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Does Success Really Hurt? Impostor Syndrome Among Managers of Polish Enterprises – Results of a – Preliminary Qualitative Study

ABSTRACT

Objective: The aim of the study presented in this article was to examine how people in independent senior management positions (exposed and highly placed in the organisational structure), who are perceived as *successful people* in the social space, perceive themselves and the achieved professional success, and to what extent the attitudes adopted, perceptions and evaluation regarding themselves can be identified with impostor syndrome. Successful people, especially in the context of professional success, are usually defined as those who, in the professional and social dimensions, have achieved above-average results expressed in social, financial, economic, and job status.

Methodology: This article presents the results of a preliminary qualitative study conducted among 32 senior managers, directors, and business owners employed in large Polish organisations and in subsidiaries of foreign companies located in Poland. The research used Rosenberg's SES self-assessment scale and individual in-depth interviews (IDI).

Findings: The research showed to what extent the problem of impostor syndrome actually affects people who seemingly should not be affected by it (managers).

Value Added: Research shows how diverse the perception of professional success is among people holding prestigious managerial positions.

Recommendations: Further in-depth research should be conducted to explore additional, individual psychological aspects related to the sense of professional success among managers.

Key words: impostor phenomenon, psychological distress, impostor fears, perfectionism, low self-esteem

JEL classification code: M500, M510, M530

Introduction

Success has many faces. Some find it in work, positions, titles, achievements, money, but also in relationships, family, or passions, emphasising what brings them particular satisfaction, fulfilment, peace of mind, security, but also prestige, recognition, or – ultimately – a sense of meaning. While there is no single definition that clearly defines what should be considered professional success, it is seen by many through the prism of achievements, titles, positions, image, but also the way in which one can position themselves in relation to the rest of society when making judgements about themselves. What is socially and professionally judged by others as a person's professional success is not always complementary with how a person perceives themselves, their achievements, competencies, and capabilities at their disposal. According to Pietruszewski, professional success is "the result of the cumulative, work-related achievement of a person at any point in their career, expressed, on the one hand, in the subjective self-evaluation of the individual and the presumptive assessment of their achievements in the eyes of others, and, on the other hand, in indicators lying outside the individual, that is, in the direct material and non-material values achieved as a result of work, as well as in the social evaluation actually made by others" (Pietruszewski, 2014, pp. 67–68). Success is individual in nature, thus it will be judged by different people through the prism of achievement and fulfilment in different areas of life (Czeranowska, 2022). Professionally, success is most often equated with a prominent position (managerial, directorial, owner, etc.), the opportunity to exercise power, decision-making, independence, and self-reliance. Position level and benefits, team, prestige, money, and ultimately image related to it, are attributes commonly associated with career success. Often the more inaccessible it is, the more desirable it is.

Motivation to achieve professional success will vary, just as people's needs, expectations, and abilities vary. For some, professional achievements are the driving force of their entire lives, and they concentrate their activities and actions around this, devoting a significant part of their lives to work and expending considerable energy on it. Professional success is also intrinsically linked to various emotional states a person experiences, their beliefs about themselves, but also

their perceptions, which are sometimes inconsistent with what their achievements actually are and how they are judged by other people.

The issue of impostor syndrome

The impostor syndrome addressed in this paper is a term introduced by Pauline Clance and Susane Imes in the 1980s. The authors point out that the causes of this syndrome need to be traced back to childhood and the relationship between the child and the caregiver, which determines how the child thinks about themselves. These beliefs, built on the basis of messages formulated by adults, and the way they perceive their own abilities are, so to speak, instructions on how they should behave (Filarowska & Schier, 2018, p. 40). Clance and Imes observed and described in their paper under the title of *The imposter phenomenon in high achieving women: Dynamics and therapeutic intervention* that professionally very successful women, whose success manifested itself, among other things, in outstanding academic achievement, titles, degrees, and expert status in their field, did not have an inner sense of success. The predominant belief among them was that the success was a coincidence or mistake, despite the fact that these women received praise and recognition for their own achievements from both authority figures and their colleagues. High test scores, distinctions, achievements, and praise did not provide them with the confidence that success was a manifestation of their own skills and aptitude (Clance & Imes, 1978, pp. 1–2). In the literature, the term is referred to as *impostor syndrome*, where affected individuals experience an intense sense that their achievements are undeserved and fear that they may be exposed (Sakulku & Alexander, 2011, pp. 73–92). It is a sense of perceived fraudulence, self-doubt, and personal incompetence that persists despite one's education, experience, and accomplishments (Duncan et al., 2023, pp. 1–13), and it is associated with a number of adverse outcomes for those experiencing it – lowered self-esteem and well-being and increased negative behaviors such as self-handicapping and self-denigration (cf., e.g., Tewfik, 2022, pp. 988–1018).

One of the main assumptions of the impostor theory is that "impostors" believe they have deceived other people when it comes to their perception of their competence and intelligence (O'Brien McElwee & Yurak, 2010, pp. 184–197). In this context, people affected by impostor syndrome believe that their competence, intelligence, and achievements are not as high and important as people perceive them to be, and they see the reasons for their achievements in external factors often overlooking their own predispositions, intelligence, skills, competence, and inner qualities.

The feelings experienced by those affected by impostor syndrome are a complex mindset that should also be linked to personality and situational factors that have important implications for employee well-being in terms of how they perceive their own achievements and career path (Calvard, 2018, pp. 211–226).

The impostor phenomenon was initially observed among high-achieving women, but new research indicates that concerns associated with the syndrome occur not only among women but also among men, regardless of professional environment or ethnic and racial group (Fimiani et al., 2021, pp. 31–40); hence, this study attempts to examine both men and women. According to research, people affected by impostor syndrome are unable to internalize their own successes and feel that the current position they hold was achieved in an "illegitimate" way, e.g., as a result of luck or excessive effort (Ibrahim et al., 2022, pp. 3916–3927; Gullifor et al., 2023). Impostor syndrome is experienced by women and men in different age groups—from adolescents to late-career professionals. It is also often accompanied by depression and anxiety and is associated with impaired job performance, job satisfaction, and burnout among various employee groups (Bravata et al., 2020, pp. 1252–1275; Joshi & Mangette, 2018, pp. 1–8).

Self-esteem – how do people perceive themselves?

Self-esteem is one of the most important psychological structures of humans. Every person has some sort of self-image. Sometimes, it is in line with how other people see a person, but just as often it is completely different from what others perceive. The first consideration of self-esteem is presented by the concept of William James, who assumed that it is the number of achievements of a person in relation to their ambitions and goals set (Szpitalak & Polczyk, 2015, p. 9). Self-esteem means the value people assign themselves. What is especially important – self-esteem is a perception of self but not reality. It refers to a person's beliefs about themselves – their intelligence or attractiveness – but does not necessarily say whether the person actually possesses these attributes. People are not indifferent to information that affects their self-esteem, even more so if it is negative information and an increase or decrease in self-esteem causes strong emotional reactions. These fluctuations can be associated with major successes or failures in life that a person experiences (Baumeister et al., 2003, pp. 1–2).

Self-esteem is linked to personal beliefs about one's own skills, abilities, but also social relationships (Abdel-Khalek, 2016). The image that a person creates for both their own use and that of others conditions their social and professional actions, shapes their relations with other people, with themselves, and leads to certain ways of emotional reaction and thinking (Góralewska-Słońska, 2011, pp. 97–112). It can be a great driving force to undertake certain activities and face challenges, but it can just as well become the cause of a downfall when the way one perceives themselves takes on pathological dimensions. It becomes difficult and sometimes even completely impossible to bear, stripping the individual of a sense of agency and kindness toward themselves. The results of a study by Neff and Vonk suggest that self-compassion can be a useful alternative to global self-esteem and thus create a healthy attitude toward oneself. Self-compassion is understood as treating oneself with kindness, but it also means being attentive when considering negative aspects about oneself. However, research indicates that self-esteem (but not self-compassion) was positively associated with narcissism (Neff & Vonk, 2009, pp. 23–46).

Perfectionism in the context of impostor syndrome

Perfectionism is one of the dimensions worth paying attention to in the context of impostor syndrome. It has its roots in childhood, and parents perform a key role in the development of perfectionism. The parental pressure hypothesis is based on two different but strongly related models of socialisation, that is, the social expectations model and the social reactions model. Parental pressure to achieve excellence combines parental expectations (social expectations) and criticism if the desired excellence does not occur (social reactions). These two elements of parenting produce different effects – parental expectations can lead to perfectionist strivings and criticism to perfectionist concerns (see: Stoeber et al., 2018, pp. 2732–2739). With the beliefs and patterns that a child acquires in childhood, they pass on to subsequent stages of development, which, depending on the environment, conditions, their own resources, and mental predispositions, may affect the adoption of certain attitudes and behaviours in adult life, which, as can be assumed, will be expressed not only in the actions taken, activities, and professional aspirations, but also in the way they formulate judgements about themselves, their achievements, successes, or failures.

Perfectionist strivings (also called personal standards perfectionism) reflect those aspects of perfectionism that are linked to the pursuit of self-improvement and setting very high personal standards of performance. Perfectionist concerns (also called evaluative perfectionism), on the other hand, reflect those concerns that are combined with concerns about making mistakes and consequent negative social evaluation (Damian et al., 2017, pp. 565–577). Research shows that people with impostor syndrome symptoms tended to harshly and continuously evaluate and criticise themselves even for mistakes of minor importance (McGregor et al., 2008, pp. 43–48). According to Hewitt and Flett, self-oriented perfectionism includes a significant motivational component. This motivation will manifest itself primarily in the pursuit of perfection in one's actions, but also in the desire to avoid failure (Hewitt & Flett, 1991, pp. 456–470).

Research objective and research questions

The aim of the study was to examine how people in independent senior management positions (exposed and highly placed in the organisational structure), who are perceived as *successful people* in the social space, perceive themselves and the achieved professional success, and to what extent the attitudes adopted and perceptions regarding themselves can be identified with impostor syndrome. The choice of the method and technique of the research conducted depended mainly on its exploratory nature, which aimed to learn about the interviewees' behaviours, motives, emotions, and perceptions of their own successes. Qualitative research, as opposed to quantitative research, provides a much better understanding of how subjects perceive a phenomenon, and this approach was used in this case.

This paper formulates the following research questions:

1. How is the self-esteem of managers occupying prestigious managerial positions in companies shaped?
2. What do managers occupying prestigious positions in companies equate professional success with, and when, professionally, do they feel fulfilled?
3. How do managers occupying prestigious positions in companies evaluate their own successes and achievements?
4. What do managers equate their own professional success with on an emotional level?

Characteristics of the study sample

The adopted aim of the research conditioned the purposeful selection of interviewees for the sample. The most important criterion for inclusion in the sample was the level of position held. The survey covered 32 independent senior managers, directors, and owners in companies in the following areas: IT, FMCG, Medicine, Pharmacy, Telco, Electronics, Special Forces, Consulting. Respondents were employed in medium-sized (50–250 employees) and large companies (more than

250 employees) with Polish and foreign capital (subsidiaries of foreign companies located in Poland). Among the respondents, there were 60% of women and 40% of men in the age range of 30 to 45, with secondary and tertiary education and seniority of 7 to 25 years. All of the respondents manage teams. The survey was conducted between July and November 2023. This paper shows the results for self-esteem among the entire group of managers surveyed, while the descriptive part (attitudes, perceptions, and experiences of those surveyed), due to the rigours of publishing, presents selected excerpts from the study, which illustrate the analysed area from a variety of perspectives – women and men from different industries and sectors, of different ages and with varying seniority. Detailed characteristics of the respondents are shown in Table 1.

Table 1. Detailed characteristics of the surveyed respondents

Respondent number	Position	Industry	Size of the organization (number of employees)	Seniority in years	Sex
R1	Vice President of the Board	Pharmacy	over 250	20	male
R2	HR Manager	IT	over 1000	7	female
R3	Senior HR Manager	Retail	3700	13	female
R4	HR Manager	Industry	over 28,000	14	female
R5	Senior Brand Manager	Electronics	over 500	10	female
R6	Senior Manager	Special Forces	over 2000	20	male
R7	CEO/Owner	IT	over 50	25	male
R8	Category Director	Retail	over 500	10	female
R9	Senior Communications Manager	Media and Advertising	1800	13	female
R10	Risk Management Director	Banking	over 10,000	13	male

Source: Own work.

Methods and tools used in the study

The study used Morris Rosenberg's SES self-esteem scale, which is one of the world's leading methods for studying this variable. The Rosenberg scale allows the study of the overall level of self-esteem, as revealed in the self-report, where self-esteem is treated as a permanent trait rather than a temporary state. In Rosenberg's view, self-esteem is a global evaluation of one's own self – high self-esteem is the conviction of being a good enough and valuable person, which at the same time does not mean that the person evaluating themselves in this way considers themselves better than other people. Low self-esteem, on the other hand, is a rejection of one's own self (Łaguna et al., 2007, pp. 164–176; Young Park & Young Park, 2019, pp. 1–10). Self-esteem is defined here as an individual's sense of self-worth (Acosta García et al., 2019, pp. 1–17) and a sense of self-worth, in turn, refers to the degree to which individuals have a positive attitude toward themselves—a sense of being good and valuable. It is also self-acceptance, self-respect (Rosenberg et al., 1995, pp. 141–156).

The study also used the individual in-depth interview (IDI) method, a free-form interview with a standardised list of information sought, where the main goal was to learn about the respondent's self-perception, to understand their attitudes and emotions. The interview questionnaire included a total of 18 open-ended questions, which the respondents answered during individual meetings with the researcher.

Self-esteem in the perspective of managers – results of own study

The results of the study indicate high self-esteem among the entire study group (N = 32). The survey allowed for a maximum of 40 points, which means high self-esteem, and a minimum of 10 points, which is interpreted as low self-esteem. The results were analysed based on the following score range: 10 to 27 points – low self-esteem, 28 to 30 – average self-esteem, and 32 to 40 points – high

self-esteem (Łaguna et al., 2007). The highest score obtained in the study group was 38 points and the lowest was 31 points. Despite this spread, these results are within a range that indicates high self-esteem.

Attitudes, evaluations, and perceptions towards own achievements, competences, skills – results of own study

The material obtained in the course of the analyses reveals a variety of understandings and perceptions of aspects related to professional success. With regard to the research questions, the first analysis was made of what people in prestigious, managerial positions in companies equate professional success with, and when, professionally, they feel fulfilled. For this purpose, the first stage analysed what, in the opinion of the respondents, determines success, that is, what factors determine one's success in life and what influences it most, as well as what success itself is in the opinion of the respondents. The collected data are shown in Table 2.

Table 2. What determines success in life and what is professional success? – managers' evaluation

Respondent number	What determines success in life? (as evaluated by the respondent)	What is professional success? (as evaluated by the respondent)
R1	What your priorities are in life, what you consider important, commitment, and motivation	Doing what you like, work is a hobby, enjoying the work
R2	Experience gained, character traits, amount of experience	Self-image and job satisfaction, salary
R3	Intelligence, hard work, a little luck	Doing what I like for good money
R4	Luck, determination, courage, the people you meet along the way, the so-called promoters, especially in corporations, who will push you forward, get you noticed, and promote you to other people	When I like what I do, if the work allows me to develop, if I see an increase in knowledge and competence, when the salary increases, when others appreciate my work and see the value in it
R5	A mixture of one's own work, mobilisation, the right place and time, or the so-called luck	Success is the financial dimension, the development of competence, the ability to make independent decisions and the recognition from colleagues and the boss
R6	Self-belief, determination, luck	Fulfilment of dreams, implementation of various professional goals and objectives
R7	Hard work and a stroke of luck	Achieving benefits from the work performed, promotions
R8	Self-satisfaction, luck	Achievement of competencies that provide you with agency in the action you are engaged in
R9	Family, health, money, training	Interesting work, new projects, interesting tasks, good salary
R10	Perseverance, abilities, work, talent	Money, position

Source: Own work.

Among all the responses collected, the most prevalent belief was that luck is needed, but it should be made clear that it is always linked to other qualities and skills. According to the respondents, luck alone, while certainly important, is only one of the factors that determine the possibility of success. The respondents were also asked whether and to what extent they feel professionally fulfilled,

what influences their sense of fulfilment, what they evaluate as their greatest success, and whether their own professional position influences how they currently evaluate themselves. The responses of those surveyed are illustrated in Table 3.

Table 3. Sense of professional fulfilment and evaluation of one's own success – a group of managers

Respondent number	Evaluation of the respondent's sense of fulfilment	What influences the respondent's sense of fulfilment	The greatest professional success in the respondent's opinion	Does professional position affect the respondent's self-esteem?
R1	Satisfied and fulfilled	Doing useful things at work, creating new solutions, developing, improving what already exists	Going through the entire career path from the lowest level to the highest in one organisation	Yes, I manage a really big company, I can influence something, I am not an average employee; this also translates into private life
R2	10/10 points in the business and private sphere	Appreciation by the company, salary, job satisfaction	Manager role at age 27 in an IT company	I think it does, it adds confidence and makes one more satisfied with life
R3	I feel fulfilled	When I feel I'm good at something and someone appreciates it	The fact that I am where I am today	Yes
R4	I feel fulfilled, but I haven't achieved all my goals yet	When I am satisfied with what I do, the place, the work atmosphere, and I am fulfilled financially	Change of role to a business partner	Yes, it can't be denied
R5	7/10 points, I hope that the greatest success is before me	A sense of security and confidence in oneself, but also a sense of happiness in the private sphere	A sense of work-home balance	Yes, to a large extent, it affects it significantly

Respondent number	Evaluation of the respondent's sense of fulfilment	What influences the respondent's sense of fulfilment	The greatest professional success in the respondent's opinion	Does professional position affect the respondent's self-esteem?
R6	8/10 points, I feel fulfilled, but I strongly separate the professional and private spheres	When my expectations are met, this is the key word, when I implement my own plans	Mental transformation, change in the way I think, from stereotypical to more open-minded, increased acceptance of tolerance to all sorts of changes, this is a success, because social pressure does not force people to be creative, think independently, rather to be afraid in life and business and withdraw	Yes, definitely, I have survived in a system that I do not fully agree with
R7	I feel fulfilled	When I achieve success, and when I succeed in what I do	Building a company	Of course
R8	I feel fulfilled in the professional and family spheres, but more in the family sphere, I do not feel fulfilled in the sphere that I define as private	When I fulfil my dreams, when I get an idea of my competence	Despite maternity leave, I got the highest possible ratings of all employees, recognition from co-workers and bosses who identify me with the future of this company	Yes, it certainly boosts self-esteem and confidence

Respondent number	Evaluation of the respondent's sense of fulfilment	What influences the respondent's sense of fulfilment	The greatest professional success in the respondent's opinion	Does professional position affect the respondent's self-esteem?
R9	8/10 points	When I implement an interesting project, when I win a tender, when the client is satisfied, when others appreciate my work	On my own, without anyone's help, I have reached a place that makes me fully independent in life	Yes, to a large extent
R10	8.5/10 points	When someone tells me "Good idea!", when someone has a problem and I help them, when I make tools that are for everyone	Director position and a good salary	Just a little bit

Source: Own work.

The analysis of the above results indicates that a sense of fulfilment is provided, on the one hand, by the broadly understood development of competencies and skills, but also that for some of the respondents, the sense of fulfilment is influenced by the fact that their actions are not only noticed, but also appreciated by other people (bosses, co-workers).

The study also analysed what managers equate their own professional success with on an emotional level. To this end, the respondents were asked, among other things, what emotions they identify with the professional path they have travelled, how the respondents believe their environment evaluates them, what insights they encounter about themselves, and what emotions accompany them when they think about their own successes and their work. The results are shown in Table 4.

Table 4. Emotional level of success as evaluated by the surveyed managers

Respondent number	Emotions I identify my professional path with	How I am perceived and evaluated by my environment	Emotions I feel when thinking about my successes
R1	Stress, stress, stress, uncertainty, but also excitement, you do not know what will happen, constant change	Perfectionist, a person with vast knowledge, very often speaking briefly and to the point, having substantive knowledge, with no unnecessary words, strongly analytical, rationalist	A sense of fulfilment, this work further motivates me, success spurs me on to do more
R2	Hard work, stress, being thrown in at the deep end	No push for promotions	Rather only positive
R3	Anger, joy, pride, uncertainty	Professional, smiling, with a lot of patience and support, sometimes chaotic and fast-acting	Pride and embarrassment, proud of where I am, and embarrassment because people around me are in a different place professionally and I have to hide my success a bit
R4	Fear, frustration, doubt, contentment, pride, satisfaction, disappointment	Task-oriented, fast-acting, action-oriented, people-oriented, friendly	Satisfaction, contentment, a sense of hard work, competition, winning others over, proving my worth
R5	Overcoming my own limitations, e.g., shyness, lack of self-confidence	Too meticulous, too emotional, but also calm and clear-headed in emergency situations	Pride, I'm proud of what I've achieved, what projects I'm implementing
R6	Frustration, regret, sadness, mood swings, lots of extremes	Rather positively, hard to say, pedantic, dutiful, reliable, I see things through, I analyze a lot	Contentment, fulfilment, happiness
R7	Positive, but there were some unpleasant moments, the road was not always smooth, although I had interesting jobs	I don't know, positively	Positive
R8	Pain and tears, a lot of work and effort, it was not easy	Very meticulous, very task-oriented, reliable, no one is afraid to entrust me with a task	Contentment, stress, pace

Respondent number	Emotions I identify my professional path with	How I am perceived and evaluated by my environment	Emotions I feel when thinking about my successes
R9	Tears, sweat, chaos, sacrifices, stress, fighting for everything, pressure	Indefatigable, conscientious, hard-working, overzealous, self-confident, she likes to control things and must know everything	Fulfilment, contentment
R10	Much joy, resignation, frustration	Intelligent, too soft, formerly an expert, so he will always help	Mixed

Source: Own work.

The study also analysed how the subjects evaluate their own success and the achievement of their career goals, as well as how they evaluate themselves compared to other people. The results are presented in Table 5.

Table 5. Respondents' evaluation of their own professional success and self-evaluation against other people

Respondent number	Evaluation of own success and achievement of set career goals	Self-evaluation against other people
R1	Goals have been achieved	I wouldn't have gotten where I am if I were on a par with others, I'm not insecure, I have knowledge, I have skills, I have experience, I work with people who studied at Harvard and I know that it doesn't help much
R2	I evaluate it very positively, at the age of 27, I became a manager in an IT company which was always my career goal	Positively, I am satisfied with my achievements
R3	Goals implementation is in progress	I evaluate myself better against other people in terms of intelligence, I often connect the dots where others can't
R4	Yes, I have managed to achieve my goals although not all of them	I evaluate myself positively although I see my shortcomings and gaps

Respondent number	Evaluation of own success and achievement of set career goals	Self-evaluation against other people
R5	For the most part, the goals have been achieved, I am halfway there, this is how I evaluate my success, I hope for more success	I have high self-esteem, I evaluate myself better than others in terms of confidence, communication skills, ability to get along with people, this has allowed me to get where I am
R6	I evaluate my success very positively, most of the goals have been achieved	I evaluate myself much better, I have a much broader spectrum of looking at reality, I feel smarter, I can clearly see human stupidity and I'm not going to equate myself with it
R7	I evaluate the implementation of goals at 80%, my dreams did not come true, but it is not bad	Good
R8	My professional success is 7/10, I have succeeded in achieving my goals, but I do not feel that this success is compatible with other areas of my life	I evaluate myself quite positively, I always treat those better than me as a reference point and compare myself to them
R9	My success is 8/10 points	I am valuable, more meticulous than others, more hard-working, more conscientious than others
R10	I don't think it is a very stunning career, but life decisions – career was not a big priority, but family was, I am satisfied	I evaluate myself positively, top 5%

Source: Own work.

Analysis of the results obtained

The research results presented here show only part of the collected data, which, due to the specific nature of the area studied, are extremely extensive and cannot be shown in full in this paper. However, the results collected show varying dimensions of evaluation, perceptions of one's success, and the emotions that accompany it. Self-esteem of those surveyed indicates that Polish managers have a high opinion of themselves, which is also largely confirmed by

their opinions on their own achievements, competencies, and qualities that, in the opinion of those surveyed, contributed to their professional success. Similarly, the respondents evaluated themselves highly compared to other people, indicating that they possess qualities and skills that have greatly influenced where they are in their careers today. However, the emotions with which they identify their success in many cases are difficult and aggravating, and, in their responses, often appear as the first association with the road they have travelled. The results collected and presented in this paper suggest that impostor syndrome as presented by the results obtained by Clance and Imes among people with above-average success and competence is basically non-existent. However, it is important to keep in mind the limitations, which in this case can be crucial for obtaining such sensitive information. In addition to a too small study group, which is due, among other things, to the qualitative approach to the research, the limitations of the study certainly include the respondents' potential fear of being judged by the researcher, the reluctance of the subjects to provide honest, profound, at times difficult answers, and the desire to show themselves in a positive light in front of the researcher. The results of the study show, for example, that those surveyed, although they generally evaluated themselves positively, often added that success was not yet full, that they hoped for more success in the future, that they evaluated themselves positively, but there were still things they would like to achieve. It should also be noted that Clance and Imes's observations were made in the late 1970s. Today's way of expressing oneself, the permission to speak openly about one's successes and failures, the social narrative that urges people to share successes, that drives people to achieve successes and show them is quite different from the time when the term appeared in the literature (cf., e.g., Kolber, 2016, pp. 79–80). Today's social pressure, both in business in the broadest sense, but also in science and other areas of human activity, places a strong emphasis on showing one's success. This is also one possible reason why the managers in the research conducted showed themselves mainly in this positive light, which is compatible with what is happening in the social space, which in today's world wants leaders and winners. In this context, it can be expected that psychological analysis at a deeper level could allow aspects to be revealed that are not necessarily readily

exposed in research and, in order for them to be revealed, require time, much more trust, and a sense of security that is not always possible to achieve in the research process. The study conducted indicates that professional success in the opinion of managers is associated not only with strong emotions, but also with a strong focus on one's own development, learning, requires certain combinations of qualities and skills, but also an awareness of who I am, what my limitations are, what my weaknesses are. Therefore, the question of how effective managers perceive who they are and what they wear under the mask is still open.

In conclusion, it should be stated that the research presented in this work indicates that professional success is multidimensional – it will be defined and assessed differently by each person. It is the combination of various factors as well as individual human perception that determines the extent to which specific achievements will be considered success.

The research presented in this work, carried out among the group of Polish managers indicated in the work, has shown that impostor syndrome in the sense presented in the observations of Clance and Imes does not occur, but, as indicated above, it is important to be aware of how much the narrative regarding success has changed over the years in the professional space.

When thinking about future research directions, it is worth considering aspects related to the emotional dimension of professional success, especially among people holding high, exposed professional positions. The psychological aspect of managers' functioning in the current business space full of unpredictability and uncertainty may certainly be important in the context of implementing a management role. Emotions, mental states, mental resilience, the ability to self-reflect, empathy or lack thereof, but also the tendency to take risks in conditions of great ambiguity – all this may determine how effectively managers will be able to function not only in organizational structures, coping with current situation's business challenges, but also in the psychological dimension, which often determines the effectiveness and efficiency of human functioning in an organization, especially in the long term. These aspects can largely determine what type of organizational behaviour will appear in the organization and how it will translate into actions and outcome.

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