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IMPLEMENTING THE WORK–LIFE BALANCE AS A CSR TOOL IN POLISH COMPANIES

Summary: The aim of this article is to assess implementing the WLB concept in Poland. There is a following hypothesis set in this article: implementing the WLB solutions as a CSR tool offers a variety of benefits to both employers and employees but the level of their application in Poland is unsatisfactory and low. In order to meet the article objective and verify the set hypothesis, two research tasks have been determined: (1) to describe the main aspects of the WLB concept crucial in implementing by entrepreneurs; (2) to analyze the implementation of the WLB concept in Poland in the light of international and domestic studies. This article has been divided into two sections. The first one describes the WLB concept and applied solutions on the basis of available literature as well as the difficulties in implementing the concept together with the benefits from applying the WLB solutions and consequences of lacking a balance between work and private life. The second section analyzes multiple aspects of implementing the WLB concept in Poland and also – for comparison – concept implementation in other countries on the basis of secondary sources, reports and own study carried out by the author of this article. The analysis of available literature, secondary data, own studies, reports allowed achieving the set research tasks and the article objective.

Keywords: work–life balance, corporate social responsibility.

DOI: 10.15611/pn.2015.387.09

1. Introduction

Socially responsible organizations take steps to enable their shareholder inner „employee” to keep the work–life balance (WLB). Socially responsible companies should pay attention to the fact that individuals are not only employees, but they also play a number of social roles, e.g. a role of a wife, a husband, a parent, a child, a friend, a local community member. Hence, except for the time devoted to work, an individual also has to find time to foster personal relationships, regeneration and self-development.

The companies’ focus (it is mainly the focus of HR in large organizations) on the relations between work and other life spheres of an individual results mainly from

the ongoing changes in the picture of a typical family, employee and values cherished by them. Spouses that both work are more and more common at present. They are forced to combine their careers with bringing up children or taking care of their elderly parents. Moreover, the younger employee generation (so-called Y generation in particular) is far less eager to sacrifice their private life for the company's sake than their older colleagues. They are ready to change their workplace to the one providing greater comfort of private life at any time. Hence, particularly attractive companies for them are the ones offering the opportunity of combining their career with non-work duties or activities, hence offering the work–life balance.

Therefore, this article pays a special attention to the assessment of implementing the WLB concept in Poland which is the main aim of the article. There is a following hypothesis set in this article: implementing the WLB solutions as a CSR tool offers a variety of benefits to both employers and employees but the level of their application in Poland is unsatisfactory and low. In order to meet the article objective and verify the set hypothesis, two research tasks have been determined: (1) to describe the main aspects of the WLB concept crucial in implementing by entrepreneurs, (2) to analyze the implementation of the WLB concept in Poland in the light of international and domestic studies.

The present article has been divided into two sections. The first one describes the WLB concept and applied solutions on the basis of available literature as well as the difficulties in implementing the concept together with the benefits from applying the WLB solutions and consequences of lacking a balance between work and private life. The second section analyzes multiple aspects of implementing the WLB concept in Poland and also – for comparison – concept implementation in other countries on the basis of secondary sources, reports and own study carried out by the author of this article.

2. Work–life balance concept – an introduction

Work–life balance is simply keeping the balance between the professional and private life without restricting self-development as well as paying attention to multiple aspects of such a balance. In this context, the need of personal fulfilment should be also translated to life aspects other than professional ones. The WLB concept is not, however, about separating completely private life from professional one but rather about combining both of them swiftly and merging them so that work, family and hobbies create a harmonious whole.

When implementing the work–life balance concept in an organization, it is important to remember that there are two parties involved: employee and employer. For employees their priorities, work significance, family and private life are important. Moreover, it is also crucial that an individual has a hobby, plans and how employee is motivated.

There are many WLB programs to which two approaches may be adopted: the wide approach – employment and family policies implemented by the authorities are taken into account or the narrow approach which focuses on steps taken by employers only. The tools applied in both approaches may be broken down into four main groups [Ratajczyk 2010]:

- a variety of work and time arrangement; they are frequently called non-standard employment: flexible working hours, part-time, telework, agreement for performance of specific work, commission contract, working from home and jobsharing;
- available holiday leave and time when an employee is not required to report for duty due to their family responsibilities; in this case it is important to retain the right to benefits when not performing work and right to remuneration;
- fringe benefits for employees taking care of dependent family members (children, elderly or disabled people);
- employee benefits granted when an employee has to combine work with family responsibilities in the event of high employer requirements.

Naturally, certain tools should be adapted to given conditions. It happens that in various conditions a number of combined tools may be applied. But they all have a common objective to support an employee who may face problems in finding the work–life balance. It happens that applying the aforementioned tools aimed at certain beneficiaries results in accusing an employer for discrimination against other employees. It is a signal to propagate widely fundamental premises and assumptions related to striving to find the work–life balance. By definition, such programs prevent discrimination, thanks to them equalization of opportunities is possible as well as supporting those who need help [Ratajczyk 2010].

Naturally, even the best programs or applied tools may fail if the approach towards them is not appropriate. In this case, special attention is paid to such a crucial issue as employer and employee's approach towards the separation of the work life from the private one. Both employee and employer have to be aware of the fact that the workplace cannot replace private life or family. Without such an approach, any tools will not keep the discussed balance.

Undoubtedly, there is a huge potential in development of work–life balance programs. The mentioned development, however, encounters many barriers. The most important barriers are as follows [Gienza et al. 2010]:

- lack of common awareness that the steps taken under the work–life balance are beneficial to both parties, i.e. employers and employees (win–win strategy);
- insufficient knowledge of possible solutions, methods and results produced by them;
- bad work organization, employees have too many duties;
- focus on the economic indices when assessing results of company operation;
- employers do not understand that there is a strong relationship between the assessment of life standard including family life and employee efficiency and engagement.

It also happens in practice that an employer offers support programs implementing the work–life balance concept and employees are not interested in them. This is caused most frequently by financial issues as drawing parenthood benefits means in many cases earning less money. Therefore, people who cannot afford to earn less money will not benefit from proposed work–family solutions although they feel conflict in this area. Additionally, it is worth mentioning that taking holiday leaves or special childcare leaves affects negatively gaining future pension rights.

When companies implement the WLB programs, everything depends on the approach of supervisors towards exercising the rights related to keeping the work–life balance. They may e.g. not consent to some solutions or discourage the interested parties to enforce the solutions in a formal way. In consequence, an employee is frustrated and stressed with such a situation and in many cases he or she has to choose between two options: to maintain good relationship with a supervisor or exercise his or her rights. It also happens that an employee using work–life balance programs is excluded from getting promoted or taking part in trainings, in some extreme cases employee may be even laid off. The above practices are socially irresponsible and they are not the part of the CSR concept in a company [Ratajczyk 2010].

A conscious employer knows that applying work-life balance programs is beneficial for both parties involved: employer and employee (see Table 1).

Table 1. Benefits from implementing work–life balance solutions

Benefits for an employer	Benefits for an employee
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • stable employment, • reduced costs of recruiting new employees, • increase in employee engagement and motivation for working, • increase in productivity, • protected investment in employee, • decrease in employee absence, • mitigation of difficulties with work stoppage due to personal reasons, • facilitated recruitment of new employees, • building a positive company image 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • mitigation of the conflict: work– private/ family life, • facilitated combining work with family, • reduced stress, • limited anxiety about losing a job, • increase in motivation for working, • acquired qualifications are protected, • increase in productivity, • impact on a salary

Source: [Balcerzak-Paradowska 2008, p. 24].

Lack of the work–life balance leads to a number of negative consequences faced by employees, their families and organizations. The studies show that the main consequences of disturbing the work–life balance for an employee are as follows: higher stress level (comparing with those employees who keep the balance), higher risk of burnout [e.g. Netemeyer et al. 2004; Noor 2002], as well as a general increase in so-called life stress [e.g. Frone et al. 1997]. While, keeping the work–life balance creates favorable conditions for family life, more effective functioning as a family member [Allen et al. 2000; Frone et al. 1997]. Disturbing the work–life balance

produces a number of negative consequences for an organization. The most visible are as follows: decrease in work engagement [Netemeyer et al. 1996], decrease in job satisfaction [Kossek, Ozeki 1998], decrease in employee productivity and efficiency [Frone et al. 1997].

3. Implementing WLB – study analysis

Solutions to keep the balance between professional and private life are applied worldwide; however, their perception is different depending on a country. The survey conducted by WFD Consulting in collaboration with WorldatWork involved two groups of countries, namely: developed and emerging countries.¹

The research showed that the employees in emerging countries reported much higher work identity scores than the employees in developed countries. In emerging countries personal/family identity scores were correlated with an employee (i.e., higher levels of personal/family identity were associated with higher levels of engagement [Linkow, Civian, Lingle 2011, p. 8]). This suggests that in these countries investments supporting employees' personal/family lives may translate into outcomes related to engagement, such as higher productivity and retention.

According to the respondents, the most considerable work–life challenges are “financial stress” and “finding time to spend with family.”

The survey showed that the employees in emerging countries used workplace flexibility at greater rates than the employees in developed countries. In emerging countries, women reported higher use of telework, remote work, compressed workweek and reduced hours than men. This is a pattern unseen in developed countries. Men use telework and remote work at higher rates, while women are more likely to reduce their hours of work [Linkow, Civian, Lingle 2011, p. 9].

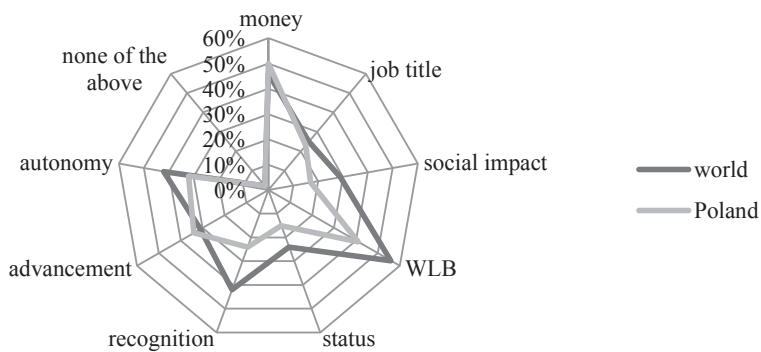
The employees were asked if they had experienced any repercussions for using WLB programs. Half or more employees in emerging countries and a quarter or more employees in developed countries directly experienced or perceived they would experience repercussions for using work–life programs [Linkow, Civian, Lingle 2011, p. 9].

Interesting information is provided by the research carried out by Accenture.² It showed that the work–life balance is most frequently cited definition of professional success. Only in four countries, including Poland, salary was more frequently cited as an equivalent to professional success (see Figure 1). The survey showed that as

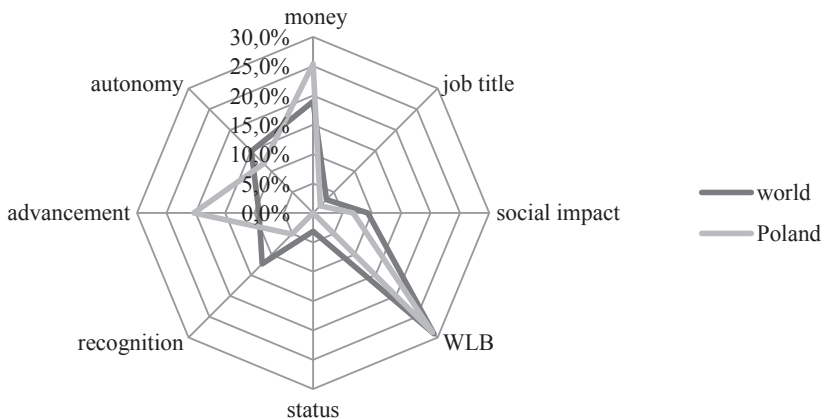
¹ Survey was carried out from November to December 2010 on the sample of 2312 employees from six countries: Brazil, China, India, Germany, the United Kingdom and the United States of America. Respondents were employees from large organizations (above 500 employees).

² The survey was carried out among 4100 business executives from medium to large companies across 33 countries all over the continents. The survey included the equal number of women and men, they have been divided into three almost the same age groups: Baby Boomers (1946–64), X and Y generation.

many as 70% of respondents believed they could achieve professional goals without sacrificing personal needs. For many respondents the work–life balance is the main criterion for choosing a job. More than half of respondents (52%) declared that they turned down a job due to concerns about its impact on the work–life balance [Sawicka, Cesarz-Kwietniak 2013, p. 23]. In the majority of countries, professional success defined from the salary perspective was ranked second. The survey shows that the role of money decreases with age, money is crucial to 51.1% of respondents from Y generation (they also significantly more frequently, above 60%, accessed their success through their pay rise) but it was true for people born before 1964 only in 38.1%.



a. Opportunity to select more than one factor



b. The most important factor

Figure 1. Definition of professional success

Source: [Sawicka, Cesarz-Kwietniak 2013, pp. 23–24].

Figure 1b shows that Poles attach significantly more attention to money as opposed to other nations; however, they appreciate the work–life balance. There is a major difference between men and women. As many as 30% of the surveyed men said that money is the most important factor in defining professional success while no less than 41% of women in Poland said that the work–life balance is the most important factor. What is interesting, Polish respondents' opinion on the role of money was different by more than 10 percentage points while Polish women were ahead of the whole world by the same percentage citing the work–life balance.

Also the survey provided by “Philips Index for Health and Well-being of Poles: 2010”³ shows that money is the most important to Poles. As many as 78% of the respondents claimed that the amount of money has a definite impact on how they feel. Unfortunately, at the same time only 18% of the respondents said that their salary is satisfactory. The comparison of the results provided by “Philips Index for Health and Well-Being: 2010” showed that Poland is ranked in the top in this respect (after Japan, Taiwan, Brazil and Korea).

The study carried out by Accenture showed that striving to find the right balance between work and spare time in Poland is possible mainly thanks to finding time to spend with family and friends (84% respondents), flexible work arrangements (77%) as well as finding time for personal hobbies (71%). Also in other studies spending time with family and friends (90%) was ranked first [Sawicka, Cesarz-Kwietniak 2013, pp. 2–25]. It is also confirmed by the study provided by Philips, which shows that family happiness and good relationship with relatives are far more important to Poles than professional success. The relationship with family was important to 97%, with friends to 95% and with a spouse or a partner to 80%. While relationship with a supervisor or co-workers was important to 61% of the respondents [*Philips Index: 2010...*, p. 10].

The survey carried out by the Public Opinion Research Center (CBOS)⁴ showed that Poles spend on average 46 hours a week on working. That is more than the statistics provided by GUS and Eurostat which show that Poles are one of the busiest nations in Europe. The biggest group of respondents (41%) declared that they spent 40 hours a week on work. Every fourth respondent claimed 41 to 50 hours a week and 12% of Poles declared working for more than 60 hours a week. Less than 10% of the respondents spent 20 to 39 hours a week on working, almost the same percentage declared that they worked for 51 to 60 hours a week [Kowalczyk 2012, pp. 2–3].

³ Philips Index for Health and Well-being of Poles: 2010. The survey was carried out in the form of OMNIMAS with the use of CAPI (Computer Assisted Personal Interview) at respondent's house, N = 983 of interviews with the Poles aged 18 and above. The survey was carried out from 24 to 27 June 2010.

⁴ The survey was carried out from 14 to 20 June 2012 on the sample of 1013 respondents chosen randomly; they were adult and lived in Poland. CBOS emphasized that data on job activity concerns only those who work, even temporary, i.e. 52% of respondents and people aged 18–64 as the oldest age group were excluded from the survey.

The Central Statistical Office of Poland under the Study of Population Job Activity (BAEL) surveyed another crucial aspect of WLB concept, namely: combining flexibly the time spent on professional duties and private life in Polish companies in 2010. Provided data shows that over 87% of the surveyed employees (employment relationship in a state or private company) have fixed working hours. This leads to no flexibility in establishing working hours and consequently adapting family duties to work. Almost 6% of the respondents declared working a fixed number of hours a day with a possibility to shift slightly working hours. Working a fixed number of hours a month without determining a number of working hours on an individual day is considered a more flexible solution. Using a solution that allows employees for autonomy in scheduling work duties is declared by 4.6% of employees. The GUS analysts considered determining own work schedule by an individual without any formal restrictions from employers to be the most flexible employment solution. The said category also included working under civil-law contracts. The survey results show that 1.6% of the respondents determine individual work schedule. The results relate to full-time employees. As to part-time employees, no less than 30% applies one of the flexible employment forms. Another issue raised in the GUS study concerned changing working hours due to family reasons. As many as 40% of the respondents said that changing working hours is not possible and 38% declared it is possible but only in emergency situations. 14% of employees cannot take a day off, use worked overtime, make up for a day off in another time or exchange a shift with another co-worker [Główny Urząd Statystyczny 2012].

Therefore, the study results provided by Regus are not surprising at all.⁵ Regus determines the work–life balance index on the basis of responses to the questions on working overtime, satisfaction from spending time with family. In 2013, Regus work–life balance Index for Poland was 115 points (while in 2012, it was 136 points) with world average index at 120 points. Half of the Poles surveyed in 2013 believed they spent more time on working than previously. The same percentage of respondents said it was mainly due to the economic slowdown.

This is confirmed by the results of the survey carried out under the 2012 Best Employers Program.⁶ The study shows that 55% of those employed in companies under study managed to keep the right work–life balance. Among those hired by “The Best Employers” the percentage was higher and amounted to 66%.

⁵ In 2013, Regus carried out a survey on work–life balance among 26,000 employees across 90 countries.

⁶ The Best Employers has been organized in Poland by Aon Hewitt for 10 years now and for over 22 years worldwide. It is mainly aimed at those organizations that want to achieve higher business results by building better and more engaging work environment based on strong leadership, high results, reliable employer brand and stability. Moreover, these companies ambition is to be the first-choice employer and gain good brand on the labor market.

The Regus survey also showed that baby boomers struggle to find their work–life balance. For generations X and Y (75%) work is more satisfactory comparing with baby boomers (53%) and they are also more satisfied with their efficiency (80% as opposed to 57% of baby boomers).

It is also important to pay attention to the relation between keeping the work–life balance and employees’ engagement. The data provided by the 2012 Best Employers Study shows that the engagement index in the group of those who managed to keep the work–life balance amounts to 59%, while the average index in Poland is 48%. Among those who definitely agreed or agreed that they do not keep the work–life balance, the engagement index was significantly lower and amounted to only 19%, while among “The Best Employers” stuff it was 12%. There is also a relation to be observed: people who managed to keep the work–life balance generally assessed better the environment created by their employers and felt engaged in their work. The results also show that those employers assessed higher keeping promises by employers, competences of their supervisors, efficiency of processes and procedures implemented by an employer (see Figure 2).



Figure 2. Selected aspects of work environment assessed by employees

Source: [Hewitt 2012].

The study also showed,⁷ which aspects of work environment had the most considerable impact, both positive and negative, on the work–life balance. Its results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. Impact of selected factors on the work–life balance

Detailed list		Positive impact	Negative impact
Areas with the most positive impact	Processes and procedures implemented in a company make my work more effective.	19%	–10%
	Important employees are retained in our company.	18%	–8%
	The management board regards employees as the most valuable resource.	17%	–10%
	My salary reflects my contribution to work.	17%	–5%
Areas with the most negative impact	I deal with work-related stress.	12%	–24%
	My work position/place is adapted to performed work.	11%	–19%
	The subordinates are required by my supervisor to be responsible for better work results.	6%	–16%
	I understand how my goals are related to the company goals.	10%	–15%

Source: [Hewitt 2012].

It is worth paying more attention to the said factors in an organization and look for inefficiency reasons that may be caused by too long or complicated procedures, red tape or inefficient systems. What is worrying, the stress among Polish employees is very much visible due to mainly difficult economic standing of a company, physical conditions of work environment which get worsening, changes in result management (supervisors are less oriented to employee results and the relation between the employee and company goals is less clear).

It is proved by previously mentioned study on Health and Well-being of Poles, according to which apart from financial issues work itself was the main stress causing factor for Poles (42%). Supervisors (43%) and co-workers (40%) are believed to be the source of stress by the majority of respondents. It may be examined from the perspective of work quality and standards (when a supervisor organizes work well, it will not be stressful) or manner of communication (supervisor who shows too often who is the boss here) ([*Philips Index 2010...*, p. 30]. What is typical, the study shows the most stressed people fell into age group 35–44.

Studies carried out by Aon Hewitt show it is worth to take care about employees' proper work–life balance as it is beneficial to employer. Employees who share effectively work and private life are also ready to meet their goals successfully and achieve better results what leads to improved company performance.

⁷ The analysis was based on all the companies surveyed in 2012.

The study carried out by the author of this article concerning the WLB issue in companies of the West-Pomeranian voivodeship confirmed the already discussed trends.⁸ Only 46% of the companies surveyed implemented work–life balance solutions. The main reasons behind such solutions included being perceived as an attractive employer on the market, hiring employees from Y generation, for whom private life is very valuable (see Figure 3).

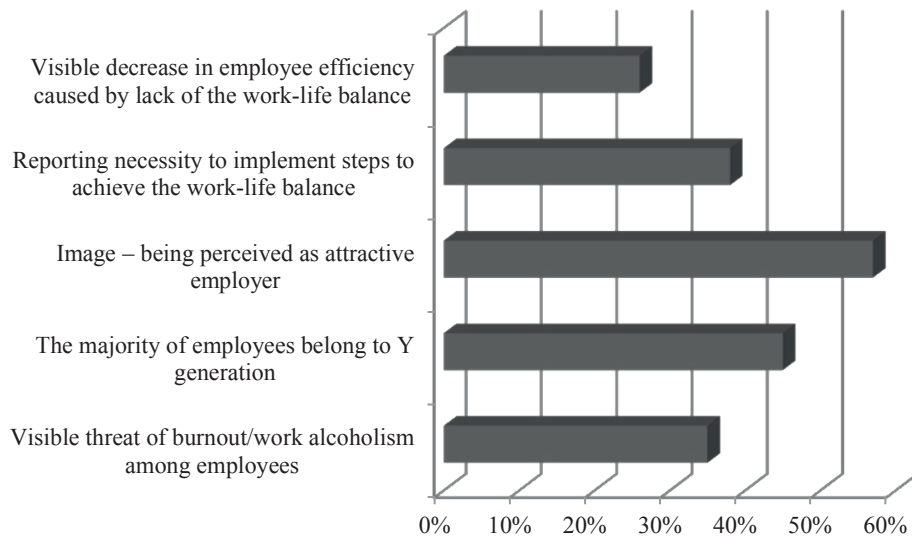


Figure 3. Reasons behind implementing WLB

Source: own compilation.

The most frequently used form was flexible work arrangement (67%), then working part-time after maternity leave (47%) and telework (45%).

The problem of keeping the work–life balance is a crucial component in human resources management. It is also a very significant issue in the economic practice, both Polish and international, due to the increasing share of Y generation on the labor market and C generation entering it. Therefore, carrying out a more detailed study on the WLB issues is very important, such a study should not be limited to the size of an organization, but it should also include its location. It is also important to focus on benefits, cost, barriers, opportunities and threats posed by implementing the WLB concept in companies with regard to both employers and employees. Undoubtedly, the author of this article is going to carry out such a study in the future.

⁸ The survey carried out in 40 companies belonging to SMEs in the West-Pomeranian voivodeship from September to December 2013. The questionnaire was aimed at employers; it contained open and semi-open questions.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of available literature, secondary sources, own studies and reports allowed achieving the set research tasks and the article objective. The hypothesis set in this article was positively verified.

The analysis based on available literature and studies allowed drawing specific conclusions. As the study shows, employees are interested in the WLB solutions. Implementing such solutions intentionally will be beneficial to both company and employees as it reduces the stress level among staff and the risk of burnout, contributes to family life and employees' satisfaction which influences positively professional life: increase in commitment to work, productivity and efficiency of an employee (employees are aware that their more efficient family life is possible thanks to the opportunities created at work).

The Polish are one of the busiest nations in Europe. Additionally, they are more focused on salary comparing to other European nations. It is important for them to value the work–life balance. Such a phenomenon will intensify due to the generation shift on the labor market, more and more employees from Y generation are on the labor market and also C generation starts to enter it. Keeping the work–life balance is for Y and C generations one of key components of staying on the labor market.

It is important for Polish employers to apply more WLB solutions but the ones tailored to employees' needs. Then, the WLB solutions will become one of the factors retaining employees in a company and increasing their commitment to work.

Implementing the WLB solutions by employers and, at the same time, discriminating employees already using proposed solutions (excluding them from getting promoted or taking part in trainings) will influence employers negatively if not immediately, surely in the long-term perspective.

Let us hope that we will observe the increasing interest in the WLB among Polish entrepreneurs, which should contribute to rapid progress in the WLB concept in Polish companies. Unfortunately, in the majority of companies most employees are doomed to permanent conflicts between work and private life. Employers, on the other hand, regard the procedures aimed at finding a balance in those areas as an unnecessary burden for a company.

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REALIZACJA WORK–LIFE BALANCE JAKO JEDNEGO Z NARZĘDZI CSR W POLSKICH PRZEDSIĘBIORSTWACH

Streszczenie: Celem artykułu jest ocena realizacji koncepcji *work–life balance* (WLB) w Polsce. Artykuł składa się z dwóch głównych części. W części pierwszej, wykorzystując literaturę przedmiotu, przedstawiono istotę WLB, rozwiązania stosowane w ramach tej koncepcji, jak również zwrócono uwagę na trudności w ich wdrażaniu. Przedstawiono także korzyści ze stosowania rozwiązań WLB oraz konsekwencje wynikające z braku zachowania równowagi pomiędzy pracą a życiem prywatnym. W części drugiej w oparciu o źródła wtórne, raporty, wyniki badań własnych autorki dokonano wieloaspektowej analizy realizacji koncepcji WLB w Polsce, przedstawiając także – dla porównania – realizację tej koncepcji w innych krajach.

Słowa kluczowe: równowaga praca–życie prywatne, społeczna odpowiedzialność biznesu.