

COMPETENCE, KNOWLEDGE AND POWER*

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The paper discusses competence from two connected but not identical aspects, i.e. knowledge and power. The connection of these three concepts is dealt with from two viewpoints namely of the empowerment theory and psychological theory of motivation. The theoretical discussion is supported by survey results introduced and discussed in the text. The survey in question was carried out two years ago. It was based on a research instrument constructed by an international team of researchers and was used by its authors to compare motivational processes in several European countries. The present authors supplemented the questionnaire by few more questions and used it in an attempt to identify differences in motivational processes of specific social groups in the Czech Republic. The authors try to show that a rather specific association of competence and self-efficacy, which the research data brought forth, was caused both by tacit knowledge on environs in which respondents live and work and their feelings of power over the course of their own lives. Besides it, the results introduced in the present paper seem to point out that competence and power should be understood both as individual and social characteristics. To grasp the intertwining relations of competence, knowledge and power they must be viewed and studied from individual, as well as societal perspectives at the same time.

competence; knowledge; power; motivation; self-concept

INTRODUCTION

Competence could be understood as an ability to perform some task. To be able to perform a task some knowledge is indispensable and the same holds for power. Without power, it might be said, a person is powerless and hardly could achieve anything. In addition to such a simple and common-sense argument, which might be dismissed as a platitude, the connection of power to knowledge and competence has gained attention of philosophers, social scientists and management experts and was analyzed from several perspectives. To touch only on few of relevant studies, Alvin Toffler might be mentioned here, as in *Powershift* (1990) he argued that there exist three main kinds of power, i.e. violence, wealth, and knowledge. According to him, each successive kind of power represents a more flexible kind of power. Violence can only be used negatively, i. e. to punish. Wealth can be used both negatively (by withholding money) and positively (by advancing/spending money). Knowledge can be used in these ways as well but, additionally, it can be used in a transformative way, as knowledge could lead to understanding and finding new solutions. Another important philosopher, who studied the ways in which power shapes social institutions and determines the lives of people, was Michel Foucault. His works analyzed the link between power and knowledge. He outlined a form of covert power that works through people rather than only on them (see *La volonté de savoir*, 1976, p. 38).

Recently, Kelly (2007) dealt with the relationship of knowledge and power in organizational setting. Kelly focused on knowledge management implementation from an organizational culture perspective and analyzed the re-

lationship between knowledge and power within this context. She tried to outline the reasons why knowledge is a power resource, and proposed that, as such, it can only be managed successfully within the framework of an effective and legitimate use of all organizational power resources.

It seems, power could be envisaged from two different viewpoints. The first one assumes power being a characteristic of a social system, like a society or an organization. In the second case power is considered to be a characteristic of an individual. The connections of power, knowledge and competence might differ depending on the viewpoint taken. The first perspective was upheld by Michel Foucault and the same holds for Kelly's conception of power in organization, as it was described above. The second perspective understands power as an asset of an individual. This distinction resembles the difference of core and individual competence. While core competence is understood as an area of specialized expertise resulting from aggregation of capabilities and harmonizing complex streams of technology (see Sanchez, 2002), individual competence stands alone and is considered in isolation from the organizational environ. Individual competence is given importance in the human resources field, where it stands for an individual capability to perform properly on a specific job. In psychology the idea was initiated by David McClelland in the 1960s (McClelland, 1973) with a view to moving away from traditional attempts to describe competence in terms of knowledge, skills and attitudes and to focus instead on the specific self-image, values, traits, and motive dispositions. McClelland's conception was criticized, however it seems, a very similar outlook was developed in the recent years in connection

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to the theory of empowerment and, especially, with its psychological branch, the psychological empowerment theory.

Empowerment theory is at present a quite popular concept which seems to join both psychological, managerial and organizational approaches and ways of understanding of the role of motivation in organizations into one theoretical and at the same time practical approach. Its psychological branch, the psychological empowerment theory, was extensively researched in the recent years and the results seem to give it a rather strong position (Wall et al., 2004; Wood et al., 2003; Conger, Kanungo, 1988; Thomas, Velthaus, 1990). One of the important concepts of the psychological empowerment theory is self-efficacy, which was originally introduced in psychology by Bandura (1977, 1986) as a central concept of his social learning theory. Self-efficacy is described as a feeling of an individual to be able to perform well on a specific job. Self-efficacy is considered as causative in producing good, even extraordinary, performance. It is quite clear that self-efficacy is a specific self-image, as McClelland envisioned. However, there is much more to it. Self-efficacy is a feeling of power and competence in an individual which stems from her/his skills, knowledge and motivation. Commonly, it is assumed that self-efficacy might be strengthening in an individual by enabling her/him higher degree of freedom (or power) over the operations of her/his job (like in the job-enrichment programs). That way, in this concept power, competence and knowledge seem to be united in pursuing one and the same goal, e. i. an excellent performance.

In the kind of organizational thought we tried to put forth here, knowledge is commonly understood as explicit knowledge needed for competent performance on the job. However, it looks like, a rather specific kind of tacit knowledge might play an important role in the motivation of the person involved. The authors are of the persuasion that in the research results described in the following paragraphs evidence could be found proving that effects of giving more control to the employees might depend on their life experience. If it would be true, it would mean that the results of empowerment practices in organizations might differ in different kinds of employees as a consequence of their past experience with organizational cultures they have encountered. This, clearly, bring us back from individual to organizational power and competence, which might mean that both these aspects of the two entities are not completely separable.

MATERIAL AND METODS

Questionnaire EDMK and the question DP6

Our study was based on questionnaire EDMK application which is described in more detail in Ten Horn et al. (1996). The questionnaire EDMK was created by its authors as a set of modules, from which scales or items can be selected according to the needs of an individual

survey. The questionnaire authors have used it in an international study which compared work motivation in several European countries. According to their conclusions (see Roe et al., 2000) they identified in countries studied the same motivation mechanisms which were, however, significantly modified by local conditions. The present authors chose for their study a module of EDMK, specified as mod 8. The comprehensive results of the survey can be found in Chamoutová et al. (2005) and Michálek et al. (2006). The module questions were complemented by another six questions coded as DP (work consequences, see Kolman, 2001), one of which specified as DP6 led to results which we consider relevant to the problem we deal with in the preceding paragraph. These results are discussed below, but first we have to clarify the nature of the question mentioned above.

Question DP6 was derived by Kolman some time ago on the basis of experience with situation in the Czech organizations and later it was used in his 2001 study (Kolman, 2001). The question DP6 sounds, as follows: "How probable is the following result of extraordinary work performance in your organization: the employee remains in the same position because s/he knows the job well." In the survey from 2001 it was shown that respondents stated a higher probability of such a consequence the older and the less educated they were. In this survey, samples of employees from various organizations were compared. It also turned out that a higher likelihood of such a consequence of work behaviour was given by employees from a company where the age average was higher and the average education lower. In both cases the findings were statistically significant. Kolman interpreted the findings as a reflection of persisting ideas and beliefs which formed in the people's minds more than 18 years ago, and as a consequence of sharing values in a social group. Further results led us to a slightly different formulation that will be explained later on.

Questionnaire EDMK and Kolman's questions DP were used in a new survey in 2005 which focused on motivation characteristics of Czech population. Altogether, data from 882 respondents were obtained. These data were subjected to statistical analysis; variance, correlation and factor analyses were used. A special attention was paid to verifying the scales reliability. The scales mentioned all showed a satisfactory reliability. In Table 1 is introduced a list of scales of EDMK used in the survey referred on.

Table 1. Scales of *mod 8* (questionnaire EDMK)

RS – responsibility
MF – meaningful of the work
OC – organization commitment
JI – job interestedness
SR – stress related to work
TL – tendency to leave
SA – job satisfaction
RP – role repletion and requests
PH – physical condition for work

Table 2. Results of ANOVA calculation for tendency to change a job

Factor						
Option	Number	Total	Average	Variance		
Column 1	87	1044	12	16.30233		
Column 2	161	1936	12.02484	16.87438		
Column 3	297	3277	11.03367	14.86373		
ANOVA						
Source of variability	SS	Difference	MS	<i>F</i>	Value <i>P</i>	<i>F krit</i>
Between options	130.4838	2	65.24189	4.159365	0.016119	3.012351
All options	8501.564	542	15.68554			
Total	8632.048	544				

Table 3. ANOVA calculation for question DP6

Factor						
Option	Number	Total	Average	Variance		
Column 1	87	199	2.287356	1.323443		
Column 2	161	399	2.478261	1.226087		
Column 3	296	779	2.631757	1.433429		
ANOVA						
Source of variability	SS	Difference	MS	<i>F</i>	Value <i>P</i>	<i>F krit</i>
Between options	8.617259	2	4.308629	3.180683	0.042336	3.012382
All options	732.8515	541	1.354624			
Total	741.4688	543				

More detailed results could be obtained from the first author of this paper.

As a part of the wider study three groups of respondents were compared. These groups differed by the place of residence of their members. The first group was formed by respondents from Prague, the second from Central Bohemia and the third from smaller municipalities from marginal regions of the Czech Republic. These groups taken together made only a part of the total number of respondents (actually, the three groups consisted from 545 respondents). Based on the analysis of variance (ANOVA) we found two statistically significant results which differentiate inhabitants from Prague and Central Bohemia from respondents in the third group. The inhabitants of Prague and Central Bohemia showed a significantly higher tendency to change a job, which probably reflects the fact that there are more opportunities to find a job in Prague and its surroundings as opposed to the situation of respondents in the third group. The results of the analysis are presented in Table 2.

Another statistically significant difference between the three compared groups was found in answers to the question DP6. The situation described by question DP6 is significantly more probable for inhabitants of smaller communities in marginal regions of the republic than for respondents from the two remaining groups. The result is shown in Table 3

Correlations shown in Table 4 are all statistically significant at 5% level. These correlations were calculated using the data from the whole group of 882 respondents.

Table 4. Statistically significant correlation of DP6 with EDMK scales

Scale	MF	OC	TL	SA	PH
Correlation	-0.118	-0.156	-0.118	-0.163	-0.172

Although these correlations are rather low in the absolute value, they prove that the answers to question DP6 are statistically significantly associated with motivation parameters from the questionnaire EDMK. In the following paragraph we will try to find how to interpret these findings in connection to the ideas introduced in the first part of the paper.

DISCUSSION

The questionnaire EDMK was based on the concepts very close to the theory of psychological empowerment. Items and scales of EDMK are formulated in such a way that they make it possible to measure parameters that are dealt with by this theory. Although the results which were stated in the previous part are not ground-breaking, without doubt they prove that motivational characteristics can be influenced by conditions in which the subject lives and probably also by her/his experience, life situation and by the way s/he understands the world around her/him. Question DP6 is a bit bizarre, as it seems to mean that persons who answer it positively in fact confirm that they do not

expect that the organization they work for is, at least in their opinion, run according to rational principles or modern management. At the same time it seems that for these people work is not a means to achieve goals in life, neither organizational nor private. For many people, quite probably, work is a sort of necessity, a burden, and a must, probably disliked. A person who will give high probability to the situation specified by DP6 question hardly would understand acceptance of higher degree of responsibility, as in the case of work enrichment, as a reason for higher job satisfaction or higher performance on the job. Basically we can find here something similar to the cases when motivational processes and their contents seem to be conditioned by cultural factors. In the case given the factors are conditioned socially and psychologically. Let us try to find out whether we can find concepts and ideas which we could use to clarify the situations we have stated here in the recent studies and theoretical papers.

According to Arnold et al. (2005) the recent approaches to the theory of work motivation were influenced by social-psychological concepts, according to which the motivational processes are contingent to who a person considers to be. This is called self-concept in social psychology. Every person seems to have more than one self-concept. First of all we have a personal identity, i.e. how we see ourselves in relation to how we see others. Then there is an ideal identity related to what we would like to be. Then there are a number of social identities, always one for every social group we belong to. The social identity deals with what connects us to other members of the same group and what differentiates us from people who do not belong to it. Motivational processes function in accord with the identity which is relevant to any specific case. So if someone's current identity is that s/he a promising manager expecting a promotion, s/he will probably be interested in such activities and manifestations which will be beneficial to this goal, such as concentration on her/his own job and on being assessed as a good performer by her/his superior. In such a case enlargement and/or enrichment of the employee responsibilities might be perceived as strengthening of her/his perceived self-efficacy and, at the same time, as strengthening of her/his personal power.

On the other hand, there exist other kinds of identities found which do not support the same behavioural response. Assume an identity of a person who has experienced exploitation repeatedly and feels to be locked in a situation in which s/he does not have any power over her/his own future rewards. Such a person will, most probably, feel endangered by higher degree of responsibility and will understand it as way to failure and punishment. Many people in the world live in conditions in which they experience exploitation and humiliation. These people hardly would respond to the methods used as job enrichment tools in the same way as a promising manager of the previous paragraph.

Leonard et al. (1999) introduced an idea that our identities consist of three parts, namely features, competence and values. Features correspond to personality traits

and they also could be defined as general tendencies to certain types of behavioural responses. Competences are given by the way subjects perceive their own skills, abilities, talents and knowledge. Values are general tendencies to prefer certain results over others. Values are relatively persistent and go beyond the situation in which a subject finds herself/himself presently. According to Leonard the combination of these three components and characteristics of a specific situation determine motivational processes within the subject. These are (quoted from Arnold et al., 2005):

- **intrinsic motivation processes** – activity is carried out because the subject enjoys it;
- **extrinsic/instrumental motivation processes** – aim to achieve an individual or group goal thanks to which it is possible to achieve satisfaction or materialistic rewards;
- **external self-concept** – looking for success and confirmation from others that the subject belongs to a successful group and that the subject has proved his/her abilities;
- **internal self-concept** – looking for success which enables the subject to see himself/herself as a competent person, regardless of how others see the subject;
- **goal internalization** – effort aimed at achieving a goal for goal's sake, because the subject values it.

It might help to shed light on the motivational processes mentioned by means of some, rather simple, examples. Few people seem to go to work just because they love it, nowadays. There could be found such lucky people, however, and they can usually be found among scientists and artists. It is quite clear, that these people are deeply involved in their work because the accomplishment of their work-goals is a significant and important value for them. Their motivation is intrinsic and the work-goal was internalized. When we work for a salary the motivational process involved is usually an extrinsic one. In the same situation we can try to become members of a social group of successful people with higher incomes. In this second case the motivation is instrumental and is based in an external self-concept. A person motivated by an external self-concept will work hard as long as it leads to her/his belonging to the desired social group. This kind of motivation may last for years. However, the extrinsically motivated person will stop trying if for example this person becomes rich. A person driven by internalized goal may complain about hard work and all the efforts exerted, nevertheless this person will never slow down. A person motivated by and internalized goal will not relax and will not stop because work is the best thing that s/he knows.

The distinction of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation processes appears to return in the field of work motivation theory over and again. It used to be tied with Herzberg's two-factor theory where the satisfiers were defined as intrinsic and hygiene factors as extrinsic motivators. Sano and Harackiewicz (2000) dealt with the same distinction from a different point of view. They studied a rather specific situation when a subject is motivated both intrinsically and extrinsically at the same time. Under spe-

cific conditions the extrinsic motivation seems to lower the intrinsic motivation. Sansone and Harackiewicz (2000) focused on determining these conditions, as they tried to identify when and how both the kinds of motivation might work together. Presently, business and industry needs people who work hard and are creative. Creativity needs intrinsic motivation, however, hardly anybody will continue for a company without material rewards. The distinction of intrinsic and extrinsic motivation enables, together with the concept of self-concept, to explain the intertwining associations of competence, knowledge and power in the motivation of an individual and that way sheds light on the research findings, described above.

CONCLUSIONS

In the previous paragraphs we have introduced the concepts of competence, knowledge and power and tried to show that these concepts could be understood as an intertwined bundle of associations. These concepts seem to be useful as means of understanding some aspects of individual behaviour, especially as concerns motivational processes. At the same time the same triad of concepts could clarify processes on organizational/societal level and might help to use methods of motivating (or, empowering) employees more efficiently. We have tried, as well, to support this claim by research survey results, which shown there exist differences in motivation between subject who differ in their life experiences and their present situation. Based on the research data we concluded that these different social groups might, and most probably would, respond differently to methods used to motivate personnel.

As it was mentioned in the preceding paragraph, job-enrichment is a method quite often used to motivate employees through the developed world. Its substance is in giving higher degree of responsibility to the employees. Based on the theoretical discussion of self-concept and extrinsic and intrinsic motivation, the influence of this method implementation could be understood as giving more power to the employees and ascertaining their competence. However, based on their (tacit) knowledge of living the conditions and life experiences these people might respond differently. They might even feel endangered by the now higher responsibility and feel there is a trap hidden in this move of the organization which might lead them to get harmed. Competence, knowledge and power operate on both the individual and organizational/societal levels and their meaning and effects might differ between the levels. They might differ in their values between these levels, as well. Because of this, a deeper research in the associations of the three concepts might be useful for better understanding of both the individual and organizational competence.

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Kompetence, znalosti a moc.

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Kompetenci můžeme chápat jako schopnost vykonat určitý úkol. Pro vykonání úkolu potřebuje subjekt znalost a také moc. Bez moci je subjekt bezmocný a sotva může něco vykonat. Tato souvislost je sice povrchní a mohla by být zamítnuta jako samozřejmost, přesto spojitosti mezi kompetencí, znalostí a mocí přivolávají pozornost filosofů, společenských vědců a odborníků z oblasti managementu. Abychom zmínili jen některé, můžeme uvést Alvina Tofflera a jeho knihu *Powershift*, francouzského filozofa a psychologa Michela Foucalda, zejména pak jeho knihu *La volonté de savoir*, či studii Catheriny Kelly z letošního roku, která se věnovala úloze moci ve znalostním managementu. Předložený příspěvek na tyto myšlenkové proudy navazuje a pokouší se je rozvíjet.

Stat' zkoumá kompetenci ve dvou souvisejících, avšak ne identických aspektech, a to znalosti a moci. Spojení uvedených tří pojmů je opět zkoumáno ze dvou úhlů, konkrétně teorie zmocnění a psychologické teorie motivace. Teoretická diskuse se pak opírá o výsledky dotazníkového výzkumu, které jsou níže v textu stati uvedeny a vysvětleny. Výzkum byl proveden před dvěma lety a byl založen na použití výzkumného nástroje, který před časem vytvořil mezinárodní tým výzkumníků, kteří jej použili ke srovnání motivačních charakteristik v několika evropských zemích. Autoři této stati doplnili dotazník o několik dalších otázek a použili jej k určení rozdílů v motivačních procesech konkrétních sociálních skupin v České republice. Výsledky naznačují, že určitá souvislost mezi kompetencí a proměnnou označovanou jako self-efficacy, kterou referované výsledky výzkumu dokládají, byla vyvolána jednak tacitní znalostí respondentů, týkající se prostředí, v němž žijí a pracují, jednak jejich vnímáním vlastní moci nad tím, co se jim v životě děje. Dále výsledky ve stati uvedené naznačují, že kompetence i moc by měly být chápány současně jako individuální i sociální charakteristiky. Chceme-li tedy dospět k pochopení složitých souvislostí kompetence, znalosti a moci, musíme je nahlížet a též zkoumat současně na obou rovinách.

kompetence; znalosti; moc; motivace; chápání sebe

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