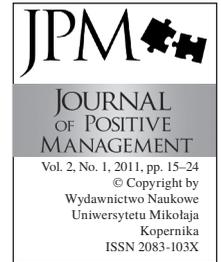# SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY OF HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTION AS MANIFESTATION OF POSITIVE ORGANIZATIONAL SCHOLARSHIP

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Abstract

Every organization searches for best conditions for development. Higher education institutions, based on the significance of a human factor, undertake many social responsibility activities. Finding the key to create a positive organization which is a motivator for employees would be a good example of applying the Positive Organizational Scholarship idea in practice. An additional consequence of the positive influence would be the perception of the higher education institution as an example of a new sustainable attitude to institution performance in a society.

Keywords: social responsibility, higher education institution, human resources, positive potential, motivation

Paper type: Conceptual paper

1. Introduction

Social and economic changes originating from the widespread access to information are enhancing globalization. Simultaneously, social pressure is growing on firmer commitment of organizations to social development. Higher education institutions have special mission to complete in this respect. The vital issue seems to be the question of efficient application of Positive Organizational Scholarship as a modern tool leading to making a better use of market opportunities and owned resources.

2. Environment and its Changes as Stimulus for Progress

Throughout many decades organizations have functioned in public space co-existing with the public. The space, accessible for everyone, has provided freedom for the exchange of ideas, behaviours and has guaranteed direct contact (Dymnicka, 2009: 19). Mutual interaction has been based on experience but the exchange lacked a deeper sense in wider social dimension. A widespread increase in the awareness of the organization activities and expectations towards it has

taken place together with the growth of social awareness inspired by a dynamic development of, mainly electronic, media.

Higher education institutions has been perceived for ages as "sanctuaries of knowledge" and treated as an inviolable monolith whose activities are self-evident as they have always been. Growing social expectations addressed towards all the organizations also referred to higher education institutions. Those particular institutions shape social knowledge with teaching youth and creating innovations with scientific research. Hence the impact of the environment change has greatly transformed social expectations towards higher education institutions

Higher education potential and its development capacity as well as the adaptability to changing conditions impose a more active role in shaping the future society. Not only stimulating and pinpointing the directions of development but also teaching specialists who are indispensable in activating the environment are some of the tasks assigned for higher education institutions by their stakeholders.

Traditionally perceived management of an organization is based on the purposeful and most effective way of using its resources to achieve the targets (Lichtarski, 2003: 208). This cliché is known to every manager in the world. Also the authorities of a higher education institution aim at developing and cultivating a recognizable brand on an educational market. However, the new concept of organization management – Positive Organizational Scholarship – is attracting more and more followers. Namely, realizing the potential and carrying out the activities of an organization on the basis of the acquired knowledge is a value and novelty in management. That is how a new dimension of management can be created. This is the key to the development of every organization in the times of global competition (Penc, 2001: 203).

3. Positive Organizational Scholarship

The search for an ideal organization management model forces scientists to use diverse methods supported by both, positive and negative, experience. The authors of the new attitude – Positive Organizational Scholarship – Kim S. Cameron, Jane E. Dutton i Robert E. Quinn (2003a) describe it as focusing attention on optimal organizational states—the dynamics in organizations that lead to the development of human strength, foster resiliency in employees, make healing, restoration, and reconciliation possible, and cultivate extraordinary individual and organizational performance.

This attitude, originating from positive psychology, draws from rich scientific experience. The advantages of the positive attitude have been repeatedly shown in other fields e.g. positive psychology is priceless in treating diseases, and positive psycho-social aspects have significant impact on the course of disease (Taylor, Sherman, 2007: 194–210).

Positive psychology, by Martin Seligman (2002) came out in 1998, concentrates on 3 main areas:

- • positive experiences – such as happiness, pleasure, joy or fulfilment,
- • positive individual traits – such as character, abilities or interests,
- • positive institutions – such family, school, enterprise, local society and general society.

Positive Organizational Scholarship mainly concentrates on the positive aspects, processes and attributes of the organization and its members. It does not introduce a single theory but it focuses on the dynamics of the phenomena, usually determined by the following expressions: perfect, prosperous, blooming, abundant, thriving or law-abiding. The theory expresses the main anxieties widely, but stresses the ideas of goodness and positive human potential.

The characteristic feature of the new attitude to organization management is to describe its conditions with the use of positive expressions. In the field of employee motivations these are: generosity, altruism, actions based on the benefit of others. Planning performance and targets, in turn, is depicted by: vitality, high quality of human relations or joyous excitement.

An attempt to explain what Positive Organizational Scholarship is was undertaken by K.S. Cameron, J.E. Dutton and R. Quinn (2003b: 4). They claim POS differs from the previous attitude to organization that it tries to understand its functioning in the best possible way for its employee.

In this attitude 'Positive' refers to searching for positive states of human activity such as resilience (Sutcliffe, Vogus, 2003: 94–110). Other positive states cover meaningfulness and clarity as reasons of all activities (Pratt, Ashforth, 2003: 309–327). R.A. Emmons (2003: 81–93) also adds dynamism, attained effects such as environment gratitude understood not only as a bonus but also the state of mind of the person undertaking the activity. Other researchers, J.E. Dutton and E.D. Heaphy (2003: 263–278), complete the set with all other benefits resulting from positive relations in an organization.

Positive Organizational Scholarship is interested in an untypical attitude to the problem. The essence is to avoid typical patterns of conduct according to the assumption that the positive change may lead to much more positive effects. One can expect motivating effect of the positive stimulations as it is supported by the optimistic attitude and search for other, non-standard ways of attaining the goal (Spreitzer, Sonenshein, 2003: 207–224).

The new approach does not discredit the traditional way of treating resources of an organization. It accepts more eagerly outstanding and uncommon activities and interest in other than accepted courses of action. The approach invites exploration of an uncharted route leading to a thriving development of an organization, which makes the entire process wholly remarkable. (Park, Peterson, 2003: 33–47)

The term 'Organizational' directly refers to the essential features of an organization and the problems arising in its environment as well as within its very structure. Owing to a great many organization management theories, the positive approach facilitates an attempt towards estimating the benefits which derive from its application. The approach also shows that 'positive' states, relationships or processes have been in a large measure ignored or omitted in a traditional view of an organization. In other words, the new perspective points out some innovative activities or encourages the modes of conduct capable of triggering both the dynamics and processes within an organization to bring about the accomplishment of desirable and unexpected results (Cameron, Dulton, Quinn, 2003b: 5–6).

The term 'Scholarship', as used in the name of the theory and rendered into Polish as 'nauka', 'podejście' or 'wsparcie', performs a role similar to dozens of how-to-be-successful handbooks available on the market. They offer swift and easy methods of attaining goals, generally oriented towards personal, family and organizational success, as well as speedy and efficient measures to achieve welfare and long-lasting prosperity. The major drawback of the widely-read 'success manuals' is, however, that they make no reference to empirical research or at least to abundant literature on the subject. Aside from that, the authors of those guidebooks claim no responsibility for the outcome of the actions which they advise to undertake. Interestingly, Positive Organizational Scholarship does not entirely reject the message contained in such compendia. However, as a scientific method Positive Organizational Scholarship requires precisely ring-fenced set of definitions and reasoning conducted according to strict scientific principles. As well as that, it also necessitates a whole spectrum of undertaken activities. Science itself looks into a pattern of interactions between its three main goals: research, teaching and practical application of knowledge (Cameron, Dutton, Quinn, 2003b: 6). The overall objective to be achieved is prosperity and proper conditions created for the development of an organization. .

Every organization, including a university, is first and foremost comprised of people and its accomplishments make up the sum total of human endeavour. Particular emotions as well as social and physical environment have a strongly negative bearing upon human behaviour. Lots of studies emphasize the role of dynamically interacting positive forces such as emotions, human conduct, social networks, positive energy and the pursuit of organizational changes.

A survey of a representative sample of one thousand employees has shown that optimal relationships between work and private life of staff contributes to positive exchange between labour and management and thus provides benefits to either side. Keeping the balance between professional and private life may have a positive impact on both the employer and employee at a workplace. The resulting

optimal work environment creates a positive work atmosphere for employees (Muse, Harris, Giles, Feild, 2008: 171–192).

Positive Organizational Scholarship covers a few major areas, which can be listed as follows:

1) Every individual, organization or a society derives benefits from institutionalised virtuousness.

2) Another area is concerned with the power of appreciating strengths to encourage personal and organizational changes.

3) The third, integrated area is connected with driving positive emotions, positive energy and positive interpersonal relations.

4) Organizations can either foster or sap the positive dynamics, mainly through the feeling of sense, understood as unambiguous goal orientation, clear motivators and values, etc.

The view can be taken that Positive Organizational Scholarship combines lots of ideas, for example the notion that measures to strengthen an organization from the inside can change its capabilities and dynamics and thus reinforce the relationships between an organization and its external environment. Aside from that, it is also worth remembering that only several positive factors are able to offset the impact of a single negative event. It need not be reminded that a human being simply craves for well-being as well as any experience linked to welfare and happiness (Cameron, Dutton, Quinn, Wrzesniewski, 2003: 361–370).

The positive attitude to organizational practice vitally affects a good atmosphere at a workplace as well as the development and maintenance of positive organizational culture. Suitable actions can efficiently uplift work satisfaction levels and boost work quality. A greater emphasis laid on success, positive motivation and proper internal relations are the objectives which an ever-increasing number of organizations are aiming for (Henry, 2007: 170–193).

It is also worth noting that positive emotions have a bearing upon the simplification of strategic practice. The positive attitude allows to take a wider view of the reality and makes a decision planning a more straightforward process. All in all, positive feelings tend to encourage greater creativity and resourcefulness (Polowczyk, 2011: 3–7).

According to Brianna Barker Caza and Arran Caza Positive Organizational Scholarhip brings along a new approach to how organizations are run. Unlike a traditional perspective, the new approach is primarily characterized by the emphasis laid on positive processes which, in turn, positively affect the performance of an organization. Undoubtedly, Positive Organizational Scholarship provides an entirely innovative outlook on the life of an organization and perfectly offsets the traditional view of how organizations ought to be managed. (Barker Caza, Caza, 2008: 21–33).

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4. Social Responsibility of Higher Education Institutions

The Higher Education Institutions which are run on the basis of a broad exchange of scientific results with other research centres have always stood at the cutting edge of globalisation. This is a broad-based trend which spans not only tighter cooperation as well as continuous and undisturbed communication, but also an utterly new system of economic exchange and the flow of social patterns of conduct.

Unhindered access to new technologies allows to enhance the way in which every institution is managed owing to business process improvements on a global scale. This affects the shift in the policies of every institution. Easier access to open source technologies and use of modern data analysis techniques are just some examples of the methods which can be employed to optimise an organization's activities (Farber, Greenspon, Tucker, 2008: 58–67).

Higher education is currently undergoing numerous changes reflecting such worldwide dynamics as globalisation, internationalisation, popularisation of tertiary education, more diverse funding institutions, business-like management of universities, education market quasi-competitiveness, market oriented teaching and research as well as their dependent services. Globalisation manifests itself mainly through the rapid development of worldwide communication systems and an increase in the intellectual capacity of thought exchange on a global scale (Marginson, 2007: 31–45).

Social responsibility of organizations stems from understanding the fact that they are bodies woven into a social fabric and therefore they have an obligation to contribute towards the development of a society. On the other hand, meeting social expectations translates into public acceptance, which amplifies market power and thus provides a fillip to the development of an institution (Geryk, 2010b: 3–11).

The impact which a society has on every organization, and particularly on educational institutions, is hard to overestimate. The modus operandi of an organization ought to reflect the ratio between a university's potential and stakeholders' expectations. Social feedback often tips the balance in favour or against an organization. On the other hand, sustainable management of an organization brings about synergic effects, which, for instance, marks the relationship between the values of an institution and the values of stakeholders. However, the key issue remains how to successfully bind together the values which are shared by a university's stakeholders, and the character of interorganizational collaboration (Jabłoński, 2011: 15–17).

When launching the debate regarding social responsibility it is also worth taking notice of a tangible financial aspect. The research by Joshua Margolis and James Walsh has confirmed that a positive correlation occurs between an organization's social activities and its financial performance (Margolis, Walsh, 2001).

Social responsibility of higher education institutions is becoming a more burning issue than ever before and nowadays it is the subject of a wide-ranging debate. The feedback which universities receive from their stakeholders allows the former to suitably respond to the expectations from the social and business environment. Continuous monitoring of the social and business milieu may allow to react swiftly and accordingly. On the other hand, globalisation dynamics necessitates diversity-oriented management of a university, both in terms of geography and nationality. Social responsibility is also manifested through fostering in students critical mindset towards unwelcome or objectionable attitudes and activities. A university is also required to be able to anticipate the needs of its prospective stakeholders. This purpose is to be attained by flexible and innovative approach to syllabuses. After all, the opinion that syllabuses ought to reflect a more humanistic and holistic approach to teaching is shared by universities as well as business circles. (Sattelberger, Cornuel, Plinke, 2011: 8–11).

The author's research experience indicates that universities are framing an ever growing number of activities to meet social expectations. Interesting data were collected as part of the 2007–2010 research project called 'Social Responsibility of Higher Education Institutions As Perceived by Stakeholders'. Among the conclusions reached, the most significant was the need to build a rapport between a university and its stakeholders. Universities are expected to concentrate more ably on their basic objectives such as teaching and education. Higher education institutions are also expected to teach such skills as creativity and civic responsibility. Additionally, scientific research should be conducted in the interest of a local community and businesses. However, one of the key objectives to be pursued by a university is an ethical attitude as a paragon for the society. In the part of the research project carried out internationally, university fellows from 46 countries responded affirmatively that a university's task is to endorse accountable management culture through research, training programmes, projects and relationships with businesses (Geryk, 2010a).

5. Positive Aspects to Social Responsibility of Higher Education Institutions

Pursuing strategies consistent with social expectations sets the foundation for a university's long-term existence. The society-oriented attitude and incorporation of social expectations into a university's policies are some of the manifestations of Positive Organizational Scholarship.

As a result, universities have ceased to be perceived as insular institutions and instead they have become to be viewed as a resilient hub of knowledge whose energetic activities are driven by support from external environment. An ongoing dialogue between the participants in social life will be producing ever better, synergic effects.

A university's intellectual capital is going to be under constant pressure from businesses and a society to grow, thus expanding its resource base and capabilities. The extent of economic power which lies dormant in the concentration of knowledge is evidenced by the fact that in 2008 global annual proceeds from patents and the sale of technologies amounted to 110 million dollars. Like many corporations operating in the sector of modern technologies, higher education institutions ought to shift their orientation from "being a university" to "serving others as a university" (Kline, 2008: 16–17).

The shift in a university's orientation is going to change its role in the social structure. A society expects a university primarily to set new patterns of development, pursue innovation and to invent advanced technologies. All activities must, of course, be conducted under regular examination for full compliance with a university's strategic scheme.

The view can be taken that an affirmative response to social expectations as well as appropriate action from educational institutions may be seen as a manifestation of Positive Organizational Scholarship. Mutual benefits flowing from this approach encourage social development and promote an organization's growth in a well-disposed environment, which, along with research-demonstrated enhanced performance and improved financial standing of an institution, allows to regard POS as one of the most promising developmental strategy for a university.

The strategy creates an added value which is bound to profit a university's internal and external stakeholders. The resulting welfare will free up employers' energies to pursue innovation. Consequently, an organization will thrive or just flourish. 'Soft' forms of cooperation, positive relationships instead of a command system as well as accountability for personal development invite conditions for top quality achievements and mark the road to an organization staffed by truly committed employees (Bakker, Schaufeli, 2008: 147–154).

6. Conclusion

Being the driving force of progress a university has become subject to stronger than ever social evaluation. A university's stakeholders expect it to be the paragon of good practice and the source of innovative ideas. One of such ideas is social responsibility of higher education institutions. Promotion of a positive approach to problem handling within an organization is a good example of applying this idea in practice. Labour culture and motivational environment are some of the elements which distinguish effective policies. Encouraging excellence based on the principles of ethics and promotion of selfless attitudes may foster new skills needed to tackle problems and thus provide a significant fillip to further development.

It appears that, apart from traditional methods of managing an organization, it is worth utilizing the latest developments in business psychology since a positive institution is going to powerfully influence its external environment, which by all means meets the needs expressed by a university's stakeholders.

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