EVALUATION OF MANAGERIAL COMPETENCES THROUGH SELF-REFLECTION

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Abstract: This qualitative research paper examines managerial competences through self-reflection. The main purpose of the evaluation is to identify strategic goals for developing and educating managers. Managerial competences are perceived as intellectual potential, through which the functions and roles of managers are performed. In the paper, managerial competences are evaluated through the self-reflection of middle managers. Due to the recommended extent of the paper, self-reflection results were presented as a case study using a SWOT analysis. The results were incorporated into the development strategy of managers. The study represents an atypical example of defensive development strategy of managers, i.e. the strategy of strong managers in adverse working environment. The main purpose of the study is to highlight the possibilities of applying SWOT analysis for self-reflection of managers and subsequent incorporation of results into development and education programs.

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Introduction

No uniform standards regarding managerial competences have been developed in the European Union due to different opinions on the mission, roles and functions of managerial work. The efforts on defining managerial competences have progressed mostly in France, Germany and the UK. The French standards fully focus on the personality of managers, while applying a psychological approach to the assessment of managerial competencies. While, on the other hand, much less attention is paid to the personality of managers, and technocracy is dominant in the German standards. The British standards prefer a multi-layer orientation, placing importance on the expertise as well as personality traits of managers, both social and psychological ones. Currently, we have been witnessing attempts to elaborate a universal model of managerial competences for the European Union. Efforts to develop European standards of managerial competences have been made by the Institute of Management in Great Britain.

Current views on managerial competencies

The need for managerial competences is displayed at a workplace by the need to demonstrate one's soft skills and hard skills. The term of a competency was first used by Boyatzis (1982) in his work "The Competent Manager" which stated that a "person's capability or talent is consistent with the needs of the job demands and the organizational environment." In 1982, he elaborated a model for effective performance with twelve competencies applicable to different organizations. The model was based on results gained from a large-scale study with 2,000 managers holding different jobs in organizations (Hronik and Vedralová, 2008).

There are two basic approaches to defining managerial competencies, i.e. performance-based and personality-based ones. The performance-based approach established a link between a competency and performance. Woodruffe (2000) referred competency to the dimensions of behavior leading to competent performance. Advocates of the personality-based theory look at managerial competencies from the personality point of view. Spencer et al. (1990) perceived competency as any measurable characteristic of an individual that can be used to distinguish between effective and non-effective performance markedly. Another approach under the personality-based theory identified the key characteristics and competencies of managers needed for effective performance. They were specialized knowledge, intellectual maturity, entrepreneurial maturity, interpersonal maturity and professional maturity. The above two approaches were combined to develop standards of managerial competencies. As a result, the Management Charter Initiative (Hlavenka, 2000) delineates competencies as inputs and outputs of behavioral patterns of managers. The Management Charter Initiative distinguished between personal and functional competencies. "Personal competencies refer to the inputs for work performance, such as knowledge, skills, abilities, attitudes, values and

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personality traits" (Hlavenka, 2000). These, however, are only the prerequisites for and not the direct indicators of real performance of managers. The outputs refer to the functional competencies that are employed to measure the performance of managerial work. We believe that the systematic approach to managerial competencies is the most complex one for highlighting readiness of managers to perform their roles as well as their actual performance in management positions. The argument is also supported by Petříková (2007) who said that a competency includes two elements – the potential for performance and the actual performance.

Managerial competencies and self-reflection

Mastering management functions and roles is as important as self-management. We maintain that self-management is a part of personal competencies covered by managerial competences. The importance of personal competencies was underscored by Porvazník (2013) who distinguished the following activities under personal competences: self-acceptance; self-actualization (incl. self-planning, self-organization, self-control); self-development or self-learning. Personal competencies go hand in hand with a personal paradigm, i.e. the way a person perceives and understands oneself (Sojka, 2007). This is an important starting point for the assessment of managerial competencies through self-reflection. Self-perception is a starting point for self-knowing oneself. There are several techniques of self-knowledge and self-perception, such as metacognition and self-reflection. While changes and mental processes are only registered under introspection, in the process of self-reflection they are analyzed and explained. Self-reflection refers to "thinking about one's past actions, ideas, attitudes, feelings, summarizing a particular portion of one's life and decision-making in critical situations" (Průcha et al., 2003). A personal SWOT analysis technique can be used to perform self-reflection in managerial competencies.

Case study with SWOT analysis

In the presented case study, the following questions were formulated:

1. What are the key internal and/or external factors related to failures of the manager?
2. What are the right development strategies for the manager?

In analyzing the given case, a personal SWOT analysis was conducted.

Problem description:

Mr. M., aged 37 is a middle manager working in a department store. He supervises 32 subordinates – sales assistants, section heads and shift supervisors. He was appointed manager after a new owner took over the store and after cutbacks in personnel were made. New objectives were set in order to restore the organization. The main goal was to meet the sales goals set. He devoted most of his time running meetings, delegating and checking task completion. Employee performance improved, but the pressure by the owner was increasing. The manager tried to motivate his employees with bonuses and fringe benefits. Employee performance increased slightly, but the owner was still not satisfied. The manager conducted customer satisfaction surveys and communicated the survey results to his employees. Continuous customer dissatisfaction made him tetchy. His attitude towards employees changed, he was critical, kept reassigning employees and those working not perfectly were punished. Interpersonal relations worsened, employees started competing with one another, and there was no cooperation among employees. Group performance was decreasing. Mr. M. fell ill more frequently and was criticized by the owner for failing to fulfil the tasks.

Analysis:

The respondent was given an inventory of managerial competencies, which were ranked using a 7-point Likert scale (1=strongly disagree, 7=strongly agree). The results were used to perform a SWOT analysis. The outcomes are given in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1 shows the manager's strengths and weaknesses. His strengths outnumbered his weaknesses. It was found that the difference between strengths and weaknesses was 19.

In Table 2, opportunities and threats, being external factors affecting managerial work, were compared. It was established that the difference between opportunities and threats equalled to -6. Threats were found to be the most critical. The respondent is under constant pressure. Having performed the SWOT analysis (Figure 1), the strategy of the manager was found to be defensive.

Table 1: Manager's strengths and weaknesses

Strengths	Assessment	Weaknesses	Assessment
I am not afraid of changes, I can adapt to new circumstances	5	I am impulsive when dealing with subordinates	2
I analyze problems before solving them	6	The slightest mistakes irritate me	6
I try to learn from my own mistakes	7	I have jitters when negotiating with others	6
I am ready and willing to help my colleagues and subordinates	7	I make decisions before having all the relevant information available	5
I am capable of controlling myself	7	I perform my work best myself, I do not like delegating	5
I can be assertive	6	I feel bad about being criticized	7
I can grasp the ideas of my subordinates and develop them	7	I tend to underestimate myself	3
I try to focus several interests towards one goal	6	I mostly do things at the last moment	3
I try to get feedback from my subordinates	6	I consider the needs of others not important	2
I can predict changes about to come	5	I do not like competition in the workplace	4
Σ_1	62	Σ_2	43
Difference between strengths and weaknesses: $\Sigma F_1 = \Sigma_1 - \Sigma_2 = 62 - 43 = 19$			

Source: Authors

Table 2: Manager's opportunities and threats

Opportunities	Assessment	Threats	Assessment
I can make new connections	5	I cannot keep my promises	2
There is a real chance of getting my salary increased	2	My age is an obstacle to my career progression	3
I develop my international business relationships	1	I cannot rest when not working	4
I feel that my work is appreciated by my superiors	1	I spend more time working than spending with friends	5
My work is respected and recognized by others	4	I am under constant pressure	7
I can develop and continuously educate myself	4	I have no time for sports activities nor for medical check-ups	5
My work lets me use my creative abilities	4	I feel overburdened at work	6
My job supports my professional and personal development	7	My personal problems affect my performance at work	1
I am provided above-average fringe benefits by my employer (allowances, vouchers, etc.)	5	I hate for asking help	6
I can objectively assess how my actions affect others	1	I like being in risky situations at work	1
Σ_3	34	Σ_4	40
Difference between opportunities and threats: $\Sigma F_2 = \Sigma_3 - \Sigma_4 = 34 - 40 = -6$			

Source: Authors

Results and Discussion

Assessment and prognosis:

The analysis given is an example of a strong manager working under unfavorable working conditions. The research questions can be answered as follows:

1. The external factors (threats) are the key reasons for failures of the manager.
2. A defensive strategy is an appropriate way for the development of the manager.

Figure 1: Manager Development Strategy

It is advisable to make use of the strengths in order to eliminate external threats, which are, in this case, demands for higher performance. It is also recommended to make the position of a manager stable and protect it. Setting strategic goals means making goals, actual performances and employer demands stable.

Conclusion

There is no consistent theoretical framework and there are too many perspectives on managerial competencies. There is not only no consensus on defining competencies but also in describing their components. The structure and hierarchy of managerial competencies are critical for making the theoretical basic research on the issue. In addition to inconsistencies in the theoretical background, competency identification and measurement are of key importance in applied research. The purpose of the paper was to point to the possibility of using a SWOT analysis in assessing managerial competencies and setting manager development priorities. There are two fundamental problems associated with the issue, such as the selection of competency components and measurement of the factors. An effective employment of a SWOT analysis needs factors to be correctly identified. It is in the identification phase when some weaknesses may be misinterpreted as threats or strengths may be misinterpreted as opportunities. As a result, the final assessment may be biased and may lead to mistakes in setting the right strategy. In order to reduce mistakes, the inventory of competence components was developed and the respondent assigned numerical values to the statements given. Results obtained from more than one respondent can be compared, and thus the strategy can be set more precisely. Moreover, a SWOT analysis can be used to identify ways for further manager development, such as improving their strengths through education, training, changing, modifying or adapting business external factors or competitive environment. A personal SWOT analysis can be employed in interviewing candidates for middle management, and can be used as a starting point for career development as well as initial career consultations.

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