning value to (Fig. 3):

- standard of living in terms of basic needs, e.g. income, education, etc.;
- living conditions in the environment, including the quality of functioning of security systems, information systems, health care, occupational safety and health, etc.;
- lifestyle, understood as the influence of ICT technology on education, changes in behavior, social communication, use of cultural heritage, security, etc.

Labor security

The transformation of patterns and work can be observed, along with a restructuring of employment caused by the dynamic development in ICT. This has an impact on the durability of the social structure, which entails individualization of work and social fragmentation.

The technological change reshapes the structure of employment. Information and communication technologies (ICT) caused the expansion of services sector related to transferring and storing information, which resulted in an increase of employment within this sector. At present, in the highly-industrialized countries, including Poland, over 50 per cent of the society works in the services sector, nearly half of which operates in the information sector. In traditional areas of industry, technology entailed improvements in the form of automated integration of information processing and warehousing. This, of course, has an impact on workplace security and is expressed by greater attention, in terms of safer high-quality tools, proper workplace and legal regulations.

However, the use of technology calls for continuous improvement of skills. The policy of building an economy based on knowledge imposes the requirement on the society to educate itself in areas related to hi-tech activity. ICT caused a reduction in costs and in the worktime, storing, processing and transferring information [6]. This resulted in the reshaping of work, qualifications, organizational structures in companies. This, in turn, translates into changes in the labor market and in the society. New demands on workers call for initiative, flexibility, confidence, dutifulness, anticipation and exploitation of opportunities. The dynamics of the changes provokes anxiety regarding labor security, the essence of work, useless skills and the relations between life and work. ICT technologies stimulate the creation of flexible forms of labor, e.g. various form of teleworking. Using new forms of work requires appropriate legal standards in order to secure the employment, the worktime, social care and workplace safety. The transformation of work and labor division end up in a crisis and several debates were held over the influence those factors have on the quality of life.

The essence of the changes in the working environment is not only to secure the employment, but also guarantee its safety. The area of a safe workplace is the subject of interest for the occupational safety and health (OSH) management system. More and more often, as a result of the increasing consciousness, it is thought of as equally important as

quality management. In Poland, the requirements regarding OSH management system were formulated in the standard PN-N18001:2004 *OSH management systems*.

Modern dimensions of labor security

The changing economy needs flexible and adaptive forms of labor. The necessity for a flexible labor market in the projected European employment strategy, whose echo can be found in the Polish strategy Poland 2030, is based on the model of flexible labor security (flexicurity) – table 2. It is the answer to the employers' postulates for more flexibility and the employees' and the society's demand for greater security. Such security is expressed not with the certainty of keeping the present job, but with the easiness of finding another. Complementary to such understanding of labor security should be an enhanced system of continual education and an efficient social care system.

Table 2. Modern dimensions of labor security [7]

Tabela 2. Współczesne wymiary bezpieczeństwa [7]

| Flexicurity | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| Outside numerical flexibility | Staffing adjustment – interim agreements |
| Inside numerical flexibility | Adjusting working hours and worktime accounting |
| Inside functional flexibility | Multitask jobs, position rotation, based on the employees' skills |
| Financial flexibility | Wages depend on performance |
| Security | |
| Occupation security | Employment security. Limited exemption opportunities |
| Employment security | Increasing the chances for employment due education and training |
| Income security | Supported income Turing unemployment periods |
| Combination security | Possibility of combining work with other activities, e.g. family life |

It can be assumed that the progress of flexibility and labor security in the information society and knowledge-based economy, will cause disruptions in the patterns of work and family life. The change in the relation between the patterns of work and life blurs the boundaries between work and leisure. Aspiration to reconcile the requirements of work and family life entails one of the major contemporary dilemmas. Anxiety over affecting the balance between these values leads to the feeling of insecurity.

A research conducted at the National Defense University (AON) that had explorative goals, attempted at analyzing the influence of a complex subject, namely the information society, internet

and the phenomena brought on by its development, on the perception of the phenomena accompanying them. The research group consisted of students (481 people in the years 2007/2008), persons that might be referred to as citizens of the emerging information society. According to the assumption they were all people with good access to the internet, its active users, contributing to its resources and representing the avant-garde of the social changes. It was assumed that this set of characteristics is shared by the students of National Defense University, Warsaw School of Computer Science and Warsaw School of Information Technology. The survey included questions that are popular in the discussions over information society's development and its social, economic and political consequences (in terms of opportunities, threats and challenges). The study, conducted in the years 2007/2008, served as comparative material (part A) which double-checks the results of the study over the consequences of the development of information society, conducted in the years 2003/2004. In areas that were especially interesting due to their social dimension, comparisons were made with the use of sets of questions developed by prof. A. Siciński and J. Lubacz [8].

The question was: will the distinguished characteristic increase, decrease, or is it hard to tell, a result of the development of an information society?

It must be highlighted, that the social consciousness of the nature of the occurring changes is perceived as increasing by 51% of the examined, they also point out the growing competition between people (85%). 61% of the examined noticed the tendency to spend more and more time working. 75% of the examined pointed at the role of work in shaping the way of life, although, in the assessment of satisfaction from work, there has been no significant difference between those who thought it will increase (35%) and those who thought it will decrease (32%). 27% had no opinion.

While rating the predictors related to the quality of work and concerning the humanization of work, they have been perceived as increasing by 41%, as decreasing by 32% and 21% gave no assessment. A similar distribution was observed in the trend of the worker's subjectivity. 37% claim that the tendency will rise, 30% that it will fall and 33% said it was difficult to say. The research was conducted during a period of economic growth and decreasing unemployment, and hence a high optimism index. This is the reason why structural unemployment is perceived by 42% as falling, by 33% as rising and 25% had no opinion (Table 3).

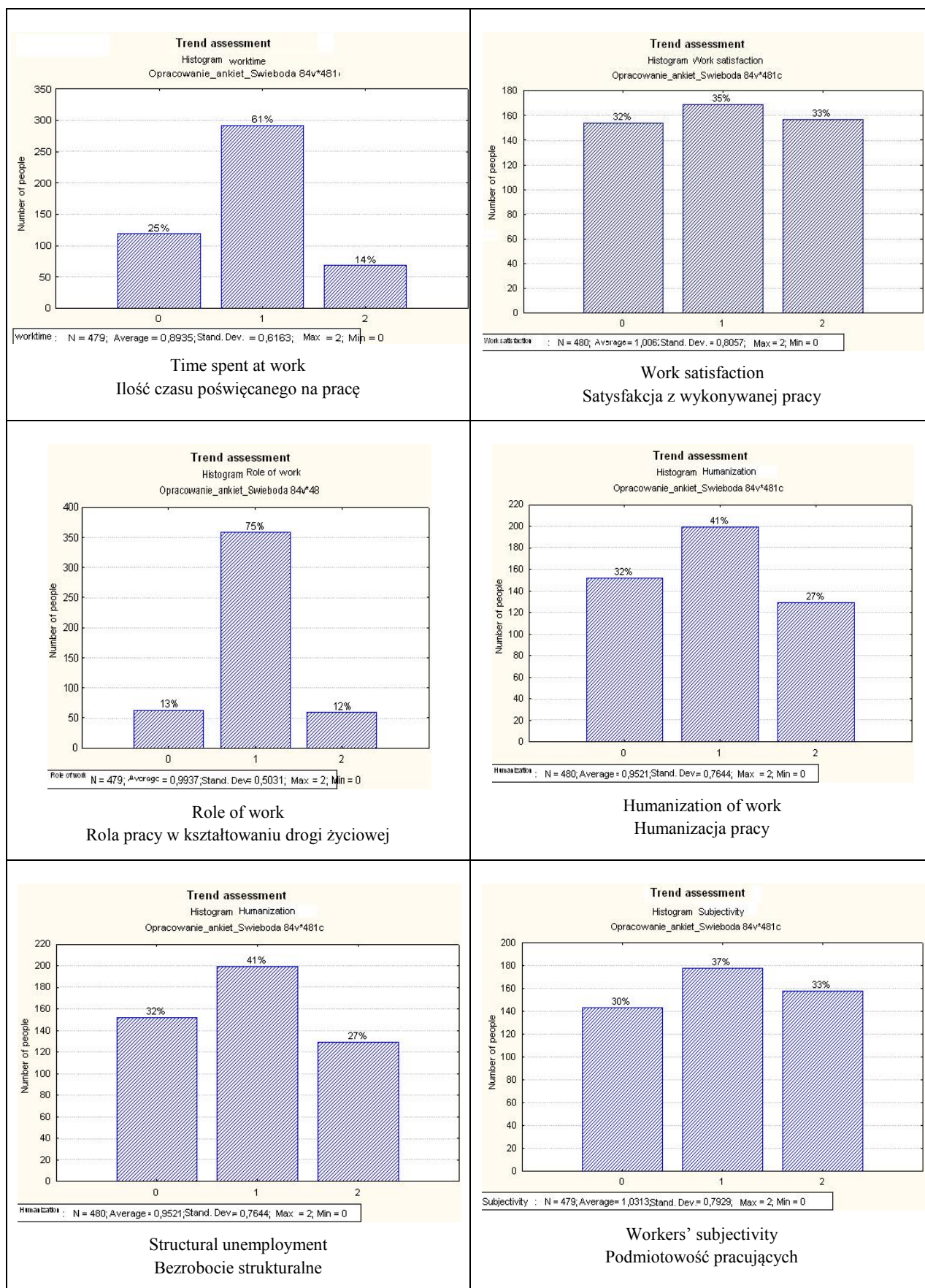
The financial equivalent of work is one of the primary needs, as it helps cover the basic existence-related needs. Therefore, most of the enhanced studies over the quality of life base on an analysis of the indicators relating to income, financial situation, money. Moreover, professional activity, unemployment, the differentiation of various types of contract and many new forms, mobility and professional training are also taken into account. In the 2007 study, according to J. Czapiński's [9] happiness theory, satisfaction with financial situation and the family income has improved. According to many happiness theories, bad living conditions, e.g. low income makes it impossible to fully satisfy one's basic needs. The results obtained with Czapiński's onion happiness theory confirm both that prosperity being has an impact on changes in individual income and that these changes have an impact on prosperity, but the dependence of income on prosperity is stronger than the inversed dependence from prosperity among more wealthy people. Among poor people, the impact of income on prosperity is stronger than the other way around.

However, this does not end the area of needs satisfied by work alone, since work-related needs are also expressed in the feeling of security resulting from certainty of employment, the environment, the quality and character of work (functionally safe), satisfaction and self-development opportunities. This can be identified with the quality of professional life, workplace equipment, and the possibility to extend one's qualifications, education, gaining new skills, which are so important in a knowledge-based economy.

The quality of life perceived, is influenced by the quality of interpersonal contacts at work as well as the general atmosphere, which corresponds to motivation for work, which in turn impacts the quality of work. Factors influencing the quality of work include individual factors (personal attitudes and needs, motivation), corresponding to the essence of work (awards, distinction, level of autonomy, self-development opportunities), diversity of tasks and factors associated with working environment and organization. Demotivating factors that cause dissatisfaction at work or lower its quality, are:

- material working conditions;
- threats to health or even life;
- pace of work unadjusted to the worker's capabilities;
- lack of friendly atmosphere at work;
- insufficient communication, or lack thereof;
- lack of participative management.

Table 3. A selection of study results
Tabela 3. Wybrane wyniki badań



One of the major issues in the quality of life is the sense of individual freedom, which in the age of ICT is expressed with the “freedom or security?” problem [10].

Conclusion

The labor security in terms of the quality of life has many dimensions [11]. It is hard to answer it completely and satisfyingly in such a short article. The consequences of the changes in the labor market are visible and perceptible to the society, including young people – future employees. Great importance must be attached to work and to the phenomena related to it.

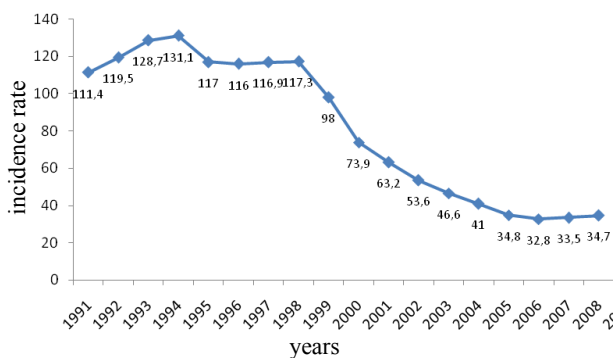


Fig. 4. Incidence rate of occupational diseases in Poland in the years 1991–2008 (per 100 000 employees) (own work based on data from [12])

Rys. 4. Współczynnik zachorowalności na choroby zawodowe w Polsce w latach 1991–2008 (na 100 tys. zatrudnionych) (oprac. własne na podstawie [12])

Working conditions are significantly improved, as evidenced with a decreasing number of accidents (Fig. 4). This proves not only that we have more

and more safe occupations, but also that social consciousness is increasing along with knowledge of threats and safe behavior in normal and in critical situations. This has a clear impact on the quality of life.

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