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TO BE OR NOT TO BE – THE ISSUES OF WORK HUMANIZATION IN PRESENT-DAY MANAGEMENT SYSTEMS

Introduction

When analyzing current achievements as regards investigations and applications related to the humanization of work as an element of organizational culture, one has to conclude that the interest in these issues both in the conceptual and pragmatic sense is insignificant.

This is difficult to understand, as in the second half of the 20th century, work humanization, both globally and in Poland, remained in the centre of interest of businesspeople, managers and employees themselves. As regards work humanization, it was typical for this period that such issues were taken into consideration as the adaptation of work conditions to the needs and abilities of employees, the adaptation of employees to the requirements of their workplace and the adaptation of employees to one another.

Consequently, a question arises, what has changed in the management systems of the 21st century, in the mentality of businesspeople, managers and employees that operations related to work humanization programs within the “modernization” of organizational cultures do not interest politicians, employers and employees themselves.

Thus, the aim of the article is to diagnose the decline in the interest in the issues of work humanization - both in the ideational and utilitarian aspects – that can be observed in present-day company management systems.

1. Functions of work humanization in company management

Two periods of development can be distinguished when analyzing the hitherto experience as regards the introduction of work humanization as an element of organizational culture to the management systems of for-profit companies, regardless of their size (either micro-, meso-, macro- or hyper-). They are: the industrial period that lasted till the end of the 20th century and the postmodern period, related with digital technology in modern management, that includes the 21st century.

In the industrial period, it was typical for management systems that the basis for the creation of organizational culture and work humanization was constituted by values, norms and symbols of work related to company traditions throughout years or even generations. Work ethos was the foundation of tradition and its symbol; it diversified industrial society into professional groups of foundry engineers, miners or electrician but, at the same time, it integrated professional groups by means of the measures of the amount of work expressed by such indicators as work efficiency.

The 21st century, often referred to as a postindustrial, postmodern or unpredictable period introduced a new stage in the development of organizational culture, and consequently, of the humanization of work in modern management systems. Organizational culture is strongly influenced by globalization processes, information and telecommunication technologies and digitalization of management systems. The dynamics of changes that are happening in the organizational field is reinforced by an incredible competition on the market, employee mobility, individualization of mass products as well as the increasing consumptionism of substantial social groups. The above listed exogenous phenomena introduce new relationships in modern management systems in the areas of decision-making processes, interpersonal relationships and communication of the type: employer – managers – employees – stakeholders. New artifacts in the organizational culture that are related to the increasing professionalism of employees constitute a moderator and regulator of the changes. In this case, the value of work as one of the main domains of work humanization is replaced by the value of knowledge, and the criteria of employee assessment are expressed by his/her creativity and innovativeness; i.e. not by the amount of the product made but by its constant upgrading.

Thus, as regards humanization of work in endogenous systems, we are witnessing now a departure from the traditional role and significance of the values and ethos of work to concentration on professionalism and perfectionism as new cultural indicators in modern management systems.

Such a trend in the cultural modernization of management systems must refer to some common work values that are treated as social capital, which changes the hitherto views on the role and significance of work humanization in company management systems.

The concept of work humanization was based on two assumption: the Marxist vision of man liberated from capitalist exploitation and the trend of *human relations* that popularized practical measures to adapt employees to company organizational systems and vice versa. Consequently, in the analysis of work humanization processes two approaches can be

distinguished: the ideological one related to the development of Marxist concepts of system changes from the point of view of employees, and an utilitarian one that focuses on practical solutions aiming at the improvement of working conditions in companies, which has an impact both on the increase of efficiency and job satisfaction on the part of employees.

The system transformation that took place in Poland at the end of the 20th century, i.e. the introduction of market economy reduced significantly the interest in work humanization, both in the ideational and practical sense. The issue was transferred from central authorities directly to company level. As a result companies were given freedom to make decisions and take steps as regards humanization of work. It is obvious that business is interested in taking measures to improve working conditions or optimize management systems on the condition of the minimization of costs and maximization of profits¹. At present, as companies operate in the conditions of global crisis, high risk and uncertainty about further market development, their activities aiming at the improvement of working conditions concentrate mainly on the pragmatic functions of work humanization and they are completely uninterested in its ideational values. As a result, it seems sound to evoke Janusz Sztumski's question whether in the 21st century the idea of work humanization is still up-to-date? ². In my opinion, the idea of work humanization, perceived as an expression of respect to employee and his/her work, is of timeless significance, irrespectively of political and economic systems and type of business. However, in present times, its ideational value has exhausted its creative potentials resulting from the modernization of economies, technologies and management systems that has been happening since the end of the 20th century.

Significant changes in the interpretation of work humanization on a macro-structural level were influenced by the development of the social structure from industrial society, "dirty" technologies, hard and dangerous working conditions and bureaucratic management systems to information society, "clean" technologies, efficient organization and adhocratic management systems. In many cases, the new social scenery solved negative aspects concerning work issues that resulted from traditional requirements of work humanization.

Nevertheless, the introduction of new forms of employment, flexitime, IT and telecommunication technologies, the increasing unemployment and the disruption of the balance between work and personal life result in new problems and hazards to employees.

¹ Cf. K. Doktor, *Przedsiębiorstwo* [in:] S. Banaszak, K. Doktor (ed.), *Problemy socjologii gospodarki*, Wydawnictwo Wyższej Szkoły Komunikacji i Zarządzania, Poznań 2008, pp. 333-335.

² J. Sztumski, *Czy idea humanizacji pracy jest nadal aktualna* [in:] F. Byłok, J. Kołodziejczyk (ed.), *Humanizacja w procesie zarządzania*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Częstochowskiej, Częstochowa 2010, pp. 32-37.

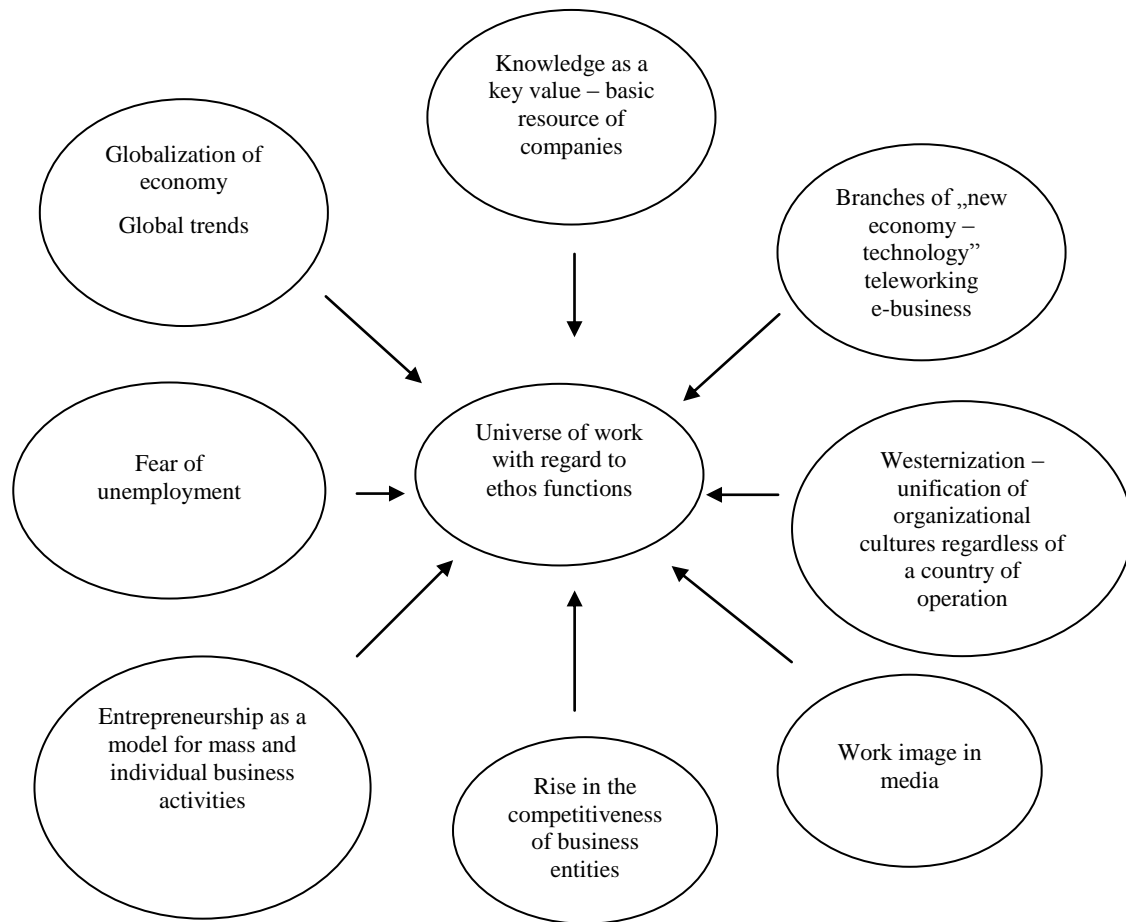
Consequently, when assessing his/her position in company organizational structure, employee refers to a subjective feeling of his/her role and significance in the processes of work and management. That is why – using the concepts of McGregor and R.Likert – I suggest that pragmatic or utilitarian functions of work humanization should be applied with the reference to employee's subjective assessment of a management system, through his/her personal emotions, feelings of being a subject or object, creative or available, satisfied or dissatisfied.

2. Social surrounding of a 21st century company versus humanization of work.

Another issue to be considered is the problem of contextual conditions for work humanization that are related to the closer and further company surrounding – to domestic and global trends in intensifying, evolving, limiting or closing down humanization work projects that emphasize functions of the work ethos. The value of work has to be redefined, too. Should attention be paid to its utilitarian values regarding the amount and efficiency of work, or rather should we still focus on the ideational, ethical and moral values of work as well as the unique mission that humanization of work exposes?

Such issues must be taken into consideration as for organizations the beginning of the third millennium is expected to be a period of chaos, policy of constant change, deregulation of norms and cultural standards and the increasingly shorter life cycles of organizations and institutions. The universal significance of the value of work in its ethos function will be influenced by an increasing number of variables that will be considered as new elements of organizational culture and that will reflect new global trends in this area. It may be predicted that new elements of cultural space in the long term will decide on further significance of the ethos functions of work.

Fig.1. New elements of cultural space with the consideration of the value of work as the universe of work humanization



Source: Author's elaboration

Globalization of economy together with the promotion of new financial and banking systems disseminates new methods of management of multinational and multicultural economic organizations. It also promotes its own ideas concerning the values of work and its ethos functions. Most frequently, they have the form of corporate procedures expressed by the ethics that staff is obliged to follow. In this case, spontaneity, rituals and professional mission that were typical for the work ethos become replaced by a formalized code of conduct which is a hidden form of working regulations. As a result, mega-companies, multinational corporations – within the development of globalization – do not promote any work ethos functions to be introduced to the management systems of peripheral or semi-peripheral centers. This is proved by a global decrease of the significance of work humanization.

Knowledge as a basic company resource is opposed to such traditional resources as capital, staff, manufacturing facilities and work. The inexhaustibility of knowledge and science is a particular advantage when compared to the limited potentials of the hitherto resources. Company intellectual capital gradually takes over the functions of the ethos of knowledge and science, and consequently supersedes the ethos character of work as a traditional company resource.

Branches of „new economy – technology” determine the modernity of an economic system. Integrated management systems that are based on network solutions, including computerization and internetization, enable prompt reactions to demand signals from consumer markets in any part of the world. This is exemplified by such virtual business as e-commerce, business-2-business, tele-work, etc. The work in such branches is individualized in character; however, social contacts occur rather in the virtual and not real sphere. This results in an increasing staff isolation in the cultural space and social environment of work. Work loses its social character and becomes merely a physical activity.

Westernization of organizational cultures and management systems is related with standardization, normalization and predictability of work operations irrespectively of the country or continent where the company operates. It is a typical situation for western companies, especially the American ones, which are expanding strongly on regional markets. It is visible in management systems where an important role is played by the knowledge of English, competitiveness of ideas and the pace of their implementation, interpersonal relations as well as the opportunities of quick career paths. A negative effect of westernization is that employees perform their work in the exactly the same way as they were trained. The goal is to gain a full control over the staff, to make the employees controllable and thanks to the increasingly advanced technologies to reduce their work to a series of mechanical impulses. This may be the origin of the return of the interest in the ideational role of work humanization.

The significance of the image of work in media can be expressed by a saying from the world of politics that *you do not exist if you do not appear in media*. The saying characterizes the role media as a creative and at the same destructive factor in the present-day world. When analyzing the significance of media in promoting human work, one should specify the media that are concerned with the issues of work – press, radio, TV, the Internet, etc. One should consider what images, attitudes and situations related to work are discussed there and with what frequency. A general analysis indicates that work is not a media category, it comes last as far as the interest of media is concerned. The frequency of

information about work is coincidental and interventionist in character; as a rule it refers to pathological phenomena in work environment, including demonstrations, strikes and riots related to them. Media – regardless of their type – almost never present the autotelic values related to work, i.e. its ethos functions. The issues of work are treated instrumentally in media; their appearance is influenced by representatives of the authorities, politicians or lobbyists, who want to reinforce their argumentations “for” or “against” with “images of work”. The other type of media message as regards work refers to its spectacularity, where it is treated as cultural folklore related to the increasing marginalization of industrial work, which was suitably referred to by D. MacCannell as work on stage³. Here work becomes a tourist attraction where ethnographic and ethic factors increase the impression that work is a relic of the industrial era. Thus, with the help of media or spectacular events, work with its ethos functions is moved from the central values that organize social activities to an occasional cultural product that determines the end of industrial society.

The rise in the competitiveness of economic entities is caused by the increasing number and role of small-business as well as the increasingly shorter life cycle of organizations, products and services, which requires constant improvement of methods of work, quality improvement and a search for novelties. Consequently, work process is intensified and its pace forces adequate behavior on the part of employees resulting in effort that frequently exceeds human ability. Company competitiveness is closely correlated with staff competition, which is basically powered by the threat of unemployment. This extends the area of the increasing significance of individualism in company organizational culture⁴. This phenomenon, through deregulation or asymmetry of social bonds in professional groups, limits sociocentric and ethos oriented behavior for the sake of an increased egocentric attitude in which work ethos often has a subjective dimension. It becomes an antinomy of work ethos.

Entrepreneurship treated as model of business operations is a correlate of a liberal state policy and an increasing individualism in social activities. On philosophical level, it refers to the idea of American Dream, according to which any employee can become a businessperson and creator of his/her work ethos on the condition of constant professionalization of skills. Thus, the realization of one's own objectives and company strategy may have both an egocentric and sociocentric dimension when considering individual and collective benefits, as well as negative and positive influence on the creation of the work

³ MacCannell D., *Turysta. Nowa teoria klasy próżniaczej*, Warszawa 2002, p. 56.

⁴ Walczak-Duraj D., *Humanizowanie pracy w okresach kryzysowych* [in:] F. Byłok, J. Kołodziejczyk (ed.), *Humanizacja w procesach zarządzania*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Częstochowskiej 2010, pp. 82-83.

ethos stereotype of entrepreneurial operations in the minds of people in closer and further surrounding⁵. In Poland, the ethos functions of entrepreneurship in its macro state are *in statu nascendi* due to the influence of a 40-year period of state economy that hampered the creation of entrepreneurship in Polish society. The lack of own examples as well as cultural factors indicates that the creation of ethos functions will require several years or even generations.

Fear of unemployment – instrumentalisation of work. At the end of the 20th century the transformation of Polish economy introduced elements of market economy, the necessity to restructure main industries and privatization that shook the hitherto certainty of employment. Redundancies appeared and employment depended on market demand. The turn of the centuries witnessed a dramatic rise in unemployment that in peripheral parts of the country accounted for 40%. Vacancies constituted a particular value for employees. Dishonest employers took advantage of the situation and applied both hidden and open forms of exploitation by extending working time, minimizing salaries, offering poor work conditions and a disrespectful attitude to staff. This led to the objectification of work; the ethos functions of work were replaced by its alienation. It is not a specifically Polish phenomenon as the analysis of the world economic indicators shows that the third millennium will face trends of global increase in unemployment. The forecasts are justified by a dynamic growth in technologies that are capital-consuming, which is particularly visible in telecommunication and computer industries and by the departure from analogous systems to network systems in integrated company management systems. The demand for knowledge results in the creation of many new job places but this does not compensate the disappearance of numerous archaic jobs.

The presented above parameters of new configuration that take place in the organization cultural sphere show clearly that traditional social programs concerning work humanization will gradually disappear. This will happen in line with the decreasing demand for a quantitative character of work that was typical for an employee in the old economy, industrial technology and bureaucratic system of management.

3. Modern management of the effects of work humanization

It is just to say that modern systems of company management, regardless of the size of business (whether small, medium sized or big), when applying new telecommunication and

⁵ Haber L. H., *Przedsiębiorczość w zarządzaniu* [in:] L. H. Haber (ed.), *Komunikowanie i zarządzanie w społeczeństwie informacyjnym*, Nomos 2011, pp. 236-237.

computer technologies, often put into practice the 20th century requirements of work humanization concentrating on such factors as creativity, innovativeness, independence, workers' initiative, etc.

Currently, to the most significant management systems that are often applied in business belong: Benchmarking, oriented at the analysis of competitive companies; Reengineering, which exposes the significance of a customer; Outsourcing, which develops the skills of cooperation with other companies; Lean Management, which constantly analyzes and rationalizes its own organizational structures; Time-based Management, which particularly emphasizes the role of time and the necessity to meet the deadlines of tasks, customer orders and the quality of services; and Sustainability Management, which assumes a permanent and continuous company development, regardless of the parameters of macro-environment, which results in the strengthening of its position on the competitive market. Company operations may be supplemented by network solutions related to the digitalization of management systems with the use of various software programs. The one that is often used is CRM (Customer Relationship Management), which makes it possible to search necessary data, it improves the quality of customer service, effectively manages projects and finances and, which is of great importance, significantly facilitates employee communication. Moreover, it is simple to use. Such solutions are applied both by big corporations and by small and medium-sized business. The program is designed for employees and managers. It helps schedule the tasks and, consequently, this is done as quickly as possible with a high level of quality. Visualization enables the managers to monitor processes. Thanks to a computerized circulation of information, the staff has an easy access to all information as regards a particular decision-making process and is made fully aware of the important company issues and its internal and external policies.

The introduction of modern management systems and digitalization create objective prerequisites for an employee to be treated as a subject in company organizational environment. The traditional requirements of work humanization as regards working conditions are met in a natural way by:

- the lack of close supervision, which makes it possible for an employee to make decisions as regards his/her own workplace,
- the variability of work, which requires constant improvement of qualifications and skills in line with technological innovations,

- fair conditions of work, being the result of continuous adjustment of technical, organizational, economical and social aspects of work to employee ambitions and needs,
- the limitation of monotony at work thanks to multitasking, frequent changes at work, as well as the introduction of the elements of initiative and independence as far the work methodology is concerned.

When presenting the relations between the utilitarian function of work humanization and modern management systems, the author made an attempt to present changes to traditional management that provide conditions and opportunities for the emergence of employee subjectiveness and creativity. However, one must take into consideration that many new solutions in the field of management result in the feeling of instrumentality which is often connected with alienation. Thus, a methodological assumption was made that the employee perception of being a subject or object, of creativity and availability, of the feelings of satisfaction and dissatisfaction in work environment should be investigated through employee's subjective assessment and perception of his/her role and position in company organizational space.

The postindustrial period had its own model of employee and, similarly, the new type of society, new technologies and principles of management and organization create the personality of a "new" employee that is a representative of information society. The formation of the new employee model is particularly influenced by:

- the individualization of identity, which is confirmed by P. Drucker's explanation of *self-management* – employee him/herself determines the objectives and makes decisions as regards their realization, this also refers to work environment,
- consumptionism as a value related to new axiological system – the style of living, where the point is not in satisfying one's needs but having new and attractive, especially top shelf products – it is not important *to be*, but *to have*; the prestige of work is determined by possessing and purchasing consumer goods⁶,
- entrepreneurship, innovativeness and creativity result from constant rivalry, competition and facilitation, which results in workaholics that aims at promotion, career and job stability in uncertain times,
- the acceptance of risk – uncertainty of employment, inconstancy, vertical and horizontal mobility and territorial displacement; as U. Beck put it, the acceptance of the *world*

⁶ Walczak-Duraj D., *Humanizowanie pracy w okresach kryzysowych* [in:] F. Byłok, J. Kołodziejczyk red.), *Humanizacja w procesach zarządzania*, Wydawnictwo Politechniki Częstochowskiej 2010, p. 17.

*risk society*⁷ has appeared in social awareness; it is important to plan alternative solutions as regards employment prior to the moment of dismissal,

- technological professionalism related to the permanent improvement of one's both vocational and intellectual skills, especially reaching the perfection in IT, software and multimedia facilities; multispecialization and efficiency are important professional factors,
- marketing skills in promoting oneself and one's own abilities to function on the competitive labor market; the consideration of assets resulting from the hitherto professional experience,
- axiological relativism visible in the alteration of value systems, e.g. the disappearance of values related to work ethos or the collectivity of operation for the sake of the values of an individual that are influenced by the closest surrounding, pressure and peer groups and/or media indoctrination; such a state is the result of the promotion of a modernist order and style of life in social and employee activities.

The elements listed above distinguish clearly the traditional features of the employee of the industrial period from the ones of the current model of a *new employee*. In the first case, there is a constant adaptation of work conditions to the needs of employees through work humanization, while in the latter the employee himself/herself creates working conditions and promotes changes in work systems. This also results from the fact that there are opportunities to start one's own business, where employees become employers. For a new employee it is important how he/she assesses his/her role and significance in company in such categories as subject – object, creativity – availability, satisfaction – dissatisfaction and philosophical projects related to the ideational function of work humanization are negligible.

Conclusion

Referring to the title *To be or not to be...*, I think that humanization of work as a definite intellectual idea has exhausted its creative and utilitarian potentials to be applied in current management systems in the 21st century. This is due to the following factors:

⁷ Beck U., *Spoleczeństwo Ryzyka*, Scholar, Warszawa 2002, p. 348.

- the evolution of social structures from an industrial society to information society, which introduces a new value to work relationship by means of new job categories, new forms of employment, flexitime, new work axiology, etc.,
- neoliberal policy of the state that reduces its social functions and delegates them to the employer-employee level, humanization of work is not within the responsibility of state institutions,
- changes in work technology – a shift from industrial technology, machine-related and “dirty” work, to “clean” IT that provides good working conditions both for individual and group work as well as for the whole company staff,
- the increasing globalization in the dissemination of modern management systems that focus on competition, intensive search for customers, wholesale clients and/or new contractors; in the systems a crucial role is played by ordinary employees and, consequently, they are offered conditions favorable for innovativeness, entrepreneurship and self-realization; in extreme cases it could be classified as “intellectual exploitation” of an employee,
- „new” quality of an employee in information society as compared to the employee of industrial era; this is due to the changes in the character of work itself, the accepted organization of work in terms of collective or individual, the move from “dirty” work conditions to “clean” telecommunication and computer technologies and/or the evolution of value from “work ethos” to “the ethos of knowledge”.

The segmentation of changes that are occurring in the 21st century, which is related to the globalization of company environment, modern management systems and employee mentality, indicates that the 20th century postulates of work humanization have been largely put into practice. This explains the fact, which was mentioned at the beginning of the paper, of the lack of interest of scientists and practitioners of management in the further work on ideational projects of work humanization within the improvement of company organizational culture.

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Abstract

The article aims at the presentation of a new attitude to work humanization as a practical aspect of organizational culture. Its main thesis is that the 20th century programs of work humanization that included the philosophies of Marxism and HR utilitarianism, have exhausted their conceptual potentials with the appearance of modern management systems. By introducing innovations, the new systems put into practice the main assumptions of work humanization: adaptation of working conditions to the needs of man, adaptation of man to working conditions and/or adaptation of man to man in work environment. Hence the author's suggestion that the programs of work humanization should be replaced by subjective emotions of employees regarding their assessment of their position in company management system. The subjective indicators of staff position are the following: subject – object, creativity – availability, satisfaction – dissatisfaction. It was assumed that this constitutes new quality of work humanization in company organizational culture.