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**Consequences of compatibility level between  
employee and supervisor characteristics:  
recommendations for HRM**

Konsekwencje poziomu zgodności między cechami pracownika i przełożonego:  
rekomendacje dla zarządzania zasobami ludzkimi

**Doctoral dissertation  
in the field of Management and Quality Studies**

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# Table of Contents

Introduction .....	2
Key terms .....	3
Dissertation Structure .....	5
Summary of Findings .....	7
PS fit in terms of Working Style and Need for Dominance dimension .....	7
PS fit in terms of demographic characteristics .....	11
Research limitation, directions for future research and recommendations for HRM .....	13

## Introduction

Being misfitted at work has several negative consequences for both the employee and the organization, which is why it has been the subject of scientific research for years. Five types of fit between person and: vocation [PV], job [PJ], organization [PO], group [PG], supervisor [PS] are examined.

Although the role of managers is unquestionable, the compatibility between **employee** and **boss** characteristics, called **Person-Supervisor Fit [PS fit]**, is the least studied in the literature. In an extensive review of 172 studies<sup>1</sup>, PO fit was estimated in 64%, PJ in 36%, PG in 12% and PS in 10%<sup>2</sup>. If we compare the number of publications on the general PE (person–environment) fit in the SCOPUS database in 2000 to 2020, we will notice an increase of 95% (from 1671 to 3262). In the case of the PS fit, the increase is almost 150% (from 830 to 2074).

The PS fit is an important research topic because various data confirm that destructive leadership affects employee behavior in many negative ways. Despite the steadily increasing financial investments in improving the quality of management (e.g. an increase of 14% in the USA per year<sup>3</sup>), employees often leave their jobs because their supervisors' misbehavior.

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<sup>1</sup> Kristof-Brown, Zimmerman, Johnson, 2005

<sup>2</sup> Sum of percentages exceeds 100% because some studies tested more than one type of fit.

<sup>3</sup> Meinert, 2014

Therefore, the objective of the dissertation is to deepen HRM knowledge about the **risks associated with the incompatibility** of the boss and employee characteristics.

The dis/similarity of the boss and the employee characteristics can be studied at different levels. The literature distinguishes between **surface-level** characteristics, such as age and gender, which are identified automatically at a glance, and **deep-level** personality traits, which require longer interaction to detect. For the empirical analysis, there were selected two surface-level characteristics: age and gender, and two deep-level traits: working style and need for dominance.

## Key terms

The list of 9 key terms used in the dissertation includes:

1. From the topic of the dissertation point of view the differences between **leadership** and **management** are not relevant, so the terms: **leader, manager, supervisor, superior, and boss** are used interchangeably. Analogically, the terms: **subordinate, employee, person, and team member** are used interchangeably, too.
2. **Relational satisfaction** – is the subjective employees' evaluation of their relationship with supervisor.
3. Five types of fits: person-vocation [**PV**], person-job [**PJ**], person-organization [**PO**], person-group [**PG**], person-supervisor [**PS**].
4. **PS fit - Person-supervisor fit** means the degree of compatibility between employee and their boss characteristics.
5. **Supplementary vs. complementary PO fit**. When examining the fit between an **employee** and an **organization** (i.e. two entities of a completely different nature), we can distinguish **SUPPLEMENTARY** fit [when an employee and an organization have similar and matching attributes] or **COMPLEMENTARY** fit [when the characteristics of a person or an organization meet each other's needs].
6. The **degree of similarity** and the **degree of PS fit**. Analyzing the fit between two persons: an employee and a supervisor, we can find out their **similarity** (e.g. they both love detailed procedures), which can turn out to be a **supplementary** fit or their **dissimilarity** (one person sees the tree, the other sees the forest), which may turn out to be a **complementary** fit when they work together. In other words, people who are

**similar** to each other may or may not fit each other in a **supplementary way**. People who **differ** from each other may or may not fit each other in a **complementary way**.

7. **SSA** - [Sondaż Stylów Aktywności] is an on-line version of the ISA [Inwentarz Stylów Aktywności] developed in 1994<sup>4</sup> to measure individual preferences for goal setting and planning strategies at work. SSA has been used and validated in many research projects. The SSA consists of several blocks of questions (scales). The blocks of questions used to build indicators of different constructs like POINT vs. INTERVAL working style, temperament, psychological needs (affiliation, dominance, achievements), emotional balance at work and in leisure time, etc., must form a unifactorial solution in principal component analysis.
8. The **need for dominance** is defined as the need to dominate, direct, or otherwise control other people. People with a strong need for dominance feel good in a superior position and do not like it very much when someone imposes their opinion on them (strong social reactance). People with a weak need for dominance feel good when someone else takes responsibility for group activities. The need for dominance is measured by the questions contained on two scales of the SSA.
9. POINT vs. INTERVAL **working style** is the preferred cognitive-behavioral activity strategy for tasks planning and execution at work. The INTERVAL working strategy is associated with imprecise goals settings and ways of achieving them, starting an action without planning, and switching between different tasks. The opposite is the POINT working strategy, which is characterized by high precision focus, precise planning, and sequential, methodical way of tasks execution. When employees keep changing the POINT and INTERVAL strategies depending on the type of a task, we can talk about functional flexibility. Most of the people are losing flexibility and prefer to use POINT or INTERVAL strategies in almost all settings, so that we can talk about **working style**. The impact of working style can be seen when the employee has high autonomy [high freedom in the way of task execution] at work. The working style is measured by questions contained on three scales of the SSA.

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<sup>4</sup> Wiczorkowska 1992-2022

# Dissertation Structure

The empirical dissertation contains of 4 chapters and the Appendix.

**Chapter 1**, titled '**Literature review for hypotheses development**' is organized in 6 sections of different length, because their volume was determined by the number of research that have been identified.

In the third decade of the twenty-first century, when the number of publications on any topic is growing exponentially, a difficult decision was made to focus the literature review on the classic theory of the person-supervisor fit (PS fit) with particular emphasis on two surface-level characteristics (age, gender) and two deep-level ones (need for dominance, working style).

The most influential works on the theoretical model I tested empirically were (in alphabetical order): Byrne (1971), Czarnota-Bojarska (2010, 2016), Edwards (1990, 1991), Glomb & Welsh (2005), Grzelak (2001-2009), Karczewski (2019, 2022), Kristof-Brown (2005-2017), Muchinsky & Monahan (1987), Peltokangas (2014), Pietrzak (2020), Schein (2004), Schneider (1987, 1995), van Vianen (2000-2018), Wieczorkowska (1992-2022), Wojtczuk-Turek (2013, 2018). A full list of the bibliographic items used in the dissertation can be found in the 'References' section.

**Section 1**, titled '**FIT Types**', addresses the problem of Person-Supervisor [PS] fit in the context of other types of fit. This section discusses the ASA model that predicts homophilia (attraction to similar people) and the concept of complementarity-supplementarity in the context of the PS fit. The chapter ends with the justification for the selection of 4 characteristics to analyze PS fit.

**Section 2**, titled '**PS fit in the Working Style dimension**', discusses Wieczorkowska's intervality theory. A review of the literature shows that there is almost no research on the consequences of the lack of compatibility of working style, although one can hear many stories on conflicts aroused on the basis of lack of fit in this dimension. Lack of the empirical studies can be considered as an identified research gap.

The section ends with justification of the hypothesis of supplementary **PS fit in the working style** dimension, which is tested in the empirical part.

**Section 3**, titled '**PS fit in the Need for Dominance dimension**', presents McClelland's, Grzelak's, and Leary's theoretical models. A review of the literature shows not so much research on the consequences of similarity or dissimilarity in the Need for Dominance

dimension, although all agree that many organizational conflicts are based on the fight for power. The empirical evidence regarding type of fit in the Need for Dominance is mixed - so the lack of agreement has been identified as a second research gap. The section ends with justification of the hypothesis of **complementary PS fit in the Need for Dominance dimension**, which was tested in the empirical part.

**Section 4**, titled '**PS compatibility in demographic characteristics**', presents the literature review on PS fit on 2 surface-level characteristics: gender and age. Preferences for the gender and age of supervisor are often examined in large surveys at the level of declarations. The literature shows that preferences inferred from choices may contradict those declared (e.g. experimental studies<sup>5</sup> have shown that younger men are more often invited to a job interview than older ones, even if they have the same qualifications).

The section concludes by advocating the use of an experimental method to investigate preferences for similarity between demographic characteristics of employees and their supervisors. The section ends with justification of the hypotheses on supplementary **PS fit regarding gender and complementary PS fit regarding age**, which were tested in the empirical part.

**Section 5**, titled '**Job satisfaction, relational satisfaction, emotional balance**', briefly discusses different operational definitions of the variables that determine the emotional-motivational state of employees (to what extent are they satisfied, stressed, willing to leave) and their correlates.

**Section 6**, titled '**Selected Findings on PS Compatibility**', presents the results of a literature review of research on the implications between employee and supervisor compatibility levels. The effects of employee and boss similarities and differences on selected dimensions are also discussed.

**Chapter 2**, titled '**The methods and the objectives**', presents the methodological paradigm 'WiW' used in the dissertation.

It includes a description of the samples, procedures, and operationalization of the variables. Chapter 2 concludes by identifying the objectives of dissertation and research tasks.

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<sup>5</sup> Bigoness, 1976

**Chapter 3**, titled ‘**Results**’, contains analyses of data from **6 studies** in which a total of **1579 employees** and **561 students** (own research) and more than **43,000 employees** participated (pre-existing data).

**Chapter 4**, titled ‘**Summary**’, contains a discussion of the results of the 6 studies, limitations, directions for further research, and recommendations for HRM.

In the Appendix there are supplementary materials that are not necessary to track the course of the argumentation but are necessary for those who would like to learn about the distributions of variables, details of the analyses carried out, or to replicate the analyses carried out on other data (detailed description of research procedures).

## **Summary of Findings**

### **PS fit in terms of Working Style and Need for Dominance dimension**

**Research task #1** investigated the relationship between relational satisfaction and emotional balance, job satisfaction, and employee health. For this purpose, data from the own studies (MTurk and SSA20) and pre-existing data from the European Working Conditions Survey – EWCS were analyzed. The relationships predicted in the hypothesis: <The higher the relational satisfaction, the better the emotional balance at work, the higher job satisfaction and the higher employee's self-assessment of health> - was confirmed by analyses on 3 different data sets (data triangulation) and different operationalizations of variables (triangulation of methods). However, it should be remembered that from correlation coefficients, it is impossible to infer a causal relationship. For example, healthier employees could appreciate everything, including their relationship with the supervisor. Against such an interpretation speaks of an insignificant relationship between relational satisfaction and emotional balance in free time shown in SSA20.

The biggest challenge in PS fit is the measurement between the compatibility level between a boss and an employee. Results of the first study, in which American employees described both themselves and their boss, showed the weakness of such an operationalization of the fit due to the very high correlation between self-description and description of a boss. With such operationalization, we do not know to what extent the evaluation of the boss' need for dominance is a projection of employee's need and to what extent an accurate estimation of boss's need. To avoid this problem in next studies, we asked employees to rate only themselves

and tell us their opinions of the target descriptions of different bosses (e.g. DOMINANT vs. AFFILIATIVE (nondominant) supervisor.

**Hypothesis H2** predicts a supplementary PS fit in the working style dimension. **POINT** employees prefer working with **POINT** boss and have **stronger preferences** than **INTERVAL** employees. **H2** has been confirmed in **3 studies**.

	POINT supervisor	INTERVAL supervisor
POINT employee	Fit	Misfit
INTERVAL employee	Misfit	Fit

Table 1 Graphical presentation of the hypothesis H2: Person-Supervisor Working Style (In)compatibility Matrix.

If we compare the results from the employee and student surveys (see the figure below), then we will notice the following differences:

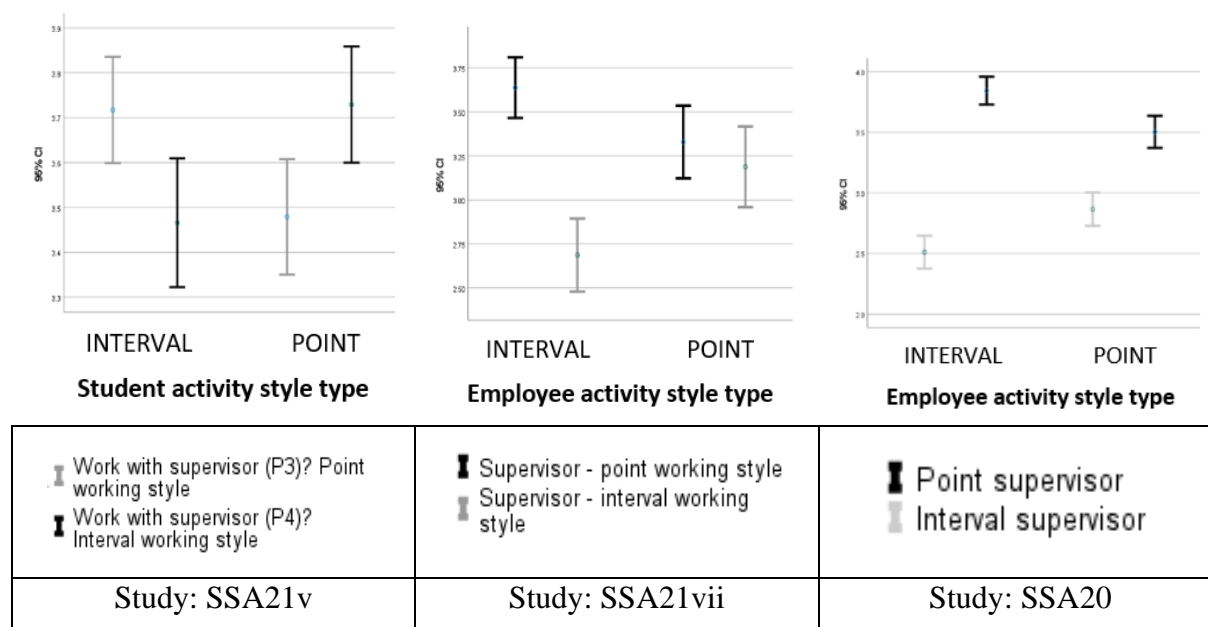


Table 2 Comparison of willingness to work with depending on EMPLOYEE'S and SUPERVISOR'S working style in study SSA21v, SSA21vii, and SSA20

Students' preferences regarding the supervisor's working style are much weaker (and the higher number of Don't know=Difficult to say answer) than the preferences of employees. This is easy



to understand if you consider that the student's dependence on their supervisor is much lower than the employee's dependence on the boss. The supervisor can be changed; the relationship with him is very limited in time.

In the group of students, you can see a full supplementary fit – preferences for working with the 'similar' type have both POINT and INTERVAL students. In one study, regarding employees, preferences of INTERVAL employees do not differentiate between the two types of supervisors, in the other, preferences are much weaker than those regarding POINT persons.

It can be said that POINT employees clearly prefer not to work with an INTERVAL supervisor. This is consistent with the hypothesis of bigger flexibility of INTERVAL persons. Similar results were obtained in other studies<sup>6</sup>: in the experimental study POINT persons chose POINT partners, regardless of the nature of the activity (work or play). Whereas INTERVAL persons showed bigger flexibility of preference. For work, they chose INTERVAL partners, while for play, they chose less INTERVAL ones.

In carrying out **task #2**, the hypothesis that predicts the **complementary fit on the dimension of need for dominance** was tested. According to Fritz Heider and Timothy Leary, relational harmony occurs when one person is more dominant and the other more submissive, so we expected bigger relational satisfaction while supervisors and employees differ in their Need for Dominance. Similarity in the Need for Dominance dimension can lead to a power struggle (in case of 2 dominant persons) or a reluctance to take control by either party (in case of 2 nondominant persons).

**Hypothesis H3** predicts a complementary PS fit in the Need for Dominance dimension. **Dominant employee prefers working with less dominant boss**, less dominant employee with more dominant boss. **H3** has been confirmed in **2 studies: SSA21v and SSA21vii**.

	Affiliative (nondominant) supervisor	Dominant supervisor
Nondominant employee	Misfit	Fit
Dominant employee	Fit	Misfit

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<sup>6</sup> Karczewski, 2022

Table 3 Graphical illustration of hypothesis H3: Person-Supervisor Need for Dominance (In)compatibility Matrix.

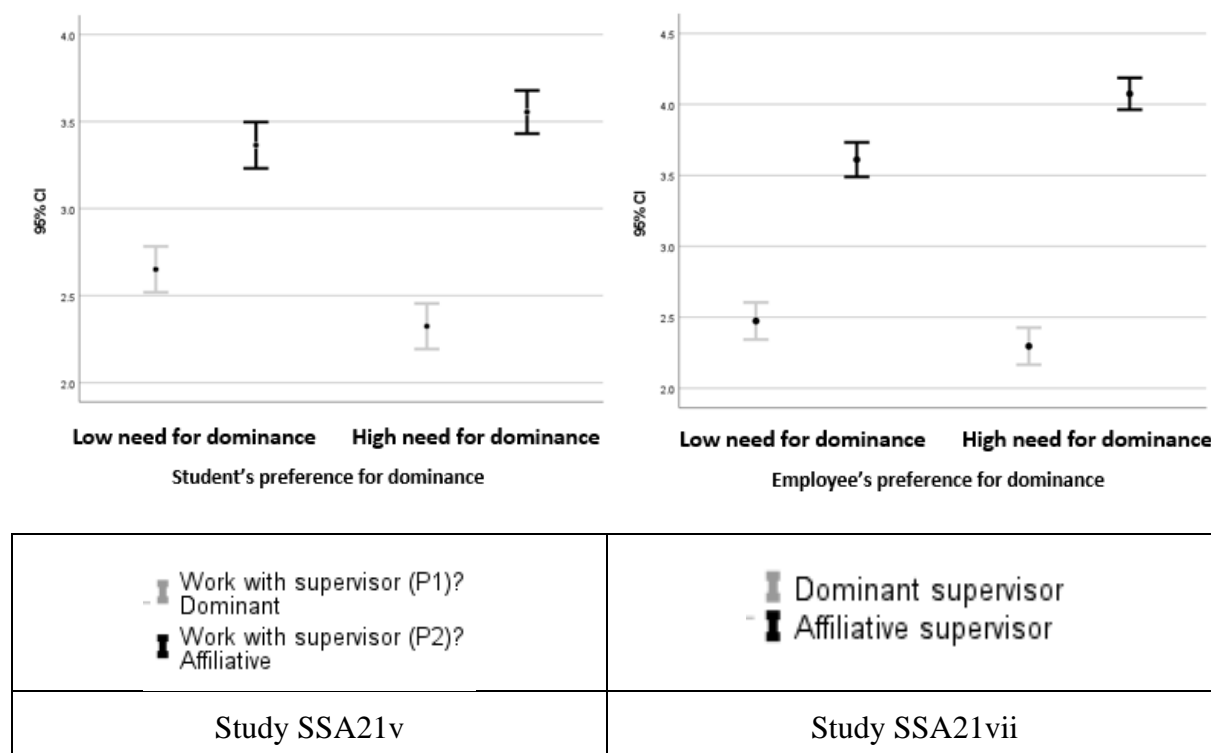


Figure 1 Graph comparison of Need for Dominance preferences in study SSA21vii and SSA21v

Other studies<sup>7</sup> have shown that a leader should have a higher level of Need for Dominance than the employee, because a higher level of preference for employee's Need for Dominance than a leader's may cause the leader to be perceived as weak and lower relational satisfaction. In my research, both employees and students 'rejected' the dominant leader – but the difference in preference for nondominant vs. dominant boss was significantly smaller in the nondominant employees/students group.

In a real situation in a particular company, the level of formalization of the decision-making process may not give employees the opportunity to really influence the situation around them.

A variable that should necessarily be investigated in further research is focus on performance.

With strong performance motivation, the issue of who dominates may recede into the background. A dominant and competent leader may be associated with higher relational

<sup>7</sup> Glomb & Welsh, 2005

satisfaction than a dominant and incompetent leader, but such a relationship cannot be detected by an 2x2 experimental research design in a *ceteris paribus* paradigm.

The results of the quantitative research were confirmed by the answers to open-ended questions given by students representing Generation Z. Some of them mentioned - to have a supervisor who will dominate, exercise control, set direction and set the pace of work. We can assume that they have a low Need for Dominance. Others wrote that, in their case, 'excessive control' from a supervisor would negatively affect their well-being at work and would have a negative impact on the evaluation of the relationship with the supervisor. We can assume that they have a rather high Need for Dominance. In both studies, both employees and students preferred to work with a nondominant boss, but the difference in preference was significantly greater in the dominant employee/student group than in nondominant group. This may imply that a strong need for dominance is an important dimension in evaluating others. Stronger rejection of dominant leaders is a signal of a potential need for power.

## **PS fit in terms of demographic characteristics**

**Research Task #3** was to examine PS fit regarding gender and age in an experimental study.

Two hypotheses were tested:

- H4a: The gender of a boss matters. Employees prefer to work with a boss of the same gender (supplementary fit).
- H4b: The age of a boss matters. Employees prefer someone older than them as their boss (complementary fit).

For this purpose, data from 3 own studies were analyzed: SSA20, SSA21i, SSA21v, and pre-existing dataset of European Working Condition Survey.

None of the 6 hypotheses was confirmed:

1. Higher relational satisfaction when working with the same-gender boss (supplementary fit).
2. The higher the gender egalitarianism in the country, the higher relational satisfaction with a female supervisor.
3. Relational satisfaction is higher when working with an older than a younger supervisor (complementary fit).

4. Respondents are more likely to prefer/choose an older than a younger team member as a leader (complementary fit).
5. Students prefer to work with an older than a younger supervisor (complementary fit).
6. Students prefer to work with a supervisor of the same gender (supplementary fit).

Congruent with reported<sup>8</sup> homophilia in friendship relationships, the supplementary gender PS fit hypothesis contradicts the survey data results showing an increase in the number of respondents claiming that the gender of the leader does not matter. This trend is the same in both Poland and the United States. Among those with a preference for the gender of the boss, 50% in the USA and 75% in Poland indicated a male. This percentage was confirmed in my research, in which we inferred preferences based not on declarations, but on leader choices.

Due to the fact that both variables: gender and psychological description of the TARGET PERSON were confounded, conclusion should be drawn with caution, because the potential leader 'Grzegorz' differed from the potential leader 'Justyna' not only in gender, but also in psychological characteristics.

The results of another study (SSA21v) showed that for its participants, the gender of the TARGET PERSON did not affect the chances of being selected as a leader. This is congruent with the free statements of the respondents participating in qualitative research that the gender of the boss they work with does not matter to them.

The problem of PS fit in age deserves further research. In the studies conducted, the manipulation of boss age was very rough. For students, both 40- and 60-year-old supervisors could be classified as old.

The complementary fit in the SSA20 study was operationalized as 'boss older than the employee', whereas a management problem could arise when 'boss much younger than the employee'.

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<sup>8</sup> Dunbar, 2020

## Research limitation, directions for future research and recommendations for HRM

The research presented in the dissertation is limited in scope - only 4 characteristics were examined and only the employee perspective was analyzed. Future research would benefit from looking at the supervisor's perspective.

Further limitations may be the results of the samples characteristics and the timing of the study.

The employees who participated in all studies had to give their consent. Therefore, they are not representative of the entire employee population and do not constitute a random, representative sample. According to the WiW methodological paradigm, replication of the same conclusions on different data sets and with different operationalizations (triangulation of data, methods, operationalization, methods of analysis) increases the external validity of the research conducted. Of course, we do not know whether conclusions would be replicated on permanently unavailable individuals who, when drawn from the population, always reject the invitation to participate in the study, but this is a limitation of ANY study because we cannot force people to participate in research.

The strength of the study is the high age diversity of the large number of employees participating in it. It is worth mentioning that the vast majority of students of the Faculty of Management combine their studies with work. The largest SSA21vii surveyed 1233 employees (median age 42) with at least 3 years of work experience. All collected data were subjected to a meticulous procedure to detect FALSE respondents<sup>9</sup>.

A limitation of the sample is the limited **level of education**: All respondents had **at least** a high **school education**, which limits the generalizability of the results to a better educated group of employees. It would be important to replicate the research among respondents with a lower level of education, which may be difficult, as it would likely require a return to the classic paper-and-pencil survey format. Fortunately, the group of employees who do not use the Internet is shrinking by the day.

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<sup>9</sup> Kabut, 2021

Without such replication, one cannot be certain that surface-level (age and gender), which was found to be statistically insignificant in 4 studies, can be a significant predictor of relational satisfaction in the group of employees with primary education.

Most of the studies (SSA21vii, SSA21v, SSA21i, SSA20) were conducted while the world was dealing with the COVID-19 pandemic. Companies were ‘adjusting’ employees’ salaries, and the labor market situation was tense. The economic crisis contributed to employee layoffs, reduced wages, or reduced work hours. For many, working in a remote or hybrid model meant intensifying, reducing, or changing their relationship with their supervisor. Therefore, the survey data collected may have been influenced by the change in the nature of work and the instability of the company. It is unknown to what extent this would have affected the results, but it cannot be ruled out. Subsequent research should be extended to the ‘TEZ’ procedure developed in the Department of Managerial Psychology and Sociology of the Faculty Management of the University of Warsaw, which is based on an analysis of experimental case studies involving several hours of teamwork.

Building authentic relationship between leaders and employees is a key factor affecting employee engagement and motivation. 3 studies confirmed a positive correlation between relational and job satisfaction, emotional balance, and self-rated health. These results are consistent with those found in the literature.

From the research conducted, we can conclude that POINT employees would feel less comfortable working with an INTERVAL boss, but we do not know the preferences of the POINT boss. Supervisors are expected to be more flexible; they should adapt their behavior, e.g. the level of precision of instruction to the characteristics and needs of an employee.

Studies presenting the **metamorphic effects of power** show that the opposite is true. Supervisors process information in a more superficial, automatic, and more abstract way (use of heuristics, stereotyping) than subordinates, who are characterized by analytical, careful processing of information at a lower level of abstraction (search for individualized information, less risk of using stereotyping).

Recommendations for HRM do not suggest hiring employees who match to the boss's preferences, but rather a modifying working conditions: changing communication styles, transferring to a different team, etc.

This means that both employees and their bosses need to know their preferred working style and be aware of how e.g. their Need for Dominance or working style affects their interpersonal

behavior and judgment of others. Knowing of differences allows us to be aware of the dangers in the employee-supervisor relationship. Awareness of the threats is a prerequisite for effectively counteracting conflicts that may arise from this trait.

It is also worth remembering that SSA measures PREFERENCE to a particular working style, but most people show flexibility to use different strategies under strong environmental stimuli (e.g. high financial rewards or punishments), so they may work with their boss even if they do not fit together. Furthermore, 'INTERVAL' bosses, knowing that they are dealing with a 'POINT' employee, can and should pay attention to more precise task formulation.

The conclusion about the positive consequences of complementary fit in the dimension of the Need for Dominance seems to be the most justified by managerial experience – as it allows to avoid power struggles – as shown in experimental studies in which activation of the power concept in all team members led to worse performance than activation of the power concept in only one of three employees<sup>10</sup>.

The conclusion about the positive consequences of supplementary fit in the dimension of working styles need further consideration.

Managers are equally likely to exhibit INTERVAL and POINT working style – there are no differences between groups of employees and bosses in their desire for precision, methodicality – but managers are indeed more 'simultaneous' than employees, which is forced by the nature of their work.

Within a team, diversity of working style is expected – we do not want to postulate that only employees who are similar to their bosses in this respect should be hired, because both – the POINT and INTERVAL working strategies have their strengths and weaknesses. Teams composed solely of 'POINT' people or solely of 'INTERVAL' people will lose in competition with mixed teams<sup>11</sup>.

Analyses of both quantitative and qualitative data have shown that for employees, the gender of the leader is losing its importance. However, it is still not easy to ensure that in e.g. gender stereotypes are not activated when making promotion decisions. As various studies have shown – gender detection is an automatic process and may involve activation of gender stereotypes on a subconscious level. The best example is the recruitment of musicians for a symphony

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<sup>10</sup> Galinsky, 2015

<sup>11</sup> Wieczorkowska-Wierzbńska, 2022

orchestra, in which only hiding the image of the candidate allowed the committee to increase from 5% to 25% the number of female musicians selected<sup>12</sup>. None of training sessions focused on discrimination avoidance that the recruiting committee attended helped.

Men and women may differ in many dimensions, but within group differences are often much larger than between-group differences (both women and men are very diverse within their gender groups). The influence of the work environment also reduces gender differences. Organizations, especially large companies, have developed systems of penalties and rewards that affect employee behavior. When rewarding competition, they should not be surprised to find themselves unwilling to share knowledge. Although women may prefer less competitive behavior, they adapt to their surroundings by choosing a pattern of behavior that is rewarded. Men follow a similar pattern.

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<sup>12</sup> Goldin, Rouse, 1997