

## SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT OF KNOWLEDGE WORKERS

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### Abstract

Literature specifies that knowledge workers represent more than half of all employees in advanced economies. In general knowledge workers are people who, when working, use their brain more than their muscles. The most important part of knowledge workers' work happens in their head. They create, distribute and use knowledge. They usually have highly specialized knowledge with dominant tacit dimension and may be the only one who has this knowledge in the organization. They are very creative and continuously learn new things, even though some of them work with hands. They like autonomy, but develop relationships with other employees. They value their knowledge and they may hesitate to share it. Management of knowledge workers is one of important challenges of our world. Knowledge workers are difficult to manage, because the process of their work cannot be observed. Intangible character of knowledge causes that managers of knowledge workers cannot use traditional methods and tools of management. One of important factors of knowledge workers management is their personal development. Knowledge workers if they are to be productive must acquire new explicit and tacit knowledge and improve their ability to use it. Development of knowledge workers can meet the need of sustainability only when built on solid knowledge of knowledge worker's personality. Personality is a strong and important factor that influences how knowledge worker responds to incentives, how he learns and how (if) he shares knowledge. Personality of knowledge worker provides link to knowledge worker's strengths and weaknesses and to his talents. The article discusses some options how to support personal development of knowledge workers.

**Key words:** knowledge, knowledge workers, personality, sustainable development.

### Introduction

Generally, the most valuable knowledge in an organisation is in the heads of the employees [1], so called knowledge workers. Literature specifies that knowledge workers represent more than half of all employees in advanced economies. In general knowledge workers are people who, when working, use their brain more than their muscles. Knowledge workers can be identified in any culture and in any phase of human-kind development. However, technologic and social changes in the 20<sup>th</sup> Century caused a remarkable increase in their numbers in organizations in advanced economies.

Knowledge workers are difficult to manage. The process of their work happens in their head while they use, create, and distribute their knowledge. This process is partly or fully subconscious, intangible and hidden. Managers of knowledge workers have limited power to influence it and change it. This makes management of knowledge workers one of important challenges of our world [2].

One of important factors of knowledge workers management is their personal development. Knowledge workers if they are to be productive must acquire new explicit and tacit knowledge and improve their ability to use it. Development of knowledge workers must be

continuous and meet the requirement of sustainability. It can be sustainable only when built on solid knowledge of knowledge worker's personality. Personality is a strong and important factor that influences how knowledge worker responds to incentives, how he learns and how (if) he shares knowledge. Knowing personality of knowledge workers may help manager to manage them and improve their performance.

### 1. Who are Knowledge Workers

Different authors understand knowledge workers differently. Peter Drucker [3] was the first to use the term knowledge worker. Knowledge worker, by Drucker is:

- A person who has knowledge important for the organisation and often is the only person who has it.
- A person who can use the knowledge in work.
- The knowledge is partly subconscious; the worker may not know about it or may not understand its importance. Other employees of the organisation have a limited approach to the knowledge, they cannot learn it (it is demanding on time or finances or is impossible as they do not have the knowledge or skills to develop it) or they cannot or are

not allowed to use it (knowledge is linked to some certificate or diploma).

- Knowledge workers often work intellectually, but this is not a rule.

Alvin Toffler [4] understands typical knowledge worker as a scientist, an engineer or a person who operates sophisticated technology. By him, knowledge worker must be able to create and improve his/her technological knowledge or manage technological knowledge of co-workers. Jack Vinson from Northwestern University wrote that knowledge worker is every employee who uses his brain more than hands. Knowledge workers depend on their knowledge and ability to learn, even though they work with hands [5]. Thomas Davenport (Davenport 2005) sees knowledge workers as people with high degrees of expertise, education, or experience. By Davenport, the primary purpose of knowledge workers' job involves the creation, distribution, or application of knowledge. Knowledge workers think for a living [6]. Jonathan B. Spira in internet discussion concludes: "We can, in part, describe knowledge workers in terms of what they are not. They are not factory workers, they are not labourers, they are not farm or field workers (the term "out in the field" notwithstanding). But that doesn't tell us very much. Many, but not all, knowledge workers are office workers. Some, but not all, are managers or white-collar workers. Some, but not all, are professionals, such as doctors or lawyers." [7].

Summarizing it, knowledge workers are people who possess high portion of knowledge, often in tacit form. They can use it in their daily work and can upgrade it; they continuously learn. Even though their output may be material, the way how they use their knowledge and how they decide is hidden in their head.

## 2. Personality Classification for Knowledge Workers

There are many different classifications of personality available in the literature. This article will discuss only one of them, Enneagram. Enneagram does not have scientific background. The literature speculates about its origin, some author see it in ancient Greece, some in India. Enneagram as we know today developed through centuries from observations of human behavior. What is more important; it is a complex system that has been used by officials of Christian, Judaist and Islam churches for work with believers and for management and development of

high church officials, who can be definitely classified as knowledge workers. As Enneagram is available to everyone these days, managers of knowledge workers can use and benefit from what previous generations developed.

Enneagram is a complex dynamic system. It works with nine personality types, three subtypes, and nine levels of personal development. It also recognizes special interrelations between types based on individual's special life situation. All these factors together enable to understand an individual and her behavior, to predict it and influence it and help to tailor future development of the individual in accordance to her abilities and strong features.

By Enneagram, the type of personality is in-born and cannot be changed during the life. The description of behavior typical for the type is universal, and it represents frame in which people who have this type of personality oscillate, e.g. not everything in the description of the type is applicable to all people. All types are equal, none is better or worse. Each type is unique and offers certain limitations and capabilities. Brief and basic description of nine types of Enneagram is as follows:

**Table 1. Nine Types of Enneagram [8]**

Type	Characteristics	Positive Behavior	Dysfunctional Behavior
1	Perfectionist, rational, orientation to details.	Honest, model for others.	Pedantic, moralistic, preaches.
2	Understanding, loving, caring, generous.	Cares for others, gives them feeling of importance.	Manipulates, possessive.
3	Efficient, adaptable, practical.	Model for others, natural leader.	Identifies himself with his role, highly competitive, merciless.
4	Expressive, dramatic, sensitive, individualistic.	Brings beauty to life, artistic.	Envious, creates own moral norms, depressive.
5	Intellectual, introvert, innovative, loyal.	Goes to the core of problems, concentrates.	Does not share resources, intellectually superior.

(continued)

6	Reliable, loyal, lacks self-confidence.	Sensitive, able to cooperate, loyal, likes hierarchies.	Demagogic, fanatic.
7	Spontaneous, flexible, generalist, optimist.	See relations, understands new trends.	Gluttony, superficial, hyperactive.
8	Strong, influential, efficient, hates hierarchies.	Strong feeling for justice, not afraid of conflicts.	Aggressive, treating, conflicting.
9	Easygoing, sensitive, idealistic.	Willing, settles conflicts, creates harmony.	Lazy, lack of will.

Enneagram is represented as a circle. Behavior of any individual is influenced not only by his type but also by types that lay next to his type on the circle. It is called a wing. Each type has two wings – type 1 has wing to type 9 and 2, type 2 has wing to type 1 and 3, type 3 has wing to type 2 and 4, etc. It means that the person, whose life type is type 1 may also behave as a person whose type is 9 or 4. The influence of the wing is individual. Some people are not influenced by their wings at all; some have one dominant wing for all their life, some people’s behavior oscillates between their wings. Even though wings influence the behavior of individual, his/her type does not change.

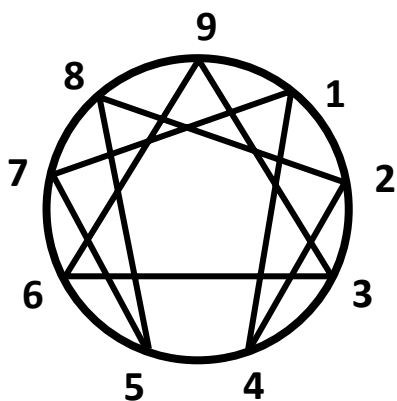


Fig. 1. Enneagram

Enneagram also works with so called stress and security lines. People behave differently when they are stressed or feel happy. The line of stress (disintegration line) is following 1-4-2-8-5-7-1 and 9-6-3-9, the line of security (integration

line) is 1-7-5-8-2-4-1 and 9-3-6-9. It means that the person of type 1 will under stress behave similarly to person of type 4 and individual of type 4 similarly to type 2, type 9 as 6, etc. Being happy 1 will behave like 7, 7 like 5, 9 like 3.

Enneagram recognizes 3 subtypes, so called instincts – self preservation instinct, sexual instinct and social instinct. One subtype is dominant. Individual to whom self preservation instinct applies is concerned about his/her security, comfort and health. Individual of sexual subtype creates intense relationships with other people; social subtype likes social activities and enjoys presence of people but dislikes intimate and close relationships.

Enneagram works with nine types of development that create backbone of individual types. Every individual develops during his/her life, improves and deteriorates his/her behavior on this scale. Level one, two and three represent healthy behavior, level four to six average and levels seven to nine dysfunctional behavior.

Wings, instincts, line of integration and disintegration, and different levels of development cause that two people with the same type of personality may behave differently [8].

Knowledge on type of personality of knowledge worker and knowledge on dominant type in the group may lead to new recommendations on management of these people. There is big difference among different Enneagram types of personality; the difference in their responses, attention focus, strengths, internal motives and weaknesses [9]. Enneagram type also influence motivational predispositions, e.g. internal factors of process of motivation, prerequisites of its content, direction and intensity [10].

### 3. Enneagram and Knowledge Worker Development

Knowledge workers differ. Even though they all work with knowledge, some of them achieve better results in their work than others. Modern managerial literature highly recommends managers to choose knowledge workers for individual jobs on their talent not on education and experience. Talent is a given commodity. People cannot develop talent; they either have it or no. Enneagram may provide managers with necessary guidelines when they are choosing employees for certain positions and for development of their knowledge workers’ skills.

Enneagram type and level of development of knowledge worker indicates potential directions

of his development and potentials of future carrier in the company.

Enneagram explains strength and weaknesses of individual types and provides us with guidelines for personal development of individuals. Enneagram philosophy also recommends managers of knowledge workers to focus on suppression of weaknesses and negative features of the personality of knowledge worker and on development of his strength and talents. This recommendation may seem to be against the traditional managerial approach. Generations of managers were taught that people must be trained in relation to requirements of their job and position. E.g. when position requirements change and the position needs for example the employee to learn new foreigner language he must learn it, even though he has problems to speak his own native tongue and up till now he was doing his job well. Enneagram accepts the fact that adult people cannot change easily and that talent that is missed cannot be simply learned. Managers are advised to take this as a reality. It is better to spend money on what people can be good in than waste it on development of skills they do not have basic potential for.

Let's give some examples. When looking at individual types, knowledge worker whose type is 1 is a perfectionist; he will never be good in situations that require high flexibility, quick decision and reaction. Knowledge worker of type 2 has a personality of helper who needs other people around; he will have problem to cope with tasks that need to be done without the involvement of other people. Knowledge workers of type 3 are high performers and good managers. They have problems to stand failures and it is extremely contra productive to force them to do activities they lack talent for. Knowledge workers of type 4 are gifted with talents for arts and creativity. They fail to perform when forced to do routine activities. Knowledge workers of type 5 are people capable to focus on details; but they have problem to refocus their attention between different pieces of knowledge at a time. Knowledge workers of type 6 are stable and loyal but tend to fail in highly chaotic unpredictable situations. Knowledge workers of type 7 are generalists; it is not advisable to force them to do anything that requires following some strictly normalized process. Knowledge workers of type 8 are good leaders but bad followers as they do not like to be in subordinate positions. Knowledge workers of type 9 are skilled negotiators,

but they may have problem to get over obstacles as they usually have problem with the will.

Upper paragraph is only the brief and simplified explanation of the problem. If manager knows Enneagram, can work with it and if he is aware of the personality, and current life situation of his knowledge worker, he probably would not make the mistake of giving his knowledge worker assignment he cannot fulfill.

#### **4. Strategy of Personal Development**

Enneagram offers different strategies for development of holders of different personality types. Managers of knowledge workers can use them as a guideline for sustainable personal development of their employees. The strategies are focused on limiting major weaknesses of individual types. These weaknesses make obstacles to healthy life and further development of knowledge worker. Strategies are as follows:

People of type 1 are rational perfections. They tend to teach other people to be perfect. It is important to explain them that salvation of the world does not rely only on them and that they should be more patient with other people who cannot change so fast as perfections would like them. It is also advisable to help them not to be so irritated by imperfection of others and help them to connect to their feelings that may be suppressed.

Type 2 are people who are understanding, loving and caring but they can also be manipulative and possessive. Important challenge from the point of view of their personal development is to identify their own needs and to take care of them. Before helping anyone they should try to identify their own motives and what other people really want. They should resist the temptation of calling attention to their good acts and reminding other people about them. They should avoid getting love of other people through giving gifts and praise. Love cannot be bought.

Type 3 represent efficient, practical and competitive people. In their personal development they should focus mostly on truth. They should be honest with themselves and with other people, too. They should pay attention to social environment and improve their social awareness. It is also necessary to help them to relax as they may fall into the trap of workaholism.

Type 4 are expressive, sensitive, individualistic people. They need to learn to pay less attention to their feelings. Manager can help them to develop self esteem and self confidence. Type

4 people are usually very creative and may think that they are exceptional so one of the challenges of their personal development is a personal discipline.

Type 5 is intellectual, innovative type. People of this type may have problems with decision making. They do not decide if they do not have "enough" facts and proofs. They also have problem to relax. For some of them knowledge is power and it is difficult to make them share it. They also have problem to trust other people. It is the role of their manager to help them to get over these problems.

Type 6 are people who are reliable, loyal but lack self-confidence and may become demagogic and fanatic. They should learn to explore their anxiety. Their managers are advised to check if they do not blame their mistakes on other people and if they can control their reactions when they are under the stress. Type 6 should try to trust more, to themselves and other people, too.

Type 7 are flexible generalists who may be superficial and hyperactive. Their challenge is to learn to control their impulsiveness, to prefer quality over quantity; distribute attention carefully. Managers should control if they avoid their tendency to do too many things at one moment and learn to finish what they started.

Type 8 is strong, influential and efficient type. Its representatives may be conflicting and aggressive. Their challenge is to understand that real power is not in dominating people but helping them and that the outer world is not as hostile as they see it.

Type 9 people are easygoing, sensitive and idealistic. They usually lack will. In personal development they should try to identify their own needs and feelings, not only to do what other people want them. Managers can help them to refocus their attention from daydreaming to participating in real world activities [11].

## Conclusions

Knowledge workers are emerging group of employees. As for the intangible character of knowledge the traditional style of management may fail with them. The process of their work cannot be controlled and it is difficult to give them orders. Knowledge workers' major tool is their knowledge. As knowledge develops very quickly in nowadays knowledge society, knowledge workers must learn and develop, too. One of new responsibilities, managers of knowledge workers must accept is the responsibility of sus-

tainable personal development of their employees. Personal development can be sustainable only when it takes into account strength and weaknesses of knowledge worker, e.g. when based on good knowing knowledge worker's personality.

Enneagram is a tool that was developed for management and personal development of special group of knowledge workers, high church officials. It is a dynamic system build of various elements that enables to evaluate human personality and its manifestation in relation to the situation. Its value and efficiency have been proven by centuries of intense use. Enneagram offers managers of knowledge workers solution to many problems they face.

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