



MANAGING THE DIVERSITY OF EMPLOYEE TEAMS – A NEW, EMERGING SEGMENT OF LABOUR PEDAGOGY

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Abstract. The aim of the article is to present the directions of changes in the understanding of the concept of human work, and against this background, the essence and benefits resulting from the inevitable diversity of employee teams, and to demonstrate that the issues of human resources management, including diversity management, constitute a new, separate segment of labour pedagogy, inscribed in the multitude of problems of this pedagogical discipline.

ZARZĄDZANIE RÓŻNORODNOŚCIĄ ZESPOŁÓW PRACOWNICZYCH – NOWY, WYODRĘBNIAJĄCY SIĘ SEGMENT PEDAGOGIKI PRACY

Słowa kluczowe: pedagogika pracy, zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi, zarządzanie różnorodnością

Streszczenie. Celem artykułu jest zaprezentowanie kierunków zmian w rozumieniu pojęcia pracy człowieka i, na tym tle, istoty i korzyści wynikających z nieuchronnego zróżnicowania zespołów pracowniczych oraz wykazanie, że problematyka zarządzania zasobami ludzkimi, w tym zarządzania różnorodnością, stanowi nowy, wyodrębniający się segment pedagogiki pracy, wpisując się w mnogość problemów tej dyscypliny pedagogicznej.

Introduction

Anniversaries such as the 50th provoke in-depth reflections on achievements. “Where is labour pedagogy going?”, “Where are we coming from and where are we, the labour pedagogues?” – are universal questions that everyone is asking themselves. Reflecting on human labour and supporting people’s employability can help to grasp the directions of change, to understand the sources and order of contemporary research trends and the specifics of educational and business practices.

Particularly in the late 20th and early 21st centuries, many articles and books have been published on the subject of human labour and competence in the work of the modern worker. This article makes another attempt at outlining the changes in the nature and types of work, revealing new dilemmas and drawing attention to the issues currently under discussion: the factors changing work, diversity and development trends.

The purpose of the article is to present the directions of changes in the understanding of the concept of human labour, and against this background, the essence and benefits of the inevitable diversity of work teams, and to show that the problem of human resource management, including diversity management, is a new, distinguishable segment of labour pedagogy, fitting into the multitude of problems of this pedagogical discipline.

Scope and content of the concept of human labour – continuation or change?

Human labour is a basic category of labour pedagogy – such a statement can be found in the literature on labour pedagogy. However, a question may emerge – otherwise close to labour pedagogues – as to whether and to what extent human labour constitutes the basic research category of this sub-discipline, given the contemporary contexts of work and the broader implications of the realities in which it is performed.

The fuzziness of the term “work”, and the different meanings given to it, is one of the important threads of reflection on the condition of labour pedagogy.

According to Prof. T.W. Nowacki (2004, p. 189), “work is a set of human efforts performed to maintain human existence and aimed at increasing its level, and it includes systems and structures of sensorimotor and intellectual

activities adapted to labour tasks, leading to the production of material goods, services and cultural products.” Z. Wiatrowski (2005, p. 81) argues that „every person has the right to work, and the organization of social life should guarantee the realization of this right; every person should obtain such preparation for work and such a state of competence that will guarantee them the chances of being a subject in any labour situation; every working person has the right to acquire, through labour, a minimum of resources that guarantee them and their loved ones the state of human existence.” Considering such a definition of human labour as binding, firstly, all activities of volunteers, annuitants, workers who frequently change the nature of their activities and those who do not need to have certain preparation and skills are excluded from the field of analysis. Second, labour is a premise of human respect and social status, but is sometimes willingly used as an instrument of punishment, and is sometimes a mechanism for the degradation of human subjectivity. Third, such a view of the characteristics of human labour points to the obligation to prepare each person to work in a diverse workforce, in cultural diversity. There is also the question of whether labour is a value in itself or whether it is a universal value, that value through which all other values are created and function.

The thesis of professional work as a factor in human development, the primary source of human income, its creative power and the foundation of a person's identity, and even the meaning of one's life is increasingly contested, both in the axiological layer and in view of the intensification of new trends in development. An example is the use of gamification – game mechanisms, combining work and play – as a method of professional development in the areas of learning through play, experience, self-improvement, and development through cooperation and interaction with others, as a way to motivate the development and growth of employee involvement manifested in cognitive, emotional and behavioural engagement (Juchnowicz 2012; Winnicka-Wejs, 2015).

One of the key features of modernity is change, or more precisely, almost constant change. The accelerated dynamics of development concerns economic processes, the emergence and implementation of new technologies and social changes. Work itself, its nature, methods and means of its implementation are also subject to change. Changes in work are mainly associated with:

- greater saturation of it with knowledge;
- using more technically advanced instrumentation and new advanced technologies;

- the decline in the importance of industrial work and the rise of service-oriented work – services are different: specialized, requiring very high competence and precise organization of work, and simpler, requiring more strength and attention than intellect;
- introducing flexible forms of work – flexible working hours and flexible work arrangements;
- people’s growing and changing needs for the type and quality of products and services;
- growth and diversification of employees’ competencies and job expectations.

Two factors reinforce this mainstream of change. One relates to changes in the nature and types of work, which is increasingly difficult to formalize (standardize). The simple criterion of quantity and quality of work as a basis for remuneration is increasingly difficult to apply. The second factor relates to the replacement of labour by new technologies, not only with regard to the effort and organization of labour, but also with regard to the replacement of the process of creating goods (and services) by artificial intelligence and robots.

Enterprises operate in an online environment. Information and communication technology has contributed to the transformation of enterprises and the modelling of new dimensions of work. Virtuality is related to the evolution of the essence of work. Virtual work, work in the „cloud” is characterized by a low degree of specialization and orientation to division of labour functions, multitasking, team cooperation, managerial nature, involvement and identification with work, self-reliance, focus on results – work is goal-oriented, not task-oriented (Masłyk-Musiał, Bulińska, 2011).

The understanding of the concept of work is changing. Nowadays, work is not just performing tasks following the instructions of a manager and passively adapting to the changes taking place. Work is also about managing employees and contributing to the creation of their creative roles. Work is combined with career management in organizations. At the same time, the realization of work often requires the ability to communicate with another employee or client in a foreign language (e.g. English or Ukrainian), to interact, i.e. to work with a much younger or much older employee, to work in different time zones. This is evidenced by the content of modern employers’ expectations of employees expressed in job offers. It is becoming increasingly important to expand the range of competencies, which has a positive impact on the employability of employees – enabling

eclectic ways of implementing various projects. Employees with a narrow range of competencies are unable to meet the challenges faced by today's organizations. The professional development of employees cannot be limited to improving narrowly defined functional skills. Today's organizations need employees who are able to adapt, act flexibly and quickly adjusting to change, to work in a diverse team and manage such a team. It is also important to skilfully manage one's own competencies, because, according to Prof. T. Oleksyn (2006, p. 262), „the thing concerns ourselves, our lives, our time, our satisfaction, our recognition, our money.”

Whatever one would like to say on these issues, work – or the lack thereof – is an enduring part of human life. Unfortunately, this is probably the only statement about work upon which there is fairly widespread agreement.

It should be added that since the primary task of labour pedagogy is to prepare a person for work, it includes – should include – preparation for managing one's own competencies and managing the competencies of others, developing the ability to lead and manage human teams. A manager is recognized as a profession that requires a specific set of competencies and performs specific tasks. Moreover, modern companies are reducing the number of middle managers (the tendency to flatten organizational structures). Their functions are being taken over by employees performing production tasks directly. This is done through employee *empowerment*. *Empowerment* is an extension of participative management, the characteristic feature of which is the participation of employees in decision-making, bringing out enthusiasm and commitment from employees by giving them the right to autonomy and control over action (Moczydlowska 2014, p. 74).

Diversity of employee teams – a feature of modern human resources

The diversification of an organization's workforce is progressing. Prof. B. Janka (2014) analyzes the structure of human resources in an organization from the perspective of such criteria as the number of employees, the nature of the contract with the organization, length of service, level of education, learned professions and authorizations to perform them, competencies possessed, gender, age, nationality, religion. It distinguishes between employees: multi-generational, multicultural, „distributed”, „virtual” (teleworkers), knowledge workers, and disadvantaged workers.

Diversity of human resources in an organization is not a new category, although nowadays workforce diversity management is becoming more important for at least three reasons. The first is the processes of internationalization or even international integration, contributing to increased mobility of people. In a broader context, it is the processes of globalization leading to the cooperation of people not only from different countries but even from different continents, resulting in an increase in the number of dimensions of diversity. The second – is the professionalization of the personnel function, requiring for its effectiveness to adequately take into account in the principles, objectives, methods or procedures an increasingly wide range of human characteristics, as well as a team of employees or even interacting persons (suppliers, customers). The third – is the development of modern forms of interaction or cooperation in the processes of production and provision of services, such as flexible forms of employment, virtuality, and networking of structures (Urbaniak, 2014).

In short, the diversity of work teams is related to such processes as internationalization, globalization, digitalization, virtuality, networking, demographic changes, and migration. It is worth remembering that migration is a phenomenon as old as the world, but today it comes with variable types of mobility. W. Morawski (2020) describes Chinese families shuttling – also to Poland. This leads to a change in the place of Asians in Western societies, the fragmentation of the lives of their families, the variability of the roles of men and women, also the sense of citizenship, and, finally, the rules of capital circulation. Increasingly, those who leave are accompanied by the idea of improving their qualifications, as well as a readiness to adopt cultural patterns different from those in their countries of origin.

The essence of diversity management in relation to human resources can be traced back to equal opportunity policies in response to manifestations of discrimination in the labour market and efforts to integrate people disadvantaged by their individual characteristics, such as gender, age, disability, ethnicity, nationality, religion/beliefs, and more recently, differences in sexual preference. At the same time, diversity management is much more than countering discriminatory behaviour or practices. Diversity management goes far beyond interventions in the field of equal opportunity policy. Diversity management activities are aimed at the general workforce, and employees themselves and all managers become the people responsible for the success of diversity management strategies (Borkowska, Jawor-Joniewicz, 2016). Diversity management of human resources can be characterized as a conscious action of the employer resulting

from the conviction of managers about the beneficial impact of the purposeful use of differences related to individual characteristics of the employee, visible and invisible – or as some researchers put it – corresponding to primary (e.g. age), secondary (e.g., education) and organizational (e.g., the form of employment) elements of an employee's identity in order to optimize organizational benefits, especially in the long term, and through the use of appropriate methods in various areas of human resource management (Urbaniak, 2014, p. 65).

As Prof. M. Armstrong (2007, p. 139) notes, implementing diversity management involves:

- recognition of cultural and individual differences among employees,
- the organization's appreciation of the various qualities of those employed enriching the work,
- the elimination of prejudice and unequal treatment in hiring, promotion, evaluation, compensation and development processes,
- focusing on individual differences rather than group differences.

Prof. B. Urbaniak (2014, pp. 67–69) presents three models for managing human resource diversity in an organization: the adaptive model, consolidation model, and business model.

The adaptive model of diversity management corresponds to organizational actions necessitated by the need to comply with anti-discrimination laws and implement equal-opportunity policies. However, the possibilities for action go beyond the minimum set by the current anti-discrimination law, particularly with regard to new forms of discrimination in the workplace in the form of, for example, selective rudeness or so-called *loving* aimed at reducing personal distance through the use of diminutive names or terms (e.g. Kasienska, little assistant).

The consolidation model of diversity management uses diversity in different areas of organizational activities to meet the needs of employer branding, and develop and implement diversity programs in various areas of human resource management, including recruitment and selection of employees, training and development, and talent search. An organizational culture based on the value of diversity is being deliberately shaped.

Diversity management business model – a model that, through a specific configuration of strategy, tactics and operational activities, is able to guarantee success at a given time, at least for a specific group of businesses. Diversity is treated as an element of building competitive advantage, as well as a lever for organizational innovation.

The list of benefits of diversifying the workforce, i.e. using diversity management, is long. Among the main ones are:

- increase in profit, profitability, the productivity of the company,
- expanding recruitment opportunities,
- increased creativity and innovation,
- an increase in employee engagement,
- positive impact on employer branding, building the image of the company perceived as an „employer of choice.”
- increasing adaptability,
- better matching the needs of customers (Borkowska, Jawor-Joniewicz, 2016, p. 41).

In Poland, 51% of companies declare activities that can be described as diversity management policies, according to a survey co-produced by the Responsible Business Forum. „Even in a society as homogeneous as ours, there is great potential in diversity, which is worth taking advantage of,” – says M. Strzelczak, president and CEO of the Responsible Business Forum. As she points out, „diversity management benefits employers: it increases innovation and employee engagement, builds a company’s reputation and translates into its relations with customers.” She adds, „diversity management is no longer a fad, but is becoming a necessity and part of business strategy. The goal is to create a work environment in which every employee, regardless of age, gender, physical ability or background, will feel valued, respected and be able to realize their full potential.” In turn, R. Prys, director of the Human Resources Department at McDonald’s Poland, says that „diversity carries great social and business potential, and allows us to hire candidates who are excluded from the labour market. Our teams include people with disabilities, who are great in the kitchen or in serving our guests. We also have mature people among our employees, who bring a lot of calm and composure. Diversity is a strength, you just have to recognize it and use it skilfully” (*Responsible Business*, 2021).

It is worth noting that a number of doctoral and master’s theses addressing the issue of managing employee diversity in the organization have already been defended, written under the guidance of labour educators and by labour educators, such as the doctoral thesis written by S.J. Zagorska under the guidance of Prof. R. Bera on „Attitudes toward work of Polish immigrants in Sweden and their professional situation” or the master’s thesis written by M. Nędzolek under the guidance of Prof. R. Gerlach on „Attitudes toward work in the context of generational differences.”

Human resource management – a new problem area of labour pedagogy

In the 1970s, Prof. T. Nowacki identified 10 areas of research in pedagogy – pertaining to the socio-economic conditions specific to that period. These areas included the following issues: 1) teleological issues, 2) vocational studies, 3) the selection and arrangement of educational content, 4) issues of upbringing, 5) the theoretical basis of methodological studies, 6) vocational orientation, 7) further education and vocational training, 8) issues of equipment, 9) issues of directing, 10) pedeutology (Nowacki, 1978, pp. 29–45). However, it should immediately be added that Prof. S.M. Kwiatkowski (2007, p. 15) when writing about the problem areas of labour pedagogy from the 1970s, renamed the 9th area, “issues of directing” as the “issues of management. Prof. T. Nowacki, in his remarks on the division of labour pedagogy, pointed out that the division of the problem areas of labour pedagogy into ten problem areas is a conventional division. The number of divisions and their content can be determined differently. In the 1990s, the need to distinguish an eleventh area of research of labour pedagogy, including the problems of the labour market, employment and unemployment, was recognized by labour pedagogues, professors: H. Bednarczyk, R. Gerlach, U. Jeruszka, S. Kaczor, S.M. Kwiatkowski, T.W. Nowacki, F. Szlosek, Z. Wiatrowski and others, giving expression to this in many of their studies.

After several decades since that magical time of the turn of the century, an attempt can be made to identify a new problem area of labour pedagogy: human resource management, concerning the issues currently being discussed and studied. Moreover, Prof. Z. Wiatrowski, in his characterization of the qualifications and professional competencies of a labour pedagogue, including a list of anticipated positions (2005, pp. 477–486), states: a labour pedagogue can count on the position and type of work of a specialist in human resource management.

The concept of competence is closely related to human resource management. It directly relates to the fundamental strategic objective of HRM – the acquisition and development of highly competent people who will quickly achieve their goals and thus maximize their contribution to the achievement of corporate objectives (Armstrong, 2001, p. 248). In companies operating in a highly competitive environment, special attention is paid to the importance of human capital as a factor of competitive advantage. This capital results from the competence of employees. The concept of competence also belongs to the basic conceptual categories

of labour pedagogy, according to labour educators, considering the formation, development and importance of various types of competence (professional competencies, key competencies, praxeological competencies, social competencies, managerial competencies, the competencies of the future, etc.).

The problem areas of labour pedagogy related to the successive stages of school and work life, as well as the problem areas of human resource management are considered in the context of lifelong learning. The identification and development of employees' competencies, and therefore the continuous learning, acquisition of new knowledge and experience related to work and the formation of interpersonal relations, a climate of cooperation and mutual trust are one of the key instruments of human resource management in companies. In the personnel policy of the company, the improvement of employees comes to the fore. E. Małyk-Musiał and H. Bulińska (2011, p. 25) emphasize that the increase in the complexity of organizational activities, cultural transformations, and technological changes will lead „to the emergence of virtual organizations and organizations associated with them. This will affect the shape of the organizational order and inter-organizational ties. The liaisons in these networks will be people with special qualities and competencies. They already need to be educated and improved.” The processes of education, further education and training are not only about supplementing or improving qualifications but also about influencing a person's personality, its development and richness. „Activity, independence, entrepreneurship, self-employment-directed thinking, independence, resourcefulness, creativity, criticality, assertiveness – personality traits highly valued on the labour market – these are the tasks of education. They should be carried out by every school, every educator” (Nowacki, Jeruszka, 2004, p. 48).

Effectively adapting to rapid changes in the environment requires efficient management. One of the key challenges facing managers in companies, especially those operating in the Internet era, amid the development of e-business is the human aspect. Therefore, one of the key factors is efficient communication. The democratization of management is also important, i.e. the process of relinquishing some managerial authority to team members to increase their involvement and sense of responsibility. Directing no longer means controlling, but inspiring. Inspiring the involvement of team members through power sharing, i.e., the collaborative nature of the management process plays an important role in leadership in modern organizations. The shift from specialized, industry-specific knowledge to general knowledge is also becoming apparent.

It is noteworthy that labour educators are increasingly publishing studies on management issues, recognizing and showing the connection of human resource management issues with the research areas of labour pedagogy. For example, in the semi-annual journal „Szkola – Zawód – Praca”, in No. 12/2016, the issue of human resource management is reflected in the content of the articles: „Endogenous determinants of human resource management in the workplace” by Prof. U. Jeruszka, „Talent management in the organization” by Dr Ł. Brzeziński, „Balancing the personal and professional spheres as a postulated element of the modern work environment” by Prof. R. Tomaszewska-Lipiec, while in No. 17/2019 the articles: „Physiognomy and Graphology in Recruitment and Selection Processes. Historical and contemporary perspectives” by Prof. J. Lenart, „Patterns of women’s careers – towards combining family and professional roles” by Prof. W. Duda, while benchmarking as an element of management in the model of social responsibility is discussed by Prof. E. Stawicka in the article: „Benchmarking and entrepreneurs’ activities in the area of good CRS practices in the field from work”.

Prof. S.M. Kwiatkowski in many studies discusses the theme of leadership correlated with the social aspects of management, understood as the ability to influence the behaviour of employees in order to achieve certain goals. A good manager is a leader. In turn, Prof. R. Tomaszewska-Lipiec in her publications discusses the issue of the workplace as a learning organization, the impact of the development of learning organizations, knowledge-based organization along with the transformation of the content of work and the characteristics of employees on the strategies and contemporary concepts of human resource management. Many labour educators analyze the issues undertaken against the background of the developing concept of human capital.

It should be noted that the problem of human resource management has already located itself for good in the problems of labour pedagogy.

Perhaps the time has come to isolate the issue of human resource management as a problem area of labour pedagogy. Due to social conditions and national, demographic, cultural, and political differences, the problem area of human resource management, including diversity management, is a new, isolated segment of labour pedagogy. It seems interesting to look for this specificity of diversity even within a single labour team.

Conclusions

As early as the 1970s, Professor T. Nowacki stated that „the issues of management and leadership are not yet sufficiently developed in relation to the needs of organizational and managerial activity.” The problems of human resource management, including the diversity of employee teams, should find an important place for it in labour pedagogy.

The inexorable social changes have led to a situation in which the use of individual characteristics of employees has become a profiling variable of the actions taken in the field of employee management, while the art of forming interpersonal relations at work has acquired significant importance.

Looking at employees over their working life cycle involves recognizing the diversity of their individual attributes. Employed workers have different personal and personality traits. They differ in age, gender, level and type of education, work experience, and skills. Their ambitions, inclinations, preferences, and habits differ. They have different value systems, beliefs, worldviews, and social and moral attitudes. These in turn project their motivations and commitment. This confronts managers with the need to design processes and systems for managing people in the organization, taking into account the specifics arising from the diversity of employee teams.

Diversity of employees due to innate and acquired characteristics can, in organizational practice, provide specific opportunities (possibilities) for both the organization, individual work teams and individual employees. The issue of diversity management seen from the perspective of human resource management is an important, rich area of research in labour pedagogy.

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