

The concept of absenteeism management system in a company

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Abstract: In many enterprises managing absenteeism is dictated by legal regulations in this regard and managerial pragmatics boiling down mainly to the control of absences and disciplining employees. In recent years, the approach of firms to employees has been changing. Caring about their condition, commitment and satisfaction from work are not perceived as a duty any more, but as a chance. However, there is no universal methodology of absenteeism management integrating the holistic approach and interdisciplinary approach, combining various spheres and perspectives. The aim of the paper is to present a concept of the absenteeism management system in an enterprise, aimed at the reduction of sickness absenteeism and the improvement of the enterprise performance. A thesis was adopted that the policy and operational activities undertaken within absenteeism management lead to the creation of common value for the firm and the employees. The presented concept of the system of managing sickness absenteeism includes five elements: goals and subject of the management, diagnosing causes and effects of absenteeism, preventive measures, the measurement of the effectiveness of the measures, as well as the analysis and assessment of the impact of these activities on the company's performance, and the verification of the methods of absenteeism management process. To fulfil the goal defined in this way, the following research methods were used: an analysis of the research findings of predecessors and the findings of own empirical research into the conditions of the humanization of work and the factors of work motivation.

Key words: absenteeism, sickness absenteeism, absenteeism management system in organization, enterprise performance, well-being of employees

1. Introduction

The purpose of this article is to present the concept of absenteeism management system in a company. Management within a company allows us to determine the aspect of a given subject of a study (in this case, absenteeism from work, with particular attention to sickness absence) as well as managerial functions carried out in relation to this subject in the context of management. The usefulness of absenteeism management system in a company is related to the fulfilment of formalization, diagnostic and motivational functions by that system. With

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this assumption, it is emphasized that as an important element of safety management system, the system of absenteeism management is one of the subsystems of company management. As an important determinant of productivity and competitiveness of a company, absenteeism from work should be managed similarly to other productive factors and business areas. It is assumed that good management of absences involves reconciliation of the imperative of organizational effectiveness with improvement of employees' well-being which reduces their absenteeism while maintaining the strategic development prospects of the organization.

The analysis of factors of absenteeism from work, which also affects the employee's motivation and performance as well as the conditions representing the 'ergonomic environment' of a working person, has two objectives. The first one is searching for economic and organizational methods and psychological means to increase the effectiveness of business organizations. The other equally important task is the pursuit of correspondence between the needs of the worker and the working conditions. In other words, the idea is to optimize the 'ergonomic environment' and the superior-subordinate relationship created by the company. Achieving such correspondence is an important issue to be dealt with by the organization and the management.

In this context, the growing interest in employees' satisfaction at work or the lack thereof among practitioners and theoreticians of management is not surprising. This approach is not entirely new—as early as in 1984, with reference to the concept of corporate social responsibility, Peter Ferdinand Drucker noticed that 'the proper social responsibility for business is to transform social problems into economic opportunities and economic benefits' (Drucker, 1984, p. 62). Michael E. Porter and Mark R. Kramer developed the idea presented by Drucker by proposing the concept of creating shared value, defined as 'the policy and operational activities that determine the competitiveness of an enterprise while leading to the improvement of economic and social conditions in the communities in which it operates. The creation of shared value is focused on identifying the links between social and economic development' (Porter and Kramer, 2011, p. 66).

To accomplish the intended purpose outlined above, the following research methods were applied: analysis of results of studies conducted by predecessors, data from the Central Statistical Office, the European Survey of Enterprises on New and Emerging Risks (ESENER)—managing safety and health at work, Pan-European Employer Health Benefits Issues (MERCER, 2016) and results of own empirical study on humanization of work as well as conditions and motivation at work.

Employee absenteeism is the absence of an employee from work, and more specifically, from where such employee should be. According to Wayne Cascio, employee absenteeism is any unplanned failure to come to work or leaving work early for whatever reason (Cascio and Boudreau, 2011, pp. 81–82). In Poland, the implementing provisions of the Labour Code determine the circumstances which justify an employee's absence by virtue of law and leave the determination of other cases justifying absenteeism at the employer's discretion (Striker, 2013, p. 144).

On average, sickness absenteeism in companies from the EU countries is at a level of 3% to 6% of the working time, whereas the costs associated with it are estimated at about 2.5%

of the GDP of those countries. Research has shown that more than 44% of sickness absence from work is associated with inappropriate material conditions of work, 27% is associated with health problems caused by inadequate psychosocial factors occurring in the workplace, and 17% is the so-called accidental absenteeism (Pęciłło-Pacek [ed.], 2013). These determinants of absenteeism are mainly related to the broadly understood working conditions. Therefore, they can be described in a company as internal factors of absenteeism—factors that are significantly affected by the company.

In statistical studies on sickness absenteeism conducted mainly on an international level, some other factors are also indicated (Bartkowski, 2004, pp. 71–72):

- the nature of the social security system—the more extensive the system of allowances and higher social security, the higher absenteeism in that country,
- the size of unemployment—the higher the level of unemployment, the lower the use of sick leave; in the event of reduction in employment, those employees who are more often absent from work lose their job in the first place; moreover, the fear of job loss limits the use of sick leave,
- employees' habits shaped by cultural values characteristic for the given country.

2. The concept of absenteeism management system

One of the key ways of eliminating the causes of sickness absenteeism and reduction of its negative effects is proper shaping of the relations and conditions at work and management of sickness absence in the organization. The growing interest of researchers and practitioners of this phenomenon was followed by the development of management of absences, i.e. absenteeism from work, sickness absence in particular. So far, however, the essence of absenteeism management in a company has not been defined and its fundamental aspects have not been described, i.e. subjective, purposive, structural, procedural and instrumental aspects—it may also be institutional pragmatics and management processes pragmatics. The few authors who deal with this issue are trying to determine the object and scope of absenteeism management and characterize the instruments of such management. For example, Caron Beesley draws attention to the imperative of accurate recognition of the absenteeism policy, in particular giving an acceptable size of absence, rules of its justification and consequences of non-compliance with those rules (Beesley, 2013). The issue of collecting and using information on absenteeism is raised by Stefani L. Yorges. The creation of an appropriate database, on the one hand, makes it easier to identify the causes, size and structure of absenteeism and assess the effectiveness of programmes aimed at reducing this phenomenon. On the other hand, Wayne Cascio and John Boudreau clarified the questions that may be helpful in the absenteeism management: (1) does absenteeism matter in the process of work? e.g. does it concern employees who can determine their working time independently?; (2) does the employer bear significant costs due to absenteeism? Should other people perform the work of the person who is absent? Does absenteeism result in decreased performance? Are there any delays in the processing of important tasks?; (3) What costs are borne by the employer as a result of absenteeism?; (4) What is the programme that would allow the employer to lower the level of absenteeism and what is its cost? (Cascio and Boudreau, 2011,

p. 88). Małgorzata Striker indicates the actions that should be taken in the management of absenteeism: clarification of the existing absenteeism policy, collecting and analyzing information on the size and effects of absences from work, discussion of direct superiors with their subordinates after they return to work, taking disciplinary action and introduction of programmes to eliminate the causes of absence (Striker, 2013, p. 147).

This short overview of the definition of absenteeism management shows a lack of clear structuring of the problem and argues for its treatment as a separate module that requires a holistic approach and operationalization.

The discrepancy between the required and the existing level of competences of managers in the scope of good absenteeism management—more broadly, the well-being of employees and social responsibility—may be a significant barrier to the development of companies and hinder the achievement of their current tasks. Mark Thomas, Gary Miles and Peter Fisk note that proper managerial competences determine good management, i.e. making the right decisions, as well as committed leadership, which would ensure that decisions would be translated into concrete actions while maintaining the strategic perspectives and reconciling the imperative of efficiency with complying with the rules of ethical conduct and social responsibility (Thomas, Miles, and Fisk, 2009, p. 13).

Absenteeism management is understood as planning, programming and controlling of the course of actions aimed at increasing the employees' well-being in order to reduce sickness absenteeism and improve business performance. Such understanding of the management of absences requires the integration of the holistic and interdisciplinary approach, combining various spheres and perspectives.

By studying the object and scope of the sickness absenteeism management, the European Economic and Social Committee identified three levels of management, namely:

- **basic level**—such management is limited to the prevention of accidents at work and occupational diseases and is dictated by applicable laws and regulations, the operation of the basic health care and formal requirements of the analysis of the level and structure of sickness absence in the company,
- **wider approach**—includes the prevention of any discomfort related to work, such as the provision of additional services in the field of health care and organization of recuperation and resting during work,
- **the widest approach**—also includes the prevention of health problems that in the long run result in sickness absence or reduced quality and productivity of work. Moreover, at this level of management, attention is paid to ensuring good mental and physical health through various forms of health promotion, creating the employees' well-being and balance between professional and private life.

The presented concept of sickness absenteeism management system covers five elements of absence management process and conditions of such process: objectives of management and managing bodies, diagnosis of causes and effects of absences, measurement of effectiveness of actions, analysis and evaluation of the impact of such actions on business performance as well as verification of methods of absence management process. The objectives resulting from the company's strategy, occupational safety culture as well as OHS and labour protection rules and regulations are crucial prerequisites for such process, e.g. PN-N-18000

standard. Owing to the limited frames of these articles, only selected and more important ones have been characterized (see Figure 1)

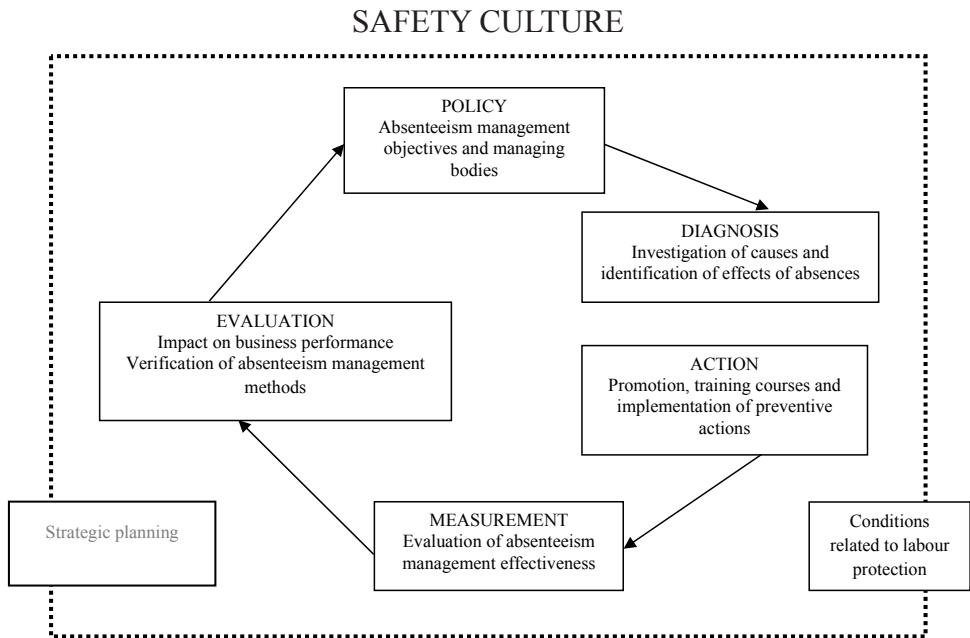


Figure 1. The system of sickness absenteeism management

Source: Authors' own elaboration.

3. Characteristics of elements of sickness absenteeism management system

3.1. Policy

In the area of personal strategy (policy), modern companies create programmes and apply reliable methods of investing in their employees' health. In enhancing the potential of work and building the attractiveness of workplaces and even supporting the interests and passions of employees, employers discern considerable benefits in the form of increased commitment and stability of their staff, decreased sickness absenteeism and ultimately increased work performance and productivity.

The results of extensive research carried by ICAN Research entitled 'Healthy Company 2016' (ICAN Research, after: Smoliński and Słowik, 2016, p. 54) show how caring about employees' health affects the performance of a company. During this research, two groups of firms were identified, varying in the level of caring about their employees' health. Every fourth firm (24%) places a strong emphasis on this area, every eighth (14%)—small. The

analysis of both groups allowed to measure the effectiveness of investment in employees' health.

Table 1. How health care influences business effectiveness

<i>Firms caring about health of their employees</i> (24%)	<i>Firms not caring about health of their employees</i> (14%)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – They have more satisfied and very satisfied employees—56%. – Their employees are ill less frequently—1.16 times per year. – They have more committed employees—61%. – They have more employees who started to actively care about their health on their own—64%. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> – They have less satisfied and very satisfied employees—37%. – Their employees are ill more frequently—1.36 times per year. – They have less committed employees—50%. – They have less employees who started to actively care about their health on their own—49%.

Source: ICAN Research, after: Smoliński and Slowik, 2016, p. 54.

The absenteeism policy should also determine the rules for absenteeism justification and methods of controlling whether sick leaves are used properly as well as other ways of disciplining employees for unplanned absence from work. Properly prepared middle managerial staff and OHS experts are the body that implements the objectives and tasks of sickness absenteeism management. Whereas, the HRM department is responsible for the preparation of health-promoting and training action programmes improving the employees' well-being and coordination thereof.

3.2. Diagnosis

The basis for sickness absenteeism management is the diagnosis of this phenomenon, i.e. examination of its causes and determination of its results. The main reason for which employers carry out health-promoting actions and other undertakings in the field of absenteeism management is the improvement of productivity and competitiveness of their enterprise, attracting and maintaining key personnel and effective management of risk factors.

From the methodological point of view, it is important to distinguish the reasons for long-term absenteeism as well as the size and causes of short-term absenteeism. This is because the sources of both mentioned types of absenteeism and the methods for reducing this phenomenon are very differentiated. Special attention should be paid to the following instruments of absenteeism management:

- monitoring of total absenteeism rates and in relation to the categories of employees,
- examination of reasons and identification of effects of sickness absenteeism,
- rules for supporting employees who return to work after long sickness,
- programming of health-promoting actions,
- monitoring of employees' health condition,
- application of traditional and modern methods and tools in the process of sickness absenteeism management in a company.

Diagnostic research should be focused on the recognition of employees' needs and this requires broad holistic approach.¹ Owing to in-depth analysis, it is possible to design actions that will contribute to better than ever before satisfaction of employees' needs both during working time and during their free time, i.e. time after work. The following techniques of analysis are helpful in looking for solutions to problems:

- a) meeting with employees, experts—suppliers of services and managerial staff,
- b) interviews with employees returning to work after illness,
- c) case studies,
- d) registers of absences,
- e) reports on using the services of experts,
- f) identification and analysis of good practices,
- g) cost-benefit analysis of implementation of health-promoting programmes,
- h) techniques of promotion and social communication and other.

As mentioned before, the basis for building the strategy of caring about employees' health is the recognition of differentiated needs of individual categories of employees. It is exemplified by the aforementioned research carried out by ICAN Research (ICAN Research, after: Smoliński and Słowik, 2016, p. 55) (see Figure 2). The most important for employees are as follows: medical care (51%) and group insurances (27%), also training courses to a lesser extent (10%). Similar opinion was expressed by managers. The perspective of employers is significantly different. According to them, the most important are as follows: group insurances (20%) and medical care (19%); while funding for sporting activities (15%), training courses (14%), and co-funding for holiday travels (14%) are considered as important.

¹ This holistic approach to the research on employees' needs as the subject of the research covers: medical care, promotion of physical activity, employees' well-being and managerial practices connected therewith, balance between professional and private life, training courses, introduction of non-standard and flexible forms of organization of working time and other.

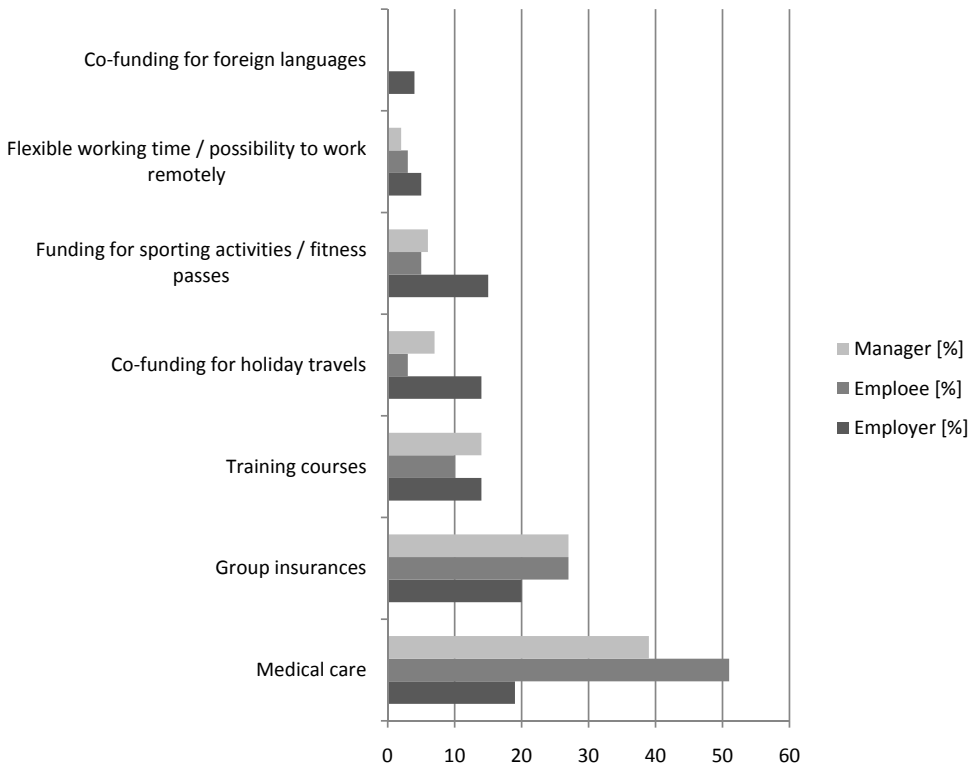


Figure 2. Most important non-salary benefits according to employers and employees

Source: ICAN Research, after: Smoliński and Slowik, 2016, p. 55.

The author's own research on the problem of stress in the workplace and evaluation of the impact of stressors in the workplace on employees' motivation and work performance has shown that the level of stress felt by the respondents may cause incorrect functioning of work organization and methods of individual employees (see Figure 3).

The sources of stress are presented via the following stressors: imposition of working rhythm, work load, performance of monotonous activities, work below qualifications. Apart from the domination of main factors, attention should be also paid to other stressors indicated by respondents, i.e. time pressure, working overtime, imprecise duties of employees.

As results of working in stressful conditions, a considerable part of respondents mentioned the following: no motivation to work, unwillingness to undertake new tasks, increase in sickness absenteeism and accidents at work, employees' complaints and resignations from work as well as frequent mistakes at work and decrease in work productivity.

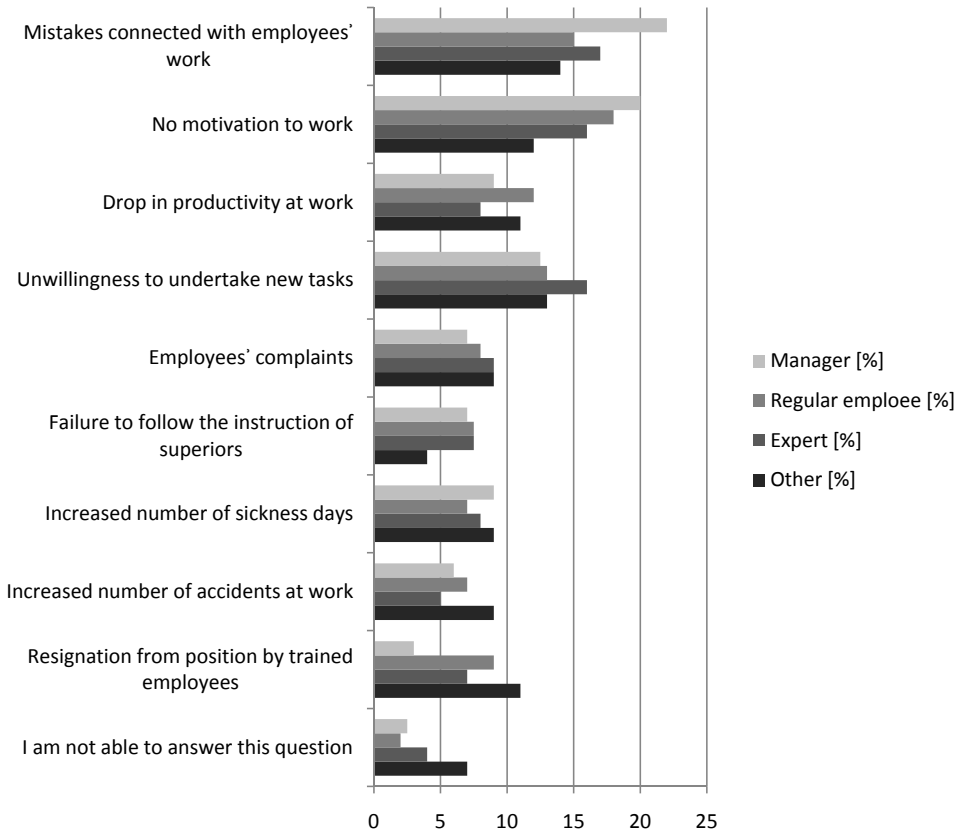


Figure 3. The results of working in stressing conditions by type of the position held

Source: Authors' own elaboration based on research results.

The sources of stress are mainly connected with work organization and individual skills of employees and not with the technical aspects of work. This means that elimination of stress sources does not require large capital expenditures. It will be sufficient to expand the knowledge of employees and develop the competences of managers.²

3.3. Action

During the stage of action, the following phases can be distinguished: planning and designing of actions and implementation thereof. In particular, they refer to the following areas: promotion of healthy lifestyle, medical care, social security, physical activity, balance between private and professional life, employees' well-being, training courses for employees and other various actions taking account of specific needs of employees and their families.

² In order to identify stressors at work, a survey was conducted among 427 employees residing in Tarnów and Tarnów Poviát. This survey consisted of 19 questions and was carried out via Internet.

Promotion of healthy lifestyle is carried out with the use of numerous tools and techniques, e.g. internal newspaper, message boards, leaflets, posters, radio network, e-mail, newsletter, invitations to participate in programmes and training courses, instruments of social communication, organization of workshops, motivation trips, integration meetings, events.

The most effective benefit and at the same time the most valued one by employees is supplementary medical care in addition to publicly funded health care system. Increased access to the services of specialists and providing health care for the employees' family members considerably increases satisfaction from work. Similarly, employees derive large satisfaction from group insurances and social security, the so-called third pillar (see Figure 3).

The research conducted by MERCER (2016) has shown that Poland is the leader in offering private medical services, including ophthalmological care, preventive vaccination and, to a lower extent, dental care. Among health-promoting activities funded by employers, sporting activities and all types of additional insurances are very popular. Furthermore, the possibility of working from home, according to flexible working time schedules and working remotely becomes more and more important. The following programmes are of little interest: anti-smoking, advice from dietitian, training on how to cope with stress, allowances and support programmes for employees after recuperating from an illness (see Figure 4).

3.4. Measurement and evaluation

In their studies, many researchers and practitioners more and more frequently emphasize the existence of a relationship between absenteeism management (more broadly: [employees' well-being] on the one hand and business performance on the other (Chenhall, 2008; Bisbe and Malagueño, 2009). They point out that the benefits generated therefrom lead to the creation of shared value for the employees, enterprises and owners. Certain authors go even further and try to show that caring about employees' well being is an important prerequisite for international operations of enterprises (Maletič, Maletič, Dahlgaard, Dahlgaard-Park, and Gomišček, 2014).

Therefore, this type of research should focus on programme implementation control as well as economic, organizational and social activity control. For this purpose, an appropriate control and reporting system should be created that would contain the rules, processes and procedures for collecting information necessary for making decisions regarding plan progress control, control of operational objectives fulfilment and evaluation of their impact on business performance. This is exemplified in the latest research conducted by ICAN Research (ICAN Research, after: Smoliński and Słowik, 2016, p. 56) (see Figure 5). It has been found that properly created and implemented non-salary benefit package contributed to reduced sickness absenteeism in the case of 52% of the studied enterprises and increased work productivity in 56% of the studied business entities. Almost half of the analyzed enterprises have emphasized that the aforementioned package caused an increase in employees' loyalty, contributed to the creation of employer's image as caring about employees and increase in the employer's attractiveness in the labour market. Moreover, these actions were largely conducive to increased attractiveness of non-salary benefits in the motivation system of the studied enterprises.

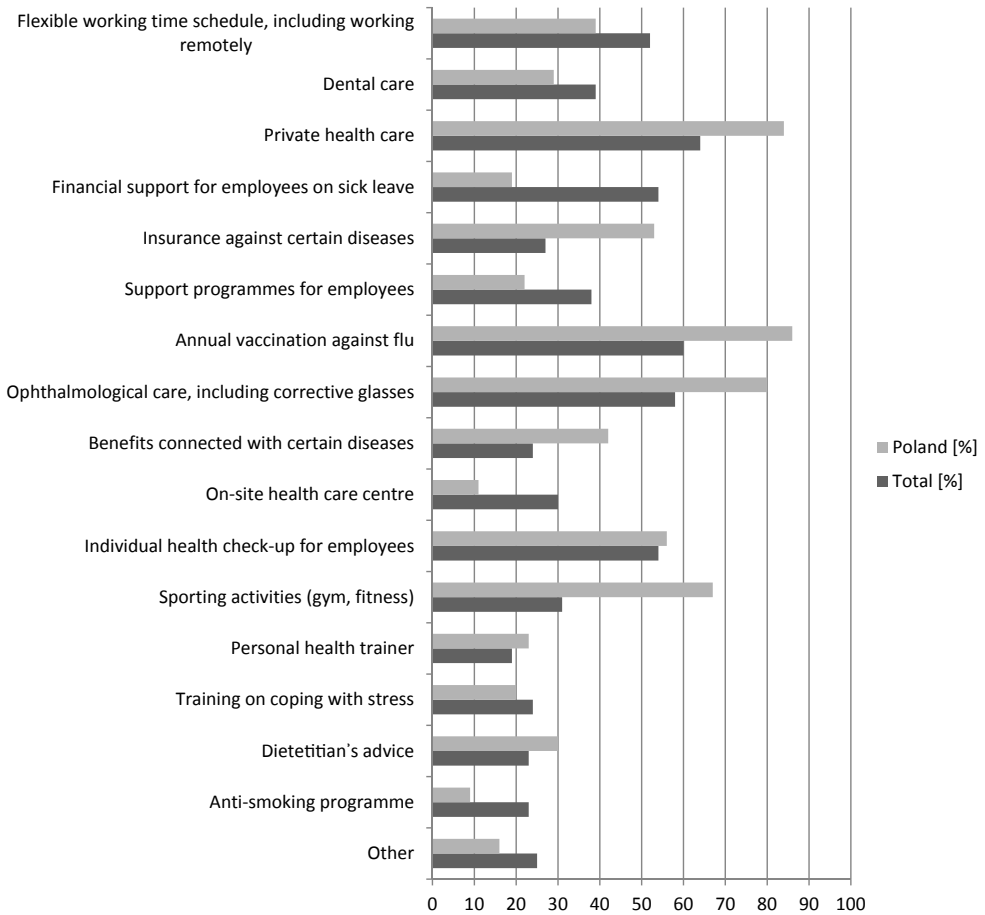


Figure 4. Health-promoting activities undertaken in the studied enterprises in Poland and selected EU countries

Source: MERCER, 2016.

An important issue remaining to be solved is the verification of methods used in individual stages of absenteeism management process. In particular, this refers to traditional and modern management methods, used at the stage of measurement and evaluation. Among traditional methods and techniques of productivity management, the following should be mentioned: cost analysis, profit and loss account, budgeting, cost-benefit analysis that are based on internal financial indicators. Current methods adequate for this type of research are i.a. *balanced scorecard*, benchmarking, controlling, which, in their nature, take account of indicators that reflect internal and external processes as well as social phenomena occurring in an enterprise, considered in operational and strategic dimension (Lopez-Valeiras, Gomez-Conde, and Naranjo-Gil, 2015, p. 3480; Chenhall and Langfield-Smith, 1998).

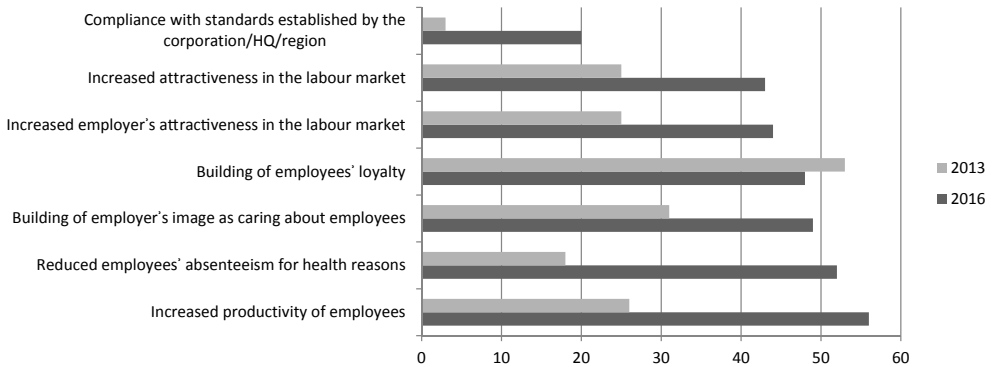


Figure 5. Benefits brought by non-salary benefit package (in %)

Source: ICAN Research, after: Smoliński and Slowik, 2016, p. 56.

Among numerous specific methods and techniques of sickness absenteeism management, the Bradford Factor should be mentioned (B), which is calculated according to the following formula (<http://www.bradfordfactorcalculator.com>):

$$B = S \cdot S \cdot D \quad (1)$$

where:

S —number of sick leaves during 52 weeks for each employee individually,

D —days of absence during 52 weeks for each employee individually.

The Bradford Factor allows us to identify short-term absences. It is higher for employees who are on short-term sick leave more frequently than for those who are rarely on sick leave but for a long time, e.g.:

– 10 sick leaves, each lasting one day: $B = 10 \cdot 10 \cdot 10 = 1000$,

– 1 sick leave lasting ten days $B = 1 \cdot 1 \cdot 10 = 10$.

This factor helps to identify this problem, however, it does not indicate any cause for this problem. Such reasons may be various i.a. improper psychophysical working environment (e.g. conflicts at work), health problems, no balance between professional and private life, employee's insubordination. The source of information in this regard should be conversations, data analyses and, first and foremost, interviews with employees.

4. Conclusions

To sum up the aforementioned comments and findings referring to absenteeism from work and absenteeism management, it should be emphasized that the basis for preventing discomfort at work and reducing absenteeism, sickness absenteeism in particular, is the improvement of sickness absenteeism management process in the given organization. The policy and operational actions undertaken under absenteeism management lead to increased well

being employees and improvement of business performance, in short—to creation of shared value, i.e. value for the enterprise, employees and owners. The creation of shared value is focused on identifying relations between economic and social development and on managing those relations (see the concepts and suggestions of management practices described by: P. F. Drucker; M. E. Porter and M. R. Kramer; A. M. Grant, M. K. Christianson and R. H. Price; P. Warr and G. Clapperton; T. Chappell; M. Thomas, G. Miles and P. Fisk and others) (Drucker, 1984; Porter and Kramer, 2011; Grant, Christianson, and Price, 2007; Warr and Clapperton, 2010; Chappell, 1993; Thomas, Miles, and Fisk, 2009).

Certain important suggestions on how to improve working conditions and recommendations on how to improve sickness absenteeism management in an enterprise are presented below. In particular:

- the system of preventing work-related health problems should be taken into account in the development strategy of a contemporary organization,
- the essential elements of sickness absenteeism management system, such as: policy, diagnosis, action, measurement and evaluation, should be covered by such system,
- application of modern management methods for the improvement of working conditions and management thereof,
- conducting of in-depth analysis of causes and evaluation of long-term and short-term sickness absenteeism effects,
- creation and improvement of OHS management,
- broader use of disciplinary techniques at work,
- development of work structuring and humanization processes as well as actions aimed at elimination of discomfort at work in terms of ergonomics,
- employees' evaluation of current management practices and health-promoting programmes in terms of improvement of employees' well-being,
- to a wider extent than previously, including psychosocial conditions of working environment in the studies of causes for sickness absenteeism,
- adopting individual approach to the examination of working conditions and absenteeism.

The process of sickness absenteeism management generating a change in the behaviour of management bodies, i.e. employees, organization, external interested parties, is already, and will be increasingly in the future, a permanent element of enterprise competitiveness.

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Koncepcja systemu zarządzania absencją w przedsiębiorstwie

Abstrakt: W wielu przedsiębiorstwach zarządzanie absencją jest podyktowane regulacjami prawnymi w tym zakresie oraz pragmatyką menedżerską sprowadzającą się głównie do kontroli nieobecności i dyscyplinowania pracowników. W ostatnich latach podejście firm do pracowników zmienia się. Dbałość o ich kondycję, zaangażowanie i satysfakcję z pracy nie jest już postrzegana jako obowiązek, ale jako szansa. Brakuje jednak

uniwersalnej metodyki zarządzania absencją integrującej podejście holistyczne i interdyscyplinarne, łączące różne sfery i perspektywy. Celem artykułu jest przedstawienie koncepcji systemu zarządzania absencją w przedsiębiorstwie, ukierunkowanego na ograniczenie absencji chorobowej i poprawę wyników przedsiębiorstwa. Przyjęto tezę, że polityka i działania operacyjne podejmowane w ramach zarządzania absencjami

prowadzą do tworzenia wspólnej wartości dla przedsiębiorstwa i pracowników. Przedstawiona koncepcja systemu zarządzania absencją chorobową obejmuje pięć elementów: cele i podmioty zarządzania, diagnozowanie przyczyn i skutków absencji, działania profilaktyczne, pomiar efektywności działań oraz analizę

i ocenę wpływu tych działań na wyniki firmy, a także weryfikację metod procesu zarządzania absencjami. Do realizacji tak nakreślonego celu wykorzystano metody badawcze: analizę wyników badań poprzedników oraz rezultaty własnych badań empirycznych nad warunkami humanizacji pracy i czynnikami motywacji pracy.

Słowa kluczowe: absencja w pracy, absencja chorobowa, system zarządzania absencją w organizacji, wyniki przedsiębiorstwa, dobrostan pracownicy
