

WORK SAFETY AMONG OBJECTIVES AND EXPECTATIONS OF EMPLOYEES AS ASSESSED BY EMPLOYEES OF SELECTED PRODUCTION COMPANIES

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Abstract: The main aim of the article is to define the importance of occupational safety and health for employees. The importance of work safety with the advent of the virus pandemic (COVID-19) has once again become a topic of conversation. The article identifies the conditions of health and safety in the group of employee objectives. For this purpose, a study among the employees of manufacturing companies was conducted. The research results showed the growing importance of occupational safety and health to employed people, which occurred to be even more important than a satisfactory salary, which could be influenced by the COVID-19 pandemic.


Keywords: employee expectations, occupational safety and health, stakeholders, work environment

JEL classification: J8, M5, M54

Introduction

In recent years, the benefits that can be achieved with a rational approach to security issues have started to be recognized. The published research results and reports on the economic aspects of occupational safety as well as thematic social campaigns, arousing increasingly more interest in the phenomenon of safety in

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a broad sense, undoubtedly contribute to this (Cieślarczyk, 2009). In order to constantly develop an organization, it is necessary to deeply involve the people employed in it.

Employees, like every group of stakeholders, have their goals and expectations, the satisfaction of which depends on their involvement in the company's operations and "attachment" to the employer (Brzeziński, 2015). The most important among employee expectations are generally financial benefits in the form of wages, job security or opportunities for development and promotion (Gołębiowski, 2001). They take into account the economic condition of the enterprise, as well as the situation on the labor market, which affects the demand for labor (Tomski & Vanyan, 2014). The lowest unemployment in 30 years means that employees have ever higher expectations of the employer, and the current coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic may cause employees to again start considering, it seems, occupational safety and health as one of the main goals and employee expectations. Among the expectations, the atmosphere at work is also important as it affects the comfort of work of the staff.

The aim of the article is to identify the position of safe and hygienic working conditions among employee goals and expectations and to assess their importance to the surveyed employees.

Literature review

Occupational safety and health should be based on the belief that the concern for one's own safety and the safety of employees is right and justified, both from the moral and economic point of view. The lack of effective protection ensuring occupational safety and health has a significant and detrimental impact on the economy. High economic costs related to health and safety issues inhibit economic growth and have adverse effects on the competitiveness of domestic enterprises. A significant part of these costs is also borne by social security systems, as well as public finances (Kowalik, 2009). Providing safe working conditions is one of the basic assumptions of the social and economic policy of the state, as it largely determines not only the appropriate quality of work, but also the quality of life outside work (Galwas-Grzeszkiewicz, 2018).

The development of civilization and the accompanying technological progress, which is manifested, among others, in a variety of human activities, causes increasingly more new unknown phenomena and threats to the environment, as well as the work environment. Hence, it is necessary to monitor the changes and conditions that take place in order to implement forms of influence appropriate to the situation. Safety is not given forever, nor is it a constant or unchanging phenomenon; on the contrary, it is subject to continuous changes conditioned by various factors (Liwo, 2010).

Working conditions include all the factors related to the performance of work. Depending on the type of business activity or services provided, the spectrum of harmfulness and nuisance occurring in the work environment is varied and of varying severity. From the point of view of the health of employees, working conditions are a very important issue; therefore, employers are obliged to provide them at a level

consistent with the applicable standards ([https://gis.gov.pl/...](https://gis.gov.pl/), 2020). The employer is obliged to ensure work safety as non-compliance with these regulations results in accidents at work and occupational diseases (Koradecka, 2008). In the scope of prevention in the field of occupational safety and health, one of the basic obligations of the employer is to use measures to prevent occupational diseases and other work-related diseases. The basic requirements for the protection of employees' health are set out in the Labor Code - the Act of June 26, 1974, as amended in section X "Health and safety at work", additionally in the executive acts to the above-mentioned law. Pursuant to the aforementioned regulations, the employer is responsible for protecting the health and life of employees by ensuring safe and hygienic working conditions with the appropriate use of technology achievements ([https://gis.gov.pl/...](https://gis.gov.pl/), 2020). The cited human/citizen rights, directly related to the quality of life, are, according to R. Wróblewski's opinion, values that determine the conditions for the duration and development of an individual because "the individual is the main point of reference for national security, and its safety is of key importance to him" (Wróblewski, 2017). Thus, it should not be surprising that ever more employers are interested in taking systematic actions to improve health and safety at work (Chodyński, 2018).

Anticipating threats in the area of OSH and taking pre-emptive steps to prevent accidents at work or industrial failures does not seem to be something new for enterprises, especially those that have an implemented occupational safety and health management system (Pęgło-Pacek, 2018). The behavioral aspects of safety, in turn, should be an integral part of occupational safety and health management (Reason, 2000).

Due to the key role of work safety in the organization, enterprises attach increasingly more importance to the activities performed in the workplace being optimized both in terms of efficiency and in terms of their safety. The expanding education in the field of occupational safety and health in addition to new technical and technological solutions are a prerequisite for increasing the level of safe conditions. This aspect mainly affects manufacturing companies since it is during the performance of manual work that the employee is most exposed to risk. The solutions introduced by enterprises are very diverse; from a series of training sessions to the publication of special company magazines (Stankiewicz & Sznajder, 2010). Despite the employers' obligation to fulfill certain tasks and incur financial expenses, safety is profitable since the company is exposed to various risks when employees perform their tasks in the face of threats to their health or life. This situation not only reduces the comfort of work of employed people, but as economic practice shows, it is economically unprofitable (Rzepecki, 2012).

The volatility of the economic reality with which we are dealing nowadays perpetuates the high rank of issues related to man and his work, including shaping working conditions (Pocztowski, 1998). It is pointed out ever more frequently that friendly and safe working conditions are conducive to achieving an increase in satisfaction with the work performed. As a consequence, it enables improvement of the results of broadly understood management in the enterprise. Hence, the issue of ensuring safe and hygienic working conditions for people who provide work, which

in some organizations is connected with the need to make changes in these conditions, is of particular importance (Cameron & Quinn, 2003).

Safe working conditions are not a reward for the employee for the work performed, but the right of each employee, which is regulated by Section X of the Labor Code; therefore, they may not be listed as leading employee expectations (Gołębiowski, 2001).

Improving the health and safety at work, and thus achieving higher levels, is favored, among others, by undertaking activities of an active nature, based on correct behavior and observations of workstations and the correctness of actions taken in connection with the shaping of individual material and non-material elements of working conditions. It becomes indispensable then for employees and employers to understand the need to raise the level of health and safety at work. An important prerequisite for permanent, and at the same time positive changes in the discussed scope, is the feeling of internal commitment, motivation and even passion to improve occupational safety and health by both of the above-mentioned groups of stakeholders (Cierniak-Emerych & Piwowski-Sulej, 2020). People operating in such conditions are fully aware of the importance of OSH for them and the organization itself. Nevertheless, if safe conditions were previously expected by them, satisfying them over a longer period of time may cause them to disappear from the cluster of current goals as a permanently satisfied need. The case of other expectations is similar. Financial benefits in the form of satisfactory wages, with their satisfaction, may shift – as A. Brzeziński claims - to the background (Brzeziński, 2015).

The occurring threat in the form of coronavirus (COVID-19) may cause concerns for one's own health, the risk of infecting children, and may result in increased requirements regarding working conditions that will not endanger their health. Employers forced to post employees to work remotely change their working environment and home conditions that limit the possibility of contamination. Remote work may therefore become another employee expectation from the point of view of occupational safety and health (aleBank.pl, 2020).

Methods

A survey was conducted in the spring of 2020 on a sample of 50 employees, selected at random from among employees of three production companies from the transmission sector, of various sizes, organizational and legal forms and business profiles. All the enterprises are located in the Silesian Voivodeship. A closed-ended questionnaire with suggested variants of answers was used.

The respondents constituted a group of people diversified in terms of age and professional experience. The sample was dominated by men (60%) and employees with several years of professional experience, and only 8% of the respondents stated the current employer as their first place of work. The age distribution of the employees is presented in Chart 1. The largest number of people was those aged between 31 and 40.

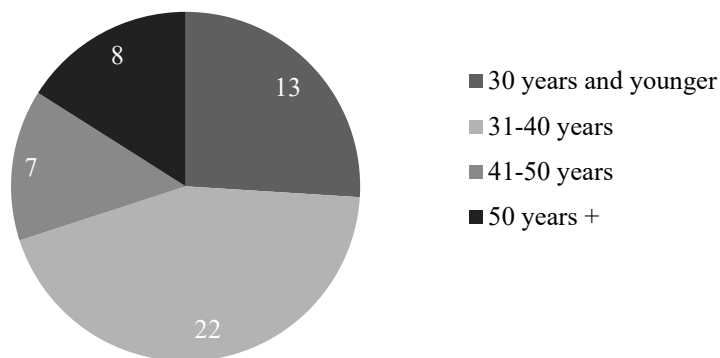


Figure 1. Age of surveyed employees

Source: Authors' own data based on conducted survey

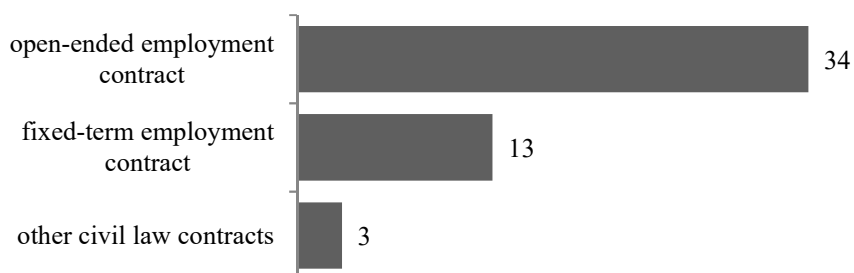


Figure 2. Forms of employment of surveyed employees

Source: Authors' own data based on conducted survey

94% of the respondents are employed on the basis of an employment contract. Among them, about 70% of employees have contracts for an indefinite period. Only 6% of the respondents are people employed under civil law contracts.

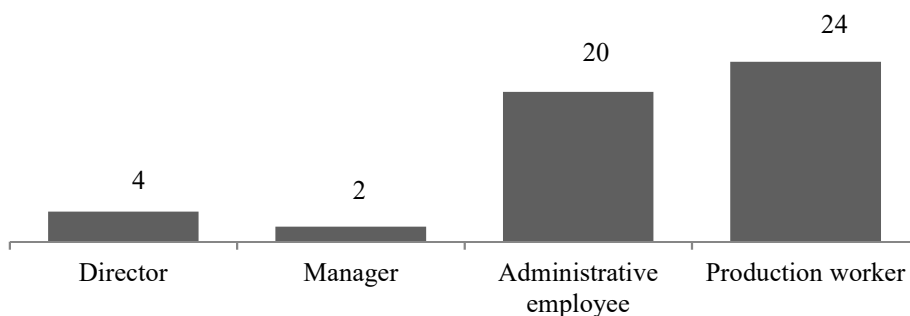


Figure 3. Employees by position held

Source: Authors' own data based on conducted survey

48% production workers and 40% administrative workers prevail among the respondents.

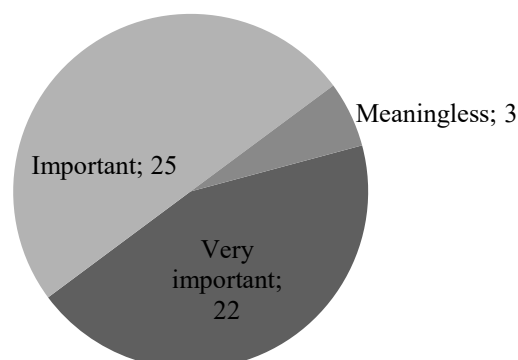


Figure 4. Safe and hygienic working conditions in set of employee expectations

Source: Authors' own data based on conducted survey

The detailed specifications of employee expectations are presented in Table 1. It was possible to choose more than one answer.

Table 1. Employee expectations

Employee expectations	Number of indications
Clear rules for promotion	8
Safe and hygienic working conditions	47
Training at employer's expense	18
Clear employee evaluation criteria	5
Satisfactory salary	36
Employment security	17
Work atmosphere	41
Organization of working time	2

Source: Own study based on the conducted research

For 94% of the respondents, safe and hygienic working conditions play an important or very important role. Furthermore, over 90% of the respondents do not agree to worse health and safety conditions in exchange for higher remuneration.

Among employee expectations, the second most frequently selected answer was the atmosphere at work. A satisfactory salary, training at the employer's expense and job security were ranked next.

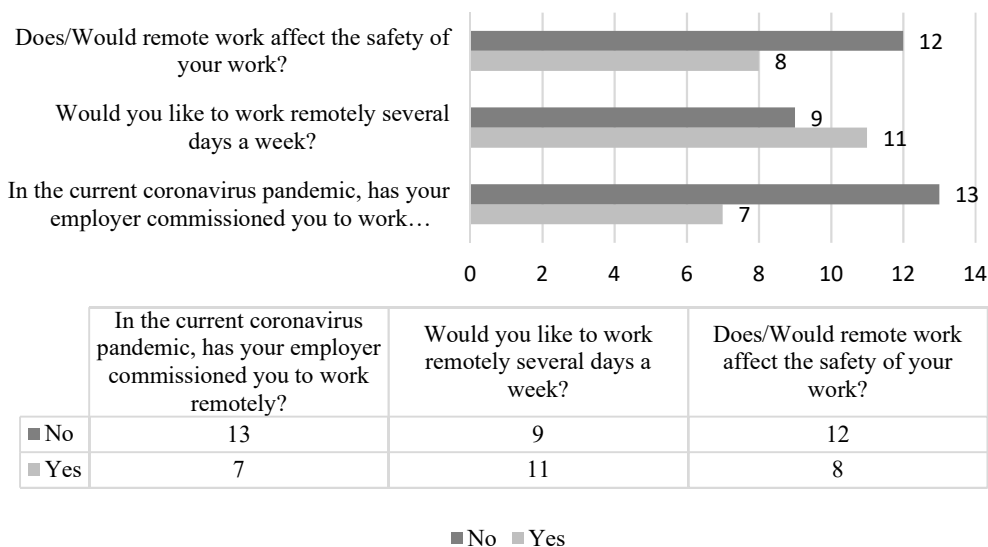


Figure 5. Possibility of remote work due to COVID-19

Source: Authors’ own data based on conducted survey

Among the respondents employed in administrative positions, research was carried out on remote work. 65% of the surveyed respondents did not receive an order to work remotely. The employees are divided as to the willingness to perform remote work and its impact on work efficiency. Nonetheless, 60% of the respondents believe that remote work does or would affect their safety at work.

Conclusions

To sum up, it can be stated that in fact we can talk about a change in the human approach to safety in relation to the situation in which it is found. With the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19), employees pay special attention to occupational safety and health, and there is no longer any sign of approval of higher wages in exchange for worse health and safety conditions.

According to the authors’ own conducted study and foreign research, in the face of a real, global threat, employees change the system of their values, though among employee expectations, health and safety conditions are more important than financial benefits or job security. Moreover, a small group of respondents is ready to accept reduced job safety for a higher salary. The vast majority of respondents described their workplaces as meeting the applicable requirements, which could mean improvement in the employers' approach to health and safety obligations. Positive changes in the work environment in terms of occupational safety and health were also noticed in the assessment of the respondents after inspections carried out by the National Labor Inspectorate.

The main limitation of the study is the small research group; hence, the study should be treated as preliminary, requiring more extensive/representative research in the future

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BEZPIECZEŃSTWO PRACY WŚRÓD CELÓW I OCZEKIWAŃ PRACOWNIKÓW W OCENIE PRACOWNIKÓW WYBRANYCH FIRM PRODUKCYJNYCH

Streszczenie: Głównym celem artykułu jest określenie znaczenia bezpieczeństwa i higieny pracy dla pracowników. Wraz z nadejściem pandemii choroby COVID-19 bezpieczeństwo pracy ponownie stało się tematem rozważań. W artykule zidentyfikowano uwarunkowania bezpieczeństwa i higieny pracy w grupie celów pracowniczych. Aby wskazać czynniki warunkujące, przeprowadzono badania wśród pracowników firm produkcyjnych. Wyniki badań wykazały rosnące znaczenie bezpieczeństwa i higieny pracy dla osób zatrudnionych, które okazało się nawet ważniejsze od satysfakcjonującego wynagrodzenia, na co może mieć wpływ pandemia COVID-19.

Słowa kluczowe: oczekiwania pracowników, bezpieczeństwo i higiena pracy, interesariusze, środowisko pracy

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