

SOCIAL SKILLS AS AN IMPORTANT PILLAR OF MANAGERIAL SUCCESS

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Abstract

The aim of the essay was to draw attention to the fact that the level of expertise and professional skills represents merely a basic prerequisite for success in managerial work. While the expertise and experience have their essential role, they are not enough to achieve excellent results. Based on this fact, we have carried out research examining the relation between the level of social skills in selected agricultural managers and their position in the management hierarchy. The level of social skills was evaluated using Riggio's Social Skills Inventory.

Keywords: managers, social skills, emotional intelligence, SSI

JEL classification: D23, L20, 015

1 Introduction

Management has recently undergone significant changes. The development of production, its productivity and achieving the state in which supply starts to exceed demand have led to a radical change on the global market. As a result of globalisation of the world economy, competition is growing rapidly and if enterprises wish to retain their competitiveness in the turbulent business environment, they not only need to pay attention to the external environment and respond to it in a suitable way, but also mobilise the entire potential of the internal environment. In order for managers to be sustainably successful, they need to make use of all

possibilities of not only so-called hard, but also soft factors. Social skills of managers may play a crucial role in this complex process.

Empirical research suggests that managers spend as much as 70% of their time interacting and communicating with other people. Without communication, empathy, assertiveness, the ability to motivate, the art of listening and other social skills, managing people cannot be sufficiently effective. Managers come into contact not only with their subordinates, co-workers and colleagues, but as group representatives also with other groups, enterprises and the public, which also puts higher demands on their work.

Various terms are used in specialised literature to refer to social skills. We may find the terms such as social competences, interpersonal competences, soft skills, interpersonal transferable skills, etc.

In recent years, social skills have been linked to other terms – a so-called emotional quotient (EQ) or social quotient (SQ). They are skills that cover the afore-said skills and give them an appropriate dimension. Their examination was conditional on the fact that also individuals with a high intelligence quotient (IQ) tend to fail in areas where a substantial role is played by interpersonal communication.

2 Theoretical background

According to Goleman (2011), comparing values of IQ with success in professional career has shown the maximum interdependence of 22%. As the author suggests, it has already become quite natural for companies around the world to take into account the emotional intelligence of both their current and future employees in the process of recruitment, promotion and development. As he further states, the Johnson & Johnson company has found that individuals working in divisions around the world who were identified as people with strong leadership potential in their mid-career had by far better emotional intelligence skills than their less prospective colleagues. Pletzer (2009) also suggests that companies working with the concept of emotional intelligence are much more successful on the market than those that pay no attention to these skills in their employees. According to Bradberry & Greaves (2006), emotional intelligence accounts for 60% of the overall success in all types of work. These scientists also found that 90% of all studied high-performing managers were also good at emotional intelligence. On the other hand, high levels of emotional intelligence were found only in 20% of those working insufficiently. Bradberry & Greaves (2006) also state that emotional intelligence skills are applied primarily in management, teamwork, and customer services. They note that such different organisations as L'Oréal and U.S.

Force saved millions of dollars by implementing programmes aimed at improving the emotional intelligence.

In the context of managerial success, Wilding (2010) quotes the American institute, The Center for Creation Leadership, which identified the lack of emotional intelligence as the primary cause of negative turning point in career of top managers. According to the author, research carried out with insurance company employees and IT salesmen has shown that those with good emotional intelligence skills had a 90% greater chance of completing the training and doubling their sales commissions. According to Wilding (2010), an employee with high emotional intelligence is able to:

- Control their emotions.
- Communicate with others effectively.
- Adapt well to changes.
- Solve problems quickly and well.
- Use humour for strengthening mutual trust and understanding in stressful situations.

These employers or employees are also:

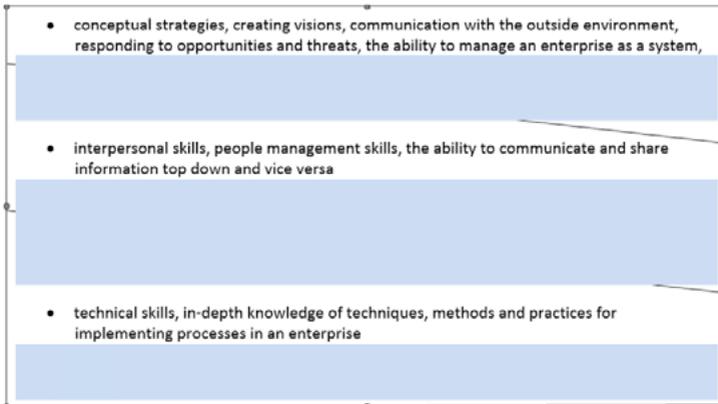
- Open and understanding.
- Optimistic also under adverse circumstances.
- Good trainers and sellers.
- Efficient employees in the area of customer claims and complaints.

Wilding (2010) also emphasises that while company human resources specialists consider interpersonal communication skills and other so-called soft skills the most important in job applicants, they are exactly what they lack the most in MBA graduates. Large commercial and economic schools supply the market with graduates with outstanding analytical skills and decent knowledge in the area of finance, marketing and strategy; however, only superficial attention is often paid to teaching soft skills as communication, people management and building team spirit.

Several authors have pointed out the connection between the level of social skills or emotional intelligence and the position rank in the management hierarchy. According to Veber (2000), there is an increasing need for social skills starting from the position of a company manager. According to Goleman (2011), IQ and technical skills represent a much stronger indicator of excellent working qualities in lower positions. Donnelly, Gibson & Ivancevich (1997) introduced a model, according to which technical skills and abilities to master techniques and methods necessary for implementing processes in an enterprise are particularly important at the level of lower management. At the level of middle management,

interpersonal skills, communication and people management skills become more important. Finally, more sophisticated skills such as conceptual strategies, creating visions, communication with the outside environment, responding to opportunities and threats become even more important at the level of top management. Also lifelong learning thus provides individuals with a better perspective and at the same time increases the chances of an organization in which they succeed and differentiate themselves on a global scale (Hallová et.al, 2017).

Figure 1 **Scheme of sophisticated skills in management**



Source: Donnelly, Gypson, Ivancevich (1997).

In this context, Bradberry & Greaves present an interesting finding. Both come to a conclusion that while the level of EQ generally has a growing tendency from lower to higher management positions, people in top positions may also have lower EQ values. According to the authors, people in charge of the whole organisation spend less time in interaction with their employees. However, the rule still applies that people with a higher level of emotional intelligence achieve better results in any position.

3 Data and methodology

The connection between the level of social skills and the position in the management hierarchy was subject to research also at our workplace. We hypothesised that the higher level of managerial position of a manager would also mean the higher level of social skills. We were evaluating 50 agricultural managers (25 men and 25 women) of 50 Slovak agricultural and food enterprises.

Table 1 Numbers of surveyed companies in all self-governing regions of Slovak Republic

Self-governing Region	No. of companies
Banská Bystrica Self-governing Region	3
Bratislava Self-governing Region	2
Košice Self-governing Region	3
Nitra Self-governing Region	15
Prešov Self-governing Region	3
Trenčín Self-governing Region	8
Trnava Self-governing Region	6
Žilina Self-governing Region	10
Together:	50

Source: Own results.

Riggio's Social Skills Inventory (SSI) was used to measure the level of social skills. This test was developed as a significant method in the area of communication and social interactions. It is also used for measuring emotional and social intelligence. It has been increasingly used in the area of manager assessment, consultancy activities, but also in training and development programmes.

The SSI measures three manifestations of social skills – sending, receiving, and controlling information at two levels – non-verbal (emotional) and verbal (social). According to Riggio & Carney (2007), successful managers generally score high points in the SSI.

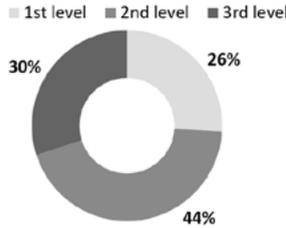
The examined managers were classified by the values they scored and according to the recommended criteria into three categories – groups with low, middle, and high level of social skills. On the basis of these criteria, 13 managers achieved the first, 22 managers the second and 15 managers the third level.

Table 2 Numbers of managers in companies by level of social skills

Level of social skills	No. of managers
1 st level of soc. skills	13
2 nd level of soc. skills	22
3 rd level of soc. Skills	15
Σ	50

Source: Own results.

Graph 1 Graphical representation of managers in companies by level of social skills



Source: Own results.

Managers were also divided into three groups based on their position in management hierarchy. We distinguished among first-line managers, middle managers and top managers. In our sample, we identified 15 managers at the level of first-line management the, 19 managers at the level of middle management and 16 top managers.

Table 3 Numbers of managers in companies by degree of management positions

Degree of management positions	No. of managers
1st level of man. Positions	15
2 nd level of man. Positions	19
3rd level of man. Positions	16
Σ	50

Source: Own results.

We tested the validity of our hypothesis using the χ^2 test and the contingency coefficient. We were observing two variables - A and B. A represented the level of social skills and B the level of managerial position. Individual levels of social skills and managerial positions of managers were put into a contingency table.

Table 4 PivotTable

Level of management positions Level of social skills	1st level of man. positions	2nd level of man. positions	3rd level of man. positions	Σ
1st level of soc. skills	6	9	5	20

Level of management positions Level of social skills	1st level of man. positions	2nd level of man. positions	3rd level of man. positions	Σ
2nd level of soc. skills	1	4	1	6
3rd level of soc. skills	8	6	10	24
Σ	15	19	16	50

Source: Own results.

In order to be able to test our hypothesis, we first tested the H_0 hypothesis for independence of the observed variables A and B using the χ^2 – test at a selected significance level $\alpha = 0.05$.

We used the null hypothesis to verify the following statement:

H_0 : We assume that the level of social and communication skills in managers does not affect the level of managerial position.

The calculation of χ^2 statistics was carried out using the STATISTICA program. We calculated the value of the χ^2 test statistic and p-value, i.e. the probability of making a mistake by rejecting the test null hypothesis. The computer output gave us the value of the χ^2 test statistic, the degree of freedom (df) of the test statistic and p-value: Pearson Chi-square: 31.8301, df=4, p=0.000002.

As the calculated value of probability was lower than the selected significance level, we rejected the null hypothesis. This means that the correlation between the observed variables was statistically significant. The test has proved that social skills of examined agricultural managers statistically significantly affect the level of managerial position.

The intensity of statistical dependence of the observed variables A and B was assessed using the contingency coefficient. We calculated the degree of dependence between the levels of social skills and the levels of managerial position. The contingency coefficient value was: $r_{A, B} = 0,97$.

4 Conclusion

The value shows the high level of direct correlation between the level of social skills and the level of managerial position in selected agricultural managers.

Our research results suggest that the more complex the work of managers, the greater the role of social skills in the overall success. Based on our findings, we recommend the following activities for improving the managerial work:

- extending knowledge from other areas important for managerial work such as psychology or sociology,

- dealing with the issue of social skills through various forms of lifelong learning,
- increasing the level of one's own social skills through training and development programmes.

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