

MAŁGORZATA WYGANOWSKA
Silesian University of Technology

KATARZYNA TOBÓR-OSADNIK
Silesian University of Technology

The Passively Active Worker—A Diagnosis and Comparison of the Phenomenon in a Mining Company and a Corporation

Abstract: Individual behavior in an organization depends on many factors. However, an individual joining an organization is already equipped with a fixed system of values and an attitude. Therefore, identifying workers' attitudes is essential for human resource management in organizations.

A passively active worker—the so-called Z type—exhibits social behavior with features of *homo sovieticus*. The authors think that a Z-type employee is not solely the product of totalitarian and communist systems. The Z attitude appears in various forms among workers in the types of economies that are characteristic of Western Europe or the USA.

The aim of this study was to determine the intensity of the Z attitude among workers in two organizations with different technical cultures. The authors compared the technical cultures in Firm X and a department of Mine X.

Keywords: a passively active worker, workers' behavior, *homo sovieticus*, *homo corporatus*, organization, hard coal mining.

Introduction

In our opinion, passively active workers are human beings who are enslaved by a system (an organization or company), and are devoid of initiative, incapable of critical thinking, and expect or even demand everything from their country, authorities, or supervisor. Such workers are passive people, unwilling to take fate in their own hands, but at the same time they are extremely demanding. Despite having authority in some situations, these workers do not want to take on any responsibility. A passively active worker—the so-called Z type—is a kind of successor to *homo sovieticus*, who was a product of the previous system. The Z-type worker's social attitude has the characteristic features of *homo sovieticus*. Although the communist system, with a centrally planned economy, is already history in Poland, we can still find workers who have habits and features that were shaped by, or characteristic of, the previous era (Tobór-Osadnik et al. 2011).

In Poland the term *homo sovieticus* was popularized by Reverend Józef Tischner (Tischner 2005), who associated it with a specific type of behavior resulting from experiences in the period of the People's Republic of Poland (Walter 2011). At the same time he treated it more generally—not as an attitude characteristic of the communist system but one resulting from the eternal relation between a ruler and a subject. According to Szostak, the social

and economic transformation after 1989 did not thus effect the complete elimination of the *homo sovieticus* mentality. Moreover, in his opinion, that mentality has even deepened in some social groups (Szostak 2004).

Currently sociologists do not have a unified view of *homo sovieticus*. Among other things, some researchers have doubts as to whether *homo sovieticus* exists today and whether this type is solely a product of communism. According to Tyszka (2009), the characteristic features of *homo sovieticus* still exist in Polish society today, two decades after the collapse of communism. However, the issue cannot be regarded solely in the context of an inheritance from the communist system. The syndrome has its roots in the imperfections of the social and political system, in mistakes committed in the transformation process, and in the ongoing creation of policies in multiple social and economic areas (Kolaszka-Nowak 2015).

Tyszka emphasizes that the communist system did not have a monopoly on shaping such attitudes. He opines that rather than seeing *homo sovieticus* in its pure form currently we rather observe elements of it in Poles' ways of thinking and behaving (Tyszka 2009). Like Tyszka, we think that a passively active worker—a Z-type employee (an employee with *homo sovieticus* features)—is not solely the product of totalitarian and communist systems. The Z attitude appears in various forms among workers in the types of economy characteristic of Western Europe or the USA. (Gunkel, Schlägel, Engle 2014; Charness, Masclet, Villeval 2014)

What is interesting is the fact that such an attitude is exhibited by individuals who were born or raised after the year 1989 in Poland. Like their peers in other countries, they exhibit the syndrome of learned helplessness in their professional work (Moczyłowska 2005). The most probable cause is the education system. It is significant that the syndrome is associated with people who have opportunities and high potential for development but who are simultaneously unwilling to change their situation. Such people expect to be fully led and to act according to set patterns (“fill in the test,” “act by the book”) (Harvey 2009). Such attitudes are intensified in organizations with a strong hierarchy and autocratic management style, including corporations.

Arnott emphasizes the powerful cult nature of such organizations, which is reflected in a hierarchical structure based on following procedures, strict control, and prescriptiveness (Arnott 2000; Yildiz 2014: 25). Such an organization leads to the enslavement of the worker and creates an imitator subjected to the organization's rules (Ostrowski 2007). Research into such attitudes in Polish companies was conducted by Grzywacz and Ochowski, who showed that such a phenomenon appears in the organizations they studied (Ochowski 2003). The engagement of workers in their organization's activities was also analyzed by Macey and Schneider. They distinguished three different aspects of engagement (Macey 2008):

- engagement resulting from performing a given task,
- engagement resulting from drawing satisfaction from the work,
- engagement resulting from having responsibility for a given task.

It is known that workers' level of engagement in an organization's activities translates notably into profits or losses. However, the point is not merely to measure the engagement level but also to look comprehensively at employee characteristics that might

enhance or hamper it (Chen, Lim 2013). It is worth mentioning here that actions leading to

- subordinating an individual's activities to the community's activities,
- releasing employees from responsibility (the centralization of decisions),
- limiting independent actions,
- bringing actions under norms,
- subordinating employees to an authoritarian power,

—which are characteristic of large organizations—might decrease the degree of engagement among workers and increase the level of prescriptivism and enslavement (Tobór-Osadnik and Wyganowska 2007).

The aspects of workers' engagement in an organization's activities defined by Macey and Schneider are consistent with the features (factors) of a Z-type worker defined by Korach (2009):

- factor N—slavery,
- factor C—martyrdom,
- factor E—egoism.

Factor N determines the degree of dependency on the system in which an individual lives. It defines the enslaved attitude—"it has to be this way." A worker is dissatisfied with the system and situation, but he does not rebel because even though there is no freedom, the system still provides a living. The worker is not responsible for anything because "the authorities" are in charge; he does not have to be creative or resourceful.

The next factor, C, measures the daily sense of injustice and oppression. At the same time, such martyrdom completely justifies lack of activity as "there is nobody to make an effort for." Such an attitude is characterized by excessive suspiciousness, putting blame on others, and irrational claims.

Factor E measures "the egoistic attitude" in an organization. The escalation of that factor in a worker is visible in a lack of responsibility for others. The worker is guided by his own narrow interest and inability to think in terms of common interests (Tobór-Osadnik, Kabalski, Wyganowska 2013).

According to many managers in various companies who have compared ideas about the passively active (Z-type) worker with their own employees' behavior, it is obvious that regardless of company type there are large numbers of workers who feel harmed by their employer and dislike the situation in the workplace yet are unwilling to act to change the situation. These are grudging workers who expect full care from the authorities (in the broad sense) (Gino, Krupka, Weber 2013). This group of workers is also characterized by reluctance to take responsibility for the fate of the community in which they live. Such workers exhibit features of the Z attitude.

A worker cannot be classified as solely one type but a dominating type can be defined. Thus in studying a Z-type worker for the above dimensions (factors) only the distance to each of these factors can be determined and treated as a measure for the domination of individual factors in a worker's general behavior.

The studies conducted in ARK Consulting in Warsaw (Korach 2009) showed that the N factor is a dominant and main factor in a passively active worker—a Z-type worker. The identification of workers with Z features is important in the sense that indi-

viduals with the N attitude are completely “controlled from outside.” Without the support of the person in control, they become helpless. They are not eager to take responsibility at work and stick to what they know well. As a rule they are obedient to their superiors. They are capable of teamwork if given a task within their inherent talents.

Admittedly, people who are “controlled from outside” do not have any ambitious goals, but they are obedient if someone sets such goals for them (Lipowska 2012). Their behavior is not influenced by internal motivation, but it may be controlled using tools of external motivation. In strongly hierarchical organizations where obedience is expected rather than independence (e.g., the army, the police, or in mining), such a worker is extremely welcome (in specific positions) and will contribute to the efficiency, effectiveness, and safety of the organization’s activities.

C attitudes (martyrdom) pose a huge threat to co-workers in a work team. People with such an attitude become “whipping boys” and often trigger aggression. Their constant grumbling, suspiciousness, and claims of prerogative may also produce a feeling of guilt in the team, and they may take permanent advantage of other workers for help with work. Quite often the C factor in team behavior is accompanied by the phenomenon of social laziness (Robbins 2004).

Individuals show a tendency to reduce their effort during teamwork in comparison to the effort undertaken individually: *Let others do their best while I do not have to because we are assessed as a group.* An individual with C-type features constantly takes advantage of other team members, avoiding responsibility and effort. At the same time it is worth emphasizing that the phenomenon of social laziness is a feature generally characterizing group behavior and as a result lowering its productivity. Efficiency may be additionally decreased if there is a person with the C factor present in the group.

People with a high intensity of the N factor are often characterized by the E factor (according to the findings of studies conducted in ARK Consulting, on the basis of an individual personality questionnaire). Such individuals are incapable of acting to further the team’s success. A permanent, sustainable development in social or ecological areas is of no importance to them if it does not translate into their personal interest. The permanent use of common goods at work or in society is “completely justified.” Such people are characterized by highly developed consumerism.

The *enslaved* attitude as such poses no threat to the efficiency or effectiveness of an activity. Proper management and choice of tasks for such a worker might make him work very well in a team. Paul Hersey and Ben Blanchard, creators of the situation management concept, recommend an “instructive management” style in such a situation (Blanchard 2007), that is, setting clearly defined goals, having a complete plan of action, and supervising its realization (Blanchard 2009). At the same time it is worth mentioning that a manager cannot always afford to direct each worker “individually.”

Threats to an organization’s effectiveness exist when features of N, C, and E types dominate a work team and set the behavioral standard for the majority, because other workers may adopt a similar attitude at work while observing the lack of reaction to the behavior of the Z-type worker (Muethel, Hoegl 2010).

This is a very unfavorable situation, and thus the identification of such attitudes among employees will allow an efficient manager to direct all subordinates in such a way that all goals are accomplished.

Identification of a Z-type worker's Attitude in Selected Companies—Calculations and Statistics

Our research hypothesis was that a passively active, Z-type attitude (with the characteristic features of an enslaved worker) may exist in companies irrespective of their type of production processes. Our research aim was to determine the existence and intensity of the features under study among workers in two organizations with different production systems: one being a Polish mining company (or a department of that company) and the other a Polish company (or a department of that company) with the characteristics of a corporation, active in the same region of the country.

The companies selected for the comparative analysis differed not only in their method of organizing production processes, but also in:

- their internal communication system,
- their manner of creating their image among their workers,
- their manner of creating distinguishable cultural artefacts in the organization,
- their manner of informing employees about the company's mission, vision, and strategic goals (lack of or significant participation in their creation),
- their lack or possession of bottom-up initiatives to create innovative solutions,
- their promotion of ecological attitudes.

The companies differed in the level of service provided both to their internal customers (employees) and to external parties. However, the companies are situated a dozen kilometers from each other. Thus all the sociological and cultural features of the community in which the workers of the companies live are consistent and we may assume that in these organizations the workers' attitudes are influenced by external factors. They were selected for further study for this reason.

The next stage was to carry out survey research on the basis of individual questionnaires and to identify workers' attitudes, including the Z attitude, in the selected companies. Minimum values of the sample were determined to be:

$$n = \frac{U_{\alpha}^2}{4E^2} \quad (1)$$

where:

E means the maximum permissible estimate error, i.e., a difference between the proportion of sample (p) and the proportion of population, whereas U means the number of units of standard deviation, which was supposed to be interpreted from the table of normal distribution for the level of trust $1 - \alpha$ (for $\alpha = 0,05$). The value interpreted from the tables is on the level $U = 1.644854$.

Using formula (1), minimum values of the sample were determined and presented in **Table 1**.

Table 1

Minimum Values of the Samples for Mine X and Firm X

Company	Number of employees (individuals)	Minimum value of the sample (individuals)	Number of questionnaires collected (individuals)
department of Mine X	320	68	69
Firm X	211	68	89

Source: individual study.

170 questionnaires were sent to Firm X and 100 questionnaires to a department of Mine X. As [table 1](#) shows, 69 correctly filled-in questionnaires were collected from the department of Mine X and 89 correctly filled-in questionnaires from Firm X. They constituted a sufficient sample, being a number over the minimum values of the sample. Then the findings from the questionnaires were arranged in order to determine the distances between matrixes of each answer and the matrix of the ideal answer posited by the authors.

The ideal answer is a set describing an employee with no Z-type features. The measured distance is treated as a numerical value defining the average deviation of the respondent's individual answers from the assumed standard. Thus the value can be treated as an unbiased estimator of dispersion—variability. Then the formula for that distance is as follows (individual study):

$$d_i^2 = \frac{(X_{(:,i)} - W)^T \cdot (X_{(:,i)} - W)}{n - 1} \quad (2)$$

where:

d_i^2 —the distance

W —the vertical vector which includes the standard,

$X_{(:,i)}$ —the vector of answers from the i -th respondent, where the value of 'I' index changes from 1 to ' Ω ', where ' Ω ' means the number of filled-in questionnaires,

Z —the matrix including the received answers from the respondents, from which vertical vectors $X_{(:,i)}$ are taken for calculations,

n —the number of questions in the survey. The distance defining the intensity variability of Z-type features is included in the interval from 0 to 1. The following formula was used to estimate the number of intervals for an analysis of the amount and attitudes of Z-type workers ([Stanisławek 2010](#)):

$$k = 1 + 3.3 \cdot \log_{10} n \quad (3)$$

where k means the number of intervals, whereas n means the size of the survey sample.

$$1 + 3.3 \cdot \log_{10} 213 = 6.6$$

7 variability intervals were accepted for use for further studies. Spans of the intervals were determined on the basis of the mathematical dependence ([Starzyńska 2009](#)):

$$h = \frac{x_{\max} - x_{\min}}{k} \quad (4)$$

where: h —the span of the interval.

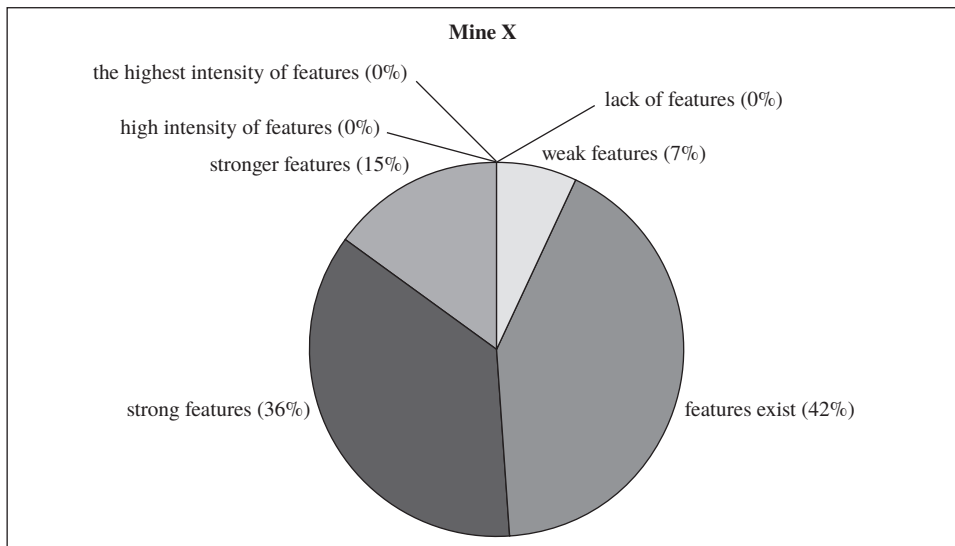
In this way 7 variability intervals were estimated and determined for further analyses.

It was assumed that workers in the extreme intervals either do not exhibit features of the attitude under study, or, on the other hand, show their largest intensity (fig. 1, 2).

In such a comparison of the results presented in figures 1 and 2 it is visible that passively active workers (Z-type workers) constitute a smaller group in Mine X than in Firm X. At the same time it should be stated that both in the Mine X department and in Firm X none of the workers being surveyed qualified for the group with the highest intensity of the features under study.

Figure 1

**A Distribution of the Percentage Participation of the Surveyed Workers in Mine 'X'
According to the Intensity Level of the Features Under Study in Workers' Attitudes (individual study)**



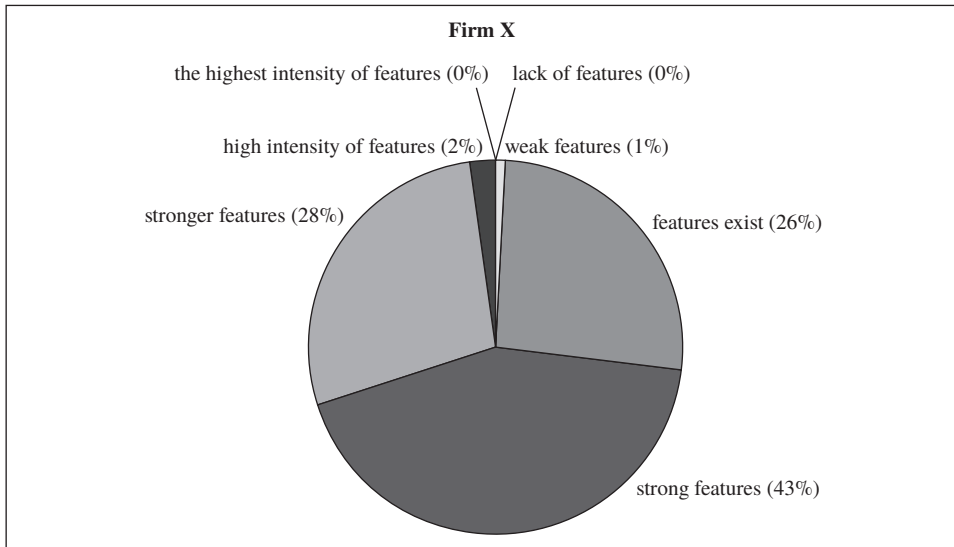
The first conclusion it is possible to form is that in Firm X, which uses a highly automated work system not demanding creativity from the average worker, there is a higher rate of passively active workers of the Z type.

Comparison of findings on the three factors of N (slavery), C (martyrdom), and E (egoism) for the respondents in Mine X is presented in fig. 3. This graph shows the level of features characteristic of a Z-type worker in a department of Mine X, qualified to the intervals from high to highest intensity of N, C, and E features. The values of the percentages indicate the prevalence of attitudes corresponding to a behavior. Thus an intensity level of 100% means that all respondents in a given group were in favor of such a behavior.

Analogically, a comparison of the research findings among workers in Firm X in the same interval is presented in fig. 4. What is important is the fact that 30% of Firm X respondents were qualified to this group of workers, whereas in Mine X only 15%.

Figure 2

**A Distribution of the Percentage Participation of the Surveyed Workers in Firm 'X'
According to the Intensity Level of Features in the Studied Attitude of Workers (individual study)**

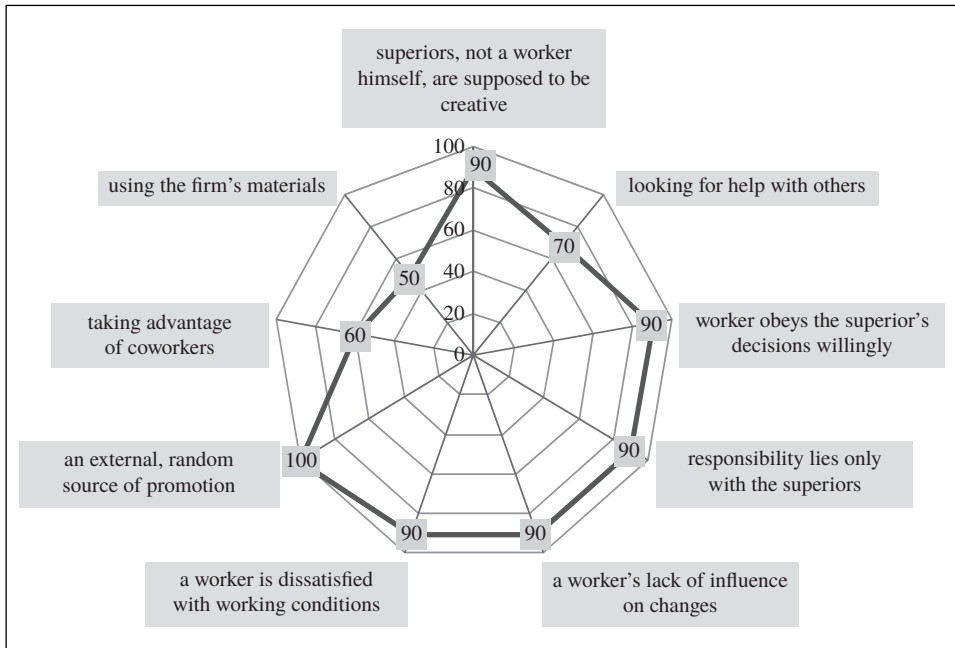


In analysing the research findings (fig. 3, 4) we notice that as many as 90% of respondents in the mine and 100% of respondents in the firm state that superiors and not workers should be creative (this is an aspect of the N feature). Furthermore, 70% in the mine and 100% in the firm believe that in a difficult situation people should seek help from others and not try to solve the problem themselves (an aspect of N and C features). As a rule, passively active workers are more willing than others to submit to their superiors' decisions (as many as 90% in the mine and 60% in the firm declare such willingness—the N feature). Passively active workers believe that responsibility for the organization lies solely with their superiors (as many as 90% of respondents in the mine and 100% in the firm—the N feature). At the same time such workers think they have no influence on the company's activities (90% in the mine and 100% in the firm—C and N features). The respondents qualified to the group with strong and very strong features of passively active employees constitute respectively 90% in the mine and 100% in the firm (C feature). All the respondents, both in the mine and the firm, declared that promotion depends on external, random factors (C and N features). This type of worker believes that there is nothing wrong with taking advantage of co-workers (60% and 100% respectively) or in using company materials (50% and 50% respectively) for their own benefit (C and E features).

The research findings proved the hypothesis that the companies under comparison have workers exhibiting the passively active attitudes of the Z type. However, the number of such workers in each company is different. There are more in Firm X, which is highly automated and where assembly-line work dominates, than in Mine X, where task work is predominant.

Figure 3

The Comparison of Features in the Studied Group of Workers in Mine ‘X’ from the Intervals With the High to the Highest Intensity of N, C and E Features (individual study)



The legend:

- 90% superiors, not a worker himself, are supposed to be creative—N
- 70% looking for help from others—N, C
- 90% a worker obeys the superior's decisions willingly—N
- 90% responsibility lies only with the superiors—N
- 90% a worker's lack of influence on changes—C, N
- 90% a worker is dissatisfied with working conditions—C
- 100% an external, random source of promotion—C, N
- 60% taking advantage of co-workers—C, E
- 50% using the firm's materials—E

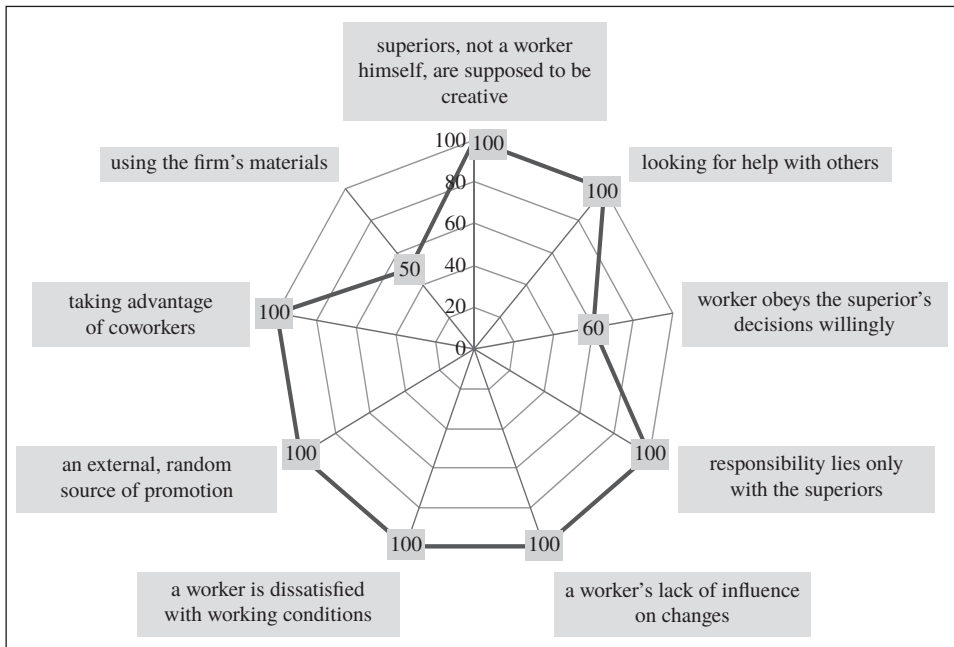
Summary and Conclusions

Understanding differences in workers' personalities and attitudes—and determining their type, regardless of methods and approach—is necessary so that contemporary managers can select good workers for specific tasks. It is easier to have a worker who is satisfied, efficient, and effective if workers are properly matched with their assigned duties. This is particularly important in teamwork, especially in management by means of projects and in creating project teams.

Individual behavior in an organization depends on many factors. However, it is necessary to realize that an individual joining an organization is already equipped with a fixed system of values and attitudes as well as with a personality that is essentially already shaped.

Figure 4

The Comparison of Features in the Studied Group of Workers in Firm 'X' from the Intervals With the High to the Highest Intensity of N, C and E Features (individual study)



The legend:

- 100% superiors, not a worker himself, are supposed to be creative—N
- 100% looking for help from others—N, C
- 60% a worker obeys the superior's decisions willingly—N
- 100% responsibility lies only with the superiors—N
- 100% a worker's lack of influence on changes—C, N
- 100% a worker is dissatisfied with working conditions—C
- 100% an external, random source of promotion—C, N
- 100% taking advantage of co-workers—C, E
- 50% using the firm's materials—E

Therefore, identifying workers' attitudes is essential for human resource management in organizations.

In summarizing the studies to identify selected workers' attitudes in a selected mining company, we can formulate the following conclusions:

A worker with a high intensity of N, C, and E features (a passively active worker of the Z type):

- expects creativity from his superior in the workplace,
- looks for help in a difficult situation from his co-workers and superiors,
- is dissatisfied with working conditions, but thinks that change at work does not depend on him,
- believes that promotion at work can be achieved only thanks to acquaintances and luck,
- reckons that he may take advantage of company materials for his own benefit.

The attitudes of passively active workers of the Z type are not significantly different in the companies under comparison, but the essential fact is that the number of such workers is greater in the assembly-line production (30% in Firm X) than the task production (15% in Mine X). This may result from the extensive system of set procedures in the corporation; the independence of employees working in an environment of completely automated production systems is limited. These attitudes appear in Firm X despite the application of modern communication methods and an expanded system of training and motivating workers.

Passively active workers of the Z type have a different attitude to teamwork from all other workers. The achievements of the team they work in are less important than their individual work, but at the same time failures are the responsibility of the whole team and not themselves.

A characteristic feature of a passively active worker is a desire for change (he likes nothing), but at the same time a reluctance to participate in change and to undertake any action to this end. Such a worker expects change for the better but without his cooperation. Resistance to change is characteristic of a large group of workers and change is considered to be the responsibility of the organization's management. Thus this aspect should not be overlooked in creating motivational tools for a Z-type worker.

Finally, although a considerable period of time has passed since the transformation of Poland's political system, the attitude of a passively active worker of the Z type, who is a kind of inheritor of some *homo sovieticus* features, is intensified in the modern and hierarchy-oriented company under study, which relies on numerous set procedures of conduct. Further research into the influence of such an attitude on the behavior of all the employees in the organization is necessary. This attitude, which is externally controlled and full of suffering, may decrease the effectiveness of the whole group and eventually the achievements of the entire company. Comparing the findings in two different companies shows the existence (in various numbers) of such workers in each of them. Their number is by no means small and we may suspect that other companies in this region also have workers with these features. Such a phenomenon may have repercussions on the macro scale, both in social and economic spheres.

References

- Arnott, D. 2000. *Corporate Cults. The Insidious Lure of the all-consuming Organization*. New York: American Management Association.
- Blanchard, K. H., Zigarmi, P., Zigarmi, D. 2009. *Jednominutowy menedżer i przywództwo*. Warszawa: MT Biznes.
- Blanchard, K. H. 2007. *Przywództwo wyższego stopnia*. Warszawa: PWN.
- Harvey, P., Martink, M. J. 2009. Attribution Theory and Motivation, in: N. Borkowski (ed.), *Organizational Behavior, Theory, and Design in Health Care*. Sudbery, MA.: Jones and Bartlett Publishers, pp. 147–164.
- Korach, R. 2009. *Nagroda i kara. Profesjonalna ocena pracownika*. Gliwice: Helion.
- Lipowska, J. 2012. Detrminanty motywacji wewnętrznej. Czy można zmotywować każdego pracownika? *Zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi* 3–4: 41–52.
- Macey, W. H., Schneider, B. 2008. The Meaning of Employee Engagement. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology* 1: 3–30.
- Moczyłowska, J. 2005. Wyuczona bezradność — psychologiczna bariera w ograniczaniu nierówności społecznych, in: M. G. Woźniak (ed.), *Kapitał ludzki i intelektualny*. Rzeszów: Mitel, pp. 419–426.

- Ochinowski, T., Grzywacz, W. 2003. Kult korporacyjny — zwyrodnienie relacji między firmą a pracownikami. *Zarządzanie Zasobami Ludzkimi* 2: 69–76.
- Ostrowski, P. 2007. Review of D. Arnett's *Corporate cults. The insidious lure of the all-consuming organization*. *Zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi* 5: 161–163.
- Robbins, S. P. 2010. *Zasady zachowania w organizacji*. Poznań: Wyd. Zysk i S-ka.
- Stanisławek, J. 2010. *Podstawy statystyki*. Warszawa: Oficyna wydawnicza Politechniki Warszawskiej.
- Starzyńska, W. (ed). 2009. *Podstawy statystyki*. Warszawa: Difin.
- Szostak, W. 2004. Świadomość homo sovieticus w III Rzeczypospolitej, in: J. Kornaś (ed.), *Kryzys Rzeczypospolitej? Studia z zakresu funkcjonowania systemu politycznego*. Kielce: Wyższa Szkoła Ekonomii i Administracji w Kielcach, pp. 111–122.
- Tischner, J. 2005. *Etyka solidarności i Homo sovieticus*. Kraków: Znak.
- Tobór-Osadnik, K., Kabalski, P., Wyganowska, M. 2012. Międzynarodowe standardy Sprawozdawczości Finansowej a homo sovieticus i postawy pracownicze polskich księgowych. *Zeszyty Teoretyczne Rachunkowości* 65(121): 71–98.
- Tobór-Osadnik, K., Wyganowska, M. 2011. Identyfikacja postaw pracowniczych. *Wiadomości Górnicze* 3: 155–161.
- Tobór-Osadnik, K. 2012. *Identyfikacja postaw pracowniczych w różnych kulturach technicznych na przykładzie przedsiębiorstwa górniczego*. Gliwice: Wydawnictwo Politechniki Śląskiej.
- Tyszką, K. 2009. Homo Sovieticus Two Decades Later. *Polish Sociological Review* 168(4): 507–522.
- Walter, P. 2011. *Homo sovieticus — spór o człowieka*. *Racjonalista.pl*, 04.07. <http://www.racjonalista.pl/>

Biographical Notes:

Małgorzata Wyganowska, Ph.D., Faculty of Mining and Geology, Department of Management and Safety Engineering, Silesian University of Technology. Her main research interests concerns optimization of human resources management in the company; internal communication-design and audit; social network analysis; competence profile employee; negotiation techniques; elements of safety management in human resources management.

E-mail: malgorzata.wyganowska@polsl.pl

Katarzyna Tobór-Osadnik, Ph.D., works at the Faculty of Mining and Geology, Department of Management and Safety Engineering, Silesian Technical University. Her interests covers management, organisational behaviour, organizational culture, safety culture, the role of HR in health and safety management.

E-mail: katarzyna.tobor@polsl.pl