

GOAL ORIENTATIONS IN THE CONTEXT OF HUMAN SUBJECTIVITY

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to present goal orientations in terms of manifestations of human subjectivity. Subjectivity is a collection of attributes that make a person influence the way of his or her own actions. These attributes belong to the cognitive, emotional, motivational, and executive spheres. Goal orientation is a good example of a complex construct, covering all these spheres. Goal orientation is a way in which an individual interprets, evaluates and reacts to achievement situations. Four goal orientations are distinguished: learning orientation, avoidance orientation, self-enhancing ego orientation and self-defeating ego orientation. They are a combination of two forms of achievement motivation (approach and avoidance) and two orientations under the competence definition adopted by subject – ego involvement and task involvement. The article presents the possibilities of concluding on subjectivity on the basis of the structure of goal orientations and analyses the opportunities and constraints related to regarding the goal orientations as manifestations of subjectivity.

Keywords: human subjectivity, goal orientation

Introduction

Defining and operationalization of subjectivity constitute an unquestionable challenge. Problems with the definition of subjectivity translate into problems with studying them. Subjectivity, defined mostly as a set of attributes, can be studied by identifying and understanding these attributes. Since subjectivity is manifested, among others, in the cognitive, motivational, and executive spheres (Jarymowicz, 2008), it is worth looking for constructs covering all these areas. One example of such a construct may be goal orientation. The developing trend of research on motivational orientations provides a number of important characteristics and research tools that can be used in the study of subjectivity.

The purpose of this article is to present goal orientation in terms of manifestations of subjectivity. The article starts with the definition of subjectivity adopted by the author. Then it presents a selection of the most significant studies in the field of goal orientation. In the next part, the opportunities and constraints related to regarding the goal orientation as manifestations of subjectivity are examined and the possibilities of concluding on subjectivity on the basis of the structure of goal orientation are presented.

The Essence of Subjectivity

The category of subject is quite often identified with a human being - a man who exists and who acts. Where there are several properties that make up this 'existence' and 'action', subject provides integration and substrate for synthesis. In the process of subject's

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cognition, we are dealing with these specific properties while subject is located, it is hiding beyond them or it manifests via them. However, the most complete manifestation is through action. Subject is therefore the source of its experiences and activities, it fulfils them and manages them (Majczyna, 2000). The nature of subject is characterized by such properties as concreteness, individuality, separation, autonomy, authorship, temporality, integrity and originality, and thus the unity and uniqueness of subject (Majczyna, 2000).

Subjectivity is a collection of attributes that make a person influence the way of his or her own actions (Jarymowicz, 2008). The development of subjectivity is related to the man's ability to cognize himself and the developing self-knowledge and self-awareness. Self-knowledge and self-awareness make adopting attitudes toward oneself possible, articulating intentions to change oneself possible. The complexity, accuracy and thoroughness of self-knowledge may be different, so that objectives pursued by subject may be implied by its different areas and aspects. Self-knowledge and self-awareness are manifestations of subjectivity in the area of cognition – they are, among others, ways to make one's identity more complete. They may also be used to build the desired visions of self (Jarymowicz, 2008).

Human subjectivity is manifested not just in the cognitive sphere, but also in the emotional, motivational, and executive ones (Jarymowicz, 2008). In the emotional and motivational sphere it allows for assessments of self and the world, defining the criteria of good and evil, guiding by one's own will in making decisions, formulating objectives and plans and anticipating their consequences. In the executive sphere, in turn, manifestations of subjectivity may include the ability to self-control and perpetration, managing self and one's development, and responsibility for one's own actions (Jarymowicz, 2008).

Achieving the status of subjectivity depends on the development of intellectual capacities, thus enabling transgressions that are designed to increase personality, manifested, among others, by deepening self-awareness and self-control (cognitive and causal) (Jarymowicz, 2008). Personality fundamentals allow actions of the subject, which consists of, among others, increasing motivation.

One of the manifestations of subjectivity could certainly be a goal orientation – a construct in the field of psychology of motivation that contains not just motivational components, but also cognitive, emotional, executive, and social ones.

Goal Orientations - Characteristics

Goal orientations concepts have grown on the basis of research on learned helplessness and achievement motivation in children of school age (Dweck, 1975; Nicholls, 1975, 1984). Dweck (1975, 1986) found that children, who do not differ in abilities, reacted in a different way to failures at school. Some children behaved in an adaptive way – they attributed failure to insufficient effort (while maintaining it or intensifying it), tackled successive challenges, had positive expectations. Other children, however, adopted non-adaptive pattern of behaviour – they treated failure as a result of lack of competence, they avoided challenges, decreased their endurance and effort, while maintaining negative expectations.

At the same time, Nicholls (1975), while analyzing motivation of achievements amongst pupils and levels of personal goals, disclosed that they define success differently. Some define it in relation to their previous achievements, whilst others take achievements and level of performance of others as a benchmark.

The analysis of research results, which were the basis for distinguishing two groups of students: focused on assessments and on the learning process, leads to similar conclusions (Eison, 1979 cited in Payne, Youngcourt and Beaubien, 2007; Eison, 1981).

Currently it is believed that the implicit theories of intelligence operating in the field of knowledge (Dweck, 1986; Elliott and Dweck, 1988) are responsible for the above-mentioned differences in the way of defining the objectives, responding to success or failure, or for accepting certain goal orientation. These theories, which normally operate at the preconscious level, are the cognitive structures which play an important role in directing and shaping human behaviour. Taking into account the criterion of the implicit theory of intelligence, humans can be divided into incremental and entity theorists (Dweck, 1986, 1991). Entity theorists believe that intelligence is fixed and immutable, while incremental theorists believe that intelligence and competence can be developed through efforts one undertakes.

Nicholls (1984), in turn, attributes the differences in the used goal orientations to the concept of abilities adopted by subject. The first, less differentiated one, states that an individual determines the level of current capacities and the difficulty of the task by reference to its current knowledge and level of performance. According to the other, differentiated concept, an individual identifies those properties in comparison to other people - members of the normative group. When a man describes his capacities in relation to himself, the perceived difficulty of the task is directly proportional to the probability of failure in this task. At the same time, the more difficult the task is and the more effort it requires, the higher the level of competence felt after reaching success. When defining an individual's capacities compared to the normative group, the difficulty of the task is determined based on the performance level of others. An individual experiences the high level of competence if the execution of the task takes less time, is of better quality and requires less effort than that of other persons.

The consequence of an individual's acceptance of one of the theories of intelligence (Dweck, 1986) or the concept of abilities (Nicholls, 1984) is the goal orientation that is relevant to it. When a man is looking for an opportunity to demonstrate skills in relation to members of the normative group, it reflects the ego orientation, also known as the performance orientation (Elliott i Dweck, 1988). The ego orientation is more likely to be adopted by entity theorists. However, if an individual defines its skills by comparing to itself, we are talking about task orientation, in other ideas also known as learning orientation (Elliott and Dweck, 1988), or mastery orientation (Ames and Archer, 1988). This orientation is consistent with the definition of intelligence being acknowledged by incremental theorists.

Ego orientation and task orientation, though initially regarded as the ends of one continuum, are independent from each other and are separate dimensions (Ames and Archer, 1988). Although the ego orientation and task orientation allowed for accurate differentiation of people with respect to tasks they preferred, the results suggested a need for an additional distinction within the ego orientation. The essence of ego orientation is to direct attention to oneself and to how others perceive us, to involvement in social comparison and assessment of competence in relation to standards (Skaalvik, 1997). It has been proven, however, that this orientation is not homogeneous. But within it, two other, different with the quality of the manifestations and the goals pursued may be distinguished. (Skaalvik, Valas and Sletta, 1994, cited in Skaalvik, 1997; VandeWalle, 1997). The self-enhancing ego orientation is an orientation, which focuses on being the best and the desire to demonstrate one's own competence. The self-defeating ego orientation is characterized by avoiding demonstration of low competence and avoiding environment's negative reactions. Adoption of the self-enhancing ego orientation is associated with searching for an opportunity to confrontation,

and the experience of being competent is shaped by gathering positive feedback from the environment. This orientation is also called prove performance goal orientation (Elliott and Harackiewicz, 1996; VandeWalle, 1997). In contrast to the self-enhancing ego, there remains the self-defeating ego that avoids confrontation, while gaining the sense of being competent by protecting itself from negative feedback from the environment. Another name of this orientation is avoid performance goal orientation (Elliott and Harackiewicz, 1996; VandeWalle, 1997)

A similar dimension, but within the task orientation, has been identified by Skaalvik (1997). Assuming that a task orientation denotes tasks perception as a means of learning through factorial analysis, Skaalvik found that also within this orientation tendencies both to drive and to avoid, known respectively as: task orientation and avoidance orientation can be identified. The task orientation is characterized by a desire to develop one's own skills, search for challenges and the feeling of competence is here the effect of overcoming difficulties and achieving a higher level of certain skills. Avoidance orientation, in turn, focuses on avoidance of work and of making any effort. It is associated with reluctance to engage in tasks, irrespective of their nature.

Finally, four main goal orientations have been distinguished (Cury, Elliot, Da Fonseca and Moller, 2006; Elliot and McGregor, 2001; Harackiewicz, Durik, Barron, Linnenbrink-Garcia and Tauer, 2008; Skaalvik, 1997), which are a combination of two forms of achievement motivation (approach and avoidance) described by Atkinson (1964 cited in Łukaszewski and Doliński, 2004) and two orientation under the competence definition adopted by subject (Nicholls, 1984; Dweck, 1986) – ego involvement and task involvement. It should be however noted that some researchers continue to apply the three-element concept, with regard to only one aversion orientation (Murayama and Elliot, 2009; Seijts, Latham, Tasa and Latham, 2004; Yeo, Sorbello, Koy and Smillie, 2008).

Although initially goal orientation was treated as relatively stable characteristics of an individual, today it is understood that they may have both a dispositional, trait-like and a state form, which is confirmed by research results (Payne, Youngcourt and Beaubien, 2007). Goal orientation as a disposition affects situational orientation adopted by subject in the specific natural or experimental context. It is not, however, the only factor determining the type of situational goal orientation. Other variables e.g. context, the definition of the task, the presence of the audience or the system of penalties and rewards are also of great importance. Ego involvement is also encouraged by e.g. competition situation, the presence of the audience, stimulation of social self-awareness or definition of the tasks as the fitness one. Ego involvement enhances the external attributions. Task involvement occurs more often in situations of learning, in the absence of competition and enhances making internal attributions (Nicholls, 1984).

The relationship between dispositional and situational form of goal orientation is shaped like with other psychological constructs such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, anxiety (Payne, Youngcourt and Beaubien, 2007).

In conclusion, the goal orientation focuses on how an individual interprets, evaluates and reacts to situations related to achievements (Dweck, 1986). All types of goal orientations are independent from each other, and they are separate constructs. The adopted goal orientation is a function of psychological characteristics of an individual and the features of the situation or the environment. An individual usually adopts the goal orientation it prefers, but distinct features of the environment may cause adopting the orientation to fit the environment (Ames and Archer, 1988). Adoption of the specific goal orientation is associated with adequate patterns of emotions, cognition and behaviour. It is also associated with the

choice of suitable tasks and activities in which an individual is involved (Cury, Elliot, Da Fonseca i Moller, 2006). What an individual sets as goals depends on his or her beliefs regarding their own potential to achieve these goals (striving to change the status quo versus maintaining the status quo), the socialization process (self-improvement orientation, competition or conservative performance, or some kind of stagnation), on the characteristics of an individual (e.g. the degree of susceptibility to anxiety, tendency to self-concentration, etc.) (Tokarz and Kaleńska, in press).

Goal Orientations as a Manifestation of Subjectivity

As already stated, subjectivity manifests itself in cognitive, emotional and motivational, and executive spheres (Jarymowicz, 2008). In these areas, goal orientations might be observed and based on this, subjectivity might be determined and concluded on. In the cognitive field, this is, first of all, self-consciousness on which a preferred goal orientation is based. All orientations differ, however, in sources of self-knowledge. While the task orientation is mainly based on self-observation and knowledge of one's past achievements (see Bąbel, 2009; Niedźwieńska, 2009), ego orientation focuses on the information derived from public sources (see Kossowska and Śmieja, 2009).

Adoption of the ego orientation makes us focus on the opinions of people from our social environment. These are not just people in the normative group (e.g. classmates for a student), but also persons who may express a binding opinion regarding the competence, such as a teacher. Adopting the task orientation allows us to focus on the self – one may exactly watch one's own achievements, analyze them, evaluate and compare with past experiences. To achieve a sense of competence it is not necessary to enter into any social interaction, which is necessary with the ego orientation. It should, however, be noted that the peculiarity described here relates to the area of self-knowledge, which is base for the goal orientation. Preferring single goal orientation and focusing on an adequate source of self-knowledge does not make that all other areas of self-knowledge are built based on the same principles.

In the emotional sphere, domination of negative emotions and defensive tendencies that are present mainly in the self-defeating ego orientation and the avoidance orientation may lead to limitation of the development of subjectivity (Jarymowicz, 2008). The self-defeating ego orientation and avoidance orientation are correlated positively with the fear for failure, and negatively with competence expectancy (Elliot and Church, 1997). The self-enhancing ego orientation is also correlated positively with fear for failure, however, it has positive correlation with competence expectancy. The task orientation is correlated positively with competence expectancy and is not related to fear for failure (Elliot and Church, 1997). Taking into account the emotional correlates of the goal orientations, it can be concluded that the approach orientations and, in particular, the task orientation, will be conducive to the development of subjectivity, because of the slightest connection with the defensive tendencies.

One of the manifestations of subjectivity of action is the growing motivation (Jarymowicz, 2008). Taking into account this criterion, it can be stated that the task orientation is evidence of a higher level of development of subjectivity than the ego orientation. The task orientation has features of the growing motivation - the objective here is to achieve a standard of excellence, transcending one's own barriers and acquisition of new competences. Adopting the ego orientation will cause focusing on the social assessments, and skills development and knowledge acquisition does not matter a lot, in fact. The task orientation, as the only one, is transgressive - actions dictated by it are implied by a conscious, reflective evaluation, and one's own decisions. It is the task orientation that best

becomes an inseparable part of the assumptions of the transgressive model of man (Kozielecki, 2007; Tokarz, Trzebińska and Piechota, in press). According to this concept, man is aware of choice, is an inner-direction system, the source of behaviour, an internal-growth-oriented perpetrator.

In the executive sphere, such manifestations as the ability to self-control and perpetration, manage oneself and one's own development, and responsibility for one's own actions, are also extremely conspicuous amongst task-oriented persons. Task-oriented persons undertake activities which they are interested in (Harackiewicz, Barron, Tauer, Carter and Elliot, 2000) and are not dependent on external rewards such as those who are ego-oriented. It should however be noted that the task orientation and self-enhancing ego orientation have a similar impact on self-motivation and commitment to perform the task, and are associated with the same, promotion self-regulatory focus (Elliot and Harackiewicz, 1996). This may mean that in the executive sphere, the task orientation and the self-enhancing ego orientation yield similar effects, and the differences between them are not significant (Tokarz, Trzebińska and Piechota, in press).

Furthermore approach orientations, compared with the avoidance orientations, exhibit greater diversity of manifestations in the executive sphere (Tokarz, Trzebińska and Piechota, in press). Avoidance is associated with a clear direction of action, while the pursuit leaves a range of options by which they might be implemented. Motivation to avoid is usually stronger and more intense than the approach motivation (Franken, 2005). Avoidance is related to evolutionary trends aimed at eliminating hazards. Motivation to avoid is more homogeneous and distinct than approach motivation. Avoiding, in any form, has the same effect - an individual shuns the situations in which it may test its competence. The approach, in turn, may take various forms (e.g., overcoming difficulties or demonstrating one's own achievements to others), and yield different results, which ultimately come down, however, to obtain a sense of competence and self-esteem and importance.

Dispositional form of the goal orientation certainly expresses human subjectivity much more than the situational form. Presenting specific dispositional goal orientation is primarily determined by an individual and its psychological properties, not by the task itself, the context or a system or external positive and negative reinforcements. For dispositional goal orientation, manifestations of subjectivity in the cognitive sphere, as well as self-knowledge and self-awareness are primarily responsible (Payne, Youngcourt and Beaubien, 2007). While, therefore, dispositional goal orientation and conduct that manifests it provide an important condition to draw conclusions regarding subject and its properties, situational orientation is a source of knowledge regarding subject to be treated with much greater caution. Observation of behaviour in the task situation should therefore be supported by thorough analysis of the environment in order to determine as precisely as possible whether we are dealing with the expression of subject properties or with the response to the specific situation. The impact of situational factors in fact determines the extent to which the goal orientation (which is an expression of personality) is going to disclose.

Subjectivity is manifested by goal orientations in different areas - cognitive, emotional, motivational, and executive ones. Based on the goal orientation (especially in the dispositional form), one may conclude on the level of development of subjectivity. Differences between the specific orientations of antecedents and consequences indicate that each of these orientations represents a different form of subjectivity, expresses different characteristics of subject.

Judging on subject on the basis of the goal orientation, one should be aware of certain limitations of such an operation. First, the goal orientations can be both of dispositional and

situational nature, which makes it necessary to look at the features of the environment before drawing a conclusion regarding subject. Secondly, the goal orientations might be subject to training (Stevens and Gist, 1997) – they can be stimulated and strengthened, and so, although they are regarded as relatively stable characteristics of individuals, they may not be regarded here as constant, which is typical for e.g. personality characteristics. Work on the development of goal orientation can therefore lead to the development of subjectivity. Thirdly, the goal orientation can occur in people in different configurations (Yeo, Sorbello, Koy and Smillie, 2008) – despite the fact that we are usually able to extract the dominant goal orientation, some other persons' orientations may be comparatively strong, which means that only the knowledge of the full configuration allows to conclude on subject. Fourthly, it is most commonly adopted, which is also confirmed by the majority of studies (Dweck, 1975, 1986; Nicholls, 1984; Phillips and Gully, 1997; VandeWalle, Brown, Cron and Slocum, 1999; VandeWalle, Cron and Slocum, 2001), that the most advantageous and most adaptive is the task orientation. Meanwhile, it appears that in some contexts it is the self-enhancing ego orientation which may bring better results and be more beneficial to an individual than the task orientation (Elliot and Harackiewicz, 1996; Hendricks and Payne, 2007; Kohli, Shervani and Challagalla, 1998; Leondari and Gialamas, 2002; Silver, Dwyer and Alford, 2006), which also makes the unequivocal determination of subjectivity more complicated. After all it is flexibility, self-control, ability to manage one's own activities and to pursue designed goals that is regarded as manifestations of subjectivity. (Jarymowicz, 2008). So if an individual notes that self-enhancing ego orientation would be in the specific situation more effective than the task orientation, then it can provide evidence of a high level of development of subjectivity, manifesting by the ability to match appropriate resources to the goal pursued. Apart from the adopted goal orientation, the subject's motivation, which stays behind such a decision, must also be taken into account.

Goal orientations, as constructs of complex nature are manifestations of subjectivity rich in information, and hence a source of knowledge about subject. Detailed analysis of the goal orientation, knowing its capabilities and limitations, can be an important complement to the diagnosis of human subjectivity, not only in task situations.

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Abstrakt

Celem niniejszego artykułu jest przedstawienie orientacji na cele w kategoriach przejawów podmiotowości. Podmiotowość jest zbiorem atrybutów, które sprawiają, że osoba wpływa na sposób własnego funkcjonowania. Atrybuty te obejmują sferę poznawczą, emocjonalną, motywacyjną oraz wykonawczą. Orientacja na cel jest przykładem złożonego konstruktów, obejmującego wszystkie te sfery. Orientacja na cel to sposób, w jaki jednostka interpretuje, ocenia i reaguje na sytuacje związane z osiągnięciami. Wyróżniamy cztery orientacje na cele: orientację na uczenie się, orientację na unikanie, orientację na ego ofensywne i orientację na ego defensywne. Orientacje te stanowią kombinację dwóch form motywacji osiągnięć (dążeniowej i unikowej) oraz dwóch orientacji wynikających z przyjętej przez podmiot definicji kompetencji – zaangażowania ego i zaangażowania w zadanie.

Artykuł przedstawia możliwości wnioskowania o podmiotowości na podstawie struktury orientacji na cele oraz analizuje szanse i ograniczenia związane z uznawaniem orientacji na cele za przejawy podmiotowości.

Słowa kluczowe: podmiotowość, orientacja na cel