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Values shared by students in their private and professional lives

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Summary. Values pursued by employees and the possibility to implement them in their workplace enhance their commitment and, consequently, their efficiency. This particularly concerns young people who are about to enter or have just entered the labour market, for they are more susceptible to corporate motivation and attitude shaping. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to analyse the values shared by university students in comparison to the population of Poles in general. The paper will present results of research from the literature, conducted mainly in Poland and Germany and by author himself.

Introduction

In market economy the cost-effect ratio has a considerable effect on staff-related decisions made in a company. What is particularly emphasised in the context of staff management is the importance of their competencies for the growth of the company value, thus shifting the focus from labour costs to labour effects. It has also been noted that the increase in workforce productivity translates to such benefits for the company as higher profits, maintained or improved competitive position, etc. As far as the employees are concerned, it brings such effects as higher wages,

more opportunities for professional development, gaining new skills as well as for satisfying extra-economic needs such as employee satisfaction or good relationships within the organisation (Jasiński, 1999, p. 247).

There are diverse tools that can be used to enhance productivity. One of them is to take into consideration the employees' systems of values or to appropriately motivate employees according to these values. It would be appropriate in this context if the employees and employers shared their system of values as it would contribute to their mutual understanding. Therefore, the awareness and recognition of the employees' values can be used for satisfying their needs, with a particular focus on the organisation performance and future workforce productivity.

Keeping the above in mind, the purpose of this paper is to find out what values are important for Polish university students and for Poles who are 16+ years old. A hypothesis has been made that for the university students the most important value in personal life is family and good health, while in professional life – good atmosphere and salary. The analyses use data from the existing reference literature as well as from the author's own survey conducted among students of the University of Szczecin.

Definition and essence of shared values

The notion of values is defined and interpreted in many ways. Sometimes they are considered equivalent to attitudes, motivation, preferences, behaviour, activity, etc. (Gajda, 1997, p. 11), or it is believed that values serve to form individual attitudes (Fritzsche, 2007, p. 336). The character of values can be psychological (values acknowledged by individuals), sociological (values shared by social groups) and cultural (values respected by a society as a whole) character (Miształ, 1980, p. 15).

Individual values have different meaning for people. According to M. Rokeach (1973, p. 21) values constitute a system where particular elements are ordered by their importance and their order of priority can be considered on a micro (an individual), mezzo (organisation, enterprise) and macro (society) level.

It is essential to be aware that each person's system of values forms gradually. It is a life-long process which follows personal development, upbringing, functioning in a given environment, education, changes in one's environment, etc. In the subsequent life stages the acknowledged values become the basis for specific attitudes, thus determining one's decisions and goals, their functioning in the educational or professional environment. More or less consciously, everyone has their hierarchy of values.

Studies on the systems of values provide vast knowledge about attitudes, behaviours, motives, etc., both in personal and professional life. The existing study results show that these values are subject to changes.

It is clear that, from the point of view of the labour market and company performance, it is vital to gain knowledge about values shared by employees. This knowledge is of a great importance to government policies aimed at improving employability as well as to corporate motivation programmes. Particular focus should be put on surveying value systems of young people who are enhancing their competences through university studies before entering the job market. These people will become professionals, managers or company owners. Being young, they are burden free, mobile and open to new social, cultural or ideological concepts. They also have a strong sense of personal freedom. This particular age group is a kind of social barometer, being ready to protest in defence of their values and principle (Strózik, 2014, p. 7).

What is important from the viewpoint of management are the values related to work, or ‘actions and behaviour within an organisation, to which individuals and groups give high priority in terms of material, social, mental and ethical values’ (Michalczyk, 1988, p. 297). Many processes and situations taking place in companies and other organisations can be approached with regard to values whose essential role is to facilitate the implementation of goals of these companies and organisations (Hryn 1999, s. 161). Obviously, it does not mean that individualised behaviour and attitudes should be rejected. But at the core of the employees’ behaviour there are the values represented by the company and by themselves because the company success largely relies on workers’ commitment (Juchnowicz, 2010; Młokosiewicz, 2017) that is partly dependent on the possibility to meet their expectations related with their shared values (Wilson, 2003, p. 157–172).

The above brief outline allows for the conclusion about a vital scientific problem, i.e. the system of values acknowledged by university students who will soon be entering the labour market as well as by employers who will be offering jobs to them.

Existing scientific studies

Values studies have been conducted for a long time. This paper presents scientific projects that concentrated on young university students preparing themselves for entering the labour market. Due to the fact that the author’s own studies were conducted on a group of Polish students and that in management the specific culture of a given country is of crucial importance, the main focus is put on the Polish research projects. For the purpose of comparison, the results of several German are presented as well.

An important diagnosis of the young Poles' system of values (on a representative sample of 1468 secondary school graduates) was made by J. Mariański (1995, p. 163). His research showed that they gave the highest priority to family, followed by work and friends.

Another survey conducted by M.J. Szymański in 1998 on a representative sample of 2090 students aged 15–18 showed that they gave the highest priority to good relationship with peers, friendship and trust (Szymański, 1998, p. 134).

Also the Public Opinion Research Centre 1998 survey conducted in a group of 1316 graduating secondary school students confirmed that they valued the highest such things as family life, interesting job, love and friendship (CBOS, 1999). It is worth noting that since 1994 the value of family life had increased by 9 percentage points, while the value of an interesting job fell by 10 percentage points.

The results of a survey by Z. Wołk on secondary school and university students coming from small towns (below 20 thousand of population) show that they also gave priority to family life followed by a good and well-paid job (Wołk, 2002, p. 67).

Important research in this field was made by T. Strózik (2014, p. 5–23). By means of questionnaires addressed to 1516 university students in Poznań, he identified the values they regarded as principal. He ranked the values in general as well as by gender, religion and life satisfaction. The results revealed that the most cherished values were family, good health, friends and good marriage, while the condition of a good-quality life are positive relationships with one's own family.

The above outline of research projects should be completed with the knowledge coming from the 2nd edition of the Study on Social Cohesion conducted in the first half of 2015 in a sample group of almost 14 thousand people. The study revealed that two most important values for the vast majority of respondents are good health, family and family well-being. Other principal values are: honesty, a sense of stabilisation, a feeling of being useful. The least important values were adventurous life, entertainment and a successful career. A group of 16–34-year olds declared that in addition to family and good health they highly valued professional work (GUS).

It is worth noting that the CBOS surveys conducted in 2005, 2010 and 2013 showed that since 2005 the order of values shared by Polish respondents remained rather stable. What is consistently most valued is family well-being (declared by 82%) followed by good health (74% of answers) (CBOS).

From this source, the studies carried out in Poland indicate an important regularity, namely the value of highest priority for Poles is a family, other important values being good health, friendship and professional career.

By comparison, the results of studies conducted in Germany revealed slightly different values than in Poland. The 1996 surveys showed that young Germans

valued the most friends and friendship, freedom, family stability and inner harmony (Kromer, Zenter, 1999, p. 4).

Regular values studies have been run under *Schell Jugendstudie* project. According to them, in the period between 2002–2015 respondents aged 12–25 declared that their values of highest priority were personal harmony, personal development, responsibility, trust and optimism. The studies also showed that friends and family life were of vital importance (17. *Schell Jugendstudie*, 2015).

As an inference from the above research findings it can be concluded that young people in Germany share somewhat different values than young Poles. Nevertheless, the fundamental values related to personal matters such as health, family and friends are the same in both countries.

Finally, it is worth quoting the *Corporate Values Index 2013*. The study was conducted for the third time¹ and it focused on employees' views on corporate values in France, the United Kingdom, Germany, Switzerland and Poland. The study showed that almost one third of the respondents did not know if their employers had defined such values. In Poland the proportion is as big as 44%. The survey also revealed that the most popular values in the five countries are: innovativeness, quality, customer satisfaction and honesty.

Author's own studies on values shared by students

In the decade between 2007 and 2017 the researchers of the University of Szczecin conducted a study on the values related to personal and professional lifeshared by university students. In the period of 2007–2015 the sample group consisted of 120–240 second cycle students (in 2007 they were the students of the 4th year of university studies) of the University of Szczecin (2007, 2012, 2014 and 2015 – the Faculty of Economics and Management; 2011 – the Faculty of Law and Administration, 2015 – only 45 students of the Faculty of Humanities)². The students were asked to rank the given values from 1 to 10, separately in the category of personal life and professional work. Mainly due to a falling number of university students which had started in 2007, in 2017 the survey was conducted in a smaller group. Therefore the study group was complemented with the students of the 3rd year of doctoral studies. The survey findings are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

¹ Previous studies were conducted in 2006 and 2009.

² Due to the unrepresentative sample the survey was of an illustrative character.

Table 1

Ranking of *personal life values* shared by university students in 2007–2017

Values	2007 N = 239	2011 N = 228	2012 N = 167	2014 N = 152	2015 N = 122	2015 N = 45	2017a N = 38	2017b N = 12
Family	1.9	3.3	2.2	1.1	1.3	2.5	1.1	1.4
Good health	2.4	3.4	2.0	3.1	2.4	3.8	3.9	1.6
Friends	4.7	3.9	5.1	3.9	3.3	5.3	3.9	6.0
Stable employment	5.1	5.3	5.0	4.1	5.3	3.5	4.4	5.9
Education	5.1	5.1	5.5	5.0	5.6	4.5	5.8	5.7
High salary	5.9	5.0	5.8	5.6	6.3	4.3	5.7	6.4
Leisure	6.8	6.8	7.4	7.2	7.3	4.8	7.3	5.6
High financial status	7.2	7.4	7.5	7.7	6.1	7.0	6.8	6.1
Principles of religion	7.4	7.3	7.4	9.3	8.4	9.3	7.8	9.1
Travel	8.2	7.6	8.2	7.4	8.8	7.8	8.1	7.3

Legend:

a – 2nd cycle students,b – 3rd cycle students.

Source: own study

Table 1 clearly shows that the students regarded the family (except 2012) and good health as the most important values, followed by friends and stable employment. The exception was the Humanities students who ordered their priorities in a slightly different way: family, stable employment, good health and education. The least appreciated from the given range of values were: travel, principles of religion and high financial status.

The study findings concerning the values in professional life are equally interesting (see Table 2).

Table 2

Ranking of *professional life values* shared by university students in 2007–2017

Values	2007 N = 239	2011 N = 228	2012 N = 167	2014 N = 152	2015 N = 122	2015 N = 45	2017a N = 38	2017b N = 12
Good atmosphere at work	3.4	3.7	3.5	3.1	4.0	3.8	4.3	5.3
Rewarding job	3.5	3.7	2.7	3.5	2.4	1.3	2.6	2.3
High salary	3.9	4.2	3.5	4.4	4.0	3.8	4.8	4.9

Perceivable importance of work	3.9	4.9	4.6	4.4	4.5	3.8	3.6	3.9
Opportunity to be creative	5.1	5.0	6.2	5.9	6.0	4.5	6.4	5.0
Work time separated from free time	6.1	5.7	6.2	4.4	5.1	6.8	3.9	3.0
Flexible working hours	6.3	6.4	6.6	5.6	5.0	8.3	4.6	4.9
Autonomy at work	6.6	6.7	5.9	7.2	7.7	6.8	8.0	8.6
Shorter working hours	7.7	7.6	7.4	8.8	7.0	9.8	8.4	7.1
Big responsibility	8.3	7.0	8.4	7.7	8.9	4.5	8.5	8.6

Legend:

a – 2nd cycle students,

b – 3rd cycle students.

Source: own study

In fact, the respondents appreciated the most good atmosphere at work and a rewarding job (the highest priority value in 2011, 2012 and 2015) followed by a high salary and perceivable importance of work (Table 2). The least important values were: big responsibility and flexible working hours. It is therefore worth noting that, firstly, even though of substance, money is not considered by students as the most important in their professional lives, Secondly, what is essential for employees is good atmosphere and a rewarding job, which may be understood as a job that matches well one’s personality predispositions. And finally, being employed the students would not be willing to perform tasks burdened with heavy responsibility and requiring big autonomy. Interestingly, the doctoral students attributed the least value to autonomy and responsibility at work. Moreover, the value of average importance for the students is creativity.

Conclusions

The above analysis allows for several relevant conclusions and in fact supports the research hypothesis or at least its first part.

The first conclusion refers to the analysis of the existing values studies which reveal that the values regarded by Poles to be of the highest priority are good health and the family in its wider sense. The second conclusion refers to the author’s own studies. The surveys conducted in a group of university students confirmed

the evidence reported in the literature. The surveyed students also declared that the values that were the most important to them were good health and the family. Moreover, the results of research into the students' values related to professional life show their highest appreciation to good atmosphere and a rewarding job, save the fact that the study group was unrepresentative. The students would reluctantly accept big autonomy and responsibility at work. Additionally, a high salary is not of crucial importance to them.

The study described above will help the employers in particular, but also the academic teachers of management, to identify what is important for workers, thus enabling the employers to find effective ways to motivate their staff to better work, to make them loyal to the company and to reduce employee turnover.

It should be underlined that the studies on human values and their changes are of great importance both in their theoretical and practical aspect, i.e. both in the fields of management science, economics, psychology or sociology of work as well as for such elements of business operation as employee motivation and management.

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Wartości w życiu i pracy zawodowej wyznawane przez studentów

Słowa kluczowe: wyznawane wartości, rynek pracy, motywowanie

Streszczenie. Wartości wyznawane przez pracowników i możliwość ich realizacji w miejscu pracy wpływają na zaangażowanie w pracę, a przez to na wydajność pracy zatrudnionych. Dotyczy to w szczególności osób młodych, przygotowujących się do wejścia na rynek pracy lub pracujących niedługo, ponieważ to właśnie one są w większym stopniu podatne na motywowanie i kształtowanie jako pracownicy. Z tego względu celem artykułu jest analiza wartości wyznawanych przez osoby studiujące i dla porównania – całej populacji Polaków.

Cytowanie

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