

## Chapter 58

# The Flexibility of the Workplace and Working Time: Analysis of Employees’ Preferences in Poland

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### ABSTRACT

*Organisations are more and more interested in ensuring flexibility of working time and space for their employees. This approach is enforced both by labour market volatility and company strategic plans, e.g. relocation. However, employers begin to realise that employees’ flexibility is limited. While the reasons behind it might be objective (lack of legal regulations, commuting expenses), in some cases it is the employees’ personal views that stand in the way. In such situation the company is much more limited in its attempts to offer a greater flexibility to its workforce. The research problem that arises here is as follows: is it possible to define the characteristics and situations in which employees are willing to accept flexible conditions of working time and space? Therefore, the aim of the study is to indicate how to increase work flexibility on the side of employees. The study focuses on four areas, i.e. changing the place of residence due to work, frequent business trips, long commuting and flexible work arrangements.*

### INTRODUCTION

“For employers, workforce flexibility refers to the ability to use labour in a more adaptable and variable way. For employees, flexibility refers particularly to the degree of choice available in their work arrangements” (Blyton & Jenkins, 2007, p. 74). While work flexibility can bring tangible benefits to the both parties, the diversity of available solutions and interests has put employers in a rather less comfortable situation. They are forced to adjust their working patterns not only to their business needs (e.g.

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flexibility of production processes or customer requirements), but also to the needs of their workforce. In turn, employees analyse the available work arrangements from their own perspective, typically in terms of work-life balance (Bailyn, Drago, & Kochan, 2001). It is considered to be one of the key EVP (Employee Value Proposition) elements in building up employees' commitment to their organisation, so welcomed by employers (Aon, 2015; Aon, 2016; Gallup, 2013).

Companies cannot afford not to take into account employees' preferences, particularly in the so-called employee's labour market, as the Polish market has been known to be called these days. As cyclical labour market research in Poland shows, the employment rate has continued to grow while the working age population has been dropping (NBP, 2016). The unemployment rate has fallen below its historical low in 2008 and currently amounts to 6.3%, reflecting both a high demand for labour and a decreasing labour supply. This drop is partially compensated by increased market participation among the youngest and oldest populations of employees; however, the rising participation cannot offset the demographic decline in the number of working people (ageing society). Employers are aware of this change – 77% of the studied entities believe that the Polish labour market is shifting towards employee's domination (HRM Partners, 2015). Consequently, it is more and more difficult to recruit candidates, whose expectations are rising also in terms of work organisation. This refers particularly to talents and those representing younger generations of employees, who pay more and more attention to working conditions, including working time and place of work (Gibson, Greenwood, & Murphy, 2009; Weyland, 2011). At the same time, studies conducted in Poland reveal that the Generation Y employees value work stability and job security, which makes them less keen on having as high a degree of flexibility as their peers in other European countries and the US (Kmiotek, 2015).

In view of the above, a question arises: is it possible to draw conclusions about preferences of job applicants or employees regarding work flexibility, based on demographic characteristics and competence? With these features in mind, is it possible to select people whose preferences are consistent with the employer's needs or to offer them a solution acceptable to them? Can a workforce be recruited whose flexibility profile complies with that of the company, as enforced by the character of its business operations? The article tries to define the characteristics and situations in which employees agree to flexible conditions in terms of working time and space.

The authors deliberately did not consider legal aspects of flexibility in their analysis due to the variety of legislations of different countries around the world.

## **BACKGROUND**

Organisational flexibility is a concept which has been defined and discussed by management science and in managerial practice for many years, with H.I. Ansoff (1965), H.W. Volberd (1997), Sushil (2001) and R.C. Pathak (2005) as its researchers (in: Osbert-Pociecha, 2011, pp. 136-137). It is a multifaceted term which refers to a variety of issues and solutions, differently approached by entrepreneurs, employees and governmental institutions, often used ideologically to reflect the views and understanding of the value of flexibility (Zeytinoglu, Cooke, & Mann, 2009). The diversity of the concept of flexibility makes it difficult to operationalise actions aimed at its promotion and determine the management methods and tools used in practice to achieve flexibility; its development is, however, one of the basic dimensions of the newly emerging paradigm of organisational management (Volberda, 1998, p. 13), next to securing effectiveness and quality. Due to the duality of its nature, flexibility is an equivocal term – it is associ-

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