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SUCCESSFUL MANAGERS – THEIR COMPETENCES, DEMANDS OF PRACTICE AND STIMULATION OF ABILITIES

Abstract

This article deals with the identification of characteristics, abilities and competences of successful managers in the field of creative industry. In this work it is assumed that creativity and communication skills are unchangeable for a successful manager and it reflects new views of R. Florida on the connectivity between creativity and economic growth. The article presents what kind of creative competences future managers – students dispose (results show a high score of creativity) and in a short survey monitors creative abilities of managers from practice (paradoxically they reach the low score). It is also focused on real demands of praxis and suggests techniques for development of creativity, emotional intelligence and communication competences. The contribution was supported by grant VEGA 1/0399/11.

Key words: manager, praxis, creativity, practice of communication skills.

Introduction

Performance and success of the company depends not only on overall potential of the company and employees’ production, but mainly on abilities and competences of managers on all levels. Nowadays, a good manager is considered the same as any other “product”. “For their acquisition, companies are willing to pay for so called brain hunters even more than 20 000 Euros.” (Krekáč, 2007, pp. 1-5). According to Joseph McCool, analyst searching for and choosing managers, the right choice for leading positions was the hot topic in 2005 (Švorcová, 2010, pp. 4-7). The selection is aimed on the selection of the highest quality managers.


1 There is a term “brain catchers” used in Slovak conditions, but in Anglo–Saxon countries the term “headhunter” is used to emphasize that the mentality is valuable. The brain is not enough. In Slovakia, “brain catching” could have negative connotations resulting from historical events linked to lilling.
What are the demands of a successful manager? In the following parts we will try to outline how these demands are presented in the academic world and we will point out the different normative publications for future managers. At the same time we will present characteristics of future managers – students of Master’s degrees – who have specializations in management in their graduate’s profile. The short study, which is a part of a more broad conceived research, will indicate what actual managers in Slovakia are like. In the next part we will describe the real demands of practice and we will suggest methods and concrete trainings activities that can help managers to draw near the abilities and competences of top and sought out representatives of managerial occupation in the creative industry.

Demands on personality and abilities of a manager

Demands on personality and abilities of a manager mentioned in research and academic sphere

Expert knowledge within certain specialization and the knowledge of management itself belong to basic requirements for a successful manager, as agreed by several authors, i.a. Šuler (2008, p. 5), Tuma (1990, p. 109), Bělohlávek et. al. (2006, p. 44) and many others. A good manager should have communication skills, the ability to lead people and should be able to organize his or her tasks (Šuler, 2008, p. 5). Some authors even present “personal quality criteria” as one of the preconditions of a manager’s success. Bedrnová and Nový (1998, pp. 300-303) include here work and personal competences, social competences, positive thinking and positive acting, willingness to work and motivation for achievement, the high level of aspiration and effort of will, the ability of self-control, developed ethic and aesthetic feeling, creativity, understanding and tolerance, sense of humor, and willingness to work on oneself. Adair (1993), based on research with successful managers mentions those characteristics, that are considered by scientists as the most valuable for Top management: the ability to decide, lead people, personal integrity, enthusiasm for work, imagination, willingness to work hard, analytical skills, empathy, the ability to grasp the opportunity, the ability to deal with unpleasant situations, the ability to quickly adjust to changes, the ability to express yourself clearly, brightness, curiosity and others. Many of these aforementioned characteristics of a successful manager are considered as a part of communication competences, creative skills and their elements.²

Both of these competences – creativity and communication – are becoming key competences nowadays. In relation to this, Neill (2001, p. 14) says that 80% of higher and middle managers in USA claim that innovation and creativity is their highest priority. But only 10% of the same managers have claimed that they are good at it. Author found out that the majority of

² A part of communication competences and social intelligence from Adair’s (1993) list is for example: the ability to decide, the ability to lead people, understanding others, the ability to solve unpleasant situations,...; part of creative abilities and creative personality skills from this list: imagination, the ability to grasp the opportunity, the ability to adjust quickly to changes, the ability to express clearly, brightness, curiosity and others.
managers identify with the statement, "Creativity is the life-blood..." Data about the level of managerial creative skills are not available for this research.

The need for creativity and communication skills, emotional intelligence is confirmed by the newest analyses focused on the identification of economic growth catalyzers in society. In connection to this, in 2004 there was an article on the website EurActiv.sk (enlarged Slovak version of Brussel’s website EurActiv.com) published by I-Europa s.r.o. The aim of the article is to inform about course of events in the EU and about development of European politics. In connection to so called creative era, the article based on a study of think-tank Demos called “Europe in the creative era” was published. This study came up with a new indicator of competitiveness and with surprising findings: creativity has outstanding whole-society meaning, while its existence proves that there is significant relation between creativity and economic growth. These facts are shown in the studies of Florida and Tinagli (2004, p. 12).

Creative potential is one of the crucial parts of the overall production potential of each society. As a result of this there are so far unknown but effective solutions of existing or future tasks or problems. Fišera (1990, p. 181) defines creative potential as a part of overall potential of the society which reacts the most to changes and needs of the future development and which influences its complex innovative potential the most (there are: facilities, flexibility, employees, sources) and dynamics and therefore economic effectiveness. It is a complex and dynamic case, as well as a measuring tool of competitiveness. Creative potential comprises of the following three components:

**Creative subjects** – creative individuals, work groups and teams, organizational units and their characteristics, skills, abilities. Tellis (2000, p. 620) refers to employees as the most important force of the agency. According to the authors Horňák and Holková (2003, p. 3) creative potential of a personality can be expressed by this equation:

\[
\text{IQ} + \text{EQ} = \text{PP} \\
\text{PP} + \text{BP} = \text{CP}
\]

These codes authors decode as follows: \textit{IQ is rational intelligence}\(^3\), \textit{EQ is emotional intelligence}, and altogether they make personality potential \((\text{PP})\). Further, according to aforementioned authors, “if during the process there is a development of the behavioral intelligence, behavioral potential \((\text{SP})\), it means the impetus for the development of manager’s creative potential of manager \((\text{CP})\). “ (Horňák, Holková, 2003, p. 3).\(^4\)

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\(^3\) Authors’ note: we do not consider the term “rational“ to be correctly chosen, it would be more appropriate to use the term IQ in terminological way as general intellectual abilities or intelligence quotient.

\(^4\)According to I. Fišera (1990) attitudes and group coherence, tendencies for cooperation or to conflicts in working groups belong to components of creative subjects. We assume that it would be better to integrate these components to another group (2): patterns of behavior, even though the permeation of both groups is evident.
Patterns of creative behavior in agency – meaning that it is prescribed and used procedures and methods of problems and tasks solving. They mostly regulate relations between managers and creative groups while handing out the topics, their appraisal and evaluation, as well as serving information.

Again in this part, personality of manager and his way of leading plays a significant role. Researches indicate (Zelina, 1992a, p. 73; Dacey, Lennon, 2000, p. 250; Fuchsová, 2005, pp. 67-75; Wojciechowski, 2008, pp. 10-17; Satková, Wojciechowski, 2002, pp. 71-84) that there is a relationship between leadership style and manifested creativity of workers. Also there is a small link between the leadership style and the atmosphere and climate at the workplace.

Part of the authors use both terms as synonyms, other part refers to term atmosphere as „the reflection of actual state of the group... [characterizing] short-term relationships in the group...“ as it is stated by M. Zelina (1993, p. 34). Meanwhile the term climate refers to long-term relationships in the group including: perception of people (Satková, 2002, pp. 154-156; Szabo, 2008, pp. 336-345), ways of cooperation, leadership style. Jaššo (2009, p. 175) calls this behavior the humanistic culture of organization that is characterized by a low degree of structure (freedom) and prevailing friendliness towards their members. These values are considered important: individualism, creativity, flight, tolerance, democracy, respect to individuals, while advantages are: support of free-thinking, conditions for expert and personal growth, quality psychogenic climate and honest and friendly interpersonal relations.

Real facilities of creative work – in other words tangible and intangible conditions of creative work such as payroll funds, information base, instrumentation, IT equipment, working environment, etc. (Fuchsová, 2005, pp. 67-75).

All mentioned parts of creative potential are part of the ultimate condition of competitiveness in each society, company or agency and as such they strongly depend on creative and communication skills of a manager. In changing environments empowered by more and more demanding requests of clients (through the demand of their own target group/s), it is the creativity that helps manage these tasks.

Abilities and qualification of future managers

Most universities select applicants for studies according to specified criteria. Only those applicants should be accepted, who have required abilities and personal capabilities. In this case it is an adequate estimate and setting of the selected criteria. At Constantine the Philosopher University in Nitra, in our study program we conduct a selection of applicants on the basis of their output in tests for creative thinking (among other criteria). Usually we use the modification of Torrance’s tests of creative thinking in adaption to the Slovak population provided by Jurčová (1984a, 1984b).

This test is criticized by some authors who think that this method identifies only divergent thinking and not creativity as such (compare Kováč, Matejík, 1994, pp. 126-134). In our
previous research with 70 university students from the third year with average age 21 years and 5.6 months had been shown by the usage of a complex creativity test – Urban's test of creativity (Urban, Jellen, Kováč, 2002, p. 50) that students indeed do achieve higher scores than average population (AM 39.38, sd 9.38; standardized score: AM 30.7, sd 10.9) even though we used other criteria than that for the potential acceptance of students as well.

However, in this program we have not included personal capabilities and in an acceptance test we identify only knowledge, skills and abilities and academic capabilities (by the means of standardized test of managerial capabilities), although these can influence in a considerable way the success of a future manager. Successfully defended diploma thesis of Gubáňová (2008, 73) calls attention to the need for the integration of this kind of criteria. She investigated personal capabilities of our students to work as managers. According to her findings, only 28.85% of tested students have personal capabilities needed for future employment in management.

Abilities of current managers - survey

Goal and hypothesis

Stemming from aforementioned facts, we tried to map creative skills of managers in our country. The goal was to identify the level of creativity. The study is an introductory survey to broadly conceived research.

Hypothesis: We assume the above-standard average level of creativity (minimum of 1 sd above arithmetic average for the reference population) in the whole explored sample of managers in marketing-communication agencies in comparison to presented standard score from the manual of The Test of Creative Thinking – drawing production designed by K. K. Urban, H. G. Jellen, T. Kováč (2002, p. 50).

Characteristic of research sample and methods

Research sample in this study consisted of 84 probands (average age=30; sd=7.70). The high standard deviation suggests a quite high age variability in research sample which included both young managers as well as experienced ones. The youngest participant was 21, the oldest was 59. The average stated practice in the field was 5.69 years (sd 6.47). Sample included quite balanced men-women ratio with a slight prevalence of women (35 men, 46 women).

We used The Test of Creative Thinking – drawing production of K. K. Urban and H. G. Jellen (Urban, Jellen, Kováč, 2002, p. 50) hereinafter as TCT-DP which belongs to newer creativity identification tools. Test is to a great extent independent from knowledge (culture-fair). Authors declare that alongside quantitative information about cognitive abilities provided by traditional tests of divergent thinking, TCT-DP enables to evaluate the answers in qualitative
categories. Test takes into consideration two aspects of creativity: cognitive and personality. Personality dimensions of creativity identifiable by the test are: the complexity of view, courage to take a risk, humor, affectivity and unconventionality. Drawings incited by stimulus picture are evaluated according to eleven scoring items (e.g. new components, connection etc.). K. K. Urban (1991, pp. 177-191) mentions considerable sensibility of TCT-DP that enables the identification of qualitative changes stages in creativity.

Analysis and interpretation of results

According to findings, our sample was quite heterogenous as indicated by high standard deviations exceeding the average score almost in all identified criteria (table 1). The overall average test score of examined sample is low in comparison with norms presented in manual. For our category, there is a stated average of 30,70 (sd 10,90), while our sample reached the average of 19,91 points (sd 10,86). As shown above, students reached the score of 39,38 (sd 9,38), however this sample is not typical because during admissions applicants are put through the test of creativity.

For the purposes of statistical significance calculation we used to test the median accordance with a known constant, while our findings indicate that abs(t vyp)>t tab (see table 2). In conclusion we can say that hypothesis H1 was not confirmed: the results didn’t show higher creativity score in examined sample compared to the average score of common population shown in The Test of Creative Thinking – drawing production of K. K. Urban, H. G. Jellen and T. Kováč (2002, p. 50) manual.

Table 1. Average scores and standard deviations for individual criteria of creativity and for the overall score in Urban's Test of Creative Thinking – drawing production (Urban, Jellen, Kováč, 2002, p. 50) for the research sample of employees from marketing-communication agencies (or departments of marketing communication in companies).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>criterium</th>
<th>Managers’ file, N=84</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Wf</td>
<td>4,79</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eg</td>
<td>4,20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ne</td>
<td>1,13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vz</td>
<td>2,77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vth</td>
<td>3,05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bfa</td>
<td>1,04</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bfu</td>
<td>0,56</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pe</td>
<td>1,24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hu</td>
<td>0,05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uk</td>
<td>0,27</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zf</td>
<td>0,82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>together</td>
<td>19,92</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Legends:

AM – arithmetical average
Sd – standard deviation
Mode – the most frequent value in data set
Median – average value in data set
Min. – minimum value in data set
Max. – maximum value in data set

Vz – the fourth criterion TSD-Z – connections in drawings
Vth – criteria TSD-Z – thematic connections
Bfa - criteria TSD-Z – exceeding of borders
Bfu - criterion TSD-Z
Pe - criterion TSD-Z – perspective vision
Hu - criterion TSD-Z
Presented low score is difficult to interpret. We assume that one of the factors is the heterogeneity of sample. It is not only educational heterogeneity (some managers didn’t have appropriate qualification), but there are large differences in the length of practice. Applied test identifies mostly figural creativity and even though the space for verbal creativity is represented, it was not the ultimate goal to record this type of creativity. Part of the sample may apply creative potential in a different way as the test has shown. The next reason found that a low average score might be a weak motivation to fill in the test and focus on duties at work, when filling in of test could be perceived as a waste of time needed for concrete tasks and assignments (in the context of low return rate and low completeness rate of acquired material (there were only 84 protocols used out of 128, that is 65,62 %, this reason seems to be the most probable).

The assumption for the low motivation for the completion of the test is supported by statistical measure of min., which represents the lowest acquired value in data set. It shows the value of zero. According to K. K. Urban (1991, p. 177-191), one of the authors of the used test who presented data on the development of creativity as well as the states of creativity development in relation to typical schemes of test execution, should adults be according to the level of examined abilities on the level of toddlers or pre-schoolers (it is less probable). According to author it refers to the stage of initial accommodation of stimulus elements up to the stage of the first assimilation that doesn’t regard creative drawings. The minimum value of achieved score for referential population in test manual is 11 points. We assume that the low rate of motivation in examined sample regards only some of the subjects with real average level of creativity (and presented below average – under 10 points (included), we identified 15 subjects which is 17,6% of research sample), and did not influence subjects with high level of creativity who according to various studies and authors (Rogers, 1983, p. 308; Amabile, 1989; Perkins, 1995, p. 212 and others) and according to our previous findings (Fichnová, Satková, 2002, pp. 262-267) (more creative individuals are more intrinsically motivated and they consider the task as a opportunity to apply creative ideas, to realize ones potential and to be challenged. In other words: creative people will mostly express as creative individuals, those with an average level of creativity need an external stimulation (e.g. in the form of a reward) in order to manifest their creativity. The presented obstacle of respondents’ low motivation concerns great amount of research works, where the data collection in terrain is necessary.

Authors’ Note: In legends, we don’t show all the titles of examined criteria TSD-Z in order to avoid possible popularization of individual investigated areas of a used test and so that the copyright law is not infringed.
Demands from practice

The abovementioned information have presented understanding of experts and results of research trying to find characteristics, skills, competences and abilities of managers that would determined their effective performance and successful mastering of manager’s tasks. The extent to which these characteristics overlap with the demand of practice tried to determine the graduate student of Mass Media Communication and Advertising Mikulášik (2009, p. 55) in his qualification thesis. He analyzed job offers for managers on the website Profesia.sk in the short random period of time (28.-29.3.2009). He identified 64 free job opportunities for managers in the field of marketing, PR, advertising from the whole Slovakia (represented regions: Bratislava, Trnava, Trenčín, Nitra, Žilina, Prešov, Banská Bystrica and Košice).

Table 2. Percentage of job offers asking for presented abilities and skills of managers on the website professia.sk during monitored period.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Required skill/ability…</th>
<th>%</th>
<th>Required skill/ability…</th>
<th>%</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Communication skills</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>High working verve</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Autonomy</td>
<td>44</td>
<td>Organizational skills</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Flexibility</td>
<td>35</td>
<td>Strategic thinking</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presentation skills</td>
<td>27</td>
<td>Analytic thinking</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representative acting</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>Negotiation skills</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Creativity</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Willingness to learn new things</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Responsibility</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>Stress resistibility</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team player</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Motivation</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business skills</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Goal determination</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
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</table>


The results of aforementioned research indicate the coherence with the opinions of experts we have mentioned in theoretical part of our work. The difference is only in the fact that communication and its components, as well as creativity and its components (e.g. flexibility, autonomy,...) are even more attractive for employers’ interest who employ managers than the above mentioned authors have mentioned.

Possibilities of creative skills, potential, communicative competence and eq stimulation of managers

In concordance with stated facts and relatively insufficient performances of investigated sample of managers in the test of creative abilities, there is a need of targeted creativity stimulation (compare for example Janková, 2009) altogether with communication skills and competences stimulation (Hamranová et. al., 2008, pp. 429-431; Mikuláš, 2010) by the program directed for managers and practice. In the time of economy recession, various
counter-arguments against this kind of „above standard“ can be heard, but it is necessary to take into consideration fact, stated by Florida (2004, p. 221): „...the key to growth does not lie in decreasing of business expenses, but in subsiding highly-educated people and in their productivity. This grouping of human capital is even more important for economic growth than grouping of society“.

According to discoveries of Toffler and Toffler (2001, pp. 76-78), on average successful companies invest more into R&D, trainings, education and human resources. The biggest assets of these companies are knowledge and skills of their employees. Because of this, training of communication and creative skills in the process of university preparation of future creative industry employees plays an important role. One of the possibilities is to focus on the training of business games as mentioned by Birknerová (2010, p. 4-15). These games can be seen as special, content limited, group of simulation games. The essence of simulation business games is a creation of quasi real environment where participants are gaining necessary experience for consequent reflection. Simulating business games allow the development of all human capital components (not only knowledge, for example). The development of human capital is more complex, it comprises multiple levels. At the same time it is more effective because it comes out from personal practical skills of participants. They can contribute to the identification of possible problems in this area and they can help to find optimal solution so that the key knowledge, skills and abilities could be used more effectively for the fulfillment of business goals. Forssén-Nyberg and Hakamäki (1998) emphasize these basic features of simulating games: 1. every simulation game must reflect the reality; 2. the part of simulating game is also the active social communication of living participants; 3. one of the goals is reality evaluation, self-evaluation and reflection. Present findings indicate that in the future human sciences, especially psychology and sociology will act as one of the most important part of management conception (along with expert knowledge) We agree with authors (Poláček, 2010; Komárková, 2001; Bedrnová et al. 1998), who assume that it will not be only about traditional completion of knowledge from the area of communication, creativity, motivation, team work, etc. as the necessary assumptions of effective managerial situation handling, but it will be also about understanding management as an activity within which it is not possible to isolate its technical and social aspects.

**Conclusion**

To conclude, we can say that creativity and communication skills are irreplaceable for a successful manager. It is not only about traditional knowledge completion from the area of communication, creativity, motivation and team work as necessary assumptions of effective coping with managing situation, but it is also about understanding of management as an activity where it is not possible to isolate its technical and social aspects. Demands from practice show that presented competences are desirable and they assure competitiveness among companies in creative industry.
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