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Cultural conditioning of employees' engagement

„The American will explain their engagement at work with the possibility of obtaining bigger earnings, the French will treat it as a matter of honour, the Chinese as a mutual obligation and the Dutch will refer to the sense of community”.

(Hofstede, Hofstede, Minkov 2011)

1. Introduction

A greater and greater meaning in gaining a competitive advantage is attributed to the essential asset as employees are, and in particular their attitudes and behaviour, which is manifested in engagement to work and the organization. It is observed that researchers are involved more often in identifying factors influencing the level of employees' activity, in defining methods and techniques of management aiming at triggering and/or reinforcing the engagement of organization members.

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The results of the analysis of subject literature prove that many of management methods and techniques, whose application was effective in some organizations – did not give similar effects in other enterprises (Bugdol 2001, Mendel 2002, Skalik 2012). A significant and major justification of the mentioned situation results from

the distinctness of the organizational culture of enterprises. As the research by G. Hofstede, G.J. Hofstede and M. Minkov (2011) showed it has its grounds in the culture of a nation, in which a particular enterprise operates. The differences in employees' behaviour become also a consequence of the impact of the culture of a society whose they are members. The factors influencing employees' engagement are different for enterprises operating in countries with a different culture. The level of their impact can also be different due to diverse preferences and interpretations of people employed in them. The knowledge about the conditions of employees' engagement is necessary and significant as the compliance of cultural patterns with the requirements of formal organizational solutions causes that the employee has a sense of control over own behaviour, responds accurately to various information and events, can predict and plan their activities and therefore – feels more confident and secure (alienation diminishes) and as a consequence – shows more commitment to work (Sikorski 2008).

Having the knowledge that the basis for employees' engagement are the values accepted in the organization and shared by its members as well as the fact that they have a connection with forms of involvement (see: Stankiewicz, Moczulska 2012), in this article the analysis of cultural conditioning favourable for engagement was conducted. The analysis of the subject literature was applied.

2. Employees' engagement: a notion and factors influencing it

Employees' engagement is „the degree in which individuals are personally involved in helping the organization, working better than it is expected for keeping the position” (Kowalski, after: Smyth 2009). According to T.J. Erickson (Macey, Schneider 2008) it is connected with passion and commitment – willingness of a particular person to invest and make effort in employer's success. However, A. M. Saks (2006) writing about the engagement as the effort put in work, highlights the intellectual and emotional commitment to the organization. The engagement “is revealed” then in employee's effort, which – being the manifestation of personal involvement – is connected with knowledge and emotions. It is possible to show after K. Truss, three dimensions of engagement related to each other: physical, that is energy generated by employee, emotional, that is their feelings and cognitive – judgments and opinions. Forms of engagement also reflect it, depicting what, how and which way employees can be engaged.

As Ch. Boshoff, G. Mels (Juchnowicz 2010) show employees' engagement can be directed at: organization (its performance, achievements of goals, mission),

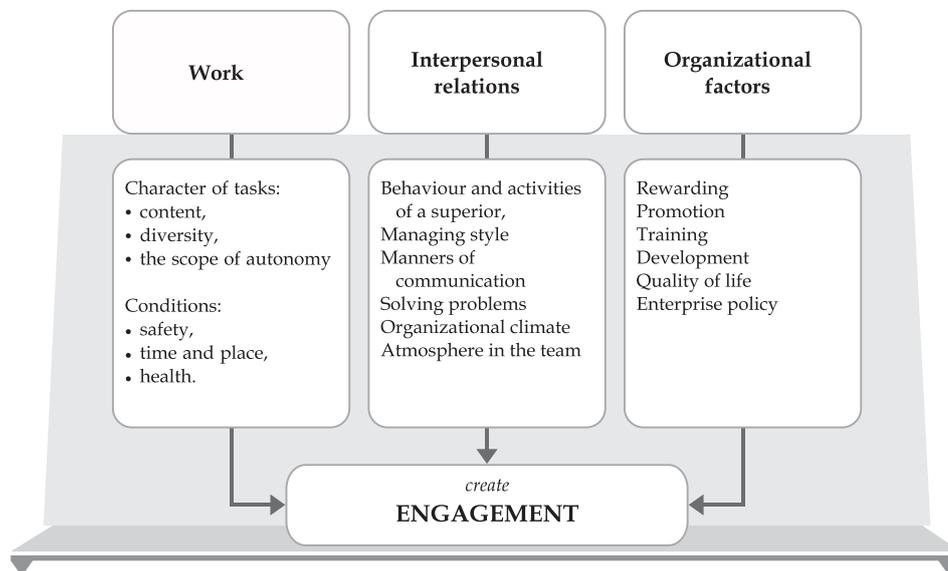
work (performing tasks), profession (development in a particular job, carrier path) and social environment (relationships with co-workers). Members of the organization can get engaged with different intensity (L. A. Witt, K. M. Kacmar, M. C. Andrews; after: Bugdol 2006):

- suitable to rules and obligations defined, which means properly done work but does not cause added value (continuing engagement),
- not restricting only to actions aiming at implementing plans, achieving goals, which results in added value (effective engagement).

They can also get engaged on a different level (Meyer, Smith 2000, pp. 319-332): duration, normative and affective. The first one concerns employees who function in the enterprise as they do not perceive the possibility of being employed beyond it or regard cost and losses connected with leaving as too high. The second one includes organization members whose engagement results from commitments, necessity of obeying social norms. The third one refers to those employees who are emotionally committed to the organization, identify with it.

Since employees' engagement can be diverse and results in other effects, it is worth presenting the factors which can influence the level, direction and intensity of engagement. In the subject literature there are three main areas presented, which are analyzed by employees and given meanings (i.e. they define feelings connected with them - after: Zigarmi, Nimon, Houson, Witt, Diehl 2009). They are the following ones: work, interpersonal relations and organizational factors. The first one concerns the character of tasks implemented on a particular work position and conditions of performing them. G.R. Oldman and J.R. Hackman as well as C. Maslach (Saks 2006) distinguish: content of tasks (their adequacy to skills) and their diversity, the scope of autonomy and participation in decision process. D. Robinson. S. Perryman and S. Hayday (Smyth 2009) pay attention to them as well. In the light of their research they state that they contribute to the sense of appreciation, exerting influence. In the authors' opinions, it is important to satisfy basic needs of the organization members - care for their safety and health (Maslow pyramid, Herzberg factors). The second area includes social relations and among them first of all relationships with superiors and co-workers. According to engagement model elaborated by DDI company (Samah 2007) and the Management Observatory Foundation (Dawid-Sawicka 2008) the essential becomes the behaviour and activities of a superior, their managing style, which determining mutual influence, manners of communication, solving problems, create climate as well as relations with co-workers. The third area is organizational factors, which first of all are connected with binding rules of rewarding in the enterprise, of promoting, participating in trainings and team

projects (Juchnowicz 2010). As it is known, rewarding is not only payment, but also benefits, including non-material ones. The results of the research conducted by a consulting firm Hewitt Association (Kosy 2005) proved that engagement is created by: rules included in the enterprise policy, which concern employees (e.g. management of quality, results) or have influence on perceiving the organization (image and reputation of the enterprise) as well as quality of life, defined as the ratio of a private life to the professional one. Keeping a balance between them becomes essential for soothing pressure and counteracting professional burnout (Maslach, Leiter 2011). The conditioning of employees' engagement according to presented areas was depicted in figure 1.



Picture 1. Determinants of employee engagement

Source: own study based on: Saks 2006, Ayers 2009, Smyth 2009, Samah 2007, David-Sawicka 2008, Juchnowicz 2010, Scythes 2005

Keeping in mind that each member of the organization is an individual, it is worth taking the words by J. Reykowski (1979) into consideration, who claims that an employee makes comparison of what he obtains, what he is expected and what he does individually according to standards adapted by himself. I. Robinson (after: Kular, Gatenby, Rees, Soane, Truss 2008) defines them as a system of reference, indicating that they also reflect, except for needs, priorities

and expectations of an individual – its personality and present experiences. Ones of the basic and significant are values, which decide about the selection of people who are trusted, actions which are given time and in which energy is invested (G.W.Watson – after: Posner, 2010), and which each man “acquires” in the process of socialization. What, out of presented areas of engagement in figure 1 and the degree in which particular conditioning influences engagement, can be different depending on the culture of a nation, in which the enterprise operates.

3. Culture, organizational culture – definitions, levels and models

According to F. Fukuyama (1997) culture is „ethic habits, norms inherited by an individual”. P.R. Harris and R.T. Morgan (after: Adamik 2011) define it as a manner in which a person reacts to „things”, or how he adapts to the conditions of the environment. At the same time, however, they point out that these reactions and knowledge, skills connected with them are “passed over” to other generations. Culture can be then regarded as learned existence, some heritage passed on vertically (from generation to generation) and horizontally (as tradition of a particular community) (vide: Czerska, Nogalski, Apanowicz, Rutka and Czermiński 2002, Winkler 2008). Let us also mention several recognitions of organizational culture. M. Armstrong (2011, p. 340) describes it through „the pattern of values, norms, beliefs, attitudes and principles, which shape people’s behaviour in the organization as well as the manner of performing tasks”. Organizational culture is similarly defines by L. J. Mullins (Zbiegień-Maciąg 2002) as „a set of values, beliefs, attitudes, which are the essence of everything what is done and what is thought in the organization”. Therefore, employees are guided by values essential for the community they are members. Taking this recognition into consideration, as well as the need of deliberations, in this article the definition by G. Hofstede (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov 2011, p. 21) was accepted, according to which culture is “collective programming of mind, which beside universal and individual programming distinguishes one group from the other”. It proves the cultural conditioning of groups’ reactions and the relation between national culture and the organizational one. Let us present the levels and dimensions of cultures, which become the basis of differences between groups.

According to E. Schein (1985) culture consists of three following levels: cultural foundations, norms and values as well as artefacts. The first ones are unperceivable and become the basis for the remaining ones. The second ones define what is proper and normal. The third ones are the manifestation – physical

(technology and art), behavioural (attitudes, behaviour, ritual) and linguistic (language, legends, myths) – of accepted cultural foundations. Let us observe that values become the basis of assessment, which a particular individual makes in order to evaluate situations, actions, objects and people. At the same time it is possible to state that values are accepted on the basis of cultural foundations, which consider such issues as: human attitude to the environment (the possibility of exerting influence), attitude to human nature (whether human is good or bad by nature), relations with others, nature of human actions (orientation towards activity or existence), nature of truth and reality, time, space.

In the literature of the subject it is possible to find numerous classifications, models of culture (including: by F. Fukujama, R.D. Lewis, E.T. Hall, F. Trompenaar and Ch. Hampden-Turner), which are based on cultural foundations, mention values essential in them and refer them to the organization. The article presents two selected models – model by G. Hofstede and S.H. Schwartz.

In the first of them, based on the results of the research, five following dimensions of culture were distinguished (Hofstede, Hofstede and Minkov 2011):

1. Power distance, which concerns social inequalities, approach to the authority.

In enterprises they are revealed in the manner of decision making and in the structure of the organization. The companies operating in countries with a large distance of authority are characterized by a hierarchized organizational system and centralization of decisions, which means uncritical subordination to superiors' decisions and regulations. The opposition is companies in countries with a low distance of authority, which have flat organizational structures, and in which a manager uses the following styles: democratic, delegating, participating, assertive-responsive. It is typical of them to: include inferiors in the decision process, take care of expressing own opinions by them or allow disagreeing.

2. Individualism or collectivism is a manifestation of relationships between an individual and a group as well as the power of impact of the group on its members. In individualistic societies individuals are perceived to be self-reliant and independent, therefore in organizations operating in this culture each employee is treated as a separate person including their needs and interests (management of individuals). It is possible to state that the employee concludes a contract with the employer, which triggers openness and tolerance to others and at the same time paying attention to: autonomy at work, content of performed tasks, which should be a challenge and bring satisfaction as well as keep balance between a professional and private life.

However, in the societies with the advantage of collectivist culture a position of the individual is determined by the organization, which in enterprises is manifested by employee's loyalty to the team, subordination to interests and goals of the organization. The importance is attributed to the conditions in the work place, possibility of increasing qualifications (trainings). Although the atmosphere in the team becomes significant, the differentiation between own and alien group results in distrust to people from outside, which contributes to conflicts and makes cooperation difficult.

3. **Uncertainty Avoidance** depicts the degree in which a particular community accepts the unpredictability of social relations and the uncertainty of the future. Individuals in culture with strong avoidance of uncertainty are characterized by a high level of a need for security, which in enterprises is provided by numerous regulations, rules and exercising control. However, employees in culture with weak avoidance of uncertainty appreciate freedom, relax, thus in organizations excessive formalization is avoided.
4. **Maleness or femaleness**, as a dimension of culture refers to the expectations concerning behaviour and acting social roles connected with sex. In the organization it is manifested in: managing style, manner of solving conflicts, attitude towards work, professional career, orientation towards results, humanization of work, and even size of the organization. In companies in which male culture dominates, employees are expected to be assertive and oriented towards success, therefore what matters in them is: payments, respect, promotion, challenge. However, in female cultures – the sphere of feelings and keeping harmony is taken care of. What becomes significant is: relationships with superiors, cooperation and guarantee of employment.
5. **Time orientation**, that is perceiving situations from the perspective of the future, present and past. A long-term orientation refers to the future, therefore in enterprises it is significant to: save and invest, be persistent to achieve the goal, keep obligations, take care of interpersonal relations. The employees of the organization in countries with a short-term culture are oriented towards: freedom, achievements and independence.

S.H. Schwartz (1992), however, distinguishes individual values and shows their connection with culture (table 1). In the last one he includes four levels: openness to changes and conservatism as well as individual growth and transcendence. The openness to changes concerns internal motivation of the individual, its autonomy. According to the author of the model it includes two types of values: *self-management* (independence in thinking and acting, autonomic selection of own goals) and *stimulation* (searching for novelties, aspiring for an exciting

and varied life). Conservatism accepts external motivation, which is related to the following values: *safety* (social order, harmony, personal and family safety, national security), *adaptation* (limitation of own aspirations and activities, which would hurt others or violate social norms) and *tradition* (acceptance and respect towards rituals and the idea of own culture or religion). On the other hand, on the level of individual growth, in the opinion of the mentioned author, the individual realizes own interests, which is expressed by such types of values as: *hedonism* (aspiring for pleasure, satisfying own – in particular organic – needs), *achievements* (personal success achieved by demonstrating competences, according to social standards) and *authority* (status and social prestige, control and dominance over other people and resources). Transcendence as the orientation towards increasing others' wealth is connected with such values as: *protectiveness* (care for the good of loved ones, family, friends, acquaintances) and *universalism* (care for the good of all people, care for environment protection, justice, wisdom, peace).

Table 1. Levels of culture, values and value types included in the model SH Schwartz

Level of culture	Value types	Value
Openness to changes	Self-management	independence, openness, wolność
	Stimulation	curiosity, creativity, openness
Conservatism	Safety	safety, respect
	Adaptation	respect, equality
	Tradition	membership, loyalty, obedience
Individual growth	Achievements	respect, equality
	Hedonism	pleasure
	Authority	subordination, authority / power of social
Transcendence	Universalism	honesty, wisdom, peace
	Protectiveness	friendship, responsibility

Source: own study based on: Schwartz (1999)

While analyzing presented models it is possible to distinguish some connections between types of values included in the model by S. H. Schwartz and dimensions of culture defined in the model by G. Hofstede (table 2). Openness to

changes and conservatism correspond with individualism and collectivism, and also avoidance of uncertainty, whereas individual growth and transcendence – with power distance..

Table 2. Dimensions of culture defined in the model by to G. Hofstede and the type of values included in the model S.H. Schwartz

Dimensions of culture		Type of values
Power Distance	Low	Achievements
	Large	Authority
	Individualism	Self-management
	Collectivism	Adaptation Tradittion
Uncertainty Avoidance	Week	Stimulation
	Strong	Safety

Source: own study based on: Hofstede, Hofstede i Minkov 2011, Szwartz (1992)

It is also possible to consider them from the perspective of achieving individual goals by the individual (achievements, authority, self-management, stimulation, hedonism) as well as being oriented towards community (protectiveness, adaptation, tradition and universalism). It is however possible to state that employees being guarded by diverse values will expect, prefer to use different solutions in the organization. What kind of engagement can be expected in a particular type of culture? How can it be created?

4. Employees' engagement in selected countries

Answering the first of the questions it is worth considering the results of the research by J. E. Finegan (after: Abbot, White, Charles 2005), where the values favouring particular levels of engagement were defined. It was proved that: affective engagement has a connection with values called "human" by the authors (e.g. cooperation, honesty, respect, justice), normative engagement – with „vision" values (e.g. openness, creativity, development) and duration – with „obedience of convention" (e.g. caution, formality, obedience)¹. It is possible to suspect that female or individualistic culture or the culture with a low distance

¹ According to four categories by P. McDonald and J. Gandz (after: Abbot, White and Charles 2005)

of authority will contribute to the affective engagement of employees, whereas the culture with a large distance of authority or strong avoidance of uncertainty, in which there is a great number of regulations – to normative engagement. Taking into consideration that many results of the research prove the relation between the form of engagement and effectiveness (Jin, Drozdenko 2010; Towers Perrin 2003 and Bernthal 2004 - after: Macey, Schnaider 2008), the assumption about the degree of employees' engagement in a particular culture should also prove that the enterprises of different countries gain different effectiveness. It is not always true. It is necessary to add that the research by J. E. Finegan was conducted in the enterprises operating in Australia, whose culture is described as: individualistic, with a low distance of authority, with weak avoidance of uncertainty, rather maleness and with a long distance of time (www.geert-hofstede.com/australia.html - 30.08.12). Otherwise, i.e. values can be different for the same levels of engagement in the organizations running the activity in countries with other culture. It requires conducting suitable research.

Giving the answer to the second question, it seems that taking presented dimensions of culture into consideration it is possible to characterize employees' engagement as well as to indicate chances of stimulating, creating it in the organization. Individuals who aim at individual achievements (cultures with a low power distance, weak avoidance of uncertainty, individualistic) will be engaged first of all in work when assigned tasks will be more interesting, will provide them with autonomy as well as the payment will be adequate to results. Members of the organization who are oriented towards others, appreciating cooperation (cultures: collectivist, femaleness, long-term) will get engaged for reason of commitment, paying attention to interpersonal relations.

Let us observe that the presented perspective does not include penetrating dimensions of cultures in a particular country. Taking them into account, it is possible to state that in some countries, e.g. the United States of America or the People's Republic of China, dimensions „suit each other“ (e.g. individualism and low power distance), and in others, e.g. in Poland – they are partly “contradictory” (table 4). Thus, shaping engagement requires noticing the uniqueness of culture and including it while implementing solutions proposed in table 3. According to the results of the research by G. Hofstede (2011) the United States of America is a country with individualistic culture, low power distance and weak avoidance of uncertainty. The engagement of the members of the organization, who appreciate freedom, independence and respect, will be favoured by taking care of: tasks to do to be interesting for them, to become a challenge, so they can perform them in a suitable range of autonomy, they are adequately rewarded. In the People's Republic of China – the country with the culture of enforced

Table 3. Dimensions of culture and determinants of employee engagement

	Determinants of employee engagement	Power distance		interpersonal relations		Uncertainty Avoidance		Importance of gender		Time orientation	
		large	low	individualism	collectivism	week	strong	masculinity	femininity	short-term	long-term
Work	Task: • content (challenge) • diversity (autonomy) • well-defined		X X	X X			X			X X	
	Condition: • time/place • benefits, • employment	X	X		X X		X X X				
Inter-personal relations	Superiors: • partners • „competitors“ • decision-makers • co-workers	X	X		X		X	X		X	X
	Employees • team (cooperation) • competition • distrust („alien“)				X X			X	X	X	X
	Organizational climate/ atmosphere in the team			X	X				X		X
	Conflicts: • power • rules • together (compromise)	X		X			X	X		X	
Organization	Goals: • enterprises • employees	X	X	X	X			X			X X
	Quality of life (balance: home- work)		X			X			X		
	Rewarding: • by position • according to merit • according to needs • by affiliation to the group • according to rules • by recognition	X	X	X	X		X		X		
	Promotion			X				X			
	Trainings		X	X	X				X		

Source: own study based on Sikorski (2006), Hofstede, Hofstede i Minkov (2011),
www.geert-hofstede.com (16.09.12)

collectivism, with large power distance, weak avoidance of uncertainty and long time horizon (table 4) – the conditions of performing work and the atmosphere in a team will be more important than tasks. Employees' engagement becomes the result of the sense of obligation, which also causes orientation towards realization of own organizational and own goals, subordination to decisions made by a superior or group, accepting inequality (www.geert-hofstede/china.html 16.09.12).

Table 4. Dimensions of culture defined in the model by to G. Hofstede taking into account the country

Dimensions of culture		Country
Power Distance	Low	Poland, the Czech Republic, Russia, China, France
	Large	England, USA, Canada, Australia, Ireland, the Netherlands, Germany, the Scandinavian countries,
interpersonal relations	Individualism	Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Germany, France, Spain, English-speaking countries, Netherlands,
	Collectivism	Thailand, Korea, China, Japan, Russia, Bulgaria
Uncertainty Avoidance	Week	scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, England, USA, Canada, Australia, Ireland, China,
	Strong	Germany, Hungary, China, India, Poland, the Czech Republic, Russia, France
Importance of gender	Masculinity	Poland, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Germany, English-speaking countries, China, Japan, Italy
	Femininity	Thailand, Korea, Russia, Bulgaria, the Netherlands, France, Spain
Time orientation	Short-term	England, USA, Spain, Czech Republic
	Long-term	China, Japan, East Asia, India

Source: own study based on: Sikorski (2006), Hofstede, Hofstede i Minkov (2011), www.geert-hofstede.com (16.09.12)

However, Polish enterprises operating in the culture with strong avoidance of uncertainty need hierarchy and formalization. At the same time a large distance of authority and individualism create specific human relations – creating the need for treating by a manager each employee in such a way as he would feel important despite the existence of visible inequality (www.geert-hofstede/poland.html, 16.09.12).

Summarizing, it is possible to state that the support of managers in shaping employees' engagement including cultural conditioning requires

conducting detailed research. They should concern the identification of relations between particular forms of engagement and values as well as dimensions of culture.

5. Instead of conclusions

Nowadays when the decrease of employees' engagement is noticed, and gaining a competitive advantage depends on it, it is significant to search for the factors influencing it. Taking into consideration that the basis of engagement is values and that globalization processes, technological progress contribute to international cooperation, creating multicultural enterprises, it is worth analyzing which elements of culture can strongly influence employees' attitudes and behaviour. Then it is possible to understand the needs and expectations of employees as well as implement suitable solutions in the organization.

Summary

Cultural determinants of employee engagement

The article presents the problem of employees' engagement. Being aware that values are the basis of employees' engagement it was assumed that it could be different in enterprises operating in diverse cultures. Taking the models of culture by G. Hofstede and H. Schwarz into consideration as well as factors influencing engagement the analysis of cultural conditioning of engagement was conducted.

Keywords: *employee engagement, culture, cultural determinants*

Streszczenie

Kulturowe uwarunkowania zaangażowania pracowników

W artykule zaprezentowano zagadnienie zaangażowania pracowników. Wiedząc, że wartości są podstawą zaangażowania pracowników założono, że może być ono inne w przedsiębiorstwach funkcjonujących w odmiennych kulturach. Uwzględniając model kultury G. Hofstede oraz H. Schwartza oraz czynniki mające wpływ na zaangażowanie dokonano analizy uwarunkowań kulturowych zaangażowania.

Słowa

kluczowe: *zaangażowanie pracowników, kultura, uwarunkowania kulturowe*

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