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BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS WITH NARCISSIST INDIVIDUALS AT WORKPLACE - GOOD PRACTICES

Introduction

The social and economic determinants of the 21st century draw the attention of theoretician and practitioners towards the owners of human capital. The literature on the subject refers to knowledge workers[1], i.e. to high class specialists who have unique competencies. In recent situation development-oriented organizations look for such employees as they are perceived as the key to success that is reflected by the achievement of the strategic targets of the organization and the fulfilment of its mission and vision. However, as investigations show, knowledge workers have particular requirements as regards their employers: they should share their employees' value system that includes the care for the development of a pleasant work atmosphere[2]. On the other hand, knowledge workers are individuals whose life experience, personality features (and life problems), views and expectations strongly influence their behavior in the organization.

With the consideration of the significance of knowledge workers for organizations, their attitude to particular values and the natural personality diversification, it seems indispensable to conduct interdisciplinary research that would combine both the aspects of psychology and the issues of human resources management. That it is why it is worth analyzing the cooperation with a person who is difficult to build relationships with due to his/her narcissistic qualities.

The aim of this article is to create a catalogue of good practices with regard to the development of interpersonal relationships with a narcissistic individual at workplace.

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[1] Cf. M. Morawski, *Zarządzanie profesjonalistami*, PWE, Warszawa 2009 oraz T.H. Davenport, *Zarządzanie pracownikami wiedzy*, Oficyna a Wolters Kluwer Business, Kraków 2007, p. 24.
[2] Cf. W. Jarecki, *Wartości wyznawane przez pracowników a motywacja do pracy,* http://kadry.infor.pl/kadry/hrm/motywowanie/619062,Wartosci-wyznawane-przez-pracownikow-a-motywacja-do-pracy.html, (accessed: 22.03.2017).

1. The role of interpersonal relationships at workplace

In the knowledge-based economy the key role in the success or failure of a company is played by human being. Human capital seems to be now one of the basic values of organizations. Its continuous development (both through the individual motivation of particular employees and by the strategic operations of the company) is necessary in the achievement and maintenance of the competitive advantage on the market. The care for the high quality of human capital through an ongoing orientation to employee needs may be the key to success. At present, according to the research, the most important needs of employees include: salary and benefits, job security and friendly working enviroment[3] (Cf. Figure 1).

Figure 1. List of employee needs
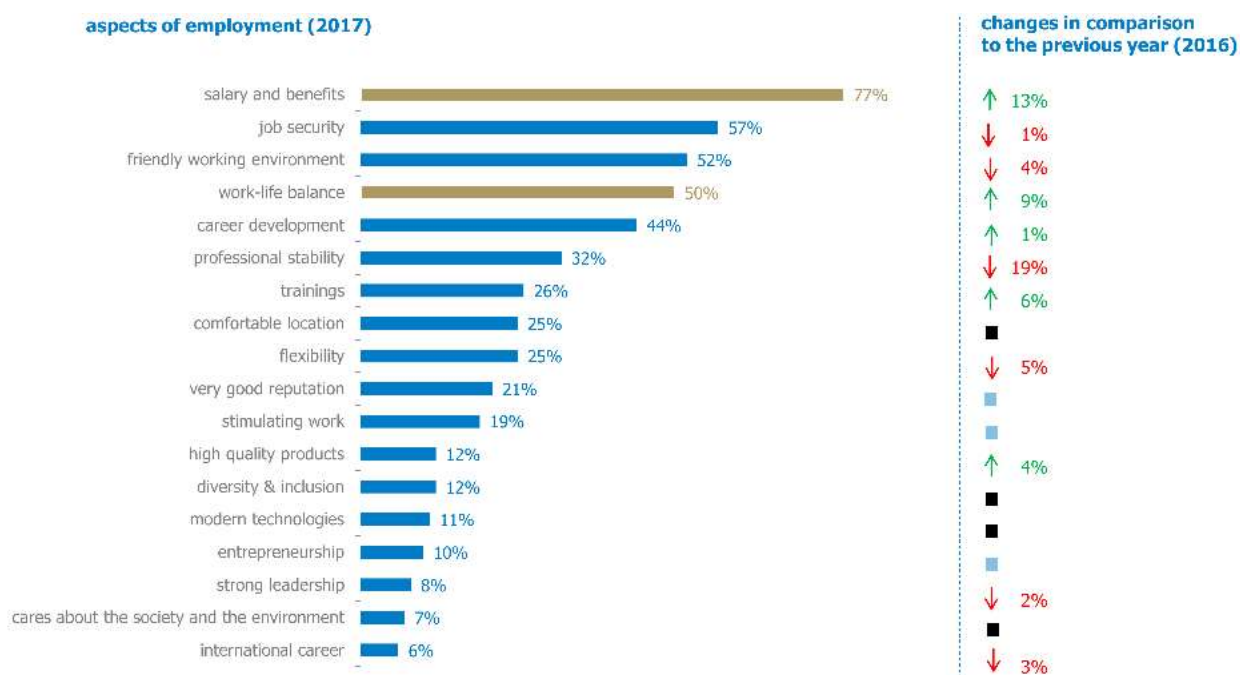
Source: Report on the research of Randstad Award 2017 http://info.randstad.pl/randstad-employer-brand-research-2017?_ga=2.191141673.223086509.1555087089-116642069.1555087089, (accessed: 13.02.2019).

Pleasant working atmosphere is described by researchers in an empirical way. For example, in the research of B.Nowotarska-Romaniak the key elements of the atmosphere are the relationships among co-workers (69%), salaries and mutual respect (61% each) and the

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[3] Based on the research results of the Randstad Award 2016 http://www.randstad.pl/media/945290/Czynniki%20atrakcyjno%C5%9Bci%20 pracodawcy_Randstad%20Awar d%202016_tabela_17_03_2016.jpg, (accessed: 22.03.2017.

relationships with direct superiors (59%)[4]. It can be evidently concluded from the research of PARP (the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development) that the issue of the relationships among coworkers remains one of the most important areas of CSR (72%). Moreover, the same research indicates that almost 50% of employers that were subject to investigation consciously take measures to develop relationships at workplace[5]. According to M.Młokosiewicz, *the development of good relationships means keeping commitments, mutual honesty, the consideration of expectations, dialogue and co-operation*[6]. In the context of the above definition one should pay attention to the character of the listed qualities of the process of building good relationships. It seems that they are inseparably related to the personal features of an individual. Thus, it can be concluded that the development of good relationships in an organization strongly depends on the individuals that are involved in the process. According to A.Pawłowska, who follows I.Krzemiński, *the context of organizational activities is not simply the surrounding that determines or stimulates particular operations nor a set of stimuli from the environment but it is a system of structures and processes in which the subjective interpretations of actors - who observe, learn and try to understand the context of their activities – participate in shaping the process of the context development*[7]. *Somebody's behavior functions as a stimulus to other person's behavior and vice versa*[8]. In the light of the above statements it seems necessary to conduct a research on the personality features of an individual in the context of the behavior in work environment. This is due to the fact that they have an impact on the creation of pleasant working atmosphere which is an indispensable success factor for organizations that operate in knowledge-based economies.

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[4] B. Nowotarska-Romaniak, *Atmosfera w pracy jako istotny element marketingu wewnętrznego firm ubezpieczeniowych*, „Wiadomości ubezpieczeniowe" (3)/2009, p. 72.

[5] *Ocena stanu wdrażania standardów społecznej odpowiedzialności biznesu. Zestaw wskaźników społecznej odpowiedzialności w mikro, małych, średnich oraz dużych przedsiębiorstwach*, PARP, Warszawa 2011, p. 4 and p.60.

[6] M. Młokosiewicz, *Znaczenie dobrych relacji z pracownikami w praktyce polskich przedsiębiorstw*, Zeszyty Naukowe Uniwersytetu Szczecińskiego. Studia i Prace Wydziału Nauk Ekonomicznych i Zarządzania, Szczecin 2015, No. 39, Vol. 3, p. 104.

[7] A. Pawłowska *Badanie relacji społecznych w organizacji z wykorzystaniem metod projekcyjnych*, Studia i Materiały, Wydział Zarządzania, Uniwersytet Warszawski (1)/2006, p.7.

[8] Ibidem (Pawłowska following A.S. Reber, *Słownik psychologii*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe Scholar, Warszawa 2000, p. 275).

2. Narcissistic personality – etiology and diagnostic criteria

Personality features have a significant impact on atmosphere in work environment. However, it is crucial to take into consideration that the difference between the function and dysfunction – between the type and the disorder of personality – lies in the degree of intensity[9]. Thus, there is no clear personality type and both personality type and personality disorder should be seen as a continuum. Hence, the literature on the subject and the psychological practice differentiate:

- personality type: self-confident; such individuals stand out from the crowd, they are leaders, stars and people who attract attention both in public and private lives[10]. They have a feeling of self-importance, are ambitious and have political talents; they are competitive, identify themselves with high-ranked people, have grandiose fantasies, self-awareness and self-esteem. The dominant domain of their lives is Me (The world is me). When some conditions are met, the co-operation with such people is usually successful.

- personality disorder: narcissistic. It is much more difficult to work with such individuals. They are concentrated on themselves, egotic, have delusions of grandeur, lack of empathy and tend to manipulate other people. They frequently achieve high social positions but are not satisfied with their lives and do not find fulfilment at work and in personal relationships[11]

Individuals with narcissistic personality have an excessive need for love, admiration and recognition[12]. The family background of such people shows that in the childhood they were not adequately treated, mirrored or reinforced as individuals with particular features and capacities. They were reinforced for their achievements and at the same time they were injured which in their adulthood resulted in a fragile self-esteem that ranged from self-devaluation to a compensating sense of superiority. Their parents used them to mirror and increase their own value as well as to fulfil their ambitions and ideals. The child's sensitivity and its will to be itself were not supported; the parents wanted their child to be something more than it actually was and on the way to meet their expectations they alternately idealized and degraded it. [13] As

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[9] J.M. Oldham., L.B. Morris, *Twój psychologiczny autoportret*, Wydawnictwo Czarna Owca, Warszawa 2009, p. 34.
[10] Ibidem, pp. 96-97.
[11] Ibidem, p.109.
[12] H.P. Röhr, *Narcyzm – zaklęte ja*, W drodze, Poznań 2012, p.6.
[13] S.M. Johnson*, Style charakteru*, Zysk i S-ka Wydawnictwo, Poznań 2012, p 70.

a result of such treatment, narcissistic personality disorders have various aspects and forms (Cf. Table 1)

The International Classification of Diseases 10th Revision (ICD-10) does not specify the criteria for the recognition of a narcissistic personality and it lists it under *Other specific personality disorders* (F60.8) together with immature and passive-aggressive personality disorders[14]. The condition for the recognition of the disorder is the fulfilment of a set of general criteria of the disorder, which may help in answering the question when the borderline between a self-confident and a narcissistic person is crossed.

The American Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM-IV) defines narcissistic personality as a pervasive pattern of grandiosity, need for admiration, and lack of empathy, beginning by early adulthood and present in a variety of contexts. This type of personality is indicated by at least five criteria presented below in Table 1.

Table 1. Criteria for narcissistic personality disorder

ICD-10 criteria	DSM-IV criteria
Fixed patterns of feeling and behaviour which as a whole clearly deviate from the culturally expected and accepted "norm",	Has a grandiose sense of self-importance (e.g., exaggerates achievements and talents, expects to be recognized as superior without commensurate achievements).
The deviation can be visible in at least two areas and may concern: cognitive processes (i.e. the way how people, things and events are perceived and interpreted; emotionality, ability to control impulses and gratification) and/or attitude to other people and interpersonal relationships,	Is preoccupied with fantasies of unlimited success, power, brilliance, beauty, or ideal love.
The deviation is reflected by the entire behaviour which is inflexible and non-adaptable – unrestricted to a single stimulus or event,	Believes that he or she is "special" and unique and can only be understood by, or should associate with, other special or high status people (or institutions).
The person suffers and/or has an undesirable influence on his/her social environment,	Requires excessive admiration
The problematic traits are stable and long-lasting. They usually appear in late childhood or adolescence and continue in adulthood.	Has a sense of entitlement, i.e., unreasonable expectations of especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with his or her expectations.
	Is interpersonally exploitative, i.e., takes advantage of others to achieve his or her own ends.
	Lacks empathy: is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings and needs of others.
	Is often envious of others or believes that others are envious of him or her.
	Shows arrogant, haughty behaviors or attitudes.

Source: Authors' research based on A. Wieczorek, B.M. Puk, *Osobowość narcystyczna*, http://psychiatria.mp.pl/ zaburzenia_osobowosci/ 74485,osobowosc-narcystyczna, (accessed: 2017.03. 23).

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[14] http://psychiatria.mp.pl/zaburzenia_osobowosci/74485,osobowosc-narcystyczna (accessed: 2017.03.28).

It is interesting that when in contact with other people, a substantial group of narcissistic individuals does not focus on themselves, does not have a sense of grandiosity and pride or inclination to manipulate although these well-hidden traits are present in their personalities[15]. Such people are frequently associated with unpleasant, egocentric artists. In fact, most of them do a lot good for people who are close to them and they pay with pain and stress for their successful efforts. They are frequently too busy proving their value or - to be more precise – denying their worthlessness to feel love, appreciation and joy that come from the contacts with other people.

The dominating emotions of narcissistic personalities are the senses of shame and envy[16]. Shame in this case is the sense of perceiving oneself as a person who acts inappropriately and is associated with weakness, ugliness and helplessness. Envy involves an internal conviction of being worse and the fear that the shortcomings may be revealed any time; consequently, a narcissistic person envies the ones who seem to be self-satisfied. Thus, the problems with self-assessment, with the ability to accept the others without assessing them and with a frank expression of feelings may be acute and may have a negative impact on relationships with other people[17].

Another typical quality of a narcissistic personality is the lack of confidence in relationships, especially the ones in which help is required[18]. This is because such a person grew up with the sense of being the best and he/she finds it difficult to ask for help. Moreover, such an individual feels cheated: tasks are required that are inadequate to his/her age and strengths and he/she has to sacrifice to meet the expectations.

3. Good practices in developing relationships with narcissist people

The importance of the development of relationships at workplace is increasing and the impact of the personalities of particular organization members is significant. As it was presented above, some qualities of narcissistic individuals may be a support for managers who are determined to create pleasant work atmosphere but some of them can be a challenge.

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[15] S.M. Johnson, *Humanizowanie narcystycznego stylu,* Jacek Santorski & Co Agencja Wydawnicza, Warszawa 1993, p.12.
[16] N. McWiliams, *Diagnoza Psychoanalityczna*, GWP, Gdańsk 2009, p.187.
[17] Ibidem, p.189.
[18] G. Francestetti, M. Gecele, J. Roubal, *Psychoterapia Gestalt w praktyce klinicznej. Od psychopatologii do estetyki kontaktu*, Harmonia Uniwersalis, Gdańsk 2016, p 776.

A theoretical analysis of a narcissistic personality that was conducted from a psychological point of view forms a starting point for the attempts to develop a catalogue of good practices used in the creation of relationships with a narcissistic individual at workplace. It seems that the suggested integration of the knowledge in psychology with managerial practices can constitute a support both to the narcissistic individuals themselves and their co-workers.

The attempt to develop a catalogue of good practices assumes a division into two groups: base practices and HR-based practices. The base practices include:

- manager's knowledge on the characteristics of narcissistic personality disorder to increase the acceptability level of the employee's activities,

- self-orientation – thinking of oneself in positive terms, noticing one's own strengths and achievements in isolation from the activities of a narcissistic individual,

- separating the sense of self-esteem from the opinion and behavior of a narcissistic individual.

This group of practices constitutes a kind of a starting point for HR practices. It seems that a successful accomplishment of practices in the area of personnel function is not possible without a proper understanding of the way a narcissistic individual functions and an adequate approach to it. Thus, it is crucial that trainings for workers and managers are conducted to show psychological and managerial aspects of the work with narcissistic individuals. It is expected that such trainings should result, firstly, in the improvement of the quality of work environment by lowering stressor levels both for narcissistic individuals and their co-workers. Secondly, the increase in employee awareness may result in a better atmosphere at workplace, which – as it was indicated in the first part of the article – leads to the growth in organizational effectiveness.

The group of good practices in developing relationships with a narcissistic individual at workplace that concerns directly the area of HR includes:

- Activities oriented at building trust with the employee by:
  a. we–oriented communication that helps remove full responsibility from the employee;
  b. mirror-oriented communication – reproducing without prejudice what we hear in order to clarify and confirm; even if we have a different point of view, it is

necessary to wait patiently with its presentation[19]; focusing on feedback with regard to subitems a and b.

- Motivation by presenting the benefits that result from actions taken.
- An ongoing assessment of the employee's satisfaction level with a balanced volume of praise with the consideration of the support in developing the employee's adequate sense of self-esteem that was mentioned above.
- Orientation towards the development of partner-like relationships, particularly through:
    a. flat organizational structure (which involves developing trust level by accepting joint responsibility for tasks).
    b. participation in the work of the team as a team member (and not a leader, due to a high responsibility level that leadership involves).
    c. the application of such resources as self-discipline and ability to restrain impulses particularly in stressful situations.
- Adequate selection of employee assessment tools:
    a. substitution of tools that assess incidentally and subjectively (e.g. a descriptive assessment or the assessment of critical events) by such objective tools as, for example, the 360 degree[20] method; an ongoing support in building employee's adequate sense of self-esteem.
    b. management by objectives approach, with a particular consideration of the sensitivity to negotiations concerning the time and range of task accomplishment and the verification methods of the effects.

The presented above attempt to provide a catalogue of good practices regarding the development of relationships with narcissistic individuals may constitute a starting point for further theoretical and empirical investigations of this issue. It seems that an interdisciplinary co-operation is the most effective way to achieve this objective. Such a catalogue may be a supporting tool for managers and ordinary employees in the creation of a pleasant atmosphere at workplace.

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[19] W.T. Behary, *Rozbroić narcyza*, GWP, Sopot 2016, p.213.
[20] following A. Ludwiczyński, *Ocenianie pracowników* [w:] H. Król., A. Ludwiczyński (red.), *Zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi. Tworzenie kapitału ludzkiego organizacji*, Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN, Warszawa 2006, s. 297: The 360° method is a complex, methodical way of collecting and applying the information on employee behavioral competencies. It consists in providing the employee and his/her superior with the feedback on how the employee is perceived by numerous subjects: direct superior, other superiors, co-workers, external and internal customers and subordinates (when superiors are subject to assessment).

Conclusions

According to recent research, the ratio of narcissistic individuals in society has been growing for several years now. In his *The Culture of Narcissism*, Christopher Lasch, an American sociologist of culture, states on the basis of clinical reports that narcissistic disorders were the most common personality disorders at the end of the 20th century[21]. In his opinion, narcissism became a social disease or even a plague in the world of politics and business. Thus, the conditions of knowledge-based economy turned the society into a holistic approach to professional life where understanding and developing the employer-employee relationship model that meets the needs of both parties seems to be crucial. However, such an approach is demanding. At the beginning, it is necessary to acquire competencies that significantly exceed professional qualifications. In return, a high quality work environment can be developed in which both the employer's and the employee's targets may be achieved. The interdisciplinary approach to HR that is suggested in the article contributes to the enrichment of the knowledge of employees and employers and helps develop a tool that supports the creation of a work environment for narcissistic individuals.

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Abstract

The article discusses the problems with the development of relationships with narcissistic individuals at workplace. The main aim is to present the impact of narcissism on relationships at workplace and to find the resources in co-workers that will positively influence the form and the development of the relationship and affect the atmosphere at work environment and the results achieved. Combining the knowledge in the areas of psychology and HRM, the authors made and attempt to create a catalogue of good practices, which may contribute to the development of a tool that would support both narcissistic individuals and their co-workers.