OPERATIVE REGRESSION OR STRATEGIC THINKING – A CRISIS THAT LEADS TO INNOVATION OR STAGNATION

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ABSTRACT

One of the most popular interesting topics of competitiveness researches is innovation. It is one of the key of business development and stability as the results say. However I was very interested how it starts or blocks in human. Is it a given potential in somebody and it only needs the necessary situation? Is innovation only a question of decision or can we recognize how ability for innovation develops?

Erikson[[1]](#footnote-1) has shown how personality develops during the whole life during typical crisis of the self to solve. Two stages belong to existential life: the professional identity and self-realization. I would like to point out that further stairs can be found within these stages that follow career development along maturing processes. One of them is belonged a quite extraordinary but after all a very common situation as the leader frustrates the professional or strategic role or ambition of the subordinate. As Shepard describes[[2]](#footnote-2) the innovation trials can be blocked in case of too authoriter or overcontrolling leaders. After analyzing the pattern in a quantitative and qualitative research I have found that six possible alternative strategies were used by the people to cope with this frustration. Five of them show different, but practically efficient solutions of the crisis which leads to career development around at middle management level[[3]](#footnote-3). One of them causes typical stagnation or regression in the frames of the position and blocks the career development. Choosing a way from the first five one, we need to cross the functional borders or confront with and synthetize different interest along the organization which are the necessary psychological skills of innovation. The paper intends to introduce this crisis and describe the possible solutions of it with facts, practical examples. It is a preparing for a further study which can look for correlations between the career development and the chosen coping strategy as a solution trial for the crisis of the given career stair.

The use of this knowledge is manifold. We can identify the focal points of training and development methods such as mentoring. We can define the tools for leaders by understanding the dynamics of how to be able to develop the people. Due to this development we can hope the innovation level, ability and willingness are increasing in a company or a region.

KEYWORDS

Innovation, human resources, coping strategies, career, frustration.

jel CLASSIFICATION codes

O15, M51,

1. INTRODUCTION

There are several stairs during the career path[[4]](#footnote-4). One of them is mostly related to middle management level. The substance of it is that the employee’s or oftener the manager’s attitude turns from operative, present time probem solving to strategic. The characteristics of the won crisis are: sensitivity to future, extending the influence of future to the present, planning the actions in the perspectives of long term objectives, work out several action plans in case of the planned future shows the alternative face of it. Not rearly people confronts with frustrative, demotivative attitude of the boss or the organization during this career stair. This paper intends to estimate the incidence of this phenomenon, and categorise the possible reactions of the people for this frustration. The study uses a quantitative method to estimate the frequency of occurance in a multinational FMCG company in Hungary and applies a qualitative interview to map the range of coping strategies. The paper anticipates a further research that could analyse the affect of these personal strategies to the further career development.

Among the possible strategies there are several winning one that provide the improving in positions to turn innovative potential to manifest practice. Excepting one! Unfortunately this one is the most chosen strategy according to the results. All the practical innovations realized by the employees that prefers other coping strategies.

As it is described by McEwen[[5]](#footnote-5) development is a process, as the people become more complex individual. This progress leads through stress. The coping mechanism given to accured challenge could lead to development if the challenge is positively resolved, or in case of negative resolving, the stress, the anxiety could cause regression in development as Chaves described[[6]](#footnote-6). The progress through necessary crises on the way of personality improvement is documented in Erikson’s lifelong development theory[[7]](#footnote-7). As he explains the not final result of crisis of each stage could lead to further stages in case of winning or regression and not developing to the next level.

The purpose of this paper is to provide a correct description of coping strategies at the deep insight period of career when the possible innovatives arises and try to manifest through professional, communication, cooperation and sometimes scope of authority related challenges.

1. Methods
   1. **Pattern, survey, analysis, interview**

This study uses a regular statisfaction survey at a multinational FMCG company in Hungary as a quantitative data. The company has around 2000 employee in different premises in the country. The questionnaire has been answered by 1134 respondents. These respondents have been categorized to 5 different position levels which can be interpreted as career stairs likely with different scope of crises and challenges. This study uses only 3 questions from the survey to select the ambitioned employees who could be probable frustrated in realizing their profession confronted to more operative or different expectations. This frustration factor was estimated from value of question number 2 substracted from value of question number 1 and value of question number 3 substracted from value of the question number 1. We just got an estimated orientation about the repartition of the frustration appeared in the difference between feeling motivated (question number 1) and feeling that the company is not motivative (question number 2) or feeling the authority is not given to the delegated responsibility (question number 3).

I have selected 15 colleauges from each position categories who answered the motivating and the ambitioning questions with the biggest difference. The tested questions were the following:

*Question number 1:**I feel motivated to go beyond my formal job responsibilities.*

*Question number 2:**My company motivates me to contribute more than is required.*

*Question number 3: I have enough decision-making authority to do my job well.*

Together with the HR director, we have assumed they had been the most frustrated persons in realizing of professional ambition. These employees (managers and associates) were asked for an optional, confidential interview for a further analysis of satisfaction and displeasures at the company as a qualitative research on frustration. We were collecting the employee’s possible coping strategies. Leaning on other experiences, we collected the coping strategies answers to frustration.

* 1. **Hypothesises**
     1. There are no more and not less then six possible coping strategies given for frustration.

Table 1. The hipothesed coping strategies:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| Number | Strategy |
|  | Direct constructive confrontation with the frustrative superior on the purpose of convincing him |
|  | Direct destructive confrontation with the acceptance of resignation, as a possible consequence of it |
|  | After wearying of the confrontation starting to apply to other companies. |
|  | Keeping on the persuading but finding allies or sponsors for the initiatives without direct confrontation |
|  | Paralelly living the professional key role in own interest and regressing to operative role in the company’s interest. The employee starts to manage his own interest sometimes against the company interests |
|  | Regression to operative role and give up initiatives |

* + 1. The 5th strategy does not appear without the leader’s or the organisation’s putative or substantive offence against the partnership.

1. Results
   1. **Numbers in the pattern**

The following questions were analysed from the satisfactionary survey of the company seen in table 1, 2 and table 3. We can see the number of respondants and the summarised score of the answers per position categories.

Table 2. Question number 1:I feel motivated to go beyond my formal job responsibilities.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Executive (member of board) | Manager of managers | Manager of people | Salaried individual | Hourly individual |
| Number of respondants | 30 | 162 | 60 | 421 | 429 |
| Summarised score[[8]](#footnote-8) | 461 | 428 | 421 | 400 | 399 |

Table 3:Question number 2:My company motivates me to contribute more than is required.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Executive (member of board) | Manager of managers | Manager of people | Salaried individual | Hourly individual |
| Number of respondants | 30 | 162 | 60 | 422 | 430 |
| Summarised score[[9]](#footnote-9) | 420 | 383 | 384 | 365 | 387 |

Table 4. Question number 3: I have enough decision-making authority to do my job well.

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Executive (member of board) | Manager of managers | Manager of people | Salaried individual | Hourly individual |
| Number of respondants | 30 | 161 | 61 | 415 | 426 |
| Summarised score[[10]](#footnote-10) | 433 | 395 | 386 | 387 | 390 |

Figure number 1. shows the difference between the summarised scores of feeling motivated for going beyond the formal job responsibility and the feeling that the required authority is enough (dark column); and the difference of the summarised scores of the mentioned motivation and the companiy’s motivative attitude. We have interpreted the higher difference (taller column) as a bigger frustration. This diagram only shows an estimated repartition of frustration among the position categories.

Figure 1. The values of the frustration indicators among position categories

Source: Hay Group (for the company), own calculation

* 1. **Testing of hypothesises**

*There are no more and not less then six possible coping strategies given for frustration.*

Analysing the results of the personal interviews with 75 people, we have found exactly these five coping strategies explicated under. So the original hypothesis is failed. Due to we have preliminary detected this kind of coping strategy, I don’t exclude the opportunity that admitting the give up of the common interest and the commitment to the company in public could be risky, so if there had been any representation of this strategy in this pattern it would have not risen up also due to the presence of HR director on interviews.

*The 5th strategy does not appear without the leader’s or the organisation’s putative or substantive offence against the partnership*

Since we could not detect this coping strategy I cannot test this hypothesis.

The figure number 2 below shows, that the more the position gets higher the more the appearance of constructive confrontation strategy is represented (black columns). The grey columns also indicates that the operative regression is rather rises up among the lower positions.

Figure 2. The representation of coping strategies in position categories

Own source, own calculation

* 1. **Description of the found coping strategies**

Table 5 shows the appearance of the coping strategies in the pattern in numbers.

Table 5. The number of coping strategies among the 15 interview participants per position categories:

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Executive (member of board) | Manager of managers | Manager of people | Salaried individual | Hourly individual |
| Construct. confronting | 8 | 6 | 2 | 1 | 0 |
| Destruct. confronting | 2 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Searching for other job | 0 | 3 | 3 | 5 | 3 |
| Finding  sponsors | 4 | 2 | 2 | 3 | 0 |
| Concentrating own interest | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 | 0 |
| Operative regression | 0 | 1 | 7 | 5 | 6 |
| Not relevant  Without frustration | 1 | 0 | 1 | 1 | 7 |
| Sum: | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 | 15 |

*Direct constructive confronting with the frustrative superior on the purpose of convincing him*

According to the respondants it is a stressful period in work. Sometimes they feel their boss uncompetent with a high motivum for living his authority. The respondants fights for the acceptance and the trust. They feel they cannot utilise their professon even they have right and reasonable arguments. But they don’t give up. Comparing with other coping strategies this one needs the highest power and dominancy.

*Direct but destructive confrontation with the acceptance of resignation as a possible consequence of it*

The employees or manager who chooses this strategy has a high dominancy and a provokable agressivity. It is pairing with the high commitment for the profession. According to the analysis of the answers, the compliance and the professional commitment devide. After the conflict goes to a demagoge

*After wearying of the confrontation starting to apply to other companies*

In this pattern I have found only one occasion for this coping strategy. The employee doesn’t give up the fight but realizes that the organisation environment is not fits for his demands. He tries to fight for his right but not just only for the desired achievement, especially the required authority or autonomy. He counts with the possible getting the push. He fights for the moral victory and maybe for the more prosperable exiting conditions. The employee still desires the opportunity for the professional commitment but realises, that it is not possible and he refuses the compromises. He plans to look for other opportunities but still does not give up the fight. The detected emotional regression does not reduce the career ambition and the drive for the development. The employee tries to retain his self esteem.

*Keeping on the persuading but finding allies or sponsors for the initiatives without direct confrontation*

This detected strategy appraised by me the most developed and complex concept. The employee regards the object professional ambition or the innovation idea as a project and he consciously looks for sponsors. This chosen sponsor or sponsors can help confronting instead of him or they can find other alternative ways to realize the idea. The person develops skills for networking and not just among the upper management from managers can help to persuade the decision makers but also among the co-ordinate colleauges. This kind of coping strategy presumes a popular person who thinks not just directly. He recognises the drives of upper decisions and develops tools to influence these. This strategy has the best prognosis.

*Paralelly living the professional key role in own interest and regressing to operative* *role in the company’s interest*. *The employee starts to manage his own interest sometimes against the company interests*

We couldn’t find example for this coping strategy in this pattern. Since this one has morally querable content as a compliance problem and the HR director cannot undertake a full confidentiality against the company internests, the respondants may have held back information. According to other experience this strategy rises up on the correlation of frustrated ambition and a felt putative or substantive offence against partnership between the leader and the subordinate. Due to this strategy was not detected, the related 2.2.4. hypothesis could not be tested.

*Regression to operative role and give up initiatives*

Considering the possible winning or stagnating progress of crisis, this strategy has the worst prognosis. The employee accepts the applicator role instead of filling the position with the required professional or strategic content. The development stops, the challenging tasks does not brings the hidden potentials to surfaces. In 3 cases the respondants turns to task orientation in the attitude and start to perform low in the position.

1. CONCLUSION

In this study I have focused a career development stair and the related, possible crisis of it. This stair is when the ambition for strategic thinking or the professional performing is high but this drive is frustrated for example because the expectation of the boss is unfairly not strategic but rather operative. The boss sometimes requires exact implementation without added value or “hard to control” extra efforts from the subordinates. This time the subordinates consciously or not, try to cope with the situation. The intention of the paper was to describe the possible coping strategies given to those special circumstances. The study shows that this kind of frustration is most related to middle management (represented in manager of people and manager of managers position categories) which is shown in figure number 1. Each coping strategies can be related to more position categories but there is a trend indicated that there is a difference in the chosen strategies as it seems in figure number 2. The results mean a great output to a further study on the correlation between career development and the given coping strategy. We can set up a hypothesis to a further research, that the operative regression stops the progress of personal profession. For testing this it is necessary to follow up the respondants on their path.

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1. Erikson (1956) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Shepard (1967) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Bognár (2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Bognár (2013) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. McEwen (1998) [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Chaves (2006) [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Erikson (1956) [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Calculated from the percents of responses [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Calculated from the percents of responses [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Calculated from the percents of responses [↑](#footnote-ref-10)