

# VALUE PREFERENCES AND FRUSTRATION IN THE WORKPLACE<sup>1</sup>

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## Abstract

A long-term personnel crisis, especially among nursing staff, has been tormenting the Czech healthcare sector despite the fact that average salaries are continuously increasing. Therefore, the financial remuneration factor is not decisive for employee retention. There are a number of other factors influencing the turnover rate, such as job satisfaction and the role of clarity although this paper deals with the influence of value preferences. The aim of the study was to map the value preferences of employees in two departments of a selected healthcare facility. Technical staff members work for the first department while the other department involved medical staff. The comparison also focused on the values that were attributed by the employees to the organisation. Furthermore, the extent of the value setting by managers reflected in their management style and how it affects the frustration of their subordinates was investigated. The data needed to evaluate the above-mentioned objectives was obtained through a questionnaire based on The Portrait Value Questionnaire. The data obtained was converted into comparable values and further evaluated through the calculation of mean values and correlation analysis. It was found in selected workplaces of the given organisation that the individual value settings of employees and their perception of organisational values do not match. Furthermore, the frustration experienced by staff in a given workplace is related to the management style of their superiors, which is affected by their value preferences. By identifying the value setting of employees and its alignment with the organisation, it is possible to better understand the internal environment of the organisation in connection with the effort to retain employees and with regard to their further motivation and achieving alignment with the values of the organisation.

**Keywords:** value preferences, frustration, employee retention, turnover, organisational values, HR management

**JEL Classification:** J53, Z13

## 1. Theoretical Background

Values constitute a central concept used to characterise cultural groups, societies and individuals and help to explain the basics of motivation that determines their attitudes and actions (Schwartz, 2012). People's values and activities provide psychological guidance, they serve to preserve and develop basic relationships between an individual and society (Výrost and Slaměnik, 2008). Values can stimulate a certain type of behaviour, act as an intermediary when interacting with an individual's social environment, regulate

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or adjust behaviour in accordance with moral and other factors, or represent the end result of various influences on an individual (Cakirpaloglu, 2004). Based on the possible consequences for their cherished values, people decide what is good or bad, justified or illegitimate, worth doing or avoiding. However, this usually only enters their awareness when the adopted view clashes with the values he or she cherishes (Schwartz, 2012).

Values also play an important role in an organisation. The values embodied by an organisation are of great importance to new job seekers. They tend to choose work that reflects values similar to their own value orientation (Judge and Bretz, 1992). Expressing the organisation's values is an important part of the process of socialisation, adaptation to new work, and the role an individual is to play in the organisation. Values convey information about expectations and formal and informal rules, linking the individual to a wider organisational context (Johnson and Jackson, 2009). Values also influence the way individuals perceive themselves and their organisation, a process closely related to unique personal experience (Harquail and King, 2010), and achieved through preferences determined by individual value settings.

The organisation's values convey signals to the employees of what is important for the organisation and serve as standards for assessing staff behaviour and the organisation's success. The organisation's set of values relate to employee self-esteem, ethical behaviour as well as workaholicism (Kang et al., 2017). The compatibility of the individual and the organisational values predetermines the commitment of employees, and it is the degree of commitment that is a key factor affecting future staff turnover (Amos and Weathington, 2008). If the values of an organisation are not in line with the motivation of its employees, they will have little influence on their attitudes and behaviour (Johnson and Jackson, 2009). The incompatibility of value systems is one of the conditions that can lead to conflicts in an organisation. Values within an organisation reflect the group's requirements for how they should be achieved (Výrost and Slaměník, 2008), and if these requirements are fundamentally inconsistent with an individual's value ranking, the relationship between the individual and the organisation is unlikely to be considered to be harmonious and fruitful in the long run.

As to the theory of organisational identity, there is a process of becoming identified with the organisation and its value system both from the top down – in terms of how an individual is influenced by the organisation through managers – and from the bottom up where an individual negotiates setting the limits between that individual and the organisation by means of the individual's mindset, experiencing and actions (Ashforth et al., 2008). If this delimitation is painful and mutually unacceptable, there will be an impasse where one, the other, or both sides conclude that a prolonged struggle is not for the benefit of either.

In his theory of values, Schwartz (2012) distinguishes ten basic personal values (Self-Direction, Stimulation, Hedonism, Achievement, Power, Security, Conformity, Tradition, Benevolence and Universalism), which are universal for all individuals across cultures, suggesting that the motivation for human behaviour is based on a universal arrangement. Values as guiding principles in an individual's life form the basis of attitudes, which is how an individual makes evaluations. What is in line with or helps to achieve the goals the individual seeks to achieve, is positively viewed. Factors that threaten or hinder these goals are then regarded negatively. This aspect can also be applied within the organisation and is what this study is based on in the practical part.

The aim of the study is to identify the value preferences of employees in two departments of a selected health facility, to measure the level of frustration resulting from their perception of the organisation that employs them or, in other words, the discrepancy of their value systems. Failure to satisfy the needs of employees stemming from inappropriate or inadequate management styles can create long-term frustration associated with tendencies to leave the organisation.

To better understand the role of values in this process, it is necessary to realize that one of their most important characteristics is their motivational effect (Schwartz, 2012). An individual's hierarchy of values affects the choice of goals that the individual considers desirable, thus it activates and regulates the person's behaviour in order to achieve these goals. Therefore, values as sources of motivation also influence the work environment and represent "energetic forces that initiate work-related behaviour and determine its form, direction, intensity and duration" (Pinder, 2008, p. 11). The process of motivation thus depends on the needs and goals as the main sources of energy that are regulated by values, but even values themselves can generate the energy needed to perform the activities leading to fulfilling the goals.

The satisfaction of an individual's basic needs or, conversely, the frustration of not meeting these needs is related constructs that affect the well-being and mental health of individuals (Longo et al., 2016). However, frustration resulting from the dissatisfaction of needs has consequences other than the mere absence of their satisfaction and therefore, these are independent constructs (Bartholomew et al., 2011). At the same time, these needs act as motivators influencing the individual's preferences and experiences, the consequences of which manifest in the individual's well-being (Sheldon and Gunz, 2009). It has been proved that a threat to meeting an individual's needs is, among other things, predicted by exhaustion (Bartholomew et al., 2011). The purpose of this study, however, is to show the relationship between the level of value frustration as a result of misalignment between personal values and work conditions as these are affected by the style of management on the one hand, and the propensity to job-hopping on the other. It also deals with the relationship between the discrepancy in personal and organisational values and the tendencies for increased staff turnover.

The theoretical basis for addressing these goals is the self-determination theory (Deci and Ryan, 2000). From the point of view of the self-determination theory (SDT), it is people's needs that precisely determine one's further psychological development, integrity and well-being. According to the SDT, these basic needs include competence, autonomy and relatedness, and if these needs are not sufficiently met, motivation decreases and performance and well-being deteriorate. The need for autonomy is based on interest-motivated behaviour and integrated values. Individuals perceive their actions as an expression of themselves, and even if such actions are influenced by external sources, the individuals identify with these influences. The need for competence refers to a satisfactory interaction with the surroundings and the feeling of being able to demonstrate one's abilities. This need leads individuals to seek and actively overcome challenges that are consistent with their capabilities. The need for relatedness stems from people's integrative tendencies to be connected with others in order to exchange support, care and acceptance (Ryan and Deci, 2002).

These needs reflect people's natural and inherent tendencies for psychological growth and Deci and Ryan (1980) summarise them by the term intrinsic motivation.

Another pre-assumption of SDT is the innate process of psychological internalisation, the purpose of which is to receive and transform external stimuli to serve as motivational resources for self-development. This process is referred to as extrinsic motivation (Deci and Ryan, 1985) and manifests itself in three ways. External motivation leads to action because people feel forced to do so by external circumstances and want to avoid their negative consequences. Introjected motivation is another source of forced behaviour, but in this case, the predominating force is the need to protect oneself against negative emotions, such as guilt. Identified motivation releases the energy to behave on the basis of one's own beliefs that such behaviour is desirable and in accordance with one's values.

For example, if a physician attends voluntary training courses, this may be due to the need for further personal development (intrinsic motivation) or to the fear that non-attendance will jeopardize his/her further career (external motivation). Alternatively, he or she may feel that non-attendance would be an indication of a lack of solidarity with colleagues in the department (introjected motivation). If the physician does not enjoy participating in training courses very much but attends them because he/she considers them to be an integral part of his profession, which is an important part of his/her identity, it is an identified motivation, also closely related to one's hierarchy of values. This example clarifies that various forms of motivation can occur simultaneously, but I hope that it also implies the importance of autonomous forms of motivation, i.e. intrinsic and identified motivation.

A number of factors and events can be behind leaving an organisation. Among other things, it may be motivated by the insecurity that an individual experiences at work. The reason why an employee feels insecure about his/her place in the organisation is a question that can be viewed both in terms of external factors and factors based on internal motives motivated by the individual settings of the individual. In any case, this uncertainty can be seen as a demotivating factor endangering the person's needs, which may compromise his or her functioning (Vander Elst et al., 2012) and as a trigger for responses affecting one's attitudes towards the job and the employer and, in the long run, even health and work-related behaviour (Sverke et al., 2002). I believe that perceived problems in the area of identified motivation, i.e. when people feel that they cannot meet their values in the given environment, may become a source of frustration that can lead to a tendency to escape from this situation, which, in a working environment, manifests as a tendency toward leaving the organisation.

It has been proven that if the employees' value setting is in line with the values of the organisation, the employees feel more satisfied with their work, are more committed to it and tend to remain in the organisation (Verquer et al., 2003). It has also been shown that value congruence has a greater impact on an organisation's outcomes than merely meeting people's psychological needs (Edwards and Cable, 2009). The question remains of what level of (dis)satisfaction has a more significant effect on the organisation's staff members and which of the two is stronger? Does the propensity to job turnover impact the misalignment on the organisation's level more than the frustration resulting from the subjective negative feelings about the style of management inducing the work conditions, which are so difficult for an individual to identify with? The purpose of this study is to determine which of the two levels of value misalignment directly impacts the degree of job turnover.

The study raises the following research questions:

- **RQ 1:** How do selected departments perceive the organisation in terms of values, and what is the difference between these departments in terms of individual settings?
- **RQ 2:** What is the relationship between the discrepancy in personal and organisational values and the tendency to leave the organisation?
- **RQ 3:** What is the relationship between the level of frustration of values due to leadership style and the tendency to leave the organisation?

## 2. Methodology and Data

Data necessary for the analysis of the above-mentioned research areas was obtained through a questionnaire survey based on the Schwartz Portrait Value Questionnaire (PVQ). This type of questionnaire was originally developed for respondents who are not capable of abstract thinking outside the context. PVQ consists of short characteristics (portraits) of people who describe individual goals, aspirations or wishes that indirectly reflect the importance of the selected value. “He (she) takes into account the needs of other people” is, for example, a description of a person inclined to the value of benevolence. Respondents compare themselves with these portraits on a scale from “not at all like me” up to “completely like me”, thus identifying the degree of their inclination towards a given value and not deviating from the relevant aspects related to that value.

The questionnaire was used to determine the value settings of the managers and general staff of two departments of a Czech medical facility. The first sample were employees of the Operational and Technical department with a total of 313 people and the second was a department comprising mostly medical staff, with a total of 202 employees. The research also examined how all respondents perceive the value setting of the organisation as such. In other words, how they perceive values embodied by the organisation. The research aimed to answer whether or not there is consistency between the staff and the organisation in value setting. For the first department, there were 63 respondents (i.e. 20.13% of the participants) and for the second unit, there were 62 respondents (i.e. 30.69% of the participants).

In addition to the differences in personal value settings prevailing among workers in both workplaces and their perception of the organisation’s value settings, the research also explored how the value preferences of executives translate into their management style and how this is related to the degree of frustration of their subordinates and turnover tendencies.

A specific form of questions to identify the degree of frustration in terms of values was based on the inverted version of Schwartz’s questionnaire of value portraits: a statement for each investigated value was formulated to characterise the employee’s motivation leading to frustration and disappointment based on the situation that represents a threat to the preferred value and that is, for the sake of conciseness, called “the disloyalty equivalent”. If, for example, the value of security in the case of individual value hierarchy is characterised by the statement “It is important for him/her to live in a secure environment. He/she avoids anything that might endanger his/her safety”, then for organisational values this is translated as “For this organisation, it is important that

everything functions properly, and nothing endangers this situation". When examining the level of frustration with the organisation, the statement "In this organisation, there is confusion in everything, nobody has any idea what other people are doing".

Each of the 10 Schwartz values was represented by two items, to which respondents assigned individual weight through a six-point scale: 1 – not at all like me, 2 – very unlike me, 3 – rather unlike me, 4 – more like me, 5 – very similar to me, 6 – absolutely similar to me. In the case of organisation evaluation then 1 – not at all like this organisation 2 – not very similar to this organisation, 3 – rather unsimilar to this organisation, 4 – rather similar to this organisation, 5 – very similar to this organisation, 6 – totally similar to this organisation.

The obtained data was further corrected by converting it into comparable values according to Schwartz's recommendation by subtracting the average value over each respondent's response to the value attributed to each item to offset the differences in the individual settings of the overall response rate across the scale.

The staff turnover tendencies were investigated through an additional question of whether employees had ever seriously considered leaving the organisation and could choose one of the answers: a. I haven't thought about it yet; b. Yes, I have thought about it a few times; c. Yes, I have been thinking about it for a long time; d. Yes, I have been thinking about it very intensively lately; e. Yes, I am taking concrete steps in this matter.

Furthermore, the data was analysed using standard statistical methods, namely the calculation of mean values (mean) and correlation analysis.

### 3. Results

**RQ1:** How do selected departments perceive the organisation in terms of values, and what is the difference between these departments in terms of individual settings?

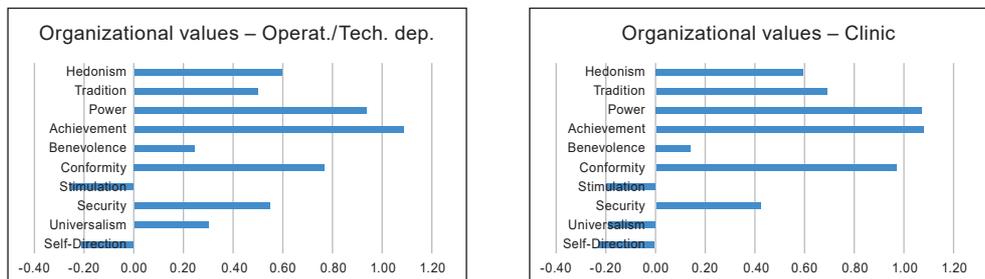
Table 1 and Figure 1 show that both sites perceive the organisation as a recognized and influential institution (Power – Operational and Technical Department 0.94; Clinic 1.09) that can demonstrate its expertise to the public (Achievement – Operational and Technical Department 1.09; Clinic 1.09) and, at the same time, has a great need to prevent any tendencies to disrupt smooth interaction and its functioning (Conformity – Operational and Technical Department 0.77; Clinic 0.98). They also consider it be a conservative organisation that avoids unusual situations (Tradition and Security – Operational and Technical Department values of 0.50 and 0.55; Clinic 0.70 and 0.43). However, according to both workplaces, the organisation does not care much about the well-being of its employees or its surroundings (Benevolence and Universalism – Operational and Technical Department 0.25 and 0.30; Clinic 0.14 and -0.19), lacking the possibility of self-direction or autonomy (Operational and Technical Department -0.21; Clinic -0.23) and Stimulation (Operational and Technical Department -0.25; Clinic -0.20).

**Table 1 | Means for individual and organisational values after correction – Taking into account the average of all answers**

Value	Operational and Technical department		Clinic	
	Individual	Organisation	Individual	Organisation
Self-Direction	0.30	-0.21	0.37	-0.23
Universalism	1.17	0.30	1.18	-0.19
Security	1.37	0.55	1.09	0.43
Stimulation	0.21	-0.25	0.33	-0.20
Conformity	0.96	0.77	0.73	0.98
Benevolence	0.98	0.25	1.27	0.14
Achievement	0.53	1.09	0.50	1.09
Power	0.51	0.94	0.26	1.09
Tradition	0.37	0.50	0.24	0.70
Hedonism	0.94	0.60	1.15	0.60

Source: Author’s own processing

**Figure 1 | Graphs for organisational values**



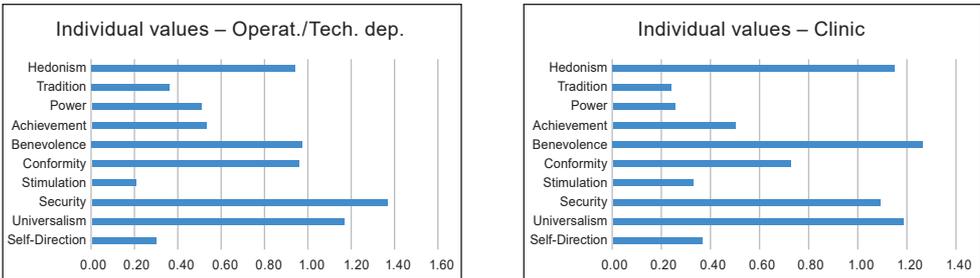
Source: Author’s own processing

Concerning demographic variables, the Operational and Technical department is predominated by men (68.3%) over the age of 50 (47.6%) with secondary (34.9%) or higher (college) (28.6%) education related to the job in the organisation where they had been employed for more than 3 years (73%). In terms of values, they are individuals for whom a sense of security, stability and need for a safe place are important (Safety value 1.37). Values they find important are appreciation, fairness and protection of well-being as such (the value of Universalism 1.17), but also being helpful and the need for the smooth functioning of the group they belong to (the value of Benevolence 0.98). On the contrary, they do not seek unusual excitement and challenges in their lives (value of Stimulation is 0.21; see Figure 2).

On the contrary, the workforce of the Clinic is predominated by women (85.5%) between the ages of 30 and 50 (56.5%) with a university degree (88.7%) related to the profession they have been practising at the Clinic for 3 years or more (62.9%). These are individuals for whom kindness, utility (value of Benevolence 1.27), understanding and protection of people and nature (value of Universalism 1.18) are very important.

They attribute the least importance in their lives to the values associated with the demonstration of authority, wealth, social power (the value of Power 0.26) and susceptibility to outdated expectations of the surroundings (the value of Tradition 0.24; see Figure 2).

**Figure 2 | Graphs for individual values**

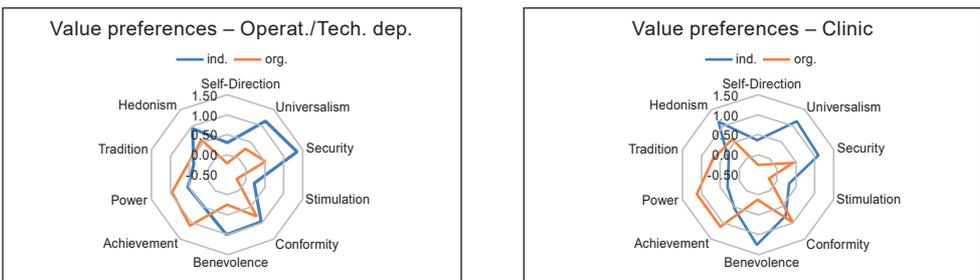


Source: Author's own processing

**RQ2:** What is the relationship between the discrepancy in personal and organisational values and the tendency to leave the organisation?

A weak correlation with personal values (correlation coefficient of 0.28 in the Operational and Technical department and -0.23 in the Clinic) suggests that at both workplaces there is a discrepancy between how the employees perceive the organisation and how they wish it functioned so that they could feel deeper harmony with their own value settings (see Figure 3).

**Figure 3 | Spider graphs for individual and organisational values after correction**



Source: Author's own processing

In terms of mapping staff turnover tendencies, it has been found that the group of respondents from the Operational and Technical department, who had never considered leaving the organisation (42), achieved the highest correlation between personal and organisational values (0.46). A group of respondents who had already considered leaving (13) showed a lower correlation rate (-0.13). The conclusion that a discrepancy in value settings is correlated with staff turnover tendencies is confirmed by the third group of respondents who had been considering leaving for a long time (7).

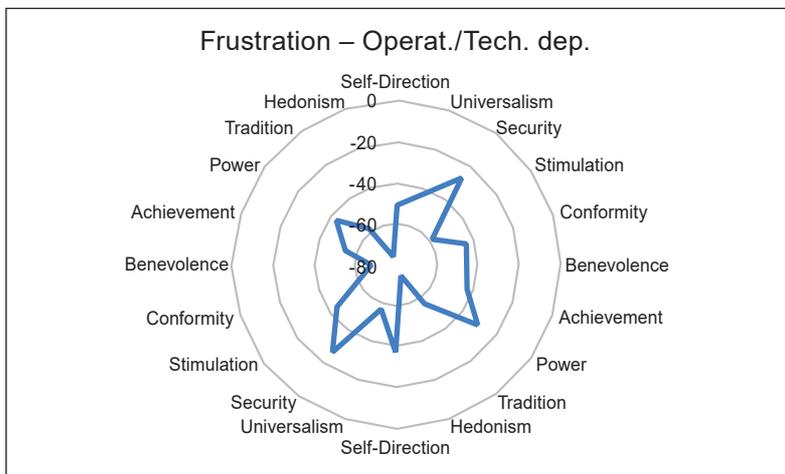
The correlation value for this group was 0.49. The only respondent who reported taking specific steps to leave the organisation at the time of the survey showed a correlation rate of 0.23.

At the Clinic, 23 respondents had never considered leaving the organisation. In their case, a correlation between individual and organisational values was achieved (-0.01). The largest group of respondents (35) who had considered leaving the organisation a few times, had a weaker negative correlation rate (-0.31). The last group of respondents, who had been considering leaving for a long time, showed a correlation rate of -0.38.

**RQ3:** What is the relationship between the level of frustration of values due to leadership style and the tendency to leave the organisation?

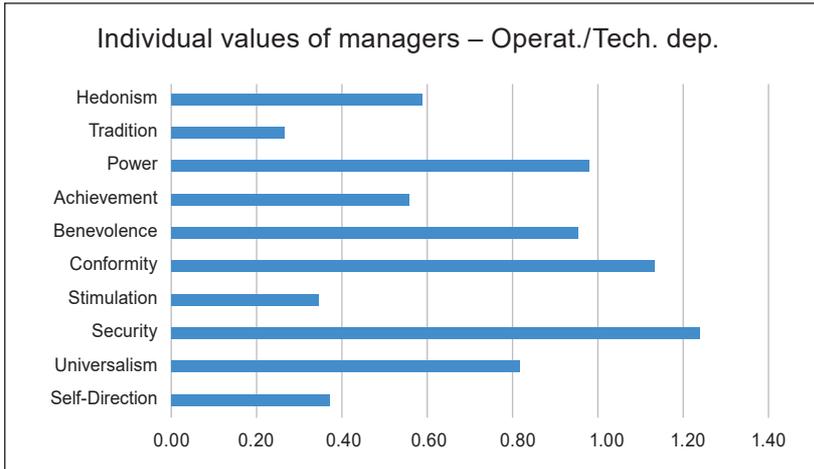
When mapping the frustration rate, it was found that in the Operational and Technical department, frustration is primarily related to the value of Security (*In this organisation, one can never be sure of anything*, and *In this organisation, there is confusion in everything, nobody has any idea what other people are doing*) and Power (*In this organisation, important things are often decided by incompetent people*). At the same time, it was found that Security and Power occupied the first places in the value setting of the superiors in this department (see Figure 4 and Figure 5). The degree of correlation between the personal values of general staff and the personal values of their superiors was 0.65, so it cannot be said that they were completely different types of people.

**Figure 4 | Spider graph for frustration – Operat./Tech. departments**



Source: Author's own processing

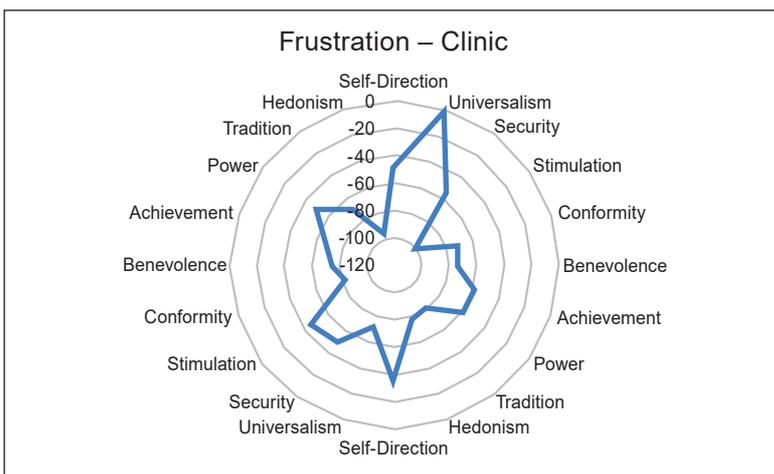
**Figure 5 | Graph for individual values of managers – Operational and Technical departments**



Source: Author's own processing

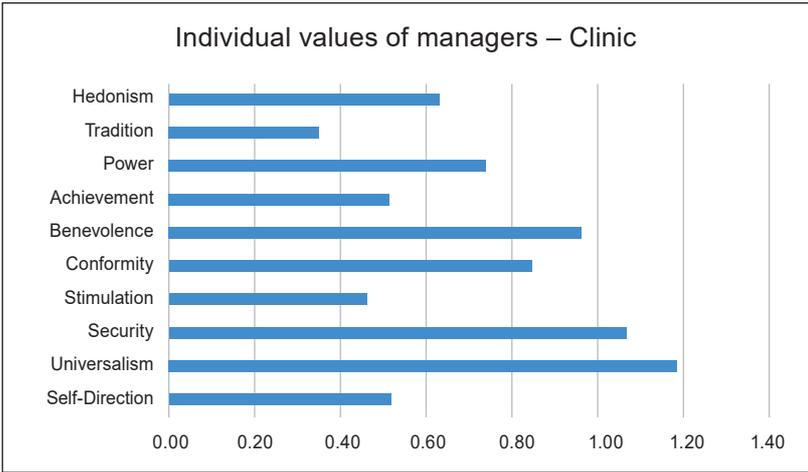
The relationship between the level of frustration associated with specific values and the value setting of superiors was also found in the second department. The highest level of frustration was unambiguously tied to the value of Universalism (*This organisation does not behave ecologically*) and at a great distance to other values. At the same time, the value of Universalism ranked first in the ranking of the managers of this department (see Figure 6 and Figure 7). The degree of correlation at this department between the personal values of general staff and the personal values of their superiors was 0.73, so it can be said that people working in this workplace represent similar types, which is probably explained by their education and professional orientation.

**Figure 6 | Spider graph for frustration – Clinic**



Source: Author's own processing

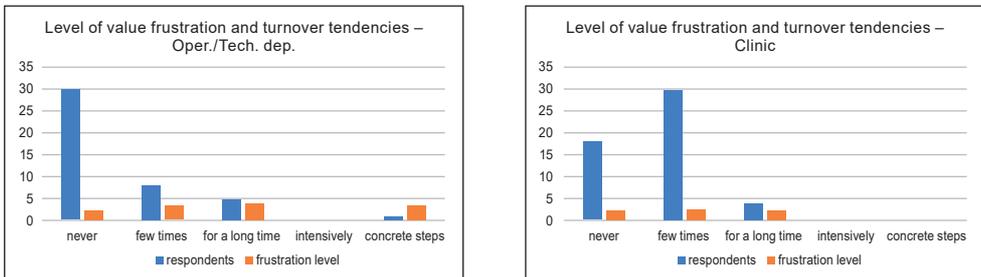
**Figure 7 | Graph for individual values of managers – Clinic**



Source: Author’s own processing

Another aim of this study was to establish a link between the level of value frustration and turnover tendencies. In the Operational and Technical Department (see Figure 8), the highest proportion among ordinary workers was by the group of respondents who had not yet considered leaving (30), who also showed the lowest level of frustration (-1.54). In second place was the group of respondents who had thought of it a few times (8). The level of frustration found in this group was slightly higher (-1.51). Respondents who had been considering leaving for a long time (5) also declared the highest level of frustration (0.02). No respondent declared considering leaving the organisation very intensively although one respondent is taking concrete steps in the matter of leaving. A frustration rate of -0.16 was found in his case. Negative values were achieved by correcting data according to Schwartz’s recommendation – the average value calculated across all respondent responses was deducted from the value attributed to each item on the Likert scale to compensate for offsetting differences in individual response rate settings. The uncorrected values correspond to positive 1–6 values within the scale. For the sake of clarity of the graphic processing, the values were kept before the correction.

**Figure 8 | Graph for turnover and frustration – Before correction**



Source: Author’s own processing

In the second workplace (see Figure 8), the group of respondents with the highest representation were those who had considered leaving a few times (30), who also showed the highest level of frustration (-1.12) and correlation of individual values with an organisational value orientation of 0.01. In second place was the group of respondents who had not considered leaving (18) with the lowest level of frustration (-1.41) and the correlation of personal values with the values of the organisation scored at -0.22. Respondents who had been considering leaving for a long time (4) declared a medium rate of frustration (-1.27). In terms of the correlation between personal values and organisational values, the value of -0.38 was achieved. No respondent fell into those groups with an increased tendency to leave the organisation.

#### **4. Research Limitations**

A certain limitation to the research could be seen in that it was not differentiated whether respondents reflect their view of the organisation as a whole or, due to its size, include only their workplace in their evaluation of the organisation.

Another limiting factor may be the relevance of the responses obtained, depending on the actual mental or physical condition of respondents related to their activities outside the organisation, their health, personality type, etc. These factors have not been subject to research, yet they can influence the answers significantly.

An application of qualitative methods making it possible to better understand what each value means for whom and what behaviour they cause in specific situations would also contribute to better understanding.

Parts of the questionnaire focusing on organisations and the level of perceived frustration have not yet been validated and their relevance will need to be reviewed and confirmed in the future. The results obtained relate to one specific facility that does not represent the population as a whole nor can it be generalised to other facilities.

#### **Conclusions**

This study, which sought to answer research questions about the importance of value congruence between an organisation and its members, related turnover tendencies and the rate of value frustration due to leadership style, identified a number of interesting connections. In two selected departments of a Czech health facility, it was proven that the specific value setting of individuals is linked to the tendency to choose a job that corresponds to this setting by its nature. Another finding was that regardless of the individual value setting and the different nature of the work performed, the organisation, in terms of the values it embodies, can be perceived by its members very similarly. This is true even if there is no value congruence between individuals and the organisation.

Furthermore, it has been proven that there is a link between a discrepancy in individual and organisational values and turnover tendencies. In terms of values, respondents with the lowest declared tendency to leave were more in agreement with the organisation than respondents with a higher tendency to leave the organisation.

A link between the level of the frustration of values due to leadership style and the turnover tendency was also confirmed. In terms of frustration, general staff in both departments showed the highest sensitivity to situations negatively depicting the values

that occupy the highest ranks in the ranking of their superiors. This has been proven despite the finding that the ordinary workers and their superiors did not represent entirely different types and there were similarities in their value settings. In terms of tendencies towards leaving the organisation, the first department showed a direct link to the level of perceived value frustration. In the case of the second department, the same clear result was not achieved, but it was also confirmed that the group of respondents who had not considered leaving the organisation showed the lowest level of frustration.

Although there are theories that good leaders motivate and inspire unprecedented performance, while the poor ones can, in various ways, hinder the achievement of expected and desired organisational and individual outcomes (e.g. by undermining subordinates' self-esteem, causing psychological or physical harm, favouritism causing divisions within working groups, etc.) (Pelletier, 2010), the aim of this study is not to downplay the sphere under consideration by stating that everything is based on who manages the staff at the particular moment and what management style they practice. Leadership and routine in an organisation go beyond the actions of individuals who are in a position to exercise influence over others. Leadership is a dynamic process co-created by executives, their subordinates, as well as the place and time which they are together. Even so-called destructive leadership can be described as a group process in which insufficient, toxic or inefficient leadership and easily influenced subordinates are involved, who are together in space and time that supports such a setting (Thoroughgood et al., 2018). At least partial knowledge and insight into the nature of some aspects of this process can significantly influence its further form and direction. The use of value theory and value congruence can then be one of the many ways to approach this goal.

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