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## THE EMPIRICAL DIMENSION OF RATIONAL ELEMENTS IN MANAGEMENT COMPETENCIES

*The aim of this article is to analyse the issues that constitute the rational dimension of management competencies based on knowledge, skills, and comprehension. The factor structure of knowledge and skills that managers have is determined. The empirical level of rational competency self-assessment is specified. This allowed measuring the degree of managers' determination expressed in the need to adjust the competence potential they have to changeable situational factors.*

*Keywords: managers; competencies; knowledge; skills.*

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## ЕМПІРИЧНИЙ ВИМІР РАЦІОНАЛЬНИХ ЕЛЕМЕНТІВ УПРАВЛІНСЬКИХ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТЕЙ

*У статті проаналізовано елементи, що формують раціональний вимір управлінських компетентностей, що спираються на знання, навички та розуміння. Визначено факторну структуру знань та навичок менеджерів. Детально описано емпіричний рівень самооцінювання раціональних компетентностей. Це дозволило виміряти ступінь рішучості менеджерів в умовах необхідності адаптувати свій потенціал компетентностей до ситуації, що змінюється.*

*Ключові слова: менеджери; компетентності; знання; навички.*

*Табл. 3. Літ. 10.*

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## ЭМПИРИЧЕСКОЕ ИЗМЕРЕНИЕ РАЦИОНАЛЬНЫХ ЭЛЕМЕНТОВ УПРАВЛЕНЧЕСКИХ КОМПЕТЕНТНОСТЕЙ

*В статье проанализированы элементы, формирующие рациональное измерение управленческих компетентностей, основывающихся на знаниях, навыках и понимании. Определена факторная структура знаний и навыков менеджеров. Детально описан эмпирический уровень самооценки рациональных компетентностей. Это позволило измерить степень решительности менеджеров в условиях необходимости адаптировать свой потенциал компетентностей к изменяющейся ситуации.*

*Ключевые слова: менеджеры; компетентности; знания; навыки.*

**Introduction.** Changes occurring in Polish companies over the last years have contributed significantly to the role played by managers in the working environment. They create a basis for people who contribute to success of companies they are in charge of. Therefore, increasing emphasis is put on the rational use of managers' competencies in various areas of company management.

Confirming the assumption that employees are the company's most important capital – they have both rational (knowledge, comprehension, skills) and emotional elements of competencies (values, beliefs, attitudes) (Czapla, 2011: 111–166) – it must be concluded that the potential they use is necessary for fulfilling objectives in an efficient way. Without competent human capital, every company will either fail to achieve its determined objectives or come across a series of unwanted difficulties in fulfilling its goals.

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The reasons given above, which underlie the interest in manager competencies, make it necessary to carry out actions for empirical verification of such manager competencies. It is reflected not only in the need to study company development conditions but also in a relatively unknown and often poorly understood issue concerning the competencies of company owners and managers. This image of company operation gives particular reasons to consider implications resulting from a pro-market orientation in management for manager competencies.

**Methods.** The *main objective* of this article is to determine the tendencies in developing a factor structure of the rational dimension of management competencies based on knowledge (Jemielniak and Kozminski, 2008: 21), skills (Spencer and Spencer, 1993: 11), and comprehension (Słownik współczesnego języka polskiego, 1996: 975). The *sub-objectives* supporting the main objective of this article are as follows:

- to identify the factor structure of the selected rational dimension of management competencies based on their *knowledge* and *skills*;
- to determine and analyse the degree of managers' determination in terms of *comprehension* of the need to constantly update their competence potential by absorbing current practices.

The general *hypothesis* relates to the objective of this article. It says that there is a factor structure of managers' rational competence level which affects the management level of the studied companies. In addition, it is stated that the increasing dynamics of changes in company environment requires managers understand the need to modify their competence behaviours through a flexible (Juchnowicz, 2012: 16) response to situational variables.

The main hypothesis is operationalised via 3 more detailed hypotheses:

- $h_1$ : managers from the studied companies have technical knowledge to a prevailing degree;
- $h_2$ : it is true that there are skills which are most desired in management positions among the studied people;
- $h_3$ : there is a competence gap, a mismatch between managers' real competencies and requirements imposed on them by situational factors.

A questionnaire and analysis of literature on the subject were used to study the rational elements of manager competencies. The questionnaire which "turned out to be the most useful method for Polish businesses" (Tokarski, 2001: 86) was addressed to 182 managers at 3 management levels in the organisational structures of the studied companies. The study was carried out in 2015. The studied managers performing their functions in the companies located in the province of Lubuskie. Implementation of the presented research concept involves empirical verification of competences. This process in particular concerns, as M. Mroziewski (2008: 17) says, the economy based on knowledge which determines the need for "activity and creativity of organisations and individuals".

**Results of the empirical study on the rational elements of managers' competency.** Actions taken by managers that aim at adjusting to situational requirements depend on the competencies they have (Tokarski, 1998: 127). In the introduction to this article it was stated that management competencies include both rational and emotional elements (the analysis of emotional elements of competence was skipped in this

article). That is why in this article a study describing the potential of rational competence elements will be presented in which mostly self-assessment was taken into account. Empirically, managers' opinions or beliefs were analysed in terms of subjective feelings which created managers' specific competence image in view of a new situation in which companies operate. Information obtained from managers in this way is to a great extent only a rough image of the reality since it is created by stimuli received in a subjective way (individually). However, it is important for the research as determinants of specific behaviours. Additionally, the managers' characteristic features include a lot of social experience and the fact that they are familiar with qualification procedures which are efficiently used for creating a desired impression (Tokarski, 2001: 76). Thus, an attempt to present managers' opinion on the assessment of their competencies is a consequence of the response to the needed procedures of company management resulting from the emerging mechanisms of Poland's developing economy.

The empirical content of the main hypothesis allows analysing the distribution of a specific type of managers' knowledge in the view of their competencies. A list was prepared containing 6 key variables that are rational elements of competence. It includes knowledge on the management of the studied company, technical (engineering) knowledge, marketing and promotion, law, finances and accounting, and knowledge on HR management.

The *analysis* of the hypothesis  $h_1$  showed the following relationships. Among the 6 studied variables concerning knowledge it was proven that in the studied period competencies of the analysed managers in general consist of engineering knowledge. The percentage distribution of rational competence elements is presented in Table 1. Statistical analysis confirmed the theoretical inquiries included in the first hypothesis.

Table 1. A percentage distribution of managers' knowledge level, authors'

Studied variable	Knowledge dimensions						Total
	CM	MaP	TK	L	FaA	HRM	
Assessment of knowledge elements	28	8	37	2	13	12	100

CM – company management; MaP – marketing and promotion, TK – technical knowledge, L – law, FaA – finances and accounting, HRM – HR management.

*Interpretation* of these results allows concluding that the rational dimension of the studied managers' competencies in terms of their knowledge is mainly determined by technical competencies. Using technical knowledge by such a big group of the studied people at the expense of knowledge on management and staff management means that the level of management knowledge is low. It can be presumed that this significant percentage of people with engineering knowledge is the result of their technical education. According there was an open question: To what extent are managers with prevailing technical knowledge able to solve the problems related to management?

Statistical *analysis* testing the second hypothesis ( $h_2$ ) shows there are elements of rational level of competencies in the form of acquired skills in the studied group of managers. It was proven that in the studied period company managers had 5 main

rational elements of competence: team management – average 4.45 pts (the number shows the average results concerning the acquired skills according to a five-grade scale in points), negotiations – 4.24 pts, stress management – 4.03 pts, communication – 4.01 motivating – 3.98 pts. A list of the 10 studied management skills is presented in Table 2.

*Table 2. Importance of acquired skills in points according to the five-point scale, authors'*

Studied variable	Skill type									
	TM	IC	SC	M	EI	SM	C	RA	I	N
Skills' assessment	4.45	3.78	3.71	3.98	3.63	4.03	4.01	3.03	2.19	4.24

TM – team management, IC – implementation of changes, SC – solving conflicts, M – motivating, EI – efficiency improvement, SM – stress management, C – communication, RA – resourceful attitude, I – influence; N – negotiations.

*Interpretation* of the results shows there are preferred skills as rational determinants of gained competencies. A set of skills with the highest average value is determined. Among the 10 studied skills in the studied period the rational elements of competence included: managing a team, negotiations, coping with stress, communication, and motivating subordinates. This indicates that the studied persons say that they have high soft skills in managing people. This is a positive outcome considering the high level of declared technical knowledge. Negotiation skills take the second place which means they must have high verbal and non-verbal predispositions in communicating with internal and external stakeholders in the studied companies. The studied managers also see high importance of skills related to coping with stress, communicating, and motivating the staff.

Further, the third hypothesis was verified ( $h_3$ ). It must be pointed out that knowledge, skills, and comprehension as rational elements of competence are linked to each other. The relation between knowledge and comprehension is learning, while the relation between skills and comprehension is based on using intuition (Czapla, 2011: 128). The relationship between knowledge and managers' skills and comprehension described above allows getting a more detailed insight into the identified competence potential of the studied managers. Based on this, differences that emerge in the view of requirements imposed on managers by the changing situational factors can be determined.

*Analysis* of the results verifying the third hypothesis ( $h_3$ ) shows that the managers from the studied companies assessed their competencies in gained knowledge and skills at a high or very high level (Table 3).

*Table 3. Percentage distribution of knowledge and skills status of the studied managers, authors'*

Studied variable	Knowledge and skills status			Total
	Very high	High	Insufficient	
Assessment of own knowledge and skills level	29	64	7	100

As the percentage distribution shows, 64% of the managers assessed their own knowledge and skills as high, while 29% identified their competencies in knowledge

and skills as being at a very high level. Only 7% of the studied managers consider their knowledge resources and skills are insufficient in relation to formal requirements and situational factors.

When *interpreting* the results of the study it can be concluded that the studied managers considered their status of knowledge and skills to be at a high or very high level. This clearly positive opinion expressed as to the compliance of acquired skills and knowledge with situational requirements may change into a negative phenomenon resulting from the fact that there is no need to change the rational structure of competence elements. This means internal motivation to learn new behaviours allowing to adapt to changing situational factors is very low. Such behaviour many result in a competence gap between actual situational needs and individual competence potential. The lack of a critical view on the need to adjust own competencies to situational factors in a flexible way determines unfavourable phenomena in management. Competencies must be updated on a regular basis, depending on the needs imposed by the dynamically changing environment. Managers should indeed have a need to learn (develop) at a high level and intuition to gain new skills relevant to new procedures.

**Conclusions.** The study results presented in this article show that changing situational factors force managers treat their competencies as priorities and use them in an efficient way. Managers are mainly required to respond to situational needs in a flexible way. The need to constantly develop management competencies to actively affect individual elements of situations at work, including strengthening the awareness of that need, should be the basis for the process of manager adaptation. Thus, the way of management, depending on the quality of rational elements of competencies, is an important element spurring the actions.

It must be also pointed out that assessment of knowledge and skills level facilitates in choosing actions and measures suitable for a specific situation while the analysis of rational elements of competence helps determining which activities managers are able to carry out.

As for further discussion on managers' competences and needs, it can be concluded that there is a divergence between managers' real competence potential and competence paradigms formulated at the situational level. This competence gap means that managers lack comprehension and have low internal motivation to increase competencies for further development. Lack of orientation on changes in the structure of rational competence elements does not force managers to constantly look for new areas to develop. This is clearly confirmed by self-assessment of individual competencies which were considered to be high or even very high. Thus this assessment carried out by the managers in terms of their competencies follows conservative tendencies to a greater extent than development tendencies in noticing and looking for new situations.

The results of the study presented in this article allow formulating the following conclusions:

1. The proposed attempt to formulate a concept structuring the rational dimension of management competencies creates an opportunity for an indepth and multi-dimensional analysis of internal processes at manager positions.
2. The study confirmed the thesis that rational elements of competence may be treated as the result of situational factors.

3. The analysis of the study results shows there is a gradation of individual elements of knowledge and skills of the studied managers. The rational level of knowledge and skills turned out to be dominating. With it, the structure of competence potential of the studied people is determined.

4. The results of the study confirm the theoretical statement that factors which change dynamically have their impact on increasing the competence gap which shows a mismatch between managers' real (rational) competencies and requirements resulting from situational factors. Therefore, the analysis of managers' work requires developing a consistent concept of HR policy, the tool in which will be the category of "comprehending" changes occurring in organisation's close and distant environments.

The conclusions show that studies on management competencies may fulfil important research functions and individually contribute to the development of management knowledge about the real determinants of behaviours and human needs which is useful for HR field overall.

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