

## THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF THE ORGANIZATIONS TOWARDS EMPLOYEES

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### ABSTRACT

*The paper reviews the main theoretical aspects related to the social responsibility of the organization towards its employees. The first and the second part of the article consists of the introduction as well as the objectives and research methodology. The third part focuses on items underlying the social responsibility in the workplace. In the fourth part the concept of burn out is presented while the elements leading to avoiding the occurrence of the burnout phenomenon are described and explained with clarity.*

**KEYWORDS:** *social responsibility in the workplace, balance between their personal life and career, burnout phenomenon.*

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### 1. INTRODUCTION

Each organization has responsibilities to the shareholders. But those on whom its functioning depends and who are most strongly influenced by it are the employees. Therefore, the first aspect that a socially responsible organization should take into account is the job offered to its employees.

The responsibility towards employees should be one of the central elements of an organization's social responsibility policy. An organization involved in the community could not be considered as being socially responsible if the employees are not satisfied. In fact, the employees and the way they talk about the organization represent the first pillar of a socially responsible organization. An organization with a clear social responsibility policy as well as integrated in the human resources strategy becomes attractive for future employees, because they have the certainty that they will be respected and valued (Horia, 2011; Bărbuță et al., 2014).

### 2. OBJECTIVES AND RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The aim of this paper is to provide a brief overview on the responsibility of private sector organizations towards employees. In this regard, theoretical aspects regarding the social responsibility in the workplace and the burnout phenomenon have been highlighted throughout the article.

The study focuses on the following objectives:

- Describing the main items underlying the social responsibility in the workplace;
- Explaining the concept of burnout;
- Illustrating the elements leading to avoiding the occurrence of the burnout phenomenon.

The data have been collected by using the document analysis method. Like other analytical methods in qualitative research, this method involves studying and interpreting the information obtained in order to develop empirical knowledge in the field (Bowen, 2009).

### 3. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND ON THE SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY IN THE WORKPLACE

The social responsibility of the organization towards employees involves creating a job where the

responsibility is essential and where the organization assumes the responsibility for the impact on employees and their families (Pereira, 2011; Exforsys, 2015).

Social responsibility in the workplace refers to:

- Developing the employees through fair access to training programs

The employees can participate in internal training programs, or can attend external trainings if their internal competencies are not sufficient.

- Ensuring fair and non-discriminatory practices in dealing with employees

The organization should fight against discrimination, support non-discriminatory promotion to management positions and respect for the principle of gender equality. It should promote a fair, evaluation-based remuneration policy and a transparent, fair and performance-based system for the selection and evaluation of staff. (Horia, 2011).

In recruiting staff, the organization should respect diversity (Centrul Parteneriat pentru Egalitate, 2008; Starostka-Patyk et al., 2015), proposing different candidates: women, minorities, elderly people, people with physical disabilities. Not only qualifications and personal characteristics are important, but also the selection of candidates from different social categories.

Social responsibility is an important recruitment tool. Studies suggest that jobseekers, especially those with high potential, are looking for activities *contributing* to the good of the community, not just a job getting them a salary (Adetunji & Ogbonna, 2013). People want better lives, not just better jobs. They want to leave something behind, to feel valuable, not to be some numbers on the payroll of an organization that enriches its shareholders.

- Providing transparency and ongoing communication with employees, their consultation and involvement

Some organizations inform the employees about their events by e-mail or newsletters, or by annual meetings. They also use the intranet networks, as well as surveys among employees (Cohen, 2011).

Communicating with employees creates a climate of confidence, prevents feelings of uncertainty and rumors, as well as deformed images and interpretations, increases employees' loyalty and appreciation towards the organization. Their involvement in the organization policy has several advantages: they become more creative, more motivated, have more initiatives, are more prepared to openly discuss their mistakes, help colleagues to achieve their goals, are more loyal, want to develop, inspire trust among the clients, etc. The organization gets a positive image in the community, being appreciated as a responsible employer for whom people enjoy working (Horia, 2011).

However, an organization is not necessarily a democracy. The president and the management team are the decision makers. However, in dialogue with the employees, they can make informed decisions, starting from reality rather than assumptions (Cohen, 2011). However, the dialogue with the employees does not mean that the management team is obliged to implement their suggestions, but it shows a strong desire to understand and take into account employees' aspirations and concerns.

- Offering decent wages paid on time to the employees

The organizations set the wage according to their competitiveness and their own resources (aiming at attracting and retaining highly qualified staff) so that they can make profit and develop.

Some multinational companies get the fabulous profits from labor exploitation in Third World countries (Roach, 2007). In these countries they often do not pay wages which cover the employees' cost of living (the so-called "living wages").

Millions of people are called "poor workers." Approximately two out of five *inappropriately paid* employees have difficulty in paying their bills. They have a job but they do not have enough money to feed their families and pay their bank loans (Cohen, 2011).

Sometimes, although the organization has a fair policy in setting wages, bonuses, and social benefits, *rewarding good staff performance*, it is not enough for a decent living. There are many factors influencing an individual's way of life: the number of family members, their past, the way they spend their money and make savings. Perhaps it would be advisable for a company to take account of these aspects in wage setting, although it is not a practice consistent with the principles of the economy.

- Caring for the employees' health and safety at work

The organization should provide employees with a safe working environment that does not endanger their health, maximizing the time spent by them at work (Raziq and Maulabakhsh, 2015). Half of employees' health problems are caused by failure to comply with ergonomic rules, injuries or accidents, and the organizations lose millions of dollars (Cohen, 2011). Healthier employees are happier, more productive and take fewer sick leave. This means lower costs and higher productivity for the company.

The employees do not have to deal with any security issues at work, especially in jobs involving working directly with the public (Bălan, 2013). Some companies offer courses to employees to fight against potential violence from citizens.

- Providing benefits to the employees beyond wages

The organizations are aware that simply raising salary is not enough to meet the needs of employees and improve their quality of life. *Providing a generous package of benefits to the employees* is also a form of social responsibility. The employees become more motivated, more loyal and less affected by health, family or subsistence concerns.

- Respecting the employees' rights and showing gratitude to their work

The organization should treat the employees with respect, show that they are important and valued, recognize their contribution to achieving the goals (Kristen, 2011), resolve work disputes and complaints satisfactorily. The employers often forget that they owe their success to the employees who assume the company's goals and labor for their achievement. The organization should pay taxes and comply with its financial obligations to the state. Although it is a legal obligation and the social responsibility goes beyond the statutory obligation, it is important to mention that many times the employer, wishing to reduce costs, jeopardizes the employee's assured status and his right to the benefits of this quality (Horia, 2011).

Moreover, the unsatisfied employees have an unfavorable effect on the organization's activities (Williams & Hazer, 1986; Jackofsky & Slocum, 1987; Kemery et al., 1987). Their dissatisfaction is caused by various factors (CNIPMMR, n.d.):

1. Discontent regarding the job and the possibilities for professional development (too much or too little monotony or too difficult work, too low wage, too few benefits and/or training opportunities, personal problems that prevent proper task solving).
2. Dissatisfaction regarding the relationships at work (difficulties in working with one or more colleagues, difficult relationship with the chief, poor promotion or inadequate appreciation of the performance, conflicts with the clients)
3. Discontent regarding the workplace (too little involvement in the company policy, difficult work schedule, health problems, workplace insecurity, uncertainties about the future (resignations, reorganizations, restructurings), issues related to the leadership style of managers or organizational culture)

When the employees are well-treated by the organization, they behave well with others: they contribute more to achieving goals, engage in community as well as in volunteer activities, they protect the environment, etc.

A socially responsible organization is concerned that its employees know the relevant regulatory framework as well as the labor policies and practices. Although the employees are not interested in knowing their rights, the organization has a duty to provide this information, but also to advise them how to act when they are infringed. Some employees do not really know their rights, and others think they have more than they really do. The knowledge of their rights leads to saving time and money from claims and mediators and gives the company more transparency (Cohen, 2011).

Human rights are not violated by organizations or departments, but by the people inside them, by those who should know what means an acceptable behavior in the business environment. They need to understand the consequences of their actions and take responsibility for everything they do in the name of the organization. Moreover, they should be able to identify the potentially explosive situations in advance.

- Ensuring the employees' well-being by striking a balance between their personal life and

career

In an increasingly competitive society, where companies run for profit and employees for bonuses and promotions, where colleagues become competitors instead of working in team, more and more people become overwhelmed and exhausted. One hour of gymnastics, meditation or other forms of relaxation means 45% more productivity (Cohen, 2011). If the organizations give the employees enough time to fulfill their various obligations to others and to themselves, then they become more productive, both professionally and in their personal lives. This is the essence of the balance between career and personal life.

#### **4. A BRIEF OVERVIEW ON THE "BURNOUT" PHENOMENON**

The work schedule of the employees is different, depending on the field of work and status: some employees work a few hours a week, and others in 12-hour shifts per day. On average, the daily work standard is 8 hours. Due to the high standards in any field, many employees suffer from exhaustion, get sick and even die from overworking (Ford et al., 1983; Ruscior, 2014).

The "burnout" phenomenon, or the overworking of employees, has become the leitmotif of the modern job (Neumann et al., 1990). Over the last few years, the stress and the overworking of employees have become more and more present on their medical records. Finally, they turn into physical suffering, can cause serious illnesses, sleep disturbances or mental disorders that all together can cause death (Cohen, 2011; Popescu et al., 2017).

The overwork in the workplace as well as the chronic fatigue reduces employees' capacity to work, are one of the underlying causes of long-term sick leave leading to lower productivity (Koeske and Koeske, 1993). The signs of overworking are highlighted by the following aspects (Horia, 2011; Colorfur.hr, 2016):

- Unexplained absences recorded more frequently;
- Repeated delays;
- Decrease in productivity, delays in finalizing projects even though they are working from morning till night;
- Uncertainty and signs of frustration;
- Health problems recorded more frequently;
- Lack of enthusiasm;
- Isolation.

To avoid the burnout phenomenon at work, it is advisable that employers focus on the following aspects (Colorfur.hr, 2016):

##### 1. Listening to employees and communicating with them

The employer has the duty to ensure that employee opinions are listened. If the employees inform their chief about their medical problems and overworking, he should take action. But even in the absence of information, the manager should notice when the employees are very tired and should find solutions to relieve them of their tasks that overwhelm them.

##### 2. Providing functional tools to employees

Nothing is more annoying than equipment not working in the office, especially when endangering the fulfilling of the tasks. Whether it is a computer not working at full capacity, the internet connection or the toner-free printer, the employee encountering such issues constantly will become extremely anxious and tense. Moreover, in the long run, this situation will become a continuous source of stress. Therefore, working in good conditions is an obligation of the employer that can greatly protect the employees from reaching the burnout limit.

##### 3. Providing a friendly work environment

The atmosphere at work is very important. Since the employees spend most of their time at work, they need to feel good in the working environment. A lot of elements make life easier for employees and help them to remove from the stress and pressure of the tasks they have to fulfill: furniture and chairs that do not give them back pain, spacious and light-lit offices, cozy sofa where they can rest

on when they want to take a break, a restaurant where they can have lunch, etc.

#### 4. Showing fairness and treating all employees equally

One of the common causes that pushes employees to burnout is the desire to prove they are good compared to others. When the competition becomes unfair because the chief favors some employees, neglecting others, who will become frustrated and want to get his appreciation. The consequence is that the employees will become overcrowded and inevitably overwhelmed. At the same time, the feeling of injustice that kills employees in such situations leads to the same result.

#### 5. Providing a flexible schedule and more free time

In recent years, the main concern of both employees and employers has been the balance between personal and professional life. If the employees are always at work and do not have time for family life, the situation is changing negatively. Therefore, blame, depression and, ultimately, psychological imbalance, with personal and professional consequences, appear. If the employees could plan their work according to their personal life events, they might become happier and more performant. That is why the organizations have more and more the tendency to offer a day off, in addition to those prescribed by the law, or to shorten the Friday workday in order to give employees more time to relax.

#### 6. Recognizing permanently the employees' performance

Regardless of their position in the organization, the employees like to feel useful and appreciated for their work. Beyond salary increases or bonuses, it is important to be praised in front of the team and that everybody be aware of their contribution to the success of the company. This increases their self-respect and self-esteem, leading to a greater involvement in the organization's projects.

The burnout phenomenon is a reality. The rest is essential, studies showing that if people sleep less than 6 hours a night, they have a very high risk of overloading (Andreescu și Liță, 2007). Unfortunately, those suffering from overworking do not realize they have a problem. They are perfectionist, ambitious, proud, believe they can do anything and refuse to accept that their own body has a limit.

The employees should strike a balance between the profession, the work environment and their own person, so that they do not become victims and commit suicide (Cohen, 2011).

The requirements of the profession should be reasonable. It is good to set high goals, but if challenges and stress prevents individuals from acting, then it will destroy the balance at all levels of their lives. The employees should work in a friendly and flexible environment (House, 1981; Etzion, 1984). They should feel that they are more than a statistic, that they are treated with respect, that their opinions matter very much, that they have opportunities for development and career advancement.

Although often the central element of the working environment is considered to be the leader, the employee is also important, while the employer should take into account the skills he/she is endowed with and his/her passions. If he/she carries out an activity that he/she likes and is in line with his abilities, then he/she shows energy and productivity (Horia, 2011).

Therefore, the balance between work and personal life (family, friends, going to the gym) is crucial. The balance between work and personal life is a responsibility of both individuals and companies and, in the long run, has positive effects on the business. Even the former President of the United States, Barack Obama, and First Lady Michelle Obama have highlighted the need for more flexible practices at work in order to enable employees to effectively manage their priorities (Tchen, 2010; Jarret, 2010).

## 5. CONCLUSIONS

The social responsibility of the organizations towards employee have been investigated in this paper by studying different publications in the field. This article attempted a qualitative research in order to portray the characteristics of the social responsibility in the workplace, to define and clarify the concept of burnout as well as to list and describe the elements allowing to avoid the occurrence of the burnout phenomenon.

After examining the publications used for the elaboration of this article, several important aspects in

the field of corporate social responsibility have been highlighted. These could be a starting point for more sophisticated research carried out in both private for-profit and private not-for-profit organizations.

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