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Anormativism of the professional life of young people—profit or loss in the post-modern era

This article takes up the subject of the influence of civilisation on the shaping of a new quality of professional life for the next generation. The normative rules of development, due to economic and cultural reasons, have ceased to be binding. Young people find themselves in a niche located between a stable but out-dated yesteryear, the dynamic present and unknown tomorrow. How do they deal with it? The answer to this question is based on current research.

Introduction—the post-modern era

Researchers analysing the development of civilisation are unanimous in their opinion that the progress of humanity is unquestionable. The previous waves of civilisation (Toffler, Toffler, 1955)—agricultural and industrial—determined a relatively foreseeable and stable direction of development; however, the only stable feature of the present informative wave is its changeability. Z. Bauman writes (2002¹): “Post-modern times have only accelerated and

¹ The text comes from a private correspondence between the author and Professor Kazimierz Obuchowski, 2 March 2002.

added to the impetus of the process of ‘creative destruction’ and shortened the predictability of the life cycle of consecutive innovations”. According to K. Obuchowski (2005), the dynamism of everyday changes makes both the world and the humans functioning in it mobile. In his considerations the researcher goes even further, formulating a hypothesis about a fourth wave approaching. He suggests that it should be called *the individualising wave*, and the man that is a symbol of this time possesses a fluid personality. The subject of the article does not allow us to conduct a deeper analysis of the legitimacy of this hypothesis. However, what seems to be the key to further considerations is the hypothesis regarding the permanent changeability that already accompanies man today.

Z. Bauman (2002), emphasising that “changes taking place in the last decades are so deep and widespread that they allow us, or even force us, to talk about a new, separate and specific social and cultural formation”, states that the norms and values existing up till now “have vanished and have been replaced by others, or, if they have not faded away entirely, they are presently in a state of advanced crisis, waiting in vain for a new set of norms, values and rules”. This phenomenon was attributed a separate name, that of “cultural anomy” by K. Obuchowski (2000 a, b, c). Its substance is a disappearance of the normative and creative function of culture, which causes man to stand alone before plurality and the artificial syncretism of co-existing norms and values. Therefore, the imperative of today becomes the ability for human’s to create themselves at all levels of life. In the sphere of values it leads to their constant verification as for their legitimacy and validity. A man examines the values through “the test of life” (cf. Kubicki, 2001). It has an effect on such a person’s functioning, especially in the professional sphere, exemplified below.

Normativism of the yesterday

The work ethos is strongly rooted in European tradition (cf. Derbis, 2000). In normative concepts of human development it is assumed, among others, that work conditions the process of growing and the quality of human life. Taking up work introduces a young person to adulthood, and abandoning it after years is a cultural sign of impending old age. The meaning of work for

human development is shown in many concepts, created for instance by D. Levinson and R. Havighurst (after Trempała, 2000). Levinson, among the tasks and problems to be solved that constitute human adulthood enumerates in turn: the creation of a plan of one's own life; choosing a career and assuming the role of employee; verification of dreams and expectations against reality (this also includes the professional sphere); potential changes of workplace; a professional career and solving the problem of retirement by looking for fulfilment in other forms of activities. According to Havighurst (1972 after Przetacznik-Gierowska, Tyszkowa, 2000), a person prepares for his or her professional career and economic independence as early as in adolescence. In early adulthood people start work in order to achieve and maintain satisfactory professional competence, during the following period of development. In old age humans are faced with the necessity of adapting to retirement, which is not only connected with a change of status, but also a reduction of income, directly and indirectly influencing their sense of quality of life.

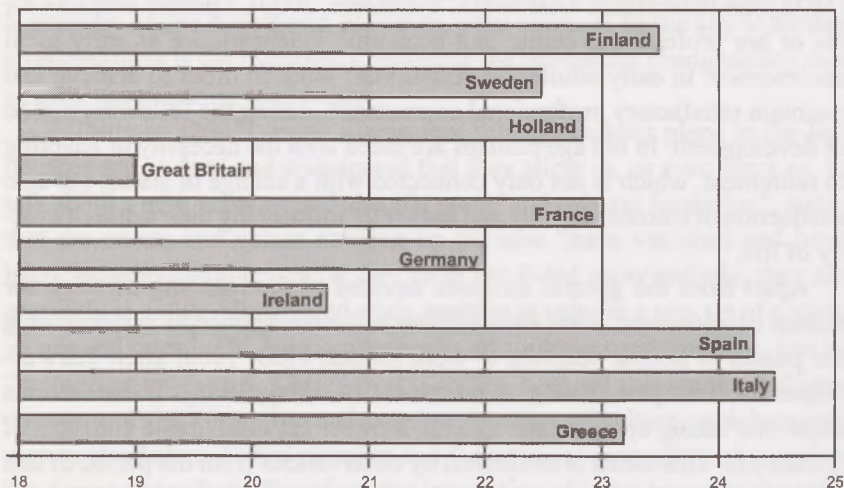
Apart from the general attitudes devoted to the meaning of work for human development, there are a number of detailed concepts systematising the phases of people adapting to work (Super, 1953, 1980; after: Harwas-Napierała, Trempała, 2000), or retirement (Atchley, 1988). These theories show that taking up work and making a career are inseparable elements of human life. This thesis is confirmed by observations from the period of late adulthood, when a man faces a challenge to resign from work and to reconcile himself with the necessity of retirement (cf. Stuart-Hamilton, 2000). However, bearing in mind the title of the article, special attention should be paid to young people and their professional development.

Not very long ago a binding strategy of multiplying the existing patterns of occupational functioning taken after parents. Solutions suggested by them often proved optimal in making choices and decisions in certain professional situations. This topic was tackled by R. Derbis who wrote: "The high stability of the system of values leads to strong engagement in worked out patterns of behaviour, as most of the group members usually act similarly. The fact that experience is common on the one hand provides support, and on the other assimilation of what is new" (2000: 81). However, in recent years economic changes in an integrating Europe have violated the order or normative developmental of young people. It is depicted by the data collected by J. Coleman (2002) in a sample of adolescents from Western Europe. It

shows the hampering effect of the economic environment on the course of an individual's development. The researcher examined how long, on average, a young person looks for permanent employment. The results are shown in the chart below.

Chart 1:
Flexibility of employment markets in EU Member States

Age at which 50% of young people find employment



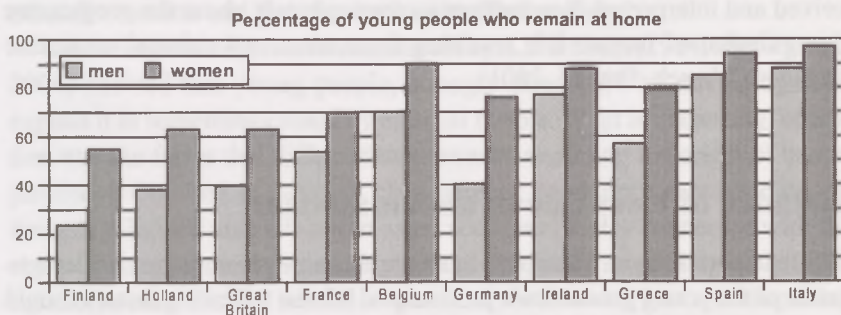
Source: Conference of the European Association for Research on Adolescence, Oxford, 3-7.09.2002

The data above shows that in most western European countries the time of looking for permanent employment spans over four years. It is also worth emphasising that this is the average time after which only a half of those “looking for” work are absorbed by the labour market. What are the consequences of this? Literature devoted to this subject talks about a change of attitudes shown by young people towards work. It is no longer a vocation. According to R. Derbis: “valuing work as such is getting weaker, i.e. less meaning is attributed to promotion, achievements, income, and more meaning is attributed to free time, the quality of life and work conditions. [. . .] Self-realisation is significant and work can be conducive to it. Discipline, obedience, diligence, obligation, self-control and punctuality are less appreciated. Emancipation, equality, participation, autonomy, as well as pleasure,

adventure and entertainment are becoming more important. Independence becomes more important than adaptation” (2000: 84).

Contrary to what is apparent, it is not a symptom of a positive way of coping with certain predicaments. It is not always a symptom of maturity, either. Very often young people usurp the right to “remain children” in conditions unfavourable to their maturity. J. Coleman conducted an interesting survey which showed that a number of people who are unemployed stay with their families. Lack of financial independence is treated by them as an obstacle in taking responsibility for their own lives. They constantly put off their life decisions such as choice of life partner, setting up a family, etc. Therefore, the moratorium period into adulthood is greatly prolonged.

Chart 2:
Influence of labour market restrictions on the functioning of young people



Source: Conference of the European Association for Research on Adolescence, Oxford, 3–7.09.2002

Such a way of functioning may imprint itself a defective pattern of behaviour upon young people which has already been given a separate descriptive category in the literature as “a paradigm of reversibility” (Ricolfi, 1984, after Lanz and Rosnati, 2002: 17–18). This means that in difficult situations young people continually test themselves; however, they lack consistency in their actions. The mechanism of “trial and error”, according to Ricolfi, boils down to the fact that young people are assured in their conviction that the undertaken tasks, decisions and choices are not “for life”, but only “for the here and now”. Delaying key life and developmental decisions is against the ability to guide oneself and every individual’s responsibilities. This extreme hypothesis requires commentary. Firstly, it is

not included in the currently dominant trend of perceiving man as the author of himself (Obuchowski, 2000a, 2005) or creator of himself (Melosik, 1995), whose functioning style is the only correct one during the third wave of civilisation (informative civilisation). This effectively increases human chances for development and self-realisation. Nevertheless, it should be realised that the processes described are only being recognised. These hypotheses, although often contrary to each other, are not symptoms of research errors, but they embody the factual, heterogenic nature of the phenomenon examined. In other words, the young generation presents various possible strategies of coping, and failing to cope, with the “fluid” civilisation that has been established at the beginning of the 21st century. Therefore, the regularities described here have the form of intensifying tendencies, however, they are not the rule. The fact is there is a change taking place in the way the order of development of contemporary men is perceived and interpreted. Researchers increasingly talk about the progressive deregulation of human life resulting from observed cultural-economic changes (Wrosch, Freund, 2001).

Balance of losses due to anormativism

While undertaking an attempt to evaluate this new phenomenon of deregulation of the young generation’s professional life the following factors should be taken into account:

1. The change of their attitude towards unemployment.
2. Analysis of the way they evaluate work.
3. Changes observed in their temporal perspective that have a direct influence on their activity, including their professional activity.

Attitudes of young people towards unemployment

Presently, as Z. Bauman accurately observes, the dominant atmosphere is “the atmosphere of uncertainty resulting from fluidity of work relations and the great pace at which qualifications acquired become old” (2002). An increase of requirements regarding the employee, accompanied by a constant narrowing of the labour market has led to the fact that society perceives unemployment as an unavoidable phenomenon for the average young

Pole. The fact that the young are aware that they may experience this, or are experiencing this already, has resulted in a change of their attitude towards unemployment. It confirms the statement made by E. Turska (2004), who—on the basis of available sources—claims that a large percentage of unemployed people are made up of people under 25 years old who suffer due to the lack of a free workplace. At the same time, she has observed that the activity of young people often takes forms which are negative for themselves and for society.

Roland-Levy describes controversial results (2000a, after Tyszka, 2004), according to which young people aged 15–17 expressed their attitude towards work and unemployment and initially evaluated work in a definitely less positive way than unemployment. This outcome was explained by the fact that very often the unemployed were surrounded by members of their family or friends. Nevertheless, perceiving unemployment as something natural, common and positive evokes justified anxiety.

On the other hand, research conducted by A. Furnham (1984, after Tyszka, 2004) showed that young people, strongly threatened by unemployment, explain it as something caused by external factors. What is interesting, education was the factor that differentiated answers regarding the origin of unemployment. Children of working class parents, apart from economic conditions, highlighted also education as an additional factor connected with the risk of unemployment. Secondary school graduates more frequently highlighted internal factors related to personal motivation. It is not surprising that the difference in evaluation was reflected by various strategies of coping with this problem.

When trying to define the nature of impact exerted by unemployment on the young generation we should look for a potential source of pathology in attitudes of helplessness and passiveness still maintained by a number of the unemployed. R. Derbis (2000: 83) notices that: “[. . .] a section of those unemployed stated that they learnt their trade for many years and they do not want to re-train now. This attachment to one’s occupation as a quality hampers adaptation in the reality of the lack of work places”. Similar conclusions are formulated by J. Czapiński who, in an interview published in October in *Polityka*, said: “Many unemployed people do not believe in their strength. There are many who accept this particular style of life” (after Żakowski, 2005: 26).

As a consequence of one's reconciliation with the role of a man permanently deprived of work, there is a radical change in the way valuable things in life are evaluated, which is not necessarily of the highest standard. "An unemployed Polish person differs from the model of an employee from the report made by Gemini Consulting—one who finds his or her career the most important thing in his life, even if it is connected with various places of work. He or she also appreciates development and promotion, which are relatively unimportant for Polish unemployed people. Unemployed Polish people value money just as all subjects examined by Gemini Consulting, especially in countries where income is typically low" (Derbis, 2000: 269).

Valuing young people's work

When entering adulthood, young people wish to realise the culturally fixed pattern of someone who is mature, independent and responsible. In order to achieve this, starting work is an essential factor. Unfortunately, economic conditions are the reason why, as mentioned above, young people face the necessity of coping with the anormative event, i.e. the lack of work. How does this influence their image of the future? H. Liberska (2004) attempted to find the answer to this question. When examining the temporal perspective of the young generation she focused on learning their current expectations connected with starting work.

By means of longitude research she undertook three surveys, (I–1991, II–1995, III–2002), on the basis of which she found significant differences in the hierarchy of frequency of expectations expressed by young people towards the future when the political system in Poland changed. The author writes (2004: 173): "Drastic shifts in the hierarchy refer to expectations connected with permanent employment (increase from 7th/8th I place in 1991 to 1st/2nd place in 2002), sticking to norms (increase from 12th/13th place in 1991 to 8th place in 2002), engagement in social and political activities (drop from 4th place in 1991 to 15th place in 2002), as well as travelling and getting to know the world (drop from 6th/7th place in 1991 to 12th place in 1996 and 2002)". Moreover, she observed a decrease as for the expectations expressed by young people to achieve material prosperity. This moment was delayed in time by approximately 3 years and 6 months (approximately age 30.2). Similarly, also the forecasted age of finding satisfying work was delayed from 22.1 years in 1991 to 27 years in 2002. H. Liberska highlights

the alarming results regarding the increase of a sense of being endangered by external factors, such as unemployment and a progressive fall of norms and values. Research indicates that youngsters notice increasingly more dangers that threaten their future. “In 2002 the subjects examined saw approximately 10% more threats than in 1991 and 1996. The greatest increase, exceeding 100%, referred to the frequency of being threatened with unemployment, homelessness and crime” (Liberska, 2004: 176–177). Finally, attention should be paid to a change observed in the planned period of realising expectations by individual cohorts—the data collected is presented in the form of a table.

Table 1:
Location of the moment of realisation of chosen expectations
in early adulthood in consecutive phases of economic-social transformation
in Poland

Phase of research	Age		
	20–25	25–30	30–35
	Realisation of expectations:		
1991	1. Find a good job 2. Take up social responsibilities	1. Get married 2. Have children 3. Achieve (material) success in life	–
1996	1. Find a good job	1. Find a good job 2. Get married 3. Have children	1. Take up social responsibilities
2002	–	1. Find a good job 2. Get married 3. Have children	1. Achieve (material) success in life 2. Take up social responsibilities

Source: Liberska, 2004: 178

The translocation that is visible within the table for the young person’s expectations towards their own future creates conditions dangerously conducive to the above-described phenomenon of young people anchored in the present, and functioning on the basis of the paradigm of reversibility. The consequences for development are, unfortunately, undeniable.

Temporal perspective of young people

H. Liberska (2000) emphasises the fact that young people with a normatively attributed future orientation, increasingly act relying on a short temporal perspective, focused mainly on the present moment. The problem of this phenomenon is common in character and has been verified in Ph.D. research (Błachnio, 2003). The results are presented in the table below.

Table 2:
Distribution of temporal orientation in adolescence and young adulthood

Age group	Retrospective orientation	Present orientation	Prospective orientation	Lack of clear orientation
Adolescence	58 (19.73%)	103 (35.03%)	76 (25.85%)	57 (19.39%)
Young adulthood	73 (23.32%)	71 (22.68%)	103 (32.91%)	66 (21.09%)

Source: Błachnio, 2003: 115

These results prove that young people are strongly orientated towards the present. This tendency is distinct among adolescents. In the group of young adults there are more people with a prospective orientation, but in the context of the whole age group this advantage is small and is only 10%.

The vast amount of research material collected also made it possible to evaluate the difference in the functional organisation of respondents' temporal perspective (cf. Nosal, Bajcar, 1999). Analyses were conducted separately for adolescents and young adults with a division into men and women. The results showed that the higher the age, the greatest number of statistically significant differences, which is depicted in the data below.

Analyses conducted in a group of adolescents showed only two statistically significant differences between average results of women and men in the *use of time* and *fear towards the future* scales.

In young adulthood, a distinctly different image of the organisation of time and functioning in time characteristic for men and women appeared. Differences (also described in the literature) were revealed in their attitude to individual time intervals: *past* and *present*. In both dimensions significantly higher results were achieved by women. A higher level of concentration on planning and thoroughness (i.e. an analytic system of processing

Table 3:
Significance of differences between men and women aged 17–22 and 23–35

Scale	Women (m)	Men (m)	HSD Tukey's Test <i>Df = 292.00</i>
Significance of differences between men and women aged 17–22			
Use of time	35.486	34.372	0.050 <i>Error: MS = 23.599</i>
Fear of the future	79.601	66.545	0.000 <i>Error: MS = 814.64</i>
Significance of differences between men and women aged 23–35			
Scale	Women (m)	Men (m)	HSD tukey's test <i>Df = 311.00</i>
Past	39.766	38.194	0.005 <i>Error: MS = 24.272</i>
Future	64.443	62.658	0.044 <i>Error: MS = 61.691</i>
Level of details	54.215	52.490	0.033 <i>Error: MS = 51.098</i>
Planning	53.652	50.819	0.004 <i>Error: MS = 75.507</i>
Time pressure	63.905	60.910	0.013 <i>Error: MS = 114.39</i>

Source: Błachnio, 2003: 122–123

information) was witnessed in women above men. The last dimension in which sex played a significant distinguishing role was *time pressure* whose average value was higher for women than for men.

The above research shows that the present-orientated attitude of the young generation is becoming increasingly apparent; however, it is still not widespread. H. Liberska (2000) aptly sums up the considerations devoted to the state of psychological time as experienced by young people: “[. . .] the group of young people living day by day without plans or hopes for the future, and even fear of the future, is increasing. On the other hand, a group of adolescents has appeared that might be described as independent, competent, consumptive, apolitical, egoistic, and, at the same time, has adapted to this new social-economic world (Liberska, 2000: 174).

Profits of anormativism

It is not an easy task to indicate the positive aspects of the phenomenon that has disturbed the former order of the professional development of young people. Certainly, the fact that this situation is new makes adolescents work out modern, more creative and innovative behaviours enabling them more effective entry into the labour market. The change is favourable for enterprising people, i.e. according to research conducted by Marody, 1996; Czapiński, 1995; Słomczyński, Janicka, Macha, Zaborowski, 1996 (after Sowińska, 2000), based on people with higher income, a subjective sense of improvement of the economic situation, higher education, higher professional position, coming from bigger cities and having fewer children. People deriving profits are more mobile.

The dynamism of changes embraces all spheres of human functioning, also including systems of values, purposeful behaviour and plans. An interesting hypothesis was formulated by Z. Melosik (1995), according to whom the present world is conducive to the emergence of a structure of aims, attitudes and actions, i.e. a co-occurrence in the same ontological dimension of all categories deprived of attempts to embrace them by the rule of union or order. The aim of this is constant "self-creation". It seems to be the main and irrefutable profit of transformations observed. Although incurring costs refers to everybody, unfortunately the possibility of deriving profit still refers to a smaller social group.

Summary

The changes observed evoke a justified doubt as to what extent young people can find themselves in a situation of, unmatched relativism, fluid dynamism and the relentless constraints of self-creation and personal responsibility. They have to find a sense of safety and a drive for necessary changes and advancements in themselves. Being creative, innovative and competent is what is the minimum requirement of young people in exchange for an open post-modern world where the economic market is the law.

So far, research has not given any clear conclusions concerning the nature of the transformation taking place in the young generation. Many reports alarmingly show that the temporal perspective of consecutive generations of adolescents and young adults is being narrowed at the expense

of the future. H. Liberska (2004), formulating more balanced considerations devoted to the future of the young, states that the weakening of their optimism is evident, which, according to her, may result in a deregulation of the life cycle of youngsters entering maturity.

However, questioning the effectiveness of the young person's adaptive potential is still unjustified. In stress-related situations (e.g. when unemployed), young people prove that they are far from forms of apathy, frustration and discouragement which may be typical for adults. They treat these situations as challenges and possibility to show their ability "to face the changes that are taking place and find a more effective way of coping with unemployment" (Turska, 2004: 316).

The research into author personality¹ (Błachnio, 2003) also speaks about a polarisation of qualitatively new strategies of the functioning of young people. Although their occurrence is still restricted to a minute percentage of the population, the observed tendency favours people who are young and well-educated. They have a chance of coping with these situations.

Nevertheless, already today there is evidence of the "life efficiency" of young people. It comes from the research conducted by the Council of Social Monitoring under the supervision of J. Czapiński. "The Poles are shockingly mobile. If they are unable to improve their life, they will simply change where they live. They move from Suwałki to Warsaw, from Warsaw to London. According to research, 20% of the Polish workforce are nomadic. Approximately half a million people are permanently employed abroad. During the last three years, over 3 million people have been registered abroad. Not all people who change their place of employment officially register this fact. This leads to the impression of a system being crushed by statistics. Poor local authorities or regions remain poor, and those that are rich remain rich. However, the statistics do not describe those people that have left, work elsewhere, earn more and have managed to escape from poverty" (Żakowski, 2005: 26).

¹ The aim of this research was to recognise the range within which a man becomes responsible and self-creative in the process of self-realisation. Psychological features subject to measurement included, among others, sense of life, subjective evaluation standards, mental distance, intentional autonomy and self-projecting.

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