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RESEARCH OF THE STRUCTURE AND NATURE OF LEADERSHIP ACTIVITIES

Abstract: *Leaders are mostly described in professional literature about leadership in terms of what they should be like (personality traits) as well as from the aspect of various leadership styles and types of leadership. However, very little is known about what leaders do in their everyday practice, or how they do it. Leadership should be seen more widely and be explored along the characteristics and style of leadership. We should explore how leaders manifest themselves outwards through their work, which means to explore the nature of the leadership work. The aim of the research project was to gain more knowledge about activities undertaken by leaders and via experience to answer a simple, but yet not too clearly answered question: "What does a leader really do?" This finding will help to reveal important activities on which best leaders focus and determine which elements are really important for leadership. The research project was managed by means of a combination of interviews conducted with 25 leaders, people in senior management positions, and a questionnaire survey.*

Keywords: *leadership, leader, leadership activities, followers*

JEL: M 20, M 21, M 29

Introduction

Leadership is a topic that is now a matter of keen interest and attention, which is reflected in a large number of books and articles on the subject. Despite the enormous amount of professional and popular literature, the concept of leadership is associated with many unanswered questions and controversial conclusions. One of the most important theoretical problems is the lack of uniform definitions of leadership, resulting in a lack of practically applicable characteristics of leadership activities. Findings from the literature mostly describe how to act like leaders, emphasize their personal characteristics, or describe different leadership styles and types of leaders. A leader is mostly seen as a complex entity equipped with features that make him ideal in the role of a leader. Massive research of characteristics made in the

past decades, however, did not reveal which features guarantee leadership success. Practical examples show that also the personality that does not have the selected features, may be an effective leader too. On the other hand, it cannot be explained why leaders unexpectedly fail, even though they provide leadership characteristics based on the research.

Compared with the extensive research approach based on characteristics of leaders, we know very little about what leaders actually do in their daily work, or how they do it. Comprehensive studies on this topic exist, resulting in a completely non-specific and metaphorical understanding of the whole concept of leadership based on personality, charisma or holding certain positions. Leadership should be seen more widely and explored along the characteristics of leadership and leadership style also how are leaders manifested outwardly through their work, what is the nature of leadership work. A comprehensive understanding of leadership involves not only the personality of leaders, their value orientation, properties and characteristics, ie "Who is a leader?" and a style of leadership used by a leader, that is, "How does he/she lead? ", but also actions that the leader performs, ie, "What is he/she doing in fact?"

Theoretical Ideas about the Nature of Leadership Work

Leadership is a concept that in managerial language, despite more than half a million books about leaders has not had a clear and unambiguous interpretation. According to Crainer, there are about 400 definitions of leadership – "it's a real minefield of misunderstandings and differences, through which theorists and practitioners have to walk"[5]. The definition of leadership is arbitrary and largely subjective. Stogdill after a comprehensive review of the literature on leadership concluded "there are almost as many definitions of leadership as those who have tried to define this concept" [19]. Confusion is caused mainly by using other misleading terms such as management, administration, power, authority, and control to describe similar phenomena [21]. "It seems that the concept of leadership has always escaped from us, or appears in a different form to mock with its sliding properties and complexity. That is why we invented endless definitions to deal with it ... and now this concept is yet not well defined", says the legend of leadership skills W. Bennis [3].

Leadership is defined in different ways, but most definitions are based on the common assumption that "it is a process of intentional influence towards other people aimed at facilitating the exercise in a collective role" [21]. Similarly Northouse defines leadership as "the process whereby an individual influences a group of people to achieve common objectives" [14]. On the other hand, the interpretation of leadership differ mainly in defining how a leader carries out its influence and determining what is the result of effort to influence.

Very often appear definitions which have a historical, psychological and sociological importance; however, are not applicable to modern business and management, for example the leader as a servant, the leader as a media product [22]. Some definitions are therefore more useful than others, but there is no

definition that would capture the essence of leadership and would be sufficiently general to all situations. Theoretical knowledge of leadership show the necessity to perceive the function of management and broad experience proves it. Under these circumstances, it is preferable to use different concept of leadership as a source of different perspectives on this complex and multifaceted phenomenon. Karmel also recommends: "Whenever feasible, leadership research should be designed to provide information relevant to a wide range of definitions, so that in time it will be possible to compare the usefulness of different approaches and come to some kind of conformity in this case" [10].

Northouse states that during the past sixty years more than 65 different classification systems have been developed to define the dimensions of leadership [14]. One of the first attempts at a systematic description was the above-mentioned leadership approach based on the properties, characteristics and features of leadership. By the early fifties of the 20th century there dominated the views that a person was born to be a leader, because leadership was restricted only to those who had a special, usually innate ability or talent. The low explanatory power of this approach, however, has led experts to paying more attention to behaviour and actions of leaders. Behavioural theories, which are based on behaviour of the leader, examined at the correlation between leader's behaviour and leadership effectiveness of different indicators to identify effective leadership behaviour.

Very often, theorists who examine leadership try to define the leader according to their leadership style. A significant shift in the theory of leadership caused the knowledge that an appropriate leadership style depends mainly on understanding the specifics of the situation. There is not one universal and the best leadership style that is why effective leader must have the flexibility to change its style due to changing circumstances and conditions.

The knowledge about leadership has been developing gradually and every new phase is partially evolved from earlier. In recent years, there has been an increasingly emerging effort to integrate two or more concepts of leadership to one study, for example simultaneously examine the characteristics of leaders, situational variables and conduct of followers.

Each of the recognized experts in the field of leadership developed a theory based on years of research. Some of these theories understand the leadership role as a specialized role of the leader, different from a process, event transaction between the leader and their followers. Most theories of leadership focus on leadership behaviours used in conjunction with direct influencing immediate subordinates, but there are also indirect leadership theories that explore how the leader can affect people at lower levels of an organization, who are not in direct interaction with them. In literature, there outweigh theories of leadership, which focus on the leader. On the other hand, only a few researches and theories focus on the followers. Theories of leadership are also divided into descriptive and prescriptive ones, depending on whether the emphasis is on "what leadership should be", or "what leadership is at the moment", or "what is happening right now".

Part of the answer to the question of what leaders actually do, can be found in an unlimited number of definitions of leadership. Rauch and Behling [16] define leadership as “the process of influencing the activities of an organized group in order to achieve the goal”. Richards and Engle [17] consider that “leadership is a formulation of a vision, embodied values and creating an environment in which things can be done”. House et al. [9] define leadership as “the ability of an individual to influence, motivate and enable others to contribute effectiveness and success of an organization”. Donnelly et al. [6] talk about leadership as “the ability to persuade others”, the definition Kotter [11] points out is that “a leader inspires to achieve vision, regardless of the complications.” Based on definitions above, we can state that leaders influence, formulate a vision, motivate, inspire, etc.

In carrying out the research project, the starting assumption is that leaders, within their leadership activities, affect their employees, but also use their power at the same time, inspire their surroundings, but also influence people through their charisma and encourage their colleagues. In some situations leaders tend to mobilise their colleagues, inspiring trust; however, their relations with staff are also based on commitments; they build a league of their followers, while raising their successors.

Aim and Research Methods

The inspiration for the research project was the study of Henry Mintzberg, one of the leading academics who have studied management. Mintzberg conducted research and its aim was to find out how managers actually did their jobs. His findings were published in 1973 entitled “The nature of managerial work.” The results were surprising. Mintzberg concluded that managers did not perform traditional management functions, namely planning, organizing and control, but carried interpersonal, information and decision-making activities. This means that most of the time managers are working at representative roles, the roles of spokesmen, resource allocators and negotiators. A supplemented and more complex model of managing (model of the manager’s job) was published by H. Mintzberg in 1994. Same as Henry Mintzberg looked at managers, we decided to explore the leaders and find out what activities do leaders really perform and whether these activities are consistent with what is suggested by the literature.

Research of leadership activities is rare and its nature is not a complex one. The mission of submitted article is to clarify this a little researched area of leadership and to contribute a small amount to the set of knowledge about leadership activities, which will create conceptual knowledge. The research project presented is a “snapshot” study, which explores the most important (basic) leadership activities. The main objective of the research project was to learn more about the activities undertaken by the leaders and by experience to answer a simple, but yet not too clearly answered question: “What really makes a leader?” This finding helps us to reveal important activities that the best leaders focus on and determine which elements are really important for leadership. These findings further help and provide guidance in training

of successors to leadership roles, and this way to improve the next generation of leaders.

The result of the main objective is the following sub-objectives of the research project, based on a complex characteristic of leadership:

- to explain how the leader performs his power and influence in practice, how he influences events in the business and what tools he uses;
- describe the ways and means used by the leader to inspire followers;
- deepen and broaden the knowledge of when and how the leader mobilizes and encourages employees;
- clarify what makes the leader, to enhance people's confidence towards him and used obligations in his work with people;
- learn more about how the leader gathers his followers and at what stage of succession he is at the moment.

The research project was conducted jointly by the Department of Management, University of Economics in Bratislava and recruiter KINGFISHER Executive Search in 2012. The research project was attended by 25 leaders at the top level in the organization (top management). The research sample consists of top leaders (CEO, chairman of the board) of big companies with hundreds of employees, so we assured consistency across the subjects of research. The size of the survey sample is considered to be appropriate for this type of research, because the examining leaders operating in top management positions and their current formal and informal positions are the result of tough choices throughout their entire careers. Research of this kind is very difficult to implement. The obstacles are unwillingness of leaders to participate in research and time-consuming for direct contact with a leader, and therefore can not expect massive research leadership. We think that with the growing hierarchical level in the company, sectoral characteristics partly lose their importance. The research sample therefore consists of leaders from different sectors (IT, financial sector, food industry, construction industry...). The research sample consists of leaders from Slovak enterprises (leaders are of Slovak nationality) with academic education and are aged 30–65 years. The research project was attended by 23 men and 2 women. In the research project, to ensure the anonymity of respondents we do not mention their names, but the leaders concerned are marked with letters of the alphabet from A to Z.

The research project was carried out by controlled interviews and questionnaires. This questionnaire contains a list of statements that describe the activities performed by leaders in the fields, which are power and influence, inspiration and charisma, encouragement and mobilization, trust and commitment, matching followers and succession. Through the study of literature, we identified a list of basic leadership activities that constitute the research project scheme. Each of these claims was evaluated by two leaders of the prescribed scales, and the *frequency* (never, rarely / about once a year / occasionally / about once a month / often / approximately once per week / and very often / daily /) and the *importance for the enterprise* (small, moderate,

substantial or critical impact on the efficiency and prosperity of the company, or has no effect on the efficiency and prosperity of the company).

The agenda of personal meetings with selected leaders was not only to complete the questionnaire, but mainly an extensive and thorough discussion of the six basic leadership actions that have been formulated as *power and influence, inspiration and charisma, encouragement and mobilization, trust and commitment, and pooling followers and succession* in order to determine whether the activities are carried out by leaders in practice and how their practical implementation in the process of leadership proceeds. The credibility of a research project was supported by just concrete and personal contact with the studied leaders. The results of the meetings were the views and insights that leaders put in their responses, thus contributing to the deepening and broadening of knowledge about leadership. During the interview, it was also possible to observe their non-verbal speech and behaviour and to learn more about how other people act. This invaluable experience and personal contact with leaders contributed to a deeper knowledge of the issues and a higher quality of research findings. The questions used in the interview were, for example: *What methods, instruments and concepts of influencing do you use in your job? When do you influence your employees and when and how do you use tools of power? What methods and instruments do you use to inspire your followers? Do you have charisma? How do you define charisma? When and how do you encourage and mobilize? What do you do for increasing people's trust in you? How do you define the commitment? At what stage of succession are you today?*

The research project is of a qualitative nature. Given the limited research sample and excellence of leaders we think that is not suitable to make quantitative conclusions. The statistical processing can erase the originality of individual leader's statements. Leadership is always individual, the average value is not standard.

The Research Results of Power and Influence

In this part of the research, we assumed that the leaders in their daily work use not only power tools which they have because of their position held in the company, but also their influence, which is not linked to a formal position. We wondered which of the components of leadership, *power* or *influence* dominate in the work of a leader and what are the reasons for their use in daily practice.

The research has shown that leaders use power when there is a little time to take a decision and also the lack of adequate resources, associated with the problem. Then the leader's decision is authoritative. Leaders use power when it is urgent to decide, but in a team of workers who are charged with taking the decision in a particular case, there is no common view of a clear way to solve the problem. It is necessary to say the final word, and this privilege, but also an obligation is the leader's right. Leaders use power to speed up things, if it is necessary to adopt a critical decision. Likewise the importance of leadership in the organization increases in this case. The power tools are also used when a team departs from

achieving the goal and the process of realization of the project has substantially different direction than planned. Leaders use power when they need to enforce measures that employees perceive as unpopular, or is necessary to clearly define the rules for the entire company, mostly at its establishment. Then it is necessary to describe the processes exactly and on pursuance of that release organizational standards from the positions of power.

Four analyzed leaders stated that they did not use power at all. The leader X said, *"I do not follow from the position of power; I use power only in decision making. I do not need much, because our relationships are based on respect and everyone has the space to realization. If a leader uses only commands and power, an employee becomes a machine and the leader destroys his space dedicated to creativity."* According to the leader E, if a leadership has to work only by orders, leaders should give up their position. It emphasizes that the leader is holding his position based on trust and asks: *"How can a leader do something based on power when he is in his position of trust?"* Contrary the leader CH says that power is not a natural part of a leadership role, but also adds that *"formal authority alone is not enough, and especially should not be misused"*. The two leaders said that power and influence were used in a ratio of 10 to 90 and just two others in the ratio of 20 to 80. One leader said that he used the power in 30 percent and influence in 70 percent of cases. Remaining answers of 16 leaders oscillated in evaluating the use of power and influence in the ratio of 40:60 to 50:50. Neither of the leaders uses power more frequently than the influence in his daily work. Most of the leaders said that at first they tried to use their influence and then they use power tools. Leaders use power and influence approximately the same with a slight dominance effect.

Although most experts dealt with leadership acknowledge that influence is one of the essential components of leadership, there is no clear definition of influence, or characteristic of what an influence by a leader actually means in practice. Based on research, we found out that leaders perform their influence mainly through explanation, discussion, providing examples, speeches at meetings, and presentations, as well as by identifying and awarding for meaningful goals. Interference happens according to the words of the leader T *"to get the people on your side"*, or according to the leader R *"to inspire employees to a particular thing and want them to make it the same way as me"*. According to the leader J, *"each situation is dealt easily if you convince people and get them on your side."* Influencing is primarily understood by leaders as an explanation and convincing.

Leaders influence in various ways their direct subordinates and other employees at lower levels of management, who are hierarchically distant from them. The influencing of direct subordinates occurs more frequently, ranging from a daily impact to an influence at about once a week. Leaders influence other employees on average a few times a year. A different need of influencing people is also related to the length of an employee's employment in the company. New leaders influence people frequently. With an increasing time of the length of employment in the business the frequency of influencing decreases.

In the case of multinational companies, there are also “forces majeures” from the foreign headquarters, which are mandatory decisions from the above and must be respected in a local company. Leaders are of the opinion that even in the central prescriptive decisions it is needed to explain the importance of the decisions needs to be explained by a leader, as well as the expected benefits have to be explained to the employee so that the employee identifies with this decision, thus combining the power operation and informal influence. The employee should adopt such a decision and see it as the decision by mutual agreement. In practice, therefore, there is an overlap between the use of power tools and influence. While leaders perceive influencing as the function performed continuously through their daily work, they use power tools only in certain situations. They highlight that power should be taken openly, reasonably, in a mature manner and with an appropriate level of self-control.

The research project has confirmed that one of the essential roles of the leader is to maintain effective relations between them and the team members and between the team members themselves. We found out that leaders often perform this leadership activity and 60% of leaders believe that this component of leadership is crucial for the efficiency and prosperity of the company. The leader V in the interview specified that “*the most important in human relations is to teach people that they are not competitors, but have to work together for the benefit of the customer*”. Similarly, the leader L says that “*he does not support the competitiveness within the team, although he ascribes great importance to individual responsibility*”. Via the influence of mutual trust and cooperation of employees leaders soften tensions between workers and supports communication between them, deal with conflicts between people and departments in an organization and try to maintain a balance in natural competition between workers and the team spirit which is essential for teamwork. This finding refutes the presumption of “loneliness at the top” [15], which is often mentioned in the literature in connection with the top leaders. No leader is lonely due to a large number of formal and informal meetings. This is confirmed by John Kotter, who found out that “the leaders spend alone less than ten percent of their working time” [15].

Further, we have found out that leaders influence positive attitudes of employees towards a company, emphasizing the need for trust, leadership by example and meetings with a leader and the company employees in the performance of leadership activities. The finding that people build a positive attitude towards the company through a positive relationship with the leader is very important.

The Research Results of Inspiration and Charisma

The second part of the research project focuses on the use of inspiration and charisma in the performance of leadership roles. We were very interested in what resources the leaders often inspire their followers and whether they rely on their charisma in their everyday life. We discovered that leaders inspire their collaborators, especially if the preparation and implementation of a particular change is prepared,

and the staff is required to leave the routines and stereotypes of behaviour and replace them with new ones. The leader again, like in the course of influencing, explains the importance and consequence of changes to the enterprise. The aim is to make the employee to identify more easily with a new idea. To be inspired by leaders means to explain and support staff in positive thinking. The leader G notes: *"Employees need to know exactly what to do and how to do it. But the role of a leader is also to inspire them – to refill the petrol that will drive them forward."* According to leaders, inspiration is also needed in times of crisis, when people tend to give up, lose the sense of a particular activity, work or project are negatively attacked by the competition.

Participating leaders agreed that while inspiring a personal example of leadership is important. Employees must feel that leaders care about them, even in difficult situations they are with them and employees must consider them as models. Employees see how a leader acts and perceive whether the leader himself is internally excited for a particular thing. If leaders themselves are not excited, they cannot inspire others. The leader R said that *"a leader is the one who has to deliver enthusiasm"*, literally *"the fuel of the project"*. According to the words of the leader N: *"People need to be drawn into the process."* If the leader has to become an example for other workers he has to be in touch with his people and develop an ongoing dialogue on an individual and collective level, while the leader and an employee have to act as equal partners, who speak directly and honestly together. The leader T points out, *"if the leader wants to inspire others, he has to be the bearer of values and goals to which he wants to get people and employees must trust him"*. The leader N said in an interview that *"he cares about inspiring people."* Inspiration is in his opinion *"based on an individual basis, a leader must know the motivation, past experience of an employee. It is important to talk to people. Otherwise, the inspiration is only superficial."*

Leaders inspire also by using past experience. They are trying to find a model situation when the realization has been successful. They show employees examples of successful decisions and projects that were implemented in the past and encourage them to participate in solving by using their own thoughts and ideas. While inspiring, leaders start with the assumption that most people like new things, so the best is to inspire by objectives and an employee has to think about the way, the manner in which they will realize these objectives. Achievement and success inspire to the next job. Leaders inspire through discussions, performances and presentations at meetings, delegation of competences to colleagues who represent them at the time of absence or send an inspiring e-mail to subordinate or recommend an interesting literature. The leader has to evoke an atmosphere in the workplace, where people will be able to make new decisions and challenges.

The results of the research project show that leaders have a clear idea (vision) of the future direction of the company and are transferring it to the staff mainly through interviews and appearances at meetings and consultations, as well as their daily activities. Leaders involved ascribe the vision a great importance according to the efficiency and prosperity of the company, which are conditioned by a uniform

procedure for all employees. The leaders agreed that transferring the vision to workers was concentrated in time when the objectives and strategies based on the vision were defined. Leaders recall and promote the vision, let us say, thoughts to their direct subordinates at about once a week. Distant subordinates are exposed to this activity less frequently, about once a year, especially at meetings with all employees of the company. The frequency of this leadership activity also depends on the success of the company. In good times, less is said about the vision; when the company fails, the vision is discussed more often. The leader F stressed that *“transferring the vision to workers is a complicated matter because it is very difficult to ensure that the vision is in undistorted form given to the lower levels of the organizational structure”*. According to the leader L, it is important that the *“vision has to be in the background of all operations in the company to employees so that the employees can rely on it while making decisions”*. The leader does not have to talk about the vision constantly, consistency between his words (vision) and actions (reality) is important. A key role is a purposeful vision and the constant repetition and reminding of the vision.

Personality of a leader plays an important role for inspiration, we explore how much importance the leaders ascribe to charisma in leadership. Charismatic leaders have some exceptional personal characteristics and exhibit a specific type of behaviour. Two-thirds of surveyed leaders are aware of their charisma, but they do not work purposefully with it. Only one leader said that he tries to “grow” charisma. The leaders in the studied companies have the opinion that the charisma is essential for leadership. Charismatic leader is able to attract, persuade and get people to his side in a natural way. He acts positively on people, builds trust, and therefore people follow him. If leaders are not charismatic, they have to use power. Leaders often perceived charisma as a fluid. It is interesting that the term fluid was used originally in the older physics and means “a presumed invisible substance of radiating energy.” Participating leaders thus perceive charisma as a radiation of a person and it creates atmosphere.

We examined whether leaders used more inspiration or charisma in practice. More than half of the participating leaders said that they utilized a combination of them in ratio of 50 to 50. Three leaders said that they used inspiration in their work. Two leaders use charisma and inspiration in the ratio of 20 to 80. The leader A uses charisma and inspiration in ratio of 30 to the 70. None of them stated they did not use any inspiration at all, or that they solely relied on their charisma.

Although most of the leaders who participated in the research project, believe that charisma is a prerequisite for leadership, there have been some suggestions that *“charisma is a highly overrated attribute or the manner of appearance, which does not really has to bring anything to working environment”* and it can be misused by leaders to manipulate his colleagues.

Further, we asked leaders whether it was necessary for the leader to be original. The majority of leaders (60%) think that a leader does not have to be original, but must support the originality, and the bearer of ideas is the whole team. The leader X thinks that *“leadership is not about originality”*. Similarly, leader R said that *“originality is*

not the value to a leader in itself". This finding contradicts the previously established opinion that originality is essential to leadership. Leaders underlined the importance of the leader to look at things in an unconventional way; the leader has to be able to provoke discussion and encourage new, original way to solve problems. The leader has to have the insight and he should bring a different opinion to projects based on knowledge of the broader context of the problem. Originality is particularly important for the leader in the development of the future direction of the company. No correlation between originality and industry in which leader operates appeared. In practice, our hypothesis that the most original will be leaders of IT companies and leaders working in the media was not confirmed.

Based on interviews with the participating leaders, we found out that the most important factors that crucially influence the creative climate in the workplace were friendly interpersonal relations, interviews, informal discussions, which could be a source of productivity growth and new ideas through creative exchange of ideas, challenging questions asked by leaders; however, their effectiveness depends on questioning techniques and a leadership style applied by the leader. On the other hand, the mandatory style of leadership does not create this kind of climate.

The Research Results of Encouraging and Mobilizing

The third part of the research on leadership questioned under what circumstances, and how leaders in practice, encouraged and mobilized their colleagues. Although leaders perceive encouraging as continuous activity, they point that there are situations in which it is extremely impressive, for example, when an employee is failing or he is afraid of competition or has disagreements with colleagues or some personal problems. The leader encourages his employees, because he feels, even if they fail that they have the potential and preconditions to handle challenges. Leaders then point out to their people that they also have another chance, because in business usually one project out of ten is successful. Encouragement is important if employees are from various reasons exposed to negative attacks from the public; it is related especially to companies that provide paid services to the public. The leader M in stress situations *"talks to employees about the reasons for their uncertainty and explains or denies if a matter of concern are misleading reports about the company in the media"*.

Leaders encourage employees mainly through interviews and praise. When encouraging they use positive characteristics, values and abilities of a person and are trying to create a partnership and lead a fair interview. The leader CH says that *"people must feel that the leader believes in their abilities based on their behaviour and performance"*. Encouraging is considered by leaders as a daily matter. The leader R says that *"he encourages constantly, stops at employees in the office and is interested in them"*. Leaders encourage so that employees informally talk about ordinary things, such as family or sports; they walk round all the offices in a company and exchange a few words with people, ask them for what they are doing and how they are getting on, or how they were able to solve a particular problem. It is important that the leaders

should be interested in his colleagues. Leaders in interviews highlighted the importance of informal discussions directly at the workplace when encouraging co-workers. This is confirmed by the statement of Jack Welch, the longest serving Executive Director of General Electric: "Every moment you spend in your office, you're useless." The leader K is aware of the importance of encouragement, because he "*stresses the importance of hearing and the feedback from the leader in encouraging as one of the main leadership activities*". The leader S adds that "*people often do not believe in his abilities*". The leader S then provides examples of difficult tasks, challenges to his subordinates, "*which they have successfully managed in the past themselves or by their colleagues*". The leader M often encourages by "*describing his own experience of the past*".

Original practice of encouraging was presented by two leaders, according to which an employee may not find encouragement always pleasant, because the encouragement can imply criticism as well. Leaders believe that criticism is actually encouraging, because it signals how the leader depends on a particular person. The leader O agrees with this view and states his own experience on this topic: "*Sometimes a person gets scolded, but ultimately it is encouraging because it is a sign that a leader depends on that person.*"

Based on the findings of the research can be stated that leaders encourage employees to voice their ideas and thoughts. They use resources and attitudes, which are tolerance to errors and unconventional ideas, provide rewards for active work, support informal atmosphere, especially informal discussions between the workers, asking challenging questions by leaders, creation of company culture that encourages creativity among employees. Trust between leaders and employees also plays an important role.

The new discovery is a fact that leaders devote a little attention to strengths of their employees and also rarely praise people for a well-done job. However, surveys show that "subordinates want to hear a word thank you from their boss more frequently" [7]. Leaders criticize more than praise, which is not correct, because leaders must be especially interested in the strengths of the people. One way to show employees their priority is coaching from the leader. In the literature on leadership a very common assumption is that a good leader must be automatically a good coach. An article published in the "Harvard Business Review" refuted this myth of leaders. Good leaders are rarely good coaches [8]. This is confirmed by the results of our research project which has showed that leaders act as coaches to their staff infrequently only in certain areas. Exploring the role of a leader as a coach is a subject to continuing research of leadership.

The results, which were obtained through interviews with leaders showed that leaders considered providing feedback as an important part of their work, but usually it was not a quick feedback. Speed for feedback is not considered a crucial factor, which is inconsistent with existing knowledge about providing feedback. The reasons are mainly the ones that leaders need more time to analyse and understand the broader context of a particular situation and the fact that it is not possible to provide a rapid feedback to distant indirect subordinates.

In the literature about leadership, mobilization is referred to as a leadership activity only very rarely. The research aim was to determine whether leaders used mobilization in their everyday practice, how they perceived this practice, and under what circumstances they mobilized their employees. The results showed that while leaders perceive encouraging as a continuous activity of the leader, mobilization is necessary only in exceptional circumstances.

We have found out that leaders mobilize their employees especially in setting non-standard goals, or in non-standard situations, when setting new tasks or in crisis situations. When mobilizing, leaders set a sufficient and ambitious goal which has to be fulfilled in non-standard time frames. Thanks to these employees they learn something new and make progress in their skills and careers. If the goals are standard, the leader does not have to mobilize employees, simply encourages them. Leaders also mobilise their subordinates to handle the new challenges in front of which employees have often respect. In these exceptional circumstances, the role of leader is "to remove anxiety of their subordinates and deliver a feeling of security" [18]. While mobilizing in crisis situations, leaders can show that they stand in the middle of the team, help the team and are looking for solutions. As a result of this, people are willing to do more on their own initiative and offer a lot more than they must, or than is expected of them.

Leaders mobilize their employees, even if the results are worse or below average. In interviews they indicated that these situations occur rarely. These are usually problems with the implementation of a specific project and the correction consists of maximizing job performance. Leaders agreed that they can not mobilize all the time. Either the employee "bestirs oneself" or they have to leave the company. Leaders also mobilize in conflicts between employees, if the party defeated needs to be encouraged to further work.

In the analysis of this part of the research project on leadership, we found out that a third of the participating leaders used encouraging in their everyday practice, but mobilized rarely; their ratio in encouraging and mobilizing is around 80 to 20. One quarter of leaders encourage approximately in 60% of situations and mobilizing in 40% of cases. Seventeen percent of leaders often use encouraging and mobilization in their work. Twelve percent said that the proportion of encouraging and mobilization in their work is 70 to 30. Six percent of leaders are mobilizing only in ten per cent of situations (90/10); and 6% of leaders state that they do not mobilize at all.

The Research Results of Trust and Commitment

The leaders of the most successful companies are characterised by systematic and diligent building of the atmosphere of trust. Various leadership researches have shown a relationship between trust and performance of employees. The purpose of the research project was to investigate whether the effective leadership is based on the trust or whether it functions upon/on the ground of written or other commitments between the leader and his employees, for instance "I will give you this if you do that." We were also interested what leaders did to strengthen people's trust towards them.

The results of the research have shown that leaders consider trust to be one of the most important factors of a successful leadership. The employees trust those leaders that are consistent, so that people are well aware of what they can expect of their leader. Francis Bacon explains the consistency by these words: "Try to keep a steady direction. This way people will know what to expect" [12]. If the leader wants to strengthen trust towards himself, he has to keep his promises and deals, he has to find time to listen to people, he should be interested in them and he cannot humiliate them. According to McElhaney [12] "in its simplest form, trust comes from an unbroken promise". The leader U indicates in an interview that trust has to be built because it is a long-run path. He emphasizes that "*trust cannot be gained by explanation, it can only be built by acts. Not what leader says, but what he does, shows his character. Competence and proficiency are the shortest paths to trust.*" Leaders think that employees trust them only when they gain achievements, so people can see that the leader is successful, that he achieved something and has a successful career behind. For the building of the trust, it is important for the leader to communicate with their employees about any change in a company. The leader has to be an example of following the principles and rules that they require from his employees to be followed. The leader cannot expect from their employees a behaviour that they themselves cannot obtain. The leader Y has a very simple manual for creating trust between him and his employees: "*A leader tells what he is going to do and he will do it. If this happens several times, people will trust him.*"

From the interviews with leaders we have discovered more relevant facts about relationships between leaders and subordinates. Even though the majority of specialized literature about leadership emphasizes that leaders must treat each employee individually, this approach does not always work in practice. Leaders agreed that individual approach is possible only towards immediate workers and not even on a daily basis. As the leader Y said: "*To treat every worker individually is energetically very demanding and slow-paced.*" Similarly, the leader T declared that "*a leader must have a certain standard approach towards his employees.*" A common assumption that the leader approaches his workers as equal has not been confirmed either. Leaders are aware that position and responsibility that they possess creates a natural barrier between them and their subordinates. The leader CH thinks that "*a certain distance is natural, because a leader has a different responsibility than his subordinates.*" According to leaders, this barrier does not have to cause negative influence on the relationships in a company or on the creative atmosphere, but it implies a certain departure in understanding the leadership in theory and in everyday practice. Even the image of a leader is seen as "a hero with superhuman power" who knows everything, resolves everything and helps everyone is not true in practice. Even though leaders try to help their employees in work as well as in private lives, they do not have much time for this next for their other leadership activities. The finding that according to leaders it is not necessary for the leader to always control their emotions and moods is also surprising. The leader R thinks that "*emotions are powerful tools and if they are used properly they can help a leader to get people on his side*".

The leader V uses only minimum commitments, because his relationships with his subordinates are based on trust from the beginning of doing business. Similarly, the leader E thinks *“leaders do not need written commitments”*. The leader N indicated in an interview: *“Trust is something that I care about. Without trust there cannot be a commitment, without trust, nobody can sit on a chair.”* Likewise, the leader CH has the opinion that leadership cannot exist without trust. According to him, *“relationships that are based on trust are the most stable ones and have the biggest value for the leadership”*.

On the other hand, the leader F has the opinion *“a leadership cannot be just about trust”*. In a company there are both written and non-written commitments, and the combination of trust and commitments is important. The leader G also perceives trust and commitment as very closely connected. He defines commitment as *“defining the rules”* and trust is according to him *“a result of constant fulfilment of the commitments”*. The leader T even declared that *“the formal commitments represent the necessary instruments in the company”*. He perceives trust as an ancestor of the commitment, because upon this a leader can estimate whether the employee is able to handle the given project or task. The leader P indicates that *“relationships between him and his co-workers are from the beginning based on commitments; trust comes later, so the building of trust is gradual”*.

The Research Results of the Association of Followers and Succession

In the final part of the research project we have mainly examined the processes of association of followers, succession, talent management and training of the next generation of leaders. Leaders are well aware of the necessity to gain and preserve their followers for the fulfilment of the vision and common business goals. They are trying to surround themselves by their allies, so a social network is established which supports a leader. The leader O gives his opinion as follows: *“allies should be diverse (young without experience, older, introverts and extroverts, foreigners, and locals) for the reason of the risk distribution”*. The leader N accentuates that *“people have to express trust and as long as this trust is mutual, they are allies”*. By means of the secondary episodic research which aim was to reveal how leaders are perceived by their followers (the experimental sample comprised of 13 staff), we have found out that employees follow those leaders who are characterised by directness, openness, honesty, and who are moral and consistent. We received various answers to the question why the employees follow their leader, completed in Chart 1.

Table 1

The assumptions of leaders to pooling followers

<i>Why do employees follow their leader?</i>
<i>“Mutual similarity in people management, decision-making steps, behaviour, shared values, cooperation with people, creating ideal conditions for a strongly motivated succession of a leader.”</i>
<i>“Straightness, openness, adherence to the word and deed.”</i>
<i>“Straightness, reflection ability, the ability to name things in the right name, go to the root of things.”</i>
<i>“Honesty, openness, self-discipline, a proactive approach to change.”</i>
<i>“Leader is consistent, builds excellent atmosphere, can be read in his decisions, does not fall into too much detail, constantly motivates by his example and attitude.”</i>
<i>“It’s fun to work with him, he is creating conditions where everyone can achieve his goals.”</i>
<i>„He keeps the conditions in which the private life has the same weight as working. He is consistently moral.”</i>
<i>“Experience, openness, professionalism, fairness.”</i>

We have discovered that in the majority of companies whose leaders took part in the research, the talent management is formally implemented. Two leaders (8%) declare that there is no space in the company for that. Two leaders think that it is not necessary to have a formalised system of developing the new talents in a company, because people grow naturally and they can make achievements in a company without talent management. Likewise, two leaders indicate that for now they do not have a formalised system of working with talents, but they are considering creating one.

It is an irony that even though the majority of companies do possess a formalised system of working with talented workers, leaders do not trust talent management. Only a quarter of leaders indicated that they believed in talent management. The leader Y emphasized the task of a leader as a teacher. He declared that *“he believes in talent management even if there is a risk that they will lose the employee later”*. According to his own words, the leader S also *“believes in the talent management, but he finds it necessary to secure it with the contract between the company and the employee, which commits the worker to stay in the company for some time”*. On the other hand, three quarters of the leaders do not trust the talent management. The leader P says *“it is not profitable for companies to invest to the talent management, because it is a huge investment and the worker will not eventually stay in the company, because the competition will overpay him”*. Likewise, the leader L thinks that *“today’s working force strongly fluctuates mainly abroad, so it is better to buy people”*. Similarly, the leader K *“has been through disappointments with the talent management, so his*

attitude towards it is restrained". The leader CH thinks "*talent management is a too risky field, because often the corporation brings up talents for the competition*".

Every leader has to count with the arrival of the day when he will have to pass along the company's leading. Therefore they should choose their successors and determine the rules of their preparation. According to the leader Y, "*the succession is a topic that has to be constantly resolved*". The leader O thinks that "*key people of the company have to have two to three successors*". The leader B declared that "*he already has his successor and he is working systematically on being able to take over his tasks and commissions any time.*" The leader A revealed that he "*plans to leave the function of the chief executive after completing a specific project. He has already chosen his successor, he was preparing for ten years, while this person began in the company as a middle level referee*". J. Collins [4] found out that the best companies in the business history considered succession as a continual process and they planned it long before the real moment of succession for purpose of preparing the company so that it would be successful in the next generation, too. The findings of our research project about succession were surprising. Even though the choice and preparation of the successor belong, according to the majority of publications about leadership, to the most important tasks of every leader, in practice a very small part of the investigated leaders are devoted to it. We have discovered that more than a half of the examined leaders do not search for a successor at this time. The objective reason for this behaviour is the fact that succession solving is not in the leader's competence, shareholders or stockholders make decisions about the successor. Part of the involved leaders does not perceive the succession as an actual topic, according to their words: "*there is enough time for that*" or "*I still have a lot of energy and experience*" perhaps even "*I will do a lot of work by myself*". Leaders themselves concern with succession only as a representation between the owners of the company (incomplete form of succession), or by means of delegation and procuration, only in the case of absence. The last reason why leaders do not pay attention to the succession issue is their private and family life. Their children are too young to take over the leadership of the company.

Discussion

The results of the research project imply that *power* and *influence* are two components of leadership, which mutually complement each other in the common business practice, even though they differ in their content. We have found out that their usage depends on the concrete situation. If there is a little time to make some decision or the company does not possess the adequate resources that are related to the given problem, the usage of power influence is as natural for the leaders as the assertion of the informal influence in the organization. Leaders, however, agreed that every situation is solved more easily if a leader gains employees on his side by convincing them to help him and support him. Influence is a much more effective way of involving the workers to the process of achieving the specified goals than the usage

of power influence. Influencing people is one of the central and decisive components used in characterising the nature of leadership. For example, G. Yukl defines leadership as follows: "Leadership is the process of influencing others to understand and agree what needs to be done and how to do it, and at the same time it is also a process of facilitating individual and collective efforts to achieve meaningful tasks and common objectives" [21]. Leaders themselves perceive the influencing as a continual process, as a continuously performed function by means of everyday work. On the basis of the research we have found out that leaders perform their influence in practice mostly by explanation, discussion, by providing examples, acting on the meetings and presentations as well as by determining meaningful goals. The previous research results indicate that successful influence of employees by a leader gives them these requirements: ability to analyse the given problem, ability to explain, to introduce their own opinion and support it by an adequate logical and emotional argument, to perceive wider connections of problems and decisions, ability to convincingly act at meetings and presentations. We assume that stated requirements for leadership function can be learned, which discredits the common idea that the leadership is birth given and cannot be learned. M. Armstrong believes that while a leader may have conferred power and authority, it does not ensure that he will be able to achieve results, especially if it means the involvement of his colleagues or superiors. The role of a leader is to convince other people to help him and support him. People go the direction that leaders wish only if their leaders will be able to effectively influence them. [2]

Many experts consider the ability to inspire as one of the key activities, or qualities of a successful leader. Kotter believes that "Leadership defines what the future should look like, brings people with vision together and inspires them to achieve it, regardless of the complications." [11] According to Adair and Reed "leadership is associated with inspiration when the leader can with his words and by his personal example inspire other employees and achieve their maximum motivation." [1] Investigated leaders are using combination of *inspiration* and *charisma* in their practice. They accord appreciable meaning to inspiration and creation of creative environment on workplace. The inspiration is needed mainly in realisation of changes and in crucial situations. The importance of inspiration is also highlighted by the ascertainment that the leader does not need to be original but has to support originality in his followers. Although most of the leaders have the opinion that charisma is an inevitable assumption of leadership, there also appeared negative perception of charisma and negative influence of charismatic leaders in a company. The speculations about the interchange of the leader's charisma and ego appear more frequently, and also that the charisma is not necessarily needed for leadership and that charisma could be even harmful for company and followers, because "illusion about leaders inerrancy suppresses proposals and criticism of followers, delimits apprenticeship in organisation, development and planning of future succession" [21]. Collins [4] also assumes that one of the most harmful trends in recent history is a tendency to choose charismatic leaders with the status of celebrity and to omit potential but less

shining leaders. The acting of charismatic leaders and their influence to company and followers is an interesting subject for continuance in study of the leadership.

The role of the leader is not only to evoke passion and inspire employees to fulfil the vision and objectives of a company, but also continuously maintain their dedication and effort throughout encouragement. According to McKenna and Meister leader can contribute to success of an organization that he "promotes thoughts and ideas of others, encourages creativity and gives energy and enthusiasm." [13] Real leaders recognize that the success of the organization depends on their ability to support other people. Leaders who participated in this study differentiate between *encouragement* and *mobilisation* and effectively use mobilisation in their leadership work. Concerning encouragement, it is important for the leader to give people the feeling of confidence and to be able to get over uncertainty of their people. People will believe that together they can get over any kind of barrier, if there is a trust between leader and them. Leaders delegate competencies and they try to provide their employees enough space and responsibility for their own decision making. Indeed, criticism can be encouragement as well. This information is contrary to the stereotypes about leadership reported in the literature, which does not pay almost any attention to constructive criticism, or does not give any incentive effect on employee performance. Leaders do not impute relevance to feedback only as a reformative measure, but there often appeared in interviews an encouraging aspect of providing feedback. Leaders in contrary do not pay any attention to the feedback from the bottom, which is provided by the subordinates to their leaders. The knowledge of how leaders perceive feedback from the bottom is another challenge for leadership research.

Interviews with leaders showed that people trust a leader who is consistent, keeps his promises and agreements, who is successful and interested in their co-workers. Investigated leaders give greater importance to the employees trust to themselves than to trust that they themselves devote to their subordinates. Leaders' trust towards their employees grows slowly and it usually is not an absolute confidence. The relationship of trust between leaders and subordinates should be naturally balanced, because an imbalance can cause poor use of human potential of organization. The finding that the idea of the leader as always "perfect robot with a stone face" belongs to the past is also interesting. Leaders are aware that emotions are a powerful tool and if they express them it may have a positive effect on their relationship with employees. Findings from the research say that it is not necessary for the leader to control his emotions and moods at all times. Although there are leaders whose leadership is based solely on trust or on commitment, we have found that most leaders use a combination of both. According to the leaders, *trust* and *commitment* are closely related, and the majority of relationships between leader and subordinate include both of these components. The simplest formula says that commitment is a voluntary acceptance of obligations and duties to the organization or individual, and the practice of mutual obligations and promises that play a major role in the life of organizations. G. Yukl defines commitment in leadership as follows: "The obligation arises when the target person (employee) internally agrees with the decision or requirement of a leader and makes

a great effort to implement this requirement, to effectively implement the decision.” [21] Some leaders perceive a commitment as setting the rules, while trust is the result of continuing fulfilment of commitments. Other leaders on the contrary perceive trust as a condition of future liabilities.

The research found out that *employees follow those leaders* who are bluntness, open, honest, moral, and consistent. The requirement for good behaviour and acting of the leaders belong to the urgent needs of the practice. Experience and expertise are indispensable condition for the leadership positions, but employees expect from their leaders something more. They are only willing to follow those leaders who are characterised by certain values and certain behaviour. They will only follow those leaders who have ethical and professional qualities in harmony. Succession planning and talent management are processes that are very closely related. Better ways of working with talents over time will generate better leaders. Formal talent management system exists mainly in local branches of multinational companies that often take it from their foreign headquarters. The issues of managing talent and succession are less often present in companies own by home owners only [20]. In the majority of enterprises the talent management is formally implemented, but the leaders do not trust talent management. They claim that it is a huge investment, which does not have to be returned to the company regarding the great young talents working instability. The findings of our research that focus on the topic of **succession** were very surprising. Although according to the majority of scholarly publications on leadership the choice of a successor is one of the most important tasks of any leader, only a very small part of the studied leaders concerns with succession in practice. The topic of succession is not seen as relevant in businesses for such reasons as a relatively young age of a leader, lack of competence of the leader in this field or because the succession is decided by the shareholders.

Conclusion

A true leader is not only characterised by their personality traits and characteristics or his power position, but mainly by their knowledge, skills, leadership style and content of the work, and finally the results of the managed company. When looking for new leaders, not only their professionalism, character, temperament will be crucial, but also how these elements can be used in the practical implementation of leadership. Leadership should be seen more widely and next to formal prerequisites for leadership work; it is useful to examine how the leader manifests himself by specific and typical leadership activities. Significant is what the leaders actually do in everyday practice, because the leadership is expected to achieve concrete and useful progress.

The research project examined the nature of leadership work through the analytical scheme that puts into interaction the typical business leadership activities. Pairs of leadership activities are *power and influence, charisma and inspiration, encouragement and mobilization, trust and commitment, supporters association and succession*. Such an arrangement is not confrontational, because activities are interconnected and operate

in continual dependence. As a result of partial contradictions some communicating tension was created, as well as space for controversy and debate.

We have found out that leadership is in very colourful and diverse in real life. Leaders rarely resort to extremes in practice, for example, absolutisation of power tools, rather we found out a combination of leadership activities, e.g. combining power and influence and trust and commitment. We examined the leader's activity such as mobilisation and utilisation of commitments, which is given only minimal attention, in the literature on leadership and we described specific situations in which leaders perform these leadership activities. Revelations in talent management and succession area of the surveyed companies were surprising and through these we refuted some of generally recognized among experts in leadership, for example, leaders do not trust the talent management and most leaders do not currently recognise the topic of succession.

It is anticipated that findings from the research could be used to establish the standard procedure of the leadership actions, which would measure and evaluate the level of true leadership, let us say leadership potential candidates for top management positions. The research results can be used to adjust the reference level (benchmark) of leadership actions of managers who have an ambition to be leaders, and so to develop and improve their leadership skills.

Exploring the nature of leadership work may result in increasing its quality and effectiveness, thus contributing to the success of large corporations and small businesses. The research project also revealed new topics in leadership research, namely the role of the leader as a coach, actions of charismatic leaders and their influence on followers and, feedback from below that leaders often underestimate.

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