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**PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS OF SALES
REPRESENTATIVES WITH DIFFERENT LEVELS OF
COMMUNICATIVE SUCCESS**

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Abstract

This article deals with comparative study of the personal characteristics of communicatively successful and communicatively unsuccessful representatives of trade organizations. At the first stage of the study, all sales representatives were divided into three groups according to the method of communicative success: highly successful, moderately successful and low successful in terms of communication. The second part of the study involved only two last groups, which took part in a comparative study of professionally significant personal characteristics: responsibility, orientation of the person in communication, propensity to manipulation and features of career orientations. The results of the study showed that communicatively successful and communicatively unsuccessful sales representatives differ from each other by a set of some personal characteristics. Thus, communicatively successful sales representatives are characterized by the following main personal characteristics: high internality in the field of interpersonal relations, a relatively high tendency to manipulation in communication and a high level of benevolent attitude to the object of communication in order to cooperate on the basis of respect for the needs of the client. The analysis showed that communicatively unsuccessful sales representatives are characterized by the opposite set of qualities. They are characterized by a low level of internality in interpersonal relationships, a high level of conformism, low manipulateness and absence of interest in the customer's needs.

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Keywords: Professional activity, professionalism, communicative success, internality, communication styles, Machiavellianism.



1. Introduction

In modern conditions of development of market relations in Russia, the issues of professional development of a personality are becoming increasingly important. In this regard, great importance is given to improving the level of formation of professional competencies, building an individual professional career, which is due to the increasing role of human resources, the understanding that it is a personality, a person who is the main actor of the entire system of social and industrial interactions.

In Russian psychological science, features of professional activity are studied from different sides. At the same time, awareness of the high relevance of improving the skills of planning and implementation of individual careers in the scientific and theoretical literature is very little.

2. Problem Statement

In the most general meaning, professional activity is understood as a special kind of purposeful coordinated activity that arises as a result of the social division of labor (Yakunina, 2004, p. 7). This type of activity is characterized by a number of features that distinguish it from other activities. Such characteristics include a pronounced social nature, procedural, etc.

The concept of professional activity is inextricably linked with the concept of professionalism, in turn, the concept of "professionalism". It should be mentioned that modern scientific literature presents different approaches to understanding the essence of professionalism.

Professionalism is defined as the ability, acquired during implementation of educational and professional activities, to perform functional duties; skill level in a certain type of professional activity, corresponding to the complexity of the tasks (Batyshev & Novikov, 2010).

In psychology, the category of professionalism can be defined both through the category of activity and through the category of the subject of activity.

Within the framework of the activity paradigm, professionalism in modern scientific literature can be understood as "the systemic quality of activity that characterizes the level of its productivity and success required and actualized by an individual, and as the systemic quality of its subject reflecting its ability to achieve the specified standards of activity" (Voilokova, 2008, p. 27). In other words, professionalism is a quality of activity, which is characterized by higher productivity, efficiency, success, as well as by the presence of certain psychological qualities and properties that allow a person to achieve new qualities and characteristics of activity. In the process of actualization of the mentioned activity, formation of certain personal qualities, characteristics and competencies is carried out. In other words, the personal development of a subject of actualization of professional activity takes place, respectively, the activity itself is considered as a determinant of personal development.

Accordingly, professionalism can be considered as a systemic quality of activity that characterizes the level of its success, productivity of the intensity of the process, and as a systemic quality of an individual, reflecting his/her ability to achieve and implement the standards of a certain type of professional activity. Moreover, the individual qualities of a subject determine the peculiarities of professional activity, in turn, professional activity determines the peculiarities of personal and professional development of a personality. Professional activity, thus, is a result of implementation of

certain personality behavioral strategies, acts, and a factor that determines the characteristics of personal development of the subject of this activity.

Implementation of professional activity is always carried out by the personality, which necessitates the identification of the role and essence of the personality as a subject of professional activity.

Successful becoming of personality in professional activity I receive the detailed study in labours of many Russian psychologists.

Professional activity has a direct and reverse impact on a person's life. First of all, implementation of the processes of professionalization is determined by the dynamics of the life cycles of a person. In addition, changes in the professional activity of a person, achievement of certain professional success, a certain social status or, conversely, failure in the profession can rebuild a person's life (Povarenkov, 2002). The main result of the professionalization process is the formation of a high level of professionalism. In other words, the concept of personality as a subject of professional activity is inextricably linked with the concept and structure of professionalism.

Thus, on the basis of the analysis it can be concluded that in the process of implementation of professional activity, not only professional, but also personal development of an individual takes place, as well as formation of socially and professionally significant, important qualities. Professionalism is generated as a result of personality professionalization.

3. Research Questions

Based on these generalizations, we conducted an empirical study, the subject of which was the study of social and personal characteristics of communicatively successful and communicatively unsuccessful representatives of trade companies (sales managers).

4. Purpose of the Study

The aim of the study was a comparative analysis of personal characteristics of communicatively successful and communicatively unsuccessful sales managers.

The general hypothesis of the study was as follows: communicatively successful and communicatively unsuccessful representatives of trade companies have distinctive personal characteristics.

Particular hypothesis of the study

Communicatively successful sales representatives tend to be more successful in professional terms, as they have an increased tendency to assume responsibility in contacts with other people, as well as possess special stylistic characteristics of communication related to orientation to benefit.

5. Research Methods

In order to verify the hypotheses, put forward, the empirical part of the study involved sales representatives sent by various trade companies to the psychological center to participate in the "Sales Training", a total of 408 people.

The following methods were used in the work:

- 5.1. an adapted version of the questionnaire of Leontyev (2005) concerning diagnostics of communication efficiency;
- 5.2. methodology of subjective control level (SCL).
- 5.3. methodology of "orientation of the personality in communication" (OPC)
- 5.4. five-factor personality questionnaire, better known as the "Big Five" ("Magnificent Five"), developed by American psychologists R. McCrae and P. Costa (as cited in Khromov, 2000);
- 5.5. the Machiavellianism scale methodology - "Mach-scale" adapted by Znakov (2000).

6. Findings

In order to solve the problems, the first stage of the study, in order to form two samples of subjects (communicatively successful and communicatively unsuccessful), used an adapted version of the questionnaire of Leontyev (2005) concerning diagnosis of the effectiveness of communication of the respondents. This questionnaire reflects the level of the respondents on such parameters of effective communication as a strategy of behavior in a situation of interaction, the ability to orientate in a situation of communication, the use of verbal and non-verbal means of communication, the ability to organize the process of communication, conflict resolution, emotional perception. The level of respondents' effectiveness of communication was determined using this questionnaire, the results of which were supported by the method of observation.

Then, the sales agents who took part in the survey were divided into three groups by the method of deviation of the variance from the average value. The first group included sales agents who showed good results on the criterion of communicative competence (98 people), the second group included subjects who showed average values on the criterion of communicative competence (192 people) and the third group included subjects who showed a low level of communicative competence (118 people).

Two last groups took part in the follow-up study: sales agents, who showed a high result on the criterion of communicative competence, and sales agents, who showed a low result on this criterion. As a result of the test, two groups of respondents were formed (total selection was 216 people).

Further, the study was conducted taking into account the distribution of the respondents into two groups. According to the first hypothesis of the study, a comparative analysis of the personal characteristics of communicatively successful and communicatively unsuccessful representatives of trade companies was carried out.

To study the level of expression of sales representatives' responsibility, we used the SCL methodology. In order to assess the differences between the respondents groups, we calculated the values of the Mann-Whitney U-test (using the SPSS 10.0 program).

Table 01 shows the findings for each methodology scale.

Table 01. The values of mean and standard deviations for SCL indicators of communicatively successful and unsuccessful representatives of trade companies and Mann–Whitney U-test for the specified selections

Group	Statistical parameter	Internality indicators under the SCL methodology						
		I _g	I _a	I _{fl}	I _{fm}	I _o	I _i	I _h
Successful	M ⁻	36.5	10.5	9.1	7.3	7.7	3.7	3.5
	σ	2.8	1.0	1.3	1.2	1.3	0.5	0.6
Unsuccessful	M ⁻	32.5	9.1	7.8	8.0	7.0	2.3	3.3
	σ	3.9	1.8	1.7	1.6	1.6	1.0	1.0
U		183.000	204.500	218.500	287.500	301.500	94.000	400.500
P		0.00	0.00	0.00	0.05	0.09	0.00	0.92

Note: I_g Internality general
 I_a Internality in achievements
 I_{fl} Internality in failures
 I_{fm} Internality in family
 I_o Internality in occupational relations
 I_i Internality in interpersonal relations
 I_h Internality in health

As can be seen from the table, all internality indicators under the SCL methodology, except for internality in health (I_h) have differences between groups of respondents. Thus, communicatively successful sales representatives, compared with communicatively unsuccessful ones, have a higher responsibility in interpersonal relations. The findings are consistent with the first hypothesis, according to which communicatively successful sales representatives have a high propensity to assuming responsibility in contacts with other people.

According to the second hypothesis of the study, there was conducted a comparative analysis of the stylistic features in communication between communicatively successful and communicatively unsuccessful representatives of trade companies.

The stylistic features of sales representatives' communication were evaluated using the method "Orientation of the person in communication". The methodology allows one to diagnose the respondent's prevailing orientation in communication (% of the total part of verbal reactions): dialogic (D), authoritarian (Au), manipulative (M), alterocentric (Al), conformal (C) and indifferent (I).

The differences between the respondents' groups were also calculated using the Mann–Whitney U-test for all parameters, using communicatively successful and communicatively unsuccessful sales representatives' databases for comparison. Table 2 shows the findings of differences calculated for selections of "communicatively successful–communicatively unsuccessful" sales representatives.

Table 02. The values of the mean and standard deviations for the indicators of orientation of the personality in communication for successful and unsuccessful representatives of trade companies and the Mann–Whitney U-test for the indicated selections for the databases in the methods of orientation of the personality in communication and the Megrabyan–Epstein method

Group	Statistical parameter	Indicators of orientation of the person in communication under the methodology of orientation of the personality in communication					
		D	Au	M	Al	C	I
Successful	M ⁻	23.8	7.5	35.0	25.5	6.3	2,0
	σ	7.2	4.6	8.2	10.3	4.6	2,8
Unsuccessful	M ⁻	19.5	13.3	17.8	13.6	33.4	2,8
	σ	7.9	8.9	9.2	7.1	13.5	3,9
U		280.000	252.500	75.500	138.000	15.500	373.500
p		0.04	0.01	0.00	0.00	0.00	0.55

Let us begin analyzing table with considering the values of Mann–Whitney U-test: its values are minimal for the indicators “conformal orientation of the person in communication” (U = 15.500 at p = 0.00) and “manipulative orientation of the person in communication” (U = 75.500 at p = 0.00), and also relatively small for the indicator “alterocentric orientation of the person in communication” (U = 138.000 at p = 0.00). For the rest of the indicators of orientation of the person in communication, the values of the U-criterion are large, which indicates that there is no significant difference in the dialogic, authoritarian and indifferent types of orientation of the person in communication for communicatively successful and communicatively unsuccessful sales representatives.

So, based on the analyzed average values, communicatively unsuccessful sales representatives have high indicators of conformance in communication, while communicatively successful sales representatives are more prone to manipulation, and also have a higher focus on a communication partner, and this focus has a “humane” but parity-based orientation (such communicatively successful sales representatives have a higher indicator of alterocentric orientation of the person in communication).

The findings are consistent with the hypothesis that stylistic characteristics of communication of communicatively successful sales representatives are a focus on benefit combined with the ability to take into account the needs and interests of a client, while the same of communicatively unsuccessful sales representatives are a conformal and non-initiative position.

The next hypothesis of the study was to research the characteristics of professional motivation of communicatively successful and communicatively unsuccessful representatives of trade companies. The third assumption was proved using the “Career anchor” methodology. The findings (presented in Table 03) resulted from this methodology were calculated according to the same scheme as the previous ones.

Table 03. The values of average and standard deviations for the indicators of the “Career anchor methodology” for successful and unsuccessful representatives of trade companies and the same of the Mann–Whitney U-test for the indicated selections under the databases of the “Career anchor” methodology

Group	Statistical parameter	Indicators of career orientations under the “Career anchor” methodology								
		Professional competence	Management	Autonomy	Job stability	Residence stability	Community service	Challenge	Lifestyles integration	Business
Successful	M	23.0	33.0	25.4	26.0	26.0	9.6	31.8	32.1	43.3
	σ	8.8	8.3	6.4	3.5	3.5	5.2	9.5	7.7	5.4
Unsuccessful	M	29.3	34.3	38.6	25.9	25.9	13.9	36.1	31.8	32.2
	σ	7.3	8.9	8.0	3.6	3.6	8.0	9.0	9.2	9.2
U		251.000	366.000	90.000	402.500	281.000	310.000	396.500	406.000	127.000
p		0.01	0.52	0.00	0.955	0.05	0.13	0.88	1.00	0.00

The methodology indicators subject to record are:

- professional competence; management; autonomy; job stability; residence stability; community service; challenge; lifestyles integration; and business.

The analysis of Table 3 shows that the reliability of differences in career orientations of successful and unsuccessful sales representatives can only be judged using the “autonomy” (U = 90.000 at p = 0.00) and “business” (U = 127.000 at p = 0.00) parameters. All other Mann–Whitney U-test values for the “Career anchor” methodology parameters are large and do not have significant differences between the respondents’ groups, even at the level of $p \leq 0.05$.

The “autonomy” indicator shows higher values for communicatively unsuccessful sales representatives, and the “business” indicator shows higher values for communicatively successful ones. So, if the distinctive features of communicatively unsuccessful sales representatives are striving to get rid of organizational rules, regulations and restrictions (their typical feature is to do everything in their own way: decide for themselves when, how much and on which things they should work and to disregard the team rules), whereas the distinctive feature of successful sales representatives is striving to start their own business. Furthermore, they are reluctant to be someone’s employee but are prone to cooperate. It is possible that communicatively successful sales representatives see their organization work as a stage in their careers. You can also regard the fact that both groups are “young”, and communicatively successful sales representatives consider their current job as a school to get professional skills, whereas communicatively unsuccessful ones prioritize avoiding any organization activity, non-conformity in the

organization's rules and accepted work schedule, which indicates the differences in the "texture" of the occupational motivation of the former and latter ones.

At first glance, there is a rather paradoxical situation: on the one hand, communicatively unsuccessful sales representatives are prone to displaying conformism in communication, but, on the other hand, ignore organizational requirements. Actually, these are manifestations of an immature personality, his/her inability to build adequate social contacts, which creates obvious communication difficulties for sales, i.e. the direct sphere of professional actualization of sales representatives. The findings are consistent with the hypothesis that a distinctive feature of the communicatively successful representatives' professional motivation is that they strive for teamship with their trade companies' members.

Finally, we conducted a comparative analysis of manipulative inclinations of communicatively successful and communicatively unsuccessful representatives of trade companies. The Machiavellianism methodology (Znakov, 2000) was used for this purpose.

Based on the analyzed average values, communicatively successful sales representatives show average indicators, with a tendency to high ones, for manipulative tendencies under the Machiavellianism methodology (89.4 points at standard deviation $\sigma = 13.1$), whereas unsuccessful ones have obviously low indicators under the Machiavellianism methodology ($M = 60.4$ at $\sigma = 10.7$). In this case, the value $U = 35.500$ at $p = 0.00$. Thus, the differences here are obvious.

So, successful sales representatives show high propensity to manipulation, while unsuccessful ones show obviously low propensity to manipulation. The findings are consistent with the data received during the study of the stylistic features of communication for sales representatives with different levels of communicative success, and, in fact, prove the hypothesis: the communication stylistic characteristics of successful sales representatives are a benefit orientation combined with the ability to take into account the needs and interests of a client, while the same for communicatively unsuccessful sales representatives is a conformal and non-initiative position in communication with customers.

7. Conclusion

The findings of the study allow one to summarize the conclusions and describe the psychological portrait of communicatively successful and communicatively unsuccessful representatives of trade companies:

- 7.1. The personality features of communicatively successful sales representatives include high internality in interpersonal relations, and relatively highly developed manipulative tendencies (i.e. a focus on obtaining certain benefits for themselves) in communication and relatively high alterocentric tendencies (benevolent attitude to the communication subject for the purpose of cooperation based on respecting the needs of a partner). Using the Machiavellianism methodology also proves a significantly higher level of manipulative tendencies of communicatively successful sales representatives.
- 7.2. The personality features of communicatively unsuccessful sales representatives are characterized by a low internality in interpersonal relations, a high level of conformism, low manipulateness and no interest in the client's needs.

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