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THE IMPORTANCE OF POSITIVE LEADERSHIP IN THE PROCESS OF CHANGE ON THE EXAMPLE OF THE BANKING SECTOR

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Abstract: In today's world, the success of modern company in dealing with change depends, to a large extent, on a positive approach toward its knowledge workers. The aim of the present study is to indicate the significance of positive leadership in the implementation of crucial changes in an organization in the environment of knowledge workers. The study has researched the case of a major Polish bank undergoing significant change in the Risk Management Division. Presented research covers the period between 2013 and 2019 and was conducted thanks to the participation of nearly 600 employees. Changes in the level of their engagement were systematically studied. All ten leaders in the division were also investigated, so that ten individual Reiss Motivation Profile (RMP) profiles could be created. Study results have confirmed that team leaders possess characteristics that confirm their preferred style is positive leadership, with a clear servant leadership attitude. The formulated hypotheses have been positively verified. It has been confirmed that the orientation of leaders on positive leadership ensured an effective implementation of crucial changes in the environment of knowledge workers.

Keywords: positive leadership, process of change, knowledge worker, banking sector.

JEL Classification: M, M1, M12, M120.

1 Introduction

In literature of the subject matter, there is a distinct knowledge gap in the attempt to make a connection between problems in positive management, and especially in positive leadership, and managing knowledge workers. Many modern organizations which are based on knowledge have undergone crucial changes in their management style and structure. Organizations are required to be more resilient, swift, agile, and innovative. Attaining a strong competitive position, based on aforementioned characteristics, would be impossible without a correct approach to employees of high professional and intellectual competence. This category of employees is more and more often described as knowledge workers.

A question arises, whether professionals, that bring significant intellectual value to the organization, can be motivated only by unilateral, financial incentives? Would it not be beneficial to influence attitudes and behavior of knowledge workers by means of positive management, and especially positive leadership?

These questions will sound even more dramatic if, while looking at the impact of the concept of positive

management and positive leadership on the motivation of knowledge workers, we place the research area in the context of the turbulent work environment of the banking sector. Numerous studies to date clearly indicate the need for a comprehensive impact on knowledge workers. However, this research, due to its unprecedented nature, may bring new answers and raise new dilemmas and doubts.

The object of the research is one of four major banks in Poland. Starting in 2013, in connection with implementing a new, ambitious "One Bank" strategy, crucial organizational changes were introduced in the Bank's Risk Management Division. The division was re-organized into nine departments, of 40–100 employees, with 4–7 managers each. The division was intended to become a strategic partner of the Bank's Executive Board. The Bank's management realized the need for changes in its organizational culture and for promoting specific values to ensure a high level of responsibility and professionalism, as well as authentic personal engagement of employees in building the organization's success.

The originality of the research is based on two factors. The first being its 7-year duration and the second being rigorous narrowing of the research sample to one selected Risk Management Division (RMD), in which nearly 600 employees are employed. In this peculiar laboratory, the Bank's management and, above all, the largely autonomous RMD's management introduced very significant strategic organizational and cultural changes. At the same time, systematic studies of changes in employees' attitudes and behavior were conducted.

The authors of the study described in detail the changes introduced and the results of surveys that were obtained thanks to regular employee surveys. At the same time, the managers were examined using the Reiss Motivation Profile (RMP) questionnaire, which allowed to determine the profile of ten managers forming the board of the RMD department. The obtained results revealed that despite radical strategic and organizational changes, the level of commitment, satisfaction, and other indicators declared by the surveyed employees not only did not fall, but either increased significantly or at least remained at the same level. A question then arises, how was this achieved?

According to the authors, in times of fundamental economic, technological, and social transformations referred to as the Fourth Industrial Revolution, it is necessary to search for and discover factors that are not only conducive to the passive adaptation of employees, including knowledge workers, to new working conditions, but primarily positively strengthen and encourage greater mobilization, activity, and involvement within the environment of constant pressure on speed, flexibility, mobility, creativity, and innovation. Banks are a suitable research object because, after the financial crisis of 2008, it was the banking sector that had to implement changes in its management processes the fastest.

A question arises that seems to have not been answered in management theory yet. What factor will encourage knowledge workers to make an even greater effort in times of rapid change? The answer to this question appears to be an important and current research problem.

Having for years now been a fly on the wall in the banking sector, the authors are inclined to formulate

a hypothesis that the appropriate model of positive leadership is a decisive element of the modern environment of knowledge workers. It is probably a model not yet discovered, but each subsequent empirical study analyzing contemporary organizations in the 21st century should bring us closer to answering this question.

The conclusions formulated by the authors in this article are in fact only an introduction to the larger-scale research covering the banking sector.

The aim of the present study is to indicate the significance of positive leadership in the implementation of crucial changes in the organization in the environment of knowledge workers.

2 Positive leadership concept – literature review and synthesis of the most important features of the theoretical model

Among different factors, which include positive relationships at work, co-participation, co-creating, and internal communication in the light of growing research movement toward positive processes in organizations, we focus our attention on positive leadership within organizations, such as banks. Banks belong to key institutions of the modern economy. We experience this particularly strongly during various crises. It is assumed that positive leadership was born when researchers started to apply elements of positive psychology to leadership (Gauthier, 2015). Since its appearance at the end of the 20th century, positive psychology has greatly influenced a significant number of conceptual and theoretical models developed in the field of psychology.

The new positive paradigm in management studies has been inspired by positive psychology (Seligman and Csikszentmihályi, 2000), mainly due to the efforts made by researchers from the University of Michigan (Cameron, et al., 2003). The new approach, referred to as the Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS), covers a wide range of positive characteristics of an organization and its members. According to Polish researchers from Nicolaus Copernicus University in Toruń, the results of their research fully confirm the existence of a "positive spiral" in the organization (also in relation to innovative processes).

Positive emotions motivate employees to strive for excellent performance, trigger their creativity, and broaden their horizons. This positive energy is translated into stronger employee commitment, which in turn boosts the effectiveness of an organization. People experiencing positive emotions are nicer, more helpful, and friendly and show empathy and respect to others; the positive feelings become “contagious” and they are transformed into relations with partners, clients, and peers in an organization. Organizational development brings about further growth of positive emotions and experiences of the company’s employees. As a result, the next loop of the positive upward spiral is completed. The process keeps on continuing since perfection has no end (Glińska-Neweś and Karwacki, 2017).

Positive psychology in this new century will allow psychologists to understand and build those factors that allow individuals, communities, and societies to flourish (Seligman and Csikszentmihályi, 2000). Positive leadership has become a crucial construct for studying leadership in organizations (Blanch, et al., 2016)

What does being a positive leader mean? How does it differ the way it differs from ordinary leadership?

The answer to this question is not easy. Zbierowski (2016) points out that little research has been done in the field of positive leadership, because the concept is relatively new. Positive leadership (PL) is one of the most vital factors within positive organizational psychology. According to researchers, leaders influence the behaviors of their employees and the environment in which they work, be it in a negative or positive manner.

To understand the term positive leader, perhaps it is best to start with what it’s not. It’s not just the opposite of a negative leader. In fact, the concept of positive leader was introduced by Kim Cameron, co-founder of the Center for Positive Organizational Scholarship (POS). POS is an umbrella concept used to emphasize what elevates and what is inspiring to individuals and organizations by defining and improving on the challenging.

Although some researchers still argue on the specifics, positive leadership is generally linked to better

outcomes than negative leadership which is associated with old, traditional, hierarchical styles. The behavior of the leader has an impact on the employees’ well-being and levels of stress (Wijewardena, et al., 2014). Positive leaders are a crucial element for the optimal performance of individuals, groups, and organizations. As a result, all positive human dimensions flourish and organizational and professional well-being and health are promoted at both individual and collective levels (Cantero-Gomez, 2019). Positive leadership involves experiencing, modeling, and purposefully enhancing positive emotions. A positive leader is interested in his or her employees’ development as well as the bottom line, thanks to which employees achieve a high level of self-awareness, optimism, and personal integrity (Avolio and Gardner 2005). A positive attitude goes beyond what is normally seen in other types of leadership, and therefore, this behavior can be classified as deviant - of course, positively deviant (Ackerman 2019). And in particular, positive leadership behaviors such as giving support and behaving ethically were shown to have a positive effect on employee well-being. Positive leaders have been noted to portray leadership behaviors such as communication, motivation, and keeping their employees accountable (Wijewardena, et al., 2014). Positive leaders focus on positively influencing their employees (Gauthier, 2015).

Positive leadership is a general scientific concept that includes several different leadership theories. All of them are included within the conceptual framework of positive leadership that is being analyzed in this research paper.

The following approaches are mentioned in the literature:

- authentic leadership development,
- transformational leadership,
- charismatic leadership,
- servant leadership,
- spiritual leadership (Avolio and Gardner, 2005).

Authentic leadership is an attempt to overcome unethical behavior that occurs in the political or business environment (Luthans and Avolio, 2003). Authentic leaders are characterized by a positive process of influence with easiness for personal and social identification, modeling positive behavior, emotional

contagion, and social exchange based on reciprocity and consistency (Blanch, et al., 2016). Avolio and Gardner defined authentic leaders as those endowed with deep moral convictions, whose behavior is strongly inspired by these ethical principles for the benefit of the group (Avolio and Gardner, 2005).

Bass notes that there are two types of leadership: transformational and transactional. Based on transformational leadership, the leader makes significant changes in the attitudes, values, and behaviors.

Transactional leadership, in contrast, is based on the exchange of rewards between the leader and the followers (Bass 1985). Transformational leadership has been found to contribute significantly to follower performance, job satisfaction, and extra effort expended (Molero, et al., 2007). “This kind of leadership, also called charismatic leadership, had not been addressed by social and organizational psychology because it was considered an exceptional phenomenon, and, consequently, impossible to measure by questionnaires or to manipulate in experimental studies” (Molero, et al., 2007). However, Bass considers that “transformational leadership is not a rare phenomenon, limited to a few extraordinary leaders, but, on the contrary, it can be found in various degrees in all kinds of groups and organizations” (Bass, 1985).

Servant leadership has been shown to enhance follower development, job satisfaction, and both follower and team performance (van Dierendonck, 2011). For a leader who serves the needs, aspirations and expectations of others are more important than their own. This attitude serves their development and organization in which they work. This way, the theory of servant leadership emphasizes the concept of service to others and the recognition that the role of the organization is to enable the formation of individuals who can help create a positive organizational environment (Blanch, et al., 2016). Servant leadership is demonstrated by empowering and developing people. A high-quality dyadic relationship, trust, and fairness are expected to be the most important mediating processes to encourage self-actualization, positive job attitudes, performance, and a stronger organizational focus on sustainability and corporate social responsibility (van Dierendonck, 2011).

The theory of spiritual leadership arises in a context in which conventional leadership does not seem sufficient to meet the needs of individuals in the organizational environment (Blanch, et al., 2016). For example, Fairholm (1996) identified a number of qualities, defined as the presence of defined life goals, deeply rooted moral convictions, high intellectual ability, social skills, and a unique orientation to the development of values in others. This model incorporates elements associated with the capabilities, needs, and interests of both the leader and their followers, as well as the objectives and goals of the organization.

Despite the ethical dimensions being present in the transformational, servant, and especially the authentic model of leadership, some authors are trying to develop the concept of ethical leadership as an independent construct. Ethical leadership seeks to promote normatively appropriate behaviors, in the followers, through personal actions and interpersonal relationships between them and the leader (Cantero-Gomes, 2019).

As already mentioned, the conceptual framework of positive leadership has deepened into different forms of positive leaders (authentic, transformational, servant, spiritual, and ethical). Avolio and Gardner have also identified five common characteristics to all the above forms (Cantero-Gomes, 2019):

- a positive moral outlook,
- leader’s self-knowledge,
- positive modeling of the followers’ behavior,
- personal and social identification of followers with the leader and the group,
- positive social exchanges between the leader and the followers.

Cameron’s description of positive leadership has been widely used to define the boundaries of the subfield; the three connotations of positive leadership according to Cameron are as follows:

- it facilitates positively deviant (extraordinarily positive) performance,
- it features an affirmative bias, meaning that it is oriented toward the positive (strengths instead of weaknesses),

- it fosters the good in people (e.g., virtuousness, moral integrity) (Cameron, 2008).

According to a slightly different approach of Wooten, L. P. and Cameron, K. S., positive leaders are those whose behaviors show an orientation toward the positive extreme, based on the existence of a continuum, on which any leader can be situated.

The models used in above theories differ based on the unique assumptions and relationships in which the theory is grounded, but generally, they all include a few agreed-upon components:

- positive leadership involves experiencing, modeling, and purposefully enhancing positive emotions,
- a positive leader is interested in his or her employees' development as well as the bottom line,
- due to positive leadership, employees achieve high self-awareness, optimism, and personal integrity (Avolio and Gardner, 2005).

Although there are numerous studies on positive leadership, there is still a large diversity and high variability regarding the conceptualization of positive leadership in literature. The concept of positive management seems to be an expression of the formation of a new paradigm in management sciences.

It also seems that an interesting, important, and current direction for the development of positive management is the creation of a working environment for knowledge workers. In contemporary conditions, competitive advantage is obtained through the ability to create new values. An organization's physical property is much less important than the resources it has in terms of knowledge and experience when considering what it can accomplish in today's knowledge-based economy. Visible assets are no longer an object of much interest in a modern organization. Far more valuable are its invisible resources including mainly knowledge based on human capital. In consequence, in case of companies subject to strong competition, an appropriate approach to managing people gains special meaning.

The term of a "knowledge worker" is included among the concepts which characterize different categories and groups of employees distinguished among other members of an organization (team, community, enterprise) by the significantly higher level of knowledge,

skills, experience, talent, etc. Davenport claims that the primary purpose of a knowledge workers' job involves the creation, distribution, or application of knowledge. Knowledge workers think for a living (Davenport, 2005). Perhaps, the most succinct definition of this category of workers is offered by Abbasi who states that knowledge workers are the ones who add value to an organization based on what they actually know (Abbasi, et al., 2009).

The analysis of subject literature (Abbasi, et al., 2009; Davenport, 2005; Huang, 2011; Mladkova, 2013; Morawski, 2016) allows for concluding that the term "knowledge worker" covers the following characteristics:

- high expectations regarding the autonomy and independence in implementing tasks and projects,
- high competencies and expertise supported by unique knowledge and experience,
- versatile skills of creative thinking in suggesting new and original solutions,
- interpersonal, leadership-oriented skills resulting from high intellectual potential and intensive professional activity,
- applying knowledge in its various processes, from acquiring and creating it to sharing and using it in the carried-out tasks,
- involvement, at different organizational levels, in creating new knowledge constituting the basis for innovative processes and solutions,
- presenting "tacit" knowledge which offers opportunities for creating added value in an organization.

The basic objective of a knowledge worker is to obtain, create, refine, and utilize one's knowledge and information. An employee's professional position is a result of specialist knowledge, wide cognitive horizons, mastering skills of trade, and permanently developed social skills that enable resilient and direct cooperation with other employees.

The aforementioned attributes form the basis of unique competence, potentially beneficial for the organization, since utilizing them generates added value, included in products and technologies. Enormous significance of high competence employees, able to obtain and utilize theoretical and analytical knowledge, is becoming more and more evident

for competitive capacity of any organization (Arthur, et al., 2008).

When the intellect becomes a critical production factor, the successful enterprises differ from the less effective ones predominantly in their approach toward employees. Companies manifest appreciation by granting bonuses for their skills in interacting with others, their commitment, professional expertise, integrity, and other attitudes, but simultaneously create adequate conditions in which employees can develop, acquire new professional skills, and increase their work value. In turn, however, the expectations and requirements from knowledge workers keep changing. The success of the growing number of knowledge workers is determined not only by the acquired knowledge but also by their swiftness in learning and sharing what they have learned (Tymon and Stumpf, 2003, p.12).

Approaching employees of such enormous significance for the organization requires different management tools – more diverse, refined, and individualized. In exchange for valuable competence, knowledge, and talents, employees should be offered various benefits: material, recognition, sense of belonging, professional development, autonomy, ability to implement their own ideas, and others (Anantatmula, 2008; Schepers and van den Berg, 2007; Todericiu, et al., 2013; Morawski, 2019).

In the literature, four groups of factors are most often indicated due to the involvement of knowledge workers:

- motivation (Nair and Vohra, 2010),
- autonomy (Nair and Vohra, 2010; Jie and Yeo, 2011),
- various work hours (Jie and Yeo 2011),
- learning and growth (Fenwick, 2007).

3 Research process – hypotheses, the object of the study, methods and results, and key findings

Linking issues connected with positive leadership in a working environment of knowledge employees with implementing changes in the banking sector provide a promising research area. In relation to the aim

of the study, which indicates the significance of positive leadership in the implementation of crucial changes in the organization and working environment of knowledge workers, two research hypotheses have been suggested by the authors.

The following hypotheses have been defined:

- *Hypothesis 1.* Effective implementation of crucial changes in the banking sector requires from efficient leaders a series of actions that will create a working environment based on engagement and satisfaction of majority of employees. It can be assumed that the most important elements of such an environment are as follows: respect for employees, mutual trust, open communication, listening to employees' opinions before making decisions, discussing errors frankly, and appreciating input.
- *Hypothesis 2.* According to Professor Steven Reiss' classification, the most important and desired characteristics of efficient leaders in the period of crucial change in a bank are high personal power, high idealism, low vengeance (living in harmony), and moderately low calm (courageous and stress-resistant). The intensity and combination of the above features thereof determine an effective implementation of change by a leader, based on positive leadership. Probably, the above-mentioned features of the leader increase the chances of implementing changes with the participation of banking sector employees.

3.1 Characteristics of object of study – XBank: The implementation of changes

XBank is the fourth-largest bank in Poland. It was established as Export Development Bank Ltd in 1986. Today, it is an all-purpose bank, serving both corporate and retail clients. In 2013, while implementing the "One Bank" strategy, the Bank's senior management decided to rename the entire bank as XBank, appreciating the significance of this brand for building a modern bank, able to meet contemporary requirements, especially using mobile devices.

Currently, the Bank employs approximately 5.5 thousand employees in Poland, Czech Republic, and Slovakia. Its total assets amount to over 150 billion Polish Zloty (35 billion Euros), with dynamic, but stable growth of both loans and deposits.

The Bank's strategy, defined in 2013 and further developed while taking into account the Bank's ambition to remain the leading supplier of mobile banking solutions, caused accelerated transformational changes. Initially, the Bank defined its selection of company values, which comprised of five pillars:

- customer centricity – cooperation and understanding client's needs,
- looking into the future – openness to change and innovation,
- simplicity – simple solutions and clear communication,
- engagement – motivated and goal-oriented approach,
- professionalism – knowledge, competence, and skills.

Business methods and tools were also changed – from the initial approach of project management with the set budget, implemented either in defined Bank's units or teams designated by the organization, through management by LEAN approach, then various elements of Agile including Scrum or Design Thinking.

XBank is a bank of entrepreneurial nature. It has no homogeneous corporate culture determined by senior management or shareholders. This is a result of the Bank's history, as well as of its leaders' character.

In 2000, a retail banking project was born, where from the beginning, online, branchless banking was the primary focus of the division. Again, this development in the start-up formula was possible due to the imagination and enthusiasm of many young employees; this time in Łódź. Two brands – XBank and YBank – were now functioning simultaneously, and a spirit of fair competition was promoted between the two.

Despite the fact that in 2013, through the implementation of “One Bank” strategy, the entire Bank assumed one XBank brand, considered to be the most promising – the corporate cultures of both business lines have never been altered through any superimposed unified organizational culture. Even the strategic XBank investor – CBank – despite the immense growth of its shares (50% in 2000, currently almost 70%) did not interfere with the Bank's strategy and, contrary to other strategic investors, did not superimpose its own organizational culture on XBank.

This way the Bank formed its own diverse organizational culture – separate divisions or business lines represented various organizational types, however with the following common culture elements: limited hierarchy, curiosity, seeking new solutions, and ultimately the “I can” approach. An example of such bottom-up action has been, e.g., the implementation of Lean management in the entire Risk division, Agile common for Retail and IT divisions, as well as interesting contests with foreign trip rewards for participants in top transactions, organized by the Corporate Banking division. These were not a part of Bank's strategy, but rather originated from the needs of individual units, resulting from their understanding of their own development stage.

In 2013, the organizational structure was flattened – apart from the management board, only two managerial levels remained, and all units were encouraged to share knowledge and innovation. Each division undertook challenges connected with the implementation of “One Bank” strategy, consistently with its specifics and management's approach.

3.2 Challenges of the investigated unit

The unit under investigation in this study is the Risk Management Division (RMD). During the study period, the unit employed 550–600 people. Initially, it comprised six departments, one of which – the Retail Risk department – was disproportionately larger than the rest. Three structure changes took place, and ultimately the division is now made up of nine departments, each with 4–7 managers and 40–100 employees. The division performs the function of “second line of defense.” It manages risk, starting with model construction and validation, through portfolio management (building strategy and determining limits) for various risk types, i.e., credit, market, liquidity and operational risk, and finally collections, restructuring, and reporting. It is responsible for independent risk analysis and taking credit decisions for all business lines. The division is also responsible for risk system architecture, data, and applications and also owns project management units, including those supporting the implementation of Agile management techniques.

In 2013, the division's new management defined the "One Risk" strategy, being the division's response to the Bank's strategy. Several workshops took place, analyzing current market trends and sharing experience (including that from other markets), with an aim to define challenges for the division, appropriate for providing support for the business but also maintaining the independent function of managing risk.

The strategy was based on three pillars of managing risk within the bank:

- focus on the client,
- integrated approach to risk,
- perspective: risk vs return.

Understanding the specifics of division's responsibility and the need for change of previous behavior, the management has, in the first place, defined values to guide its actions: "All our relations are based on *truth*, presenting the highest level of *professionalism*. Our opinions and decisions are shared in the spirit of *responsibility* for the implementation of long-term, stable objectives of the Bank, with *prudence* and *respect* to the Bank's clients, our employees and ourselves."

The task of the management team was therefore leading the entire division through the transformational change in an evolutionary manner.

3.3 Methods

The research involved almost 600 employees of the Risk Management Division of XBank during the last 7-year period (2013–2019), studying engagement level changes as well as the employees' perception of several elements that are key to the level of engagement.

All ten leaders in the RMD were investigated, so that ten individual RMP profiles could have been created. This team of leaders together makes strategic decisions, indicating the vision, mission, and direction of action of the division.

3.4 Engagement Culture Survey

Since 2010, the Bank has carried out an Engagement Culture Survey (ECS) in cooperation with a company that was the predecessor of Kincentric. ECS is based

on the engaging work environment model. It is generally assumed that a firm is able to create for its employees a working environment that enables their engagement through demonstrating following attitudes:

- speak: positive commenting on the organization and people employed therein,
- remain: need to identify with the firm and its values,
- act: above-average activity, motivation to actions that contribute to firm's success.

In the course of study process, groups of questions were analyzed to define the undermentioned indexes. Each index is a combination of questions, according to the methodology:

- engagement level,
- satisfaction: employee's first impression – I am satisfied with my job,
- tasks: I have a sense of fulfilment in my job; I really like my tasks,
- cooperation: in our firm, we share knowledge and experience; my co-workers respect my opinions and feelings and want to understand my perspective; I involve other units and am involved in the work of other units at the initial concept stage,
- autonomy: the firm encourages me to assume responsibility; decisions are made at the lowest level; I am involved in decision-making process; my superior considers my opinion,
- remuneration: my pay is adequate to my contribution; my performance has significant impact on my remuneration; offered benefits meet me and my family's needs,
- processes: the processes, resources, and tools available in the firm allow me to work effectively,
- people focus: I am perceived as an individual human, not just employee; diversity is valued and people are treated with respect,
- development opportunities: I am offered opportunities for skill improvement; I develop my skills by performing various tasks; I talk to my superior about development opportunities; mistakes and failures are openly discussed,

- management: my superior cares for building a team based on trust, open communication, and co-operation; communicates reasons behind decisions taken; listens to my opinion before making decision; and appreciates my input and engagement.

3.5 Reiss Motivation Profile (RMP)

The RMP method was developed in 1998 by Professor Steven Reiss (1947–2016) of Ohio State University, together with his associates. He argues that the source of personality characteristics of a human being is his values and beliefs, and especially that the source of a dominating personality is an above-average craving for competence, achievements, and influencing others. This research and stages thereof have been published in *Psychological Assessment*. The authors argue that a person is motivated by 16 desires, the intensity and combination of which determines our behaviors and forms personality characteristics. These 16 desires are power, independence, curiosity, acceptance, order, saving, honor, idealism, social contact, family, status, vengeance, romance, eating, physical activity, and tranquility. The intensity of these motivators (needs) has been determined as continuous between two extremes: (−2) being low

need to (+2) high need. Values between (−0.8) and (+0.8) are the average values demonstrated by 68% of the population.

In the course of further work, a questionnaire has been created, to investigate the individual degree to which a person is motivated to achieve each of these needs. Several thousands of people, on various continents and in various cultures, have been investigated since then. This analysis confirms the initial results of the research.

The author's intention, while analyzing all 16 motivators, was to define these, that given the right combination and intensity in the leaders, influence to the highest degree the effective leading the team through the transformational change. Since Reiss motivators indicate a leader's individual profile in his/her hierarchy of values and the basis for beliefs, they are the ones that determine his/her behaviors that ultimately affect the team that the leader manages.

3.6 Research results

The author sought correlation between individual index results and engagement level.

Table 1. Collection of ECS indexes (*Source: Authors' own research*)

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	Growth	Bank 2019	Best employers
Attendance	422	524	559	536	537	537	581		5107	
%	75%	91%	95%	95%	97%	94%	96%		92%	
Engagement level	44%	59%	67%	67%	71%	67%	71%	27%	56%	77%
Satisfaction	55%	69%	71%	81%	81%	77%	82%	27%	82%	84%
Tasks	62%	68%	N/B	73%	78%	71%	73%	11%	60.0%	75%
Cooperation	70.0%	75%	N/B	70.0%	71%	68%	57%	−13%	48%	69%
Autonomy	64%	74%	N/B	73%	76%	66%	70.0%	6%	55%	68%
Remuneration	18%	25%	31%	51%	54%	54%	50.0%	32%	45%	61%
Processes	36%	46%	52%	63%	66%	61%	54%	18%	45%	66%
People focus	19%	39%	37%	66%	73%	65%	70.0%	51%	54%	77%
Development opportunities	46%	57%	61%	66%	72%	67%	70.0%	24%	60.0%	71%
Management	37%	66%	74%	80.0%	80.0%	73%	78%	41%	71%	75%

Table 1 indicates index development over the years. During this period, the group of organization's leaders performed several actions to support employees through various organizational changes.

A substantial growth of engagement level (+27%) is clearly visible within the division, 44%–71%, whereas it is relatively stable at 56% for the entire Bank. The engagement level in Risk Management Division is close to that of the best employers in Poland (77%) (Table 2).

Table 2. Index dynamics (*Source: Authors' own research*)

	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Risk division	44%	59%	67%	67%	71%	67%	71%
XBank	52%	56%	55%	57%	53%	52%	56%
<i>Difference to mBank</i>	−8%	3%	12%	12%	18%	15%	15%
Best employers in Poland	77%	77%	77%	77%	74%	72%	77%
<i>Difference to best employers</i>	−33%	−18%	−10.0%	−10.0%	−3%	−5%	−6%

A substantial index growth has been noted in remuneration and processes categories; however, these categories scored at relatively low levels – ca. 50%. Other indexes – tasks, cooperation, and autonomy – scored at stable high levels of 60%–75% for 7 years in a row.

The indexes best related to engagement levels are focus on people (growth +51%), development opportunities (+25%), and management (+41%). All these indexes have eventually scored at a high level of 70% and above. These levels are characteristic for the best employers in the country.

The index definitions indicate that the role of the leaders managing teams who have everyday direct contact and influence on the employees is the most key element influencing employee engagement and satisfaction. Therefore, a conclusion may be drawn that any organization ought, to a large degree, undertake actions to support the right recruitment and development of their managers. Ultimately, it is the direct superior's role to define actions that will ensure employees' perception of correct communication of the organization's objectives. Employees who know reasons behind decisions made, who are being listened to, who are able to develop their skills, and whose ideas are considered and appreciated present a much higher level of engagement and satisfaction in their workplace.

Particularly in the years 2013–2016, the division's leaders declared and performed several actions that directly influenced the growth of desired indexes. However, the analysis of engagement results has always been most important – not the result itself but rather the listening and comprehension of the employees' understanding of questions and their expectations. Such analysis has been regularly performed through meetings of managers with their teams, then directors with managers, and ultimately the division management makes decisions that are widely communicated to employees. An important element of this analysis is sharing best practices. Initially, directors from outside the division were invited, and then the directors from within the division shared their experience of discussions with their employees and of practices that they utilized.

In 2013 and 2014, following actions were specifically stressed:

- communication: each manager offers constructive feedback to all employees at least twice a year, annual meetings with all division's employees, quarterly e-mails from management board members on major developments within division.
- development: cascading the division's mission to all departments, definition of mission (*raison d'être*) of smaller units, Risk Academy, supported

by division leaders to share knowledge among departments, employees able to move to other work areas.

- engagement: achievements rewarded during the year, employee breakfasts with management board members, and introductory meetings with newly hired employees.

2015 saw a further defining of a systemic approach to the development of managers – people directly managing other employees and teams, and particularly newly appointed managers. Basic competence training modules, available within the Bank, were utilized – including those on coaching skills. Additionally, long-serving directors shared their own experiences in dealing with management's challenges through discussions with line managers.

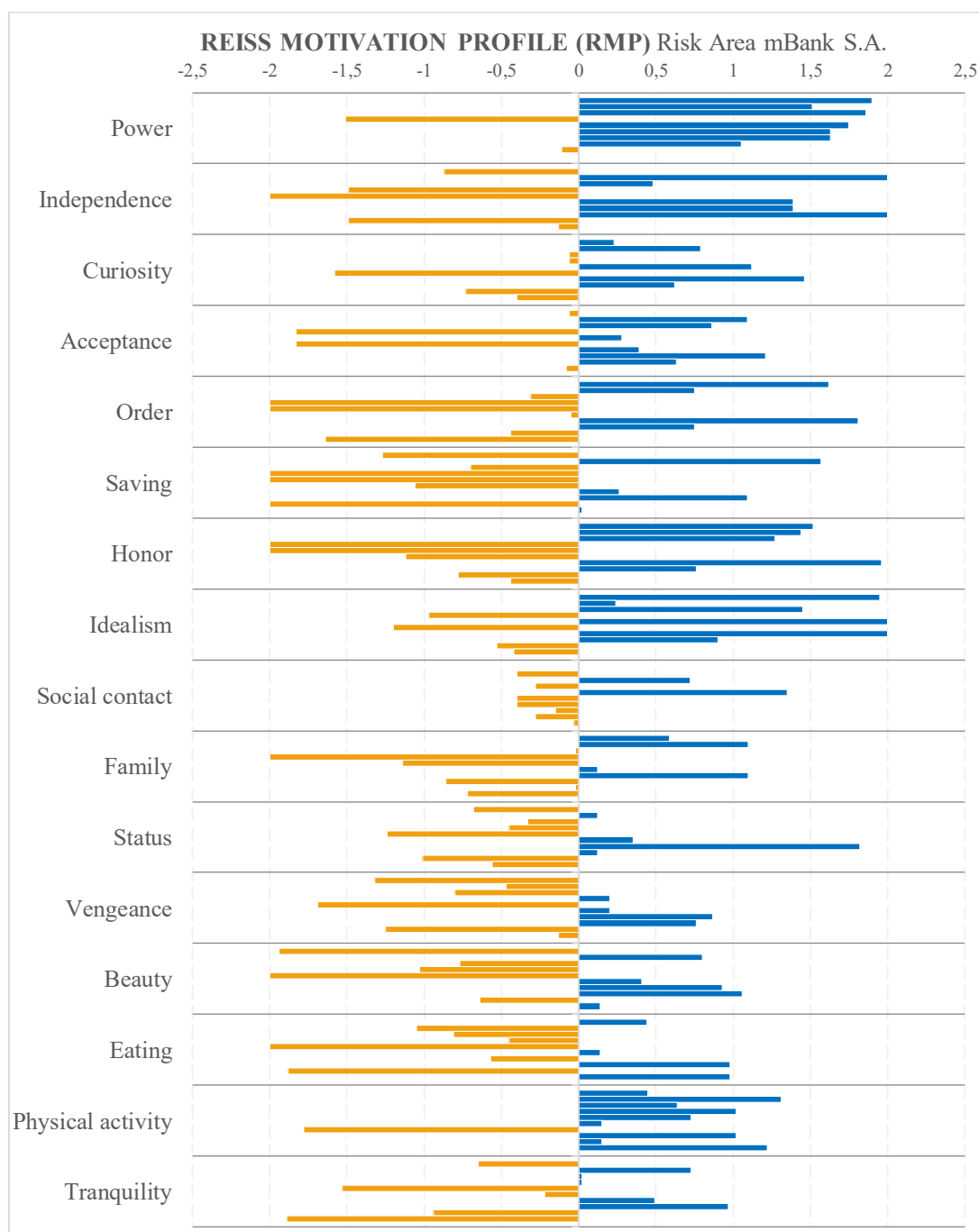


Figure 1. Reiss Motivation Profile (RMP) risk area mBank S.A
(Source: Authors' own study)

In 2016, facing challenges connected with the need to improve work effectiveness resulting from an increasing burden on the financial sector in Poland as well as new regulatory challenges, the division's leaders decided to introduce Lean culture to work. The initial focus was on three elements:

- common and systematic defining, cascading and monitoring of objectives – Hoshin Kanri,
- everyday routine of sharing knowledge of tasks and allocation thereof to individuals, identifying problems with their implementation, and permanent presence of higher management – White Tables and Gemba Walk,
- systemic approach to analysis and changes in operational tasks – TWI (Training Within Industry, predecessor to Kaizen) and KPS (Standardized Work Chart).

The full implementation of work habits connected with Lean culture took 2–3 years, but it was relatively quickly accepted by the employees. They expressed this in their answers to open questions. These actions consolidated behaviors that are consistent with focus on people, their development, and forming leaders to support their employees. Most of these actions were continued in the following years. Lean culture lay at the foundation of further changes in work organization: Agile, Scrum, Dual Organization.

Despite varying personalities of the leaders, certain similarities in values hierarchy and needs can be observed, according to RMP methodology (Fig. 1).

The analyzed team is indeed diverse, which is beneficial for the teamwork necessary for implementing change. All people in the team complement and support each other. However, several common motivators may be observed – the most important features of which are instrumental during change implementation. These include the following:

- very high power (+1.5 to +2.0): need to influence people, challenges mobilize to action, the higher the challenge, the higher the engagement; introducing change offers an opportunity to practically see the effects of influencing the environment; in a stressful situation, a leader will increase effort and take over command.
- very high idealism (+1.0 to +2.0): a leader values fair treatment of people, approaches employees

with empathy, showing that every single person is needed and plays an important role within the team.

- moderate or low status (–1.5 to –0.5): instead of perception of one's own position as a source of privileges "I am rightly entitled to," a leader possesses sufficient humility, stresses his features that are common with those of others, and will not need to build a hierarchical structure around himself in order to function efficiently.
- low vengeance (–1.5 to –0.8): values harmony and seeks compromise; does not allow to be provoked; assumes the role of arbitrator or mediator; selects important action elements, in case of lesser elements is able to accept relevant circumstances; a win in itself is not a motivating element, and even a failure may provide good conclusions.
- average but low calm (–1.0 to –0.5): from time to time needs new challenges, seeks and supports them; at the same time, attempts to introduce these changes in a systematic manner; controls stress, understands that a certain level of stress is indispensable in the implementation of change, and does not require total emotional stability.

3.7 Key findings

The key findings are as follows:

- 1) During 6 years of research, the RMD's and Bank's management initiated several major changes in the structure and organization of both the Bank as a whole and the RMD department. It was a period of changes, which, although a continuation of the current direction of the organization's development, were radical and dynamic. From its beginnings, this organization was characterized by an entrepreneurial, somewhat rebellious and boundary-pushing spirit. And at the same time, an autotelic feature of the organization was the deep respect for employees as professionals and human beings. Both these aspects of the firm continued to be developed throughout the years, of which the RMD department is a remarkable example.
- 2) This study focuses on the changes that took place in RMD. The new strategy of the Bank and related transformations in its organizational structure encouraged the management board of the division to implement new and adequate management methods and

tools. Being the strategic partner of the Management Board of the Bank, the Department's considerable autonomy was conducive to original ideas and solutions.

3) The Management Board of the Department developed a new strategy, consistent with the Bank's strategy. The following core company values were defined (which would direct the attitudes and behavior of employees): truth, responsibility, professionalism, respect for clients, co-workers, and themselves. By specifying the values supporting the department's mission and vision, the following were added: openness in discussing problems, knowledge sharing, discussion and dialogue, and communication of decisions.

4) Resolutions were implemented through various activities involving all employees and managers: workshops, trainings, regular team meetings with managers, periodic information from management to employees, mentoring, programs introducing students to work, monitoring and cascading of goals, and others.

5) In order to verify the achieved results, the Department's management, in cooperation with an external consulting company, developed a culture of engagement questionnaire, which was to answer how they changed employees' attitudes and behavior in terms of established indicators (including commitment, satisfaction, development, and others) in the examined period. In addition, a group of managers was tested separately using the RMP method. A questionnaire was developed that allows for an individual manager profile based on 16 identified motivators.

6) The authors of this study obtained the permission to use the test results for academic research purposes. In addition, they had an unparalleled opportunity to observe the changes taking place in the Bank itself, to talk to employees and analyze selected organizational documents. Rich empirical material gave them the opportunity to make many interesting interpretations, some of which are the subject of attention in this study. The research covered several hundred employees and ten leaders, members of the RMD Management Board, in the vast majority a team of the same people, as the attrition rate was low, constituting less than 10% of the total employed.

7) The authors observed changes in employee attitudes and behavior, which are reflected, among others, in the results of surveys. At the same time, employees answered intervals to the same set of questions, whose various combinations corresponded to the adopted indicators.

8) The bank has been one of the most respected employers in Poland for years, and this includes all companies, not just the banking sector. In the case of this Bank, the good employer brand meant showing respect to employees, precise matching of tasks and responsibilities to their psychological predispositions and professional competences, a high degree of autonomy in the workplace, and providing opportunities for professional development.

9) During the time of major strategic, organizational-structural, and substantive changes – related to tasks and methods of their implementation – the RMD management board continuously undertook action in order to strengthen positive relations with employees, which gave direct results, because the level of commitment and job satisfaction increased significantly. During the study period, employee commitment increased from 44% to 71%, and job satisfaction grew from 55% to 82%. Additionally, numerous conversations between the authors and employees, as well as observations of behaviors in team cooperation relationships, allow us to believe that the key to success turned out to be appropriate action on the side of the RMD board and other managers.

10) Indicators related to the activities of managers at various levels: people focus, development opportunities, and management increased dramatically. This seems to be a good testimony to the development of positive management and at the same time orientation to create comfortable working conditions for knowledge workers.

11) Indicators related to the essence and content of the work (autonomy, tasks) which were at a high level already at the beginning of the research period also increased, but the range of growth was not as drastic as for the indicators mentioned in point 10.

12) The psychological profile of the RMD board managers clearly indicates the positive leadership type. The question of what kind of positive leadership remains unanswered.

4 Discussion on the research of 2013–2019

The authors believe that the initial hypotheses have been positively verified. Results of empirical research appear to confirm the hypotheses that were adapted for research assumptions. Obviously, the authors view the study results with due caution, as a result of addressing a target sample only, therefore not being representative of the entire population of knowledge employees in the banking sector. On the other hand, study results proved to be unequivocal, clearly indicating trends of change within a several year observation period, and covering a large group of respondents. Research results confirm that Polish entrepreneurs and managers seek to avoid uncertainty and risk (Hryniewicz, 2004). In Poland, there is a general tendency of company management to be more concentrated on short-term goals rather than on making even not very distant future forecasts. Immediate results are of primary importance to them, with a strong emphasis on economic and financial results. Management staff and the remaining employees present a negative approach to conflicts. Therefore, differences in opinions or assessments remain undisclosed in official relations, and the occurring disparities are discussed behind the scenes, in the course of private or social conversations.

Contacts between employees representing the same level in an organization are usually close and friendly. It is a common daily practice to inform colleagues about personal, family life matters, or meet outside work at social gatherings. The majority of workers expect the continuity of employment and desire to keep their position at work. The feeling of work safety is stronger than the desire to seek new, professional challenges outside the parent company. Workers are characterized by a strong feeling of individualism; they expect tasks focused on obtaining individual goals. An opportunity for personal development and stimulating individual skills by managers is well appreciated. Many features, which can be assigned to Polish companies and Polish workers, seem to facilitate effective management. Among them, the following can be listed: maintaining close personal contacts, good relations with colleagues and supervisors, striving for a permanent job, and the sense of loyalty to the

company gradually transformed into increasing involvement (Morawski, 2014; Stankiewicz, 2010; Doktor and Banaszak, 2007).

During the period of research, it was revealed that the growth of knowledge employees' engagement resulted primarily from factors respecting their individuality and diversity, enabling them to deeply respect their own selves. Management methods based on mutual trust, open communication, and cooperation were perceived positively. This included the appreciation by managers of employees' input. Equally positive influence on employees resulted from the opportunity for permanent professional development and for improving skills through various job assignments.

Hypothesis 1 indicates a need to perform necessary actions by a leader, in order to engage a significant majority of the team through a period of changes. The article presents a series of actions that influenced an above-average engagement in the entire Risk Division. According to the research methodology, it showed results comparable to the country's best employers. This was an exceptional result as, typically, since employees appreciate stable working conditions, the engagement level of teams drops in the course of change.

On the other hand, in the course of implementing changes of a transformational character, leaders alone and their determination are not sufficient. They alone will not provide expected results, including those in the area of economy. There is a need of a bigger number of employees, engaged in changing their skills but also their attitudes, in this case in an open dialogue – within set limits – with the Business.

More often than not, the Risk unit performs a strictly control function, based on limited trust, or rather distrust, of Business' actions. This approach may provide good results, but will cause a need of considerable resources to be applied to control process. In a situation of a dynamically growing business, a need to introduce innovative products and a need for effective action, a transformational change was needed.

Such engagement level among employees may be attained in the course of implementing change only when the leadership team focuses primarily on creating a working environment that will promote respect

and appreciation of all employees' talents (people focus) and will allow employees to develop a wide array of skills and competence through training and secondment and also through moving to other jobs consistent with employee's talent (development).

An equally important process is the development of the widely conceived management team. It is the attitudes of the managers that have everyday contact with employees and are responsible for implementing change that are crucial in making the change in the spirit of positive leadership. A manager should, in the course of change, be really close to his employees, listen to their ideas but also to their doubts, and transparently communicate decisions. This will build an organization based on trust.

Hypothesis 2 concentrates on a person of the leader and more specifically on a group of leaders that propose the development direction and implementing the change. It is important that this group be differentiated. Since the process of change is a great unknown, without guaranteed effects of undertaken actions, there is a need for a dialogue within the leadership team, listening to each other and making right but speedy decisions. Such dialogue is possible when the leadership team is not monolithic.

Despite the existing beneficial diversification of the management team, several characteristics (desires, according to Reiss Motivation Profile) were common to majority of leaders in the studied team, and these are vital for implementing change in a positive manner. It is equally important to note the combination of these characteristics.

It seems quite obvious that leaders possess the attribute of "power" at a very high level. They are expected to persevere in meeting targets, make decisions, effectively manage teams, and cause enthusiasm in their employees. However, the combination within which these characteristics show is important. It is preferable that such a leader displays an adequate level of humility, does not have a need to focus all the attention, and treats all employees equally, which indicates rather negative "status" characteristic.

Equally important in the course of change is to listen to others' points of view and doubts, and to react flexibly, rather than show the approach: "I must win" or

"only my way is the right way" which is an indication of the "vengeance" characteristic that is best displayed low in the majority of leaders. Such combination is characteristic of a leader possessing the "servant leadership" approach.

Another characteristic worth noting is the combination of "idealism" with "calm." It is obvious that leaders that successfully implement change display very low "calm." They are expected to be energetic, resilient to stress, and courageous in making decisions. However, there is a thin line between perfect low "calm" and too low "calm," as this characteristic may indicate recklessness, an excessive need for new challenges and impressions. Such an approach is not desirable in the course of transformational change. One cannot act on adrenalin – change has to be implemented courageously but with prudence. If a leader "runs too fast," he may not notice that his people are left behind. It is therefore preferred that this characteristic remains negative, but not to an extreme degree.

On the other hand, high idealism will be beneficial for effective implementation of change. This means that a leader does not focus on himself and his perception of change, but takes into account the employees' views and is able to see their perspective of change with empathy. Change implemented by such a leader allows further engagement of employees; it therefore has a positive course. Ultimately, employees have, in place of anxiety or fear of change results, a satisfaction from implementing this change, or rather a feeling of responsibility for the results of common work.

The research has been conducted on a limited sample, however within an extended period of transformational organizational change. It indicates the importance of not only "WHAT" is being introduced, but first of all "HOW" it is being done. A change introduced in a positive spirit (positive leadership) will be more effective and - more importantly - sustainable. This is a result of engagement of the majority of employees, and not just leaders, in the form and ultimate implementation of change. Such an approach to implementing change requires, however, suitable "servant leadership" individuals.

5 Conclusion

The authors of the study are aware of the many limitations of the findings and formulated proposals within the study. The abovementioned research is not representative of leadership processes in the entire banking sector. The study lays out the case of only one large bank whose management has agreed to conduct the study and where the authors focused on the functioning of only one department. On the other hand, it should be emphasized that the research was conducted throughout a 7-year period (2013–2019) and was attended by a group of almost 600 respondents, knowledge workers representing Risk Management Division of the bank.

Several research methods were used in the research: survey, interview, and direct observation of the work environment of the selected department. The Risk Management Department has become a kind of laboratory in which changes in their natural environment were being observed, registered, and analyzed on an ongoing basis.

The carried-out tests are preliminary, and the proposed model is the result of in-depth literature studies, research, experiments, and scientific and managerial reflections of the authors of the study. A lot of valuable information was collected; the authors acquired a significant amount of knowledge about the determinants of leadership in a substantively advanced environment of professional activity of specialists – knowledge workers. Test tools have been determined by trial and error.

According to the authors' assumptions, the next stage of research will be to deepen knowledge about selected aspects of leadership in the context of selected, current, and important factors affecting the relationships of leaders - knowledge workers in the banking sector. The factors that will have a significant impact include the following:

- The growing inclination of employers - resulting from the coronavirus pandemic experience, and in particular in relation to work based on expert knowledge - to create remote jobs, outside the current office.

- As a consequence of the abovementioned factor, problems and challenges will arise regarding communication, mobilization, and cooperation in a virtual environment of large groups of employees.
- Another factor related to the previous ones is the problem of shaping and maintaining the integration of mobile employees, awareness being a part of a work community in a specific company, its mission, brand, and clients.

It seems that the assumed goals have been achieved and the results obtained to a limited extent fill the knowledge gap in the field of the concept of positive leadership in the banking sector.

6 References

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