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The Study of Group and Team Management in Agribusiness Companies

György Szabados

*Department of Management and Labour Sciences, Faculty of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development,
University of Debrecen Debrecen, Böszörményi str. 138, H-4032 szabados@agr.unideb.hu*

Summary: For almost three decades now that the operation of groups and teams became highlighted by scientific examinations and widespread acknowledged leverage for improving corporate efficiency and effectiveness. Much is known about general conditions of operation, still little is known about managerial attitudes, behaviour in operating them. Considering the agribusiness sector, we have hundreds of years of traditions; although operational rules, internal properties, managerial aspects are poorly acknowledged. The Department of Management of University of Debrecen has been conducting research in this field for many years now. Its research program enabled me to work out a questionnaire for surveying agribusiness organizations so that I could identify major and typical characteristics of performance groups. In this article I intend to more precisely describe internal rules, relations and characteristics of this phenomenon.

Key words: agribusiness, management, group and team performance, leadership

Introduction

Human performance may be characterized by specialization and task division during work. Mostly, the aim of the collective work is the improvement of efficiency and effectiveness, the better realization of corporate tasks. On the other hand, at working together, the mere presence of the other dominates human behaviour (*Dienesné-Berde*, 2003). The influence of groups largely affects the behaviour and performance of the members, so within a company it should be directed in a positive way, since it largely affects the success or the failure of the organization. Hungarian managers usually work much more than the law prescribes; professional literatures suggest that it is a direct result of improper task delegation. In Hungary, and the same applies to Slovenia and the Czech Republic, managers consider technical knowledge more important than social skills. It also means that the most trained, technical type professional will become the manager instead of a more social sensitive one. This attitude stands in contrast with Western trends. *Juhász* (2004) described further major problems with the Hungarian-Eastern style management. Regarding the countries examined he found that social skills and competences become more important for a manager with the increase of corporate scale, which also seems to get more importance with corporate concentration. Groups and teams are often considered as official, authority leverages, which purely serve corporate objectives. However, the presence of informal/social groups cannot be depreciated; since such groups equally influence effectiveness and social work atmosphere, sometimes not at all advantageously. On international level, teams and groups are distinct terms, in the Hungarian application they are often used as one. Hungarian professional literatures use the words team and group as

synonyms without any differences, *Klein* also (1998) thinks these two words fully harmonize, mean the same.

In the agribusiness sector group and team performance have long term traditions. Considering antecedents, in the end of the XIX century physical agricultural workers usually went to the southern parts to Hungary in well-organized groups, forming a typical phenomenon of the sector, regulated on central level. Examining the agribusiness sector I believe that seasonality (and its direct sequent, the changing, dynamic work structure), professional tasks and managerial challenges (EU accession, labour organization) justify the reason for the research, mainly managers need to learn more about the human aspects of it.

Precedents and applied methods

Scientific examinations were carried out in the framework of a doctoral programme; prime objective was to find properties and rules in the operation of agribusiness groups. A special questionnaire was edited covering all the relevant fields, later was revised many times, and survey was taken by attendants.

Since different approaches are present in the professional literature (point of economics, point of psychology, point of history, point of management, etc.), I have selected the managerial point of view and an operational approach. It also means that group operation was detailed in processes and managerial activity was broken into special activities paired with the distinctive process. This approach is represented in the questionnaire itself, meaning that major parts of the questionnaire is based on this model. Figure 1 describes further details with associated managerial duties and tasks.

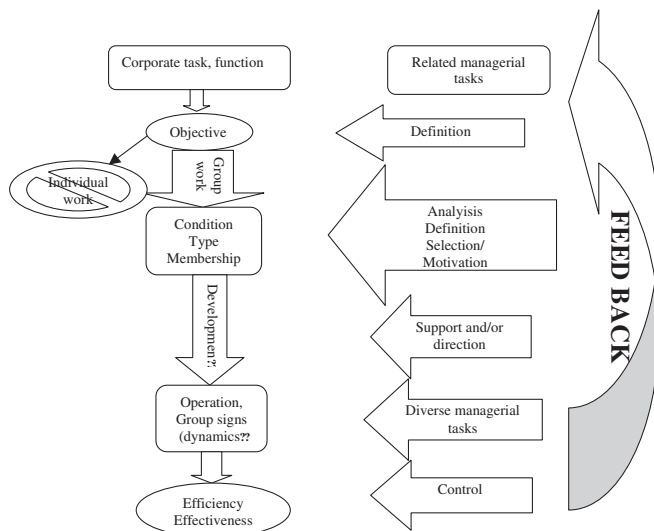


Figure 1. The managerial process of group operation

Source: Private editing, 2008.

Prime suppositions were that groups are basic leverages for the managerial activity, meaning that managers probably use and prefer common work activity. Permanent and temporary working activity may determine types of groups. I have also supposed that current agribusiness conditions primarily justify efficiency and effectiveness (that is corporate aspect) orientation, human relations are not really considered. By ignoring personal relations, managerial work division is complex, which may result in overload. Considering internal relations, human aspects are apparent. It was not really clear what defines the system of internal relations, moreover whether managers need to deal with major or every single operational task. Continuous attention and related experience seemed more obvious. Analysis of performance seemed to be a problematic field due to many outputs. Organizational performance may prevail above all the other factors. Leverages for evaluation were descriptive statistics, main component and cluster analysis. Number of items for the evaluation was 477, different level agribusiness managers.

Results and discussion

Results of descriptive statistics revealed that group work is a general leverage of meeting organizational objectives. It was considered useful by most interviewees, this corresponds with international aspects (Dumaine, 1994), on the other hand 99% of managers had experience in working together (Figure 2). Based on the analyses, I could define that technical, professional point of views, work tasks play an important role in the creation of groups, and these are corporate aspects. Drastic methods of group creation, such as enforcement and power, were qualified with lower values. Research results suggest that interviewees consider the more efficient realization of corporate goals and successful operation the most important benefits of the groups, so corporate objectives also prevail.

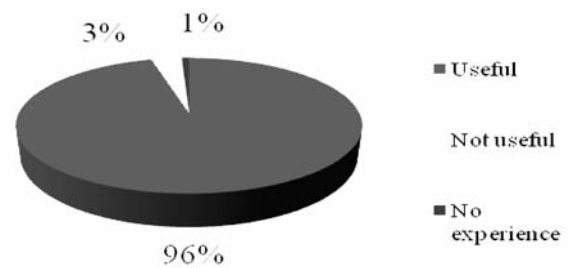


Figure 2. Opinions about group performance

Source: Private examinations, 2008.

Of the drawbacks opposition and strict norms were emphasized, these may relate to personal factors. Status and role examinations were treated together, since first defines vertical, the other horizontal position. Status is mainly determined by technical competence and performance, that is corporate aspect. I have applied a widely accepted structure at the definition of the possible role of the interviewee. Belbin (1998) firstly defined novel roles in the composition of a performance team. One member may identify himself with one of the eight roles by a simple test, the reason for application is to define main characteristics and eliminate repetition, aggregation when setting up a team. I have applied it in a novel way. Of the interviewees, most of them identified themselves as a monitor-evaluator (Figure 3.). It may also be declared, that there was not large differences between the identification of the roles, which may relate to the democracy of the roles.

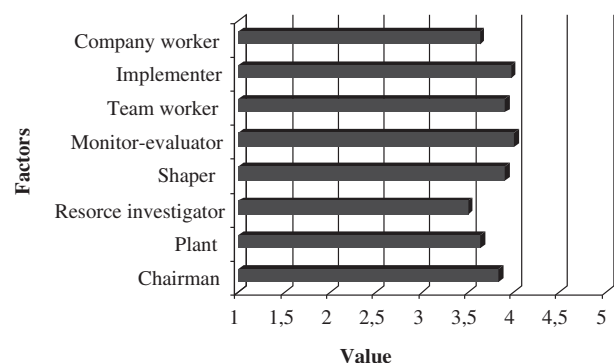


Figure 3. Definition of membership

Source: Private examinations, 2008.

Norm examinations suggest that of the group norms, formal organizational functions were emphasized, these were quick and fast work performance.

Results of success and failure examinations suggest that factors possess a greater role in the success compared to the failure. The success of a group is a result of many factors. Reachable goals, managerial expectations and imaginations, strong norms equally interact. The termination of an operation is influenced by many factors; most important were the managerial intentions, environmental conditions, changes and mainly strong norms.

After descriptive statistics, I have applied the method of main component analysis on the sample. Of the 104 questions, and 43 variables (33 main and 10 single ones) were created. Variables were examined by sex, age, graduation, position (individual parameters), operation form, number of employees and specialization (organizational parameters). I have used parametric variance analysis to find differences in the samples, and non-parametric tests were carried out for the missing values.

Considering the sex of respondents, I have found that women assign a larger importance for the formal functional being of the group operation, analysis of the missing values revealed that authority factors (leadership, enforcement, and power) seem to be more important for and typical of men.

Examinations of the affect of age parameter revealed that significant differences mainly appeared in the case of relatively younger and older respondents. Furthermore, mainly financial and prestige, correlation and effectiveness reasons seemed to be more determinant and important for them.

Examining the effect of graduation I have revealed that technical aspects of formation were mainly important for the ones with higher graduation, its importance decreases with lower graduations. Importance of internal group factors (norms, cohesion, and appeal) also rises with graduation, which means these respondents have a higher and more thorough view of group operation.

No significant differences were found considering organizational form examinations, it also means that behaviour of the sample slightly changes by shift in organizational forms.

Examining the effect of employee number categories I have indicated the differences in formation methods, membership benefits, polarization reasons and membership related questions.

I intended to explain differences by typical properties in the framework of cluster analysis, and some tendencies could be revealed. Groups formed differed by many aspects, many properties, so by focus on these differences further characteristics may be illustrated, and former definitions may be justified. Cluster analysis required the division of the sample into four groups, which were the following:

1. Middle age managers of co-operatives and other organizations
2. Elder top managers of corporations
3. Young lower and middle level managers of corporations and public companies
4. Elder lower and middle level managers of corporations and public companies

Cluster analysis revealed many connections. Formation is mainly affected by technical factors at corporations and public companies, while information factor seems to be more

Table 1. Differences in the evaluation of components by cluster analysis

	Group formation		Membership benefits	Polarization	Membership		Group failure
Clusters/ Factors	Technical aspect	Information aspect	Financial, prestige benefits	Different value orientation	Appeal	Limitation factor	Group norm/effect factor
1. cluster	–	+	–	~	+	~	+
2. cluster	+	–	~	~	~	–	–
3. cluster	+	–	+	–	–	~	~
4. cluster	~	~	~	+	~	+	+

Legend (– less important, ~ average important, + more important)

Source: Private examinations, 2008.

determining for co-operatives and other organizations. Financials and prestige as membership values are mostly dominant for bottom and middle level younger managers. The importance of different values as a reason for polarization differs between the younger and older respondents; its importance may rise with age for public and limited company bottom and intermediate level managers. Appeal is mainly dominant for middle age managers of co-operatives. Group pressure is mainly emphasized by elder bottom and middle level managers of limited companies, while top managers ignore that. Of the roles, chairman seems specific for elder top managers of small scale limited companies; its importance seems to be changing by the increase of position and age.

Consequences

I have edited a private model for the management of group operation, it has a process approach, and stages are paired with managerial tasks. Mainly organizational aspects are considered at formation, informational relations are less emphasized. Managerial opinions revealed that organizational and individual aspects equally appear in internal relations. Operation may be evaluated by criteria of success, and it is primarily judged by efficiency.

In general, managerial opinions mainly covered organizational aspects; the participation of individual relations seems to be slight. It also means the ignorance of personal conditions, enhances the current, mainly economic aspects and may relate to the autocratic attitude of managers.

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