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Relationship between Tolerance for Ambiguity and Socio-psychological Characteristics of Managers

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The existing lifestyle and dynamic changes in social and economic spheres can lead to subjective ambiguity, which can be defined as „the perception of inadequate information arising from certain characteristics of situation" [McLain 1993: 183–189]. Tolerance for ambiguity is the degree of acceptance or even attraction to the lack of information [McLain 1993: 183–189], i.e. situations that are unclear, uncertain, vague or have more than one meaning. A. Karpov defines tolerance for ambiguity as „manager's ability to withstand the external and internal ambiguity being one of major professional characteristics of a leader. It is a combination of cognitive abilities to resolve the ambiguity and emotional tendency to perceive ambiguous situations as difficult yet not traumatic" [Karpov 2005: 562].

In an organization as a complex system, sources of ambiguity can be located both within the organization and in the external environment. The internal sources include job insecurity, organizational changes, unclear policies, and so on. An example of external sources is financial markets for financial organization. Frequent organizational changes, impossibility to make an accurate long-term forecast of the organization's development, and permanent need for innovation in order to compete successfully are essential attributes of modern IT organizations.

In this connection, tolerance for ambiguity is a major professional characteristic of a modern manager, whose managerial activity is mediated in relation to the results of the organizational (group) activity by various activities of performers. Therefore, identifying socio-psychological characteristics of a manager connected with tolerance for ambiguity is an important issue and the subject of this study.

As we see it, socio-psychological characteristics of a manager include manager's individual characteristics that determine interpersonal relations, causation attribution, independence or dependence on others, coping behavior, and decision-making connected with personality factors (rationality or risk seeking) and thinking styles.

The aim of the research is to identify the relationship between tolerance for ambiguity and socio-psychological characteristics of managers.

Hypothesis of the study is that there are direct and inverse relationships between tolerance for ambiguity and socio-psychological characteristics of managers.

Additional hypothesis 1 is that tolerance for ambiguity has a positive correlation with domination, internality, independence, risk seeking, and assertive action coping strategy.

Additional hypothesis 2 is that tolerance for ambiguity has a negative correlation with dependant interpersonal relations, activity denial, and avoidant actions coping strategy.

Methods of research: psycho-diagnostic methods: Multiple Stimulus Types Ambiguity Tolerance Questionnaire – I (D.L. McLain adapted by Ye.G. Lukovitskaya), Autonomy-Dependence (G.S. Prygin), modified Interpersonal Behavior Personal Questionnaire (T. Leary adapted by L.N. Sobchik), Locus of Control (Ye.G. Ksenofontova), Strategic Approach to Coping Scale (S. Hobfoll adapted by N. Vodopyanova and Ye. Starchenkova), Personal Factors of Decision Making – 25 (T.V. Kornilova), Inquiry Modes Questionnaire (A.F. Harrison, R.M. Branson adapted by A.A. Alekseev).

Processing of the results of empirical research carried out by correlation analysis to identify correlation between tolerance for ambiguity and socio-psychological characteristics.

The study covered 143 participants (middle managers from the Udmurt Republic, Russia) aged 23–59 (59 males and 84 females).

1. The results of empirical research

Correlation analysis showed statistically relevant positive correlation between tolerance for ambiguity and autonomy-dependence (r=0.385; p≤0.01), leading type of interpersonal behavior (r=0.298; p≤0.01), self-enhancing type of interpersonal behavior (r=0.261; p≤0.01), domination (r=0.496; p≤0.01), general internality (r=0.298; p≤0.01), general life view internality (r=0.192; p≤0.05), personal experience description internality (r=0.337; p≤0.01), internality of professional activity in terms of social interaction (r=0.202; p≤0.05), internality of professional activity in terms of activity support (r=0.385; p≤0.01), interpersonal relations internality (r=0.338; p≤0.01), interpersonal relations competency (r=0.364; p≤0.01), family relations internality (r=0.181; p≤0.05), readiness to cope with difficulties (r=0.281; p≤0.01), readiness for risk (r=0.460; p≤0.01), assertive actions coping strategy (r=0.307; p≤0.01), and idealistic thinking style (r=0.249; p≤0.01).

We identified statistically relevant negative correlation between tolerance for ambiguity and distrustful type of interpersonal behavior (r=-0.179; p≤0.05),

self-effacing type of interpersonal behavior (r=-0.313; p≤0.01), docile type of interpersonal behavior (r=-0.251; p≤0.01), cooperative type of interpersonal behavior (r=-0.172; p≤0.05), friendliness (r=-0.207; p≤0.05), activity denial (r=-0.238; p≤0.05), rationality (r=-0.165; p≤0.05), avoidant actions coping strategy (r=-0.228; p≤0.01), aggressive actions coping strategy (r=-0.214; p≤0.05), and realistic thinking style (r=-0.283; p≤0.01).

Summing up, we can conclude that the higher tolerance for ambiguity is, the more managers seek to dominate in the group, the more important and meaningful they want to look, the more they are result – and success-oriented in anything they do, and the higher their motivation for struggle and winning is. The managers might be intolerant of criticism and overestimate their own abilities.

They tend to be more independent in their judgments and actions and prefer active actions to passive waiting for occasional joys. They may be indifferent to something useless (things, people etc.).

In their interpersonal relations, they are less compliant, docile or shy. They are less dependent on other people's opinions and are less likely to be led.

They have a lower tendency to compromise behavior and are less friendly.

They demonstrate higher cognitive and search activity, which makes them more aware of the environment. It is worth mentioning that the greater the ambiguity is, the greater their search activity is. They are less likely to deny activity because of not believing in its results, and they are more prepared to overcome difficulties.

They are more convinced that their professional results depend on them and the quality of their actions, so they tend to show professional initiative and take responsibility both in social relations and in resolving organizational issues.

They believe they are competent in interpersonal relations and take responsibility as they think they are a major cause in their family relationships.

They can be less rational when making decisions and think over and evaluate all options less, so they demonstrate higher readiness to take risks when making a decision.

In difficult life situations they more often tend to demonstrate assertive actions, not to give up, and prefer to act rather than wait for others to solve problems. Therefore in difficult situations they less often use avoidance strategies or refuse to solve a new problem hoping that it will disappear on its own. They are less likely to use aggressive actions in such situations.

They tend to make intuitive general assessments without detailed analysis of a problem.

Thus, our hypothesis has been confirmed empirically, and our findings can be used in HR management, including IT companies to hire employees or make forecasts about their work in the organization.

Literature

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Abstract

The article describes the relationship between tolerance for ambiguity and socio-psychological characteristic of managers. Statistically relevant correlations have been identified. The findings have practical value.

Key words: tolerance for ambiguity, socio-psychological characteristics, inter-personal relationship, locus of control, autonomy, dependence, coping behavior, risk, rationality, thinking styles.