Social and Professional Adaptation of Employees as a Main Factor in Shaping Working Conditions

Joanna Gajda
Częstochowa University of Technology, Częstochowa, Poland

The process of adaptation to work is an important period in the life of an employee, and its main aim is to help the newly employed person adopt and accept habits and ways of the organization. The process of introducing a new employee to work is mainly to familiarize the employee with the organization of work in the company, organizational culture, procedures, and also the values of the organization. All this is to ensure a fast and proper process of adaptation on which will depend the future work and efficiency of employee. Getting started in a new place is very stressful for an employee, associated with the confrontation with unfamiliar surroundings and people. In the process of implementation of a worker, not only the employer should be involved, but the whole team, highlighting concern, willingness to help and support at this important early stage. Proper implementation of this process allows for adaptation of the employee in two dimensions—social and professional. Adaptation in social dimension means acceptance of the norms and rules of the team and management styles. Professional adaptation involves adapting to the content and conditions of the job. This paper aims to present factors determining the proper implementation of process of introducing a new employee to the organization.

Keywords: adaptation to work, individual and institutional approach to adaptation, innovative forms of work organization

Acquisition of an employee is associated with an important issue which is the introduction to work. It should be noted that the newly employed people join the organization gradually, which is why employers should be concerned whether the adaptation of workers at the new place of work proceeds in a proper manner. Proper implementation of responsibilities will affect the adoption of desired attitudes, and thus the efficiency of employee’s work and proper functioning of the entire organization. Therefore, it is important that the adaptation process is well-planned and properly carried out. A lot depends on the attitude of those responsible for introducing newly adopted people to work.

To allow the new employees have a good start, it is necessary to take into account the procedures to exercise control over the stages of the process of occupational adaptation. These activities cannot be limited to the institutional approach which is making the documents related to the responsibilities and adaptation to new conditions available. Individual approach is also important and it boils down to providing, in casual conversations, information about employer’s expectations of the style of work in a specific position and cooperation with team members. Inclusion of these two approaches is a mobilizing factor for efficient work,
which becomes beneficial for the organization and the employee.

The Nature and Process of Social and Professional Adaptation of Employee

Professional adaptation is the adaptation of a worker to a new environment and work processes in order to prepare him for effective work for the organization. The ability to adapt to new conditions is not an easy process, therefore the organization needs to ensure proper conduct of this step (Listwan, 2004, p. 92). A. Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, when defining the social and professional adaptation process, refers to the relations between the requirements of the organization and employee’s capabilities. The author recognizes this concept as Żarczyńska-Dobiesz (2008, p. 275):

1. All activities initiated by man, in order to consciously prepare himself for his duties. This process is closely associated with improving qualifications of a newly recruited employee;
2. Activities aimed at minimizing differences between the potential of a man and the expectations set by the organization. It is about adaptation process that focuses on the concretization of tasks, elimination of arduous working conditions, increasing self-esteem, and elimination of threats.

Particularly important are activities such as Kawka and Listwan (2006, p. 102):
1. Adaptation, which involves the use of employee efficiency and performance at an early stage of entering the organization;
2. Motivation, consisting of fast and conscientious adaptation of employee to the work environment, which has a great impact on the positive perception of new workplace and employee engagement;
3. Social, arising from the fact that the employee should get acquainted with staff members, elements of the organizational culture of the company, and current rules of social coexistence. It is recommended to introduce the employee to an organizational community, even informally;
4. Organizational, which come down to familiarize the employee with the tools of work, organizational structure, scheme of document circulation. Employee should adapt to the content and working conditions, and understand basic procedures, tasks, responsibilities, organizational dependencies.

Activities listed above have a double meaning. They help to ensure that the newly recruited employee properly adapts to the work which is crucial for its further progress and efficiency. With the implementation of adaptation process, the organization gains beneficial effect in form of increased efficiency, which is reflected in proper functioning of the organization.

The process of adaptation to a new place of work is considered to be undervalued area of human resources management. However, the quality of its progress depends on results of the work of newly recruited staff. A structured process of occupational adaptation of new employees should follow three stages (Niedzielski & Walkowiak, 2000, p. 26).

The first stage of adaptation is based on familiarization of newly recruited employee with the current situation of the organization, especially with:
1. The company’s mission;
2. The activities of the organization in terms of legal and economic environment and its external environment;
3. The situation within the organization (organizational structure, tasks of individual divisions, interdependencies between individual cells, general principles of cooperation and exchange of information);
4. Work regulations and other acts in force in company.
Upon his entry into the organization, employee comes into contact with organizational culture, and this means that he should understand and accept it. It is necessary to know the values of the organization and things closely related to it, such as rituals, myths, symbols, that facilitate adaptation to new working environment. Basing adaptability of workers on a conscious introduction to the culture allows to accelerate the process of integration with the organization and its members and facilitates reaching the full effectiveness (Lewicka, 2006, p. 130). In practice, it often happens that an employee, by adopting and accepting a system of values characteristic for organization, enriches its culture with his own personal qualities (Szalkowski, 2006, p. 106). The knowledge acquired on this subject should reassure a new employee that he has chosen the right company.

The second stage of adaptation concerns employee’s acquisition of theoretical and practical skills and information necessary to perform work at a specific position. According to R. Webber (1996), tasks and responsibilities assigned in the workplace should be consistent with perceptions shaped by a novice during the recruitment process. If the requirements set to the employee are properly understood by him, and his behavior is adapted to these requirements, only then we can talk about the effectiveness of the role. The concept of the R. Webber’s role is presented in Figure 1.

![Figure 1. The concept of role. Source: Webber (1996, p. 557).](image)

The condition for active adaptation to the role imposed on the employee is the need to familiarize with the expectations related to the nature of the tasks, as well as the required attitudes and behaviors. A. Żarczyńska-Dobiesz (2008, p. 67) believed that we can speak about adaptation to the professional role only when the role imposed on the employee corresponds with his values and ambitions. If the role is not consistent with his wishes, employee fails to comply with it properly.

In order for the process of adaptation to go smoothly and remain unhindered by the tasks set for the employee, employers should take care of correct formulation of the rules referring to the tasks at the workplace. A. Żarczyńska-Dobiesz deems necessary to comply with the following group of principles (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, 2008, p. 67):

1. Principle of adaptability, according to which the tasks should be adapted to abilities and qualifications of employee;
2. Principle of optimal specialization, which means matching activities and tasks assigned to a man with machines, tools, skills of subordinate and environmental conditions;
3. Principle of detail requires such definition of tasks that will make them map out a direction, but allow a leeway in how to implement the content of the tasks;
(4) Principle of purpose requires the designation of tasks and activities to employees at a given position from the perspective of organizational goals;

(5) Principle of a minimum of decentralization points to the need for the allocation of staff’s entitlements, so that they are appropriate for the position held;

(6) The principle of balancing the tasks, power, and responsibilities indicates the need to match the difficulty of tasks with responsibilities given to staff.

Active adaptation of a new employee to the role imposed on him will facilitate its proper structurization. According to J. Jaszek (1980), correctly shaped structure of the role meets a number of conditions:

 Ensures identification and clear division of activities that are necessary to perform the tasks and achievement of its objectives, and guarantees grouping of functions; clearly defines principles of horizontal linkages and business dependencies between colleagues; clearly defines procedures for implementation of tasks in a linear and functional way; realizes the potential span of control; ensures smooth functioning of the communication system responsible for providing the necessary information; allows the use of employees’ qualifications; designs changes in case of difficulty (or easiness) in working at given position; cares about designing career paths for new employees and building incentive systems; creates possibility for modification in a situation of changing environmental conditions or development of the organization.

An important factor associated with adapting to work is the content of the work. G. Gruszczyńska-Malec defined this concept as “a variety of activities carried out in the workplace, in their mutual structural relations, arising from the tasks entrusted to the employee” (Gruszczyńska-Malec, 1991, p. 36). E. Tytyk (2001) formulated a number of requirements for the content of work from the perspective of employee:

 The content of work carried out at a particular position should not be separated from the content of work carried out on adjacent positions; division of the work process should be flexible, enabling changes; range of tasks assigned to employee should ensure the ability to memorize the sequence of operations; tasks consisting of a long-term observation of automated processes should be eliminated; the degree of difficulty of tasks should be adapted to potential future candidate for the job; position at work should not lead to monotype, static overloads or hypokinesia.

A job with rich content allows an employee to shape attitudes, optimal use of skills, engagement of intellectual processes in relation to physical activities. A man reaches a high level of satisfaction with his tasks and motivation to work through participation in innovative forms of work organization (Mikuł, 2000, p. 85). Such forms of work organization include:

 Job rotation is a planned and systematic change of given jobs within the organization as a form of division of labor. The character of work can remain the same, which means that “employee follows the work process after the product”, or the change may concern the type of work which is a transition from performing basic activities to auxiliary activities. This form of work counteracts the effects of excessive division of labor, and despite the small effects of its use is a variation to fixed work.

Extending the scope of work (tasks) means assigning to employee more varied tasks in the transformation of workplaces and work process. At a certain workplace, it is possible to combine structurally uniform activities divided so far among different employees. This form is designed to enhance activities of the best quality. It is considered helpful for easing onerous working conditions and the introduction of an atmosphere conducive to work (Steinmann & Sehreyögg, 2001, p. 374).

Enrichment of work comes down to increasing the number of activities performed by the worker and extending their control. To achieve this objective, managers give up some elements of control over specific
workplace to fully use the decision-making competences of employees and create jobs within the natural units (Griffin, 2005, p. 347). According to A. Szalkowski, who quotes H. Weihrich and H. Koontz, the work can be enriched by:

Giving the employed more freedom in deciding on methods of working, sequence and pace of work and acceptation or refusal to accept materials; encouraging subordinates to participate and interact with other employees; giving employees a sense of personal responsibility for the implementation of tasks; creating such opportunities, so that employees can see their work input in the implementation of the final product and the welfare of the enterprise; giving people feedback about their results before their superiors get the results; engaging employees in analyzing and changing the physical conditions of work such as office or workplace design, temperature, lighting and cleanliness. (Szalkowski, 2002, p. 125)

Approach based on the characteristics of the job is an alternative job specialization that focuses on a system of work and employee preferences. This concept indicates that workplaces should be diagnosed and improved, taking into account the five elementary dimensions:

1. Diversity of qualifications, i.e., the number of operations performed by a subordinate in a certain position;
2. Identical tasks, that is the extent of employee’s full or recognizable part of total work;
3. Feeling the importance of the task;
4. Autonomy is the extent to which the worker controls the way the work is done;
5. Feedback concerns the scope of the assessment of quality of performed tasks by employee (Griffin, 2005, p. 348).

Quality circles are systematized way of “getting high productivity and quality effects of the activities through the use of employees’ inherent initiative, the desire to improve the organization, conditions and results of the processes and their theoretical and practical knowledge on the job” (Mikula, 2000, p. 86). This method is the preferred way to improve the efficiency of the company, as it is based on the synergy of results obtained from the teamwork.

Autonomous groups whose task is to implement a certain number of closely linked subtasks that form a harmonized process work. Team members have a high level of autonomy, which means that they have the possibility of achieving the goals themselves (Mikula, 2000, p. 90).

At this stage of adaptation, the employee should be informed about schedule of working time, principles of using leave, rules of justifying absences from work, principles of the use of mutual replacements (Makowski, 2002, p. 58).

The third stage of adaptation aims to integrate a new person with a team of staff. Newly recruited introduces himself to team members with whom he will work. Employee is obliged to obtain information about the conditions of employment and effective teamwork.

The process of adaptation to colleagues is the most difficult part for the new employee because of the need to assimilate and comply with standards developed by team members. It should be kept in mind that the imposition of rigid standards often causes resistance and use of defense mechanisms. Therefore, the supervisor and the person responsible for newly employed should ensure that the existing standards system in the organization corresponds even to a small extent to the values of employee. Not only the ability to join the group is important, but also gaining the group’s approval and the opportunity to actively participate (Żarczyńska-Dobiesz, 2008, p. 58).

The formation of adaptation process of employee to the organization is affected by determination of his position in the group structure. In the new situation, employee feels confused and helpless. That is why it is
important to adopt him into the team and give him appropriate position in the group. If a novice accepts the hierarchy, he will understand and accept the standards of his colleagues.

Effective adaptation of the individual to the group is ensured by a good atmosphere at work. For new employees, it is particularly important to have good relationships. They claim that they could cope with problems often occurring at work if there are honest relationships between the workers and if they show the ability to support others in difficult situations. The lack of satisfactory relationships tends to result in the exclusion of employee from a group and rise of conflicts.

The process of introduction to work will be completed, when employee reaches at least an average degree of efficiency in the implementation of the following activities:

1. Adapting to the prevailing system of work, which manifests itself in a significant decrease of fatigue;
2. Demonstrating his own creativity when discussing tasks given by superior;
3. Full subordination in relation to superiors;
4. Acceptance by employees from the immediate surroundings—establishing peer contacts;
5. Adapting to the culture of work and organization;
6. Determining his own emotional state in relation to work and company in terms of satisfaction (Niedzielski & Walkowiak, 2000, p. 27).

When the final results of the introduction to work confirm validity of the above procedures, it can be said that the organization has recruited a competent employee.

The largest turnover occurs in the initial period of employment. Not without significance is the phenomenon of “syndrome of three (six) months” characteristic for newly hired people with a positive attitude to work. They want to do well because they try to avoid mistakes and think that taking a new job is a lifetime opportunity. It happens quite often that some of them, due to the strong disappointment, decide to leave the company.

Among the reasons for leaving a new job in the first months of employment, the following should be mentioned (Jamka, 2001, p. 155):

1. Errors resulting from traditional recruitment processes: The advertisement of organization presents attractive working conditions in an effort to maximize the number of potential candidates resulting in too high expectations of the newly hired. When facing the reality, they experience disappointment and dissatisfaction with accepted job which ultimately results in fluctuation;
2. Errors related to selection of employees: Using the wrong tools for testing the competence and erroneous selection procedure that allows the exclusion of candidates with a high degree of crucial characteristics in the initial stage of the selection of candidates;
3. Inadequately prepared adaptation of employees to tasks, new work environment, corporate culture and even its absence.

**Conclusions**

The process of occupational adaptation is primarily related to the transfer of the intricacies of performing work at a given position to an employee. In the first period of employment, particular importance is attributed to the support of the people responsible for adhering to well-planned procedures, allowing the novice to prepare to fulfill the obligations regarding the performance of the new role and tasks. Chances to properly adapt the new employee to new working conditions are higher when he is presented with a range of activities that is
consistent with perceptions shaped by him in the course of recruitment. To ensure that an employee is well-prepared to carry out the planned tasks, innovative forms of work organization are of great help. Adaptation process that was properly carried out has an impact on shaping a positive attitude of employee to perform his daily duties.

References


