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Communication and Decision-making in Public and Private Organizations in Bulgaria

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Abstract: Decision-making is a current topic in the management of internal communications in public and private organizations. In the classical concept, decisions are taken independently by the manager, but nowadays it is common for other employees to participate in this process as well. This article represents the results from an empirical study conducted in Bulgarian public and private organizations operating on the territory of the city of Sofia. More than 80 people took part in the survey and a questionnaire for determining the decision-making style GDMSI (General Decision Making Style Inventory) was used. The results show that management and executive personnel have a highly pronounced dependent decision-making style. Managers transfer the responsibility for the decision to other employees in the organizations - the experts. This implies new approaches to communications - to target both experts and managers in an attempt to influence the decision-making process. The research was conducted in the conditions of the Bulgarian cultural environment.

Keywords: communications, decision-maker, decision making style, occupation, public organizations, private organizations.

Scientific problem

The modern business environment requires public and private organizations to adapt and implement new approaches in management. Years ago ‘hard’ topics such as efficiency and profitability were put on focus, however nowadays stakeholders are interested in ‘softer’ aspects such as corporate social responsibility, organizational culture and reputation of the organization. The article presents the results of an empirical study, dedicated to identifying the decision-makers in public and private organizations and based on this, to give recommendations for targeting people and influencing the decision making process. The research is based on a widely used research methodology – General Decision Making Style Inventory (GDMSI). More than 80 people (managerial, expert and executive personnel) employed in public and private organizations operating in Bulgaria were surveyed. The objectives are to find out the general style of

decision-making in public and private organizations and to understand who makes decisions in organizations and how this process can be influenced for the purposes of communications. The structure of the study requires the introduction of basic concepts and a theoretical review of the decision-making styles, which is done in the first part of the article. The second part includes the results of the study, analyses and a summary. As the topic suggests future research, the limitations of it are discussed at the end of the article.

Decision making style

In business and beyond, people are constantly making decisions. In some cases they are automatic, while in others the decision undergoes a somehow longer and more complex process. The decision style determines some of the most important events in man's life, both in the organization in which he/she works and in a person's private life. Those can be decisions related to investments in a big infrastructure project, business mergers, decisions related to personnel management, etc. All of these issues require consideration of multiple factors and should be considered taking into account the future expectation. There are also decisions that people make that don't require as much thought. An example of such are: where the next business meeting with potential future partners will be held, which is the shortest way to the airport, a question about purchases of basic office supplies, etc. All these decisions, in the most common case, are made quickly.

The decision-making style depends on various factors. Research published in 2004 by Thunholm found that the traditional understanding of decision-making styles is inadequate. It is believed to be due to habits and the way of thinking. It is found that it also depends on self-esteem and the ability to initiate and maintain certain intentions - self-regulation. [1]

One of the first studies of decision-making styles followed normative theories and probabilistic models that attempted to explain how people make their best choices (Edwards, 1954). [2] Subsequently, research began to focus on decision making and its relationship to the situation (Payne, 1993). [3] Later, researchers also started taking personality characteristics into account when studying the issue of decision-making styles (Brew, 2001). [4] As a consequence, it is established that there are different decision-making styles (Arroba, 1977). [5]

Considering the evolution of the decision-making style theory, the focus is seen to shift from task- and situation-related variables to individual differences (Scott & Bruce, 1995). [6] From the literature analysis, it is clear that the decision-making style represents a modality used by individuals in resolving a conflict that has arisen in relation to the decision-making process (Janis, 1977). [7] It has subsequently been defined as a habitual pattern (Driver, 1979) [8] or as a typical way of making a decision (Harren, 1979). [9] The term "decision-

making style” is often used as a synonym for “cognitive style” in relation to the procedures for selecting and processing necessary information as it pertains to the decision-making process (Andersen, 2000). [10]

For the purposes of the present research, Scott and Bruce’s definition of decision-making style cited by Karastoyanov (2017) is used: “A learned, habitual pattern of response exhibited by an individual when faced with a situation in which he is supposed to make a decision. It is not a personality trait, but a habit-based predisposition to react in a certain way in a specific decision context”. [11]

There are multiple classifications of decision-making styles (Karastoyanov, 2017). [12] The interest in them has led to the development of some scientific models, which are confirmed as traditional concepts. An example of such are the Mann model developed in 1997 [13] (Mann, 1997) and the Scott and Bruce model developed in 1995 (Scott & Bruce, 1995). [14]

In the first model four decision-making styles are distinguished: avoidant, i.e. the tendency to avoid the internal conflict that occurs when making a decision, shifting the responsibility for the final decision to others or finding justification for not solving the decision problem. The second style is vigilant. It involves a careful way of clarifying the main goals to be achieved, analyzing the various options and seeking information. The third style is the procrastinator. It is characterized by postponing the moment when the person will need to face a problem and enter into a decision conflict. The last, fourth style, is hyper vigilant. It is characterized by a frantic search for ways to resolve conflict when making a decision, the former being impulsive.

According to Scott and Bruce’s work, there are five decision-making styles: rational, characterized by an in-depth study of information and a systematic evaluation of alternatives; intuitive style, characterized by believe in one’s own intuition and feelings; dependent style, characterized by seeking advice; an avoidant style, characterized by the desire to avoid making a decision; spontaneous style, distinguished by the search for an opportunity to make a decision quickly.

In one of his research papers, Karastoyanov (2017) [15] describes in detail and analyzes the relationship between the five decision-making styles developed by Scott and Bruce and some important individual differences:

- The *rational style* can generally be characterized by the tendency to collect a large amount of information so it can be analyzed and used to make a decision. In his dissertation (2017) [16], Karastoyanov established that this style is associated with searching for information and creating multiple alternatives when making a decision.
- While in the rational style there is a search and processing of information, in the *intuitive style* the details are evaluated and weighed based on the intuition. When using it, emotions, impressions and feelings take

precedence. Very often they cannot be expressed verbally (Karastoyanov, 2017). [17]

- The third decision-making style, according to Scott and Bruce's model, is the *dependent* one. Its distinguishing feature is that individuals seek advice, opinions and support from other people when it is necessary to make a decision.
- In the *avoidant* decision-making style, behavior characterized by delaying or avoiding decision-making is observed.
- The *spontaneous style* is characterized by a strong preference for making a decision by making it spontaneously (very fast). People using that type of decision making style can't handle pressure well when they need to make a decision.

The general decision-making style is a subject of interest for many scholars. They manage to find a correlation between it and other personality characteristics. In their research, Singh and Greenhouse (2004) [18] were able to prove that a general decision-making style can determine whether a certain person would be a good fit for a profession. In this regard, different types of work activity require a certain type of decision-making style. This is dictated by a person's function in the organizational environment

Methods employed in the empirical study

To achieve the main goal of the study, a battery of questionnaires was created, the data derived from which helps to establish the relationship between the hierarchical level in the organization (occupation) and the general decision-making style. The questionnaires are selected in a way that ensures adequate data collection. The methodology used is reliable and validated by Bulgarian scientists.

The General Decision Making Style Inventory (GDMSI) is a tool that helps discovering an individual's decision making style. It consists 25 items structured into five subscales that correspond to the five decision-making styles described in Scott and Bruce's theory (Scott, 1995). The answers to the questions are given on a Likert scale (from strongly disagree to strongly agree).

The Bulgarian version of the measuring tool was validated by Karastoyanov (2017). [19] In the adaptation of the questionnaire, aggregated data from four samples of 338 respondents were used. The instrument was found to measure five factors (the number of decision-making styles, according to Scott and Bruce). The Kaiser-Meier-Olkin measure of sampling adequacy is 0.828, which proves that the number of items for each factor is sufficient. The internal consistency of the scales (Cornbrash's Alpha) is as follows:

- Scale “Rational decision-making style” - 5 items, $\alpha=0.735$;
- Scale “Intuitive decision-making style” - 4 items, $\alpha=0.845$;
- Scale “Dependent decision-making style” - 5 items, $\alpha=0.715$;

- Scale “Avoidant decision-making style” - 4 items, $\alpha=0.834$;
- Scale “Spontaneous decision-making style” - 5 items, $\alpha=0.74$.

SPSS statistical software was used to process the information from the empirical study. The following statistical methods were used: descriptive statistics, ANOVA and correlation analysis.

For the present study, a group of 81 people (29 men and 51 women) employed in the public (N 23) and private (N 58) sectors on management, expert and executive positions were analysed. The participants were randomly selected in the city of Sofia. The participants were familiar with the objectives of the research and participate in it on a voluntary basis. After consenting the participation, they were provided with the battery of tests that explored the type of organization they worked for, their level in the hierarchy, and their decision-making style.

The distribution based on “Hierarchical level” is presented in Table №1:

Table №1. **Distribution of the surveyed people according to “Hierarchical level”**

Hierarchical level	N	Share
Managers	14	17,2%
Experts	26	32,1%
Executives	41	50,6%

**Source: the author*

From the data presented in Table №1, it can be seen that the distribution of the sample according to “hierarchical level” is uneven. Approximately 20% of the surveyed persons are managerial staff, 30% - expert staff and 50% - executive staff, which reflects the proportion of the positions in the organizational setting.

Results

Table №2. Comparison of mean values with one-way ANOVA for the influence of the type of chosen profession on the preferred style of taking

Decision making style	Occupation (type personnel)	N	Mean	F	Sig.
Rational	Mangers	14	19,21	2,16	0,123
	Experts	26	20,23		
	Executives	41	18,22		
	Total:	81	19,04		
Dependent	Mangers	14	18,93	2,94	0,050
	Experts	26	15,31		
	Executives	41	16,95		
	Total:	81	16,77		
Avoidant	Mangers	14	14,50	0,26	0,768
	Experts	26	14,50		
	Executives	41	15,15		
	Total:	81	14,83		
Spontaneous	Mangers	14	15,07	0,37	0,689
	Experts	26	15,65		
	Executives	41	15,98		
	Total:	81	15,72		
Intuitive	Mangers	14	19,79	1,13	0,327
	Experts	26	18,85		
	Executives	41	18,15		
	Total:	81	18,65		

**Source: the author*

Table №2 represents data about the general decision-making style of the sample, in relation to the type of profession (managerial, expert or executive staff). In order to test whether the arithmetic mean values for the preferred decision-making style differ among the different groups of occupations, a one-way ANOVA was conducted.

From the presented data, it can be seen that the type of profession has a limited effect on the decision-making style. Only in the case of the dependent one there is a statistically significant difference ($F=2.94$; $p=0.050$). For the rest of the decision-making styles, no statistically significant difference was found in the different types of professions: Rational ($F=2.16$; $p=0.123$), Avoidant ($F=0.26$; $p=0.768$), Spontaneous ($F=0.37$; $p=0.689$), Intuitive ($F=1.13$; $p=0.327$).

The obtained results correspond to the data presented in the theoretical part from a study by Singh and Grenhaus (2004). [20] An explanation of this phenomenon can also be sought in the the type of professions.

Table №3. Sector and decision-making style

Decision making style	Sector	N	Mean	F	Sig.
Rational	Public	23	18,43	0,51	0,47
	Private	58	19,28		
Dependent	Public	23	16,09	8,87	0,004
	Private	58	17,03		
Avoidant	Public	23	13,52	0,95	0,332
	Private	58	15,34		
Spontaneous	Public	23	15,13	2,92	0,091
	Private	58	15,95		
Intuitive	Public	23	18,57	1,00	0,320
	Private	58	18,69		

**Source: the author*

Table №3 presents data on the preferred decision-making style in relation to the selected work sector. An ANOVA was conducted to analyze the results.

Based on the presented data it can be concluded that the work sector determines the preferred decision-making style to a limited extent. Statistically significant differences were found in the dependent style ($F=8.87$, $p=0.004$). There are no statistically significant differences in the remaining types of decision-making style: Rational ($F=0.51$, $p=0.47$), Avoidant ($F=0.95$, $p=0.332$), Spontaneous ($F=2.92$, $p=0.091$), and Intuitive ($F= 1.00$, $p=0.320$).

The obtained results contradict with a study conducted by Gunasekare (2010). [21] According to it, a rational and spontaneous style predominates in the private sector, while in the public sector it is dependent and avoidant. Explanations may be sought in the cultural characteristics of the representatives or in the composition of the sample. The cited study used a sample of middle managers, while the present study used a non-homogeneous sample of managers, experts and executives. Further analysis is needed to determine the exact reasons for the differences between the two studies.

Conclusion

The aim of the present study was to investigate what the usual decision-making styles in public and private organizations in Bulgaria are and to identify the decision-makers in them. Through this, it is possible to draw an appropriate communication strategy or communication plan that helps various aspects of communications (influencing decisions for organizational change, managing business processes, successful sales strategies, etc.).

The results of the empirical study reflect the situation in Bulgarian business organizations. It was found that the occupation/hierarchy level - managerial, expert and executive personnel have different manifestations in the dependent decision-making style. Contrary to popular belief, it turns out that managerial and executive personnel have a dependent decision-making style, while the expert has the lowest level on this indicator. This means that when decisions are made in organizations, experts, not managers, have a strong influence. An appropriate

communication strategy in this case would be targeting the experts (advisors, consultants, experts) together with the formal decision-makers (the management staff).

Another finding is the difference between the sectors in which organizations operate and the general decision-making style. It was found that in the private sector, employees have more pronounced dependent decision-making style than employees in the public sector. A possible explanation can be found in the nature of activities of different types of organizations – often the public ones control and consult the private ones and this implies consulting with institutions and experts (lawyers, accountants, consultants) before taking a decision in the organizations in the private sector.

A carefully designed communication strategy for communications with public and private organizations is important for reaching the communication goals. Knowledge of the general decision-making style in public and private organizations in Bulgaria facilitates the influencing of key figures (decision-makers) and thus facilitating the process of negotiation and/or organizational change.

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