

THE SOCIAL COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT OF MANAGERS IN THE CONTEXT OF THE PERSON CENTERED APPROACH (PCA)

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Abstract: *The paper presents the results of a research whose aim was to examine the effectiveness of training for managers focused on the social competence development. The changes in the PCA attitude qualities - acceptance, empathy and congruence were evaluated in a scale by 2 experts and 116 participants of a six day experiential training. The growth of acceptance, empathy and congruence was identified both in the self - evaluation by participants and experts evaluation when measured on the participants of the training. The results confirmed the reinforced social competence of managers in the accomplished structure of the experiential training of PCA attitude qualities.*

Keywords: *social competence, interpersonal relations, training of managers, Person Centered Approach*

The concept of social competence can be defined as the effectiveness of social behavior and human activities. Models of social competence differ from those that rest on specific behavioral abilities to those which are focused on cognitive structures. Howes (1987) identifies the social competence with behavior that reflects the successful social functioning with other people.

The concept of **competence** was introduced to managerial practice by Boyatzis (1982). The concept was used to differentiate the successful manager from the unsuccessful. He understood the concept of competence as abilities and capabilities of a man to behave in a way that is adequate to the requirements of a working position within the framework given by the social space of an organization and in this way to achieve required results.

In the seventies of 20th C the **competence approach** was developed. Its aim was to examine the managerial competence in the organizations.

The essence of the competence approach is that the education and learning are not organized according to the content of the studied material; however, the priority becomes to decide what competences are necessary to develop and advance for participants. Instead of the presentation of information, facts and knowledge the role of the educator is to facilitate, lead and support a learner in a non-directive way to acquire and adopt the required competences. The aim of educational process is a positive change in

the behavior of participants of educational process and to acquire the ability to solve topical, or prospect situations autonomously, effectively and mainly with a high degree of competence. The survey of key competences differs from author to author. The *social competences* are central to our interest together with the competences necessary to perform managerial work effectively.

The ability of the individual successfully and effectively solve social situations, to integrate in a social environment, to understand not only the social situation but solve it in accordance to the needs and interests of participants is defined by Kollarik (1993) as social competence of the personality.

Výrost (2001) composed a survey of components of social competence and outlined areas, which are covered by social competences:

- effective communication,
- ability to create and sustain relationships,
- effective solution of social problems,
- ability to make decisions,
- constructive solution of conflicts,
- application of social competence,
- social knowledge,
- self-control,
- the perception of the self,
- the self identity,
- ability to provide and acquire social support,
- effective social network,
- orientation to future,
- interest in others and the ability to take over the responsibility for them,
- respecting individual differences,
- ability to differ between socially positive and negative influences of groups.

Rogers (1951, p. 50) understands the potential of the person centered approach in “almost universal applications” and offers the approach to reformulate it for the use “in almost infinite variables of human situations”. In the application of our research it is a man in the working situations, in the context of an organization whose identity we perceive as aligned to the presented image of an optimally working personality by the above mentioned representatives of the person centered approach; as a relevant image of a psychologically healthy, mature man who is able to create and sustain effective working relationships. The presented image of the fully functioning man or the psychologically integrated man offers a collection of characteristics which significantly overlap with the concept of social competences. The components of the concept of social competence (Výrost, 2002) significantly overlap with the presented characteristics of the optimally functioning personality.

Rogers (1962) states that a highly productive manager leads people through influence and effect as counter poles to power and control. Such psychologically adapted or integrated man is referred to by Rogers as “fully functioning person” who allows for relationships that are equal and mutually accepting. He does not have increased requirements for the others as well as he does not prefer his/her position or power. Such

relationships take the form that is not filled with threat, dependence or danger. The intimacy and relationships are sustained better and the relationships are more permanent. Such person is friendlier, more original, more open, interprets not only positive but also negative feelings. Thanks to that he/ she enjoys understanding but is not overprotective. The person builds the interpersonal relationships, but does not value power too much. The environment accepts him/ her positively. The person's behavior leads to the fact that they are visible, favored and respected (Merry, 2004). According to Rogers (1999) an effective leading worker, whose attitudes – acceptance, empathy and congruence are internalized, relates to other members of the team in a following way:

- enables the autonomy of the individuals
- offers freedom “to do own things”
- expresses own ideas and feelings
- stimulates the independence of thinking and acting
- grants full responsibility
- supports and relies on self-evaluation

There is a wide applicability of findings how person's own capacities can be released in order to change the person and the way in which the relationships can reinforce such a self oriented change.

Educational process belongs among possible applications. It was theoretically, practically and also in a research examined by Rogers (1951, 1983). His promotion to shift the intentions in education from teaching process to learning process and from a teacher to a facilitator of learning involving the whole personality is fully relevant for the forms of effective education of adults. The role of a facilitator - trainer is not to decide what the participants should study but to identify and create the main qualities of psychological climate that can help them to feel the freedom in learning and development. External conditions that facilitate learning and development contain:

- unconditional acceptance of the participant,
- authentic presence and expression of facilitator,
- empathic understanding,
- climate without critical evaluation,
- support of psychological freedom.

In our view, the characteristics of PCA skills training in a group overlaps with the characteristics of the development of a fully functioning person and comes out of the persuasion that PCA skills can be learned and have their function to achieve the social competence in relationships, in particular in working relationships (Sollarova, 2005).

Acquiring PCA skills for working and interpersonal interactions directly results in:

- skills of clear and congruent communication,
- skills to understand communication of the other in the interaction,
- skills to facilitate the clarity of communication with a person who has different opinion,

- skills to improve the communication in a team, whose members differ in their perception and experience,
- skills to understand the other,
- skills to manage effectively burdensome, conflicting, and stressful situations.

According to the authors results defined in this way significantly saturate components of social competence. Therefore it is possible to perceive the development of key qualities of the PCA within a group of managers as a support of their social competence in defined expressions, which create and manage working relationships in a narrower sense of the word and support optimally, more effectively, fully functioning person in a broader sense of the word. (more in Sollárová, 2008).

Research verification of changes in personal variables, interpersonal variables and behavior (e.g. Sollárová, Sollár, 2007) can be evaluated as compatible with changes, which the examinations of changes within a therapy focused on a client state, in the direction of reinforcement of optimal person's functioning.

PCA is understood as one of the models of theoretical and also methodological application to understand and develop social competences of managers. We were interested in the PCA training effectiveness lead from a perspective focused on participants. We tested if the training has an effect on a change of the level of attitude – *acceptance, empathy and congruence* as qualities reflected in social competence of managers.

Methods

We tested 165 managers working in the state administration of the Slovak Republic. 48 hour training was focused on effective creation and management of working relations through the training of PCA attitude qualities – acceptance, empathy and congruence and was accomplished in groups of 15 people under the guidance of 2 qualified lecturers in two 24 hour sessions with a two month distance between training sessions. To verify the level and changes of attitude qualities (acceptance, empathy and congruence) we created a 15 item *Scale to assess the level of interpersonal qualities*, which we administered to participants at the end of the training to self evaluate the original level and present level of monitored qualities. The level at the beginning and at the end was in a conclusion evaluated also externally, by the expertise evaluation of lecturers.

Out of 15 items of the *Scale* the quality of acceptance was reflected by 2 items (acceptance of the opinion of the other and the acceptance of criticism), empathy by 3 items (nonjudgmental attitude during listening, impersonal dissociation and control of the correctness of listening) and congruence by 4 items (clarity of the message, matter-of-factness, expression of the experience and congruent decision) evaluated on a scale from – 5 to +5, where the value of -5 represented the level of extreme incompetence and value of +5 extreme competence. Results were transformed to the index -100, +100 and defined 7 levels of competence: *highly incompetent, rather incompetent, slightly incompetent, unclear, slightly competent, quite competent, and highly competent*. To verify the differences in self evaluation of participants and evaluation of experts we used Student t-test for dependent samples (Sollár, Ritomský, 2002).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Changes at the level of acceptance

Table 1. The significance of differences in score of acceptance during self-evaluation by participants and evaluation from experts

		N	AM	SD	T	p
SE	<i>situation at the beginning</i>	97	24.22	39.83		
	<i>situation at the end</i>	97	52.47	29.54	-8.716	0.001
EE	<i>situation at the beginning</i>	99	-12.32	33.40		
	<i>situation at the end</i>	99	13.43	35.66	-16.439	0.001

Legend: SE- self-evaluation by participants EE- experts evaluation

The participants achieved during self-evaluation in the subscale *acceptance* the average score 24.22 at the beginning and 52, 47 at the end. The difference identified was statistically significant at the 0.1 % significance level, in the direction of a higher score at the end of the training.

The experts evaluated the level of acceptance of participants at the beginning of the training -12.32 and at the end of the training +13.43. The stated difference was statistically significant at the 0.1 % significance level, in the direction of a higher score at the end of the training. Monitoring the self-evaluation by participants we found out managers at the beginning of the training evaluated the achieved level of *acceptance* in the level of *slight competence*. At the end of the training the value of acceptance was of a rising tendency while it remained in the level of *slight competence*.

Significantly more critical were the experts who evaluated the level of participants' *acceptance* at the beginning of the training with a minus value in the level of *unclear*. A progressive change took place at the end of the training when experts evaluated the level of participants' *acceptance* still in the level of *unclear*, this time, however, with a plus value.

We assume that as a result of a change in the *acceptance* the managers will be more competent to perceive real social situations, especially in terms of tolerance to the opinions of the other, as well as in the ability to accept disagreement and criticism of the others. Therefore it is positive that in spite of differences in the original evaluation of the level of attitude quality there was a rising tendency in both evaluating groups. The tendency supports the statistically significant change in the increase of the *acceptance* level. In compliance with Rogers (1951) we assume that if manager introduces the *acceptance* value in team work the members of the group gradually take over the value. They start to express higher degree of *acceptance* to each other. They can be more tolerant to mutual disagreements. Accepting environment supports the willingness of individuals to express easier their own real attitudes and feelings and at the same time it enables them to accept authentic feelings and attitudes of the others.

Changes at the level of empathy

Table 2. The significance of differences in average scores in self-evaluation by participants and experts to evaluate the training in empathy

		N	AM	SD	t	p
SE	<i>situation at the beginning</i>	92	18.98	32.83		
	<i>situation at the end</i>	92	52.82	21.38	-10.768	0.001
EE	<i>situation at the beginning</i>	100	-15.73	24.57		
	<i>situation at the end</i>	100	12.13	26.99	-18.296	0.001

Legend: SE- self-evaluation by participants EE- experts evaluation

The participants achieved an average score *18.98* in the subscale *empathy* during the self-evaluation at the beginning of the training and *52.82* at the end. The difference was statistically significant at the 0.1 % significance level in the direction of a higher score at the end of the training.

The experts evaluated participants in the subscale *empathy* at the beginning of the score *-15.73* at the end of the training *+12.13*. The stated difference was statistically significant at the 0.1 % significance level in the direction of a higher score at the end of the training. At the beginning of the training participants evaluated the attitude value *empathy* as a plus value in the level of *unclear*. The evaluation at the end of training captures the positive tendency and managerial skills were shifted to the level of *slight competence*.

The same tendency of more critical evaluation than in the case of acceptance is revealed in the evaluation of experts of *empathy* quality. The original level of *empathy* of participants is evaluated by the experts as a minus value in the level of *unclear*, at the end of the training in the same level, however, as a positive value.

To compare the original values during self-evaluation of empathy by the managers with the average values of other qualities, these were lower. We assume that it is because *empathy* is underestimated as a quality supporting the building of relationships and facilitating communication in working relationships.

We assume that the increase of *empathic behavior* influences the social competence of managers mainly in the aspects of willingness to listen to others and assurance that they understand the others correctly as well as the willingness to listen without subjective interpretations and a risk to identify with their problems.

Changes at the level of congruence

Table 3. The significance of differences of average scores during the self-evaluation of participants and experts to evaluate the training in congruence

		N	AM	SD	t	P
SE	<i>Situation at the beginning</i>	94	30.37	30.71		
	<i>Situation at the end</i>	94	57.76	22.15	-10.664	0.001

EE	<i>Situation at the beginning</i>	100	3.65	25.59		
	<i>Situation at the end</i>	100	20.95	25.79	-12.384	0.003

Legend: SE- self-evaluation by participants EE- experts evaluation

Participants achieved average score *30.37* in the subscale of *congruence* at the beginning of the training and at the end it was *57.76*. The difference in score was statistically significant at the 0.1 % significance level in the direction of a higher score at the end of the training. The experts evaluated participants at the beginning of the training in the subscale *congruence* as the score of *3.65* and at the end it was *20.95*. The difference in score was statistically significant at the 1 % significance level in the direction of a higher score at the end of the training.

At the beginning of the training the participants evaluated themselves in the level of *slightly competent*. At the same time as it was mentioned above also in this case we follow the reinforced acquiring of *congruence* in the level of *slight competence*. In comparison with other qualities in the self-evaluation managers evaluated *congruence* as the highest value. We consider important to support and train effective forms of assertive behavior because traditional management understands assertion rather in the form of power and control than influence and effect (Rogers, 1999).

The change that was observed by the experts at the end of the training was directed toward the participants' *congruence* in the level of *slight competence*.

We assume that the growth of congruence affects the social competence of managers especially in the aspects of non-harmful self-assertion, comprehensibility to set tasks, as well as the ability to decide and express one's needs in correspondence to one's beliefs.

Conclusion

While evaluating attitude qualities we observed a common phenomenon .The evaluation of the original level of *acceptance*, *empathy* and *congruence* in self-evaluation by the participants was more positive on one hand and markedly more critical when it came from the experts.

We think that a number of managers idealize their own style of interpersonal functioning. A more critical evaluation from the experts can be linked to a more qualified and complex understanding of the content of the abovementioned concepts – *acceptance*, *empathy* and *congruence* and the competence to have a more operative idea how to use attitude qualities in specific interpersonal attitudes and behavior. Difference in self and other perception corresponds to results of research (Sollár, 2010), in which self-evaluators rated their interpersonal characteristics positively than external evaluators.

In spite of the original differences in the evaluation of the level of achieved qualities from the experts and in the self-evaluation of the participants both the self-evaluation of the training by participants and the evaluation from the experts recorded the increased level of all three interpersonal qualities. The results confirmed the effectiveness and reinforcement of the managerial competences in the pattern of the accomplished experiential training of PCA attitude qualities.

ROZVOJ SOCIÁLNEJ KOMPETENCIE MANAŽÉROV V KONTEXTE PRÍSTUPU ZAMERANÉHO NA ČLOVEKA (PCA)

Abstrakt: Príspevok prezentuje výsledky výskumu, ktorého cieľom bolo skúmať účinnosť výcviku manažérov zameraného na rozvoj sociálnej kompetencie. Zmeny v postojových kvalitách PCA (prístupu zameraného na človeka) – akceptácii, empatii a kongruencii boli hodnotené na škále 2 expertmi a 116 účastníkmi 6-dňového zážitkového výcviku. V sebahodnotení účastníkov aj v hodnotení expertov bol vo výcviku zaznamenaný významný nárast akceptácie, empatie a kongruencie u účastníkov výcviku. Výsledky potvrdili účinnosť posilnenia sociálnej kompetencie manažérov v realizovanom dizajne zážitkového výcviku PCA postojových kvalít.

Kľúčové slová: sociálna kompetencia, interpersonálne vzťahy, vzdelávanie manažérov, prístup zameraný na človeka (PCA)