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VERSATILE LEADERSHIP AND ACTION RESEARCH APPROACH TO MANAGERIAL SKILLS DEVELOPMENT – CASE OF ŠKODA AUTO COORDINATOR PREPARING FOR ADVANCEMENT

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Abstract:

The paper presents case of a young coordinator of two projects teams who was assigned a task to improve his meetings management skills. Team composed of this coordinator from ŠKODA

AUTO and two academics identified a combination of versatile leadership and action research approaches as being appropriate in this respect. Paper is divided into three parts.

The first part presents a brief overview of the versatile leadership theory as well as of the versatile style of the meetings management. Theory of versatile leadership represents an approach which thinks about management and leadership in terms of opposites which are both useful and complementary. It refers to three basic principles (Kaiser, 2020):

- (1) versatile leaders don't overdo it – overuse of any useful behaviour results into a weakness;
- (2) versatile leaders strike balances;
- (3) versatile leaders read and respond appropriately.

These principles must be applied to interpersonal (“how” manager leads) as well as to organizational (“what” one leads) aspects of leadership. In consequence versatile style of the meetings management can be described as an art to combine and maintain balance between both, task related (i.e., appropriate time schedule/length, combination of creativity with critical analysis, of inviting contributions with summarizing) and interpersonal (i.e., combination of listening with self-expression, paying attention to speaker with observing the reactions of others) processes (Pavlica et al, 2015).

The second part of the paper describes the way in which methodology of action research and versatile leadership were combined. Action research represents a disciplined process of inquiry conducted by and for those (“our” coordinator and his project teams in this case) taking the action (Sagor, 2000). The action research involves seven steps:

- (1) selecting a focus (meetings management in this case);
- (2) clarifying theories (theory of versatile leadership);
- (3) identifying research questions (understanding the meetings participants perception of/experience with meetings);
- (4) collecting data (two rounds of questionnaire survey in this case);
- (5) analysing data (standard statistical analysis of the questionnaire data);
- (6) reporting results (discussion of the questionnaire results with the meetings participants and a report to the coordinator's supervisor);
- (7) taking informed action (implementation of the findings from both rounds of survey).

Versatile leadership methodology was reflected in both the content of the questionnaire items (see above versatile style of meetings management) and a form of the main scale used in the questionnaire. Versatility is measured by the means of the curvilinear scales (Kaplan-Kaiser, 2007) ranging from minus scores (doing something too little) through score 0 (doing something in the right amount) to plus scores (doing something too much). Likert type scales (i.e., the higher score the better result) were used on some specific items (i.e., the degree of satisfaction with the meeting's results) as well.

The third part of the paper presents a detailed description of the ways in which “our” coordinator combined action research methodology with versatile view of leadership. It also discusses the key results of this project including transferability of our methodological approach to both context of managerial skills development in organizations and context of the university students' education.

Keywords:

Managerial skills development, versatile leadership, action research, meetings management.