

INDIVIDUAL COMPETENCIES IN AN ORGANISATION

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Due to current dynamic development and changes, more and more attention is being paid to the personality of a manager, his competencies and organisation's core competencies since they are viewed as important sources of achieving competitive advantage. The traditional scheme of qualification gaining has been changing. The accent is put on new conceptions in human resources management aimed primarily at the use of human, or rather work potential of employees. Therefore it is essential to accurately define and identify both individual and core competencies of employees. Moreover, organisation's competencies need to be determined too. The application of competencies in the management process enables requirements and opportunities to interlink in a way to permit their development in mutual harmony and ensure company's competitiveness in the market.

competencies; individual competencies; management competencies; core competencies; resource-based approach; competitive advantage

INTRODUCTION

The first part of the article deals with definitions of competencies and their classification. In technical literature, a competency is defined as an ability based of work tasks or outputs or as an ability based on behaviour. Competencies are classified into two main categories: individual competencies and organisation's competencies. This article explains the links between individual types of competencies within these categories and between them, including theoretical approaches of various authors.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The objective of the article is to carry out an analysis and thus to:

- identify general categories of competencies, their definitions and significance;
- divide individual types, kinds of competencies into general categories of competencies;
- identify mutual relations of competencies in competencies frames.

The secondary sources of data have been used, in particular scientific studies targeted at competencies in general as well as an individual and management competencies. The data collected have been processed using the methods of induction, deduction, analysis and synthesis. To compare individual competency typologies and to determine their different and common elements, the method of comparative and content analysis and the method of mind maps have been used.

Competencies – definitions, categorisation, competency relations

The term “competency” was first used by White (1959) to describe the characteristics of a personality that are connected with an excellent performance and high mo-

– tivation. According to Woodruffe (1992) competency is an umbrella term covering everything that is, directly or indirectly, associated with work performance. In technical literature competencies are defined as a description of work tasks or work outputs, i.e. as a system of minimum requirements or demonstration of performance or results (of work), or as a description of behaviour. Firstly, it refers to the behaviours that an employee must have or must acquire in order to achieve high levels of performance in a certain situation. These two conceptions of competency are based on English terms “competency” and “competence”. According to Boyatzis (1982) a “competency” is a human ability to behave in a way to meet work (job) requirements according to the parameters given by the organisation's environment and thus to bring the required results. A “competence” was defined as an activity, behaviour or results a person in question should be able to demonstrate. In short, a “competency” relates to the agent while a “competence” to the activity performed.

The term “competency” is recently used in many areas of management, in particular in the area of human resources management where competencies serve to develop a profile of required capabilities for a job position, selection of candidates for job positions, career planning and management, remuneration, identification of individual development needs, functioning of the system of employee circulation planning, or functioning of diagnostic and development centres. Similarly, competencies may be used to create optimal project teams and to manage them and also to evaluate the work of managers and specialists in a team. In terms of management of an organisation itself, competencies can help to identify and analyse the human potential of an organisation, to ensure optimal distribution of this potential, for example, by creating new organisational structures, comparison of quality of human resources in the organisation and their management. The main strategic benefit of competency management in an organisation is the origination of the so-called organisation's “core competency”.

The broad use of competencies for management purposes is given by a number of factors, one of which is the non-existence of uniform consensus as regards the definition and content of a competency (Kub eš et al., 2004) and the broad scale of possibilities of applying the competency approach (for example, in the area of emotional intelligence and self-development of an individual as mentioned by Boyatzis (1982) or in the field of competitive advantage of an organisation).

According to its development, it is possible to divide competencies into three main development phases. The first group, whose representatives are White, McClelland, Spencer and Spencer, and Boyatzis, concentrates on individual competencies. The second group is based on the possibility of managing competencies in an organisation by means of competency models (McLagan, 1980; Spencer, Spencer, 1993). The third phase is the identification of organisation's competencies (Prahalad, Hamel, 1990; Ulrich, Lake, 1991; Gallon et al., 1995; Coyne et al., 1997).

Individual competencies

White (1959) was the first to define the term. According to him, competencies are a description of personal characteristics connected with an excellent performance and high motivation. Plamínek, Fišer (2005) characterises competencies as a sum of human performances achieved (i.e. human work) and the potential invested (i.e. human resources). Krontorád and Trčka (2005) define competencies as a mixture of knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviour which employees apply in the course of their work, which are decisive for result accomplishment and are in compliance with organisation's strategic interests. According to Woodruffe (1992, cit. Kub eš et al., 2004) a competency is the set of behaviour patterns that employees need to bring to a position in order to perform their tasks with competence. To successfully accomplish a task, three preconditions have to be met:

- 1) the employee is endowed with qualities, abilities, knowledge and experience that are essential for such behaviour;
- 2) is motivated to use such behaviour (sees a value in the required behaviour and is willing to invest the necessary energy);
- 3) has an opportunity to apply such behaviour in the given environment.

It is necessary to note that the absence of any of the above-mentioned preconditions prevents competent performance.

Types of individual competencies

According to Spencer and Spencer (1993) individual competencies are divided into *threshold* and *distinguish* competencies. *Threshold competencies* are essential for work task fulfilment, they describe minimum

requirements for behaviour, abilities, skills and knowledge that are necessary to perform a work task. *Distinguish competencies* are easy to separate and compare with work standards of a large number of employees. They divide work performances into exceptional, average and below average with respect to expectations (standards). They create a "superstructure" above threshold competencies. A different categorisation of competencies according to Tyrón (cit. Kub eš et al., 2004) is based on their division into *management, interpersonal and technical competencies*. A more detailed description of individual categories follows from their name. *Management competencies* consist of skills and abilities contributing to an excellent performance of a manager. *Interpersonal competencies* are necessary for efficient communication. *Technical competencies* are a set of skills related to the given job position. Using the previous categorisation, Carroll and McCrackin (cit. Kub eš et al., 2004) classified competencies as *core competencies* (for all employees), *team* (for groups), *functional* (relating to individual functional areas) and *leadership and management competencies*. In his work, Woodruffe (1992) divides competencies into *behavioural competencies*, so-called "soft" competencies and *technical*, so-called "hard" competencies. *Behavioural competencies* are personal characteristics and dispositions for a job that manifest in human behaviour (e.g. initiative, team work). *Technical competencies* include technical and professional knowledge and skills (e.g. qualification, education). Building on the idea of Goleman (2002) regarding emotional intelligence, Boyatzis and McKee divided competencies into *emotional, cognitive and technical competencies*.

In their work, Belz and Siegrist (2001) state that the potential to exploit competencies in an organisation is an individual competency to deal. Individual competency develops from the concurrence of social competency, self-competency and competency in the field of methods. The level of impact of individual competencies on each person varies. Competencies consist of various abilities and their mutual relations. They are acquired reflexively. A reflection means comparing and connecting individual abilities with respect to one's own scale of values and individual life goals for the purpose of competency acquisition. A reflection unveils connections between abilities and interlinks them (Richer, 1995). It may occur in full solely in joint activities with other people. Group learning is a basic prerequisite for acquiring core competencies (Belz, Siegrist, 2001).

Management competencies

Management competencies are a specific type of individual competencies. Based on a survey covering more than 2,000 managers, Boyatzis (1982) defined competencies as a human ability to behave in a way to meet job requirements in parameters given by the organisation's environment and thus to achieve the required results. Prokopenko and Kubr (1996) define manager's

competencies as their ability to perform a function or a set of functions and simultaneously reach a certain level of efficiency. According to Khelerová (1999), a manager is a person who is in charge of a team of collaborators with the help of which the managers implements the set goals. According to Krontorád and Trčka (2005), management competencies are manager's abilities to reach performance corresponding to the relevant job standards. Prokopenko and Kubr (1996) also mention that the most common definition of management competencies is a description of manager's knowledge, traits, attitudes and skills where:

- knowledge is information on certain phenomena and relations acquired and kept in memory;
- traits are the person's characteristic ways of responding to the same groups of inputs;
- attitudes are based on feelings and taking positive and negative stands in various matters and are mirrored in the manager's behaviour; they are difficult to change and only under certain circumstances;
- skills are abilities to do certain things, apply knowledge, dispositions and attitudes in the working environment.

The above-mentioned definitions focus on the field of personal management and determine the area of personal development (knowledge, skills, abilities and behaviour) a person should, with respect to the given position, task or present outcome, possess. These competencies may be specified as individual. Those aiming directly at executives (managers) are described as management competencies. Management competencies relate to a single management position or an individual task of a manager. According to Tyron (cit. Kubeš et al., 2004), management competencies consist of skills and abilities that contribute to the excellent performance of managers. In this case they should be rather defined as distinguish competencies composed of skills and abilities distinguishing excellent employees from others (Kleibl, 2001).

In the article presented, **management competencies are perceived as individual competencies consisting of a set of knowledge, skills, abilities, traits and attitudes of an individual manager where the manager is, as defined by Khelerová (1999), a person who is in charge of a team of collaborators with the help of which the manger implements the present goals.**

In his work, Boyatzis (1982) defined *threshold competencies* as competencies crucial for managerial work, however, not having any significant causal relationship to its efficiency and better results. *Management competencies* are activities, knowledge, skills or attitudes and perhaps also personal characteristics necessary to improve management performance. Schröder (1989) uses a similar classification of competencies and distinguishes between *basic competencies* and *high performance competencies*. *Basic competencies* are defined as knowledge and skills essential for the performance of a manager's job. They relate to specific tasks and guarantee manager's personal efficiency. *High performance competencies* are relatively stable manifestations of behaviour thanks to

which the entire teams led by the manager accomplish excellent above standard results. High performance competencies are further subdivided into *cognitive, motivational, directional* and *performance competencies*.

Core competencies of employees

To master changes in these turbulent times it is necessary for employees to possess core competencies, i.e. abilities whose value is, in the process of permanent changes, stable (Belz, Siegrist, 2001). Mertens (1974) characterises core competencies as competencies that help to cope with reality and thus to respond to the demands of the flexible world of labour. According to the European Commission core competencies are a transferable and multifunctional set of knowledge, skills, attitudes and values that every individual needs for their personal fulfilment and development, for their participation in society and future successful employability. As Brassard (1992) states, core competencies have longer lifespan than qualifications associated with a profession. Therefore they may form a basis for further learning and thus simultaneously increase social competency of the trained. To definitively master core competencies is not possible as, according to Richter (1995), the process of learning is never really over. Core competencies thus invite to life-long learning, processes of permanent change and further development of both people and society (Belz, Siegrist, 2001). These authors also state that core competencies may not substitute professional knowledge, they may, however, lead to their better exploitation. Core competencies include the whole range of competencies going beyond the border of individual specialisation. They are a manifestation of the person's ability to behave according to the situation, in harmony with oneself, i.e. to act with competence. The level of competencies is, among others, characterised by the fact that various very complex skills work together. Core competencies may be acquired only in groups, i.e. in contact and dealing with others.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As regards individual competencies, nine approaches of different authors or groups of authors have been identified. These approaches are represented in Figs 1 and 2.

As shown in Fig. 1, despite the authors' different approaches to individual competencies and their typology, it is clear that the main or the basic categorisation of individual competencies lies in the terms "competence" and "competency", i.e. in reference to the agent (soft or also behavioural competencies) or in reference to the activity performed (so-called hard or also technical competencies). In the field of behavioural competencies, technical literature presents other categorisations according to various perspectives, as shown in Fig. 1. Various authors accept these categorisations and their contributions on a more detailed classification focus on the establishment of clus-

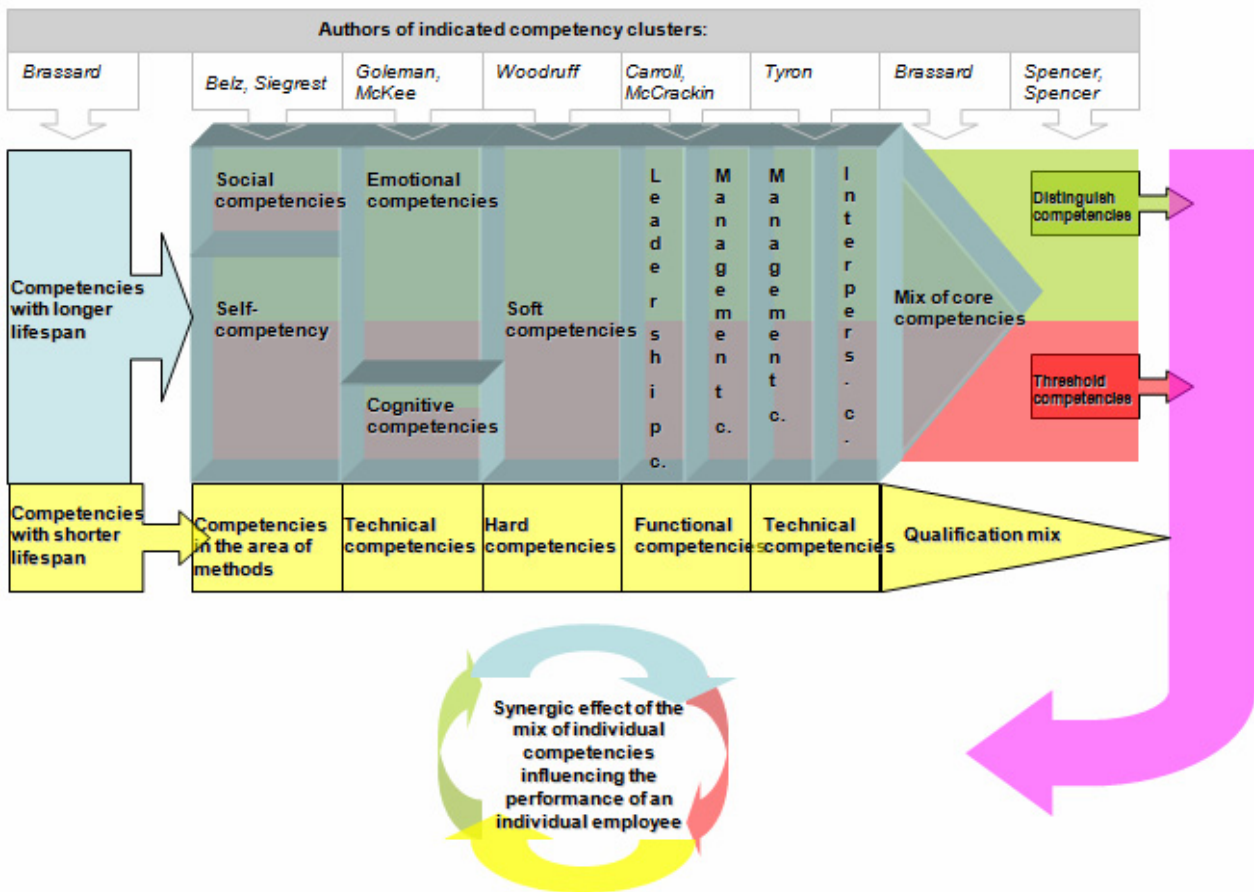


Fig. 1. Graphically depicted clusters of individual competencies according to the approaches of the studied authors

ters of competencies within behavioural competencies (personal characteristics, approaches, etc.), i.e. in the area of individual patterns of behaviour. As Mattewman (1996) claims, this is due to the fact that individual competencies were identified and used as an auxiliary tool to determine training needs that later became the focus of intentional development activities within an organisation. In the category of so-called technical or also hard competencies (education, qualification, etc.), no substantial differences in the approaches of the studied authors have been found. None of them makes any further subdivision of this category.

Fig. 1 presents the outcomes of the content analysis examining the approaches to individual competencies of seven authors. Individual competencies are basically divided into behavioural (soft) and technical (hard) competencies (Woodruffe, 1992). The approaches of other authors (Belz, Siegreist, 2001; Goleman et al., 2002; Carroll, McCrackin, cit. Kubeš et al., 2004; Tyron, cit. Kubeš et al., 2004) can be, based on the survey outcomes, described as various competency clusters determined by selected criteria that come under the category of behavioural competencies.

A different categorisation classifies competencies as threshold and distinguish (Spencer, Spencer, 1993). Again, the categorisation according to the cited authors focuses solely on behavioural competencies; none of

the authors involves technical competencies. In the scheme threshold and distinguish competencies are marked red and green. It is their structure that significantly influences the performance of any worker (in the process of competency synergic effect shown by arrows of the same colours).

Behavioural competencies of an individual worker consist of a specific mix of competencies that may be defined as individual core competencies. Brassard (1992) describes individual core competencies as competencies with a longer lifespan compared to technical competencies. Fig. 1 clearly demonstrates that core competencies are a certain mixture of behavioural competencies of all employees and therefore the statement about the longer lifespan of core competencies is generally applicable to the entire category of behavioural competencies.

Technical competencies create a specific mix of competencies necessary to master certain work skills and knowledge which are indicated as qualification mix in the scheme. The joint action of core competencies, the qualification mix and various combinations of threshold and distinguish competencies creates a competency mix of an individual employee intensified by the synergic effect. This mix of competencies and the potential synergic effect then determine the performance of the employee.

Fig. 1 also describes the approaches of Carroll and McCrackin (cit. Kubeš et al., 2004) and Tyron

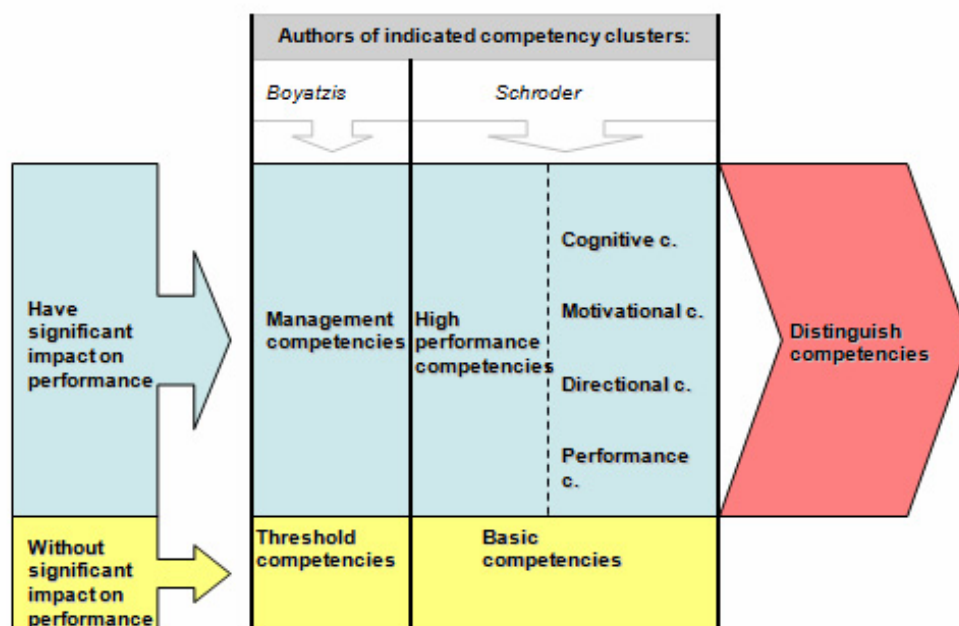


Fig. 2. Graphically depicted clusters of management competencies according to Boyatzis (1982) and Schroder (1989)

(cit. K u b e š et al., 2004), in technical literature defined as individual competencies (not purely management).

Pursuant to the authors of definitions of management competencies, these competencies consist essentially of two groups (management competencies and high performance competencies) and of basic or threshold competencies. As demonstrated in Fig. 2, the main difference between these groups is that management competencies have a substantial influence on performance while threshold competencies do not.

In compliance with the conclusions arising from Fig. 1, it may be stated that in the examined theoretical approaches management competencies are viewed as a mix of distinguish and hard competencies. The classification of individual competencies by Carroll and McCrackin (cit. K u b e š et al., 2004) and Tyrone (cit. K u b e š et al., 2004), depicted in Fig. 1, confirm the above said.

CONCLUSION

The conclusions are founded on the comparison of the approaches of individual authors to both categories of competencies through a content analysis. Two main categories of individual competencies in an organisation have been identified: behavioural (soft) and technical (hard) competencies. The competencies influencing solely the behaviour of an employee, i.e. employee's behavioural competencies, are categorised as threshold and distinguish (Spencer, Spencer, 1993). Management competencies according to Boyatzis (1982) and Schroder (1989) have been defined as a mix of distinguish and hard competencies.

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V současné době, která je charakteristická svým dynamickým rozvojem a změnami, je stále větší pozornost věnována osobnosti manažera, jeho kompetencím a klíčovými kompetencím organizace jako významným zdrojům pro dosažení konkurenční výhody. Tradiční schéma získávání kvalifikace se mění. Důraz je kladen na nové koncepty v řízení lidských zdrojů zaměřující se převážně na využití lidského, resp. pracovního potenciálu zaměstnanců. Z tohoto důvodu je nezbytné, aby byly jak individuální, tak klíčové kompetence zaměstnanců správně definovány a identifikovány. Zároveň dochází i k vymezení kompetencí organizace. Využití kompetencí v procesu řízení vede k propojení požadavků a možností tak, aby se vyvíjely ve vzájemném souladu k zajištění konkurenceschopnosti podniku na trhu. Cílem příspěvku je na základě analýzy identifikovat obecné skupiny kompetencí, určit příslušnost jednotlivých druhů kompetencí k obecným skupinám kompetencí a vymežit vztahy mezi kompetencemi v organizaci. K práci byly využity sekundární zdroje dat, především vědecké práce zaměřené na kompetence obecně, individuální a manažerské kompetence a klíčové kompetence organizace. Získaná data byla zpracována na základě metod indukce, dedukce, analýzy a syntézy. K porovnání jednotlivých typologií kompetencí a zjištění rozdílných a společných prvků byla využita srovnávací a obsahová analýza doplněná metodou myšlenkových map. V první části příspěvku jsou definovány kompetence a jejich rozdělení. Následně je provedeno členění kompetencí individuálních z teoretických východisek podle shodnosti jednotlivých kritérií, kterými autoři individuální kompetence vymezili. V rámci těchto skupin a mezi nimi jsou pak vysvětleny spojitosti jednotlivých druhů kompetencí včetně teoretických přístupů různých autorů. V poslední části je zpřesněna definice klíčové kompetence organizace z hlediska kritérií, kterými jsou tyto kompetence tvořeny.

Kompetence jsou v odborné literatuře definovány jako popis pracovních úkolů či výstupů nebo jako popis chování. Specifickým typem individuálních kompetencí jsou manažerské kompetence. V příspěvku je k manažerským kompetencím přistupováno jako k individuálním kompetencím skládajícím se ze souhrnu znalostí, schopností, dovedností, povahových rysů a postojů individuálního manažera, kde manažer je člověk, kterému je svěřen tým spolupracovníků, s jehož pomocí realizuje vytčené cíle. Ke zvládnutí změn v dnešní turbulentní době je nutné, aby zaměstnanci měli klíčové kompetence, tj. schopnosti, které budou mít trvalou hodnotu i v procesu permanentních změn. Klíčové kompetence vybízejí k celoživotnímu učení, k procesům stálých změn a k možnostem dalšího rozvoje osob a společnosti.

Závěry příspěvku vycházejí z porovnání přístupů jednotlivých autorů k oběma skupinám kompetencí prostřednictvím obsahové analýzy. Jako dvě hlavní skupiny individuálních kompetencí v organizaci byly zjištěny kompetence behaviorální (měkké) a technické (tvrdé). Jako kompetence mající vliv pouze na chování pracovníka, tedy na jeho behaviorální kompetence, byly identifikovány kompetence rozdělené na prahové a diferenciací. Manažerské kompetence byly identifikovány jako směsice diferenciací a tvrdých kompetencí.

kompetence; individuální kompetence; manažerské kompetence; klíčové kompetence; teoretický přístup; konkurenční výhoda

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