

### **Magdalena Borowska**

Wrocław University of Economics  
e-mail: magdalena.borowska@ue.wroc.pl  
ORCID: 0000-0001-5627-7058

### **Agata Pietron-Pyszczyk**

Wrocław University of Economics  
e-mail: agata.pietron-pyszczyk@ue.wroc.pl  
ORCID: 0000-0002-3861-3609

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## **AWARENESS OF EMPLOYEES` INTERESTS AS THE INTEREST OF THE ENTERPRISE. THE CASE OF PKP SA COMPANIES**

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## **ZNAJOMOŚĆ INTERESÓW PRACOWNIKÓW JAKO INTERES PRZEDSIĘBIORSTWA. PRZYPADEK SPÓŁEK PKP SA**

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**Summary:** The aim of the article is to recognise the interests of employees in PKP SA companies and to determine the rank of these interests due to the motivational potential which lies in their implementation. This was conducted thorough studies of literature on the subject as well as empirical studies with the use of a questionnaire. Based on the review of the literature, the interests were divided into two groups: those protected by law and those that are partly or completely within the competence of the employer. Non-managerial staff (495 persons) were offered a second interest group for assessment. The motivational potential was determined by comparing the value that employees assign to particular interests with the perceived level of their implementation. High-value interests, whose degree of implementation the respondents rated the lowest were considered to be those with motivational potential; these are (in descending order): transparent rules of promotion, pay adequate to duties, equal treatment in employment, good working atmosphere, employment protection, safe working conditions.

**Keywords:** internal stakeholders, employees, employee interests.

**Streszczenie:** Celem artykułu jest rozpoznanie interesów pracowników w spółkach PKP SA oraz ustalenie rangi tych interesów ze względu na potencjał motywacyjny, który tkwi w ich realizacji. Przeprowadzono studia literatury przedmiotu oraz badania empiryczne z wykorzystaniem kwestionariusza ankiety. Na podstawie przeglądu piśmiennictwa podzielono interesy na dwie grupy: chronione prawem oraz te pozostające częściowo bądź całkowicie w gestii pracodawcy. Pracownikom niepełniącym funkcji kierowniczych (495 osób) przed-

stawiono do oceny drugą grupę interesów. Potencjał motywacyjny ustalano, porównując wartość, jaką pracownicy przypisują poszczególnym interesom z odczuwanym poziomem ich realizacji. Interesy o wysokiej wartości, których stopień realizacji respondenci ocenili najniżej, uznano za te, które mają potencjał motywacyjny. Są to (malejąco): przejrzyste reguły awansu, płace adekwatne do obowiązków, równe traktowanie w zatrudnieniu, dobra atmosfera pracy, ochrona zatrudnienia, bezpieczne warunki pracy.

**Słowa kluczowe:** interesariusze wewnętrzni, pracobiorcy, interesy pracownicze.

## 1. Introduction

Considerations about the purpose and sense of the existence of the enterprise, as well as whom it should serve and whose interests it should satisfy, still cause significant controversy [Rybak 2004, p. 43]. The literature on the subject usually distinguishes external (outsider) and internal (insider) stakeholders of employee representation [Mendel 2001; Freeman, Reed 1983, p. 2; Rybak 2004, pp. 43-44]. The indicated groups of stakeholders may have an influence on the company, but what is important is that they are themselves also affected by it. It must be borne in mind that their personal shares possess a reciprocal character, because they interact with each other in terms of damages and benefits, but also rights and obligations [Paliwoda-Matiolańska 2014, p. 55].

A particularly important group of stakeholders are employees, because their motivation and commitment depend on the ability to meet the needs of other stakeholders [Król, Ludwiczynski (eds.), p. 11]. These employees are “ambassadors” of the enterprise in its external environment. They affect the perception of the organisation by various groups interested in its functioning, perpetuating a specific image of the company, and thus its image.

Therefore, managers should take into account the interests of employees in the company goals<sup>1</sup> [Gableta, Adamska 2009, p. 59]. Employees as stakeholders of the company hope that it responds positively to their expectations. In the original perspective (*homo economicus*), these expectations concern remuneration for work [Wawrzyniak 2002, p. 26]. Currently, however, it is increasingly said that employees expect their employer not only to fulfil their obligations under a formal employment contract, but also to fulfil their obligations under a psychological contract [Rogozińska-Pawelczyk 2011, pp. 135-146].

Each stakeholder is connected to the company with a certain stake indicating the type and degree of their expectations and risk. In the case of an employee, this risk is associated with the commencement of cooperation with the given company and therefore turning down other job offers. In addition, the employee is exposed to possible professional stagnation and the acquisition of improper habits. The risk is also related to the employer, whose business practices can negatively affect the image of

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<sup>1</sup> In the article, the term “employees’ interests” is used interchangeably with the term “expectations”, defined as something that one desires and expects.

their employees. All this may have a negative impact on their future employability<sup>2</sup>. It may be also assumed that the risk will be lower, the greater the level of trust between the parties, i.e. the belief that they are guided by the same moral principles and are willing to put in the same amount of effort in the implementation of obligations or implementation of the agreed plan [Hryniewicz 2007, p. 29].

The subject literature indicates two basic groups of such interests [Gableta (ed.) 2012, p. 17]. The first is related to interests whose implementation has been guaranteed by law, the second is related to voluntary actions undertaken for employees, which are the responsibility of managers and which reveal themselves through such components of human resource management (HRM) as workplaces, working conditions, personnel function and internal communication [Gableta 2003, p. 183].

Caring for employees' interests requires regularity and consistency in undertaking specific actions (both identifying and evaluating) that ultimately lead to their implementation. This means that these interests – after their proper systematisation – should be recognised with an emphasis on those which should be prioritised in the process of their implementation, because the employees count on their fulfilment in given conditions of the company's functioning. This is mainly about recognising the motivational potential embedded in the implementation of specific interests. Negligence related to its activation may inhibit the processes of motivating people to work. It is important to bear in mind the links between a particular approach to employees and their involvement.

Recently the issue of building engagement has become more and more important. This is because employee engagement genuinely contributes to the organization's success through the employees' efforts to achieve the goals of the enterprise. It is also emphasized that the employee is not only interested in their work and in having a positive attitude to it, but they are also ready for an additional effort to do it as best as possible. As a result, they achieve the desired goal, they are creative and innovative, thus mobilising other employees, and at the same time identifying with the organisation. Among the numerous factors which determine the involvement of people in the matters of the organisation, one can mention positive relations with superiors, development prospects, participation in decision-making processes, proper constructed working conditions, and efficient internal communication channels. The above factors are important work-related benefits for employees. Therefore, it can be stated that creating conditions stimulating the involvement of employees in the enterprise's affairs is connected to the realisation of their interests.

The aim of the study was to indicate those interests of the employees of PKP SA companies which have the potential to motivate them. The implementation of intermediate goals was assumed for the conducting the research project formulated in this way, i.e.

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<sup>2</sup> Employability as a reflection of the bargaining power of individuals on the labour market, related to the availability of attributes conditioning employment, i.e. having a job.

- an indication of potential employee expectations as internal stakeholders of the company, based on the analysis of the literature on the subject;
- determining the rank of interests of the employees of PKP SA companies by the comparison of the importance of particular interests with the level of their satisfaction, indicated by employees in the survey<sup>3</sup>.

## **2. Employees' interests and the premise for their analysis in management practice**

Two radically different approaches emerge at the opposite poles of the above-mentioned stakeholders concept. The first is in favour of subordinating the organisation's activities to the interests of the shareholders. This position is reflected in the so-called thesis on the disharmony of goals, according to which the shareholders' plans are different from the expectations of the other stakeholders of the company. The second one, in turn, indicates the need to subordinate the organisation's activities to the expectations of all stakeholders of the company, even those indirectly related to it. It is indicated here that the value of an organisation increases along with the implementation of the needs and expectations that are important to all stakeholders. The company's care about fulfilling social obligations results in the fulfilment of its duties also towards the shareholders, which refers to the thesis on the harmony of goals [Marcinkowska 2004, p. 31].

Nowadays, in this era of rising social expectations, the need to implement the second of the presented approaches is becoming more and more common. It requires managers to have a broader than an only profit-oriented perspective, and at the same time emphasize the moral responsibility for their actions, decisions and their consequences [Rybak 2004, p. 51].

In the literature on management it is emphasized that entities interested in the continuity and development of an organisation should be sought, in particular, within the parties contributing to the achievement of its objectives, i.e. internal (insider) stakeholders. Thanks to their knowledge, competences, skills and experience – which are, as it is stressed, a strategic resource – an enterprise can achieve the desired competitive position as well as meet the needs of other stakeholders [Król, Ludwiczynski (eds.) 2006, p. 11]. The goal is, among others, efficiency, speed, reliability, customer service safety, and the effective use of fixed assets of the enterprise [Jabłoński 2012, p. 39].

Hence it seems that there should be an increase in the importance of blending the duration and development of the organisation with the employees' achievement of the benefits they expect from employment. These benefits are the result of the employees realising their interests, reflecting specific expectations related to

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<sup>3</sup> The description of the research procedure is included in the further part of the study.

activities undertaken in the given organisation, whose implementation should enable them to obtain benefits important for them [Gableta, Adamska 2009, p. 59].

The literature indicates two groups of interests, namely those that have been guaranteed by law, and those whose implementation is the responsibility of the company. Examples of employee interests are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Areas of employees' interests in which there are noted legal protection and management decisions

The interests of employees	
protected by law	partly or completely at the discretion of the employer
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Training preparing for work</li> <li>– Protection of social benefits</li> <li>– Creating collective agreements</li> <li>– Timely payment of monthly remuneration</li> <li>– Ensuring an 11-hour break between consecutive days of work</li> <li>– Informing employees about hazards at the workplaces</li> <li>– Conducting initial and periodic health and safety training financed by the employer</li> <li>– Providing initial and periodic medical examinations financed by the employer</li> <li>– Ensuring, at the employer's expense, personal and collective protection</li> <li>– The right to a vacation leave and so-called leave on demand</li> <li>– Payment of remuneration or additional time off for working overtime</li> <li>– Compliance with the prohibition of mobbing and discrimination</li> <li>– Establishment of trade union</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Wages adequate to the performed duties</li> <li>– Employment protection</li> <li>– Protection (security) of social benefits</li> <li>– Equal treatment</li> <li>– The functioning of trade unions</li> <li>– Above-standard health and safety solutions</li> <li>– Additional health benefits financed by the employer</li> <li>– Providing complete, unambiguous, up-to-date information</li> <li>– Efficient flow of information – “up-down”, “bottom-up”</li> <li>– Training financed by the employer</li> <li>– Influence on the organisation of working time</li> <li>– Help from superiors and colleagues</li> <li>– Good atmosphere at the workplace</li> <li>– Assistance with outplacement</li> <li>– Transparent rules of promotion</li> <li>– Formal procedures for expressing opinions</li> <li>– Adaptation programs for new employees</li> <li>– Organising integration events</li> <li>– Information on important issues regarding the functioning of the company</li> <li>– Participation in decision-making processes</li> <li>– Organising meetings with the team</li> <li>– Helping employees in a difficult situation</li> </ul>

Source: own study based on [Gableta (ed.) 2012, p. 18].

When analysing the interests of employees, it seems important to determine the rank of particular interests, mainly due to the motivational potential that lies in their implementation. According to Vroom's expectancy theory, the motivation of the employee is conditioned by the strength of expectation and the assessment of the probability of its fulfilment [Czajka 2009, p. 24]. Employees may feel a specific need with varying intensity, and therefore assign a given rank to the hierarchy of their values. At different stages of professional activity, these values can generally take up a different position. At one time, they can be considered as a priority pursuit, in

another as a means to satisfy, for example, completely new needs. It is therefore important to systematically monitor the interests of employees in the effective use of their inherent incentive potential. It is also worth remembering that not all of the identified interests of employees can be realised in specific circumstances of the organisation's functioning [Gableta (ed.) 2012, p. 95].

It is worth mentioning here the theory of social exchange theory [Saks 2006, p. 602]. According to this theory, when the employees "receive" certain resources from the organisation, also in the form of respecting their interests, which are relevant here, they feel obliged to reimburse the enterprise with a higher level of involvement. This involvement should be understood as the identification with the goals and the values in force in the enterprise, which is connected with the need to belong to this enterprise and readiness to act [Bugdol 2006, pp. 90-91]. This commitment reflects the intellectual as well as emotional commitment to the organisation, which is expressed by the amount of effort an employee puts into their work [Juchnowicz 2010, p. 35].

### **3. Motivational potential of employees' interests in PKP SA companies**

#### **3.1. The research method**

Empirical research was conducted in 2011-2014 on three subsidiaries of PKP SA. In total, the authors studied 495 executive employees directly handling rail traffic. The research was conducted using a closed questionnaire with suggested variants of answers. Most of the questions were in the form of conjunction, i.e. allowed more than one answer to be selected using the scale from "definitely not", through "rather not", "neither yes nor no", "rather yes" to "definitely yes". For the sake of clarity the questions were presented in a tabular form, where there were suggested variants of the answer. The questionnaire also included alternative questions in which the answers were "yes" or "no".

In order to select the interests of priority importance, the employees were asked to indicate three particularly important benefits which they expect in the given conditions of the company's operation. The respondents made this choice out of a set of 22 interests, assigning them a weight of 1 to 3 (where 1 meant an interest which the employee put in first place in their hierarchy of importance). The employees' opinions were also asked regarding the degree of implementation of the set of interests chosen by them.

#### **3.2. Results**

Based on the employees' indications, the frequency of naming particular interests was calculated. This allowed to combine the interests with the consideration of their incentive potential, as illustrated in Figure 1.

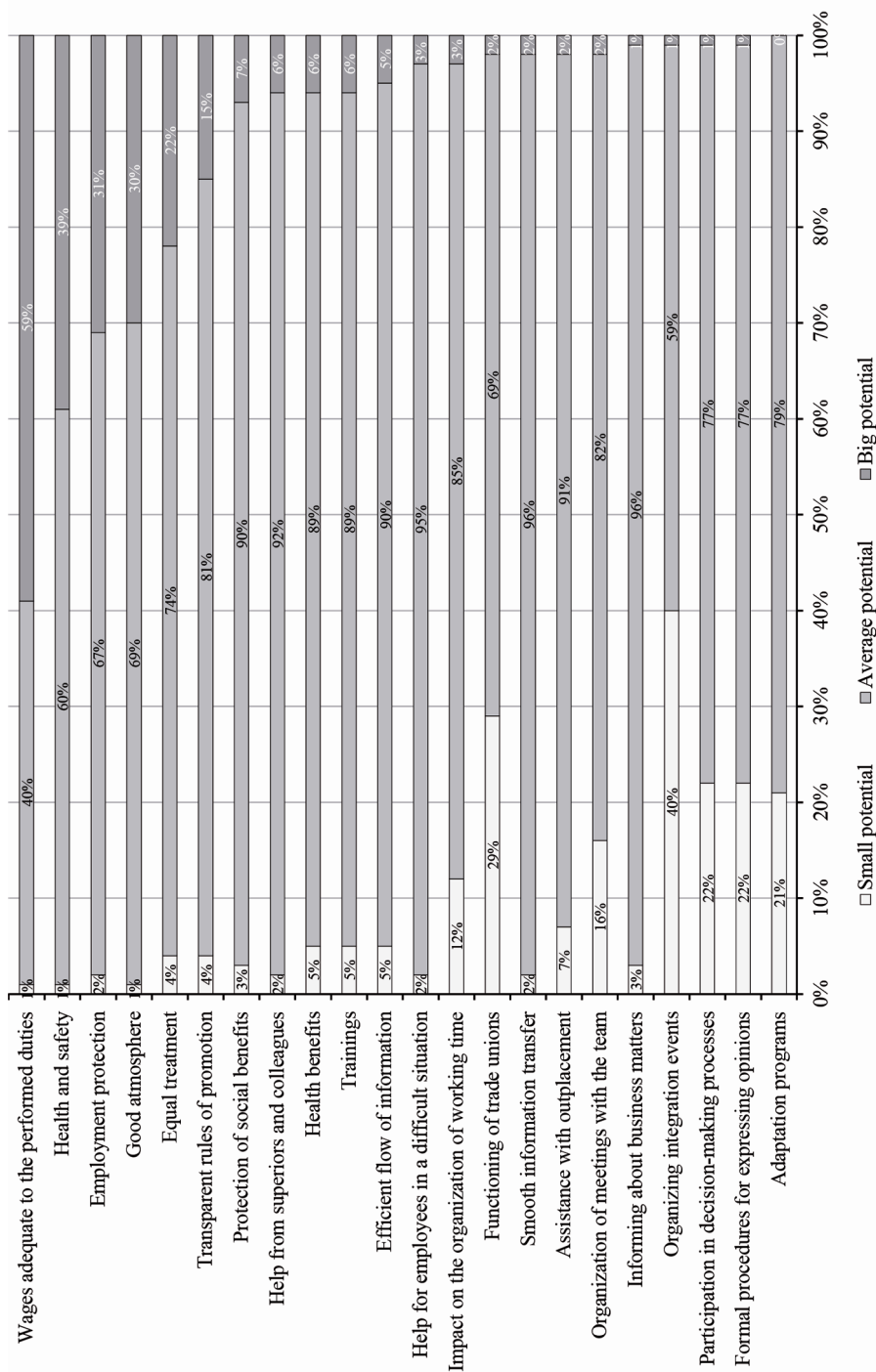


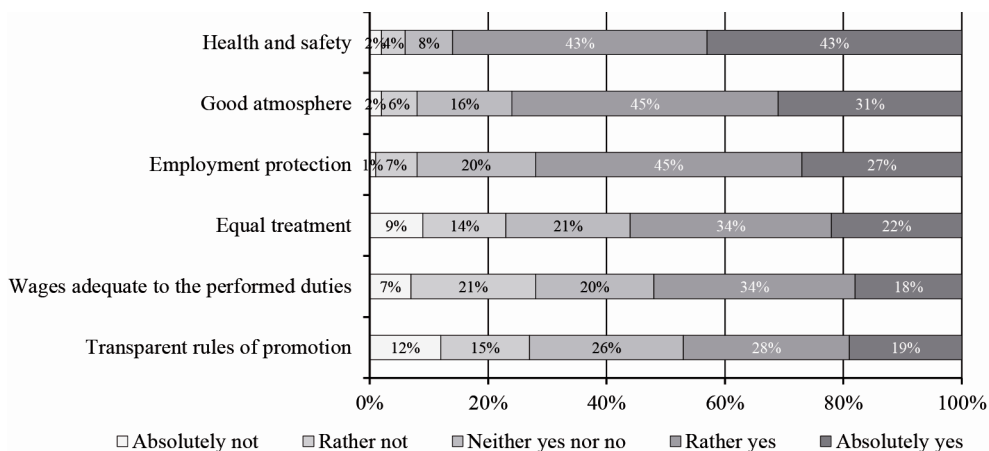
Fig.1. Interests considered in the context of the rank given to them by executive employees

Source: own elaboration.

Further analysis was conducted in relation to the group of the six most indicated interests:<sup>4</sup>

- 1) wages adequate to the duties performed (59%),
- 2) safe and hygienic working conditions (39%),
- 3) employment protection (31%),
- 4) good atmosphere in the workplace (30%),
- 5) equal treatment in employment (22%),
- 6) transparent rules of promotion (15%).

The distribution of the employees' opinions presented in Figure 2 reveals the existence of important interests whose implementation is assessed very low (the answer "interest is not implemented at all" and "the interest is rather not implemented").



**Fig. 2.** The degree of realisation of interests indicated by the respondents as the most important

Source: own elaboration.

It can be assumed that this divergence indicated specific reserves of motivational potential. In order to use it, the management should pay particular attention to ensuring transparent rules of promotion and wages adequate to the duties performed by individual employees. The fact that the respondents poorly assess the employer's approach to the issue of equal treatment and employment protection requires further analysis. The assessment of the working atmosphere and the level of working conditions can be considered satisfactory. When trying to utilise the maximum potential of their employees, managers need to be aware that it will be easier to plan improvement solutions in terms of health and safety rather than to "order" the improvement of the working atmosphere.

<sup>4</sup> The percentage of respondents who chose a particular interest (as one of the three most important ones) is given in brackets.



## 4. Conclusion

While analysing the motivational potential, the focus was on the interests of the employer. It was assumed, in reference to the position promoted in the literature, that the implementation of interests sanctioned by law should be treated as the employer's obligation. It is also worth pointing out that research on the employees' interests in the surveyed enterprises revealed that the interests protected by law are respected at a satisfactory level, according to the employees.

Based on the surveys, the authors established a set of interests which the respondents most often considered the most important: wages adequate to the performed duties, safe and hygienic working conditions, protection of employment, good atmosphere at the workplace, equal treatment in employment, transparent rules of promotion. The expectations of employees in the indicated areas, however, are not fully satisfied. The lack of decisions favourable for employees should be considered in the context of "wasting" their motivational potential, the application of which would result in positive attitudes of employees towards the organisation. Employees pointed out that these failures often constitute the basis for deciding to change employment.

It is worth noting that after the liberalisation of the railway market, a successive increase in the competitiveness of the railway transport market, rapid development of the private sector and the decline in the dominance of PKP SA companies were observed. The emergence of new entities, often better managed than the surveyed companies, resulted in a revival of the labour market in the industry. This resulted in themigration of a large number of employees from PKP companies to private sector companies [Grobelyny 2018].

It is in the interest of the audited employer to monitor employee interests due also to the generational gap clearly visible in the analysed companies. The retirement of a significant number (measured in thousands) of experienced employees working in positions directly related to the operation of railway traffic has progressed much faster than the recruitment of young, well-trained people to replace them<sup>5</sup>.

The case presented here also proves that the level of respecting specific employee interests may be assessed as more satisfactory compared to the "offer" of other enterprises, which should be appropriately used in the process of shaping PKP's image as an employer. However, so far the lack of adequate (reliable) analyses limits the possibility of constructing a convincing and a reliable message for the sector.

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<sup>5</sup> The railway transport industry is characterised by the need for large numbers of employees with unique skills. The job of a railway driver, for example, requires both long-term training and practice. Unfortunately, a significant decrease in interest (in the 1980s and 90s) of education in the field of transport caused the necessity to close schools linked with railways. The simultaneous absence of instruments motivating young people to take up work in the railway industry, as well as restructuring in the companies of the PKP Group, in practice limited the admission of new employees. In such circumstances only a small number of young people obtained the necessary knowledge and practice.

The examination of the scope and hierarchy of employees' interests in the context of their motivational potential may contribute to the development of the theory of corporate social responsibility. The practical application of the approach presented here to the analysis of employee interests will increase the efficiency of human resource management and will facilitate decision-making in the field of employer branding. An interesting area of future research will be the attitude of management to the legitimacy of monitoring the interests of employees.

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