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PROFESSIONAL PSYCHOLOGICAL CHALLENGES IN THE PERCEPTION OF MANAGERS

Abstract: The psychological challenges in professional jobs of managerial staff are the subject of the research presented in this chapter. The chapter contains an epistemological part which includes an analysis and synthesis of achievements of the management sciences in the area of managerial psychological challenges and competencies necessary for their undertaking. The aim of the empirical part is to get to know the opinion of managers on the most important and the most difficult challenges of the psychological nature that managers notice in their work. This material can be used to construct useful educational programs carried out in the process of educating managerial staffs.

Key words: manager, psychological challenges, competencies

Introduction

The dynamics of changes taking place in contemporary organizations and in their environment, the diversity and complexity of factors determining their functioning are only some of the variables causing an increase in the degree of difficulty of the professional jobs of managers[2] and expectations towards them. In present organizational realities a manager is seen rather as a performer of a role, or even a collection of roles, fulfilled cyclically and temporarily than a stable job with a clearly defined scope of tasks and responsibilities. This chapter is based on the assumption confirmed in the management studies that the

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[2] The author is aware of the fact that in the management studies the separation of managers from other groups performing managerial roles is more and more emphasized The author is aware of the fact that the science of management increasingly emphasizes the separation of managers from other groups performing the roles of managers (see U. ORNAROWICZ, 2008). However, in this chapter the concepts of a manager and a director are used interchangeably.

condition of the effective undertaking of the challenges resulting from professional roles performed by managerial staff is to make oneself aware of the existence of these challenges. Noticing the problem (the phenomenon) and its verbalization are the first steps in the process of the problem recognition, making decisions, and their implementation. It is also a condition for acquisition, development, and/or activation of the managerial competencies required for this process.

Among the success factors of contemporary organizations the importance of human capital grows. It constitutes a strategic resource that determines the competitive advantage of the organization, but it is also one of the main sources of organization's value. Hence, simultaneously the scale and range of psychological problems grow that should be solved by managers. As a result, the psychological challenges in professional work of managerial staff are the subject of the research presented in this chapter. The chapter contains an epistemological part in which the author presents a critical analysis of the achievements of management sciences in the area of managerial psychological challenges. The aim of the empirical part is to get to know the opinion of the managers on the most important and the most difficult challenges of the psychological nature that managers notice in their work. In the author's opinion, this material has utilitarian value because it can be used to construct useful educational programs carried out in the process of educating and training managerial staffs. Recognition of the psychological challenges allows in the process of education to develop those competencies which are necessary to undertake these challenges effectively by managers in practice.

1. Psychological challenges and managerial roles

Psychological determinants of organizational behaviours, processes, and phenomena have a complex character and are strongly related to the organization's specificity, its culture, personality, etc. The research shows (HOPEJ M. 2009, p. 11) that among the most important problems faced by present directors the lack of trust between people, the lack of loyalty, the unsatisfied need for security and stability, and the lack of sufficient involvement of employees should be mentioned. The quality and attributes of organization's human capital are also changing: the number and importance of the so-called knowledge employees is growing, which in turn implicates a continuous

metamorphosis of managerial roles. More and more organizations promote the so-called servant leadership based on trust, openness, fluidity of roles and responsibilities, flexibility, and creation of a favourable environment facilitating team working and learning (GRUDZEWSKI W., and others, 2010).

The managerial staff that achieves goals in an increasingly complex organizational reality performs diverse roles, two of which seem to be the most important in the context of the undertaken subject matter: the leadership role and the managerial role. There will be no exaggeration in saying that these two roles condition the proper functioning and development of any organization. The leadership role is expressed by having an influence on others in such a way so they understand and accept what must be done. It is a creation of conditions for an effective cooperation within the network of relationships (HAMEL G., 2009). Crucial for the leadership role are the following actions: inspiring, stimulating, and integrating. Leadership requires the facilitation of activities of individuals and the team, thus it is possible to achieve the common goals (YUKL G., 2009). The most important areas of activity within the leadership role include setting the goals and resulting from them tasks, building a network of people and relations between them, and causing that people indeed perform tasks assigned to them. It is hard not to notice that they are mainly psychological challenges and require from managers skills of motivating employees and commitment management to elaborate the community of goals and actions in order to achieve these objectives. Motivating, inspiring, and triggering the enthusiastic attitudes based on a good recognition of the potential of employees and a proper communication with them are undoubtedly the key challenges relevant to the discussed role. Their implementation requires reaching the level of needs, emotions, and desires and focusing on building relationships with subordinates. On the part of managerial staff the particular significance gains the so-called inspirational motivation combined with intellectual stimulation of subordinates. It is a degree to which a manager is able to present the attractiveness of the vision, the way how he or she refers to the concepts of the co-workers by taking risk and encouraging and inspiring their creativity (BARABASZ A., BEŁZ G. 2010, p. 37).

Not only the character of the tasks resulting from the managerial role of leadership is psychologically conditioned, but also the way of fulfilling this role by manager. This process results from manager's personality traits, his or her

perceptions on previous professional experiences, and a style of deduction based on these experiences.

The second role is the managerial role. This role is combined with psychological predispositions such as perseverance, firmness, diligence, intelligence, within it especially analytical skills, tolerance, and goodwill (ZALEZNIK A. 2004, p. 2). The managerial role requires the skills of controlling, mitigating differences and resulting from them conflicts, and maintaining a specific "balance of power" in the organization. On account of the professionalism in carrying out this role, directors provide order, coherence, and relative predictability for the organization.

Both roles of a leader and manager should not be treated as the opposing ones. On the contrary, they are complementary, but in the literature of the problem publications can be found which rather focus on what differs them than how to combine them into one comprehensive, coherent, and effective model of management.

2. Psychosocial competencies of a manager as a condition of effective management

Observed in the recent years mass education at the university level and great popularity of management and economics faculties are factors that cause a significant increase in a number of people who possess formal qualifications to perform managerial functions. Nevertheless, qualifications do not yet determine a high quality of human capital in a given sector of the labour market. In the assessment of the author, qualifications are only one part that builds professional competencies of managerial staffs and the effective fulfilment of this role requires broadly defined organizational competencies. They comprise not only the talent, knowledge, practical skills, but also personality predispositions and other psychophysical traits. Currently, when there is a general agreement that the most important capital of any organization is the human capital, the psychosocial competencies grow to the rank of key managerial competencies. They allow managers to diagnose the psychological and social aspects of their own work and the work of the whole organization, identify potential sources of psychological problems and effectively counteract them.

While defining competencies T. Oleksyn (2006, pp. 25-30) mentions a set of the following elements:
- internal motivation,

- talents and predispositions,
- knowledge,
- education,
- experience and practical skills
- health and condition,
- other psychophysical traits important in work processes,
- attitudes and behaviours expected in the workplace,
- formal qualifications.

Universal competencies are common for all entities of the organization, that is why they are further divided into universal competencies of the whole organization, universal competencies of managerial staff, and universal competencies of all employees. Universal competencies of managerial staff include:
- ability to form and effectively implement the mission, vision, and strategy of the organization;
- ability to achieve the intended objectives;
- knowledge and skills to professionally perform all managerial functions;
- effective, rational, and ethical management of all organization's resources (human, financial, and material), skilful management of time and information;
- competencies in the area of PR and ability to represent the organization outside.

According to G. Bartkowiak (2003, pp. 109, 112), managerial competencies include "the perception of goals, attitudes, and motives of individuals, knowledge of social structures (technological and social environment, organizational culture), and the effectiveness in implementing the objectives, social skills (communicating, motivating, evaluating the team of employees, etc.), as well as the ability to use knowledge in practice." The cited author treats them as "the essential characteristics of managerial staff."

With regard to managerial staff, the distinction between hard and soft competencies is introduced, important for the subject matter of this publication. The former ones refer to the knowledge and skills of the practical application of methods, techniques, and tools useful in the management, including mathematical and statistical methods, operational research, etc. The latter ones are mainly associated with social and personal competencies (e.g. characteristics of a management style, leadership, empathy, and widely understood emotional

maturity of a director). They determine the ability to perceive the interpersonal or personality problems of co-workers and their effective resolution.

In the literature in the area of management sciences the role of "experts-visionaries leaders" (HAROMSZEKI Ł. 2010, p. 91) is strongly exposed. On the other hand, however, the last thirty years has been a slow, yet systematic departure from the division into managers – decision-makers and workers – executors in favour of the division of managers performing the roles of *coaches*, and employees who are knowledge workers (JAMALI D. 2005, pp. 104-115). The "new" managers must be simultaneously coaches and players in the team. They must be managers of the processes, innovators, and entrepreneurs (LONGENECKER C.O., ARISS S.S. 2002, pp. 640-654). Thus, there will not be an overuse to state that managerial competencies are the most important of all resources of each organization. The quality of organization management is in fact the resultant of competencies of managerial staff and its motivation to use the competencies in practice. Without managers' professionalism it is not possible to create competent resources of the organization, identify those resources, and transforming them into a source of the effective activity.

It is also important to highlight here the relationship between the competencies of managerial staff and professional competencies of employees. Managers' skills, especially in the area of the professional use of the tools of human resource management, determine access to the necessary competencies of particular employees. Managers by making personnel decisions are responsible for the quality of a competency resource brought to the organization by its employees. Managers by shaping and implementing incentive systems are responsible for transformation of the employees' competencies into desired and measurable results of their work. Therefore, without hesitation it can be assumed that the achievement of management objectives is impossible without a high level of managerial competencies of people performing the managerial functions. Certainly, for this reason and on the basis of management sciences there still emerge new and greater demands concerning professional competencies of managerial staff. Even if the concept of "competencies" is not directly used, to this concept refers a number of indications, expectations, and postulates expressed under the maxim "a modern manager should ..."

3. Managers on the psychological challenges in their work – methodology and results of the research

Presented here results of the research constitute a part of a broader research program. The research covered a group of 120 representatives of managerial staff of middle and high levels from enterprises and other organizations who are students of the Executive MBA at the Institute of Economics PAN and MBA at Lazarski University.

The respondents possess various education degrees, but each of them has management experience (approximately – 4 years). 60% of the survey group constituted males. This proportion of men and women reflects the real gender distribution of representatives among people holding managerial positions, yet it must be noted that among managers of lower levels women predominate noticeably. It is unfortunately a wide-spread tendency in Europe. In the countries of the European Union only every tenth position in the companies' boards of directors is held by a woman. In the 50 largest companies of every country of the EU that are listed on the stock exchange, women occupy approximately 11% of senior management positions, and 4% of positions of presidents and heads of supervisory boards (KUPCZYK T. 2009, p. 19). Although Warsaw was the place where the research was conducted, respondents represented all regions of Poland.

A questionnaire form was used as a tool to carry out the research. Questions concerning the psychological challenges in manager's/director' work were only open so the freedom of respondents' expressions was limited to the minimum and answers not suggested. Each participant could write any number of issues, problems, and opinions. Questionnaire surveys of which results are comprised in this publication are based on the mechanism of introspection. [*] The author is aware that this method is seen as one that not allows for gaining knowledge which is inter-subjectively verifiable and does not give access to the factual causes of behaviours. In spite of the criticisms raised by methodologists of social sciences, introspective studies are essentially the basis for all questionnaire studies, and the use of their results in the diagnosis of psychological determinants of managers' work is based on the statement, well-documented in the literature, that the employee is the best source of information

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[*] Introspection – from Latin *introspicere*, literally it means „looking inside," observing and analyzing one's own mental states, thoughts, feelings, and motives. It deals with the conscious contents and processes.

about the specificity of his/her position or the fulfilled organizational role (WOŹNIAK J. 2006).

Presented studies were supposed to solve the following research problem: what challenges of the psychological nature managers regard as the most important and the most difficult in their professional jobs? Are there any significant differences in the indications of men and women? Is there a correlation between the responses and variables such as the respondent's age and work experience in a managerial position?

In the questionnaire form the major psychological challenges and the most difficult psychological challenges were distinguished, but the respondents' answers indicate that this division is not justified. The vast majority of them gave the same answers to both questions, thus in the analysis of the results the most important and the most difficult challenges are discussed as one category.

The respondents' answers led to the emergence of two groups of potential problems: challenges concerning the same person examined as a manager and challenges appearing in the relation manager – co-workers, or even more broadly, the relation manager – organization. Significant differences between answers of women – managers and men – managers were not founded in this study. Also respondents' work experience turned out to be the insignificant variable. In Table 1 were presented these psychological factors which managers participating in the research perceive as the most difficult and at the same time the most important with reference to their roles as managers. They can be classified to the group of issues from the area of "self-management."

Table 1. Psychological challenges in the manager's work
– the category of „self-management"

A category of the answer	Respondents (N= 120)	
	A number of answers	%
Occupational burnout (prevention, perception of the first alarming symptoms)	22	18.3
Maintaining a balance between the professional and personal life	12	10
Coping with stress, especially with time pressure and responsibility for the results	12	10

Keeping a healthy distance towards occupational problems, maintaining inner peace	4	3.33
Being an assertive person	3	2.5

Source: self-elaboration based on the results of the research

While managerial staff mentions the managerial psychological challenges concerning themselves, they focus their attention on issues related to the broadly understood mental health in the workplace. The majority of the answers concern the occupational burnout. In the literature of this problem the occupational burnout is primarily treated as a result of incurring by the individual too high costs in the sphere of relations with the environment (MESJASZ J., ZALESKI Z., 2001). Since the source of these costs may be (but not necessarily must be) the chronically experienced organizational stress, this factor has been illustrated separately.

On the one hand the fact that participants of the research are aware of this kind of threats should be evaluated very positively, on the other hand, however, it must be emphasized that less than half of the surveyed managers pointed out these threats. Answers from the category of "self-management" were definitely less often mentioned in comparison with the other category of "people management" (see Table 2). The fact that respondents' work experience turned out to be the insignificant variable, the phenomenon seems to be very interesting. The problem of occupational burnout is in the same degree noticed by young respondents, who are briefly present in the labour market, and by those people who have more than 10 years of work experience.

Table 2. Psychological challenges of the manager's work – the category of "people management"

A category of the answer	Respondents (N= 120)	
	A number of answers	**%**
Motivating employees	110	91.7
Dismissing from work	109	90.8
Resolving conflicts, reconciling diversity	109	90.8

Psychological aspects of communicating with co-workers	98	81.7
Team building, building good relations within the team	65	54.2
Making decisions in conditions of uncertainty	44	36.7
Conducting an evaluation, transferring the evaluation results to employees (with particular emphasis on the negative ratings)	42	35.0
The diagnosis of mental predispositions of co-workers in the context of assigning the most appropriate task for them	32	26.7
Selecting and developing employees-talents	11	9.1
Building own authority and position in the team	10	8.3
Dealing with emotional problems of subordinates	9	7.5
Building and maintaining trust	9	7.5
Challenges associated with the role of a supervisor: delegation of authority, division of work, organization and time management, personal participation in work of the team	7	5.8

Source: self-elaboration based on the results of the research

Creation of an organizational climate that would support the high efficiency requires the difficult art of motivation. Among the most important managerial roles the role of "coach enthusiast" has been indicated, whose task is to encourage, inspire, or even activate others to action. Managers paid attention to diverse aspects of this process (see Table 3), emphasizing that the effective motivation must have an individual character and take into account the life situation of an employee and his/her personality, what in an organizational practice is not only difficult but often impossible. Currently, the chronically unsatisfied need of employees' security also constitutes a particular psychological challenge. In the face of recessionary turbulences many people are afraid of losing their jobs or worsening employment conditions what negatively influences the level of their motivation (more on the subject in: MOCZYDŁOWSKA J.M., 2010). Also stimulating the development of employee's potential, including the creativity, motivational context of change

management, or building the image of the organization (team) as an attractive place to work is a challenge.

Table X. 3. Psychological challenges associated with motivating employees

Challenges in the process of motivating
How to choose rewards and penalties to be effective and ethical at the same time?
How in motivating take into account the specificity of work of individual departments of the company, or even individual people?
How to motivate employees since the need for security and stability is very important for them, and in present, very difficult organizational reality a manager can not satisfy this need?
How to create an atmosphere of "cool job"?
How to motivate to creativity?
How to motivate those who are in a difficult personal situation?
How to get the whole potential of an employee?
How to encourage somebody to change the way of behaving?
How to strengthen the self-esteem of employees so they would not be afraid of difficult tasks?

Source: self-elaboration based on the results of the research

The data presented in Table 2 show that the very important and difficult managerial task, in which the psychological context plays an important role, is dismissing from work. It is certainly one of the most stressful and mentally burdening situations with which a manager must deal. Also directors participating in the research point out a number of specific matters. First of all as psychologically difficult they assess dismissing an employee with long work experience who has not acquired new competencies important in the context of current needs of the organization. Equally difficult is the situation in which it is necessary to dismiss a person who was earlier employed by the manager but did not achieve the expected job results. In the opinion of some respondents (12%), it is tantamount to an admission of a mistake during the employee selection

process, which causes a significant psychological discomfort and fear of losing credibility and authority. Both the choice of an employee with whom the organization ends cooperation and conducting the conversation during which the employee is informed about the dismissal are very difficult. From the cross-sectional comparative analysis of the results (cf. MOCZYDŁOWSKA J.M., 2005, pp. 65-72) it can be concluded that dismissing from work has been for many years invariably a leading position among problems assessed as important and difficult in manager's work regardless of gender and work experience of a manager.

At the top of the list of professional psychological challenges managers place various aspects of conflict management. Some of respondents (approximately 5%) underline that particularly difficult are conflicts of ambition and conflicts resulting from the specific personality traits of employees and their emotional problems.

Conflict is a problem closely related to other aspects of the respondents' work, especially to building up the integrated team based on healthy interpersonal relations, particularly on mutual trust. Contemporary organizations operate in a space in which the value of teamwork is highly appreciated. Advantage of the efficiency of the group work over the work of even the most talented individuals is simply treated in categories of the management paradigm (ABBASI S.M., BELHADJALI M., HOLLMAN K.W., 2009). Participants of the research accurately notice that it is difficult to transfer this paradigm to practice, because it requires reconciling diversity of human experiences, characters, needs, and interests triggering complex and difficult group mechanisms. This diversity is on the one hand a potential source of conflicts, but on the other hand, when different competencies and values of employees complement each others, they become a source of strength and organizational value of the group.

Over 36% of the managers participating in the research the necessity to make a decision in circumstances of uncertainty treat as a challenge. The state of uncertainty arising in the mind of a manager is a complex state. In real situations a manager rarely deals with only one source of uncertainty. The research shows (NOSAL CZ. 1998, pp. 119-120) that objective statistics of occurrences taking place in the environment is represented in the human mind. Yet, the manager can evaluate this statistics or experience it in a variety of ways. Thus, his/her

final assessment of the degree of risk and chances of success may take a form of the advanced deduction or fast intuitive assessment. From this results that the second source of uncertainty are the mental processes of a manager. The human mind does not work as a computer processing only the statistics of environmental occurrences. This statistics and its assessments are constantly confronted with personal experience on which basis adjustments are made for the deduction. Uncertainty is treated as a complex state arising in the manager's mind and has two separate aspects:

- uncertainty resulting from the lack or deficiency of knowledge on objectively existing mechanisms of the formation of occurrences;
- uncertainty resulting from the awareness of one's own cognitive restrictions and deficiency of information, knowledge, experience, etc.

The first type of uncertainty can be defined as the external uncertainty. Its source lies in the degree of confidence in the knowledge on objective mechanisms of the formation of certain occurrences. The second type of uncertainty is rooted in the lack of confidence in one's own deductions, ideas, or opinions resulting from personal experience or arising as a result of thinking. Thus, this type of uncertainty expresses the uncertainty of the internal origin.

Another group of managerial tasks which respondents regarded as psychological challenges are the elements of the personnel process. Managers highlighted the psychological dimension of evaluation (especially the evaluating conversation), recruitment, selection of staff, and management of the most talented employees. More than ¼ of the respondents expressed the need for proper recognition of the employees' potential, including their psychological traits in order to properly use this potential through the appropriate selection of professional tasks and organizational roles. It is hoped that the awareness of the importance of this type of activities will steadily grow in Polish organizations.

Table 4. Self-assessment of abilities to deal with managerial challenges of psychological character

Self ability to deal with psychological	Respondents (N= 120)

challenges in the manager's work I assess as …	A number of answers	%
Excellent	3	3.5
Very good	16	13.33
Good	45	37.5
Average	33	27.5
Rather weak	18	15.0
Very weak	5	4.17

Source: self-elaboration based on the results of the research

From the results mentioned so far it can be concluded that managerial staff is in the vast majority aware of psychological challenges associated with manager's work. It seems to be important to put questions how respondents assess their own abilities to undertake these challenges and solve psychological problems. The data presented in the table X.4 shows that almost 20% of respondents critically assess their own abilities to solve psychological problems. If we add more than 27% of the managers who admit that only "average" they handle the psychological problems, we will get a picture of managerial staff that is aware of various psychological challenges, but at the same time they deal with problems arising from these challenge in a small degree.

4. Conclusion

The paradigm of leadership in the organization and the theory of managerialism are subjected to a constant process of change. The search for one best style of management and an optimal way of fulfilling the managerial roles generally ends in failure in confrontation with a rich, complex, and smooth organizational practice. Only one tendency turns out to be quite stable: expectations towards professional competencies of managers in both economic entities and the public sector are still growing.

Competencies constitute the attribute of the entity that owns them, but the degree and manner of their visibility in operating depend on a number of

variables such as the performed organizational roles, organizational culture, and motivational system. The role of a manager is an example of an organizational role which is tantamount to a high level of professional responsibility and at the same time to a significant social exposure that "dooms" the manager to the constant process of informal and formal assessment by subordinates, supervisors, and customers. New challenges of organization management also include typical psychological problems resulting from the fact that the basic capital of the organization is the human capital. On the basis of presented here results it can be concluded that managerial staff is in the vast majority aware of the existence of these challenges and their importance in the context of professional management. It does not mean, however, that managers feel prepared to solve the problems resulting from the psychological premises. It is a task for educational institutions, especially universities, to pay a special attention to equip students with interpersonal competencies during their education.

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