

COPING WITH DIFFICULT STRATEGIES IN MANAGEMENT

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Abstract: The study is based on specific personal characteristics of managers, for instance, a relatively good choice of behavioural strategy and some practical studies as well as on phases of coping with difficult situations, appropriate and inappropriate ways of coping, coping styles focused on task, emotions and avoidance. The study explains that the answer may be useful for any layperson. Managers are daily exposed to difficult and stressful situations and in order to solve them they need to collect all their forces leading to a greater or lesser success. Work-related stress and its coping in management bring new challenging situations as well. The present study introduces our own research, experimental evaluation of working hypothesis, evaluation of research data and presentation of results.

Keywords: strategy, management, managers

JEL Classification: L21, M11

1. INTRODUCTION

Managers are daily exposed to difficult and stressful situations and in order to solve them they need to collect all their forces leading to a greater or lesser success. However, also situations in which they fail may appear [13]. Increasing interest in behavioural strategies in difficult situations is closely linked with research dealing with questions of coping [5],[10],[1],[2] and also needs of social practice (new approach and development of managerial activities, increasing number of stressful situations in our lives, increased interest in solving problems effectively, questions of their impact on managers' mental and physical health and well-being, tasks dealing with the quality of life, effective company running, importance of performing unpopular decisions, deadlines of decision makings)[6].

There is a group of authors whose work is devoted to coping with difficult and stressful situations in management whereas they focus on descriptions and features of different processes and strategies of coping. Even though there may be some specific differences in the orientation of behaviour in difficult situations, according to Frankovský and Baumgartner (1997), several common features may be found among these authors. These are represented mainly at the theoretical level with the aim to analyse processes and strategies of coping in given situations described by Folkman, Lazarus et al. [5] – regulation of internal or external pressures and tension which arise from mutual cooperation of managers and their environment. In what the authors working independently differ and what is, in their opinion, dominant at the level of empirical analysis is the aim to reveal a principle based on which an extensive list of behavioural forms may be worked out and proposed. The list should be worked out through factor analysis procedures which is an important dimension of behaviour and strategy for coping with difficult situations [6].

2. COPING STRATEGIES

They may be understood as coping patterns managers use while coping with difficult situations [12]. A number of authors dealing with the study of the given issue agree in

defining coping and coping strategies. There are no significant differences among them. According to Atkinson coping has three strategic forms [7]:

- *Strategy focused on a problem.* This strategy includes behaviour such as a problem analysis, setting up a plan for its solution and active behaviour.
- *Strategy focused on emotions.* It is characterized by the fact that managers focus on reducing their emotions they experience in a given stressful situation whereas a change in the given situation may not necessarily happen.
- *Strategy focused on escape.* This strategy is defensive and it should result in forgetting demanding situations and not admitting the fact that a certain problem exists.

Lazarusová [7] introduces a categorization of coping strategies:

- Strategy of apathy – accompanied by feelings of hopelessness and depression.
- Strategy to avoid the exposure of a noxious agent (something harmful) – accompanied by fear.
- Strategy of attack – accompanied by feelings of danger.
- Strategy of different activities – focus on strengthening own energy sources.

According to Bratská [4] application of coping strategies division into coping focused on a problem and coping focused on emotions may encounter many pitfalls in practice and interpersonal relationships. A group of researchers who, in their research, focus on the identification of stable factors influencing the choice of behavioural strategies in difficult situations analyses mainly the influence of personal characteristics on coping. This includes, for instance, a finding that managers characterized by a higher level of self-esteem rely on problem-oriented strategies more often as compared to those managers with low or lower level of self-esteem [15]. It may be associated with a stronger confidence in their own abilities to solve the problem. Similarly, differences between managers with inner and outer localization of controls are interpreted. Another interesting finding is that managers with high level of neuroticism incline to the use of strategies focused on

emotions, in this context, expresses his assumption that managers with inner control, high self-esteem and lower neuroticism are more flexible in the choice of appropriate coping strategies with regards to the conditions of a situation [15].

Understanding the controllability of situations seems to be very important while choosing a particular coping strategy and response to such a situation is problem solving, whereas in situations which seem to be difficult to control or change managers tend to use emotional strategies and strategies of avoidance [10]. Strategy of solving prevails in work environment but strategies focused on emotions are more common while dealing with health issues [11].

3. RESEARCH

The present study introduces our own research, experimental evaluation of working hypothesis, evaluation of research data and presentation of results.

The aim of the research was explore and find out important differences between respondents in different social positions selected in preference coping strategies. The research was carried out with the help of managers working on different posts - first degree, second degree and top managers and executive employees from not management practice. Number of respondents 147.

Research Problem. Are there any significant statistical differences in executive managers from non-managerial practice and managers in terms of preferences of selected coping strategies?

Hypothesis H: We assume the existence of significant statistical differences between the performance from not management employees and managers in practice of preferences of selected coping strategies.

Methodology. Coping with difficult and burden situations was realized and performed with the use of methodology CSI – coping strategy indicator. Author CSI methodology is Amirkhan (1992). CSI range is designed to detect certain ways of coping with problems and difficulties.

For the determination of significant differences in the choice of coping strategies in connection to social position the gained data were analysed using the T-test. Results of the performed analysis were presented via the outputs from the SPSS statistical programme [8].

4. RESULTS

In the given research we investigated and expected the existence of significant differences in the preference of selected coping strategies in in the context of social position. The following tables represent data and outputs the statistical program SPSS for the significant statistical difference between the performance from not management employees and managers, (H) in the preferences selected managers coping strategies – methodology CSI- coping strategy indicator.

Table 1 Differences in behavioural assessment strategies CSI

CSI	Executive employees	Manager average	t-test	Significance
PS	2,0000	2,0298	-0,422	0,674
SS	2,1399	2,3387	-2,446	0,015
A	2,6609	2,7418	-1,449	0,149

Source: Own evaluation of outputs with the SPSS statistical programme

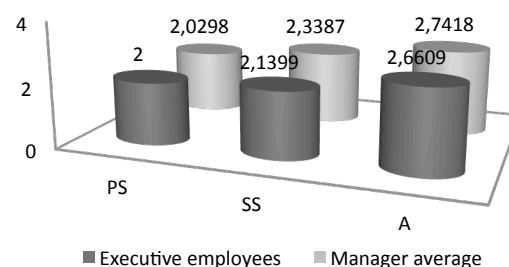


Figure 1 Differences in behavioural assessment strategies CSI

Source: Own evaluation of outputs with the SPSS statistical programme

Explanation: PS – problem solution
SS – social support
A – avoidance

While dealing with the differences of coping strategies performed at the position of an executive employees and a managers in practice, the results introduced were analysed with the help of the t-test. The results are presented in Table 1 and Figure 1.

A significant statistical difference was found only strategies - social support, where managers scored higher (average value 2,3387) than executive employees (average value 2,1399).

Respondents of both positions are converged to solving the problem with value "rather yes", but managers greater than executive employees. This means that both groups use the possibility of making known their feelings to a friend, accept expressions of sympathy and understanding from another person. Also helps them tell to somebody, seek support to a friend or relative, seek specialist for dialogue, seek help and support to colleagues in a similar situation etc.

5. DISCUSSION

The results presented confirm the H hypothesis. Statistically significant connections were found in positions, the position of a manager as well as the position of an executive employee, while dealing with difficult and burden situations in management.

Preference of the problem focused strategy in management is more common in managers than in executive employees. The given strategy may be characterised as "I will do everything in order to solve the problem; I will look for the most optimal solution; I will make up a plan which will help me; I will set objectives in order to solve the problem; I will carefully go through all the possibilities; I will pay all my attention to the problem solutions; I will slowly and carefully follow the steps of the plan I have made up". The given results may probably rise from a higher responsibility level in managerial work in comparison to the work of executive employees.

Preference of strategies based on emotions is lower in managers as opposed to executive employees who would prefer social and emotional support in difficult situations. The given strategy may be characterised as "I will ask my colleagues; I expect compassion and understanding; I will solve my problems with family members; I will look for a

company and I will talk about my problem and I expect advice from managers with similar problems”.

Preference of strategy focused on escape is higher in managers as opposed to executive employees; however, the difference is small. The strategy may be characterised as “I deliberately do not see the problem; I do not solve the situation, I have other work to do, I am turning my back to the problem and I am trying to do everything so that the others do not see what the problem is; I am dreaming about a better future and I want to be alone and spend time on my hobbies and favourite activities; I am avoiding meetings with people”. The results gained show that managers dealing with difficult and burden situations would use the strategy of escape more often than executive employees.

6. CONCLUSION

Based on the theoretical knowledge and scientific literature and application of own approach, the aim of the given study was to investigate and find out significant statistical differences between executive employees in not-managerial practice and managers in terms of preference of selected coping strategies. The aim of the research was based on the increase interest in the given field dealing with difficult situations that managers come across. Furthermore, it aimed at investigating coping strategies which are linked with a constant seek for effective and constructive ways of coping with burden. Nowadays, a high attention is paid to the factor of stress and its influence which accompanies the work of managers [14]. The increase and difficulty of difficult working duties often leads to complicated situations managers get into and, therefore, they go for inappropriate coping strategies.

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