

MANAGER EFFECTIVENESS TRAINING IN SOLVING STRESSFUL INTERPERSONAL SITUATIONS

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Abstract: *The paper presents the investigation of the managers' education in organizations from the perspective of person centered approach. The goal of the education is to develop the core attitude qualities of the approach – acceptance, empathy and congruence as a part of the social competences which support effective and successful working relationships. In the context of effective education the paper presents the effectiveness of interpersonal behavior of managers in solving interpersonal, primary stressful, situations. 116 managers solved three model situations after participating in 6 day training. Content analysis of interpersonal reactions did not support the hypothesis that effective reactions dominate over non-effective reactions. Low increase of effective reactions with dominance of congruent reactions over non-effective reactions was found out.*

Keywords: *managers' education, interpersonal situations, social competences, person centered approach, empathy, acceptance, congruence*

High technology level of organization connected with professional competences of managers doesn't guarantee success. Team success is significantly influenced by working relationships. The process of leading organization isn't possible without interaction of managers in interpersonal relationships. Employees are exposed to communication situations that can lead to stress and dissatisfaction on both sides. The necessity to preserve organization competitiveness exerts pressure on managers. Subsequent managers' inability to cope the stress produces their hostile behavior to the employees. Managers often don't use potential of effective social interactions because of non-effective communication such as aggressive, passive or manipulative behavior (Praško, Prašková, 2007). This takes energy necessary for production and achieving the desired results away.

From the factors distinguishing successful and unsuccessful managers identified by Lombardo, Ruderman a McCauley (1988), the successfulness of manager is supported by his competence in interpersonal relationships (in Sternberg, 2004). Kollárik (1993) confirms that the presence of personal social competences determines how effectively people are solving interpersonal situations. Majtán (2008) states that manager equipped by more social competences is usually more successful than manager equipped by low social competences.

Social competences can be to some extent influenced. From this reason they are becoming important elements of specific trainings. Training in person centered approach (Rogers, 1997b, 2000) is one of the developmental models. It is applied with the goal to develop personal, social and professional competences of managers by:

- *supporting personal growth,*
- *developing the ability of effective interpersonal relationships,*
- *mastering the attitude facilitating the process of change in group.*

In our conditions the application of person centered approach in managers' education is verifying by researches and these results are basic conception of presented paper (Sollárová, 2005a, 2005b, Sollárová, Sollár, 2007a, 2007b). The goal of person centered approach is the complex personal development – “personal growth of self-actualization”.

Rogers (2000) emphasized that effectiveness of any relationship depends on the presence of attitude qualities such as:

- ***empathy***, *the ability to enter fully into the world of other,*
- ***congruence***, *the ability to be myself, to communicate my own opinions,*
- ***acceptance***, *the ability to accept independently on the quality of fulfilling some particular conditions.*

Attitude qualities of person centered approach are connected with specific goals in management.

Empathy is quality enabling manager to understand what the words of other person mean. Communication becomes transparent and free from possible subjective interpretations when the person approves the sending message. When manager delays his subjective experience, conviction and evaluation he pays attention to what people are saying. Practically he offers space for others in the moment when he wants to understand, analyze and solve what is subjectively important for him. In this case a group member feels understanding (Rogers, 2000).

Congruence is the support to express what the manager experiences. It leads to competent manifestation of his own experience and to his assertion without arrogance. Its truthfulness significantly supports change to openness. This creates potential of group members to better understand themselves and to feel that the responsibility for evaluation depends on themselves (Rogers, 2000).

Acceptance enables manager to accept others as they really are without evaluation and conditions. In contact with others it means to see team members as independent beings who have right to have their own experiences and feelings. As a consequence of acceptance team members feel respected. They easily express their subjective feelings and at the same time they accept others' feelings (Rogers, 2000).

Presented attitude qualities can be a source that eliminates the lack of positive climate in interpersonal relationships. After their adoption and application into the team work Rogers (2000) identified specific forms of behavior that is competent manager consciously able to apply in the group:

- *to demonstrate warmth and empathy,*
- *to pay attention to other people,*
- *to understand the meaning and intention,*
- *to express acceptance and tolerance,*

- *to connect messages into the idea.*

The paper presents potential of person centered approach in education with the goal to support effective working relationships.

Subjects and procedures

Subjects were 165 managers working in civil service from all around Slovakia. The goal of the training was to master the attitude qualities of empathy, congruence and acceptance as a part of social competences. Research design represented 48 hours concentrated into 6 days which were divided in 2x3 days a two months. Training was realized in 11 groups which represents 528 hours of intervention.

Measure

Content analysis of managers' interpersonal reactions on suggested statements was used to measure which types of effective reactions predominate as a consequence of mastering the attitude qualities – *empathy, acceptance* and *congruence*. To verify the effectiveness three different interpersonal situations typical for manager practice were used.

Statement 1 can be characterized as *an emotional critique* in interpersonal situation.

“You don't report the performance you are supposed to. I suspected more when I had hired you.”

Statement 2 can be characterized as *a negative evaluation* in interpersonal situation.

“I call for you because you repeatedly report non-stable performance that is demonstrated by three records I have. I'm forced to finish the contract of your employment.”

Statement 3 can be characterized as *a passive-aggressive behavior* in interpersonal situation.

“It was much easier to communicate with the former boss. He could stand up for us and our department had better position in the firm as nowadays.”

Managers wrote their reactions on every statement characterizing the real situations in organization environment. The *whole sentence* or *the phrase* was considered as an unit of content analysis according to Hradiská (2004). One reaction of the subject could consist of more *sentences* or *phrases*. Each statement was evaluated and categorized by two experts trained in person centered approach. The key to categorize consists of two basic categories and their three subcategories:

1. Category of effective reactions was represented by attitude qualities defined by Rogers' approach - *acceptance, empathy* and *congruence*.

Acceptance is demonstrated by accepting other person in the way he/she really is. Instead of defense or attack against behavior considered as a threat the individual changes blaming others to responsibility for him/herself.

Empathy is demonstrated by ability to understand the meaning of the other's message without subjective deceptive interpretations. The ability to understand the other's attitude considerably revises the statements and as its consequence the emotions disappear and differences are reduced from the dialogue. Participants orient communication more to solving problem rather than attacking person or group of people (Rogers, 1995).

Congruence is demonstrated by self-expression if the person decides. It is characterized by potential to realize the uniqueness of subjective experience which corresponds with actual experience and thinking as an extreme to its suppression.

2. Category of non-effective reactions includes – *aggressive, passive and manipulative* reactions. Defining non-effective reactions was inspired by dividing the forms of behavior according to assertiveness trainings (Praško, Prašková, 2007).

Aggressive behavior is characterized by assertion one's own interest on detriment of others. It is demonstrated by inability to take other's interest into consideration, non-adequate aggression as well as irony, sarcasm and underestimation.

Passive behavior is characterized by helplessness against other's requirements. It is demonstrated by inability to speak about subjective emotions and needs that are suppressed because of other's interests.

Manipulative behavior is characterized by the fact that person finds others responsible for the process and the result of situation. There are many manipulative variants such as pretending helplessness, emphasizing importance, using tears, possibly aggression (Praško, Prašková, 2007).

Chi square test of homogeneity (Sollár, Ritomský, 2002, Ritomský, Sollár, 2005) was used to verify the hypothesis that subjects will use effective reactions for solving stressful situations during the training focuses on mastering the attitude qualities.

Results

Reactions on three different interpersonal model situations were used to verify the hypothesis. *Accepting, empathic* and *congruent* reactions were evaluated as effective. *Aggressive, passive* and *manipulative* reactions on statements were evaluated as non-effective.

- ***Comparison of effective and non-effective reactions (in three statements)***

Following tables present differences in frequencies of effective and non-effective reactions and their sum number.

Table 1: Differences in frequencies of effective and non-effective reactions (statement 1)

Statement 1	Expert 1	Expert 2	Sum	Mean		Difference in eff. reactions	
<i>Acceptance</i>	6	12	18	9		χ^2	p
<i>Empathy</i>	4	6	10	5		33,303	< 0,001
<i>Congruence</i>	38	33	71	35,5	49,5		
<i>Aggression</i>	21	22	43	21,5		Difference in no-eff. reactions	
<i>Passivity</i>	21	26	47	23,5		χ^2	p
<i>Manipulation</i>	3	0	3	1,5	46,5	14,143	< 0,001
		<i>Effective</i>	<i>versus</i>	χ^2	0,093		
		<i>Non-effective</i>	<i>reactions</i>	p	0,759		

No statistically significant difference between effective and non-effective reactions on the first statement was found out ($p = 0,759$). We registered balanced number of effective and non-effective reactions on situation marked as *emotional critique* (statement 1).

Table 2: Differences in frequencies of effective and non-effective reactions (statement 2)

Statement 2	Expert 1	Expert 2	Sum	Mean		Difference in eff. reactions	
<i>Acceptance</i>	14	19	33	16,5		χ^2	p
<i>Empathy</i>	4	5	9	4,5		37,866	< 0,001
<i>Congruence</i>	46	42	88	44	65		
<i>Aggression</i>	21	26	47	23,5		Difference in no-eff. reactions	
<i>Passivity</i>	10	8	18	9		χ^2	p
<i>Manipulation</i>	8	3	11	5,5	38	6,7	0,035
		<i>Effective</i>	<i>versus</i>	χ^2	7,077		
		<i>Non-effective</i>	<i>reactions</i>	p	0,007		

Between effective and non-effective reactions on negative evaluation (statement 2) statistically significant differentiation of effective reactions ($p = 0,007$) was noticed.

In this analysis it was not differentiating between the types of effective or non-effective reaction but the dominance of any effective over any non-effective reaction was measured.

Table 3: Differences in frequencies of effective and non-effective reactions (statement 3)

Statement 3	Expert 1	Expert 2	Sum	Mean	Difference in eff. reactions	
<i>Acceptance</i>	14	10	24	12	χ^2	p
<i>Empathy</i>	10	10	20	10	25,562	< 0,001
<i>Congruence</i>	36	34	70	35	57	
<i>Aggression</i>	21	23	44	22	Difference in no-eff. reactions	
<i>Passivity</i>	24	31	55	27,5	χ^2	p
<i>Manipulation</i>	3	0	3	1,5	51	16,105
			<i>Effective versus Non-effective reactions</i>	χ^2	0,333	
				p	0,563	

Comparison of effective and non-effective reactions on passive-aggressive statement showed statistically significant difference ($p = 0,563$).

More effective reactions occurred in comparison with non-effective reactions on all of the statements but only in one case statistically significant difference was observed (statement 2 – negative evaluation). Using more effective than non-effective reactions was not confirmed.

- ***Types of effective and non-effective reactions on statements***

We analyzed the types of effective reactions. We verified if there are an equal number of three types of effective reactions on three statements. Statistically significant difference was found out in three types of reactions on all three statements. *Congruent* reactions (all $p < 0,001$) were the most frequent in comparison with *empathic* and *accepting* ones.

Using non-effective reactions we were interested if the managers had tendency to prefer *aggressive*, *passive* or *manipulative* reactions on some of the statements. The most frequent reactions characterized as non-effective were *aggressive* and *passive*. There was less frequency of *manipulative* reactions.

- ***Preferring effective and non-effective reactions according to the type of statement.***

Using effective reactions on particular statements we tested if managers had tendency to prefer *congruent*, *accepting* or *empathic* reaction. We verify if there is a difference in frequency of effective reactions according to the type of the statement.

Table 4: Differences in frequencies of *effective reactions* on (3) statements

Attitude quality	Statement 1	Statement 2	Statement 3	Sum
<i>Acceptance</i>	9	16,5	12	37,5
<i>Empathy</i>	5	4,5	10	19,5
<i>Congruence</i>	35,5	44	35	114,5
Sum	49,5	65	57	171
			χ^2	4,239
			p	0,374

The statements aroused similar reactions of managers. No statistically significant difference in preference of particular effective reaction according to the type of the statement was found out.

It was observed that preference of some of the effective reactions did not depend on the type of the statement. Congruent reactions prevailed over accepting as well as empathic reactions.

Empathic reactions were least preferable.

Table 5: Differences in frequencies of *non-effective reactions* on (3) statements

Attitude quality	Statement 1	Statement 2	Statement 3	Sum
<i>Acceptance</i>	21,5	23,5	22	67
<i>Empathy</i>	23,5	9	27,5	60
<i>Congruence</i>	1,5	5,5	1,5	8,5
Sum	46,5	38	51	135
			χ^2	12,475
			p	0,014

We verified if there is a difference in frequency of non-effective reactions according to the type of the statement. Statistically significant difference in preference of one of the non-effective reaction was found out. The difference was related to *negative evaluation* (statement 2) compared with *emotional critique* (statement 1) and *passive-aggressive response* (statement 3). On statement 2 (*negative evaluation*) managers reacted mostly aggressively.

Discussion

We suppose that mastering the qualities of person centered approach will lead managers to more productive solving of interpersonal situations. We anticipated the development of managers towards more *competent managers* prepare to work also in incompetent environment. And also mastering the skills in solving interpersonal, primary stressful, situations in training will demonstrate dominance of effective over non-effective reactions.

- *Comparison of effective and non-effective reactions (in three statements)*

Investigating the frequencies of effective (49,5) and non-effective (46,5) reactions in statement 1 we came to the conclusion that the rate of the reactions was equal. Interpersonal situation presented by statement 1 expressed *emotional critique*. Emotional critique often tends to be a source of hostile impulses. Hostile behavior appears when the relationship is seen in the way that the other person is a threat for us (in Rogers, 2000). If there are communication barriers between people (the other threatens me) it is not likely that the hostile attitude will be solved. If the person sees the emotional critique as the threat of his/herself then he/she constructs the barriers of free communication (Rogers, 2000). The reactions on critique (threat) often tend to be non-constructive. It can appear as an *aggressive* or *passive form* of behavior. *Passive form of behavior* is connected with fear of critique and it is saturated by low self-confidence and self-esteem. *Aggressive form of behavior* is connected with desire for victory and effort to dominate over others. The consequences of opposed types of interpersonal behavior lead to aggravation, quarrel or hostile silence (Praško, Prašková, 2007).

The hypothesis about the dominance of effective reactions on emotional critique (statement 1) was not confirmed and we interpret this by the demandingness of interpersonal situation such as critique. The ability of person to stop him/herself and look at the critique as at the “gift” while other person threaten us or others in the situation of critique inhibits the impact of the critique. Auto-regulation supported by the training can increase social competence and thus support more productive behavior. Specifically using *acceptance* in the moment when the critique is seen as a threat generates an assumption that the person will get back the power in contact with others (Sollárová, 2005).

The conclusion from investigation of reactions on statement 2 (*negative evaluation*) confirmed the dominance of effective (65) over non-effective reactions (38). The significant dominance of effective reactions in spite of their negative content can be explained by its congruent formulation. We work on the presumption that sending congruent message as an effective form of reaction lower the probability of defensive reaction (personal dialogue, Meadows, 08.02. 2002). Congruence breaks barriers (Vymětal, Rezková, 2001). Cherry’s research (in Rogers, 1999) confirms that congruent manager is better oriented in his own motives. He is able to express immediately hostile feelings in the way that does not hurt the other’s dignity. He is able to accept hostile feelings e.g. negative evaluation, too. He becomes more powerful and effective because he feels control over the situation instead of helplessness.

The conclusion from investigation of reactions on statement 3 (*passive-aggressive*) confirmed low dominance of effective (57) over non-effective reactions (51) but this was not statistically significant. *Passive-aggressive behavior* that hides fear and masks anger stops to form positive atmosphere and can be a source of chaos in working relationships. When reacting on tasks it is demonstrated by excuses, pretexts, forgetfulness, often by blaming others and avoiding responsibility (www.soulwork.sk/index.php/passiveaggressive). Training in attitude qualities, specifically in congruence, can support the competence of manager to decide not to escape the responsibility as well as to change blaming for responsibility.

- *Types of effective reactions on the statements*

While evaluating the frequency of types of effective reactions on three statements we concluded that the most often reactions on statements were *congruent* (114,5) in comparison with *empathic* (19,5) and *accepting* (37,5) reactions. The dominance of congruent reactions can be back up by the training where congruence brings participants significant value in competence to assert in non-aggressive way. The meaning of existence of organization is potential to assert that orients on productivity and profit. We assume that it is natural that managers most often reacted congruently. They reacted by effective form of behavior ensuring self-assertion without effort to gain control and power over the people. According to Rogers' notes about leadership congruent behavior can tend to a leadership based on influence and impact instead of power and control. From long-lasting perspective it is harmful if the person behaves in the way he is someone else. The ability to become a person helps to be more open to others. Then we less project "fixed schemes" and rigid rules into relationships with others (Rogers, 1999).

From possible effective reactions the lowest frequency of empathic reactions was found out (19,5). It can be explained by tendency to dichotomized emotions and facts as two different aspects. Organizations are traditional places where the emphasis is put on consciousness and intellect. Emotions are considered as undesirable (Rogers, 1997b). From the research it can be concluded that in the direct management process where the emphasis is on pragmatic side of communication empathic reactions are minimal. At the same time the effect of empathy is important in situations where it is necessary to show others understanding or facilitate communication (Rogers, 2000). Without target training managers consciously do not apply the value of empathy as one of the determinant of effective interpersonal relationships. More frequency of *empathic reactions* (10) was noticed in reactions on *passive-aggressive situation* (statement 3) in comparison with statements 1 and 2. It can be explained by potential of empathy. We supposed that managers reacted more empathic because in situations such as hidden hostility or anger and aggressiveness when we do not know how to react immediately it is appropriate to use this attitude quality. Thanks to empathy we gain time and space to be better oriented (personal dialogue, Meadows, 08.02. 2002). The lowest frequency of *empathic reactions* was on *negative evaluation* that can be explained by constructive form of the statement.

The research confirmed that managers used less often than *congruent* but more often than *empathic, accepting reactions* (37,5). According to Rogers (2000) it is unchangeable fact that applying acceptance as an attitude quality is noticeably limited because of hierarchical arrangement in organization environment. To which extent is manager able to express acceptance to other team members is considered by Rogers as basic condition of person centered leadership. Specifically how he demonstrates willingness:

- a) *to accept group where it is at that moment,*
- b) *to discuss themes group finds important,*
- c) *to respect group's decisions.*

Rogers (2000) says about more demanding bounds in manager and superior relationship. According to Rogers managers have to operate in some laid down limits. Some

managers are in situations with fewer bounds while there are some who have to work in situations with many limits. We understand acceptance not only as a competence in relationship with other person but also as a competence that person uses for himself/herself to restore his/her "impact" with the goal to interpret the situation in his/her favor. Acceptance in this complex form includes factors as follows: exclusion of evaluation, accepting others as they really are and accepting possible threaten of integrity as an impulse to gain strength and independence. In spite of the fact that managers used accepting reactions on the second place while empathic reactions were on the third place, acceptance is a quality that requires more demanding process of learning.

Conclusion

In the meaning of Rogers' term of "**fully functioning person**" Sollárová (2005) suggests to use the term of „**competent manager**“. The research results don't support the hypothesis about dominance of effective reactions over non-effective. No statistically significance in reactions on social situations such as *emotional critique* and *passive aggressiveness* was found out. Statistically significance was found out in reaction on situation of *negative evaluation*. Investigation of frequencies of effective and non-effective reactions confirms that mastering attitude qualities is a process and not a final point in development (Merry, 2004). The findings open the themes of qualities of competent manager with relevant concepts e.g. psychologically integrated person (in Sollárová, 2008) or proactive coping (Sollár, Sollárová, 2009, Daniel, Romanová, Sollár, 2002).

In spite of our enthusiasm during the training in person centered approach we define limits that were identified in the research. We present the principal ones.

- A) We find the low number of statements (3) limiting. Working environment brings unlimited number of interpersonal stressful situations. We suggest enlarging the scale and the number of statements.
- B) The basic step was to investigate the reactions of managers on the same statements before and after the training.
- C) Only women (experts in person centered approach) evaluated the reactions. The perspective to enrich the evaluation from the male point of view is offered.
- D) In the process of mastering and adopting the qualities of empathy, acceptance and congruence the need of more intensive and longer training emerged.
- E) The understanding of the term effectiveness remains controversial. According to Rogers the idea that effective behavior is saturated by empathy, acceptance and congruence was central. Reaching the goal in solving interpersonal situations can be supported also by non-effective reactions saturated by aggressiveness, manipulation, passivity.

In spite of the limits we supported potential of person centered approach in solving interpersonal situations. We are convinced that working relationships exist to support good results. Application of person centered approach in working environment means possibilities to participate more actively on personal or working affairs.

ÚČINNOSTĚ VÝCVIKU VEDÚCÍCH PRACOVNÍKOV V RIEŠENÍ ZÁŤAŽOVÝCH INTERPERSONÁLNÝCH SITUÁCIÍ

Abstrakt: Príspevok prezentuje skúmanie problematiky vzdelávania vedúcich pracovníkov v organizácii v intenciách prístupu zameraného na človeka. Cieľom vzdelávania je rozvíjať ústredné postojoyé kvality prístupu - akceptáciu, empatiu a kongruenciu ako súčasť sociálnych kompetencií, ktoré podporujú efektívne a úspešné pracovné vzťahy. V rámci účinnosti vzdelávania príspevok prezentuje efektivitu interpersonálneho správania vedúcich pracovníkov v riešení interpersonálnych, primárne záťažových situácií. 116 vedúcich pracovníkov po absolvovaní 6-dňového výcviku riešilo 3 modelové záťažové situácie. Obsahová analýza reakcií interpersonálneho charakteru predpoklad o prevahe efektívnych reakcií nad neefektívnymi nepotvrdila jednoznačne. Ukázala mierny nárast efektívnych reakcií s prevahou kongruentných reakcií nad neefektívnymi reakciami.

Kľúčové slová: vzdelávanie vedúcich pracovníkov, interpersonálne situácie, sociálne kompetencie, prístup zameraný na človeka, empatia, akceptácia, kongruencia