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Work, profit and dignity: Towards an integrative HRM paradigm

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ABSTRACT

Purpose. The main purpose of this article is to present two opposing paradigms of management – economic and humanistic – and to indicate the sources and consequences of their dissimilarities.

Methodology. This article is conceptual in nature. It is based on a literature review. During the research, a comparative analysis was carried out to sort out the differences in the definitions of labour in economics and sociology.

Findings. Economics and sociology have different understanding of labour. This difference is significant and gives birth to two opposing paradigms of HRM management. The dominant paradigm is the economic one, which does not take into account the humanistic nature of man. Therefore, an integrative model of management, including social theory of labour, is needed.

Research limitation and directions for future research. The article presents work in its historical aspect. It does not show how the pandemic contributes to the concept of work and changes it. Investigating whether remote work is the next step in the evolution of the concept of work might indicate the direction of future research.

Practical implications. The integrative approach ensures employees the achievement of material (financial) well-being and social well-being (social relations based on respect for dignity). This could prevent negative organizational behaviour such as mobbing or work-related phenomena such as occupational burnouts.

Originality/value. The paper is a conceptual article investigating how the notions of labour in economics and sociology influence the economic and humanistic paradigm of management. It also makes an original contribution regarding the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on HRM methods.

Keywords: labour, economic/non-economic action, economic/humanistic HRM

INTRODUCTION

Work is central to everyone's life. It is a source of income, enables the implementation of life plans and goals, facilitates one's own development, provides a sense of security, and is sometimes the meaning of life. In a market economy, labour becomes a complex and diverse action. Due to globalization and digitalization, the forms of labour are changing. In these circumstances it is important to rethink the understanding of labour, particularly in economics and sociology, and find out the consequences of these different understandings for business.

The main problem addressed in this paper is whether labour as an economic action is enough for companies to succeed in the modern market or whether an idea of a job as a non-economic action is needed as well. The subject of this article lies on the borderline between economics and sociology. That is why there is a need to know how labour is defined in these disciplines, i.e. neoclassical economic theory and sociology. The other point is to understand what an *economic action* and a *non-economic action* are and how both could be applied to the paradigm of management. The words 'work' and 'labour', though they are not entirely synonyms and have their own meanings, will be used interchangeably for the sake of the article.

Work in a historical perspective

From ancient times to the Middle Ages, labour and productive activity were seen as below the dignity of a free man. Work was done by slaves and craftsmen under duress. The ideal way of life was to do little or no physical work. However, despite the universality of this ideology, the first church fathers (John Chrysostom, Basil of Caesarea, Ambrose, Irenaeus) did not share the opinion that work was *opus servile*. On the contrary, they believed work to be *opus humanum*. They had a vision of work that would honour a man, correspond to his dignity, express this dignity and even increase it (Pirson *et al.*, 2016).

In the late Middle Ages, there was a significant controversy between the clergy and the Mendicant orders (Franciscans, Dominicans) regarding the attitude towards physical labour. New views on the role of work and its place in human life emerged at the time (Sison, 1992). Any productive activity that engaged the entire human being – not only the body, but also the soul and reason – began to be regarded as work, according to the term '*opus humanum*'. In this way, work gained access to the sphere of dignity to such an extent that it was recognized as a 'human act', an activity of a rational and free person which reflected his intrinsic value.

In this new approach, a working person begins to identify with his work, transferring his inner dignity onto it as onto something personal and as onto the property of the one who performed the act. During this period, work obtained an instrumental value (*bonum utile*), which was not an autotelic value in itself. Thomas Aquinas highlighted three instrumental

values of work: avoiding idleness, equipping people with higher skills and obtaining means of subsistence. Given the reasons above, work was considered an element of natural law, not just a divine recommendation.

These three instrumental values reflect the developmental, dynamic aspect of human dignity. Human dignity reaches its fullness by working and thanks to work. Therefore, work is a human vocation: man expresses himself through work; humanity is fulfilled through work and because of work.

In the concept of Thomas Aquinas, there are differences between natural moral principles, some of which result from community needs, others from individual needs. The work done to obtain resources necessary for subsistence responds to collective needs. Work creates a common good. When a departure from physical labour is observed – for example in the case of children, disabled people, the elderly, Mendicant orders – intellectual work appears. This is a step forward in creating a reputation for work as being closely related to human dignity (Sison, 1992).

The process of raising the status of work and including intellectual work in the concept of human labour (as related to dignity) was halted during the Reformation. Luther undermined the legitimacy of Mendicant monasteries. In his opinion, the monks should work like all other people, not only to earn a living, but also for their own salvation. According to him, the duty of manual labour applied to everyone without exception. To this interpretation of work, Calvinists added that success at work is evidence of God's grace and predestination. Such an understanding of work undermined the previous conviction of spirituality's superiority over physical work. It also undermined the superiority of autotelic values, which are goals in themselves, over instrumental values directly related to work. In the approach adopted by the Reformation, instrumental values prevailed (Sison *et al.*, 2016). A return to the issue of human labour could once again be observed at the end of the 19th century, when the Catholic Church defended workers' rights (Encyclical of Leo XIII, 1891). A departure from the traditionally accepted perspective of work morality towards work theology took place (a possible approach to God through work). The obligation to work and the right to work are inherent in human nature. People express themselves and increase their dignity through work.

In the European tradition, dignity is perceived in the post-Kantian perspective as an inalienable quality of a human being regardless of race, sex, age, social status, ethnicity or nationality. Kant claimed that there are things that have no price but have value in themselves. Dignity is such a feature. Kant believed that only human beings had dignity. Thus, dignity in a broad understanding can only be human.

The notion of labour in economics and sociology

Nowadays labour is a complex notion. In this part of the paper, an attempt will be made to verify whether the notions of labour are alike in sociology and economics and determine the problems and possibilities of the definitions of labour in both of these sciences.

From the sociological point of view, talking about labour is talking about the relationships between employers and workers. These relationships may be organized both in the form of “paid employment” and in the forms of “unpaid, voluntary, and forced labor” (Elger, 2006). It is significant that all these forms of labour can be understood within the framework of different paradigms, such as Marxist, capitalist or institutionalist.

The economic view on labour recognizes human beings as factors of production (Rogozhnikova, 2018). Consequently, a short excursus on the theory of human capital to clarify the economic view on labour is needed. G. Becker, a co-founder of the theory of human capital, gave a broad interpretation of capital as not only labour and land, but also schooling, computer training courses, medical care expenditures, and lectures on the virtues of punctuality and honesty. These constitute human capital because people cannot be separated from their knowledge, skills, health, or values in the way they can be separated from their financial and physical assets (Becker, 2008). T. Schultz expressed this thought in a very significant phrase: the “economic value of man” (Schultz, 1972). He emphasized a “strictly economic” essence of the theory of human capital. That is, human capital is broader than just labour, because it includes some aspects behind the labour process: preparation for labour, further training, private medical insurance and the like.

This view on capital was all new to both classical and neoclassical economics. The theory of human capital, originally innovative, was simplified by neoclassical economics. This simplification consisted of the assumption that earning on human capital had become more important than investing in it.

When comparing sociological and economical definitions of labour, the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The sociological definition of labour reveals itself through the analysis of the relationships between the parties involved in the labour process. This approach allows one to trace different changes in the organization of the labour process and in understanding it, caused by changes in society and in paradigms of understanding labour itself.
- The modern economic view on labour defines it by referring to the theory of human capital. The human capital theory includes phenomena which get their specific economic value when they become elements of the labour process and by way of evaluating this process. This theory changed the human’s view of himself, placing an individuum in the centre of the labour process as a commodity. Society is all products, not persons. People / products have a price tag; having a price, they lose the dignity which is priceless.

Labour as an economic and non-economic action

Work means taking specific actions. An action is defined as a purposeful, conscious and responsible operation: physical or mental. Since labour has an economic understanding as a prevailing one, we define it as an expedient activity of economic value production using our knowledge and skills.

Work can be interpreted as an economic or non-economic action. To explain the difference between these meanings, the question of the difference between economic and social aspects of reality, or how economic and social aspects relate to each other, must be answered (Rogozhnikova, 2018). There may be at least three points of view on the relationship between the economic view and the social approach.

The first one assumes that economics is social; thus, there is no need for the particular science of sociology. In principle, no other action than economic exists. One should simply strengthen and develop the scope and method of economics. And if sociology nevertheless exists, its only purpose is to use economic methods and approaches in further sociological research. Trying to keep itself alive, sociology can also criticize economics, but it will remain just a “negative program” (Judin, 2010).

The second point of view treats economics and sociology as two independent spheres. The difference between them lies in different logics which are expressed in different notions, terms and concepts. Here, a social action is completely different from an economic one.

The third approach considers economics to be a case of sociology. Economic and social aspects constantly overlap. Even if there is an economic language, it includes notions and concepts not just from economic science, but also from philosophy, politology, law, psychology, sociology, and elements of natural language as well.

Taking these three points of view into account, a conclusion can be drawn that there are also three options to understand labour (Rogozhnikova, 2018).

The first assumes that labour is just an economic action, because there is nothing apart from economics.

The second supposes that labour can be considered both as an economic and as a social action. It is economic when the supply and the demand of labour are considered, and it is social when we mean the relationship between a worker and an employee or the social structure of the labour process.

The third treats economic labour as a case of social action, because even when the supply and the demand are considered, there are always social processes and structures that labour is involved in. One can abstract from this background while analyzing the economic meaning of labour in particular, but to understand the matter of labour, the social roots of economics must be taken into account. Everything that was said above allows one to specify the issue of labour as an economic and a non-economic action.

H. Arendt (1998) treated labour as a non-economic action. In her understanding it is important for humans just to live as a biological species, while labour as a non-economic action is necessary in case of survival as non-biological creatures. Which seems to be more important? Our biological nature is basic to the non-biological one. That is, labour as a non-economic action correlates with labour as an economic action. Economic labour gives us the means to do non-economic labour, and the latter helps us not just to recover, but to feel like people, and not only like mechanisms.

Thus, we may list the following specifics of a non-economic action (Rogozhnikova, 2018):

- it is a type of work with any aim except for an economic one
- it has diverse motives, again except for economic ones
- it is connected to human dignity
- it is a personal activity
- it should be in balance with economic labour

The human model which could reflect such behaviour ought to be an interdisciplinary one. However, staying inside the economic field of research and understanding, for example, the constraints and possibilities of labour behaviour, the convergence of each sphere, economic and social, should be visible. The philosophy of economics can develop such a model for applying in cases of complex and interdisciplinary problems, such as labour.

The consequence of understanding work as an economic and non-economic activity results in two different management paradigms. Work as an economic activity entails the economic management paradigm. On the other hand, work as a non-economic activity entails a humanistic paradigm in management. In addition to a different understanding of work, both approaches and their paradigms perceive a worker differently.

Man in the economic paradigm

Contemporary management theory created by economists derives from neoclassical human theories (Ghoshal, 2005). According to its assumptions, people strive to increase the material utility of broadly understood benefits. However, it is common for them to prefer their own individual benefits, rather than social, collective ones.

Economic management assumes that each individual enters into relationships with other people primarily to meet his own needs (Pirson and von Kimakowitz, 2014). In this way, man seeks satisfaction from his efforts, often acting opportunistically for his own gain. A person perceived in this way, called *homo economicus*, is someone acting in accordance with the principles of economic rationality. J. S. Mill, a representative of classical economics, was the first to outline the psychological model (theoretical construction) of a *homo economicus*. He stated that political economy accepts in advance an arbitrary

definition of man as a being invariably working to obtain the most necessary needs, facilities and luxuries, with the least workload and self-denial and in light of the current level of knowledge (Mill, 2000). In his opinion, economics should focus its research primarily on human activities resulting from economic motives and lead to material well-being and wealth. And although he assumed that in the activities of individuals, in addition to economic motives, there are also moral motives, the former play a dominant role.

The economic paradigm, the source of which is Enlightenment utilitarianism, perceives the human as an individual engaging only in short-term relationships with other people. Each commitment is based on the personal interests of the individual, and other people are treated as means necessary to achieve the goal. Therefore, such a person acts in a conformist way, and his actions are caused mainly by the lower needs in Maslow's hierarchy. Since his activities are not evaluated in terms of universal social utility, he is considered to be amoral.

The management paradigm based on the *homo economicus* concept guarantees rational economic efficiency of human activity. The proponents of this orientation assume that the main goal of the company is to maximize profit, and the primary and only responsibility that managers bear is to bring profit to shareholders who own the enterprise (Mazur, 2017).

The effects of widespread use of the economic paradigm in the global economy can be seen at three levels: systemic, organizational and individual (Pirson and von Kimakowitz, 2014). At the system level, irreversible destruction of the natural environment occurs because the modern global economy consumes a disproportionate amount of resources compared to the possibilities. At the organizational level, there is a decrease in social capital because interpersonal relationships seen in the perspective of profit maximization are instrumental in nature. In relation to a person, we can observe that the increase in the level of national income resulting from economic management is not tantamount to an increase in the level of employee well-being.

Man in the humanistic paradigm

In contrast to the economic paradigm, the humanistic approach assumes that human nature is not given once and for all and can be improved by systematic education (Pirson and von Kimakowitz, 2014). However, what distinguishes the economic approach from the humanist approach is the ethical element, which remains the leading category in the humanist paradigm. Its significance results from the fact that each person is assigned an inalienable right to respect for their own dignity, regardless of ethnicity, nationality, social status or gender. The humanistic perspective identifies man as a rational being that realizes its right to freedom in social interaction based on values. According to Aristotle's definition of man, he is a *politikon zoon* – a being by nature capable of participating in the social and political life of the state.

The humanistic trend in management focuses on all phenomena concerning man and his place in the organization. In search of the roots of humanistic management, the '*avant la lettre*' concept of management is sometimes referred to. It sets the good of the human being as its primary goal (Rağ, 2015). The ideas of utopian socialists C. Fourier and R. Owen represent examples of the '*avant la lettre*' concept. Their beliefs are not considered only as narrowly understood projects of the organization, but are treated as a humanistic vision of the society of the future. Humanistic management, having utopian thinkers of the nineteenth century as its precursors, gained its present form during the twentieth century. Researchers take the perspective of the evolutionary development of humanistic management principles. Three stages in the process of forming the foundations of humanistic management can be distinguished. They were shaped respectively at the beginning of the twentieth century, in the mid-twentieth century and at the turn of the twenty-first century (Melé, 2009; 2013).

Key assumptions which the humanistic concept of the organization is based on include:

- the perception of the organization as a group of people who, as members of the community, recognize their own well-being and society's well-being as the main objective of the organization, and
- recognize management as a human practice, the aim of which is to bring about the best functioning of a given organization (Melé, 2003; 2013).

Humanistic management is accompanied by a cogitation of a deeply philosophical nature. According to this reflection, it can manifest itself in ontological, epistemological, axiological and praxeological dimensions (Arandia and Portales, 2015). In the ontological dimension, it manifests itself through self-awareness, rationality, socialization and language. In the epistemological one, it manifests itself through humanism and spirituality, but it can also be observed and analyzed in areas such as sociology of work, anthropology and phenomenology. In the axiological dimension, it manifests itself through respect for human dignity, equal treatment of all people, empathy, solidarity, freedom, trust and responsibility. In praxeology, humanistic management is demonstrated through the development of talents, dialogue with the internal and external stakeholders of the organization, and management compatible with the broadly conceived concept of sustainable development.

Humanities management vs economic management

The relation between management based on the economic and humanistic paradigms can be described as twofold. Two positions concerning both can be outlined: separation and integration.

Separation approach

The “founding fathers” of management studies are thought to be M. Weber and F. Taylor. It is recognized that M. Weber initiated the humanistic trend, which then began to develop particularly within universities, and F. Taylor gave rise to the economic trend, represented primarily by economics universities and commercial schools (Kostera and Kociatkiewicz, 2013). Despite the fact that in recent decades these two trends have overlapped, repeatedly met intellectually and supported each other, some researchers claim that since their inception, they have retained their own distinctiveness because of the different subjects undertaken in their framework areas and different methodological preferences (Kostera and Kociatkiewicz, 2013). Table 1 depicts the differences between the approaches in relation to basic management issues, such as the accepted paradigms, the aim and object of research and the research methods applied in the two approaches.

Table 1

Humanistic and economic trends in management studies

Specification	Humanistic trend	Economic trend
Main precursors	Adam Smith (moral philosophy) Max Weber Elton Mayo	Adam Smith (economics) Frederick Taylor Henri Fayol
Paradigms	Radical-humanistic Imperative	Functionalist Radical-structural
Methodology	Qualitative case study	Quantitative case study
Subject of study	Organizations (and management) from the human perspective	Organizations (and management) from an efficiency perspective
Purpose of research	Increasing the well-being of people in organizations. Understanding organization and management mechanisms from a human perspective.	Increasing organization and management efficiency. Understanding organization and management mechanisms from the perspective of market principles.

Source: based on Kostera, M. and Kociatkiewicz, J. (2013).

The research undertaken under both trends is often based on substantially different paradigmatic bases. In social studies, G. Burrell and G. Morgan (2003) distinguished four types of paradigms divided between their objective and subjective recognition (depending on the fundamental beliefs about the nature of science and the nature of society). Both humanities and economics rely on them.

The humanistic trend prefers two non-objectivistic paradigms (humanistic, evaluative), while the economic trend is based on objectivistic paradigms (functionalist, structuralist).

This not only stems from research traditions which these teachings appeal to, but is also linked to the subject of research adopted. The humanistic trend is essentially interested in all manifestations and patterns from the point of view of a human and his place in the organization. Therefore, it seems natural to choose the paradigms that put man in the centre, emphasizing his ontological status as an actor endowed with causative power and responsibility (Kostera and Kociatkiewicz, 2013). On the other hand, the economic trend is understandably interested in the study of phenomena and abstract regularities, detached from the perspective of individual human experience and subjectivity. Therefore, the researchers' inclination to base their research on paradigms assuming both the existence and the significance of such objective creations should be understood (Kostera and Kociatkiewicz, 2013). The paradigmatic preferences are followed by the preference for using specific types of research methods. Those researchers who adopt assumptions derived from non-objective paradigms (humanists) use qualitative methods to study the development of phenomena over time (Kostera, 2008). Typical methods of this type are ethnography, grounded theory, critical analysis of culture, and ethnomethodology. In turn, the objectivist researchers, representing the economic trend, prefer the formulation of a general theory, describing the state of things. Quantitative methods, statistical methods, but also mathematical modelling is what allows them to do this. Both trends share a common area: case studies of different types, allowing one to define both the growth process and the state of the phenomenon. A case study may contain both qualitative and quantitative elements (Szydło, 2015). In both trends, research using case studies is undertaken particularly keenly for the purpose of consulting. The difference is that the humanistic trend prefers the action research consulting type, designed to educate and improve the fortune of participants in the organization. The economic trend is related to pro-efficiency consulting. *These different types of consulting result from the different research purposes under the two trends; the humanistic one is oriented toward helping a person improve his fate, and the economic trend is focused on improving the efficiency indicators of the organization. The cognitive objective is partially common for both trends – understanding and describing the organization and management – except that the accepted point of view is different for humanists and economists; it is either humanistic or related to efficiency.* It is here that the fundamental difference between humanistic and economic management becomes clear. The first one seeks to answer the question of why manage, and the second one addresses how to do it.

Integrative approach

Humanistic management involves strategies and practices aimed at creating human well-being. It unconditionally respects human dignity by subjecting the activities of the organization to social assessment. By engaging in an open dialogue concerning values, managers should realize that the ultimate goal of business is to serve people, also in an economic sense. Humanistic management, by integrating both dimensions of business

operations – economic and moral – helps companies perform a society-friendly role. Exclusive economic management does not allow this role to be fulfilled completely.

Humanistic management takes place in organizations that have managed to develop financially attractive business models and business practices that respect human dignity. Humanistically managed companies create products and provide services that are directed to meet true human needs and do so in a way that respects the expectations of all stakeholder groups. Numerous studies prove that social entrepreneurship largely implements the premises of humanistic management. A truly humanistic business is one that stops at achieving a satisfactory profit without absolutizing its maximization, and as a priority it assumes to make a human being a measure of all things (Von Kimakowitz *et al.*, 2011). The main goal of companies implementing humanistic management is to eliminate human suffering and create conditions leading to a better life. Humanistic management, putting profit after people, also recognizes their role in achieving its goals. The integrated model of humanistic management indicates the need to relativize financial profit in relation to the humanistic goals of the organization. Profit, as H. Spitzneck argues, is a necessary but insufficient condition for humanistic management (Spitzneck, 2011). He considers the moral values and humanistic perception of management as necessary for the sustainable future of our planet and necessary in respecting human dignity in a business environment.

In 20th-century management theory, the mainstream was based on the perception of man in the category of *homo economicus*. In light of the adopted model of the human being in economic theory, business was perceived through the prism of economic profit and human relations were viewed as ordinary transactions. This approach meant that managers only included economic facts, ignoring the human and ethical dimensions of business operations (Mele, 2013). The humanistic synthesis, which is a different view on the ethics-economics relationship in an economic activity, perceives ethics as the internal dimension of human action and, consequently, of all economic actions. W. Grassl and A. Habisch (2011) emphasize the interdependence of ethics and economic activities and their inseparable ontological relationship.

Therefore, the preference for the paradigms putting man at the centre, emphasizing his ontological status, and recognizing him as a being endowed with agency and responsibility seems to be natural.

According to practitioners, humanistic management was created as a complement to economic management, which is understood as hard, project-type management. It was also a supplement to the universally applicable (until recently) management culture based on summaries, analyses, tables, and a very orderly decision-making process. In this approach, economic management is a set of processes, rules, and principles of a person who manages a team performing specific tasks and accounts and overseeing the tasks ordered (Mazur, 2017).

The beginnings of humanistic management are associated with the emergence of new management methods: diversity management, talent management, age management, etc.

This particular type of management became more important when managers started to rely less on lists and tables and began noticing the role of teams in organizations. In this regard, it was important to select the right people for a team. It was insufficient to respect the deadlines and procedures specific to project management; personality, partnership at work, and ability to work in a team began to gain significance.

In humanistic management, the selection of appropriate people with a set of similar values and interests and a common way of perceiving reality was considered key. In such management, the greatest difficulty is to engage employees because the line between humanistic management and an interregnum is thin.

In the case of young managers, it is primarily beneficial to embed economic management culture and, over time, to give it elements of humanistic management.

DISCUSSION

The pandemic is changing the methods of managing people. In a crisis situation, the health and safety of employees turn out to be the most important things. Among many types of crisis situations, pandemics have the capability of creating widespread change. Using the same habitual management styles and practices is often inadequate in such mass-scale disruption. One of the reasons for this change is that during the COVID-19 pandemic, man became the guarantor of the effective operation of enterprises. Therefore, the need to care for the well-being of employees resulted in an approach integrating the economic and humanistic paradigm in people management on a larger scale. The role of HR departments has also changed. Many of them considered it their task to listen to employees, be in touch with them and address their needs and concerns as best as possible. In this perspective the humanistic paradigm is getting closer to the commonly used economic paradigm of human resource management.

The support and care for the well-being of employees in the pandemic era manifested itself in the fact that, whenever possible, employees were encouraged to work from home. Companies also ensure that people have the right equipment and tools to work online. According to the theory of organizational support, employees who perceive their workplace as supportive are more sympathetic to their organizations and willing to invest more effort in the tasks performed. Such a strategy of approaching employees is therefore not only humanistic, it is also profitable in the long run.

CONCLUSIONS

1. Work understood as economic action and non-economic action is the basis of two different management paradigms, respectively economic and humanistic.

Combined in an integrated method of management, they create a new human model in management referring to man as *homo economicus* and *politikon zoon*.

2. Labour as an economic and non-economic action shows how different activities in our life correlate to each other, and that there is a need to find a balance between them in everyday life. In the case of further dominance of work understood as economic activity, the economization of social life will be more and more common, which may end up with the total mechanization of our lives. There is no other possibility to understand complex phenomena in any field of research concerning the human being, except for studying human actions. Understanding the labour process, especially with regard to humanistic management, could be very fruitful for the economic view on the human being.
3. Adopting a humanistic perspective in the management process may be a significant contribution to a holistic study of the organization and its activities, which were previously mostly the domain of economists. Both descriptions of an organization – economic and humanistic – are complementary and create the characteristics of the same phenomena in light of each of these approaches. Considering the positions presented, the statement that management needs humanists and humanists need management seems to be more than relevant.

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