



The Socio-Diagnostic Model for Analyzing Subtle Influence Technologies in Business Management

El modelo sociodiagnóstico para el análisis de las tecnologías de influencia sutil en la gestión empresarial

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ABSTRACT:

The issue of subtle and indirect influence in the management process has not been properly studied in sociology so far. The most diverse technologies can be used in management of business organizations of different levels. There are technologies that are based on subtle influence. But, moreover, it is impossible to explain many management technologies, subtle or indirect, by manipulation, as it was perfectly shown by the researchers of the human relations school (E. Mayo, M.P. Follet, etc.). A wide range of practices and norms of professional communication occurs spontaneously in small groups and bears no manipulative nature. For example, such management decisions (an extra break during working hours, lighting control on a working place, seating of people according to their likes and dislikes), which became the classic ones after the famous Hawthorne experiments (1924-1932), can be considered as subtle influence, but they are not manipulative. The author ranges subtle influence technologies together with such phenomena as spontaneous control, manipulation and suggestion, as part of the whole layer of management practices and technologies. From the author's point of view, subtle influence is studied as a wide range of changes in the structure of complex, nonlinear interactions of all participants of management communication and assumes that the nature of their impact is not official, public, but appears latently.

Keywords: Management, subtle influence, manipulation, social technologies, small and medium businesses.

RESUMEN:

La cuestión de la influencia sutil e indirecta en el proceso de gestión no se ha estudiado adecuadamente en sociología hasta el momento. Las tecnologías más diversas pueden utilizarse en la gestión de organizaciones empresariales de diferentes niveles. Hay tecnologías que se basan en la influencia sutil. Pero, además, es imposible explicar muchas tecnologías de gestión, sutiles o indirectas, mediante la manipulación, como lo demostraron perfectamente los investigadores de la escuela de relaciones humanas (E. Mayo, M.P. Follet, etc.). Una amplia gama de prácticas y normas de comunicación profesional se produce espontáneamente en pequeños grupos y no tiene una naturaleza manipuladora. Por ejemplo, tales decisiones de gestión (un descanso adicional durante las horas de trabajo, control de iluminación en un lugar de trabajo, asientos de personas según sus gustos y disgustos), que se convirtieron en los clásicos después de los famosos experimentos de Hawthorne (1924-1932), pueden considerado como influencia sutil, pero no son manipuladores. El autor abarca las tecnologías de influencia sutil junto con fenómenos tales como el control espontáneo, la manipulación y la sugestión, como parte de toda la capa de prácticas y tecnologías de gestión. Desde el punto de vista del autor, la influencia sutil se estudia como una amplia gama de cambios en la estructura de las interacciones no lineales complejas de todos los participantes en la comunicación de gestión y supone que la naturaleza de su impacto no es oficial, pública, sino que aparece de manera latente.

Palabras clave: gestión, influencia sutil, manipulación, tecnologías sociales, pequeñas y medianas empresas.

1. Introduction

Management is such a mode of activity of individuals or groups that is understood as restraint of action freedom in the frames of mandated norms and rules, which, in turn, provides for a conscious process of design, creation, change and relevant use of this instrument. The management process itself is rather wide and multifaceted in its nature and can result both in achievement and dispersion of goals of its subjects. Within a modern constantly changing social environment, the management process enables to effect regulative and control functions, as well as to be subject to motivating, sanctioning, stimulating, corrective and other impacts.

Subtle influence technologies are the instruments, the application of which is indirectly or in no way covered by duty

regulations of business organizations, and the nature of their impact is directed to special reactions of objects that cannot be achieved in another way due to different reasons.

2. Methods

Based on these theoretical and methodological instruments, the social research was conducted in business organizations of different levels in one of the regions of the Russian Federation – Bashkortostan – in 2010-2016.

The aim of the research was to define the frequency and ways of applying social subtle influence technologies by agents of management of small and medium businesses. The social research was conducted in stages.

The first stage included expert interviews with business consultants (2009-2010). The problem to define importance of social subtle influence technologies at formation and functioning of the organization culture in business organizations was considered. Thus, 43 experts were subject to depth interviewing that can be considered as substantiated from the point of view of the main selection criteria – competence and sufficient quantity.

The panel study was conducted based on the findings at the second stage (2009-2014). In total 763 leaders of business organizations were interviewed. The selection of enterprises was based on criteria, according to which business organizations in the Russian Federation had been assigned to small and medium businesses.

The third stage (2014-2015) involved the socio-diagnostic research with regard to the application of the social subtle influence technologies. It included quantitative and qualitative research. A set of focus-groups was run according to the above principles (type of enterprises, type of activity and location) and with addition of such a parameter as "application of subtle influence technologies at enterprises". There were selected 26 enterprises, limited by quotas as per types of activity: 12 service enterprises, 8 commercial enterprises and 6 manufacturing enterprises. Wherein, 16 of them were located in the capital of the region – Ufa city, and 10 – in other cities of Bashkortostan. Parallel to reinterviewing leaders of these enterprises, 26 focus-groups were run thereat with the participation of employees. At the same time, the social research was conducted at these enterprises. The selection was based on types of activity. In total 427 people were interviewed.

3. Results and discussion

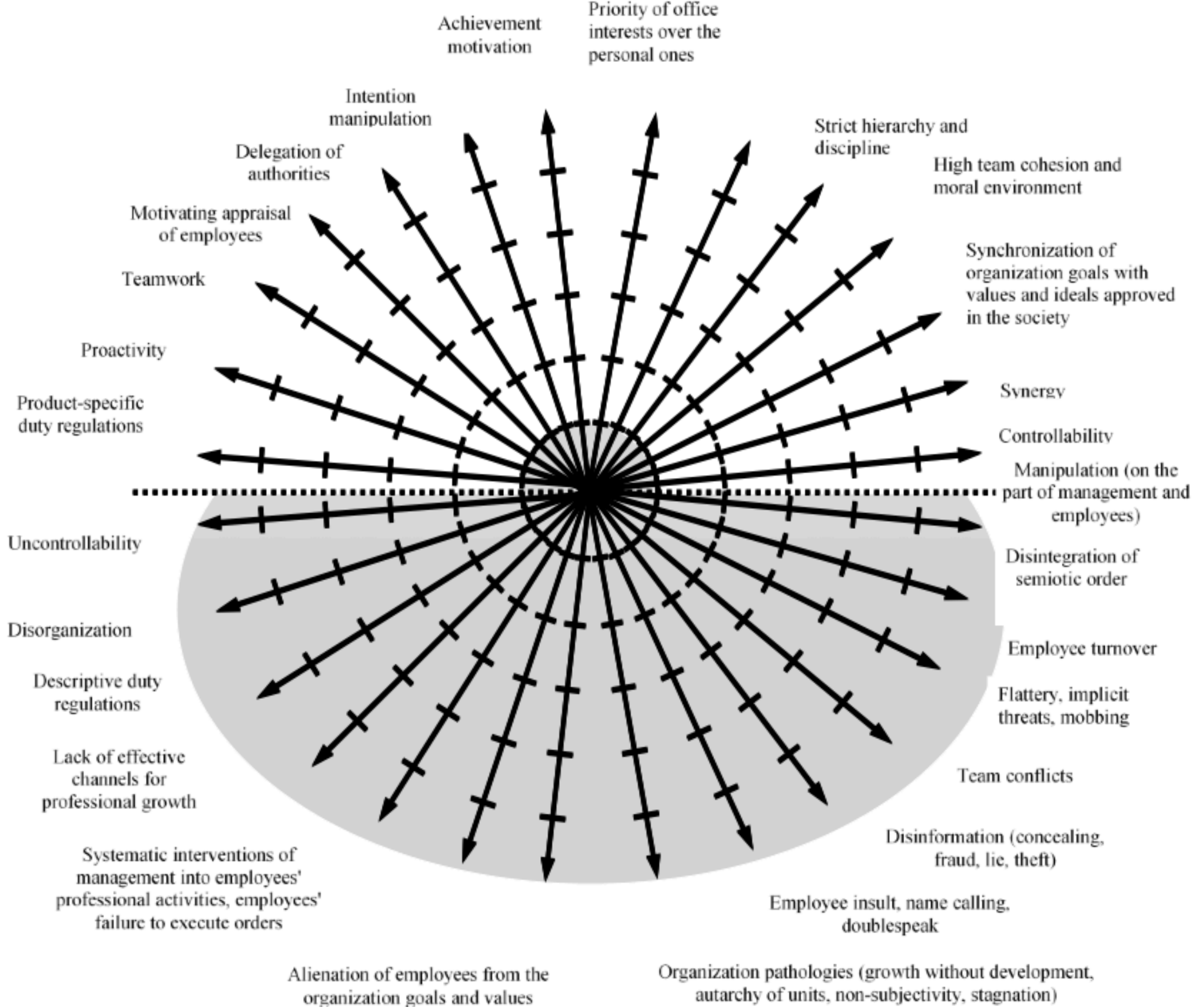
The first two stages of the research have shown that almost all business organizations use subtle influence technologies anyway, but their impact on the organization development and culture differs. Thus, a socio-diagnostic model of analyzing subtle influence technologies was constructed to define their place in business organizations.

The diagnostic features evaluating practicability of subtle influence technologies in a business organization were determined according to the approach founded by I.A. Prigozhin (2007), who offered to study the impact of these technologies by a pair of dichotomous terms "controllability – uncontrollability" and "disorganization – synergetic organization". The first dichotomy ("controllability – uncontrollability") characterizes the abilities of a management agent to implement the process, and the second one ("disorganization – synergy") enables to diagnose results of management activity. At that, the "controllability" category shows the most important feature of any management configuration involving the principal ability of a management agent to control internal processes and to transfer a system from one state to another depending on the targets and values. The "uncontrollability" category means a wide range of processes and factors (inclusive of the situational ones) resulting in a loss by the agent of its ability to manage the business.

According to I.A. Prigozhin, the category "synergetic organization" means the organization with proactive goal-setting (Prigozhin 2007), where parameters of staff achievement motivation are implemented and professional communication results in synergetic effect. It is counted with "disorganization" as a state characterizing processes in business organizations. The "disorganization" process includes a wide range of entropy processes, endogenous and exogenous factors resulting in imbalance of existing management configurations and, thus, organization chaos.

Figure 1

Wheel of diagnostic features of social subtle influence technologies
at managing small and medium businesses (Beck 2008)



As social subtle influence technologies are disseminated at the companies with different intensity, gradations of Figure 1 show the impact of one or another technology. So, this fact was reflected while drawing up a questionnaire of the socio-diagnostic research that was conducted at 26 small and medium businesses. This fact was reflected while drawing up a questionnaire and a guide for focus-groups.

The analysis of management practices of business organizations in Bashkortostan shows that the application of these technologies can result in both an increase of controllability and efficiency of organization development, and, vice versa, uncontrollability and disorganization. The sociological model, presented in Figure 1, is drawn up taking into account the ambivalence of application of these technologies and includes the potentially constructive (intentions manipulation, motivating appraisal of employees, etc.), and destructive (mobbing, flattery, implicit threats, employee insult, name calling, etc.) features.

It should be noted that the analytical geometry methods are used at accomplishment and visualization of sociological tasks, first of all, because they provide for possible visualization of a social object or a process. Mathematical modeling suggests solving the object operation tasks by finding criteria for its optimum operation. A set of equations forms a mathematical model of the sociological process of the static and dynamic types. In the static model, all parameters are related to the specific time. Therefore, a group of diagnostic features can be presented as free vectors, the application points of which are social subtle influence technologies.

The vectors are differently directed, but the "controllability" group vector is collinear and is directed opposite to the "disorganization" group vector. In turn, the "synergy" group vector is collinear and is directed opposite to the "uncontrollability" group vector. The "controllability" and "disorganization" group vectors are orthogonal to the "synergy" and "uncontrollability" group vectors (Beck 2008).

For calculation convenience we build up a Cartesian coordinate system with the Z and W axes and plot along these axes the following vectors with the application point at the origin: vector \bar{a} ("Controllability") with coordinates of the end of the vector $(\vec{a}_w; \vec{a}_z)$ – (that is, a_w – coordinate on the W axis, a_z – coordinate on the Z axis, hereinafter the notations are similar), vector \bar{b} ("Synergetic organization") with coordinates of the end of the vector $(\vec{b}_w; \vec{b}_z)$, vector \bar{c} ("Uncontrollability") with coordinates of the end of the vector $(\vec{c}_w; \vec{c}_z)$, vector \bar{d} ("Disorganization") with coordinates of the end of the vector $(\vec{d}_w; \vec{d}_z)$. By definition, coordinates of projection of the end of vectors $a_w, b_z, c_z, d_w = 0$, and a_z, b_w, c_w, d_z are equal to arithmetic average of management process features derived from empiric values.

At that, allowing for above characteristics, the vectors are plotted respectively in the positive and negative part of the system of coordinates, but the actual values of vectors are not "negative" and "positive" in a value sense, but are to characterize the dichotomous pairs of the management process in small and medium businesses. Thus, "controllability" and "synergy" are in the "positive" system of coordinates, and "uncontrollability" and "disorganization" – in the "negative" one.

In coordinate representation, the sum vector results from adding relevant coordinates of summands. Applying the rule of vector addition in coordinates

$\bar{r} = \bar{a} + \bar{b} + \bar{c} + \bar{d} = (a_w + b_w + c_w + d_w; a_z + b_z + c_z + d_z)$ we get coordinates of resulting vector \bar{r} .

Taking into account that business organizations are teleological, we plot the X and Y axes in one plane at an angle of 90 degrees to the Z and W axes. The dichotomous pair "goal achievement – dispersion" is in Y-direction, and the parameters characterizing means to goal achievement at the enterprise ("value influence" and "influence by professional communication") are in X-direction.

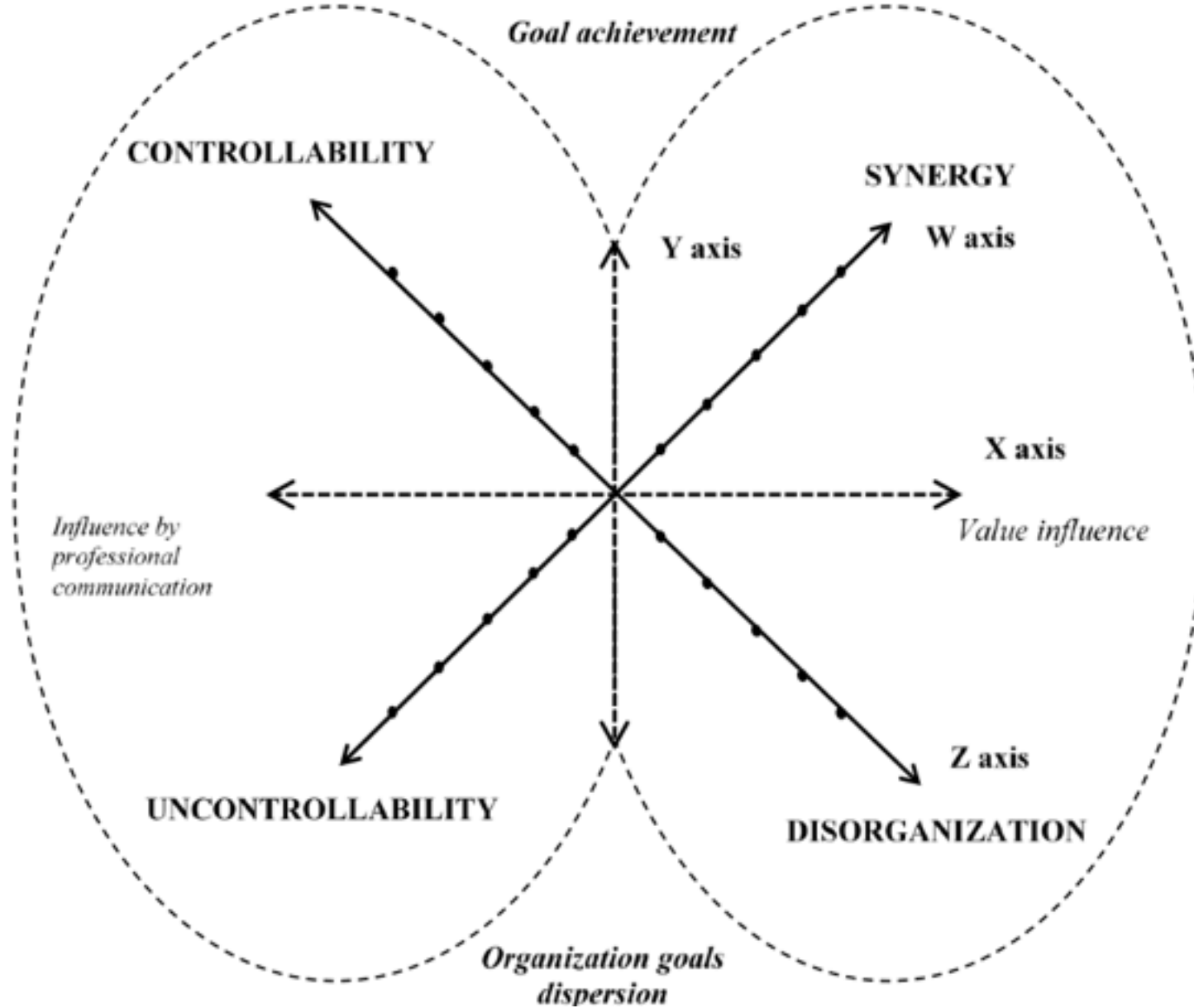
As a result, we form the X – Y coordinate system consisting of parameters of the direction of goal achievement by different channels (value influence and influence by professional communication). This system of coordinates enables to diagnose the management profile of social subtle influence technologies of the enterprise at present. Having successively connected the points of adjacent ends of vectors (a_z, b_w, c_w, d_z) , we get a trapezium with unique contours consisting of eight triangles, which are formed by axes of the coordinate system, these triangles are $S_1, S_2, S_3, S_4, S_5, S_6, S_7, S_8$. This trapezium means the management profile of subtle influence at one or another enterprise. The area of each triangle characterizes the application intensity of social subtle influence technologies and their dissemination channels. The term "management profile" characterizes the management process in business organizations by fixing special and unique (peculiar only to this management configuration) parameters of applying social subtle influence technologies.

Then, we need to identify such a parameter as a resulting vector. This parameter allows fixing the resulting direction of impact of social subtle influence technologies at small and medium businesses. And, the area of vector-adjacent triangles describes the intensity of impact by one or another feature.

The graphical model is as follows:

Figure 2

The vectors of social subtle influence technologies' application at small and medium business management (Dobrenkov, Zyryanov & Temnova 2011).



The above-mentioned diagnostic features are to be applied as the basic values for the coordinate system. These features show the availability of social subtle influence technologies which, in turn, enables to realize the management reflection, as well as to define the feasibility of using these (or any other) technologies in the management process. The diagnostic features are divided according to the dissemination channels of social subtle influence technologies at small and medium business management. Thus, they can be grouped as follows: organization development ("organization – disorganization" dichotomy) and organization behavior ("controllability – uncontrollability" dichotomy).

In order to determine the nature of impact of social subtle influence technologies on the management process, one should diagnose the intensity of their use. The larger area of a triangle, as compared to others, means more intensive application of social subtle influence technologies and, vice versa, the smaller area of triangles in a different system of coordinates means the smaller intensity of social subtle influence technologies (Saidullaev & Shestoperov 2011; Teece, Pisano & Shuen 2003; Habermas 2007; Chernysh 2014).

The findings of the socio-diagnostic research at enterprises are shown in Table 1. The calculations enabled to localize the nature of impact of social subtle influence technologies within the given system of coordinates.

Table 1
Findings of the socio-diagnostic research

No.	Evidence of subtle influence	Group	Questionnaire															Average		Variants of answers				
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	1	2	3	4	5		
1	Intention manipulation	Controllability	1	2	2	1	2	3	3	2	2	1	2	2	3	2	2	2	3	9	3	0	0	
2	Synchronization of organization and employees' goals by product-specific duty regulations		3	0	2	2	1	1	4	1	2	1	1	0	2	0	1	1	6	4	1	1	0	
3	Priority of office interests over the personal		3	2	2	3	2	3	1	1	3	3	1	2	2	1	1	2	5	5	5	0	0	

	ones by indoctrination																							
4	Motivating appraisal of employees		3	0	1	2	1	3	1	2	1	3	2	1	1	1	0	1	7	3	3	0	0	
Average																		1.7	21	21	12	1	0	
%																			38	38	22	2	0	
5	Achievement motivation	Synergetic organization	2	1	2	1	3	1	2	1	1	3	1	2	1	0	1	1	8	4	2	0	0	
6	Teamwork		1	2	2	1	1	2	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	6	9	0	0	0	
7	Delegation of (leader's) authorities		1	1	1	1	2	1	2	1	3	1	2	2	1	1	1	1	10	4	1	0	0	
8	Synergy		2	2	1	1	3	2	2	2	2	1	4	1	2	4	1	2	5	7	1	2	0	
Average																			1.6	29	24	4	2	0
%																				49	41	7	3	0
9	Manipulation on the part of management and employees	Uncontrollability	3	5	5	5	5	5	2	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	0	1	1	1	12	
10	Disinformation (concealing, fraud, lie)		3	4	4	3	5	4	4	5	4	5	5	4	5	4	4	4	0	0	2	8	5	
11	Doublespeak		4	5	4	3	4	4	5	5	4	4	4	5	5	4	5	4	0	0	1	8	6	
12	Flattery, implicit threats		5	5	5	5	4	4	4	5	4	5	5	5	4	5	5	5	0	0	0	5	10	
Average																			4.5	0	1	4	22	33
%																			0	2	7	37	55	
13	Employee insult, name calling	Disorganization	2	4	5	3	5	5	4	4	5	4	4	4	5	4	4	4	0	1	1	8	5	
14	Team conflicts		5	5	4	5	4	4	3	5	5	4	4	4	5	3	5	4	0	0	2	6	7	
15	Employee turnover		3	4	4	5	3	5	4	4	3	4	4	5	3	5	4	4	0	0	4	7	4	
16	Disintegration of semiotic order		2	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	4	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	0	1	0	4	10	
Average																			4.3	0	2	7	25	26
%																			0	3	12	42	43	

The complex socio-diagnostic analysis provides for understanding of prevailing dissemination channels for social subtle influence technologies at one or another business organization. In other words, it is important to understand that the subtle influence is performed by professional communication and/or value impact. This index is calculated by comparing the areas of the right and left side of the irregular geometric figure that graphs the management profile of subtle influence.

The resulting vector of social subtle influence technologies is a term enabling to fix the nature of impact of social subtle influence technologies on processes at small and medium businesses. As it was mentioned before, the resulting vector shows the direction of development of enterprises applying social subtle influence technologies at the moment. That is to say, the resulting vector allows to determine a "business as usual" scenario. Thus, if the resulting vector points at disorganization or uncontrollability, it is needed to reconfigure the social management technologies in order to improve the management efficiency. If the resulting vector points at the synergetic organization or the improved controllability, one must admit that the management practices are developed in a right way at the enterprise, and the business organization problems are to be found in external factors.

Taking into account these parameters, a multifactor socio-diagnostic model is formed to determine:

- the influence direction (organization goal achievement or dispersion);
- the prevailing dissemination channels for social subtle influence technologies in business organizations (defined by comparing the areas of the right and left side of the management profile);
- the resulting vector of social subtle influence technologies specifying the nature of impact;
- the intensity of social subtle influence technologies;
- the nature of impact of social subtle influence technologies on the management profile (synergy, controllability, uncontrollability, disorganization).

The socio-diagnostic model enabled to get empirical data with regard to the nature of application of subtle influence technologies in business organizations. The findings of the complex socio-diagnostic research of applying subtle influence technologies in business organizations enabled to identify the management profiles of organizations, as well as to classify them in terms of application of social subtle influence technologies (Ebner, Frank, Korunka & Lueger 2010; Grunig 2011).

The case study proves the non-homogeneous and non-linear impact of social subtle influence technologies on the management process. The analysis of positioning of the resulting vectors of subtle influence technologies shows that these technologies increase uncontrollability at twelve enterprises, disorganization – at three enterprises, controllability – at eight enterprises, and synergetic effect – at two enterprises. It is interesting that social subtle influence technologies result in peculiar compensation at one enterprise. The constructive and destructive parameters neutralize each other.

4. Conclusion

The analysis of socio-diagnostic model implementation arrangements has shown a rather important element. The destructive results of applying social subtle influence technologies are found anyway at the majority of enterprises under survey. Thus, within the formulated conception it is needed to analyze this problem in details and offer effective instruments to react to destructive results of the social subtle influence technologies application (Mugler 2015).

The socio-diagnostic analysis allowed to define some types of management configurations, which are characterized by both the constructive and destructive application of social subtle influence technologies, as well as by offer to develop transparency and participative principles at business organization management. The practical application of the socio-diagnostic model enables the management agents to determine practicability and efficiency of any subtle influence technologies, including of manipulative, suggestive and non-manipulative nature.

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