

Professional and Emotional Competence of Civil Servants

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Summary:

The new models of organizational development resulted in drastic changes in the way organizations are being managed. The changes in managers' professional responsibilities and functions were faster than they were prepared accept. Presently their day-to-day tasks are knowledge-based and managers have to deal with huge amounts of information. Obviously, to be successful managers must be committed to their work and take maximum advantage of all available resources and opportunities. The accelerating rates of development today require higher levels of adaptability to the new conditions and better competence of all employees. Thus the capacity of organizations to learn, and to increase the value of their human resource and use it efficiently has become of primary importance. Lifelong learning is a strategic goal for the European Union. Today the leaders and managers who are responsible for the adequate management of their organizations are required to utilize in full the potential of their employees. This is why the employers and experts are increasingly interested in the processes of personnel training and development.

Key words: competence, habits, selection of civil servants, emotional competence

JEL Classification: I25

1. Nature and development of the concept of competence

The challenges of the contemporary business environment stirred the interest in the knowledge, skills and capacity of administrative staff. Practice has shown that there is a need for setting certain requirements for professional competence. According to P. Drucker, "incompetence, after all, is the only thing in abundant and never-ending supply." (Drucker, P., 2002, p. 175). Moreover, the introduction of uniform requirements for professional competence will reinforce the principles of objectivity, transparency, equal access and fairness in the selection and appointment of managers. This is why the requirements for the competence of administrative staff should be specified in greater detail and companies should adopt more specific and fair criteria for recruitment and career development, taking into account the specificity of the each position.

However, we should first define the concept of *competence*. According to the online Business Dictionary, competence is "a cluster of related abilities, commitments, knowledge, and skills that enable a person (or an organization) to act effectively in a job or situation" (Milev, A., 1971, p. 348).

Over the past century many scientists (e.g. Thompson, Ellstrom, McCauley, Louton, etc) have tried to determine the qualities and skills of the efficient administrator or identify the characteristics of the successful manager. Early research

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in this area attempted to analyse various managerial positions, trying to determine what actually administrators do and to identify the skills required for each job.

The growing importance of professional competence within organizations created the need for competence assessment and development and performance forecasting. In 1973 McClelland concluded that the traditional scholastic aptitude tests as well as school grades and certification procedures „1. are not a valid measure for good life and job performance. 2. are often prejudiced against member of minority groups, women or people from lower socio-economic strata of the society” (McClelland, D. C., 1973, p. 1-14).

Later Boyatzis conducted a research on professional competence based on McClelland's study. In 1981 he analyzed again the empirical data from numerous surveys that distinguished the respondents in terms of their functions and skills. He defined competency: „...an underlying characteristic of an individual, which is causally related to effective or superior performance in a job' which could be 'a motive, trait, skill, aspect of one's self image or social role, or a body of knowledge which he or she uses” (Boyatzis, R. E., 1982, p. 21).

What can be inferred from Boyatzis' definition is that he focuses not on the job itself but on the personal characteristics required for it. His model includes the unconscious, conscious and behavioural dimensions of personal abilities in terms of a specific job. He emphasizes the interdependence between effective performance and professional competency, between the job performance requirements and the organizational environment. In his model an effective action or behaviour is observed when the three critical components of the model are consistent - organizational behaviour, professional skills and personal competence.

Each person has certain habits that have become their second nature. These habits may become a condition for effective performance. S. Covey defines habit as „the

intersection of knowledge, skill, and desire. Knowledge is a theoretical paradigm – what to do and why to do it. Skill is how to do it, and desire is the motivation, or the want to do it. In order to make something a habit in our lives, we have to have all three” (Kovi, S., 1999, p. 71).

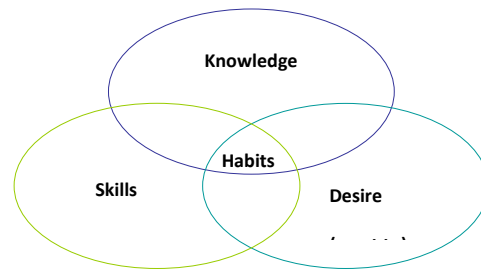


Fig. 1. Effective habits acc. to S. Covey

By developing their knowledge, skills and desire people can achieve a new, higher level of personal and interpersonal competence and develop habits. Habits are not inherent, they are the result of extensive efforts towards self-development. Given the desire and willpower, anyone can acquire new habits that would make them more effective, bring them happiness and relationships based on trust. Building effective habits should be motivated with the achievement of higher professional goals within everyone's freedom of choice. The freedom of choice between different models of behaviour provides the executive officer with free will - the ability to act effectively, regardless of the impact of irrational factors.

Freedom of choice is essential for developing communication habits and interpersonal relationships. The lack of communication skills based on knowledge about effective forms of communication, the skills for their implementation and the desire to turn them into actual behaviour can be the reason why people with brilliant intellect are unable to communicate effectively and appear rude, unpleasant, scheming, insensitive and unable to adapt to new environment.

A direct benefit for people whose behaviour is characterized by a high level of professional competence is that they easily establish *trust*. Trust cannot be learned intellectually, it is built over a period of collaboration and emotional understanding. Trust facilitates teamwork, team members' motivation and establishment of partnership relations. When there is no trust, negative emotions such as envy and suspicion can undermine and destroy the atmosphere of collaboration within the team and result in tension. In such situations people would usually think "If my colleagues envy me and I do not know me how should they know whether I say what I think? On the other hand, if I do not trust them and do not like them, how should I know whether to say what I think?" This is what trust is all about - a sense of integrity, confidence, helpfulness and empathy.

Several scientific research works define professional competence in terms of abilities. Later these abilities were related to the practical aspects of professional performance. Besides performing well, a professional should also be flexible in order to be considered competent. Based on an extensive research Willis and Dubin define professional competence as "*the ability to function effectively in the tasks considered essential within a given profession*" (Willis, S. and S. Dubin, 1990, p. 56). They outline two broad areas professional competence: mastery and general skills.

Mastery is defined as the comprehensive professional skill that includes knowledge, technical habits and problem-solving skills. General skills are related to individual intellectual skills, personal motivation and values.

The above definitions focus on abilities. Defining competence in terms of abilities is especially important. Considering the above definitions, we may in fact define competence as "*the ability for excellent performance of a job according to job-specific standards that ensure the success of both the individual and organizational development*". The main socially significant

result of career development is the acquisition of competencies in terms of specific skills for effective solution of typical problems and tasks. Thus competence presumes the availability of certain knowledge, skills and awareness of the size of responsibility and performance. "*Competencies relate to the areas of personal skills that enable managers to carry out their responsibilities by solving (implementation) of specific tasks and thus make profits. Competence may be defined as knowledge, skill, behaviour, quality or personality trait.*" (Blagoev, D., 2005, p. 215).

The introduction of compulsory competitive selection of civil servants necessitated the setting of clear and realistic for Bulgarian conditions that are measurable and relevant to the requirements for the overall administrative competence of the applicants for such positions. The overall administrative competence includes *knowledge of the nature, structure and functions of the administration; of the principles and rules for its effective operation as well as the skills relevant to the job position; of the aspects for modernization of the administration according to the requirements for improving the administrative capacity*, i.e. the overall administrative culture beyond the specific professional skills included in the job description that is essential for a successful performance.

The minimum general requirements for administrative competence are essentially *the general administrative knowledge, skills, abilities, personal qualities and skills that are essential for the successful performance of the functions and responsibilities of the position and that the applicants must have prior to being appointed*. Their presence can be interpreted as a confirmation of the assumption that the basic competencies of civil servants are essentially the same, despite the different responsibilities related to the different administrative structures. This fact is not only interesting, but also has practical importance because it provides opportunities for unification and optimization of the selection procedures.

The results of an empirical study (Joint project of the Public Administration Institute and Open Society Institute, 2004) on the minimum general requirements for administrative competence show

The study has proved that applicants for civil servant positions should show the set of knowledge, skills, competencies and personal and business skills shown in the table below:

Table 1. Minimum general administrative requirements for applicants for civil servant positions

Knowledge	Competencies	Personal and business skills
Knowledge of the regulations related to their field	Social and communication skills (team-building and business communication skills)	Consciousness, responsibility, commitment, discipline (determination for the managerial staff)
Language skills and competence (reading comprehension, Bulgarian grammar and spelling)	Intellectual skills (synthesis and analysis of information, critical and innovative thinking)	Psychological and emotional stability
Computer literacy – knowledge of the most popular operating systems and office applications (excl. managers)	Business skills – planning and organization of activities (the functions of the unit – for managerial staff)	Motivation and drive

Source: Public Administration Institute, 2004

that the selection procedures should include assessment tests of applicants' language skills, legislative competence, computer literacy, intelligence and social, communication and business skills. This, of course, does not mean that all applicants must meet the same requirements, nor that the contents of the exam papers for the different positions must be the same. However, it means that since a relatively small number of subject-specific assessment materials (assignments or tests) are needed, they can be developed centrally and then used by the administrative structure that needs them. Such an option can significantly reduce the cost of competitions and facilitate the work of selection boards. It may also improve the objectivity of competition results because it is very likely that presently the administrative structures could hardly afford to develop a sufficient number of assessment materials that can guarantee a valid and reliable assessment of the general administrative competence.

What follows is a review of the specific competences required for concrete civil servant positions developed within the project of the Public Administration Institute (PAI). According to the survey [IPA project] the minimum requirements for the general administrative competence of applicants for **managerial positions** (directors and heads of departments or units) are:

- 1. Knowledge, skills and competences – the successful candidate for managerial administrative position should presumably:**
 - identify priority goals and apply effective methods for achieving them foreseeing the possible consequences/effects;
 - know the structure of state administration and the functions of government bodies;
 - understand, interpret and enforce regulations;
 - know how to plan and organize his activities and the activities of his administrative unit; is capable of giving clear instructions and setting performance benchmarks and reasonable deadlines;
 - know how to assess the qualities and contribution of his inferiors as well as to

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motivate them adequately and delegate tasks and responsibilities;

- be aware of, and adhere to, the basic rules of business communication and negotiations;
- be comprehensible both orally and in writing;
- have analytical skills and is able to compile information from different sources and chose the best alternative solution;
- work with office applications and Internet browsers.

2. Personal and business skills - the successful candidate should demonstrate:

- determination and willingness to take responsibility;
- emotional stability and behavioural self-control;
- focus and self-organization;
- drive for professional and personal development.

The minimum requirements for the general administrative competence of applicants for the position of **chief expert** are:

1. Knowledge, skills and competences – the successful candidate for the position of chief expert is expected to:

- know the structure of state administration and the functions of government bodies;
- understand, interpret and enforce regulations;
- be comprehensible both orally and in writing;
- suggest effective methods for achieving the set goals and foresee the possible consequences/effects;
- have analytical skills and is able to compile information from different sources and chose the best alternative solution;
- know how to plan and organize his activities and is capable of working on several tasks simultaneously;
- be aware of, and adhere to, the basic rules of business communication, team building and negotiations;
- work with office applications and Internet browsers.

2. Personal and business skills - the successful candidate should demonstrate:

- emotional stability and behavioural self-control;
- focus and self-organization;
- drive for professional and personal development;
- willingness to take on responsibility.

Applicants for the position of **Chief Inspector** should have the following administrative competences:

1. Knowledge, skills and competences – the successful candidate for the position of Chief Inspector should presumably:

- know the structure of state administration and the functions of government bodies;
- understand, interpret and enforce regulations;
- be aware of, and adhere to, the basic rules of business communication and conflict management;
- know how to plan and organize his activities and is capable of working on several tasks simultaneously;
- be comprehensible both orally and in writing;
- demonstrate critical thinking, can identify problems and apply suitable methods to resolve them;
- have analytical skills and is able to compile information from different sources;
- work with office applications and Internet browsers.

2. Personal and business skills - the successful candidate should demonstrate:

- emotional stability and behavioural self-control;
- focus and self-organization;
- drive for professional and personal development;
- determination and willingness to take responsibility.

Applicants for the position of **Junior Inspector** should have the following competences:

1. Knowledge, skills and competences – the successful candidate for the position of Junior Inspector should presumably:

- understand, interpret and enforce regulations;
- be comprehensible both orally and in writing;
- be able to compile information from different sources;
- be aware of, and adhere to, the basic rules of business communication and team building;
- know how to plan and organize his activities;
- work with office applications and Internet browsers.

2. Personal and business skills - the successful candidate should demonstrate:

- emotional stability and behavioural self-control;
- focus and self-organization;
- drive for professional and personal development.

2. Emotional competence – characteristics

Undoubtedly, administrative staff, regardless of their position, has different levels of the skills and abilities required for the performance of their functions. There is also a specific ability the people in our country are still insufficiently aware of, even though the need for it is widely accepted and has been the subject matter of various research and analyses. It is the so-called *emotional intelligence*. It does not depend on the IQ or the educational level of a person but is acquired through "intelligent management of emotions." It includes the ability for self-control, personal and social competence, motivation and delegation of authority, conflict management, empathy and hope. Civil servants that are emotionally intelligent make considerable efforts to ensure their own professional development and the professional development of their colleagues, and are aware of their real capabilities. The term **emotional intelligence** (EI) was proposed

by Daniel Goleman. (2000) and became widely known. Emotions are the drive of personal development, they pose challenges and give meaning to our daily routines. Emotions require intelligence, they can be used in such a way as to facilitate achievements.

In classical literature, the problem was stated as the need for „sentimental education“, „need of nobility“ or „rich sensitivity.“ In antiquity Confucius (551-479 BC), seeking to impose his doctrine in China and unify the country, wandered for many years collecting historical materials and folk songs. His sermons recorded by his disciples in a book entitled „Lun-Yu“ (Discourses and judgments) were based on his ethical and political doctrine at the heart of which stands the term „gen“ (humanity): „... a moral principle that determines the relationships between people, requires respect for the elderly and for the people of higher social status ... Everyone should learn and improve himself morally and rulers are required to provide training and education to their subjects.“ (BAS, 1966, p. 124).

In fact, the person who is considered most closely related to the term emotional intelligence is Daniel Goleman – a writer from New York. In 1994 he decided to write a book about emotional literacy, and later decided to change the title to *Emotional Intelligence*. In his view, the term refers to people's ability to acquire a set of characteristics different from the level of intelligence developed over the years. This set of features is called emotional intelligence: "*qualities such as motivation and resistance to frustration; control over impulses and delay of gratification, control over one's own feelings and the ability to not allow failures to suppress our ability to think; propensity to empathy and hope.*" (Goleman, D.2000, p. 71).

Emotional intelligence does not only mean to know when and how to express an emotion but also how to control it. For example, empathy is a particularly important aspect of emotional intelligence and researchers know that it contributes to employees' success. Those who can best identify the

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emotions of others are more successful at their jobs and in their social life. Customers want representatives who can better listen to them and really understand what they want and what their interests are. Note, however, that the ability to manage our emotions also means that we should be able to regulate and suppress them as well. According to Mayer and Salovey *“people with a higher level of emotional intelligence are expected to prosper faster due to these abilities and learn from them”*. (Mayer, J. etc., 1997, p. 10-11).

According to Goleman, these abilities can be arranged in clusters as shown in the figure below:

Clustering has proved to be an efficient method in business. The same applies to the clustering of feelings and motivation factors.

Researchers define emotional competence as a factor that contributes to employees' success. People who are best at identifying the emotions of others (i.e. have empathic skills) are more successful at their jobs and in their social life.

In the future assessment of emotional competence have numerous practical applications, the most important of which may be as a measure of job performance. It will spread beyond the boundaries of individuality, going into academia, where it will be studied as a wide range of psychological mechanisms, emotional competencies that will facilitate the achievement of excellent results in life, professional development, family relations and civil behaviour. The future of emotional competence, which underlies emotional intelligence, is to

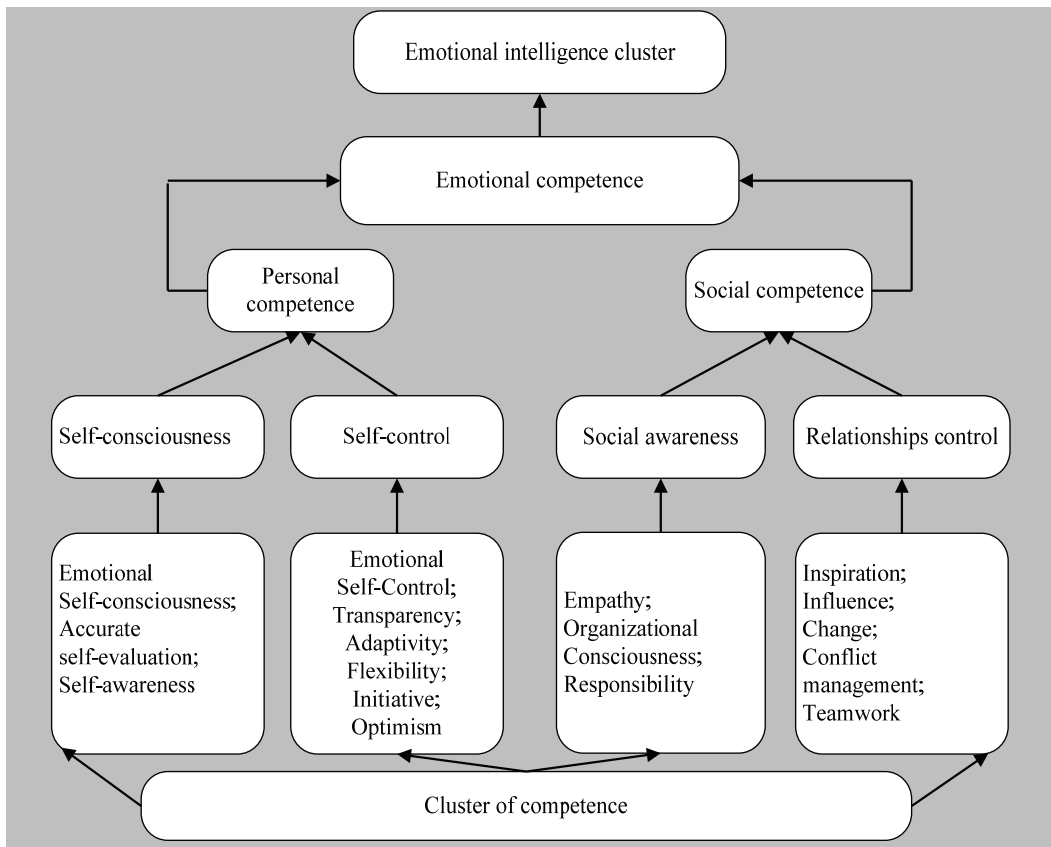


Fig. 2. Emotional intelligence clusters

improve job performance and teamwork.

The characteristics of emotional competence that are related to job performance are included in a model in an attempts to present the key emotional skills, which, added to the basic competences, represent the practical skills required for successful job performance.

The above skills are essential in today's rapidly changing environment in terms of the strategic vision and impartial assessment of the current status and readiness for change - key target points for development of professional competence in compliance with the European standards. They are typical of the proactive, critical and broad-minded people who take responsibility for important decisions in their lives and prepare for work in the information society by increasing their personal motivation and professional competence.

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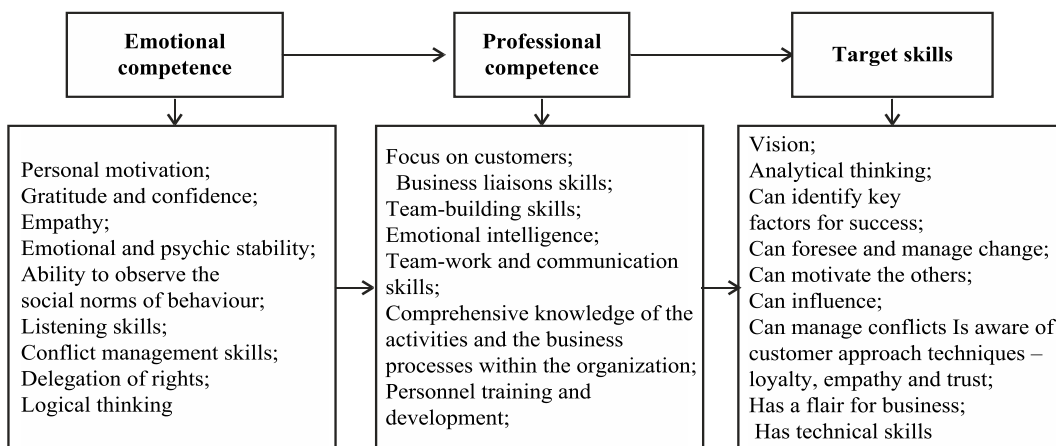


Fig. 3. Main groups of abilities improving job performance

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