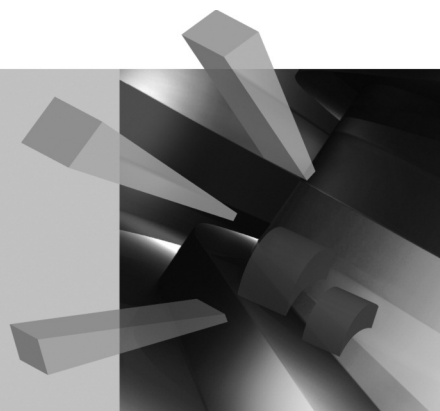


Human and work in a changing organisation. Management oriented on the employee interests



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JOB NEGOTIATIONS AS A TOOL FOR FRAMING A WORK–LIFE BALANCE*

Summary: The article addresses the issue of job negotiations carried out on the external labour market. As a result, candidates seeking a new employer can achieve work–life balance, measured, as the author assumes, by the level of life satisfaction. The course and outcome of the negotiation are influenced by different traits and skills whose relations with the psychological result of negotiation are studied by the author. The results of these explorations have both cognitive and applicative dimension; they may become a guideline for job candidates and recruiters representing their organisations.

Keywords: job negotiations, life satisfaction, work-life balance.

1. Introduction

Job negotiations can be treated in two ways, as a discussion about remuneration or – more broadly – as a way to agree mutual expectations and obligations of the parties, covering various aspects of work and life. This article assumes the second of these approaches according to which job negotiations, referring to the definition of Fisher *et al.* [1994, pp. 27-28], can be considered as a two-way communication and decision-making process during which both parties joined by a common interest and divided by divergent interests try to reach agreement.

When negotiating employment conditions with an employer, including a job-position, responsibilities, expected benefits, the parties at the same time go beyond the professional area, because the occupation-related social position affects the circle of friends, forms of spending free time, abilities to pursue after-work hobbies. We should therefore negotiate the employer-employee agreement to secure such financial, time, and mental conditions that a work–life balance, expressed by the level of life satisfaction, is really possible (see Figure 1). This article aims to show that the individual characteristics of job candidates are important during negotiation and how they affect the welfare of people seeking employment on the external labour market.

* The research was financed by the Polish science's resources in 2007-2010 as a research project No. N 115 016 32/0285.

2. Work–life balance

The importance of work–life balance is particularly visible after it is disturbed and an employee is unable to recover his or her strength. He thoroughly belongs to an organisation which is not only a place of work and a source of professional satisfaction, but a sense of belonging to it, and above-average involvement in professional work is also a way to compensate for deficits in other areas of life.

It should be emphasised that to help an employee maintain work–life balance, the organisation can clearly define the requirements for employees, learn the internal obstacles, and understand the employees' perception of the work environment. Numerous empirical studies demonstrate the thesis that a work–life balance brings tangible benefits for both an organisation and an employee [Dallimore, Mickel 2006, pp. 61-103]. The problem assumes particular importance, when we realise that the consequences of a lack of work–life balance affect not only employees themselves, but the entire economic and social organisations and society at the macro level [Borkowska 2003, p. 16].

An employer who is able to provide his or her employee with the benefits he or she expects, owing to which he or she will strive for harmonious, rather than just professional development, will help improve the quality of his or her psychophysical health, life quality, and satisfaction in general.

However, finding the answers to the question of what are the abovementioned benefits that an employee expects is not simple. There is no universal template or organisational procedure that would give a clear and simple solution in this case. The solution to this dilemma can be found by establishing – from the earliest stages of contact between an employer and an employee – effective communication during which the parties will explain their expectations and declare obligations or, in other words, they will negotiate job conditions.

Research on individualised employment contracts carried out by Hornung *et al.* [2008, pp. 655-664] on German officials in Bavaria shows that the negotiated working time flexibility helps reduce a work-family conflict, and the amount of overtime, which testifies to the degree of involvement in an organisation. The negotiated conditions of professional development are conducive to the affective organisational commitment, increasing a work-family conflict, higher expectations associated with fulfilling tasks set and a greater amount of overtime.

In other words, i-deals,¹ occurring also on markets with relatively limited competition, are the future of relations in the job market and have an undeniable influence on a work–life balance, which can be for example measured by the level of life satisfaction, shaped by both professional and extraprofessional factors.

¹ I-deals – idiosyncratic deals - personalised employment contracts of a nonstandard nature negotiated between individual employees and their employers [I-deal 2011].

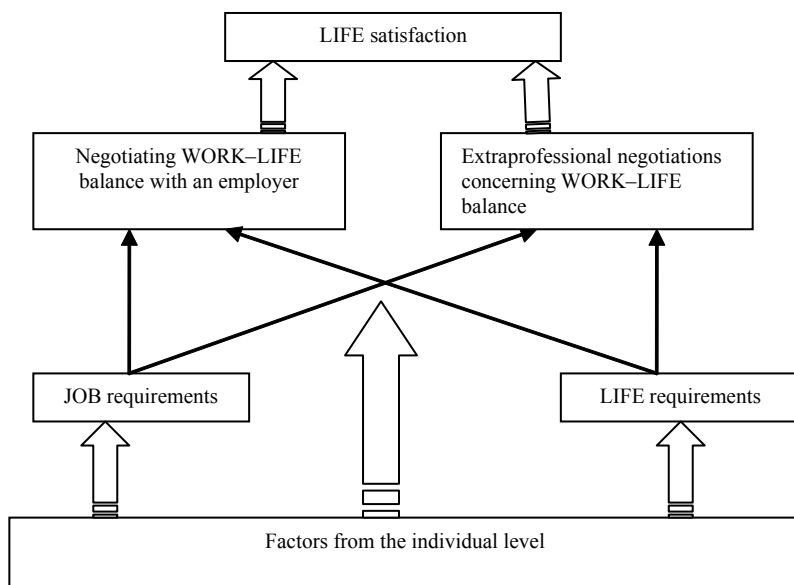


Figure 1. The importance of job negotiations for life satisfaction

Source: author's own elaboration.

3. Life satisfaction as a measure of work–life balance

Life satisfaction, semantically close to life quality, contentment in life, welfare, and a sense of happiness is the subject of research in many fields of science such as economics, sociology, pedagogy, philosophy, or psychology.

Because of the issues discussed herein, we should refer to the life quality model created by A.E. Mickel, E.J. Dallimore, and C.A. Nelson, affected by various states of an individual (e.g., satisfaction with and balance of different aspects of life, physical and mental health, welfare), available resources (e.g., money, time), and activities (e.g., work, recreation and entertainment, service to others) [Dallimore, Mickel 2006, pp. 61-103]. Life quality understood as a set of factors may be considered a result of exchange between an individual and his or her environment, including his or her work-related environment, especially when there is a conflict between work and life which disturbs the life quality. Then it is necessary to: a) take actions aimed at changing professional and life roles (professional and extraprofessional negotiation); b) develop support from a spouse, partner (extraprofessional negotiation); c) use family-friendly programs offered by an organisation (professional negotiation) [Mickel, Dallimore 2009, pp. 627-668]. This means that extraprofessional life and work are communicating vessels, and a good or bad agreement that is negotiated with an employer, and then carried out, will affect other aspects of the individual's

functioning, and form his or her overall life satisfaction. Therefore, job negotiations will affect the level of life satisfaction.

The factors that influence life satisfaction achieved through a sense of work–life balance and in part achieved through negotiation between a candidate and an employer are the individual's competencies, his or her characteristics, and work-related factors. These include the Big Five personality dimensions, hope for success, negotiation skills, ability to cope with stress, a sense of locus of control in a work situation, perception of the job market. Owing to the limited framework of the article, I will present only the factors whose relations with negotiated life satisfaction turned out to be statistically significant.

4. Selected individual factors affecting the negotiated life satisfaction

The first group of factors analysed in the study is a group of features being part of the Big Five personality structure and hope for success. The Big Five is a personality concept formulated by P.T. Cost and R.R. McCrae, which implies the existence of five key personality dimensions: extraversion, agreeableness, conscientiousness, openness to experience and emotional stability [Zawadzki *et al.* 1998, pp. 13-20]. The concept was used by B. Barry and R. Friedman to study negotiators who found that in distributive negotiations extroverted and agreeable negotiators obtained worse results. This relationship did not exist, however, in integrative negotiations [Lewicki *et al.* 2006, pp. 396-397], and these generally occur during job negotiations. However, in my earlier studies, I found that the ability to cope with negotiation and carry out negotiation goals was affected by two scales: emotional stability (no neuroticism) and conscientiousness [Kowalczyk 2001, pp. 191-192]. It can be assumed that some of these features will leave their mark on the negotiated, psychological effect of job negotiations, measured by the level of life satisfaction and achieved by providing work–life balance.

Another feature is hope for success which, according to C.R. Snyder's concept, is understood as having the power to achieve success. According to Snyder, it is a positive motivational state consisting of two components: belief in one's strong-will and confidence in one's ability to find solutions. Those endowed with this trait are more persistent, enterprising, they better handle social interactions and crisis, they care more about their health and cope better with severe and chronic diseases. Success orientation is therefore a good predictive index of perceiving the importance of a goal, chances of its implementation and willingness to put effort [Łaguna *et al.* 2005, pp. 5-14, 25-27]. This seems to be particularly conducive to job negotiations and obtaining a result that will ensure a work–life balance.

Another set of individual parameters of job candidates includes skills such as coping with stress and negotiations. Nęcki [1994, p. 26] believes that negotiation and interview with a job candidate are among the most difficult interpersonal situations. In such cases, skillful coping with stress turns out to be inevitable as it makes it pos-

sible to counteract difficulties or bring mental relief. Changing job and negotiating its terms is generally challenging and it increases the quality of a scheduled task. In addition, favorable arrangements during job negotiations that are conducive to attaining job satisfaction, giving control of it, ensuring appropriate workload, and eliminating a role conflict, can contribute to reducing the work-related stress a new employer experiences [Schultz, Schultz 2002, pp. 425-444]. Dealing with stress can manifest itself in threefold styles: a task-oriented style (e.g., seeking work actively, participating in trainings, changing professional qualifications); emotion-oriented style (e.g., fantasizing and imagining a positive solution to the problem); avoidance-oriented style (e.g., engaging in alternative activities or searching for social contacts) [cf. Strelau *et al.* 2005, pp. 16-17]. It can be assumed that the emotion-oriented style is the least effective in achieving work–life balance as expressed by the level of life satisfaction, because it distances the applicant from a positive outcome and fosters wishful, unreal interpretation of events.

Negotiation skills, in the narrow sense of the term, stand for negotiation competences, flexible responding to situations, knowledge of and skill in the use of negotiation techniques and skill in defending against the other party's manipulation attempts. Negotiation skills mean playing a game in a hard, soft, or kind manner, depending on an existing situation, personal preferences, and views on the ethical aspects of negotiation.

The factors influencing a negotiation result, i.e., work–life balance, measured by the degree of life satisfaction, are also work-related features and market aspects. The former include a sense of locus of control in work situations, whereas the latter – the perception of the job market.

Job candidates with an internal locus of control will treat negotiation as a set of problems to solve and execute; they will look at the world realistically and assess their chances accurately. They will adopt an active attitude and treat any stumbling as an enriching experience [Januszek, Krzyminiewska 1995, p. 89], they will cope better with stress and frustration that often occur at the negotiating table; they will feel responsible for the conduct and outcome of discussions [Kałużna-Drewińska 2006, p. 39]. In a job search situation, a negotiator will be more persistent, often undertaking application attempts, which will result in greater experience and skill thus contributing to their success on the job market.

Another important factor influencing life satisfaction is the perception of the labour market as our actions are governed not so much by reality, but its subjective image created in our mind. The individual perception of the labour market is affected by different experiences, needs, personal characteristics, and education system. The labour market can be viewed in two dimensions: cognitive, in the form of judgments; and emotional, in the form of feelings that it evokes. Both judgments and feelings will affect actions and bring a candidate closer to or distance him or her from his or her sense of life satisfaction achieved through a work–life balance [Kowalczyk 2011, p. 159]. According to the main research hypothesis, the aforementioned factors

are activated in the job negotiation process and contribute to achieving work–life balance, measured by the level of life satisfaction.

5. Research sample

The research involved 177 respondents that applied for positions with new employers and were searching for jobs for 18 months preceding the research in widely understood economical professions in areas such as trade and marketing, management, finance and accounting. The majority of the respondents were on early phases of professional career, which are tied with dynamics of change and looking for one’s own place in professional life (see Table 1 for further details).

Table 1. Respondents’ characteristics

Sex		Mean age			Respondents applied for the following jobs (in %):						Work experience	
female	male	total	female	male	Rank and file	Independent specialist	Executive position of medium rank	Executive position of high rank	Other	Mean in years	Median in years	
133	44	26.2	26.1	26.7	29.1	51.7	12.2	2.9	4.1	4.8	3.0	

Source: author’s own study.

6. Tools and research indicators

Tools and research indicators are summarised in Table 2.

Table 2. Variables, indicators, and research tools

Independent (explanatory) and dependent (response) variables			Research indicators	Research tools
Independent variables	Personal Aspects	Traits	Success orientation	KNS The Hope Scale
			Personality type	NEO-FFI for measuring the Big Five
		Job related traits	Locus of control in a work situation	I-E scale at work
		Skills	Negotiation competences of job candidates	Survey titled „Handling negotiations” (Alfa-Cronbach r= 0.78).
	Stress coping		CISS survey	
	Market Aspects		Demographic data	Sex, age, position
Dependent variables	Work–life balance of applicants	Job-market conditions	Author’s test on the perception of labor market (cognitive and emotional component) (Alfa Cronbach r= 0.85).	
		Life satisfaction	SWLS survey – questionnaire for measuring life satisfaction	

Source: author’s own study.

7. Research results

In the research assumptions, life satisfaction is a dependent variable achieved to some extent through fulfillment in a professional role that is possible owing to a contract negotiated in the job search process. Obviously, life satisfaction is achieved also thanks to other values; however, the more efficient the job search process and negotiation, the fuller the achievement of work–life balance and the higher contentment with life. Therefore the first hypothesis regarding life satisfaction is formulated:

[H1] = There is a relation between the characteristics of job candidates and life satisfaction.

The relation between the level of job satisfaction and personality dimensions was analysed in accordance with the Big Five model and success orientation.

Therefore, trichotomisation of data forming the Big Five model scale was conducted, and data analysis with a one-way analysis of variance was carried out. Statistically significant differences between the groups were obtained on the scale of neuroticism ($F = 7.510$, $p = 0.001$; $df = 1;174$), extraversion ($F = 3.914$, $p = 0.022$; $df = 2;174$) and conscientiousness ($F = 13.003$, $p = 0.000$, $df = 2;174$). Then *post hoc* Bonferroni tests showed statistically significant differences between groups with low and high results on the scale of neuroticism in terms of life satisfaction ($p = 0.043$), people with low and high levels of extraversion in terms of life satisfaction ($p = 0.018$), and groups with low and medium levels ($p = 0.000$) and low and high levels ($p = 0.000$) of conscientiousness.

Neurotics are individuals with a high degree of anxiety and uncertainty who poorly tolerate stress. This results in their worse performance in difficult situations, including job search. Therefore, they become less attractive candidates, who are offered less favourable conditions, which prevents them from satisfying their work–life balance and achieving life satisfaction.

Extroverts are more satisfied with life and the trait is conducive to negotiating more satisfactory living conditions. Extraversion also fosters interpersonal attraction and a greater number of contacts at work and elsewhere. Such people are not afraid of claiming for their benefits; they are also seen as candidates that can easily adapt to a team. Owing to their social contacts, they may also find support for their candidacy. During job negotiations they have fewer scruples in reporting their expectations, which may contribute to the development of their favourable work–life balance.

In addition, a higher level of conscientiousness results in higher life satisfaction, and taking into account that conscientiousness contributes to professional and academic achievements, this relationship can be explained by the regularity: the better performance at work and elsewhere, the higher life satisfaction.

At a later stage of the study, relations between hope for success and life satisfaction were also looked for. This time, statistically significant relations between the belief in one's strong will and the analysed factor ($r = 0.374$, $p = 0.000$) as well as the ability to find solutions ($r = 0.187$, $p = 0.012$) and life satisfaction were demonstrated. These features make it possible to achieve goals despite difficulties, in the face of despair and fatigue, and this is accompanied by the conviction of possessing a valuable intellectual competence that allows one to carry out the intended task. Perseverance in the job search process can therefore result in life satisfaction. This analysis allows us to accept the hypothesis [H1] about the existence of a relation between candidates' characteristics and life satisfaction.

At the next stage of the analysis, a question about a relation between life satisfaction and the skills of applicants was asked, which helped to formulate the following hypothesis:

[H2] = There is a relation between the skills of candidates and life satisfaction.

The analysis of correlation showed that there was a statistically significant relation between the level of negotiation competences and life satisfaction ($r = 0.184$, $p = 0.014$). This means that life satisfaction can be achieved by negotiating different things, and the efficiency of these negotiations has an impact on the overall quality of life. The better the negotiation skills are, the easier it is to develop satisfactory relationships at work and elsewhere in the course of mutual agreement. This helps reach work–life balance that forms the level of life satisfaction. In addition, a statistically significant negative relationship between the style of coping with stress by focusing on emotions and life satisfaction was demonstrated ($r = -0.227$, $p = 0.002$), which causes that people who focus on emotions and reduce their negative consequences during job search feel as a result less satisfied with life. Consequently, this means that this is not an effective way of coping with this difficult situation.

The results obtained allow for the adoption of the hypothesis [H2], which assumes a relationship between the skills of job candidates and life satisfaction to a limited extent. Another hypothesis tested concerned the verification of a relation between the perception of work (including a sense of locus of control and attitude toward the job market) and the level of life satisfaction.

[H3] = There is a relation between candidates' perception of work and their life satisfaction.

To test this hypothesis, it was shown that there is a statistically significant correlation between an inner locus of control in a work situation and life satisfaction ($r = 0.268$, $p = 0.000$), which means that a candidate who perceives himself or herself as a person who has an impact on the results of his or her work and situations that shape his or her work environment is more likely to be satisfied with life. A person

with an internal locus of control believes in himself or herself and his or her own competences and is more active, so job negotiations are also treated as a situation of challenge which he or she can influence, and whose outcome depends on his or her attitude and commitment. Such an approach will contribute to better outcomes providing greater life satisfaction through negotiating conditions that allow him or her to cope with and fulfill himself or herself in many roles.

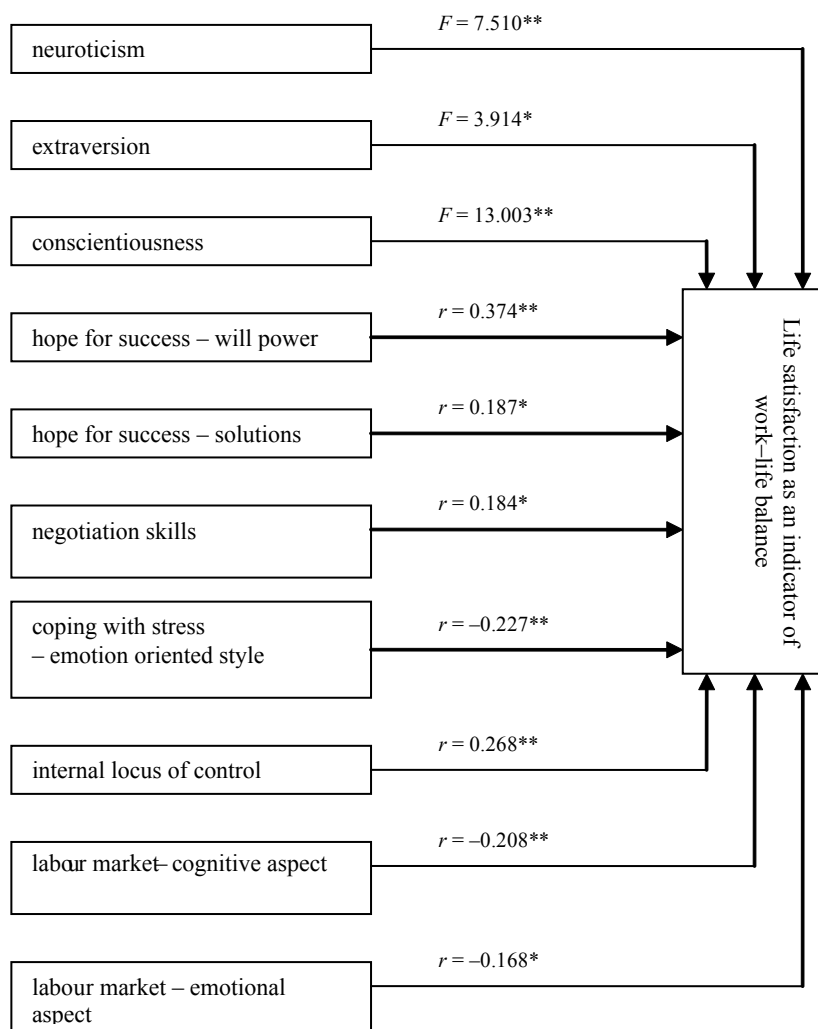


Figure 2. Factors forming life satisfaction as an indicator of work–life balance

* Statistical significance at the level 0.05; ** Statistical significance at the level 0.01.

Source: author's own study.

Moreover, it was demonstrated that the perception of the labour market in the cognitive dimension ($r = -0.208$, $p = 0.006$) and emotional dimension ($r = -0.186$, $p = 0.013$) correlates with the level of life satisfaction. At the same time, the more favourable the picture of the labour market and the more positive emotions it raises, the greater life satisfaction. The labour market seen as a challenge, rather than a threat, makes the running programmes of action bring positive results, among other, encouraging job-seekers to aim at bold plans and ambitious goals. This in turn will translate into successful results in the form of obtaining greater benefits and increased life satisfaction. The results obtained allow for the adoption of a hypothesis about a relation between candidates' perception of work and their life satisfaction [H3].

8. Conclusions

The aforementioned parameters of candidates which in part can be developed, trained, are conducive to negotiating life satisfaction. The degree of candidates' attractiveness is shaped by the way in which they behave and their character traits that a recruiter can see. If their profile is consistent with the image desired by an employee, they will receive more benefits and an employer will be willing to go for more concessions to win them. What follows, with additional knowledge of themselves and their life goals, when negotiating conditions, candidates can create a foundation that will allow them to ensure work–life balance measured by life satisfaction.

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NEGOCJACJE W SPRAWIE PRACY JAKO NARZĘDZIE KSZTAŁTUJĄCE RÓWNOWAGĘ PRACA–ŻYCIE

Streszczenie: Artykuł porusza problematykę negocjacji w sprawie pracy prowadzonej na zewnętrznym rynku pracy. W ich efekcie kandydaci poszukujący nowego pracodawcy mogą osiągać równowagę pomiędzy pracą a życiem, której miarą w założeniach autorki jest poziom satysfakcji życiowej. Na przebieg i wynik negocjacji wpływają różne cechy i umiejętności, których związek z psychologicznym rezultatem negocjacji badała autorka. Wyniki tych eksploracji mają zarówno wymiar poznawczy, jak i aplikacyjny, mogąc stać się wskazówką dla kandydatów do pracy, jak i rekruterów występujących z ramienia organizacji.

Słowa kluczowe: negocjacje w sprawie pracy, satysfakcja życiowa, równowaga praca–życie.