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The Methods of Information Management in the Space of the Current Scientific Discourse: Recommendations for Public Sector Organisations

Abstract

Objectives: The information age constantly poses new challenges for management specialists. Such a circumstance encourages to creative considerations on how to overcome these challenges. The dynamics of changes taking place in the organisational environment and the response to them, which is formulated by the scientific community, is then an interesting subject of research. The author adopts the thesis that it is possible to identify certain common elements of the ongoing discourse, which determine its current character, adequate to the challenges of the present day. The presented analysis includes a study of examples of invoking information management methods in publications from recent years.

Research Design & Methods: The qualitative text analysis – especially one based on the method of binary oppositions – was used in the considerations. The use of this method makes it possible to indicate examples of common denominators connecting the publications that were the subject of the research.

Findings: As the result of the conducted research, the dimension of directing the discourse to the context of using the latest IT technologies to improve internal processes and, on the other hand, to increase the scope of inter-organisational integration was revealed. Another dimension of the discourse turned out to be the reference to information management methods in the context of using IT to change the role and importance of the human factor, but also to autonomise and automate the production system.

Implications / Recommendations: Based on the conducted analyses, recommendations were formulated that will make it easier for public sector organisations to implement their missions within the context of identified dimensions. However, it is necessary to implement changes consistent with the detected trends shaping the inter-organisational information exchange network.

Contribution / Value Added: It was found out that in the face of the changing level of complexity of the environment and the dynamically growing level of inter-organisational integration, the public sector must ensure its ability to engage in ongoing processes. This requires the introduction of appropriate system and organisational solutions as well as the development of analytical competences, taking into account the potential of artificial intelligence and other advanced information technologies.

Article classification: research article

Keywords: information management, management methods, information system

JEL classification: D82, M10, M15

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Introduction

In the times of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, one of the most important problems is the excessive amount of data and its diversity. The interpretation of such a set requires the detection of non-obvious relationships that connect individual elements. A properly prepared information system helps in the implementation of such a task. However, in order to effectively improve the system itself, information management methods should be used artfully.

The change in the operating conditions of modern organisations is the result of the development of breakthrough technological solutions that primarily affect the sphere of information use. For instance, solutions in the field of the Internet of Things and Services are appearing more and more often. As a result, vast, decentralised ecosystems are created, in which the network of interconnections is very dense (Manu, 2015). Inter-organisational ties become inseparable, eliminating the existing boundaries between cooperating entities (Bukowski, 2016). This affects the way information is managed. Enterprises are taking part in an increasingly faster race for who will be the first to recognise and properly interpret new trends and phenomena.

The ability to effectively collect information must be accompanied by the ability to process it effectively in the procedural and hardware aspect (Becker et al., 2009). At the operational level, the phenomenon of process automation is progressing. As a consequence, cyber-physical manufacturing systems are created (Monostori, 2014). Factors in the form of space and time lose their previous meaning. This creates conditions for innovative integration and optimisation of activities in the field of design, production, sales, and after-sales service (Chen & Li, 2018). Trends in the form of sharing economy cause the resignation from ownership in favour of a fee for use (Strømmen-Bakhtiar & Vinogradov, 2020) and the user themselves becomes a source of valuable feedback for the service provider (Trstenjak & Cosic, 2017).

The outlined above description of selected challenges that currently affect the sphere of information management shows how complex is the reality that organisations operating today face. In some areas, the observed changes are radical and establish new rules of the market game. Therefore, the question arises: what determines the space of topics discussed in the current scientific discourse (over the last two decades) in the context of information management methods – methods whose main task is to improve the functioning of the information system – and what implications does this have for public sector organisations?

Literature review

Information management methods are a very broad category. Its separation is associated with some difficulty. The problem stems from the universal spectrum of applications of many items of the aforementioned collection. The examples listed below include twenty tools of this type. The presented description involves the methods known for many years and mentioned many times in the literature on the subject.

The KSS communication system analysis method is based on the assumption that the quality and flow of information is closely related to the organisational structure and management system. It is postulated here that the information gap be minimised, leading to the optimisation of the course of interrelated information processes. One of the interesting areas of the application of the KSS method concerns the procedure of auditing the intellectual leverage effect. Such leverage is created by using the knowledge available in the environment. This is to lead to the preparation of innovative products and services as well as to build an advantage based on intangible assets (Winkler, 2018). Another example of the application of the aforementioned method concerns improving the efficiency of the mutual communication system between cooperating enterprises (Schindlbeck, 2015). The method is also referred to in the context of efforts to improve the degree of use of IT within the information system, owing to the introduction of appropriate quality information to its interior (Schindlbeck, 2015).

The OiM method consists in examining and rationalising the operation of regulatory units of various institutions. It is about achieving an increase in the efficiency of the organisation of administration owing to the rationalisation of procedures, workflows, methods and systems of communication or control, as well as the organisational structure. Nowadays, it is emphasised that the method is highly useful when it comes to eliminating threats in the form of various attacks on the information system (McCall, 2022). Another important area of the application of this tool is the improvement of systemic support for processes aimed at undertaking research and knowledge management (Brezhneva, 2018).

The SADT method of analysis and design of information systems focuses on the development of an intra-organisational communication system. The functions of the system are gradually broken down into partial and elementary components, while the connections between them are depicted. The area of the application of the method turns out to be solving problems related to organising the operation of entire industrial sectors in accordance with the "smart" idea (Turlakova, 2019). The method also facilitates the implementation of a systemic approach to improve the efficiency of IT project management (Zakharova et al., 2020). Another area of the application of this method is the analysis of complex dependencies in the area of system-dynamic modelling of information influences and cooperation (Yablochnikov et al., 2018).

The BISAD method of analysing and designing the information system helps to build an information system that combines the implementation of the information function with the goals and structure of the organisation. Currently, the method is considered to be the basic tool for modelling information systems. The described method is actually a reference point for other tools in this area (Sungau, 2019). It is emphasised that the BISAD method is an effective tool for implementing Business Intelligence solutions (Kiselnicki & Misiak, 2021).

The ASTEX method is used to restructure the information system under the influence of a change in the division of labour or the structure of personnel qualifications, or the instrumentalisation of information processes. The method is currently appreciated for its effectiveness in restructuring the organisation of the administrative and office sphere of a typical production company (Łęgowik-Małolepsza, 2016). It is also noticed that the method facilitates the elimination or at least reduction of employee fatigue (Potocki, 2013).

The KIWA method of analysing the value of information and communicating is an extension of the popular value analysis. The method assesses the value of information, its carriers, form, flow, origin, timeliness. Owing to this, delays, unnecessary costs, and low quality of information are eliminated. KIWA is currently recognised as a precise tool for recording the course of information processes, which allows for the rationalisation of sources, methods, and forms of information transfer (Czekaj & Ziębicki, 2008). The discussed method is also valued from the perspective of its current applications in the field of information economy (Gola, 2016; Jaki, 2011).

The method of directive analysis is used to improve information processes and rationalise the media that control information processing. The logic of procedure used here requires defining the system outputs and then moving towards the inputs. It also requires thinking in terms of functions and only then in terms of their carriers. Nowadays, the discussed method is appreciated for the precision of "thinking in terms of functions" (Ćwiklicki, 2011). The method is also useful in the context of current challenges related to the growing amount of data suitable for processing (Hong et al., 2021).

The DZA method of analysing the time of information processes is a tool that allows for the classification of activities carried out as part of the information process and optimisation of its time. For this reason, the DZA method is a valuable tool for diagnosing the information process (Włodarski, 2011). The method can also be used during the implementation of the Agile concept, because owing to it, the structure of administrative and office work can be rationalised in a way that will support the generation of innovative solutions (Łęgowik-Małolepsza, 2019). Generally, contemporary works aimed at mathematical modelling of information processes (in order to optimise them) are the field of the application of the discussed method (Dumas et al., 2021). This is particularly evident in relation to the current challenges of improving entire supply chains (Werner, 2020).

The KSA communication structure analysis method is used to identify internal and external information dependencies in terms of structural, functional, and process diagnosis of the direction of technical and technological changes in the system, organisation, and human resources. The application of the method leads to the detection of errors in the operation of the system and to the indication of the possibility of improving the situation. Nowadays, we can talk about the legitimacy of using the method in the area of analysing relationships in business networks (Barczak, 2015) and also to coordinate a portfolio of projects in network structures (Barczak & Bińczycki, 2018; Barczak, 2018).

M. Klotz's strategic information system design method is used to define a strategy for an organisation's information function. The method is a useful tool from the perspective of current challenges in management related to the need to determine the architecture of information processes (Urbanowska-Sojkin, 2009). As part of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, organisations are transforming in accordance with the course of their processes, moving from a vertical to a horizontal system. Currently, it is noticed that the method helps to effectively indicate the paths of data and information flow (Pietsch et al., 2004). Owing to the method, the organisation can fully focus on the effects of its basic activities and what is necessary for this to happen (Jiatong et al., 2022; Tariq & Khan, 2022).

H. Kadłubowski's managerial information collection model method helps to define the scope of information needed by the management in the decision-making process. The method is currently appreciated for its high usefulness in identifying the real information needs of people managing various types of organisations (Czekaj, 2012). The knowledge of such needs obtained through the use of the method makes it possible to meet the contemporary challenges related to the dynamic growth of information resources (Rascão, 2021; Idoko & Akinsunmi, 2021).

The information flow path analysis method is used to eliminate the mismatch between the organisational structure and the information and decision-making system. Nowadays, the potential of the described method is noticed in the case of defining the ways and forms of providing information to decision-makers (Czekaj, 2012). Currently, it is emphasised that the advantage of the method is the reduction of the risk of making mistakes resulting in a distortion of the message (Nascimento et al., 2021). The challenges related to the analysis of information flow paths are today analysed in the context of implementing innovative solutions that are an expression of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Molenaar, 2022; Colli, 2023).

The IKSI comprehensive inventory method of the information system is used to consider the system as a set of information, information channels, and technical infrastructure defined in space and time. The area of the application of the IKSI method today includes, among others, the implementation of solutions based on the idea of lean administration (Czekaj, 2010). A precise description of the studied reality allows for the effective implementation of solutions based on artificial intelligence that support managers in the decision-making process (Rtal & Hanoune, 2021; Nourani, 2021). Another area of the application of the method is the optimisation of increasingly complex relationships between public administration and business (Baran, 2010).

The HIPO input-process-output hierarchy method is used to optimise the design of the information system. The system is considered here at three levels: the whole system, the programme, and the programme module. Nowadays, the usefulness of the method is noticed in the sphere of defining the factors determining the success of an information system (Subiyakto et al., 2015) or determining the conceptual framework for this success (Nguyen et al., 2017). In general, the HIPO method is currently mentioned as a useful tool for developing various detailed system solutions that fit into the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Chen et al., 2019; Syed-Mohamad & Md. Akhir, 2019).

The BSP IT management infrastructure planning method is used to analyse and plan the IT management structure. The method facilitates the diagnosis of the structure of the entire information system as well as the recognition of dependencies between functions, cells, data sets, and IT subsystems. Nowadays, it is emphasised that it is a useful tool for designing the architecture of an information system (Vasconcelos & Sousa, 2022; Kotusev, 2021). The method is also mentioned by authors who consider the problem of information sharing. This is information saved in the system by various business functions that use it (Huom et al., 2022).

The method of the para-algorithmisation of information sets for a fixed part of the problem is used to analyse the information resources necessary to solve recurring problems (a situation of repetitive content, form, time, etc.) The challenges for which the method is applied are today the subject of a thorough analysis of the scientific community, because the implementation of solutions based on artificial intelligence translates into the need to standardise the scope of data and information (Adel, 2022). At the same time, such a need exists for entire complex supply chains (Khan & Abonyi, 2022). The use of the method can lead to an increase in the level of synergy between the human-worker and the surrounding technology (Pai et al., 2022).

The ISAC method of analysis and design of the information system is used to increase the level of the computerisation of the enterprise in a way that effectively meets its information needs. The perspective of the user's needs and system and IT procedures is adopted here. The ISAC method is nowadays particularly appreciated for its purposeful aspect, which allows the organisation to effectively respond to the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Kavvadia, 2021). The implementation of the method is conducive to the flexible modernisation of the system operation and its adaptation to the requirements of cyber-physical organisational units (Cachada et al., 2018). The method is conducive to improving modern business processes with a complex course (Lundeberg, 2017).

The FAOR information system functional analysis method is used to analyse and design an integrated information system. The method focuses on modelling the organisation in the context of the latest achievements in IT knowledge. Nowadays, the FAOR method is used in the case of improving the scope of the cooperation and coordination of the organisation's activities with the support of information technology implemented as part of the information system (Schmidt, 2011). Currently, the FAOR method is used in relation to a wide range of problems in the area of adapting information systems to the challenges of the present day (Pernici & Rolland, 2012). The literature also raises the issue of the usefulness of the method due to the way in which it takes into account the interactions resulting from the human factor in the created system solution (Fernandes, 2012).

The ARIS integrated information system design method is a tool that is based on the analysis of the organisation's activity, taking into account the perspective of its components and their functional properties. The use of the ARIS method makes it easier to build a modern information system that will be able to meet modern challenges (Dotsenko & Kamenskyi, 2019). The method is a response to trends that shape the use of the latest, innovative solutions emerging in the field of information technology (de Kinderen et al., 2021). Among these trends, the development of network organisations and progress in the use of artificial intelligence should be mentioned above all (de Kinderen et al., 2022).

The OOA/OOD method is a collection of tools known as object-oriented methods. They allow for effective modelling of system dynamics. Currently, methods from the OOA/OOD group are mentioned in the context of challenges related to improving the sphere of adjusting the system to the needs and expectations of its users or potential external partners (Ngowi & Mvungi, 2018). The method is treated as the foundation for the current paradigm of analysis and design of comprehensive solutions in the form of information systems (Tamai, 2019; Short, 2019). The literature also mentions that the OOA/OOD method is the optimal starting point for the complementary use of other specialised tools (Yadav et al., 2021).

Methodology

In the context of the conducted literature review, there arises a question about the possibilities of identifying dimensions shaping the space of scientific discourse devoted to methods of information management. The Qualitative Data Analyses (QDA) methods are the tools that can be successfully used in a case such as the search for a common denominator of contemporary scientific discourse. The specificity of the data here is that it is qualitative in nature, which excludes the possibility of making simple quantitative comparisons (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). The aim of the analysis is to find the key content elements and relationships that create the context. In the modern world, the exploration of this type of cognitive space often brings new and very valuable insights, expanding the available knowledge and opening new research fields. The requirement of representativeness in the case of this type of qualitative research does not apply. The point here is only to observe the characteristic symptoms of previously unnoticed phenomena and relationships that confirm the existence of these circumstances. Therefore, in this case, there is no need to comment on the frequency of the recorded observation; what counts is the fact of even a single statement of the occurrence of the identified phenomenon (Krippendorff, 2013). This approach also allows us to reach for incomplete, selective, diverse datasets, the composition of which seemingly raises objections related to the subjectivism of the selection. In this case, however, it is about inspiration and noticing prospective new perspectives of analysis. There is an analogy here to the procedure known from such methods as "brainstorming" or "focus group research". The main subject of interest is the structure of the semantic context that occurs in the material studied. When analysing the title issue, the following rules of conduct were applied:

- the titles and abstracts of the publications identified and described in the previous section of the considerations were adopted as the units of analysis. The selection of these publications was intentional and was to guarantee the diversity of the set of considered cases;
- all included publications had to focus directly on the analysed title issue;
- in each of the included publications, the terms that constitute the basic context of the presented scientific discourse have been distinguished;
- the next step was to develop a concept map showing the network of connections between the identified concepts that create the context;
- finally, a strategy of analysing binary oppositions by nomothetic explanatory induction was applied (Gibbs, 2008; Kuckartz, 2014).

Research results

The analysis of the scientific publications described in the previous sections – which were devoted to twenty methods of information management – indicates their significant diversity in terms of the context of the considerations. For the purpose of the analysis, the concepts that can be distinguished are presented in the form of nouns. The resulting initial set includes the following elements: network organisations, public sector, information system, information technology, business processes, the Fourth Industrial Revolution, information flow, information relations, IT development, IT management, technological maturity, the implementation of IT technology, process automation, artificial intelligence, digital transformation, information process, smart production, the integration of information resources, the coordination of information resources, socio-technical system, cyber-physical system, information needs, information audit, system innovations, technological innovations, process innovations, system modelling, information efficiency, the Internet of Things, information value, strategic information, information engineering, information architecture, value chain, integrated system, sharing economy, information sharing, information security, decision-making process. The next step was to reduce the above set due to the occurrence of synonymous terms.

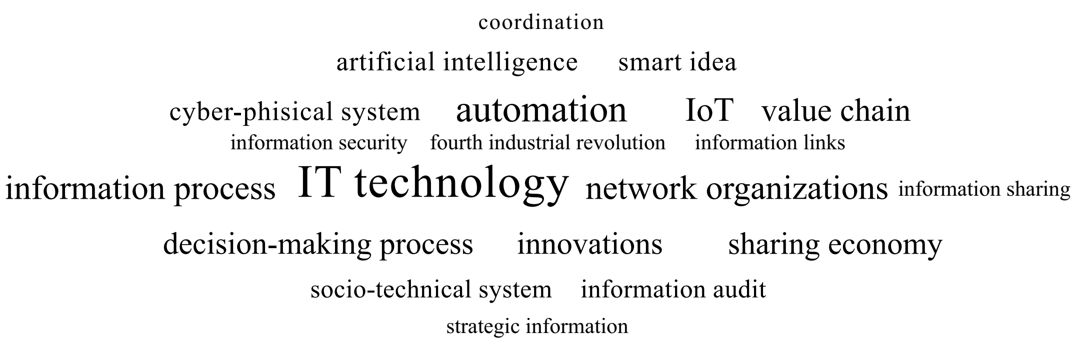

Figure 1. A map of key concepts defining the context of recalling information management methods in contemporary scientific publications

Source: Own research.

Based on the set of selected key phrases forming the context of the researched discourse, a concept map was created (Figure 1). Concepts of the greatest importance for recognising the general context in which the analysed publications fit in have been marked on it. Concepts that are closer to the centre of the map have a denser network of connections with other concepts, while the size of the font indicates the frequency of their occurrence in the set of publications – usually both parameters changed in a similar way.

Discussion

The Fourth Industrial Revolution, even when it was not directly mentioned, left its mark on the scientific discourse conducted in recent years. This manifests itself in various ways. This is particularly visible in the area of references to information management methods. We are dealing here with the management of a resource that is of key importance from the perspective of the current changes. Almost every sphere of organised human activity is influenced by this dynamic process. However, the nature of the successively emerging challenges and the knowledge accumulated so far make it seem that certain phenomena attract the attention of a wider group of researchers. Therefore, the thesis was adopted in the considerations that it is possible to identify certain common elements of the ongoing discourse, determining its current character, adequate to the challenges of the present day. In accordance with the procedure provided for, in the presented analysis it was decided to attempt to indicate the criteria for the division identified in the context research, in accordance with the logic of determining binary oppositions by means of nomothetic explanatory induction.

The image that emerges from the analysis of the map of key concepts that determine the context of referring to information management methods in contemporary scientific publications leads to the formulation of at least two criteria. The first of these criteria concerns directing the discourse to the issue of using the latest IT technologies to improve internal processes on the one hand and to increase the scope of inter-organisational integration on the other. The common denominator here is the issue of references to the formal boundaries of the organisation in the conditions of the growing importance of information resources and their flow. This is evidenced, on the one hand, by concepts strongly emphasising the perspective of improving the internal organisation, such as “information security” or “decision-making process”, and, on the other, by concepts indicating the increasing importance of supra-organisational structures: “value chain”, “sharing economy”, or “network organisations”. A good example of a discourse conducted in accordance with the observations made is the invoking of the KSS communication system analysis method as part of considerations on the possibility of improving the communication process between independent organisations (Schindlbeck, 2015); the DZA method of analysing the time of information processes to describe the issue of coordinating the operation of the entire, complex supply chain (Werner, 2020); or KSA communication structure analysis methods to consider complex relationships in business networks (Barczak, 2015).

The second criterion differentiating the ongoing discourse may be the issue of recalling information management methods in the context of using IT to change the role and importance of the human factor and, on the other hand, to give autonomy to technical solutions and automate the production system as a whole. The common denominator here is the issue of references to the scope of human interference in the functioning of the system. This is evidenced, on the one hand, by concepts such as innovation, strategic information (requiring creative interpretation by a human), decision-making process, and, on the other, by concepts such as automation, the Internet of Things, and artificial intelligence. A good example of a discourse conducted in accordance with the observations made above is the reference to the FAOR information system functional analysis method as part of considerations on the importance of interactions resulting from the impact of the human factor (Fernandes, 2012); the ARIS integrated information system design method to describe the issue of using artificial intelligence within the information system (de Kinderen et al., 2022); or the HIPO input-process-output hierarchy method to consider creating innovative system solutions that fit into the idea of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Chen et al., 2019; Syed-Mohamad & Md. Akhir, 2019).

The identified dimensions of the space of recalling information management methods (within the current scientific discourse) are not the only possibilities in this regard. Potentially, further common denominators can be sought within the researched discourse. However, it is not the number of dimensions that is important here, but the observation and description of the trend that proves the phenomena taking place. In the analysed case, we are dealing with the process of using traditional methods of information management to improve the space in which, as a result of technological changes, the role of a human being is changing. What we are observing proves a general redefinition of the scope of tasks facing humans. This is the result of a dynamic increase in the amount of information that needs to be processed, with a simultaneous increase in their diversity and the scope of reality that this information represents (and it is for this reason that the formal boundaries of the organisation cease to matter). At the same time, it turns out that everything should be treated as if it were in constant motion due to the number of interactions connecting increasingly complex networks of related entities. All these conditions change the optics of looking at information management methods, which is expressed in the current scientific discourse devoted to this subject.

Turning to issues related to the functioning of public sector organisations, in the context of the observations made so far, it is possible to formulate recommendations that will facilitate the implementation of the mission of this type of entities in the modern world. Organisations whose main goal is not profit but solving problems important to a given community, in the face of the growing level of the complexity of the environment, must take care to deepen their integration with it. Access to more and more complete information is the foundation for building the organisation's influence on the entire system. Therefore, in order to effectively influence the reality, it is crucial to deepen the level of the understanding of phenomena occurring in a specific network of integrating entities (Geodecki & Zawicki, 2021). Since changes in the functioning of the public sector must keep up with changes in the environment, it is necessary to dynamically develop competences that allow public sector organisations to more precisely identify rapidly growing (both quantitative and qualitative) information resources generated within the network of cooperating entities (van der Meer & Dijkstra, 2022). Owing to information management methods such as those discussed above, it is possible to consciously create specialised interfaces that allow public sector organisations to "plug in" to the optimal place in the stream of inter-organisational information flows. This also means that such organisations need to intensively develop advanced analytical competences based not only on organisational solutions, but also on the use of the latest information technologies, especially artificial intelligence.

Of course, from the perspective of key technologies – the dynamic development of which takes place as part of the Fourth Industrial Revolution – public sector organisations should pay special attention not only to solutions based on artificial intelligence but also to blockchain technology (due to the credibility of data sources of various origins) and quantum computers (due to the rapidly increased computing power enabling the processing of a gigantically growing amount of data). The breakthrough associated with the use of artificial intelligence involves relieving humans from the mental work of detecting patterns in large datasets and identifying any deviations from the standards set by the relevant public authorities. It is obvious that in the public sphere, activities are conducted primarily on the basis of a system of standards, regulations, and procedures. This situation is particularly suitable for the use of the previously mentioned technologies, because it is an area of highly determined activities and, in addition, everything takes place within a clearly defined context of references. This distinguishes this type of activity from commercial ventures, which require much more individual creative input that only the human mind can provide.

Like all research procedures, the analysis presented above is subject to various limitations. Due to the qualitative nature of the methods used, the unresolved issue at the current stage of work is determining the statistical characteristics of the observations made. Qualitative research does not guarantee that the explored area covers the most important issues from the perspective of the challenges faced by the examined public sector entities. It may even turn out that subsequent similar studies will lead to slightly different conclusions. However, this will not be a denial of the results already described, but only their extension and supplementation with an additional point of view. The qualitative research results presented here are, therefore, only exploratory in nature and should be treated as such. This means that any conclusions drawn refer only to a certain aspect of the examined reality. In this case, additional limitations also result from the scope of the examined source material (but the qualitative nature of the analysis makes it possible to focus on data that is merely an exemplification of a broader group of phenomena). The purpose of carrying out the procedure described above was to identify and understand the nature of exemplary relationships that can be observed in the studied area without judging the scale of their occurrence.

Conclusions

The carried out analysis shows a complex picture of the space of the current scientific discourse, which is devoted to information management issues – especially when it comes to taking into account the perspective resulting from the specific activities of public sector organisations. However, it can certainly be said that in the face of the changing level of the complexity of the environment and the dynamically growing level of inter-organisational integration, the public sector must also ensure its ability to join the ongoing processes. This requires the introduction of appropriate system and organisational solutions as well as the development of analytical competences, taking into account the potential of artificial intelligence and other advanced information technologies. Future research – based on the conclusions presented above – should more precisely determine the scale and scope of necessary adaptation activities that public sector organisations can carry out in order to effectively implement the tasks entrusted to them in a world changed by the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

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The Work-Life Balance of Public Sector Employees in Poland in the Context of Available Legal Regulations

Abstract

Objective: The purpose of this article is to present changes in the legal system in Poland regarding work-life balance and to confront them with the expectations of public sector employees in this area.

Research Design & Methods: The study is based on the analysis of literature, normative acts, and the results of nationwide surveys conducted in 2021 in Poland based on sample of 3,114 public sector employees.

Findings: Research shows that remote work, the ability to choose working hours, and informal working time arrangements are solutions that would significantly help public sector employees reconcile work and private life.

Implications/Recommendations: The analysis of legal acts shows changes in the approach to the WLB concept over the last decade in Poland and the development of solutions facilitating the reconciliation of professional and personal life. These changes are expected by employees. Difficulties related to the implementation of WLB tools in public organisations are identified resulting from their specific structure, procedures, and budget constraints.

Contribution/Value Added: The article is a source of knowledge for theoreticians, practitioners, employers, and public authorities. The presented results can be used when making decisions aimed at optimising the working conditions of public sector employees and adapting them to changing social needs and legal requirements.

Article classification: research article

Keywords: work–life balance, public sector, public authorities, legal regulations

JEL classification: I 38, J 80, J18, J24, K31, K36

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Introduction

In response to the changing needs of society and employees, the deepening demographic crisis, as well as due to the accelerated pace of life and technological progress – which both facilitates and complicates balancing personal and professional life – a dynamic development of the Work-Life Balance (WLB) concept has been observed in recent years. The development of legal regulations related to it can also be seen. Public authorities, operating both at national and international levels, are trying to cope with emerging new problems and challenges by implementing new legal acts and changing the catalogue of WLB instruments.

The aim of the article is to present the changes that have occurred in the legal system in Poland in recent years in the area of WLB in comparison to the expectations of public sector employees. The implementation of WLB instruments is particularly difficult and specific in public organisations, limited by rigid organisational structures, procedures, and budgets, and at the same time burdened with general social pressure to maintain the continuity of public service provision at the highest level.

The conclusions from the article will be drawn based on the analysis of the literature on the subject, normative acts, and the results of nationwide surveys conducted on a group of 3,114 employees employed in the public sector in 2021. The presented research results can be a source of knowledge for theoreticians, practitioners, employers, and public authorities, serving as material when making decisions regarding the optimisation of the working conditions of public sector employees.

Theory development

The evolution of the Work-Life Balance concept

The concept of WLB, which involves reconciling professional and private life, has its roots in the changing socioeconomic context and transformations in the employment structure, which began to develop with the advancing industrialisation already in the 19th century. Before the emergence of industry, much of the production was carried out by families, mainly for subsistence (Clark, 2000, pp. 747–770). However, as the market economy became more industrialised, employment under so-called „foreign employers," or those outside family circles, became increasingly common. These dependencies necessitated changes to the social security and insurance systems in many countries around the world. High involvement in work in industry and growing criticism of working conditions resulted in the negative consequences of excessive professional involvement being noticed (Bailyn, 1993). More and more attention has been paid to work-life balance. A breakthrough period for the development of the WLB concept was the 1960s and 1970s. At that time, the growing number of women entering the labour market and changing social roles further strengthened the interest in work-life balance. During that period, scientific research began to be conducted on the impact of work on private life and on employees' expectations in this area (Bond et al., 1997). It should be emphasised here that the results of the research conducted at that time were diverse. Some of them confirmed that women experience more conflicts between work and private life than men do (Frone et al., 1992; Hammer et al., 1997), often showing a similar level of satisfaction with work and family life. Other analyses showed no differences in the psychological involvement of women and men in work, pointing to, among others, instrumentality and interpersonal sensitivity as the main factors influencing the conflict between roles (Blanchard-Fields et al., 1997). Women's entry into the workforce has led to the development of corporate policies to support employees in achieving this balance. The largest companies began to modify their internal regulations and procedures, paying more and more attention to the values and needs of, above all, their employees. The changes included, among others, flexible working time, work from home, and the possibility of childcare, as well as other benefits. In the 1980s, men also began to express their concerns about the harmonisation of professional life and private life. At the end of this decade, work-life balance was perceived not only as a problem of women, but also of men, entire families, organisations, and national cultures (Greenhaus & Kossek, 2014).The 1990s established the recognition of work-life balance as a key issue for all women, men, parents, non-parents, single people, and couples (Bird, 2006, pp. 21–30). With technological progress and the globalisation of the economy, the boundaries between work and personal life have begun to blur, prompting the development of new time and energy management strategies in both areas. The pressure on employees increased and, therefore, so did the importance of work-life balance (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985). In the 1990s, the first concepts and theoretical models appeared aimed at understanding the relationship between work and private life (Parasuraman & Greenhaus, 2002). Various solutions to problems related to the conflict between professional and family roles have also been proposed (Greenhaus & Beutell, 1985; Kossek & Ozeki, 1998, pp. 139–149). Changing social trends and expectations, enormous modifications in family models – and, consequently, in the nature of social roles performed – to which the entry of women into the labour market and the increase in their education contributed significantly, have led to a significant development of research in the area of Work-Life Balance (Powell et al., 2019, pp. 54–71). The WLB concept has evolved over several decades, from the initial assumptions about the separation of work and life to a more complex approach that takes into account the integration of these areas. Currently, we strive for compliance and harmony between both spheres of life.

The definition of WLB

The concept of Work-Life Balance, in the most general sense, refers to a harmonious balance between work and private life, which includes appropriate distribution of time and attention to work, family, social relationships, rest, and personal development. It is the pursuit of a satisfying life both in the professional life and in the private sphere while minimising conflicts and stress resulting from their imbalance. Researchers in the literature present different approaches to the definition of the Work-Life Balance concept, which is also influenced by the time in which they conducted their analyses. Some suggest that WLB is the ability to achieve goals in both professional and personal life while feeling satisfied in both areas. According to others, the term 'balance' means equal commitment and satisfaction with professional and life roles (Bulger, 2014, pp. 7231–7232). H. J. Greenhaus, M. K. Collins, and D. J. Shaw, narrowing the scope of the subject, define work-family balance as "the degree to which a person is equally committed to and satisfied with his or her professional and family roles" (Greenhaus et al., 2003, pp. 510–531).Imbalance or interference between professional and private roles may cause conflict, resulting in various consequences, which are widely discussed in the literature on the subject (Bulger, 2014, pp. 7231–7232).

It should be emphasised that in most of the earlier studies from the 1970s and 1980s, when writing about private life, the authors usually had family roles in mind, primarily the role of the mother. Nowadays, however, due to changing social and cultural conditions, the perspective is broadening, and researchers emphasise that when examining WLB, other private roles, not only family ones, should also be taken into account.

Due to the lack of a universal definition of Work-Life Balance, but also the lack of a common point for everyone at which it could be said that the balance has been exceeded, it is necessary to define this term individually in each study or analysis. This article assumes that work-life balance is a key element of human resources management in modern organisations operating in various economic sectors. Initiatives related to WLB require commitment to understanding the needs of employees and employers and adapting the organisation's activities depending on changes in the environment. Public authorities play a special role in this constantly evolving process, creating a legal framework and implementing specific instruments and solutions designed to support the development of the WLB concept (Szczudlińska-Kanoś & Marzec, 2022).

The modern approach to Work-Life Balance emphasises the integration of work and personal life, encouraging the search for harmony through flexible solutions such as remote work, flexible working hours, and family support programmes. The idea has become an important part of the political discourse at various government and organisational levels, primarily related to human resources management and employee well-being (Greenhaus & Allen, 2011, pp. 165–183), regardless of the economic sector in which the organisations function. Moreover, this idea is of interest to researchers from other disciplines, including psychologists, sociologists, political scientists, and lawyers (see: Thilagavathy & Geetha, 2023, pp. 258–276). Contemporary research on WLB often focuses on identifying factors influencing work-life balance and developing practical strategies supporting the harmonious combination of both spheres of life (Kossek & Lautsch, 2017). The concept is also important for practitioners – especially public authorities that shape the legal system and implement tools enabling the implementation of the WLB idea – as well as for employers who in their everyday activities, using specific legal, economic, and technological instruments, try to take care of harmony between the professional and private spheres of their employees. Employers and public sector employees are in a particularly difficult situation, primarily due to numerous organisational, financial, and legal restrictions.

Difficulties in implementing the Work-Life Balance concept in the public sector

Implementing the Work-Life Balance concept in public organisations is a complex process accompanied by many challenges and difficulties. Research conducted in this area indicates a number of factors that may influence the achievement of work-life balance by public sector employees (among others: Oktosatiro & Liu, 2019; Afifah & Satrya, 2022; Dulk & Groeneveld, 2013).Firstly, public organisations are institutions acting for the benefit of society, and their main task is to provide public services and maintain constant access to them. These obligations result in more restrictive solutions regarding schedules and determining the working hours of employees. Limited opportunities to perform remote or hybrid work or implement flexible working time have a huge impact on achieving harmony in the private and professional lives of employees. At this point, it is also necessary to mention the specificity of the work of uniformed services (Sandhya, 2024; Oskarsson et al., 2020) as well as health care workers (Putri, 2023).

Another factor hindering the implementation of WLB in the public sector is financial resources. Public organisations operating on the basis of public finance regulations have limited possibilities of managing financial resources. They must, therefore, operate within strictly defined budgets, which limits flexibility in making decisions and conceiving solutions enabling the implementation of WLB. Rigid budgets also often mean the inability to invest in modern technologies and technical infrastructure necessary to implement solutions that contribute to strengthening the harmony between employees' private and professional lives, including work outside the organisation's headquarters.

Inadequately educated staff, especially management, as well as the lack of understanding of the problems related to excessive workload and lack of work-life balance may also lead to ignoring the needs of employees in this area, which will impact the results of their work. An appropriate management style, which is adapted to the organisation and employees, the type of leadership, and the personnel policy properly conducted by the management staff are the basic organisational elements that can affect the level of balance between employees' professional and private lives.

The specific, often hierarchical organisational structure of the public sector as well as the excess of procedures and formalities make it much difficult for both management staff and lower-level employees to flexibly manage their time and private life. Decisions about work and leave schedules are often made higher up the hierarchy, limiting employees' ability to align their personal lives with work demands.

Finally, frequent political changes, which often imply the replacement of staff in top positions in public organisations, as well as numerous modifications in legal regulations may lead to a lack of stability in the organisation, which may make it difficult to implement long-term strategies related to the improvement of working conditions and work-life balance of employees.

The above presents only selected factors that may hinder the effective implementation of the Work-Life Balance concept in public organisations. The limited possibilities of taking care of the WLB of employees in individual organisations operating in the public sector make the role of the state and public authorities in this area extremely important. Research results show that institutional pressure is the most important factor motivating public sector organisations to offer WLB support to their employees. State support in a given country has a positive relationship with the development of WLB in public organisations, in particular in public administration organisations (Dulk & Groeneveld, 2013). International research also shows a statistically-significant positive relationship between work-life balance and work engagement in many different European welfare states, after controlling for factors at the individual level (Björk-Fant et al., 2023), confirming that the actions of states, in particular the social policy model they adopt and legal regulations that facilitate, among others, care for children or the elderly, have a key impact on the development of WLB in organisations. Therefore, any modifications that strengthen WLB instruments are purposeful and desirable. The changes that have occurred in the legal system in Poland in this area in recent years are only briefly presented below. They were also referred to the results of surveys in which the respondents – public sector employees – indicated what expectations they had from their employers in the area of WLB.

Legal regulations in the area of Work-life Balance in Poland

For over a dozen years, many countries have witnessed the development of legal solutions designed to support employees in achieving work-life balance. Public authorities not only try to meet the new expectations of employees, but, above all, by promoting equal opportunities for women and men, promoting the inclusion of women in the labour market, and combating gender discrimination, they try to prevent the demographic crisis and its unfavourable consequences. According to research conducted by the Randstad employment agency on a sample of over

27,000 employees aged 18–67 in 34 countries around the world, employees prioritise work-life balance. WLB is the most important factor influencing workplace satisfaction – this is the opinion of as many as 94% of respondents from Poland and 1% fewer respondents worldwide. In these analyses, remuneration came second – 92% and 93% of responses, respectively, and third – the sense of employment stability (89% each) (Randstad, 2024).

In Poland, modifications to legal acts and the development of WLB tools have been recorded for over a decade. It should be mentioned here that maternity leave was extended several times, additional maternity leave was introduced (2010–2013), as well as parental leave and paternity leave were introduced (in 2016 and 2010, respectively) (Act, 1999). Moreover, there are changes in social benefits that expand both their objective and subjective scope. In addition to family benefits and supplements to family benefits, regulated by the Act on Social Assistance of 12th March, 2004 (Act, 2004), other benefits were introduced, such as the 500+ Programme and then the 800+ Programme, to help raise children (Act, 2016), or 'Good Start'– 300 PLN for a school kit once a year (Resolution, 2018). In 2011, the regulations regarding institutional care for children were also significantly modified (Act, 2011). All these changes were addressed to parents raising children and were intended to make it easier for them to reconcile work and family life.

An important moment for the development of WLB in Poland was the implementation of the Directive (EU) 2019/1158 of the European Parliament and of the Council of 20th June, 2019, on work-life balance for parents and carers, and repealing the Council Directive 2010/18/EU (Directive (EU) 2019/1158).The directive introduced several significant changes to the Polish Labour Code, aimed at improving the working and living conditions of employees. New regulations governing remote work entered into force on 7th April, 2023. Firstly, the number of weeks of parental leave was increased. After the changes come into force, parents are entitled to 41 weeks or 43 weeks (in the case of multiple births) of such leave. Importantly, nine weeks of parental leave cannot be transferred to the other parent and are lost if not taken. For the entire period of parental leave, the parent using it receives a maternity benefit equivalent to 70% of the salary. When taking maternity and parental leave, a parent receives on average 81.5% remuneration. Moreover, in 2023, the two-week paternity leave was maintained, but the time until which it can be used was shortened – until the child is 12 months old. The directive also introduced facilities for employees who have relatives under their care. Footnotes have been implemented that allow for leave from work due to *force majeure* in the event of urgent family matters caused by an illness or an accident. Such leave for a full-time employee may amount to a maximum of 2 days or 16 hours in a calendar year. For this time off, the employee will receive half of the remuneration, calculated as an equivalent for vacation time. An unpaid 5-day carer's leave has also been introduced, which is granted to provide personal care or support for serious medical reasons to a person living in the same household, as well as to the father, mother, children, and spouse. Moreover, the amendment to the Labour Code made it possible for an employee raising a child up to the age of 8 to apply for flexible work organisation. Additionally, an obligation was introduced to obtain from an employee who is raising a child until the child is 8 years old (and not 4 years old as before) consent to employment overtime, at night, in the intermittent working time system and to delegation outside the permanent place of work. According to the directive,one of the flexible solutions that employees-caregivers should have at their disposal should also be the possibility of remote work (Labour Code, 1974).

Remote work is extremely important not only for employees with small children. The latest research shows that for nearly 40% of people, remote work is extremely important and is not subject to discussion during conversations with the employer. This trend is even more visible in Poland, where 43% of employees consider remote work to be crucial. It is also interesting that 22% of employees in Poland, and 37% globally, are considering changing their place of residence due to remote work. This data suggests that remote work is becoming a lasting trend, not a passing fad (Randstad, 2024).

The development of remote work has somehow forced public authorities to regulate it legally. In Poland, the Act of 1st December, 2022, amending the Labour Code and certain other acts (Journal of Laws of 2023, item 240), introduced remote work to the Labour Code while repealing the provisions on telework. New regulations governing online work entered into force on 7th April, 2023. In the light of Article 67, „work may be performed entirely or partially in a place indicated by the employee and each time agreed with the employer, including the employee's home address, in particular using means of direct distance communication (remote work)" (Labour Code, 1974). The Labour Code provides for both full remote work and hybrid work. The legislator also provided for the possibility of performing the so-called occasional remote work, which is granted at the employee's request and is non-binding, and the employer may refuse to take it into account. Occasional remote work may be carried out for 24 days in the calendar year, and due to its special nature, specific provisions regarding, for example, the obligation to provide materials and work tools are not applied (MRPIPS, 2024).

Changes regarding remote work in the public sector are also planned in the near future. The modifications are aimed at introducing more flexible working hours and forms of organisation in offices. According to the new regulations, office managers will be obliged to establish a fixed work schedule from Monday to Friday, ensuring full 8 hours a day. Work will start at the earliest at 7:00 a.m. and end at 3:00 p.m., or will begin at the latest at 10:00 a.m. and end at 6:00 p.m. If the office serves the public, it must be open on at least one day of the week from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. Additionally, it is possible to introduce shift work and flexibility in working days, taking into account the individual needs of employees. The new regulations also aim to standardise the rules for all employees in the office, including members of the civil service. Office managers will be able to designate days off taking into account the working time and needs of employees. These changes are intended to improve the attractiveness of work in the public sector and adapt it to the contemporary expectations of employees (Draft regulation of the Prime Minister, 2024). The changes proposed in the public sector are an important signal and give hope for the possibility of adapting working time and methods of operation in offices and other public organisations. In the face of changing conditions on the labour market, the public sector must adapt to employee expectations in order to attract and retain the best specialists, despite limited financial resources. Flexible forms of work can be an attractive tool in drawing and retaining engaged and efficient employees. Below are the results of a nationwide survey conducted among employees in the public sector, which aim to show what expectations they have in the context of balancing professional life and private life.

Research methodology

The presented research results are part of nationwide research that was conducted among 10,331 respondents, including 7,800 professionally-active parents with children in the period from

16th March to 2nd April, 2021[1], and was preceded by a pilot study. For the purposes of this article, only the group of public sector employees with children to raise was analysed – 3,114 employees. The analysed group included 2,930 (94.09%) women and 184 (5.91%) men. The respondents were most often aged 41–50 years – 52.34%; 31–40 years old – 42.49%; and 21–30 years old – 1.7%. The respondents lived in towns of various sizes. The largest cities, with over 500,000 inhabitants, inhabited 29.13% of the respondents; villages – 26.36%; cities with up to 50,000 inhabitants – 20.91%. The respondents usually had higher education Master's degrees – 78.61%; Bachelor's degrees – 8.8 percent; or secondary education – 10.15%. 59.67% of the respondents had 11–20 years of work experience; 26.53% – 21–30 years of work experience; 11.21% – less than 10 years of work experience; and 2.6% – over 30 years of work experience. The respondents most often had two children to raise (54.46%), then one child (29.06%), and three children (13.33%).

The study used the diagnostic survey method, and the technique was the CAWI (Computer-Assisted Web Interviewing) online survey. The questionnaire consisted of 37 questions (mostly closed using a Likert scale, nominal scales, and 2 open questions) and was available on the website of the national electronic daily Librus[2] and sent via the portal directly to user accounts. The results were prepared using the „Statistica 13" programme. The main aim of the research was to comprehensively assess the situation of working parents, and in particular to diagnose how employees combine their professional duties with child care. One of the specific objectives was to check whether the changes introduced in the Polish legal system in the area of WLB meet the expectations of public sector employees. In order to achieve the detailed objective presented above, several research questions were asked: Do public institutions make it easier for employees to combine work with childcare? What do public institutions offer their employees in the area of WLB? What solutions do working parents expect that would make it easier to care for children?

Discussion of the results

The research shows that 57.55% of public sector employees are able to separate their professional and personal lives (definitely yes – 17.15%, rather yes – 40.40%). Interestingly, 6% fewer private sector employees responded in the same way – 51.15% (definitely yes – 14.45, rather yes – 36.7%) (n=3316). Analyses have shown that when choosing a workplace, the ability to reconcile work and private life is the dominant factor for 29.45% of the respondents working in the public sector, and for 32.95%, this is a very important but not decisive factor. 29.13% of the respondents considered this an important factor. For comparison, for 37.06% employees of private companies, it was the decisive factor.

In the public sector, almost 43.06% of employers make it easier for employees to perform professional and personal duties, in particular child care, and in business as many as 59.62%. There is also a definite difference in the answer – it definitely does not make it easier.

Almost half of public sector employers offer remote work to their employees, but almost the same percentage do not offer flexible working time. In over 60%, organisations do not have flexible scope of responsibilities.

[1] Research conducted together with Dr Małgorzata Marzec from the Institute of Public Affairs, Faculty of Management and Social Communication, Jagiellonian University.

[2] Librus is a supplier of unique systems that support thousands of Polish schools and local government units in their daily work. The Librus company has been operating on the Polish market for over 20 years. Librus systems are used by over 12,000 schools in 1,700 local government units.

Table 1. Reconciling professional and private life as a factor influencing the choice of workplace

Labor sector	Decisive/ dominant	Very important, but not decisive	Important	It's hard to judge	I do not care about this	Not very important	Irrelevant	Together
Sector public	917 **29.45%**	1026 **32.95%**	907 **29.13%**	139 4.46%	37 1.19%	63 2.02%	25 0.80%	3114
Private sector	1229 37.06%	1126 33.96%	736 22.20%	84 2.53%	42 1.27%	67 2.02%	32 0.97%	3316

Source: Own work.

Table 2. The employer's facilitation of combining work with childcare

Labor sector	Definitely yes	I guess so	I don't think so	Definitely not	Hard to say	Not applicable	Together
Public sector	436 **14.00%**	905 **29.06%**	767 24.63%	538 17.28%	252 8.09%	216 6.94%	3114
Private sector	867 26.15%	1110 33.47%	570 17.19%	277 8.35%	232 7.00%	260 7.84%	3316

Source: Own work.

Table 3. Solutions of public sector employers that help achieve harmony between professional and private life

Solutions	Offers	Does not offer	Hard to say	Not applicable	Together
Flexible working time	754 **24.21%**	1519 **48.78%**	341 10.95%	500 16.06%	3114
Flexible scope of duties	297 9.54%	1919 61.62%	294 9.44%	604 19.40%	3114
Remote work	1474 **47.33%**	1014 **32.56%**	249 8.00%	377 12.11%	3114
The organisation of child care	44 1.41%	2428 77.97%	68 2.18%	574 18.43%	3114

Source: Own work.

Table 4. Solutions that would significantly help public sector employees in reconciling work and private life depending on the employment sector

Solutions	Number of respondents	Percentage of respondents
The possibility to choose working hours	1704	**54.72%**
Working in a remote system	1677	**53.85%**
Informal working time arrangements	1454	**46.69%**
Employment flexibility/division of responsibilities included in the regulations	1293	41.52%
A gradual process of adaptation after a long break, e.g. maternity leave	883	28.36%
The organisation of child care	1190	38.21%
Surcharges for nursery and kindergarten	961	30.86%

The numbers do not add up. The question allowed for multiple answers.

Source: Own work.

Public sector employees assessed that the ability to choose working hours, remote work, and informal agreements on working hours are the most expected solutions that would help them achieve a balance between professional and private life.

Conclusions

In times of changing socioeconomic problems, the demographic crisis, as well as diverse and different expectations of employees, public authorities and organisations operating in all sectors of the economy face a number of challenges, and one of them is making it easier for employees to combine work and personal life. Harmony between these two spheres is extremely important, because it allows one to maintain a healthy mental and physical balance, which translates into the overall quality of life. Providing time for family or developing individual interests promotes greater professional and personal satisfaction, which, in turn, has a positive impact on work efficiency and the general well-being of both individual organisational units and entire societies.

The development of the WLB concept requires the implementation of various solutions and legal provisions that respond to the needs and changes. In recent years, numerous normative acts have been implemented in Poland, including those resulting from EU regulations, which have had a positive impact on the possibility of reconciling professional life with private life. In particular, leaves for the birth of a child were extended, additional days off to care for loved ones were introduced, and regulations regarding remote work were introduced. It should be mentioned that these solutions, especially the last one, depending on individual situations, may be either an opportunity for the development of WLB or a threat. However, these considerations are not the subject of this study. Regardless of the above, the practical implementation of WLB instruments is a huge financial and organisational challenge both for the state and for individual institutions. Public organisations are in a particularly difficult situation. Due to the specific requirements and constraints related to the functioning of the public sector – especially limited financial and human resources, rigid budgets, and the need to ensure the continuity of public services – these organisations struggle with challenges when implementing the work-life balance concept. In connection with the above, work on regulations that will allow public sector employers greater freedom when making decisions regarding working hours or online work outside the office should also be positively assessed. It should be emphasised that the changes taking place in the Polish legal system are consistent with employees' expectations. The research clearly shows that remote work, the ability to choose working hours, and informal working time arrangements are the most important elements in achieving work-life balance for public sector employees. Further modifications and adaptations of regulations to technological changes and the challenges associated with them are necessary, which is obviously required from the point of view of increasing public sector financing.

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Organisational Culture in Polish Small Private Enterprises as an Inspiration for the Public Sector

Abstract

Objective: This study seeks to identify and adapt elements of organisational culture from small enterprises in the apparel industry that can strengthen the functioning of public institutions. The objective is to provide guidelines for improving efficiency, ethics, and adaptability in organisations such as universities and the police, where formal structures alone are insufficient to meet the demands of the dynamic socioeconomic environment.

Research Design & Methods: The study employed semi-structured in-depth interviews with owners, directors, and managers from micro and small enterprises in the Polish apparel industry, allowing for the collection of detailed qualitative data on organisational culture. The collected data was analysed thematically, enabling the recognition of recurring patterns in the respondents' answers.

Findings: The analysis revealed practices such as participatory management, trust-based relations, and openness to innovation, which, although rooted in the private sector, can serve as inspiration for enhancing the organisational culture of public institutions.

Implications / Recommendations: The findings indicate that cultivating humanistic values, strengthening transparent communication, and integrating modern technologies can significantly improve the effectiveness and adaptability of public sector institutions. Such practices can foster employee trust, organisational efficiency, and broader social engagement.

Contribution / Value Added: This study contributes to both academia and practice by applying elements of organisational culture from small enterprises in the apparel industry as a benchmark.

Keywords: culture, organisational culture, private sector, public sector

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Introduction

Organisational culture is intricately linked to its major influence on various areas of organisational life as well as its environment. Organisational culture affects individual performance, organisational efficiency, job satisfaction and engagement, strategy planning and task execution, recruitment and selection of employees as well as their acceptance by the company, the scale of resistance to change and organisational conflicts, socialisation and the nature of interactions, innovation and the development of new products, marketing, and sales. Therefore, organisational culture eliminates organisational ambiguity in behaviours and promotes pro-efficiency behaviours among employees and the company's environment.

In the public sector, formal structure alone is not sufficient, and organisational culture plays a key role in shaping the attitudes, motivation, and effectiveness of employees. A better understanding of organisational culture can improve the functioning of these institutions and enhance the quality of services provided to citizens.

This article aims to present the shaping of organisational culture using the example of private companies in the apparel industry; some of these practices can be applied as recommendations for the public sector.

In Poland, there is a noticeable research gap – in the public sector, studies on the analysis of organisational culture are less developed than in the private sector (Grodecka & Gierczak, 2014; Grzebyk, 2020; Podgórniak-Krzykacz, 2021). Most models of culture have been created based on business environments; therefore, efforts should be made to adapt these models to the realities of public administration. The market reforms of New Public Management sought to transform public organisations into more business-oriented and market-driven entities by implementing management methods and tools commonly used in the private sector (Podgórniak-Krzykacz, 2021).

Modern public institutions operating in a dynamically changing socioeconomic environment require reforms not only within their structures but also in organisational culture. This is important as the behaviours and attitudes of employees in individual institutions affect the effectiveness of actions and ethics as well as the quality of relationships with citizens (Krukowski, 2023).

Literature review

Every organisation, be it a private enterprise or a public institution, has its own organisational culture. Often, it emerges spontaneously over the years as the organisation operates and undergoes changes. The concept of organisational culture consists of factors such as norms, values, beliefs, and patterns of behaviour. Over time, organisational culture may change, influenced by both external and internal factors. It is also important to note that the concept of culture in management can refer not only to organisations but also to individual professions or even individuals who possess the charisma to influence the behaviour of others. Typically, organisational culture does not undergo revolutionary transformation – these are subtle changes introduced gradually, influenced by the employees of the enterprise, who are its most valuable resource. In larger enterprises, culture is often imposed top-down (such as the company logo or the colour of employees' uniforms) (Białas et al., 2023; Pawłowski et al., 2019).

One of the first definitions of corporate culture is the one created by Elliot Jaques in 1951: "the culture of the factory is its customary and traditional way of thinking and doing of things, which is shared to a greater or lesser degree by all its members, and which new members must learn, and at least partially accept, in order to be accepted into service in the firm" (Jacques, 1951 cited in Aniszewska, 2007). Significant interest in the topic has resulted in the current difficulty of providing a single, universally accepted definition of organisational culture. For this article, organisational culture is understood as a pattern of basic assumptions developed or evolved by a group as it copes with problems of external adaptation and internal integration. It consists of many factors and their coexistence and proper interaction is key to the image of the organisation (Sidor-Rządkowska, 2021).

Every organisation has its own model of organisational culture and, in fact, there are no two identical models. It is created by people, their habits, and behaviours. Sometimes, its model is imposed by a charismatic leader. Organisational culture is born in people's minds, which is why some of its elements are difficult to capture. Its essence and models have been the subject of much research for years. Among all, the models of three researchers are discussed in more detail, namely Schein, Hofstede, and Davies (Sułkowski, 2020). Despite visible differences, common denominators can be found among them. All the researchers claim that organisational culture is extremely important for an enterprise or organisation at every stage of its operation. When organisational culture functions properly, there is a high chance that other components of the enterprise or organisation will also function properly. The primary goal of the models and research on them is to show the relationships between the various elements of organisational culture, from perspectives such as the ease of observing them or the role they play in managing an enterprise. These models were created based not only on theoretical knowledge but also on practical examples. Therefore, the results are reliable and show what organisational culture really is. However, these models are only auxiliary, as organisational culture in each enterprise is often unique. Defining organisational culture based on a single model can be misleading, as it leads to an oversimplification of the subject (Pawłowski et al., 2019).

Regardless of the adopted model, it is possible to distinguish components that make up organisational culture. These include basic assumptions, rituals, cultural values, social and organisational norms, ways of communication, narratives, stories, myths or metaphors, organisational stereotypes, cultural patterns, cultural artefacts, customs, traditions, symbols, organisational heroes, subcultures, and taboos (Sułkowski, 2020).

Organisational culture is widely recognised as a key factor in organisational effectiveness, adaptability, and innovation (Schein, 2010). In Poland, the transition from a centrally-planned economy to a market-based one has significantly influenced organisational culture, especially in the private sector. It can be observed that, although the Polish public sector continues to struggle with challenges such as bureaucracy and limited innovation (Kuhlmann & Wollmann, 2019), there is growing interest in drawing inspiration from the more dynamic and flexible cultures present in the private sector. Differences in organisational culture between the private sector and public organisations are shaped by institutional frameworks, legal regulations, and cultural norms.

Private companies in Poland are fundamentally profit-oriented, prioritising market competitiveness, efficiency, and innovation. Ownership structures are tied to shareholders or private entities. In private companies, the flexibility of structures, decentralised decision-making, and rapid response to market needs are also essential. In contrast, public organisations are funded by the state and focus on public service, stability, and equality. These institutions are dominated by hierarchical, highly formalised structures based on protocols and managed in a bureaucratic manner (Dębski et al., 2020; Cieciora et al., 2021). Legally, private companies are governed by commercial law, which allows for flexible human resources policies. Public organisations, on the other hand, are subject to administrative law, civil service statutes, and heightened requirements for transparency and accountability (Dębski et al., 2020).

Culturally, private companies in Poland exhibit market-oriented cultures, with a growing emphasis on innovation, customer focus, and performance-based rewards, as well as a communication style that is direct and critical. In contrast, public entities are dominated by hierarchical cultures with bureaucratic processes: employees in these environments value stability but often express a preference for more collaborative, clan-oriented cultures. It is worth noting that nepotism and favouritism occur at similar rates in both the public and private sectors in Poland, which distinguishes the Polish context from some neighbouring countries. In many public organisations, there is a lack of tradition in hiring professional managers, and managerial positions are held by specialists in a given field (e.g. teachers, doctors), which affects the specificity of organisational culture and limits the possibilities for implementing modern management styles and empathetic leadership (Grodecka & Gierczak, 2014; Vveinhardt & Sroka, 2020).

According to Markethub Sp. z o.o., the Polish apparel market constitutes one of the largest in Central and Eastern Europe, with revenues for this sector in 2024 estimated at 15.51 billion USD. The market is characterised by a high level of competitiveness, increasing consumer awareness, and a growing emphasis on innovation, sustainability, and digitalisation (Kalinowska & Żyliński, 2023; Wysokińska, 2019). It encompasses a broad spectrum of enterprises, ranging from international brands and domestic market leaders to an expanding e-commerce segment. Data provided by the Polish Agency for Enterprise Development (PARP) indicates that in 2022, the Polish fashion and innovative textiles industry comprised over 36,000 entities. Among them, several thousand small and medium-sized clothing companies operate, including local manufacturing workshops, boutiques, and niche online brands. However, detailed statistics concerning the number and market value of small Polish apparel brands remain difficult to determine due to the dynamic nature of this sector (Wysokińska, 2019).

Within the Polish apparel industry, an increasing significance is being attributed to soft management aspects, particularly organisational culture, which is regarded as a key factor in attaining competitive advantage. Small enterprises play a particularly important role in this regard, as they are characterised by the absence of rigid organisational structures (in contrast to large corporations) and greater flexibility in responding to market changes (Białas et al., 2023; Borkowski, 2014).

Research methodology

In the study, the in-depth interview method was employed, enabling the collection of detailed qualitative data regarding the experiences of employees from selected companies regarding their organisational culture. The interviews were semi-structured and conducted according to a scenario covering key areas of cultural functioning within the organisation. The data was analysed using thematic analysis, which made it possible to identify several patterns of responses (Miński, 2017).

A total of twelve interviews were conducted with owners, directors, and managers – representatives of companies from the Polish apparel industry. The respondents were drawn from micro and small enterprises operating in southern and central Poland. The respondents' ages ranged from 28 to 49 years old, and all held higher education degrees. The selection of the respondents was purposeful – individuals holding key managerial positions were chosen, as they possess extensive knowledge of the organisation's functioning and the impact of organisational culture on everyday management practices.

Analysing the results of research conducted among the representatives of clothing companies in the private sector reveals several elements of organisational culture – such as trust-based relations, the social mission of the company, social values, and ways of communication – that could be effectively adapted and implemented within the public sector. It should be noted that public institutions, such as universities or the police, resemble corporations in their structure. Therefore, the importance of organisational culture is growing in enhancing the efficiency, ethics, and adaptability of public institutions operating in a dynamic socioeconomic environment (Grześ-Bukłaho, 2022).

Results and discussion

Humanistic values (trust-based relations)

The first aspect observed in the analysed companies is prioritising people and their well-being, whether it involves the client, producer, or anyone else involved in the production process. They strive to treat all contractors and collaborators with respect. At the same time, proper coordination of work and efficient planning of all activities are essential, ensuring that tasks are completed on time. In smaller enterprises, it is often the owner who manages all production-related activities at every stage.

The fundamental principle of a public organisation is to put people and their well-being first, regardless of whether they are beneficiaries of public services, employees of the institution, or partners involved in the implementation of a given project. The goal is to build relationships based on mutual respect and effective communication, which facilitates the smoother coordination of activities and the planning of administrative processes. Clearly defining the scope of responsibilities and deadlines for task completion promotes operational efficiency and strengthens the sense of responsibility among employees. The management of a public institution plays a significant role in coordinating activities at every stage of public service delivery, ensuring high quality and accessibility (Młodzik, 2014; Cichorzewska & Kostecki, 2021).

In the analysed companies, the management approach in some ways resembles the Kaizen philosophy. The most important thing is to focus on daily tasks and to consistently implement the company's development plans. It is worth noting how crucial planning is in the management process – not only in business, but more broadly. Nowadays, there are many tools available that facilitate this task. It is relevant to mention that local government units (LGUs) with limited resources may also benefit from implementing Quality Management Systems such as ISO 9001 (Ćwiklicki et al., 2021).

The owners and managers of small businesses highlighted the connection between the way in which the company is managed and their private lifestyle. It is extremely important to maintain a balance between professional duties and private life, so as not to fall behind on projects, but also to ensure that relationships with loved ones and health do not suffer. The value system professed by the company's leadership determines the management process. For example, a representative of one of the analysed companies bases their values on beliefs rooted in the Christian faith and strives to ensure that all actions are consistent with these values. In contrast, the head of another analysed company is passionate about sport, and efforts are made to reflect this in the company's activities by motivating people to engage in physical activity. Of course, it would be difficult to convey these values and beliefs without the active participation and example set by the company's management, who lead a highly active lifestyle themselves. The other analysed company runs educational projects aimed at increasing public awareness, making people realise how important good nutrition and exercise are for health and well-being.

An essential element of the activities of public organisations, beyond the fulfilment of statutory tasks, is the promotion of social values such as respect, solidarity, a healthy lifestyle, and the development of civic competencies. Institutions use modern communication channels, including social media, to conduct educational and informational campaigns targeted at various social groups, with a particular emphasis on young people. For example, values that foster the building of civil society – such as physical activity, healthy eating, and responsible social attitudes – are promoted (Kożuch, 2005).

The social mission and social values

The second aspect that undoubtedly forms part of the essence of the company's activity – beyond the obvious goal of generating profit – is fulfilling a social mission and promoting positive values, especially among young people. For example, one company features the slogan "Make love not war" on the back of its hoodies. These attempts also include active engagement in social media. Companies offering sportswear promote values such as sport and healthy eating. This is extremely important nowadays, as there are many negative – sometimes even pathological – patterns being directed at young consumers. The promotion of positive values takes place on well-known platforms such as Instagram, Facebook, or TikTok. Their messaging must be consistent and carefully prepared, as it forms an integral part of the company's mission and vision.

For example, one of the analysed companies focuses on inspiration, education, motivation, and providing a daily example of what the company's work looks like. Through such actions, the above-mentioned company wants to show that embracing values such as kindness, respect, hard work, passion, and commitment to creating things from the heart can lead to a happy and fulfilled life. Another example is an educational series on the basics of nutrition, conducted with a personal trainer by another analysed company. Many even micro entrepreneurs also collaborate with so-called influencers, which allows them to reach a large group of potential customers.

Public organisations – through educational activities and the conscious shaping of a positive image – strive to strengthen social trust and build a sense of community. Conducting health campaigns, collaborating with experts, or maintaining presence in digital media are all integral parts of the public mission. Modern public institutions are increasingly using contemporary communication channels for educational and motivational activities to promote social values and encourage greater citizen engagement in public life (Różycka & Lisowska, 2023).

Ways of communication

Another critical point influencing company operations is honesty in communication, i.e. authenticity. This includes direct contact with customers on online platforms and through social media, listening to suggestions and ideas, and trying to involve them in the production process so that they have a real impact on the appearance of new collections. Companies must be flexible and dynamic, adapting to current market conditions and customer needs by continuously improving products, expanding services, and introducing innovations in line with the current trends. An ongoing market analysis also allows companies to launch additional services, which provides an opportunity to generate extra income and diversify revenue streams.

An analysis of organisational culture in companies suggests that a range of practices, despite their origins in the private sector, can serve as inspiration for public institutions. Emphasising the role of the individual and relationships based on respect and transparent communication leads to increased trust and a better coordination of activities. Clearly defining duties and responsibilities, caring for the ethical dimension of operations, and social engagement are elements that can effectively support the fulfilment of the public mission. In the public sector, this means the need to strengthen the humanistic dimension of management – one that recognises the citizen not only as a recipient of services but also as a co-creator of value (Kożuch, 2005; Schein, 2010; Grudowski & Wziątek-Staśko, 2021).

Moreover, the observation of the active use of social media by various companies – as a tool for education, the promotion of positive attitudes, or community-building – encourages reflection on their broader application in public institutions. In the context of contemporary public governance, authenticity, flexibility, and readiness for dialogue with the environment are becoming increasingly important. The ability to respond to social needs, openness to changing conditions, and integrating communication activities with the mission of the public organisation can, in the long term, contribute to increased effectiveness and social legitimacy of institutional actions (Bekkers et al., 2011; Feeney & Porumbescu, 2021; Lubasz, 2021).

Conclusions

Based on the conducted analysis of organisational culture development, the following conclusions can be drawn, which may be applicable in the public sector:

1. An organisational culture based on humanistic values has the potential to enhance the effectiveness of public-sector activities. Prioritising people and their well-being can contribute to a greater development of social trust.
2. Respect and transparent organisational communication are fundamental to effective management. A clearly defined division of tasks and greater flexibility can contribute to the improved functioning of public administration by minimising organisational disorder and boosting employee morale.
3. The social mission of public organisations goes beyond merely fulfilling statutory obligations. Like modern private enterprises, public-sector entities can actively promote social values – such as health, education, and civic engagement – through innovative methods, including the use of social media.
4. The integration of contemporary analytical and communication technologies has the potential to significantly enhance the effectiveness of public-sector initiatives. The adoption of social trend monitoring and digital marketing instruments within public campaigns can improve both the reach and the impact of these activities.

The practices such as participatory management, trust-based relations, and openness to innovation can serve as inspiration for managers operating in public institutions.

The study's limitation that could be addressed in future studies includes conducting broader research in the private and public entities in Poland in order to build a comparable knowledge base for public administration practices.

As for directions of future research, it would be interesting to investigate the organisational culture in large Polish enterprises, or even international corporations.

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All data will be available and shared upon request.

Journal of Public Governance

Aims and scope

Journal of Public Governance (formerly *Zarządzanie Publiczne / Public Governance*) is a quarterly published since 2007. It is intended for experts and researchers who specialise in public issues, including political decision-makers and students. It offers a forum for debates between academics and practitioners interested not only in the theoretical foundations of public governance but also in the opportunities for its practical application. The quarterly is international in scope, which is reflected in the nature of research issues (they involve matters of interest to academic circles worldwide), the contributing authors (a significant proportion of them comes from different countries), and the composition of its Programme Board as well as the make-up of the team of reviewers (it includes international research and academic centres).

The mission of the *Journal of Public Governance* is to publish advanced theoretical and empirical research in public management, governance, public policy analysis and evaluation, public sector economy as well as strategic management, which reflects new developments in the methodology of social sciences. The editors select papers with an original theoretical background and those that discuss the results of pioneering empirical research. We are also eager to promote the interdisciplinary and comparative approaches based on qualitative, quantitative, and experimental studies that provide new insights into the construction of theoretical models along with the methodological concepts in the field of public management.

In our journal, we adopt a unique approach to specific issues inherent in the sphere of public governance. The originality of our approach consists in the selection of both research areas and research methodologies.

A significant proportion of texts published by our journal is devoted to the analysis of the mechanisms of public governance at national and regional government levels (respectively), relevant to the administrative culture predominant in Central and Eastern European countries with a particular focus on the programming, implementation, and evaluation of public policies. The texts:

a. focus on problems occurring in post-transition countries which build their own public governance institutions and mechanisms, including the sphere of good governance;
b. represent attempts at a creative transposition and adaptation of international achievements in developing original solutions in the field of public governance in post-transformation countries.

The distinguishing features of the research methodologies preferred by our journal include:

a. a strongly established interdisciplinary approach to the study of public governance, combining research and analyses in the areas of economics, political science, management, public policy, sociology, and psychology;
b. the published texts are firmly rooted in social science theory.

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