

ORGANISING THE EFFECTIVE INTERACTION IN THE FIELD OF MANAGEMENT EDUCATION: THE EXPERIENCE FROM ACTION RESEARCH

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Abstract

This article presents the results of interaction processes research in education of practicing managers. We consider the process of interaction between communities, engaged in educational activity, is the most important factor to create effective self-study environment. The research was performed in one of the largest training centers for managers and workers of Sverdlovsk region* companies. The purpose of research was to identify factors, preventing the realization of effective cooperation systems and to find measures to optimize such systems.

The results of monitoring indicate the raise of the share of rationally motivated and systematically studying managers, which have the highest demands to the content of programs and development of intragroup communications. During the analysis of present models of interaction between the key participants of educational activity and the institutional conditions for its implement we identified the problem of insufficient coordination of information streams and communication inside the organization. The result of action research was development of the project for structural changes to improve the interaction management efficiency in the training center, considering professional experience, achievements, demands and motivational characteristics of trainees, and the present resources of organization.

** Sverdlovsk region – is one of the highly developed industrial territories of Russia*

Key words: management education, professional training, organizing the interaction

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Introduction

An every country in the world, include Russia, understands the economic and social need in a continuous enhancement of the management potential. The dynamical growth of the Russian management education followed by an increase in demands of clients to the quality of educational

services requires a constant improvement of educational programs and service support. Quality learning today comes as an essential instrument to build managers' professional career trajectory. In this context still are actual discussions of business schools education effect on the success of graduates in a real business (Pfeffer & Fong, 2002; Gioia & Herman, 2005; Montgomery & Ramus, 2011).

The trend of management education research today is in a search of strategic line of its development, based on the experience of preceding decades (Friga, Bettis & Sullivan, 2003; Acito, McDougall & Smith, 2008). The urgency of close connection between a management education and a management practice, an applicability of gained knowledge to manager's goals and activities is highly emphasized in works of Gosling and Mintzberg (Gosling & Mintzberg, 2004), Bennis and O'Toole (Bennis & O'Toole, 2005). The problems of moral guide and principles in the business schools graduates practice are referred in works of Ghoshal (Ghoshal, 2005), Pfeffer and Fong (Pfeffer & Fong, 2004), Slater and Dixon-Fowler (Slater & Dixon-Fowler, 2010). The research of leading business schools in USA, conducted by Navarro (Navarro, 2008), revealed the most significant characteristics of the ideal MBA program. Here some of them: interdisciplinary integration, focus on practice, focus on global trends and information technologies, development of such skills as communication, leadership, collaboration, team-work and other, drawing attention to business ethics and social responsibility.

The most urgent task for the current development stage of management education in Russia is to establish an effective interaction between educational institutes and business community (Evenko, 2012). Russian education for practicing managers is developing with a great dynamics under the influence of economic, social and territorial factors. In recent years, we can see the increase in short-term and mid-term educational programs, which give managers the opportunity to update their basic knowledge and gain some extra skills for immediate use in the business problems solving. Our research was performed in "The Potential" training center, which specializes on mid-term and short-term educational programs and offering them to managers and workers of Sverdlovsk region companies. The purpose of research was to identify factors, hindering the sustainable growth of training center and development of management solutions to improve the effectiveness of interactions between people involved in educational activities. We consider the process of interaction as a key factor to succeed in management education, because it is very important to create effective self-study and converting environment in education of practicing managers.

1 Data and Methods

The research has been conducted using the action research strategy. According to this strategy, the researcher must be fully involved in situation and focused on gain in positive changes in studied organization. The realization of action research strategy was undertaken through a combination of diagnostic and projective methods. On the first stage of research, we made an analysis of the training center's client database. Probability sampling was based on the analysis of client database (N-400). During 2007, 2010 and 2014 years, we have made three waves of polls with managers, studying in the training center. The purpose of these polls was to identify qualitative changes in the contingent and quantitative dynamics of identified characteristics. The questionnaire contained three modules: the motivation for getting education module, the expectations about final results of education module, satisfaction degree module. Using correlation results, we constructed the secondary variable and used it in creation the typology of learners. The results of the first stage served as the ground to choose goals and methods to proceed with research.

On the second stage of research, we ran the open group discussion with teachers and trainers. The aim of discussion was to identify the models of interaction, analyze teaching staff capabilities to use these models and conditions provided by the training center.

On the third stage of research, we ran the expert discussion with education programs coordinators and heads of departments to work out measures to improve interaction processes on vertical and horizontal levels.

2 Results

The results of the first stage of research were identification of the base typological groups of studying managers, for whom we gave imagined figurative names (Table 1).

Tab. 1: Learners constitution dynamics

№	Group name	2007	2010	2014
1	“Naive students”	39%	20%	5%
2	“Education programs addicts”	25%	22%	15%
3	“Rationally motivated learners”	31%	50%	60%
4	“Advanced group of systematically studying learners”	5%	8%	20%

	Total:	100%	100%	100%
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Source: author's calculation

Group 1 “Naive students” is noted for the uncertain motivation for getting a supplemental education. They understand the need in changes and personal growth, but their priorities are not set. They are ready and waiting to receive a maximal volume of any information, so they can use it in the future. This group of learners has the maximal satisfaction from the education.

The behavior of Group 2 “Education programs addicts” is noted for a migration from one business school to another, an active discussion of their education experience in a group, a choice of multidirectional programs, which not connected to each other in subject. Their career aspirations are not structured, often they shift the sphere of activity, and they are in a constant search for their ‘place in the sun’ and in reflection about correspondence of the work to their inner ‘self’. Representatives of this group appreciate the studying process, as it is not mere, but even more than practical professional results. The main criterion to assess trainer and program is ‘the engaging manner in delivery of content’.

Group 3 “Rationally motivated learners” has a clear idea of information they need and a will to use it on practice as soon as it possible. The representatives of this group are going on workshops and trainings with concrete set of problems. During training sessions, they are searching how to solve these problems in collaboration with trainers and other learners. They are open for exchange of experience and managerial decisions. They tend to build a career in one (mostly preferred) big company or going to start their own business. The main criterion to assess education quality for them is ‘the practical good of received knowledge to solve own business problems’.

Group 4 “Advanced group of systematically studying learners” is characterized as a group with the highest level of motivation. The increase in quantity of members in this group in last years is the evidence of business movement to a phase, when managers understand, that a regular training of professional skills is a ‘conditio sine qua non’ to enhance the efficiency of company operations and raise their own value on a job market. The main criterion to assess education in this group is ‘applicability of studying tasks, practical use of information’ and ‘well-arranged content’. Members of this group have the lowest satisfaction from the education and the highest demands to program's contents, service support and to the communication management during studying process. Experts forecast a raise in the quantity of “advanced systematically studying managers”. It is a signal of importance for business schools and training centers to enhance quality of their service and product.

Comparing quantitative proportions of typological groups described below we found the steady trend of increase in the share of competent consumers of education services. This trend will drive to

the increase in demands of consumers and in risks growth to be unclaimed for weak educational programs and institutions. The understanding by a management of the urgency of monitoring the changes and teamwork ‘retraining’ to tune on statuses, needs and motivation characteristics of learners are important factors to consolidate the positions of educational institution.

Fundamental characteristics changes of studying managers registered on the first stage called for the expert analysis on correspondence of organization’s existing state to the changed external conditions. The results of open group discussion with teachers and trainers registered on the second stage revealed a call for change of orientation from classical forms of interaction to innovative according to changing image of studying managers.

According to the results of discussion, we constructed three base models of interaction in study groups. After that, teachers and trainers estimated in scores their abilities to use every model and analyzed any obstacles in organization to use these models (Table 2).

Tab. 2: The score esteem of abilities to use interaction models

№	Model of interaction name	Average score	
		(potential teachers rate)	(organization conditions rate)
1	“Academic”	5	5
2	“Expert consultation”	4,2	3,5
3	“Situational dynamical”	3,3	2,4

Source: author's calculation

Model 1 “Academic” is oriented on a basic knowledge and information translation. Roles of interaction participants in this model are hierarchical: trainer / trainee. This model is traditionally used in open programs, offered for a vast audience as a released product. This model has maximal score rate either for personnel abilities or for organizational conditions to use it. Still, as clients demands for education product are growing steadily, just the same way the value of this model decreasing.

Model 2 “Expert consultation” in full extent corresponds to essential needs of studying managers, who understand lack of knowledge and practical skills in a current period and turn to a training center to get lacking ‘capital’. In this situation, roles of interaction participants are conventionally hierarchical, formally identified on the start. During education process, the role of trainer can be transformed from expert and consultant to a coordinator. Besides, expert roles can be

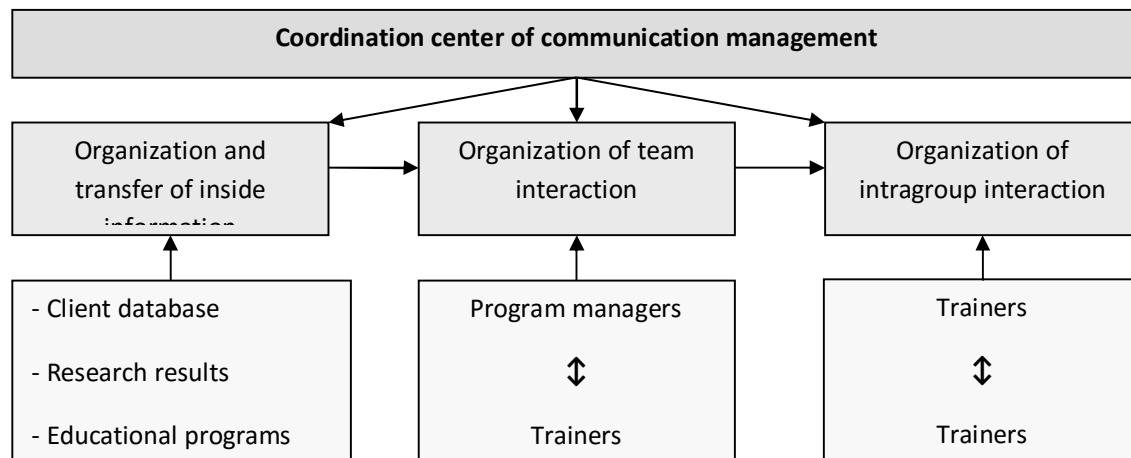
adopted by the members of study group, who have a greater expertise in some problems and more experienced in studied cases than the others, whether they have higher status or not. Expert consultation model is optimal for narrowly open and closed corporative programs. The average score for this model testify that there are several problems as in trainers' competence field, so in organization conditions to fulfill its realization. The main obstacles are groups' heterogeneity, lack of information about expectations of learners before start of a program, lack of team coordination during the program realization. Very often colleagues are not aware of study cases, methods and content transfer logics of each other. Because of that one approach and solution often not fit to another, the system effect is missing. As a consequence, level of the satisfaction from education results decreases.

Role interaction in Model 3 “Situational dynamical” is constructed during the problem solving process. Trainer does not have absolute authority or competence here. He is more like a moderator, who maintains a structure of a process to ensure functionality and productivity of participants work. Roles of participants can be defined and redefined in every phase of work. Seeming exception of trainer's function is a method to activate inner potential of the group. In case of successful realization of such kind of interaction, it is possible to get brand new result, to create unique technology, go beyond the bounds of standard solutions. In the scope of using this model are closed corporative programs, designed specially to solve existing or revealed problem of client. The average score for this model is lowest because of absence of strategic background of organization for full realization of this model. The main obstacle to successful realization of situational dynamical model is the absence of strictly regulated procedure of coordination the project of training with a client and choosing standards for evaluation of the results.

Results of research served as a ground to make management decisions to consolidate a current position of the training center and increase its strategic availability, as far as experts forecast raise of demands for the quality of educational services, and the increase in quantity of complicated orders from corporative clients.

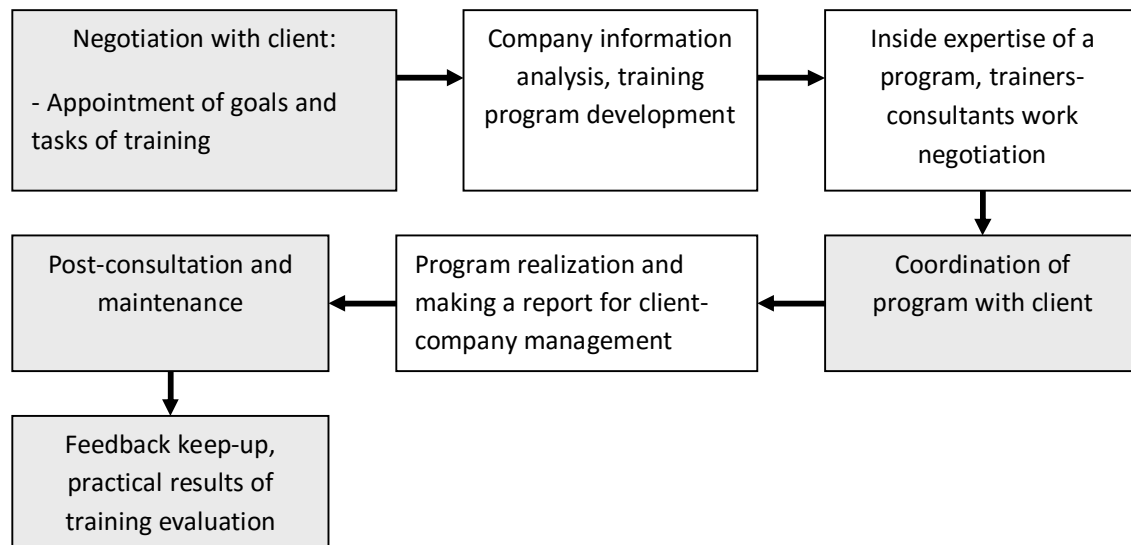
The project of structural changes to manage the communications inside the organization is presented on the Figure 1. The algorithm of interaction with corporative clients for solving complicated business tasks is presented on the Figure 2.

Fig.1: Coordination center of communication management



Source: Compiled by author from the results of expert discussion

Fig.2: The process of corporative education organization



Source: Compiled by author from the results of expert discussion

Conclusion

Training results depend on reasonable construction of multi-level interaction system within the process of educational activity. Promising directions to improve practical management education quality are connected to precise dialogue scheme constructing, taking into consideration professional experience and achievements of studying managers, also human and technological resources of educational institution. The precise definition of goals for offered programs, focusing the target group and socialization of participants inside the programs are the necessary conditions for satisfaction and the practical advantage from spent time, financial and psychological resources. Regular monitoring of problems on vertical and horizontal levels of interactions management is a very important condition for saving a competitive position of educational institution.

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