

THE COMPETENCIES OF A MANAGER AS A FACTOR CONTRIBUTING TO THE SUCCESS OF A COMPANY IN THE VUCA ENVIRONMENT

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Purpose: Change is nowadays becoming an intrinsic part of any organization's functioning. The concept of a learning organization that can meet the requirements of the VUCA principle is already common in literature. Since organizations are made up of people led by a leader/manager, thus requiring personal ability to deal with emerging problems. The aim of this paper is to present theoretical considerations and research analysis justifying its thesis that the diversity of a leader's competencies significantly affects the effectiveness of management and ultimately determines their organization's success.

Design/methodology/approach: The aim of this paper was achieved by conducting an argumentative review of the literature available on the subject, which served as the basis for designing the methodological assumptions and further research. Survey methodology was selected as the main research method. The research was conducted among managers/leaders of a group of selected building materials companies. Such targeted research allowed for proper understanding of respondents' position in relation to the subject matter and made it possible to draw conclusions.

Findings: The conducted research leads to the conclusion that the variety and universality of a leader's competencies affect the effectiveness of managing a team. The research has resulted in a proposal of a competency model of a modern manager able to effectively manage a company. The model considers the leading competencies as the basis for the proposed spectrum of skills. The leading competencies determining a manager's actions and allow for the emphasis of the multidirectional nature of the desired features include self-organization, self-improvement, openness to new ideas, strict principles, making correct decisions, and taking care of the team's relations and environment. The above-listed competencies can be used to generate further skills and traits, which can be used to create a complete competency model of an effective manager.

Practical implications: The results of the conducted research and the proposed competency model constitute a valuable source of information for those responsible for managing a team in a difficult VUCA environment. The proposed approach to managerial competencies and in particular to their diversity will contribute to managers' effectiveness and flexibility.

Originality/value: The assumed research position pertains to learning organizations operating in dynamic environments. The key role in such an organization is played by a manager able to

not only keep up with the changing conditions, but also anticipate them. The authors of this paper propose a model allowing managers/leaders to learn and evolve in response to emerging challenges, thus ensuring their company's effectiveness.

Keywords: competencies, leader, manager, VUCA principle, leadership roles.

1. Introduction

The constant change inherent to the economy and the crises that accompany it pose consistent challenges for the management of enterprises in both domestic and international economies. When describing this contemporary reality, one might use the VUCA acronym, which stands for an environment characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (SLP, 1998). The managerial cadre of any enterprise functioning within the modern market economy must have to react to its expectations as well as to the expectations of its employees. This new, complex, and ever-changing environment sets very high expectations for managers and, consequently, for their competencies. As a result, it is temporarily difficult to speak of any constant pool of managerial/leadership competencies able to ensure success. Consequently, the authors of this paper have assumed that the dynamically changing environment necessitates constant adaptation and development from a manager. This fact implies the need to alter the spectrum of competencies that should characterize a modern manager/leader.

The aim of this paper is to answer the question what competencies of a manager/leader should be considered crucial to effective team management. The authors undertook, based on a critical analysis of available literature, to present their own research including the opinions of managers/leaders in relation to the stated question.

2. Evolution of the term “competencies”

Literature closely related to managing human resources unambiguously states that competencies as a term lack any single, clear definition. It is clear however that the earlier definitions involve fewer aspects and variables than more modern ones, which are far more extensive although still not considered exhaustive (Czupryna-Nowak, 2018).

Nowadays, competencies are not only described as a particular set of skills, abilities, and knowledge. Multiple studies unequivocally indicate that the difference between successful enterprises and other organizations consists in focusing not only on the goal, but also on how to achieve it. The division of labor between group members in accordance with their competencies, is considered to be quintessential (Boyatzis, 1982).

The term “competence” is a combination of three qualities: skill, attitude, and knowledge. Together they describe a person who carries out their tasks efficiently and effectively, thus meeting the expectations of their organization (Spencer, 1993).

The term “competency” first appeared in the United States of America. Later, a different notion of the term “competence” arose in Great Britain. For this reason, there exist two different interpretations of the term: one American and one British (Winterton, 2009).

The main originator of the American approach to competencies was R. Boyatzis. Through his research, he determined that the employees’ successes do not depend on a singular factor, but on an entire array of various factors. Its key elements include (Sikorski, 1999):

- motive,
- behavioral characteristics,
- experience,
- personal traits.

According to R. Boyatzis, competency is a person’s ability to meet the requirements set for them in their position in relation to their organization’s environment, which in turn means being able to achieve expected goals. Moreover, R. Boyatzis pointed out the difference between threshold competencies, which constitute the fundamental qualities needed to perform a task, and differentiating competencies, which make it possible to categorize employees based on their results. Furthermore, R. Boyatzis introduced the so-called “areas of competence”, which include (Woodruffe, 1991):

- leadership,
- goal and action-based management,
- human resources management,
- managing subordinates.

The American approach to competencies was co-created by D. McClelland. His basic premise was to carry out any assessments in relation to a specific criterion. This criterion would then serve as the basis for evaluating the most important aspects of a single employee’s behavior, which determines their actions (Stabryła, 2012).

According to the British approach, the term “competence” is understood as the basic aspect of the development of the standards of Scottish Occupational Classification and national Standard Occupational Classification. They specify the minimum conditions that must be met to be allowed to carry out specific tasks, while also allowing certification after a process of observation and evaluation. In this regard, competence is the ability of employees to perform their job. The degree of competence is therefore left unspecified. Instead, the emphasis is put on personal skills, which indicate whether a person can do something or not. How the employee achieves this goal is less important than the goal itself (Armstrong, 2007).

In literature available on this topic, there exist two similar words used to describe competencies: “competency” and “competence”. These terms are often used interchangeably which, due to the slight difference in meaning, can cause misunderstandings. “Competency” is understood to mean “soft” competencies. In 1991 C. Woodruffe defined them as those of employees’ skills that are related to their behavior, emphasizing that said behavior is the basis for competent action. Competences are known as behavioral traits. “Competence”, in turn, is used to describe “hard” competencies, which C. Woodruffe associated with work fields in which an employee’s skills are adequate to their position. C. Woodruffe also assumed that a competent person meets any expectations related to the effects of their work. Competence describes those skills which make an employee effective. Moreover, it means being able to use one’s resources and knowledge to achieve the intended work goals. Competencies can therefore be finally defined as the employee’s knowledge necessary to perform their tasks (Furmanek, 1997).

The difference between “competency” and “competence” might seem obvious at first glance. Recent years, however, have brought about some significant changes to the meaning of “competency”. Nowadays this term is commonly used to refer to both “soft” and “hard” skills (Klemp, 1980).

The evolution of the term “competency” introduces some unclarities, the solution to which was published by L. Miller, F. Neathey and N. Rankin in 2001. They identified the differences between behavioral competencies (“soft” skills) and functional competencies (“hard” skills). The former describe the way employees should behave to efficiently perform their duties. Meanwhile the latter specify in detail what a person must know to perform a task. The difference between behavioral and functional competencies can be seen through the lens of competencies inherent to a person’s performed profession while considering the expectations set for the employee and the expected end results of their work. L. Miller’s, F. Neathey’s and N. Rankin’s solution lets us avoid the confusion caused by precise meaning of the considered terms, which might be an issue when trying to distinguish “soft” and “hard” competencies. The meaning of the term “competence”, however, remains unchanged – it is most often used when determining what the employees must know and be able to do to meet professional standards and effectively perform their job (Miller, Rankin, Neathey, 2001).

The issue of managerial competencies was also raised by V. Robinson. He claims that the structure of any competency model must be linked to a specific leadership model. Through this all skills, broadly understood knowledge, and openness to new ideas are combined. The aforementioned elements are the constituent parts of not only leadership competencies, but also those of various employees, and they result in increased efficiency of the organization as a whole (Robinson, 2010).

There are many different definitional approaches to competencies. The elementary approach presented by M. Dale is one of them. He believes that ability, education, knowledge, experience, practical skills, internal motivation, attitude, behavior, health, and ethical values and principles are essential components of competency (Dale, 1993).

S. Whiddett and S. Hollyforde claim that competencies are a set of personal traits characterizing a specific employee (manager). Among them one can point out skills, knowledge, motivation, and the ability to self-reflect (Whiddett, Hollyforde, 2003).

G. Mazurkiewicz even believes that the constituent what makes a leader competent is, among others, their achieved education and a set of qualities acquired through continuous work. Competencies should be thus primarily defined as traits that can be acquired by learning in preparation to fulfil a task (Mazurkiewicz, 2012).

It is perfectly reasonable to put the above-mentioned definitions under scrutiny. It is worth noting that being competent does not only mean possessing comprehensive and complete knowledge about one's field. In acquiring competency, it is crucial to consider all its aforementioned elements. Furthermore, it should be emphasized that when talking about a company's success and the positive impact of managerial skills, one cannot overlook the impact of managerial competencies and especially their development.

3. Competency-based company management process

Managing a company is considered to be one of its leader's most important tasks, requiring them, above all, to exhibit all the appropriate qualifications and experiences. Any leader beginning their managerial career lacks vital experience, and therefore is oblivious to the realities of managing an organization. To further discuss managing a company, we should first discuss the areas and factors playing into its operational effectiveness (Olekszyn, 1997).

Defining a company's vision, values, mission, and strategy is fundamental to its management process. Additionally, a manager directing and managing an organization can choose a specific managerial style, which implies its own, specific measures and approach to work. Some leaders prefer the managerial style based on rewarding employees for openness and resourcefulness, while others consider threat of punishment to be a better motivating factor. Some take into consideration their subordinates' suggestions regarding the company's goals, while others heed only their own experience and professional knowledge. In addition, one can easily get to know a manager by looking at their approach to the costs of performing a task. Some put emphasis on cooperation and healthy teamwork, while others consider achieving their goals, and the goals of the organization, to be of utmost importance (Żukowski, 1998).

The autocratic management style is characterized by the manager's independence as they choose the team's direction, define its goals, chooses functions for specific employees, and determines how to carry out tasks – all in a top-down fashion. An autocratic manager does not feel the need to justify their decisions and share key information with the team members. Moreover, they see punishment as more motivating than reward.

On the other hand, the democratic style is characterized primarily by the emphasis it puts on maintaining good relations between employees within a team. Its defining feature is striving towards coexistence by including all team members in the decision-making process. In a democratically managed team, a leader suggests different solutions to their coworkers and makes the final decision after consulting with the team. The work is assessed by them based on the actual state of a task's completion. In such a team the manager appreciates cooperation with their subordinate employees (they are an active member of the team, but simultaneously refrains from performing tasks assigned to other people).

The liberal style consists in members of a group making all the decisions. The group's leader takes part in this process, but their involvement is minimal. Their responsibilities include providing key information and guidance on the topic of methods of operation. A liberal manager is a person that keeps their influence over the team's workflow to the minimum, giving negative feedback reluctantly, if at all (Bugdol, 2021).

The management process is influenced not only by its style, but also the adopted management phases. W. Bańka pointed them out in the following order (Bańka, 2000):

- defining the task,
- delegating its realization to individual employees and outlining its realization,
- providing motivation,
- providing manpower and resources necessary to fulfill the task,
- supervision and control.

For the above-mentioned phases and the management process as a whole to be considered effective, the leader has to perform specific functions. P. Wojciechowski distinguishes them as (Wojciechowski, 2015):

- organizing work,
- setting goals,
- providing motivation and encouragement,
- communication,
- settling disputes.

Organizing work requires the ability to delegate tasks to individual subordinates. However, a leader must remember that this process will largely depend on the type of service provided and the employees' abilities. Considering these factors makes it possible to delegate tasks to people with specific competencies, while also increasing the team's effectiveness.

Any company's functioning is largely determined by its goals. It is impossible to determine management's effectiveness, if said goals have not been outlined by the manager. The goal has to be defined clearly and its constituent parts assigned to specific people so that they are responsible for their fulfilment. The ability to make plans is closely linked to choosing goals. It is plans that influence set goals and help reach them (Żeromski, 2020).

A good manager must be able to constantly provide motivation and encouragement. This not only improves the whole team's workflow, but also helps the development of individual employees, while fostering positive emotions. The manager's involvement in the realization of individual tasks has a direct impact on their quality and the timely fulfilment of the organization's goals. It is crucial for a good manager to not only know motivational techniques, but also to be able to use them in practice (Wojciechowski, 2015).

Communication is another key element of running a company. Open communication is considered to be the most effective. It is based on constructiveness and clarity of information and instructions. It is characterized by allowing every member of a group to speak their mind. The quality of communication has an immense effect on mood prevailing in a team (Olekszyn, 1997).

Leaving conflicts unresolved may lead to an increase in disdain between the parties. It is the leader's duty to find a way out of any situation threatening their team's functioning by agreeing with one of the parties or, if possible, solving the issue to the advantage of both (Wojciechowski, 2015).

The ability to lead is thought to be one of the most important aspects of a managerial position. A manager should not only perform his function effectively, but more importantly, be able to overcome any difficulties stemming from managing people. A competent manager should choose an adequate management style and take into consideration all factors that might cause him trouble while working with a team.

4. Manager and the company's success

Nowadays, leading and managing an organization requires of its manager the ability to choose appropriate goals and judge the effectiveness of undertaken actions. It is often argued that the ability to achieve its goals is the defining measure of a company's success since modern management style is based on defining a specific purpose and assigning resources appropriate to its fulfilment (Ducker, 1976).

To effectively run an enterprise, a manager needs the ability to (Penc, 1993):

- make decisions about introducing changes that will avoid unnecessary conflicts,
- identify, organize, and seize opportunities to reach new markets (company growth),

- observe trends, analyze results, and encourage employees,
- organize people with qualifications necessary to achieve the organization's goals and provide them with opportunities and resources allowing and helping them achieve these goals.

Only the appropriately prepared leaders can manage an organization. Such a leader can rapidly react to changes in their environment and effectively choose response strategies to achieve success based on their creativity (Ducker, 1976; Mrówka, 2010).

Considering multiple studies, it appears that a skillfully managed organization is characterized by achieving better results through the employment of specific strategy, which emerges thanks to talented leaders using appropriate management styles. The fundamental principles describing this strategy include (Peters, Waterman, 1992):

- absolute focus on the market,
- clear formulation of the company's goals, mission, and vision,
- improving used solutions through innovation,
- creativeness in managing employees,
- considering ecological requirements in managing an organization.

The above-mentioned principles indicate that the free market is not a lawless battlefield devoid of any rules. Companies operating with morals gain favor of the public, which boosts their brand's popularity and leads to success (Penc, 1997).

Achieving good results is always based on many factors (dependent and independent) that emerge and affect work simultaneously. The dependent factors include, among others: managing manpower and resources, achieving motivation, production methods, and management style, while independent factors include: production costs, taxes, exchange rates, and, broadly, the law (Griffin, 1996).

A company must be properly managed to achieve its intended success. Effective management process consists of planning, organizing, controlling, and motivating (Majewska-Opiełka, 1998).

The success of an organization is influenced by a multitude of factors, both internal and external. It has long since been believed that the basis of any company's results is the work of its employees. Some would claim that they are of paramount importance. A subordinate employee, however, expects certain actions from their manager in order to be able to fulfil their tasks and further their own personal development and, as a result, improve the company. A company's success depends mainly on its manager's abilities, since they, as a leader, motivate their employees, delegate tasks, set goals, give out functions, oversee work, and bind all these elements together. Every manager has to realize that it is with them that their company's success truly begins and that they need to provide the basic conditions needed by the employees to work not only for their own gain, but also for that of the company as a whole (Majewska-Opiełka, 1998).

5. Research methodology

Gathering the research material was preceded by an in-depth analysis of source material. A survey was conducted to obtain the opinion of respondents on the research questions. The research questions included in the survey were: Which skills are the most desirable in a manager of an organization? What competencies of a leader do you consider key when managing a team? Which of the roles played by a manager is the most important to managing an organization? The obtained results allowed the researchers to propose a competency model of a modern manager.

When implementing the research, a plan of activity was followed that included: identifying the research subject, the treatment of results and presenting them in the form of authorial conclusions, and, finally, applying the research in practice.

The research was carried out in two stages. The first was based on defining the research objective and the research questions, identifying appropriate tools and methods, and applying specific procedures. The second stage was closely linked to interpreting the gathered data and forming conclusion based on it.

The data was gathered in 2021 among employees of selected building material companies. The research sample included 144 respondents, all holding managerial positions in the surveyed organizations. Men and women constituted 60% and 40% of the studied group respectively. About 51% of respondents were aged 30 to 34, 18% were aged 35 to 39, 13% were aged 25 to 29, 11% were aged 40 to 44, and the other 7% were over the age of 50.

More than half of the respondents (52%) were people with 10-15 years of work experience, 20% were experts working for 4-9 years, 16% of respondents had 2-4 years of experience, 8% had 16-20 years of work experience, and the other 4% were employed in their profession for over 20 years.

6. Research results and analysis

The study analyzed in detail the aspects of identifying abilities, roles, and competencies that would be most desirable to a manager and have the biggest impact on the way a team (an organization) is managed. The vast majority of respondents considered interpersonal skills to be the most crucial for a manager. The results of other options are very similar. 88% of interviewees considered the role of a leader to be the most important for a manager. The other options were selected relatively rarely. The last question concerned managerial competencies, which, in the context of this paper, are the most important part of the research.

Table 1.*Skills most desired by the leader/manager in the opinion of the respondents [%]*

| Respondents' opinion | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| Decision-making skills | 11% |
| Diagnostic skills | 8% |
| Communication skills | 11% |
| Interpersonal skills | 70% |

Source: own research.

Interpersonal skills, i.e., skills allowing the leader to acquire new interpersonal relations and develop existing ones, are considered to by the respondents to be key abilities of a manager. They were chosen by 70% of the respondents. 11% of the respondents chose communication skills, as in the ability to effectively share information. The exact same percentage of respondents selected decision-making skills, i.e., the ability to make correct, informed decisions. The fewest people (8%) chose diagnostic skills, which are understood as possessing the ability to effectively respond to specific situations.

Table 2.*Roles that, according to the respondents, are the most important in managing the organization [%]*

| Respondents' opinion | Percentage |
|-----------------------------|-------------------|
| Leader | 88% |
| Negotiator | 3% |
| Observer | 6% |
| Representative | 2% |

Source: own research.

The role of a leader focused on increasing their organization's effectiveness through motivation was selected in 88% of all responses. The role of a negotiator, who effectively conducts talks with external actors, was chosen by 3% of the respondents. 6% considered the role of an observer, a person responsible for, among others, monitoring the company's activity and analyzing reports, to be the most important. The least respondents (2%) chose the role of a representative – a person responsible for the company's image.

Table 3.*Key competencies of a leader in managing a team in the opinion of respondents*

| No. | Competence | Number of occurrences |
|------------|--------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|
| 1. | Self-organization | 17 |
| 2. | Self-improvement | 15 |
| 3. | Openness to ideas | 14 |
| 4. | Strong principles | 12 |
| 5. | Making the right decisions | 10 |
| 6. | Caring for the relationship and atmosphere in the team | 10 |
| 7. | Humility | 6 |
| 8. | Charisma | 6 |
| 9. | Striving for the goal | 6 |
| 10. | Empathy | 6 |
| 11. | Communicativeness | 5 |
| 12. | Business orientation | 5 |

Cont. table 3

| | | |
|-----|-----------------------------------------|---|
| 13. | Ethical behavior | 5 |
| 14. | Personal culture and work culture | 4 |
| 15. | Effective planning (task sharing) | 4 |
| 16. | Motivating | 4 |
| 17. | Responsibility | 3 |
| 18. | Being trustworthy | 3 |
| 19. | Professionalism | 3 |
| 20. | Being an authority on others | 2 |
| 21. | Strategic thinking | 2 |
| 22. | Caring for the development of employees | 1 |
| 23. | Introducing innovation (creativity) | 1 |

Source: own research.

The table presented above shows competencies as ranked based on the respondents' answers. Those chosen most often included, in order of descending popularity, self-organization, self-improvement, openness to ideas, strong principles, making the right decisions, and caring for the relationship and the atmosphere in the team. The competencies associated by the researchers with the manager's effectiveness received a significantly lower number of votes. These included: striving for a goal, business orientation, effective planning (task sharing), responsibility, and professionalism.

It is also puzzling that in times of change, the respondents did not seem to value managerial competencies such as: strategic thinking, being an authority, caring for the development of employees, or introducing innovation (creativity). Competencies that would seemingly help an organization adapt.

A group of six key competencies has been selected based on the survey results. These competencies include: self-organization, self-improvement, openness to ideas, strong principles, making the right decisions, and caring for the relationship and atmosphere in the team. Analysis of the gathered data has prompted the researchers to propose a competency model of a modern leader able to effectively manage a company.

Self-organization, often associated with decentralization, is an integral part of any company's functioning. The multitude of tasks creates a need to delegate some responsibilities and tasks to lower-level managers. Numerous studies confirm the need to delegate powers, pointing at the effectiveness of organizations that assign smaller tasks to the relevant departments within the company.

The new requirements the managers/leaders face are results of the intensification and development of competition on the labor market. In such a situation the process of self-development is more than justified. One of the myriad of roles played by a manager/leader consists in striving towards new experience and knowledge as well as motivating their employees to expand their skills by organizing training courses.

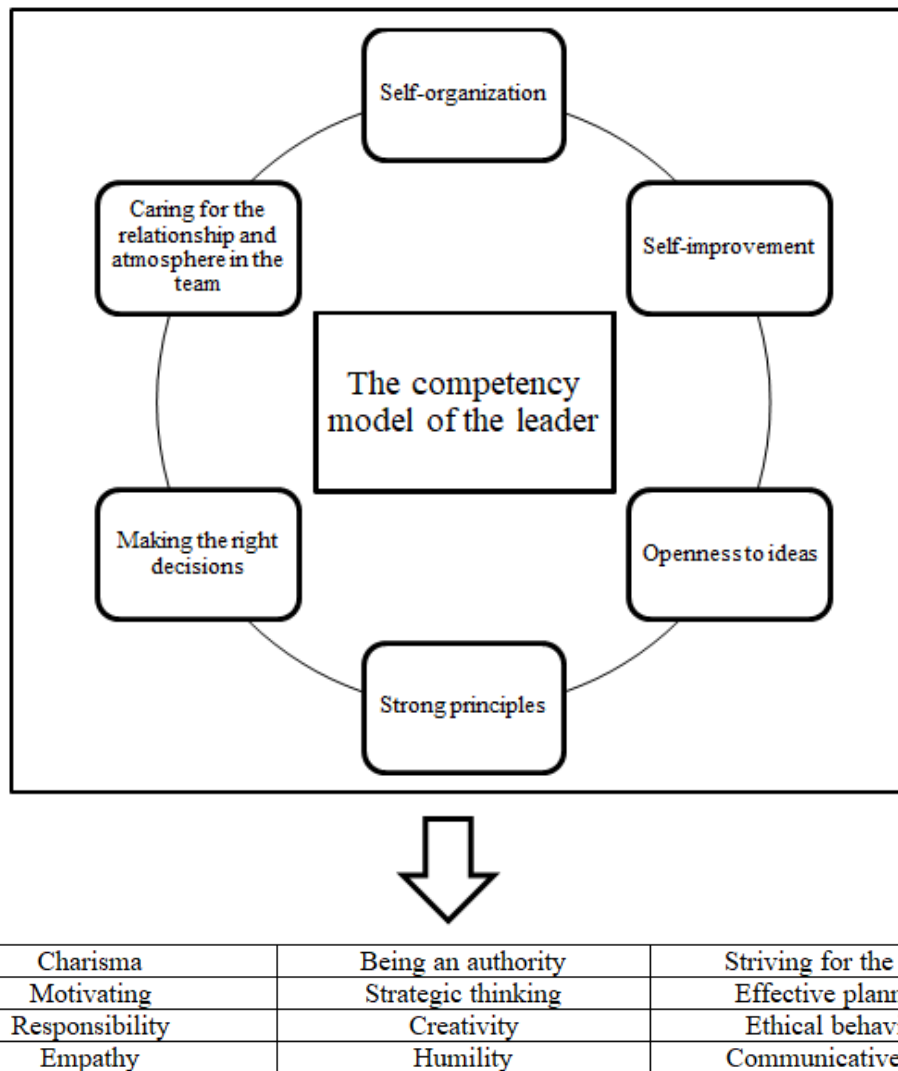


Figure 1. The competency model of the leader supplemented with additional attributes. Source: own research.

To make planning effective, a manager/leader should be open to the ideas of their subordinates. Taking advantage of the employees' knowledge and experience not only gives the manager more potential options, but also increases the staff's involvement in implementing the company's mission. Previous studies (Balcerzyk & Karczewski, 2021) show that many leaders are not only open to their subordinates' input, but also take it into consideration in the decision-making process, which is a sign of a relationship based on trust.

Having strong principles means both maintaining appropriate relationships between a superior and their subordinates and increasing the employees' effectiveness. Lack of faith in the principles their company operates on introduces uncertainty to the decision-making process, which might lead to doubts among the staff.

A leader is also responsible for caring for the interpersonal relations within their team and its work environment. A single person should not necessarily be blamed for any potential failure. It is vital to identify the factors that led to the lack of success and analyze the problem

with the whole team (the leader and the employees). Only then will the organization function as one and knowing the source of mistakes will help it succeed in the future.

These competencies are considered the most important by the proposed model. They are at its core and help identify other traits that a manager/leader should possess to effectively manage human resources, which makes the model universal, since it contains several various features.

7. Conclusion

The general analysis of literature and the survey's results allows to draw a conclusion that the diversity of a leader's competencies significantly affects the effectiveness of managing a company and determines the success of an organization.

It is worth noting that the competences and managerial roles considered in the cited literature largely depend on the research perspective of given publication's author (Balcerzyk, 2021; Czaińska, 2021; Simerson and Venn, 2010; Sus & Sylwestrzak, 2021). The large variety of approaches results mainly from the specificity of the research and the breadth of the management science that allows us to describe the issue. It is nonetheless undisputable that an effective leader must possess certain competencies and play various roles in a way that allows them to adapt to a multitude of difficult and unexpected situations.

The basic thesis of this paper concerned the assumption that management requires a diversity of competencies. The conducted research leads to the conclusion that diversity and universality of a manager's competencies affect the effectiveness of a team managed by them. The research has resulted in a proposal of a competency model of a modern manager/leader – one able to effectively manage a company. Said model includes key competencies around which a spectrum should be constructed, and which develop the spectrum of competencies. Such approach to competencies contributes to the diversity and flexibility of a manager's actions. The key competencies, that determine a manager's actions and allow us to emphasize the multidirectional nature of their traits, include self-organization, self-improvement, openness to new ideas, strict principles, making correct decisions, and taking care of the team's relations and environment. These competencies, in turn, allow us to point to other leadership skills and traits that outline a complete competency model of an effective manager/leader. It is important to remember that the assumed model in itself will not ensure a company's success. It can, however, serve as the basis for taking specific actions, as it suggests how to achieve satisfactory results.

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