

## Czechs and Work

Naděžda Horáková

Work, considering mainly work in the form of a paid job, places an important position in the life of every man. Work has its importance not only for the individual, who spends more than one quarter of every day of his productive life working, but also for the society. Although there have been changes in the meaning and the role of work in today's society [see Mareš 2004], the majority of people consider work as a commonplace part of their life. The negative characteristics as "inability" and "laziness" are ascribed by the society to people who are not engaged in any paid job. This is one of the reasons why enforced loss of work is in most cases perceived strongly negatively. The negative impacts of job loss on the individual and his or her environment are today well described in the literature [from Czech literature see Mareš 2002; Buchtová & team 2002].

Important data concerning employment and unemployment in the Czech Republic are collected by the Czech statistical office in its Selective inquiry on labour forces (VŠPS). VŠPS is a continual inquiry, the results of which are evaluated and published quarterly. From the data obtained by VŠPS it is possible to find out what proportion of Czech population is performing or could perform certain job. There are two indicators important here: the rate of economic activity and the employment rate. According to the results of VŠPS in the first quarter of 2004, the current rate of economic activity of population older than 15 years is 59,1% and the rate of employment is 54%.

Table no. 1: The rate of economic activity – population aged 15+

	1st Quarter 2001	1st Quarter 2002	1st Quarter 2003	1st Quarter 2004
Total	60,2	59,5	59,5	59,1
Men	69,4	69,0	68,8	68,3
Women	51,7	50,7	50,9	50,6

Source: Czech statistical office

I am going to devote my contribution above all to three important aspects of work activity: the individual satisfaction with work, the occurrence of negative phenomena at the workplace and the evaluation of job stability. I will draw mainly from the periodical inquiries realized by the Public opinion research centre SOÚ AV ČR.

## I. Satisfaction with work and assessment of the relationships at the workplace

The satisfaction with work is without any question an important indicator of how people feel at work. The satisfaction with work is observed by CVVM researches in two ways. Respondents are expressing both general satisfaction with their work and the satisfaction with particular aspects of their work.

More than one half of the economic active respondents<sup>1</sup> expressed satisfaction with their job<sup>2</sup> (55 % of respondents stated, that they were very or rather satisfied with their job) in February 2004. But this specification isn't a very good indicator, because of great differences between particular groups of employees. Let's try to discover, what lies behind this data.

One of the most significant distinctions connected to the satisfaction with work is possible to find between a group of people working within employee contract and those, who are enterprising. Whole three quarters of entrepreneurs and tradesmen expressed satisfaction with their job. Among employees this was only slightly more than one half. Significant differences could also be found among people with different level of achieved education, where the increasing level of education means larger proportion of people satisfied with their work. University educated people are most often satisfied with their job (70%), least often then the people with primary school education (39%). Higher satisfaction with work also occurs among the managers. On the opposite, there is not even a whole quarter of satisfied among manual workers. The analysis of the satisfaction with work in different work-types is complicated because of the lack of "representatives" in each of the professional work-types. Nevertheless it is possible to state that people working in banking and insurance sector are a bit more often satisfied with their job than workers from the field of manufacturing industry, business, motor vehicles repairs and consumer goods.

The table below looks at how are the employees satisfied with particular aspects of their work. These are sorted from those aspects, with which most people expressed satisfaction to those, with which there were least people satisfied.

---

<sup>1</sup> Question answered by 583 respondents.

<sup>2</sup> Question: How are you generally satisfied with your job? Are you very satisfied, rather satisfied, half and half satisfied, half and half dissatisfied, rather dissatisfied, very dissatisfied?"

Table no. 2.: Satisfaction with particular work aspects (in %).

	Satisfied	Dissatisfied
with the time needed for commuting <sup>3</sup>	77	22
with how is the work interesting	77	22
with the relationships with fellow workers	75	22
with the use of professional abilities	75	23
with the working time, shifting	72	28
with their superior	69	24
with the work scheduling	69	30
with the physical environment and its equipment	68	29
with the work load	68	31
with the care for employee's wellness	56	37
with the job guarantee /job stability/	49	43
with the salary	41	58
with promotion or raise possibilities <sup>3</sup>	27	68

Source: CVVM, research Our Society 2003, 2004, investigation 04-02 and 03-10. Note: The remaining percentage is constituted by the answer "I don't know".

We can see from the table that the satisfaction is expressed with almost all of the observed aspects with the exception of salary and promotion and raise possibilities. The majority of employees appreciate the time needed for commuting, the fact that their work is interesting, the relationships with fellow workers and the use of professional abilities.

I have used factor analysis, method of main components and varimax rotation for detecting hidden structures, which can be found behind the data. For these purposes I brought together data from two researches: from October 2003 and February 2004. The interpretation is based on the solution of 3 factors explaining 62% of the total variance.

The first factor includes especially items characterizing the work performed by the individual itself. They are the following aspects: how is the work interesting, the use of professional abilities, working hours, job stability and the workload. The assessment of this factor differed mainly according to the achieved level of education. University educated people are much more often satisfied with those aspects of their work than people with basic education, where the trend is exactly the opposite.

<sup>3</sup> These aspects were observed only in inquiry i February 2004.

The second factor includes mainly items that are on the employer's side, creating a sort of external framework for the performed job. It is in particular the physical environment and the work equipment, the care for employees, the salary and the work organization. Here again there are significant distinctions between the different education groups similarly to the previous factor.

The third factor can be labelled as a relation factor. It includes items describing relationships among people at the workplace; that is satisfaction with superior and with interpersonal relationships at the workplace. While the share of satisfied and dissatisfied is by this factor virtually the same in groups with all levels of achieved education, women are likely to evaluate the relationships at the workplace more positively than men.

It is interesting that none of the observed factors has any connection to the age of the respondents.

As I have already mentioned earlier, the assessment of mutual relationships at the workplace gives us a significant information about the employee's feelings about their work. Analysis has also proved that the assessment of the relationships at the workplace and the satisfaction with work are closely connected. The table no. 3 shows how people perceive the relationships at their workplace.

Table no. 3: Work relationships (in percentage)

Prevails friendly to intimate atmosphere	22
Characteristic is good cooperation without any special personal proximity	53
Prevail cold relationships	19
Atmosphere full of stress and conflicts	6

Source: CVVM, research Our Society 2004, investigation 04-03.

Results have shown that according to the employee's evaluation there are good relationships prevailing at the workplace. Approximately one fifth of the employees experience friendly to intimate atmosphere at work, according to other half of the respondents there is a good cooperation without any special personal proximity characteristic for their job. One quarter of people within employee contract perceive the relationships at their workplace as rather negative, when 19% described them as cold and 6% even as a stressed and full of conflict.

More detailed analysis confirmed that women and men evaluate the relationships at work differently. As proclaimed, 26% of women, but only 17% of men describe the relationships at their workplace as characterized by friendly to intimate atmosphere. On the contrary, men claimed more often that their job is characterized by good cooperation without any special personal proximity (this answer chose 58% of men, 48% of women).

As I have already suggested, there is a strong connection between the assessment of relationships at the workplace and the satisfaction with work. People who expressed satisfaction with their job also perceive rather positively the relationships at the workplace (30% identified them as friendly and another 59% characterized them as a good cooperation without close proximity). On the contrary, a negative assessment of the relationships at the workplace prevails among the people who expressed dissatisfaction with their job (44% characterize them as cold and 28% of dissatisfied respondents described the atmosphere as one full of stress and conflicts).

People who assess negatively the personal relationships at their workplace voiced also more often the opinion that they are likely to start working for another employer within the next two years.

## II. Negative phenomena at work

Beside the satisfaction with work we have also addressed other aspects of working activity in our researches.

Interesting results were brought by a question about a presence of some mostly negatively perceived phenomena in Czech jobs.

Table no. 4: Presence of some phenomena at work (in %)

	Yes	No
Repeated signing of fixed-term working contracts	34	46
Frequent downsizing	30	62
Bad work organization	30	57
Non-paid overtime hours	26	63
Production restraining	21	48
Employment of foreigners	18	69
Bossing	12	78
Frequent violation of employment law regulations by the	12	73

employer		
Insufficient ensuring of work safety conditions by the employer	11	79
Non-payment or delays in payment of salaries	10	84
Breaches of collective agreement	8	60

Source: CVVM, research Our Society 2004, investigation 04-03 (n = 492), Note: The remaining percentage is constituted by the answer “I don’t know” and “I am not concerned about it”.

The repeated signing of fixed-term working contracts is the most frequent problem in Czech companies. A whole third of the employees experienced this phenomenon in their company. Presented data come from an investigation realized between the 15th – 22nd of March 2004. We have to take into account that repeated signing of fixed-term contracts has been considerably restricted by the labour code since the 1<sup>st</sup> of March 2004. We can therefore hope that appearance of this phenomenon in Czech companies will be at least reduced. Unfortunately the appearance of other negative aspects is also quite frequent in Czech businesses. Three out of ten Czech employees came across frequent downsizing and bad work organization, more than a quarter of respondents stated that in their companies it is common to work non-paid overtime hours.

I was further interested in finding out if the above mentioned phenomena appear individually or if it is common that more of them occur in one company. I used the same tools for answering this question – factor analysis, method of main components and varimax rotation. By using this method I obtained two factors, that is two groups of phenomena, which are likely to appear in companies at the same time. First group consists of phenomena connected with the violation of laws and regulations in particular company. Part of this category are the following: breaches of the collective agreement, frequent violation of employment law regulations by the employer, insufficient ensuring of work safety conditions by the employer, non-paid overtime hours and non-payment or delays in payment of salaries.

In the second group are phenomena that are likely to occur more often in companies struggling with financial problems. These are: frequent downsizing, production restraining, bad work organization, repeated signing of fixed-term working contracts and bossing.

Appearance of all those phenomena included in table no. 4 has a significant influence on the satisfaction of the respondents with their jobs. Respondents who stated that the above

mentioned phenomena existed at their workplace are less likely to be satisfied with their job. The only exception is the employment of foreigners, where the influence on work satisfaction isn't statistically significant.

Table no. 5. Influence of different phenomena on work satisfaction (in %)

	Phenomenon occurs	Phenomenon does not occur
	Satisfied/ Unsatisfied	Satisfied/ Unsatisfied
Repeated signing of fixed-term working contracts	44/11	63/6
Frequent downsizing	46/16	61/5
Bad work organization	37/16	65/5
Non-paid overtime hours	40/15	62/6
Production restraining	39/20	61/5
Employment of foreigners	49/12	57/8
Bossing	22/26	61/6
Frequent violation of employment law regulations by the employer	24/29	62/5
Insufficient ensuring of work safety conditions by the employer	17/27	61/7
Non-payment or delays in payment of salaries	31/27	59/7
Breaches of collective agreement	24/24	63/5

Source: CVVM, research Our Society 2004, investigation 04-03, Note: The remaining percentage is constituted by the answer “Neither satisfied, nor unsatisfied”.

As presented in the table no. 5, the existence of negative phenomena at the workplace has significant influence on work satisfaction. In companies where there is bossing, frequent violation of employment law regulations and insufficient ensuring of work safety conditions by the employer is larger proportion of dissatisfied employees. People who are experiencing such negative phenomena in their companies expressed more often the opinion that they will work for a different employer within the next two years.

### III. Job stability and fear of its loss

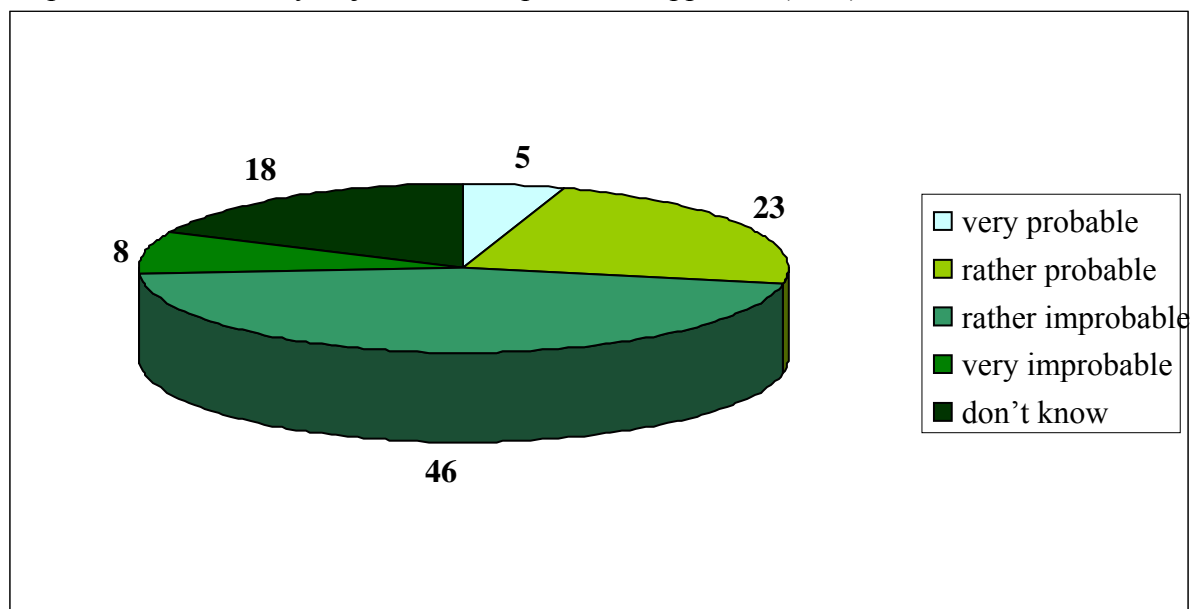
The job stability contributes to the general satisfaction with work. According to our research realized in February 2004 nearly half of the employees (48%) are satisfied with the stability of their jobs and only a little less (45 %) expressed in this respect dissatisfaction. The rest of the respondents wasn't able to answer this question.

The assessment of the job stability differs significantly according to the level of achieved education. Whole 71% of university educated respondents expressed satisfaction with the stability of their job, among secondary school graduates it was 52%. Even lower satisfaction (42%) was found among people with secondary school education without final school-leaving exam. The least satisfied with this aspect of work are people with basic education, satisfaction was expressed by only one fifth of them (21 %).

Bigger satisfaction with job stability is expressed by people in managerial positions, entrepreneurs and by self-employers. Lower proportion of satisfied is above all among manual workers.

The uncertainty about one's job stability is surely reflected in statements about a high probability of a job loss.<sup>4</sup>

Graph no. 1: Probability of job loss – respondent's appraisal (in %)



Source: CVVM, research Our Society 2004, investigation 04-05

<sup>4</sup> Question: „How likely it is that you would loose your job (e.g. because of reduction of work positions, employer's bankruptcy)? It is very probable, rather probable, rather improbable, very improbable.”



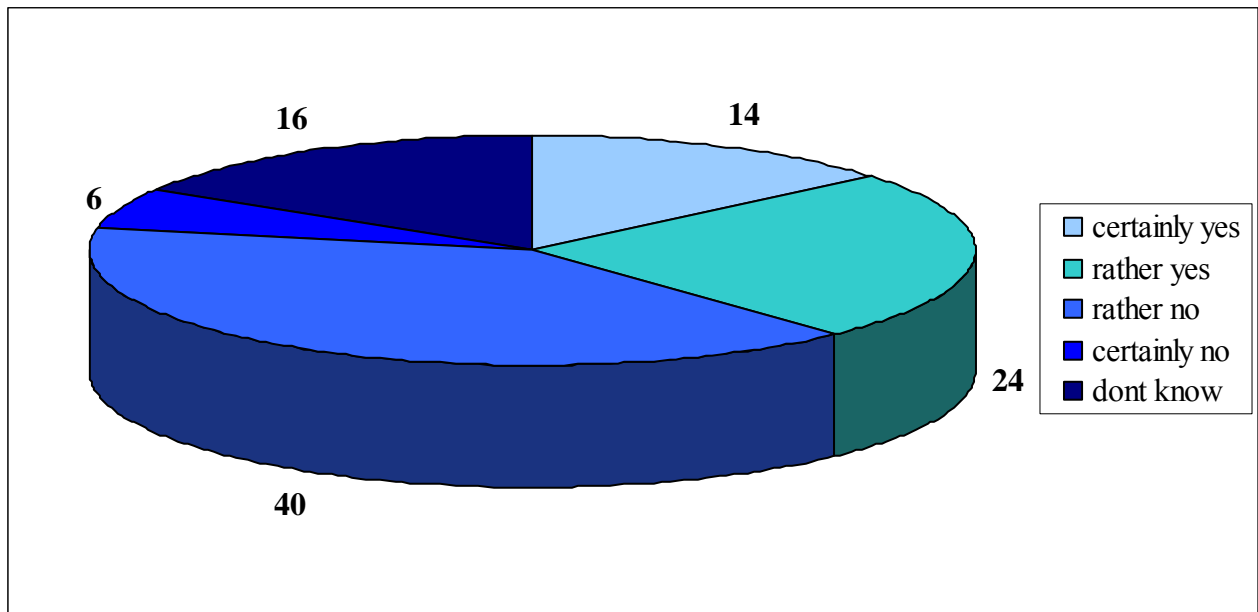
More than a quarter of Czechs consider the job loss as probable, while 5% perceive it as very probable. On the contrary, half of the respondents don't consider this alternative as probable. The following groups find the job loss more likely: people, who have already been unemployed, manual workers, respondents with basic education or vocational education without graduation, inhabitants of Zlín region and people working in manufacturing industry. People who consider losing their job as probable differ in their opinion about unemployment and unemployed. This group of respondents claims more often that unemployment in the Czech Republic will further increase within the next two years and that most of the unemployed in the Czech Republic cannot find any job. They also state more often that they would be willing to accept any work in case of losing their job.

On the contrary the following groups of respondents perceive losing their job as unlikely: graduates from secondary school with school-leaving exams, university educated respondents, people working in managerial positions; inhabitants of South-Bohemia region, employees who have never been unemployed or those, who were unemployed for only a short time (less than 3 months). When we look at the respondents according to the sphere of their activity, as least probable perceive the loss of their job employees in the education and health service.

Respondents considering the job loss as improbable are more often convinced that the unemployment in the Czech Republic will in the future remain approximately on the same level and that most of the unemployed cannot find an appropriate work. These respondents also inclined more often to the statement that if they after all lost their job, they would look for a particular job rather than accepting any work.

The situation looked differently when we asked the respondents if they are afraid of losing their job.

Graph no. 2: Fear of job loss (in %)



Nearly two fifths of all employees (38%) are afraid of the job loss, without any fear is little less than a half of them (46%). More detailed analysis has shown, that the group of respondents expressing fear of job loss has similar characteristics to the group considering losing their job as probable.

Literature:

Buchtová, Božena a kol. 2002. *Nezaměstnanost : psychologický, ekonomický a sociální problém*. Praha: Grada Publishing.

Mareš, Petr 2002. *Nezaměstnanost jako sociální problém*. Praha: Sociologické nakladatelství.

Mareš, Petr 2004. „Od práce emancipující k práci mizející.“ *Sociologický časopis*, Vol. 40, No. 1-2:37-48.