

DIRECT SUPERIORS AND ANOMIE OF ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOUR – RESEARCH RESULTS

Introduction

The issue of organizational behavior has been the subject of theoretical and practical interest practically since the beginning of management sciences. Both theoreticians and practitioners are interested in behavior improving effectiveness of business operations, as well as in behavior posing a threat for business functioning. The latter is described as anomie, in enterprise context understood as violating norms applied at work, towards an employer, superior or client. This phenomenon is also termed unethical behaviour [Blikle, 2017; Gigol, Sypniewska, 2019]. Anomie as a subject of academic analysis was important for E. Durkheim, who related it to the breakdown of structures and social bonds. He identified the reason of this phenomenon as the development of capitalism in the 19th century, leading to the disappearance of religious norms regulating human interrelations [Durkheim, 2006; 2010]. Management practitioners highlight the dysfunctional impact of anomie on management processes [Umphress, Bingham, 2011; Hawk, 2020]. Considering the adverse consequences of this phenomenon it is worth analyzing conditions in which it occurs. The article develops a thesis that one of the sources of anomie are people's relations with their direct superiors. It does not necessarily have to be connected with the mechanism commonly described by the proverb *a fish rots from the head down*. What can occur however is a different mechanism, i.e. that of strong employees' identification with their superiors and their enterprise.

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The aim of this article is to present the connection between the anomie of employee behavior and the attitude of superiors as well as their identification with their company. The research problem is expressed in the form of the question: which attitudes of superiors favor anomie in business entities?

The thesis will be developed and the aim will be pursued on the basis of the results of statutory research of SGH Warsaw School of Economics entitled “Nieetyczne zachowania w imieniu organizacji” (“*Unethical behaviour on behalf of an organisation*”) KZiF/11/19 conducted under the supervision of T. Gigol. The research was carried out at the turn of 2019 and 2020 using a survey questionnaire (proprietary questionnaire of T. Gigol with the use, approved by the authors of *Authentic Leadership Questionnaire*, MindGarden Inc. by Bruce J. Avolio, William L. Gardner, Fred O. Walumbwana) on a sample of 389 employees of various enterprises. The sampling was carried out on non-probability basis and for statistical reasons it cannot be applied to entire population. It can be a premise to explain the discussed issues and formulate further research hypotheses. Women accounted for 53% and men for 47% of the sample; 48% were employees of state-owned companies, 24% – companies with prevailing Polish capital and 22% with foreign capital; 61% were companies hiring more than 250 workers, 21% were medium-sized enterprises, while 18% were small and micro-enterprises.

1. Anomie

The issue of anomie is analyzed from the perspective of organizational culture, whose values and norms determine the behavior of individuals in business organizations [Winch, 2016]. This is a very simplified definition of organizational structure. Its more comprehensive description exceeds the framework of this article, which focuses exclusively on the phenomenon of anomie. Culture controls the individual, for whom it is a reference point for defining what is good and what is wrong. What is more, culture gives people moral support, a sense of security and belonging. E. Durkheim called breaking the bond between an individual and a group *anomie* [Durkheim, 2006: 324].

The central point of E. Durkheim’s sociology is the idea of social facts that “consist of manners of acting, thinking and feeling external to the individual, which are invested with a coercive power by virtue of which they exercise control over him. (...) Social fact can exist except where there is a well-defined social organization” [Durkheim, 2000: 30–31]. In this definition organization is not equivalent to coordination of activities to achieve common goals, as it is the case in management sciences. It is closer to the category of collective consciousness and its impact on the attitudes of individuals. It can take the form of a business organization, but it is not a necessary condition. Closer to E. Durkheim’s concept would be an institution understood as

“a complex of coordinated actions and ideas found by individuals as something ready and imposed on them more or less irresistibly” [Szacki, 2002: 388–389]. According to this concept the key institution was religion perceived as the most important social fact. Deliberations of E. Durkheim were not theological in nature, but it is the religion in which he placed major mechanisms of regulation of human behavior. They had been broken down, says E. Durkheim, by the 19th century development of capitalism, the greediness which displaced religious norms, causing decay of social bonds, the sign of which was an increase in the number of suicides.

A concept closer to management sciences is that of R. Merton's. He does not question the significance of religion as a mechanism for regulating social behavior patterns, but perceives it as something unchangeable, and therefore static. The truths of faith are stable across time, providing a basis for a society, but human interrelations are dynamic and require also other tools of regulation. The most significant ones are culture and policy allowing to govern a community with the law. An individual's subordination to religion is unquestionable, while the law enacted by people is a process of continuous agreements and contradicting interests [Merton, 2002: 197–225]. According to R. Merton anomie occurs where the availability of legal tools to pursue goals important for a given culture is problematic. Sociological ideas of anomie focus on explaining pathological relations between the social structure, the individual and culture. They indicate what consequences for the system and for the individual may result from a failure to adapt to valid values and norms. R. Merton describes these phenomena based on typology, the major components of which are: acceptance of cultural norms and involvement in social goals.

The concept of anomie is criticized for analyzing established systems and leaving aside the issues of change. It does not have to be identified with pathological behavior, but rather with natural development of an organization resulting from environment's changes. What is more, people modify their criteria of behavior evaluation, and, consequently, define what anomie is and what it is not. It is important to underline the role of culture, and in particular fundamental values and norms maintaining social bonds and an organization's continuance.

Management concepts assume the possibility of anomie, the sources of which are placed in unequal distribution of power, faulty motivation systems, leadership styles, etc. [Pocztowski, 2008]. The term “anomie” is rarely used, and rather replaced by such categories as conflict regulation, informal groups, etc. The definition in classic approach to management distinguishes control function of anomie, assuming that employees may behave against regulations in force. What is also highlighted is the significance of organizational structure as a source of pathological (or unethical) behavior, i.e. behavior which threatens implementation of broadly defined enterprise goals.

Current research on anomy focuses on issues of ethics and corporate social responsibility. This last rule usually ignores the classic function of the enterprise, trying

not to offend various social groups. This is the main research direction of the last few years. Attempts to change this state of affairs are not recognized by the majority of authors who deal with the problems of pathology in organizational behavior. The current state of research is a dilemma between political correctness (i.e. any behavior is acceptable) and a traditional view on economic organization (i.e. we accept behavior conducive to generating profit) [Scruton, 2014].

2. Areas of anomie: Superiors

The research problem is expressed in the form of the question: which attitudes of superiors favor anomie in business entities? The term “attitude” in this article refers to the definition proposed by S. Nowak: “An attitude of a human towards a thing comprises all the relatively permanent abilities to evaluate that thing and to react to it emotionally or, possibly, relatively permanent beliefs about the nature and qualities of the thing accompanying the emotional and evaluating abilities, as well as relatively permanent abilities to behave towards that thing” [Nowak, 1973: 24]. The proposed definition distinguishes three components of an attitude: emotionally evaluating element; cognitive element; behavioral element. S. Nowak assigns to the first component as being the most significant, constituting meaning of the term. For it is possible that the cognitive and behavioral components do not occur at all. The cognitive component comprises beliefs and knowledge about the object of attitude. In some cases knowledge may be very broad, while in others it can be only fragmentary. The behavioral component is a kind of action plan for the object. If the emotional evaluating component is of key importance for the definition, why not restrict the definition to this component? S. Nowak says that the listed components are closely linked and it is impossible to separate them in analytical manner: “Most people simply ‘have an attitude’ to a certain object, and it is a specific system of abilities to react to it, both in an emotionally evaluating and behavioral way, where these elements are experienced jointly in the sense of their joint reference” [Nowak, 1973: 25].

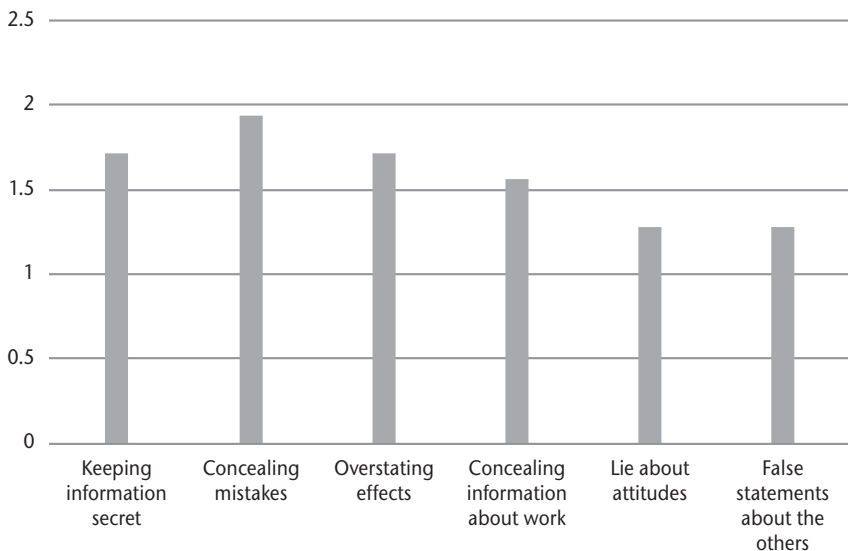
The survey questionnaire comprised 29 categories referring to the components of attitude distinguished by S. Nowak. The list of types of behavior that may indicate anomie in the superior – subordinate relation was much shorter. It included keeping secret information that could be harmful for a superior, concealing mistakes negatively affecting their reputation, overstating the significance of facts favorable for a superior, expressing opinions harmful to the others but favorable to a superior.

With reference to the problem defined in this way a hypothesis has been formulated according to which evaluating emotional components (the survey comprised 6 of them: being proud of collective work, trust, good contact, help in finding the meaningfulness of work, formulating an appealing vision, comprehensible communication of tasks)

is conducive to anomie in the superior – subordinate relations. Measurement of the strength of relation performed with the use of Pearson correlation coefficient has not shown any correlation between the distinguished variables. The hypothesis has not been confirmed.

It must be pointed out that the rate of the respondents' agreement (measured on the five-grade Likert scale) with the distinguished areas of anomie was very low. These areas included support for the superior by: keeping secret information that could be harmful for a superior (keeping information secret); not revealing a superior's error threatening his/her reputation (concealing errors); overstating the truth about the effects of his/her work (overstating effects); concealing negative information about the effects of a superior's work (concealing information about work); false presentation of truth (lie about attitudes); unfavorable statements about the others (false statements about the others). For each of these variable the percentage of answers "never" and "rarely" amounted to about 80%. The arithmetic mean for each area of anomie is presented on Figure 1.

Figure 1. Areas of anomie – arithmetic mean



Source: own study.

The distinguished areas of anomie have not been experienced by a majority of respondents. Does this mean that the phenomenon of anomie is non-existent in the analyzed organizations? It does occur, but the range of the phenomenon, considering percentage distribution, does not exceed 12%.

Table 1. Areas of anomie (%)

Areas of anomie	% Answers 'often' and 'always'
Concealing information that could be harmful for a superior	6
Not revealing a superior's mistake threatening his/her reputation	12
Overstating the truth about the effects of his/her work	10
Concealing negative information about the effects of a superior's work	6
False presentation of truth about a superior's attitudes	6
Negative statements about the others	2

Source: own study.

In the social relations the phenomenon of anomie is usually a marginal portion of human behavior of a given community. After exceeding the 'critical mass', which is difficult to define in quantitative terms, anomie becomes a norm. Previous moral order is being disintegrated, while other values and behavior standards start to prevail.

Traditional, sociological concepts of anomie focus on social relations, which sometimes are not adequate to relations in business organizations. It is caused by, among others, the fact that classic approach to enterprise [Friedeman, 1993; Scrutton, 2014] regards generating financial profit to be its primary function. Additionally, enterprises have other mechanisms of their employees' control and evaluation. R. Scott distinguished three pillars of a professional organization:

- regulative – based on coercion deriving from the law in force;
- normative – based on values and an assumption that employees will comply for moral reasons;
- cognitive – based on qualifications and commonly recognized concepts [Morawski, 2001: 62].

He stated that the foundations of a society are: culture, social structure and customary order. If we translate the concept of R. Scott into the terms of an enterprise, similar categories can be distinguished: culture, organizational structure and management (Table 2).

Table 2. Pillars and foundations of enterprises

Foundations	Pillars of an enterprise		
	Regulative	Normative	Cognitive
Culture	Law and regulations	Values and norms	Cultural dimensions
Organizational structure	Authority	Leadership	Inter-tier relationships
Management	Planning, control, organization, motivation	Profit generation	Procedures, action scenario

Source: own study.

One of the major sources of anomie is deregulation within the pillars of an enterprise, for example values and norms are not conducive to generating profit, leaders do not motivate their subordinates.

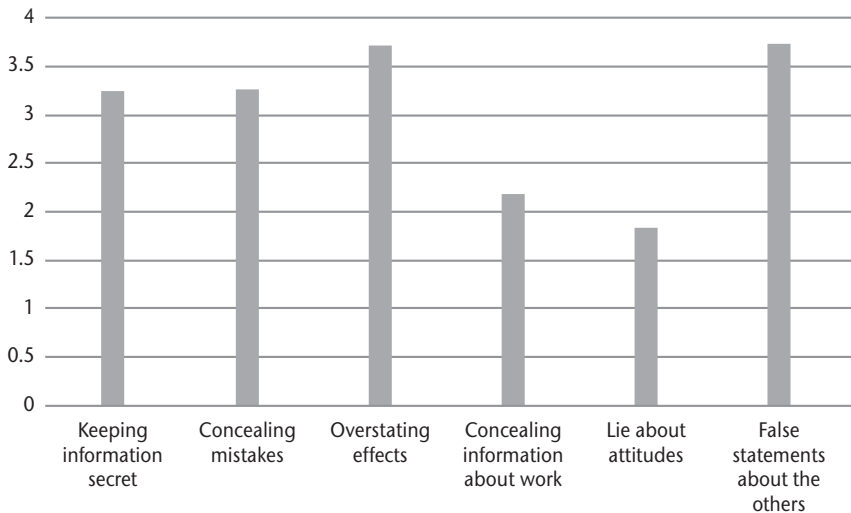
It should be highlighted that in the 2020 research respondents referred only to the normative pillar. At this point a question about the causes of anomie may arise. R. Merton pointed out community members' disapproval for goals and/or their achievement strategy [Merton, 2002; Winch, 2016]. Anomie occurs where the goals set by the culture and management are difficult or impossible to achieve and the organizational structure hampers their pursuit. It seems impossible to eliminate anomie completely, since it is difficult to find a perfect enterprise and perfect employees. We should not forget about the environment (e.g., contradictory expectations of stakeholders, competition, technology changes), which can also be conducive to this phenomenon.

3. Areas of anomie: Organization

The arithmetic means of anomie areas (Figure 1) and the lack of statistically significant relation between them and the emotionally evaluating component of the superiors' attitudes can be possibly explained by the concept of E. Durkheim. He, and many other culture specialists [Benedict, 2016; Scruton, 2010] assumed that religion has strong influence on social attitudes. A key feature helping to understand Christianity, and the Catholics in particular, is the disapproval for bearing false witness against our neighbors. This is exactly the attitude that was asked about in the survey. It is therefore possible that the respondents perceive anomie differently in respect of other people than in respect of the organization itself. With regard to people, what is more important are cultural norms (religion) and, consequently, disapproval for unethical behavior. An organization is not subject to personification; what may be more significant is pursuit of interests based on calculation of profits and losses. Evaluation of these phenomena may be less burdened by the normative aspect. A question was formulated about the strength of relation between identification with a company and approval for anomie. The hypothesis connected with it is as follows: the stronger identification with a company, the greater approval for anomie in relation to an organization.

One of the survey questions concerned the strength of identification with a company. It was measured on the five-grade Likert scale. Another survey question was worded in a very similar way to the one about the superiors. The only difference was that the word *superior* was replaced by the word *organization*. The values of arithmetic means are presented on Figure 2.

Figure 2. Areas of anomie (business) – arithmetic mean



Source: own study.

The values of arithmetic means are significantly higher (mostly by 1.5 point) than for the question about the superiors. The rate of relation between identification with the company and approval for anomie was measured using Pearson correlation coefficient, presented in Table 3.

Table 3. Rate of relation between areas of anomie and identification with the company

Areas of anomie	Identification with the company
	Pearson’s correlation coefficient (%)
False presentation of truth for the sake of organization	0.173
Overstating the truth about products for the sake of organization	0.126
Concealing unfavorable information about products from the client	x
Giving good references to an incompetent employee in order to cause problems for another company	x
Holding back overpayment due to a Client for the sake of organization	x
Concealing information from the public for the sake of organization	0.142

The ‘x’ sign means no statistically significant rate of relation.

Source: own study.

Pearson’s correlation coefficient measures the strength and direction of the relation. It uses values from (-) 1 to (+) 1. It is also assumed that the distribution of

the analyzed variables is normal or close to normal. Knowing the coefficient value, we may analyze how one variable affects another, but it is impossible to indicate logical relation between them. Coefficient values between 0.126 and 0.173 must be considered minor. Still, they are statistically significant. It should be pointed out that there is no statistically significant relation when unethical behavior is directed at people (i.e., clients, incompetent employee, public opinion). This confirms the hypothesis that anomie is more common in respect of attitudes towards an organization.

4. An ideal superior

One of the survey questions concerned ethical behavior of the superiors. For the needs of the research 16 categories were distinguished, such as: expressing what a person thinks; decision-making based on high ethical standards; listening to various points of view; admitting to one's mistakes; being ready to revise one's views. The question is constructed in a way that refers to two leadership concepts: one based on an individual's attributes and one based on relations [Winch, 2016].

One source of success of leadership based on individual features is the social need for an authority. Sometimes in a situation of change, and particularly threat, people need an answer to the question: what features minimize negative consequences of actions or enhance advantageous ones? An ideal personality model is therefore looked for that would show what is good and what is wrong. It is not only a need of psychological and social nature, but also a strategic matter of an enterprise. It is particularly significant in a crisis, when there is usually no time to consult decisions with others and employees' approval for undertaken measures is not sought for. What is decisive in such situations is a leader's authority and their features allowing to win social approval. Moreover, their task is to motivate people to take actions.

In recent decades researchers and theoreticians listed numerous features typical for leaders of business organizations. This approach was criticized by R.M. Stogdil, who pointed out that among 15 authors only 5 out of 124 features are repeated (intelligence, education achievements, readiness to broaden responsibilities, social activity and involvement, social and economic status) [Stogdil, 1948]. Additionally, the author indicated discrepancies in defining key features and their relations with other variables describing leaders. To be exact, let us list the features most commonly distinguished in the reference literature: intelligence, motivation, self-confidence, morals, being people-oriented, controlling one's emotions, self-esteem, composure, integrity. The aim of R.M. Stogdil's research was not to reject the previous concepts, but to show that features of leaders do not determine a company's achievements, but are a circumstance favorable for the pursuit of business goals. In the first decade of the 21st century a configurational approach prevails among scientists with regard

to the issues of leaders' features impact on the businesses' situation. They claim that impact of individual factors is much smaller than of a group of factors. The research shows that group leaders differ from the others in respect of numerous features.

The concept of combination of features has played a significant role in the development of management sciences. It has shown that an enterprise's success is not determined only by perfect production organization, precision in designing work-stands or cutting-edge technology. These factors are very important, but one more aspect should be taken into account – the superiors' features. As a consequence, theory and empirical research have been developed, oriented towards not only an individual, but also relations with other stakeholders. Additionally, numerous tools have been created to be used in recruitment, selection and evaluation of employees, which translates into practical operations of businesses.

The second of the concepts referred to above, leadership based on relations, focuses on a person's behavior in their relations with the environment they function in [Fotii, Hauenstein, 2007]. It is assumed that identification of such behavior would be the first step to leaders' education and increase in effectiveness of measures undertaken by them. Another important element is the one-direction relation between the superior and their team, which means that only formal leaders influence the attitudes of workers (one-dimension perspective).

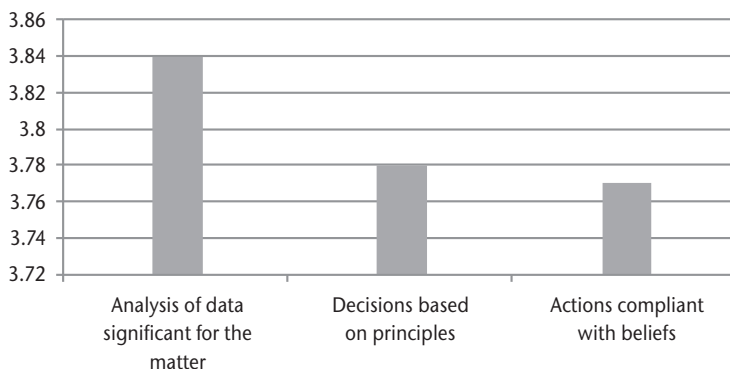
Among behavioral concepts two trends may be distinguished. The first focuses on the performance of tasks, the second one – on human relations. The second trend values concepts of G. Yukl, trying to explain leaders' behavior by its connection to employees' motivation, rate of decision centralization, level of the subordinates' skills and organizational structure [Yukl, 2008]. The merit of the authors of behavioral concepts is that they have created foundations for competence models, which can be observed in the reference literature also in the first decade of the 21st century. For it has been found that the bases of behavior are entrenched in competences possible to obtain, among others, by sharing experience. This has persuaded scientists to look for the superiors' attributes beyond the features, competences and skills of individuals, i.e. in organizational structures, relations with stakeholders, legal regulations, etc.

Regarding the analyzed research result, another question was formulated about the most significant types of behaviors of the superiors towards their subordinates. Arithmetic means were used to answer this question.

The values of arithmetic means describe an ideal superior as a person analyzing information necessary to take decisions based on beliefs and principles. It is also a person who is predictable, if these principles are permanent.

The lowest arithmetic mean value (2.98) referred to the variable "My direct superior can state clearly how his/her abilities are assessed by the others". The arithmetic means values were between 2.98 and 3.84.

Figure 3. Ideal superior's attitude



Source: own study.

Conclusion

The presented research results did not show statistically strong relation between anomie of employees' behavior and superiors' attitudes. This does not mean however that such phenomena do not occur in economic organizations. In the context of the research it seems probable that such phenomena derive from strong, i.e. emotional relations between the superior and the subordinate. This may be a direction for further empirical research.

A statistically stronger relation can be found between anomie and identification with a company. The latter is not of personal nature and can thus more easily transform into violation of cultural norms. What is more, such behavior may be perceived as something natural and needed for an organization. Violating moral order does not have to entail decrease in an enterprise's performance. In future research it would be advantageous to diagnose the strength of relation between the moral and financial aspect of business organizations. This consideration is permanently present in management sciences, but along with dynamic changes in the environment this relation may also be modified.

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Abstract

The article develops a thesis according to which one of the sources of anomie are people's relations with their direct superiors. The aim of the work is to show the connection between the anomie of employee behavior and the attitude of superiors as well as strength of their identification with their company. My considerations are based on results of quantitative research carried out on a target sample of 389 workers. The genesis of anomie is a strong emotional relation between a subordinate and a superior and their strong identification with their enterprise.

KEYWORDS: ANOMIE, ORGANIZATIONAL BEHAVIOR, SUPERIORS

JEL CLASSIFICATION CODES: J24, J28

BEZPOŚREDNI PRZEŁOŻENI A ANOMIA ZACHOWAŃ ORGANIZACYJNYCH – WYNIKI BADAŃ

Streszczenie

W artykule zostaje rozwinięta teza głosząca, że jednym ze źródeł anomii są relacje z bezpośrednimi średni przełożonymi. Celem jest pokazanie związku pomiędzy anomią zachowań pracowniczych a postawami przełożonych i stopniem identyfikacji z firmą. Rozważania są prowadzone na podstawie wyników badań ilościowych zrealizowanych na celowej próbie 389 pracowników. Genezą anomii jest silna emocjonalna relacja przełożony-podwładny oraz wysoki stopień identyfikacji z przedsiębiorstwem.

SŁOWA KLUCZOWE: ANOMIA, ZACHOWANIA ORGANIZACYJNE, PRZEŁOŻENI

KODY KLASYFIKACJI JEL: J24, J28