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ACTION VS. EMOTION VOCABULARY IN MANAGERIAL COMMUNICATION

Introduction

Dynamic changes taking place in the modern world present people with new challenges. One of the most desirable features is broadly understood creativity which means the skill of introducing new and useful changes in personal and professional life. Creativity, which is demanded from managers, is expected to help in meeting competitors' requirements. This paper presents an attempt to describe the personality traits of both creative and uncreative managers, and the expression of this creativity manifesting itself in their vocabulary and body language.[*] One would expect that the observed trends are applicable for people in general, and not only managers.

The personality traits of creative and uncreative managers established empirically here may be useful in two ways: firstly, they allow the relatively easy classification of people into the two aforementioned groups, and secondly we can consciously programme ourselves to achieve success or fail depending whether we choose "action" or "emotion" vocabulary.

The anthropologist Turner (2005:32) points out that certain forms of programming of the style of speech, rhetoric, verbal and non-verbal language are observable in a social dimension, and distinguishes the language of the crisis period, war period, the period of restoring the equilibrium and the period of restoring peace. A journalist of the Polish weekly *Tygodnik Powszechny* (23. 7. 2006) wrote in the weekly cultural column that nowadays there seems to exist an involuntary reluctance to call a spade a spade. For example, the word *barber* is replaced by a *hair stylist*, a *flower girl* is frequently replaced by a *florist*. The new tendency has a sublimating and elevating effect, its aim is to eliminate any

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negative associations, replacing them with the new ones which create the impression of luxury and glamour.

Description of the empirical research

The research hypothesis was that the feature of creativity manifests itself in an empirically measurable way. The research tools selected were: Popek *Creative Behaviour Questionnaire KANH* and Gough and Heilbrun *Adjective Test ACL* translated by Z. Płużek. The aim of the former was to single out those groups of people who received high and low scores of creativity, the latter was employed to describe the personality traits of managers in these two groups. The unquestionable advantage of the ACL test is its simplicity. The subjects were to underline from among 300 adjectives those which characterise them best. It should be stressed that both tools meet the required statistical parameters.

Description of the studied managers

All in all, 300 managers (146 women and 154 men) were surveyed. Managers in the services sector were the largest group (111), managers in the education sector (94), managers in the production sector (47), managers in the tourism and agro-tourism sector (46). Half of the respondents lived in large cities (Warszawa, Łódź, Kraków, Lublin) or in average-sized towns (Rzeszów, Kielce, Chełm, Zamość) and the remainder were the inhabitants of either small towns or villages. 50% of the respondents managed large teams (over 31 people), the rest managed small teams. Almost 1/3 of the subjects had only secondary education, 11% incomplete higher education and 38% higher education.

Research results

Creativity, as with every empirical feature, is characterized by a certain continuum. If we arrange the results from all 300 tests from the lowest to the highest, we can choose 25% of the extreme results on each side to emphasise the relation of these extreme features to the respondents' personality traits. The managers from the group of high creativity are characterized by an optimistic and positive attitude both to themselves and to the world, which manifests itself particularly in:
1. internal strength,

2. faith in the ability to achieve one's goals,
3. intensive and persistent endeavours to achieve the aim, which results in seeking strength primarily in oneself.

One may say that all these characteristics make up a certain set of mutually supporting and complementary features or they form a set of programmes geared towards success in the future. In general, one may say that the uncreative managers were characterized by the reverse of these features. Both the creative managers and the uncreative ones differ not only in the personality traits as shown above, but even in the choice of particular adjectives that they used to describe themselves. From among 300 adjectives as many as 76 differentiated statistically one group from the other ($p<0.05$). Significantly, the whole group of high-creativity managers used 5441 adjectives to describe themselves, meanwhile, the group of low-creativity managers of similar size used only 4228 adjectives. What can be noticed here is visible self-restraint, or even scantiness on the part of low-creativity managers in choosing the adjectives. In addition to this, they more often and more willingly choose negative adjectives.

This statistically confirmed regularity, expressed in statistical figures, can also be observed in classes with students, workshops, or psychological training sessions for managers. There is no need to carry out tests to know what programme a given person realizes, it will suffice to ask the participants to introduce themselves. In many groups a voluntary introduction is a difficult challenge to students, and they often limit themselves to saying obvious things (such as their names and surnames, their fields of study, the year they are in, or where they come from).

One may formulate a general rule and say that the narrow boundaries of language are simultaneously the boundaries of our world. Also, when we talk, we speak not only to other people, but also to ourselves and it is through this inner communication that we shape ourselves. Uncreative people when describing the world, select passiveness, preserving and stabilising their feeling of dependence (Neuberger 1998).

In our culture it is normally socially unacceptable to brag about oneself, which may be regarded as lack of modesty, to say the least. Many people find it far easier to be derogatory about themselves. Moreover, during workshops low-creativity managers have more difficulty than the creative ones in changing the verbal language into non-verbal. This difficulty is particularly present when the uncreative managers are performing some new or unconventional tasks or are asked to use the space in a room or on a large piece of paper. Their graphic forms are often squeezed and marked by the scanty means of expression, lack of colour, excessive inhibitions and self-control. When the tasks concern relations among people, their human figures show signs of self-deprecation and – simultaneously – signs of appreciation of other people (Szopiński 2007).

The most frequent adjective used by the creative managers to describe themselves was *active* (91% choices). 83% of them regarded themselves as *ready to co-operate*, 82% selected the adjective *ambitious*, and 78% chose *able to appreciate*. Thus, one feels justified in saying that the creative managers most often use adjectives which express activity. On the other hand, managers from the low-creativity group most often used adjectives which expressed feelings, e.g. *friendly* (69% choices), *emotional* (67%), *tender* (66%) and *kind* (66%). Chart 1 given below shows 16 adjectives differentiating statistically ($p<0.001$) selected from among 76 adjectives differentiating statistically ($p<0.001$), presented in Szopiński (2004).
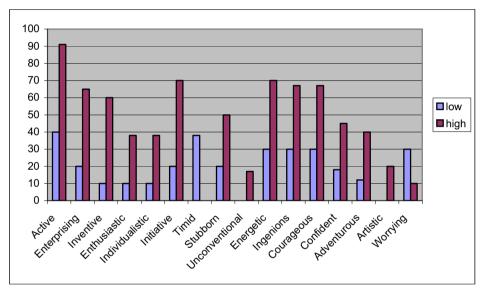

Chart 1. Adjectives differentiating managers in the extreme groups of creativity

Only in two differentiating adjectival expressions, that is *timid* and *worrying* the creative managers received a lower percentage of choices than the uncreative managers, apart from that, in the other 15 adjectives expressing activity, energy, ingeniousness, enthusiasm, etc., the creative managers achieved higher scores (see Chart 1).

Interpretation

One may conclude that the creative managers and the uncreative ones tend to use completely opposing paradigms in their private and professional lives. The creative managers' paradigm is marked by good functioning even if there is

asymmetry and diversity present. Meanwhile, the uncreative managers are able to function only in the situation of equality and symmetry. One could go as far as to say that the uncreative managers can function well in a collectivist-managed society, whereas the creative managers find good conditions for development in free-market economy systems, where a great deal of variety is not only allowed but also encouraged. The creative managers seem to claim that it is not necessary to be like others, and they are ready to differ from others. They seem to express their attitude that may be formulated: *we are autonomous and different*.

The results of the study reveal that the uncreative managers focus mainly on emotions. They share their emotions with other people in order to be on familiar terms with them, according to the principle: *we are close to one another and the same*. The need to share the same emotions with others might result from their low self-esteem. Such principle seems to prevent or even forbid the uncreative managers from being different from people they meet.

It is possible to demonstrate the above hypothesis with a real-life example. In Poland exactly twenty years ago it became legally possible for the first time to organize and offer new *products in the form of psychological and educational services*. However, the greatest difficulty that accompanied the process of organizing a new privately-funded company in the Lublin region was to find collaborators, namely doctors and psychologists, who could afford to differ from a number of their colleagues objecting to seizing this opportunity of charging people for such a service. It would have been embarrassing and even somewhat unethical to those who thought that health care should be free of charge. Limiting our observations only to the area around Lublin, it is possible to observe that 20 years were needed to overcome this emotional barrier. Today it is publicly accepted that some medical and psychological services are free (i.e. paid with our taxes) while others must be paid for directly by clients.

Reykowski (1995) remarks that the factor defining the level of subjectively justified social claims, especially in times of crisis and social transformation, is the element of comparing oneself to others. The egalitarian ideology makes everyone consider themselves to be similar, not differing from others. Therefore, there is a low tolerance for significant differences in material status. Various professional groups perceive it as an act of discrimination that their wages are below the average. In stable societies there is an acceptance of the status of persons who work in certain professions. Thus, the doctor, manager, miner or teacher knows what wages to expect. Also, society knows what to expect from persons who play certain roles in it. These norms are no longer obvious in situations of social transformation. New groups emerge, and the former ones become marginalised (e.g. workers of huge factories). Thus, the ensuing changes caused the instability of norms that formed the basis of many existing social norms and relations. Hence, social conflicts may appear unless new rules are worked out that are based on social dialogue.

Ratajczak (1980: 38–42) claims that a conflict resulting from introducing an innovation is a form of control which aims at delaying or preventing it. More specifically, she presents five types of behaviour typical of particular members of the community in the face of novelty, corresponding to five categories of people: innovators, early assimilators, the so-called early majority, the so-called late majority and stragglers, each of these groups having different values. For innovators the predominant value is taking risk, a desire to be different and to challenge the values recognised by the majority. The early assimilators appreciate prestige and try to achieve it by assimilating innovation. The early majority values prudence and the late majority scepticism, the stragglers advocate tradition and safety manifesting themselves in repeating the well-known and tried-out behavioural paths.

It would appear that the above division seems to function in every social group. Normally, I finish all my classes with a students' anonymous evaluation of the course. One of the questions is a request for advice about how to improve my next edition. Among many enthusiastic answers, such as: *Keep it up*, *Don't change anything*, *The classes made me more open and self-confident*, or *The classes helped me to break my internal barriers and overcome my shyness* one opinion that crops up invariably is *Don't wake those who don't feel like getting involved in class, please!* The question arises in this context whether this cold description expressed with the language of statistical regularities could be modified while taking conscious actions to shape the characteristics empirically presented above in the part of population which is ready to be affected? Perhaps then the process of introducing certain specific changes could be shortened in some local communities and it would not have to take place in a natural way over a period of 20 years. Boastful as it may sound, in my classes a large portion of the students are motivated within 15 hours.

Final remarks

It should be emphasized that it is neither school nor university but rather the first years of life in a family that are the first place to learn the style of communication. In the family system the way of communicating reflects the relations within the family. The essential factor in communicating in the subsystem of marriage – through empathy, understanding and co-operation – is the partners' ability to differentiate to find a common point in the *continuum* of interpersonal space between similarity and difference. This ability helps to establish clear-cut borders both between the partners in the marital subsystem, and between the marital subsystem and the subsystem of children (Szopiński 2004).

The creative managers operate with ease within this space of diversity both in the family system, as well as in the social one. The uncreative managers have

difficulty differentiating in both these systems. Therefore, it appears relevant to make enquiries about the origin of this difficulty. Is it possible that some of them failed to master the skill of differentiating in their family life, and developed it only later in their professional life? Or – alternately – did they start it in the family and improve it later? It seems that – on the whole – clear-cut borders between the spouses as well as between adult children and their parents correspond to the higher scores in creativity tests. Thus, the basic paradigm of differentiating, which has its roots in family, seems to be improved and developed by further differentiation, depending on the concrete situation or the specific social role. The action vocabulary or emotion vocabulary the managers use to describe themselves certainly reveals their constitutive personality traits.

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