SOCIAL COMPETENCES OF IT DEPARTMENT EMPLOYEES

Aleksandra CZUPRYNA-NOWAK

Silesian University of Technology; aleksandra.nowak@polsl.pl, ORCID: 0000-0001-8565-1029

Purpose: Employee competences nowadays, when management methods are dynamically changing become one of the key elements of building competitive advantage. IT activities play an important role in business operations. Information flow, response to external stimuli with the help of IT department is becoming an important element of building competitive advantage of enterprises. Hence, it becomes important that the right people with appropriate social competences manage and work in IT departments.
Design/methodology/approach: Social competences at work were identified on the basis of job advertisements on internet portals. The observation was made at the turn of April-June 2018. The study was repeated in January 2018.
Findings: The article presents a list of social competences that are necessary among IT department employees.
Originality/value: The work concerns social competences of IT department employees. The original is an attempt to select social competences for employees of IT departments. The exclusion of IT competences from the research allowed to examine whether there are differences between employees of individual departments in the enterprise.

Keywords: competences, employees' competences, human resources management, IT competences.

Category of the paper: Research paperIntroduction.

At present, the activity of any organization, especially an enterprise operating in a changing reality, focused on profit, is not possible without an efficient IT department. The management cadre began to fully realize that the IT department is not only a flow of information. At times, the IT department has an impact on the speed of responding to changes and, consequently, on increasing the innovativeness of the enterprise (Woźniak, 2012). No department can operate without a well-functioning staff. Personnel must have specific properties, i.e. have appropriate competences. Competence is primarily human resources management. A well-chosen competence management system allows to create a coherent policy for managing human resources, as A. Rakowska remarks (Rakowska, 2008). By using the appropriate competence management system we can improve in the enterprise, among others: the recruitment of employees, training needs assessment or making decisions regarding promotions. The system will serve the development of employees' talents, also in the IT department. Constant changes

in the environment caused that an ideal IT employee from 15 or 10 years ago is different from a perfect employee of today. This is primarily due to technological changes, the availability of new technologies and their use in business operations. New competences that an employee must possess due to technological development will affect the effectiveness of performed tasks and, consequently, the effectiveness of the enterprise. It seems logical that there is a relationship between competences and the level of task performance. The more well-developed employees' skills, the better the efficiency of entrusted tasks (Filipowicz, 2004). Therefore, it seems necessary to monitor the fundamental employee competences of the IT department.

The purpose of the article is to try to identify employees' IT competences. Among the competences, the author attempts to identify competences related to Information Technology.

The article consists of two parts: theoretical and practical. The theoretical part concerns the scope of competence. This part presents a discussion on the definition of competence and its types. The practical part of the research focused on creating a list of social competences of IT department employees. The whole was completed with conclusions.

Definition of competences

Literature in the field of competence management shows that there is no single valid definition of the concept of competence. The attempts to define the concept of competence were made, among others, by McClelland, G. Filipowicz, Armstrong, T. Oleksyn, and T. Rostowski. The precursor of the definition of competence is McClelland (McClelland, 1973), who noticed that certain behaviours are desirable in a particular job. He emphasised that there is a relationship between specific employee's behaviour and achieving expected results in the workplace. His thoughts are continued by R. Bayatzis, who states that competence is a motive (incentive), character trait, aspect of one's image, or a social role (Bayatzis, 1982). It seems that in this approach, the definition is hardly understandable. Table 1 presents the definitions of competence, which are listed chronologically from the oldest to the newest one. At the same time, the classification shows that the definition of competence changed its scope. It can be clearly seen that the earliest definition has the smallest range, and the latest has the largest.

T. Oleksyn states that competences are: "Knowledge, experience and practical skills, intrinsic motivation, talents and predispositions, health and fitness, other psychophysical features important for work processes, attitudes and behaviours expected in the workplace and formal rights to act."

Table 1.

Definitions of the concept of competence. Mikuła 2006, McClelland, 1973, Armstrong 2006, Mikuła 2006, S. Whiddett 2003

Author	Definition
Armstrong	Competences relate to what an employee should know, what an employee should do, how an employee should do it.
R. Bayatzis	Competence is a motive, character trait, aspect of one's image or social role, but also knowledge.
Guion	Competences are the real characteristics of people that determine their behaviour and thinking.
Spencer & Spencer	Competences can be motives, character traits, self-conceptions, attitudes, values, knowledge or cognitive and behavioural skills, individual characteristics that can be measured or counted, and which allow a significant distinction between above average and average performers, or between these who are effective and ineffective.
Levy-Leboyer	Competences relate to the integrated use of abilities, personality traits, as well as acquired knowledge and skills to complete a complex mission within the enterprise.
Mirabile	Competence is knowledge, skill, ability or quality related to getting high results at work.
D. Thierry, Ch. Sauret	Competence is the totality of knowledge, ability to act, and attitudes forming a whole depending on the purpose and operating conditions.
T. Oleksyn	Knowledge, experience and practical skills, intrinsic motivation, talents and predispositions, health and fitness, other psychophysical features relevant to work processes, expected attitudes, and behaviours in the workplace and formal right to act.
M. Montmollin	Competences are established sets of knowledge, skills, typical behaviours, standard procedures, ways of thinking that can be applied without new learning.
T. Rostowski	Competences are all employees' characteristics, knowledge, skills, ambitions, values, adopted styles of action whose possession and utilisation by employees enables the strategy of a company in which they are employed to be implemented.
S. Whiddett, S. Hollyforde	Competence in the field of work is a set of characteristics of a person, which consists of elements characteristic for that person, such as motivation, personality traits, skills, self-assessment related to functioning in a group, and the knowledge which that person acquired and uses.

The most complete definition of competence is given by S. Whiddett, and S. Hollyforde, who state that competence: "in terms of work performed is a set of characteristics of a person, which consists of elements characteristic for that person, such as motivation, personality traits, skills, self-assessment related to functioning in a group and the knowledge that this person acquired and uses" (Whiddett, 2003). Knowledge, skills, attitude, and personality traits are what competence consist of.

Acquiring competences seems to be a constant process. The employee will continuously acquire knowledge, improve already gained experience, skills, attitudes and personality traits. The development of competences can be divided into specific stages, which in consequence leads to distinguishing different stages of their development.

A severe problem in competence research seems to be the fact that there are no strict rules for naming competence. Even though the same scope of work is carried out, the naming of competences may differ.

Types of competences

Competence is a continually changing and dynamic concept due to the changing needs of an enterprise. Therefore, it is not possible to create a complete list of competences. Some authors even list 300 skills. There are also different competence classifications: IPMA Competence Baseline was formed by the International Project Management Association (Dałkowski, 2009). Competences can be categorised and classified, which will allow to acquire an in-depth knowledge of the competences of a given category. Classification of competences can be done according to various criteria, e.g., sources of acquisition of competences (formal and actual competences), substantive scope (narrow and broad competences), measurability (easily or elusively measurable competences), or content (professional, social, business, conceptual skills). T. Rostowski gives eight categories of competences:

1. Talent-related competences – relate to employees' potential, opportunities of development, use of talents to acquire new competences. The more an enterprise is focused on changes, the more significant this type of competence becomes.

2. Competences related to skills and abilities – are necessary for success in a specific task. The group of these competences includes communication, mental, interpersonal, technical, business, organizational, etc. competences.

3. Knowledge-related competences – a group of competences preparing for the performance of specific tasks within a profession or position. This category includes all competences regarding what the employee has learnt so far and what he or she can use in a desired situation.

4. Physical competence – all competences related to the physical requirements of the workplace, i.e., physical fitness, sensory sensitivity, psychophysical skills.

5. Competences related to styles of activity – they refer to how goals are defined. Planning skills, and organizational abilities are also considered.

6. Personality-related competences – complex skills that condition the efficiency of coping with certain types of social situations. These competences are a result of personality traits and they affect the quality and the way of executing tasks. They decide about appropriate functioning in a group. The grouping of these competences is a skill that provides an effective realisation of objectives during conflicts with other employees.

7. Competences related to principles and values – refer to values, faith, beliefs.

8. Competences related to interests – these are competences that mean preferences regarding tasks, type of work, and work environment. They affect work efficiency, especially when the kind of work is entirely in line with the non-professional type of interests of the employee.

R. Kantz distinguished three groups of competences: human, technical, and conceptual. The role of individual groups changes as the management level changes. Technical abilities prevail at the lowest level. At the highest levels, where management is responsible for setting goals and building strategies, conceptual competence dominates. Theoretical competences are interchangeably called strategic competences.

In literature, authors often refer to the classification of competences presented by F. Delamare le Deist and J. Winterton. This classification assumes two criteria for division:

1. related to the area of application of the competence: personal or professional
2. relevant to the type of activity: operational or professional.

Another division is proposed by G. Filipowicz (Filipowicz, 2009), who divided the competences into basic and executive competences. The basic ones are the basis for other competences: cognitive, social, and personal. They are general and universal. However, executive competences are related to employees' activities. This group includes business, company, and management skills. Business competences relate to the industry in which an enterprise operates, company competences related to the enterprise, while management competences concern people in management positions.

IT competences – research presentation

Research on the social skills of IT department employees was conducted based on job advertisements on web portals. The study attempts to include as many portals offering jobs for IT employees as possible. The following portals were added: pracuj.pl, telayr.io, wortgds.pl, indeed.pl, hakierka.pl, olx.pl, zapmeta.pl, zabrze.lento.pl, praca.pl, gowork.pl, facebook.com, performgroup.com, gumtree.pl, zacznijpoziomwyzej.pl, izito.pl, q4.pl, jobs.pl, lajt.lm.pl, gazetapraca.pl, sovaaaccounting.pl, inforaca.pl, szukampracy.pl and nordicjobs.fi. From all job advertisements, the ads selected for the research met the criteria: job search, IT, IT department. The observation was made at the turn of April-June 2018. The study was repeated in January 2019. The list of selected social competences of IT department employees is presented in Table 2.

Work in IT departments requires from employees not only digital competences and programming. Of course, these are the most sought and expected competences of IT department employees. However, social skills also become crucial in the work of IT specialists.

Work in IT departments usually concerns working in small groups or in large project teams. Hence, communication skills are necessary, both to communicate within a group and with other groups. It is also essential to adapt the appropriate narrative to the recipient of the message. Interpersonal skills, communicativeness are competences that reflect the requirements for communication skills.

Table 2.

Social competencies of IT department employees

Competence	
Analytical skills	Willingness to share knowledge
Openness to communication with others	Ability to analyse problems
Ability to communicate with others	Focus on seeking solutions
Activeness	Ability to share knowledge
Courage in action	Ability to build relationships with a customer
Ability to work in a team	Focus on continuous learning
Individual work skills	Accuracy
Ability to work with an external customer	Commitment
Communicativeness	Ability to think analytically
Availability	Effective time management
Self-reliance	Taking initiative
Independence in making decisions	Willingness to overcome difficulties
Making contact with others easily	Generating new ideas / solutions
Ability to resolve conflicts	Critical analysis of ideas
Ability to learn quickly	Interpersonal skills
Decision making in stressful situations	Ability to work in a multicultural environment
Ability to set goals	Ability to work under pressure
Multitasking	Ability to cooperate
Ability to create technical documentation	

Accuracy, reliability, commitment, availability are competencies that every employee should possess, not just an IT department employee.

Due to the possibilities of remote work, work in IT departments is one in which borders of countries or continents are not recognised. The necessity of working in international environments forces employees to speak English fluently or to possess skills of working in multicultural groups. The requirements for internationalisation of work in the IT industry are met by the following competences: fluency in English, ability to work remotely, and ability to work in multicultural teams.

The list of competences that could be created based on the viewed job advertisements seems to be a list of universal competences of employees of any department. One may be tempted to conclude that there are no social competences that uniquely identify an IT department employee. Only when we add digital skills to social skills they will give a list of competences of an IT department employee.

Conclusions

Responding to changes in an enterprise's environment that can lead to competitive advantage is possible thanks to the right personnel. The right staff is one with the necessary knowledge, skills, attitude, and character traits. Therefore, the right personnel has the appropriate competences, also the social ones. Interestingly, IT department employees do not

have to be characterised by specific social competences. The social skills of IT staff should be the same as of any other employee.

The list of competences that was created as a result of the author's research in the work is probably not complete. The reason is that the scope of competences and the stages of their development will change along the development of a given area of the enterprise's activity. A further step of research on competences seems to be studies on the intensity of a given competence at a particular stage of enterprise development.

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