

GROUP DECISIONS – ANALYSIS OF BEHAVIOR

The behavior of individuals in developing and making group decisions is analyzed in this study. Behaviour options are identified, taking into account different motivating factors, pointing out the advantages and disadvantages of group decisions. Situations are highlighted, where group decisions are appropriate and others, in which they just legitimize a decision, that has already been taken by members of the group.

JEL: D03; D21

The decision as an act of behavior of an individual or a group has a crucial role in changing the practice of companies and organizations. The analysis of behaviour can help predicting the reaction of a person, respectively a group in some situations in management practice.

Various decisions are to be elaborated and made in order to achieve the ultimate management goals. They could be classified according to their scope, manner of making a decision, connection to the main management functions, etc. Depending on the number of participants, decisions are defined as personal and group decisions. Usually the first ones are made in case of a deficit of time, low-skilled employees and conflict situations. In literature group decisions are defined with three varieties (see Shikun, Filinova, 2002, p. 137):

- consulting - decision makers, having consulted their staff or experts make their own choice, taking into account the recommendations;
- joint - taken as a result of the mutual consent of all participants;
- parliamentary - taken by a majority of the participants in the group.

Regardless of how a group decision is made, the manager is responsible for it. The responsibility can be distributed in various ways (social, differentiated solidarity) but always with the involvement of the manager.

If the advantage of group decisions to the individual decisions should be searched, it can be found in the different general knowledge of the participants in the group, which can also provide a different perspective in assessing the problem situation. If, however, very specific knowledge is required, the individual decisions are of more benefit.

Analysis of the behavior of the group members' reactions

In developing and making group decisions, relations among the group members arise, associated, on the one hand, with the group skills and on the other, with purely human qualities. In view with the behavioral analysis of the reactions of the group members the information is essential in several aspects.

Self-evaluation of the personality within the group

It may be:

- Pessimistic – without any significant expectations by the person of the work in the group, and therefore the activity in discussing the problem is reduced to implementation of formal professional obligations. Pessimistic self-evaluation may

be due to a lack of understanding by the others, a growing sense of doubt in the internal sense of fairness, inability or unwillingness to react to external pressure or persuasion about how the problem should be resolved, etc. The behavior of such individuals is most often characterized by their intention to adapt themselves to the realities. Accordingly, with their real actions in time they will be on the side of the more active group members.

- Optimistic - in this case, there are positive expectations of the group work, accompanied with an active attitude, such as expressing opinions, persuading and taking specific actions. In certain circumstances, group members with such a behavior may also try to manipulate the other participants, by targeting specific option to solve a problem. The reason for this can be both external interactions and striving for personal advantage. Of course, active behavior in this case may be the result of good intentions related to the demonstration of professional skills and increasing the personal prestige in the group.

- Realistic - usually this is the self-evaluation of group members, being aware of their professional ability and having an established system of values, with a proper motivation of their inner feeling for fairness. Their balanced behavior when discussing the most complex problems makes these people an important regulator of the final opinions and statements, expressed by some participants in the group. If the group manager tries to impose his authority, conflicts with such members are not excluded. In the long run such relationships become inconvenient and they should be settled appropriately.

Evaluation of a personality in the group by the attitude of the others

As the activity is driven by the thought, it is essential to identify the thought models set up in the mind of an individual. They can be linked to the targeting of thought mainly in two directions - thoughts and reflections about the individual behavior and thoughts and reflections about the attitudes of the others towards the individual. The basis of active behavior of individuals in the group is how they are covered by the external evaluation (see Scheme 1). In this case it is not a matter of being objective or not, but of the degree of coverage with the thought models of the individual.

Scheme 1 presents the following options:

- *High 'A' - high "B"*. Under this option, there is a high degree of coverage of the thought models in the mind of the individual and for their own behavior and attitudes of others to oneself. This allows an objective evaluation of the problematic situation in view of which a management decision will be tested and taken. In management practice usually such people are equally good as managers and executives. They always take into account the reality and look at success as a sequence of real actions based on the decisions taken. They do not rely on coincidences AND do not take any unreasonable risks, which means that they are correct in discussing the problem and rely on their professional skills. The fact that they are not willing to risk, often makes them a regulator of aspirations for hasty decision making.

- *High 'A' - low 'B'*. This is an option in which a person is fully aware of the individual capabilities and behavior in situations arising in connection with the discussion of the problem, but does not have any real idea about the attitude of other group members to him. In this sense, as good professionals they can concentrate extremely well in solving possible problems in the group, without accepting assignments beyond their potential professional level. They are not suitable to be managers, but they can be assigned tasks of coordinating the work of other members in the group with the same level of competence.

- *High "A" - no "B"*. This type of personalities are introvert, they are realistic about their personal and professional capacity and can achieve good results in assigning tasks, that require their personal involvement. Because they hardly communicate both horizontally and vertically, they are not active in giving ideas for making specific decisions, but they are useful primarily with specific results of professionally completed tasks.

- *Low "A" - high "B"*. Usually this type of personalities pay greater attention to the external evaluation than to the evaluation of their own behavior. If the members of the group start behaving with flexible benevolence, they could be persuaded, that they have qualities and potential, they do not possess. Poor judgment of their own behavior can make such type of group members highly susceptible to external influence, and promoters of conduct for management decisions that are not in the interest of the organization, because the lack of good judgment about their own behavior makes them very suitable to be manipulated by the competition. Thus, in practice ways of impact can be searched on the focus of the management decisions taken by the group.

- *Low "A" - low "B"*. Usually those members of the group have a slight idea of their environment, and they do not show any particular willingness to become familiar with it. Their lack of interest in the attitude of others towards them, is complemented by the low self-esteem for their own behavior. In discussing the problems for management decision making their apparent passivity, is often combined with distrust, but it can be shared in an informal environment. Usually such members of the group are difficult to be retained in the group because of their poor motivation and lack of activity.

- *Low "A" - no "B"*. Insufficient directing the thought model to their own behavior and lack of knowledge about the external evaluation usually make such personalities inert with low activity in the group. As a result of the difficulty in communicating with the other members, they become alienated and in their relations with the manager, they feel misunderstood and distrust. Usually such people are hard to involve in group work and do not stay long in one job.

- *No "A" - high "B"*. Though rarely, there are people, without any feedback about their own behavior, but in contrast, have a high degree of focus on the mental model to external evaluation. Usually such people are motivated to be accepted well by the group, especially by the manager, which is not a negative behavior. They encounter serious problems if the impressions left by them in others do not correspond with their

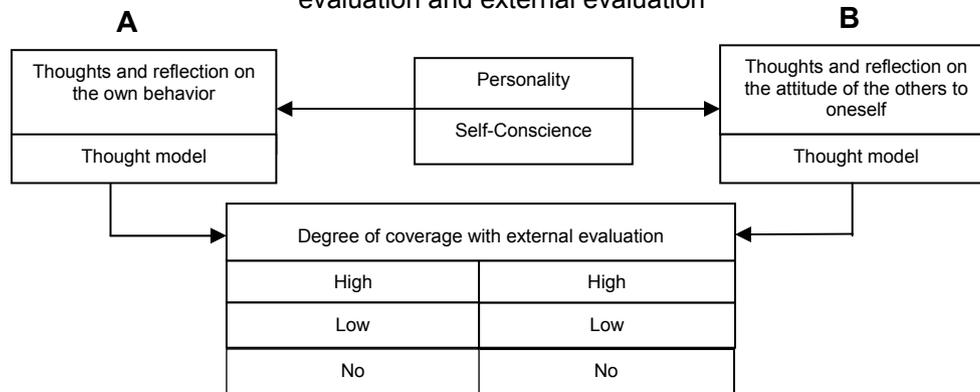
actual personal and professional potential. Flexible benevolence might appear in the behavior of such people and they might support a decision, that is imposed by others, without being internally convinced in it. If they do not begin to think and reflect on their own behavior, however, in time they become isolated by the group members and their opinions when discussing problems are not accepted seriously enough.

- *No "A" - low "B"* - are introverts, encountering difficulties in establishing contacts, because on the one hand they may be surprised by their own behavior, on the other hand, they have a slight idea of the attitude of the other group members towards them. In discussing decision-making problems they are not very active and adhere to the majority opinion. They isolate themselves from the group and have no clear idea of their place in it, which makes them insecure and suspicious. The lack of adequate behavior is a serious reason not to be accepted positively enough by the other members, so they often leave the group themselves.

- *No "A" - no "B"* - not only from a theoretical point of view there are such people, although rarely. Such behavior of indifference on the judgment of one's own behavior and attitudes of others towards them, can be caused by many factors - both social and personal. Uselessness of such individuals when discussing problems is obvious and only the intervention of a social psychologist or psychotherapist can help uncover the real reason for their behavior.

Scheme 1

Degree of coverage with the thought models of the individual between self-evaluation and external evaluation



Source. Kamenov, 2009, p. 235-237.

The thought model of a personality is "dressed" by behavior. Options under consideration show that not a few cases of discrepancy between the perception of the personality of its own conduct and the evaluation of the group members of it. Naturally, in such cases improper behavior may emerge during the discussion of emerging situations in relation to the solution of certain problems. The thoughts shared on the solution of a specific problem in the form of an opinion or persuasion are a behaviour. In the mind of a person there could be one thought model, but he

could speak about something else, that might be described as hypocrisy, manipulation, a kind of strategy, etc. The manifestation of such a behavior can be provoked by different motives, but it could be based on the discrepancy in the thought model of personality in the evaluation of the personal behavior to that of the group members.

How an individual perceives the participation in a group to discuss a problem

In this regard, following options are important as a source for motivation for an activity for the behavior of an individual:

- The participation in the group is regarded an *official duty*. In this case, the activity is largely dominated by the objectives of the decision and the relations with other group members. The manager is the one who guides the discussion, but the activity of participants is limited by the framework of the job description that specifies their powers as well. Usually when designing and making of such group decisions the objectives are clearly defined and significant deviations from them are not expected. In this sense, group work is more coordinated and coherent of already predetermined change, beginning with the decision made.

- The participation in the groups is *considered a way to prove capabilities and professional skills*. Such a behavior is appropriate for decisions that are related to the achievement of more than one objective, i.e. when creative and free discussion of the problem may be considered a reason to look for the best solution. In this type of solutions the role of the manager is primarily targeting. Any attempt to impose opinions or groundless persuasion may restrict or stop the active behavior of participants.

- The participation in the group at the time of development and decision-making is accepted with *indifference*. Such a behavior is influenced by prior lack of motivation, which may be due to various reasons - rejection of the objectives pursued by solving the problem, vague and unmotivating goals, inappropriate set up of the group. If in the process of work the level of motivation does not change, such a participant in practice contributes nothing to group activities related to the decision-making. However, a change in this behavior is not excluded, if some preliminary guidelines for the decision, suggested by the manager or the informal leader are amended constantly.

Predisposition about how to participate in the group for elaborating and making a decision

It is very important because it has essentially a follow-up effect on the behavior of the individual and can be expressed as follows:

- Predisposition for participation *with an opinion*. In the absence of deliberateness in the behavior of the individual, the attitude to the particular situation (problem) can be defined as an inner feeling of fairness, i.e. to be fully motivated in specific circumstances, which depends primarily on the value system of the person. Opinion as an expressed attitude can be influenced both by the specific situation and the insight, i.e. the ability to look forward in time. The opinion may be different from the ultimate behavior as a form of a specific action. It can be affected by the external pressure, any changes in the situation, the lack of clarity in some of the components of

the problem, etc. In this sense, the predisposition to participate with a particular opinion can prove to be just an intention to undergo a change when discussing the issue.

- Pre-disposition to participate with a *persuasion*. There is a strong belief in the rightness of one's own vision for solving the problem, persuading the other group members during the discussion. Unlike the opinion in this case such participants in the group retreat from their personal positions more unwillingly and are active in the discussion, trying to persuade the other members with their vision for solving the problem. A change in the ultimate behaviour is not excluded here as well as in the case with the opinion, although it is more difficult. However, this can be done when the other participants present serious arguments or under the influence of irresistible external pressure. Members of the group susceptible to persuasion actually provide the activity and the general discussion on this issue, which is a prerequisite for establishing and making effective management decisions;

- Pre-disposition for participation *with manipulation*. Not excluded are options in which the group has members pre-disposed to manipulate the other participants in connection with solving the problem. This can be due to various reasons - striving to satisfy different interests, irresistible external pressure that may be associated with third parties (a change in the status of relatives, expressed misunderstanding on the part of the entourage of personality, attempt to adjust oneself to the prevailing circumstances, feeling doubt in the inner sense of fairness), etc. The success of the manipulative intentions of a person largely depends on the preparedness of the other participants in the group and the level of their motivation to solve the problem.

The real action as a form of active behavior can deviate from the prior attitude to the problematic situation. In this sense preconceptions of the individual to participate through opinion, persuasion and manipulation are just an intention, that can be changed in the course of the work in the group. However, they should not be ignored, and the ability of the manager to grasp various intentions of the participants is the result of his insight. Therefore, when discussing important issues for the organization, collecting and analyzing background information for individual participants can facilitate a lot the elaboration and making of management decision. It is particularly important in this case to know the symptoms of behaviour types that create an environment of uncertainty.

Specific results from the behavior of individuals in the group

The analysis of the behavior of the participants in designing and making group decisions is associated with the results of the specific behavior of the individual in a given situation, as well as with the eventual occurrence in the future. Thus, if we know the reasons for the reaction of the person when discussing a particular problem, it might be expected that, in other circumstances, with available identical motifs, a similar or the same reaction can be expected. This would allow to predict a somewhat likely behavior of individuals in the group. Therefore psychologists advise through mere repetition to reinforce aptitudes that are useful

to the individual. "The secret of being happy, as well as to succeed in professional life, is to be aware of the fact that man is a recurring machine" (Tuluz, 1909, p. 57).

With reference to the specific results of the behavior of the individual in the group not only the nature of the situation, but also ethics and conscience are important. In literature, ethics and morality are often identified. Ethics is based on moral values, related to norms, rules, notions of good and evil, etc. Each member of the group has a strictly individual system of values, because the family, the social environment and his professional skills are also strictly individual. It is trustworthy to argue that in a group of individuals there are no persons with overlapping system of values. It is therefore essential when discussing a situation and seeking solutions to discover the common values rather than the differences among the participants. This is largely determined by the nature of the established basic values and also by the flexible part of the value system.

Not less important for the unification around the common values is the role of the manager of the group. The authority over the group members can be exercised by means of various mechanisms, including the fear of punishment. Each member of the group including the formal leader (the manager), albeit subconsciously associates his behavior with power. This means at least to comply with the persuasion or made by the manager or opinions expressed on the problem to be solved. Another mechanism is also associated with power – the material mechanism, concerning the granting or withdrawal of something that can be used as a form of influence and beyond the time when participating in a group to solve a problem. The freedom of the participants in the group is restricted, affecting their behavior in solving the problem. In this sense, group decisions, designed and made with the participation of the manager are largely influenced by his presence. The informal leader may also have a certain impact on the group members, especially if it is associated with any personal interests or interests of minor groups.

The results of the behavior of individuals in the group are also linked with conscience. Without any observations of specific reactions over time is difficult to determine to what extent it will occur in every individual. Philosophers and psychologists use as a criterion for conscience the attitude to external goods, i.e. how far the personality rules them and where they begin to possess it. This means that every person should know well and should not trespass the limits of his own stability. It is the inability to exhibit such a behavior that makes some members of the group susceptible to external influences or informal incentives, which also affects their participation in the designing and making a management decision.

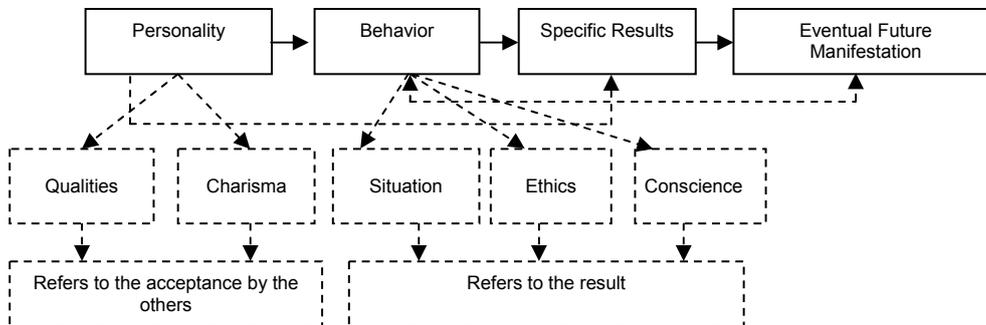
The qualities and the charisma of the person are important for the way of being accepted by the group members. The qualities can be assessed in a different aspect, but the others are impressed by the depth of thought and its speed and flexibility. Not without significance in making management decisions is the ability to combine different facts, events and data, deriving their common features and determining the trends. As for the charisma, it is always associated with a set of personal qualities such

as charm, frankness, candor and straightforwardness, accessibility and ease of communication etc. To some extent, charisma is also a power over other people, which undoubtedly affects the groups in designing and making management decisions.

The conclusion made from the analysis of the behavior of each participant in the group is that on the one hand, the specific behavior influences the result, and on the other, the possessed personal qualities and charisma are important for the way of being accepted by other group members (Scheme 2).

Scheme 2

Relation between personal qualities and the specific behavior in group decisions



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The preconceptions of the individual are important in group decisions. But they are predetermined by the qualities of personality as its potential, and its charisma, professional ethics and conscience. Thus the results are a function of both the professional qualities of the personality and the values of its system, which is the basis of morality and conscience. No exceptions are the cases, when in solving important problems such virtues (values) as moderateness, fairness, wisdom, courage, etc. prove to be more important than the professional skills and charisma.

A specific feature of group activity is that a person may show qualities, not typical for him, when evaluated outside the group. For example, in a group discussion of a problem a good professional can make a compromise with his own conscience in order to appeal to other members, i.e. professional skills give way to pure human vanity. If a professional gives an opinion to solve the problem outside the group, the same professional can have a completely different attitude. In this sense the physical presence in the group, respectively. Direct communication, can affect the behavior of the individual. In this case the "power" of charisma is definitely important. This is one of the reasons to believe that group decisions are more effective than individual decisions. Often psychologists are of the opinion that in companies and organizations it is more appropriate for taking important management solutions, the group work with a physical presence to be replaced by written expert opinions and reports or by conferencing.

Very critical in making group decisions is to discuss various alternatives. Sometimes alternatives, being valuable and important to the final outcome, can be rejected at the expense of other less effective ones. The reasons are different. Individual members of the group may take advantage of certain weaknesses of other members; non-official informal relations when discussing options could be transferred as attitude to individual members of the group; strong external pressure could be exerted, motivated with appropriate incentives for taking the pre-set decision, etc. So professional skills shown during the discussion of the problem and the development of options may be sacrificed due to a lack of morality by some of the group members.

Social idleness is considered by psychologists a disadvantage of group decisions, i.e. the individual participant sees no significant relationship between the individual activity and the result of the joint decision. If the division of responsibility is added thereto, which actually releases the persons from responsibility for the proposals made and future results of the implementation of the decision, a trend appears towards an eventual increased risk for group decisions (for more details see Kornilova, 2003, p. 151).

Reducing the risk of group decisions can be searched in a different perspectives - ranging from how the problem is presented, through the regulation of the behavior of individual participants with pre-set rules and reaching personal evaluation of the behavior of each participant. But all this is a function of an already fulfilled condition, regarding how the group is set up. The most important thing to be done is to collect information about the background of each participant in the group, i.e. what kind of person he is, what are his values, respectively, what is his morality. The difficult choice in this case is that the very good professional skills might conceal not so good moral values. It is dangerous, that if such personalities enter the group, they may affect negatively the social climate therein. They can promote external interests and pursue personal benefit. To avoid such risks, it is necessary to provide information not only about the professional skills of a person, but also about his moral and ethical values. The opposite is a prerequisite for the emergence of large risks in group decisions. In practice there are many cases when the group discussion is just a cover for already taken decision. Then undeniably the moral value of the individual in the group is not so significant because with its presence it only legitimizes a decision predetermined by some group members.

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