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CENTRE FOR AGRICULTURAL SCIENCES AND ENGINEERING
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DEPARTMENT OF MANAGEMENT AND LABOUR SCIENCES**

**KÁROLY IHRIG DOCTORAL SCHOOL OF MANAGEMENT AND BUSINESS
ADMINISTRATION**

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Dissertation abstract

Group management in agribusiness companies

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Debrecen

2008

1. INTRODUCTION

Socialization basically characterizes human being. Life may be spend in human society, with mates. Desire to get connected to a society is one of the most ancient human phenomena. It is typical of human, although social life may appear among other creatures, too. On the other hand, people deliberately seek society for other reasons beside instincts. They have intended to solve problems in groups for time out of mind (DOBÁK, 1996). Atmosphere of the society mutually influences activity. We must behave differently in a society than alone, and characteristics of behaviour may be determined by the skills of the group. People grow up as a part of different groups through lifetime, they work and grow old. Behaviour has impress on every atmosphere, just like all of them slightly or largely influence personality.

Communal human activity raised the attention of many discliplines in the last centuries, so it is a real interdisciplinary field. It is hard to determine who was the first to deal with the problem of mutuality, since its phenomenon is as old as mankind. Last century offered staple base for the observation of behaviour. It is examined by sociology, which analyzes elements of social activity, defines operational rules of individuals, groups, organizations and institutes. It is studied by psychology, a discipline dealing with human thinking and behaviour. Historic sciences quite often observe this kinds of examinations, events. In the last decades conventional economics focused on those processes, which serve institutional or social base for the understanding and observing events of economic life.

Many books were written about how socialization might help to promote labour, how working groups might be turned into more efficient and effective (for example SPEGEL and TORRES, 1998; BELBIN, 1998; HELLER, 2002). SCHUMACHER (1991) demonstrated in his book that our scientific and technical skills must deliberately be used to create such political and organizational systems, which enable intimate relations, optimal scales. People may find themselves in groups, their personality may be realized.

We need to think in the concepts of separated organizations, which may unite the mass of small scale items. When we are able to aggregate more efficient and effective groups, we may help others, who care about profits, in understanding the benefits of a more humanic organizations (KLEIN, 1998).

Management today is not a private, individual job. Due to characteristics of tasks, changing environment and many other factors, knowledge cannot be completely acquired or applied by only one person, or it needs too much time. The formation of organizational groups seems essential in this case. It seems logical to think in groups instead of individuals, which more and more form the base of organizational performance, so formation and operation of groups became one of the most important managerial job.

1.1 Researchal subject

Scientists of management have dealt with the rules of activity and operation of groups for a long time. First examinations are now more than hundred years old. Studies mainly focused on how groups are suitable to solve general problems. We cannot say that we could acquire convincing answers, only knowledge was enhanced, some processes may more precisely be defined, so communal behaviour and working activity may be predicted better. It also means that many phenomena wait for interpretation, and it also provide tasks for researchers.

Examinations in agribusiness seem to be complex as a result of the appearance of other factors. Occasionality quite often occurs as a result of seasonality, which also requires the adaptation to the changing situation. Despite the rapid growth of the last fifty years, the base and tool for working activity is the human itself with all of its beneficial or disadvantageous skills. This is why not all processes in the sector may be treated completely calculable and determined.

The subject of my PhD thesis is to reveal specialities, agribusiness characteristics of group and team operation. I decided during my examinations to mainly focus on managerial aspects, and researches would identify and describe characteristics of managerial activity, managerial opinions. Researchal results would also intend to develop and enhance managerial activity, by which communal work operation may get more efficient and effective. Researches were based on the functional examination method of University of Debrecen, Department of Management and Labour Sciences, it forms a private modul of that.

1.2 Basic suppositions of the research:

I started out from the supposition that groups are typical phenomena of everyday life, so they also appear in working activity. I supposed that in agribusiness processes communal forms of work may be identified, which also means the formation of special groups as a result of peculiar nature of internal conditions.

I accepted that international way of approach that groups are typical organizational tools formed to reach a specific goal. Managers of agricultural organizations probably prefer communal work activity and their opinion may be supported by real working activity, experience.

Consistency and occasionality in work equally determine group relations, types of organizations examined.

I also supposed that current agricultural conditions primarily justify aim and efficiency, effectiveness orientation, so human relations are not preferred enough. As a result of dependency from economic aspects, personal relations are not emphasized, so informality has a secondary role. It also means that managerial work division is less efficient and activity is varied, which may result in the managerial overload.

I believed that not purely organizational but also human aspects are apparent in the approach of internal relations. It was not clear what defines the system of internal relations, moreover whether managers need to completely deal with all of the group operational processes or only with formation tasks. The continuous attention to the whole process seemed more obvious.

Analysis, examination of the group by result categories may be a problematic field. It is hard to clearly define the operational saldo, results. I believed that operation today is mainly defined by organizational aspects, expectations and all other relations are secondary behind that. Beside many reasons, I tried to examine this field since it has not been cleared so far.

1.3 Aims of the research:

By carrying out doctoral research I tried to define how agribusiness groups may be described by managerial opinions, points of views. Objectives may be detailed by the following:

- ✓ To define the approach of professional literature of groups and what main characteristics may be identified.
- ✓ To examine what relations are apparent in agribusiness and what typical methods or traditions of group operation exist.
- ✓ To identify whether managerial activity covers all phases of group operation and whether managers are active in group operation.
- ✓ To determine how managers evaluate and judge groups in the sector.
- ✓ To clear how and in what way groups may be characterized, what specialities, conditions and typical events may be observed.
- ✓ To decide whether organizational or human aspects prevail in the operation of groups.
- ✓ To understand how group operation may be qualified and how managers themselves evaluate results of activity?

1.4 Activities of the research:

- ✓ In the first part of the thesis I tried to introduce basic knowledge, scientific results of the subject by studying professional literature, and tried to detail all those fields, which strictly belongs to it. I tried to form private definitions.
- ✓ Material and method of research introduce the base for the research, moreover those possibilities, which were used and applied during the researches. Subject of the research is the managerial opinion of agribusiness organizations. Examination means questionnaire survey carried out by attendants. Based on the research programme of the department, I edited a private questionnaire which analyzed managerial tasks and problems of group operation, from the point of view of managers.
- ✓ Validation of research methods, introduction of examination way were also my task.
- ✓ Results are introduced progressively, basic, descriptive statistics are followed by more sophisticated statistical tests and detailed evaluations are added by managerial points

of view. I think organizational and human parameters, aspects may identify differences in managerial evaluations, which I tried to introduce and describe.

- ✓ Thesis is ended by the introduction of new and novel results. It is necessary for the interpretation of researchal results, to demonstrate them by unique logics.

To summarize it all, general objective of my research was to form such statements, consequences and draw conclusions by theoretical approach and prime results, which may contribute to the better description, understanding and better management of these group structures.

2. THE PROCESS ASPECT GROUP APPROACH

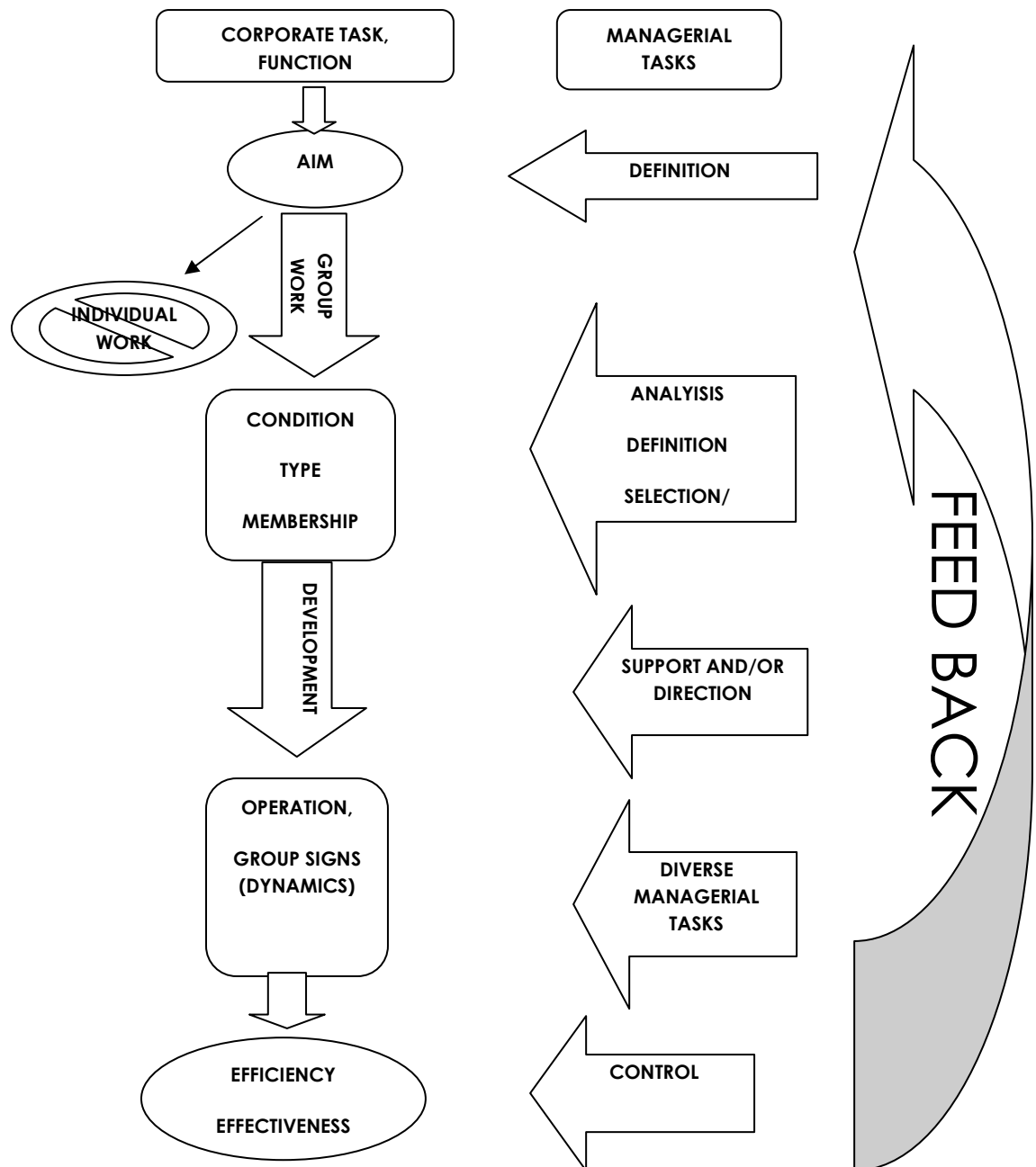
The study of professional literature summarizes and evaluates most important scientific knowledge up to now. It seems obvious that I did not select an isolated researchal field but one which may be approached from many aspects as a result of interdisciplinarity, it aggregates knowledge of many disciplines. Agribusiness aspects were preferred, although I could not find any other aspects but the organizational one. It also convinced me that the subject requires novel approach. I declared that we may clearly identify groups in agribusiness organizations. In this sector, operation seems traditional for centuries now, it is also connected to the culture of the region. Currently we quite often set up and manage groups. Analyzing professional literatures I am convinced that management of groups is a really complex, composed managerial task. Formation may be interpreted also to physical and mental activity, beside psychologic and social relations, it justifies validity even in the field of management. Examination of agribusiness justifies that working activity, seasonality, constant and changing groups were formerly valid for labour organizations, on the other hand typical, special structures, characteristics remained after the transition, too.

Term of the group may be defined in many ways. Some approaches focus on communal activity, interaction, or objective realization. In my opinion, group is a *communal form based on direct or indirect (virtual or some kind of IT connection) interaction, intends to meet many needs but mainly focuses on objective realization. Its characteristics, interactions and appearance largely differ from the skills of an individual.*

Professional literatures enabled to work out a private model to study the management of group operation (Figure 1). Model covers all the processes of operation, it also breaks the

whole in clearly defined details, phases. All phases may be treated as separate managerial tasks, where managerial approach and tasks depend on the actual phase. The process was broken into task defining, forming, activity and control stages and separate managerial tasks were paired to them.

Figure 1.: The managerial process of group operation



Source: Private examination, 2007

Management of organizational groups may be considered as private managerial function. Activity should be studied in its process, or some kinds of milestones be inserted, by which activity may be controlled from time to time and offers the possibility of intervention.

3. MATERIAL AND METHOD

In the thesis I intended to introduce researchal activity and results. Examinations formed the part of the functional type researchal program of Department of Managerial and Labour Sciences, as a private modul. I have edited a private questionnaire to survey the managerial opinions, it was revised by methodologic and psychologig bases. It was continuously developed and closed in 2004.

Material of the research included managerial interviews of agribusiness organizations. Questionnaire included fifteen technical questions to evaluate group management, beside the survey of basic corporal and individual data. The number of items was 477.

Data collected was tested statistically. To introduce the mass, I carried out descriptive statistical examinations. Since differences may also be explained by organizational and individual skills, I have also examined it by main component analysis. Another approach was possible by the demonstration and analysis of defined clusters. It all deepened my examinations considering functions compared to the results of descriptive statistics. To the evaluation of relations, the understanding of differences by individual and corporate characteristics, main component and cluster analyses privately contributed.

3.1 Introduction of the sample (characteristics)

I carried out my examinations among organizations of the North-Great Plain region. I intended to select mainly managers of the agribusiness sector. 28% of interviewees work for public company, 43% for limited companies, 10% for co-operatives and 2% for deposit companies, 17% work for other type of organizations. Considering height, the distribution of micro organization is 8%, for small organization it is 27%, for intermediate it is 44% and 21% of managers belong to great enterprises, it also means that in 92% of organizations, more than 10 employees work. 71% of interviewees are male, the rest are female. Considering age distribution, most of the respondents belong to the middle age category, the ratio of 30-60

year old respondents is 80%, the ratio of 20-29 year old respondents is 17%, while the distribution of relatively older interviewees is only 3%. Considering professions, 77% has a diploma. The ratio of those with technical school degrees is 21%, with vocational school is 2% and primary school is less than 1%. All respondents were managers. Inside I separated bottom, intermediate and high level managerial categories. The ratio of the bottom level managers is 33%, the ratio of high level ones is 21%, the rest belongs to the intermediate level category. Most managers are responsible for the activity of smaller groups. The ratio of managers with less than 10 subordinates is 51%, the ratio of managers with 11-50 subordinates is 41%, a slight part (8%) has more than 51 subordinates.

3.2 Structure of the examinations

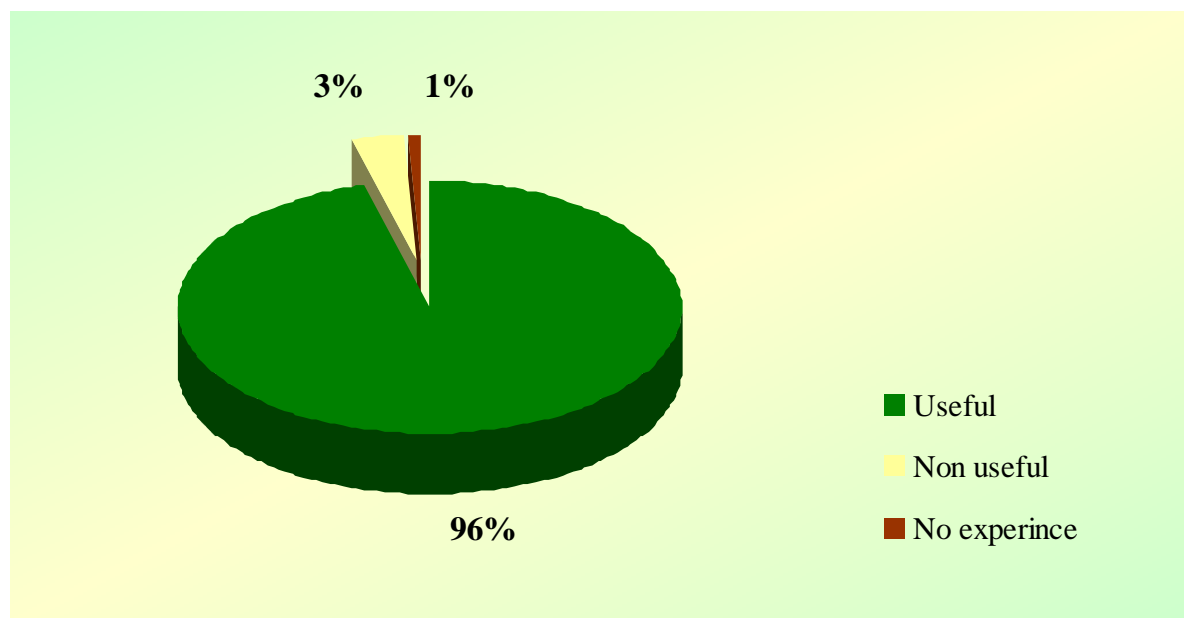
The database was examined by different statistical tests. In my analyses I follow this order. First part introduces the results of statistical examinations. It includes further chapters, I separately examined the managerial approach of factors affecting the question of group formation, the relations of group membership and internal conditions. Descriptive statistics were finished by the evaluation of factors of group operation. Detailed analyses basically included two examinations, the results of main component and cluster analyses. In the framework of main component analysis, I have treated organizational and individual parameters separately. Of organizational parameters, I have examined operational profile, operational form and the effect of height by the number of employees. Of the individual parameters, I have analyzed the effect of position, graduation, age and sex on the difference in managerial opinions. Last chapter of statistical test included the results, main consequences of cluster analysis.

4. RESEARCHAL RESULTS

Some literatures suggest that the opinion, thinking of group operation differs from the real practice. My results proved that managers examined had experiences of operation of groups, so real, actual practice supports their opinion. Two, separate aspects may be identified through the development of management. Former, classic theories justify the efficiency loss by group operation, while novel approaches promote communal work due to efficiency and

effectiveness reasons. So the examination, evaluation of group work may be justified by controversial professional literatures, it may also be beneficial or not. This is the reason why I wondered how managers think about communal, group activity. This is an elemental part of the questionnaire, since I intended to examine the opinion of those ones, who have expertise, practice and impression about working together. Respondents had the opportunity to decide whether it is beneficial, disadvantageous, or they could not have the experience. Figure 2 illustrates that most of them (99%) had practice in working together, so they also had real opinion. 96% of the managers considered common work useful, since this kind of work is more efficient and faster this way.

Figure 2: Managers' opinion of working together in groups

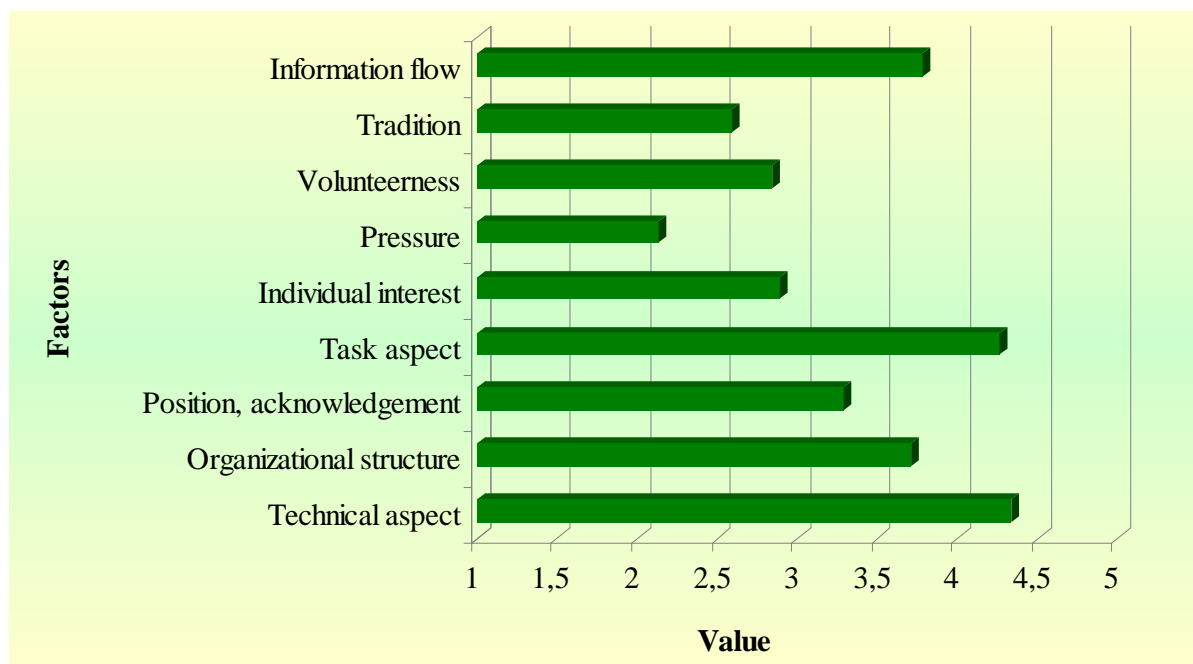


Source: private examinations, 2004-2007.

Smaller ratio of managers (3%) believed that work cannot be performed in groups, they probably considered it to be a disadvantageous anomaly and avoided that. This largely justifies the divided professional suggestions, since there are those opinions which do not prefer it as a result of disadvantageous contribution to the company interest and operation. It may also be interpreted that this ratio prefers individual working activity. Most managers preferred common work in groups, but the controversial aspect still exists, which suggests avoiding its application.

There are many reasons behind the formation of groups, many factors may also interact. By the next question I tried to define what may be the most important factors of group formation from the point of view of managers (Figure 3). Formation may occur directly or spontaneously. The question more precisely examined the reasons for group formation and factors interacting in it. Respondents considered technical aspects (4,33), task aspects (4,26) and information flow (3,78) items most important.

Figure 3: The qualification of group formation factors



Source: private examinations, 2004-2007.

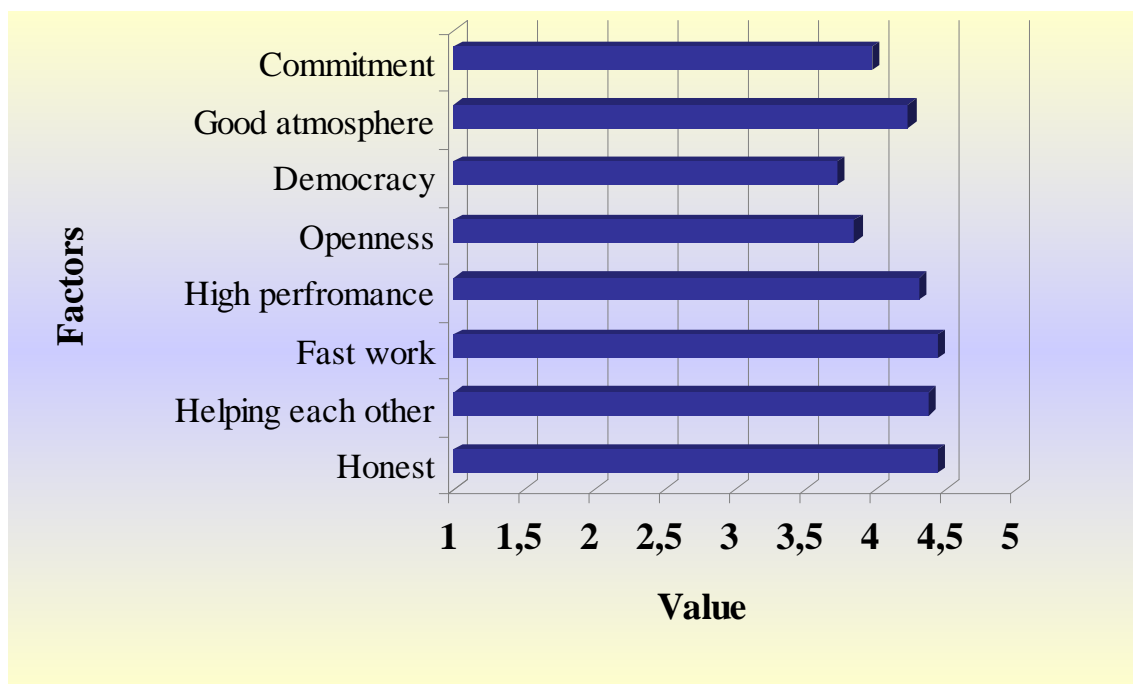
Results show that groups are formed mainly for organizational and technical reasons, so primarily formal, official groups are set up for operation. Individual factors has little role and effect, so informality is not dominant. The ratio of functional and task groups also equals by importance, the dominance of functional groups is slightly larger. Of the formation methods, management and tasks aspect prevail, authority and concincing methods had little role.

I have dealt with the question of membership in different chapter. I have started my examinations by the analysis of general group related factors, later these were analyzed in details. I separatedly examined the role of different norms, the formation of group cohesion, and factors responsible for polarization. Moreover, I have examined factors influencing

ingroup position and most important roles. Finally, I tried to determine how respondents evaluate most important group related benefits and drawbacks and their relation.

In this examination, many results seem notable. At the examination of group membership relations, I have found that benefits are more important than drawbacks, so values are emphasized. Evaluating positive norms, I have found that most important norms also cover work performance and personal relations (Figure 4). Least important norm was democracy, which may justify the existence of structural conditions.

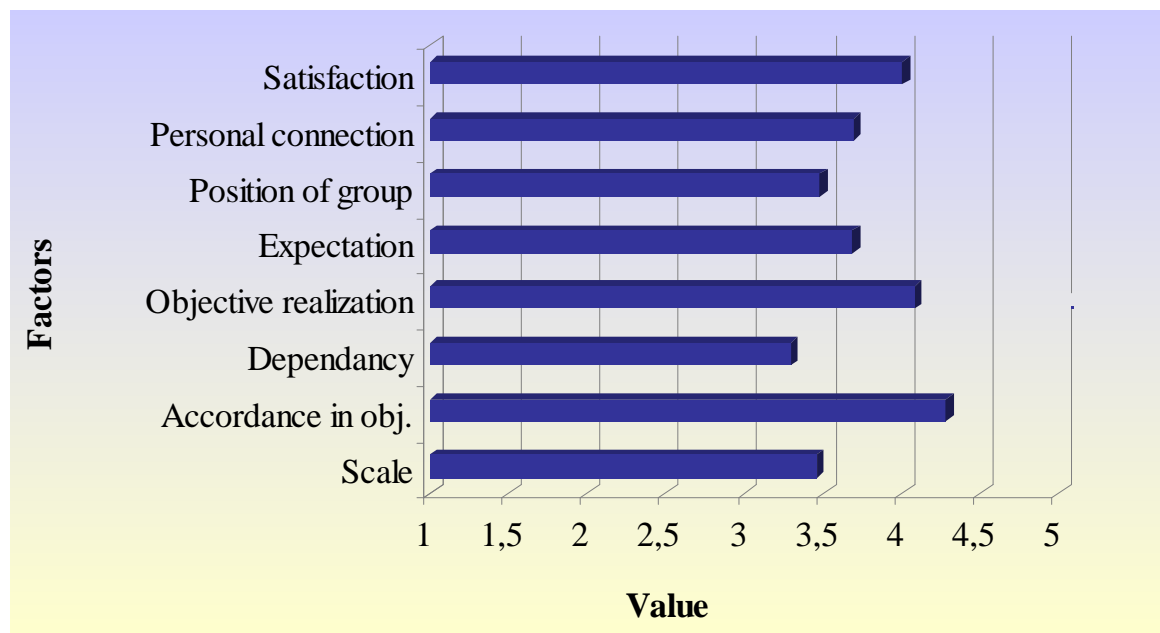
Figure 4: Evaluation of group norms



Source: private examinations, 2004-2007.

Cohesion is the force keeping the group together, and its tightness, property. This is why not just cohesion, but factors generating polarization had to be examined, since these kinds of relations sometimes are not cleared. Results of my examinations are illustrated in Figure 5. It shows that cohesion is most of all influenced by the accordance in objectives. In the generation of polarization, organizational and personal reasons also interact.

Figure 5: Qualification of factors determining group cohesion

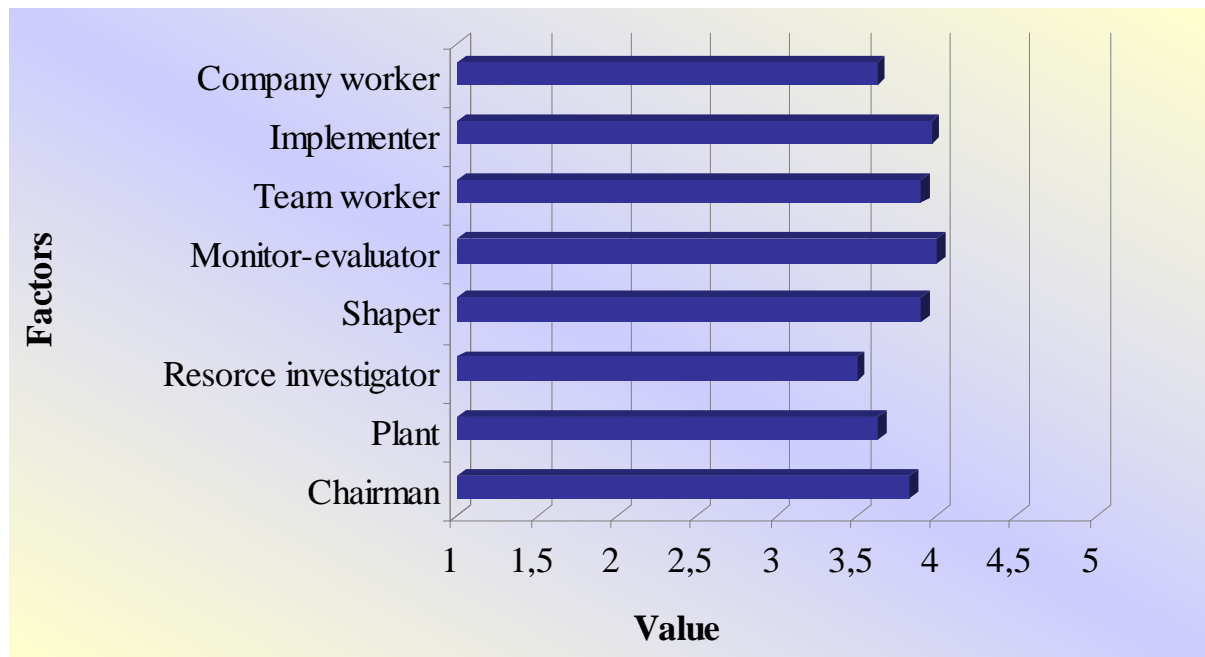


Source: private examinations, 2004-2007.

State and role are the most important properties of the internal structure. The reason for the examination was to determine most important factors, which determine position of the individual inside. Personal and work related factors were also included among factors by professional suggestions. Examinational results show that state is most of all influenced by technical competence. At the examination of personal roles, I have tried to apply the system of roles defined by BELBIN (1998), where all persons may be identified as one of the following actors in the group: chairman, plant, resource investigator, shaper, monitor-evaluator, team worker, implementer, company worker. My approach follows this classification. Most important was the monitor-evaluator role by respondents (Figure 6).

Meanwhile, it seems obvious that there was not a dominant role due to the similarity of values, which means managerial activity cannot be characterized by a single role, managerial role is diverse, complex, composed. It also means that all roles were found to be equally important by managerial evaluations.

Figure 6: The qualification of roles

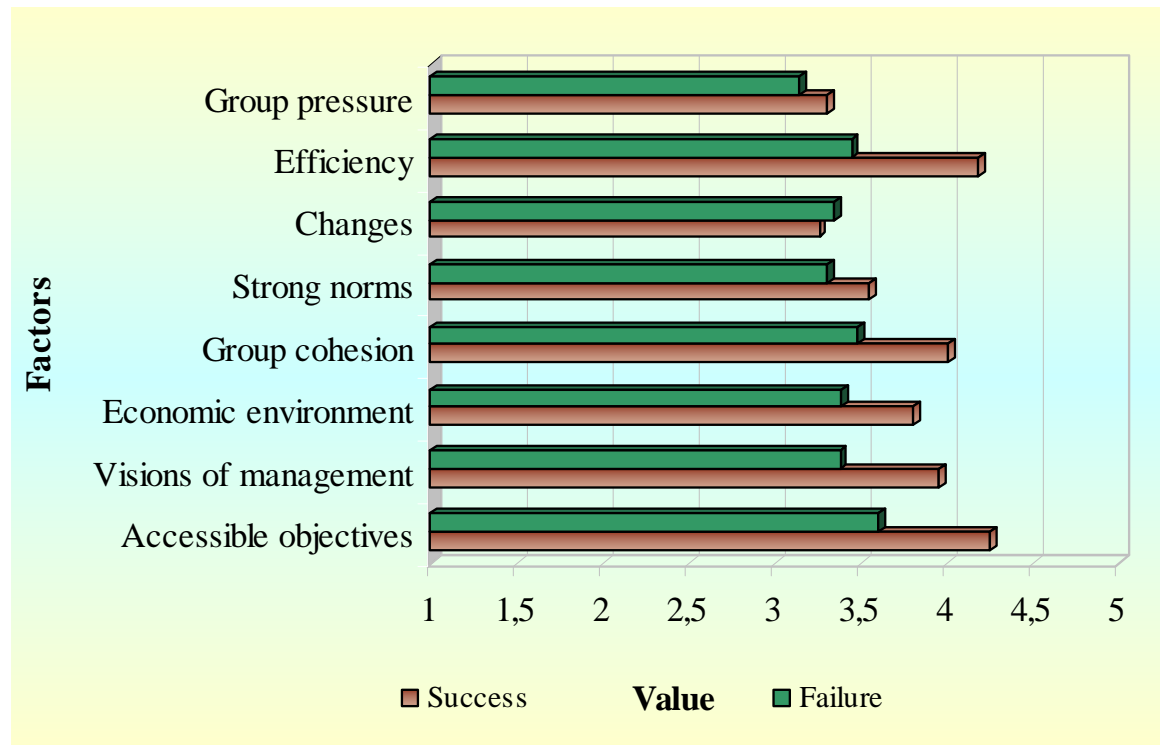


Source: private examinations, 2004-2007.

Examining the benefits of group activity, I have found that these are mainly organizational related instead of individual, meaning that benefits connect to functions, and personal interests are not really relevant. Drawbacks are generated by personal and norm related reasons, so the acceptance of rules may also interact.

The qualification of operation was examined in a private chapter. Differences in the qualification of success and failure indicate that factors defined largely justify success compared to the failure. (Figure 7).

Figure 7: The comparison of success and failure factors



Source: private examinations, 2004-2007.

In both cases most important factors were accessible objectives and efficiency. Failure is largely determined by group cohesion, as well. The relative high role of group cohesion may refer to the appearance of negative anomalies. By the results of examinations of organizational acceptance I believe that organizational position largely depend on the efficiency of operation.

For the better understanding of connections examined, descriptive statistics were supplemented by main component analysis. My objective was to more precisely define differences in the behaviour of the sample by parameters and to discover novel relations. Parameters examined were composed of organizational and individual characteristics of the original questionnaire. For the analysis, these all were selected into two groups. Organizational parameters included organizational profile, operational form and number of employees. Individual parameters included position, graduation, age and sex. Main components were formed between questions ranging from 3 to 17. I have worked with 104 factors, and 43 variables were created. Considering distribution, I had 33 main composed components and 10 single ones.

By the examination of organizational parameters, I have determined that managers of agro-economic organizations mainly form groups by interest and information, while other managers emphasized the role of technical tasks. Membership generates financial and prestige benefits, it is largely valid for limited companies. Managers of other organizations think membership has more technical related benefits. It also means that group formation is mainly characterized by not purely technical but also individual reasons for agro-economic organizations, while other organizations mainly concentrate on technical and task aspect. The role of information main component is dominant by co-operative respondents, financial and prestige benefits are most important for limited companies. Managerial opinions also differ by scale categories. For larger organizations, formation is mainly influenced by identification with objectives, convictions, while middle organizations mainly organize their groups by technical aspects, which means organizational reasons. Considering membership values, the rise in scale may lead to technical benefits instead of financial ones. Moreover, I have defined that groups in intermediate organizations became polarized due to task and work division, while in larger organizations position has attributes by which membership became divided. There was difference in the qualification of membership related questions, small organizations are mainly result orientated. Intermediate organizations must deal with restrictive, limiting factors, large organizations have considerable values for the members, which also means attractive forces.

I have drawn many consequences from the examinations by individual parameters. Examinations by position indicated some differences in membership roles, some ones may be emphasized by higher positions, such as the chairman role. The judgement of this role is special, since its importance raises with age, position and graduation partially. Graduation related examinations revealed that technical aspects (tasks, technical points of view) were mainly important for those with higher graduation, by the decrease of that this component became less emphasized as a formation method. Significant differences appeared at higher graduation respondents, their view on these questions (appeal, cohesion, norms) may obviously better. Age has a dominant role for the relative younger and older managers, it is highly valid in the case of membership benefits (financial and prestige reasons), norms and membership related questions. Considering females, some components have a larger role, mainly formality related aspects, which means the emphasize on formality by women. Men assign greater role of some authority factors.

I intended to explain differences by typical properties in the framework of cluster analysis, and some tendencies could be revealed. Groups formed differed by many aspects, many properties, so by focus on these differences further characteristics may be illustrated, and former definitions may be justified.

Cluster analysis required the division of the sample into four groups. I have created the following clusters:

- **1. cluster:** set of co-operative and other organization managers, they mostly have the same distribution considering position, they are of middle age (above 30 years), the number of employees ranges from 10-250 capitals, so it means small and intermediate level organizations.
- **2. cluster:** set of managers of limited companies, they are more than 40 years old, most of them have top positions, organizations represented are mainly micro and small scale ones.
- **3. klaszter:** set of managers of corporations and limited companies, they most of all are relatively younger (85% less than 40 years old), their positions range from bottom to intermediate level, and number of employees ranges mainly from 10-250 capitals, so small and intermediate organizations are covered.
- **4. cluster:** set of managers mainly of corporates and even limited companies, the ratio of bottom level managers is relatively high compared to the former clusters, with almost the same amount intermediate level managers, they are relatively elder, and this cluster includes mostly the higher organizations, which means intermediate and large organizations. Cluster parameters are detailed in Table 1.

Table 1.

The characterization of defined clusters by examinational parameters

Clusters defined	Operational form	Number of employees	Sex	Age	Graduation	Position	Frequency (%)
1	4,58	2,85	1,30	3,79	4,32	4,95	26,9
2	2,03	1,65	1,30	4,77	4,07	5,30	13,5
3	1,73	2,52	1,18	2,75	4,19	4,80	26,0
4	1,43	3,40	1,32	4,32	4,31	4,73	33,6
Total	2,44	2,79	1,28	3,83	4,25	4,88	100,0

Source: private examinations, 2004-2007.

Differences in the judgement of main components revealed by cluster analysis may be described by numbers. Such data set may be better illustrated in a table I have edited, where mainly differences are highlighted. Table 2 demonstrate the opinion of all the four clusters, meaning whether a specific main component has a role in the determination of the questions, and defining its direction.

Cluster analysis revealed many connections. Formation is mainly affected by technical factors by limited companies and public companies, while information factor seems to be more determinant for co-operatives and other organizations. Financials and prestige as membership values are mostly dominant for bottom and middle level managers. The importance of different values as a reason for polarization differs between the younger and older respondents, its importance may rise with age for public and limited company bottom and intermediate level managers. Appeal mainly dominant for relatively elder, bottom and intermediate level managers of limited companies and public companies. Group pressure is mainly emphasized by elder bottom and middle level managers of limited companies, while top managers ignore that. Of the roles, chairman seems specific for elder top managers of small scale limited companies, its importance seems to be changing by the increase of position and age.

Table 2.

Differences in the evaluation of components by cluster analysis

	Group formation		Membership benefits	Polarization	Membership		Group failure
Clusters/ Factors	Technical aspect	Information aspect	Financial, prestige benefits	Different value orientation	Appeal	Limitation factor	Group norm/effect factor
1.cluster	-	+	-	~	+	~	+
2. cluster	+	-	~	~	~	-	-
3. cluster	+	-	+	-	-	~	~
4. cluster	~	~	~	+	~	+	+

Legend (- less important, ~ average important, + more important)

Source: private examinations, 2004-2007.

As a summary, I may declare that operation, based on my results, may be interpreted as a process. Formation is dynamic and has two directions, so tendencies of development and its controversy may be identified, in many cases norm realignment, renewal may occur. Development itself is a long term, dynamic procedure, since activity rarely static, so it is mainly characterized by constant move and change.

5. NEW AND NOVEL SCIENTIFIC RESULTS:

- ✓ I have identified that group operation is traditional, typical of the sector, although it has only been described by organizational aspects. By studying professional literature and private examination, I have defined groups and sectoral teams.
- ✓ I have worked out for the management of group operation a private model, it has a process approach, stages are paired with managerial tasks.
- ✓ Mainly organizational aspects are considered at formation, informational relations are less emphasized. Managerial opinions revealed that organizational and individual aspects equally appear in internal relations. Operation may be evaluated by criteria of success, and it is primarily judged by efficiency.
- ✓ Managerial opinions mainly covered organizational aspects, the participation of individual relations seems to be slight. It also means the ignorance of personal conditions and enhance the current, mainly economic aspects and may relate to the autocratic attitude of managers.

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14. **Szabados Gy.:** Csoportmenedzsment és csoport strukturális vizsgálatok a mezőgazdaságban. „Élelmiszer alapanyag előállítás - Quo vadis” XXXI. Óvári Tudományos Napok kiadványa, Mosonmagyaróvár, 2006.
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16. **Szabados Gy.** – Dienesné K. E. – Munkácsi Sz.: Organizations and groups: Internal network inside companies. Riesenie krízovycs situácií v špecifickom prostredí. Nitra, 2006.
17. **Szabados Gy.** – Dienesné K. E. – Munkácsi Sz.: Group management examinations in the field of agriculture. Organizations and groups: Internal network inside companies. Riesenie krízovycs situácií v špecifickom prostredí. Nitra, 2006.
18. **Szabados Gy.** – Dajnoki K. – Berde Cs.: Examination of performance groups. „Enhancing the Capacities of Agricultural Systems and Producers” Second Green Week Scientific Conference, Berlin, Germany, 2008. /<http://www.mace-events.org/greenweek2008/5228-MACE/version/last/part/19/data?branch=1&language=2/>
19. **Szabados Gy.** – Dajnoki K. – Berde Cs.: Managerial Attitudes of Agricultural Performance Groups. „43rd Croatian and 3rd International Symposium on Agriculture” Opatija, Croatia, 2008.

<u>Scores of the Publications Relating to the Dissertation</u> <u>(Minimum Score: 1,0):</u>			
1. 0,1	6. 0,1	11. 0,1	16. 0,1
2. 0,1	7. 0,5	12. 0,1	17. 0,1
3. 0,5	8. 0,5	13. 0,033	18. 0,1
4. 0,1	9. 0,025	14. 0,1	19. 0,1
5. 0,15	10. 0,0375	15. 0,1	Total: 2,94