

ELIMINATION OF COGNITIVE DISTORTIONS BY BUSINESS MANAGERS THROUGH A COACHING APPROACH

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Abstract: Cognitive distortions occur in every area of life. In the business sphere, the tendency to make decisions based on incorrect, incomplete, or distorted information poses a dangerous risk. Cognitive distortions made by business managers are present not only in the decision-making process but also in everyday communication, where they can affect work and business relationships. The aim of the paper was to verify the existence of connections between the occurrence of cognitive distortions in business managers and the coaching approach in the context of the business behaviour of managers. This brings a new perspective on the issue of cognitive distortions and their elimination through a coaching approach. The validated CCC3 methodology for assessing coach competence and the PKO18 methodology for assessing the four cognitive distortions were used. The data showed a normal distribution; therefore, parametric tests such as Pearson's correlation coefficient and t-test for two independent samples are used in this paper. Data were processed in IBM SPSS 26 statistical program. The results of a sample of 174 business managers confirm that a coaching approach can eliminate cognitive distortions in business behaviour. In addition to the known benefits of the coaching approach presented in the theoretical part of the paper, the findings, actuality and novelty of this study enrich the knowledge in terms of eliminating cognitive distortions in business managers.

Key words: cognitive distortions, coaching approach, business managers

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Introduction

Business managers can transform the running of an organization into an efficient and competitive advantage. Managers and entrepreneurs face the challenge of how to increase performance while reducing operating costs (Štefko, Svetozárovová & Nastišin, 2021) and thus earning a profit that is the essential sense of every company (Slávik & Zagoršek, 2016). The solution, according to the authors Haque, Sher and Urbański (2020), is to increase the competencies of individuals who work in the organisation and in the business (Abu Salma et al., 2021; Shevyakova et al., 2021; Iershova, et al., 2022). In the market of educational services, there is a wide offer of how to increase the mentioned competencies, but no one guarantees the effectiveness

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of the offered courses and training. Birknerová and Benková (2021) consider coaching as one of the tools for the development of business managers and revealing their hidden potential. It is a tool for seeking satisfaction, motivation, and increasing effectiveness. Coaching can be applied not only in a managerial environment but wherever there is a need to talk about support, solutions, goals, the future, and change. Cognitive distortions form part of everyone's life, including business managers. The aforementioned distortions in managers' thinking are a risk for the business environment because they interfere with the decision-making process (Frankovský & Birknerová, 2017; Ead et al., 2021; Widelska, Jeseviciute-Ufartiene & Jezerske, 2021). The impact of intuition and emotions in decision-making is also significant (Morselli, 2015). Rapid changes and advances in economic, political, technological, and social factors require business managers to develop human capital to achieve strategic goals. Meiste and Jakstiene (2015) claim there is a strong connection between crisis and changes, which reflects a positive crisis impulse for successful company's development. This complex and challenging context also creates the need to develop healthy and positive leaders who are able to maintain and optimize psychosocial well-being (Kirchner & Akdere, 2014).

In determining professional success and prestige, it was found that social and emotional skills are four times more important than IQ. There is considerable research done suggesting that a person's ability to perceive, identify and manage emotions provides the basis for social and emotional competencies that are important for success in almost any job, not excluding business. It is social and emotional intelligence that have a major impact on the cognitive distortions of business managers regarding excessive self-confidence, mind-reading, personalization, and the like (Gilar-Corbi et al., 2019; Kumar, 2014; Szostak, 2021).

Literature Review

Cognitive distortions of business managers

In cognitive psychology, automatic and self-reinforcing irrational thought patterns are known as cognitive distortions. People with this tendency can get stuck in a negative framework and loop of unhealthy thinking, leading to an inaccurate perception of reality (Shickel et al. 2019). Cognitive distortions are irrational misconceptions about people and the environment. They occur due to the tendency of the human mind to simplify, due to low or high self-esteem, mental health problems, stereotypes, and biases about how one should behave. These are "mistakes" in people's attitudes - the way they assess situations (Chand, Kuckel, & Huecker, 2021). Cognitive distortions are also perceived in managerial work as systematic distortions in the thinking and perception of managers, repeated incorrect judgments, or incorrect evaluations (Frankovský & Birknerová, 2017). This also applies to business and business managers.

Every company wants effective business managers who will move the company forward and lead the company to be successful. The irrationality of managers and their distorted perception of reality can be an input factor for wrong decisions.

Excessive self-confidence is typical irrational behaviour. Managers tend to exhibit this in managerial decision making when, for example, they make investment decisions that lead to problems of overinvestment or inappropriate investment (He et al., 2019).

Business managers often replace reality with their own thoughts, assumptions, predictions, or prejudices. They act on what they believe to be real, even when it is not. In strategic decisions, for example, optimism not only creates unrealistic predictions but also leads managers to underestimate future challenges (Belousová & Mochalová, 2020; Shepperd et al., 2015), for example by ignoring risk (Lovallo, 2006). When assessing the likelihood of potentially positive results, managers tend to be overly optimistic or confident. They think the future will be great, especially for them. If the manager is not in the best interests of the organization, it may be more or less a deliberate problem to provide misleading or incomplete information that multiplies the problem of unintentional distortions. The key to reducing excessive optimism is, in general, to improve the learning environment by generating frequent, rapid, and unambiguous feedback, which can also be achieved through a coaching approach (Zhang et al., 2019).

Coaching approach

It is not possible to clearly determine which behaviour of business managers and their style of communication and leadership is the best. Most leaders are aware of the possibility of switching from one style to another. Choosing the right leadership style depends on the situation that is happening. The coaching style is among the new ones and is increasingly used by managers (Martinuzzi, 2019). By using the right management style, superiors can motivate people to perform better, innovate, and create new ideas (Cherry, 2020).

The key principle of the coaching approach is the assumption that people have all the resources to solve their problems. The importance of a coaching conversation is not about trying to solve the problem on behalf of the client. Coaching strengthens self-confidence and works with interferences that could limit performance. In the coaching process, we focus on what is important to the clients in terms of their goals. The coach and the coached person plan together a strategy to achieve the desired result (Corti & Gelati, 2020; Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2018; Szostak, 2022).

According to ICF, coaching is a process that supports coaching where the client is recognized as an expert in his/her personal and professional life and believes that the client is creative and full of ideas (ICF, 2021).

Professional coaching has its specific principles and tools. According to the ICF (2020), we can look at the coaching approach as a useful skill that people who should manage, lead, or support other people could acquire. Managers, who only marginally brought a coaching approach to their communication, very quickly noticed positive organizational changes. This style strengthens trust in relationships, leads people to pay attention to reality and opportunities, helps to set expectations, formulate goals, etc.

Coaching can be effective in reducing perceived stress and increasing an organization's well-being when provided by trained managers in cognitive behaviour theory and interventions and working in a real-world environment (Lungu et al., 2021). Coaching is a unique philosophy that needs coaches to know how to use the coaching approach in their own lives to organize values, ideas, and solve problems. Comprehensive training of coaches treats the occurrence of cognitive distortions in a certain way because professional coaches can not violate the code of ethics and rules of the profession. Business managers who coach are aware of the influence of circumstances, personalities, or culture, which can negatively affect the coaching process. They control emotions, show respect for the identity of employees. They are empathetic, consider the identity, environment, experiences of all colleagues, and summarize to understand them well (ICF, 2021).

We can consider the coaching approach as an employee-oriented human resources policy and the development of their potential. It is ultimately a variable that increases the performance of individuals and organizations. This approach helps business managers understand the need to develop and implement human resource management solutions in line with an employee-centred approach, including development programs, payroll systems, performance appraisal, planning, and the like (Ludwikowska 2021).

Research Methodology

Based on the developed theory, we determined the research question: "Can the coaching approach eliminate cognitive distortions in business managers?" The research sample consisted of 174 business managers.

Table 1. Sample demographics summary.

Gender	Men 79 (45.4%); Women 95 (54.6%)
Age (mean)	35.06 years (SD 17.11 years)
Education	Undergraduate 124 (72,09%); Postgraduate 50 (29,07%)
Time Period	From December to February
Experience	with coaching 99 (56.9%); without coaching 75 (43.1%)

The selection of respondents was carried out using the Convenience Sampling method on a Slovak sample of business managers. The PKO18 methodology was used to assess the incidence of cognitive distortions (Frankovský & Birknerová, 2017), which contains 18 self-assessment items evaluated by respondents on a 6-point scale with a degree of agreement (0 - definitely no, 1 - no, 2 - rather no than yes, 3 – rather yes than no, 4 - yes, 5 - definitely yes). The methodology consists of four factors: Negative Prophecies, Thought-reading, Unsubstantiated Conclusions, Argumentation through emotions. The CCC3 methodology was used to assess the coaching approach (Birknerová & Miško, 2021). The methodology contains 24 items and three factors: Effective Communication and Awareness creation, Relationship

Creation, Active Listening, and Laying the Foundations. Items are rated on a scale of 1 - absolutely no to 6 - absolutely yes. Data were processed in IBM SPSS 26 statistical programme using parametric Pearson correlation coefficient and Independent-Samples t-test.

Research Results

The aim of the research was to assess the occurrence of cognitive distortions and their elimination through the coaching approach of business managers. To meet the condition of using parametric statistical tests, we assessed the normality of the data distribution using Skewness and Kurtosis (Table 2).

Table 2. Normality of data distribution – Skewness and Kurtosis.

	Skewness	SD.	Kurtosis	SD.
Laying the Foundations	0,332	0,211	0,429	0,119
Relationship Creation and Active Listening	0,298	0,234	0,376	0,202
Effective Communication and Awareness creation	0,129	0,312	0,432	0,101
Negative Prophecies	-0,228	0,197	0,322	0,100
Thought-reading	-0,078	0,189	-0,181	0,302
Unsubstantiated Conclusions	-0,217	0,099	-0,26	0,206
Argumentation through emotions	0,437	0,134	0,011	0,178

Based on the assessment of Skewness and Kurtosis, we can consider the data to be normally distributed, so parametric statistical tests are used for further analysis. Table 3 presents the existence of statistically significant correlations between the occurrence of cognitive distortions by business managers (PKO18 methodology) and the coaching approach (CCC3 methodology).

Table 3. Relationships between cognitive distortions and key competencies of the coaching approach.

PKO18 CCC3	Negative Prophecies	Thought-reading	Argumentation through emotions	Unsubstantiated Conclusions
Laying the Foundations	-0,395	-0,330	-0,068	-0,160
	0,000	0,000	0,370	0,325
Relationship Creation and Active Listening	-0,180	-0,043	-0,029	-0,119
	0,018	0,569	0,705	0,118
Effective Communication and Awareness Creation	-0,255	-0,035	0,161	0,135
	0,001	0,651	0,134	0,644

Table 3 shows the statistically significant correlations between all three key competencies of the coaching approach and the cognitive distortions factors of business managers. Laying the Foundations within a coaching approach reduces the cognitive propensity for Negative Prophecies and Thought-reading. Coaching approach factors of Relationship Creation and Active Listening, Effective communication, and Awareness Creation reduce the propensity for Negative Prophecies.

In this context, it is clear that Negative Prophecies and Thought-reading should not occur through the application of a coaching approach. In the Thought-reading factor, it can be disputable to what extent it is natural and when we consider it a cognitive tendency. A certain level of thought-reading is necessary for a business manager. However, it cannot be decisive for drawing conclusions in business.

The coaching approach is based on a comprehensive assessment of the situation and several options. Negative Prophecies are negatively correlated with all three factors of key competencies. Correlation analysis does not analyse the causality of the relationships of these variables and the correlation coefficients are lower, however, theoretical processing and our results support the claim that the coaching approach reduces the incidence of some cognitive distortions of business managers. According to the results of Frankovský and Birknerová (2017), all factors of cognitive distortions of the PKO18 methodology are positively correlated, therefore it is possible to consider some cognitive distortions as intervening variables to reduce the incidence of other cognitive distortions through a coaching approach.

With respect to the aim of the research, in Table 4 we analysed the statistically significant differences between the occurrence of cognitive distortions of business managers in the group with coaching experience and without coaching experience.

Table 4. Differences in cognitive distortions factors between business managers with and without coaching approach experience.

		N	Average	SD	t-test	Sig. (2-tailed)
Negative Prophecies	without experience	99	3,0069	1,58352	9,172	0,000
	with experience	75	1,1932	0,33338		
Thought-reading	without experience	75	4,1204	1,04691	10,681	0,000
	with experience	51	2,4455	0,92806		
Unsubstantiated Conclusions	without experience	99	4,1111	1,03408	4,423	0,000
	with experience	75	3,3674	1,14205		
Argumentation through emotions	without experience	99	3,5500	1,11410	7,790	0,000
	with experience	75	2,3152	0,94856		

Business managers with coaching experience have a lower occurrence of cognitive distortions. In cognitive distortions, incorrect inferences occur (Frankovský &

Birknerová, 2017). The above results can be argued on the basis of the coaching approach theory:

- Coaching is a positively oriented process (opposite of the Negative Prophecies factor).
- It analyses real situations, all possibilities, and different angles of view of the situation (opposite of the Thought-reading factor).
- It allows you to realize the reality and solve problems without affective emotions (the opposite of the factor of Argumentation through emotions).
- By rational analysis of the situation and problem, various possibilities, and perspectives, it contributes to obtaining information about the given issue, thus reducing the tendency to Unsubstantiated Conclusions.

Conclusion

So far, the insufficient processing of this issue at the research level requires further supporting studies to confirm the results of this paper.

The goal of coaching is to help identify irrational thoughts and beliefs. The coaching approach allows changing a manager's irrational attitude by asking questions and discovering other possibilities and perspectives (Allen 2016, Garber et al. 2016). Frankovský, Birknerová (2016) identified the four most common cognitive distortions in managerial work in the PKO18 methodology:

Negative Prophecies - Negative thinking or negative prophecies are often associated with some degree of perfectionism, which drives a recurring negative process of thinking about past distortions and performance related to results (Huang et al. 2020). Business managers in all industries face negativity in their work for several reasons. The negative actions of one person and the impact caused can spread among the employees in the organization and can even affect their performance and the organization itself (Archana, Priyadarshini 2018). Coaching is an interactive process of exploring seemingly solid ideas and circumstances. Coaches learn to challenge automatic thoughts, beliefs, and perceptions and thus distinguish between facts, assumptions, and interpretations. Coaching helps to detect and challenge negative emotional patterns. It modifies thinking patterns to improve workload management and encourages the coached persons to question whether negative thoughts are real (Gazelle et al. 2015).

Thought-reading - Although the ability to read the intentions of others is a useful social and managerial skill, there is a risk. We are currently seeing interest in emotionally and socially advanced managers, from whom the ability to establish relationships and outperform the other party's intentions is considered a positive trait. On the other hand, managerial business decisions based solely on feelings, or from reading thoughts can be dangerous. Most of us think we are much better at reading others than we really are. Thought-reading is a state where we think we know what the other person is thinking without further verification (Turner, Felisberti 2017; Ickes 2004). A degree of this social skill is required and can be improved through coaching, which allows you to see multiple decision options and multiple aspects

entering the decision, which can eliminate the decision solely under the influence of this cognitive distortion.

Unsubstantiated conclusions - Sinatra (2018) states that unsubstantiated decisions are a sign of inefficient management. An effective business manager always takes several alternatives into account when making decisions. Being able to draw conclusions based on available information is a good skill in the business world. However, we must realize that in managerial work, there are often situations where immediate decisions and solutions are needed. However, a good manager realizes that the time spent verifying the situation and all the information is not lost time but used effectively. The coaching approach allows for a deeper examination of the situation and other information that is necessary to make the right decision at a given time.

Argumentation through emotions - is defined as the process by which subjective emotions are used to determine conclusions (Berle, Molds 2013). Emotional intelligence plays an important role in the relationship between business managers, employees, and the environment, as Gorgi et al. (2015) state that emotionally intelligent managers can correctly interpret their emotions as well as emotions in the work team. The ICF (2021) requires that the program for developing coach's competencies focus on working with emotions, and coaching competency training should always cover psychological and emotional topics in order to understand the connections between emotions and other organizational variables (ICF, 2021).

Coaching is always focused on the success, strengths of the people, and the positives of each situation. The context has not been proven in all the factors examined, but the coaching approach has an irreplaceable place in the business environment. The coaching approach is beneficial for business managers and all those who use the coaching approach in the business sphere. We consider the main limitations of our research to be the insufficiently processed issue of cognitive distortions in terms of the coaching approach at the theoretical and empirical levels. A deeper understanding of the issue creates space for future research, which implies additional intervening variables that can enter for statistical analysis and more accurate results. By performing regression analysis or structural modelling, we will examine the direct or indirect effects of the coaching approach on the occurrence of cognitive distortions in the future.

There is a need to focus on certain management patterns that can be observed in many organizations and that could explain the behaviour and decisions of business managers (Agoston, 2014). For preventive evaluation of cognitive distortions of business managers, we recommend applying questionnaires to assess the occurrence of cognitive distortions and the evaluation of key competencies of the coach. We take into account that real situations may not always correspond to the answers of business managers in the questionnaires. But it is one of the ways to assess these determinants. The training of business managers should also cover the area of cognitive distortions and the coaching approach, as an integral part of holistic education and development. We recommend that business managers as well as their

employees have at least a minimal knowledge of cognitive distortions and the possibilities of eliminating them through a coaching approach. The coaching approach has an important place in the business environment for the development of personality potential, increasing the efficiency and productivity of business managers.

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ELIMINACJA ZAKŁÓCENÍ POZNAWCZYCH PRZEZ MENEDŻERÓW DZIĘKI PODEJŚCIU COACHINGOWYM

Streszczenie: Zniekształcenia poznawcze występują w każdej dziedzinie życia. W sferze biznesowej skłonność do podejmowania decyzji na podstawie błędnych, niepełnych lub zniekształconych informacji stanowi niebezpieczne ryzyko. Zniekształcenia poznawcze dokonywane przez menedżerów biznesowych są obecne nie tylko w procesie podejmowania decyzji, ale także w codziennej komunikacji, gdzie mogą wpływać na pracę i relacje biznesowe. Celem artykułu była weryfikacja istnienia powiązań między występowaniem zniekształceń poznawczych u menedżerów biznesowych a podejściem coachingowym w kontekście zachowań biznesowych menedżerów. Daje to nowe spojrzenie na problem zniekształceń poznawczych i ich eliminację poprzez podejście coachingowe. Wykorzystano

zwalidowaną metodologię CCC3 do oceny kompetencji trenera oraz metodologię PKO18 do oceny czterech zniekształceń poznawczych. Dane wykazały rozkład normalny; dlatego w niniejszym artykule zastosowano testy parametryczne, takie jak współczynnik korelacji Pearsona i test t dla dwóch niezależnych próbek. Dane zostały przetworzone w programie statystycznym IBM SPSS 26. Wyniki próby 174 menedżerów biznesowych potwierdzają, że podejście coachingowe może wyeliminować zniekształcenia poznawcze w zachowaniach biznesowych. Poza znanymi korzyściami podejścia coachingowego przedstawionymi w części teoretycznej artykułu, wyniki, aktualność i nowatorstwo tego badania wzbogacają wiedzę w zakresie eliminowania zniekształceń poznawczych u menedżerów przedsiębiorstw.

Słowa kluczowe: zniekształcenia poznawcze, podejście coachingowe, menedżerowie biznesu

通过教练方法消除业务经理的认知扭曲

摘要：认知扭曲发生在生活的各个领域。在商业领域，根据不正确、不完整或扭曲的信息做出决策的倾向会带来危险的风险。业务经理造成的认知扭曲不仅存在于决策过程中，还存在于日常沟通中，它们会影响工作和业务关系。本文的目的是验证企业管理者认知扭曲的发生与管理者商业行为背景下的教练方法之间是否存在联系。这为认知扭曲问题及其通过教练方法消除的问题带来了新的视角。使用经过验证的用于评估教练能力的 CCC3 方法和用于评估四种认知扭曲的 PKO18 方法。数据呈正态分布；因此，本文采用了两个独立样本的 Pearson 相关系数和 t 检验等参数检验。数据在 IBM SPSS 26 统计程序中处理。对 174 位业务经理的抽样结果证实，教练方法可以消除业务行为中的认知扭曲。除了本文理论部分介绍的教练方法的已知好处外，本研究的发现、现实性和新颖性丰富了消除业务经理认知扭曲方面的知识。

关键词: 认知扭曲, 教练方式, 企业管理者