

Transformations of Working Time as a Factor of Labour Dehumanization

Renata Tomaszewska-Lipiec
Kazimierz Wielki University, Bydgoszcz, Poland

Shortening working time and making it more flexible, which have been observed in Europe since mid-20th century, are perceived as the main features and conditions for labour humanization as well as the sign of social progress. The aim of the article has been showing negative consequences of this phenomenon, especially for maintaining balance between work and private life. It was based on hypothesis that the tendency to shorten the working time and to make it more flexible cannot be seen only as a factor of humanization, as the achievements of the social policy in Europe have been accompanied by many negative aspects, having a negative influence over both employees and employers. One of those observed occurrences were progressive disturbances in balancing work and private life. The considerations have been based on critical literature analysis method, the analysis of formal legal documents and statistics reports and sources. The transformations of working time and their influence over free time shortage and thus the imbalance between work and private life have been analysed. The theoretical-problem analyses allowed to reach the conclusion that the transformations of working time, related to negative changes in its organization, can be perceived as a factor of dehumanization of one's work.

Keywords: world of labour, working time, free time, flexibility, humanization, work-life balance

Introduction

For more than 100 years, the world has been undergoing many great transformations, with the dispersion of work's unity in time and space being one of the domination trends described by literature. On one hand, by the end of the 19th century, the civilization introduced the organization of the working time, with around 80 hours of work a week; on the other hand, by the end of the 20th century, the average working week consisted of 40 hours of work. Optimistic future forecasts show that the working time in the mid-21st century will not exceed 20-30 hours a week. However, the data concerning the practice of economic life provided by Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) and Eurostat show that the shortening of working time seems to be merely apparent. The analyses of literature and statistical reports and sources confirm that the process of shortening people's working time, resulting from the increasing level of work effectiveness, does not mean more free time for the workers. Furthermore, it has been observed that the importance of flexible employment forms in Europe has become more significant, which results in the demand for workers who can adapt to work well, especially when under time pressure. However, flexibility at work causes the loss of

Renata Tomaszewska-Lipiec, Ph.D., assistant professor of pedagogy, Kazimierz Wielki University, Bydgoszcz, Poland.

Correspondence concerning this article should be addressed to Renata Tomaszewska-Lipiec, Department of Labour Pedagogy and Andragogy, The Institute of Pedagogy, Faculty of Pedagogy and Psychology, Kazimierz Wielki University in Bydgoszcz, Chodkiewicza 30, Bydgoszcz 85-064, Poland. E-mail: renatatl@ukw.edu.pl.

flexibility in other areas of life, which has serious consequences for person's physical and mental health, their functioning within the family and their social relationships. The transformations of the working time, especially in the developed countries, have inspired writing this article. They have been presented from the perspective of the working time humanization idea, as it is an important matter of global economics, including European social policy.

Shortening the Working Time as a Way to Labour Humanization

The 20th century can be regarded as a period in human history, which was dominated by a strong development of the idea of humanism.

Generally, it means the whole of changes in the treatment of human labour, which lead to giving fully humanistic character to the working conditions of an individual, expressed through a concern for the needs, dignity, and development of the individual. Humanisation of work requires such action and system of organization in the workplace that performing professional activities could be a factor in the development process through the work itself.

Dynamics of civilization changes, the development of technology, and an increase of the amount of innovation force the use of the idea of humanism to a degree never seen before, because these phenomena bring negative consequences in the form of degradation of the working man. Approaches based on empirical studies emphasize the technical, economic, and social conditions that alienate professionally active person.

Therefore, the basic properties and conditions of humanization of work include, among others:

- perception of an employee as the subject of work;
- ensuring safety at work;
- shortening the working day and increasing the culture of work;
- using replacement jobs, which guarantee a correct relationship man-machine;
- active participation of workers in the control of technological and social processes;
- increasing leisure time for the purpose of rest, recreation, and improvement of personality (Wiatrowski, 2005).

Referring to the properties and conditions of the humanization of work directly related to the employee, one should pay attention to the mentioned postulates: shortening the working day and increasing leisure time of working people. From the perspective of the idea of humanization, working time is treated as one of the factors determining the amount of free time and affecting the level and quality of work, including the quality of the whole life of man and his family. Therefore, the presented reflections are devoted to the transformations of working time and in particular the phenomenon of its shortening.

As for the working time, the member states of the European Union are primarily bound by the principles set out in article 31 of the *Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union* and the provisions of *Directive 2003/88/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council* on November 4, 2003 concerning certain aspects of the organization of working time. Provisions of the Directive state that working time shall mean any period during which the worker is working, at the employer's disposal and carrying out his activity or duties, in accordance with national legislation or practice, while the rest period means any period which is not working time.

With reference to the mentioned demands of the humanization of work, it should be noted that modern times are characterized by lengthening of the average life time while shortening of working time. According to Eurostat

data, over the last century, the average life time in Western Europe increased from 440,000 hours to 610,000 hours in 1980. Further prolonging of life time up to 700,000 hours occurred over the next 20 years (until 2000). As a result, the number of hours of performing commercial activities decreased from 150,000 hours at the end of the 19th century to 75,000 hours at the end of the 20th century and this process continues. Considering the involvement of working time during the whole of human life, one cannot ignore such characteristic phenomena, observed in recent years, as reducing the working week from six to five days, shortening the daily working time to eight hours, prolonged holidays, lengthening the period of education which delays the age of entering the job market, interruption of employment in order to increase or change professional qualifications, longer annual or occasional leave, the place of work moving away from the place of residence, etc. These phenomena contribute to the vision of 40,000 working hours as the average time of professional activities during the life of Europeans in the 21st century (Rajkiewicz, 2001).

Statistical analyses show that the average working week in Europe is getting shorter. The average weekly working time in 2012 in the old member states of the European Union (EU-15) amounted to an average of 37.6 hours, while in the new member states (EU-13), it is 39.7 hours. The average size of annual working time in the old member states amounted to 1,677.4 hours, while in the new member, it was about 1,824 hours (Klos, 2013).¹

It should be emphasized that this time, in particular countries, results from the law or agreements between employers and trade unions. In the latter case, it is often varied within the country and also depends on the sector or group of employees.

OECD publishes statistical data of the annual number of hours worked by one working person and one hired worker in the 34 member states and in Russia. The analysis of the OECD average for the years 2004-2012 shows a decrease in the number of hours worked per year during this period, with the exception that this decline occurred mainly in the period 2005-2009 (from 1,804 hours to 1,761 hours). In 2010, the number of hours increased to 1,766 hours and stabilized at 1,765 hours in 2011-2012. In Poland, in the analyzed period, the number of hours of work significantly exceeded the average for the OECD and besides the increase in 2005, steadily decreased from 1,994 hours to 1,929 hours. The decrease in the number of hours worked in the period 2004-2012 was higher in Poland (54 hours) than the average for all OECD countries (45 hours) (Klos, 2013).

The tendency to shorten working time is undoubtedly an important factor on the way to its humanization, which will contribute to the further transformation of the labour market. However, the question arises whether this process entails only positive effects, or whether the reduction of working time in this form, which was mentioned above, is a common practice and whether it does not contain the elements of dehumanization. An answer to this question will be attempted later in the article. Earlier, the issue of more flexible working time and forms of employment will be discussed.

Towards Flexible Working Time

Continuing the discussion devoted to changes in the area of working time and referring to the separation of work in time and space, it is worth mentioning understanding of terms adopted in the European study: standard and flexible working hours.

The definition proposed by the ISO Institut zur Erforschung sozialer Chancen in Cologne assumes that the normal hours of work means employment of full 35-40 hours performed five days a week, from Monday to

¹ In the years 2004-2012 in the EU-15, the average weekly working time decreased and in the EU-12 increased. The difference increased from 1.6 hours to 2.1 hours.

Friday, at a fixed time schedule. All forms different from that described above are included in flexible working hours (Lipińska-Grobelny, 2013).

In this context, it should be emphasized that the standard hours of work still are the “norm”. In 2010, 67% of employees worked the same number of hours every week and 58% the same number of hours each day; this situation in principle has not changed since 2000. Most Europeans still work five days a week in a standard time of 40 hours. A reflection of this is the typical place of work. Nearly 60% of employees in the European Union work all or almost all the time in the company premises (Retrieved from https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_files/pubdocs/2008/90/pl/1/EF0890PL.pdf). It must therefore be noted how stable the model of a “typical” working week is.

Referring in turn to the issue of flexible working time and forms of its organization, it is worth mentioning three main directions of this flexibility:

- more flexible organization of working time in chronometric dimension, which concerns the length of working time flexibility. Its basic form is the reduction of working time and flexibility is achieved based on part-time work and flexible retirement;
- more flexible organization of working time in chronological dimension, meaning the choice of the mandatory time in a day, week, or year. One of the most popular forms is called flexible working hours, sabbatical leave, and cafeteria benefits enabling conversion of time resources to financial and non-financial profits;
- more flexible organization of working time in chronometric-chronological dimension, which is characterized by temporary work, job sharing, annual working hours, shift work, work at home (telecommuting), and work “a la carte” (Pocztowski, 2007).²

In addition to flexible working time, another way of its differentiation is the flexible forms of employment. In legal literature, they are included in non-employee forms of employment that contrast the traditional model of work or employment. Non-employee form of employment refers to any non-standard forms of employment and includes term employment contracts, part-time work, telecommuting, and temporary work. Flexible forms of employment should also include civil contracts, self-employment, and management contract (Lipińska-Grobelny, 2013).

In relation to flexible working time and flexible forms of employment, it is possible to indicate several characteristic trends in the labour market, which contribute to the dissipation of work in time and space. They are also the consequence of the process of reducing working time:

- less stable employment, due to increasing popularity of flexible forms of employment;
- increasing popularity of temporary work;
- increase in part-time work;
- greater flexibility of work (e.g., flexi-time, compressed hours, and job sharing);
- greater flexibility of the place of work (e.g., telecommuting);
- more frequent job changes and bigger number of employers (Grycuk, 2013).

The outlined trends in the labour market show that flexible working time is increasingly becoming a feature of professional life in Europe and perhaps soon flexible working time and flexible forms of employment

² It is one of the ways of shaping the working time in a flexible way, in the chronological (i.e., letting the worker choose and place their working time within the day, week, year, or even the whole life) and chronometric dimensions (which means changes in the working time’s length, which may concern the daily, weekly, yearly, or all-life working time). This organization form allows the worker to choose among many diverse ways of dividing their working time within set range, which is different from the standard working time.

will become “norm” and “standard”. Due to the imperative of increasing competitiveness, employers will seek opportunities for reducing labour costs offered by flexible working time and flexible forms of employment.

As the statistical data demonstrate that already half of European companies employing 10 or more people have some kind of system of flexible working hours, the simplest form allows one to set the start and finish their working time in the working day. The greatest flexibility is provided by systems, which allow the accumulation of working hours and taking extended leave (so-called working time account) (Retrieved from https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_files/pubdocs/2008/90/pl/1/EF0890PL.pdf).

Analyzing the transformations of working time, which have been accompanying people for more than 100 years, one can form a conclusion that they evoke a sense of accelerating the pace of work. As a result, practices leading to dehumanization of work become common, since organizations fall into a “trap of acceleration” and introduce one of the three patterns of destructive conduct:

- overloading employees with work—the staff does not have time to carry out the commissioned responsibilities, lack of resources needed to achieve the tasks;
- loading employees with a wide variety of activities—the organization does not have a clear direction of the business;
- loading employees with new tasks—as a consequence of constant changes in the organization (Pluta, 2013).

As a consequence of this type of practices used by employers, professional work takes over non-professional sphere of an individual, where not working time, but free time is shortened. Although theoretically speaking, it seems that the amount of free time should increase as a result of the introduction of paid leave, increased number of days off per week, formal limitation of the length of working day, and technological progress, in practice of the economic and everyday life of individuals, the proportions occurring between these two kinds of time, have been disturbed. The effects of this disharmony can be seen at the individual, social, and economic level. They cause doubts in the treatment of the mentioned transformations as properties of work humanization.

Transformation of Working Time—A Sign of Civilization Progress or Meter of Social Arrhythmia

The tendency to shortening of working time and its evolution in the direction of flexibility are undoubtedly a measure of social progress, expressed as a prolongation of life and improvement of living conditions. So, they should be considered as factors of humanization of work, if these achievements of social policy were not also accompanied by adverse changes in the area of working time. These include:

- increase in leisure time “unwanted” in view of the increasing unemployment; “empty hours” difficult to utilize in temporary jobs, causing negative psychological effects of being under constant pressure of job loss;
- differences between statutory and actual working time; differences of increase of free time in each category of employment; growing phenomenon of workaholism, burnout, chronic fatigue syndrome, and even the phenomenon of sudden death due to overwork and stress defined as “karoshi”;
- organizational changes in the shaping of time enforcing the new rhythm of work and rest, due to flexible working time and flexible forms of employment (Strzemińska, 2003).

Analyzing further, it should be noted that hours worked in all European Union countries are higher than legal norms constitute. Longer working week is a phenomenon that primarily affects males: 18% of men work more than 48 hours a week, while for women, the figure is 8%. Self-employed persons also extend their

working week. Longer working week is more common in the production sector than that in the service sector (European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, 2010).

OECD (2013) said that the average working time for European countries in 2013 amounted to 1,765 hours per year. It also appears that poles are at the forefront industrious nations. An average pole devotes to work as many as 1,929 hours per year—in this respect among the countries surveyed by the OECD in Europe, Poland is outrun only by the Greeks and the Russians (Retrieved from <http://www.fakt.pl/ile-pracuja-polacy-i-cornbia-w-czasie-wolnym,artykuly,423652,1.html>).

These facts indicate that the actual work time is different from the statutory, adopted as “standard”.

Continuing the analysis, it is also worth noting that according to employment status at the level of the entire European Union in the years 2004-2012, employers were a group declaring the greatest number of hours worked per week. Subsequent positions were taken by self-employed, helping family members and finally hired workers. Moreover, considering professional groups at the level of the whole European Union public officials, senior officials and managers declared the most hours worked during the period of 2004-2012 (46.9-45.4 hours); farmers, gardeners, foresters, and fishermen (46.5-44.3); least of all office workers (38.5-38.2); and simple jobs workers (39.8-38.9) (Klos, 2013).

It can therefore be concluded that the number of hours worked remains in relation to the level of qualifications and responsibilities requiring a greater commitment of time than for lower-skilled workers, as well as working in various industries.

One should also pay attention to the phenomenon of multiple job holders, referred to as “portfolio career”. Among the European Union countries, the rate of portfolio workers on the job market in 2010 amounted to almost 4%. The highest percentage of multiple job holders and so-called moonlighters was in Denmark (9.5%), Sweden (8.2%), and Poland (7.5%). Data from 2011 are comparable. “Portfolio employee” simply combines flexible forms of working time organization and flexible forms of employment. This phenomenon is sometimes referred to in legal nomenclature as hybrid employment (Lipińska-Grobelny, 2013).

Continuing the topic of flexible working time and flexible forms of employment, it should be emphasized that although they are justified in economic terms, as indicated by Strzemińska (2003), one cannot treat them uniformly positive from the standpoint of humanization of work.

Years of research in various research centres around the world have confirmed that the employee labour cost in its flexible forms (especially shift work) is associated with greater physical and mental fatigue, increased exposure to harmful environmental factors at work, and increased risk of participating in an accident at work. Non-standard working hours (night work and weekends) may also limit social life and disrupt the balance between work and family life. Such work schedules conflict with physiological readiness for physical and mental work in accordance with the endogenous rhythm of human life processes. Especially the night work is considered to be the cause of sleep disorders, problems with digestion, heart disease, and others. At the working time of over 40 hours a week, employees complain of worsening back pain, increasing fatigue and sleepiness, accumulating digestive ailments, and circulatory system diseases. The researchers conclude that, contrary to widespread opinion, flexible working time does not have a positive influence on family ties and better use of the time available for rest (Zużewicz & Konarska, 2005).

As emphasized by representatives of ergonomics and work physiology, man is a diurnal species and all of their biological functions have circadian rhythm. Biological rhythms are one of the fundamental characteristics of living matter (life) and produced by evolution facilitate adaptation to cyclical changes in the natural

environment (Pokorski, 2008). Therefore, in this context, it is worth noting disseminated in the literature terms “non-stop society” or “24-hour society”, which indicate the departure of individuals and entire societies from the natural rhythms of nature, such as daily and annual rhythms, causing a threat to the health and life of humans.

To conclude this part of the presented reflections, a conclusion can be formulated that the statutory limitation of working hours, which is taking place in European countries, does not reduce it in practice and thereby increases leisure time of workers. Shortening of working time related to adverse changes in the sphere of its organization can therefore be considered as a factor of dehumanization.

Working time is inextricably linked to leisure time and the effects of disturbed balance between the sphere of family and professional life are experienced both by employees and employers. Further discussion is devoted to their mutual relations.

Towards Balance Work—Non-work Life

Time of human life is treated as a specific value, recognized in the symbiosis of two spheres of life—work and leisure.

Transformations of the world of work and the demands of professional responsibilities more and more frequently interfere with other spheres of life of an individual. More and more clearly, the relationship among working time and free time and worker’s productivity, salary level, standard of consumption, and social status is emerging.

Nowadays, it seems that between working time and leisure time, sharp contrast appeared. A situation where working time and leisure time are felt by the employee as opposed spheres of life becomes a problem. Leisure time has become a negative of work; strictly speaking, it is work that has become negative, in relation to which, personal time takes on features of desired and positive. Thus, leisure time reveals itself as an antithesis of work—its absolute opposition and more and more often deficient. It is no coincidence that its definition is formulated in purely negative terms: the time not sold, unfettered, not subjected to rigors, control, and subordination (Danecki, 1974).

Referring to the conclusion that free time has become a negative of working time, because time of being professionally active is prolonged, and taking into account the previous considerations, it seems that the analyzed transformations of working time lead to a deficit of free time, and thus to an imbalance in the relationship between professional work and private sphere.

This phenomenon is confirmed by the statistics, which show that the Europeans lack the time for personal sphere. Over 40% of European workers believe that they do not have enough time for hobbies, interests, social work, or political activities. Over 25% believe that they do not spend enough time with family and friends. At the same time, they assume that it is the employers who are partly responsible for the lack of balance between work and private life (Retrieved from https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_files/pubdocs/2008/90/pl/1/EF0890PL.pdf).

The signalled imbalance, sustained in the long term perspective, can lead to emotional exhaustion and lower self-esteem of individuals; thus, this in turn becomes a source of frustration, which negatively affects relationships with family members, employers, co-workers, and commitment to work. In contrast, a sense of harmony and appropriate proportions in this regard will be conducive to meeting new challenges of work and life. The second relationship is the most desirable, both by employees and employers.

Referring to the possibility of supporting workers by employers in this regard, it should also be noted that organizational and time solutions in large enterprises are formalized through rules, internal labour code, or a collective agreement. In medium and small enterprises, these solutions operate rather on the basis of practices adopted and accepted by the owners and management (Yasbek, 2011; Borkowska, 2010).

Summing up this part of the presented reflections, maintaining appropriate balance between working time and free time generally comes down to reconciliation of professional and personal life and achieving personal happiness. This condition seems to be necessary, which is confirmed by an English physiologist Sheldon in a curve of happiness developed. The happiness curve is presented in the following Figure 1.

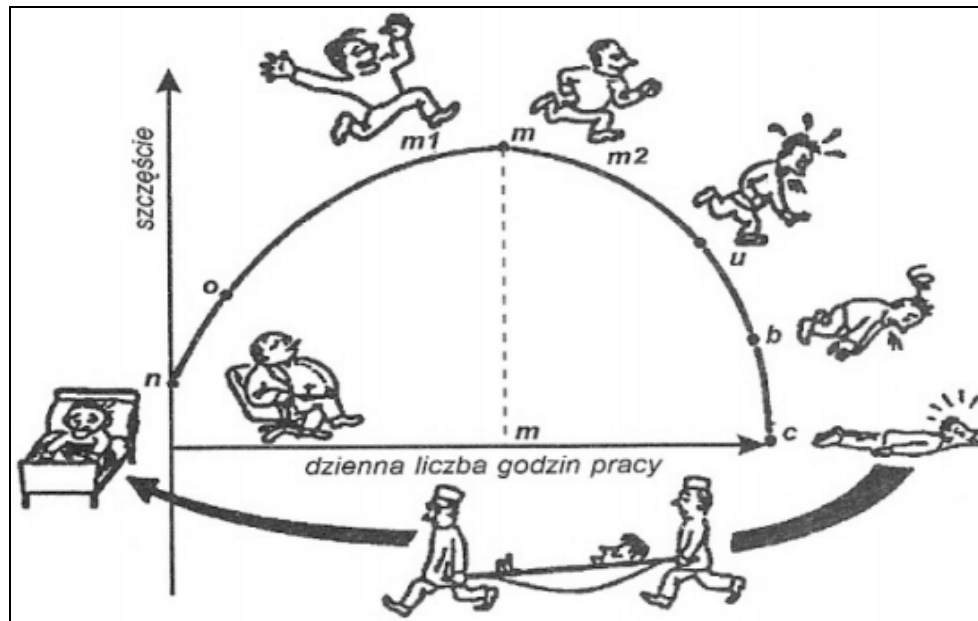


Figure 1. The curve of happiness by Sheldon. Source: Pluta (2013).

Selected points on Sheldon's curve mean "m"—the maximum point where the man is satisfied with his professional activities; this corresponds to five to eight hours of work. At the same time, it appears that reducing the number of working hours leads to a decline in satisfaction, which results in the development of physiological disturbances (point "o"—obesity zone) or a sense of extreme inefficiency (point "n"). In contrast, extending the work beyond the point of maximum leads to overwork and causes the appearance of stomach ulcers (point "u"), nervous breakdown (point "b"), or total elimination from work caused by myocardial infarction—involves working 10 to 16 hours a day (point "c") (Pluta, 2013).

In relation to the above curve of happiness, it seems that due to the transformation of working time, for a growing number of professionally active people, achieving point "m" will become increasingly difficult.

Conclusions

In light of the above reflections, it can be concluded that working time is, actually and often informally, lengthened and moreover unpaid, with all the negative consequences for both the employee and the employer.

Basic properties of the humanization of work, such as shortening and flexibility of working time, have therefore a dual character: An opportunity for employment, undoubtedly however, contains many elements of dehumanization. Therefore, such an important issue seems to be the ability to maintain a balance between a

longer period of professional activity and psychophysical potential of an individual, their health, safety, as well as the personal sphere.

References

- Borkowska, S. (2010). The balance between work and non-work life. *Acta Universitatis Lodziensis Folia Economica*, 240, 8-13.
- Danecki, J. (1974). *Unity of shared time*. Warsaw: KIW.
- European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions. (2010). *Living and working in Europe, yearbook*. Luxembourg: Publications Office of the European Union.
- Grycuk, A. (2013). Major trends in the labour markets in developed countries. *Studies Research Bureau of Chancellery of Sejm Poles' Jobs*, 4(36), 17-18.
- Klos, B. (2013). Working time in Poland compared to other European Union member states. *Studies of Research Bureau of Chancellery of Sejm Poles' Work*, 4(36), 63-91.
- Lipińska-Grobelny, A. (2013). Portfolio employee—Analysis of the modern multiple employment. *Organization and Leadership*, 2, 135-139.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2013). *OECD employment outlook*. Retrieved from http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/empl_outlook-2013-en
- Eurofound. (2009). *Overview living and working in Europe*. Retrieved from https://www.eurofound.europa.eu/sites/default/files/ef_files/pubdocs/2008/90/pl/1/EF0890PL.pdf
- Pluta, A. (2013). Time management—Strong or weak side of an employee of the twenty-first century. *Humanistic Education*, 1(28), 147-150.
- Pocztowski, A. (2007). *Human resources management*. Krakow: PWE.
- Pokorski, J. (2008). Medical aspects of night work and shift work. Proceedings from *First International Conference Concerning Planning Working Time "Shift work in the 24/7 society"*.
- Fakt. (2013). *Poles are the most busy people*. Retrieved from <http://www.fakt.pl/ile-pracuja-polacy-i-co-robia-w-czasie-wolnym,artykuly,423652,1.html>
- Rajkiewicz, A. (2001). Working time during life. In R. Horodeński and E. Ozorowski (Eds.), *Man, ethics, economics*. Białystok: WSE.
- Strzezińska, H. (2003). Working time and the humanization of work and professional life at the turn of the century. In D. Walczak-Duraj (Ed.), *Is it the twilight of work? Humanization in work relations* (pp. 37-38). Plock: Pawel Wlodkowic University College.
- Wiatrowski, Z. (2005). *Fundamentals of pedagogy of work*. Bydgoszcz: Publishing House of Akademia Bydgoska.
- Yasbek, P. (2011). *The business case for firm-level work-life balance policies: A review of the literature*. Retrieved from <http://employment.govt.nz/PDFs/FirmLevelWLB.pdf>
- Zużewicz, K., & Konarska, M. (2005). Time—The fourth dimension of work. *Work Safety*, 9, 1-3.