Psychological Problems of Polish Organizations in Transition

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is identification of psychological problems, diagnosis of workers´ ideas and initiatives aimed at solving those problems, and diagnosis of readiness of workers to change. There is an assumption that organizational behaviour is multilevel, involves multiple variables, and requires multivariate measurement. In this paper I ask questions about the level of different psychosocial and emotional dimensions, the main problems experienced by organization members, and the greatest barriers in the process of change. I also examine what should be done to solve existing problems.

I constructed and used the Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (OAQ) that is composed of 15 sections and 190 questions covering different sectors of organizational functioning. The OAQ was completed by 432 workers from organizations in the highly industrialised Upper Silesia region of Poland.

On the basis of OAQ, interviews and discussions with employees I divided the results into positive and negative factors. Positive factors are those that can be treated as opportunities; employees' emotional engagement and self-perceptions of competence and ambition. Negative factors were psychological barriers in the process of organizational transition; functioning in area of HRM that badly need to be changed. In conclusion I proposed some solutions in the area of Human Resources, management trust and workers' self- assessment.

Purpose

The purpose of this paper is to: a) present the results of my research on the psycho-emotional status of companies in the process of transition and change; b) describe psychological, emotional and social factors influencing workers' behaviour measured on psychosocial and emotional dimensions; and c) propose practical solutions of psycho-social and psycho-emotional problems to organizations.

Introduction

Transformation changes in my country require a completely new type of manager: a shift from individual exertion of power towards more participative and autonomous systems of influence is requested. The new transformational manager (Bass, 1998) represents "feminine" and positive values. The new manager is cooperative, flexible, open, warm, and facilitates personal and organizational efficacy, individual growth and development as well as open learning, delegation and participation processes and teamwork (Argyris, 1976; Deci, 1975; DeCharms, 1968; Hollander, 1986; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). According to these assumptions, the human capital manager should represent a pragmatic and effective attitude which helps to create conditions and an organizational environment enabling effective work. Development of such an environment is a core task of human capital management. "*Primum non nocere"* is

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medicine's first commandment. The first commandment of human capital management is "*not to waste".* Not to waste means - give it a chance, make it possible. Use of human capital and human capabilities has two aspects: firstly, traits and characteristics of people; secondly, external circumstances, conditions and the world surroundings. Both sides make the "fulfilment of human capital" possible. According to an optimistic and humanistic point of view, human resources management could be and should be a positive mission (a vocation similar to those of doctors or teachers). A new discipline is born, a discipline inspired by the belief that human beings should be masters of their own lives, not only their victims. Positive leadership behaviour is understood as a behaviour which allows each member self-management, autonomy and independence in formalised organizational life.

I'd like to present my research and practical work in three big Polish government owned organizations – electro-energetic, administration and university. There are problems changing organizational culture, workers and managers' attitudes in these kinds of organizations. In today's climate of globalisation and integration**,** knowledge based organizations demand new organizational behaviours based on decentralisation and a federal structure. Effectiveness of knowledge organization depends on its openness for human potential and change as well as on individual self-management.

I question, especially in government owned organizations, if we are ready to develop new forms of organization based on delegation, federation and knowledge. Are we able to develop new structures like project teams and new leadership behaviours? My research aims to:

- Identify psychosocial problems ("soft" problems generally are of psychological nature – negative and positive attitudes of workers or groups in organization, workers expectations, modes of behaviour patterns, typical experiences, so called organizational climate e.g., mutual sympathy, discipline, openness of communication etc);
- Examine workers´ ideas and initiatives aimed at problem solving;
- Diagnose the readiness of workers´ to change.

In this work I make the following assumptions:

- Organizational behaviour is multilevel and involves multiple variables; therefore the measurement of change must be multilevel and multivariate;
- Comparative assessment of change requires a standardised package of instruments;
- An assessment package should have some underlying theoretical model of organizational functioning. Here it is based on the conception that a great deal of behaviour in organizations is determined by the conscious choices of individuals based on their perceptions of the consequences of their behaviour and within the constraints provided by existing structures, technologies, or human processes.

Method

I constructed and used the Organizational Assessment Questionnaire (OAQ) and this was completed by 392 workers. In addition, I conducted individual interviews with 67 workers on the problems of their organizations and undertook group analysis with eight groups of workers looking at organizational problems.

OAQ

The OAQ is a large instrument used to diagnose different organizational aspects on the basis of employees´ perceptions. Construction of the OAQ was based on the assumption that behaviour of workers is based on their ability to make conscious choices. The OAQ consists of ten standardised question modules plus one module of open questions. There are 15 parts to the questionnaire and 190 questions covering different areas of organizational functioning. These are:

- 28 items addressing general employee attitudes such as job satisfaction, intention to turnover, intrinsic motivation, and performance outcomes;
- 14 items addressing different kinds of employees' training and development;

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- 46 items assessing employees' orientation and perceptions of job facets and outcomes**.** It also scrutinises employee beliefs that especially good or poor performance will lead to an increase or a decrease in the extent to which those facets are present in their jobs;
- 2 items assessing employees' perceptions of the characteristics of the task performed as a part of their job;
- 24 items assessing work groups in organizations with a primary focus on describing how the work group functions, its process, the characteristics of its members and their behaviour and its effectiveness;
- 16 items examining the way in which employees' supervisors are perceived. Description of competence, style and general leadership behaviour are obtained;
- 6 items assesses the extent employees feel they can and should influence decisions made in the operation of the organization;
- 16 items assessing employees' attitudes towards changes in organization, future of the organization, possible threats and challenges;
- 16 items assessing employees' attitudes about their life in general and their reactions to their job within a global framework; and
- open questions dealing with problems, difficulties, emotions, opinions of employees' not mentioned in the modules above.

In addition to the questionnaire I interviewed a number of employees.

Individual interviews

Sixty-seven workers were asked the following questions about problems within their organizations:

- What do you like in your organization?
- What is the main strength of your organization?
- What is in your organization you disagree with?
- Describe the system of motivation in your organization.
- What is the process of information like? Is it effective? What are the main barriers?
- What is the basis of the most common conflicts in your organization?
- What are the most important problems in your organization now?
- What should be done or change immediately?

Finally, I undertook some group level discussions with employees.

Group analysis

I discussed organizational problems with eight groups of employees. I used a method of "metaplan" and Lewin's concept of "Force Field Analysis" to stimulate discussion about existing problems within the organizations and to find some solutions. Each of the groups chose one problem and worked on a solution for this problem. The most popular was the problem of motivation and communication in the organization.

The typical arrangement of two of the above-mentioned categories was:

Category (a) Assessment

Scale	*Number of answers*
1	1□
2	1□
3	2□□
4	2□□
5	5□□□□□
6	10□□□□□□□□□□
7	9□□□□□□□□□

Category (b) Assessment

Scale	*Number of answers*
1	5□□□□□
2	3□□□
3	6□□□□□□
4	5□□□□□
5	4□□□□
6	6□□□□□□
7	4□□□□

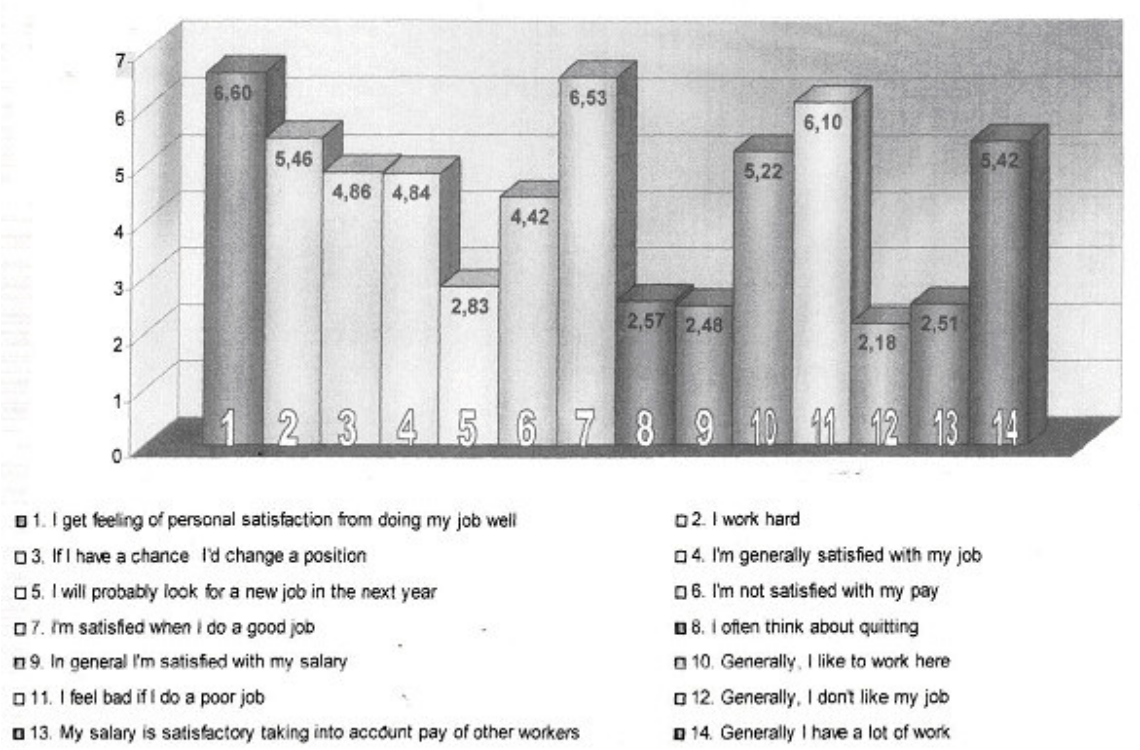
In the process of analysis I found three groups of items that I called:

- Consistent positive – employees are generally consistent and answer “I agree” or “I fully agree”;
- Consistent negative – employees are generally consistent and answer “I disagree’ or “I fully disagree”
- Divergent, in conflict – there is a high variance in the answers of employees and this probably means that employees vary in their opinions and attitudes.

Results

The following table describes the general attitudes employees express towards their work.

Table 1. A. General attitudes toward my work.



Employees agree that they get a feeling of personal satisfaction from doing their job well; they are satisfied when they do a good job and that they feel bad when doing a poor job. Employees disagree that they often think about quitting, that they are satisfied of their pay and that they generally do not like their job.

General opinions about organization and its members. Employees agree that their managers inform them poorly about their plans, that there is nepotism in hiring new workers,

that employees working badly should be fired. Further, employees feel there is no adequacy between employment and the needs of organizational units. Employees disagree that they do not understand about organizational problems.

Opinions about training and development. Employees agree that the access to training in organization is unjust and unfair. They disagree that employees are systematically trained, that if they wish they can take part in training, and that they do not care about training.

Opinion about the importance of different elements of the work. Employees agree that each element of work is important - the benefits, respect of co-workers, amount of pay, amount of freedom, chances for training, friendliness of people, chances to do something new and worthwhile doing, security.

Opinion of satisfaction of different elements of the work. Employees agree that there is friendliness among people they work with, that they receive respect from their co-workers and that they experience good social relations at work.

Likeliness that there will be an effect when they perform well. Employees agree that they will feel personally better, that they will develop their skills and abilities, and that they feel they have accomplished something worthwhile doing. Employees disagree that they will get a bonus or increased pay, that their feeling of security and safeness is enhanced, that they will get a promotion, that they will have much more freedom.

Likeliness that there will be an effect when they perform poorly. Employees agree that they will get no increased pay, that they will feel badly and they will feel lacking in competences.

Opinion about work tasks. Employees agree that they usually can predict what others expect of them in their job, that to do their job well is important for them, and that they have enough skills to do their job well.

Opinion about the work group. Employees agree that they look forward to being with their work group each day. Employees disagree that people they work with do not respect others, that there are constant quarrels in their work group, and that they cannot trust their peers.

Opinion about the immediate supervisor. Employees agree that their supervisor maintains high standards of performance, that he demands that subordinates deliver high quality work.

Changes in the organization. Employees agree that changes seem to create more problems then they solve, that changes should be connected with payment and motivation systems, that the information system about changes is wrong, that the system of appraisal and promotion should be changed (see Table 2, overleaf).

There is a *divergence* of employees' opinion that:

- If I have a chance I would change my position in the organization;
- Managers are professionally poorly prepared for their managerial work;
- There are chances of doing something really worthwhile doing;
- Typical in my job is the lack of challenges to show my abilities and skills;
- My supervisor helps me to solve problems;
- My supervisor is very good in his work;
- My supervisor has respect for his/her workers;
- My supervisor deals and communicates well with subordinates;
- My supervisor is behaving like a partner;
- My supervisor is not interested of the opinion of other people;
- I have a lot of say over decisions which are made;
- I feel wasted in my work.

The next section looks at the changes in organizations.

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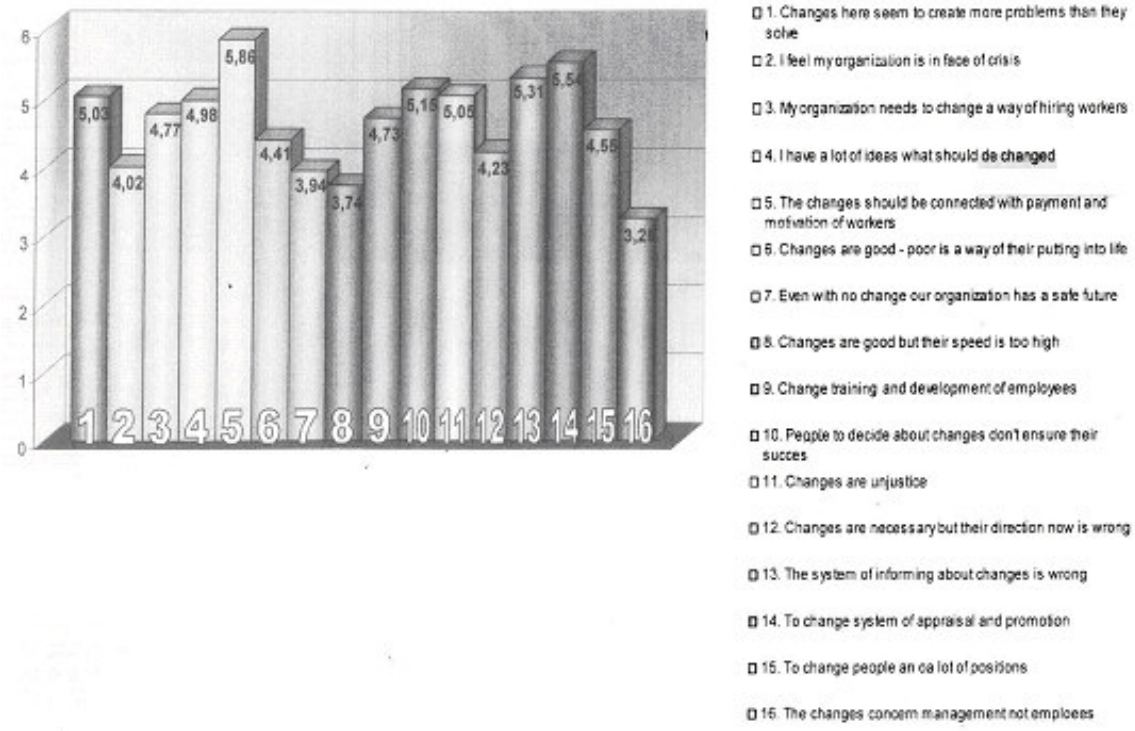
Table 2. N. Changes in my organization.



Employees think that the following is *true:*

- I get a feeling of personal satisfaction from doing my job well (6.60);
- I feel very good if I do my job well (6.53);
- I feel bad when I do a poor job (6.10);
- Likeness that I'll feel satisfaction for a well done job (5.91); and
- I know what others expect me to do on my job (5.98).

Employees think that the following is *false*:

- I do not care about training (1.65);
- Training is systematic (2.81);
- Able to take part in different trainings organised by the organization (2.79);
- Likelihood that I will get a bonus or pay increase for a well done job (2.07);
- Likelihood that I will be promoted for a well done job (2.08);
- The amount of money depends on the work I have done (1.96);
- I have no skills or education to do my job well (1.57);
- There are conflicts in my work group (2.11); and
- Employees are informed well (2.15).

The next section looks at employees' opinions.

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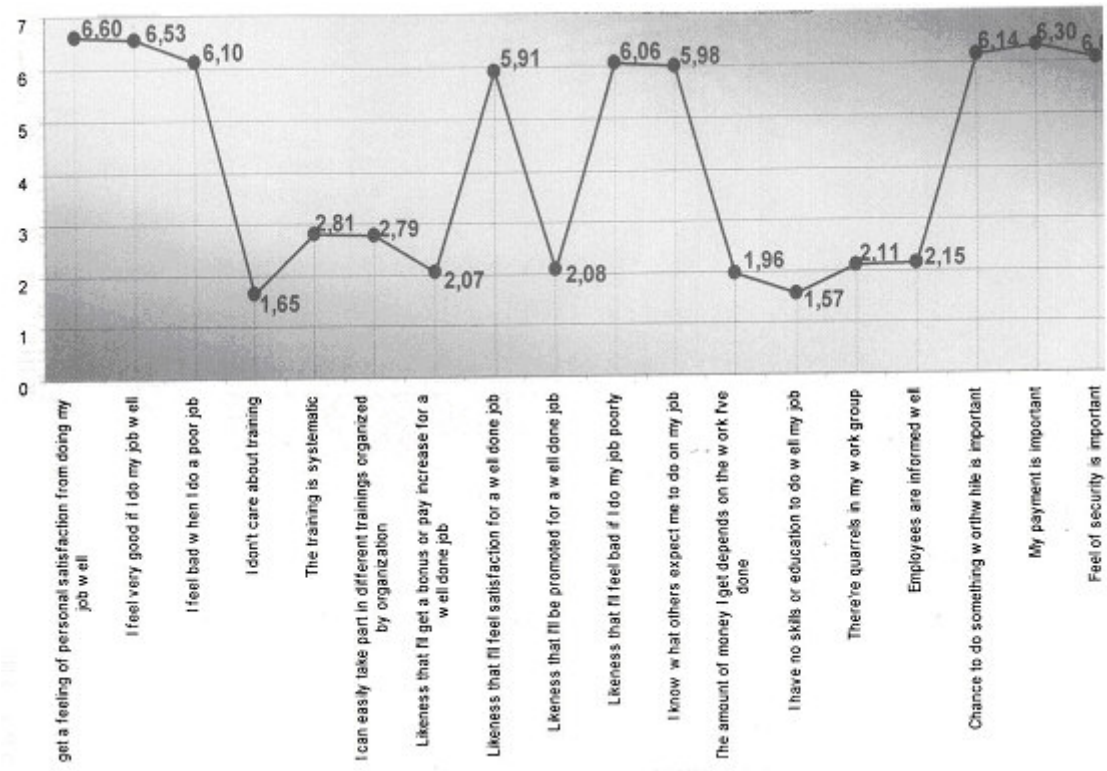
Table 3.



Discussion and Conclusions

On the basis of the OAQ, interviews and discussions with employees, I divided the results in two groups: positive factors which can be treated as opportunities and negative factors which are the barriers for Polish enterprises in the process of transition.

The negative factors were:

- It is possible that workers do not realise that the situation badly needs to be changed;
- There is a low level of human resources management, lack of a good motivation system and lack of effective systems of appraisal and recruitment;
- Good communication and information systems are lacking;
- There are expectancies and habits that someone will do something for me;
- There are divergences in the assessment of managers and in the opinion of employees;
- There is a perception that managers have no managerial competencies; and
- There are deficiencies in systematic training and development of employees.

The positive factors were:

- Employees expect changes in the area of HRM, the motivational system, payment, assessment and recruitment and selection;
- Employees expect that the change process be just, based on effective information and done by competent people;
- Employees are emotionally engaged in organizational change; and
- Employees' self assessment of their resources is high – workers perceive themselves as competent and ambitious**.**

It is possible to organise these results of this study into three areas: a) Trust; employees do not fully trust their supervisors; b) Self Assessment; employees perceive themselves as competent and motivated; and c) Social Resources; employees perceive their work groups as important resource in the organization.

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We can observe the "vicious circle" of problems in large, government owned organizations (e.g., electro-energetic, administration and university) in Poland suggesting that there is a problem changing organizational culture and attitudes of workers and managers. A sequence of problems occurs which leads back to the original problems. There is a kind of blindness of employees: suggesting they feel "this does not refer to me" which is combined with a high self-esteem. Additionally, there are expectations that "someone do something for me" and that managers are responsible for everything.

Simultaneously**,** there is a lack of good HRM in these organizations that triggers incorrect managerial activities as they are not professionally prepared. This helps to maintain the "vicious circle".

In the face of the challenges of the global and European market this vicious circle should be broken. But, how do we break a vicious circle? Based on of my research, some practical interventions were undertaken in the three organizations. These interventions were executed in the form of workshops, lectures, HRM projects, and individual consultations. This work aimed to develop better information systems as well as improved work motivation and human resources management, advanced managerial competences and enhanced trust in top management.

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