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Social Skills as an Important Pillar of Managerial Success

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Abstract

The aim of our study is to highlight the fact, that the level of expertise and professional skills is only the starting point of the success in managerial work. However, expertise, knowledge and experience have an indispensable role, this is not enough to achieve excellence in the managerial work. There are also important other personal characteristics of the manager. On this basis we have carried out research, in which we investigated the relation between the degree of social skills among selected agro-managers and their position in the hierarchy of control. To assess the level of social skills we used the Social Skills Inventory by Riggio. There was proven connection among social skills and managerial positions and thus it can imply that social skills influence the success in the managerial position and in the career growth of the manager. We proved that successful managers (top level management) achieved high score in the SSI questionnaire.

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1. Introduction

Management is recently undergoing many significant changes. Development of production, productivity and achievement of the state when the supply begins to exceed demands is setting on a radical changes at world markets. The impact of globalization of world economy has been growing rapidly. When companies want to be competitive in the current turbulent business environment, they must monitor not only the external environment and respond to it appropriately, but also to mobilize the full potential of the internal environment. In order to be a permanently successful manager, they must take every opportunity to so-called hard but also to soft factors. Throughout this

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complex process a crucial role can play social skills of managers. Many empirical researches described in the literature indicate that managers spend up to 70% of their time in interaction and communication with other people. Without communication, empathy, assertiveness, ability to motivate, to listen and other social skills, management of human resources cannot be sufficiently effective. Managers come into contact not only with subordinates, co-workers and colleagues, but also with the representatives of other groups, enterprises and the public. Even this fact puts on their work increased demands.

Currently different terminology stands for the term social skills in the literature. There can be found terms like social competence, interpersonal competence, soft skills, interpersonal transferable skills etc. In the last years are being social skills connected with other terms – so-called emotional (EQ) or social intelligence (SQ) (e.g. in the works of Ahmetoglu, Leutner, Chamorro-Premuzic, 2011; Farh, C. C., Seo, Tesluk, 2012; Goleman, 2011). These are the terms that are above the mentioned skills and give them an appropriate dimension. Their examination was conditioned by the fact, that even individual with high intelligence (IQ) can fail in the areas where the important role has interpersonal skills.

The aim of our study is to highlight the fact, that the level of expertise and professional skills is only the starting point of success in managerial work and very important are other personal characteristics of managers which are labeled as social skills. In the study are presented some definitions, theoretical background and selected results of surveys on the theme according to various authors. Further are briefly presented results of our empirical research on relation between social skills and level of managerial work. In the research in the year 2014 were examined social skills of fifty selected agro-managers at different levels of management. As the methodology was used Social skills inventory by Riggio and Carney (2007).

2. Material and Methods

According to Goleman (2011) when comparing the values of IQ with the success in professional career, there has been proved the maximum dependence of 22%. According to the author, companies all over the world in the processes of recruitment, career rise and development already naturally take into account the emotional intelligence of their current and future employees. As the author further states, Johnson & Johnson Company found out in their divisions all around the world the following fact. People, who were in their mid-career identified as people with strong leadership potential, have much higher emotional intelligence than their less prospective colleagues. Also Pletzer (2009) states, that companies that work with the concept of emotional intelligence are commercially more successful than enterprises which to these skills of their employees do not pay attention. According Bradberry and Greaves (2006), emotional intelligence is involved in the overall sixty percent of the success in all types of work. Mentioned researchers further found that from all of the surveyed high performance managers, ninety percent of them had also high score in emotional intelligence. On the other hand, only twenty percent of those who have worked insufficient had a high emotional intelligence. Bradberry and Greaves (2006) also note that the skills of emotional intelligence are applied especially in leadership, in teamwork and customer services. They state that such different organizations such as L'Oreal and US Force saved millions of dollars by introducing programs aimed at enhancing emotional intelligence.

Wilding (2010) in relation to managerial success quotes The American Institute for Creation Leadership Centre and describes the lack of emotional intelligence as a primary reason for the negative turning point in the career of the top managers. According to the author's research on staff of insurance companies and IT vendors, those who had developed skills in emotional intelligence, had about ninety percent greater chance to complete their training and to double their sales commission.

According to Wilding (2010) employee with high emotional intelligence is able to:

- Manage their own emotions,
- Effectively communicate with others,
- Well adapt to changes,
- Quickly and adequately solve problems,
- Use humor to improve mutual trust and understanding in stressful situations.
- These employers or employees are also:
- Open and understanding,

- Optimistic even in adverse circumstances,
- Good teachers and dealers,
- Efficient in customer complaints.

Wilding (2010) also emphasizes that while the Human Resources officers consider among the most important skills of job seekers the interpersonal communication and so-called soft skills, the most MBA graduates lack them. Large commercial and business schools supply the market with graduates with excellent analytical skills and a good knowledge of finance, marketing and strategy. On the other hand to the development of soft skills such as communication, people management and team spirit building, is often paid only very shallow attention.

Several authors point to a connection between the level of social skills, respectively emotional intelligence and position in the management hierarchy. According to Veber (2000) with the position of senior manager in the organization grows also the need for social skills. According to Goleman (2011) IQ and technical skills are much stronger indicator of excellent qualities at work in lower positions. Donely, Gypson and Ivancevich (1997) describe the model, under which at lower management are particularly important technical skills and the ability to control techniques and methods necessary to implement the processes in the company. At the middle level of management are more important interpersonal skills, communication skills and leadership skills. At a high-level management are the most important more sophisticated skills such as conceptual strategy, creating visions, communicating with the outside environment, responding to opportunities and threats as shown in the figure 1.

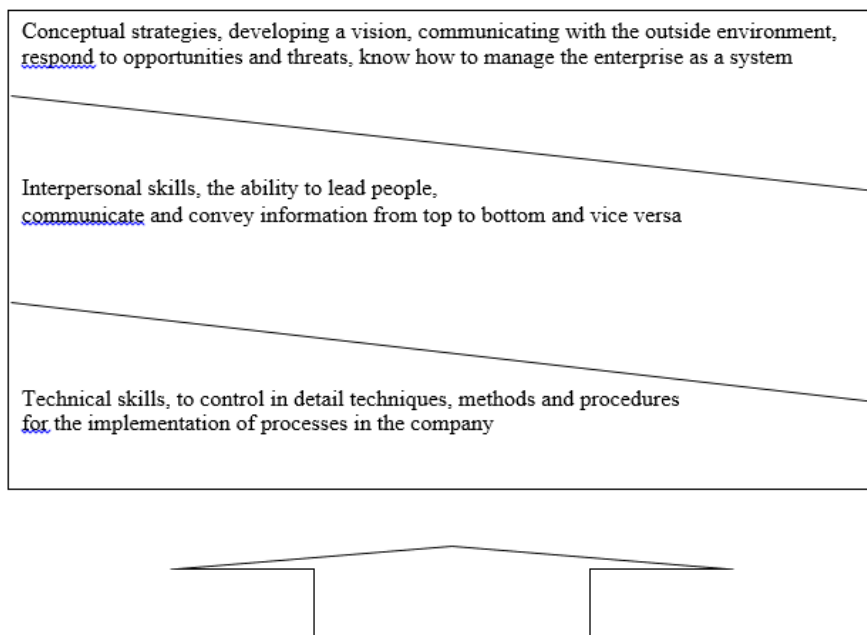


Fig. 1 The importance of managerial skills in accordance with management levels. Source: Donnelly , Gypson, Ivancevich, 1997.

In this context, Bradberry and Greaves mention very interesting finding. They state, however, the EQ in generally rises from the bottom positions up to the highest company management, people in the top positions may have even lower EQ. According to the authors, those who span the entire organization, already spend less time interacting with the staff. Still, the rule is that people with a higher level of emotional intelligence in any position perform better.

In accordance with the above mentioned overview of theoretical analysis we also empirically examined the relation between the level of social skills and the position within the management hierarchy. Empirical research was aimed at managers at different levels of management in various regions of Slovakia.

3. Results and Discussion

We hypothesized the presumption that level of social skills of managers is rising accordingly with the higher position in management. Examined were 50 agro-managers (25 male and 25 female) from fifty Slovak agricultural and food enterprises.

Table 1. Number of examined enterprises in separate regions of Slovak Republic.

Region	Number of enterprises
Banská Bystrica	3
Bratislava	2
Košice	3
Nitra	15
Prešov	3
Trenčín	8
Trnava	6
Žilina	10

Source: Own computation

To measure the level of social skills we used a Social Skills Inventory (SSI) by Riggio. This research tool has been developed as an important method in the field of communication and social interactions. The Social Skills Inventory (SSI), also known as the Self-Description Inventory, assesses basic social skills that underlie social competence. It evaluates verbal and non-verbal communication skills and identifies strengths and weaknesses. The instrument is useful in individual and couples counseling, management and leadership training, and health psychology.

Clients respond to items using a five-point scale, indicating the extent to which the description of the item applies to them. Scores are reported for each of the scales and a combined score is given to indicate global social intelligence.

SSI measures the three demonstrations of social skills - transmitting, receiving and control of information at two levels - non-verbal (emotional) and verbal (social). According to Riggio and Carney (2007) successful managers often have high score achieved in the SSI questionnaire.

Surveyed managers were classified according to the obtained score and the recommended criteria into three categories - groups with low, medium and high level of social skills. Based on these criteria 13 managers have reached the first level of social skills, 22 managers reached the second level and 15 managers reached the third level. Number of managers divided according to the degrees of their social skills is shown in the Table 2.

Table 2. Number of managers according to the degrees of their social skills.

Degrees of social skills	Number of managers
1 st degree of social skills	13
2 nd degree of social skills	22
3rd degree of social skills	15
Total	50

Source: Own computation

Managers were also divided into three groups according to their position in management. We distinguished first-line managers, middle management at 2nd level of management and senior executives at 3rd level of management. There were identified fifteen managers at lower management level, nineteen managers, from middle management and sixteen top managers (senior executives).

Table 3. Number of selected managers according to the management levels.

Management levels	Number of managers
1st level	15
2nd level	19
3rd level	16
Total	50

Source: Own computation

Our hypothesis was verified by χ^2 - test and contingency coefficient. Investigated characteristics were two characteristics A and B. A was a degree of social skills and characteristic B was the level of managerial position. Degrees of social skills and managerial positions of individual managers are shown in the contingency table.

Table 4. Contingency table.

Degree of social skills	1st level of managerial position	2nd level of managerial position	3rd level of managerial position	Total
1	6	9	5	20
2	1	4	1	6
3	8	6	10	24
Total	15	19	16	50

Source: Own computation

To confirm the hypothesis the null hypothesis H_0 about two independent means was tested by using χ^2 - test for the selected significance level

$$\alpha = 0.05 \tag{1}$$

The null hypothesis tested the following statement:

H_0 The degree of social and communication skills of managers does not affect the level of management position.

Software STATISTICA was used for the calculation of χ^2 statistics. We examined the value of the test criterion χ^2 and p value, thus the probability of the fault committed by rejecting the test hypothesis H_0 . From the computer output reports we received the value test criterion χ^2 , degrees of freedom df test criteria and p value:

$$\text{Pearson Chi-square: } 31,8301, \text{ df}=4, \text{ p}=0,00002 \quad (2)$$

As the calculated value of probability p was smaller than the selected significance level, we reject the hypothesis H_0 . This means that the relation between the observed characteristics showed statistical significance. Tests have shown that social skills of examined agro-managers statistically significantly affect the degree of management positions.

Intensity of statistical dependence of observed characteristics A and B have been assessed by using contingency coefficient. We calculated the degree of dependence between levels of social skills and levels of managerial positions. Contingency coefficient was:

$$r_{A, B} = 0,97 \quad (3)$$

Given value indicates a high degree of direct relation between the level of social skills and levels of managerial positions of selected agro-managers.

To sum up the results there was proven connection among social skills and managerial positions and thus it can imply that social skills influence the success in the managerial position and in the career growth of the manager. In accordance with Riggio and Carney (2007) we proved that successful managers (top level management) achieved high score in the SSI questionnaire.

4. Conclusion

To conclude the text, we can say that social skills are very important part of the humans' success in management. The results of our work suggest that the more complex managerial work is, the greater influence in the overall success social skills have. Based on our findings for the improvement of managerial work, we recommend:

- To pay attention to social skills development as the part of higher education and professional training of the future managers. New skills and competencies are needed for success in a contemporary world and those skills should be a component part of education (Šeben Zaťková, 2014).
- To support students with knowledge and tools to develop their own skills needed for the future profession.
- Implementation of courses aimed at soft skills development into the study programs at economical faculties and universities.
- Update the knowledge in the managerial work not only in the field of economy and management but also in other areas of importance such as psychology or sociology,
- Address the issue of social skills through various forms of lifelong learning. As state Šrédli, Mikhalkina and Kopecká (2014), the challenges and changes in a technology, in every economy and in a society require a constant acquiring of new skills, and also the ability to accept permanent changes. Investing in the lifelong learning is necessary, especially when a country needs to improve skills of a workforce.
- Increase the level of social skills of managers at different levels of management through various training and development programs as the part of company training.

Most management research and educational programs have focused on developing individual-based knowledge, skills, and abilities associated with formal roles of individuals in the managerial work. Management development therefore results by investing in human capital. Development of social and emotional aspects of the humans' personality is very important part of the professional development. Not only development of the knowledge base is crucial for the managerial work. It is also important to differentiate the particular skills and abilities needed for the success at different levels of management. It is important to continue in the research to distinguish the specific social skills that guarantee the attainment of the managerial expertise at different positions.

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