

SAFETY IN THE VALUES HIERARCHY RELATED TO PROFESSIONAL WORK IN THE OPINION OF EMPLOYEES IN THE SME SECTOR

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Abstract: In the life of every person, there are a number of values that guide them. These values are reflected both in private and professional life, and sometimes they smoothly interpenetrate. In the hierarchy of values related to professional work, work safety should rank among the highest. However, the number of accidents in Polish enterprises leaves no illusions, and the causes of these accidents indicate the main source of their occurrence, which has undoubtedly been the human factor for many years. This paper presents the results of surveys conducted in the SME sector regarding the place of work safety in the hierarchy of values related to professional work in the opinion of employees.

Keywords: work safety, value hierarchy, sector SME

1. INTRODUCTION

Work is one of the basic sociological categories that can be analyzed from many perspectives, therefore it is the subject of many scientific studies. The nature of the work that a person performs is important to them, because it primarily satisfies their needs and places it in the social structure. In addition, work is a social activity that requires proper preparation, development of goals, methods and principles that should be followed. This is related to specific social relations, aspirations and attitudes, and the need to cooperate with many individuals and groups dispersed in time and space (Suchacka, Jasik-Ślęzak, 2020). Using data from Eurostat, Polish citizens spend on average 33.5 years at work, which is below the European average of 36.2 years. But a decade ago we worked shorter - on average 2.5 years less (EUROSTAT, 2019). However, Polish citizens are very overworked. The data of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development show that Polish citizens work almost the most in the European Union - on average over 400 hours a year longer than Germany. It turns out that in 2019 a Polish citizen worked an average of 1,806 hours a year, while a German worked 1,386 hours. Polish citizens work almost the longest in the European Union, and only Greeks are ahead by 143 hours a year.

Moreover, last year the average number of hours worked in Poland did not drop at all, but increased slightly (by 9 hours a year). Poles spend slightly more time on earning than Czechs (on average 8 hours a year) and significantly more than Slovaks (111 hours), Hungarians (81 hours) or Lithuanians (171 hours) (OECD, 2019). The reason for this is probably the fact that workers in developed economies are able to produce goods and services of greater value within one hour, which translates into higher income, and thus - more free time. Considering the fact that we, as employees, spend a lot of time in the workplace, one should be sure that this place is safe and hygienic. In the light of section X of the Labor Code, the basic duty of every employer is to provide their employees with safe and hygienic working conditions (Labor Code, 2021). Safety, which is a supreme value in itself, not subject to any assessment, is not always the same for employers and employees themselves. According to the data of the Central Statistical Office and the National Labor Inspectorate, the cause of accidents at work is the human factor, i.e. the company's human capital (Gede, et al. 2020).

And although, according to the Central Statistical Office's statistical data, since 2017 there has been a generally downward trend in recorded accidents at work (GUS, 2020), unfortunately, accidents at work, especially fatal and severe, are most often caused by dangerous behavior of employees who underestimate or disregard they disregard occupational health and safety regulations (PIP, 2020). For example, the dominant group of causes of accidents at work in 2019 were the above-mentioned human causes, in particular:

- employee misbehavior,
- inappropriate and arbitrary behavior of the employee,
- disregard and ignorance of health and safety regulations.

When analyzing the causes of accidents at work, it can be assumed that safety is not of paramount importance for Polish employees. It is most likely caused by low awareness of safe behaviors (Klimecka-Tatar and Niciejewska, 2016). Moreover, the most numerous group of employees who suffer accidents at work are young people with work experience ranging from 1 to 3 years (Lewandowski and Niciejewska, 2019). The literature shows ways of shaping safe and accident-free behavior among employees (Kapusta, et al. 2018). These are all kinds of training, thematic meetings, screenings of films on health and safety and the promotion of safe and accident-free behavior with the help of the so-called "Good practices" (Niciejewska, 2018). Despite measures taken to promote safe and accident-free behavior among employees by such institutions as the aforementioned National Labor Inspectorate or the Central Institute for Labor Protection - National Research Institute, there is a large number of enterprises that do not use this type of prevention. One of the reasons for the low level of awareness of safe behavior among Polish employees of enterprises in the SME sector (especially the smallest business entities) is the inadequate level of training related to the broadly understood subject of Occupational Health and Safety (Klimecka-Tatar and Niciejewska 2021). It turns out that Polish enterprises evaluate the initial OHS training as boring and not contributing much to the practical knowledge of the training participants (Znmięcka-Sikora et al., 2010, 2018). Therefore, there is a great need to organize effective health and safety training, as well as to control the level of these training. Specialists also point to the appropriate motivation for safe and accident-free behavior of employees, which is the task of, inter alia, employers. One of the American work psychologists A.H. Maslow believes that human motivation is a hierarchy of six groups of needs: physiological, security, social, respect, self-actualization, and aesthetic (Maslow, 2016).

According to this theory, in order for each new need to appear, the need that is lower in the hierarchy must be satisfied. Every physiological need, therefore, must be met, at least partially, before the person wishes to meet the needs of a higher order.

There are a lot of conclusions resulting from this theory for motivation in workplaces. All the physiological needs of the worker must be met by wages sufficient to provide food, housing and protection for the worker and their family. It is also very important to guarantee a safe workplace, motivation to work, a sense of belonging and development opportunities. Another very important aspect is job satisfaction (Hala, 2017). It is obvious that if one of the above needs is not met, then automatically job satisfaction will be lower, which has an impact on work efficiency. The factors that cause job satisfaction include (Matejek, 2015; Sharma, et al. 2018):

- Trust in the management that knows their stuff and has the right attitude towards subordinates.
- Awareness of participation in important work and confidence in one's own working group.
- A sense of own importance for work.
- A fair and equitable wage, sufficient for a decent living.
- The prospect of promotion, the possibility of demonstrating abilities and improving qualifications.
- Stability of work. Care in the event of an old age disease.
- Awareness of what is happening in the plant. Taking into account the opinion of subordinates.
- Good working conditions, efficient equipment and tools.

The above factors can also be applied to the area of broadly understood safety at work, which consists of both trust in the management, awareness of participating in important projects - for example in the assessment of occupational risk, as well as good working conditions, efficient equipment and tools that determine, among others, ergonomics of the workplace (Baryshnikova, et. al. 2021; Mistarihi, 2020). Safety is of paramount importance in the company. How employees will treat them depends largely on the employer and their approach to this topic.

2. METHODOLOGY OF RESEARCH

The paper presents the results of the survey. The research was carried out using the proprietary questionnaire, which is the main tool for quantitative research. The quantitative research was extended to the qualitative research conducted with the use of direct interview with elements of open observation. 1006 business entities of various profiles participated in the quantitative study, of which manufacturing enterprises accounted for 26% of the surveyed business entities. The rest of the research entities were service and trade enterprises. 45 business entities in the construction industry participated in the qualitative study. The article also uses statistical methods that enable the analysis of (survey) data presented in an ordinal and nominal scale. Mainly the structure indices, correlation analysis with the use of the tau-Kendall coefficient, and the independence test χ^2 and the correlation coefficient ϕ -Youl were used. In the case of small cell counts, the Yates correction was additionally used. In the field of mathematical statistics, the Mann-Whitney test was used as an alternative to the mean test.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In the survey, the respondents assessed the place of safety in the hierarchy of values related to professional work. They had several other values to choose from. Their task was to assess 8 values and goals that they can pursue in their professional lives. Table 1 summarizes the results of the survey on the most important goals of employees in "small size" enterprises.

Table 1

The most important goals in the opinion of the respondents (percentage of indications) and the results of the significance test of differences between the percentage of indications for the production and service sectors

Goal	Type of activity				Sum	Test results	
	production	service	trade	mixed		U	P
Decent earnings for the work done	92,5%	93,7%	83,3%	87,1%	92.1%	-0.624	0.266
High professional position - increasing professional qualifications	13.7%	16.8%	33.3%	12.1%	16.0%	-1.114	0.133
Work in line with the interests	24.5%	27.5%	36.1%	15.7%	25.4%	-0.894	0.186
Job security	49.8%	53.5%	52.8%	53.6%	52.6%	-0.966	0.167
Sense of security	29.9%	36.5%	19.4%	35.0%	34.1%	-1.822*	0.034
Good interpersonal relations	32.0%	35.1%	33.3%	34.3%	34.2%	-0.880	0.189
Good work organization	46.5%	30.7%	33.3%	51.4%	37.5%	4.308*	0.000
Recognition of superiors and employees	11.2%	6.5%	11.1%	10.7%	8.3%	2.313*	0.010

Own study * - statistically significant values at the level of $\alpha = 0.05$

The most important of the goals. The aspirations and values in the professional life of the respondents are generally decent earnings for the work performed (92.1% of responses). The highest rating for this goal is indicated for each type of activity. Also in all groups, job security was indicated as the second (52.6%). The differences appear in subsequent assessments. In general, 37.5% of the respondents indicated good organization of work - this was indicated by, for example, the respondents involved in production and mixed activities. In turn, 36.5% of employees in the service sector, mentioned a sense of security as the third goal. On the other hand, employees of the commercial sector indicated, in the third place, work consistent with their interests (36.1% responses). The juxtaposition of the responses of employees from the service and production sectors shows that in the service sector, the sense of security is valued significantly higher ($U = -1.822$. $P = 0.034$). In the manufacturing sector, it values significantly higher than the service sector work organization spirit ($U = 4.308$. $p < 0.001$) and recognition of superiors and employees ($U = 2.313$. $p = 0.010$).

In order to refer to the results obtained from the conducted research with the use of a questionnaire, in selected "small-sized" enterprises, an open observation with elements of direct interview was additionally carried out. The enterprises selected for this study are small and micro construction enterprises (45 economic entities). All companies are located in the Silesian Voivodeship. The construction industry subject to additional

analysis belongs to the group of economic entities in which a large number of accidents at work is recorded, especially fatal. According to the Central Statistical Office, the rate of fatal accidents in construction was 0.086 per 1000 employees, with the national average being 0.025.

Such statistics are influenced by the situation in micro and small construction companies that participate in the implementation of large and small investments, constituting the vast majority of enterprises involved in construction sites. The complexity of their health and safety functioning, incl. resulting from the difficult economic situation, makes construction one of the sections of the economy with one of the highest accident rates. Construction companies were selected from among those that participated in the study using a questionnaire.

The observation period with direct interview elements lasted two years and was carried out before the Covid-19 pandemic. Out of 45 economic entities, 32 belonged to micro enterprises (up to 9 employees) and 13 - to small enterprises (from 10 to 49 employees). All the surveyed companies were most often employed as subcontractors of larger construction investments. They also implemented independent projects, especially those with a construction and renovation profile. Only 5 companies out of 45 observed with elements of direct intelligence had a functioning management system - Fig. 4.25. As already mentioned, there is a high complexity in the functioning of "small size" construction companies in the field of occupational health and safety. Unfortunately, this is confirmed by the observation with elements of direct intelligence, carried out on the premises of 45 "small size" economic entities.

As a result of the observation assisted by elements of direct interview, it was found that in the vast majority of subjects subject to the study, work safety is not of the highest priority. In the opinion of employees of construction companies of "small size", the most important value in their work is job security and decent earnings for the work performed. Safety is mentioned as the third value in professional work. Subsequently, employees exchange jobs in line with their interests, improving qualifications and good interpersonal relations in the work environment. Work safety, although it is an autotelic value, in the opinion of employees, is inferior to others. Observation confirms the attitude of employees to the topic of security, which is neglected by the majority of employees on the construction site.

Figure 1 presents the hierarchy of values of employees of the surveyed business entities, established on the basis of observation supported by elements of direct interview. Enterprises of "small size" often have to fight to stay in the labor market, and issues related to work safety are often moved by them to the background. Unfortunately, most employers are still convinced that any care for work safety means only costs. They do not see any benefits in it.

This tendency - in the light of the conducted observations with elements of direct interview - is stronger in micro enterprises (up to 9 employees), which mainly provide construction and renovation services with a smaller scope than small enterprises. In small enterprises (10-49 employees), which very often work as subcontractors in large construction projects, the knowledge about the need to care for safe working conditions is greater. It results, first of all, from the management's care for the observance of safe behaviors and standards as well as health and safety regulations at the construction site. The awareness of both costs and legal consequences for non-compliance with safety on construction sites of companies that carry out large investments is greater than in micro companies that carry out smaller renovation works.

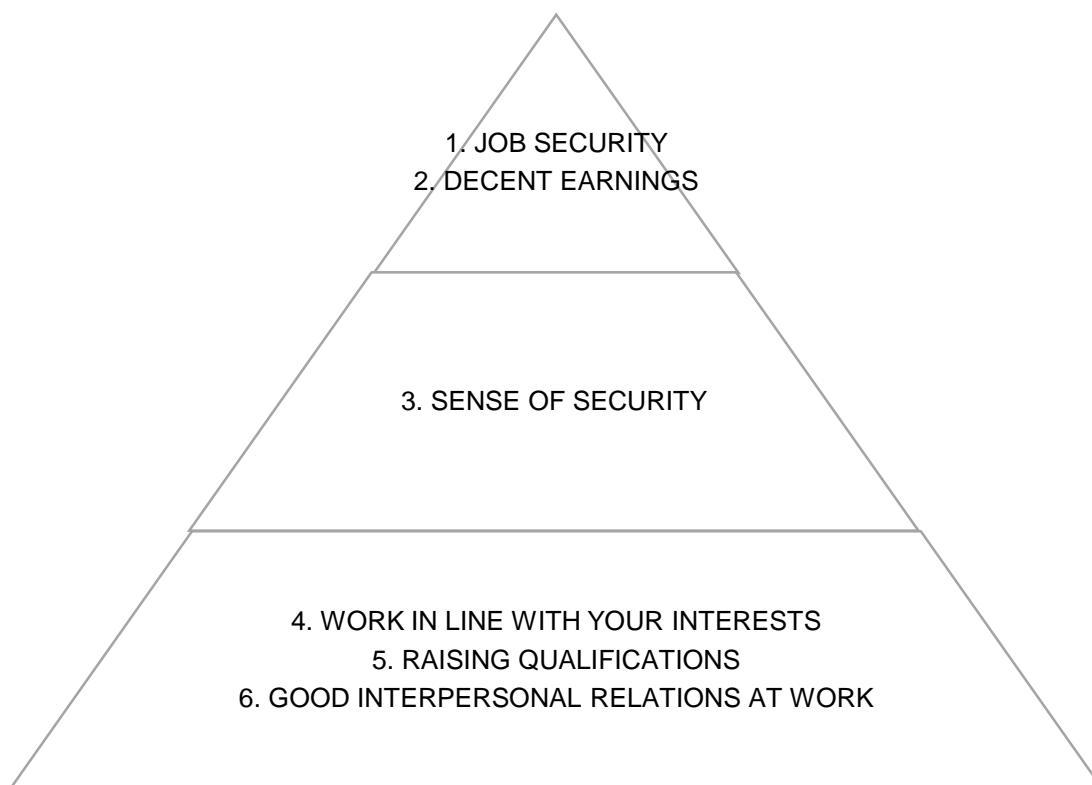


Fig. 1. Hierarchy of selected values in the opinion of employees of "small size" construction companies (small and micro enterprises)

In small economic entities of the construction industry (10-49 employees), more discipline is observed during work, which results primarily from the fear of penalties and other consequences (e.g. lack of bonuses, financial deductions for failure to observe safe behavior on construction sites). In micro-companies, where more often there are informal, loose relations between the manager (employer) and the rest of the employees, the employer's consent to dangerous behavior is observed (omitting procedures, norms and regulations). For micro companies, only the final result counts - completing the order. A sense of security is definitely not the overriding value in their work.

4. CONCLUSION

Occupational health and safety is an area that is still, in the minds of the average employee and the employer, associated with expenses and costs. Shaping the awareness of safe behavior among employees is a long and difficult process. As it results from the conducted research, both quantitative and qualitative, safety in the hierarchy of values, in the opinion of the respondents, does not occupy a paramount place.

It gives way to such values as job security and decent earnings. This can be explained by the fact that there is now much uncertainty about employment. It is therefore understandable that ensuring the existence of the family is very important for a person. It would be desirable for the value of work safety to be a basic need for every human

being, also in connection with professional work. It is not a skill to be aware of the importance of safe working conditions as well as safe behavior in connection with the performance of employee tasks. This is a value that should be shaped and strengthened with appropriate actions. Shape and strengthen through appropriate mechanisms related to motivating safe behavior, as well as prevention and good practices. which are designed to strengthen the developed pro-safe attitudes. The results of the research indicate, however, that there is still a great need to work on the topic in order to put the autotelic value of work safety in the first place in enterprises - especially in the smallest economic entities.

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