

Human Capital Management in the Wandering Context of Events – Challenges for the Managerial Staff

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Chapter 10

JOB SECURITY – FROM THE PERSPECTIVE OF EMPLOYEE INTERESTS

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10.1. Introduction

The application aspects of the solutions postulated in the literature, related to giving importance to knowledge about reality, increase the utility of the theory. This is particularly reflected in *business economics* (Gruszecki, 2002, pp. 43-44), which is largely characterized by its approach to respecting the interests of employers and employees.

It has been stated in the literature for some time that employees are the primary group of stakeholders (Stuart, 2002, p. 28). Therefore, their role in the creation and survival of the enterprise is critical. This is evidenced in particular by monitoring the extent to which employees identify with changes in the enterprise's identity while ensuring that their needs are met (Stuart, 2002, p. 28). However, this requires knowing their interests and treating them in a way they would like to be treated. This prevents the sense of exclusion and fosters belonging to the community. It also involves experiencing social support in problematic, difficult, stressful, and critical situations (Sęk and Cieślak, 2004, p. 18).

The interests of employees are differentiated depending on several factors such as the current legal regulations in a given country (especially labor law), the situation on the labor market, cultural and demographic conditions, including the so-called generational changes, and the preferred approach of employers to people and their work, etc.

Employee interests are related to a wide range of issues. It is a popular thesis in management theory that a person must feel physical and mental comfort to engage in work actively and creatively. With this in mind, it is increasingly frequently stated that for people taking up work, a particularly important interest, in addition to the amount and structure of income obtained for performing tasks in the enterprise, is

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also – and sometimes even primarily – a sense of job security. It is worth pointing out that the concept of job security is perceived in the literature in a complex and insufficiently unambiguous way. For example, it is linked to, among other things, ensuring safe and healthy working conditions, but also to the sense of stable employment.

In this context, **the goal of this chapter** is to support the thesis that that job security should be considered as an important interest of employees. To attain this goal the content of this part of the monograph is structured in the following way. First, the author discusses the theoretical foundations for providing job security and its importance to employee interests, because of the conducted empirical research in this area, and thus the adopted research methodics are addressed before its presentation. The most important results of the empirical research are described next. Finally, a concise summary of these research findings and key conclusions are made.

10.2. Theoretical foundations for job security and its importance for employee interests

The term ‘employee interests’ is not clearly defined in the literature. The interests are most often described as the manifestation of advantages¹ and expectations of employees in relation to the performed work. It is noted that employees, who have their expectations, strive to achieve them, and if this does not happen, they eventually look to work for another employer (*Employees expectations...*, 2021). The explorations of the interests of employees are conducted in a rather scattered way; they concern, for example, economic and professional aspects. The problems of interests viewed as employee expectations were addressed in reference to the research on motivation to work (Lobanova, 2015), the possibility of activating this motivation by meeting the employee interests, and showing the relation between interests and future job search, choice of education, or the currently performed job (Harackiewicz and Hulleman, 2010; Hidi and Renninger, 2006).

Given the above, it is worth pointing out that the literature on the subject makes attempts, referring to the results of empirical research, to indicate the most important interests of employees related to the performance of work (e.g. Gableta, 2012, pp. 15-75; Hai-dong and Yu-jun, 2006; Paliwoda-Matiolańska, 2014, pp. 62-63; Wachowiak, 2013, pp. 148-149):

- a rewarding salary and/or compensation commensurate with responsibilities,
- a sense of job security,
- good occupational safety and health,
- clear criteria for the evaluation of task performance,

¹ One interpretation of the term ‘interest’ indicates that it means a benefit or something that benefits someone (*Cambridge dictionary*, 2021).

- access to reliable information about the enterprise and its situation,
- friendly atmosphere in the workplace,
- opportunities for development and promotion.

The complexity and fast pace of changes occurring in the global economy have led to the transformation of enterprises, the way they operate, their management, and the nature of the work itself. This gives rise to the need to increase the flexibility of employees, having the ability to adapt to new challenges coming from enterprises and their environment, in particular the continuous updating, complementing, and developing competencies by people providing work (Myjak, 2019, pp. 79-88). As emphasized by researchers, pursuing the chosen profession and career path for many years (see e.g. Auer, 2006; Barley, Bechky, and Milliken, 2017; Gembalska-Kwiecień, 2017; Juchnowicz, 2010; Muffels, Crouch, and Wilthagen, 2014; Pawłowska, 2017) has ceased to be a defining characteristic of working life. Instead, instability of employment with a single employer, occupational mobility, and insecurity of employment are enumerated. In these circumstances, among the interests of employees, the category of security and its perception by employees becomes increasingly important.

The term ‘security’ is interdisciplinary in its nature, which makes it difficult to define. As stated in the literature, it is sometimes defined differently for the needs of different scientific disciplines (Ejdys, Lulewicz, and Obolewicz, 2008, p. 53). According to one definition, security should be associated with the ability to avoid harm resulting from risk, danger, or threat (*Cambridge dictionary*, 2021).

When considering the individual risk associated with the stability of employees within the enterprise, the literature usually refers to job security (Barley et al., 2017; Chung and Mau, 2014; Collins, 2006; Green, 2009; Juchnowicz, 2010; Lowe, 2018; Myjak, 2018; Salladarré, Hlaimi, and Wolff, 2011; Probst and Jiang, 2017). To understand the essence of job security, it seems crucial to look at it from the standpoint of its reference perspectives. The analysis of the literature on the subject draws particular attention to two of them:

- the perspective related to ensuring that workers are not exposed to harmful and hazardous conditions in the workplace,
- the perspective related to the possibility of job loss, or revealing job insecurity within the enterprise.

The former is explored mainly in the literature on the protection of health and life of employees and, more broadly, the problems of working conditions. Thus, this security is identified here with the state of a workplace’s equipment, its adaptation to the physical, mental, and social capabilities of the person performing the work to limit dangerous situations, potential accidents, etc. (Studenski, 1996, p. 15). In other words, job security is perceived in this perspective as an activity aimed at protecting employees from potential exposure or accidents using various technical measures, safe organization of work, and instilling safe human behavior at work, taking into account the type and severity of potential accident hazards (Hansen, 1998, p. 14).

It should be added that job security understood in this way is also described in the literature, especially in Polish, using the term *bezpieczeństwo i higiena pracy* (BHP), the English-language literature opts for ‘occupational safety and health’ (OSH). Similarly to Polish literature, OSH refers to the anticipation, recognition, evaluation, and control of workplace hazards that may adversely affect employees’ life and health, taking into account the impact on surrounding communities and the environment (Alli, 2008).

In the latter perspective, characteristic especially of studies in the field of social economics, sociology, and social policy, job security refers to the possibility of keeping a particular job and at the same time providing protection against dismissal (see e.g. Madsen, 2007) or the lack of fear of losing the job. Part of the international research on perceptions of job security, conducted as early as in the late 1990s, is therefore based on the consideration of the attitudes to employees’ perceptions of the likelihood of downsizing (Wooden, 1999). In Polish literature, an analogous understanding of the concept of job security can be observed. It is indicated that job security should be combined with certainty about the workplace, fear of losing the specific benefits associated with it, and a sense of helplessness to prevent it (cf. Pawłowska, 2017).

According to businessdictionary.com, the security in question is seen as the assurance, or the lack of assurance, that an employee will not be laid off. Thus, this does not mean only being employed in a particular enterprise at a particular time but also having a job throughout one’s working life. A similar perspective on the perception of job security was presented by Heibutzki (2013), who indicated that it should be combined with both career stability and the improvement of work motivation. This author also pointed out that job insecurity cannot be equated with subjective assessments of job opportunities by individual employees (van Oorschot and Chung, 2015).

Consequently, researchers are increasingly stressing that in today’s flexible conditions of providing work, job security should be associated with a sense of employment security (cf. Lowe, 2018). It is emphasized that employment security is associated not only with having a job at a particular place and time but with career progression, regardless of the current place and time of employment. This is because employability plays a key role here, meaning the individual’s perception of the possibility of finding a new job using the individuals’ knowledge and skills (see e.g. Madsen, 2007; Marx, 2014). It is pointed out that the increase in employability is facilitated in particular by the creation of conditions for participation in training, which foster the improvement of qualifications (Collins, 2006). The literature also points to the importance of individual competencies as key to increasing employability (Miller, 2018; Roth and Kurtyka, 2017; Wood and Payne, 2006; World Economic Forum, 2016). However, it is important to keep in mind that in practice, differences in individual countries, even in Europe, emerge both in the very understanding of employability and in how its development is supported (cf. Marzec, 2015).

Considering the complexity of the job security problems discussed here, including its two-dimensionality (the OSH perspective and the perspective related to having work and/or employability), the author's definition of job security is proposed, namely the possibility of getting a job, keeping it and securing the conditions of its performance which do not endanger the health and life of employees, and the possibility of obtaining income by individuals performing work, regardless of the employee or non-employee form of its provision. Note that the definition also refers to the aspect which has not been explored to date, i.e. income generation by persons performing work. However, it seems that this aspect cannot be omitted when talking about employee safety.

10.3. The empirical research methodics

The main goal of the empirical research was to identify the importance given by employees to job security as one of their interests. Due to the ambiguity of the concept of job security, it was deemed appropriate, as a first step, to identify the perception of the term in light of empirical research among employees.

The following research questions were formulated:

1. How do employees perceive the concept of job security?
2. What place does job security have in the hierarchy of employee interests?
3. Are employee interests in ensuring job security respected by employers?

To answer these research questions, an empirical study was conducted among employees in 2018-2020². The information was collected using a questionnaire, the PAPI (*Paper and Pencil Interview*) technique was used³.

A random sample of employees working in enterprises registered in the Lower Silesia Voivodeship was used (working both based on full-time employment and e.g. contract of mandate). Data from EURES (European Job Mobility Portal) show that the population of employees (in the business sector of the Lower Silesia Voivodeship) in 2018 numbered 484,100.

For the purpose of the study, a random sample of $N = 274$ was drawn from a finite population of employees working in enterprises registered in the Lower Silesia Voivodeship. Assuming a 6% maximum estimation error, a significance level of $\alpha = 0.05$, and an estimated fraction size of 0.5 for a finite population of $N = 484,100$, the minimum sample size was $n = 267$. The randomness of the sample was obtained using a random operator in the form of a database of employees working in enterprises registered in the Lower Silesia Voivodeship from a population of employees defined for the purposes of the study.

² The research results presented here are a part of a larger study on the interests of employees and respecting them, conducted by the author of this article and presented in a broader context in the monograph (Cierniak-Emerych and Gableta, 2022).

³ At this stage of the study, the author collaborated with the Instytut Badawczy IPC Sp. z o.o.

The study group included both individuals who have been with their current employer for less than a year (14.2%) and those with more than 15 years of job seniority with their current employer (19.0%). Most of the respondents at the time of the survey were employed under a contract for an indefinite period (56.6%), while 21.2% were employed under a contract for a definite period of time. The study group was also highly diverse in terms of gender and age; women accounted for 50.4% of the group while there were 49.6% men. There were 24.5% of the respondents under the age of 30 years, and 21.5% of those over 50. One in four respondents was aged between 31 and 40. The most numerous group, accounting for 28.8% of the total study group, were those aged 41-50.

10.4. The empirical research findings

When searching for an answer to the research question concerning the employees' perception of the concept of job security, it was found – based on the results of the study – that the respondents most often associated job security with occupational safety and health and employment security (48.2% of responses) (see Figure 10.1).

However, 42.7% of the respondents associate job security only with safe and healthy working conditions (machinery, equipment, lighting, etc.). Furthermore, 41.6% of the respondents perceived job security as the certainty of having a job, whereas slightly fewer (38.3%) linked it with working under a contract of employment (see Figure 10.1). It should also be noted that the respondents had mixed opinions on the non-standard forms of employment; 44.9% stated that these forms of employment do not allow the interests of employees to be satisfied. The opposite view was held by 36.5%, whereas the other respondents were not able to give a clear answer.

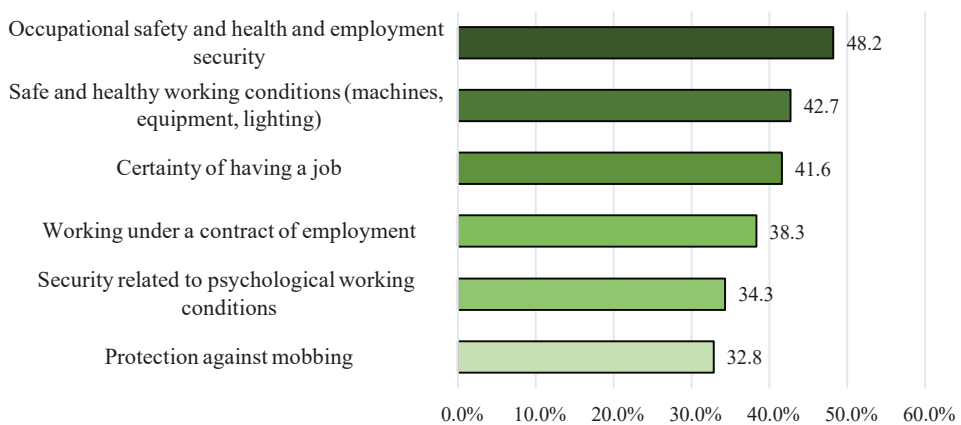


Figure 10.1. Job security as perceived by the respondents

Source: own research.

It should be noted that among the respondents with a contract for an indefinite period of time, there was a higher percentage of indications of associating the term ‘job security’ with both occupational safety and health and employment security than in the study group in total. The relation was confirmed by the chi-squared test (see Figure 10.2).

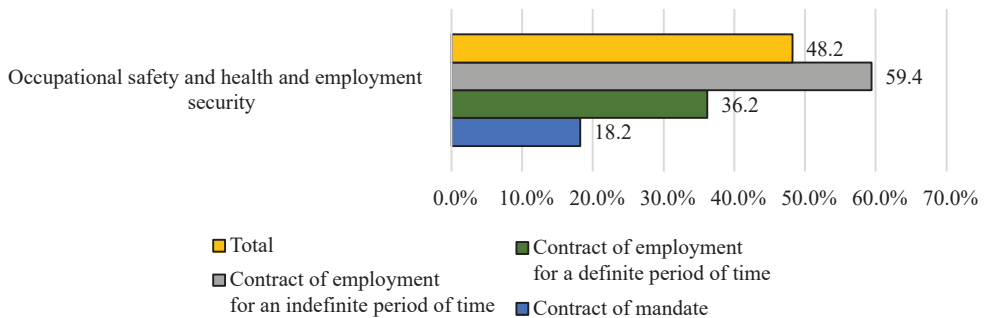


Figure 10.2. What do you associate the term job security with? – in terms of employment

Source: own research.

There was also a relation indicating that women are significantly more likely than men to associate job security with protection against mobbing (see Figure 10.3). The relation was confirmed by the chi-squared test.

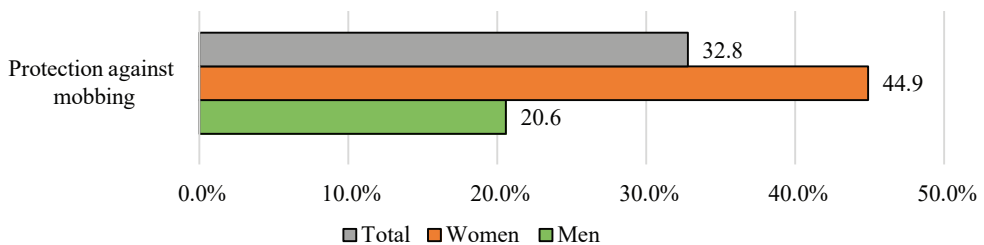


Figure 10.3. What do you associate the term job security with? – in terms of gender

Source: own research.

While searching for an answer to the question of the place of job security in the hierarchy of interests of employees, it was found that among the proposed choice of interests⁴ which could be indicated by the respondents, first place was taken by safe and healthy working conditions (96.3%), and second by compensation commensurate with responsibilities (92%). With the accepted definition of the concept of job security, it should be noted that other important factors indicated by employees

⁴ The proposed choice of 22 interests was developed based on research conducted in 2009-2017, in which the author of this paper was a member of the research team and carried out a literature review.

are permanent employment (85% of indications) and protection against dismissal (83.9% of indications). Of the other interests of employees, a good atmosphere was also enumerated by the respondents and was ranked third in terms of importance. More than 90% of the respondents also indicated the provision of clear criteria for evaluating task performance as important.

The last research question was whether employee interests in ensuring job security were respected by employers. The results of the survey showed that almost all the respondents had safe and healthy working conditions at their workplace (96.7%, see Figure 14). In terms of the number of indications, a good working atmosphere was in second place, whereas the help of superiors and co-workers was third. The listed items were indicated by 83.1% and 80.1% of the respondents, respectively. In the context of the discussion, however, it is noteworthy that among the interests that are respected, employees did not give significant priority to issues related to job security such as employment for an indefinite period or protection of employment.

According to the employees surveyed, managers take the interests of employees into account, mainly because of the need for maintaining a good reputation (71.5% of affirmative responses). Concern about conflict with employees came second (59.5% of indications). Furthermore, according to 59.1% of the respondents, this type of behavior is a result of the enterprise's organizational culture. It should be noted that, among others, Sanders and Roefs (European Agency for Safety and Health at Work, 2004) emphasized that an appropriate combination of safety and health issues with social responsibility helps create a positive image of the employer.

10.5. Final conclusions and research summary

The changing conditions of the functioning of business entities are reflected, among other things, in the area of job security. This requires recognizing the symptoms of these changes and reviewing the existing solutions related to respecting the employee interests concerning job security.

Meeting the employee interests in terms of safe and healthy working and employment conditions is related to corporate social responsibility (CSR). One of the aspects of CSR is responsibility related to employment, including job security. The approach to job security presented here reflects an effort to consider it as comprehensively as possible. This is evidenced by going beyond the field of occupational safety and health. Consideration of job security in relation to employment security also demonstrates the desire for a multifaceted view of occupational safety in modern enterprises.

By presenting an approach to job security that meets today's challenges, the attempt was made in the study to draw attention not only to the importance of adequate OSH within an enterprise but also to the importance of employment security, including employment for an indefinite period of time and related protection against dismissal, as important items in the group of interests expressed by employees.

In this context the main goal of the empirical research was to identify the importance given by employees to job security as one of their interests. Referring the research findings presented in the previous section it can be concluded that the goal has been achieved. The author presented and discussed the data associated with such issues as the employees' perception of the job security concept, the place that job security occupies in the hierarchy of employees' interests, and the respect of employers toward employees' interests in ensuring job security. Moreover, this allows to recognize that the goal of this chapter has also been achieved. Namely, in the final summary one can conclude that the thesis that that job security should be considered as an important interest of employees has been supported both by the literature review and empirical research findings.

However, the investigations carried out in this study should be continued having in mind, in particular, the changes occurring in the labor market associated with generational changes, the situation caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, and migration, especially from Ukraine.

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