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LOST TIME COMMUNICATION IN SLOVENIAN BOARDING SCHOOLS

IZGUBLJENA VREMENSKA KOMUNIKACIJA U ĐAČKIM DOMOVIMA SLOVENIJE

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Abstract:

What role plays absenteeism in boarding schools? Is it a big or a minor problem? We asked headmasters of boarding schools about this. Research showed satisfying condition about absenteeism in boarding schools which means that absenteeism does not provoke a lot of trouble to the headmasters. Absence from work for different reasons in Slovenia still means a lot of lost working hours and money. Current discussions about reduction of payment for sick leave bear witness to the fact that the government of Slovenia realizes this problem and wants to solve it.

Sažetak

Kakva je situacija sa problemom izostajanja u đačkim domovima? Ima li puno izostanaka ili malo? O tome smo pitali ravnatelje đačkih domova. Istraživanje je pokazalo, da je situacija u đačkim domovima u pogledu izostajanja zadovoljavajuća i da ravnateljima ne predstavlja veliki problem. Odsutnost s posla - radnog mjesta - zbog različitih razloga ima za posljedicu veliki broj izgubljenih radnih sati, a samim time i novaca. Aktualne su rasprave o pomanjkanju nedostatku, bolničkog kadra, što samo potvrđuje da je izostajanje problem s kojim se susreću i pokušavaju ga riješiti u samom vrhu slovenske države.

1 INTRODUCTION

Absenteeism in organization becomes a matter of debate when this phenomenon becomes a problem that must be solved. Causes and solutions that would reduce this phenomenon become a matter of search in crisis situations if not before. Absenteeism is present also in boarding schools.

Absenteeism or absence from work is situation that occurs more or less in all organizations. It is at least slightly harmful for organization in every kind and amount, but there is a limit to which it is still manageable from organizational and also from social point of view. The limit of »still tolerable« absenteeism is different - it depends upon size of organization, its system, culture and close and wide environment. Management's and employee's tolerance of absenteeism varies. Tolerance of absenteeism is influenced by kind of activity in which a certain organization engages, extent of work in certain moment, number of employees at doing certain work, economic stability of organization, etc. /1/. Organization is successful if it has good business results. Authoritative individuals in organization can

mostly and most directly contribute to business result /2/. We achieve good business results if all employees are doing their own work and tasks optimally.

Majority of boarding schools belongs to minor-sized organizations regarding the amount of employees, rare boarding schools to medium-sized organizations /3/. Every employee has her/his own amount of tasks that is why his absence from work or notworking means that her/his work must be done by someone else, or it will simply wait until her/his return. Main goal of this text is to explain absenteeism and to show alternatives of managing it and to point out problems that we encounter when absenteeism occurs in boarding schools. The text will show the results of research about absenteeism that we did in boarding schools.

2 ORGANIZATION, WORKING PROCESS AND ABSENTEEISM

Every organization tends to organise working process so that it will give better results with minimum costs and maximum profit. From this

point of view, every absence of worker from work represents definite organizational problem that is not possible completely to ignore. The phenomenon when worker is absent from work is called absenteeism. Word *absens* means absent by Latin. Hence, a word *absenteeism* stands for all absences from work /4/. Absenteeism is used in narrow and broad sense in professional literature. In narrow sense it means absence from work because of disease. More common is the word *absenteeism* used in broad sense. In this sense *absenteeism* means every absence of worker from job and comprises justified and unjustified absences /5/.

Environment differently defines organization because of its own specific and uniqueness. More authors /6/ wrote about environment as an important factor that influences successfulness of organization. They stress out the importance of *external nad internal environment*, since changes of relations in integrated environment influence relations in organizations. *External and internal environment* has to be monitored and analysed because only this plays very important role in work planning. Dečman Dobrnjičeva includes students, professional workers, technical/non-pedagogical workers, headmasters, inner place and inventory into the term *inner environment* in boarding school. *Inner environment* of boarding school will be a subject of research in our research.

Causes of absenteeism can be divided to objective and subjective. Objective are, for example, legal, economic, geographical etc., in short they cannot be influenced by us in the way to reduce them. However, we can influence subjective causes more easily, since they are of psychic and social nature mostly. Factors that influence absenteeism in organization are next /7/:

- working discipline,
- nature of management,
- relations between workers,
- relations between organizational groups, etc..

Although majority of authors defines absenteeism in broadest sense (as every absence from work) our research deals with narrow sense of the word *absenteeism* (this is absence because of sick leave). Going late to work, premature going from work, notworking and alike is understood under term *quiet absenteeism* which is difficult to reveal and to record. Companies are hiding such problems from public in order to preserve

their own credibility. Absenteeism because of sick leave is much more common. People take sick leave because of different causes and they are not necessary always justified.

Absenteeism in educational system appears as /8/ :

- sick leave and maternity leave in primary schools represent 87,4 % of all absences. There are important differences in incidence of sick leave among different schools and they depend of gender (women are absent approximately 10-times more often as men), education, length of service and kind of work pedagogical workers perform;
- most absenteeism is performed by pedagogical workers with high (18,84%) and higher education (9,38%), teachers with up to 10 years of length of service;
- teachers of elementary school show more absenteeism than management workers in school;
- low percent of headmasters (14,7%) and teachers (14,5%) confess existence of quiet absenteeism on their own school;
- majority of headmasters (76,5%) and teachers (62,0%) is certain that it is possible to reduce absenteeism with different measures.

Širca's research is the first one that completely investigates absenteeism in Slovene primary schools. It does not say anything about absenteeism in secondary schools and in boarding schools. In order to fill this gap a bit we will discuss about absenteeism in boarding schools in Slovenia in this text.

There are differences in organizational sense between absence of teacher and educator. If a teacher is absent, class is left alone by itself. It is necessary to make up educational contents that is why substitution must be organized right away. In boarding schools educator from other group can take care of group which is under supervision of absent worker. Therefore, absence of educator does not cause so many organizational problems as does absence of a teacher at school. There are still employments and jobs in boarding schools where absence from work sets off more problems already because of nature of work. This applies to kitchen workers and maintenance work which are urgently necessary. Absence of these workers can set off organizational, financial and other problems.

3 ABSENTEEISM IN BOARDING SCHOOLS - RESEARCH

Research sample for absenteeism research were workers of 30 boarding schools in Slovenia. Instrument of research was combined questionnaire

for headmasters with multiple-choice questions. They were answering questions by writing. We got data about absenteeism of pedagogical and also of technical (non-pedagogical) workers, separately.

3.1 Analysis of questionnaire

3.1.1 Causes of absence from work

Disease is the most frequent cause of absence from work. Causes of absence are different by pedagogical and non-pedagogical workers which demonstrates table 1.

3.1.2 Problems with absences shorter than one day

In none of interviewed boarding schools have problems with absences shorter than one day (lateness, premature departures...) of pedagogical

workers. In 13,32% or 4 boarding schools have problem with such absences of non-pedagogical workers.

3.1.3 Type of absence shorter than one day

Headmasters confessed that absences shorter than one day exist, however not to such extent that would be disturbing. According to headmasters it is about morning lateness and premature departures by individuals. They also prolong snack at times. Extent of these absences is small, they are not frequent, but they appear.

3.1.4 Causes for lateness

Headmasters listed the following causes for lateness: bad manners, arranging of personal matters, nonresponsibility, losing of working elan.

3.1.5 Problems regarding absence from work

Organizational, financial problems and disapproving of co-workers seems to be main problems regarding absenteeism.

Table 1: Causes of absence from work (it was possible to select many answers)

Cause of absence	Pedagogical workers	%	Non-pedagogical workers	%
Disease	26	86,58	30	100
Additional education of workers	14	46,62	/	
Nursing a family member	7	23,31	/	
Accidents	1	3,33	7	23,31
Regular vacation	/		7	23,31
Extra vacation	/		7	23,31

Table 2: Problems regarding absence from work (it was possible to select many answers)

	Pedagogical workers	Percent	Non-pedagogical workers	Percent
Organizational problems	27	76,95	23	65,55
Financial problems	4	11,4	16	45,6
Disapproving of co-workers	12	34,2	19	54,15
Pedagogical problems	12	34,2		/
There was no problems	8	22,8	4	11,4

Table 3: How much headmasters means that negative consequences exist

	Pedagogical workers	%	Non-pedagogical workers	%
Consequences exist	20	66,6	23	76,59
Consequences do not exist	10	33,33	7	23,31

3.1.6 Existence of negative consequences regarding absence from work

Surprisingly, 23 or 76,59% of headmasters confessed the existence of negative consequences regarding absenteeism among non-pedagogical workers.

3.1.7 Which negative consequence occur

Those headmasters who are of opinion that negative consequences of absenteeism exist listed them in next order:

- pedagogical workers: organizational consequences, pedagogical consequences, negative impact on atmosphere in institute;
- non-pedagogical workers: negative impact on atmosphere in institute, organizational consequences, financial consequences.

Headmasters accused often absence from work of one individual as more disturbing as length of absence from work.

3.1.8 Legitimacy of absences regarding length and incidences

The remainder of percent up to 100% represent those headmasters who doubt about legitimacy of absences.

3.1.9 Lateness and premature going from work

Interpretation of these answers reveals that 16,65% (on average) of pedagogical workers and 23,31% (on average) of non-pedagogical workers is late or premature goes from work.

3.1.10. Reasons for lateness or premature going from work

Headmasters think that the main reasons for lateness or premature going from work are

Table 6: Utilisation rate of working hours

Kind of work	No	Percent
Pedagogical workers	24	79,92
Administrative workers	25	83,25
Kitchen workers	26	86,58
Technical workers	23	76,59

next: bad habits of individuals, too little control, unsuitable working discipline, bad salary.

3.1.11 Quiet absence from work

More than half of headmasters, 17 or 56,61%, evaluate that quiet absenteeism in boarding schools exists and that there is no difference between pedagogical and non-pedagogical workers.

3.1.12 Utilisation rate of working hours by workers

Headmasters evaluate that utilisation rate of working hours in boarding schools is 81,59%. They assigned best utilisation rate of working hours to the kitchen workers, administrative workers, pedagogical workers and technical workers, respectively.

3.1.13 Subjective reasons for quiet absenteeism

Answers of interviewees about subjective reasons that encourage quiet absenteeism are different for pedagogical and non-pedagogical workers. More than half of headmasters put dissatisfaction with status, dissatisfaction with personal work, bad mutual relations, dissatisfaction with management, free behaviour of individuals as subjective reasons for quiet absenteeism of pedagogical workers. For non-pedagogical

Table 4: Justified absences regarding length and incidences

	Pedagogical workers	%	Non-pedagogical workers	%
Regarding length	20	66,6	17	56,61
Regarding incidence	17	56,61	14	46,62

Table 5: How much is there lateness or premature going from work

	Pedagogical workers	%	Non-pedagogical workers	%
Lateness or premature going from work exist	10	33,4	13	43,39
Lateness or premature going from work do not exist	20	66,6	17	56,61

workers, however, they put salary on the first place followed by bad advancement possibilities, dissatisfaction with status, bad mutual relations, dissatisfaction with management, etc.

3.1.14 Measures for reducing absenteeism

All interviewees think that it is possible to reduce absence from work with different interventions. Measures that could make this possible are: control of sick leave, common appointments with workers, increasing possibility of stimulative reward, presence checking, better atmosphere between co-workers, disciplinary proceedings, precise recording of presence and absence, conversation with concrete worker, introducing the problem to working collective if it could not be solved anymore. 76,59% of asked think that frequent absence from work shows negative consequences for educational work.

15.15.15 Negative consequences of absence from work

Table 7: Negative consequences of absence from work

Consequence	N	%
Reduced discipline of students	24	79,92
Negative student's relations to work	13	43,29
Unfulfilled educational programme	10	33,3
Bad example to students	10	33,3
Reduced extent and quality of activities	4	13,32

Those who answered that absenteeism has negative consequences for work think that these consequences are: reduced discipline of students, negative student's relations to work, unfulfilled educational programme, bad example for students and reduced extent and quality of activities.

5.1.16 What else have headmasters said

All interviewees had possibility to write whatever they would like to add regarding absenteeism in boarding schools.

Let us look at their thoughts:

- management does not have anything in its hands if the absent person knows to which limit he/she may go. That is why the best thing

to do is to arrange collective appointment for conversation about mentioned problem;

- above all it is necessary to find out reasons and then act in order to reduce or abolish problems;
- management wants more responsible physicians when they assign sick leave;
- sick leave should be paid by ZZV, because only that would make greater control over physicians that often assign sick leave;
- headmaster should have insight into reasons for absence, but physicians wrap reasons for absence into secrecy;
- problems occur when diseases or injuries disable worker to do work for a long period of time;
- problems appear when collective is small and it contains older workers that have a lot of vacation;
- education of workers must be organised in time of school holidays.

Opinions of headmasters are subjective by a certain extent. They show problem as they see it. For balanced analysis of absenteeism it would be necessary to interview other workers also. However, it is possible to pull certain conclusions from answers on asked questions.

4 CONCLUSIONS

Research results showed that there is no problem with absences from work shorter than one day. Phenomenon is present in boarding schools in smaller extent at times, however it is not necessary to devote special attention to it in sense of incapacitating or abolishing such absences. Survey showed that in more than half of boarding schools this phenomenon is not registered. Those boarding schools that have registered this phenomenon can control it with conversations with individual workers and with occasional organising collective appointments. It is bad habits of individuals, too little control and bad working discipline that cause absences shorter than one day or premature departures from work. Appointments with workers are established practice in boarding schools which can affect such absences protectively.

The phenomenon of quiet absenteeism in boarding schools goes similar rout. Quiet absenteeism is present in more than half of the boarding school that were included in survey. Evaluation of absenteeism gave satisfactory

results. However, there are major differences between pedagogical and non-pedagogical workers. Pedagogical workers are unsatisfied with their own status and personal work. Status of pedagogical workers in society is bad in comparison with other similar professions. Non-pedagogical workers are dissatisfied with salary and bad advancement possibilities. They are paid less and because of poor education they are difficult to employ. They cannot make progress with job or within profession. Non-pedagogical workers have more bad mutual relations, while pedagogical workers know how to hide bad relation successfully, if they want to.

In spite of the fact that absenteeism in boarding schools is not a major problem, headmasters are convinced that it can be reduced with different interventions. From 15th point of analysis of questionnaire it is clear that internal potential for reducing absenteeism is already used up, since boarding schools cannot freely dispose with money to additionally encourage workers for stability on work place, because they are legally restricted.

However, it is necessary to add that problems do occur time to time. When they appear it is necessary to solve them. Points 5 to 9 of analysis of questionnaire describe what kind of problems appear when absence of workers from work is increased and how are they managed. There is nothing astonishing going on. We know that listed problems are those that actually occur, we know what are the possibilities for abolishing them (substitution, rearrangement of working hours etc.). Question that bothers me is where to find financial means for payment of substitution of absent workers. Substitution for longer period of time up to 30 days requires other solutions, because of little number of employees. In such cases managers have to pay two shares, one to the absent worker and one to that who substitute

the absent worker. There are no additional or new sources of incomes. Indirect budgetary consumer, which boarding school is, has meted out financial means as much as it needs or less. Additional financial loads are not foreseen. Financial problems that accure in such instance must be solved by every management alone and there is no general prescription for this.

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