PROBLEMS OF COOPERATION AND HARMONIZATION OF GROUP INTERESTS IN THE CONTEXT OF INTEGRATED AGRIBUSINESS DEVELOPMENT

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ABSTRACT

Using a theory of group activities the article will address the *issues of cooperation and harmonization of interests of organization members* as a model of activity in the conception of sustainable rural development. The problems discussed in the paper will comprise: *group cohesion, intergroup conflicts and their alleviating, group roles.* The analysis aims to find a group response to involvement in the process of sustainable rural development considering the above mentioned limitations of group activities. The Author perceives a necessity of realization the sustainable agribusiness development through balanced teams (organizations), referring to identification of team role according to R.M. Belbin.

Key words: group, team, teamwork in the concept of sustainable rural development, cohesion, group roles

Introduction

A complex character of problems which contemporary world faces, such as environmental pollution, global warming or homelessness is beyond the coping possibilities of individuals. Numerous institutions sharing their knowledge and resources must handle them, since this may lead to the desired solutions.

In contemporary world leadership constantly faces tasks, which require identification and determination of ***common benefit = sustainable development***, struggling with social problems, as well as inspiration and mobilization of others to undertake joint activities. Joint activity requires certain knowledge and skills to harmonize interests of various persons and groups. What is a group as a team? How can one improve the efficiency of group work in rural areas? These are crucial questions which have been posed in the presented article in the context of a **hypothesis**, that sustainable development depends among others on the effectiveness of teamwork, organizational and institutional activities (as opposed to individual activity).

Sustainable development of agribusiness

Sustainable development is a modern conception of shaping internal equilibrium in agribusiness and its links with the environment . It involves maximization of net benefit from economic development on condition that it will protect and ensure the reconstruction of natural resources utility over a long period of time. The conception aims to interrelate economic development with protection of natural resources and global equilibrium of ecosystems. In the approach presented above sustainable agriculture is a complex structure and comprises:

1. Intersectorial relations, particularly between agriculture, forestry, water economy and fisheries;
2. Management of natural resources, particularly the land, soil and water;
3. Natural environment protection, including counteracting stepping process, protection against erosion and counteracting the vanishing of species;
4. Institutional structures[1] ;
5. Relationships between the government and private sector;
6. Scientific research and dissemination of its results.

The conception of sustainable development is an example of global thinking and derives from the canons of the economy of welfare. It is understood as a sum of (long-term) benefits and satisfaction achieved in result of growth processes (limiting social losses) [WœA.][2] . On the other hand, Jojewski and Skinder [2005][3] understand the sustainable development under Polish conditions as balancing economic, social, ecological, technological and spatial aspects at individual stages of multifunctional deve-

1 Institutional structures are the basic subject of team activities in which rules of increasing efficiency described in this article may be applied. The importance of institution for the regional development was among others emphasized by Koïuch [2004], who concluded that a lack of coherent system of institutions capable of coordinating the development policy poses one of the main obstacles hindering region development.

2 (ed.) Woś A.: Encyklopedia agrobiznesu, Fundacja Innowacja, Warszawa, s. 735.

3 Jojewski S., Skinder Z. 2005: Uwarunkowania zrywnowaïonego rozwoju rolnictwa i obszaryw wiejskich. Zagadnienia Doradztwa Rolniczego, nr 3, s.45.

lopment. The authors quoted above consider the necessity to conduct scientific research on sustainable development by interdisciplinary teams of professionals and experts and subsequent implementation of the results in practice.

Group and problems of collaboration

Observations of transformations occurring in rural areas[4] show that the model of integrated farmer activities makes possible efficient overcoming difficulties, particularly resulting from the scale and quality of production [Domagalska-Grкdys 2004, 2006]. Producers form groups not only for economic reasons. Frequently they also manage to maintain the environment-friendly *image*[5] through the use of suitable cultivation rules and technologies of production but also proper wastewater and waste management [Boguta, Ejsmont, Ochai 2003][6]. Conception of sustainable development of agriculture and rural areas (generally agribusiness) may be most efficiently implemented not only by interdisciplinary research teams but also by producer groups and organizations. The role of teams and groups seems obvious, if only by the analogy with the role of employees teams which currently are the most effective link of development. However, it should be emphasized that a number of problems may occur in a **teamwork** (***e.g. reaching cohesion, negative outcomes of rivalry , group conflicts***), and no conception of group activities will be successful if these problems are not solved.

Let us start with the definitions. A *group* is " each number of persons" who are connected by mutual interactions, psychologically aware of one another and perceiving themselves as a group [Koïusznik 2002][7] .However, it should be emphasized that in the context of the problem discussed in the article, i.e. sustainable development, the use of *team* seems more suitable than group. *Teams* are more purposeful than groups and according to the definition they constitute a group numbering between two and twenty people, complementing one another with their knowledge and skills. These people have a common objective, standards and values for which they all feel responsible. The main objective sets the direction of work and gives meaning to their activities, the standards determine the ways and conditions of team members functioning, while the values allow to focus on important matters and omit the unimportant [Zgud, Kossowska 2000][8] .

Factors affecting the quality of cooperation

1. Cohesion

Cohesion of team is a level of and development of links between team members (organization members) and the level of "team spirit". It is also a measure of the team attractiveness for prospective members. Most coherent groups reveal strong links apparent as mutual loyalty and respect for the group standards. Less coherent groups are more prone to the influence of external factors degrading the sustainable development (e.g. with the view of individual gain individual members agree to larger fertilizer doses, limit expenditure on environmental protection, do not identify themselves with team objectives, etc.). Lack of cohesion in a group realizing the conception of sustainable development may markedly worsen the effectiveness in the area of group operations (village, region or country).

2. Competition and conflict

In practice of group activities one of frequently encountered problems is competition and the state of conflict. **Intergroup conflict is particularly dangerous, since in this case the task is not as important as gaining advantage over another person or group**. Negative consequences may lead to a mutual negative stereotype threatening proper realization of tasks.

In order to solve the problem of group conflict Edgar Schein [1988] suggests:

1. reducing the conflict through improvement of communication and distribution of goals;

2. preventing conflicts by establishing such organizational terms, which would stimulate coopera-

4 The observations concern Polish and European agribusiness. In Polish literature of the subject numerous works addressing this issue focus on the period before and after Poland's integration into the EU (since 2004).

5 The necessity to respect the natural environment by agricultural producer groups was stated in the Act on agri-producer groups and their unions, article 1 *...producer groups are created in order to adjust agricultural production to market conditions to improve farming effectiveness and production planning with particular regard to its quantity and quality, concentration of demand and organization of agricultural product sales, but also* ***for the protection of natural environment***.

6 Boguta W., Ejsmont J., Ochai M. 2003: Organizowanie i dziaianie grupy producentyw rolnych. Wydawnictwo Duszpasterskie Rolnikyw, Krakyw.

7 Kożusznik B.2002: Zachowanie cziowieka w organizacji. PWE. Warszawa, s.81.

8 Zgud J., Kossowska M. 2000: Anatomia zespoiu. O pracy zespoiowej w organizacji. Personel 16-30 czerwca, s.30.

tion rather than competition.

The conflict prevention strategy does not lead to ultimate agreement and artificial situation described by Koïusznik [2002] as "complete bliss" because a conflict and dissatisfaction on the level of group or organizational task are desired, since they are prerequisites for finding the best solution to the problem.

Other common problems are joining objectives of individual members with group aims and inhibiting the competition limiting the collaboration.

In case of rival groups, the characteristic phenomena occurring within groups and among them comprise among others [Scheriff 1961][9]:

- Better cohesion and loyalty of members, diminishing individual differences.
- The climate changes from informal to formal, focused on tasks; the emphasis shifts from psychological needs to completing tasks.
- Management changes from democratic to autocratic, the group tolerates is better.
- The group is better structured and organized.
- The group requires better loyalty and subordination from its members to present a "common front". Each of the rival groups perceives the other as a more serious enemy than a neutral object.
- Each group begins to experience a distorted perception; the tendency to perceive own good points, negation of weaknesses, a tendency to perceive the worst sides but not strong points of other groups; a negative stereotype "they are not as fair as we are".
- Hostility towards the other group increases when the interaction and communication decreases, which favours the persistence of the negative stereotype.
- The tendency to listening in such a way as to maintain the stereotype[10].

Two situations may arise in result of the phenomena described above:

1. The first one connected with the winner group characterized by: retaining the hitherto cohesion, laziness and the situation of "fat and happy" type, aiming at improving the collaboration and small need for bettering relationships.

2. The second one concerning the looser group characterized with quarrels, looking for the culprit, accusations of e.g. the manager, judges, the situation of "thin and hungry" type and a negative assessment of the other conflict party.

Reducing of negative consequences of intergroup competition

Competition and intergroup conflicts seem inevitable, however it does not denote a helplessness in view of such situations. Edgar Schein [1988][11] states that the main problem of group rivalry is the conflict of goals and a wane of interaction and communication between groups. It favours the negative stereotypes and distortion of perception. In order to prevent it one should:

1. Locate the common enemy and shift the problem to a higher level.
2. Develop a strategy of negotiations so that interactions are formed, e.g. between group representatives.
3. Set an important common objective – completely new task.
4. Reduce the conflict through laboratory training also called ***sensitivity training***, in which:

a) the objectives of groups in conflict are openly discussed,

b) both groups discuss with each other, present their feelings and attitudes,

c) groups share the perception of themselves and the others, one person speaks whereas the rest is listening

d) an analysis of differences occurs, "private meeting" followed by a public session with both groups' representatives.

Team roles and an attempt at their adaptation in activities of teams implementing sustainable development programmes

Although many contemporary leaders and managers think that competition is the most stimulating form of development, in fact it works for a short period of time and in longer perspective brings definitely negative consequences. A team is usually composed of various persons who play various group roles. Identification of such roles and allocation of tasks within the possessed resources (roles) may be useful. One of the conceptions was developed by R. Meredith Belbin [1993] [12], who assumed 9 team roles (*1. Implementer, 2. Coordinator, 3.Shaper, 4.Plant, 5. Resource investigator, 6. Monitor/Evaluator,*

9 Sheriff M. , Harvey O.J. White B.J., Hood W.R 1961: Intergroup Conflict and cooperation: The Robber's Cave Experiment, University Book Exchange, Norman, Okla.

10 If the group forces itself to interaction, e.g. if its members are obliged to listen to the arguments of both groups' representatives, each group listen first to its own representative and if it listens to the other part, it is only to find its mistakes.

11 Schein E. 1988: Organizational Psychology, Pretice-Hall, Engllewood Cliffs, N.Y. Koïusznik 2002 s. 36.

12 Belbin B. 1993: Team roles at work, British Library, London

7. Team Worker,8. Completer and 9. Specialist). Selection of employees for task teams based on R.M. Belbin's classification is made using Self Perception Inventory (SPI) used for measuring preferences of the eight roles potentially undertaken and played in a team (they have been characterized below).

Conception of team roles according to R. Meredith Belbin

Implementer – changes conceptions and plans into practical activity, organizes and does things systematically and efficiently. Features: orderly, conscientious and practical. May doubt the efficacy of new ideas and changes, has plenty of common sense, owing to him projects and solutions are implemented in practice. Realist, does not like to change plans.

Coordinator – controls the way in which the groups attempts to reach its objectives. Capable of efficient utilization of the team resources, the process leader. Recognizes group strengths and weaknesses and is able to use the individual potential of each employee. Features: even-tempered and dominant. His characteristics involves rather common sense than intellectual reflection. Not aggressive in his management style.

Shaper – hard driving task leader, shapes the way in which group efforts will be utilized. Focuses his attention immediately on setting goal and priorities. He wants to influence group discussion and the result of group activities. Features: restless, dominant, impulsive, easily becomes irritated. Tense, dynamic, poses challenges, strives to overcome inertia, self-satisfaction and inactivity. Wants to see the effects fast. Competes with the others, may be arrogant but owing to him "things happen".

Plant – the ideas person, has new ideas and strategies with particular regard to the most important matters and tries to "force" his vision upon group attitude towards a problem using confrontation of opinions. Features: dominant, unconventional individualist. Using his imagination and intellect may disregard details and make mistakes but also criticize ideas of others. The graver the problem, the more challenged he feels to solve it. He thinks that all good ideas at first look strange. Creates the atmosphere of genius around himself.

Resource investigator – maker of contacts and provider of information, investigates, analyzes and gains information on ideas, state of knowledge and resources outside the group. Makes external contacts which may prove useful for the team. Capable of negotiating. Features: even-tempered and dominant, enthusiast, good networker interested in the world in general. Supports innovations and is a good improviser. Slightly cynical while seeking profit for the group. Reveals great skill in contacts with other people and discovering everything new, skillfully responds to challenges. Looses energy fast after the initial fascination. His usual saying is: "new opportunities are created because of mistakes the others make".

Monitor/evaluator – analyzes the problem, evaluates ideas and suggestions therefore the group starts from a position better prepared for decision making. Features: sober-minded, thinks carefully and accurately, free of emotions. Able of cool judgment, discreet, practical, deals only in facts, no sentiments. He is the most objective, neutral and emotionally uninvolved person, likes to have time for thought. May lack skills or ability to inspire others, he is no enthusiast, but his reserve allows to make sound decisions.

Team worker - oriented towards social aspects of work, mild and sensitive. Support the group members, strengthens cooperation and improves communication, the social glue within the team and loyal to it. Features: level-headed, hardly willing to dominate or compete, with high capability of empathy. In crisis he may be undecided, does not like confrontation but his loyalty and devotion to the group are invaluable.

Completer – focused on real effect, i.e. completion of task by the appointed deadline and ensuring the highest standard. May be difficult in contacts because disregards the chance activities and often becomes entangled in details, unimportant for the task completion. Always fully aware of the goal. Features: restless, tense and orderly. Able to see things through to the end, conscientious, painstaking and well –ordered.

Specialist – concentrates on key areas of work. Focuses on technical details. Greatly involved in realization of tasks. Features: focused on definite objective, involved, "self-driven". Provides valuable knowledge and skills. Focused on a narrow area of his own activities, may not perceive the whole picture.

The characteristic of team role evidences that there are no ideal roles and one must realize the ups and downs of each role because then it is easier to allocate tasks to individual team members. In this way it may be expected that they will be realized efficiently. Application of the role theory seems particularly useful for explaining and predicting behaviours of the team members (implementing the concept of sustainable development, e.g. advisors, farmers or rural entrepreneurs). To operate efficiently a **team needs members with definite skills**: firstly specialist technicians and technologists; secondly

persons able to solve problems and make decisions and finally persons with interpersonal skills [Robbins 1996][13].

Belbin's experiments [1981 and 1993] proved that the composition of a team is one of more important variables determining its effectiveness. A team needs **balance** to be **effective.** It does not mean balancing an individual but rather complementing each other. Such state should be ensured by selection of people capable of fulfilling specified roles. Belbin discovered and described eight important roles. A team member is willing to assume and fulfill efficiently one of the team roles (so called preferred role). However, depending on the situation (demand) it is possible to assume a different, i.e. temporary role owing to even slight natural predispositions).

Investigations conducted in 1996-1997 by Witkowski and Ilski to determine the usefulness of Belbin's Team Role Self-Perception Inventory to Polish conditions revealed its practical applications. The method was presented in detail by Ilski [2000][14] and Koïusznik B.[15] in her work entitled: *Psychology in manager's work.* The test material consists of a) test questionnaire prepared separately for men and women containing 56 statements in seven equally numerous groups ; b) computational sheet with collective table of results and key with marked self-perception answers for individual roles; c) interpretational sheet.

Conclusion

Complexity of problems and multi-aspect character of sustainable activities make integrated activity necessary. Not only interdisciplinary teams but also producer groups are the carriers of the theory of sustainable agriculture development. Using the reliable methods of group activities requires knowledge and skills. Efficient management of a group depends on the recognition of factors limiting team efficiency (such as lack of cohesion, competition among members and conflicts) and recognition of team roles. Team roles theory by R.M. Belbin discussed in the article allows to evaluate the team and may be used in the activities of interdisciplinary organizations (producer groups) realizing the sustainable development of agriculture. One may risk a statement that there are no bad teams there are only wrongly managed ones!

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