

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LEADERSHIP STYLE AND SUCCESS IN SOCIAL ENTERPRISES – EVIDENCE FROM POLAND

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Abstract

The contemporary organisations, functioning in a turbulent environment, face the need to meet many complex requirements, which demands different way of managing an organisation. This also applies to leaders in the third sector, who face the challenge of realizing both economic and social mission. Therefore, in order to operate effectively, social enterprises are in the need of proper leadership, as the success of any organisation depends largely on the senior management.

The aim of this article is to identify relationship between leadership style and perceived success in social enterprises. Using data from executives employed in 141 social enterprises (social cooperatives) in Poland key hypothesis is confirmed.

Keywords: social entrepreneurship, social enterprise, leadership, success.

1. Introduction

Modern organisations operating in the turbulent environment are confronted with many complex requirements. This also applies to social entrepreneurs who face the challenge of implementing the mission combining social and economic goals (Muscat and Whitty, 2009). The necessity to comply with external business requirements, the volatility of the environment and dynamic changes occurring in the third sector call for the presence of managers who will be able not only to deal with financial matters competently, but also use human resources optimally (Starnawska, 2014). The success of every organisation depends, to a large extent, on its top executives, so the effective operation of social enterprises also relies on its leadership (Spineli, 2006). The aim of this paper is to attempt to answer the following ques-

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tions: is there a relationship between leadership style and the success of social enterprise, and if so, which style is more effective.

2. Importance of leadership for social entrepreneurs

Leadership is defined both as a process involving influencing other people without resorting to constraints and a process of supporting individual and collective efforts undertaken to achieve common goals (Yukl, 2008). In an effective organisation, leadership is one of the key elements of management activity and involves such human resources organisation that allows the right people to focus on the right tasks and have access to the right information and tools, while at the same time the incentives and control systems applied help them to use the tasks effectively and economically (Muscat and Whitty, 2009). Leadership is therefore, and in a broader sense, associated to the process of influencing people to reach a specific goal; but it is also associated with the process of motivating people to follow together towards a goal; selflessly and for the greater good of the community. The role of leadership is particularly important in terms of an organisation's growth, which becomes apparent while analysing the initial stages of the operation of social enterprises, which often experience management-related problems (Smith and Woodworth, 2012). These problems result from the fact that the leaders of newly established social enterprises neither have a clear vision of their organisation's market growth, nor possess management competencies required on the free market or adequate personality traits, such as charisma. Moreover, the fact that social leaders are driven by their social mission obviously affects how they perceive and assess opportunities (Mort et al., 2002). As subject literature often automatically labels social entrepreneurs as leaders, it is worth looking at some of the definitions appearing in the literature.

From definitions presented above social entrepreneur emerges as a strong and internally motivated individual, devoted to his activities while being engaged in solving the existing problems (Mason, 2012). Cited definitions put emphasis on vision, leadership, ideas and ethical values aiming at generating changes in the social structure. As noted by Barendsen and Gardner (2004), social entrepreneurs are devoted to solving social problems in a spirit of entrepreneurship and business acumen. Therefore, they are not only employers, but also visionaries, leaders or business leaders, and serve as educators or mentors, who provide its employees with practical skills and social values (Pache and Chowdhury, 2012). Regardless definition, these are the people who launch and run social enterprises, and largely determine the way it functions and operates. The ability to build organisations around the opportunity, and then manage it in an efficient way, is an issue that concerns not only the companies competing in the private sector, but also social enterprises (Germak and Singh, 2010). The fundamental objective of any organisation should be to achieving success, understood as a prosperity and successful result of undertaken activities,

as well as the organisation's ability to grow in the long term (Penc-Pietrzak, 2010). Hence, arising need for leadership, consisting of communicating a vision, development of organisational structures and processes, change management and creating opportunities (Barendsen and Gardner, 2004). Numerous researches confirm that the personality, charisma and leadership skills are crucial factors in the development of social enterprises, as for the proper functioning they need a strong leader understood as a change agent, who supports and implements changes and is involved in conducting and coordinating the venture (Sharir and Lerner, 2006; Wronka 2013) The implementation of these activities requires the ability to inspire people and to acquire the necessary resources. Successful leaders understand both needs and perspectives of their followers, adjust leadership style and are able to manage networks and stakeholders, which in turn translates into the success, effectiveness and results achieved by the organisation.

Table 1. Definitions of social entrepreneur

Source	Definition
J. Thompson, G. Alvy and A. Lees (2000)	People who realize where there is an opportunity to satisfy some unmet need that the state welfare system will not or cannot meet, and who gather together the necessary resources (generally people, often volunteers, money and premises) and use these to "make a difference".
B. Drayton (2002)	They have the same core temperament as their industry-creating, business entrepreneur peers (...). What defines a leading social entrepreneur? First, there is no entrepreneur without a powerful, new, system change idea. There are four other necessary ingredients: creativity, widespread impact, entrepreneurial quality, and strong ethical fiber.
G.S. Mort, J. Weerawardena and K. Carnegie (2003)	Those who are driven by the social mission of creating better social value than their competitors which results in their displaying entrepreneurially virtuous behavior.
D. Bornstein (2004)	Social entrepreneurs are people with new ideas to address major problems who are relentless in the pursuit of their visions (...) who will not give up until they have spread their ideas as far as they possibly can.
R.L. Korosec and E.M Berman (2006)	Social entrepreneurs are defined as individuals or private organizations that take the initiative to identify and address important social problems in their communities. They exhibit vision, energy, and ability to develop new ways of alleviating social problems.

Source: Own elaboration

3. The relationship between a leadership style and the success of a social enterprise

According to Prabhu (1999), our knowledge on social entrepreneurial leaders is inadequate, as no large sample studies exist which can be used for generalization and comparison. Few case accounts have the rich detail required to make adequate ideographic or content analytical studies. Although some exceptions exist – such as GEM Report on Social Entrepreneurship (2011) or Schwab's Foundation report Leadership in Social Enterprise (2014) – existing research focus mostly on leadership traits and characteristics of social entrepreneurs, namely, significant personal credibility, integrity and ability to generate followers' commitment to the project by framing it in terms of important social values, rather than purely economic terms (Borins, 2000; Waddock and Post, 1991). Empirical research regarding relationship between leadership style and success in social enterprises remains relatively scarce and – if only exists – take into consideration mainly qualitative studies (Borins, 2000; Prabhu, 1998; Shaw et al., 2002).

The existence of the relationship between a leadership style and performance or success of an enterprise is confirmed by numerous studies in commercial sector. Leadership style is proven to have a positive effect on employee involvement in the US apparel manufacturing industry (McCann, 2008), increased organisational involvement in the financial sector in China, India and Kenya (Walumbwa and Lawler, 2003), improved levels of innovation in organisations (Lee and Chang, 2006), the organisational effectiveness of business units (Howell et al., 2005), higher revenues (Ensley et al., 2006) and the financial performance of enterprises (Brown and Moshavi, 2002; Elenkov, 2002). Naturally, the question arises whether social enterprises are sufficiently similar to their profit-making counterparts for the relationship between a leadership style and the success of a for-profit enterprise to be generalized so that it can also be applied to organisations operating in the third sector. Leaders working in this sector have to focus both on the internal and external environment; they must plan, motivate, organise, make decisions, delegate, coordinate, report, supervise, manage finance and sometimes raise funds (Kurlito, 2012). Apart from the last activity, all the others correspond with similar activities undertaken by leaders working in the for-profit sector. Since social enterprises also have to reach a certain level of financial stability in order to provide services to the community, there is an expectation for the relationship between a leadership style and the success of an enterprise to emerge as it is in the case of the commercial sector. In the public sector, which bears a considerable resemblance to the social sector, Parry and Proctor-Thomson (2003) observed the impact of leadership on the performance and efficiency of public organisations. Thach and Thompson (2007), on the other hand, analysed 20 leadership competencies based on the interviews that they conducted with leaders working both in the for-profit and non-profit sectors. As a result, the

competencies were ranked in a similar manner, with integrity, cooperation and stimulating the development of other people on top of the ranking. Geer et al. (2008) studied how leadership affected the achievement of an organisation's mission, which is also related with an organisation's vision, constituting a crucial leadership component. As Moxley argues (2004), leaders in non-profits should use their competencies not only to create the vision of a future, but also to translate this vision into an organisation's mission. The competency involved in managing key stakeholder relations is a pivotal element of leadership in the social sector because it plays a crucial role in the legitimacy of and accountability for assigned responsibilities (Frączkiewicz-Wronka, 2010; Ospina et al., 2002). As some notice, for both non-profits and social enterprises managing stakeholder relationships is crucial, as its effectiveness is based on the ability to manage the concerns of stakeholders (Balser and McCluskey, 2005). A leader presenting his vision inside the organisation helps to promote the organisation's mission outside, while communicating the vision outside he acts towards strengthening the legitimacy of the organisation in the environment (Dart, 2004). Operating in an integral and ethical manner, the organisation demonstrates to stakeholders that it is trustworthy. Despite the existing ambiguities, empirical studies into leadership and organisational performance conducted so far allow for the conclusion that leadership has an effect on organisational performance and/or success of organisation. It needs to be noted though, that the frame of organisational effectiveness and/or success will be different from other organisations, as social enterprises desire to sponsor social change. Therefore, such an enterprise needs to be able to accomplish the mission and have sufficient level of legitimacy within the community in order to grow the organisation to the point that it will have a significant impact on society. While without financial stability social change is not going to happen, looking only at profits, revenue growth, or other financial returns does not account for the importance of mission to social enterprises.

4. Methodology

Data collection and sample

Data for this study come from a more extensive research project on the role of leadership and entrepreneurial orientation in success of social enterprises (on the basis of social cooperatives). The research was conducted in social coops based throughout Poland in 2013. The sample was selected randomly and comprised 141 enterprises, which is 17% of the general population (identified on the basis of EMES criteria). Managers of social enterprises (social entrepreneurs) received the questionnaire directly, as variables used in the study require information to be provided by people who have a good knowledge of the functioning and development of the whole organisation.

Measures

As many researchers imply, leadership style is particularly important for the achievement of an organisation's goals and employees' targets (Lynham and Chermack, 2006). Therefore, hypothesis 1 discusses the relationship between a leadership style and the perceived success of a social enterprise.

In order to study a leadership style measurement tool referred to as the "managerial grid" was used (Blake and Mouton, 1982). The study bases on the modified managerial grid presented by Tokarski (1996), already applied by Foltyn (2006), who researched leadership styles of 200 Polish managers. The respondents assessed a series of 16 statements, declaring how often a particular situation occurred and choose answers between: never (N), seldom (S), usually (U), often (O) or always (A).

The success of a social enterprise was measured with the use of existing scales, which will be discussed further in the text. The literature on organisational performance offers an on-going discussion on objective and subjective measures of evaluating performance of non-profit organisations and social enterprises (Lepoutre et al., 2013). Wall et al. (2004) emphasize that in most cases such organisations do not keep adequate financial records. Yamada and Eshima (2009) also indicate two benefits resulting from the use of subjective measures of organisational performance. First, in small and medium-sized businesses the fact that staff acknowledges the success or failure of the organisation strongly affects the choices made. Secondly, the use of subjective measures allows for the comparison of enterprises operating in different contexts (different industries, markets, economic conditions). What is more, Wall et al. (2004) conducted three studies on potential differences between objective and subjective measures and, as a result, they confirmed the conceptual validity of the two notions.

What makes social enterprises successful is the accomplishment of their mission, legitimacy and financial stability, and none of these measures is objective. Therefore, success of social enterprises was measured through three dimensions – the ability of the enterprise to accomplish its mission, level of legitimacy it has in the environment and how much financial stability it has as an organisation (Wronka, 2014). Within each of the dimensions, the adopted areas were presented as situations the frequency of which was assessed by respondents on a five-level Likert scale (from 1 = "I strongly disagree" to 5 = "I strongly agree"). Then, an arithmetic mean was calculated for the responses. In the area of financial stability three statements were used. The second dimension was studied on a four-item scale, used to measure the perceived legitimacy of an organisation, which drew on Cornforth (2001). The first two items refer to the trust and reputation of an organisation, while the remaining two to the experience and competencies of a board. The last three questions covered the accomplishment of a mission and were based on a three-item scale developed by Snow (1992), who studied how successfully non-profit organisations

accomplished their mission. Cronbach's alpha statistic for the measurement tool was 0.87. Such a high value of the statistic confirms the applicability of the tool due to its high reliability and consistency.

5. Research results

Hypothesis H1 was validated by comparing the average level of the measures of success for social enterprises as well as its particular dimensions for enterprises with different leadership styles. Since none of the analysed variables came from the population of normal distribution, the non-parametric Kruskal-Wallis test and the median test was used in order to validate the hypothesis of the lack of significant differences between particular groups in the entire population of social enterprises.

The tables below (Tables 2–9) present the compilation of the mean values of the analysed variables for individual groups together with the mean errors of their estimates. The values of test statistics for both tests are given below the tables. Relationships statistically significant at the level of significance at 0.1, 0.05 and 0.01 are marked with one, two and three asterisks respectively (differences between the groups at the likelihood of error are no higher than 10% – one asterisk; at the likelihood of error no higher than 5% – two asterisks; at the likelihood of error no higher than 1% – three asterisks).

The first table in each pair of tables shows the means for all the groups and the results of the tests comparing all groups jointly, whereas the second table presents the Kruskal-Wallis test for the comparison between the pairs of each group. The test results in the first table show whether any difference between the styles exists, whereas the second table shows between which groups the differences are statistically significant.

Table 2. Relationship between leadership style and perceived success

Success	Leadership style			
	Democratic (<i>N</i> = 29)	Integrated (participative) (<i>N</i> = 64)	Laissez-faire (<i>N</i> = 25)	Autocratic (<i>N</i> = 23)
Mean	3,65	4,06	3,80	3,98
Standard error	0,12	0,08	0,13	0,14
$H = 11,38^{***}$, $\chi^2 = 14,05^{***}$				

Source: Own elaboration

Table 3. Leadership style and perceived success – pairwise comparisons (Kruskal-Wallis)

Leadership style	Democratic	Integrated (participative)	Laissez-faire	Autocratic
Democratic		3,11**	0,73	1,79
Integrated (participative)			2,11	0,81
Laissez-faire				1,04
Autocratic				

Source: Own elaboration

As shown in Table 2, the highest level of success characterises social enterprises run by leaders representing integrated leadership style (4.06), while the lowest run by readers representing democratic style (3.65). While analysing the responses in Table 3, one may conclude that success of enterprises managed by integrated leaders is significantly higher than for those democratic. The difference between these two groups is statistically significant at the level of significance at 0.01, while the differences between the other leadership styles are not statistically significant. Thus, in social enterprises integrated leadership style leads to the highest level of success, while democratic to the lowest.

The following tables show the relationship between leadership style and the various dimensions of social enterprise success, namely financial stability (Tab. 4–5), legitimacy (Tab. 6–7) and the mission accomplishment (Tab. 8–9).

Table 4. Relationship between leadership style and perceived financial stability

Success	Leadership style			
	Democratic (<i>N</i> = 29)	Integrated (participative) (<i>N</i> = 64)	Laissez-faire (<i>N</i> = 25)	Autocratic (<i>N</i> = 23)
Mean	2,86	3,38	2,99	3,00
Standard error	0,20	0,13	0,21	0,22
$H = 6,40^*$, $\chi^2 = 4,28$				

Source: Own elaboration

Comparably as earlier, the highest level of financial stability characterises social enterprises run by leaders representing integrated (participative) leadership style

(3,38), while the lowest run by readers representing democratic style (Table 4). In that case, there is no certainty that the observed difference is statistically significant, as one of the tests indicate significant differences at the level of 0.1, while the other does not. Indeed, pairwise comparisons indicate no statistically significant differences (Table 5).

Table 5. Leadership style and perceived financial stability – pairwise comparisons (Kruskal-Wallis)

Leadership style	Democratic	Integrated (participative)	Laissez-faire	Autocratic
Democratic		2,19	0,43	0,43
Integrated (participative)			1,58	1,52
Laissez-faire				0,01
Autocratic				

Source: Own elaboration

Table 6. Relationship between leadership style and perceived legitimacy

Success	Leadership style			
	Democratic (N = 29)	Integrated (participative) (N = 64)	Laissez-faire (N = 25)	Autocratic (N = 23)
Mean	3,94	4,15	3,86	4,26
Standard error	0,15	0,10	0,16	0,16
$H = 9,79^{**}$, $\chi^2 = 9,14^{**}$				

Source: Own elaboration

While analysing the responses in Table 6, it can be observed that the highest level of legitimization exemplifies social enterprises managed by autocratic social entrepreneurs (4,26), while the lowest by laissez-faire (3,86). The significance of differences in the distributions of the level of perception of the legitimacy of social enterprises in relation to leadership style is statistically significant at the level of significance at 0.01. In other words, the level of legitimacy in social enterprises – being one of the dimensions of success – statistically differs depending on the leadership style.

Table 7. Leadership style and perceived legitimacy – pairwise comparisons (Kruskal-Wallis)

Leadership style	Democratic	Integrated (participative)	Laissez-faire	Autocratic
Democratic		2,01	0,60	1,63
Integrated (participative)			2,60*	0,03
Laissez-faire				2,14
Autocratic				

Source: Own elaboration

Table 8. Relationship between leadership style and perceived mission accomplishment

Success	Leadership style			
	Democratic (N = 29)	Integrated (participative) (N = 64)	Laissez-faire (N = 25)	Autocratic (N = 23)
Mean	4,15	4,64	4,55	4,67
Standard error	0,15	0,10	0,16	0,17
$H = 9,11^{**}$, $\chi^2 = 0$				

Source: Own elaboration

Table 9. Leadership style and perceived mission accomplishment – pairwise comparisons (Kruskal-Wallis)

Leadership style	Democratic	Integrated (participative)	Laissez-faire	Autocratic
Democratic		2,18	1,51	2,53*
Integrated (participative)			0,32	0,90
Laissez-faire				1,02
Autocratic				

Source: Own elaboration

The highest level of mission accomplishment can be observed in social enterprises managed by autocratic (4,67) and participative leaders (4,64) while the lowest characterises democratic leaders (4,15). While analysing the responses in Table 9, one may conclude that the level of mission accomplishment in social enterprises managed by autocratic leaders is statistically significantly different than for democratic ones.

6. Discussion

Based on the collected data, it can be argued that the most appropriate leadership style in social enterprises is participative leadership, focusing both on performed tasks and an appreciation of the importance of individual workers. This is all the more significant because of the fact, that people yet marginalized or excluded need to first regain confidence in their own strength and abilities. That can be achieved based on trust and giving them job opportunities, being a factor legitimizing their position in the society. Thus, managing people in social enterprises requires an integrated (participative) leadership that in relation to leadership styles can be identified using managerial grid by Blake and Mouton (1982). Participative leader believes the involvement of people leads to performance at work while interdependence, resulting from the common goals, fosters an atmosphere of mutual trust and respect. Therefore leaders in social enterprises attempt to integrate the needs and expectations of the employee with the needs of the organisation, consequently ensuring both maximum productivity, as well as a full understanding of the employees. Indeed, as Henton et al. points out (1997) "...collaborative leadership to bring diverse parties to the table, identify common ground and take joint action. They build bridges". However, one should bear in mind that leadership style can be adapted to the workforce of social enterprise (both background of the employees and the amount of time they have been working as a part social enterprise). As situational leadership theory suggest style will adapt and evolve with time according to belief in the employee or member.

According to research results, participative leadership style not only dominates, but also leads to the highest level of perceived success. What is more, research results draw attention to the fact that social enterprises managed by participative (integrated) leaders achieve the highest level of financial stability and high level of mission accomplishment. Hypothesis H1 was verified several times, as indicated by the results presented in Tables 2–9. Such research results are justified, because in the case of social enterprises the role of leader is indeed prominent. The leader is the one who serves as a guide conscious of external threats and understanding limitations within the team resulting for example from illness, disability, lack of work habits or addiction. Specificity of social enterprises significant impacts the shape of management and the way things are done in the company. Firstly, organising and leading is much more focused on the human being, an employee but also on an associate (collaborator). Therefore, leader needs to be consistent and fault tolerant, as innovation

usually raises resistance and the process of its implementation is rarely progressing without complications.

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ZALEŻNOŚĆ POMIĘDZY STYLEM PRZYWÓDZTWA A SUKCESEM W POLSKICH PRZEDSIĘBIORSTWACH SPOŁECZNYCH

Streszczenie

Sprostanie wymogom zmiennego otoczenia, w tym nasilającej się konkurencji, wymaga odmiennego niż dotąd przewodzenia organizacją. Dotyczy to także przywódców działających w sektorze ekonomii społecznej, stojących przed wyzwaniem realizowania misji uwzględniającej zarówno cele społeczne jak i ekonomiczne. Efektywne działanie przedsiębiorstw społecznych nie może więc mieć miejsca bez właściwego przywództwa, ponieważ sukces każdej organizacji zależy w dużej mierze od naczelnego kierownictwa. Celem artykułu jest odpowiedź na pytanie, czy istnieje związek pomiędzy stylem przywództwa a postrzeganym poziomem sukcesu w przedsiębiorstwach społecznych. Aby potwierdzić postawioną hipotezę przeprowadzono badania wśród 141 zarządzających w polskich przedsiębiorstwach społecznych (spółdzielniach socjalnych).

Słowa kluczowe: przedsiębiorczość społeczna, przedsiębiorstwo społeczne, przywództwo, sukces.