

SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE AS A SIGNIFICANT PART OF MANAGERIAL AGILITY

Martina Minárová – Filip Smutný

Abstract

The work of a manager is often unpredictable, flexibility and creativity are great benefits that help a manager to solve necessary issues. Strategic agility allows the manager to improve these personality traits, while part of managerial agility is the ability in the form of social intelligence. For several years, this ability has helped managers to deal with social interactions wisely as well as to build healthier relationships. The aim of the paper is to declare the importance and impact of social intelligence of managers in the business practice as well as to present results of our research on a selected sample of Slovak managers. We researched 275 managers from the Slovak Republic through the MESI method. Furthermore, in accordance with our hypothesis we assume that female managers achieve higher score with regard to social intelligence. Based on the research we can evaluate the social intelligence of examined Slovak managers as above average with the possibility and potential for development in case of all managers. This sample shows that female managers achieved higher social intelligence, however, the difference was not proven to be statistically significant by verification. First of all, managers should realize what this ability means, subsequently they should develop their own agility, since this represents the manager's will to change a way of everyday thinking and acting.

Key words: Social intelligence, manager, personality, humanity, relations.

JEL Code: M14, M12, D91

Introduction

„The more socially intelligent you are, the happier, more robust and enjoyable your relationships will be.“

Daniel Goleman

Manager and leader cannot be considered as identical terms, despite their close connection. We believe that a leader is a person who has embarked on the difficult process of building himself and his path, learning from his own mistakes and building healthy relationships,

knowing himself and others. All of these are the benefits not only for him, but also for an enterprise, which is run by a socially intelligent manager, who knows and works on his strengths and weaknesses, builds values and can be called a leader. All of this is part of his personal agility, which has a positive impact on the company's strategic agility. A manager with strong social skills can anticipate and know how to act flexibly and with oversight.

Social intelligence refers to the ability to deal with challenging social contexts effectively, understanding others' concerns, feelings and emotional states and knowing what to say, when to say it, and how to say it in order to build and maintain positive relationships with others. This is ability critical also for organizational agility. It is because of the people with strong social intelligence are able to quickly connect and build trust with their colleagues, which also makes it easier for them to navigate challenging social situations, influence others and support cooperation. What's more, the way they behave, contributes to an overall climate of the team and corporate culture. That leader encourages people to speak up, share their ideas as well as take risks and change the point of view. We agree with Závadský et al. (2018) since they say that a reflection of the management quality of managers is their leadership ability, while leadership comes from exceptional elements of the manager's personality. All these aspects create base for the collaboration, creativity, innovation and change of thinking that strategic agility unconditionally demands.

While examining the importance of connecting social intelligence as an important soft skill of a manager and managerial agility as a beneficial strategic thinking, we realized the importance of measuring the level of this ability, as it has a great impact on personal agility, and therefore also on the agility of the company, while this connection can bring an amount of positives. The professional and scientific public recommends the development of this ability, and at the same time we perceive a lack of research in the conditions of the Slovak Republic and that is also the fact, why we attach importance to our research.

1 Social intelligence of the manager

The history of the study of social intelligence is 100 years old, its origin is dating back to the 1920s. With regard to social intelligence we emphasize how an individual understands and interprets their own behavior and behavior of other people, their thinking and feelings and depending on this, interpretations can effectively guide their behavior and the behavior of other people. The possibility to specify social intelligence as one of the important predictors of effective behavior of managers already helps in recruitment to select people who are more

likely to succeed managerial positions. Social intelligence in management also means successful results in the field of work organization, participation in social events, inputs into social interactions, transmission and receiving more information, oversight and sense of humor. It also helps in increasing level of empathy and personal harmony, work-life balance, willingness to help and maturity of personality, as well as deeper generous values (Frankovský, Birknerová, 2017; Birknerová, Vávrová et al. 2013; Frankovský, Baranová, 2010; Goleman 2015; Gulliford et al. 2019). Frankovský and Birknerová (2017) define three main factors that are researched within social intelligence of the manager. These are manipulation, empathy and social irritability (MESI).

Within social irritability, it is the individual's tendency to different contact with others or during various social interactions. It might be characterized as an inappropriate emotional response to frustrating events. It is often connected with aggression, impatience, intolerance or anger. These are offensive reactions to weak stimuli, because the individual is not in control of his reactions. Such a feature is often dangerous and needs to be paid attention to. It can cause a number of personal and work problems and complications.

Empathy is the art of empathizing with the feelings and states of others with effort to understand and help. It is an ability, but also a process in which we use our own sensitivity, respect and openness. For the manager, it is a key and a masterful ability.

The third pillar of social intelligence is completed by manipulation. This one is a negative phenomenon for all individuals, including managers since it is about using others for one's own benefit. The one, who manipulates, can force others to do what they did not even want to. Often those who are the manipulated adopt opinions or positions without realizing why they do it and despite the fact they feel that they are acting against their interests. They often leave jump and renounce their own opinion on the matter. The effort of the manipulator is to achieve his own personal or professional benefit and success even at the expense of others. This state persists from raising one's own ego above real values as well as from a lack of empathy, humanity or other abilities, such as emotional intelligence (Frankovský, Birknerová 2017, Kika 2014, Lajčín 2014).

1.1 Social intelligence as a part of managerial agility

Current age and presence of an enterprise in the international arena requires considering necessary strategies to compete in the global arena. Except this, surviving in this competitive era is also the reason why enterprises must think about reducing response times and improving flexibility in performing tasks. This requires the creation of entirely new form of

organization. On this basis, moving an enterprise towards agility as a new approach in the path to change is vital. This fact is accompanied by the study that showed there is a positive and significant relation between manager's personality, including cultural or social intelligence, with organizational agility (Hadi, Najmeh 2015; Varshney 2020). Since agile organizations experiment to learn, occasional mistakes are inevitable. Empowering employees to act requires accepting a certain level of risk. People basically do not like to fail and that is why resilience comes in this case. To bring their best to the learning process, individuals need to be able to "bounce back" from adverse experiences. They need to be resilient. Some people are naturally more resilient than others, but research has demonstrated that humans can improve their level of resilience by developing their self-awareness and a positive attitude.

A socially intelligent manager can support a positive outlook support and mindset of the employees that is open to information, primed to succeed, which enables people to listen, learn and make accomplishments. In many situations, positivity also enhances problem-solving and decision-making and helps people think more flexibly, innovatively and creatively and allows employees broad range of potential thoughts and behaviours as well as eliminate negativity. All of these help them build their own physical, intellectual, social and psychological resources. In the long run, these resources are what help people "bounce back" from adverse experiences, which is crucial for organizational agility (Marone, 2019). The author mentions that while it is not the only key to organizational agility, building social intelligence within an organization can go a long way to enabling it to move more quickly from insights to innovation.

The mentioned and cited authors also agree on the fact that social intelligence can be developed by encouraging a positive attitude, by building a corporate culture and trust, sharing information, being open-minded or to set some trainings or development programs. This skill can be improved also by creating an environment of psychological safety, where fear, criticism, condemnation, complaining or inappropriate unethical behavior is eliminated and also by building employee's self confidence by noticing and appreciating individuals.

2 Methodology

The material we used consists of primary and also secondary data. Secondary content includes some international researches and findings. Primary information is represented by our own research through an online questionnaire survey that was carried out from October to December 2020. We received answers from 275 managers from the Slovak Republic (136

male managers and 139 female managers). We used a method called MESI, which is used to measure the social intelligence of managers and was created by Frankovský, Birknerová (2017). MESI, self-evaluating test, contains 21 items, where 7 items are focused on the tendency of social irritability (statements such as: contact with others disturbs me, the feelings of others distract me), 7 items focused on empathy (statements like: I am able to guess the wishes of others, I can guess what I have to adapt to) and 7 items focused on the tendency to manipulate (statements such as: I can persuade others to do anything, use others to my advantage is good to me). However, it is necessary to emphasize that the higher the empathy (the higher score) and the lower the manipulation and social irritability (the lower point score) is, the higher social intelligence the manager is abounding. During the process, we also used the method of analysis, synthesis and comparison.

3 Results

Based on our survey of Slovak managers, we can say that the item of empathy as the only positive component in this test reaches favorable above average results. It is a medium high score, 3.61 points (out of 5) with a standard deviation of 0.60. Female managers achieve higher empathy scores. Empathy as a masterful ability needs to be perceived and worked on, as the high score of the other two items reduces it. This is also confirmed by our other results, as empathy does not reach a completely high score; it is also due to the fact that the items manipulation and social irritability have moving values around the average that could be achieved on the rating scale. Within the social irritability, the average value achieved by managers is 2.28 points with a standard deviation 0.60. At the same time, women managers show a few hundredths points higher score, which means that they tend to have more inappropriate emotional reactions to the complicated circumstances. Overall, the level of social irritability is below average, which is in line with the research by Frankovský et al. (2018), in which the authors stated that Slovak managers largely reject social irritability. An important finding is the level of manipulation, which is on average 2.72 points with standard deviation 0.68. This level is still below average, which is favorable, nevertheless, it is a fairly high value. Significantly higher scores are achieved by male managers, so they have a greater tendency to abuse or persuade others for their own benefit.

By these findings we see the importance and a connection of social and emotional intelligence, because it contains intrapersonal components that help build the inside of each manager and subsequently improve the ability of empathy as well as social relations. All this

affects personal growth and personality shift as well in working life, to which it brings more peace, joy, honesty and higher life values and thus eliminates social irritability, also the tendency to manipulate and egocentrism.

By our hypothesis *we assume that female managers achieve higher score of social intelligence*. To verify the established hypothesis, we chose the non-parametric Mann-Whitney test to confirm or reject the ancillary assumptions that the areas of social intelligence reach equal values in the comparison of male and female managers. Using the test, where we tested at the significance level of 0.05, we found that the p-value for social intelligence reaches a value of 0.148, therefore we concluded the following statement:

$$p\text{-value} < \alpha, \text{ not valid, since } 0.148 > 0.05$$

Sample set of 273 Slovak managers showed that social intelligence is achieved higher by women, female managers, but the difference between the tested groups was not proven to be statistically significant by verification, therefore we reject the established hypothesis.

We also used Pearson's correlation coefficient to determine the links between individual areas of social intelligence. By examining the degree of correlation intensity, we found out that the manager's social intelligence areas do not report strong ties. The only negative value, although the low one, is the link between empathy and manager manipulation. We evaluate the finding positively, considering that the increasing empathy of the manager helps to a certain extent to eliminate manipulative behavior.

The MESI methodology, that we used in the research, has gone through many changes, and the concept we present in the paper has existed for several years. It was created by Slovak researchers Frankovský, Birknerová (2017) and it is an area that is not that explored, which created space for us to bring new findings and knowledge to an area that represents positive changes in global management. Also, our findings give us space for comparison with other conducted researches.

A research by Frankovský et al. (2018) focused on comparing the social intelligence of 131 Slovak and Ukrainian managers. Authors used MESI method as well and the results of the study showed great similarities between managers from Slovakia and Ukraine. Similar to our research, they pointed to higher empathy scores, lower social irritability scores, but also a certain tendency to manipulate. The study also revealed the influence of the country's culture on the social intelligence score. Lajčin et al. (2014) examined the social intelligence of 132 Slovak managers with several tests, but the MESI methodology was also part of the research. As part of the research, they similarly focused on the differences between male and female managers. A comparison of the answers of male and female managers pointed to the existence

of three statistically significant differences, social irritability, processing of social information and social receptivity. Female managers rated themselves more positively in the factors of social information processing and social sensitivity. On the other hand, male managers rated themselves as less socially irritable. Significant finding is the fact, that social irritability was assessed by both male and female managers as rarely occurring. A similar attitude appears in the sample of our respondents. By interpreting these results, authors start from role expectations specific to our socio-cultural environment. In a given environment, certain manifestations and ways of behavior typical for women and for men are generally expected. Women are expected to be more socially perceptive and thus have more social information at their disposal. For the authors it is clear that these general assumptions they are also related to the differences between male and female managers.

The authors comment, based on extensive research, that social intelligence is a significant component of leadership and managerial agility. The analysis of the differences between selected characteristics of social intelligence between female and male managers confirms the findings that approaches to the investigation of managerial work must take into account gender specificities. We agree with the authors that the point is not for male and female managers to be the same. On the contrary, positions in specific situations and social and cultural contexts can be mutual enrichment.

Research by Ebrahimpoor, Zahed and Elyasi (2013) draw attention to the development of managers' social skills in their study. In this way, they are able to understand each other, pursue common goals and, above all, trust each other. At the same time, this ability helps to give right feedback, creates space for ideas, opinions for everyone and enhances good crisis and conflict management. It works to create a pleasant and friendly working atmosphere, greater initiative on the part of employees and their identification with products, which will improve sales and business performance.

A study by Genc and Genc (2018) confirms that the social intelligence of managers affects the emotions, behavior and performance of employees, job satisfaction and subsequently customer satisfaction. The important fact is that the level of social intelligence can be increased and developed mostly by self-awareness, which can be defined as a right choice that helps to some favorable changes. Renani et al. (2016) investigate the relationship between social intelligence and agility of the staff and the findings showed there is a strong connection between them. Mostly it is social awareness, as the component of the social intelligence, that can better forecast staff agility, as well as agility of the manager.

Through our secondary research, we found out that social intelligence is a significant predictor of managerial work. This ability helps the manager in a range of activities, especially in ordinary social interactions. They are a daily part of managerial work, that can be often called unpredictable. Examined ability can be seen as an important part of managerial agility, given that it is social intelligence that helps the manager solve situations flexibly, wisely and effectively, can recognize intentions as well as communicate correctly. Manager can also build a team and trust, allocate forces and resources in the right direction, simplify difficulties and ultimately help to satisfy both employees and customers. That all is a great benefit for the enterprise, but it also brings many other positives. A favorable primary finding presents the fact that the analyzed Slovak managers have the potential to develop this skill.

Conclusion

Based on our primary and secondary research, we can state that social intelligence is a skill that has a deep potential and it is a fundamental pillar of manager personality. We evaluate the social intelligence of the examined Slovak managers as above average with the possibility and potential for improvement and development, both for male and female managers. The stronger side is the higher degree of empathy and the more favorable results of lower social irritability, the weaker side is the tendency to manipulate. The first step for managers is the need to realize this fact and what social intelligence means. Next step is the will to understand that everyone has to start on his own. Managers with social intelligence skills can be confident and develop themselves and their everyday mission as well as the art of managerial work. They can gain courage in new visions or see things from a different point of view. They can perceive life more positively, build healthier relationships, recognize what makes sense and what does not and also what true success means, lead their life path by reevaluating own value preferences. By the skill of social intelligence, they are able to build their own agility, agility of the team as well as of an enterprise and subsequently change themselves into a true leader.

Each manager is different, factors as culture, raising up, values and also others unconditionally affect his behavior and life approach. We believe that a manager's social intelligence is closely related to emotional intelligence, which means how a manager can deal with his emotions in the form of self-knowledge, self-control, self-motivation or empathy and social skills. Based on the examination of these areas, we conclude that social intelligence is a part of emotional intelligence, considering that it represents its interpersonal part. This is the

reason why it is good to develop emotional intelligence as well, while this knowledge can also build social intelligence. It is primarily about the development of empathy, which does not represent the weakness of the manager, but the elevation of decency and humanity above personal ego, which will bring a change in thinking and behavior. The development of empathy depends on understanding the depth and essence of this ability and bringing a pro-human approach and dignity into everyday activities. By building social intelligence, we do not degrade mental intelligence, it is their connection that brings new knowledge, a new point of view, perspective, flexibility and creativity, which is crucial for solving internal and external matters or unexpected circumstances and especially for the strategic agility of the manager, project or the company itself.

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Contact

Martina Minárová

Faculty of Economics, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia

Tajovského 10, 975 90 Banská Bystrica, Slovakia

e-mail: martina.minarova@umb.sk

Filip Smutný

Faculty of Economics, Matej Bel University in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia

Tajovského 10, 975 90 Banská Bystrica, Slovakia

e-mail: filip.smutny@umb.sk