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Employee Anomie in the Organization

Anomia pracownicza w organizacji

INTRODUCTION

The inspiration for writing this article was the study conducted by Euler Hermes and the Confederation of Polish Employers (Pracodawcy Rzeczypospolitej Polskiej) in collaboration with CMB Indicator[1]. In the preface to the report, the authors emphasize that the post-1989 transition in Central European countries introduced a new order – a democratic state. This was reflected in the amendments to the existing constitutions in those countries, which introduced the principles of a free market economy (in Poland, a significant change of the Constitution was made only in 1997)[2]. The underlying principle of the free market was to base on the constitutional freedom economic activity and the equal rights of market entities, regardless of the form of ownership. The existence of the private sector, which emerged from the market economy as a result of establishing new workplaces and privatizing state-owned enterprises, was of particular importance to labor relations. The state ceased to be the sole employer, thus giving rise to the labor market marked by the activity of social partners: trade unions, workers, employers and their organizations, and the state. It was widely expected that the social market economy would imply the emergence of new values – both in business and in the relationship between the employer and employees.

[1] *Anomia pracownicza – a po HR już tylko prokurator*, www.kadry.abc.com.pl/artykuly/anomia-pracownicza-a-po-hr-juz-tylko-prokurator,60845.html [access: 28.12.2016].

[2] *Ibidem*, p. 3.

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In the opinion of employers, before 1989, work was devoid of any ethics, moral context, or a sense of obligation towards the employer. In their view, the obligation to care for the good of the workplace – enshrined in the labor code – became a dead letter for many workers. The authorities decided on the size and type of production, set prices and wages, concealing the factual unemployment rate for ideological reasons and proclaiming the principle of "full employment". The economic and labor markets, as such, were non-existent, with unproductive jobs being created instead and the state serving as the employer for most of the employees[3].

Changes following 1989 occurred very quickly in some regions, but the lack of solid foundation hindered their full implementation. The societies of the Central European countries, encouraged by freedom and the pursuit of economic activity, set out to launch private enterprises and thus the labor market. The high unemployment rate allowed employers to abuse and unfairly treat the employees. Incoherent provisions of the labor law, different interpretations of it, as well as lack of case law, favored limiting the rights of employees and committing them to act in a specific manner. Employees most often preferred not to stand up for their rights for fear of dismissal, while the ineffective and hostile judicial system discouraged them from taking legal action.

The breakthrough of 1989 in Poland triggered adaptive processes of social structures at macro-, meso- and micro-level, resting on the mechanisms of recombination of the available material, social and cultural resources shaped largely during the People's Republic of Poland. The term "mental legacy of communism" influenced the shaping of the institutional order in Poland in terms of cognitive and normative functions of social institutions[4].

Despite the fall of socialism in 1989, there is still a low morality of work in Poland. The elimination of value from the work process, so widespread in socialism, takes its toll on subsequent generations of workers. According to the employers of the Republic of Poland, despite the fact Poland has been exercising the free market system during the last 25 years, pathological behaviors remain present and are even far more common than it may seem. Only in the retail sector, financial losses for entrepreneurs due to stealing acts committed by the employees amounted to over 1.7 billion PLN in 2011, and the problem of employee anomaly – as demonstrated by studies – concerns 78% of employers in Poland[5].

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[3] K. Głąbicka, *Polityka społeczna w Unii Europejskiej. Aspekty aksjologiczne i empiryczne*, Warszawa 2001, pp. 7–9.

[4] Cf. B.W. Mach, *Transformacja ustrojowa a mentalne dziedzictwo socjalizmu*, Warszawa 1998, p. 31.

[5] *Anomia pracownicza w Polsce 2012. Raport Skala oszustw i kradzieży w firmach*, www.

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The rapid pace of changes in socio-economic conditions does not entail noticeable changes in attitudes of the participants in the labor market. It seems that the phenomenon of employee anomie is inherited from generation to generation. While it is true that it evolves and constantly assumes new forms, it nonetheless is still persistent[6].

Modern market economy implies the emergence of a new kind of relationship between the employer and employees; relationship based on mutual loyalty and trust. However, because of the situation of transition from one social system to another, the existing system of standards can become disintegrated and confrontational. There is a phenomenon of social anomie. Anomie may concern the individual and manifest itself in non-observance of laws and norms of social coexistence. In the context of business management, a phenomenon called employee anomie can be observed, understood as systematic occurrence in employees, or more often in groups of employees, behavior leading the organization to measurable financial losses[7]. According to the study by the Employers of Poland, the main barrier to growth in productivity and quality of work in Poland is employee anomie inherited after real socialism, which blocks the formation of proper work ethic and the ensuing self-control[8].

The article attempts to characterize employee anomie[9], indicate its sources and present the possibility of diagnosing the phenomenon in question.

ANOMIE AS A THEORETICAL CATEGORY

The concept of anomie was introduced to the language of sociology thanks to Émile Durkheim (*The Division of Labor in Society*, *Suicide*) and belongs to the canon of basic sociological concepts. The late 19th and early 20th century in France was the time of social, political and economic transformation, and also, characteristic of that period, crisis of humanities and destruction of basics axionormative order of French society. Durkheim's theory was to provide practical tools

pracodawcyrp.pl/aktualnosci/art,980,anomia-pracownicza-to-problem-spoleczny.html [access: 28.04.2016].

[6] J. Bieliński, *Między anomią a fatalizmem. Regulacja społeczna w Polsce w okresie zmiany systemowej*, Kraków 2013, pp. 17–21.

[7] D. Ambroziak, M. Maj, *Oszustwa i nieuczciwość w organizacjach. Problem anomii pracowniczej – diagnoza, kontrola i przeciwdziałanie*, Warszawa 2013, p. 13.

[8] M. Kosewski, *Triada współzależności: jakość – samokontrola – etos pracowniczy*, [in:] *Anomia pracownicza w Polsce 2012…*

[9] Marek Kosewski pioneered the research in employee anomie in Poland. Cf. M. Kosewski, *Wartość, godność i władza*, Warszawa 2008. A multiperceptive assessment of this phenomenon cf. D. Ambroziak, M. Maj, *op. cit*.

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to overcome the major social problems of industrial society. Durkheim defined anomie as a state:

> […] in which the normative system loses coherence and turns into chaos. The guideposts of action – of objectives and measures – become blurred, ambiguous. People lose the sense of what is good and what is bad, what is worthy and what is unworthy, what one should strive for and what one should avoid, which methods are permitted and which are prohibited[10].

The state of anomie is a situation accompanied, among others, by the lack of clearly defined objectives and unlimited aspirations of individuals, as well as the state of normative confusion. This situation is caused by a change taking place too rapidly, either widening or narrowing potential ability to act[11]. The essence of this kind of anomaly lies in the sudden deprivation of rules and constraints previously defining the possibilities and the ceiling of aspirations of the individual.

Robert K. Merton defines anomie as a conflict relating to the way of achieving the objectives[12]. He argues that anomie is, on the one hand, the result of peer pressure toward an individual in terms of achieving certain values and goals that cannot be achieved under socially accepted norms. The second cause, according to Merton, refers to situations where the objective is heavily emphasized, whereas the way to achieve it is less important. This produces a situation in which the validity of the goal overrides the path to its achievement, leading to demoralization and selection of the most effective methods that are not necessarily in accordance with the generally respected standards and values. Its structural and functional concept, according to which anomie is triggered by discrepancy between the values acceptable in a given society and the standards for achieving them, indirectly provides the answer to the question about the source of anomie from the perspective of understanding the organization. The gap between objectives and ways of achieving them, described by Merton, referred to the culture and customs prevailing in society, but those are analogous to the culture and behavioral norms and values within the organization, which may cause a similar gap at the organizational level[13].

Anomie, therefore – as it is understood by É. Durkheim and R.K. Merton – means a situation in which individuals no longer distinguish good and socially desirable behavior from behavior that is bad and undesirable. It is a state of mutual contradictions regarding standards, state of uncertainty in the axio-normative system, most commonly triggered by its transformation.

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[10] P. Sztompka, *Analiza społeczeństwa polskiego*, Kraków 2002, p. 275.

[11] P. Besnard, *The true nature of anomie*, "Sociological Theory", Vol. 1 (6), DOI: https://doi.org/10.2307/201916, p. 93.

[12] R.K. Merton, *Teoria socjologiczna i struktura społeczna*, Warszawa 2002, p. 43.

[13] *Ibidem*, pp. 45–56.

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EMPLOYEE ANOMIE – MECHANISMS AND EXPLANATORY MODELS

"Employee anomie is an unwritten social contract allowing behavior that is unfair to the employer – people employed have the feeling that in a particular situation one can act dishonestly, immorally and unethically"[14]. Employee anomie is a situation in which values, although exist, are not respected, and employees are convinced of credible justification for cheating their employer[15]. Employee anomie refers to the behavior of an employee who justifies his or her temptation and gives in to it, thus obtaining the benefits of the circumstances[16]. The essence of this phenomenon is that an employee cheating his or her employer believes they are not doing anything wrong.

When diagnosing employee anomie, it is necessary to pay special attention to the psychological processes and specific circumstances. The combination of these factors may, in favorable conditions, trigger action of psychological mechanisms that allow morally reprehensible acts (theft, embezzlement, falsification of documents, fraud etc.). without remorse or a sense of guilt on the part of the employee. Employee theft and abuse are an important and very common problem that translates into serious financial losses for any organization, and also leads to a decrease in employee's performance and engagement in work. First of all, people steal when they are repeatedly exposed to temptation, which can be defined, following Marek Kosewski, as a situation where achieving certain gains is contrary to the personally significant value[17]. Remaining within the sphere of temptation, therefore, creates conflict in the employee between the desire to preserve dignity and compliance with his or her own standards and ethical principles, and on the other hand the desire to obtain personal gains arising from the circumstances. Gains, or benefits, by coming into conflict with values, may cause different types of temptations (that concerning money, promotion, getting rid of a co-worker etc.). If the organization is functioning properly and there is no supervision and external control to overlook employee anomie, there remains yet another form of employee's self-control, namely conscience[18]. To act against one's professed values makes one feel ill-at-ease. Excuse is used to reduce it, and it can be divided into two types: rationalizations and socially

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[14] M. Maj, *Czym jest anomia pracownicza?*, [in:] *Anomia pracownicza w Polsce 2012…*

[15] D. Ambroziak, M. Maj, *op. cit*., p. 18.

[16] A. Żuber, *Moralnie naganne korzyści*, „Personel i Zarządzanie" 2009, nr 6, pp. 57–59.

[17] M. Kosewski, *Wartość, godność…*, pp. 10–15.

[18] P. Nowodziński, *Anomia strategiczna – próba konceptualizacji*, „Studia i Prace Wydziału Nauk Ekonomicznych i Zarządzania Uniwersytetu w Szczecinie" 2015, nr 39, pp. 223–234.

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agreed justifications. The former – otherwise known as self-justification – relies on the internal explanation by an employee of unethical and reprehensible behavior with respect to his or her axio-normative system (everybody does it, nobody got hurt, anyone in my shoes would have taken advantage of that situation). The mechanism of rationalization relies on seeking objective (according to the individual) arguments justifying the decision taken and reducing the resulting psychological discomfort[19]. The effort put into self-justification will be the larger, the more important for self-esteem are the values that have been compromised. The effectiveness of this solution is most often unsatisfying to the employee and therefore he or she must resort to justifications agreed socially.

Justifications derive their credibility from the process of social reconciliation. They are a product of this process, which is a specific sequence of social interactions whose participants agree on the meanings ascribed to some simple convictions relating to a specific, generally jointly experienced situation of temptation, thus allowing them to better handle any arising remorse. The credibility of justifications is molded in the social process of surrendering to empirical insight. The justifiers, i.e. those who provide justifications, are often found among the closest family, friends and colleagues at work[20].

Tab. 1. Types of socially agreed justifications

Flattering comparison: to show that other do worse things	„What I did was nothing, those above me – they are the real thieves"
Moral credit: relies mainly on distorted meaning of justice. Someone wronged (actually or fictitiously) feels more justified to take advantage	1. *Cursing about fate*: "I've had it tough in life, so now I deserve something good" 2. *Fair compensation*: "I've been robbed so I can steal from others", "I deserve it for what others have done to me"
No victim: here, a sense of reducing psychological discomfort relates to indicating that no particular person has been harmed in the process	„If it's state's, it means it's no one's, so it's there to be taken", or „Banks cannot be harmed – they won't even notice credit fraud or theft…"
Victim condemnation: this method is to show the different (real or fictional) immoral qualities of the victim	„I'm sure the CEO of this company steals too", "To cheat the cheater is nothing but merit…"
Denying responsibility: this justification is based on the indication that the responsibility for one's behavior is attributed to an unidentified *force majeure*	"They got under my skin so much, I simply had to do it", or "In that particular situation, I had no choice"

[19] E. Więcek-Janka, *Psychologia gier symulacyjnych*, „Prace Naukowe Instytutu Organizacji i Zarządzania Politechniki Wrocławskiej" 2004, nr 75, pp. 312–313.

[20] M. Kosewski, *Wartość, godność*..., p. 16.

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Manipulating norms: when we talk about values or morality, we are also talking about behavior that we consider consistent with them. However, these are quite general concepts, which gives the possibility to manipulate them for those who want to take advantage of something. Distinguished here are two most common types of manipulation	1. Narrowing the meaning of the value "lie is only prohibited towards the close ones" 2. Using standards assigned to a different standard: "Maybe it wasn't 100% fair, but it did take guts"

Source: own study based on: D. Ambroziak, M. Maj, *Oszustwa i nieuczciwość w organizacjach. Problem anomii pracowniczej – diagnoza, kontrola i przeciwdziałanie*, Warszawa 2013.

Employee anomie movies quickly from relatively not particularly substantial acts to ever higher levels of unethical behavior. Most common fraudulent practices include: stealing employer's products, feigning work, using employer's property for private purposes, leaving work early, settling private matters during working hours, taking out good work equipment and writing it off during the inventory, certification of false reports, analyses etc., using discount cards for regular customers to take money from the employer, making private purchases at the expense of the employer's clients.

A question should then be raised whether the above-described anomic behavior can be eliminated by making the punishment more severe? The answer is no. The premise upon which this answer relies stems from the observation that people in fear of punishment often refrain from taking advantage of a temptation behave not so much honestly, but rather fearfully. Severe punishment and intensity of external behavior control merely make anomie concealed, but do not solve the problem itself. People, then, do not behave with dignity – honestly, friendly, morally – but only cowardly, fearfully, respecting the norms and rules of conduct only out of fear, not out of conviction[21].

Concealed anomie will appear at the first opportunity when individuals recognize that no punishment awaits them. The essence of anomie comprises, in fact, psychological and social processes coming to the fore in situations of temptation, whereas value-affecting behavior is only an indicator of its existence and its most important symptom. Anomie is, in a sense, disturbance or loss of inner voice of an individual (voice of conscience) and acting with dignity stemming from the social group to which that individual belongs. External supervision and control of individuals or groups of individuals does not eliminate anomie, but only makes it temporarily dormant. External control of employee behavior, material punishment

[21] M. Kosewski, *Układy. Dlaczego porządni ludzie czasem kradną, a złodzieje ujmują się honorem*, Warszawa 2007, pp. 23–29.

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and rewards do not eliminate anomie at its core, does not teach adults the principles, norms and values, merely establishing an apparent order and transparency for individual actions. Furthermore, it strives to prevent the formation in the organization of an atmosphere where ethical behavior meets with denial of dignity[22]. At the same time it should be remembered that reference to dignity-related techniques cannot be used *instead*, but only *along with* external supervision. Synergy of these two factors can shape lawful behavior, morality and professional ethics.

The model used in explaining anomie behavior in the organization is called the Cressey Triangle[23]. It assumes the presence of three elements necessary for the occurrence of fraud: opportunity, pressure and rationalization.

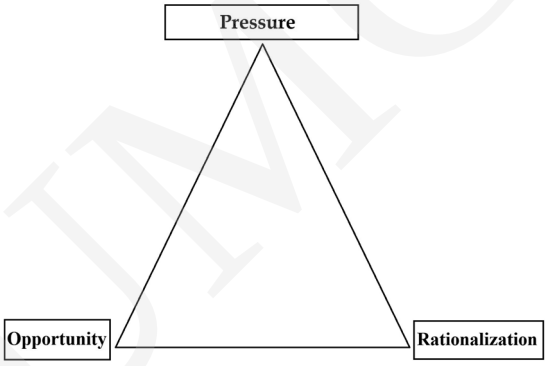

Fig. 1. The Fraud Triangle Model

Source: own study based on: R. Kassem, A. Higson, *The New Fraud Triangle Model*, "Journal of Emerging Trends in Economics and Management Sciences" 2012, Vol. 3 (3), p. 192.

Cressey assumes that the main and crucial motif for the creation of unfair behavior is pressure, understood by him as the reason of conduct. Very closely related to it is opportunity, which, according to the assessment of the cheater, is greater if there is less chance of being caught. The final element of the model is rationalization or justifications of one's actions. However, although very simple and clear, this model is too general in explaining employee anomie. It points to advantage as the main reason for committed abuses, while overlooking psychological reasons and employee's behavior in the work situation. Additionally, it does not allow to apply preventive measures and does not contribute to detecting fraud.

[22] *Idem*, *Moralność a władza – dlaczego można rządzić ludźmi niegodnymi metodami*, www.kontrateksty.pl/index.php?action=show&type=news&newsgroup=34&id=1652 [access: 29.12.2016].

[23] D. Cressey, *Other People's Money: A Study in the Social Psychology of Embezzlement*, Patterson Smith 1973.

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Supplementing Cressey's model with the MICE and The Fraud Diamond was suggested by Kassem and Higson[24].

The MICE model accurately describes pressure from Cressey's model, taking into account the specific sources of motivation that guide the employee taking anomic actions. Innovativeness of this model lies in the fact that it emphasizes self-esteem and ego – the elements associated with self-image present in the fraud-making person. Self-esteem is understood in this model as the individual's vulnerability to distortion of self-image while the structure of ego is the range of activities that a person is able to fulfill in order to maintain his or her image within the group.

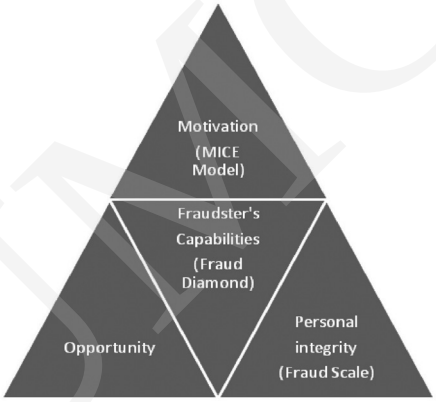

Fig. 2. The MICE fraud model

Source: own study based on: R. Kassem, A. Higson, *The New Fraud Triangle Model*, "Journal of Emerging Trends in Economics and Management Sciences" 2012, Vol. 3 (3), p. 194.

According to the authors, there are strong cultural norms of behavior that may affect the behavior of employees. If an organization tends to assess employees based on comparing actions and thus ignoring the achievements of others or questioning their skills just to build a background for one's own sense of values, such situation poses a high risk of the occurrence of work anomie in the enterprise. Critics of the MICE model accuse it of lack of clarification of the fraud investigation mechanism in the organization and also that it does not account for linkages between the various factors of the model.

The Fraud Diamond is another model used in the studies of employee anomie. It stresses mainly the ability of a person to commit fraud and that the impact of the situation in which a worker finds themselves is an important trigger of anomic behavior.

[24] R. Kassem, A. Higson, *The New Fraud Triangle Model*, "Journal of Emerging Trends in Economics and Management Sciences" 2012, Vol. 3 (3), pp. 191–194.

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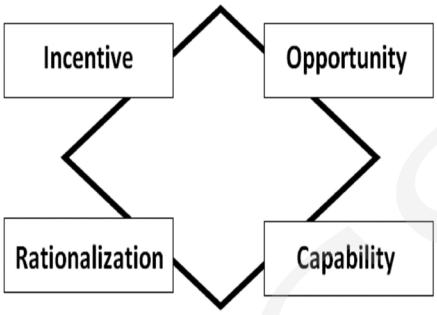

Fig. 3. The Fraud Diamond

Source: own study based on: R. Kassem, A. Higson, *The New Fraud Triangle Model*, "Journal of Emerging Trends in Economics and Management Sciences" 2012, Vol. 3 (3), p. 194.

These psychological mechanisms and models used in the analysis of anomic behavior in the organization focus on the individual and his or her deliberate and intentional action aiming to achieve benefits. While it may be assumed that they are effective in individual pathological behavior patterns, it simultaneously raises the question of whether they will prove as useful in the analysis of anomic behavior in employee groups. In the opinion of the author, the presented mechanisms and models are helpful in individual and incidental actions. It seems, however, necessary to come up with a new comprehensive model that will encompass factors such as the environment, human behavior in organizations or organization management methods.

THE MODEL OF THE THREE FORCES OF EMPLOYEE ANOMIE (3AP)[25]

According to the authors of the 3AP model, employee anomie is the result of three forces (see Fig. 4). Each of them has a significant impact on activating and sustaining anomic behavior in the organization. Using this model, one should bear in mind that diagnosing, and then controlling, anomic behavior in the organization must necessarily account for the simultaneous analysis of three forces and the relationship between them in the conditions of a particular organization[26].

[25] The interdisciplinary model of the Three Forces of Employee Anomic (3AP) is a comprehensive work of sociologists, psychologists, lawyers, criminologists and management experts explaining the phenomenon of work anomic and providing practical knowledge in the field to determine the level of risk of work anomie, its limitations and preventing it within an organization. Cf. www.anomia-pracownicza.pl [access: 10.04.2016].

[26] D. Ambroziak, M. Maj, *op. cit.*, pp. 93–94.

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Fig. 4. The Model of the Three Forces of Employee Anomie

Source: own study based on: D. Ambroziak, M. Maj, *Oszustwa i nieuczciwość w organizacjach. Problem anomii pracowniczej – diagnoza, kontrola i przeciwdziałanie*, Warszawa 2013, p. 93.

The diagnosis of employee anomie using the 3AP model allows for finding its source, which may be the result of a simultaneous operation of all three factors or a combination of them, and for measuring the phenomenon in the organization. Analysis of the three forces also gives the opportunity to understand anomic work behavior within the context created by the organization. Diagnostic actions are focused mainly on:

1. Recognizing potential situations which are particularly easy and fast in terms of revealing the triggers of anomic behavior.
2. Recognizing the values and norms of behavior valued by employees.
3. Understanding the impact of management practices on employee behavior.

One should keep in mind that the proposed diagnostic process using the 3AP model analyzes three dimensions of the organization simultaneously (Fig. 5).

The phenomenon of anomie has been and will be present in every organization. Anomie cannot be eliminated, but it can be managed. It seems that having the knowledge of employee anomie is practically mandatory at the level of executives as well as senior and middle managers. Understanding and implementing basic models to explain this phenomenon would allow organizations to reduce the extent uncontrolled employee anomie, which ultimately may lead to bankruptcy of the organization.

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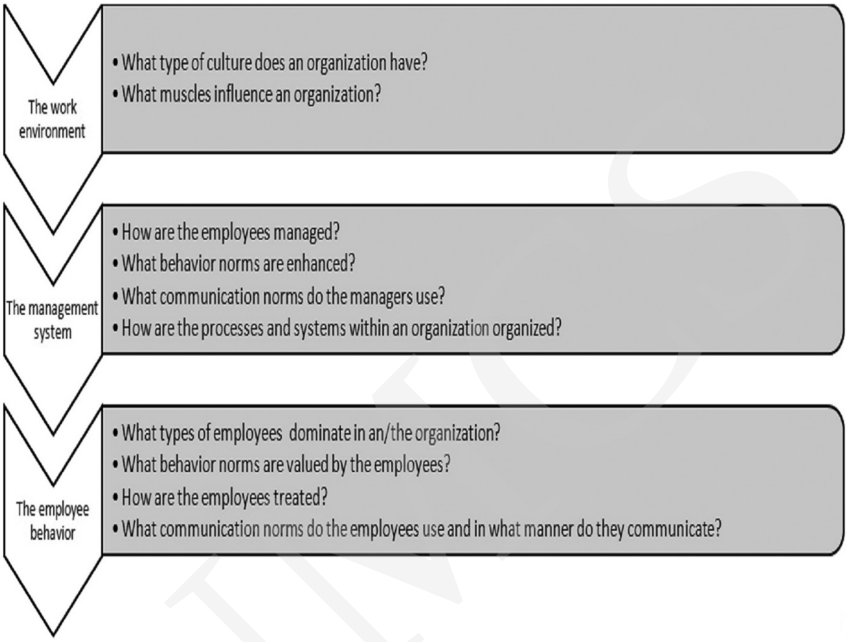

Fig. 5. The basic diagnosis model the Three Forces of Employee Anomie with basic diagnostic questions

Source: own study based on: D. Ambroziak, M. Maj, *Oszustwa i nieuczciwość w organizacjach. Problem anomii pracowniczej – diagnoza, kontrola i przeciwdziałanie*, Warszawa 2013, p. 95.

CONCLUSION

Manifestations of anomic behavior can be found in any organization. This means that there is always a certain base level of employee anomie due to the inertia of an organization. What is important to the proper functioning of the organization, is appropriate diagnosis of its base level of anomie, precise determination of its scale and skillful prevention[27]. Effectiveness of external supervision without activities that are characteristic of value-based management will only be apparent and will eventually lead to concealed anomie.

Lack of institutional control contributes to the state in which the only factor governing the behavior of employees is the balance of the fear of punishment and maximization of personal gain. Financial success becomes the main cultural objective. In this respect, strategic value-based management makes it possible to establish specific goals and precise criteria used by employees in making decisions

[27] *Anomia pracownicza – a po HR…*

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about how to act. Such approach will have a significant impact on reducing the possibility of work anomie[28]. Employees should collaborate with each other – uniting around values such as responsibility, commitment and cooperation. Work should regain the moral and dignity-related importance for the worker, and not only be a technical activity bringing him or her financial benefits[29].

A well-managed company build its position on the triad of interdependence: quality of work and products is due to the self-control of employees, which arises only if the employees consider themselves *working entities*, when the work a certain dignity-like significance for them, they take pride in the work they do, when there is work ethic[30].

Reducing employee anomie is a necessary prelude to the transition of the Polish enterprises to the second generation management methods, actuating motivation that arises from a sense of self-worth and dignity of the worker.

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STRESZCZENIE

Anomia pracownicza jest jednym z tych problemów, których skala i dynamika nie zostały dokładnie rozpoznane. Brakuje syntetycznych opracowań z zakresu zachowań anomijnych w organizacji. Działy HR, które doświadczają zjawiska anomii, ale nie mają spójnej metody jej kontrolowania, nie posiadają strategicznego planu obejmującego kompleksowe i skoordynowane działania, których celem jest rozwiązywanie problemów związanych z anomią pracowniczą. Podstawą efektywnego przeciwdziałania anomii pracowniczej i pomocy organizacjom już nią dotkniętych jest właściwe rozpoznanie problemu. Aby skutecznie podejmować działania, konieczna jest wieloaspektowa diagnoza tego zjawiska społecznego.

Słowa kluczowe: anomia; anomia pracownicza; organizacja; zarządzanie

SUMMARY

Work anomie is one of those issues whose scale and dynamics have yet to be thoroughly explored. HR departments that experience anomie, but do not have a consistent method of controlling it, lack a strategic plan including comprehensive and coordinated actions aimed at solving the problems of work anomie. The extent of anomie among social problems is determined not only by elusive quantitative parameters, but also by the structure of the homeless population and its variations. There are currently no synthetic studies in the field of anomic behavior in the organization. The basis for effective prevention of work anomie and supporting the organizations already affected by it is appropriate recognition of the problem. In order to take efficient preventive measures and implement efficient programs to combat homelessness, a multifaceted diagnosis of this social phenomenon is required.

Keywords: anomie; work anomie; organization; management