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Defining Work Ethics in the Modern Labour Market: Ethical Competence Criteria Emerging from Technological Development and Moral-Theological Documents

Abstract

Ethical competence is not an easily defined concept, especially with respect to the job requirements resulting from new technologies and digital transformation of the economy. The present paper attempts to define the competence profile of a worker in knowledge-based economy and workplaces using automation and digital technologies, but in relation to sources from encyclicals and other moral-theological documents. This profile

includes specific ethical criteria, which are relevant and valid regardless of the times. Moreover, in the face of technological progress in modern economies, these criteria seem to have the power to influence the effectiveness of work processes. Thus, features such as respect for human dignity, responsibility, honesty, quality, courage, trustworthiness, justice, and secrecy should be considered as key for recruitment and evaluation of human capital in the modern labour market. As these are values mentioned in moral-theological documents, including papal encyclicals, they refer to the essence of human work and ensure that no man is reified.

Keywords

ethical competence, work, competence profile, dignity, encyclicals, automation, AI

1. Introduction

In everyday life, we all want to meet "ethical" people, and we all want to be seen as "ethical" persons. In the job environment, we often hear about *work ethics* as something motivating and positively influencing employee performance.[1] Thus, *ethics* is regarded only with positive values. People trust professionals who are ethical, as well as professions and workplaces associated with ethos and ethics. Ethics is, by its nature, human-oriented. Thus, development of new technologies and transformation into the so-called "digital economy" raise questions about the role of humans in contemporary and future work processes. Inspiration to take up this topic is the role of human dignity in the process of economic development, currently associated with automation and AI. These issues have been discussed by numerous researchers with respect to the impact on societies (e.g. ethical impact theory)[2], and raised in the encyclical document *Laborem Exercens* by John Paul II. The latter, despite having been published in 1981, appears to be more pertinent now than ever before.

[1] S. Listiani, P. Lumbanraja, P. Daulay, *The influence of work ethos, work environment and work motivation on the performance*, "Jurnal Riset Bisnis dan Manajemen" (2022) Vol. 15, No. 2, pp. 109–116.

[2] H. Khogali, S. Mekid, *The blended future of automation and AI: Examining some long-term societal and ethical impact features*, "Technology in Society" (2023) Vol. 73, pp. 1–12.

The teaching of John Paul II and of other popes help to organise, and even redefine, the criteria for assessing competences in the context of the requirements of the modern labour market, characterised by trends such as increasing automation, use of AI and popularity of remote (digital) work. Worldwide technology development is commonly accepted as good and necessary.

On the other hand, an increasingly prevalent phenomenon called automation anxiety[3], or the fear of automation (which also embraces the fear of AI[4]), shows that employees are worried about the future of their workplaces, while employers think about the competencies an employee should have to cope with these challenges. This phenomenon is also referred to as automation-related job insecurity, an opposition to automation-related performance optimism; both are associated with perceived automatability, in pessimistic or optimistic way, respectively. These attitudes are expected to have effects on overall job engagement, although in a diverse way.[5] This in turn may have strong impact on the whole society, therefore it is necessary to establish widely accepted ethical control systems.[6]

The ongoing digitization leads to a decreasing demand for some work performed so far by humans, especially based on average skills that are increasingly implemented by computers, robots and other digital technologies.[7] Recent declines in the share of labour in the national income and the ratio of the number of employees to the population in countries such as the US confirm claims that digital technologies, robotics and artificial intelligence permeate production processes in many countries. Additionally, the increasing automation contributes to lowering the production costs in which human work

[3] A. Goffey, Au*tomation Anxieties and infrastructural technologies*, "New Formations" (2019) No 98, pp. 29–47.

[4] Ch. Montag, J. Kraus, M. Baumann, D. Rozgonjuk, *The propensity to trust in (automated) technology mediates the links between technology self-efficacy and fear and acceptance of artificial intelligence*, Computers in Human Behavior Reports (2023), Vol. 11, pp. 1–7.

[5] A. F. Godollei, J. W. Beck, *Insecure or optimistic? Employees' diverging appraisals of automation, and consequences for job attitudes*, "Computers in Human Behavior Reports" (2023), Vol. 12, pp. 1–15.

[6] H. O. Khogali, S. Mekid, *The blended future of automation and AI: Examining some long-term societal and ethical impact features*, "Technology in Society" (2023), Vol. 73, pp. 1–12.

[7] E. Brynjolfsson, A. McAfee, *The second machine age: work, progress, and prosperity in a time of brilliant technologies*, New York—London 2014, W.W. Norton & Company.

is applied, at the same time increasing the number of new, more complex job tasks.[8]

In order to increase efficiency of modern management systems, it is necessary to develop new ways of work and cooperation of the human factor at different levels of value creation chains of various sectors and enterprises. It requires identification of new areas in management and quality sciences, emerging at the "fuzzy" junction of human activity and technology. However, such a combination always produces ethical dilemmas. It is therefore essential to pay attention to the ethical competence of an employee, who acts in a network of distributed agents managing different business processes. We postulate that ethical competence has the power to increase efficiency of employee cooperation in value creation chains in the modern economy and labour market. In the present study, the authors review contemporary competence frameworks with relation to the presence of ethics, compare them with excerpts of papal encyclicals and other documents, and finally, come up with the list of ethical competence criteria which should be considered in the modern labour market.

2. The space for ethics in employee competence models

Perhaps the most frequently used model of competence categorization is hard-skill versus soft-skill ones, in which hard competencies include specific technical skills, while soft competencies relate to different aspects of personality.[9] The EU authorities recognised the importance of proper understanding and valuing of skills and qualifications, in order to match the needs of the labour market. For this purpose, the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning (EQF) was set up in 2008 to improve the transparency, compatibility and portability of people's qualifications, and it was revised in 2017 to adapt to challenges of the current and future economy.[10] However, it does not refer

[8] D. Acemoglu, P. Restrepo, *The race between machine and man: implications of technology for growth, factor shares and employment*, "American Economic Review" (2018), Vol. 108, No. 6, pp. 1488–1542.

[9] A.F. Hendarman, U. Cantner, *Soft skills, hard skills, and individual innovativeness*, "Eurasian Business Review" (2018) Vol. 8, No. 2, pp. 139–169.

[10] The European Parliament and the Council, *Council recommendation of 22 may 2017 on the European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning and repealing the recommendation of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 April 2008 on the establishment of the*

to ethical issues, a fact which has been noted by Guillen *et al*. and titled "the great forgotten issue".[11] Although the first attempt to formulate the EQF listed ethical qualifications (competences) next to cognitive (knowledge), functional (skills) and personal ones (attitudes and behaviours), it did not specify what they include and how they can be measured.[12] Moreover, Guillen *et al.*[13] demonstrated the gradual disappearance of ethics from the EQF. They observed that the EQF initially started with *ethical competences* as an independent category but ended with incorporating *ethical issues* as an aspect of a broader group called *professional and vocational competence*. In this perspective, ethics is no longer regarded as a separate competence category. Even worse, the latest EQF has no reference to ethics whatsoever, whereas many authors stress that ethical competence is distinctive enough to deserve its own conceptualization and measurement.[14]

There are many references and definitions of ethical competence in the literature. It was part of the holistic model of professional competence developed in the 1990's by Cheetham and Chivers, which consisted of five dimensions of employee abilities: i) cognitive competence (knowledge of theories and concepts), ii) functional competencies (skills and know-how), iii) personal competency (behavioural competencies, knowledge on how to behave), iv) meta-competencies (the ability to cope with uncertainty and learning), and v) ethical competencies. The latter was defined as "the possession of appropriate personal and professional values and the ability to make sound judgements based upon these in work-related situations".[15] Practical ethics and moral maturity were also mentioned in the German educational framework, which has long been

European Qualifications Framework for lifelong learning, Brussels 2017, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:32017H0615(01) (15.09.2023).

[11] M. Guillén, J. Fontrodona, A. Rodríguez-Sedano, *The Great Forgotten Issue: Vindicating Ethics in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)*, "Journal of Business Ethics" (2007) Vol. 74, No. 4, pp. 409–423.

[12] European Commission, *Towards a European qualifications framework for lifelong learning*, Brussels 2005, https://www.voced.edu.au/content/ngv%3A30220 (15.09.2023).

[13] M. Guillén, J. Fontrodona, A. Rodríguez-Sedano, *The Great Forgotten Issue: Vindicating Ethics in the European Qualifications Framework (EQF)*, "Journal of Business Ethics" (2007) Vol. 74, No. 4, pp. 409–423.

[14] A. Schrijver de, J. Maesschalck, *A new definition and conceptualization of ethical competence*, in: D. Menzel, T. Cooper (eds.), *Achieving ethical competence for public service leadership*, New York 2013, Routledge, pp. 29–51.

[15] G. Cheetham, G. Chivers, *Towards a Holistic Model of Professional Competence*, "Journal of European Industrial Training" (1996) Vol. 20, No. 5, pp. 20–30.

viewed as a model for the European system.[16] According to Jormsri *et al*.[17] ethical competence is "the ability or capacity of persons to recognize their feelings as they influence what is good or bad in particular situations, and then to reflect on these feelings, to make their decision, and to act in ways that bring about the highest level of benefit". In short, it is defined as seeking for knowledge and action that defines right and wrong behaviour, and subsequently, an ethically competent persons are those who distinguish between right and wrong and act accordingly.[18]

In the literature, there have been several attempts to specify the criteria of ethical competence. Furmanek[19] pointed out that the core of the moral experience of every human is *responsibility*. Responsibility means understanding the consequences of an action, performing tasks and duties as best one can, and being courageous but mindful at the same time. Besides, the ability to accept responsibility demonstrates the moral maturity of a person. He further lists other moral virtues, such as prudence, temperance, justice and fortitude (called ancient virtues and being mentioned by Plato), as well as more contemporary values including internal discipline, tolerance, socialisation and honesty. An example of operationalization of ethical competence has been provided by Rest[20] in his Four-Component Model. It consists of moral awareness or sensitivity, moral judgement or reasoning, moral intention and moral behaviour. Kavathatzopoulos *et al*.[21] developed and tested a tool called Ethical Competence Questionnaire for Persons and Organizations (ECQ-PO), aiming to measure the degree of ethical competence of employees and organisational processes. It was based on the subjective judgement by employees on how they feel and understand the presence or absence of particular parameters of ethical competence.

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[16] J. Winterton, F. Delamare-Le Deist, E. Stringfellow, *Typology of knowledge, skills and competences: clarification of the concept and prototype*, Luxembourg 2006, Office for Official Publications of the European Communities.

[17] P. Jormsri, W. Kunaviktikul, S. Ketefian, A. Chaowalit, *Moral competence in nursing practice*, "Nursing Ethics" (2005) Vol. 12, No. 6, pp. 582–594.

[18] D.C. Menzel, *Ethics Moments in Government: Cases and Controversies,* Abington—New York 2010, Routledge.

[19] W. Furmanek, *Ethical dimensions of the modern approach to human work*, "Labor et Educatio" (2013) No. 1, pp. 45–59.

[20] J.R. Rest, *Moral Development: Advance in Research and Theory*, New York 1986, Praeger.

[21] I. Kavathatzopoulos, G. Rigas, *A Measurement Model for Ethical Competence in Business*, "Journal of Business Ethics Education" (2006), No. 3, pp. 55–74.

It should be added that each profession may have its specific set of ethical criteria. A large number of recent studies on ethical competence of staff focuses on healthcare and social services. From among ten core competencies for nurses, three of them have been identified as of moral nature, specifically: commitment, thoroughness and compassion.[22] In economic and business context, ethics (or: business ethics, which is used synonymously in economic settings) is a frequently explored theme with respect to corporate values[23] and often linked with corporate social responsibility.[24] Primarily, many debates on business ethics referred to the financial sector, to fight against corruption, prevent white-collar crime and ensure consumer protection. In turn, marketing ethics focuses on honesty, fairness, and product quality.[25]

3. Inspiration from encyclicals in developing model of ethical competence with respect to challenges of modern labour market

With no doubt, papal encyclicals and other moral-theological documents constitute a rich source of information on ethical aspects in labour and socio-economic relations. In particular, *Laborem Exercens* by John Paul II relates directly to work ethics, and therefore to ethical competence. However, references to various ethical aspects in the context of economy can be found in other documents, too. In combination with the review of literature, the authors attempted to build a list of ethical competence criteria which are key for the contemporary labour market. As its major challenges include the increasing use of automation, AI and remote work, the ethical competence has to take into account these three important contexts. Thus, our conceptual framework consists of eight groups

[22] S.K. Sporrong, B. Arnetz, M.G. Hansson, P. Westerholm, A.T. Höglund, *Developing Ethical Competence in Health Care Organizations*, "Nursing Ethics" (2007) Vol. 14, No. 6, pp. 825–837.

[23] G. Orme, C. Ashton, *Ethics—a foundation competency*, "Industrial and Commercial Training" (2003) Vol. 35, No. 5, pp. 184–190.

[24] Ch.A. Sarfo, J.A. Zhang, P. O'Kane, N. Podgorodnichenko, K.K. Osei-Fosu, *Perceived corporate social responsibility and employee ethical behaviour: do employee commitment and co worker ethicality matter?*, "Journal of Management and Organization" (2002) Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 184–201.

[25] Ch. Enz, D. Skodova Parmová, P. Wolf, *Importance of ethical competence for the sales management of small and medium-sized financial sales organisations*, "DETUROPE—The Central European Journal of Tourism and Regional Development" (2021) Vol. 13, No. 1, pp. 121–152.

of ethical criteria, namely: *respect for dignity*, *responsibility*, *honesty*, *quality*, *courage*, *trustworthiness*, *justice*, and *secrecy*. The framework is summarised in tab. 1 and discussed below.

Tab. 1. Ethical competence criteria with respect to challenges of modern economy with reference to encyclicals and other moral-theological documents

Ethical competence criteria	Main challenges of modern economy			Reference in encyclicals and other documents
	Automation of work	Use of AI in work processes	Digital (remote) work	
Dignity (respect for dignity)	Awareness of the optimal point for robotization of work processes so as not to violate the dignity of human being	Engage the AI only where there is no risk of violating the dignity of another human being	Showing respect for other people despite physical distance	Paul VI, *Dignitatis humanae*, 1965 Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Dignitas personae*, 2008 John Paul II, *LE* 6 John Paul II, *SRS* 41
Responsibility	Respecting and optimising the monetary value of work as a source of employee income	Tendency to engage AI tools only in those situations which do not impose risk to one's life and wellbeing	Strong consideration of the client's perspective, ensure respect for other employees in work processes	John Paul II, *LE* 17 John Paul II, *SRS* 15
Honesty (fairness)	Open and transparent presentation of the advantages as well as the disadvantages of the planned solutions	Clear information about the use of AI, e.g. bots instead of humans, wherever the recipients may be unaware of it	Conscientious performance of duties without feigning work, no idleness or workplace resistance (so called "empty labour")	John Paul II, *VS* 98–99
Quality	Taking care about the quality of products and services, but not forced by the customer who pays for the product, but by the owner, manager and employees of automated production processes	Taking care about the constant monitoring of the AI	Maximising the value added of your own work (contribution to common value) that is transferred to coworkers, customers, etc.	John Paul II, *LE* 5 John Paul II, *SRS* 34

Ethical competence criteria	Main challenges of modern economy			Reference in encyclicals and other documents
	Automation of work	Use of AI in work processes	Digital (remote) work	
Courage	Readiness to stop further automation of work processes in case of predominance of its negative social effects (even if it involves higher costs)	Readiness to withdraw from AI if there is a risk of negative effects, even if it involves higher costs	Readiness to bear witness to the truth, even when it is inconvenient (e.g. admitting a mistake)	John XXIII, *ADS* 3 John Paul II, *SRS* 38
Trustworthiness	Taking care to maximise the degree of automation reliability	Taking care to maximise the degree of AI reliability	Self-motivation, work commitment and dependability	John Paul II, *CA* 27
Justice	Taking care about the equity in sharing the benefits of automating work processes	Taking care about the equity in sharing the benefits of AI	Fair treatment of subordinates and coworkers	John Paul II, *LE* 2 John Paul II, *SRS* 33
Secrecy (confidentiality)	Secrecy, e.g. for technological solutions, confidentiality, non-disclosure of data on the technology	Secrecy, e.g. for algorithmic solutions, confidentiality, non-disclosure of data on the AI technology, protection of user-data	Taking care of the coworkers' personal data, not distributing personal (especially sensitive) information, avoiding gossip, etc.	John Paul II, 1991, Address of to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Commission for Social Communication

Source: own data

Respect for dignity

Dignity is central in ethics, and its status as a criterion in the ethical competence model should be supreme. Some sources define dignity as the principal value, "the value of all values"[26], or essentially equate dignity with ethics itself, indicating that it is the foundation for all ethical factors and should be prioritised even over freedom, responsibility and solidarity.[27] Human dignity is discussed numerous

[26] W. Furmanek, *Ethical dimensions of the modern approach to human work*, "Labor et Educatio" (2013) No. 1, pp. 45–59.

[27] A. Autiero, *Human Dignity is an Ethical Sense: Basic Considerations*, "Interdisciplinary Journal for Religion and Transformation in Contemporary Society" (2020) No. 6, pp. 9–21.

times in moral-theological documents, including *Dignitatis Humanae*[28], *Dignitas personae*[29] and the above mentioned papal encyclicals *Laborem Exercens*[30] and *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*[31]. In the current model, however, the term *dignity* is used not as much as a primary value, but as a competence criterion pertaining to the *respect for human dignity*. In the context of the modern economy, the dignity of employees should be taken into account in decision-making on automation of work processes. The optimal level of automation is one in which there is a balance between marginal social benefits, without lowering human dignity below the level that is socially considered dignified. In this sense, the criterion of *respect for human dignity* indicates the willingness to engage the AI tools only where there is no risk of violating the dignity of another human being. As the increasing use of AI is motivated by considerations of higher performance and profits, *human dignity* was recognized by international law and became a legal constraint. In this respect, dignity is perceived not only as a moral idea, but also as a principle of law.[32] As such, it requires assessment of the compliance of the AI systems with fundamental human rights.[33] As a key moral value mentioned in all papal encyclicals referring to work, dignity points to the essence of human work and ensures that no man is reified. Thus, any competence profile should assume *a priori*, at the very beginning, the dignity of employees and of the customers.

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[28] Paul VI, *Declaration on religious freedom Dignitatis Humanae on the right of the person and of communities to social and civil freedom in matters religious promulgated by His Holiness Pope Paul VI*, Vatican 1965, https://www.vatican.va/archive/hist_councils/ii_vatican_council/documents/vat-ii_decl_19651207_dignitatis-humanae_en.html (15.09.2023).

[29] Congregation for the Doctrine of the Faith, *Instruction Dignitas personae of certain bioethical questions*, Vatican 2008, https://www.vatican.va/roman_curia/congregations/cfaith/documents/rc_con_cfaith_doc_20081208_dignitas-personae_en.html (15.09.2023).

[30] John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 6, Vatican 1981, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_14091981_laborem-exercens.html (15.09.2023).

[31] John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 41, Vatican 1987, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_30121987_sollicitudo-rei-socialis.html (15.09.2023).

[32] H. Harris, *Human Dignity and Business Ethics*, in: D. Poff, A. Michalos (eds.) Encyclopedia of Business and Professional Ethics, Springer Link 2017, https://link.springer.com/referenceworkentry/10.1007/978-3-319-23514-1_177-1 (28.06.2023).

[33] G. Le Moli, *AI vs Human Dignity: When Human Underperformance is Legally Required*, "Revue Européenne du Droit" (2022) Vol. 4, No. 1, pp. 105-109.

Responsibility

In the encyclical *Laborem Exercens* human work is linked not only with dignity, but also with responsibility. The issue of responsibility is raised with respect to employer-employee relation and ethically correct labour policy[34], as well as with respect to intellectuals, scientists and "those who bear the burden of grave responsibility for decisions that will have a vast impact on society."[35] Responsibility is also mentioned in *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* in the context of international relations between rich and poor countries.[36] Responsibility means respecting and optimising the monetary value of work as a source of employee income. When limiting human participation in work processes, employees' income should not be reduced below the socially acceptable level. In addition, it is necessary to ensure continuous opportunities for human resource development so that people can adapt their competences to the current needs of the labour market. Similarly, the responsible use of AI should indicate one's tendency to engage AI tools only in those situations which do not impose risk to one's life and wellbeing. For example, producers and users of intelligent medical devices should first consider safety. Whereas there are medical centres that start using medical robots without any experience or authorization from the manufacturer or distributor, imposing a huge risk to the patients' life.[37] Similarly, responsibility in the use of self-driving vehicles indicates prioritising human health safety over possible profits,[38] and in case of an accident taking on the blame and liability.[39] In other words, man has to have ultimate control over any machine and its results, not the opposite.[40]

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[34] John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 17, Vatican 1981.

[35] John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 9, Vatican 1981.

[36] John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 15, Vatican 1987.

[37] J. Styczyński, *Unauthorised robotic systems pose a huge risk to patients*, (2023), https://www.rynekzdrowia.pl/Nauka/Nieautoryzowane-systemy-robotyczne-powoduja-olbrzymie-ryzyko-dla-pacjentow,246724,9.html (28.06.2023).

[38] E. Cheng, *Self-driving car companies' first step to making money isn't robotaxis*, (2022), https://www.cnbc.com/2022/06/02/self-driving-car-companies-first-step-to-making-money-isnt-robotaxis.html (28.06.2023).

[39] C. McCormack, *Who's at fault when an autonomous vehicle gets into a collision?*, (2022), https://driving.ca/features/insurance/whos-at-fault-when-an-autonomous-vehicle-gets-into-a-collision (28.06.2023).

[40] M. Rybak, *Personal ethics and organisational ethics in the light of the teaching of John Paul II*, "Rynek Pracy", (2005) No. 7, pp. 73–100.

Honesty (fairness)

In theological documents, honesty is always associated with truth and openness. The encyclical devoted to truth, *Veritatis Splendor*, clearly indicates the need for honesty and openness in social, economic and political contexts. It says: "The Supreme Good and the moral good meet in truth: the truth of God, the Creator and Redeemer, and the truth of man, created and redeemed by him. Only upon this truth is it possible to construct a renewed society and to solve the complex and weighty problems affecting it (…)."[41] Honesty in automation refers to truthful and transparent presentation of the advantages as well as the disadvantages of the planned solutions and their consequences. Honesty (being fair) implies readiness to provide clear information that AI is involved in a process or service. It is particularly important in the situations when recipients may not realise that they are being served by a robot. For instance, telemarketing robots ("bots") are able to interact with customers in a very natural way, responding to their inquiries and providing accurate information. In recent years, the Competition and Consumer Protection Office in Poland receives plenty of complaints against companies that communicate with customers using chatbots.[42] However, the problem with "robocalls" is not just the naive customers, who are unaware that there is no living person on the other side; the major threat is that use of chatbots may lead to unauthorised use of personal data and even fraud.[43] According to the Directive 2002/65/EC[44] people should be informed about the use of automated calling systems without participation of the interlocutor. However, as it is difficult to fight legally with such

[41] John Paul II, *Veritatis Splendor*, 98–99, Vatican 1993, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_06081993_veritatis-splendor.html (15.09.2023).

[42] T. Jurczak, *UOKiK receives complaints about bots*, (2023), https://serwisy.gazetaprawna.pl/poradnik-konsumenta/artykuly/8658758,chatboty-voiceboty-uokik-boty-prawa-konsumenta.html (28.06.2023).

[43] S. Czubkowska, M. Szymaniak, *„Are you sure you're human? No". The plague of robocalls reaches Poland*, (2021), https://spidersweb.pl/plus/2021/09/automat-telemarketingowy-plaga-robocalls-czy-pani-na-pewno-jest-czlowiekiem (28.06.2023).

[44] The European Parliament and the Council, *Directive 2002/65/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council of 23 September 2002 concerning the distance marketing of consumer financial services and amending Council Directive 90/619/EEC and Directives 97/7/EC and 98/27/EC*, Brussels 2002, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/?uri=celex%3A32002L0065 (15.09.2023).

practices,[45] *honesty* still provides an important protective power against the potential misuses of this kind of technology.

Quality

The quality of work and products appeared numerous times in the bible. For example, Paul's First Epistle to the Corinthians clearly indicates that "the fire will test the quality of each one's work" (1 Corinthians 3–13). The quality is mentioned in *Laborem Exercens* with reference to the technology, which facilitates human work and leads to an increase in the quantity and quality of products.[46] On the other hand, the encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* pertains to "the consequences of a certain type of development on the quality of life in the industrialised zones."[47] Automated work processes require care for quality, but not forced by the customer who pays for the product, but by the owner, manager and employees of automated production processes of goods and services. Quality as an ethical competence means readiness to control and continuous monitoring of processes and results, so the recipients get what they expect and what they have been promised.

Courage

John XIII in his encyclical *Aeterna Dei Sapientia* used the term "moral courage"[48], which clearly associates this virtue with ethics. Courage is therefore a very important feature of ethical competence. Unlike dignity, it is not regulated by law, yet it should reflect a personal characteristic of a contemporary worker: his or her willingness to bear the costs of resignation from automation and AI applications if there is a risk of negative effects to fundamental human rights and values, as they were listed above. The encyclical *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* emphasises that courage is required to take a difficult path to overcome the evil, and "one must have the courage to set out on this path, and, where some

[45] M. Madejski, *„Don't insult me, I'm not a bot." This is what we hear when we talk… with the bot*, (2020), https://www.money.pl/gospodarka/niech-pan-mnie-nie-obraza-nie-jestem-botem-to-uslyszymy-gdy-rozmawiamy-z-botem-6559985630215008a.html (28.06.2023).

[46] John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 5, Vatican 1981.

[47] John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 34, Vatican 1987.

[48] John XXIII, *Aeterna Dei Sapientia*, 3, Vatican 1961, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-xxiii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_j-xxiii_enc_11111961_aeterna-dei.html (15.09.2023).

steps have been taken or a part of the journey made, the courage to go on to the end."[49] As a competence, courage is key in remote work, where individual employees in different locations often do not know each other in person. Such workers should have the courage to openly communicate injustices and other inefficiencies and pathologies in work and collaboration processes.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was referenced by John Paul II in *Centesimus annus* as one of the basic virtues of economic life, alongside truthfulness and hard work.[50] The scope and level of automation, AI and digital work solutions should be adapted to the context of value creation, i.e. resources, conditions, sometimes disregarding potential technological possibilities. For example, for developers of AI applications, trustworthiness needs to be proven for its use in critical systems such as i.e. avionics, mobility, defence, healthcare or finance. From the competence perspective, trustworthiness always means taking care about reliability of automated processes and AI applications, even though it is used to generate seemingly harmless products such as media messages. In addition, in the field of digital work, it refers to self-motivation and dependability, which is particularly important for process efficiency.

Justice

In broad understanding, *justice* is one of the fundamental values considered in guidelines for development of technological solutions, i.e.. automation, AI and digital work solutions. As an ethical competence criterion, it implies caring about the equity in sharing the benefits of them, as well as readiness in promoting fairness in any activity performed with the help of them. The reference to justice in modern world and contemporary workplaces has been made numerous times in *Laborem Exercens*[51], while *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis* points directly to the context of technological advancements: "True development, in keeping with the specific needs of the human being-man or woman, child, adult or old

[49] John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 38, Vatican 1987.

[50] John Paul II, *Centesimus annus*, 27, Vatican 1991, https://www.vatican.va/content/john-paul-ii/en/encyclicals/documents/hf_jp-ii_enc_01051991_centesimus-annus.html (15.09.2023).

[51] John Paul II, *Laborem Exercens*, 2, Vatican 1981.

person- implies, especially for those who actively share in this process and are responsible for it, a lively awareness of the value of the rights of all and of each person. It likewise implies a lively awareness of the need to respect the right of every individual to the full use of the benefits offered by science and technology". Moreover, it further mentions that these rights should be implemented by i.a. "justice in employment relationships."[52] Referring to financial benefits from automation, justice means, apart from the return on particular capitals, also the redistribution necessary for the restoration and development of technical, human and other resources. Justice in digital work means the fair treatment of subordinates and co-workers.

Secrecy

Secrecy (*confidentiality*) is an important ethical criterion valued not only in relation to AI, but also in the whole labour market. The entrepreneurs are increasingly aware of the need to protect their intellectual property rights, financial data, private information of employees, etc. There are numerous legal measures to assure safety in these areas, such as Polish RODO.[53] Employees are asked to sign confidentiality agreements. However, ethical competence seems to be the guarantor in this process. From the automation, AI and digital work perspective, it involves the ability of a worker to keep confidentiality about technological or algorithmic solutions and any data which should not be disclosed to unauthorised persons. The value of secrecy at different levels was expressed by John Paul II in his *Address to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Commission for Social Communication*. It referenced the right for privacy to protect the private life of families and individuals, but also "the right of secrecy" in professional duty: "Indeed, whenever public good is at stake, discretion and discernment and careful judgement should be used in the preparation of news."[54] The latter is of particular importance in the context of the use of AI in broadly understood communication processes.

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[52] John Paul II, *Sollicitudo Rei Socialis*, 33, Vatican 1987.

[53] The European Parliament and the Council, *Regulation 2016/679 of The European Parliament and of the Council of 27 April 2016 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data and repealing Directive 95/46/EC*, Brussels 2016, https://eur-lex.europa.eu/eli/reg/2016/679/oj (15.09.2023).

[54] John Paul II, *Address of John Paul II to the Plenary Assembly of the Pontifical Commission for Social Communication*, Vatican 1994.

4. Conclusion

Increasing automation and use of AI, as well as significant changes in the labour market require more research on an employee's competence profile in the face of these specific conditions, and with respect to ethical dimensions. This paper attempted to compare the ethical competence criteria, found across a variety of publications, with the teaching of papal encyclicals and with regard to the aforementioned challenges of the modern labour market. Obviously, the presented model touches on only the most important issues. It is not an easy task to define and measure the ethical capabilities of a person. It is difficult to even imagine modern assessment centres which focus on workers' moral predispositions or ethical maturity, although the employers would certainly declare that they want only "ethical persons" as their staff. Thus, despite being widely explored by academics, ethical competence seems to be underrated in contemporary employee assessments methods.

Further research should be carried out in this area to explore i.e. the relative importance of ethical competence criteria regarding job positions, branches and organisational cultures. The ethical competencies of a worker are not only a *modus vivendi*, but they provide a real "power" to fight with potential threats emerging from new technologies. There are also opinions that although the participation of human factors in work processes will decrease due to automation and AI, the value of human resources will increase as a result of their scarcity. Thus, in order to analyse the ethical profile of a worker, one needs to consider the dignity of humans in work processes. It stems directly from the encyclical documents of popes, especially of John Paul II and his encyclical *Laborem Exercens.* In this document, the Pope addressed the role of human factors in technological progress at a time when artificial intelligence was not yet a widely discussed topic. Pope Francis addresses this issue in the context of the modern era. In his messages, he has repeatedly cautioned against the unethical application of AI.[55]

[55] Reuters, *Pope warns against potential dangers of artificial intelligence*, 2023.

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