DECISION-MAKING GAMES IN MENTORING AS A DEVELOPMENT STRATEGY OF MANAGERIAL COMPETENCIES

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Abstract: *These days, the rapidly changing environment forces organisations and individuals to adjust the valuation of specific elements of economy. The tangible capital became less important than human capital, which in turn can be used only by focusing on personal and social competencies. The managerial competencies have a big impact on personal and professional success. Organisations begin to notice the main function of competencies and increasingly consider them in business education. The comeback to the master - apprentice relationship by introducing the mentoring program to the organisation or school seems to be the best way to harmonize and give fresh impetus to the development of individuals. The emphasis on the development of skills is particularly important in the decision-making games, which now, unfortunately, often take the form of unhealthy competition for high notes, completely ignoring the possibility of personal development of participants. The mentor, who is at the same time a moderator, an assessor and an adviser, helps to see the development opportunities in fulfilling activities and stimulates an active search for new solutions.*

Keywords: *mentoring, mentor, mentee, managerial competencies, personal and social competencies, decision-making games, business education, interactive teaching methods.*

1. Introduction

Over the past decades, the world has become an arena of dynamic and broad-based changes. The development of technology, progressive globalisation and increasing public awareness are forcing flexibility and change of management methods on organisations. Today, the downward trend in the importance of natural and financial resources in the economy can be seen very clear. At the first plan the human capital advanced and is determining the competitiveness of the society, organisations and individuals. Its discovery, use and development tend to play a dominant role in creation of economic prosperity, and also contribution to the fulfilment of individuals, who derive satisfaction from their work.

The progress of science has created enormous opportunities for both individuals and large organisations. The technology allows almost instant exchange of ideas and an increasing effectiveness of information retrieval, while reports in the field of psychology and the brain functioning show new ways of development and improvement of the processes of assimilation and processing of information, stressing the importance of problem solving creativity.

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All organisations now are faced with the challenge of functioning at the time of uncertainty and immense complexity. Changes in attitude, needs and expectations of consumers additionally make the decision-making complex and require from managers well-developed personal and social competencies. Hence, the need for change in the whole educational system, especially at higher levels, should not only adapt to the needs of the contemporary economy but also try to anticipate and overtake it.

2. The role of personal and social competencies

The dynamically changing economy forces individuals to not only a permanent reassessment of acquired professional skills and knowledge but also a development of competencies that have a significant impact on the ability to use them. It was firstly proved by the research by D. McClelland (1973), who decided to verify the extent to which the scientific achievements and high intelligence quotient might be linked to a successful career after graduating in school. The results clearly showed that the top students are not the ones who have the biggest chance to achieve an unusual career. It was the first documented signal that, in addition to supplied technical skills and general and expertise knowledge, it is necessary to pay attention to the existence of additional elements, which have been identified as competencies, and their significant contribution in shaping of an individual.

Competencies consist of attitudes, values, skills, abilities, specific knowledge, character and personality. These are the key elements that distinguish people from each other. They determine the ability to fulfil the potential of the individual and stimulate its development. Although an employer may decide to engage an individual mainly because of the evaluation of his expertise (70%), he can lose this job mainly because of lack of social competencies, and only in 30% in case of lack of substantive qualifications (Flis 2006).

The classification of social and personal competencies, closely linked to emotional intelligence, was made on the basis of their impact; and so personal competencies relate to the ability to manage oneself and the scope of self-awareness, and social competencies determine the ability of dealing with others. The following table contains a breakdown of the two types of competencies.

Personal competencies play an important role in discovering one's potential and its complete fulfilment. The possession of some of them enhances the desire to self-realisation and the courage to follow this direction. The achievement of the individual's objectives cannot take place in isolation from social structures in which it operates, since its effectiveness is largely based on cooperation and interdependence. Social competencies are, therefore, very important. Their appropriate formation and development affects the fruitfulness of the interpersonal relationships as also the group and individual success.

There are numerous proven examples of the positive impact of personal and social competencies on the professional life. I would like to quote two of them: Employees of an American insurance company, MetLife, with a high level of optimism have sold in the first two years 37% more life insurances than the pessimists (Seligman 1990). The other study, involving 130 top managers, showed that depending on how they were dealing with their

emotions, so many people wanted to work with them (Clarke 1996). Managerial competencies, namely those of social and personal competencies that the best managers are equipped in (Reagan 1994, Greengard 1999), have an actual reflection in the results at work, as well as in the subjective sense of fulfilment.

Table 2.1. Examples of personal and social competencies

personal competencies	social competencies
self-knowledge	empathy
self-assessment	shaping others
commitment	tolerance
self-believe and self-confidence	ability to work in a team (cooperation)
motivation	persuasion
initiative and entrepreneurship	negotiation skills
self-regulation and self-control	leadership
determination	inspiring change
conscientiousness	dispute resolution
adaption to change	reaching consensus
optimism and enthusiasm	management skills
self-esteem	organisational skills
decision-making	motivating others
ability to self-manage	active listening
ability to learn	interpersonal communication

The survey aimed at identifying key managerial competencies, conducted in 1999 among 2,500 organisations (Abraham, Karns, Shaw, Mena 2001), showed that the 10 most desirable competencies are primarily based on social competencies. Classified ones were as follows:

- leadership skills,
- customer focus,
- results oriented,
- problem solver,
- communication skills,
- team worker,
- quality focused,
- interpersonal skills,
- technical expertise,
- business expertise.

It is worth noticing that organisations which put a strong emphasis on the development and use of the workers´ competencies (part of the company's intellectual capital), are in the position to manage their competitive advantage better and are considered to be more innovative and visionary (Collins, Porras 1996). Those are competencies which are the main source of success of the organisation, but also of individuals, therefore, the development of social and personal competencies should be one of the main tasks of education not only in the

business field. Universities should equally value the transfer of expertise and technical skills and the development of competencies. While the realisation of the first element is sufficiently effective by using the current, accordingly modified, system (lectures, group exercises), inasmuch the formation of competencies makes sense only when the individual approach to students is involved, preferably using the master – apprentice relationship (mentor – *mentee*). Therefore, it is worth transforming universities to put more emphasis on education of young and self-aware people who, being full of determination and optimism, are going to achieve the set goals.

3. Mentoring in the business education

Modern education has a growing interest in methods that stimulate activity and autonomy of students. Educators and others who are involved in composing of programs and establishing of training courses, particularly in higher education, are increasingly aware of the fact that only through adequate exposure of the practical path the transferred knowledge will enrich the student and prepare him to a situation he can find himself in the future. Moreover, in the era of interest in individual development, in personal and social competencies itself, interactive teaching methods become a likely response to the desire to increase self-awareness of the student and the assistance in his pursuit of personal mastery.

The subjective glance at the student and the appreciation of individualism extorted a reflection on the effectiveness of different methods used so far in the process of education. The solution that can meet the challenge of realisation of human potential and its development is mentoring, which would be supporting and actuate the process of education. Mentoring is an individualized form of training based on the master - apprentice relationship. Its main assumption is *helping people to become the person they want to be* (Parsloe, Wray 2000, p. xiii). This is due to the basic observation - expertise and technical skills are not sufficient elements, which one should transfer to a young man, so that he could consciously and effectively follow the path of self-realisation. A student needs a mentor (Karwala 2007), who could help him to extract hidden knowledge, to develop social and personal competencies and to realise the path which he wants to follow.

Mentoring outlines here an important strategy that allows combining various training methods. This is a new quality in education aimed at helping students to fulfil their potential. D. Clutterbuck describes mentoring as a *one of the most powerful developmental approaches available to individuals and organisations* (1998, p. 87). Though, how can mentoring be defined? Mentoring is a partner relationship between master and apprentice (student, worker, *kōhai* etc.), oriented towards discovery and development of the potential of the apprentice. It is based on inspiration, intellectual stimulation and leadership. It rests mainly on the fact that the student, through the appropriate handling of the mentor, gets to know himself, thus developing his self-awareness, and does not fear to go his own chosen way of self-realisation. It also includes counselling, evaluation and assistance in the programming of the student's success.

Mentoring uses many methods of teaching, but the accent is clearly set on discussion. Omnipresent dialogue with extensive feedback and openness to individual student helps in the

selection of other methods. Because of the importance of the practical path and development of competencies, interactive teaching methods are particularly helpful. One of these methods is simulation and decision-making games.

4. Decision-making games in mentoring

Decision-making in a complex and unpredictable environment is extremely difficult - and making effective decisions is even more complicated. Decisions are the cornerstone of effective functioning and development of each organisation, as well as of individuals. Whether a success will be achieved, or a defeat suffered depends on the right decision made. Making a decision, in addition to expertise knowledge, requires certain personal and social competencies. One of the most important methods, which emphasises the development of these competencies, is the 'decision-making game'.

Decision-making games, as well as other interactive methods, were formed from the opposition to traditional learning methods. The best effects associated with learning are achieved by what we say and do. About 90% of the information is memorized then although this figure may vary slightly according to people's learning styles and intelligence (Magnesen, in: Dryden, Vos 1999, p. 100). Moreover, these methods make a better use of the potential of both brain hemispheres, owing to the fact that, the creativity and effectiveness of learning increases.

Placing decision-making games on specific cases from real life makes business education more effective because students see the strong relationship between the acquired knowledge and the reality and are more likely to engage in this learning process. The aspect of fun is not less important, because it further reinforces the desire to learn and gives pleasure and satisfaction. In addition, finding ourselves in a situation in which we can make decisions, and choosing a wrong one will have no material consequences for us is an ideal place for training. Making mistakes is a natural thing and it is even desirable in school education, where the practical implementation of the theory is free from risk as it makes us more sensible for the most common pitfalls and difficulties.
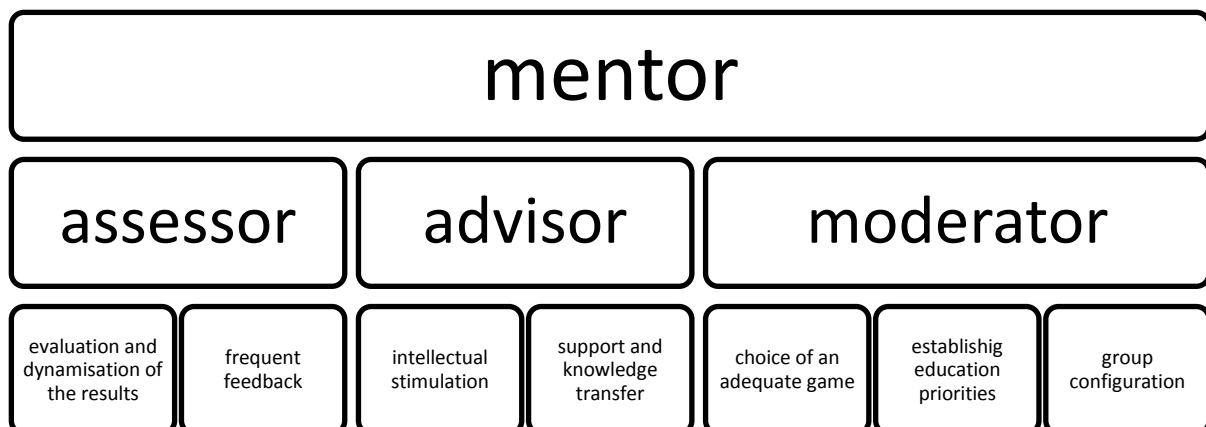
In business education, decision-making games are often reduced to a tool where students or managers get familiar with certain problem situations. The game is an interactive case study that students can resolve themselves by manipulating decision-making variables. The involvement teaches certain situational, economical, organisational and praxeological behaviours and regularities (Długosz 1990). One should also remember the restrictions, which are involved in any decision-making and simulation games. They must be approached with a certain detachment when it comes to the validity of the decision-making. In most cases, games have been designed on the basis of historical data and general guiding principles such as market data and do not take into account present and future dynamic changes (they do not derive from the present - are only programmed and are not able to foresee the future). The decisions taken in the current reality might be inappropriate. Therefore, the essence here is the decision-making process and its supporting methods. The role of a mentor is exceptional because he can keep inspiring and encouraging the participant through a dialogue or by providing new variables and changes. Particularly decision-making games have a simplified

character, and do not take into account many other external and internal factors. Therefore, one should refrain from routine and control, one's habits, in order to maintain adequate flexibility and efficiency.

The awareness of the rules, which are valid in one game, cannot be regarded as an educational priority, because this might have a certain risk connected with fixation and inflexibility. The most important feature of the decision-making games is its positive impact on the student's personal development, which is to a large extent too sparsely used in business education. Decision-making games are used more for the sake of transferring of knowledge and experience associated with the game, often neglecting the discovery and development of human potential.

One way of taking an advantage of decision-making games fully is mentoring. It can play a specific role, with its emphasis on the formation and development of managerial competencies, while reducing possible limitations associated with rational decision-making, like these connected with the knowledge, competencies, motivation and routine barrier. The combination of the mentoring strategy and decision-making games allows to use the apprentice's potential more efficiently and to stimulate his development. The role of the mentor is here multi-component. One can talk about mentor in the role of a moderator, assessor and advisor.

Figure 4.1. Mentoring rules in decision-making games

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│     assessor      │  │      advisor      │  │     moderator     │
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│evaluation││frequent│  │intellectual││support and│  │choice of an││establishig││group│
│and       ││feedback│  │stimulation ││knowledge  │  │adequate game││education  ││configuration│
│dynamisation││        │  │           ││transfer   │  │            ││priorities ││             │
│of the    ││        │  │           ││           │  │            ││           ││             │
│results   ││        │  │           ││           │  │            ││           ││             │
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In order to make a mentoring program reasonable, the mentor should take students' needs and expectations into account and adapt to them so that the relation of master - apprentice would bring as many benefits as possible for both parties. Therefore, it is necessary for mentoring to comprise the following basic steps, which mutually penetrate and complement (Karwala 2007):

1. Setting a goal and the exchange of expectations associated with mentoring (education).
2. Gathering of information about oneself and the identification of strengths and weaknesses.
3. Series of discussions to increase the self-knowledge and self-awareness of the *mentee* and to identify of opportunities and threats of the individual paths of development.

4. Stimulating the needs for formulating expectations and objectives for the future.
5. The identification and confirmation of the personal development path and its consistent implementation.
6. The deliberate removal of limitations imposed by the *mentee* himself, like these caused by fear.
7. Developing personal and social competencies, including leadership, team building, project management, etc.
8. Connection and use of acquired knowledge and skills in practice. Continuous contact and an extensive feedback between the participants of the theoretical & practical path and the mentor.
9. Assessment of the *mentee* and support in evaluation of the results: dialogue on the implementation of the chosen path, its verification, elimination of weaknesses, intensifying the strengths, identifying new opportunities and maintaining the dynamics of change.

The primary task of a mentor/moderator is to help choosing the appropriate decision-making game for the student with a view for the development of his competencies. It is significant that the student's weaknesses, strengths, individual preferences, learning styles, intelligence, life goals and many other factors are taken into consideration. These arrangements may seem laborious at the beginning, but they decide on the effectiveness of the decision-making game. It is particularly important to select a game that will be a level more difficult than the knowledge and competencies of the *mentee*. This allows to sustain the challenges with a sense of ability to solve without the feeling of helplessness and frustration (too difficult) or boredom (too easy). This can be specified by the creative tension that allows effective learning.

In addition to the above, it is necessary to provide the gamers different play configurations, i.e. to allow them a one-person decision-making system, and also a group one of rotating commitment of roles (leader, theoretician, innovator, etc.), which will support the development of specific competencies. It is worth mentioning a research carried out by Stair and Kuehne (1980), which contradicts the widespread perception of the preponderance of a group on individuals. In a study where various MBA students from an American university took part, the learning curves of individuals and teams of three persons were compared. Initially, the individuals made decisions much more slowly, but their effectiveness and efficiency improved much faster than when placed in teams of three. In the longer-term, individualists overtook numerous teams.

The role of the mentor - assessor lies in the evaluation of the proceedings and the operational effectiveness of the student and his stimulation to perform a reflective self-assessment. Evaluation should take place as frequently as possible and cover all aspects of the accomplishing of tasks in the decision-making game, so that an assessment will be more integrated and comprehensive. It should be noticed that the mentor focuses, to a lesser extent, on the game performance of the student, and more on his personal development. Placing the emphasis on this aspect should be a priority, which will also grant the student to seek for a more conscious participation in the process of education. It means that competition and

private interests in the team lose their importance while the essence of the game is the development of competencies.

Evaluation should be tripartite (Vos, Dryden 1999) and based on self-assessment (50%), assessment carried out by a mentor (20%) and among the participants (30%). Effective learning, beside the challenges, requires explicit evaluation in the form of feedback, so that the student can understand the place he stands and adjust his behaviour to the set objectives (Erlauer 2003, p. 8). The feedback, as also the reflection, should be as extensive as possible and should include elements related to managerial competencies. For instance, this applies to personal competencies (coping with stress, time management, motivation, self-control, task-orientation, commitment, creativity) and social (leadership, teamwork, participation, communication with others). In the area of decision-making, it is important for a student to be aware of the fact that acting by intuition and emotions can lead to inefficient decisions. It is also significant for him to understand the importance of the control of emotions, which according to studies are responsible for 80% of the decision made, while only 20% is based on reasoning (Weiss 1985, p. 12).

A mentor - adviser has also other tasks; he monitors the ongoing course of the games. Based on the case study he also stimulates the student intellectually by asking questions and helping to pursue the truth through the various decision-making techniques, such as lateral thinking, brainstorming, heuristics and other decision supporting systems. It is important that the student identifies and includes the interactions between the different functional areas. The mentor's task is also to break down the schematic way of thinking of the student, by boosting him to an independent and creative problem solving approach.

The master - apprentice relation is very important because it is based on trust, which facilitates a genuine conversation, taking into account the problems, which the *mentee* is facing. The mentor knows the strengths and weaknesses of the student, making the process of education more individualised and based on challenges. The corresponding suggestion to the selection of a game and subsequent decision-making strategy can direct the student to new ways of thinking and help him overcome the existing difficulties. The student is not left by himself, so not to feel excessive fear and he knows that at any moment he can be access advice from his master. The advice given by a mentor is not in a form of complete answers, but guidelines stimulating the search for an answer in the *mentee* himself. Decision-making games, under the watchful eye of an experienced mentor, not only allow the acquisition of knowledge and skills, but above all, increase knowledge about themselves and their capabilities.

5. Conclusion

Decision-making games implemented in the strategy of mentoring accelerate the learning process and focus on the development of personal and social competencies. In addition, they allow to present complex problem situations and their sensitivity to changes in the environment. Through real contact with the players, participants realise the importance of

interpersonal relationships, communication and of the role of competencies in the development of their personal and professional life.

This is a very versatile strategy that can be successfully applied in education at universities, schools and other organisations, particularly, which are open to permanent learning. Yet, it is important to remember that simulation and decision-making games are not the only way to discover and realise the potential of students. It seems necessary to also use other methods of training both interactive and traditional, but always based on mentoring. Management games do not only serve to train a person in the process of decision-making, but above all stimulate the development of certain competencies.

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