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## **BRIDGES BETWEEN ACADEMIA AND BUSINESSES AS A REQUIREMENT FOR DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP AND MANAGEMENT CAPABILITIES TO SUPPORT ORGANIZATIONAL SUSTAINABILITY**

**Summary.** The article explains why there is a need to prepare the managers for the times in which the organizational survival has become more difficult. Due to the changes managers must develop new competences. Business schools should reinforce dialogue with business, and finally adapt new curricula and new teaching methods, which will satisfy the needs of business and students. Mutual cooperation between academia and business, is not only beneficial for both sides, but indispensable for the development of management science and the economy.

**Keywords:** managerial competencies, leadership, education, research, rankings, business, sustainability, cooperation

## **WSPÓŁPRACA MIĘDZY UCZELNIAMI A BIZNESEM JAKO WARUNEK KONIECZNY DLA ROZWOJU PRZYWÓDZTWA I UMIEJĘTNOŚCI MENEDŻERSKICH WSPIERAJĄCYCH PRZETRWANIE ORGANIZACJI**

**Streszczenie.** W artykule zwrócono uwagę na konieczność przygotowania menedżerów do pracy w czasach, w których coraz trudniejsze jest przetrwanie organizacji. W wyniku zmian konieczne jest kształtowanie nowych kompetencji. Szkoły biznesu, aby podołać nowym wyzwaniom, muszą nawiązać dialog z biznesem i dostosować metody i programy do potrzeb biznesu i studentów. Wzajemna współpraca uczelni i biznesu jest nie tylko korzystna dla obu stron, ale także niezbędna dla rozwoju nauk o zarządzaniu, jak i gospodarki.

**Słowa kluczowe:** kompetencje menedżerskie, przywództwo, edukacja, badania, rankingi, biznes, przetrwanie, współpraca

## 1. Hard times for managers

We are living in a very dynamic world, in the world in which changes – especially those unpredictable – have become a natural phenomenon. Expanding globalization, growing competition, appearance of new technological developments, broader virtual structures and ascending speed of communication cause new interdependencies among organizations and people. Those interdependencies are becoming more complicated and contribute to the rise of instability and finally we are in a state of flux. As a result, fighting with crises and looking for the best strategies for organizational survival have become the most important tasks for today's managers. All crises, by definition, are extremely unpredictable and highly damaging. However, if a crisis is managed correctly, the recovery can be swift and the danger transformed into success. The credibility and reputation of an organization is highly influenced by the perception of its response and „response time” during crisis situations. Anticipating crisis is not only a matter of good strategic planning and risk management, but also a lot depends on good leaders.

Growing more aggressive competition and readiness to gain profits at any cost has made many damagers to natural environment. It has brought to reflection, and hopefully to a conclusion, that the best way for organizational subsistence and development, is the way based on, at least partial, harmony with the environment. Primarily, it is important not to waste brutally our globe, otherwise we will experience new crises, mostly ecological, which influence very negatively biological, social and business life [Bhopal tragedy 1984, Chernobyl 1986, BP oil disaster in the Gulf of Mexico in 2010, or Fukushima 2011]. Industrial catastrophes and serious damages made to the environment caused that term „sustainable” have become very popular lately.

The term „sustainable” can be used in double meaning, so it could be understood as „sustainable” development, as a capability for continuing growth for a long time, simply a capability of survival, or in a second way „sustainable” development can be perceived as the strategy for using methods that do no harm to the environment, the strategy which meets organizational needs, and human needs while preserving the environment, not only in the present, but also for next generations. Regardless of which definition is chosen, on the basis of observation of undergoing changes the conclusion must be drawn, that managers need to be well equipped in skills which will enable them to deal with new challenges, in capabilities of survival in complex, unforeseen condition, but at the same time, their survival strategies

mustn't harm environment and contain broader ecological dimension [Wankel, Stoner, 2010; Grudzewski, Hejduk, et al., 2010].

As the research shows managers are not well prepared for leading for survival in new circumstances. This opinion refers not only to Polish managers [Rakowska, 2007, pp. 155-167], but also to other nationalities; the most often studied and cited are Americans. On the basis of literature review, the conclusion can be drawn, that this is partly caused by poor and inadequate managerial education. Many American authors underline that managerial education does not meet neither the needs of managers nor the requirements of contemporary organizations. S. Armstrong and C.V. Fukami [2009] argue that because of rapid changes, and the financial crisis, we are experiencing the „management crisis”, which is partly caused by crisis in managerial education. Managers are simply not ready for the hard times. Business schools' curriculum are not matched with real business problems what results in students not sufficiently skilled to face modern challenges [Mintzberg, 2010, 2004]. Another factor which influences the low level of managerial skills is the existing gap among the research in management area, the research in the real business problems and the teaching programs in business schools [Bennis, 2005, pp. 96-114; Burke, Rau, 2010, pp.132-143].

This publication consists of four parts. First refers to the competencies of Polish managers in the contexts of new requirements, then a few words concerning critics of managerial education, thirdly approaches to learning and development, and finally conclusions.

## **2. Are Polish managers ready to meet new challenges?**

For quite a long period of time there has been held an intense discussion about managers' readiness to deal with the new challenges [Mintzberg, 2004; Burke, Rau 2010]. Study of Polish managers lead to conclusion that notwithstanding the situation is changing for better, there is a lot to be improved. One of the studies which was undertaken just before crisis [Rakowska, 2007, pp. 155-167] gives us a picture of a very traditional and optimistic Polish manager. At the moment the research was conducted, an annual GDP in Poland was very high [Q1 of the 2007 – 7,4%, Q1 – 2009 – 0,8%]. Most respondents [720 managers out of 1066] assessed the market position of their companies as good, and perceived their future very well [72% expected to keep good, or very good market position during next 3 years]. Of course, they didn't expect that crisis may come soon.

Researched companies [76 in the sample] were managed in a traditional way, had strong operational competencies and short term thinking. The strongest points were: competent and devoted workers, good business relations, good quality management. It is interesting that

while social capital and relational capital were perceived as very important competitive factors, little was done to develop them. The weakest sides of organizations were: lack of organizational learning, poor change management. So this means that there was a competence gap [difference between competencies required in a modern organization and competencies typical for these organizations]. It seems that managers knew about it, but didn't perceive it as dangerous. At that moment, the results were good and future seemed in the pink.

Typical manager in this sample was the one who cares about technical skills, concentrates on a professional execution of operational tasks, appreciates the importance of workers' competences, plans the nearest future, and spends quite a lot of time on negotiations and problem solving. She has good operational skills, but rather weak strategic skills. Moreover, managers declare that they like learning, perceive themselves as self-confident, open and independent people. What is very annoying is the fact that 30% of them agreed that doesn't like to take risk. This confirms their problems with strategic management. Each tenth manager admitted that cannot cope with stress! And we have to remember that data was gathered in 2007, in the time of their prosperity. How would they cope in the time of crisis? Unfortunately this research was not continued in 2008. Crises in 2008 were something that definitely they didn't expect. Maybe Andy Grove was right with his opinion expressed in his book *Only the Paranoid Survive* [1996]. He used to say that when things go too good in business it is well possible crisis is looming on the horizon. By saying that he meant when business situation is too good this means that it indeed is too good.

Mitroff and Apsalan [2003] had been conducting in USA the research for 20 years which concentrated on managing the crises. They came to conclusion that only three in four Fortune 500 companies were prepared to handle only the types of calamities they've already suffered, and not even all of those. Authors noticed that crisis-prepared companies are far better financially, have stronger reputation, and stay in business. Crisis-prepared companies use a systematic approach to focus their efforts. In addition to planning for natural disasters, they divide man-made calamities into two sorts-accidental and „normal” ones, like the Exxon Valdez oil spill, and deliberate or „abnormal” ones, like product tampering. Today we can conclude that, managers should not ask whether the organization awaits a crisis, but rather ask when it may happen, and how to prepare for it.

There are some studies conducted on Polish managers during the crisis. According to one of them, in Poland 52% of organizational crises are caused by presidents, directors and manager [Jankowski, 2010]. Only one-fifth of crises [19%] is caused by employees. For one-third (29%) of them factors beyond the company are responsible [Jankowski, 2010]. This means that lack of managerial competencies is main source of crisis in Polish companies.

Longenecker, Neubert, Fink [2007, pp. 148-149] undertook a study on a group of 1040 American managers and disclosed the 15 primary causes of managerial failures among which two definitely dominated: weak interpersonal and personal competencies. Similar conclusions could be drawn from Finkelstein work [2003] titled „Why do smart managers fails?“ Author suggest that managers fail because:

- managers notice their mistakes too late,
- have limited insight into their own strengths and weaknesses,
- use the wrong management style [the way how they treat others].
- do not care how are they perceived by others,
- overestimate their high intelligence [assume that high IQ it is enough to be successful manager],
- too much rely on own talent.

Buffet-Willett, Kruse [2009, pp. 248-250] claim the most critical competencies needed by crisis leaders are:

- ability to adapt to changes in the organization,
- ability to undertake a rapid and rational action,
- skills for fast rational decisions,
- flexibility, adaptability,
- readiness to make difficult decisions,
- possessing a wide range of experience,
- ability to learn from mistakes and from the others,
- ability of careful listening,
- building trust and manage expectations of their fans,
- thinking proactively,
- creative, fresh, and broad approach to the organization,
- continuous identification of potential threats, especially those the least expected,
- creating scenarios of hazards and preparing a response to them.

As we can see most of them can be classified as attitudes, personal skills, interpersonal skills like which can not be easily learned in a classroom.

The research conducted in Poland within the Programme Talent Group in 2009, have shown that Polish managers were not prepared to the crisis [<http://www.talentclub> 2009]. Only half of surveyed managers considered that they were prepared to work under new crisis conditions [16% was not at all prepared]. Respondents claimed that the work in the period of stagnation has contributed to their burnout and led to lower productivity. Almost 2/3 of respondents identified their job performance as not very high. The biggest challenge for them was how to increase the efficiency of work while maintaining the same personal effort, time

and money. Lack of competencies required in new conditions was pointed by them as the main cause of stress, which affected not only them but also their co-workers and general company atmosphere. Managers who perceived themselves as well prepared for tough times, found out that the biggest influence on competencies had previous experience [29%], intuition [23%], and resourcefulness [19%]. They also indicated that formal education had no influence of their development. Similar findings are mentioned in other studies, like [Sayegh, Anthony, Perrewe, 2004, p. 187], according to them in critical situations, for survival the most important managerial skills are: intuitive decision-making, experience, intuition (knowledge hidden). Under high stress and time pressures managers adapt successful strategies based on intuition and tacit knowledge. Polish managers believe that in the time of emergency the most important skills needed to sustain are: flexibility in approach to the problem [65%], ability to manage people [64%], creativity [51%], experience [51%], ability to take risks [45%], which are similar to the previously mentioned qualities of crisis leaders from the Programme Talent Group. So again, these skills can not be learned at the university.

Another study conducted in 2009 informs us that 68% of Polish managers felt that there were not sufficiently strong and resilient physically to lead the company for survival in a crisis [Jadczyk, 2009]. Only 7% of managers stated to have strength and mental resilience. Moreover many managers confessed that they had been hiding their head in the sand quite often blaming the environment for troubles.

This leads to the conclusion that Polish managers are not well prepared to work under new conditions. The main role in developing their survival competencies play experience, personal features, personal skills, and leadership skills [flexibility, resistance to stress, managing emotions, experience, ability to make quick and difficult decisions]. It is sad, but they admitted that formal education does not help in developing their managerial competencies. But similar conclusions can be drawn against the American managers. So why is this so badly in this area, especially when there is a need for faster development and survival.

### **3. Crisis of managerial education?**

A lot of writers – especially American ones – underline that business schools do not equip their students, viz. potential managers with skills needed for survival in a global and complex world. According to some authors one of the reasons for this poor situation is the policy of university rankings that forces a scholar to pay special attention to „production” of publications. This is explained greatly in the article by Adler J.N. and Harzing A.W., titled *When Knowledge Wins Transcending the Sense and Nonsense of Academic Rankings* [2009,

pp. 72-95]. The paper was chosen by American Academy of Management as the best paper of the 2009. Authors make a clear conclusion that university scholarship has gone astray, mostly because of the nature of the academic ranking system. They also make the point that competition pressure to publish only or primarily in A-listed journals may foster attempts to boost scores on assessment metrics but not necessarily maximize the quality of research. [Adler, Harzig, 2009, p. 92]. Doesn't it sound familiar?

Pressure on publishing leads to very dangerous and harmful acts of desperation undertaken by many scientists. I have found a shocking information in the paper by Bedeian et al. concerning this problem [Bedeian et al., 2010, pp. 718-719]. Basing on a study which was conducted on a group of American academics in the field of management [from 1940 mailed, 448 agreed to take part], the authors stated that: 26,8% of scientists fabricated data, 60% „dropped data ... on the gut feeling that they were inaccurate”, 70% engaged in plagiarism and 80% reported to „withheld methodological details or results”, or „sought only those data that support a hypothesis”. Such big research misconduct is unacceptable! No wonder why the business doesn't want to use new theories.

Burke, Rau [2008] and Bennis, O'Toole [2005] note that there is another serious problem which influences the quality of managerial education. It is the gap between the research of real management problems and the research of the programs used in business schools. This kind of research especially undertaken in collaboration between scholars and businesses could be a good starting point for improving school curricula. During the last three decades American business schools have been concentrating mostly on gaining the credibility and position among universities measured by publications and scientific research thus becoming less relevant to practitioners [Bennis, O'Toole, 2005].

In countries like the U.S., Canada or Great Britain it is the MBA degree that plays the special role in managerial and career development. The MBA is a kind of „ticket” which helps managers to climb to the highest levels of corporate ladders. Some authors state that the value of MBA programs lays not only in what one can learn but also in additional values such as social networks they can have the chance to be involved in and the prestige that comes with having MBA title [Vaara, Fay, 2011 pp. 27-39]. In Germany the PhD degree plays a similar role that MBA degree in mentioned countries. 70% of the presidents of major German companies and 60% of board members are PhDs [Rakowska, 2007, p. 247]. This is the result of cooperation between industries and universities and the way in which universities are financed.

However, despite the good and long reputation of MBAs most notably in the USA [first MBA at Harvard University in 1908] we can hear also critical voices, which became stronger in last two decades. Dissatisfaction refers mostly to the quality of skills that students are

taught. Students who have finished business schools are not sufficiently prepared for dealing with business challenges.

We can posit that in the last four decades business world has changed faster than the school curricula themselves. Especially in the last two decades. So if business schools still want to prepare their students for sustainability in real business world they must strongly collaborate with businesses in various areas and have to prepare new programs combined with new teaching and learning methods.

It is the establishment of American Association of Schools of Business [AACSB] in 1977 that plays a historic role in improving this bad situation. AACSB has formulated a committee responsible for the evaluation of the use of practical skills by students as part of the business schools' evaluation process. Ten years later L. Porter and L.E. McKibbin [1988] published a famous report in which they strongly criticized the curricula of MBA schools. The authors underlined that companies were not happy with the MBA alumni because they had poor leadership and interpersonal skills. For many years business schools have been evaluating much „harder” skills [financial, management practices] rather than attitudes and soft skills. At present day we can hear very often comments that education does not satisfy neither the needs of managers nor the requirements of organizations. It is also being underlined that the main purpose of MBA schools should be to prepare managers for the future and educate them to become survival leaders for „tomorrow” organizations. So a good curriculum needs to contain at least some time when students will learn how to self-study and develop reflection skills.

Similar but stronger comments are aired by the representatives of the strand called Critical Management Education. They claim that studies do not prepare managers to cope with real business problems because schools do not pay enough attention to the development of soft skills and personal values. Goshal S. [2005] in his famous publication *Bad Management Theories are Destroying Good Management Practices* maintains that MBA schools promote "immoral" theories based only on competition, incentives and caring about one's own interest. As we know such approach is not compliant with the idea of sustainable development, understood in a broader context (strategy for doing business with respect to different dimensions of environment also the social one). Similarly the Editors of *Academy of Management Learning and Education* [Arbaugh, 2010, pp. 587-589] underline the role of ethical values. They propose adopting a paradigm in education based on well human being. "This includes understanding what is a healthy human culture, how to create one, how to avoid a toxic one, and consequences of not doing so". One of the methods could be "engaging students in community-based projects during the course of their degree to ensure that they are



exposed to the circumstances of disadvantaged individuals and experienced in making decisions that take into account all sectors of society” [Arbaugh, 2010, p. 588].

One of the most active authors in this area is H. Mintzberg [2004]. He argues that sometimes students who take part in the MBA programs are simply not predisposed to this profession. He strongly believes that a manager cannot be „created” in a classroom during a course. This means that MBA programs should be directed only to practicing managers. He also underlines the fact that delivered knowledge requires an integrated approach, in contrast to the functional approach. Harrison and Leitch [2007] state that universities while implementing business knowledge should concentrate more on shaping students’ attitudes and developing their learning and thinking skills rather than on transferring knowledge. Moreover, we should distinguish training already practicing managers from the more formalized university education. In the case of practicing managers experience gathered in the workplace, which is the base of creation of tacit knowledge, plays a key role [Burke, Rau, 2010; Bennis, O’Toole, 2005; Mintzberg 2004].

As it was concluded earlier in the part referring to the skills required for sustaining an organization in a competitive market, personal characteristics of managers and their experience play the biggest role in managerial development. This means that more practical courses must be introduced in the curricula, but may also mean that student recruitment process itself should be changed.

#### **4. Approaches to learning. Development of practicing managers**

For most of us learning and teaching are connected with pedagogy. Pedagogy originally refers to teaching and educating children. So in the case of educating adults the term *andragogy* seems more appropriate. It was introduced in 1833 by a German A. Kapp and popularized later in the 70s by American M. Knowles [1970]. In andragogy there are four main components: the concept of self-learning, experience of the learner, willingness to learn and focus on improving efficiency in operations. There is an assumption that adults know their learning goals and feel inner motivation to learn, so they can take responsibility for learning. The learning process focuses mostly on learners [Forrest, Peterson 2008]. However, not all business teachers and trainers like this approach. Some of them still prefer to use old methods similar to those which are used for teaching children. In andragogy trainer acts more like a mentor who tries to help an individual with his/her development. High degree of openness and flexibility between student and trainer is required. This approach is especially good in the case of practicing managers, because it is based on experience. It may have some

limitations in the case of students with no experience so in their case more pedagogical approach at least at the beginning is needed.

Of course we can't forget about development of already practicing managers. There is a new trend in European companies according to which the number of traditional training sessions is decreasing [Leuven, 2010]. It is said that they are too expensive and not very effective. For example, it is not always certain whether managers will apply new course knowledge in the workplace and some of them forget the material very quickly. Open, public training programs are very often criticized for the fact that they are not tailored to the specific needs of managers and organizations. Training need analysis is carried out on a very poor level [Clarke, Butcher, Bailey, 2004]. So European HR professionals have started to look for more practical and effective solutions.

For managers and organizations it is important that training programs deliver knowledge and skills which can be immediately applied in their company. So one of the assumptions of the new approach is that training must improve manager's effectiveness. Another is that learning needs to be based on experience and practice. It is learning by doing. Different HR tools are used for training need analysis. The tool used most often is an appraisal system or a 360 degree feedback. On these bases trainers build their teaching plans. During the course of the learning process they cooperate with managers and organizations. The rules of andragogy can be applied here.

The need for such developmental approach, i.e. more in-company on-the-job training sessions has been also recognized in Polish companies. The report of the Polish Society of HRM [Raport, 2010] shows that after crisis, companies should no longer use so many traditional courses and training. Managerial programs and talents programs must be based upon a wide range of methods which can be implemented in the course of work. Among these methods the most desirable are: coaching, 360 degree assessment, assessment centers, monitoring, internal projects and rotations.

This report has also revealed that Polish companies need stronger leaders at all levels, who are capable of creating teams with engaged members who are able to fight in a competitive market. Generally, there is demand for a new model of leadership; the one which will enable organizational survival. In this model an organizational culture plays a very important role. Culture should guarantee good communication and flows of knowledge, and experience between all departments. Part of the development plan should be the preparation of special projects. Managers will play new roles as interim projects managers so in that way they can exchange knowledge, gain new skills and strengthen the culture.

There is also another trend observed. The responsibility for the development is transferred from HR departments to business units. There is an assumption made that relevant decisions

should be made in this area. Heads of business units know better than HR managers how to support their staff development. More and more often they are starting to play the roles of coaches and mentors for the staff. Another trend is the individualization of development programs. As a result there is growing popularity of learner-centered methods such as coaching, mentoring, planning individual development paths. These methods enable making the best use of the each team member's strengths especially in the case of talent. There is also growing importance of the role of competences being perceived as a way for building competitive advantage.

As we can see, organizations need the help from outsiders in the processes of managerial development. Companies need cooperation but not with scientists whose theories are inconsistent with their reality. Rather, they want partners who understand their problems and want to be engaged in organizational life. The traditional courses and lectures are not valued much by managers who want to see the immediate results of their invested time and money. So academia should visit companies more often to build a bridge for mutual understanding and exchange of point of view for the present and future business problems.

Some managers are very skeptical about scientists and their theories, but this should not come unexpected having in mind the data published above. Scientists need to become far more reliable and address the problems seen from managerial point of view. The study of management should concentrate on real-life problems. There is also an need to engage practitioners to share their experience with students [e.g. running workshops] and to take part in scientific programs.

Van Aken J.E. [2004] suggests that one way of improving the situation could to change the research paradigm. He distinguishes two paradigms: the explanatory paradigm and the design science paradigm. The first one can be found in business schools and is concerned with understanding „what is”, while the design science paradigm refers to the perspective „what should be” [found mostly in medicine and engineering]. According to him effective business education requires collaboration between the explanatory sciences [where the output is a causal model developed in the controlled conditions] and the design sciences.

It is also worth mentioning the latest discoveries in the field of neurosciences [Waldman, Balthazar, Peterson, 2011, pp. 60-74]. The results seem to be very interesting from the point of view of managerial development most notably the inspirational leadership's point of view. The research concentrates on better understanding of brain's role in producing effective managerial behavior and exploring how the brain itself can be put to better use when it comes to leadership potential. Authors explain how neuro-feedback intervention can be potentially used for the purpose of leadership development and for other application to management

related areas like improving decision making and areas beyond leadership like helping to recover from mental disorders.

## 5. Summary

Well educated managers play a very important role in gaining company's success. Research shows that managers do not have skills needed for organizational survival in new circumstances.

Educational programs are insufficient to prepare "new managers". Education delivered by business schools satisfies neither the needs of students nor the needs of organizations. Like H. Mintzberg mentioned some time ago schools should notice the difference between teaching about management and teaching how to manage. There is a need for moving away from the functional transfer of knowledge to more interdisciplinary, holistic approach, which is typical for the problems encountered in real world, more practical orientation on the soft skills (not only knowledge and hard skills) more active methods and learning how to learn.

The business world is changing much faster than schools' curricula. There is a need for adjusting university education to the needs of businesses. So there is a need for collaboration and research. To make a proper curriculum we should answer the following questions:

1. Which managerial competences [understood as areas of knowledge, types of skills and attitudes] are the most necessary in current and future survival?
2. Which methods are the most effective in preparing managers for future and in developing already practicing managers?
3. How to evaluate the effectiveness of managerial education?

There is a need for better cooperation between academics and practitioners. Criticism regarding the engagement in cooperation between academia and practice is not only restricted to the management sciences but unlike other disciplines management science should have pragmatic, applicable character so without this collaboration it cannot develop any more.

A lively discussion is going on about the gap between the needs of universities (to get higher rank among universities) and the needs of businesses. Not all universities want to produce commercially usable knowledge. Some scientists tend to narrow research topics to the problems which could be more attractive to publish but not necessarily for managers. Sadly, the pressure for publishing high competition among universities brings some academics to desperate steps, which are not only unethical but also destroy the faith in scientists' credibility and enlarge the group of cynical managers. So the gap is expanding.

Busy managers definitely need help in many areas from the academia. But is it not strange that some of them do not believe in a scientific approach? Scholars have to understand that

their research results must be applicable. Definitely both sides ought to understand that cooperation pays off. This is the only way to overcome crisis in managerial education and develop new curricula which will satisfy not only students but also businesses.

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