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SIGNIFICANCE OF “WORK EXPERIENCE” MANAGEMENT FROM AN ORGANISATIONAL STANDPOINT

Review
Article

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Abstract

The purpose of the article is to summarize the major aspects that characterize current labour market expectations and to compare them to the criteria that emerge as a condition of the “flow state”. As a result of the above, conclusions are drawn and support the organizational justification of work experience management and provide an initial basis for practical application. It can be concluded that achievement of the flow experience might be a desirable situation on organizational level, because it might result in improved employee loyalty and a stronger relationship between the individual and the organisation, thus employee retention is promoted as well. However, reaching the flow experience has a number of requirements; it cannot be realised unless these conditions are met. Obviously, the realization of these factors can be supported by the organizational HR system through its diverse functions, out of which the following ones act as the closest links: job design, motivation, career planning, occupational safety, health preservation and performance appraisal.

Introduction

Human resource management as the tool of an organization that maintains primary contact with both employees and employers must be in the vanguard of properly responding to potential environmental changes. As a non-negotiable change, there is a tendency in current labour markets that employees are getting more and more able to formulate their needs agilely and to receive proper responses from employers - given the fact that it is increasingly difficult to find and retain quality workforce at company level. One of the latest trends in this area is obtaining experience, which affects both working environment and jobs. The emphasis on gaining positive experience means such practical approach that it can be and it is to be built into numerous aspects of work, since it can significantly determine organizational retention power, loyalty and attractiveness. In order for the organizational environment to be able to generate organizational experience gain and, above all, flow experience originating from work activities, HR is capable of the realization of noteworthy improvements in a number of areas. Analysing the conditions behind the emergence of flow experience, there are several parallels between certain HR functions and activities, which indicates their combinability and that practical elaboration of the relationship can be established as well.

The aim of our study is to highlight – based on technical literature review – the aspects of HR functions through the conditions of the flow state, to systematically interpret the correlations among them and to introduce the relevant possibilities with an innovative approach by supporting practical feasibility.

WORK EXPERIENCE AND FLOW

In multiple fields of our lives, but particularly in ones where we spend most of our time – e.g. our place of employment – most of us try to enjoy ourselves. Nevertheless, it is recently noticeable that boundaries are increasingly blurring between working hours and leisure time. Consequently, the formation of working environment requires a paradigm shift and innovative approach both from the standpoint of the organization and the individual (Szabó, 2013). At the time of its appearance, human resource management has responded to challenges originating from the emergence of industrial society; currently it is present in corporate functioning in a more extended form (Gulyás, 2017). Due to the rapidly changing corporate environment, certain areas became outstandingly important for management, which have come into prominence as a result of the

changes (Oláh – Bácsné, 2012; Ujhelyi et al., 2015; Oláh – Nagy, 2015). In the labour market situation of our time, when a large number of organizations have been struggling for years with the Europe-wide lack of employee base (Csehne, 2011), and to attract and retain suitable and talented workforce (Manpower, 2017), it is not a negligible aspect to meet employee expectations by providing a comfortable environment for the working collective. Deliberate generation of workplace and directly work-related experiences is of great importance not only from the standpoint of employees but also from that of employers. Considering employee perspective, the need for gaining experience is clearly present, which can be interpreted as one of the main results of a global survey in 2017 (Deloitte). In the course of the research, it was established that a primary expectation of employees is for their work to be attractive, result-oriented and enjoyable. Employee satisfaction affects the degree of loyalty, namely the rate of retention. According to Thomas (2017) – consulting expert of Select International – companies should consider the following five factors if they intend to retain their talented employees (some of these factors are related to enjoyable work):

- Elaboration of appropriate environment and occupational safety for the employees.
- Clearly defined objectives and expectations, in which organizational communication and job descriptions are of key importance.
- Open working environment where regular feedback has an important role.
- Support of training and development; challenging and stimulating work tasks.
- Knowing, appreciating and rewarding of good work.

In connection with the above points it can be established that the knowledge of people of the 21st century is inseparable from its recognition within a work environment (Móré – Szabados, 2015; Tarnóczy et al, 2017), which serves as cornerstone of enjoyed work experience. Therefore, human emotions have a prominent role within the elaboration of everyday workplace experiences (Scott, 2017). According to Gergely – Pierog (2016), influences gathered at the workplace are highly determined by the management style. One of its forms of appearance is motivation – which might originate from the deliberate generation of the experience. Thus, proper experiences largely determine the satisfaction of employees, however it has to be recorded that for the employees of the 21st money is not exclusively important in terms of satisfaction (Juhász, 2016), therefore, various tools should be applied for its achievement. When analysing the issue from the aspect of employers, it can be stated that work experience and flow are associated with a number of HR functions due to

the integrated nature of human resource management, therefore they have an impact on each other. Among the related areas of activity, selection (As-Levine, 1985) and career development and trainings (Ford et al., 1992; Campion et al., 1994; McCall et al., 1988), can be mentioned, which were already emphasized during the last century. However, elaboration of a conscious and appropriate environment is one of the major challenges of the present period.

Demographic changes also have an impact on organizational functioning, since due to the aging society the number of available employees keeps decreasing. This expressly raises the value of human workforce, not to mention the value of outstandingly performing human capital. Consequently, less number of employees are required to carry out more tasks than before – given the continuously increasing number of consumers – but in exchange for that, employers also raise more complex expectations towards their employers (Canton, 2013).

One of the significant researcher collaborations establishing the spread of positive psychology were Martin E. P. Seligman and Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, who helped highlight the fact that psychology is not only capable of treating problematic issues, but in many cases it emphasizes on prevention and the intensification of positive factors (Seligman - Csíkszentmihályi, 2000). From the aspect of workplace, strengthening these positive emotions and promotion of their emergence are very important, because positive emotions emerging in employees might be linked to the organization, which reinforces their loyalty and might contribute to their improved performance (Matkó – Takács, 2017). The efficiency of an individual is among others influenced by motivation within the workplace and his/her commitment to it (Fekete, 2011). For its optimal development, employee needs and objectives must be taken into consideration by the management.

According to the 2014 survey of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, it can be established that 70% of Hungarian employers regularly perform workplace risk assessments, where physical and psychosocial factors are also evaluated, thus we are not behind the EU average. However, the survey also confirms that only 19% of the analysed organizations have an action plan for reducing risks, which means that in many cases, they are aware of the problems, but they still do not do anything about them. Based on the results of the survey it can be stated that the largest psychosocial frustration in Hungary is related to the management of problematic clients, which was verified at 40% percent of the evaluated organizations. This was followed – as a problem indicated by 29% of the respondents – by the lack of time available for the

solution of the given task, while 13% of the assessed entities identified the fact that their employees are unable to influence their own work rhythm or working processes as a problem (EU-OSHA, 2014). However, in order for the employees to have a chance for achieving the flow experience, the fulfilment of multiple requirements is indispensable; among others, it is necessary for them to have autonomy in certain fields, providing them with the impression that the work they perform is responsible and contributes to the operation of the company and the world. In many cases, this could be a small sub-task, but the person carrying out that task is still required to comprehend the purpose and functioning of the entire system. The aspiration towards deliberately achieving this state should be one of the general objectives within the life of companies, as flow „is a phenomenon when we ease up as much during an activity as everything else shrinks, the experience itself becomes as enjoyable that we intend to carry on with the activity for itself, at all costs.” (Csíkszentmihályi, 1997:11). The emergence of the emotion is able to support organizational effectiveness, successfulness, competitiveness on the level of individuals and if it appears as a built-in part of work processes, it might revolutionize the job of the management and HR experts. Realization is perceptibly not simple and organizational level introduction requires conscious preparation, planning, organization and the completion of necessary modifications and developments. However, in order for this to be realized, it is important to reveal the theoretical background of the situation and to find linking points for connecting and combining psychology with management. The significance of work experience management seems to become of key importance for competitive companies operating within the global economy. If the application of work experience management becomes reality, it might have numerous beneficial effects on the organization, for example the increased attractiveness and retention ability of the company. Positive work experience contributes to a similarly positive client/consumer experience, which further improves organizational reputation (Taylor, 2016) and consequently helps with the maintenance of competitiveness.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Carrying out secondary research in the scope of the topic, conditions considered fundamentally necessary for the emergence of the flow state have been summarized, which when assigned to HR functions, support the realization of organizational application and the strengthening of the relevance of management attitude even more. Summarization

of the conditions of flow experience was supported by the results of Csíkszentmihályi (1997), and Jackson and Marsh (1996). Csíkszentmihályi distinguishes eight categories, while Jackson-Marsh indicate nine factors. Although the authors published their findings referring to athletes, they can be generally interpreted to people employed in other fields. There are many overlaps and parallels between the two determined lists, thus they can easily be combined.

For the summarization of employee preferences and expectations, the Hungarian survey of PWC (2017) was taken as a basis, where the opinions of students of domestic secondary and higher education institutions have been processed, summarizing the views of 13,000 people. Additionally, we reflect with the data of the survey carried out by the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work (2014) to the development of current expectations. By means of secondary research, the analysis of documents and technical literature helps us interpret the topic from a managerial standpoint and imagine it within the scope of organizational functioning.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Requirements for the emergence of flow experience involve multiple fields, which can be connected to HR functions on organizational level. HR functions appear within corporate functioning as one of the most dynamically changing areas of the organization, since they adapt the most flexibly responding to environmental changes, ensuring the fulfilment of different employee demands. When combined, HR functions involve nearly twenty different areas and most of these areas are closely related with each other due to integrated functioning. Table 1 shows these HR functions based on the summary of Dajnoki (2014).

However, due to the developments of recent years, the list of HR functions can be further completed with generation management, attraction and retention, succession planning and work experience management. The functions still form a whole system representing each area and possessing individual specialities. Therefore, the majority of these areas has an effect on the others, namely if a new function appears, it will somehow influence the rest of the areas as well.

The major conditions of flow experience are shown summarized in Table 2. The aspects are interpreted in ten different perspectives, which are equally related to individual and environmental conditions, while Table 3 introduces the possible connections with HR functions.

Balance of challenges and skills appears as a fundamental condition during the flow state, since if a task proves to be excessively difficult –

because the individual does not possess the appropriate abilities for its solution – anxiety and worry can easily take over the given person. The other extreme if the task is too easy to fulfil and it is done without challenges; then the feeling of boredom might prevail due to the under-exploitation of skills. Ideally, abilities of a person and the content and purpose of a job are important aspects during job design, because they help determine optimal expectations which still motivate the employee but do not exceed his/her abilities, thus they are in balance. The eight-channel model of Csíkszentmihályi (1997) helps visualise the difficulty level of abilities and tasks (Figure 1). When a person is within the arousal phase, the difficulty level of tasks is slightly high; therefore the abilities of the individual should be developed. However, in the control phase the difficulty level of tasks is too low, the individual has more potential, thus the solution of more complex tasks might be the condition leading the person to the flow experience.

Determination of clear and understandable goals is fundamental for achieving flow state, which has a very simple explanation. If individuals are aware of goals and expectations, they know where they intend to arrive and how to do that the most effectively. Similarly to the difficulty level of tasks, goals that are close to reality should be set, because too large, too distant goals might have a destructive effect on the individual. In such a case, it is logical to set sub-goals, which eventually lead to the final objective. Determination of objectives is mostly linked to performance appraisal discussions and career management from amongst HR functions, as these are the areas where actual statements are made concerning our future concepts.

The demand of people for clear and continuous feedback has an important role in all aspects of life. Regular feedback is very important for both the individual and the organization, since this will confirm whether the employee is successfully proceeding towards the set objective and whether the selection process was adequate and if individuals are able to solve the tasks assigned to them. If we are fully aware of our tasks and goals, and what we have to do, it is useful to receive feedback whether we perform our tasks well or not. One of the objectives of the systematic process of performance appraisal is the exact determination of feedback and its transfer towards the individual.

The ability of strong concentration can be considered as a “waiting-room” for the flow experience. It is important that after the goals that are optimized to individual abilities have been determined and communicated and we start fulfilling the task, we should block out every distracting factor and be absorbed in our work. HR is able to contribute to the establishment of concentration through the provision of working

conditions, working environment and proper equipment during the process of job design. Beyond that, occupational safety as an HR function has recently been completed with the idea of health preservation, which might also relate to the more intensive achievement of concentration.

One of the typical concomitants of the flow experience is the altered perception of time, which results in a phenomenon where our realistic perception of time during the flow state largely differs from reality, which might occur in both extremes. There are cases when we feel that time flies, but in the case of a dancer, a stage appearance will seem longer than it does for the audience because the dancer will live through every single movement. HR is able to support this difference in the perception of time by means of flexible working hours in the course of the job design process, since the adaptation of employees to available conditions might differ individually. Observations show that employees working part-time have less occasions experiencing the flow state, as deep concentration requires an adequate amount of dedicated time.

The feeling of control does not mean that we are constantly being controlled by someone, but rather our own independence, autonomy over our own actions. It means the faith, knowledge and feeling of being in control of the events and having power and governance over them – the reason for this: people enjoy being able to practice power in certain challenging situations. This area is somewhat relatable to career management, because if we have a hold over events and rule the processes, then we keep building our own career within the organizational existence while proceeding towards our objectives.

Combined realisation of awareness and action is one of the most complex conditions of the flow state, since it requires a completely blocked out outside world and fulfilment of the given task with maximum commitment and concentration, which means that we should let ourselves “go with the flow”. The final goal of this state is to become one with the task. Similarly to concentration, this could be facilitated through the ideal design of working environment.

Loss of self-consciousness in this case does not mean an unconscious state; it means just the opposite, a maximum conscious functioning. This state slightly resembles a situation when we become so preoccupied in an activity that our sense of hunger remains undetected. Obviously, achieving the loss of self-consciousness is more complicated than that, but if we are able to do it, then we step outside of our own limits and we extend our views of ourselves during the fulfilment of the task. However paradox the comparison may be, but at the end of the flow experience, our self-consciousness returns and we receive a much more

self-confident image of ourselves which is reinforced with new experiences and extended with skills. From the aspect of organizational support, working environment might again be the key in this case, which could help achieve this state.

The term ‘autotelic’ is of Greek origin, which means, “having a purpose in itself”. In the course of carrying out the tasks, we must strive to find the part of the task that we do because it delights us and not because we expect some sort of benefit from it; if an activity is carried out for itself, there is a much greater chance for the flow. It is not a problem if we start executing it due to an external factor, but it is essential for the autotelic feeling to emerge during our action, which will result in the activity having an internally rewarding value. Achievement of this state is best supported by motivation management systems that motivate employees for a similar purpose.

Consequently, results confirm that the flow state that can be experienced during work might be promoted by certain HR functions, namely because of the managerial approach, generation of flow might become feasible within the supporting environment of the organization, where HR has a paramount role. Due to the significance of the flow state and seeing that although it is linkable to multiple HR areas, we might feel some lack, which in our opinion could be resolved by “work experience” management as a new HR function. Greater emphasis could be put on the conditions of flow within the work experience management HR function in order to generate the occurrence of the flow state in the lives of employees deliberately.

Due to the labour market anomaly of our time, the lack of experts and proper workforce appears as a growing limit against corporate development. In the course of its recent survey (2017), PWC Hungary attempted to interpret this in an innovative manner and to present a suggestion for its solution, because the struggle for a satisfactory number of high quality workforce at company level is intensifying. For the sake of successful operation, organizations are forced to take more and more professional steps and they have to elaborate more aimed action plans as well. One of the methods that might mean a “path” of solution involves deliberate management of employee experience, which needs to be elaborated based on the actual demands of employees. Organizations have been striving to perform an experience-centred “flooding” of clients, since they are aware that if client are able to relate to the organization through positive experience, they are more likely to remain clients, thus the company secures higher profits. However, if this process is further discussed, we have to realize that our clients often – especially in the servicing sector – gain their first impressions or experience related to the organization through our colleagues. This means that our employees are able

to transfer our brand message directly towards any relevant target group, partner, client or even a competitor company. If employees are satisfied and feel well, they will represent the company proudly and enthusiastically towards the clients with a positive attitude. Consequently, client experience on the long run will never be better, higher or more attractive than employee experience, therefore it is effective to initiate the process from the starting point and influence our clients through our colleagues.

According to PWC Hungary (2017), the idea of employee experience is different from employee commitment in a sense, that it does not exclusively seek the retention of staff, but it also deals with how future talents can be attracted. It is interested in what the members of the new generation are sensitive to, where and under what sort of circumstances they intend to work and what they desire. An important condition during the establishment of work experience management is that “offered” employee experiences must be in harmony with brand building efforts of the employer, namely what has previously been communicated and serves the achievement of our vision. Therefore, beyond composing the message of the employee brand, the task of organizations is to do that by being aware of target group preferences, knowing its own organizational culture and the commitment of its own employees. Organizations must manage the formation of employee demands based on these factors, because they have to be able not only to attract new workforce but also to retain it and improve its commitment and motivation. The findings based on responses of the surveyed nearly 13,000 people belonging to the Y and Z generation the major preferences in terms of working, the content of work and company management are summarized in Figure 2.

Based on the results, it can be established that the declared responses in the surveyed target group are related to the conditions of the flow experience as well, since flexible working hours might contribute to the altered perception of time during work. The excitement of work is directly linked to the balance of challenges and skills, since the state of arousal is situated right next to the direct flow state in the eight-channel model of Csíkszentmihályi (1997), when we are able to achieve flow state through the development of our skills. At the same time, open, straightforward, honest communication can be identified with clear and understandable goals, as a condition.

Comparing these findings to the survey of the European Agency for Safety and Health at Work in 2014, blocking factors that do not support the emergence of the flow state are immediately visible. For example, lack of time available for the fulfilment of a given task belongs here, which

appeared as a problem in the case of 29% of the surveyed domestic companies along employee opinions. This fact fundamentally limits the emergence of the flow experience, since it is one of the essential factors, which determines the realization of multiple other conditions, such as concentration, synchronization of action and awareness and the loss of self-consciousness. According to employee feedback, another frustrating factor – which was a problem at 13% of the surveyed companies – is that they have no influence on their own work, namely there is no proper autonomy and they lack the feeling of being in control, which is another starting point for the emergence of the flow state.

CONCLUSIONS

Consequently, it can be established that experience gained at the workplace might have a significant role in the organizational everyday life, having a stimulating effect on employee attitude. However, in order for experience gain and the achievement of flow state to become possible, some fundamental conditions must be inevitably realized. If demand for the deliberate management of experience gain appears within an organization, then it might be able to have an impact on the target group if it is well controlled and part of a framework. Supporting the realization of the major conditions of experiencing flow state, the primary objective of work experience management is to be able to form employee circumstances to promote the emergence of flow. To support a practical approach, it can be stated – as a finding of the survey – that numerous HR functions can be closely linked to the conditions of the flow state. Among others, a relevant HR function is job analysis and design, which shows a direct connection with the intention to provide balance between the skills and tasks of the individual. A similar example could be the determination of clear and understandable goals, as well as explicit and continuous feedback towards the employees, which can be paired with performance appraisal and career planning as HR functions. Beyond that, job design might appear in the case of the altered perception of time and merging action and awareness, as well as the loss of self-consciousness, which is completed by occupational safety and health preservation as existing HR functions.

Based on the above, we can conclude that although work experience management does not belong to the fundamental, conventional HR functions, its application might bring increased employee satisfaction for companies, *which might result in loyalty and improved profitability, which after all is the ultimate objective of most of the organizations.* Therefore, its involvement and practical application

amongst already existing HR functions is worthy of consideration.

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ANNEXES

Table 1. Current HR functions

Human resource planning	Knowledge management
Workforce planning	Talent management
Job analysis, design, appraisal	Occupational safety
Workforce supply	Employment relations
Motivation management	Equal opportunity human resource management
Performance appraisal	HR controlling
Human resource development	HR branding
Career management	Staff information system
Generation management	Attraction and retention management
Succession planning	Work experience management

Source: Own editing (2017) based on Dajnoki (2014)

Table 2. Conditions of the flow state

Balance of challenges and skills
Clear and understandable goals
Explicit and continuous feedback
Concentration
Altered perception of time
Feeling of control
Presence – merging of action and awareness
Loss of self-consciousness
Autotelic approach of tasks

Source: Own editing (2017) based on Csíkszentmihályi (1997) and Jackson – Marsh (1996)

Table 3. HR functions supporting the conditions of flow state

CONDITIONS OF THE FLOW STATE	RELATED HR FUNCTIONS
Balance of challenges and skills	Job analysis and design
Clear and understandable goals	Performance appraisal, career planning
Explicit and continuous feedback	Performance appraisal
Concentration	Design of working environment, occupational safety, health preservation
Altered perception of time	Job design (flexible working hours)
Feeling of control	Career management
Presence – merging of action and awareness	Job design, occupational safety, health preservation
Loss of self-consciousness	Job design, occupational safety, health preservation
Autotelic approach of tasks	Motivation management

Source: Own editing (2017) based on Csíkszentmihályi (1997), Jackson – Marsh (1996), Dajnoki (2014)

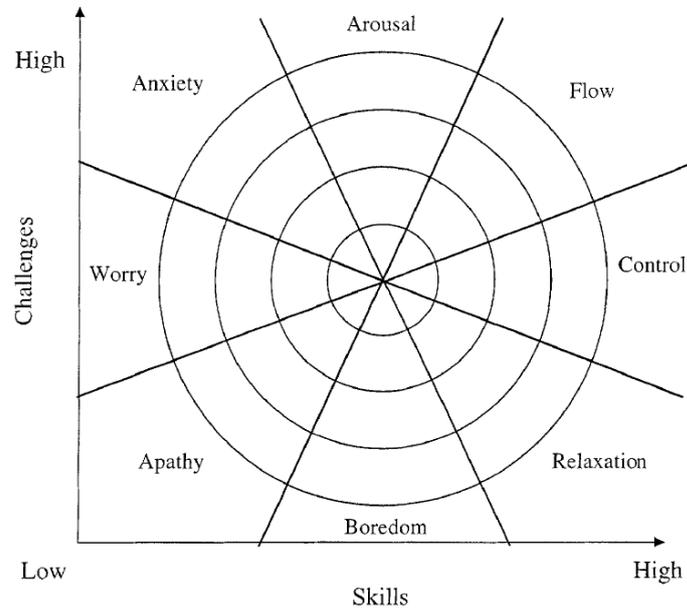


Figure 1: Flow-model: Balance of challenges and skills
Source: Csíkszentmihályi (1997)

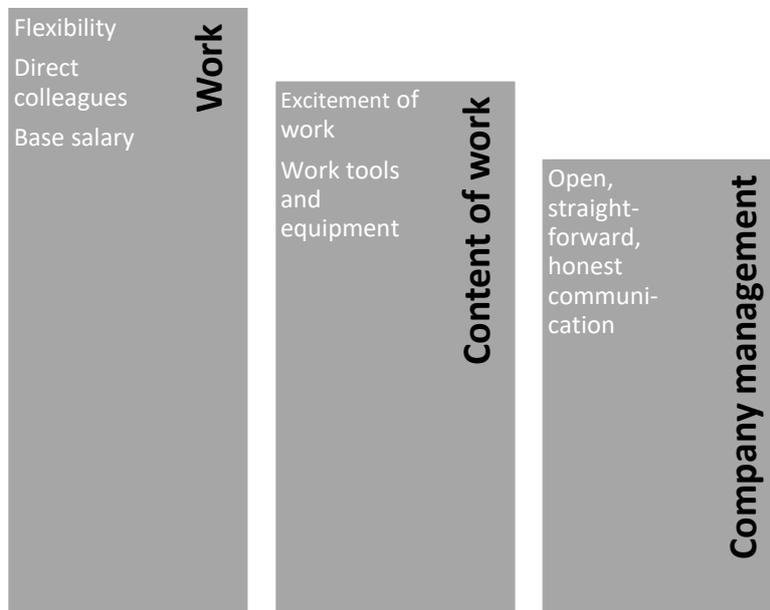


Figure 2: Employee preferences
Source: Own editing based on PWC Hungary (2017)