

Original article

## Principles of good work - selected problems of praxeology

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### INFORMATIONS

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### ABSTRACT

*The text addresses the growing interest in praxeology as the theory of effective action in the form that has been given to this field mainly by Tadeusz Kotarbinski. The transformation of the social order requires the application of technical recommendations that improve all good work, and praxeology determines the canons of such efficiency such precisely.*

*Praxeology also enforces the use of ethnical norms and references to value systems because they determine adaptive strategies of individuals and social groups, and thus influence the organizational culture of a company.*

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### KEYWORDS

*praxeology, principles of good work, simple act, compound act, perpetrator*



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## 1. Introduction

Praxeology, the general theory of effective action, determines the techniques of performing every “good work as such”, contains recommendations and warnings useful for effective implementation of all kinds of work. It is a kind of “action grammar” (T. Kotarbinski).

As practical knowledge, praxeology refers to human individual actions and multi-agent actions; to professional activities and common activities. Its recommendations are of particular value in the conditions of replacing rules that are simple and passed down as tradition by complex rules, based on the scientific analysis of factors which mediate, that is, intervene in actions.

Praxeology focuses on objectives and uses appropriate conceptual apparatus and directives for rational action in reference to them. It determines the principles of proper management of information, energy and resources, indicates methods for triggering motivation, using long-distance and flexible planning, efficiency and effectiveness, organizational improvement as well as principles of collaboration and participation in the work process. It includes systematization of daily and professional skills.

The primary function of praxeology is advisory. The article presents the most important directives of praxeology.

## 2. On the need for the use of “good work” principles

The name “praxeology” appeared in the work of Louis Bourdeau *Theorie des science. Plan de science integrale* (1882), where it meant studying “about the functions” of organisms of all living beings. A.V. Espinas used this name 15 years later (*Les origins de la technologie*). He gave it a new meaning and referred it only to human activity, mainly to exploring the world, and to practice, which – as a conscious and intentional human activity – requires mastery. As he wrote: “Craft is more a set of established rules than a collection of thought-out initiatives. (...) All of this is within the rules. It is not about fine arts but about useful crafts. Thus, the word <practice> leads to the term <praxeology> to denote the science of this kind of facts considered in their entirety, the study of the most general forms and the highest principles of action in the world of living creatures” [2,5]. According to praxeology, the advance and improvement of activities is based on multi-actor practice in carrying out tasks. Practical knowledge, however, is still being assessed: acting man is self-critical and breaks the routine. Therefore, research on human activity must take into account its dynamics; analyze the processes of formation and development of skills, as well as the paths on which the processes of proficiency regress take place.

A.V. Espinas’ program of praxeology as a science included three groups of issues:

- the morphology of techniques, whose task is to classify skills/crafts. These techniques are practical rules ensuring effectiveness in individual and group actions;
- the physiology of techniques, the goal of which is deliberation on the way in which – in a long historical process – new principles and rules appear based on experience and reflection, on how they change previous ways of action and how they increase human competences;
- the genetics of techniques, which is a study on how the determined principles of action were shaped and how they depleted their effectiveness [1].

Each community develops sets of legitimate – in given historical conditions – generalizations of a practical nature. These principles are useful in all types of human activity and are in force in the transition from the stage of helplessness to the mastery phase. These rules – as generalizations resulting from human practice – do not have a universal character, but are partial, i.e. ones that could be described by a logician as generalizations “with a small quantifier”. They are “often” effective, although not necessarily, but with a high probability, as a result of which they significantly limit the risk that is associated with decision-making.

The use of the principles of “good work” (T. Kotarbinski):

- encourages to take effective action;

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- fosters innovation because it increases the number of possible variants of solving problems;
  - enables disclosure of task forces' knowledge;
  - eliminates the randomness of outcomes;
  - mobilizes the achievement of clearly established goals;
  - determines the repeatability and regularity of actions;
  - allows for maintaining a sense of confidence even in situations where working conditions are disturbed;
  - enables perceiving new and untypical situations, which can inspire change;
  - eliminates the freedom of choice of ways to perform work;
  - allows for verification of action results;
  - teaches new teamwork skills;
  - integrates the employee group;
  - fosters the economization of actions;
  - allows for distinguishing important events from unimportant ones;
  - rationalizes activities;
  - allows for seeing things realistically;
  - allows for respecting reasonably established borders;
  - allows for the adoption of the proper hierarchy of values;
  - triggers the willingness to act.

The list includes only few benefits that result from the skillful application of the principles of good work, which are composed by the principal rules of conduct referring not only to performing professional activities, but – since the ancient Greeks – regarding all practical skills, i.e. also those which cover the broadly understood art of living and the implementation of the freedom principle. “As long as our action is not irrevocably entangled in the mechanism of the ways to perform, we have a feeling that we do what we want and we consider ourselves free. When choosing primary goals and before calculating the chances of success, our uncertainty is preceded by an intervention of the rules, which turn our freedom into obligation” [3]. This statement concerns both the proficiency values as well as the moral values – separating what is decent and worthy from what is shameful, disgraceful and discrediting.

It can therefore be assumed that praxeology is concerned with all forms of human activity and explains actions by examining cognitive structures, emotions, needs and systems of goods. They are interdependent. Therefore, for example, in the concept of A. Bogdanow (Tektologia), praxeology aims to develop a general theory of organization whose recommendations would establish “how to shape the structure of complex objects the most efficiently in such a way to ensure their durability and immunity to external factors (destructive) in different circumstances and phases of development. These recommendations are to be justified by regularities governing the emergence,

transformation, maintenance or collapse of structures of complex objects, adapting to changing circumstances, especially in the struggle for existence” [1].

Praxeology (A.V. Espinas, A. Bogdanow and T. Kotarbinski) “roots” the rules of efficient action in the theory of events. It does not yet produce the typology of temporary consequences, but – by analyzing simple acts, tools, means and ways of action – it proceeds to explain complex actions and their types, principles of cooperation, fighting techniques, development in the area of improvement and considers the temporary nature of consequences: instantaneous, short-term, long-term, consequences for the whole life and even nonlife consequences [6].

### **3. Elementary principles of praxeology: fight**

Act so that you treat humanity, whether in your own person or in that of another, always as an end, and never as a mere means. I. Kant.

A principle, according to the Polish dictionary, is:

- a law governing some processes, phenomena;
- a formula governing some processes, phenomena;
- a norm of behavior;
- a procedure established by a regulation or custom;
- a basis for construction or functioning of something;
- a chemical compound”.

The term “take root” has the following meanings:

- put a plant root into the ground;
- to show someone his or her place;
- place something on something else.

“Taking root” is based on:

- taking something as a basis;
- treating something as a basis.

In order to better explain the concept of “principles of praxeology”, it is the most useful to understand “principles” as norms or guidelines (tips) of practices that serve to rationalize and optimize actions of individuals and social groups, and allow to “take root” in the human world.

According to the most general, dichotomous division of principles of praxeology, T. Kotarbinski points out two groups:

- fighting principles;
- cooperation principles.

Fight is “any action of at least two actors (assuming that a team can be an actor), where at least one of actor disturbs another. In a particular, most ordinary and perhaps most interesting case, both actors not only strive objectively for incompatible

goals, but they also know about it and take into account actions of the opposite side while developing their own plans of action” [5]. Efficiency in fighting for material goods or for symbolic goods requires the use of specific fighting techniques. Neither does T. Kotarbinski value positively nor does he encourage using methods contrary to morality.

In Treaty about good work, he does not consider “the emotional side of fighting each other, but he is interested “only in the efficiency of fighting techniques” [5]. Fighting methods are analyzed in order to show how deviousness and flair can ensure gaining an advantage in a real clash. He indicates effective, although not always moral, modes of action, including also those that mislead an enemy and are effective at his or her expense.

Here are some of the fighting principles indicated by T. Kotarbinski [5]:

- attempting to mentally or even physically destroy an opponent as a result of direct or indirect attacks such as: hand-to-hand fight, slander, blackmailing, sabotage and disinformation;
- treating the situation is a “zero sum game”, which leads to polarization of positions. A defeated party usually uptakes – often effective – self-defense;
- creating difficulties for an opponent by using force against him or her and imposing solutions beneficial for themselves;
- using trickery in order to paralyze opponent’s actions or prevent own defeat;
- preemptive accumulation of forces and means in a convenient place and their skillful use in a decisive clash;
- ensuring him- or herself – even at the expense of own significant losses – freedom of movement;
- using opponent’s position and means for own benefit;
- causing an opponent to take action in which he or she is not specialized and consequently commits numerous mistakes;
- using objects, evidence and documents collected by an opponent on their own account;
- paralyzing and depriving, according to Kotrabinski, governing bodies or, in other words, those which govern and are at the forefront of opponent’s forces, of the possibility of action,
- counteracting the concentration of opponent’s forces;
- applying the principle “divide and rule” that results in conflicts in each of the teams, which leads to weakening opponent’s strength;
- “linking the division of forces with the use of another’s resources for own benefit in a fight” [5]. This is a situation where A allies with B against C, and A, after defeating C together with B, turns against B and wins;
- instant replacement of used resources with substitutes;

- immediate restoration of activity to restrained and excluded from fighting “management segments” (T. Kotarbinski) or instant replacement of them with equivalent segments;
- creating “accomplished facts”: occupation of land and market domination;
- in an uncertain situation or when forces have not been gathered to a sufficient degree, applying the method of cunctation, it is stalling for time;
- focusing on maintaining interest in leading issues that concern them and not allowing to replace them with competing ones;
- clever use of the role of the one who “tips the balance”;
- preventing competitors from conducting their activities as well as actions aimed at eliminating rivals;
- boycotting competitors’ actions;
- discouraging an opponent from fighting by threatening about the possibility of striking an effective blow;
- using the “surprise paradox”, which is based on abandoning rational action and applying strange, irrational steps. In the case of irrational behavior, “normally rational” actions of an opponent become counter-productive, and result in the defeat of a rational rival;
- pushing an opponent “into a corner”, or to one solution, by informing him or her about own moves in detail;
- entrapping the chasing party by applying the “escape paradox”. It is the escaping person who “sets the direction and pace of the pursuit, and if he or she knows how to use it, wins”.

T. Kotarbinski himself admits that one should look at conflicts and ways to solve them not only from the perspective of praxeology, but also ethics. He accepts this point of view as superior in works in practical philosophy, where he showed how important ethical, fair and brave action is, as it is undertaken in order to achieve good and beauty.

#### **4. Basic principles of cooperation**

In the consideration about the principles of cooperation, the central concepts are: “integration” and “synthesis of actions”, which means that “While acting, one must be able to integrate all component activities into the most efficient whole for achieving a goal, and integration of actions is precisely this merging. The term <synthesis of actions> could be used here accurately” [5]. Changing the structure of an organization to a more cooperative one, that is, where the managerial staff is proficient in performing personal politics, enhances the creativity and initiative of employees and promotes increasing their competences, which results in personal successes and long-term success of the company.

In management practice, what counts is the increase of the role of the so-called network teams [8,7] established on the basis of two primary principles:

- not an individual but a team is of great significance because – as an integrated group – it is effective due to the fact that it uses the total of employees' knowledge. The team mobilizes, motivates and integrates individuals with the group, and – through the effect of synergy – increases the strength of each employee;
- the “network” is important, which means that such organization of groups, where the degree of formalization of work is not high, “there is not therefore a clear division into operational and functional activities. The goal of a team is to perform a specific task using a set of activities that are necessary. The diverse nature of employees' knowledge and skills as well as their exchange before tasks serves this purpose. Task orientation focused on the implementation of common projects is the key factor in the integration of specialists scattered around the network structure” [7].

There is no room for broader reflection on the essence of inter- and intra-organizational networks as well as their evolution, the intensification of connections and the kinds of employee participation in the structure. Czeslaw Sikorski discusses this issue in detail in the book *People's behaviors in the organization (Zachowania ludzi w organizacji)*.

It is worth noting here that the humanistic sense of causative action cannot be explained if it is unknown how the work is organized and how the manager behaves as a guarantor of effectiveness in teamwork activities. It can be already seen clearly that, as a result of the changes caused by globalization and the use of network structural forms in the economy, the methods of managing employees are also changing. The transition from hierarchical leadership to a management mode that is flexible in terms of commitments, qualifications and skills takes place.

Under these conditions, the team's participation in decision-making, planning, broad access to information and delegating powers and responsibilities for employee teams increases. This action is consistent with the understanding of motivation, which in essence says: “The point is that man is willing to do what he must do in order to find pleasure in doing what he must do, and thus improve his work repeatedly, showing generosity in devoting himself to it” [9].

All complex actors, including all organizations, are essentially unstable entities. In order to prevent their destruction, one should [5]:

- take protective measures;
- replace used elements with working ones;
- care about making all components of the system more efficient;
- adopt the appropriate hierarchy of importance elements of the complex;
- eliminate unnecessary burdens;
- coordinate activities of the components, that is, make them not impede the performance of tasks, but rather support one another;
- coordinate tasks and goals;

- accumulate goals “around a common means as a common center: this happens only when, while doing what is needed for a given goal, one simultaneously does what is required by other, also set, objectives” [5].
- resolve conflicts effectively and in a long-term perspective;
- consider interests of particular working groups;
- establish – according to the purpose of a company – goals achieved by it;
- provide assistance “by negotiating and mediating for the benefit of citizens and social groups as well as creating public values” [9];
- together with the transformation of the formal structure of a company, re-define obligations and responsibilities of employees;
- adjust employee responsibilities – in terms of categorization and specificity – to requirements of the dynamically changing market;
- implementing the principles of coordination as an activity of work teams that increases the efficiency of teams as a result of, among others, planning/placement, providing a substantial area of freedom of action and introducing a simple and clear motivation system.

## **Conclusions**

The necessary conditions for good work are: efficiency understood as maximization of activities, purposefulness – as devotion to a performed task individually or collectively; economics – as resource savings and decision accuracy; innovativeness – understood according to its Latin meaning as a “variety”, “repair”, “renewal” and “intensity”; economization of action – understood as the ability to use regulations and procedures in such a way that they implement and strengthen one another.

Nonetheless, good work is not only the effectiveness of work but also such achievement of organization’s goals that go beyond the field of business. It is about fair and honest behavior, undertaken for equitable purposes. Management and business demand solidity, legality, methodicalness and practicality as well as respect for workers-producers, contractors and recipients of work results. Through work and its effects, all relationships that appeal to humanity as an indispensable and permanent ethical disposition of individuals and social groups are established.

Ethical principles designate tasks with a high degree of categorization. These include, but are not limited to: the necessity to take responsibility over the community by carrying out socially useful tasks, concern for the proper course and result of self-creation, skillful organization of the work process and care for the use of fair measurements of human work, which is a necessary condition for any behavior aimed at the elimination of exploitation and alienation of work still present in the modern world.

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**Ethical statement**

The research complies with all national and international ethical requirements.

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