

PSYCHOLOGICAL FREEDOM TO FEAR WHEN DEFENDING A THESIS IN PORT TECHNOLOGY MANAGEMENT

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Abstract

There are situations when employees of port companies studying at the maritime academy write good-quality theses but, as undergraduates, they are too afraid and worried when preparing and defending their theses. Therefore, the persons involved in the preparation of the thesis usually advise the undergraduates using clichés “don’t worry”, “don’t stress”, etc. The advice mentioned is a disservice because they do not explain how not to be worried and not to be stressed. At that time, the persons involved give additional fear to the undergraduates who may be afraid of their natural fear – the fear of defending the thesis. Therefore, their fear multiplies. The support system should be the main academic key to the success of undergraduates. It is important to give them the freedom to be, live and naturally fear, if necessary, because it allows the person to meaningfully experience his/her individual authenticity, wholeness and integrity from the anthropological point of view. This experience can reduce his/her fear.

Key words

Undergraduates, theses, fear, freedom, seaport

JEL Classification: H00, H53, E26.

Introduction

Seaport companies are characterized by intensive technological activities of cargo handling, warehousing, ship agency, forwarding, etc. A person feels the call to work in a port company and goes there to be hired. Vocational training for work in the port is held at the maritime academy, where students study and finally defend their theses. Natural stress, fear, anxiety and excitement characterizes work in the port and the defense of a thesis – this is a test-phobia.

Mental phenomena in society are interpreted differently, especially because of the difference between popular and scientific psychology.

Popular psychology is based on things such as:

- Primitive pragmatism and social cliché of the approach to the person’s behavior and traditional folk sayings and advice;
- Ignorance of the specific direction of psychology when making decisions;
- Ignorance of anthropological laws of personality, and of the principles of the person’s integrity, expression and development.

The representatives of scientific psychology do as follows:

- Carefully assess mental phenomena and consistently take into account the specific

direction of psychology in accordance with scientific epistemology;

- Do not follow social clichés and do not give any advice;
- Know the anthropological laws of personality, and the principles of integrity, expression and development of personality, which are based on theoretical and empirical research.

There are situations when employees of port companies studying at the maritime academy write good-quality theses but, as undergraduates, they are too afraid and worried when preparing and defending their theses. Therefore, the persons involved in the preparation of the thesis usually advise the undergraduates using clichés, for example, “don’t worry”, “don’t stress”, etc. Inadvertently, the advice mentioned is a disservice because they do not explain how not to be worried and not to be stressed. At that time, the persons involved give additional fear to the undergraduates who may be afraid of their natural fear – the fear of defending the thesis. Therefore, their fear multiplies.

Generally, this is a very sensitive area in people’s relationships with themselves. The mentioned advice can reduce the undergraduate’s self-esteem and self-confidence because he/she starts to think, for example: “If I am afraid of defending the thesis, is there something wrong with me?” Additional and

unnecessary psycho-emotional experiences begin to occur. The undergraduate's natural fear increases instead of being reduced, allowing him/her to experience his/her natural fear and encouraging him/her to learn, i.e. recognize this fear, perceive its causes and look for ways to cope with it if its level is too high.

Sometimes it is necessary to learn to live with fear, for example, there is a saying in medicine: "Make friends with your disease".

Literature overview

If the undergraduate is advised to deny his/her fear, he/she is encouraged to deny his/her psycho-emotional state as an integral part of his/her personality. However, it is appropriate to confirm the undergraduate's personality by strengthening him/her as a *human factor*, because the quality of the activity mainly depends on this factor. Self-positioning of the undergraduate in the process of preparing the thesis must be socially supported at a holistic level, including all the powers of his/her personality, i.e. physical, psychological and spiritual ones from the anthropological point of view. This is relevant, even if some pathologies appear. They are not necessarily harmful, according to studies (Alloy, Abramson, 1979; Ghaemi, 2014), and have to be recognized.

Nevertheless, some pathologies in extreme conditions can be very helpful, so that a person could act purposefully, insightfully and decisively. The defense of a thesis is characterized by natural fear due to extreme conditions, which include control, unexpected questions and criticism. Human fear and sensitivity should not be considered as unacceptable because its meanings depend on a particular situation and personal approach (Petronienè, 2018).

The behavior of advisors mentioned shows a psychological defense mechanism called *projection*, i.e. they project their fear experience onto the undergraduates, by advising them to give up their fear. The people in the marine industry, i.e. on board and in port companies, are characterized by frequent psychological defense mechanisms, when taking into account the investigations undertaken (Лебедев, 2001; Jonutyte, 2007; Malinauskienè, Jonutyte, 2008; Lileikis, 2018).

We should consider both – management of excessive fear, and lack of fear as investigative issues:

- The management of excessive fear is a mass phenomenon in science worldwide. In addition, empirical research by the author of this article shows that fear is a very obvious problem in the marine industry, especially when employees are young adults (Lileikis, 2018);
- The lack of fear as an issue and part of professional activity and of psychological self-management is studied, but not as much and not systematically (Marks, 1987; Becker, 1999; Kahn, Doctor, 2000; Лебедев, 2001; Saul, 2001; Clarkson, 2005; Ghaemi, 2014; Jeffers, 2018; Petronienè, 2018). The lack of fear is a task of scientific psychology because it is not popular or directly clear and it requires professionalism, methodical consistency, insight, a discursive approach and scientific communication.

It is appropriate to note that, thanks to fear, a human being is more careful, vigilant, attentive, safe and active (Clarkson, 2005). Fear is closely related to cognitive dissonance, which is the basis for creativity (Sacks, 2000).

Fear, especially excitement, includes short-term psycho-emotional stress, which is a very important gift of nature because it helps the person in an extreme situation to pay attention, decide quickly and act creatively (Лебедев, 2001).

It was found that employees of the marine industry, who are characterized by lower self-esteem, usually compensate for this with excessive self-confidence. This means a lack of natural fear, which is a necessary basis for care and security, in accordance with the maritime principle – *safety first*.

Before becoming employees of the marine industry or upgrading their skills, they study at the maritime academy and finally defend their theses. When defending the theses, the undergraduates *inter alia* must demonstrate their ability of psychological self-management as a mental self-regulation. Therefore, it is necessary to help them professionally to keep their self-esteem and personal integrity associated with

mental health and ensure the conditions for their freedom of expression.

It is appropriate to analyze this specific issue of the psychology of management and self-management, taking into account the psychological projection, nature of criticism and leadership in regard to a thesis in port technology management. At the levels mentioned, this issue is almost unexplored.

Goal and Methodology

The goal of the research is to conduct a theoretical heuristic investigation of giving undergraduates the freedom to fear as a psychological opportunity for them to speak fearlessly when defending their theses in port technology management.

The object is the psychological and anthropological discourse of fear in the context of defending a thesis in port technology management.

The subject is the freedom of expression of the undergraduate's personality in terms of his/her authenticity, wholeness and integrity.

The objectives are as follows:

1. Revelation of the manipulative nature of the thesis management in accordance with the psychological projection.
2. Characterization of the nature of the thesis criticism.
3. Presentation of the importance of leadership managing fear.

The type is theoretically descriptive. The main *method* is heuristic, anthropological and psychological analysis.

The basic *methodological principles* are as follows:

- Existentialism and humanism, which emphasizes the freedom of personality and his/her noble activities, including psychological self-management; despite many stressful situations that arise when studying at the maritime academy and/or working in the seaport, a skilled employee is able to base his/her life on the values of personal freedom, authenticity, wholeness and integrity and perceive the meaning and apply the skills of psychological self-management;

- Gestalt-psychology is based on the wholeness and integrity of personality, allowing the person to experience natural feelings and emotions, understand himself/herself and see the meaning of not only positive emotional experiences and characteristics but also negative ones for the individual development of a unique personality.

1. Management of a thesis and psychological projection

Undergraduates defend their theses in port technology management in front of a panel composed of representatives of port companies. Together with supervisors and reviewers and other persons of the maritime academy, they feel professional responsibility, which psychologically affects the undergraduates. A tense psychological climate leads to a natural psycho-emotional stress and natural fear of the undergraduates and other participants in terms of defending the thesis. The undergraduates usually experience psychological defense mechanisms, especially regression, repression and avoidance.

Some persons involved are characterized by the projection mechanism when they advise the undergraduates not to be afraid because the persons involved are themselves afraid and they are semi-consciously projecting their fear onto others.

Human anthropology, scientific psychology and leadership is characterized by flexibility, reduced control, adequate benevolence and confidence in order to achieve goals. The issue that we focus on arises in a relationship between popular and scientific psychology of management, as well as of self-management, when advisers, who advise not to be afraid, are quasi-benevolent, but their activity is based on traditional clichés of popular psychology.

The psychological defense mechanisms work semi-consciously. These mechanisms are natural and important because they help survive. However, at the same time they disrupt smooth collaboration and the person's self-esteem. Therefore, it is necessary, as much as possible, to use psychological self-management resisting the defense mechanisms in stressful situations that are natural when working in the seaport or defending a thesis at the maritime academy.

The projection mechanism can manifest itself in the marine industry and in some academic situations. Usually, a weak and inadequately responsible person, for example, a boss may be inclined to apply excessive control to his/her subordinates, especially under extreme conditions. Therefore, he/she semi-consciously projects his/her weakness onto others.

The boss of an organization, who enriches his/her personality, does not allow himself/herself to accuse others (even if others are really guilty) or deny the existential and individual self-concept of others. He/she applies leadership, creates a scientifically-based adequate relationship with his/her subordinates and solves problems together with them in terms of a positive psychological climate, which is characterized by natural creative tension in the free expression of personality but not by his/her excessive fear.

In general, we can consider projection as defensive and semi-conscious manipulation. Usually, the strategy of manipulation consists of aspiration to increase a sense of guilt of the subordinates by convincing the people that they are guilty because of all their problems and misfortunes due to a lack of their intellect, talent and efforts. Thus, the individuals experience remorse and guilt, instead of being methodically resisting. Finally, they feel depressed and limited (Chomsky, 2002). In case of defending a thesis, an undergraduate can feel guilty, because he/she is afraid and has not been taught how not to be afraid and how to recognize the extent of fear in order to act effectively.

Therefore, the activity of preparing and defending the thesis should not be manipulative. Benevolence of the people involved in managing the thesis should be justified. Giving the undergraduates freedom is more important than restricting their expression by semi-consciously applying projection as a psychological defense mechanism. The undergraduates should be given real freedom and feel free, i.e. their feeling that the people involved believe in them, helps them very much at the initial ontological level to freely express themselves and creatively resist criticism regarding their theses. The feeling of freedom is the ontological basis for creative fear management.

Nevertheless, when undergraduates defend their theses, this means the following – they are

on their own, nobody else can help them and nobody else can do their work for them.

The undergraduates can rely only on the competency they have acquired, i.e. professional, intellectual and especially psychological skills. This competency is characterized by the tools they have acquired in educational processes, thanks to their authorities who contributed to their free expression.

2. Nature of thesis criticism

If undergraduates get freedom, i.e. freedom of personal expression, freedom of self-motivation, freedom of creativity, freedom to experience natural emotions (including fear), an opportunity opens for them up to be freely interested in criticism and know it and its nature. Advisers usually say: “Don’t worry, everything will be fine”. Okay, but what about criticism? It is a mandatory part of the defense of a thesis, and it is important that undergraduates are ready for it.

Therefore, it is inappropriate to avoid the natural fear and free knowledge of criticism. It is necessary to enable the undergraduates to be free, fear naturally and freely, if necessary, be prepared to defend their theses and defend them in an original and creative way. A person is not and should not be perfect or insensitive. However, it is appropriate to be well prepared. A hero is different from a coward. The coward does not dare to do something because of fear. The hero is afraid but does it anyway. Being allowed to express himself/herself freely, an undergraduate is more self-confident and can freely generate his/her ideas from the subconscious. What has been learned will be remembered in one way or another, especially if undergraduates like and are interested in what they have studied.

In order to adequately accept criticism, it is necessary to teach the students to know its nature and develop their valuable attitude towards criticism, for example, a positive, as well as comprehensive approach to criticism and that studies, employment and life in general need criticism. Students should be aware of the nature of criticism, because it is considered in scientific psychology as a factor associated with the fear of the “I” of the person. Thus, this is an area of his/her particular sensitivity.

Undergraduates should perceive the ontological nature of criticism, where does it come from, why it is so necessary, what types of criticism are there, and how to respond to it in an appropriate way. All this helps to understand that not only criticism itself but also its fear is useful, since it promotes self-criticism and purposeful academic and professional activity (Paulauskas, 1999). The nature of enisophobia, which is a fear of criticism, has been revealed in psychological theories (Hubbard, 1999; Weisinger, 2000; Clarkson, 2005, etc.).

The ontological nature of criticism is characterized by the fact that there is no other way how to check the competency acquired. A colloquium, exam and defense of a thesis has so far been invented as the forms of educational criticism.

On the one hand, human life in a society partially limits subjectivity through objectivity. A person must be objectively and professionally useful to the society, and the examination of his/her professional identity is a very natural process. Furthermore, there is a law – the more a person has reached in his/her life, the more he/she has been criticized. Criticism is a sign that a person and his/her activities or ideas are the object of someone's attention (Clarkson, 2005). This is also some kind of recognition of a person, although it can be a jealous one, because losers are very dissatisfied with the success of other people.

On the other hand, a person can avoid criticism at all, if he/she says nothing and does nothing in the public sphere, because he/she chooses to be nobody in the society (Hubbard, 1999). This extreme is unacceptable for a person as a healthy member of the society due to his/her self-esteem. Nevertheless, the lack of criticism in an organization can mean that the boss ignores his/her subordinate and does not believe in his/her ability to act professionally and progress.

It is necessary to realize that the panel for the defense of a thesis in port technology management consists of representatives of port companies who are naturally interested in the thesis and have some questions. They have no purpose to harm, but their right and duty is to understand the thesis and evaluate it according to their own understanding. It is necessary to discuss in order to evaluate adequately. It would also be impossible to answer a question that was

not asked at the time when defending the thesis. Undergraduates must demonstrate their understanding of their theses. All this requires questions and critical comments. The undergraduates can hope for a higher grade only by answering the questions and adequately responding to the critical comments.

Furthermore, the reviewer of a thesis is committed to criticize the text of the thesis. His/her mandatory activity is to find some inconsistencies, as well as dubious places in the text or places to be corrected, and ask questions.

Criticism in an organization is defined as help, when the boss helps his/her subordinate, so that he/she can regulate himself/herself independently in his/her professional activity from the point of view of humanistic psychology. Personal, nihilistic and destructive criticism is unacceptable. Constructive and business criticism is acceptable because it does not offend the employee and helps him/her to understand work issues. The types of criticism mentioned must be differentiated and identified. The employee should be well oriented how to react in situations due to criticism. His/her appropriate response is based on flexibility, humor and understanding of the perspective of his/her reputation and long-term cooperation with his/her boss and colleagues.

Frequent and destructive and personal criticism usually characterizes an expression of people who are unhappy in their lives. We can understand them and their psychological situation. Their psychological defense mechanism works by expressing socially unacceptable criticism. They do not directly want to offend others, but firstly they psychologically compensate for their negative psycho-emotional state, applying excessive control over others and rudeness.

Moreover, elementary emotionality of a person should not be regarded as criticism. A raised voice, while defending a thesis, can be a natural reaction of the panel member. A representative of a port company reacts very naturally, when he/she hears a strange idea of an undergraduate. It is important for students to learn to tolerate this form of reaction. A representative of a port company responds loudly not in bad faith but because he/she is interested in the topic being discussed, is limited by his/her personality and relies on his/her

cognitive, academic and professional life experience. Therefore, he/she reacts individually. Representatives of port companies do not want to insult students, but they naturally ask questions, say something louder or laugh spontaneously. This is a natural anthropology that an undergraduate, who has entered the 3rd decade of his/her life, should understand.

Thus, it is very useful to participate in the defense of a thesis at the department level. Nevertheless, it is helpful to rehearse the defense of a thesis in front of a rigorous critic, for example, the supervisor or another person, who would spontaneously ask the questions in accordance with the contents of the thesis.

All this requires the freedom of personal expression and activity of an undergraduate, when he/she defends his/her thesis. When a person is free, he/she can be himself/herself and naturally excited, if he/she is more sensitive. Natural excitement can help successfully defend a thesis, for example, like the excitement of a job interview helps a person to become hired. If a person is excited, he/she seeks, is careful and not sluggish or without enthusiasm and energy (Clarkson, 2005). Being sensitive, the students of port technology management are more responsible and have the intended result in mind. Such undergraduates work well during their professional practice. The mentors and employers notice that and sometimes offer them to take a position in the port company where they have their professional practice.

3. Leadership of the maritime academy and marine industry

At the level of aspiration, since 2010, the marine industry has been characterized by leadership as a politically recognized commitment worldwide, issued of the International Maritime Organization. Modern science and business forums reveal leadership, which is characterized by the support of the boss in business processes, the promotion of work motivation and perseverance, taking into account the individual experience of employees. At present, almost all business areas are politically introducing leadership and creating an organizational culture on its basis.

The main purpose of leadership is the principle that the self-leadership of employees should prevail in the professional activity with

less control over them. Self-leadership must be based on freedom and professional identity in order to achieve a higher level of organizational culture, which does not require much control in terms of the 4th industrial revolution and the importance of high technology in the activities of the port and the entire marine industry.

Thus, on the one hand, the marine business professionals, who are free and creative people, unlimited by various advisers, should be trained in terms of wholeness, expression and development of their personality. These professionals should not have a narrow competency, but a broad profile, i.e. personal, social and specific skills.

On the other hand, for nearly 80 years, gestalt-psychology has emphasized, *inter alia*, the integrity of personality, as well as the wholeness of the person's powers, processes, states and characteristics, and their special significance for his/her physiological, psychological and social expression and development.

The defense of a thesis in the context of the marine business requires an appropriate approach to the personality, whose academic career in terms of the port professional is considered. That is the freedom, which bases responsibility and does not mean to do everything. However, this freedom is the ontological basis for inspiring a person for his/her creative expression, even if it is associated with creative stress or fears. A person is alive and dynamic, and as long as his/her fears do not harm him/her, it should not be seen as a problem. If fears harm the person, he/she should not deny them but learn to recognize them, understand their genetic, psycho-social and cultural causes, as it was mentioned.

We need a positive social correction that would affirm the person and not divide him/her, in the case of preparing and defending a thesis in the field of port technology management. The persons involved should develop their leadership and carefully communicate with undergraduates, because they are not things. A person is brought up by his/her parents, teachers in kindergarten, at school and then at the academy, and later by managers in the workplace. The basic social correction should be expressed as support.

Therefore, the supportive leadership in the marine industry is considered because it is defined as a phenomenon, when the boss interacts with his/her subordinates, taking into account their experience. This is also relevant to the academic community.

All persons involved should strengthen the individuality of an undergraduate, instead of denying it while preparing a thesis. It is noticed, that the *human factor* is often criticized, and people would like to eliminate it. However, this factor must be strengthened, because it is the personality, as well as the individuality of the employee or student, i.e. his/her sensory and motion characteristics and abilities, which need to be developed, so that they are able to ensure the academic and professional expression of the person and the quality of his/her activity.

Popular psychology should be replaced by a scientific one, which is more sensitive and insightful and not misled by clichés, and the process of preparing and defending a thesis could be more sensitively, insightfully and responsibly managed, taking into account its frequent defensive nature. All persons involved, including students, especially those who investigate the human resource management of a port company, should learn that.

The support system should be the main academic key to the success of undergraduates. It is important to give them the freedom to be, live and naturally fear, if necessary, because it allows the person to meaningfully experience his/her individual authenticity, wholeness and integrity from the anthropological point of view. This experience automatically reduces his/her fear. A free undergraduate chooses meaningful activities that are interesting to him/her, and he/she is calmer and less worrisome. A person is happy about his/her inner integrity and external social support in the form of supportive leadership.

If an undergraduate is confused and afraid more than it is required to successfully defend a thesis, he/she cannot express as he/she could. If the support system of the maritime academy works well, an undergraduate focuses more on activities than on his/her fear, can adequately know his/her fear in the totality of his/her personal powers, is not too afraid of criticism, does not feel like a victim of circumstances and can enjoy his/her free academic development and especially the originality of his/her purposeful

defense speech. It is also appropriate to take into account the young age of students, their inexperience and possible dependence on mobile phones, from the psychoeducational point of view.

Thus, the application of supportive leadership is one of the most important factors reducing a person's fear and gaining his/her self-confidence in terms of organizational culture, for example, when socializing in the port company and the maritime academy. Supportive leadership is useful because this activity is based on mutual subsidiarity and recognizes personal freedom and experience of an employee or student, and provides freedom not only benevolently but also professionally and develops a creative approach, personal activity and professional self-esteem thanks to the purposeful freedom.

The increased self-esteem of students or employees and the development of their positive attitudes towards themselves and the environment can naturally reduce their fear and increase their productivity (Clarkson, 2005).

Conclusion

Giving undergraduates the freedom to fear is a psychological opportunity for them to speak fearlessly when defending their theses in port technology management. The manipulative nature of the thesis management is based on the psychological projection. Giving the undergraduates freedom is more important than restricting their expression. Their feeling that the people involved believe in them, helps them very much at the initial ontological level to freely express themselves and creatively resist criticism regarding their theses. The feeling of freedom is the ontological basis for creative fear management. When undergraduates defend their theses, they are on their own, nobody else can help them and do their work for them. The undergraduates can rely only on the competency they have acquired, i.e. professional, intellectual and especially psychological skills. This competency is characterized by the tools they have acquired in educational processes, thanks to their authorities who contributed to their free expression. In order to adequately accept criticism, it is necessary to teach the students to know its nature and develop their valuable attitude towards criticism. Studies, employment and life in general needs criticism, if students are

committed to the personal development and their professional life of full value in a society. Supportive leadership is very significant for the management of fear. The support system should be the main academic key to the success of undergraduates. It is important to give them the freedom to be, live and naturally fear, if necessary, because it allows the person to meaningfully experience his/her individual authenticity, wholeness and integrity from the anthropological point of view. This experience automatically reduces his/her fear. A free undergraduate chooses meaningful activities that are interesting to him/her, and he/she is calmer and less worrisome.

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