

Importance of Flexibility of Employment in a Professional Education of Persons Endangered by a Social Exclusion

Malgorzata Dobrowolska

Associated Professor, University of Silesia in Katowice

Institute of Psychology, Department of Psychology of Work and Organisation

malgorzata.dobrowolska@us.edu.pl

Abstract

The paper includes description of selected results of the Author's research carried out in the last 10 years (2005 - 2015) focused on flexibility of employment. The most important notions related to flexible forms of employment have been indicated. At the end of the paper the author presents results of the research on a group of $n = 489$ persons endangered by a social exclusion, professional career of which were monitored after conclusion of programmes co-financed by the resources of the European Social Fund. Education of persons from groups endangered by a social exclusion is decisive for effective social-and-professional functioning, adequately to changing labour market and changes in economics.

Keywords: flexible forms of employment, professional problems of persons endangered by social exclusion.

Introduction. On flexibility of employment

Due to already permanent changes on the labour market, the effect of which is superseding traditional forms of employment in favour of the flexible ones, the most common form of employment of persons who were included in the group of the socially excluded or endangered by a social exclusion are flexible forms of employment. (Dobrowolska, 2014). Education of persons from groups endangered by a social exclusion is decisive for effective social-and-professional functioning, adequately to changing labour market and changes in economics.

The term of *flexible (non-traditional, atypical, non-standard, alternative, temporary, external, peripheral) forms of employment* is used to determine employment in a form other than traditional one. (compare to: Dobrowolska, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014).

Traditional forms of employment, according to the Labour Code, covers full-time employment, for an indefinite period of time, with a fixed one shift eight hour long working day, lasting from Monday to Friday, performed on the premises of an employer. All the other ones, being exception to the above mentioned forms, are flexible forms of employment.

At this point I would like to make an analysis of terms used to specify relationship with an employer other than the traditional one more ordered, since in the majority of cases these are mostly synonyms. The most common term is *a flexible form of employment* - introduced as a consequence of making human resources more flexible, their operating mode within an organisation related to working time, amount and characteristics of works performed and a relationship with an entity that allows for making one's living. The very concept of an employer, commonly known and understood clearly in traditional jobs no longer sticks to reality in the face of new forms of employment, in the case of which there are several employers - like for example temporarily employed (a company of a user and at the same time a temporary job agency) - or it is difficult to define them as such - like for example the self-employed, private entrepreneurs, social co-operatives providing services to contractors and clients.

Atypical or non-standard forms of employment, which is another popular expression, used due to specific features and conditions of employment that are quite different from a traditional form of employment and different from one another even within the framework of atypical employment that do not match at all - like for example seasonal work and employment in a social economy sector. *Peripheral or external forms of employment* became widely used as the result of externalisation of a staff divided into a permanent and supporting one, depending on the needs of an organisation. The latter is employed on cyclical basis, the need occurring, or constitutes a relatively fixed percentage of a staff that does not enjoy professional

privileges or enjoys them only partly, which is the case for substitute employees or the already mentioned employees employed by a temporary job agencies. *Temporary forms of employment* refer to characteristic features of non-traditional employment contracts, which in principle are temporary and belong to short-term employment relationships. And finally the term, which in my opinion defines psychological nature of non-traditional forms of employment in the most adequate way - *alternative* to traditional forms of employment, employment that is alternative to a permanent and standard employment (cf. Dobrowolska, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014).

In general in my research and academic considerations I treat non-traditional forms of employment as an alternative to a traditional employment and a good solution for certain social groups in a certain moment of their lives. For yearning and desire for a permanent job confronted with specific features of non-traditional employment can not satisfy these human needs. Alternative forms of earning have been analysed many times with respect to their qualities for persons "forced" by a number of reasons to combine professional life with other duties - care for dependent persons, study and other obligations. They are also an ideal solution in the face of lack of offers of traditional jobs allowing for legal earning. In some cases they may become a manifestation of a life-time career - like in the case of social entrepreneurs. Flexible forms of work require, due to their nature, certain psychological dispositions, which foster smooth functioning of employees, which is related to a simultaneous experience of satisfaction, meaning and quality of life (Bańka, 2006).

In recent years in Poland and many European countries flexible forms of employment developed, not only when it comes to the number of new forms included in the Labour Code, such as teleworking, but also when it comes to qualitative systematised legal entries that regulate characteristics of employment, like for example in case of social co-operatives, for which changes in the appropriate act triggered key changes in characteristics of members of co-operatives, who now can be institutions, keeping financial books according to simplified formulas, etc. There is no time and space to analyse them in details right now. Due to the immensity of various forms of employment and a limited number of signs allowed in this paper I am going to enumerate below only exemplary forms of employment and provide examples of non-traditional job agreements: *substitute work agreement, temporary employment, self-employment, telework, shift work non-permanent agreement, part-time job agreement, commission agreement, contract work agreement, agreement for a period of completion of a specific task (seasonal work), work in a social economy, tolling agreement, employment of employees via another entity, hybrid employment, task period of work, employment in the form of interrupted period of work, individual schedule of work, group organisation of work, job sharing, alternative employment, etc.*

To sum up, there are many forms of employment on the labour market, which is quite a challenge for a person endangered by a social exclusion looking for employment. Amount of information necessary to make a decision concerning a particular form of employment that regulates many issues, such as working hours, benefits, professional privileges and general characteristics of employment, duties and maintenance of employment is extremely vital. Lack of the information may contribute to tragic effects, which is reflected in research concerning reasons of cancelling social cooperatives carried out lately (cf. Dobrowolska, 2010). *Taking into consideration in education (at every stage and level) topics related to flexibility of employment among persons from groups endangered by a social exclusion is decisive for effective social-and-professional functioning, adequately to changing labour market and changes in economics.*

Flexible forms of employment - selected conclusions from the author's own research

On the basis of my research carried out in the last 10 years I would like to highlight ten most important, in my opinion, conclusions. It is my intention not to describe a full methodology of the research, but to signal only the key issues (cf. Dobrowolska 2007, 2008, 2010, 2011, 2012, 2013, 2014).¹

1. Alternative forms of employment constitute an alternative for traditional employment.

It is an excellent solution for certain social groups at a certain stage of their lives. I mentioned this fact in the introduction, but I would like to stress it once again. Unfortunately in the majority of longitudinal research one gets results which show unequivocally that flexible forms of employment do not meet a criterion of "certainty of employment", being a solution for the young, students and those who start a professional career, as an easy beginning of existence on the labour market. The same applies to mothers, for whom flexible forms of employment allow to combine maternal duties and keeping a

¹ All the reports from the research of the Author is available at: malgorzata.dobrowolska@us.edu.pl

household with a professional career, or retired persons who are able to get additional income. The said agreements are not, however, related to declarations of the employed concerning their will to stay with a given job for the rest of their lives (the so called target agreements).

2. Flexible forms of employment constitute an optimal form of social and professional activation of groups endangered by a social exclusion.

It is an excellent tool to fight unemployment and a way to solve social problems. It responds to many needs of persons endangered by a social exclusion and groups of a particularly difficult situation of the labour market. Here one can refer to many research papers and theoretical assumptions. The most basic ones are hidden functions of work - structuralisation of a day. During an isolation on the labour market the long-term unemployed do not have a daily rhythm typical for working persons: waking up in the morning, breakfast, leaving to work, work, return, shopping, cooking, meal, house works, spending time with a family, sleeping. Adjusting to a standard working rhythm of a full-time employee often contributes to overwork related to a number of duties and their rhythm, which leads to quitting a job "inexplicable" for colleagues. This fact shocks everybody and exposed an overworked person to a pejorative opinions, especially when a job is related to good conditions, optimal salary, etc. Flexible forms of employment allow for "slow" entering the labour market - a few hours or days per week. Flexibility of time allow to smooth adjustment to professional activities and make people keep their employment in a long-term perspective, which is related to an effective reintegration with the labour market.

3. Change of a pejorative perception of flexible forms of employment is observed within the last 10 years.

Changes in professional careers manifesting themselves in transcendental markets, borderless careers, etc. (cf. Bańka, 2006) contribute to the fact, that more and more employees is employed on highly specialised positions and appointed to well paid jobs. Former assessment of flexible jobs as the so called "junk jobs" is gradually being forgotten. This is irrefutably positive change of the current commercial labour market which regards all three sectors: public, private and social one. Visible improvement of flexicurity, working conditions and growing popularity on the labour market contribute to the fact that assessment of the public, which in my qualitative research carried out ten years ago included very negative opinions, such as: "forty-year-old with a temporary work contract is a loser", is now quite different: "forty-year-old employed in a temporary work agency uses possibilities offered by the labour market!". Assessments concerning flexible forms of employment are either neutral or clearly non-negative.

4. Relatively highly developed psycho-social and preventive competencies among employees of flexible forms of employment are diagnosed.

Employees of flexible forms of employment function in a more efficient way than employees of the so called core of the staff and employees with permanent job contracts within traditional staff solutions. Such result I have been obtaining every year for 10 years within the framework of comparative analyses in the same organisations belonging to the three sectors: private, public and social one.

5. Consequences of flexible employment are identical with characteristics of traditional forms of employment.

Flexible forms of employment exhibit all the professional problems of traditional models of employment. This is an important conclusion in the perspective of many stereotypes that accompany flexible forms of employment and conditions offered by them to the employed. It is a common belief that temporality or momentariness of employment suffices to prevent some pathological phenomena such as mobbing, which according to some theories requires minimum half a year of work, or a professional burn-out that requires a longer temporal perspective, or workaholism. Far from it. I obtained many empirical data proving occurrence of not only the three above mentioned negative phenomena in a working place, but also all the other ones typical for traditional employment.

6. Characteristics of functioning of employees depends on a form of employment.

Each form of flexible employment is characterised by a characteristic profile of variables. It is a very important conclusion especially for a choice of a research sample which can not be a breakdown of all forms of employment "bit by bit" due to totally different conditions of employment and work that influence characteristics of functioning of flexible employees. For work experience of a teleworker doing his/her job at home is totally different from experience of a social member of a cooperative. Therefore "putting everyone to a single sack" (according to a Polish saying) is not correct. One should not carry out research and drawing conclusions on the basis of one group of flexible employees mixed with the other one, in

spite of the fact that these are all flexible employees. This is a very frequent mistake of the measurements carried out so far.

7. In flexible forms of employment positive aspects of work are diagnosed in a limited degree.

Employees employed in flexible form of employment obtain average results in the following scales: job satisfaction, attribution of organisational affiliation, involvement and loyalty. Unfortunately it is true that in the times of formal relations prevailing over psychological ones, or relatively high frequency of a change of a place of employment phenomena related to identification with a company and its consequences are more negative than among traditional employees. In all the researched variables concerning positive aspects of work, spread on calculated scales reached its maximum results in average ranges - it is symptomatic that increased results have not been obtained even once.

8. A need to create new human resources management tools with consideration of a peripheral staff.

Flexible staff solutions cause characteristic effects for an organisation. Use of traditional solutions becomes impossible. Unfortunately most of these differences is caused by law - labour code or civil code. For example use of staff assessment system devised for permanent staff becomes impossible for employees hired by a temporary work agency. Due to a formula of employment these are not employees of a specific company of a user for which they work, but of an agency, in spite of the fact that they perform professional duties in favour and under supervision of the user. From the legal point of view they can not undergo obligatory staff procedures of an employer that is not their own, and therefore they lose some or all privileges, such as holiday parcels, awards, etc. It causes a lot of confusion. As a matter of fact all the HR functions - from personnel planning taking into consideration flexible employees, to recruitment require different characteristics in traditional and non-traditional work model.

9. Flexible forms of employment require diverse professional predispositions.

There is a need of diagnosing professional predispositions for specific forms of employment as a new trend in career counselling. Analyses of psychological dispositions or dispositions for a specific type of organisation - big, medium and small one - become insufficient. Analysis of how a given person is able to cope with characteristics of a relatively big changeability, dynamics and flexibility is decisive for efficient psychosocial functioning in flexible forms and prevention of negative consequences of professional work for an entity. Tests diagnosing adjustment of a person to flexible forms of employment appeared on the market. Within the carried out research variable personal flexibility proved to be especially important due to a relatively high amplitude of changes of work place. The variable is responsible for ability to adjust efficiently to sudden changes.

10. There are small cross-cultural differences of psychological functioning between samples of specific employment forms.

Statistically unimportant transnational differences were obtained in selected EU countries (Germany, Holland, Denmark, Great Britain, Italy, Spain). It turns out that apart from differences of individual parameters, in case of many psychological variables (*autonomy of choice of a flexible form of employment, personal flexibility, hope of success, styles of coping with stress, engagement in a professional work, attachment to an organisation, loyalty, work satisfaction, work efficiency, workaholism, professional burnout, mobbing and culture of work safety*) considerable similarities were obtained with respect to descriptions of experienced professional problems and characteristics of functioning in a work place as well as characteristics of consequences of flexible employment for an entity.

Results of the research presented above give an insight into some crucial mechanisms to be found at the foundations of professional activity of employees who decide to get involved in a form of employment alternative to a traditional one. One can hope that tests carried out will allow for a better understanding of mechanisms of functioning of flexible employees, their professional problems and, what follows, more accurate forecast of consequences of flexible forms of employment.

"Importance of flexibility of employment in a professional education of persons endangered by a social exclusion" - summary

It is hard to insist that flexible forms of employment are a perfect solution in activation of persons endangered by a social exclusion due to their various disadvantages such as "temporariness" of employment, by some described as "uncertainty" of employment, "short period" of employment, etc. Also, it is difficult, due to smaller than in traditional forms of employment

employees' provisions, to assess them only in positive terms even in the context of continuously developing idea of flexicurity. In the context of results obtained on the sample of n=489 persons endangered by a social exclusion, whose professional career was monitored after conclusion of programmes co-financed by the European Social Fund from June 2013 to March 2015 the following should be clearly stated:

- Within a general employment rate, that was 33% of the general number of qualified participators, in line with statutory criteria, to a group of persons socially endangered, to ESF projects (n=489) only one person started working within a framework of a traditional form of employment, 13 persons were incorporated to existing social co-operatives or launched their own co-operatives, 0 persons started their own business, and the rest started working in flexible forms of employment (including temporary job agencies, specific task agreement, seasonal works, substitute job agreement, part-time job and agreements for a specific period of time)

- all the above mentioned persons kept the employment for minimum 3 months, and 73% of them kept employment for the period of career monitoring of graduates of ESF programmes for 12 months.

- scores of described psychological variables in the described sample n=489 concerning environmental and subject conditions of behaviour at work (inter alia *autonomy of choice of a flexible form of employment, personal flexibility, hope of success, styles of coping with stress, engagement in a professional work, attachment to an organisation, loyalty, work satisfaction, work efficiency, culture of work safety*) were average

- individual scores of perception of conditions of flexible employment were average - 6 sten scores.

The above results suggest, that flexible forms of employment constitute a reasonable direction of actions in education taken up at all the levels and stages for an adequate professional activation of persons endangered by a social exclusion and are one of the key instruments of efficient fight with unemployment promoting inclusion of persons with exceptionally difficult situation on the market.

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