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ACADEMIC ETHOS AND DIGNITY-BASED MANAGEMENT – AN ATTEMPT TO IDENTIFY THE IMPORTANCE OF VALUES IN HIGHER EDUCATION

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Purpose: The aim of this article is to assess the significance of the values that shape the contemporary academic ethos in the light of dignity-based management practices. To achieve this aim, the following research questions were posed: What is the significance of the values that shape the academic ethos for higher education institution employees? To what extent are dignity-based management practices implemented in higher education institutions?
Design/methodology/approach: This study is theoretical and empirical. The theoretical part was developed on the basis of a critical review of the literature on the subject, while the empirical part was based on a survey (CAWI technique) conducted among 100 academic teachers. The research sample was selected purposefully.
Findings: The analysis of the results obtained indicated a diversity of responses depending on the title/academic degree of the surveyed university employees, both in terms of the values included in the ethos and in terms of the perceived level of implementation of dignity-based management practices; It also revealed a clear dissonance between the 'demand' for the values included in the ethos and the level of implementation of dignity-based management practices as perceived by the surveyed employees.
Research limitations/implications: The limitations of the study include the lack of representativeness of the sample and the research method used. Despite its many advantages, surveying does not allow for a deeper analysis of the broader context of the issues described. However, the opinions obtained should be considered valuable, as the structure of the respondents in terms of their academic degree / title (or lack thereof) was consistent with the structure of academic teachers employed in higher education institutions in Poland, which allowed for certain generalisations to be made.
Practical implications: The conclusions from the conducted research indicate that it is reasonable to create appropriate organisational conditions in higher education institutions, taking into account respect for the dignity of employees, permanently embedded in the mechanisms of the functioning of universities as their organisational resource. These conditions would contribute to strengthening the ethical attitudes and behaviour of academic staff.
Originality/value: A review of the literature on the subject shows that the concept of dignity-based management has not been explored in the context of the crisis of ethos in higher education; the attempt undertaken in this study therefore fills an existing research gap.

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Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Since their inception, universities have played a special role in social and economic life. This was due to their specific nature, reflected, among other things, in their mission, management and academic culture. Looking back at the history of universities over the centuries, it can be seen that, on the one hand, they are stable organisations, as their basic tasks relating to science and education have not undergone any fundamental changes (Sułkowski, 2022), but on the other hand, phenomena that have emerged in the immediate and wider environment over the last century have significantly changed the organisational system of contemporary higher education institutions, which, in terms of internal and external relations, are not and will not be an 'enclave of peace' (Leja, 2013, p. 158). The challenges facing universities in the context of, for example, the massification of higher education, globalisation, rapid technological progress and increased competition in the education market are addressed in successive amendments to the law, but are also the subject of discussion in the academic community.

Ethical issues are an important aspect of the ongoing discussions and actions taken by universities. Interest in these issues is related to the crisis of academic ethos, which, according to Joanna Dudek (2017), manifests itself in 'intellectual corruption', the mixing of the 'market' (entrepreneurship, politics, ideology) with academia, the vision of transforming the university into a bureaucratic educational corporation devoid of mission, and the conflict of interest between scientists and entrepreneurs. The issue of ethos encompasses the principles and values professed and implemented by the academic community, and therefore fits into the discussion on the directions of development of contemporary higher education. It also draws attention to the most important resources of universities, which are their employees (cf. Załoga, Ciekanowski, 2017). As Kazimierz Denek (2015) emphasises, despite the clash of different models of the university of the future, the academic community, especially teachers, plays a key role in higher education. They are responsible not only for 'practising science' or educating young people, but also for raising future generations. Hence, the issue of codifying the behaviour of members of the academic community, i.e. formalising specific norms and rules derived from ethical values, becomes important. However, the mere development of codes of ethics, despite their enormous popularity in higher education institutions (see Cywińska, 2013), may not be effective in preventing the erosion of the academic ethos. According to Remigiusz Sobański (1994), it is important to provide scholars with an 'ethical education' based on values that will determine their attitude towards science, other researchers, students, society and the

state. It is also important to reflect on the adaptation of human capital management concepts and methods to the world of higher education (Sułkowski, 2022, p. 232). Traditionally, this process was carried out by taking into account the values, rituals and patterns functioning in academic institutions, but today it seems that these measures may be insufficient, hence it is necessary to look for ways to strengthen management, including leadership, with ethical aspects. Although the crisis of academic ethos certainly has various causes, one of them may be the insufficient consideration of the subjective, dignified treatment of employees in management practices. The degree to which the need for dignity, as a need for self-respect, self-esteem and respect for others, is satisfied influences people's behaviour in the workplace (Blikle, 2018). Respect for the dignity of another person requires the creation of space for subjective treatment: recognition of their identity and diversity, the opportunity to express their views, dialogue, development and "experiencing acceptance (Hicks, 2016). Such conditions create a working environment based on fundamental human values such as reliability, honesty, responsibility, professionalism, loyalty, fairness, truthfulness and solidarity, the practical implementation of which builds trust. The experience of respect for one's own dignity, which is a fundamental need of every human being, then plays an important motivational role (Młokosiewicz, 2023).

With this in mind, the aim of this article is to assess the importance of values that shape academic ethos in the light of dignity-based management practices. In order to achieve this aim, the following research questions were also posed: What is the significance of values that shape academic ethos for higher education institution employees? To what extent are dignity-based management practices implemented in higher education institutions?

This study is part of the discussion on the reform of Polish higher education, which has been ongoing in academic circles since the 1990s. It also presents a kind of 'voice' of academic teachers on the role and importance of values / ethos in contemporary universities. While the literature on the subject contains analyses of the issue of values from the perspective of university authorities, set out in formal documents (e.g. Czakon, 2020), there are few publications presenting these issues from the perspective of academic staff. The article also reflects on the possibility of applying management methods previously used in enterprises to universities. In this respect, it contributes to the existing research gap.

2. Academic ethos and ethos-related values

Higher education institutions have always been faithful to their internal standards regarding research and teaching (Brzeziński, 2010) and, since their inception, have been distinguished by a specific organisational culture based on certain values. The voluntary acceptance of these values, perceived in terms of identifying with a specific idea of the university and the academic community, is an expression of ethos (Dudek, 2017). The concept of ethos can therefore be interpreted as a set of values and principles that guide the life of the academic community and provide guidelines for the actions of university authorities (Etos..., 2004). While the essence of ethos is understandable, it may be more difficult to specify the canon of values that comprise it. This is due to the changing concepts of the university and the challenges facing contemporary higher education.

Taking into account the transformation of universities and their environment, several model approaches to academic ethos can be identified. According to Robert Merton, ethos is defined as 'an emotionally charged set of values and norms considered binding on people of science. They are expressed in the form of commands, prohibitions, rules of preference and acceptability, which are validated institutional values' (as cited in Czakon, 2020, p. 6). This ethos, referred to as the ethos of academic science or the ethos of scholars, is based on several values/norms, known as 'CUDOS', which include: communalism, universalism, disinterestedness, organised scepticism (Bieliński, Tomczyńska, 2019; Grzesiak, 2017). Considering the links between science and business, John Ziman proposed the following values / principles of the industrial science ethos: proprietary, local, authoritarian, commissioned, expert, collectively known as 'PLACE' (Czakon, 2020; Bieliński, Tomczyńska, 2019). In turn, according to Tomasz Czakon (2020), one can speak of the ethos of post-academic science, which includes various, rather vague proposals that take into account, to some extent, the values indicated by Merton and Ziman. Piotr Sztompka (2007) notes that trust is the value that strongly differentiates the proposed models. He emphasises that the high level of trust in the academic science model resulted from adherence to the moral norms of the scientific ethos, and that today, in the era of post-academic science, these norms have been weakened as a result of fiscalisation, privatisation, commercialisation and bureaucratisation of science, and a reduction in the exclusivity and autonomy of the scientific community, which has translated into a visible destruction of the ethos.

The values that make up the ethos have been and continue to be shaped largely by academic tradition, referring to informal norms, behaviours and attitudes of community members, but also by legal provisions regulating the functioning of higher education. Traditional, so-called fundamental values include truth, integrity and responsibility (Etos..., 2004), while references to values related to the implementation of the university's mission can be found in

legal regulations and various organisational documents. In the Higher Education Act (Dz.U., 2023), the relevant provisions are as follows:

- 'The pursuit of truth and the passing on of knowledge from generation to generation is a particularly noble human endeavour'.
- 'It is the duty of public authorities to create optimal conditions for freedom of scientific research and artistic creativity, freedom of teaching, and the autonomy of the academic community'.
- 'Every scholar is responsible for the quality and reliability of their research and for educating the younger generation'.
- 'Universities and other research institutions (...) help shape the moral standards that apply in public life'.
- 'The mission of the higher education and science system is to provide the highest quality education and scientific activity, to shape civic attitudes, and to participate in social development and the creation of an innovation-based economy'.
- 'The basis of the higher education and science system is freedom of teaching, artistic creation, scientific research and the publication of its results, as well as the autonomy of universities'.
- 'The higher education and science system operates in accordance with international standards, ethical principles and good practices in the field of education and scientific activity, taking into account the particular importance of social responsibility in science'.

An analysis of the above provisions indicates that the values that make up the academic ethos are primarily: truth, freedom, responsibility, quality and reliability. It is worth emphasising the close relationship between ethos and the quality of research and teaching. Ireneusz Białecki points out that in the context of implementing a quality policy based on parameters and indicators, academic staff should ultimately 'refer to their scientific conscience, i.e. to their ethos' (Białecki, 2014, p. 27).

A catalogue of values that are desirable in times of crisis of ethics can be found in documents prepared by various organisations operating in the higher education sector. An example of this is the Code of Ethics for Researchers (2024), prepared by the Polish Academy of Sciences. In this document, the values and principles leading to the maintenance of high standards in science include: truthfulness, honesty, reliability, conscientiousness, credibility, meticulousness, objectivity, independence, openness, responsibility, justice, reliability, courage and care.

References to values can also be found in higher education institutions' organisational documents, such as statutes, formalised missions, action strategies and codes of ethics. Krzysztof Leja (2013) confirms that the missions of most technical universities in Poland contain references to academic and universal human values. Tomasz Czakon, on the other hand,

based on an analysis of the statutes of ten Polish research universities, distinguishes six groups of so-called indicators that 'reveal what declared values and norms are enshrined in the documents examined' (Czakon, 2020, p. 4). These values are expressed in the following indicators: cognitive, disciplinary, pro-social, utilitarian, humanistic, didactic and educational.

In conclusion, it is worth emphasising that in a situation of erosion of the ethos, universities should intensify their efforts to strengthen the ethical attitudes and behaviour of academic staff.

3. Dignity-based management values

Numerous researchers in the field of management – both internationally and in the Polish context – have been emphasising for many years the need to recognise human dignity as the central point of reference for management practices (Pirson, 2014; Donaldson, Walsh, 2015; Hicks, 2016; Kostera, Pirson, 2017; Blikle, 2018; Sypniewska, 2019; Zawadzki, 2018). As noted by D. Huijser and P. Nullens (2024), the concept of human dignity plays various roles in thinking about management: from paradigm shift (Waddock, 2022; Pirson, 2017; Laloux, 2014), through the protection of human rights (Kateb, 2011; Gohl, 2018), to the orientation of organisational business practices (Dierksmeier, 2011; Pirson, 2014; Donaldson, Walsh, 2015; Pirson et al., 2016; cited in: Huijser, Nullens, 2024).

Dignity is understood as a special intrinsic value of a human being, associated exclusively with humanity (Pirson, Piedmont, Nagy, Hicks, 2023) and a trait inextricably linked to human actions and constituting one of the most important values for a human being (Fontrodona, Melé, 2022). Michael Pirson and co-authors (2016) point to three main strands of conceptualisation of dignity:

- as a general category,
- as an unconditional, intrinsic value – inherent to human beings and universal,
- as a conditional and deserved value (Pirson et al., 2016).

The analysis undertaken in this study focuses on the second approach, which recognises dignity as an unconditional value.

According to Donna Hicks, respect for dignity implies acceptance of difference and diversity, recognising another person as an integral human being who has the privilege to express their views and be accepted, regardless of age, beliefs or other characteristics (Hicks, 2016). Recognising a person's dignity also involves appreciating their work, treating them as trustworthy, and creating a culture of honesty and accountability for one's actions (Zawadzki, 2018). According to Hicks, dignity is the highest common denominator that allows for cooperation and ensures peace between people, while violations of dignity are the source of many protracted conflicts, including in organisations. These conflicts can be resolved when

dignity is restored, which involves recognising the intrinsic value of human beings (Hicks, 2016).

Management that respects the dignity of employees combines the ability to motivate with dignity with the organisation and structuring of the work process in a way that allows employees to realise the values they hold dear (those deeply rooted in human nature, such as honesty, fairness, reliability, solidarity, loyalty, responsibility, professionalism, etc.), which promotes their internal satisfaction and thus creates dignified employee self-control (Kosewski, 2012). Satisfying the need for dignity in the workplace plays an important role in shaping organisational effectiveness. People who are treated with greater dignity have a higher sense of self-worth in the workplace, and by perceiving themselves as valuable members of the organisation, they are more willing to make a voluntary effort in their professional roles – an effort that is focused on organisational goals and goes beyond the minimum level required to keep their job. This means that when employees are treated with dignity, their desire to derive 'value' from their work is satisfied, which motivates them to make greater efforts (Ahmed, Liang, Anjum, Durrani, 2023, p. 4738). In economic terms, respect for employee dignity can therefore be seen as an organisational resource for two reasons: firstly, it is something that employees value, and secondly, it contributes to generating positive work-related outcomes by stimulating certain conditions/resources (such as employee engagement) that can help to achieve other resources (Thomas, Lucas, 2019; Ahmed, Liang, Anjum, Durrani, 2023). As Lech Górniak notes, basing the management process on values, ensuring their transparency and the compatibility of personal and organisational values creates psychological conditions for employees that are conducive to performing tasks at a high level, increasing personal responsibility, high self-control and strong commitment to achieving the organisation's goals. The trust that then arises in the organisation creates the possibility for employees to act freely, creates a space of psychological freedom, and encourages employees to exceed organisational expectations. In doing so, they take into account not only their own interests, but also the interests of those whom their work is intended to serve: members of their team, teams from other departments, customers and the entire organisation (Górniak, 2015, p. 102).

With regard to higher education, the concept of dignified management should be incorporated into university management processes. This is evident, for example, in the provisions of the Higher Education Act (Journal of Laws, 2023), which refers to the dignity of the teaching profession (Article 275.1), the dignity of students (Article 307.1) and the dignity of doctoral students (Article 322.1). It should be noted, however, that these terms appear only in the context of the disciplinary responsibility of the persons mentioned.

Basing management practices on respect for employee dignity brings invaluable benefits to both managers and employees themselves. It creates a friendly and supportive work environment in which employees feel a sense of agency, meaning and satisfaction from their work, perform high-quality work and identify with the organisation. This has a beneficial effect

on their mental health and well-being, which translates into both organisational efficiency and effectiveness, as well as opportunities to improve individual talents, knowledge and skills.

4. Empirical research methodology

Two research methods were used for the purposes of this study: a critical review of the literature on the subject and a survey. The empirical part of the study is part of a broader pilot study, in which the research tool was a survey questionnaire consisting of 6 closed-ended Likert questions and 1 open-ended question. The following scientific publications were used in developing the questions:

- regarding the catalogue of academic values (Code of Ethics for Researchers, 2020; Good Practices in Science. A Set of Rules and Guidelines, 2001),
- regarding dignity practices (Lewandowski, 2010; Valente, 2015; Baran, Sypniewska, 2017; Blikle, 2018); moreover, according to DeVellis and Thorpe (2021) and Pirson, Piedmont, Nagy, Hicks (2023), it was assumed that dignity is a hidden construct that cannot be observed directly; since it is internal by definition, the satisfaction of the need for dignity can be assessed by diagnosing the experience of specific behaviours on the part of other people / superiors in the workplace (this was to be achieved by specific statements in the research questionnaire).

The research sample was selected purposefully. The study covered employees of two public universities: Maria Curie-Skłodowska University in Lublin and the University of Szczecin. The research sample of 100 people accurately reflects the structure of academic teachers in higher education institutions in Poland in terms of academic degree/title (RAD-on Report, 2022). The study used the CAWI (Computer Assisted Web Interviews) technique, whereby university employees were sent a link to a research questionnaire prepared using Google Forms via email. The study was conducted in May 2025.

5. Results of empirical research

5.1. Research sample

It was assumed that the study would involve employees of higher education institutions in Poland, i.e. research and teaching staff, researchers and lecturers. The main criterion of selection for the research sample was the consistency of the number of respondents in terms of their academic degree / title with the structure of academic teachers employed at universities in

Poland, as presented in the RAD-on report (2022). The research questionnaire was therefore sent to employees of the Maria Curie-Sklodowska University in Lublin and the University of Szczecin. Taking into account the main criterion of selection for the sample, the following participated in the study:

- 10 prof. dr hab. (professorial title),
- 22 dr hab. (habilitation / postdoctoral qualification),
- 48 dr (PhD),
- 18 mgr (Master's; no doctoral degree).

The university employees surveyed were also diverse in terms of gender, age, and length of service in higher education (Table 1).

Table 1.
Structure of respondents by gender, age, length of service in higher education (%)

Criterion		N	%
Gender	female	64	64%
	male	36	36%
Age	up to 25 years old	3	3%
	26-35 years old	21	21%
	36-45 years old	25	25%
	46-55 years old	33	33%
	56-65 years old	15	15%
	over 65 years old	3	3%
Length of service in higher education	up to 5 years	16	16%
	6-15 years	25	25%
	16-25 years	26	26%
	26-35 years	24	24%
	36-45 years	7	7%
	over 45 years	2	2%

Source: own compilation based on conducted surveys.

The analysis of the results indicates that the research sample was dominated by women, with the largest group of respondents being aged 46-55, while in terms of length of service, the most numerous group was academic teachers with professional experience in the following ranges: 16-25 years, 6-15 years, and 26-35 years.

5.2. Discussion of the study results

The first question posed to respondents was: 'In your opinion, how important are the values listed below in the context of the mission pursued by contemporary universities in Poland?' Respondents could answer using a scale of 1-5, where 1 meant 'not important', 2 - 'not very important', 3 meant 'moderately important value', 4 meant 'important value', and 5 meant 'very important value'. Table 2 presents the average ratings for each value in total and broken down by academic degree /title.

Table 2.
Assessment of the importance of individual values in the context of higher education institutions fulfilling their mission (calculated as an arithmetic mean)

Value	Overall	Mgr	Dr	Dr hab.	Prof. dr hab.
Freedom	4,19	3,75	4,27	4,50	4,00
Truth	4,48	4,60	4,46	4,59	4,10
Selflessness	3,71	3,35	3,81	3,86	3,60
Justice	4,21	4,40	4,17	4,23	4,00
Reliability	4,47	4,65	4,42	4,55	4,20
Responsibility	4,31	4,50	4,25	4,36	4,10
Impartiality	4,12	4,15	4,19	4,14	3,70
Respect	4,30	4,35	4,31	4,36	4,00
Kindness	4,04	4,00	4,17	3,86	3,90
Credibility	4,44	4,60	4,35	4,59	4,20
Honesty	4,47	4,50	4,50	4,55	4,10
Openness	4,20	4,05	4,27	4,27	4,00
Solidarity	3,83	3,65	3,94	4,00	3,30
Courage	3,83	3,90	3,71	4,14	3,60

Source: own compilation based on conducted surveys.

An analysis of the responses obtained indicates that, in the opinion of the respondents, the values of greatest importance for the fulfilment of the mission of higher education institutions are truth, reliability, honesty and credibility (rating above 4.40), while the least important are selflessness, solidarity and courage (rating below 4.0). Taking into account the division of respondents according to academic degree/title, it should be noted that the assessment of professors in relation to the vast majority of values was lower than that of other groups of respondents. Furthermore, based on an additional analysis of the results in terms of other criteria of the research sample, it should be concluded that:

- women rated the importance of all values higher (compared to men),
- the youngest employees in terms of age (up to 25 years old) and employees with 36-45 years of service attached less importance to the vast majority of values.

It is worth noting that despite the generally high ratings given by respondents to the importance of values in the university's mission, no value received an average rating of 5.0.

Respondents were also asked to comment on the frequency of selected dignity-based management practices in higher education. The question was formulated as follows: ‘How often do the following situations/aspects concerning employees occur in contemporary higher education institutions in Poland, in your opinion?’ Respondents could choose answers on a scale of 1-5, where 1 meant ‘very rarely’, 2 meant ‘rarely’, 3 meant ‘sometimes’, 4 meant ‘often’ and 5 meant ‘very often’. Table 3 presents the average ratings of the frequency of occurrence of individual dignity-based management practices in total and broken down by academic degree/title.

Table 3.
Assessment of the frequency of selected dignity-based management practices in higher education (calculated as an arithmetic mean)

Types of dignity-based management practices	Overall	Mgr	Dr	Dr hab.	Prof. dr hab.
Employees are clearly informed about standards of reliable work and undesirable (i.e., undignified, unethical) behaviours	3,08	2,80	3,15	3,05	3,40
Reliable work is appreciated in practice and unreliable behaviour is clearly disapproved of	2,69	2,70	2,63	2,73	2,90
Employees can raise concerns about their work without fear of reprisals	2,63	2,25	2,58	2,73	3,40
An atmosphere of kindness and cooperation among employees is preferred	3,36	3,30	3,29	3,50	3,50
Employees are treated as individuals, not as 'easily replaceable human resources'	3,02	2,90	3,02	3,14	3,00
Individual predispositions of employees are noticed and their development is supported	2,75	2,55	2,67	2,95	3,10

Source: own compilation based on conducted surveys.

As shown in Table 3, the arithmetic mean for the six dignity-based management practices diagnosed using the questionnaire did not exceed 3.4, which means that such behaviours on the part of managers did not occur often or very often. The surveyed academic staff least often observed such management practices as the possibility of reporting their work-related concerns without fear of reprisals, appreciation of reliable work and clear disapproval of unreliable behaviour, as well as noticing individual predispositions of employees and supporting their development (scores below 3.0). Furthermore, unfortunately, they only sometimes experienced subjective treatment, were clearly informed about standards of reliable work and undesirable behaviour, and slightly more often, an atmosphere of kindness and cooperation between employees was preferred in their workplaces (ratings between 3.02 and 3.36). The lowest ratings in the perception of dignity-based management practices were recorded for master's degree holders, and the highest for professors. Taking into account the gender category, it was noted that women observed dignity-based management practices slightly less often than men, while no particular patterns were noted for the other categories.

6. Discussion of results

The considerations presented in the empirical part of the article provided answers to the research questions. The surveyed university employees highly rated the importance of values in the context of the mission pursued by contemporary higher education institutions in Poland (most ratings above 4.0). The highest-rated values included fundamental values, i.e. truth and reliability, as well as honesty and credibility. The high rating of the latter values may be a kind of signal from the academic community that it recognises the phenomenon of erosion of trust in science, as described by Piotr Sztompka (2007). It is surprising that the category of freedom

was not among the highest-rated values, as, in the opinion of Zbyszko Melosik (2019), it constitutes the core of the academic ethos and shapes the identity of the researcher. This may be related to the different perceptions of freedom among teachers at public universities (the research was conducted at two public universities) and cases of its violation (Stachowiak-Kudła, 2023). On the other hand, the lower importance rating of values like selflessness, solidarity and courage is not surprising, as these values are more relevant to relationships in higher education institutions.

According to the study, dignity-based management practices appeared only occasionally in the respondents' opinions. The high importance rating of most of the values asked about in the survey was not reflected in their perception of management practices. There was also a small but noticeable difference in the perception of dignity-based management practices by the surveyed university employees depending on their academic degree. They were observed more often by independent academic staff (habilitated doctors and professors) than by non-independent staff. The higher the academic degree of the employees, the greater the frequency of management practices observed by them that took into account respect for the dignity and subjectivity of the employee. The study may therefore suggest that dignity is not sufficiently perceived in the academic environment as an unconditional, internal value – inherent to human beings and universal – but rather as a conditional and deserved value. This corresponds with the observation made by Pirson and his co-authors, who noted that dignity as a value has been 'significantly neglected in contemporary society, which focuses on market principles of organisation and management'. In organisations and society, the dominant organisational criterion is price, and anything that has no price is overlooked in decision-making processes. It is therefore likely that human dignity is consistently neglected because it has not been valued as an asset (Pirson, Piedmont, Nagy, Hicks, 2023, p. 98). However, one must agree with Pirson that dignity cannot be part of the logic of exchange (Pirson, 2017).

An unquestionable limitation of the study is the lack of representativeness of the sample and the research method used. Despite its many advantages (including time savings and the wide range of data that can be obtained), surveying does not allow for a deeper analysis of the broader context of the issues described. However, the opinions obtained should be considered valuable, as the structure of the respondents in terms of their academic degree/title (or lack thereof) was consistent with the structure of academic teachers employed in higher education institutions in Poland, which allowed for certain generalisations to be made.

7. Conclusions

The research objective outlined at the beginning of this study has been achieved. Answers to the research questions have also been obtained. Based on the analysis of the results, it should be concluded that, in the opinion of the surveyed university employees, the values of greatest importance in the implementation of the university's mission were truth, honesty, reliability and credibility, while the least important were selflessness, courage and solidarity. The results obtained indicated a diversity of responses depending on the title/academic degree of the surveyed university employees, both in terms of the values included in the ethos and in terms of the perceived level of implementation of dignity-based management practices.

The high rating of values by respondents indicates that they have expectations regarding ethos-related values, which they would like to see implemented. Thus, the problem likely lies in developing adequate organisational conditions that respect the dignity of employees and are permanently built into the mechanisms by which higher education institutions function as an organisational resource. These conditions would be conducive to strengthening the ethical attitudes and behaviour of academic staff. It would be interesting to examine them in detail, for which qualitative research methods such as individual interviews could be used. Based on the analysis, other areas of research could also be identified, such as the identification of ethos-related values desired, for example, in the digital university model. In this context, it would also be useful to explore the possibility of developing a new model framework that combines the issue of ethos with modern concepts of university management.

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