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The Values of Employment from the Perspective of the Elderly

Wartości wpływające z wykonywania pracy z perspektywy osób starszych

Introduction

As a result of various transformation processes, Europeanization and globalization, Poland has experienced considerable changes over the last thirty years which may be observed, among other things, in the changing hierarchy of values which are considered important, including changes in the value of work, vision of freedom, happiness, social relations or knowledge, which is the basic factor of development. From the perspective of the considerations referred to herein, a clear enunciation of the values of work for the elderly who have finished their professional activity is of particular importance. The years of their activity refer mostly to several decades of professional stability and low appreciability of social, economic and cultural changes, as well as several

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years of transformational experiences affecting employment in the labour market, professional stability/instability, etc., and, in consequence, individual experience of the value of work itself and the values resulting from them.

From the perspective of human life activity, the period of late adulthood is most frequently perceived as a period of withdrawing from professional activity and redefining one's own life. During this period, the elderly experience a shift from instrumental activity, which was thus far professional work that satisfied their need for recognition, usefulness, independence, and safety, and gave benefits and satisfaction, to an expressive activity undertaken for pleasure, the root of which is to satisfy needs and desires. Moreover, during this period of life, every person poses questions about the meaning of human existence (which gets intensified with retirement).

Work, regardless of what semantic value is assigned to it, affects a field of activity which is extremely important for a human being; for instance, physical, cognitive, emotional and social activities which, in consequence, give human life a certain meaning and set its goals in this area for several decades. With regard to the elderly, it has a special value in determining the meaning of life. Therefore, work is an essential element of life for elderly people. Despite ending their professional activity and retiring, work is their basic activity, and makes it possible to satisfy needs and contributes to human development in various areas.

The values resulting from work for older people who have been enucleated in this article are the result of research conducted by me since 2012 among older people living in southern Poland. The main objective of the research, which was formulated for the needs of the presented analysis was to identify, isolate and describe values resulting from the work for the elderly. The main problem took the form of a question: *What are the main values that result from work – in the perception of older people?* The research used the method of secondary data analysis.

Work is still regarded as meaningful and shapes attitudes towards life that activate various values resulting from its performance in everyday life and constitutes the basis for the considerations presented herein.

Human work

Living in a world of change and the accompanying processes imposes a way in which work is perceived. More and more people consider it through the

prism of economic values and differences, as well as stability and insecurity, which is a result of the fact that in the world of “permanent changes,” work is no longer regarded as a “job for a lifetime.” “Employees with a portfolio” are becoming more and more visible on the market, i.e. those who have a range of professional skills and recommendations from previous employers, which are necessary when changing the place of employment. This situation generates fear, as it may lead to employment and dismissal from work of individuals by employers, and anxiety experienced by employees resulting from job insecurity (Giddens 2008, p. 433–437) may result in a number of negative consequences in terms of the value and meaning of work, such as reliable work demotivation, intentional indolence in creative behaviour, ruthless competition for keeping one’s position, no ties, lack of relationships between employees, etc. The changes characteristic of modern times are roughly outlined, and cause different (adaptive, stable) thinking about one’s work, place and relationships, and about the working man.

Work understood as “an activity that a human being needs to undertake in order to create something (...), which (1) is directly necessary to satisfy one or more human needs (...); and (2) can be exchanged for other «products» of the same kind which were produced in similar conditions,” (Guichard, 2016, p. 16) is necessary for humans. It is the basis for their evaluation and the value that generates all other values. It guarantees both social usefulness and material security, provides the conditions necessary for survival, and makes it possible for humans to be important, significant, responsible, recognized, etc. Such a vision is connected with understanding conducted work as “decent,” i.e. that “is productive, provides decent income, ensures safety in the workplace and social protection for the employee and their family, offers personal development and social integration, and guarantees employees the freedom of expression, free choice of trade union organizations and participation in making decisions affecting their lives, as well as provides both equal opportunities and treatment for all women and men.” (Guichard, 2016, p. 15) A number of values included in the understanding of decent work has become the basis for exploring this aspect in relation to the research on the importance of work for the elderly conducted thus far. (Pikuła 2016, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2017, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c) This research, the conclusions of which I present herein, was conducted among retired individuals in Poland and Canada – among the Polish-Canadian community. For the purposes of this paper, the most important values coming

from work and their understanding and characteristics from the perspective of older people are presented on the basis of these results. For the elderly, the values regarding work are above all: meaning of life, responsibility, loyalty, trust, education and development.

Values coming from work

For the elderly, work is an important aspect of life that makes it possible to satisfy their needs, including activity, social functioning, a sense of usefulness, belonging, etc. Therefore, regardless of whether an individual is professionally active or retired, work is their basic activity, which satisfies their needs and contributes to their development in various areas. The conviction that using one's potential, predispositions, as well as professional and interdisciplinary skills while undertaking specific work can lead to happiness, professional satisfaction and fulfillment, is an important factor for self-fulfillment.

Meaning of life

Giving meaning to existence, reflecting upon it, recalling one's own successes, achievements and failures, and evaluating life are especially characteristic of the period of old age, which results from "the system of personal meanings created around recognized values, set goals and fulfilled individual tasks." (Oleś, 2000, p. 228) The meaning of life understood as a system of judgments, more or less conscious ideas, which refers to perspective life tasks carried out by individuals materializes in a specific structure of goals, values and possibility of their implementation. Obuchowski distinguishes three types of life goals: general and long-term, specific, and included in the action (Obuchowski, 1999). According to V.E. Frankl, a human being is a creature that can fight for recognized values and meaning of existence, which means that people, regardless of their age, desire to discover and give substance to the surrounding world that is worth being personally accepted. Therefore, they are focused and involved in implementing goals that are related to recognized values.

Work, regardless what semantic value is assigned to it, affects an extremely important field of activity for a human being – namely physical, cognitive, emotional and social activities which, in consequence, give human life a certain meaning and determine its goals in this area for several decades. As far

as the elderly are concerned, it has a special value in making life meaningful. It is not about prestigious aspirations relevant to professional activity being a priority for the elderly, as “they are gradually losing importance for the benefit of the increased need for being accepted by the environment” (Trafiałek, 2003, p. 106); it is crucial for them to feel they are useful, valuable people whose experience and life wisdom, in relation to professional activities, is just as important as modern technological solutions.

In hindsight, work is a source of pleasant associations and feelings for the elderly. First and foremost, professional activity contributed to the fact that retirement is not perceived as something negative, and the accumulated work experience is meaningful (compare: Pikuła 2016, 2016b, 2016c, 2017a). For older people who have ended their professional activity, work is perceived as any social and family-oriented activity that is undertaken so that the home, family and individual can function properly. They work to make their lives worthwhile, to feel useful, meaningful and valuable. Work is pleasant for them and gives satisfaction. Because of it, they are active; because of their commitment, they have the motivation to live, and their life makes sense. They are able to look after themselves, help others and act on their behalf (volunteering, social activities), and develop. As a result, before reaching the age of retirement, participants were able to take advantage of guaranteed retirement benefits and stable income, which is why they often undertake activities or work free of charge (*ibid.*).

Responsibility

Responsibility refers to various areas of human life and activity. There are different criteria that distinguish various types of responsibility. Taking into account the method of enforcing responsibility in the relationships between “entity-object-entity,” three types of responsibility can be mentioned: naturally enforced for transgressing the laws of nature; socially enforced for transgressing the rights of culture; or self-enforced (sense of responsibility). In the relationship between “entity-object,” however, the responsibility that is socially enforced on one’s own is mentioned (compare: Z. Zimny, 1984, R. Derbis, 1987). According to R. Ingarden (1987), the phenomenon of responsibility is present when: (a) someone bears responsibility for something or, in other words, is responsible for something (metaphysical responsibility);

(b) someone takes responsibility for something (psychological responsibility);
(c) someone is held responsible for something (legal responsibility); or
(d) someone acts responsibly (moral responsibility). (p. 73–74)

Responsibility is a characteristic of the human being (the entity), by virtue of which good or evil is included in the content of their personality, and as a result of which they suffer related consequences. Maria Nowicka Koziół distinguishes several types of responsibility: (1) for oneself, which forces an individual to acquire self-knowledge and to confront each other, to act and to take calculated risk, but also to protect oneself and take care of one's own identity; (2) for another person, which makes "building oneself" at the expense of others impossible, and is, rather, the basis for establishing creative relationships with those closest to them, those who are weaker and need support; (3) social responsibility, which consciously influences the creation of the conditions of social order, principles of life in a community, cooperation and solving conflicts in a constructive way; (4) cultural responsibility, which involves taking care of cultural heritage and created values, patterns and norms; (5) political responsibility, which is associated with the awareness of the role played in social and political life; and (6) historical responsibility, which combines the past with the present and the future. (2000, p. 14)

For the elderly, work is a value that makes it particularly possible to experience responsibility in the first three categories listed by M. Nowicka-Koziół. Older people expose and highlight responsibility for closest family members (performing duties in an honest manner guarantees work and retirement in the future) and people from work (good and decent work influences the satisfaction and professional success of humans and their professional community) especially strongly. The elderly participants of this study believe that the awareness of "who and to whom" and "for what" liability is held is important, which makes it possible to approach work even more consciously so that it is profitable, gives satisfaction and fulfillment, and makes sense to both the person who performs it and to those who remain in a relationship with them (compare: Piłkuła 2016a, 2017, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). The category of bearing the consequences of performed work – both positive and negative – is strongly exposed as well, due to the fact that it is inscribed in responsible work performance and results from the fact that a human being is once a decision-maker, enforcer, and then other times is held responsible (ibid.).

Trust and loyalty

Thanks to trust, one might expect that a partner will behave in line with their desires and dreams (and thus, will be competent and truthful, helpful and compassionate, and will take care of common interests), whereas loyalty is understood as a duty towards someone who has trusted someone else.

According to Joanna M. Łukasik and Inetta Nowosad (2018), trust is an expectation that is observed in the fact that others will maintain goodwill, while respecting their commitments and refraining from hurting others. Therefore, one can trust on the basis of the belief that “other people act in a predictable, reliable, unselfish and thoughtful manner,” (Szlenadak 2015, p. 333) and not to the detriment of other people. That is why the positive intentions of another entity, which are manifested in the regular, honest behaviour of other people that is in line with norms and is prepared to cooperate, constitute the basis of trust. Therefore, it may be stated that trust exists when the belief that others (companies, institutions, products) are trustworthy, meet our expectations and condition a trustworthy behaviour. Taking the above into consideration, trust is possible when a person is convinced of their credibility, ethical behaviour, honesty, truthfulness, helpfulness and empathy. Certainly, this person follows such principles and behaves in line with them. Moreover, trust arises when people behave in a fair manner, are helpful, responsible, and take care of their common interests. (Łukasik, Nowosad, 2018)

As far as relationships between people are concerned, trust is a key value which is common to all individuals, relationships, teams and families, all around the world. It is the basis for shaping relationships at work and, for example, in families. With trust in the workplace, people feel safer in their environment.

Loyalty is based on trust and can refer to many aspects of life. One might accept that it is a non-abusive, practical and in-depth devotion of a person to a certain matter. Loyalty is connected with human emotions and feelings; however, its operation is not solely based upon them. What an individual is devoted to does not assume beforehand whether it is good or bad, or if it is worth someone's loyalty. A person selects a case that they have personal feelings towards and which is valuable. Regardless of what system of values a person has, the direction of operation is constant and refers to the pursuit of set goals.

Elderly people referring to these values indicate good relations in the workplace. Confidence and loyalty in the modern world are not natural and obvious, and in their opinion, they were a condition of functioning in the workplace (compare: Piłkuła 2016a, 2016c, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c). According to the research, these values have contributed to building relationships between friends and spouses in a positive way, which has its effects in their durability and quality. The elderly especially value supervisors for building an appropriate work atmosphere, in which these values could exist, and co-workers who incorporated them in everyday work practices and proved that the workplace can guarantee safety, support, help and human reciprocity (*ibid.*). They also observed that, at present, it is difficult to find trust and loyalty at work – which is a sign of a time of social changes and dehumanization of work as a value (compare: Piłkuła 2016, 2016a).

Education and development

Vocational education, training and development can be treated as a set of intentional and purposeful activities organized with regard to work, which have proper goals, are implemented in appropriate organizational forms, take the form of a specific process, achieve the intended results, and fulfill certain social functions. It is related to acquiring the knowledge, skills, and social competences characteristic of a particular professional profile. Training supplements vocational education in order to achieve the scientific and organizational level that has currently arisen. It is realized upon obtaining a diploma, which confirms the validity and modernity of the education. Development is, however, an activity aimed at achieving employee excellence that is visible in performing vocational tasks in an efficient manner, at the highest possible level of quality, with perfection, and – with becoming more skillful – increasingly better and faster.

The undertaking and implementation of vocational education, training and development in the modern workplace originates from several sources. The first is related to insufficient preparation of new employees. In order to offset it and train employees to perform professional duties in an efficient and effective manner, they must be prepared beforehand, by shaping appropriate habits and attitudes. It is linked to the fact that an economic and social organization accepting new employees must train them to perform professional tasks and

form desired attitudes towards the social environment through appropriate intentional impact on employees, so that they can achieve the highest level of professional maturity expressed in achieving maximum professional performance and the ability to form relationships with co-workers in an appropriate manner.

Educational activities that are undertaken with regard to employees often result from changing position in the workplace. As a rule, it is connected – regardless of the reason – with the fact that an employee takes on new tasks and duties, the performance of which is sometimes difficult due to those new and uncommon features. Proper assistance in the form of well-organized training and professional development might alleviate them. (Aleksander, 2018)

Due to ongoing changes in regard to work and performance in various positions, it is necessary to organize training and vocational development in the workplace. These changes result from technical, technological and organizational progress, which takes place under the influence of the development of science and technology. The evoked changes in work and the manner of performing it often require the retraining of entire groups of employees. This is why the educational aspect is of crucial importance, especially if it is highlighted by the elderly, as for them, the value coming from work is education, in this case – education and vocational development. According to the senior participants of the study, work gives people such opportunities and even becomes a natural learning environment throughout their professional lives. It has its repercussions in retirement: motivation for self-learning and development. The elderly think that work has not only contributed to their proper education, but has also become the source of internal motivation that encourages them to constantly improve their skills, develop new competences, and follow the challenges of the profession, the labour market and employment. The participants believe that improvement and development should be a natural quality of employees because, as a result of it, it is easier to meet social and professional requirements and to cope with changes, as well as to achieve promotions and life successes (compare: Pikuła 2016, 2016a, 2016b, 2016c, 2017a).

Moreover, as the senior participants of this study observed, education is inseparably connected with development (compare: Pikuła 2016ab, 2016c, 2017b, 2017c). According to Joanna M. Łukasik and Katarzyna Jagielska, the purpose of personal or professional development is always an ideal that a person strives for in a dynamic way, which is determined by their priorities

and the actions required to be undertaken. A thesis may be formulated that personal development is the basis and prerequisite for vocational development, as conscious vocational development cannot take place without conscious personal development. (2018) This is noticed by the senior participants who strongly emphasize the value of development during the retirement, as well (compare: Piłkuła 2016ab, 2016c, 2017b, 2017c). Education, attitudes towards fulfilling specific educational and personal goals related to personal transformation constitute the basis for implementing changes and developing in old age. These positive experiences translate into quality of life after retirement and understanding oneself, managing spare time and setting long- and short-term goals conditioning the meaning of life. (Piłkuła 2016)

Conclusion

Work ennobles human life, makes it meaningful and makes it possible to satisfy an individual's basic needs and the needs of their relatives. As a value, it takes on a primary place in the lives of the elderly; thanks to it, as active employees and retirees, they satisfy not only their basic needs (basic material needs) but carry it out during their retirement in the form of activities that are based on work as a value and on values arising from it (e.g. education, self-fulfillment, social functioning and others). Thanks to work, the elderly can promote the main values related to it in their everyday lives and thus, make their lives meaningful, and be role models in bearing responsibility for themselves and for other people, being loyal to themselves, their relatives, ideas, values, trusting and building trust in their relationships. Furthermore, work focused on education and development not only gives meaning to their existence but also makes it challenging and separate from their own potential and the possibility to develop it regardless of their age.

Abstract: Work is of primary value in a person's life, as, over the course of a lifetime, it occupies more than half of adulthood. Its meaning has individual value for every person. With respect to the research conducted so far, this article presents the values that arise from performing work by elderly people. The experience of professional work has made it possible to distinguish such values as: meaning of life, responsibility, loyalty, trust, education and development.

Keywords: an elderly person, work, the value of work

Streszczenie: Praca jest naczelną wartością w życiu człowieka. W biegu jego życia zajmuje ona ponad połowę życia osoby dorosłej. Jej znaczenie ma indywidualną wartość dla każdego człowieka. W prezentowanym artykule, w odniesieniu do dotychczas prowadzonych przeze mnie badań, wskazano wartości, jakie wyływają z wykonywania dla osób starszych pracy. Doświadczenia pracy zawodowej pozwoliły na wyodrębnienie takich wartości jak: poczucie sensu życia, odpowiedzialność, lojalność, zaufanie, edukacja i rozwój.

Słowa kluczowe: osoba starsza, praca, wartość pracy

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