

EMPLOYEE COMPETENCY INTEGRATED ASSESSMENT: THE EXAMPLE OF THE PUBLIC RELATIONS SPECIALISTS OF THE LITHUANIAN ARMED FORCES

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Abstract. The constantly changing environment causes the changes in the factors affecting employee competency and its evaluation methods, which are considered controversial in the scientific literature. Various authors apply different approaches when evaluating the factors affecting employee competency. Therefore, the problem of identifying the approach, which reflects the real situation in the most accurate and comprehensive way, has been detected. The present article discusses the problems in question by combining various scientific positions considering the aspects of the evaluation of the factors affecting competency. The article is aimed at forming the model of the employee competency integrated assessment, based on the example of the public relations specialists of the Lithuanian Armed Forces. In order to identify and evaluate the factors affecting employee competency, multi-criteria and expert evaluation methods have been employed. The employee competency integrated assessment model, allowing identifying and evaluating the factors affecting employee competency (by applying the method of estimating the significances) as well as developing the solutions for its improvement, has been proposed.

Keywords: competency, assessment, multi-criteria evaluation, Lithuanian Armed Forces, public relations specialists.

Jel classification: D83, M12.

1. Introduction

The scientists and researchers have paid particular attention to the analysis of such complex phenomenon as employee competency evaluation and improvement, which is considered one of the most important factors affecting the innovativeness and competitiveness of the company.

In the context of transformations, the significance of the employee competency management, which is considered the effective tool for increasing the efficiency of the operating of the public management institutions and business organizations, is based on the recognition of the organizations of the fact that the management of the traditional resources is not enough for maintaining the existing competitive ad-

vantage and ensuring the long-term competitor-resistant one. The organizations should focus on the management of the essential and exceptional employee competencies, stay above the current knowledge level, and be able to create new knowledge at the lowest cost. It has been recently accepted that the maintenance of the long-term competitive advantages usually depends on the competency level of the employees of the organization; this is particularly important as the results of such activity could be significant at the individual, organizational, regional and even state level.

According to the Lithuanian National Defence System (NDS), the skills, knowledge and the performance of the official duties of the soldier of the professional military service are assessed by the commander, who marks the evaluations in the standard soldier's Attestation Paper (Order No V-1448 of December 30, 2004, of the MND of the Republic of Lithuania; and Order No V-1112 of November 10, 2007, of the MND of the Republic of Lithuania). There are two types of the soldier's Attestation Paper forms: the officer of the professional military service, and the soldier (Private, Seaman, Sergeant or Warrant Officer) of the professional military service. Considering the complexity of the employee competency assessment, the evaluation forms mentioned could not reflect the differences of the various military competencies. In order to improve the evaluation system, applying widely used competence-based evaluation principles, it is highly important to form an integrated model for the evaluation of the competency of the public relations (PR) specialists of the Lithuanian Armed Forces (LAF).

In order to achieve the goal mentioned above, it is also important to have a good understanding of the competency phenomenon, be able to indicate the factors affecting employee competency and identify the evaluation methods. When evaluating employee competency, it is aimed at the highest performance level, combining the employee's personal qualities, knowledge, abilities and skills with the professional requirements.

Employee competency assessment has been analysed for more than one decade; however, the researchers still have not find a single approach to the objective employee competency assessment. The concept of the competency is considered a complex and ambiguous research object; thus, the scientific literature presents different scientific approaches to the identification and evaluation of the factors affecting competency.

The research object of the present article is the assessment of the factors affecting employee competency of the public relations specialists of the Lithuanian Armed Forces. In the present research, the PR specialists of the LAF have been chosen as the example because of their functions of the "bridge" between the LAF and society and the implementers of the NDS strategic communication, engaged in the activities related to public information and crisis, public and internal communication, and having impact on such factors affecting the national security as the image and reputation of the NDS as well as public confidence in it.

The present article is aimed at forming a model for the employee competency integrated assessment, based on the example of the public relations specialists of the Lithuanian Armed Forces.

In the present research, the methods of the theory analysis, comparison and generalisation have been employed when presenting the specificity and significance of the phenomenon of the employee competency evaluation and systematising the factors affecting the competency. The methods of the multi-criteria and expert evaluation have been applied in order to identify the factors affecting employee competency and carry out their integrated assessment.

2. Theoretical aspects of the evaluation of the factors affecting employee competency

Knowledge combined with human skills and experience form the competency, which is considered as a set of the certain knowledge, abilities and skills.

The concept of the competency has been analysed by various sociologists, philosophers, psychologists, economists and managers; however, no general consensus in defining the concept of the competency has been reached. Most researchers and business practitioners link the concept of the competency with the individual perspective, experience, expertise, specialisation, intelligent expression, decision making and efficiency.

R. E. Boyatzis (2008) has argued that efficiency is the essential aspect of the competency; moreover, according to him, the concept of the competency is based on the contingency theory: the highest efficiency level could be achieved when the skills and talents of the individual (i.e., vision, values, philosophy and interests) meet the professional requirements (i.e., tasks, functions and roles) and organizational environment (i.e., culture, organizational climate, structure and system, and key competencies).

R. Adamonienė and L. Ruibytė (2010) have distinguished two key aspects related to the topicality of the competency: the position of the employee and the position of the organization. On the one hand, the competency is considered a significant factor in the successful implementation of the career, on the other hand, employee competency and related trainings are important for the implementation of the goals of the organization.

According to A. Skaržauskienė and G. Paražinskaitė (2010), there could be identified a number of conceptual drawbacks, theoretical inaccuracies and ambiguities in the competency models and research methods. Competency research is usually focused on the competency development and assessment of the specialists of certain areas (Skaržauskienė *et al.* 2010).

In the Education of the Republic of Lithuania Law Amendment Act (No XI-1281 of March 30, 2011), competence is defined as the “ability to perform a certain activity on the basis of the entirety of acquired knowledge, skills, abilities and values.”

Other concepts related to the competency include abilities, proficiency and skills.

Ability is the physical or mental capacity to perform a certain operation, action or work, i.e., the precondition and the consequence of the proficiency. The concept of proficiency is employed when dealing with the ability as a result of learning. The ability has several bases: the physical, i.e., health; the psychological, i.e., talent, skills acquired and intellect; the pedagogical, i.e., knowledge, proficiency and skills; and the social, i.e., the right to act, and etc. (Jovaiša 1993).

Ability is the talent developed in the process of learning and studying, as well as the performance of certain intellectual and (or) physical operations in certain field (Laužackas 2005).

Proficiency is the ability to perform certain theoretical and practical operations on the basis of current knowledge and sensory and practical experience (Jovaiša 1993).

Skill is the action automated by mental and material, or practical, activity, or simply the knowledge, developed to an automated level. It is the ability, acquired by repeating, to automatically perform a certain operation (Jovaiša 1993).

Competency could be analysed at individual, group and organizational levels.

According to D. Diskienė, A. Marčinskas and A. Stankevičienė (2010), the competency as a set of basic personal characteristics indicates the individual level whereas the key competency indicates the organizational level. Such organization-specific competencies include motivation, employee efforts, technological and professional experience, cooperation methods and management processes, which are difficult for competitors to imitate (Diskienė *et al.* 2010).

At the individual level, the competency is usually classified into a professional, methodological, social, personal, management (control) and intercultural (Sakalas 2003; Radzevičienė 2005; Butkevičienė *et al.* 2009; Adamonienė *et al.* 2010; Raudeliūnienė *et al.* 2012).

Professional competency is identified as the ability to work effectively in several practices, which is directly related to the employee's education, qualification and experience. There could be distinguished two dimensions of such competency: the area (indicating the area of competence of the individual) and the quality (describing the efficiency of the performance according to a certain scale).

Methodological competency reflects the ability related to work performance regardless of its professional content, employing the methods, techniques and tools required.

Social competency reflects the individual's social behaviour and expresses adaptive and effective functioning in certain situations. Individual's social competency criteria include social skills, the ability to achieve goals and (or) the quality of interpersonal relations. This competency is linked with the professional one, which is characterised by the ability to cooperate with colleagues, managers and customer, and create the appropriate organizational climate.

Personal competency is related to self-evaluation, attitude to work, motivation and personal abilities employment level.

Management (CEO or managerial) competency involves certain professional, personal and methodological competencies and their sets requires for the particular position.

Intercultural competency is the ability of the individual, based on certain knowledge, skills and attitudes, to work efficiently in the context of cross-cultural interaction.

V. Židžiūnaitė (2003) has discussed the concept of the team competency as an independent holistic competency covering specific competencies, which are based on the principles of education, management, psychology and sociology, reflecting personal potentiality, which incorporates human ability to integrate mental and physical capacity. Teamwork competencies include three elements: teamwork-based knowledge, abilities, attitudes and behaviour; focus on management, psychology, education and sociology studies, stimulating teamwork; and orientation towards individual (as a team member) and team levels. The integration of the above-mentioned aspects into the teamwork environment allows its members understanding teamwork and communication processes, diagnosing the problems related to the implementation of the teamwork competencies, reflecting the activity on the basis of diagnostic results, and encouraging continuous professional self-improvement (Židžiūnaitė 2003).

J. Makūnas (2005) has formed a theoretical model of consultant competencies, based on the theoretical analysis of the competency structure, and indicated the most important factors affecting professional, personal, methodological and social competency. However, in this model, some of the factors overlap when evaluating both personal and social competencies (e.g., the ability to work in a team). A. Sakalas (2003) has agreed with such approach by arguing that “only professional competency could be clearly identified whereas the features of other competencies are interrelated, which both indicates the theoretical incompleteness and provides a wide variety of practical applications.”

Various Lithuanian and foreign scientists have carried out a number of managerial (management and leader) competency researches. The U.S. scientist R.E. Boyatzis (1982) has initiated more extensive studies of managerial competency. In their studies, the scientists have described the management (managerial and leader) competency as an integrated multifaceted concept related to the efficiency at both the individual and organizational levels.

Managerial competency research issues are influenced by globalisation and transformation processes as well as technological and social changes, affecting both the needs of society and the management forms of public and business organizations. As a consequence, the role of the leader and the competency framework also experience changes since it becomes important making both effective and socially responsible decisions considering the public interests and the long-term well-being. When forming and making the decisions, it is also important for the leader

to understand the systemic transformation processes and be able to control them under uncertainty conditions, i.e., realising how the particular solution could affect the organization and its environment.

According to D. Diskienė, A. Marčinskas and A. Stankevičienė (2010), the theoretical analysis of the managerial competency is significant by providing the possibility to identify which of the competency elements are the most important: the innate (e.g., personal characteristics) or the acquired (e.g., knowledge and skills) ones.

When dealing with the managerial competency, Lithuanian scientists distinguish two approaches, which are widely spread in Western management practices (Petkevičiūtė *et al.* 2003; Skaržauskienė 2008), such as:

- a functional analytical approach (Management Charter Initiative), applied by the scientists of the United Kingdom, according to which the competency is identified as an equivalent of work performance standards, and a combination of skills, knowledge and attitudes related to the effectiveness of the operations;
- a personal characteristics approach, applied by the scientists of the United States (Boyatzis 1982), according to which personal characteristics of the individual are treated as an integral part of the competency causally related to more effective work performance.

The first approach (British scientists' model) is mostly oriented to the employers' sector and the profession, emphasising the work performance requirements, that is related to the job function.

The second approach (competency model of R.E. Boyatzis) is related to work performance by focusing on the contribution and emphasising the individual characteristics of the manager.

R. E. Boyatzis (2008), discussing the main competencies of the leaders of the twenty-first century, has identified three groups of the competencies:

- cognitive competencies, such as systems thinking and cognitive models and structures;
- emotional intelligence competencies, such as self-consciousness and control (e.g., emotional self-awareness and self-control);
- social intelligence competencies, such as social awareness and relationship management (e.g., empathy and teamwork).

A number of the Lithuanian scientists and business practitioners have conducted managerial (e.g., management and manager leader) competency researches in the public and business sectors in order to investigate the components of the competencies in question (Butkevičienė *et al.* 2009; Adamonienė *et al.* 2010; Diskienė *et al.* 2010; Skaržauskienė *et al.* 2010). Summing up the results of the research of the competency expression in the context of knowledge economy and society, scientists and business practitioners have paid particular attention to the description and evaluation of the essential leadership competencies. Manager leadership competencies are directly related to the concept of effectiveness at both managerial and organizational levels, i.e., covering the leader as an individual (including successful

carrier planning), and the organization's strategy in general (including the competencies required for the change management under uncertainty, complex problem solving, and efficient and socially responsible decision making). The effective managerial competencies control preconditions the leader's targeted operation in a dynamic environment, and the implementation of the innovative management tools for the development of the creative potential of the organization.

Employee competency, influenced by a variety of interrelated factors (sometimes acting contrary) is described as a complex social phenomenon. According to V. Podvezko, multi-criteria evaluation methods are efficiently employed in case of integrated assessment of complex values, as it allows quantifying the complex phenomenon represented by many indicators (Podvezko 2008).

R. Ginevičius has noted that the assessment of complex and integrated phenomena usually includes the following stages of the multi-criteria evaluation: formulation of the research problem and setting the research object and objectives; compilation of the list of the factors affecting the research object; formation of the system of the factors affecting the research object; setting the quantification (the indicators) of the factors affecting the research object; formalisation of the factors affecting the research object, setting the values of the indicators, and their normalisation; selection of the model for rating the significance of the factors affecting the research object, and rating the significance of the factors affecting the research object; the selection of the method of the connection of the indicators of the research object into a summative value; the connection of the indicators of the research object into a summative value; and decision making related to the improvement of the research object (Ginevičius *et al.* 2005).

According to R. Ginevičius and V. Podvezko (2003), the method discussed includes, first, the determination of the sub-indicators of the research object, then the calculation of their values and weights, and, finally, their connection into a summative value which integrates a set of sub-criteria.

Since individual indicators describing the research object affect that object differently, the estimation of the significance of the indicators is particularly important when employing the multi-criteria evaluation method. The methods of the estimation of the criteria significance could be divided into objective and subjective: in case of the subjective method, the significance of the criteria is evaluated by experts, whereas, in case of objective method, it is estimated using the mathematical calculations based on the objective information (Podvezko 2008). When estimating the criteria significance on the basis of the criteria weight scale, the scales of different values (e.g., [0, 1], [0, 100], and etc.), grades, scores and per cent are used. The criteria weight scale in the range [0, 1] is the most widely-used one (Ginevičius *et al.* 2005). Summing up the research results, it could be stated that the employee competency is a complex phenomenon affected by a number of interrelated factors. On the basis of the analysis of the scientific literature, 51 factors affecting the employee competency have been indicated, and the initial list of those factors has been compiled and submitted for the expert evaluation.

The integrated multi-criteria evaluation is suitable for the employee competency assessment according to the following facts: the factors could not be expressed by a single evaluation criterion, and the number of the criteria does not have to be restricted when this method is employed, which allows evaluating the importance of the single criteria to the evaluation results, and comparing the values of the sub-criteria to each other.

3. The identification of the factors affecting the employee competency on the example of the example of the public relations specialists of the lithuanian armed forces

The identification of the factors affecting the employee competency in the Lithuanian Armed Forces has been carried out employing the expert and multi-criteria evaluation methods. The initial list of the factors affecting the employee competency has been compiled on the basis of the research analysis. 51 factors affecting the employee competency have been submitted to the expert evaluation. The expert group was represented by 6 experts, who have been selected according to the following two criteria: 5 years work experience in PR of NDF, and the qualification in PR (i.e., the training course is completed or the appropriate education is acquired). On the basis of the complex multi-criteria evaluation method, the integrated assessment of the competency of the PR specialists of the LAF has been carried out including the following stages: the compilation of the initial list of the factors affecting the competency of the PR specialists of the LAF; the revision and the formalisation of the list compiled; the estimation and normalisation of the weights and values of the criteria of the factors affecting the competency of the PR specialists of the LAF using the [1, 5] rates scale; the experimental assessment of the competency of the PR specialists of the LAF; the calculation of the integrated criteria of their competency; and the formation of the set of the possible solutions for improving the competency of the specialists assessed. The interval of [0, 1] was used for the estimation of the weights of the criteria. Applying the method of the estimation of the weights of the criteria, 4 criteria of the primary 51 have been considered insignificant. The results of the assessment of the factors affecting the employee competency have shown that professional and communicative competencies are the most significant ones for the overall competency of the PR specialist of the LAF (Table 1). The professional competency of the PR specialist of the LAF is mostly affected by the knowledge of PR-related legislation and its application in the service, the pursuit of professional knowledge, education and work experience; whereas, the communicative competency, according to experts, covers literacy, oratorical skills and computer skills. According to the research results, it could be stated that the model of the integrated evaluation of the competency of the PR specialists of the LAF allows assessing the competency of the PR specialists of the LAF more efficiently in comparison to the current system of the assessment of the performance of the professional military servicemen of the LAF (Order No V-1448

of December 30, 2004, of the MND of the Republic of Lithuania; and Order No V-1112 of November 10, 2007, of the MND of the Republic of Lithuania).

Table 1. Factors Affecting Employee Competency

Integrated Second-Level Sub-Criterion (the Weight of the Criterion)	The Initial Criterion (The Weight of the Criterion of the Initial Evaluation)
1. Personal Competency (0,13)	1.1. Tolerance of innovation (0,28)
	1.2. Initiative (0,38)
	1.3. Objectivity (0,34)
2. Social Competency (0,12)	2.1. Self-awareness (0,17)
	2.2. Self-management (0,3)
	2.3. Social awareness (0,3)
	2.4. Relationship management (0,23)
3. Professional Competency (0,25)	3.1. Education (0,17)
	3.2. Pursuit of professional knowledge (0,21)
	3.3. Work experience (0,17)
	3.4. Team-work skills (0,05)
	3.5. Ability to be a team leader (0,07)
	3.6. Knowledge of Military Service Law and ability to apply it in practice (0,1)
	3.7. Knowledge of PR-related legislation and ability to apply it in practice (0,23)
4. Managerial Competency (0,07)	4.1. Recognition of the problems of the caller (0,13)
	4.2. Enthusiasm (0,24)
	4.3. Professional and ethical standards support (0,3)
	4.4. Maintenance of the climate of trust (0,13)
	4.5. Decision making (0,2)
5. Methodological Competency (0,12)	5.1. The ability to manage the information (0,17)
	5.2. Analytical thinking (0,13)
	5.3. The ability to solve problems (0,12)
	5.4. The ability to manage conflicts in service (0,08)
	5.5. Planning skills (0,27)
	5.6. The ability to organise work (0,15)
	5.7. Critical thinking (0,08)
6. Communicative Competency (0,18)	6.1. Oratorical skills (0,23)
	6.2. Knowledge of styles of language and its application (0,17)
	6.3. Focus on the interlocutor (0,07)
	6.4. Cooperation skills (0,08)
	6.5. Literacy (0,25)
	6.6. Computer skills (0,2)
7. Moral Competency (0,08)	7.1. Will strength (0,17)
	7.2. Telling the truth (0,22)
	7.3. Defending the truth (0,08)
	7.4. Ability to fulfil promises (0,13)
	7.5. Ability to accept responsibility for given decisions (0,05)
	7.6. Ability to recognise mistakes and failures (0,08)
	7.7. Caring for others (0,08)
	7.8. The ability to learn from personal mistakes (0,12)
	7.9. The ability to learn from the mistakes of others (0,07)
8. Intercultural Competency (0,05)	8.1. Cultural sensitivity (0,2)
	8.2. Cultural objectivity (0,13)
	8.3. Flexibility (0,08)
	8.4. Foreign language skills (0,27)
	8.5. Nonverbal communication competence (0,12)
	8.6. Cultural awareness (0,2)

The fact mentioned above has been proved by the list of the factors affecting the competency of the PR specialist of the LAF, the character of the factors, and the results of the experimental evaluation on the basis of this model.

4. The Integrated Model of the Assessment of the Competency of the PR Specialist of the LAF and Its Application Prospects

The research carried out has preconditioned the formation of the integrated model of the assessment of the competency of the PR specialist of the LAF (Fig. 1).

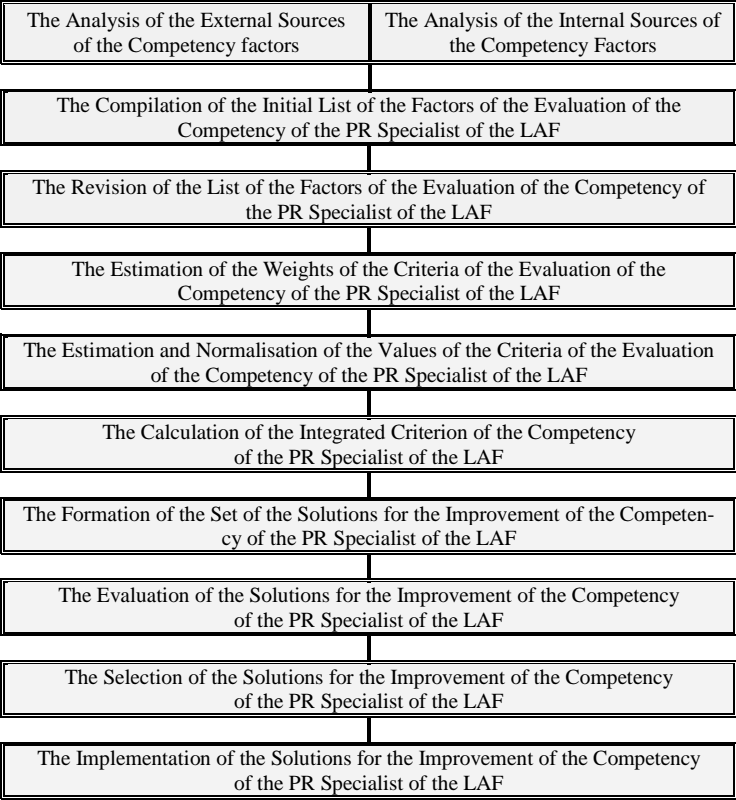


Fig. 1. The Integrated Model of the Assessment of the Competency of the PR Specialist of the LAF

The model includes the following basic stages: the analysis of the external and internal sources of the competency factors, according to which the initial list of the factors of the evaluation of the competency of the PR specialist of the LAF has been compiled; the revision of the list of the factors of the evaluation of the competency of the PR specialist of the LAF; the estimation of the weights of the criteria of the evaluation of the competency of the PR specialist of the LAF; the estimation and normalisation of the values of the criteria of the evaluation of the competency

of the PR specialist of the LAF; the calculation of the integrated criterion of the competency of the PR specialist of the LAF; the formation of the set of the solutions for the improvement of the competency of the PR specialist of the LAF; the evaluation of the solutions for the improvement of the competency of the PR specialist of the LAF; the selection of the solutions for the improvement of the competency of the PR specialist of the LAF; and the implementation of the solutions for the improvement of the competency of the PR specialist of the LAF. The integrated model of the evaluation of the competency of the PR specialist of the LAF suggested, should be applied in order to achieve a more objective and accurate evaluation of the employee competency; moreover it allows not only evaluating the factors affecting the employee competency and indicating the strengths and weaknesses of this area but finding solutions for the improvement of the employee competency.

5. Conclusions

Knowledge combined with human skills and experiences constitute the competency, which is defined as a set of certain knowledge, abilities and skills. The concept of the competency has been studied by many scientists, who have emphasised the fact that the employee competency is a complex phenomenon; therefore, there is no general consensus in defining the concept of the competency. The researchers analysing the factors affecting the employee competency suggest different interpretations; moreover, little attention is paid to the evaluation of the factors of the competency evaluation. Thus, the issue of selecting the most suitable and explicit approach to the problem occurs. In order to solve the problem in question, the expert and multi-criteria evaluation methods have been employed. The research of the factors affecting the employee competency has been carried using the example of the public relations specialists of the Lithuanian Armed Forces. On the basis of the research carried out, the factors affecting the employee competency have been divided into personal, social, professional, managerial, methodological, communicative, moral and intercultural competencies. Applying the method of the estimation of the weights of the criteria, 4 criteria of the initial 51 have been considered insignificant. The integrated model of the evaluation of the competency of the PR specialist of the LAF has been developed, which could help the units of the Lithuanian Armed Forces and the organizations of the public and private sectors assessing the employee competency and forming the solutions for its improvement.

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