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SEMANTIC PSYCHOGEOMETRICAL TEST IN THE RESEARCH OF EDUCATION TOP MANAGERS' PERCEPTIONS OF THE ORGANIZATION

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ABSTRACT:

The environment of the organization is ambiguous and contradictory, having both formal and informal information flows, some of them are contrary to others. Each organization has spheres quite easily understood by its members, and space being unconscious by other people, but interacting with the organization in destructive forms. Some researchers call them "the shadow" of the organization. These representations' fields, the attitudes and the relationships of the members of the group can be researched by means of the projective methods. We suggest the psycho-geometric test for the semantic study of the managers' images.

Keywords: Projective methods, risk, psychological safety, perception, management.

Modern educational organizations often aim to realize their unique social mission for a wide range of consumers, while ignoring their own members of the group who have difficulties and depersonalization in the process of education and upbringing. Psychological security, as a condition and characteristic of the environment, becomes an important aspect of human life. It applies both to a specific person and to a society as a whole [1]. Psychological safety in education appears to be an essential factor which ensures the development

and well-being of employees [2,3]. The subjects' security of the internal organizational environment is disturbed, while the performance indicators of the organization continue to decay [4].

The increasing tension and social and psychological climate greatly influence the security of the organization. Within current crisis in the production sphere, market volatility and disruptive innovations, updating of CRM systems, implementation of new standards of the organizational environment acquire the particular

relevance. Cooperation of all stakeholders (ordinary members of the group, middle managers, top managers) becomes essential for the security of the internal organizational environment. All stakeholders are facing some kinds of challenges, but often these social risks are not recognized by both employees and managers. The safety of the subjects of the internal organizational environment is disrupted, while the performance indicators of the organization as a whole organism continue to deteriorate.

Thus, modern concepts of educational management are based on the understanding of factors important for the organizational environment as human relations, the security of which becomes a task for the educational organization [5,6]. Research of the employees' attitudes, needs and organizational conditions allows to choose methods of the development. The most successful leaders are based on the understanding that social capital [7] or human resources [8] are no less important and valuable components than production capacity and assets.

The most important driving forces of high quality education are self-competent employees, while the managers of the educational organization involve social resources of society and the public groups [9]. The challenge for top managers and company owners is to attract and keep members in the group [10]. We are interested in the content of irregularities of the psychological safety in the real company associated with the contradictions of the formal and informal information flows. Also, we are interested in what the member of the organization feels but does not realize, and under this influence, employee shapes their own organizational behavior.

We conducted a pilot study using a projective method. From the point of view of the educational organization members, an expected result of our study is a generalized characteristic of the internal organizational environment, the identification of special tension zones, social ones by the source of risk occurrence and a description of the main contradictions. The research of the attitudes to the organization is connected with the unwillingness and danger of expression of employee's opinion. Direct questions do not provide a reliable picture of the relationships and risks. Such subjective phenomena are not easy to objectify, because members of the group do not seek to detect their negative perception of what is happening in the organization, fearing the evaluation and pressure on the part of top management.

Research design and methods

We considered characteristics of actors of the internal organizational environment from the point of view of the theory of relations [9]. We were aimed to examine a complex phenomenon of the internal organizational environment, using projective methods while studying the attitude of education managers to the organization. First, we conducted supervision and one-to-one conversations with stakeholders of the organization processes, selected stimulus material. The group participating in the study included 2 subgroups - head of the educational organizations (top-management, 8 persons), head of departments or educational projects (middle-management, 8 persons).

At the stage of the study we used the following projective methods:

1) Semantic psycho-geometric test (was modified by us) [11]. A set of paper figures of different sizes and shapes was offered to each employee for detection of the relationship between the figure and the concepts - "Myself", "Organization", "Society". They were asked to choose a figure that is associated with the above concepts. Then the selected figures were placed on a blank piece of paper and were circled. Members of the group described their associations.

2) The method of choosing postcards.

It allows discovering association caused by the vision of the organizational environment. Stimulus material included a random set of the postcards. Participants were asked to present their vision of the organization and to find at least three postcards which are associated with concepts above.

The location of the stimulus material reflects how a manager perceives and composes the system- of logical and emotional relationships in the organization. This procedure allows us to objectify the ratio of perceived concepts and to determine the place of each element in the representations of the members of the group as well as to judge the risks to which it is exposed.

Since applied methods are projective they allow judging the content of representations indirectly, due to the location on the paper space of analogs of the perceived concepts.

Results and discussion.

The concepts "Myself", "Organization", "Society" were chosen to describe the educational organization state in the outer (environmental) and internal (individual) aspects. Participants presented a peculiar projection of the features and state of the internal organizational environment, therefore the study of their representations is valuable in the context of prevention of psychological safety risks'.

The elaboration of the psycho-semantic geometric test was carried out according to standard categories. Experts were 3 qualified psychologists with 5-10 years of practical psychodiagnostic experience. For analyzing the concepts we used spatial categories - size, shape, and location.

A high frequency of the category "above the center" was interpreted as an orientation toward the future or an overestimation of the significance of the concept. The concept "organization" is more often placed above the center, in the future zone, overestimation, and as for "society" there is an ambivalent reaction - "above the center" and "below the center".

This trend is partially confirmed by the results in the category of "domination - subordination". The dominance of the concepts of "Myself" and "Organization" is more typical, and subordination - for "society". Domination of the concept of "society" reveals the personal dependence, while the dominance of the concept of "Myself" was associated with the perception of an active role in the life of the educational organization. The subordinate position of "society" can testify that it does not depend on the individual activity and does not attract subject's attention. The connection between individual and society is perceived as weak and does not

affect the reality of the managers. Domination of an organization can display the risks to manifestations of personal independence, initiative, and creativity, a growing sense of helplessness and alienation. Also, highly likely, managers underestimate the opportunities and resources of society and significance of it. These results could be evidence of the disconnection with social consumption processes, isolation in the economy and lack of the social support.

The choice of "no contact" equally applies to all three concepts - "Myself", "Organization" and "Society" in all subgroups. The frequency of the category "contact" is slightly higher in two concepts - "Organization" and "Society." The category "total absorption" was not detected.

This could be explained by the fact that experienced managers divided the organization, its projects, and personal goals. They distance themselves emotionally from events and difficulties in the organization. Safety risks are mitigated by creating a distance between themselves and the organization. The establishment of the emotional contact with the colleagues is seen as dangerous since it remains unclear how to maintain personal borders, health, and independence. "Partial absorption" of the category "Myself" was found in only one case, this fact can reflect the subjective perception of a particular top manager who made this choice. Thus, the social risks of psychological safety are associated with protection of the interaction boundaries. Most managers used to fully control the situation or to ignore colleagues and their personal difficulties, which prevents reliable and full-fledged joint activity.

We can judge the importance of suggested concepts for the group members by figure size. High significance was revealed for the concepts "Organization" and "Society". None of the managers have chosen a medium-sized figure. Probably, we attribute the absence of the choice of medium-sized figures to the fact that all respondents distinguish different significance of the proposed concepts for themselves. A small figure was chosen only in one case, and it related to the concept "Myself". Members of both groups often choose a circle and a square in respect of the concepts "Organization" and "Society." No one chose the circle in relation to the concept "Myself". It could be assumed that this choice reflects a conservative position and a weak expression of the active tendencies, which contradicts the leading positions of these respondents. Probably, managers of both groups avoiding contact with employees also do not provide timely and prompt feedback. The lack of feedback disrupts the effectiveness of the joint activity and integrity of the educational process.

Members of this group often choose a circle and a square working with concepts "Organization" and "Society." No one has chosen the circle in the concept "Myself". Probably this choice reflects a conservative position and a lack of leadership skills and activeness, contradicting the managerial positions of these respondents. Approximately an equal number of choices regard the concept "Myself" choosing triangle and square. Member of the group differs with attitudes and perceptions of their own organization, themselves

and society. Apparently, such diversity of their elections reflects that some part of the subjects has a peaceful state, but others are in an anxious and stressful state. Managers spend their efforts to protect their own personality and dignity in perceiving social threats and risks.

We found main tendencies in the group such as a rather positive attitude to the concepts of "Myself", "Organization", "Society", with a tendency to overestimation, some preference of the categories "domination" and "subordination". In the ratio of concepts, the category "no contact" prevails, in terms of the size of the selected figures.

We can make a conclusion that notable but inactive attitude to the concepts under study was revealed. In general, such results indicate the existence of deep-seated conflict, alienation and anxious state of mind, perceiving and creating social security risks in the organization. Most likely, we can notify the contradiction in terms of the dilemma "to dominate over others - to obey others" in the top managers' group.

The equal frequency of occurrence in the categories "at the center" and "above the center" and "below the center" is found in all concepts. The largest number of the locations concerning concept "Myself" indicate that middle managers tend to exaggerate their importance for an organization. The concept of "organization" is more often located in the middle of the blank, in the zone of the present and can confirm an adequate assessment. With regard to the concept of "Society", the same number of locations in the center and below the center can be understood as an ambivalent perception of the importance of society, its resources, influence, and capabilities. We believe that security risks may be related to some overstating of their own value on the part of middle managers in comparison with the other research categories and possible devaluation of the concept of "society".

Members of this group often choose a circle, rarely but almost equally a square and a triangle. We can assume they have an adaptive and subordinate position, weak or depressed leadership aspirations. Approximately equal number of choices of a square and a triangle, it is much rare than a circle. Apparently, security risks for middle managers are minimized due to adaptive behavior and perception, while for an organization such a situation is associated with negative consequences. Middle managers as the main conductors and implementers of current changes and development of the educational organization do not show initiative and activity and prefer to adopt a passive position in the established rules of the interaction.

Thus, the main tendencies inherent in the manager groups are quite a positive attitude to the concepts of "Myself", "Organization", "Society", with a tendency to exaggeration, some priority of the categories "domination" and "submission", "no contact" in the ratio concepts, a pronounced passive attitude to the concepts under study. In general, our results indicate the existence of a deep conflict, which is one of the security risks in the organization, related to the contradiction of attitudes to domination over others - subordination to others. Lack of contact with themselves, organization and

society is combined with the adaptive position of middle managers preferred not to show initiative and activity, which reduces the efficiency of the organization, worsens the psychological climate and health of managers, and also leads to stagnation of the whole organization.

Most likely, it is necessary to speak about pressure and stress, which are rendered by the organization in the person of middle and top managers; at the same time, they also experience tension.

Conclusion

To understand the contradictions arising in the management of the organization, we tried to compare the choice of figures in two groups of managers. To confirm the reliability of differences in the perception of ourselves, the organization and society, we performed statistical processing of the data using the chi-square test. On the level of trends, it can be said that top and middle managers give various answers that reveal attitudes toward these concepts. The most similar answers were received regarding the concept of "Society". Probably, it should be said that society is the sphere which is located out of the zones of influences of respondents, they have a weak link with values and needs.

In accordance with the objectives set, we identified the contradictions defining the risk zones for the psychological security of the educational organization:

- to dominate over others - to obey others;
- to be isolated from the environment - to be completely absorbed by the environment and to lose oneself.

Most likely, managers of both types do not fully realize themselves as subjects of the educational organization, they feel the pressure of a system they cannot resist. We can speak about the lack of contact with themselves and with the organization found in the group of managers. The organization is perceived as significant, but weakly exposed to its own impact. Leadership as a process leading to cooperation and constructive interaction is replaced by strict control and authoritarian management on the part of top management.

Also, recommendations for managers of educational organizations were formulated and presented.

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