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CONTROLLERS, NON-CONTROLLERS AND POTENTIAL FUTURE CONTROLLERS. PREFERENCES ON INDIVIDUALISM OR COLLECTIVISM IN PROFESSIONAL WORK

Summary: The paper presents the result of an empirical study on controlling psychology. It focuses on the preferences on individualism or collectivism in professional work in identified groups of declarative controllers and non-controllers, real controllers and non-controllers and potential future controllers

Keywords: controllers, individualism, collectivism.

1. Introduction

In modern economy and management of companies and other units psychological findings are gaining more and more importance. One of the most important psychological dimensions, crucial for managing workplace and making business decisions, is an individualism–collectivism dimension.

"Individualism on the one side versus its opposite, collectivism […], is the degree to which people in a society are integrated into groups" [Hofstede 2011, p. 11]. "Individualism stands for a preference for a loosely knit social framework in society wherein individuals are supposed to take care of themselves and their immediate families only. Its opposite, collectivism, stands for a preference for a tightly knit social framework in which individuals can expect their relatives, clan, or other in-group to look after them in exchange for unquestioning loyalty […]. The fundamental issue addressed by this dimension is the degree of interdependence a society maintains among individuals. It relates to people's self-concept: 'I' or 'we'" [Hofstede 1984, p. 83].

People characterised by high collectivism will prefer working in groups. A group is defined as any "number of people who interact with one another, are psychologically aware of one another and who perceive themselves as being in a group" [Mullins 2007, p. 804]. Groups function in business life as well as in the private life. Group

working and using its effect is the base for formulating teams within companies as well as teams combined with employees of different companies that work together on a business project.

Collectivism is used in various psychological contexts. The example can be a concept of collective narcissism which "bases on the premise of social identity theory which states that as people can be narcissistic at the individual level and they idealize their own self then they can be also narcissistic at the group level and idealize the group that they identify themselves with" [Cichocka, Golec de Zavada 2011, pp. 233–234]. Even, the term collective unconsciousness exits, which is defined as "the storehouse of archetypes and racial memories" [Nevid, Rathus 2006, p. 553].

Although in the present western world, skills combining group working and collective approach to job tasks are highly valued. In theory and practice there are trends showing that individual work connected with introvert approach to life, although underestimated, becomes nowadays more appreciated in professional and private life [see Cain 2012, *passim*].

From another point of view, some business experts underlay the necessity of usage of even informal groups that function in the workplace and suggest the profitability of building communities. Communities, when strategically built, can be more engaged and cheaper than other forms of collective acting within companies [McDermott, Archibald 2011, pp. 112–121].

The various aspects of individualism–collectivist dimension are also important questions in managerial accounting and controlling. This matter is especially important while designing and implementing solutions connected with responsibility accounting, performance measurement and remuneration of managers and employees. In these contexts a question arises: which form of planning, motivating and controlling should be used: connected with individual work, performance and effects or connected with collective-group performance. Obvioulsy each approach has its advantages and disadvantages. "Some people believe that individual performance should be evaluated relative to that person's tasks and assigned goals in the organization In this approach, performance awards should be based on the individual's performance relative to plan, with due consideration of the factors over which the individual had no control and may have affected performance. Others recommend that rewards should be based on group performance. The disadvantage of this perspective is that distinctive (good or bad) individual performance is not formally recognized and, if no effective group sanctions exist, may lead to individual shrinking" [Kaplan, Atkinson 1995, p. 740].

In contemporary responsibility accounting rewarding "[…] individuals is more complicated than in the traditional setting. Individuals simultaneously have accountability for team and individual performance. Since the emphasis is on efforts, group-based rewards are more suitable than individual rewards" [Hansen, Mowen 1995, p. 848].

Usually people responsible for implementation of controlling should face the dilemma of choosing preference for the collectivist or the individualistic approach or, what is more difficult, to combine both of them. Anyway, controllers themselves can prefer one of those forms of working. Controllers's job usually consists of individual and collective work. Some of controllers' task are strictly analytical and usually strongly connected with the necessity of individual work. Other tasks, like budget negotiations, are related with the necessity of working within a group which consists of people belonging to various fields, having different skills and knowledge, and sometimes very different personality. Therefore, a research question arises: whether controllers prefer individual or collective work.

The goal of the paper is to identify the preferences for collective or individual groups which have different relations with controlling. Respondents will be classified on the basis of declarations about work in controlling and real realization of controlling tasks. Also respondents who can potentially work in controlling in the future will be taken into account.

2. Empirical research

Presented research was conducted by the questionnaire method. In points 2.1 and 2.2 the characteristic of the groups of respondents and their choice will be given. In points 2.3 and 2.4 the analysis of research results will be presented.

2.1. Identification of groups of real and declarative controllers and non-controllers

The first part of the research was conducted on the group of 102 people. The choice of the research sample was aleatory. Figure 1 presents the percentage of two genders in the group of the participants of the research. Women constituted 52% of the group and men – 48%.

First classification of respondents was made based on their declarations about their work in controlling. Two groups were established:

1) group of "declarative controllers" – people who declare that they work or worked in controlling;

2) group of "declarative non-controllers" – people who declare that they do not work or have never worked in controlling.

On those conditions of classification, 45 respondents were identified as "declarative controllers". The group comprised 67% of men and 38% of women (see Figure 2).

The group of declarative non-controllers consists of respondents who answered negatively the question on work in controlling. Consequently 57 respondents were identified as "declarative non-controllers". The gender dimension of the group is depicted in Figure 3. The group of declarative non-controllers consisted of 63% of women and 37% of men.
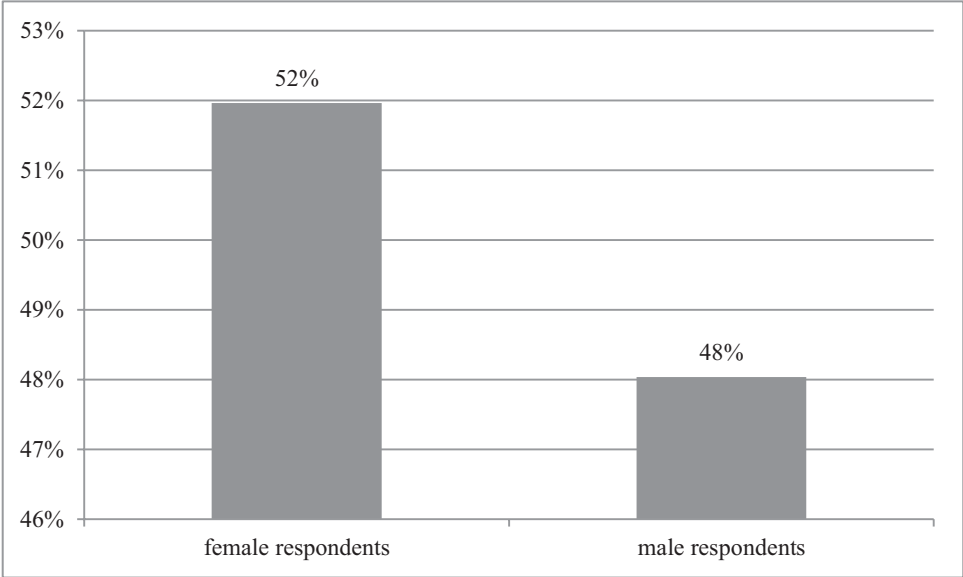
Figure 1. Respondents with respect to gender classification
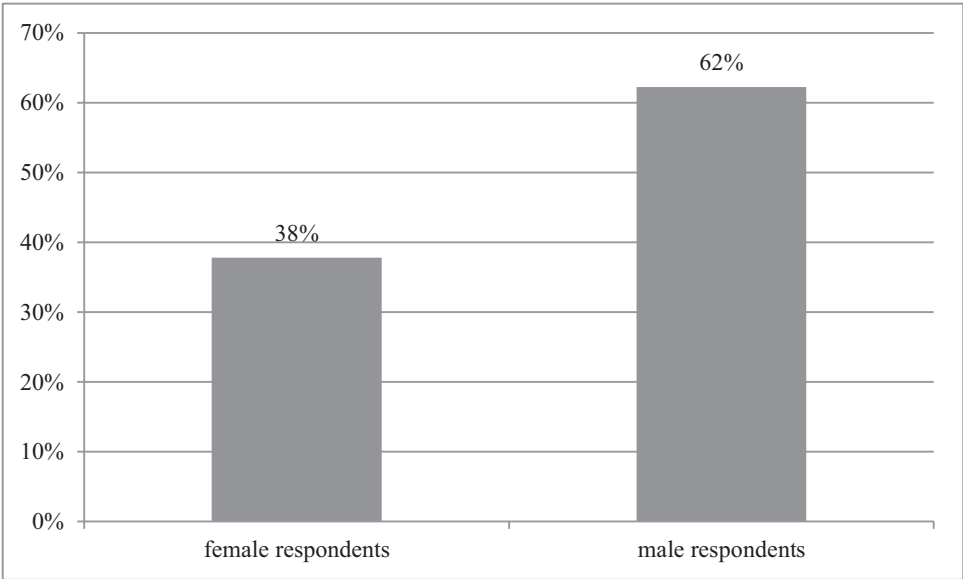
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Figure 2. Declarative controllers with respect to gender classification
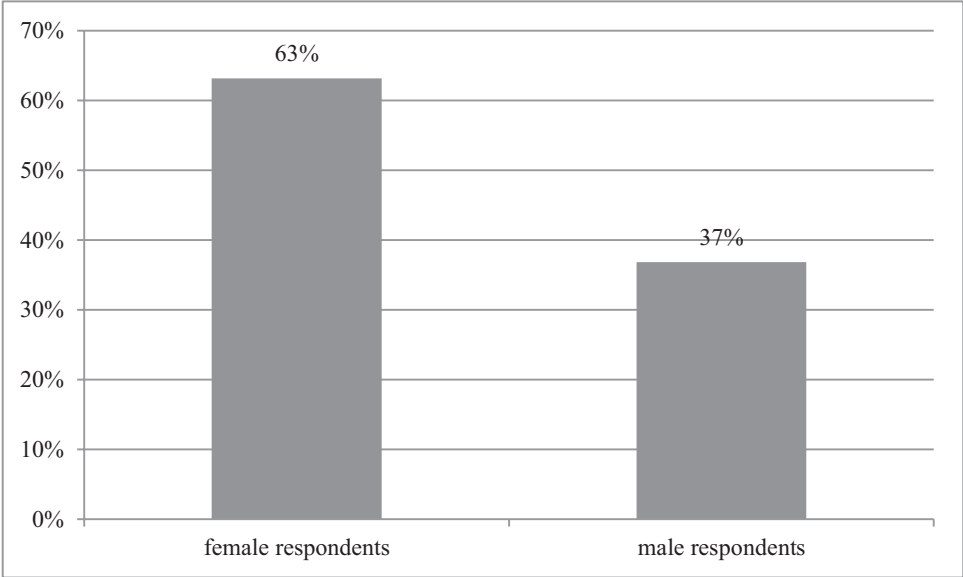
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Figure 3. Declarative non-controllers with respect to gender classification
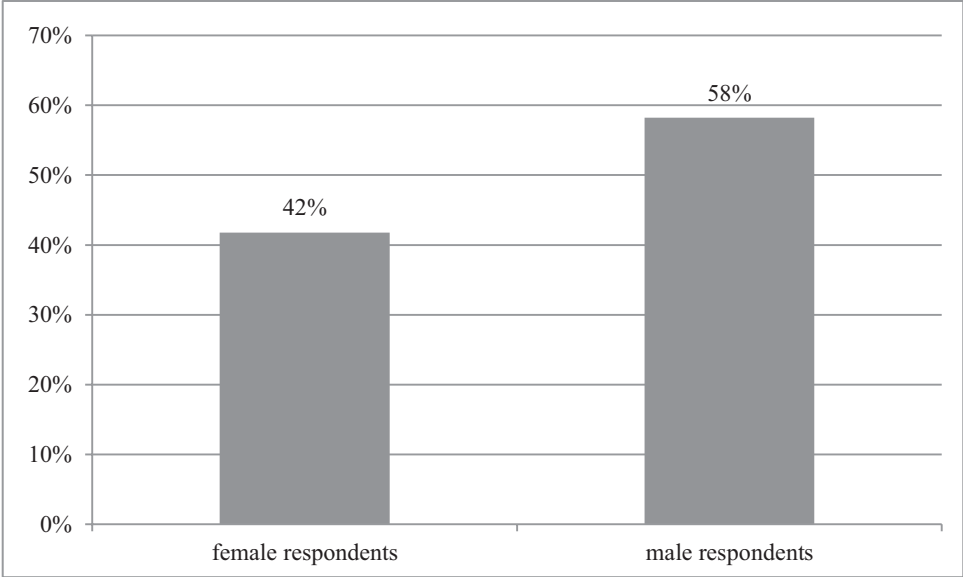
Source: own elaboration.

Figure 4. Real controllers with respect to gender classification

Source: own elaboration.

The second classification was conducted on the basis of real realization of controlling tasks – 24 tasks of controllers were enumerated. Again, two groups were identified:

1) respondents who in their work realize or realized at least 3 of enumerated tasks of controlling were classified as "real controllers";

2) respondents who in their work realize or realized 2 or 1 or none of enumerated tasks of controlling were classified as "real non-controllers".

As a consequence, 67 people were identified as "real controllers". The group is 58% male and 42% female (see Figure 4).

The group of "real non-controllers" – people who performed less than 3 tasks of controlling consists of 35 persons, including 71% women and 29% men. The gender dimension of non-controllers is shown in Figure 5.
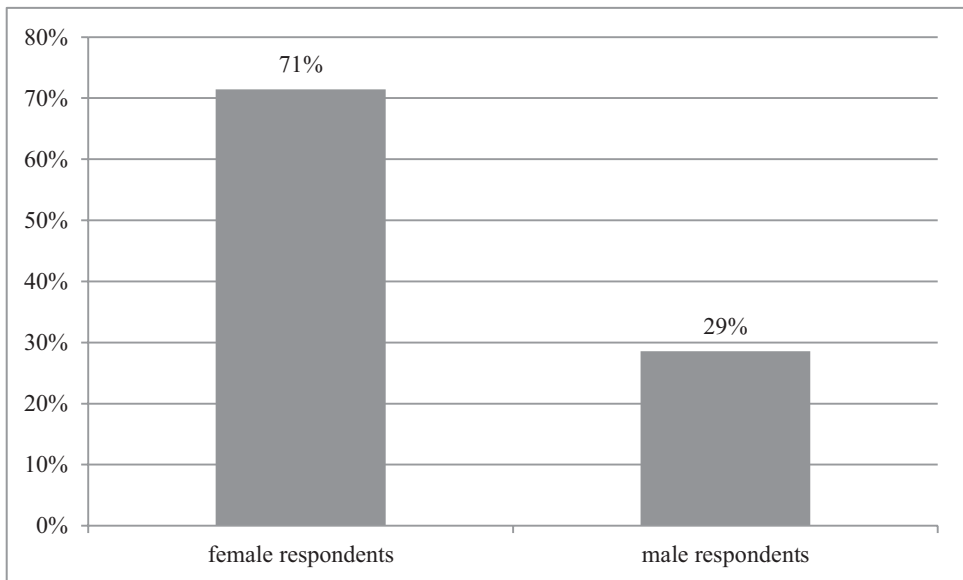

Figure 5. Real non-controllers with respect to gender classification
Source: own elaboration.

2.2. Group of potential future controllers

The second part of the research was conducted on the group of potential future controllers. The group of potential future controllers was identified among the students who can possibly work in the future in controlling, meaning, their fulfilled the following conditions:

1) they chose and participated in lectures or workshops whose subject was controlling-related – which means they show potential interest in controlling task;

2) at the university, they major or specialise in accounting or accounting-related subjects – which means that they will possess the knowledge and skills necessary for realizing controlling tasks.

The group of respondents consisted of all the population of the students at Wrocław University of Economics that fulfilled the given conditions.

The group of respondents that fulfilled those two conditions numbered 516 people: 21% men and 79% women. It is depicted in Figure 6.
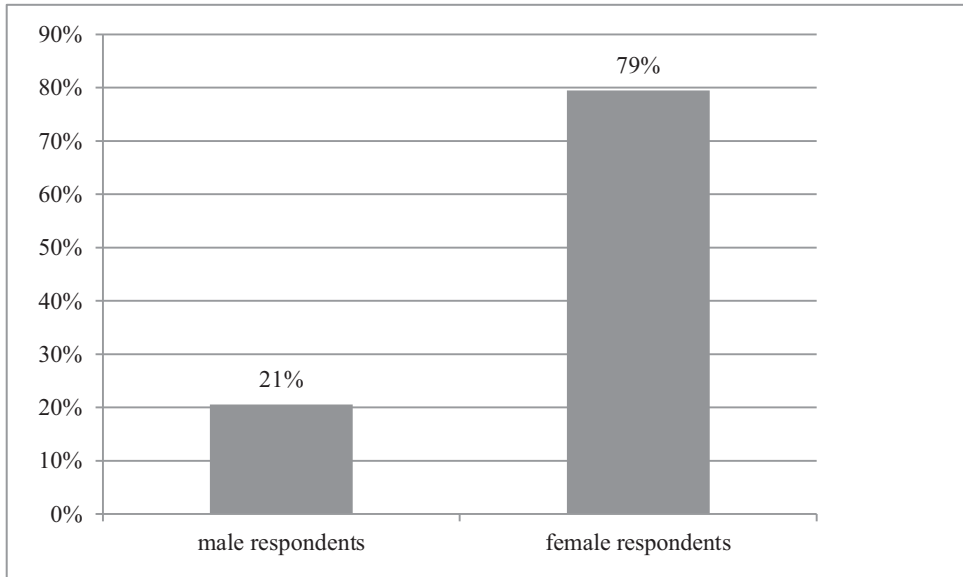

Figure 6. Potential future controllers with respect to gender classification

Source: own elaboration.

In the research people studying in two basic study forms – regular daily studies (66%) and weekend studies (34%) – were taken into account. This is presented in Figure 7.

Respondents studied at different levels of studies. Among them 57% studied at the bachelor level (the first level of studies), 19% studied at the master level (as the second level studies), 24% of them studied at united master studies (which functioned before the implementation of the Bologna system). This is shown in Figure 8.

The research on the students – potential controllers group – was conducted from the academic year 2007/2008 to the academic year 2011/2012. The percentage of the number of respondents in given years is presented in Figure 9.
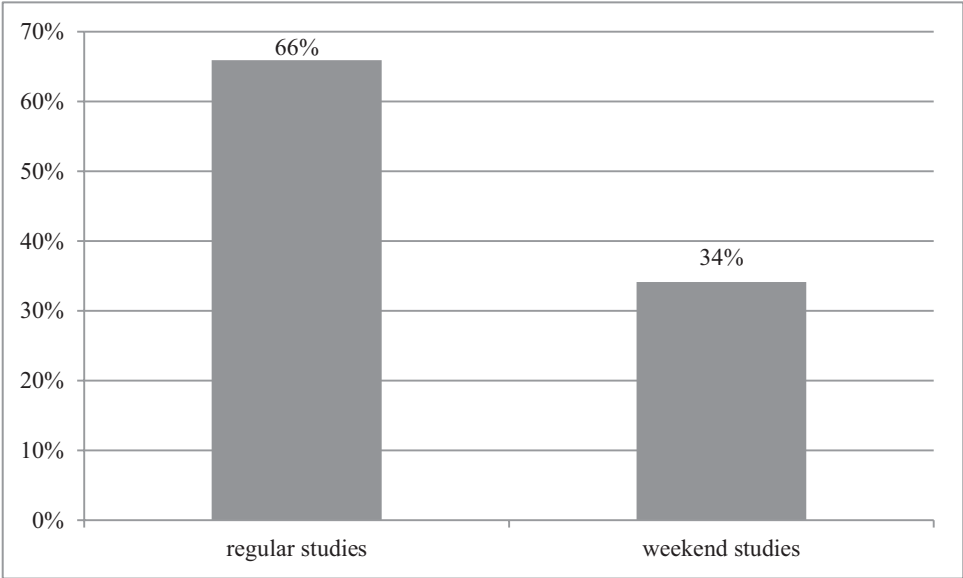
Figure 7. Respondents classified with respect to the form of studies
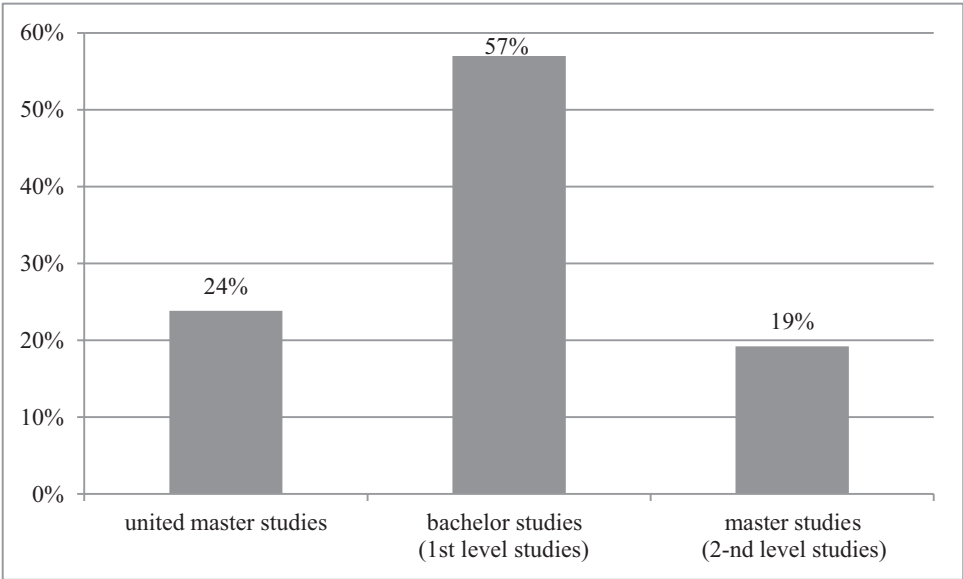
Source: own elaboration.

Figure 8. Respondents classified with respect to the level of studies
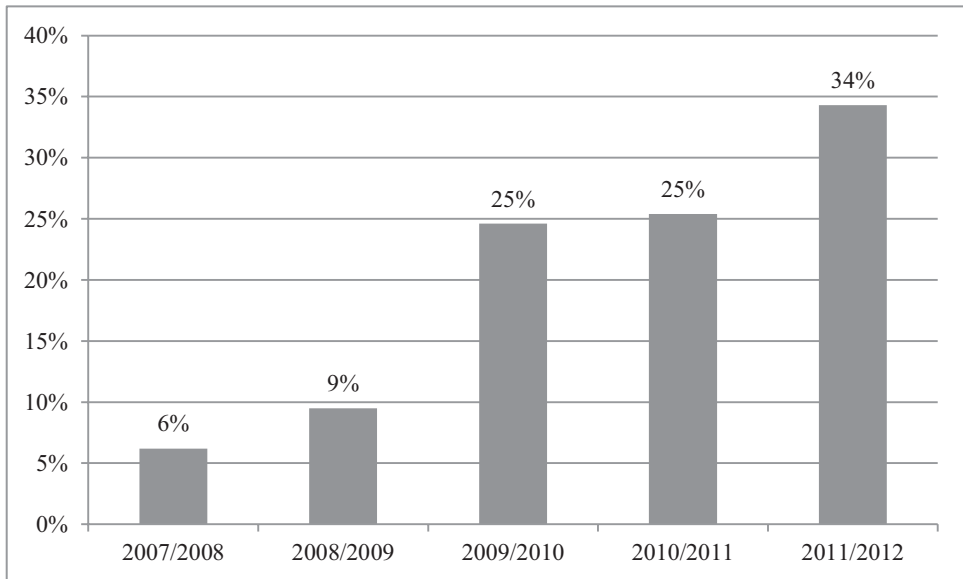
Source: own elaboration.

Figure 9. Respondents classified with respect to academic year

Source: own elaboration.

The biggest number of people constituted respondents in the academic year 2011/2012 (34%), following 2009/2010 and 2010/2011 (in both of those periods – 1/4), the smallest number of respondents was in 2007/2008 (6%) and 2008/2009 (10%).

2.3. Comparative analysis of individual or collective preferences for declarative and real controllers and non-controllers

The respondents were to answer a question whether they prefer to work individually, collectively or this has no importance for them. Figure 10 presents a comparison of answers given by declarative controllers and declarative non-controllers.

The comparative analysis of groups of declarative controllers and declarative non-controllers shows that declarative controllers more often declare the lack of preferences. For both groups people who have preferences show them for individual work.

The comparison presented in Figure 11 concerns the controllers and non--controllers classification.

Comparing people who really work in controlling and who do not work in controlling from the point of view of the individualistic or the collectivist approach, one should emphasise that almost 1/5 more of controllers than non-controllers prefer individual work (42% responses for controllers and 60% responses for non-
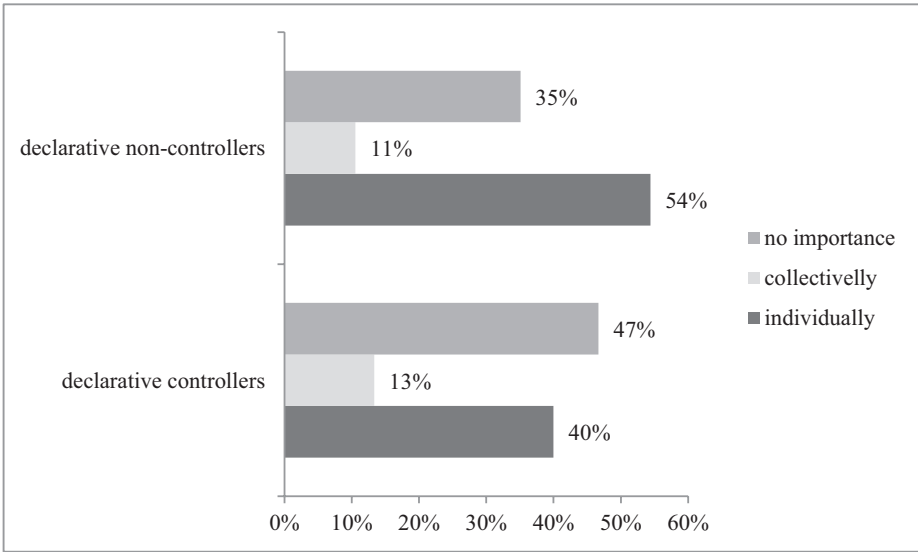
Figure 10. Declaratice controllers *versus* declarative non-controllers – preferences for the group aspect of working
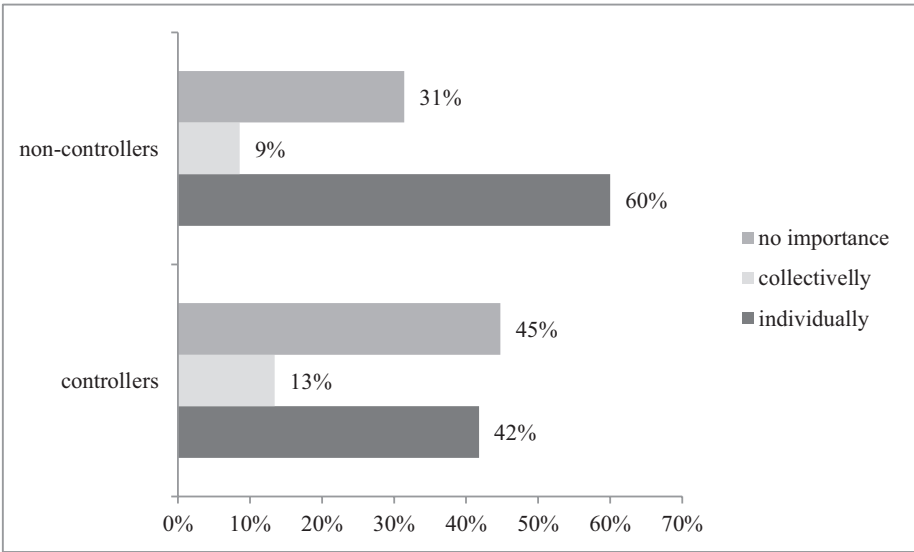
Source: own elaboration.

Figure 11. Declaratice controllers *versus* declarative non-controllers – preferences for the group aspect of working

Source: own elaboration.

controllers). Among controllers, the largest group with no preferences exists (45% comparing to 31% in non-controllers group). The group work is chosen only by 13% of non-controllers and 9% of controllers.

2.4. Comparative analysis of individual or collective preferences of potential future controllers

The following analyses will be based on the answers of potential future controllers. Figure 12 presents the preferences declared in different academic years.
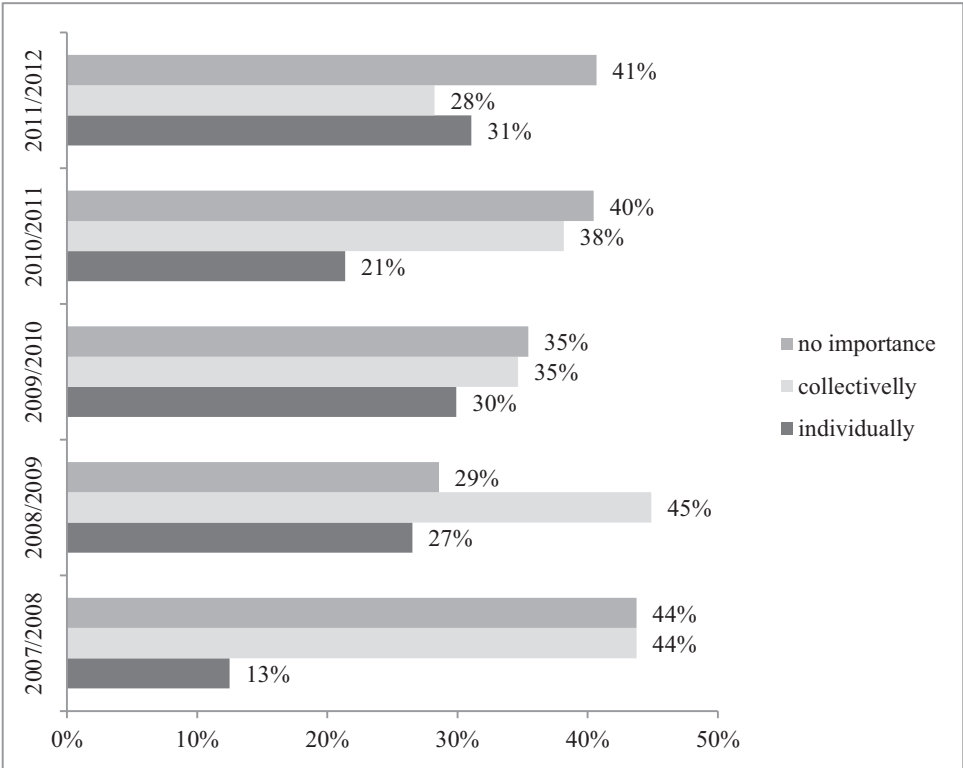

Figure 12. Preferences for the group aspect of working identified in the sequence of academic years

Source: own elaboration.

As shown in Figure 12, changes in the preferences exhibit irregularity. Nevertheless, in most of the analysed periods, individual work was the least preferable but it can be noticed than the number of the percentage of people who prefer this form of working increases. The collective work is the most preferable, but, apart from the last period, it is becoming less popular. The high percentage of people with no percentage is quite stable.
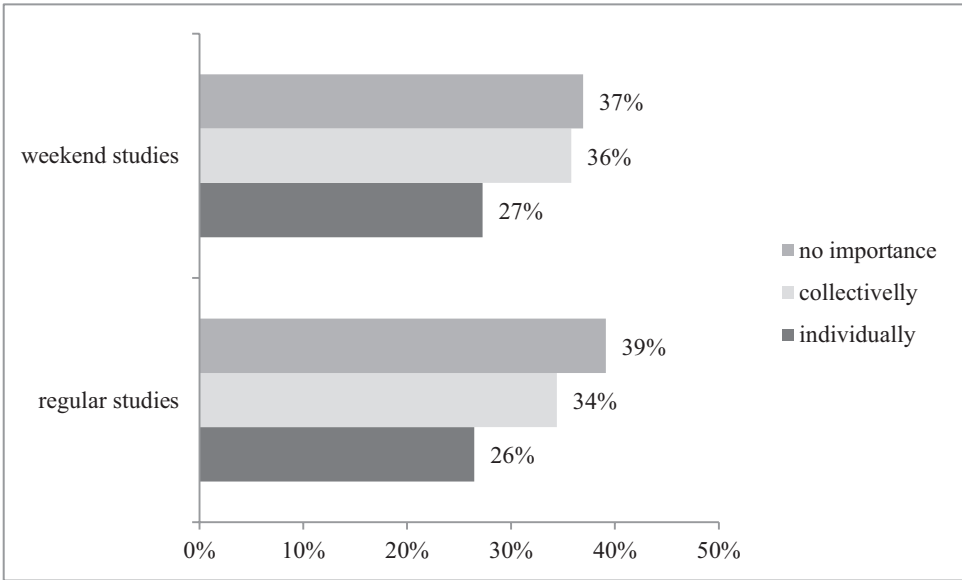
Figure 13. Preferences for the group aspect of working identified for groups of regular and weekend studies
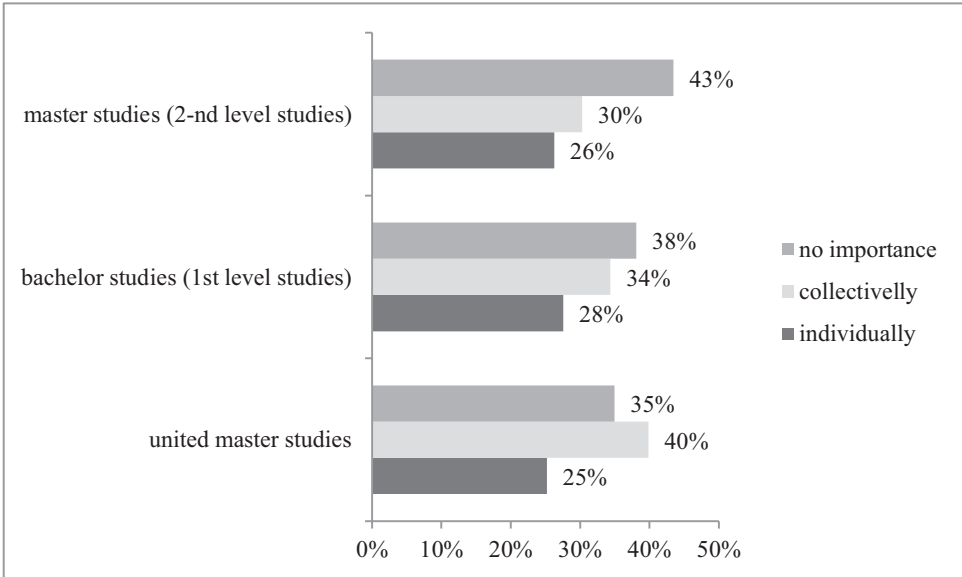
Source: own elaboration.

Figure 14. Preferences for the group aspect of working identified for different levels of studies

Source: own elaboration.

Figure 13 depicts preferences of respondents who participate in regular studies compared to those who participate in weekend studies.

The biggest percentage of respondents doing both forms of studies (39% for regular studies and 37% for weekend studies) declares lack of preferences. Among people with preferences, the collective work option dominates (36% of weekend students and 34% of regular students). In both groups, individual work has the lowest popularity (26% for regular students and 27% for weekend students).

For all the levels of studies, there is agreement that individual work is characterised by the lowest popularity (25% for united master studies, 26% for second-level master studies and 28% for bachelor studies). For both levels of the two-level system of studies, the most popular option was lack of importance (38% for bachelor studies and 43% for master studies), whereas for united master studies collective work was the most popular (40% of respondents). As many as 35% of respondents from the united master studies group opted for "no importance" (and it was the second option, according to its popularity) and 34% bachelor students and 30% of second-level master students chose the collective work option.

3. Conclusions

Table 1 presents the most and the least popular preferences in various groups of respondents.

Table 1. Comparison of the most and the least popular preferences

	Most popular answer – maximum percentage	Least popular answer – minimum percentage
Declarative controllers	No importance – 47%	Collectively – 13%
Declarative non-controllers	Individually – 54%	Collectively – 11%
Real controllers	No importance – 45%	Collectively – 13%
Real non-controllers	Individually – 60%	Collectively – 9%
Potential future controllers – regular studies	No importance – 39%	Individually – 26%
Potential future controllers – weekend studies	No importance – 37%	Individually – 27%
Potential future controllers – bachelor first-level studies	No importance – 38%	Individually – 28%
Potential future controllers – master second-level studies	No importance – 43%	Individually – 26%
Potential future controllers – united master studies	Collectively – 40%	Individually – 25%

Source: own elaboration.

As can be noticed, the most meaningful differences do not appear between groups of controllers and non-controllers (no matter real or declarative) but between

potential future controllers and the rest of respondents. For the group of potential future controllers individual work has the lowest popularity. For other groups collective work is the most unpopular. This can be contributed to differences in experience. Moreover, it can be stated that for choosing the form of work the formal education (knowledge of controlling, accounting and finance) is not as important as practical job experience and mental maturity. It can be argued that although respondents belonging to the group of potential future controllers can be well-educated in the aforementioned matters and have proper knowledge of methods and tools of controlling, they can still be unsure if they can manage to fulfil controller's tasks on their own. The human being can be defined as an adult one by:

- specifics of life tasks which are undertaken and realized,
- responsibility for oneself and others,
- independence, especially the emotional one, from parents or custodians,
- freedom of choice and accompanying power to fulfill ones strives and needs. [Oleś 2012, p. 15]. Therefore, individual fulfillment of tasks assigned at work (in the analyzed case: the controller's tasks), taking individual responsibility for the effects and quality of one's tasks, independence from other people (colleagues) at work will be a sign of maturity, which is not always an attribute of people who have not finished their studies yet.

On the other hand, people who work in controlling already, having contact with other people in companies and being able to compare their skills and qualifications, can notice that –being experts in controlling – they will do many tasks faster, with better quality and more satisfactory effect if they do the tasks on their own. Individual work in such a complicated matter as controlling, where a a range of professional knowledge, many unique skills and acquaintance many procedures are necessary, can be more effective than a collective work, taken into account that a controller really possesses all those qualifications. Peter Drucker stated that the success is achieved by people who are capable of self-management [Drucker 2006, p. 168]. The research shows that controllers are persons who are capable of self-management.

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CONTROLLERZY, NIECONTROLLERZY I POTENCJALNI CONTROLLERZY. PREFERENCJE DOTYCZĄCE INDYWIDUALIZMU BĄDŹ KOLEKTYWIZMU W PRACY ZAWODOWEJ

Streszczenie: W artykule przedstawiono wyniki badań empirycznych z zakresu psychologii controllingu. Dotyczyły one preferencji w zakresie indywidualizmu bądź kolektywizmu w pracy wydzielonych w badaniu grup controllerów deklaratywnych i rzeczywistych, niecontrollerów deklaratywnych rzeczywistych oraz potencjalnych przyszłych controllerów

Słowa kluczowe: controllerzy, indywidualizm, kolektywizm.