Are Coaching Competence and Resilience of Managers a Success Factor for Companies?

Stefan Stark

Abstract: This study aims on assessing the success relevance of different management styles and resilience approaches for business performance. Design/methodology/approach: Based on surveying CEOs of Austrianitized companies, this research applies explorative data analysis approaches to analyze the attitudes of the surveyed CEOs towards different management styles and resilience approaches in the context of firm performance indicators. Findings and Originality: A coaching approach in management and the consideration of resilience in its different dimensions – organizational resilience, the manager’s consciousness for his personal resilience, and a management style focusing on the resilience of employees – could not be found as success-relevant for both Key business performance indicators, such as sales performance or earning power.

Keywords: coaching competence, managers, resilience, success factor.

I. INTRODUCTION

There is a lot of upheaval in the professional world. Expectations of personnel have changed dramatically at all organizational heights (Lenz, 2019, p. 50-55). With the increasing shortage of skilled workers and managers, many decision-makers believe that employee retention will be the number one issue in the world of work in the coming years. At the same time, contents that are important for retention, such as appreciation, satisfaction and responsibility can only be integrated into the daily work routine in the long term (Lenz, 2019, p. 50-55). Nevertheless, it is extremely worrying, and in some cases the performance of the employee can be considerably damaged, if employees at all departmental levels are reduced to proactivity results only and, in addition, cost-cutting and fundamental organizational restructuring are on the agenda (Lenz, 2019, p. 50-55).

It is therefore imperative for all managers to undergo further training in their self-responsibility, social space orientation and communication culture (Wellensieck, 2010, p. 74). Wellensieck asserts that the task portfolio of leaders and high achievers is incessantly increasing and makes the following claim: a head person today "must be a mature person who continuously works on himself/herself" (Wellensieck, 2010, p. 74). This also results in new requirements for management in terms of leadership style and understanding of roles or areas of responsibility in management, particularly also in promoting the mental health of employees. This explorative study, therefore, examines a possible connection between management roles, resilience, and business performance to derive management recommendations on the basis of a preliminary impact model.

II. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

A. Coaching as a Management Task/Role

The pioneer of managerial theory, Peter Drucker (Malik. 2010, p. 41), characterized the then dominant conception of the function of managing as being governed by the concept of agency and the assertion of dominance. He opposed his "new perception of a leader" (Drucker, 1973, p. 17). Following this very definition, the manager's role is to be answerable and to add to the enterprise's achievements (Drucker, 1973, p. 17).

Drucker's elaboration of distinction mirrors the changing attitudes that have been evident since the fifties in the shape of the rising challenges to fixed system of personnel authority, finally modelled on the example of the army, and the overall attitude transformation towards the comprehension of guidance as the wielding of force in many sectors of society (Franken, 2016, pp. 119-139). Here it can be seen that both democratization in the political sphere as well as the demands of the modern world of work and the change in social attitudes towards human resources have led to a new conception of management, which should not rely on instruction and compliance, but on forms of governance based on partnership and accordingly other tools of guidance (Magee, 2015, p. 58). Last but not least, gender equality has also helped to transform the way of leadership from the former doctrine of unilateral decision-making to participative and directive ones, as empirical studies have demonstrated (e.g. Burke & Collings, 2001; Ye et al., 2016).

Following this general perception of a necessary change in the self-understanding of leadership, Shipley defines the contemporary tasks of the leader as (1) directing, (2) mentoring and (3) coaching (see Table I).

Table I: The Shippy Dimensions of Business Mission

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Task</th>
<th>Content</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leading</td>
<td>inspires others to do their best, sets a vision, thinks, and acts strategically</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Organizing</td>
<td>allocates resources, people, and time to get results</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coaching</td>
<td>develops and empowers others</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* Source: Own representation based on Shipley (2017), p. 45.

It is possible to consider that this threefold task of today's leadership can be seen as a strategic framework for contemporary guidance or as an 'integrated leadership model' (Strycharczyk et al., 2015, pp. 33-36) and can be regarded as of specific relevance for leadership in knowledge-intensive organizations (Nnumere, 2018, p. 266). The three mission fields indicate three leadership tasks that a manager is expected to fulfill in a workplace: (1) manager, (2) trainer and (3) chief executive.
The comprehensive up-to-date guidance literature relating to the perception of the tasks and the fields of action or accountability of executives often describes these terms in a combination, for example, in the form of ‘leadership manager’, ‘coaching manager’, or ‘leader coach’, ‘manager as coach’ and other variations (e.g., Strycharczyk et al., 2015; Levin & Edwards, 2007; Harkey, 2007; Wu, 2013). Each of these composites combines two of the three roles or task areas are postulated as the required particular focus of successful leadership. A coaching manager, for example, is a leader who engages and influences directly with particular team members to help them enhance their skills in order to improve overall team output (e.g. Hunt & Weintraub, 2002, pp. 68-70). Nevertheless, the key issue is the emphasis of the three functions in advancing the corporate mission, ultimately the generation of profit in private enterprises, since a company cannot refinance itself or remain competitive in the long term in the absence of long-term profitability. Consequently, it is also necessary to ask - as has happened during this research - about the importance of the spheres of influence or the focus of the various functions on the success of the company.

B. Management and Resilience

In the context of leadership and coaching, resilience has become another topic of contemporary leadership in recent years (Klein, 2009, pp. 357-358). The basic assumption is that companies can only achieve sustainable success if their employees do not suffer from permanent stress or receive individual help in crisis situations (Soucek et al., 2018, pp. 33-34). In the field of coaching in the context of companies, resilience is understood as protecting or strengthening employees (Heller & Gallenmüller, 2019, pp. 10-11). Resilience, however, can extend beyond the realm of individual coaching - especially in larger companies and can be seen accordingly as corporate resilience, i.e., as an individual competence or as an ‘institutionally systematized employee service’ (Soucek et al., 2018, p. 28). Consequently, at least three corporate-relevant or management-relevant areas of resilience: (1) resilience coaching, (2) organizational resilience, and personal resilience in the sense of an individual competence in dealing with oneself (Soucek et al., 2018, pp. 28-32). Thus, there is a substantial functional relationship between the three fields of management activities, or the three management roles as defined in Section 2.1 and the three dimensions of resilience, which are also integrated into the research model (see Figure 1 in Section D) as the basis for operationalizing the research question.

C. Firm Performance

Although there are studies in the literature on the topic of members of the armed forces and resilience, as well as research with the effects of negative conditions such as poverty, alcoholism and crime on child development (Luthar 1991), but the topic of resilience and leadership in the context of organisational performance is not found in academic journal databases such as Elsevier, Science Direct, Sage and others. In Germany, the Bertelsmann Foundation stands out for its regular empirical studies on leadership, resilience, and performance (Soucek et al., 2018, pp. 28-32). Their studies regularly conclude that resilience as a topic for the ‘leader of the future’ should have both personal competence on the topic to preserve his or her own resources, but also towards his or her employees through organizational resilience in the context of corporate health management and resilience coaching opportunities the preservation of employees’ resources (Mourlane et al., 2013, pp. 12-13, Bertelsmann Foundation, 2015, pp. 12, 53, 57-61). However, a connection to firm performance is not established or sought. From a business perspective, however, there is always the question of return on investment. The usual measures of business management, as well as business research, are revenue growth and profit (Achtenhagen et al., 2010, p. 293). Accordingly, the two performance indicators are also used in this study as indicators of quantitative growth (revenue growth) and qualitative growth (EBIT growth). EBIT (earnings before interest and taxes) is used as profit indicator. This excludes, for example, revenue or costs from financial transactions, so that only the result from so-called ordinary business activities is considered without the changes from corporate financing activities (financial management) or through tax effects, so that ‘pure’ operational performance is examined in connection with management orientation and resilience, i.e., the areas on which the leadership factors can actually have an impact.

D. Research Design Consequences

As mentioned, three roles of modern management can be identified in the literature discussed: (1) leader, (2) coach, and (3) manager (organizer). Accordingly, there are three management tasks or fields of action: (1) leading, (2) organizing, and (3) coaching (see Figure 1).

III. METHODOLOGY AND RESEARCH DESIGN

A. Research Question, Research Aim and Research Model

This study follows an exploratory approach: no existing cause-effect model is tested. The structural model developed in Section 2.4 provides only a structural model derived from the literature review provides only a basis for structuring the observation space. Accordingly, the following sections develop only working hypotheses that are derived from the researcher’s prior understanding and not from an existing model or prior studies.
The research question combines the three monitoring topics of this study: (1) the manager’s self-conception of leadership, (2) resilience promotion, and (3) business success. The research question is:

What is the effect of (1) the manager’s self-conception of leadership (management style) and (2) the promotion of resilience on (3) firm success?

The hypotheses derived from the research question relate to the sub-areas mentioned in the research question (the manager’s self-conception of leadership, resilience promotion, and firm performance). Hypothesis H1 expects the following result for the attitudes of the interviewed manager to the success relevance of the three task dimensions, i.e., regarding his task orientations:

H1: The surveyed managers rate the success relevance of their role as leader higher than that of organizational development or coaching.

It is assumed that the surveyed managers rate the firm performance effect of their decisions and ideas higher than the effects of organizational structures and coaching. To test the hypothesis, the questionnaire’s first question (see Question 1 in the appendix) asks about the relevance of the individual management dimensions for firm performance, i.e., about the respondent’s attitude and thus his role conception.

Question Q2 asks about attitudes toward the three areas of resilience in the context of the three management activity areas. Two working hypotheses are tested in this regard:

H2a: The surveyed CEOs tend to view resilience as an organizational problem or task. They prefer organizational solutions for protecting and strengthening employees instead of individual support for employees.

H2b: The CEOs surveyed consider resilience competence, i.e., the ability to achieve personal resilience, to be unimportant.

The testing of working hypotheses H2a and H2b should be considered in context with. Question F3 asking for the respondent's attitude toward resilience and its effects on the corporate achievement. It is considered that the surveyed do not generally attribute a high degree of success relevance to resilience. Furthermore, it is expected that managing directors delegate the topic to the organization as they consider it to be of little success relevance to firm performance (H2a). Furthermore, it is assumed that they do not place a high value on treating themselves or the management team with care (H2b).

Theses H3 and H4 test the effect of the variables surveyed by questions F1 to F4 as independent variables on the variables S4a (revenue growth) and S4b (EBIT growth) as dependent variables (see the questionnaire in the appendix). The working hypothesis H3a assumes that companies run by managers with a higher appreciation of resilience are more successful (difference test):

H3a: Companies whose managers value resilience higher than average are more successful in terms of firm performance.

The working hypothesis H3b assumes a positive effect of a coaching orientation and formulates analogously to H3a:

H3b: Companies whose managers value coaching higher than average are more successful in terms of firm performance.

Analogous to the working hypotheses H3a and H3b, the effect on firm performance is also examined on the basis of sick leave days of an employee. The indicator sick days on average per year and employee is considered a conventional performance indicator for corporate health management and is considered here as a proxy indicator for corporate resilience (Singer & Neumann, 2010, p. 58). It is said to apply: The higher the value of sick days/employee, the lower the level of corporate resilience. Accordingly, the hypothesis is H3c:

H3c: Companies with an above-average degree of resilience (= below-average number of sick days) show a higher firm performance.

Thus, based on the effect relationships formulated as working hypotheses and as a basis for multiple regression, the research model can be represented as in Figure 2, where - following the exploratory approach - no preference is assumed for any of the two factor domains in either of the three dimensions in both factor dimensions.

Fig. 2. Research Model (Source: Own representation)

B. Data Collection and Data Analysis Methods

The questionnaire was realized as an online questionnaire by means of the online service provider Survey Monkey. The surveyed companies were sent a link to the questionnaire. The data was collected in an anonymized way. The participation reminder email management for already contacted businesses which have not already taken part was sent automatically. Two reminder emails were distributed in total during the survey field time. Collection of data occurred between 10/01/2019 and 28/02/2019. Answering the questionnaire took an estimated time of 25.5 minutes per questionnaire respondent. The managing directors of companies whose headquarters are in Austria and who are members of the Leitbetriebe Austria network were surveyed. The Leitbetriebe Austria network sees itself as a platform for exchange in the field of corporate management and as a representation of the interests of Austrian companies of excellence. The latter results from the self-claim of the network and is secured by a set of admission criteria of economic and social key figures of the company, for which threshold values were defined by the Leitbetriebe Austria (Leading Companies Austria) and are the basis for the acceptance or rejection of applications as business network member. Thus, this is not a representative survey that allows conclusions to be drawn about the population of Austrian companies. Rather, an 'excellence' bias can be assumed, as the companies are among those with high ESG standards and firm performance based on various qualitative and quantitative selection criteria.

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For the survey, all managing directors of the member companies of the Leitbetriebe Austria network were asked to participate. Of the 352 managing directors contacted, 248 completed the online questionnaire in full. The resulting data set forms the basis for the data analysis in Section IV. The appendix provides the questionnaire as well as the data analysis results.

C. Data Analysis Methods

Data analysis was based on descriptive statistics as well as t-test for independent samples and multiple regression:
- The t-test for independent samples is used for comparison between groups formed according to different characteristics. The t-test for independent samples can be considered robust with respect to a violation of the uniform distribution for groups of relatively equal size (Bortz, 1989, p. 172), so that no test for normal distribution is performed. The significance level is defined as \( p \leq 0.05 \) as usual.
- High demands are made on the robustness of the final models of multiple regression with regard to autocorrelation and multicollinearity, i.e., the robustness of the final model. Therefore, the Durbin-Watson value is required to be \( 1.5 < d < 2.5 \) (Treyer, 2003, p. 137). As a threshold for tolerance, the final model should not include any variable with a TOL value of \( \text{TOL} < 0.8 \) (Zimmermann, 1997, p. 303; Scheld, 2013, p. 237).
- Regarding the scale level requirements of multiple regression, it is pointed out that data from Likert-scale questions can be considered metric variables (Güttler, 2009, p. 127), so that the requirements for multiple regression are met for all variables included in this research.
- Forward selection was used as multiple regression method which can be considered as best suited for explorative research (Hahs-Vaughn & Lomax, 2020, pp. 1011-1013).

IV. DATA ANALYSIS RESULTS

A. Data

A total of 248 complete data sets representing 248 companies are collected from 276 questionnaires. Due to the filter question at the beginning of the online questionnaire, it should be ensured that the answers come from the managing directors of the company.

With regard to the managing directors surveyed, it can be stated (see Table 2 in Appendix A2):
1. The respondents are between 35 and 61 years of age, with an average age of 46.5.
2. 2% of the managing directors interviewed are female, 98% are male.
3. Respondents have been general managers in the surveyed company for between less than 1 year and 20 years. On average, respondents have been managing directors in the current company for 6.42 years.

This shows first of all that women are clearly underrepresented in the surveyed companies, that the managing directors are on average in the middle stage of their lives and that, on average, they have not been working in this position for very long.

Regarding the companies included in the sample, it can be stated (see also Table 2 in Appendix A2):
- In total, 190,000 employees work in the companies of the respondents, with the smallest company having 16 employees and the largest having 1,100 employees. On average, 766 employees work in the companies.
- The companies of the surveyed managers generated EUR 24 billion on average over the last three years, with the smallest company generating EUR 5 million and the largest company EUR 160 million in revenue.
- The average revenue is EUR 99 million and the average profit (EBIT) EUR 27.4 million.
- The companies show a revenue growth of 15% and a profit growth of 24% on average over the last three years, so it can be assumed that the cost efficiency of the companies has increased significantly in recent years, as the profit grows disproportionately faster than the revenue.
- The average by sick leave days is 10.75 days, so that sick leave days are slightly below the Austrian average of 12.5 days (Austrian Federal Economic Chamber, 2018).

In terms of executive role focus and resilience, it can be seen that on average, respondents are leadership-focused (44%), while around 25% of respondents have an organizational focus, but around 30% have a coaching focus (see Table II).

Thus, we can first conclude that the majority of respondents understand their role as individual performance drivers and that organizational development (25%) and coaching (31%) are only of lesser relevance to success.
H2a and H2b: In the distribution of an imaginary budget for resilience, respondents prefer organizational solutions (45%), while personal resilience competence (38%) and individualized resilience measures (17%) are considered less important.

B. Success Relevance of Resilience and Coaching (H3a, H3b and H3c)

Based on the median, the data are grouped and analyzed using t-test for independent samples with the following results (see Tables 4, 5 and 6 in Appendix A2):

- H3a: Companies whose CEOs consider resilience to be more important than average do not show significantly higher revenue growth, but significantly higher profit growth (29% vs. 19%, p = 0.000).
- H3b: Companies whose CEOs rate coaching as a management role higher than average show no significantly higher revenue growth, but significantly higher profit growth (32% vs. 16%, p = 0.000).
- H3c: Companies with a below-average number of sick days - i.e., an above-average level of resilience — show significantly higher profit growth (32% vs. 18%), p = 0.000, but no higher revenue growth.

C. Factors explaining Firm Performance (Regressions Models)

For the two multiple regression analyses discussed in this Section, all variables of Questions 1 to Question 3 as well as the control variable company size were included as independent variables and their effect on the dependent variables revenue growth and profit growth was examined.

The stepwise forward multiple regression with revenue growth as the dependent variable (see Table 7 in Appendix A2) provides three predictors as the final model (Model 3): (1) organizational focus (F1-1_Orga Focus), (2) firm size (SS-Firm Size), and (4) profit growth (S4b_EBIT Growth). All three beta coefficients are positive. The explanatory power is 39.2% ($r^2$ (adj.) = 39.2; p = 0.000). Correspondingly, it can be concluded that the greater the organizational focus of the manager, the greater is the revenue growth. However, firm size is also found as predictor, so that it may be concluded that the relevance of the organization focus can ultimately result from firm size increase, insofar as the size of the company can be the source of an increasing requirement for an organization focus, so that a personal leadership style – for example, with a coaching focus – is decreasingly appropriate in larger companies in contrast to the ability to establish efficient organizational structures. This is in line with the results of the 2015 study on the topic of mental health of managers: Results Report on the PsyGeMa Study (Zimber & Hentrich 2015). The final model of the profit growth regression (Model 1; see Table 8 in Appendix A2) – showing a high explanatory power of 45.4% ($r^2$ (adj.) = 4.546; p = 0.000) – provides only the self-resilience focus as valid predictor. The predictor’s negative beta shows, however, that the lower the self-resilience orientation, the higher the profit growth. Thus, it could be hypothesized that profit growth is associated with manager’s lower mindfulness for his personal resilience resulting in increased profits. However, the low Durbin-Watson value (DW = 0.399) indicates a positive autocorrelation, so the result of the significance test may not be correct. In this respect, the model goodness of the final model is questionable to a certain degree.

V. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS

As a research question asks about the importance of different dimensions of management activities and the promotion of resilience for business management success. From the hypotheses testing and multiple regressions, it is found that:

- H1 can be confirmed: The CEOs surveyed see themselves primarily in the role of leader. A latent, implicit Big Man theory can be assumed here to be common among managers.
- H2a can be confirmed: Resilience is primarily seen as an organizational task. It could be assumed that company health management in standardized form (‘more or less the same for everyone’) is preferred to personalized or individualized assistance.
- H2b can be confirmed: Personal competence in resilience is least important to the respondents. It could be concluded that managers still give preference to the primacy of permanent commitment and performance orientation.
- H3a: A positive effect of resilience appreciation can be confirmed for profit growth, but not for revenue growth. Here it could be concluded that managers who value resilience more highly contribute to a work climate that already maintains and/or releases employee resources so that a positive effect in relation to profit growth is conceivable.
- H3b: A positive effect of a coaching orientation can be confirmed for profit growth but not for revenue growth. Here, it could be concluded that a self-image of the manager as a coach or a greater attention to the coaching approach in management favors qualitative growth.
- H3c can be confirmed for profit growth, but not for revenue growth: A higher degree of resilience is related to higher profit growth, but not to higher revenue growth.

However, the results of the multiple regressions with both revenue growth and profit growth do not support the results of the t-test concerning the hypotheses H3a, H3b, and H3c: (1) the revenue growth regression model allows the conclusion that increasing firm growth leads to a higher requirement of organizational competence instead of a coaching style in the management of employees; (2) the profit growth regression model shows a negative relationship between manager’s personal resilience orientation and profit growth indicating that profit growth can be considered as a result of absent-mindedness instead of consciousness for personal resilience. Moreover, both models show that a coaching style does not explain firm performance. Therefore, it is to conclude that (1) a coaching approach in management and (2) the consideration of resilience in its different dimensions – organizational resilience, the manager’s consciousness for his personal resilience, and a management style focusing on the resilience of employees – could not be found as success-relevant for both firm performance indicators (revenue growth and profit growth).
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APPENDIX

A1: Questionnaire

Results and Statistic

(F1) Are you in the habit of reading? (Yes/No)

(F2a) How far do you agree with the following statements? (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)

(F2b) How far do you agree with the following statements? (1=strongly disagree, 5=strongly agree)

Table III: Resilience Assessment

Table IV: T-Test Group Statistics: Resilience Assessment Groups (Grouped by the F3_Res.-Wertung Median; Referring to Hypothesis H3a)

Table V: T-Test Group Statistics: Coaching Orientation Groups (Grouped by the F1_3_Coach-Focus Median; Referring to Hypothesis H3b)

Frage F3

(F3) How important were the resilience measures in the last 2 questions in the company's overall success?

Frage F4

(F4) How important are the annual profit surpluses for managers (feeling of achievement), as well as the annual profit surpluses for the company for your health?

A2: Data Analysis Results (SPSS Tables)
S4a_Rev-Growth
Equal variances assumed
Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances
Sig. Sig. (2-tailed)
1.49 .107
S4a_EBIT-Growth
Equal variances assumed
Levene’s Test for Equality of Variances
Sig. Sig. (2-tailed)
0.00 .000
Table VI: T-Test Group Statistics: Resilience Degree groups (Grouped by the F4_Krankenstand Median; Referring to Hypothesis H3c)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>F4_Krankenstand</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>Std. Deviation</th>
<th>Std. Error Mean</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S4a_Rev-Growth</td>
<td>&gt;= 10</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>15.67</td>
<td>11.128</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4a_Rev-Growth</td>
<td>&lt; 10</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>14.49</td>
<td>10.388</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4a_EBIT-Growth</td>
<td>&gt;= 10</td>
<td>128</td>
<td>18.38</td>
<td>16.839</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4a_EBIT-Growth</td>
<td>&lt; 10</td>
<td>110</td>
<td>15.68</td>
<td>12.066</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table VII: Revenue Growth Regression Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Adj R Square</th>
<th>R Square Change</th>
<th>Durbin-Watson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.351</td>
<td>0.354</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.373</td>
<td>0.024</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>0.385</td>
<td>0.014</td>
<td>1.466</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

d. Dependent Variable: S4a_Rev-Growth

Table VIII: Profit Growth Regression Model

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Adj R Square</th>
<th>R Square Change</th>
<th>Durbin-Watson</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.454</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.355</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>0.589</td>
<td>0.000</td>
<td>0.544</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
e. Dependent Variable: S4b_EBIT-Growth

REFERENCES
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