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Teachers and Success – Psychological Characteristics and Perceived Success Sources¹

Abstract

In this article three separate, but connected studies are presented. The first and second studies conducted on two large samples of teachers (N=610&N=200) were realized to find an answer to the question about relationship of some personality characteristics (study 1.) or creative attitude (study 2.) and feeling of being a man/woman of success in teachers' case. The results showed statistically significant correlations between achieved success (in self-assessment) and such personality traits as: extraversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness (all relations are positive) and a negative correlation with neuroticism. In the second study significant differences in nonconformity, algorithmic behaviour and heuristic behaviour were found between teachers who think about themselves as people of success and those who did not achieve success. Successful teachers (in their own eyes) were more conformist and intellectually rigid (higher algorithmic and lower heuristic behaviour levels) than those who did not achieve success.

The third study deals with the problem of teachers' success source definitions and elements which could help to achieve success. The analysis of the data conducted in the Polish General Social Survey between 1992 and 2002 shows that teachers, similarly to the rest of society, see success sources mainly in individual abilities and activity (ambition, hard work), but one can see an interesting phenomenon of a growing number of factors which could be associated with social stratification – mainly family income and parents' education level.

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Introduction

Success is becoming one of the journalistic, political as well as scientific discourse keywords, and pursuing it assumes the proportions of a basic activity, though the statement “man of success” is sometimes ambiguously associated – as one often uses this expression with respect to both people who aim at self-realization or have become successful businesspeople, and – less frequently in fact – embezzlers and those who effectively evade the law. Views on the nature of success and on its circumstances seem significant for at least a few reasons. Firstly, attributions connected with achieving success, or ascribing sources of success to an individual or to extra-individual sources, set a specific climate of debates over social life. If one claims that success is most of all dependent on an individual, then those who do not achieve it are treated as those who do not try hard enough or are less bright. If one considers placement on the social ladder to be the source, then one should assume that the family status, education or parents’ affluence are the factors that mark out the efficiency of operating in the contemporary world. The second significant reason for which these issues are worth dealing with is the problem of attributing success or factors that are conducive to success in the eyes of teachers. According to their point of view, and if it is then to what extent, different from their view of the rest of the society? Do teachers see success as an element of individual engagement – its ambition and conscientious work – or do they ascribe it more to talents or maybe even skilful though not always honest “resourcefulness” and making use of one’s own or one’s parents’ contacts? Answers to these and not only these questions can be found further down the pages of the present article which discusses definition doubts connected with the idea of success in the pedagogical and psychological literature on the subject. Then, some attention is paid to the different dimensions of success, most frequently listed predicators of success as well as to attempting to sketch a profile of a man of success.

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Dimensions of success

In order to understand the essence of the phenomenon in question, aside from defining success it is also important to separate the fields in which people achieve success, analyze which types of accomplishments are accepted by the subject as success, and how people classify and hierarchize the achieved successes (Czarzasty, 2005).

Research, conducted in 1995 on the sample of 1.5 thousand Poles (Firkowska-Mankiewicz, 1997, 1999) shows that Polish people describe success in the categories of esteemed values and achievements in preferred fields.

Almost half (48%) of the researched group associate success with material success, one in three (29%) reads success as achievements connected with work and professional standing, 28% indicate self-fulfillment, realization of ambitions and plans, 27% point to successful family life, 16% of the researched describe success as health, happiness, peace of mind, 14% consider social prestige to be the definition of success, and a mere 8% of the researched indicate the level of education (Grzeszczyk, 2003; Mehrabian, 2000; Pankowski, 1997; Skarzynska, Chmielewski, 1998).

The characteristic of people who choose a particular type of success was checked upon. Analyses indicate that success is most frequently associated with material goods by people between thirty and fifty years of age, of a low level of education, a difficult material situation and doing low social status jobs. This group is characterized by pessimism, passiveness, and negative assessment of their frame of mind. The answer to the question of whether they did achieve success is usually negative.

Most often, success is seen as a category of professional accomplishment by women from large towns, of minimum secondary education level, very frequently running their own businesses.

Self-fulfillment is synonymous with success primarily according to young people, between 18 and 30 years of age, descending from intellectual families. The group is characterized by high activity, entrepreneurship, good frame of mind, confidence in their own abilities.

Almost a third (27%) of the researched group that attribute success to family life is composed of people who have family, more frequently women than men. Most of this population is composed of people of a secondary and higher education level, white-collar workers, for example in the sector of trade and services or running their own businesses.

Analyzing the afore-mentioned characteristics, one may assume with high likelihood that understanding success is largely dependent on the values one

believes in, which on the other hand are influenced by complex psychosocial factors that condition a person to particular perception and preference of the given categories of success.

Similar conclusions can be drawn while analyzing the results of the research conducted nearly thirty years ago by M. Widerszal-Bazyl (1979, p. 63-65). The author conducted research that regarded interrelations between the level of motivation for achievement and preferred success. One of the stages of her research was determination by the researched of who they regard to be a person of success. On the basis of an open question, the author separated 12 categories that described the different types of success. The researched regarded the following to be success: (1) good and eminent results at professional work; (2) competitions, patents, national prizes; (3) high level of specialization, high qualifications, great knowledge; (4) interesting job, satisfaction with work; (5) social usefulness of their work; (6) consequent realization of life-size aspirations, hard objectives, undertaking actions in which human character can be seen; (7) doctorate, scientific degrees; (8) high-ranking professional position; (9) recognition; (10) "consumption" success (material success); (11) "family" success.

The clear majority of the highlighted categories is connected with success in the professional field. At least to some extent this is a result of the specificity of the researched group, to which 174 engineers were qualified – people of a higher education level, and in many cases still doing research.

What follows from the quoted research is that the values one prizes largely influence understanding of success. Hence, one can come up with a hypothesis that it is a relatively subjective definition, as to a great extent it depends on the condition of the subject, his or her outlooks and hierarchy of values.

Predictors of success

Similarly as in case of defining success, there is a lack of a clear-cut expression of what factors are crucial in achieving success.

Analyses run by Anna Firkowska-Mankiewicz (1999, p. 113–114) bring forth a conclusion that the feeling of success mainly depends on: (1) health condition (the worse the health condition, the more rare feeling of success); (2) investing in one's personal development (the higher the level of it, the more frequent the feeling of success is); (3) self-assessment during secondary school (the better it is, the more frequent feeling of success); (4) go-aheadness (the higher it is, the more frequent feeling of success); (5) life optimism (the higher it is, the more frequent feeling of success); (6) current self-assessment (the better it is, the more frequent feeling of

success); (7) frame of mind (the worse it is, the more rare the feeling of success); (8) marital status (married ones admit to having achieved success more frequently); (9) professional level (the lower it is, the more rare the feeling of success); (10) assessment of one's own professional position (the higher it is, the more frequent feeling of success); (11) assessment of one's own material position (the higher it is, the more frequent feeling of success).

Carrying on the analysis further down the road of the stages of the research, the influence of bio-psycho-social factors on the feeling of success proved that in as many as 23% of the cases personality factors influence the feeling of success, and 16% have to do with professional and material position indicators. Educational competences explain approximately 8% of the variance of the feeling of success.

Should one break each of these indicators into individual variables, it proves that out of the “personality block” the current self-assessment is mostly influential in the feeling of achieved success – the higher the self-assessment, the higher the feeling of success. Moreover, “(...) high feeling of success goes together with a low level of machiavellianism; people who think they have achieved success in life are characterized by a positive image of the world and human nature, not distorted by cynicism and manipulation.” (Firkowska-Mankiewicz, 1999, p. 117).

In the block connected with educational competences, the most important role was played by high motivation to study in high school. Those people who were characterized by high cognitive curiosity experienced the feeling of success more often.

In summary, one may suppose that people characterized by a high level of self-assessment and a low level of the feeling of machiavellianism, occupying higher professional posts and having a higher material status than their coevals as well as characterized by high motivation to study during high school, have the highest chance of feeling that they are people of success.

Study 1

To check how self-assessment of being a man-of-success is connected with some psychological characteristics of teachers, the first study was realized. The main dependent variable was self-evaluation of being or not being a man/woman who achieved success, measured on a 5-point Likert type scale. Independent variables were personality factors – openness to experience, extraversion, neuroticism, agreeableness and conscientiousness, as well as some socio-demographical variables – age, gender, and number of years of experience.

Method and sample

The subjects were asked to say to what extent they think they achieved success on a 5-point Likert type scale – from decidedly not (1) to decidedly yes (5).

Additionally they were asked to complete some demographics information and personality inventory – NEO-FFI of Costa and McCrae in the Polish adaptation by Zawadzki, Strelau, Szczepaniak and Śliwińska (1998).

The research was realized on a sample of 610 Polish teachers. More than 80% of the sample were women (80.6% - 508). The subjects' age ranged from 20 to 66, with a mean $x=40$ years and standard deviation $s=10.10$. Nearly all of the Ss had a higher educational level with a university degree (M.A. – 87.5%, B.A. – 7%, Ph.D. – 1%).

Results

The majority of the studied teachers declared that they rather achieved success (54%), while 1/5 of the Ss had problems with the answer (“neither yes nor no” category was chosen by 21%). Twelve percent of the asked teachers declared they definitely achieved success (definitely yes – 12%), and eight percent felt they rather did not achieve success, and less than two percent (1.7%) – that they definitely did not achieve success. Due to the skewed distribution of dependent variable and its ordinal scale – Kendall *tau-b* correlation coefficient was used in the further analysis as well as other non parametric statistical tests.

The feeling of success was significantly correlated with four of five personality factors, three coefficients were positive, one negative. Positive correlations were found between the feeling of success and extraversion ($\tau[610]=.112$; $p=.0001$), agreeableness ($\tau[610]=.09$; $p=.0001$) and conscientiousness ($\tau[610]=.1$; $p=.0001$), and negative between the dependent variable and neuroticism ($\tau[610]=-.16$; $p=.0001$).

The comparison of the demographic profiles of the teachers who said they did not achieve success (“definitely not” and “rather not” categories – in total 62 people) and those who said they definitely achieved success (N=76), showed no statistically significant differences, but a relationship close to this was found in case of gender. Men generally perceived themselves more often as those who did not achieve success (58% in the “no-success group”), when women more often thought about themselves in terms of achieved success (58% in the “success group”). This difference was relatively close to significance ($\chi^2[df=1, N=136]=2.1$; $p=.11$). Correlations between the respondents' age or specialization and perceived success were not statistically significant.

Study 2

The goal of the second study was to find relations between creative attitudes and a feeling of achieved success. A creative attitude was understood here as a connection of nonconformist behaviour (personality factor important for creative behaviour) and heuristic reactions (cognitive factor) due to Popek’s (2000) theory.

Method and sample

Similarly as in study one, subjects were asked to say to what extent they think they achieved success, but in this case a 3-point scale was used – not (1), in part (2), and yes (3).

Additionally, they were asked to answer some demographic questions and complete Popek’s (2000) Questionnaire of Creative Behaviour KANH.

The research was realized on a sample of 200 Polish teachers. More than 70% of the sample were women (72.5% – 145). The subjects’ age ranged from 20 to 50 years, with a mean $x=36$ years and standard deviation $s=8.2$.

Results

To find any significant relations between the feeling of success and creative / un-creative attitudes mean results in the Questionnaire of Creative Behaviour scales were compared for people who thought they achieved, partially achieved and did not achieve success. The results are presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Comparison of results in Questionnaire of Creative Behaviour scales of people who achieved, partially achieved and did not achieve success

FEELING OF ACHIEVED SUCCESS		CREATIVE ATTITUDE		UN-CREATIVE ATTITUDE	
		NON-CONFORMITY	HEURISTIC BEHAVIOUR	CONFORMITY	ALGORITHMIC BEHAVIOUR
(1) NOT	Mean	20.13	19.53	10.67	12.43
	N	30	30	30	30
	Standard deviation	3.785	4.15	4.901	4.569
(2) IN PART	Mean	17.65	16.56	11.37	14.84
	N	107	107	107	107
	Standard deviation	4.112	3.965	4.875	3.839

FEELING OF ACHIEVED SUCCESS		CREATIVE ATTITUDE		UN-CREATIVE ATTITUDE	
		NON-CONFORMITY	HEURISTIC BEHAVIOUR	CONFORMITY	ALGORITHMIC BEHAVIOUR
(3) YES	Mean	16.63	16.33	12.89	15.16
	N	63	63	63	63
	Standard deviation	4.566	4.166	4.68	4.049
TOTAL	Mean	17.7	16.94	11.75	14.58
	N	200	200	200	200
	Standard deviation	4.341	4.183	4.863	4.103
ANOVA		$F(2,199)=7$ $p=.001$	$F(2,199)=7.3$ $p=.001$	$F(2,199)=2.8$; $p=.06$	$F(2,199)=5.2$; $p=.007$
Post-hoc – LSD		1>2>3	1>2>3	1<3; 2<3	1<2; 1<3

Significant differences were found in three of the four comparisons. The teachers who described themselves in terms of achieved success were significantly less nonconformist than those who did not achieve success, and the same phenomenon was observed in heuristic behaviour case – the people who achieved success were significantly less heuristic and more algorithmic than those who did not achieve success. In case of gender or age differences were not significant.

Discussion of studies 1&2 results

The two presented studies were conducted to check how psychological characteristics of the teachers may influence their self-perception as people who achieved success. It is worth mentioning that no explicit definition of success was used – the teachers drew on their own, implicit theories of success.

Study two shows that feeling of being a man/woman of success is significantly, but rather low correlated with some personality factors, especially – extraversion, conscientiousness and agreeableness, and – with a negative correlation coefficient – with neuroticism. As always in correlation research two kinds of explanation could be used. The first one – assuming that personality influences chances of achieving success – is an explanation that people who are effective in contact with other people (extraversion), who have the ability to work hard and long (conscientiousness), but who are sometimes a little bit conformist (agreeableness), with a stable ego (low level of neuroticism) have more chances to be a successful man/woman because of these traits. Another possibility is an assumption that personality factors influence and change self-perception and self-assessment, so people who

are more extrovert, emotionally stable, conscious and agreeable more often think about themselves as people who achieved success, despite its being true or not. The fact that only subjective understanding of success was used makes such a hypothesis probable.

The second study, where connections between perception of success and creative/un-creative attitudes were studied, showed interesting differences among three groups of teachers. The teachers who talked about themselves in terms of achieved success were more conformist, and had a stronger tendency to behave algorithmically than the teachers who did not perceive themselves as people of success. Similarly as in the previous case, one can ask a question – what is the reason? Are conformist and algorithmic behaviours really helpful to achieve success in the teaching profession or rather un-creative people (more conformist and algorithmic) have lower standards of success, and more often say that they achieved it? Those questions are still open-ended and need answering in future studies.

Study 3²

The main aim of the analyses presented below was to determine the key factors that are conducive to achieving success in teachers' perspective. It was especially about examining whether spontaneous factors associated with achieving success are connected with a subject's skills and activity level, or associated more with elements of situation within the social structure – independently of the individual. Basically, therefore, it is a question of whether success in the teacher's perception is the effect of meritocracy or stratification, skill and engagement, or social situation. A separate, significant problem is a comparison of the teacher estimations with those made by the rest of the society which form a characteristic point of reference, as well as examining whether and to what extent the analyzed factors do undergo changes in time.

And so, the key research issues can be brought down to two key issues:

- 1) What are the key factors that are conducive to success in the eyes of all Poles as well as a narrower group of teachers separated from among them?
- 2) Are changes that take place in the perception of factors that are conducive to success on the break of the decade of 1992–2002 visible at all? If so, then

² Wider presentation of this study results could be found elsewhere (Lebuda, Karwowski, 2006).

what is their character? Is the conviction that success is attributed rather to factors that are connected with the activity of an individual on the increase or decrease, or does it also have to do with the status (stratification) elements?

Method and sample

In further analyses, one made use of data gathered within the framework of the Polish General Social Survey (PGSS) –cyclical sociological research conducted by the Institute of Social Studies of Warsaw University. Since the beginning of its operation (which was in 1992), the Polish General Social Survey has provided basic information about Polish society. It is conducted on the representative sample of adult Poles, chosen in a random-stratified way. The average sample is composed of approximately 1000 people per annum. In general, data from 13.664 people during the seven waves of PGSS (conducted in 1992, 1993, 1994, 1995, 1997, 1999, and 2002) were analyzed. 523 teachers were included in the researched population.

The dependent variable, presented in further analyses was formulated in question 92: “I would now like to ask you about conditions for achieving success in life. With respect to each of them, do state whether according to you it is of decisive importance, it is very important, it is of ordinary importance, not too much of importance, or of no importance whatsoever.”

The task given to the researched people was for them to state how significant a factor for achieving success was to them, by means of choosing one out of five answers on the Likert scale from “of no significance whatsoever” (5) to “of decisive significance” (1). For the needs of further analyses, the scale was reversed (recoded) so that a greater value translated into greater perceived significance of each of the factors for achieving success.

Results

Let us begin the presentation of the results with presenting the general hierarchy of factors that are conducive to achieving success in the perception of teachers and society as a whole. It was decided that a comparison of educators against overall society be conducted, so as to be able to administer a point of reference that would allow for a more legitimate interpretation of gained results.

Factors that are conducive to success in the perception of teachers and the rest of society

Independently of differences in percent indications, it is important to highlight the fact that the hierarchy (order) of factors that are conducive to success in the perception of teachers is not different from that of the rest of society.

Clearly, the factor that was more frequently perceived as being a source of achieving success is conscientious work – the element considered most important both by Poles in general and by teachers. This factor that refers to the Protestant ethics, should be attributed to a large extent to the increase of individualistic values as well as a belief, shared by society, that human fate is mostly dependent on him or her very self and his or her engagement in conscious creation of one's own future.

It is not hard to notice that acknowledgement that luck as an element that creates an individual's success is extremely high. On the one hand, we obtain a result according to which success largely depends on individual engagement and one's conscientious labour, yet on the other, high acknowledgement is also attributed to luck, a factor that is completely independent of an individual. Obviously, one may state that only conscientious work in connection with luck may increase probability of success, yet the correlation between these factors is extremely weak ($r=.07$), which could indicate that for some people, a key success-generating factor is conscientious work, whereas for others it is luck. It is also worth noticing that educators regard luck as an element that is significant for achieving success way less frequently than the rest of society, and it is a statistically significant difference ($\chi^2[df=4]=18.90; p=.001$), which may serve as an argument in favour of the hypothesis that in case of teachers, elements that are hard to control – such as luck – play a lesser role, or – looking at the issue from a different perspective – a greater emphasis is put on one's own activity that is possible to develop and control.

Three other factors accentuate the significance of features of an individual – the following locations in our ranking are taken up by, respectively: ambitions, one's own education as well as skills/capabilities. It is therefore not hard to notice that most of the elements characterized by the perceived greatest influence on whether an individual will achieve success in life or not are connected with the individual him – or herself.

Further down the road of our ranking of factors that influence achieving success are – good contacts, wealthy family and parents' level of education – the first two elements are significantly more often perceived as important by the rest of society rather than by teachers – respectively $\chi^2(df=4)=16.75; p=.002$ and $\chi^2(df=4)=23;$

$p=.0001$. Distant places are occupied by such elements as political preferences and connections, gender, religious beliefs as well as a general place of origin, such as village or town.

It is important to remember that we are talking here about convictions of the researched people rather than objective measurement of the influence of individual elements on actual achievement of success.

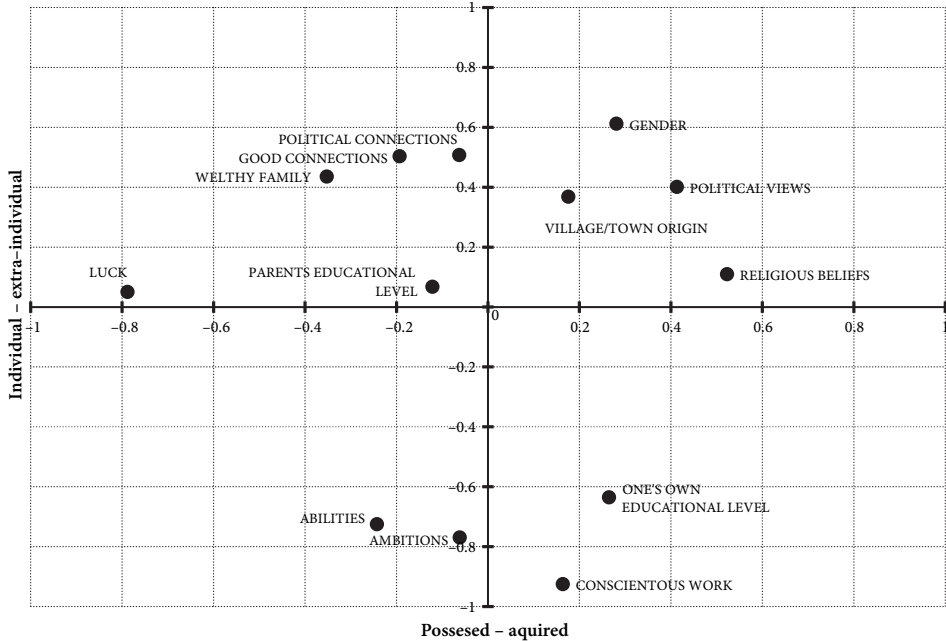
It seemed an interesting question to examine whether the changes that had occurred during the decade of 1992-2002 in politics, economy, and life of the Poles translated into regarding individual elements as those that are conducive to success in the perception of teachers. Between years 1992 and 2002, a clear increase in significance of one's own education was noticed as a factor that is conducive to achieving success – from 67% of Poles who said it is decidedly or very important at the beginning of the 1990s to almost 90% in 2002. Other statistically significant changes are the increasing conviction as to the significance of ambitions – a peak of acknowledgement at the end of the 1990s – as well as a spectacular increase in the significance of contacts. In 1992, fewer than a half of the researched teachers stated that contacts are of decisive importance or are very important in order to achieve success, and in 2002 already $\frac{3}{4}$ of the researched claimed so. A similarly significant and clear trend is visible in case of political connections – in 1992 only one in four teachers was certain as to the significance of this factor; ten years later – the number grew to over a half. The other dimensions prove relatively stable in time; skills/capabilities or conscientious labour are considered important in order to achieve success, independently of the year the research was conducted in.

An individual, origin, views – structure of the perceived conditions for success

Even a cursory look at the mentioned elements that could influence achieving success indicates that we have to do with a number of groups of conditions. Some seem to be more dependent on an individual, some other on social stratification, and yet other on relatively independent factors, such as gender. In order to determine the structure of teachers' representation of factors that determine the structure of achieving success, the collected data underwent multidimensional scaling as well as factor analysis. In both cases, achievement of a more frugal, and so, overall, easier to perceive group of variables that are factors conducive to success was aimed at. An additional, but not less important advantage of such conduct is a possibility of determining how, in case of the researched population, the given elements group one with respect to the other; which of them prove to be more

connected with others, and which of them do not. The results of the multidimensional scaling are presented in Graph 1.

Graph 1. Structure of factors that are conducive to success in the perception of teachers – multidimensional scaling results



As in most cases of making use of the multidimensional scaling methodology, axis interpretation should be treated as a hypothetical proposal. Yet, even the most perfunctory look makes one state that we have to do with a number of very clear concentrations. The first of them – the one located at the bottom of the drawing, contains elements that are largely dependent on the individual – skills, ambitions, one’s own level of education and conscientious work, though one can notice some difference in here as well – for it seems that skills and ambitions form a single group that is characterized to a great extent by features an individual possesses, often independent of the individual him- or herself – whereas the conscientious work and one’s own education level – though they are attributes of an individual – to a much greater extent demand his or her engagement and intensive labour.

Of a slightly different nature is a group of factors located at the top of the drawing. On the left – aside from luck that slightly stands out – we notice a grouping of elements that to a great extent describe placement of an individual within the social structure – these are parents’ level of education, good contacts, wealthy family,

political connections – in other words elements that are almost completely independent of the individual and constitute something that an individual comes across and that is external of the individual.

On the left we can notice that the remaining elements that are conducive to success join one with another – both those connected with views (religious beliefs and political preferences) and those that describe the objective dimensions of an individual (gender, village/town origin).

In order to confirm the obtained structure of values, the data underwent factor analysis, by means of main components with the use of rectangular rotation (*Varimax*). Even though the four factors achieved their own value of more than 1, on the basis of the *scree plot* test the decision was taken to go for a three-factor solution. The KMO measure of Kaiser, Mayer and Olkin assumed the value of .74, which convinces one that the collected data fit well for factor analysis and it is worth conducting.

The obtained solution is almost identical with the result obtained by means of multidimensional scaling. The first factor – the one that explains 26% of the results' variance – contains such elements as wealthy family, parents' education level, good contacts as well as political connections, which means components that are conducive to achieving success that depend on an individual to a lesser extent. The second factor – in short described as “the individual,” and explaining not much less, because 18% of the variance, concentrates on such elements within itself as: conscientious work, skills/capabilities, ambitions and one's own education level. The third factor – descriptively referred to as views, gender and origin, and explaining 10% of the variants, contains within itself political views, religious beliefs, village/town origin and gender. “Luck” as a separate element was omitted in further analyses, as it does not charge any of the three highlighted factors.

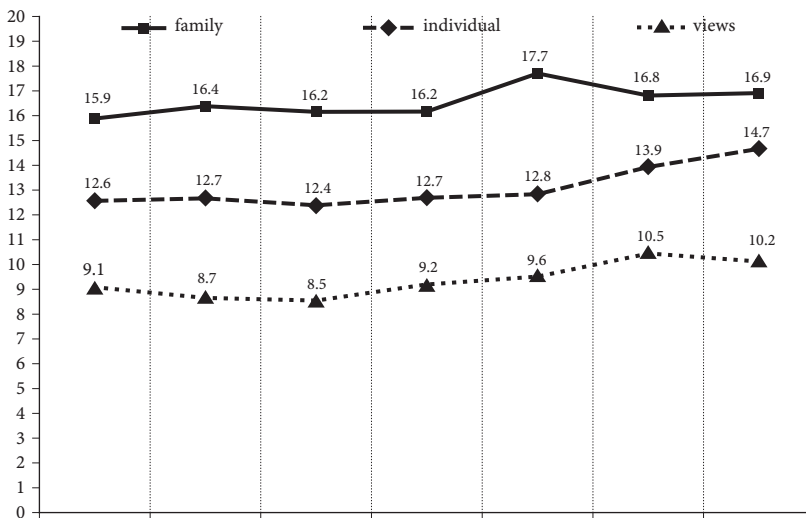
Because of the fact that each of the three factors is composed of four components that in the perception of teachers are conducive to success as well as due to quite high reliability of the scales ($\alpha=.73$, $\alpha=.69$ and $\alpha=.64$ respectively), it was decided that three variables be created that in a more general way describe appreciation for three types of conditions for success. The three created variables are: the family (discerning reasons for success in parents' education or wealthy family), the individual (discerning reasons for success in engagement, skills/capabilities and the individual's level of education), as well as views (religious beliefs, but also town/village origin or gender). Each of these variables could assume the theoretical values of 4 to 20, because of the fact that each was composed of four variables the researched expressed their views as to on the scale of 1–5.

The differences between recognition for each of the three groups of factors that are conducive to success in the eyes of teachers are of statistical significance. To the greatest extent, it is clear to see the reasons for success in features and engage-

ment of an individual ($M=16.48$; $SD=2.23$), then come elements that have to do with the individual’s social circumstances described by the family situation ($M=13.05$; $SD=3.27$), and questions of village/town origin, views or gender are of the lowest importance ($M=9.29$; $SD=2.99$). The planned comparison with t-test used, showed a significant difference between individual-family sources ($t[353]=-16.62$; $p=.0001$), the same as family-view sources ($t[353]=21.76$; $p=.0001$), and individual-view sources ($t[353]=36.73$; $p=.0001$).

However, it seems that the simple establishment as to the domination of factors connected with an individual is insufficient, as analysis of the phenomena we are interested in the temporal context, namely allowing for the influence of time and an attempt to examine whether we are dealing here with the statistical image of the encountered reality or whether it is rather a construction that is full of dynamics and changes, is much more interesting. In order to respond to this issue, changes that are taking place in views on conditions for success underwent analyses year by year. The results were included in Graph 2.

Graph 2. Changes in significance of individual elements that are conducive to success in consecutive years of the PGSS research



The conviction as to the greater significance of individual factors over the elements that are connected with social position and views of the individual, is clear in every year of the research, yet, what is especially interesting and cognitively valuable, when it comes to teachers’ convictions with respect to the issue of the nature of success, is the clear increasing trend of the “family” factor. Since 1994,

significance of this element has been on the systematic increase. In other words, the researched teachers perceive the elements connected with the social situation of the individual as a source of success; they pay increasing attention to these and are convinced of the increasing significance of these.

Discussion of study 3 results

The presented definition-related problems, classifications of understanding success, but most of all the results of the research conducted on a representative sample of Poles incline one to a number of reflections of a summary character.

First of all, one should notice that the hierarchy of elements that are conducive to success among teachers is identical to the rest of society. Polish people are convinced that the elements which most influence whether one will achieve success or not are conscientious work, ambitions, one's own education level and skills/capabilities. It should be mentioned that a high position in the ranking of the mentioned elements is occupied by luck as a factor that is conducive to making it in life, though teachers ascribe lesser significance to it than the rest of society do.

The hierarchy of factors that are conducive to success in the perception of educators is quite stable, yet one may notice some interesting changes also in their case. Firstly, education as a factor that is conducive to success has gained very clearly over the last few years, and so has ambition, which at the end of the 1990s was regarded clearly more significant in achieving success than it was at the beginning of the decade. One must also not overlook the increase in the significance of good contacts as a success-generating element.

Statistical analyses made in order to group the analyzed categories into ones that are easier to understand and into more synthetic concentrations, provided similar results both in case of multidimensional scaling and factor analysis. Obtaining of the differentiation of individual factors into two groups – quite dependent on and independent of the individual as a result of multidimensional scaling – might be worth a short note. The factors that are more dependent are one's own education level and conscientious work; the ones that are more under control of an individual are ambitions and skills/capabilities.

The factor analysis brought a dozen or so factors to three more or less coherent groups, tentatively referred to as the "individual," the "family" and the "views." The "individual" factor is composed of those elements that are conducive to achieving success that may be regarded as characteristic of an individual person, namely his or her education level and conscientious work, ambitions and skills/capabilities. The "family" factor contains such components as: wealthy family, parents' education

level, good contacts and political connections – namely factors that to a greater extent characterize the individual's environment and describe his or her positioning on the social ladder. The third factor – the least clear of all, contains such elements as religious beliefs, village/town origin, gender and political views. Because of the acceptable reliability of scales created as a result of factor analysis, further statistical analyses were run on three newly created scales. It proved that we deal with a statistically significant superiority of the significance of individual features over those connected with family, which in turn prove to be of significantly greater importance than the “views” factor.

Despite the clear hierarchy and strong conviction of the researched teachers that success is to the greatest extent dependent on the individual, it is not possible to omit the clearly increasing trend that confirms the growing significance of factors that are connected with social stratification – the social capital of family, to be precise.

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