Identification and development of communicative capabilities in agromanagers

Identifikácia a rozvoj komunikačných spôsobilostí u agromanažérov

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Abstract: A high level of communicative capabilities as an integral part of social skills in managers is an essential prerequisite of success in managerial position. The paper points out an opportunity of quantifying the level of communicative capabilities, as well as the way of delimiting deficiencies in communication and planning the process of development of communicative capabilities. The testing was done on a sample of 230 students of the Faculty of Economics and Management, Slovak University of Agriculture in Nitra, i.e. in the future agromanagers.

Key words: manager, social skills, communicative capability, testing of communicative capabilities

Abstrakt: Vysoká úroveň spôsobilosti komunikovať ako súčasť sociálnej zručnosti manažérov je zásadným predpokladom úspešnosti v manažérskej pozícii. V príspevku ukazujeme na možnosť kvantifikovať úroveň spôsobilosti komunikovať, ďalej na spôsob ako stanoviť nedostatky (deficity v komunikácii) a ako plánovať proces rozvoja spôsobilosti komunikovať. Testovanie bolo uskutočnené na vzorke 230 poslucháčov Fakulty ekonomiky a manažmentu Slovenskej poľnohospodárskej univerzity v Nitre, teda u budúcich agromanažérov.

Kľúčové slová: manažér, sociálna zručnosť, komunikačná spôsobilosť, testovanie spôsobilosti komunikovať

The paper (Višňovský 1999) presents a group of methodologies that can be used to test social skills in managers. In laying down these methodologies, we proceeded from the conviction (Višňovský, Otolinski, Gdovin 1996), that indispensable for success in managerial position are two personality prerequisites which can be called global personality traits, namely *dominance* and *sociability*. If a manager has both a high level of dominance and a high level of sociability, then in relation to his/her employees, it is manifested in the manager setting sensible and demanding objectives, prompting people to co-operate, motivating, orienting, delineating and coordinating their activities. On the contrary, a manager with high dominance but low sociability mostly criticizes, disagrees, opposes, prohibits, humiliates and condemns his/her employees. Such managerial "outfit" has become insufficient by now. Employees realize their human dimensions and the quality of human relations in any workplace has become one of the dominant motivating factors.

The present paper aims at showing the opportunities of testing communicative capabilities and at utilizing the test results. We proceed here from the recognition that the high level of human capital in a firm has become a strategic advantage and that the improvement of managerial competences is an important component of the training institution (Hron, Tichá 2002); that the training of managers should be controlled purposefully (Vetráková 2002, Horalíková 1999, Krninská 2002) to bring their competence in line with the demands on managers in the globalising entrepreneurial environment.

PAPER AIM

Human behavior can be monitored in three systems: cognitivity, emotionality and executive functions. Cognitive functions show the way of human dealing with information. Emotionality points out motivation and feelings. Executive functions document human activities and behavior control.

Communication, the essence of which is a form of human response, manifests especially the executive functions. However, the level of these functions is essentially influenced by the level of cognitive functions and emotionality. The better the human's cognizance of the problem communicated (i.e. more profound, more precise), the more factual, complete, precise can be the communication. On the other hand, the stronger the motives proceeding from human needs (e.g. to obtain or win something, such as money, property, position, or even concession of partners for being right) the more complicated is human acting. All this is manifested in the level of communication.

According to the prevailing opinion, the level of communicative capabilities in our managers is rather low. This leads to radical questions:

1. Is it possible to quantify in any way the communicative capability?
2. Is it possible to identify particular deficiencies in communicative capability?
3. Is it possible to remove the deficiencies in communicative capability?

The answers to the above questions form the aim of this paper.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Attempting to increase their communicative capabilities, managers take part in courses (development programs). Participants of such courses get acquainted with model communicative situations, with their communicative faults etc. If anyone wishes to achieve real improvement in communication, s/he must, first of all, be able to identify his/her communicative capability, pinpoint own failures and their background, consider the degree to which these lead to problems s/he has in contact with other people, weigh up the sense and contributions of self-improvement in communication. There is no sense in talking about the desired situation but not taking any means of improving the present one.

The testing of communicative capabilities was done both in a group of graduated managers (Višňovský, Pecuchová 2002) and in a group of managerial students. This paper presents the results of the tested students, as the future managerial elite. A sample of 230 students of 4th and 5th grades of the Faculty of Economics and Management, who either as obligatory or optional subject enrolled in the winter term 2002/2003 in the discipline "Human Resources Management", underwent a test of communicative capability. The test group was composed of 4 study branches: Business Management, Economics of Agriculture, International Agrarian Commerce and Finance in Agriculture. The structure of respondents (totals, male : female ratio) are given in the Results.

A questionnaire **(**by Kozári, quoted in Višňovský 2002**)** was used to test the communicative capability. It contains the following 40 questions:

1. Are you able to express your opinion so that the other party will understand it?
2. Will you ask the partner to specify a question that seems unclear to you?
3. Do other partners in negotiations try to word for you some expressions when you attempt to explain something?
4. Do you agree that the other party knows what you want to say – even without you having to explain your opinion in detail?
5. Will you ask the other party to express his/her opinion on the standpoint you defend?
6. Does it cause you a problem to lead a dialog with another person?
7. Do you try to discuss such questions that interest both your partner and you?
8. Does it cause you a problem to express your opinion if it differs from the opinion of other persons you are negotiating with?
9. Can you see the situation from the other party's standpoint in discussion?
10. Do you try to talk more than your partner in discussion?
11. Are you aware of the impact of your voice on other people?
12. Do you avoid saying something that you think could offend the other party or worsen mutual relations?
13. Does it cause you a problem to accept constructive criticism from others?
14. Would you discuss the problem when somebody offended your feelings?
15. Would you apologize to a person after you have hurt him/her?
16. Are you much baffled when somebody does not agree with you?
17. Does it cause you a problem to think reasonably when you are angry with someone?
18. Are you afraid of contradicting other people because you think they might get angry?
19. When a problem arises between you and the other party, can you discuss it without getting angry?
20. Are you satisfied with the way of solving conflicts and misunderstandings with others?
21. When somebody baffles you, do you grouch and curse?
22. When somebody flatters you, are you at a loss?
23. Are you generally able of trusting other people?
24. Do you find it difficult to flatter or praise other people?
25. Do you consciously try to cover up your faults from other people?
26. Would you enable other people to come to know you better by saying what you think, feel and believe in?
27. Does it cause you a problem to believe in people?
28. Do you try to change the topic of discussion when you feel confrontation is imminent?
29. In discussion, do you let your partner finish his/her words, or do you interrupt him/her?
30. Have you ever caught yourself napping in a discussion with your partner, not paying attention to what s/he says?
31. With somebody talking, do you seek for the sense of his/her words?
32. Do you believe your partners pay attention to what you are talking about?
33. Can you see the situation from your partner's standpoint in discussion?
34. Do you pretend to pay attention at discussions even when in fact you are not doing so?
35. Are you able to sense the difference between what somebody is saying and what in fact s/he is feeling?
36. Can you specify the response of other people to your opinion?
37. Have you ever felt your partners would like you to be a different person?

38. Do other people understand your feelings?
39. Do you get hints sometimes that you believe always to be in the right?
40. You have found you were wrong. Will you confess?

The respondents are to answer each of the above questions truly, using one of the answers available: yes, no, sometimes; the latter should be minimized. According to the type of the answer the questions are then allotted values: 3, 2, 1, 0 points, in accordance with the degree of identification of the tested with the required (correct) answer.

The results obtained by testing were evaluated statistically, the following hypotheses being verified here:
– the type of secondary school finished may (but need not) influence the level of communicative capability (mean value and variability of the number of obtained points),
– communicative capability is determined by the student's orientation at certain study branches within his/her study course,
– communicative capability is significantly different in males and females.

Also monitored was the correlation of success (failure) in communication in respondent subgroup of the study branch Business Management to the most frequently occurring questions in which the tested achieved zero points.

RESULTS ACHIEVED

Individual communicative capability

Theoretically, it is possible to obtain 120 points in the test. The mean capability level ranged between 81 and 85 points.

The utilization of test results, as already mentioned in Material and Methods, is topical predominantly on individual level. If the person tested answers the questions truly, then the total number of obtained points documents his/her overall topical communicative capability. In questions with zero points, individual deficiencies occur. People with low sub-mean and mean level should carefully analyze the causes of their deficiencies.

Multi-source evaluation was also applied in the tested group. This concerned mutual evaluation of pairs of students knowing each other well. Varying results (between self-evaluation and evaluation by colleagues) and the analysis of these variations in pairs or larger groups is not only an attractive but also sensible activity for the tested persons. Students are more open compared with managers, willing to listen to the opinion of others on themselves. The students did not embellish their capabilities. Neither did they know they would be asked, at the end of the term, for voluntary release of their test results for group processing of results. Knowing the real condition and its critical evaluation leads to attempts at developing their communicative capabilities.

Communicative capability of tested group and subgroups

Mutual comparison of mean successfulness of students as represented by the mean number of points obtained by the students of individual branches but also the variations among the students within these branches yielded the following results:

Comparative analyses of male and female successfulness in communicative capabilities led to the conclusion that there are no statistically significant differences in the mean level of obtained points between males (mean 84.24 points) and females (mean 82.45 points) or in the variability of communicative capabilities of students within the male and female groups.

Table 1. Number of tested students and parameters of communicative capability levels

Study branch		Males	Females	Total
Total	number of tested	76.00	154.00	230.00
	mean – points	84.23	82.45	83.04
	variable coefficient in %	12.85	13.26	13.14
Business management	number of tested	48.00	85.00	133.00
	mean – points	85.69	81.89	83.30
	variable coefficient in %	12.71	12.80	12.87
Economics of agriculture	number of tested	9.00	13.00	22.00
	mean – points	78.44	76.85	77.50
	variable coefficient in %	16.28	19.32	17.73
International commerce	number of tested	3.00	23.00	26.00
	mean – points	88.00	87.61	87.70
	variable coefficient in %	6.33	9.52	9.10
Finance	number of tested	4.00	17.00	21.00
	mean – points	87.50	84.50	85.00
	variable coefficient in %	13.83	13.49	13.29

Comparing points obtained in the test of communicative successfulness we found that there was a significant difference (level of significance 0.02) between the students of individual study branches. Mutual comparison of the students of Business Management branch with those of other branches was studied in detail. Statistically significant difference (level of significance 0.025) was found in communicative capabilities between the students of Business Management (mean 83.26) and International Commerce (mean 87.64). These groups showed also a significant difference in variability (level of significance 0.044). Statistically significant variability in communicative capabilities was found within the group of Business Management with variation coefficient 12.87%, while in the group of International Commerce it was only 9.1%.

Communicative capabilities of the students of Business Management group in correlation with other groups, such as Finances, were not statistically significantly different. This was also caused by a lower number of students of other branches undergoing the tests. Statistically significant difference was only found in the variability of points obtained by Business Management students and those of Economics of Agriculture: substantially higher variability in communicative capabilities is evident in the students of Economics of Agriculture (variability coefficient 17.73%).

Investigating the correlation of mean communicative capabilities and variability in communicative abilities among students *vs.* the type of secondary school finished (only the Grammar School – Gymnasium, Commercial Academy, and other types of secondary schools were considered), significant differences in the level of communicative capabilities presented by the number of points obtained were found only among grammar school students (mean 84.3 points) and other type of schools (mean 79.8 points).

A more detailed analysis of students´ communicative capabilities was done in the most numerous groups of Business Management students, specially investigating the relatively high number of questions with zero points in classification by sex. The results are given in Figure 1.

The graph shows what percentage of Business Management group (males and females apart) obtained 0 points for answers to questions given in the graph.

The results shown here suggest that the problems in student communication consist of:

– non-concentration or inattention in communication with others
– poor self-control following stimulus situation that led to opinion clash
– neglecting that the recipient can receive only such information with precision which is not only semantically but also formally attractive (speech speed, appropriate intonation
– inability to formulate with precision our opinions, accesses
– diverging from the problem – topic of conflicting situation – for fear of getting the conflict out of hand
– purposeful cover-up of our faults from others to seem better in their view than we really are
– suspiciousness of insincerity of our partners in communication and reluctance to openly admit our faults and to apologize if we hurt somebody.

CONCLUSIONS

Communication is an important component of efficient managerial style in influencing employees. In many managers, however, communication is conceived simplistically in the sense of making sure that certain message (information) sent by the expedient is also received by

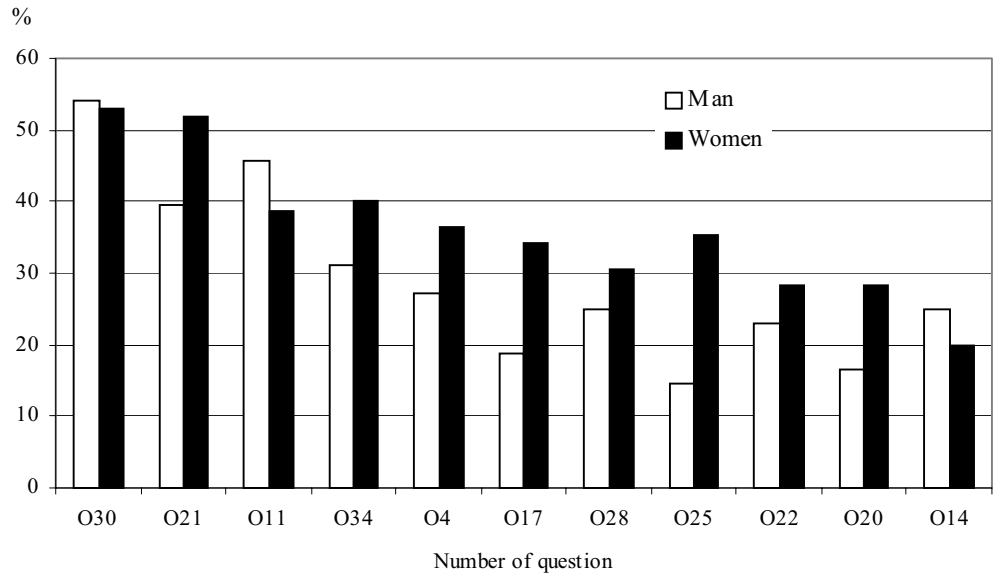

Figure 1. Relative ratio of questions with zero points obtained

the recipient. In reality communication is a much more complicated process.

The paper shows opportunities of receiving an idea on our real communicative capability based on the score of points obtained in the test of communication.

The level of communicative capability is inter-individual. Success in a managerial position, however, requires a high level of communicative capabilities. Our earlier test results of communicative capability in business managers revealed extraordinarily high differences. Dominant in many managers is still the "commanding" model of thinking, their values falling under 70 points (Višňovský, Pecúchová 2002). On the other hand, in many younger academically educated managers, the level is high above the standard.

Essential changes in communicative capability are to be expected from the future managerial generation – the present university undergraduates. Our testing confirmed relatively high mean potential capability to communicate successfully. Particularly analyzed was the level of Business Management students whose mean level is represented by 83 points with variation coefficient 12.87 %. It will be expedient to consider whether a prerequisite for admission to the branch Business Management (after graduating in 1st study grade) should not be at least a mean level of communicative capabilities.

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