

“Managerial competence: the attitude of Lithuanian managers”

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SECTION 2 | Management in Firms and Organizations

Managerial Competence: The Attitude of Lithuanian Managers

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Abstract

The present article focuses on the issue of distinctiveness in the approaches to managerial competence first of all predetermined by the social-cultural environment of the country, managers work in. So the subject of this research is managerial competence as viewed by Lithuanian managers. The study presented suggests a hypothesis that the managers' perception of managerial competence may have certain peculiarities influenced by the beliefs and traditions formed in the Soviet period. The aim of the research is to identify and evaluate the attitude of Lithuanian managers to managerial competence. A questionnaire has been created on the basis of management literature of the field to enable the identification of the following aspects: managers' attitude to the nature and development of managerial competence; their opinion about the importance and influence of knowledge, skills, experience, and personal characteristics on the successful performance.

Over 100 respondents representing different management levels have been interviewed. The article presents a detailed methodology of the research, as well as the results of the survey. The results received have been evaluated according to the criteria of the managers' age and education. The study leads to a conclusion that younger managers perceive managerial competence more thoroughly than the executives who received education in the Soviet period.

Key words: managerial competence, management development, managerial work, personnel management.

JEL classification: M12, M19, M53.

Introduction

Nowadays all over the world organizations need competent managers/leaders to be able to work both efficiently and effectively. In J.P. Kotter's opinion (1999), most organizations today lack the managers/leaders they need. And the shortfall is often large. The lack of managerial competence may be considered as one of the essential causes deciding the situation. Therefore, it is not without a reason that the issue of managerial competence, as a subject of scientific research has been in the centre of the debate over management development. Such authors as R.E. Boyatzis (1993, 1982), J.P. Kotter (1999, 1982), R. Mansfield (1999), P.D. Rutherford (1995), A. Zaleznik (1987), G. Yukl (2002), E.P. Antonacopoulou and L. Fitzgerald (1996), G.J. Bergenhenegouwen (1996), M-I. Cheng, A.R.J. Dainty and D.R. Motore (2005), as well as many others pay special attention to different issues of managerial competence. It should also be noted that a unanimous opinion on a number of the decisive aspects of managerial competence has not been reached yet. M-I. Cheng et al. (2005), for example, note that in the sphere of managerial competence there exists a semantic minefield in which the terms are used to mean fundamentally different things. R. Cacioppe and S. Albrecht (2000) maintain that many competence frameworks lack conceptual basis. M. Higgs (2003) states that there is little real knowledge of what is required for effective leadership or manager's work. The managerial competence analysis scheme is also necessary.

S.A. Tirmizi (2002) has put forward a very important idea that, although internationalization proceeds apace as we become a unified global economy, cultural differences (the values, beliefs, norms, and ideals) continue to have a strong effect on the approach to managerial competence in different countries. The controversy about validity and availability of theories and instruments across cultures make strong case for identifying peculiarities in different countries and developing new models outside the western context.

Therefore, the research presented in this article focuses on managerial competence as viewed by Lithuanian managers. Lithuania, being one of the post-Soviet countries, experienced cardinal changes in economic and political environment, thus an assumption could be made that managers' attitude to managerial competence as a whole and its separate aspects should be different from the western approach because of the beliefs and traditions formed in the Soviet period.

The aim of the research is to identify and evaluate the attitude of Lithuanian managers to the main dimensions of managerial competence. Research methodology was developed, based on management literature concerning the issues of managerial competence and an original questionnaire was created that allowed to distinguish the main peculiarities in the attitude of managers to managerial competence.

Research Methodology

Literature analysis proves the fact that the main dimensions of managerial competence overviewed further are still under scientific discussion. These are, first of all, understanding of managerial competence, approaches to it, as well as its nature and development. The differences in understanding of managerial competence could be found in the articles of P.D. Rutherford (1995), R.E. Boyatzis (1993, 1982); J.P. Kotter (1999, 1982); R. Mansfield (1999); G. Von Krogh, J.A. Roos (1995). Performance-based theory of managerial competence is used in the present research, so competence is defined as "underlying characteristics of a person that lead to or cause superior or effective job performance" (Boyatzis, 1993).

The most popular approaches in western practice are functional-analytical and that of personal characteristics. Analyzing performance-based understanding of managerial performance, M-I. Cheng et al. (2005) single out a job-focused approach, a person-focused approach, a role-focused approach and a hybrid approach. The aforementioned approaches are significant for the research because of the following reason: they allow determining which components of managerial competence – acquired (knowledge and skills) or inborn (personal characteristics) – are more important. This, in turn, allows validation of the opinion about the nature of managerial competence. It is well known that there exist two opinions in management: one can become a manager and one has to be born a manager. In the opinion of a number of management scholars (Bergenhengouwen, 1996; Hunsaker, 2001; Yukl, 2002; Boyatzis, 1982; Zaleznik, 1987; Anderson, 1982 and others), it is possible to become a good manager only in the process of constant learning and acquiring experience.

The ways of managerial competence development are also an object of discussion in scientific literature (Boyatzis, Kolb, 1995; Cacioppe, Albrecht, 2000; Weir, Smallman, 1998). There is no unanimous opinion, which of these ways is the best and most appropriate.

The comparison of a leader and a manager becomes of importance when aiming at a deeper research of managerial competence, determining the area that needs improvement and selecting appropriate methods to achieve it. Western approaches claim a modern manager has to be a leader. Still, as R. E. Boyatzis (1993) and J.P. Kotter (1999) rightly observe many persons in leadership positions do not demonstrate leadership, even though they possess many of the competencies necessary to be an effective leader; many managers had the competencies of effective leaders, but did not use them at work.

In this case their understandings, types of activities, relationship with the subordinates, developing persons, capability to be a leader are compared (more: Kotter, 1999; Zaleznik, 1987; Yukl, 2002; Higgs, 2003; Tirmizi, 2002). The discussions on the issues of manager-leader lead to an idea that the main dimensions identifying a leader are personality and behaviour, relationship with people (interpersonal skills are important) and formulation of vision, mission and long-term goals. A man-

ager is more task-oriented: Bergenhenegouwen (1996) argued that managers must possess a range of personal competencies along with task-specific competences to perform effectively.

Approaches to managerial work discussed (for extensive discussion see: Chapman, 2001) most often attempt to clarify understanding of managerial work and are focused on skills (Katz, 1974; Griffin, 2006), the key competencies (Kotter, 1982; Antonacopoulou, Fitzgerald, 1996), roles and activities (Kraut et al., 1989; Minzberg, 1973). The classical management functions approach is used quite often for understanding managerial work. S.J. Carroll and D.J. Gillen (1987) suggest it is because it provides clear and discrete methods of classifying the thousands of different activities that managers carry out and the techniques they use in terms of the functions they perform for the achieving of organizational goals. Discussions and studies of the knowledge for managers seem to be lacking in the managerial literature. The classical management functions first introduced by H. Fayol and elaborated and expanded by others still represent the most useful way of conceptualizing the manager's job, especially for management education (Carroll, Gillen, 1987). The key skills involved in management are often mentioned in discussions. Typically, the three managerial skills discussed by R. Katz (1974) are listed.

The aforementioned aspects of managerial competence research, as well as the main assumptions formulated, confirmed the necessity to find answers to the key questions of managerial competence in the process of research. For this reason, a questionnaire was prepared including the questions that would help to disclose the opinion of Lithuanian managers on the following aspects of the competent managers' work:

1. *The significance of managerial competence for effective performance and the ways to develop it.* The respondents were first of all asked to express their opinion on approaches existing in management. In the first case, managerial competence is related to personal characteristics; the other approach is supported by the idea that managerial competence is developed through managerial education and experience. Managers were also asked to point out the ways that would be the most effective for developing managerial competence.

2. *The significance of the main managerial competence elements – knowledge, skills, personal characteristics – for successful performance.* The three components of managerial competence were named together with the distinguishing features of a manager and a leader (i.e. concern about the task and concern about the people), as well as with the other aspects decisive for the successful performance of Lithuanian managers', such as: salary, contacts, authority, intuition, etc. The managers were asked to evaluate the importance of the named elements. In addition, the respondents had to point out the element that would determine the successful managerial performance the most precisely, as well as management skills – technical, conceptual, interpersonal and diagnostic – that would be the most significant for a competent manager.

3. *The understanding of managerial work.* To explain more precisely, why managers give preference to certain elements of managerial competence, the respondents were presented with several different examples of a manager's definition. One of the presented descriptions was that of a classic ("pure") manager, the others were of a "pure" leader and a manager taking up the activities that are also typical of a leader. The questionnaire also included an additional question about the relationship between managers and subordinates that would specify more clearly the respondents' opinion. The elements that decide the differences between the work of a manager and that of a leader were also incorporated in the questions concerning factors for successful performance.

4. *The significance of different managerial activities for effective performance.* The respondents were asked to assess the importance of the main managerial functions: planning, organization, motivation and control. Such management areas as operations, finance, marketing, maintenance and staffing had to be evaluated too. In order to find out the attitude of Lithuanian managers to the least developed planning function, it was divided into the following aspects: formulation of vision and mission (more characteristic for leaders), as well as of long-term and short-term goals.

To have a deeper analysis of the answers with respect to the fact that political-economical and social-cultural development of the country may determine the differences in the managers' approach to managerial competence, certain demographic data were collected (specifically on age and education). These data were chosen for specific reasons. In Soviet times there were practically

no management or business administration studies; therefore, most managers had engineer education and developed managerial competence through experience. Managers of the time were task-oriented and were supposed to carry out production plans, created by ministries. Therefore, the answers of the respondents were analyzed according to two age groups – younger (21-40 years old) and senior (41-60 years old) – and according to the level and specialization (when necessary) of education.

Data collection

The opinions of Lithuanian managers on the mentioned aspects of managerial competence have been collected by performing pilot research. The main instrument of the pilot research was a standardized open questionnaire with the same questions and standard answers for all respondents. The following answer scales were applied:

- 1) nominal – respondents had to tick one or several the most acceptable variants,
- 2) interval – respondents had to choose the relevance of the answer in the interval from 1 to 5.

The questionnaire also allowed additions and specifications by supplying personal answers.

The data for the research were collected during the spring of 2005 in more than 150 Lithuanian enterprises. The main respondents' selection criterion was their position. Therefore, only managers making managerial decisions and having subordinates participated in the questionnaire. 100 fully completed questionnaires were used in the research. Thus, according to the demographic characteristics, the respondents could be distributed as follows:

- *According to age:* 48% of all the survey respondents were up to 40 years old and 52% – 41-60 years old.

- *According to the level and specialization of education:* 19% of the respondents did not have high education; 25% had technical (engineer) education; 39% had a bachelor's degree, 17% – master's degree and more. In addition, 52% of the respondents had management or economic education, 18% major in marketing, finance and law and 29% are production professionals.

- *According to managerial experience:* 75% of all the survey respondents have been working in the manager's position for 10 or less years; 16 % – for 11-20 years and 9% – for over 21 years.

- *According to the management level:* 19% executives; 53% middle level managers and 28% supervisors.

- *According to the profile of the organization:* 44% of all the survey respondents work in production organizations, 56% – in service enterprises, 61% of which are those of the Lithuanian capital, and the rest – of foreign and mixed.

- *According to sex:* 55% of all the survey respondents were women and 45% – men.

Research results

The attitude of Lithuanian managers to developing managerial competence and the factors determining it can be seen from the distribution of the answers, presented in Table 1. The respondents were asked to choose and tick one the most correct statement out of four.

Table 1

The distribution of answers on statements determining the development of a competent manager

Statement	In support of the statement (%)
1. Managerial qualities are inborn (inborn personal characteristics decide)	9
2. Managerial qualities can be developed (experience decides)	27
3. Management can be learned (managerial education decides)	15
4. Everything mentioned is important	49

When analyzing the answers according to age, it was determined that 56,25% of managers in the age group from 21-40 chose the statement that managerial competence covers all the mentioned factors. 77,8% of the respondents representing the age group from 41-60 support the statement that managerial qualities are inborn. They also attach greater significance to experience (65,5% of all who chose this statement). 60% of the respondents supporting the statement that managerial education is the decisive factor for managerial competence are 21-40 years old.

A close connection between the manager's education and the attitude to becoming a competent manager was observed in the answers based on the education criterion. 73% of the respondents who chose the third statement (the most important factor for managerial competence is that of knowledge) have bachelors and master's degrees. Among those who give preference to the second statement (managerial competence is decided by experience), 85,2% are the respondents with high technical education, as well as those having no high education.

The respondents' opinions on the importance of different components of managerial competence for effective performance are presented in Table 2. The respondents gave evaluations in the 5-point scale, where 1 point is for the least important component and 5 points – for the most important one.

Table 2

The respondents' evaluations of managerial competence components

The components of managerial competence	Evaluation (in points)
Personal characteristics	4,52
Theoretical knowledge of management	3,9
Managerial skills	3,76

Further analysis of the answers on the above issue according to the age criterion showed the following results:

- The respondents of both age groups consider personal characteristics to be the most significant (no respondent gave this component less than 3 points): 41-60 year old managers gave this component 4,77 points and younger (21-40 years old) – 4,25 points.
- Managerial skills are assessed similarly by both age groups: 41-60 year old managers gave this component 3,92 points and the younger ones (21-40 years old) – 3,58 points.
- Theoretical knowledge of management is valued more by senior managers (4,15 points). Younger managers gave this component 3,76 points.

The evaluation of answers according to the education criterion showed that the evaluations of the respondents with bachelor's and master's degrees practically correspond with those of younger managers (21-40 years). The answers of the respondents having another education corresponded with those of senior managers (41-60 years)

The opinion of Lithuanian managers about the relevance of the main managerial skills for a competent manager in the scale from 0 to 100% is as follows: in average the managers give almost equal attention for these skills – interpersonal are given 30%, technical – 29%, diagnostic – 21% and conceptual – 20%. The distribution of these answers according to age is presented in Table 3.

Table 3

The distribution of answers on the relevance of the managerial skills for a competent manager

Managerial skills	The evaluations of the younger managers (21-40) (%)	The evaluations of the senior managers (41-60) (%)
Technical skills	31,7%	26,1%
Interpersonal skills	26,3%	34%
Conceptual skills	21,6%	19,8%
Diagnostic skills	20,1%	21,1%

Deeper analysis of the results according to the education criterion demonstrated the following distribution of separate skills:

- The respondents with a master's degree consider interpersonal skills to be the most important (35,3%); conceptual skills are in the second place – 29,4%. Diagnostic skills were given 23,5% and technical skills were seen as the least important (11,8%).
- The respondents with a bachelor's degree also see interpersonal skills as the most important in a manager's work (30,7%). They gave 28,2% for diagnostic skills and 25,6% for conceptual skills. These respondents also consider technical skills as the least important (15,4%).
- The respondents with high technical education regard interpersonal skills as the most significant (32%). They gave 28% for diagnostic skills and 24% for technical skills. Conceptual skills were seen as the least important (16%).
- The respondents without high education attach the greatest significance to technical skills (36,8%), interpersonal skills were given 26,3% and diagnostic – 21,1%. Conceptual skills were given 15,8%.

Table 4 demonstrates the distribution of the answers on the evaluation of the most effective methods to develop managerial competence. The respondents were asked to evaluate the given competence development method in the 5-point scale (1 point for the least important and 5 points for the most important).

Table 4

The respondents' evaluation of the methods to develop managerial competence

Managerial competence development method	Evaluation (in points)
Self-development (studying of managerial literature)	4,17
Work with management consultants	3,77
Colleagues	3,58
Work with foreign partners	3,32
Specialized management development programs	3,33

Given an opportunity to offer their own ways for managerial competence development, the respondents signified short inside seminars in the company (25%), mobilities in foreign companies (24%) and studies in MBA programs (19%).

The attitude of Lithuanian managers to the concept of a competent manager's work was determined by asking the respondents to choose and tick one the most correct statement out of four. The answers to the question on the most precise definition of a manager were distributed as follows:

- 1) 42% of the respondents chose the first statement, reflecting the classical definition of a manager: "a manager is a person who plans, organizes, and supervises the work of the subordinates. His/her main task is to formulate goals, assign work to the subordinates, control how they carry out the tasks and to motivate them to complete the work on time".
- 2) 28% of the respondents chose the second statement, presenting a definition of a manager who has leader's traits: "a manager is a person who is responsible for the achievement of the goals of a company/department. His/her main task is to help the subordinates to formulate and implement the set goals and to influence positively their attitude to performance."
- 3) 19% of the respondents chose the third statement that reflects the definition of a "pure" leader: "a manager is a person who inspires the subordinates for shared work to achieve the goals of a company".
- 4) 11% of the respondents pointed several statements; 7% of them chose the first and the third statements.

Further analysis showed that 64,6% of the respondents aged 21-40 think that a competent manager has to be a classical manager, while the opinions of the 41-60 year old managers split. The managers aged 41-50 support the same opinion as the younger managers (57,1%). Senior managers (51-60) maintain that the second statement conforms better with the conception of a competent manager (89,6%). 53,5% of managers with bachelor's and master's degrees, as well as 47,7% of the respondents with high technical education and without high education also chose the first statement as the most precise. The respondents with bachelor's and master's degrees prevailed (89,4%) among the supporters of the statement that the conception of a leader characterizes the work of a competent manager the best.

The respondents defined the relationship of a competent manager with the subordinates according to the statements in the questionnaire as follows (the respondents had to choose and tick one of the most correct statements out of four):

- 1) 37% of the respondents supported the first statement saying "a competent manager needs subordinates so that with their help he/she could accomplish the necessary tasks more efficiently".
- 2) 4% of the managers thought the second statement to be correct – "a manager is the patron of the subordinates and his/her main concern is to take care of them and to satisfy their needs".
- 3) 54% of the respondents chose the third statement saying that "a competent manager and his/her subordinates are partners; together they formulate goals, distribute responsibilities, etc".
- 4) 4% of the respondents chose several statements.

The analysis of the answers according to the age demonstrated that 68,7% of 21-40 year old managers supported the third statement (even 95% of the youngest respondents (21-30 years old) chose this statement). 56,6% of senior managers (41-60 years old) supported the first statement, as well as 68% of those aged 51-60. The analysis according to the education criterion showed the respondents with a bachelor's degree (58,9%) and a master's degree (58,8%), as well as those having technical education (60%) tend to support the third statement.

The respondents' opinion (according to two age groups (21-40 and 41-60)) on the nine factors influencing the results of a competent manager's performance is presented in Table 5. The significance of each factor was evaluated in points from 1 (the factor is the least influential) to 5 (the factor is the most influential).

Table 5

The respondents' evaluation of the factors, influencing the results of a competent manager's performance

Factor	Evaluations of respondents aged 21-40 (in points)	Evaluations of respondents aged 41-60 (in points)
Task concerning	4,65	4,62
People concerning	4,33	4,38
Managerial knowledge	4,02	4,54
Managerial experience	4,03	4,41
Manager talent (inborn traits)	4,05	4,13
Authority	3,97	4,31
Salary	3,82	4,05
Contacts	3,65	3,92
Intuition	3,57	3,72
Other:		
Creativity	3,67	4,18
Appearance	2,87	3,00

When analyzing the answers on the influence of separate factors on the results of a manager's work according to age and education criteria, it should be noted that the evaluations deviate from the average in the table not more than 0,2 of a point.

The opinion of the respondents (the average and according age) about the significance of different managerial activities is presented in Table 6. The presented activities were to be evaluated in the scale from 1 point (the activity is the least important) to 5 points (the activity is the most important).

Table 6

The respondents' evaluation of the most significant activities in the successful performance of a competent manager

Activity	Average evaluation (in points)	Evaluations of 21-40 year old respondents (in points)	Evaluations of 41-60 year old respondents (in points)
Organizing	4,57	4,52	4,66
Human resource management	4,45	4,3	4,6
Operations management	4,34	4,14	4,64
Finance	4,22	4,06	4,56
Marketing	4,22	4,17	4,33
Motivation	4,06	4,08	4,05
Control	3,92	3,9	4,00
Maintenance	3,87	3,85	4,00
Long-term goal setting	3,86	4,2	3,6
Short-term goal setting	3,84	3,87	3,6
Vision and mission creating	3,31	3,4	3,33

The analysis of the answers on the importance of different managerial activities to a competent manager's performance according to the education criterion demonstrated that in all groups organizing, human resources, operations, finance and marketing were considered the most significant factors. There was a more significant difference in the managers' attitude to planning of activities. Setting of long-term goals received the highest evaluation from the managers with a bachelor's and a master's degree. The evaluation was lower in the case of the managers with high technical education and of those having no high education. The managers with high education saw short-term goals as more important. Analogous results were received when evaluating the creating of vision and mission.

Research findings and conclusions

According to the research results presented above the following assumptions of Lithuanian managers to the main aspects of managerial competence could be distinguished.

Irrespective of age and education, Lithuanian managers consider managerial competence significant for effective performance. As could be seen in Table 5, managers of different age gave relatively high evaluations to all components of managerial competence. Most managers in Lithuania, irrespective of age and education, see personal characteristics as the most important of the three managerial competence components (see Table 1). Managerial skills come in the second place and theoretical management knowledge – in the third.

In the opinion of Lithuanian managers, all main managerial skills are approximately equally important for a competent manager. The distribution of answers shows that on the average managers express preference to interpersonal and technical skills and not to conceptual and diagnostic ones. The analysis of the answers according to age and education criteria discloses the traditions and values, influenced by the Soviet period. 41-60 year old managers, despite the fact that

most of them represent the top and middle management (it was determined according to the demographic characteristics in the questionnaires), consider technical skills as more important than conceptual and diagnostic (see Table 3). The data of the research show that education decides the more precise evaluation of managerial skills (according to R. Katz theory).

About a half of the respondents (see Table 2) think that managerial competence is determined not only by the inborn personal characteristics, but also by those acquired in the process of managerial competence development. Still the research shows that a number of Lithuanian managers who acquired managerial competence by experience keep to the opinion that it is determined by experience and personal characteristics. The managers who received education in independent Lithuania demonstrate a more western approach to the nature of managerial competence.

The most appropriate managerial competence development methods as distinguished by the respondents (Table 4), partly confirm their attitude to the nature of managerial competence. The experience of the article authors allows to maintain that such answers were determined by the traditions and values fostered in the Soviet period, when the development of professional competence was seen as a personal matter of an employee. As a result, quantitative and qualitative level of personnel (managers included) training and development activities still does not conform to requirements of changing environment in Lithuanian organizations.

The analysis of the answers on the understanding of managerial work, its content and the importance of different aspects showed that Lithuanian managers are not inclined to think that a competent manager has to be a leader (only the fifth of the respondents support the opposite statement). Most of the respondents, irrespective of age, see a competent manager as a classical manager who has typical responsibilities and is task-oriented. This could also be explained by the strong influence of social-cultural environment of the Soviet period. It is worth mentioning that Lithuanian managers acknowledge the importance of relationship with subordinates that is typical of a leader: more than half of the respondents consider the right attitude of a competent manager to the subordinates to be like that of a leader. All the respondents, irrespective of age and education, evaluated attention to subordinates as a significant factor, influencing a competent manager's performance results. A deeper analysis of these answers according to age and education allows hypothesizing that the growing number of managers who have received modern education will cause an increase in the number of leaders in Lithuanian organizations.

As can be seen from Table 6, assessment of the importance of different managerial activities shows that the choice of Lithuanian managers, irrespective of age, is predetermined by traditions: functions of organizing and operations management are valued more than planning activities. The comparison of evaluations according to age and education demonstrates a more up-to-date thinking of younger managers. The significance of HRM and finance could be explained by the influence of the economical-political environment in Lithuania.

Thus, the generalization of the aforementioned research findings leads to a conclusion that the peculiarities of the Lithuanian managers' opinions are mostly determined by their values, traditions and education. To integrate more successfully into the social-cultural space of the EU, Lithuanian managers need to give more attention to the development of managerial competence. Therefore, Lithuanian organizations need to introduce and apply management training and development activities more extensively, considering the positive examples of western organizations. It is necessary to propose more suitable principles and methods in management literature for developing managerial competence in Lithuanian organizations, as well as more appropriate training programs for managers.

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