

METHODS OF INCREASING LABOUR PRODUCTIVITY IN SERVICE ENTERPRISE*

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A b s t r a c t

In the era of innovation resulting from intense competition on a global scale, a modern enterprise, especially a service one, needs to keep pace with the changing market conditions. One of the requirements, under the process of “technologization” of economic activities that determines the survival and development of an enterprise, is the ability to increase the level of labour productivity. Identifying the determinants of labour productivity in the enterprise, to a large extent, affects the building of its competitive position and market advantage. As service companies are exposed to substantial uncertainty and risk, they are particularly focused on finding ways to rationalize costs and increase efficiency.

The aim of this article is to present the methods of increasing labour productivity in a modern service enterprise. The research methods undertaken include an analysis of secondary sources as well as a case study of a specific service enterprise.

METODY ZWIĘKSZANIA WYDAJNOŚCI PRACY W PRZEDSIĘBIORSTWIE USŁUGOWYM

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Abstrakt

W dobie innowacji wymuszanych przez intensywną konkurencję w wymiarze globalnym współczesne przedsiębiorstwo, zwłaszcza usługowe, musi na bieżąco dostosowywać swoje działania do zmieniających się warunków rynkowych. Jednym z wymogów w warunkach „technologizacji” działalności gospodarczych, warunkujących przetrwanie i rozwój przedsiębiorstw, jest umiejętność podwyższania poziomu wydajności pracy. Określenie determinant wydajności pracy w danym przedsiębiorstwie w znacznym stopniu oddziałuje na budowanie jego pozycji konkurencyjnej i przewagi rynkowej. Przedsiębiorstwa, ponieważ są narażone na znaczną niepewność i ryzyko, w szczególnym stopniu są zmuszone do poszukiwania sposobów racjonalizacji kosztów i zwiększania efektywności. Celem artykułu jest identyfikacja metod zwiększania wydajności pracy we współczesnym przedsiębiorstwie usługowym. Obraną metodą badawczą jest analiza źródeł wtórnych, a także studium przypadku konkretnego przedsiębiorstwa usługowego.

Introduction

One of the crucial fields of economic study is to learn how firms turn inputs into outputs in order to analyse productivity – the efficiency with which the conversion occurs. Every enterprise is oriented to maximize profits through effective activity based on human labour as well as mechanized capital. Nowadays, in the face of the development of modern technologies and mechanization as well as decreasing labour resources due to demographic trends, the human factor is an extremely valuable business resource. Shortages in the labour force may substantially limit the growth of an enterprise (ROLLNIK-SADOWSKA 2015, p. 324, 325).

Increasing labour productivity is one of the crucial areas of creating a competitive advantage for the enterprise. It is especially important for the Central and Eastern European (CEE) post-communist countries which still fall behind in terms of labour productivity as compared to Western Europe¹.

Market services are more productive than other sectors (MARTINO 2015, p. 195) and an analysis of service enterprises allows for an investigation of the reasons for such significant productivity.

This paper presents a discussion concerning identifying methods which make it possible to obtain a relatively high productivity of human labour in a service enterprise.

The paper is divided into three parts. The first part includes a theoretical approach to labour productivity. The second and third chapters contain the

¹ In 2015, in Central and Eastern European countries, despite the gradual increase of labour productivity, the indicator per hour worked (calculated as real output per unit of labour input (measured by the total number of hours worked)) was still lower than the EU-28 average. It reached 82.5% of the EU-28 average in Slovakia, 81.3% in Slovenia, 79.7% in the Czech Republic, 74.3% in Poland, 72.1% in Lithuania, 70.7% in Estonia, 69.1% in Hungary, 69.0% in Croatia, 64.6% in Latvia, 59.2% in Romania, 43.6% in Bulgaria, <http://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tesem160&plugin=1> (access: 18.07.2016).

basis of methodological and empirical considerations concerning the labour productivity of a service enterprise.

The aim of this article is to highlight the methods of increasing labour productivity in a modern service enterprise. The research methods used an analysis of secondary sources as well as a case study of a specific service enterprise in one of the CEE countries – Poland.

Labour productivity – a theoretical approach

Productivity is efficiency in production: how much output is obtained from a given set of inputs. As such, it is typically expressed as an output-input ratio.

Single-factor productivity measures reflect units of output produced per unit of a particular input. Labour productivity is the most common measure of this type, though occasionally capital or even material productivity measures are used (SYVERSON 2011, p. 329).

Labour productivity is the ratio of labour costs to the level of generated profit (FILIPOWICZ 2013, p. 35). Šmid defines the concept of productivity as the relationship between the degree of engagement of the element in the manufacturing process and its physical size, and the value (ŠMID 2012, p. 215). However, according to TYLLINGER (1926, p. 14), work can be efficient if it is voluntary and focused on results. Labour productivity can be measured by some other indicators. Natural units, i.e. the amount of the goods produced per unit of time, may be applied to a homogeneous output. Diverse production entails calculation of efficiency with the use of a formula, making it possible to compare the performance of companies producing a diverse range of products:

$$\text{labour productivity} = \frac{\text{value of global output per unit of time}}{\text{number of employees} \times \text{number of time units}}$$

For the numerator, the standard approach has been to use revenues (deflated to a real value for a common year using a price deflator series) to measure output.

In the case of the denominator and measuring inputs, some issues arise. For labour, there is the choice of whether to use the number of employees, employee-hours, or some quality-adjusted labour measure (the wage bill is often used in this last role, based on the notion that wages capture marginal products of heterogeneous labour units) (SYVERSON 2011, p. 330, 331).

The term “efficiency” is strongly related with labour productivity. It is also expressed by the following concepts: economic efficiency, favourability, effectiveness or proficiency. Economic efficiency means the ratio between output (the achieved useful result) and input (resource usage), in which the output is higher than the input. Favourability is a feature of the action, assessed positively due to a predominance of acquisitions in the difference between acquisitions and losses. Effectiveness is understood to be positively assessed if the compatibility of the result matches with the objective. Proficiency is meant to be the virtues of individual good work, i.e. effectiveness, favourability, or economic efficiency (JASIŃSKI 1999, p. 243).

Armstrong presented some assumptions, determining the productivity indicators (AMSTRONG 2011, p. 191, 192):

- a) the indicator should reflect the results not the effort that was made,
- b) the results need to be controlled by an employee,
- c) the measure should be objective and observable,
- d) the measured data should be easily accessible,
- e) if possible, existing indicators should be used or adapted.

Productivity is a function of external and internal factors (SIGALA 2004, p. 39–60). One can also determine the following external factors – seasonal fluctuations and business cycles. By their nature, these environmental elements are also the most closely tied to government policy.

The internal factors of productivity are connected with the organization of a production process in a given enterprise as well as with the applied management methods. One of the crucial internal factors strongly determining productivity is the level of wages. In the microeconomic dimension, wages are closely related to marginal productivities. Microeconomic theory also implies that labour demand would increase if productivity per unit of labour input increased (at given wages), because a further extension of production would increase a firm’s profits (MEAGER, SPECKESSER 2011, p. 3). Following that theory, restraining wage increases below the rate of productivity growth will increase employment levels. Research findings from labour economists have also proven that there are not only influences at the level of wage on productivity, but there are also crucial productivity effects of incentive pay (LAZEAR 2000, p. 1346–1359).

Peculiarities of service enterprise resources

Service companies, due to the specific nature of their activities, must focus their efforts on staff as they maintain (mainly direct) relations with customers. Such relations are significantly important nowadays as service enterprises

compete mainly at the level of customer relations. Moreover, all actions taken with regard to staff management, as well as their satisfaction and commitment to work, are reflected in customer satisfaction, which is the value of service companies (SKĄPSKA, SAMUL 2015, p. 277).

The main clues with regards to the activities of service companies in the market are consumer demands for service providers who are forced to provide high quality service. In the classical model of service quality, five essential dimensions have been determined through which consumers perceive and evaluate the quality of services. They are: reliability, commitment, confidence, empathy and material elements. Therefore, customers expect appropriate behaviour from staff as material confirmation of service quality. Expectations connected with services may relate to their technical quality (quality score) and functional quality (the quality of service process and interpersonal relations) (GRÖNROOS 2007, p. 73–75).

Nowadays, service activity is not enough to work as a factor in the provision of services, understood as the labour force in the mechanical sense. Under market conditions, there is a need to preserve specific characteristics such as: direct contact between the service contractor and their recipient or supplying the employee in knowledge, appropriate to the type of service, which represents the specificity of the process of creating services, as opposed to the production of material goods (SKĄPSKA, SAMUL 2015, p. 283).

The process of service delivery, in contrast to the production process, is long and has a complex waveform with an intangible nature. The intellectual capital of staff plays an important role in the process of service delivery. The service provider's core capability is the ability to transform information into useful knowledge. An essential component of the economic process is "service personalization", but the distance between the service recipient and the service provider has been inevitably shrinking. Its main point is a digital message with the use of modern technologies that have transformed the consumer into e-consumer, and services into e-services. Improvements in the way of providing services (thanks to the Internet) refer to multidimensional electronic communication, which changes the relationship from direct to digital (SKĄPSKA 2016).

Changing patterns of self-realization, attitudes toward work and increasing the level of education within society have been forcing employers to engender in employees a sense of mission. In services, employees together with their competence and readiness for change are an important link in the process of implementing innovations that affect productivity. Employee creativity plays a significant role in creating innovation. It allows one to properly analyse the situation of an organization in the service market. As a result, there is a tendency to bring new solutions to improve the competitive position and thus

improve the image of service innovativeness in a country (SKĄPSKA 2014, p. 151).

All companies need highly skilled, experienced and motivated employees to gain a competitive advantage, but human capital is even more important in the service sector, which is labour-intensive work (KIAN TO, HURMELINNA-LAUK-KANE 2010, p. 305–325). Keh and Pang compared the methods of service delivery in terms of cost and time savings for access and use of services as well as the range of choices with regards to the place and time of service supply. They concluded that a separation of production and consumption is more advantageous, but this mode of supply is not without risk concerning the important problem of information asymmetry (KEH, PANG 2010, p. 56, 57). This means that there is a discrepancy between what the vendor knows, and what it should know in order to fully satisfy its customers (PAGILACCI, KĘDZIOR 2006, p. 3).

A modern service enterprise that wishes to strengthen their relationship with a customer, and thus achieve the benefits, introduces services that accompany machines and devices. The opportunity to collect and update information about customers becomes important. Their satisfaction, expectations, strategies, competitive behaviour, the size and the age of a machinery park and future investment decisions emerge during the extensive and continual customer contact connected with the use of the services associated with the product (HOMBURG et al. 2000, p. 6). It is an effective instrument for equalizing fluctuations in demand for investment goods.

Methods of increasing labour productivity

During the twentieth century, workers were seen as an insignificant element in an organization. This was mainly due to a lack of alignment and preparation to perform a certain type of profession. Therefore, methods that could contribute to raising productivity were not aimed directly at competence and personal development of employees (WYRWICKA 2010, p. 9).

Outstanding results concerning productivity were primarily shaped by a rational organization of work. Firstly, there were isolated obligations incumbent on each employee and the relationship between individuals in the organization in order to organise work properly. An important aspect was health and safety at work (BLINOWSKI 1955, p. 27–29). Shapiro claimed that specialization was the source of labour productivity as well as the distribution and harmonization of labour which allowed an employee to largely automate some repetitive work, which then could be performed much faster than a new employee was able to do being in the same position (SHAPIRO 1951, p. 25).

Shapiro did not foresee that an employee could become bored by repetitive work. In this case, the employee could fall into a rut, and thus instead of increasing labour productivity they could lower it significantly. This problem was noted by Blinowski, who claimed that it was necessary to introduce some kind of diversity at work which, to a large extent, would solve the problem.

Higher productivity is also affected by innovation. Among some important incentives that lie at the root of innovative behaviour, one may primarily feature financial instruments, e.g. government procurement of innovation services, but also the development of infrastructure to facilitate the transfer of technology through, among others, entrepreneurship centres. Moreover, it is also important to conduct scientific research towards investment in human capital (SKĄPSKA 2014, p. 158).

Evaluation of labour productivity in a service enterprise – a case study

The analyzed company is part of a global group, which employs more than 5,000 employees. It represents the betting sector. The researched enterprise can be considered as one of the most popular and largest companies operating in that industry in the Polish market. The main activity of the company is organising mutual betting. The researched group of respondents was formed by employees of one of the bookmakers. They represented a non-probability sample – a purposive sample, as they were selected deliberately. The study was directed at people receiving mutual bets, so-called “collectors”. The research was realised by CAWI – Computer Assisted Web Interview. An online survey was sent to respondents via the Internet. The questionnaire was attached to the selected group of employees by one of the social networking sites.

The researched group consisted of 46 people. Most of the employees were women – 67%. Men accounted for only 33% of the study population. The greater part of the study group were young people under 26 years of age. Respondents in the range from 27 to 35 years of age made up 35% of all respondents, while workers above the age of 35 accounted for only 4%.

Analyzing education, one may state that the majority of respondents had a secondary education (54%). Higher education and vocational training had a similar number of respondents, and it was about 20%. The distribution of seniority in the researched group can be described as balanced. The largest group were people who had worked in the company from 3 to 5 years, another equally large group were people with little work experience, i.e. a year or less, which was as much as 30%.

The main objective of the research was identification of factors which have the greatest impact on labour productivity in the selected service enterprise. In addition, the analysis examined the level of employee work satisfaction and indicated the aspects that greatly affected the growth and the decline in labour productivity in the analyzed company.

More than half of the respondents claimed that they were unhappy working for the analysed enterprise, and was as much as 56%. However, 43% of respondents were fully satisfied with the realisation of their professional duties. Such a large proportion of workers who are dissatisfied with their professional activity encourages a search for the reasons of such a state.

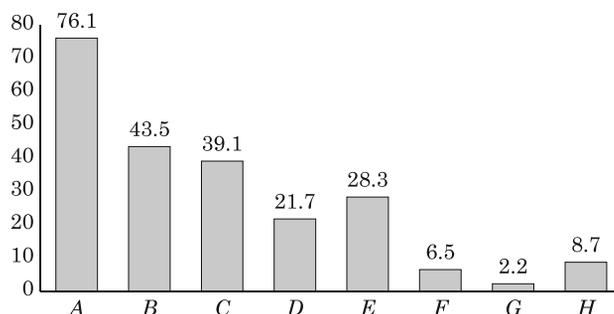
The vast majority of respondents considered their work to be rather not diversified (74%). A lack of diversity at work is a bad phenomenon, especially when it comes to companies in the service industry where workers are closest to the customer. The best way to increase diversity and prevent a sense of monotony at work is to give employees more responsibility in decision-making.

Most workers (65%) thought that their salary was too low compared to the duties entrusted to employees. At the same time, 35% of respondents regarded their remuneration as being set at an appropriate level and adequate to the tasks assigned to them.

The vast majority of respondents agreed with the statement that work performance was affected by proper motivation. Only 11% of respondents gave a different answer. The company's success largely depends on the people working in the organization, and effective incentive systems play a key role. Only 35% of respondents claimed that a supervisor motivated the employees in an appropriate way. Thus, it was clear that the managers had created insufficient conditions for efficient work.

The most popular form of motivation (Fig. 1) was wage incentives, i.e. bonuses (76.1%) and salary increases (43.5%). The next position out of wage motivators was occupied respectively by: praise (39.1%), tickets to the cinema and theatre (28.3%) and prizes (21.7%). A small percentage of respondents indicated integration trips (2.2%) and additional leave (6.5%) as incentives used by their company. An additional form of motivation, determined by respondents was vouchers to various stores (8.7%).

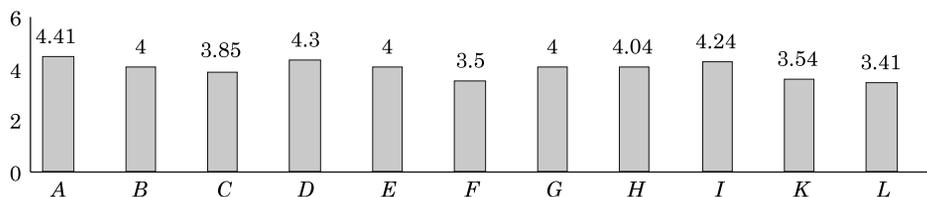
According to the respondents, labour efficiency is mainly affected by the level of remuneration, workplace equipment and employment stability. Lower priority was given to: work with promotion possibilities, the atmosphere among the employees, the bonus system, health and safety conditions. Less appreciated aspects also included good relations with a manager, training and professional development, flexible working hours and approbation of a supervisor (Fig. 2).



A – bonuses, B – salary increase, C – praise, D – tickets to the cinema and theatre, E – prizes, F – trips, G – additional leave, H – vouchers to various stores

Fig. 1. Types of motivation used by analysed company

Source: own study based on conducted research.



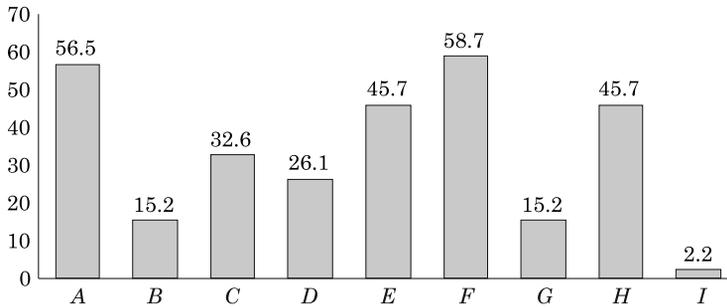
A – level of remuneration, B – atmosphere among the employees, C – good relations with manager, D – workplace equipment, E – bonus system, F – training and professional development, G – occupational health and safety, H – work with promotion possibilities, I – employment stability, J – flexible working hours, K – approbation of a supervisor, L – others

Fig. 2. The average assessment of influence of selected aspects on productivity growth

Source: own study based on conducted research.

According to the opinion of respondents, very low wages were the most demotivating for the employees of a company – 58.7% of respondents (Fig. 3). Once again, the financial incentives were out of the most crucial factors for the labour effectiveness in the analysed service enterprise. Equally often, respondents pointed to the lack of development prospects, since 56.5% of respondents gave such an answer. Further down on the list was no pay-rise and the duty of working on holidays. Both factors reached the same results at 45.7%. Afterwards, respondents indicated a sequence: poor communication (32.6%), the monotony of work (26.1%), strained relations between employees and the lack of clearly defined breaks (15.2%).

The vast majority of respondents (89%) knew of a loyalty system for the staff in the company. Only 11% of employees were not familiar with that issue. Perhaps this is due to the fact that a large percentage of the surveyed employees had worked in the company for less than a year (30%) and they were not sufficiently familiar with the operation of the company. Although the



A – lack of development prospects, B – strained relations between employees, C – poor communication, D – monotony of work, E – no rise, F – low wages, G – lack of clearly defined breaks, H – duty to work on holidays, I – others

Fig. 3. Aspects that demotivate employees to work

Source: own study based on conducted research.

company's loyalty program was noticed by the staff, the majority of employees believed that it was not clear enough (57%).

The dominant number of employees participating in the survey rated the atmosphere in the workplace as satisfactory or rather satisfactory. A small percentage of respondents felt that the atmosphere was inadequate (7%). Good relations, both among employees and in a supervisor-subordinate role, not only contributed to the improvement of performance but they also improved the well-being of employees, thus increasing their willingness and eagerness to work.

The research findings show that the enterprise's employees have the possibility of proposing improvements to their work. That answer was marked by as many as 78% of respondents. Only 22% of employees felt that there was no such possibility. There may have been a problem with the implementation of the proposed improvements. Only 2% of respondents believed that they were empowered to implement them. The largest portion of employees indicated the answer "occasionally", which was as many as 46% of respondents.

With regard to safety in the workplace, the majority of respondents stated that they felt safe. A large percentage of the respondents admitted that they did not feel safe at work, which was as many as 33% of respondents. The causes of this phenomenon were suggested by respondents and included: no alarm, no protective glass separating the employee from the customer, a lack of monitoring, poor protection of cash – no security against theft or burglary, the presence of large amounts of cash – threat of attack, problems with "difficult" customers, the lack of permanent protection, the need for large cash deposits in the bank, bank institutions that were far away from the place of work, late closing time of the office, workplaces that were often poorly lit, an inconvenient location away from a street, and faulty wiring.

Almost half of the respondents considered the workplace to be poorly designed (46%). Moreover, 20% of respondents indicated that equipment within the workplace was of a very low standard.

As shown by these conducted studies, employees often used the time allocated to work on activities not related to their job duties. The largest proportion of respondents admitted that they did them occasionally (44%), while 30% of respondents did them often.

Even though the level of motivation incentives was not enough and there was insufficient satisfaction with the workplace, the majority of respondents admitted that they had no plans to change their jobs. However, 39% of respondents admitted that they had been considering other jobs. Respondents gave several reasons that contributed to this endeavour. These included:

- a) wages too low in relation to seniority,
- b) the lack of opportunities for promotion and career development,
- c) the need to work on holidays and Sundays,
- d) the lack of an employment contract,
- e) fear of being attacked while performing professional duties,
- f) the need to work with large amounts of cash.

The methods and means applied by the analyzed company that contributed to the increase of work efficiency were as follows: financial motivators like bonuses, pay-rises, prizes, tickets to the cinema, theatre, etc., vouchers to various shops. At the same time there were also non-wage motivators such as praise from a supervisor, extra vacation, and integration trips.

Conclusions

Labour productivity in a service enterprise is related to the development of a suitable motivation system for employees. Job satisfaction surveys can be considered to be one of the tools which allows for the identification of factors of increasing labour productivity.

The analysis of the results of this survey conducted in one of the service enterprises (selected as a case study in this paper) indicates that the major problems in terms of increasing work efficiency are low salary as well as work monotony.

The importance of financial factors was strongly emphasized by participants of the study, as they claimed that very low wages are the most demotivating for efficient work. At the same time, respondents regarded their salaries as being too low as compared to their duties. Moreover, they assessed that their level of remuneration (together with workplace equipment and employment stability) influenced labour efficiency the most.

In the era of gradual creation of the employee labour market (also in the CEE countries), the improvement of financial conditions of work will be a crucial element for the acquisition of a labour force in service companies.

At the same time, this analysed case study proved that assuring work diversity is a crucial element of increasing labour efficiency. The respondents stated that a lack of diversity at work reduces their work satisfaction.

A demotivated, bored employee may discourage a client to re-use the offerings of the enterprise. Managers should solve the problem by giving employees, among others, more freedom in decision-making. As a result, employees will feel independent and improve their self-esteem. Managers should also engage employees in the process of decision making by encouraging them to suggest improvements as well as implement their ideas in the enterprise activity.

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