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COOPERATION AND COMPETITION AS ELEMENTS OF INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL VALUE SYSTEM AMONG MIDDLE TOP MANAGERS – PILOT STUDY

INTRODUCTION

Ever more researchers are interested in issues of values in work and organization context [e.g. Schwartz 1999; Ros et al. 1999]. Nowadays, one of the most acknowledged one is Shalom H. Schwartz who conducts research into values in cultural context. He defines values as "conceptions of the desirable that influence the way people select action and evaluate events." In other words, value system is a collection of norms, which constitute a moral code – indicator of what is good and desired, and what is bad, not acceptable, or even condemned. Values may be discussed with reference to individual (individual value system), and to smaller or bigger and more complicated group like company.

And just at organizational level values are an intrinsic element or basis of organizational culture [Chatman and Jehn 1994; O'Reilly, Chatman and Caldwell 1991; Sheridan 1992; Cameron and Quinn 2003], that serves realization of company mission, goals achievement, and development of ways of coping with problems in hard or even crisis times. In order to fulfill its function values should be shared by the greatest number of participants possible, even though managers have the most influence on its shape [Giberson et al. 2009]. Organizational values are employees' lodestar, especially new ones, and are an indicator of acceptable behaviors and attitudes.

Cooperation and competition are definitely significant values from the point of view of organization. Due to the skills of cooperation and interaction between members of organization or team within a company it is possible to realize many tasks or projects, which individuals would not be

able to do on their own. In turn, competition serves motivating employees and arousing energy, what is rather difficult to achieve in a group,[1] and what allows to gain extraordinary results by individuals.

Yet, is it possible to combine cooperation, which should be based on mutual trust and loyalty to coworkers, with competition between each other, that results in dishonesty and insincerity and insincerity to others? How do employees place just cooperation and competition in their values system? What positions in hierarchy do both values take in organizational system? What other values are connected with cooperation and competition at individual and organizational level? And finally, is there discrepancy between these values at organizational and individual level? The present work serves answering these questions, but because of small size of the sample it is only a pilot study.

1. AIMS OF STUDY

First aim of the current study was identification of individual value system of specific professional group – middle top managers who work for one of the biggest bank in Poland. Next goal was to determine value system in organization, what subjects work for, and finally comparing these two systems – individual and organizational, with emphasis on discrepancy in values, especially: cooperation and competition. Moreover, relationships of cooperation and competition with other values both at individual and organizational level were tested.

2. METHODS

PARTICIPANTS

The study was conducted among managers purposely. They were selected to the work in that organization as well as on managerial positions very carefully, and their work experience was sufficiently long. So, they make an

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[1] See: social loafing effect – "*the tendency to exert less effort when working on a group task in which individual contributions cannot be measured*" (Gilovich et al. 2006, p. 60).

example for new employees by virtue of organizational value system, being a means of conveying this value system, and having definitely better knowledge and awareness what is valued in organization.

Sample consisted of 54 participants – 27 women (52%) and 25 men (48%); two of them did not specify their gender. Average age of participants was 30 (SD = 4.19). The youngest person was 22, the oldest – 43. Respondents have worked in their present organization on average for about 4.67 years (SD = 3.17), the longest – 17 years; and in the current position – 2.4 years (SD = 2.32), the longest – 13 years.

MEASURES

The study was conducted with the use of a questionnaire, which was constructed basing on Schwartz Value Survey. The questionnaire consisted of 25 values relating to individual (part A – "important to me"), and organizational level (part B – "important to the organization I work for"). Answers were rated on a 6-point scale ranging from [−1] "opposed" to 4 "of supreme importance." Data collection was carried out on the training, which was part of a development program directed to managers with sufficient work experience in the organization and human resource management.

3. RESULTS

Data was analyzed with SPSS to compute correlations and descriptive statistics. Figure 1 displays detailed results concerning means in comparison of individual and organizational level.

ORGANIZATIONAL AND INDIVIDUAL VALUES

Values recognized by the studied managers as the most valued in their organization are:
- effectiveness (3.52),
- success (3.44),
- responsibility (3.41),
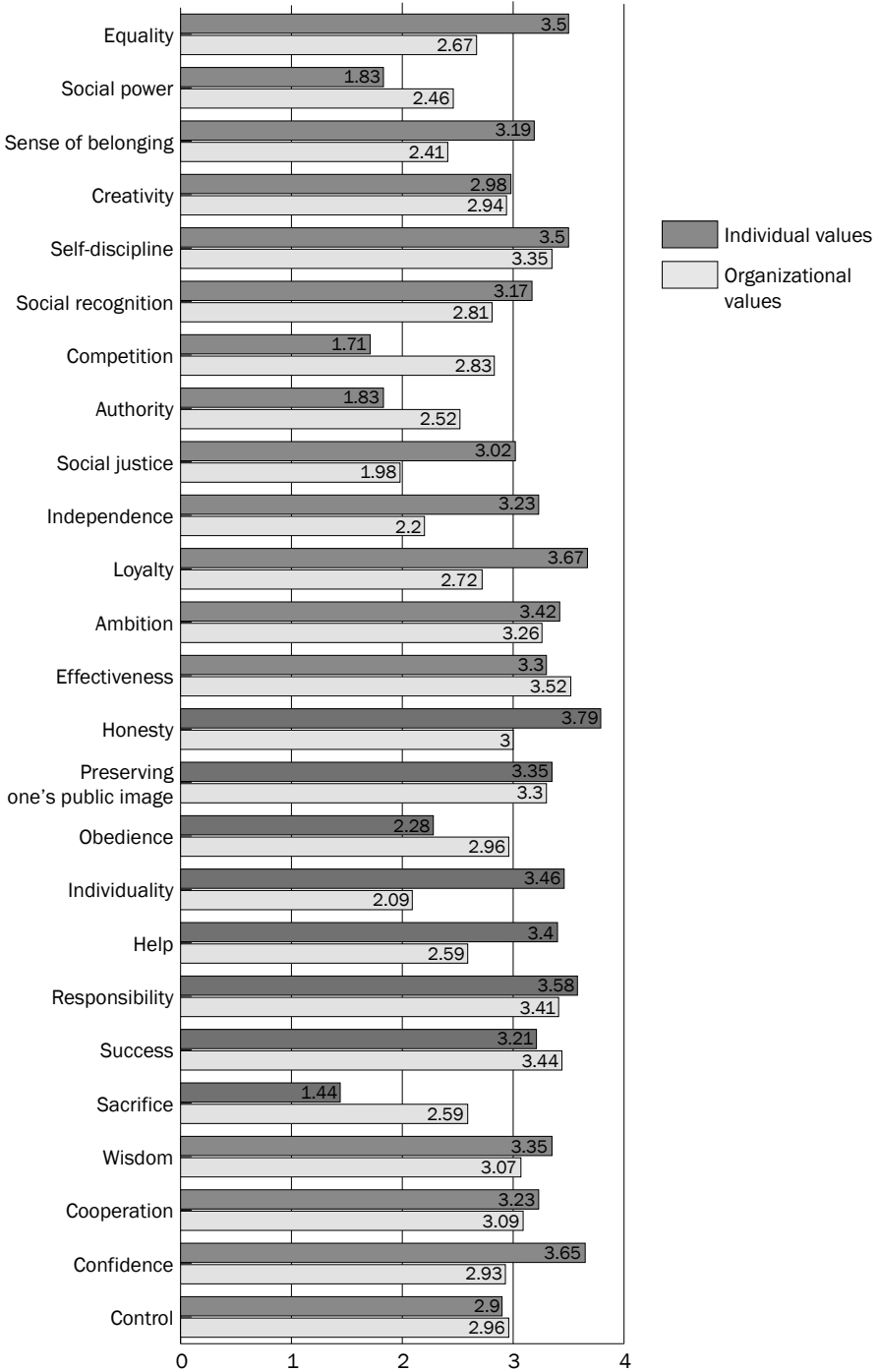- self-discipline (3.35),

Figure 1. Means of values compared individual with organizational level (n = 48)
Source: own elaboration.

   – preserving one's public image (3.3),
   – ambition (3.26),
   – **cooperation (3.09),**
   – wisdom (3.07).

In turn, values recognized as the least significant in the studied managers' place work are: social justice (1.98). Competition also gained high mean of 2.83.

In regard to individual values, according to respondents, the most important are:

   – honesty (3.79),
   – loyalty (3.67),
   – confidence (3.65),
   – responsibility (3.58),
   – self-discipline (3.5),
   – equality (3.5).

The least important values for managers at individual level are: sacrifice (1.44), **competition (1.71)** and authority (1.83). Cooperation was recognized between "very important" and "of supreme importance." There are more values from individual level above "very important" than in case organizational ones – 18 values in 25 gained an average equal or above 3.0 (on organizational level – only 9).

DISCREPANCY IN INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL VALUE SYSTEM

The widest gap between values at individual and organizational level concern: **competition**, social justice, independence, individuality and sacrifice (Figure 2). In turn, the arrowest discrepancy in these two value systems was gained in case of: creativity, preserving one's public image, control, **cooperation**, ambition and self-discipline.
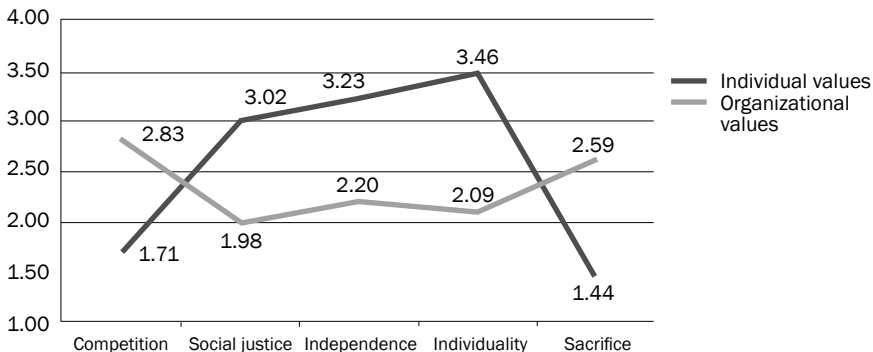

Figure 2. The widest gaps between organizational and individual values
Source: own elaboration.

RELATIONSHIPS OF COMPETITION AND COOPERATION WITH OTHER VALUES – INDIVIDUAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL LEVEL

When investigating relationships of competition and cooperation with other values, both at individual and organizational level some interesting relations may be observed (see: Table 1). Two values, i.e. effectiveness and success correlate positively with competition (respectively: r = .32 and .36) and cooperation at both levels (r = .36 and .35). Values related to only competition (but not to cooperation) in individual and organizational value system are: Authority (r = .67 and .65) and social power (r = .35 and .44). Whereas values which occured to be associated only with cooperation (but not with competition) at both levels are: preserving one's public image (r = .30 and .39), help (r = .30 and .43), and confidence (r = .50 and .46).

Some differences between organizational and individual value system were observed with regard to cooperation and competition. Competition, only at individual level (not at organizational) relates to creativity (r = .31), ambition (r = .35), and wisdom (r = .41). In organizational system values (but not in individual) self-discipline (r = .30), responsibility (r = .28), honesty (r = −.33), and individuality (r = −.30) are associated with competition. It is worth to note the negative relations in case of two last values and competition.

In turn, cooperation correlates with creativity (r = .41), self-discipline (r = .37), social recognition (r = .41) and obedience (r = .49) at individual level only, whereas at the organizational one with: equality (r = .33), ambition (r = .31), honesty (r = .34), responsibility (r = .40), sacrifice (r = .34) and control (r = .36).

Values, such as: sense of belonging, loyalty, social justice, and independence do not relate to any competition and cooperation at any level. It is surprising in case of lack of relationships between two first values and cooperation. It must be noticed that both values: cooperation and competition are not related to each other. Studied relationships fluctuate from weak (.28) to significant (.68).

Table 1. Correlations of Competition and Cooperation with other values, separately at individual (n = 48) and organizational (n = 54) levels

	Individual level		Organizational level	
	Competition	Cooperation	Competition	Cooperation
Equality	–.197	–.062	–.135	.326(*)
Social power	.354(*)	.147	.442(**)	–.153
Sense of belonging	.071	.199	–.047	.218
Creativity	.309(*)	.411(**)	.009	.232
Self-discipline	.12	.373(**)	.298(*)	.095
Social recognition	.246	.407(**)	.107	.219
Competition	1	.256	1	–.003
Authority	.675(**)	.284	.654(**)	–.119
Social justice	–.115	–.096	–.022	.170
Independence	.025	–.139	–.055	.170
Loyalty	–.096	.257	–.232	.200
Ambition	.355(*)	.204	.081	.310(*)
Effectiveness	.322(*)	.332(*)	.356(**)	.412(**)
Honesty	.046	–.044	–.332(*)	.345(*)
Preserving one's public image	.284	.297(*)	.038	.392(**)
Obedience	.395(**)	.488(**)	.500(**)	.058
Individuality	–.185	.25	–.303(*)	.223
Help	–.175	.304(*)	–.065	.430(**)
Responsibility	.005	.191	.280(*)	.402(**)
Success	.451(**)	.356(*)	.353(**)	.351(**)
Sacrifice	.439(**)	.233	.524(**)	.342(*)
Wisdom	.407(**)	.508(**)	.117	.430(**)
Cooperation	.256	1	–.003	1
Confidence	–.024	.509(**)	–.174	.461(**)
Control	.367(*)	–.112	.447(**)	.360(**)

*p < 0.01, **p < 0.001

Source: own elaboration.

4. DISCUSSION

The first aim of the present study was to identify the position of two values: cooperation and competition in individual and organizational value systems of managers. The second aim was to verify relationships these two values with others, and compare these relations at individual and organizational levels.

The studied individuals, personally value the most: honesty, loyalty, confidence, responsibility, self-discipline, and equality. Two of them, i.e. responsibility and self-discipline occurred in the group of organizational values. Apart from them, effectiveness, success, preserving one's public image, ambition, cooperation, and wisdom appeared as well. First group of values seems to be more universal, and to a greater extent is associated with characteristics which we expect from our close relatives, friends, and co-workers. The second group consists of values which are profitable for organization in the form of intensive work of employees.

Translating results into practice, organizational culture of company where studied managers work, is characterized by the expectation of success and goals achievement. Employees who are ambitious, very responsible, conscientious, self-disciplined, with strong need for development and achievement are highly valued in the organization. What is interesting, more important is skill of cooperation than need for competition, although the last one ranked very high also. Two organizational values found out in the group of the highest ranked individual values, i.e. responsibility and self-discipline, and next three were very close to the organizational ones: Preserving one's public image, cooperation, and ambition. It means, that studied managers seem to be fitted for their work place. They differ from organization to the highest degree in case of feeling of independence, individuality, and social justice.

Hence, the organization may become close to their employees by emphasis on these values, which are important for them and to a lesser extent for the organization, i.e. social justice, individuality, and independence. First of them means safety and a concern for others, two last ones – need for autonomy and having control over situation in the organization. Some studies confirmed that the level of congruence between organizational and individual values may be predictor of turnover [Vandenberghe 1999; O'Reilly et al. 1991]. So, it is worth to work on reducing gaps between organizational and individual system value and just selecting future employees in respect of person-culture fit.

Out of two key values from the point of view of the current work, i.e. cooperation and competition, only the last one ranked differently in organizational and individual value system. Skill of teamwork, coordination of efforts joined is a value almost to the same degree personal as organizational.

In turn, competition is perceived as a value needed in the organization, but in the individual value system it scores very low (lower is only sacrifice). Two issues are emerging. First, there is a gap between organizational and individual level in regard to competition. Some studies observed that values congruence may be related to job satisfaction, organizational commitment, and employees' intent to remain with employer [Westerman and Cyr 2004; Amos and Weathington 2008; Vandenberghe 1999; O'Reilly et al. 1991], whereas value mismatch leads to occupational burnout, and as further consequence to resignation from a job [Leiter, Jackson, Shaughnessy 2009].

Simultaneously, cooperation and competition are perceived as very important in the organizational value system. Both values give some profits for organization. Some tasks exceed abilities even of the best individual and in order to be accomplished they require coordination of efforts of the entire team. In turn, competition generates energy, what may lead to extraordinary results gained by individuals. Obtained correlations in current work show that both cooperation and competition are good for organization – both are associated with such values as success and effectiveness. Yet, is it possible to reconcile cooperation which should be based on mutual loyalty and confidence in co-workers, with competition associated with among others 'suspicious and hostile attitudes' or 'poor communication' [Deutsch 2006, p. 30]? Results of that study partly does not deny such combination – there is no negative correlation between these two values at both levels, as it would be expected (as well as positive relation). On the other hand, competition at both levels is associated, among others, with authority, social power, and above all – at organizational level negatively with honesty (!), what may exclude competitive and cooperative behaviors at the same time.

Deutsch distinguishes "destructive" and "constructive" competition, when in case of the last one – "the losers as well as the winners gain" and "winners see (...) that losers are better off, or at least not worse off than they were before the competition" [Deutsch 2006, p. 29]. In turn, Sagiv, Sverdlik and Schwartz [2011] suggest to assign individuals to character of tasks. Employees who emphasize power values should work in a competitive atmosphere, whereas individuals emphasize values associated with concern and care of others to tasks that require teamwork and cooperation.

To sum up, competition in the managers' individual value system is very low, otherwise at organization level where is valued as almost "very important." In turn, cooperation is significant both at individual and organizational level. In organizational value system competition is associated with authority, sacrifice, and obedience, whereas cooperation with: confidence, wisdom, and help. At individual level, the strongest relations competition were observed with authority, success, and sacrifice, and in case cooperation – confidence, wisdom, and obedience.

It must be emphasized, that it is pilot study, and results because of small sample should be treated with caution. However, it would be interesting to continue similar research but in larger sample, and in comparison with other occupational groups.

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