

INFLUENCE OF EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT ON ORGANISATIONAL COMPETENCE OF INNOVATIVE ENTERPRISES IN SELECTED COUNTRIES

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Abstract:

The modern world is constantly changing and the changes influence various aspects of functioning of enterprises. The effects of those changes are visible not only in the manner of functioning of organisations, but also their competition on the market, their internal structure and the manner of establishing cooperation with stakeholders. Constantly increasing technological complexity of modern manufacturing systems requires the employees to be engaged in multiple disciplines, which implies the need of diffusion of information and knowledge, implementation of new innovative solutions in the scope of technology enabling their utilisation as well as constant professional development of employees. Through implementation of innovative activities an enterprise may achieve competitive advantage, the stability of which is possible thanks to possession of internal, knowledge-based resources, known as the competence of the organisation, with particular emphasis placed on importance of key competences. The improvement of competences of the organisation is connected with constant development of its employees. The paper presents the results of empirical studies performed in order to identify the impact of employee development on the level of organizational competencies surveyed innovative enterprises. The studies were carried out in 281 enterprises, including in Poland, Thailand, Ukraine, U.S. and Austria, with the use of a specially developed questionnaire. Finally, the paper presents some recommendations for managers, concerning the directions of changes that should be made in the approaches to development of organizational competencies.

Keywords: organizational competencies, core competencies, employee development, talent management, innovative enterprise

1. INTRODUCTION

The modern world is constantly changing and the changes influence various aspects of functioning of enterprises. The effects of those changes are visible not only in the manner of functioning of organisations, but also their competition on the market, their internal structure and the manner of establishing cooperation with stakeholders. Constantly increasing technological complexity of modern manufacturing systems requires the employees to be engaged in multiple disciplines, which implies the need of diffusion of information and knowledge, implementation of new innovative solutions in the scope of technology enabling their utilisation as well as constant professional development of employees. In order to reach and maintain the desired competitive position, it is necessary to possess relevant competitive advantage, the crucial source of which is their ability to create something no one else is able to, or to do it better. Through implementation of innovative activities an enterprise may achieve competitive advantage (Porter, 2001), the stability of which is possible thanks to possession of internal, knowledge-based resources, known as the competence of the organisation (Łoboda i Sitko-Lutek, 2007, p. 13), with particular emphasis placed on importance of key competences (Prahalad i Hamel, 1990, pp. 79-91). The improvement of competences of the organisation is connected with constant development of its employees.

2. EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

Employee development is a universal term denominating educational activity, concentrating on development of knowledge and skills required by the organisation. In a broad meaning it means a wide range of activities enabling to determine the needs in the scope of trainings and development as well as support by means of trainings of groups of people functioning in the enterprise (Róžański, 2014, pp.9-13). In the enterprise management practice there is a dual approach to employee development. The first approach assumes that employee development is an integral part of human resource management, including acquisition of people well prepared for realisation of goals and keeping them in the organisation. The other approach treats human resource development and management as two issues complementing each other. The essence of that approach is adapting the company's development, trainings and careers of employees in order to improve work efficiency (Walton, 1999, pp. 143-145).

The aim of employee development is ensuring conditions which would encourage employees to learn and self-improve as well as to work on a cohesive and clear human resource management policy. The main intention behind those activities should be broadening the skills and encouraging employees for self-development resulting from their aspirations and possibilities, taking into account the needs of the organisation. It may be claimed that a success of employee development will be fulfilling the expectations of both the employee and the employer, which are reflected in the fact of preparing the former to hold a specific position at the company, and transferring that position onto him/her by the employer (Kryński, 2001, p. 101).

Employee development is implemented in various manners. In practice four strategic approaches to employee development may be listed (Pocztowski, 2008, pp. 275-276):

- Intervention activities - the approach assumes emergency and random activities in order to ensure that the organisation hires employees with specific knowledge, qualifications and skills. Within this strategy intervention activities are undertaken to solve the problem that has arisen;
- Planned action strategy - determines purposeful policy aimed at creating relevant knowledge and competence resources within the organisation which constitute an important factor for strategic development of the entire organisation. The strategy consists in employing young, talented employees, who have a great potential for development, and pursuing a conscious and purposeful policy for them in the scope of development of that potential;
- Strategy of employing selected employees - the approach consists in hiring employees with certain professional experience, and then focused on further development of the potential through learning, training or educating themselves in a given profession;
- Strategy of purchase of human resource potential - it consists in acquiring employees from outside the organisation, without engaging into training policy or education. The approach is passive in nature and it is undertaken by organisations which anticipate quick results. Such organisations believe that the cost of human resource purchase on the market is lower than human resource training.

The above mentioned strategies determine general directions of action, in the scope of which the undertakings developing individual components of human resources are planned and executed, with the use of relevant instruments. H. Król (2008, p. 277) distinguishes between five different factors of human resource development:

- trainings,
- employee relocation,
- restructuring the work performed,
- health care and health promotion,
- shaping career paths.

The greatest importance, from the point of employee development, is placed on trainings, which may be defined as “a set of purposeful and systematic activities present in a given organisation and aimed at deepening and broadening specific elements of human resources, as well as equipping them with new elements, necessary from the point of view of the present and future needs of such organisation” (Pocztowski, 2008, p. 277). Training entails investing in people in order to enable them to achieve better results and utilise their talents and skills to a fuller extent. This aims at:

- broadening the scope of knowledge and skills of employees, which allows to achieve better work performance;
- supporting employee development within the organisation so that its personnel needs could be fulfilled;
- educating new employees or persons changing their work position as fast as possible and as economically as possible (Armstrong, 2000, p. 448).

There are crucial reasons which take into account the need of training and development from the point of view of both the enterprise and employees. The employees are forced to learn new methods and techniques of work required for realisation of specific tasks, while organisations must take care of educating successors of persons on specific positions. There is a need of increasing flexibility of employees, which is possible by developing their competences in such a way that they could perform their duties in various functional areas (Whiddett and Hollyforde, 2003, p. 150).

Activities connected with employee development are particularly visible in case of the so-called talents, or persons who can “make a change in the results of activities through their direct contribution or, in longer perspective, by exhibiting their potential at the highest level” (Armstrong, 2010, p.199). Talent management is a process of identification, recruitment, development and proper utilisation of the potential of talented people (Armstrong, 2010, p.199).

For the organisation talented employees constitute a source of innovative undertakings and activities, however they should be ensured a favourable work environment and appropriate forms of motivation. Only in such conditions talented employees will be able to create new systems of popularising knowledge, build new knowledge, formulate hypotheses and notions not discovered so far, and first of all quickly and effectively react to the possibilities in their environment. Thus acquisition and development of talents is incredibly important for modern, innovative enterprises, because it enables to generate exceptional individual and organisational value (Jabłoński, 2009, p. 92).

3. COMPETENCES OF THE ORGANISATION

In practice the term “competences” is used in various meanings. Variability of interpretation results from a multitude of entities to which it is applied (e.g. human resources, managers, organisations) as well as various sources or interest in that topic, originating from strategic management, quality management or human resource management. The notion of “competence” is multidimensional and its definition depends on the perspective adopted by the authors. Competences are abstract, complex and multidimensional by assumption, defined taking into account different theoretical approaches, e.g. psychological, situational, cognitive (Thierry and Sauret, 1994, p. 84).

Initially the term was used only in a very narrow meaning, only with regard to employees - “competences” meant having a formal right to deal with specific issues and make decisions in a specifically defined scope. Therefore competences meant only the rights to perform certain activities regulated by the rules applicable in a given organisation. On the other hand, the ability of the employee to effectively perform his/her work was associated with relevant qualifications, which were usually treated as a product of education and professional experience (Oleksyn, 2006, p. 17). It may

be stated that individual competences of employees comprise the work potential, which is formed by knowledge and skills (so-called hard competences) as well as personal traits, predispositions, motivation and social roles (so-called soft competences) (Olczak, and Kołodziejczyk-Olczak 2006, pp. 145-146). As regards the relationship between individual competences and the level of organisation, it may be concluded that competence potential of the organisation is a product of individual work potentials expressed by the number of employees and their individual work time (Sitko-Lutek, 2007, p. 13). Such approach is presented by M. Bennour and D. Crestani, who claim that competences constitute a combination of knowledge (theoretical, contextual and procedural), know-how (practical and empirical experience) and behaviour (relational or cognitive attitudes and behaviours) (Bennour and Crestani, 2007, pp.151–163). According to that concept, competences have been divided into individual and collective, whereas the latter are recognised as a combination of individual competences (Hinds, Carley, Krackhardt and Wholey, 2000, pp. 226–251).

Another, broader approach as regards definition of competences pertains to competitive advantage of the enterprise on the market, and the object of interest are the competences of the organisation, including internal resources of an enterprise (Sanchez, 2004, pp. 518- 532), key abilities (Bratnicki, 2000, p. 64) and finally key competences (Prahalad and Hamel, 1990, pp. 79-91. According to that approach, competences may be defined as abilities to develop, coordinate and utilise possessed resources in order to realise tasks and achieve the goals of the organisation (Amit and Schoemaker, 1993, p. 33-46). That approach made managers realise that in order to maintain competitive advantage, it is necessary to identify and develop own, specific key competences (Scarbrough, 1998, pp. 219-232). Initially those ideas translated poorly into operational aspects, which greatly inhibited the managers ability to incorporate competence perspective in the management of the organisation (Drejer and Riis, 1999, pp. 631–644). That concept turned out to be very useful in explaining ex-post the sources of success of some companies, however insufficient knowledge of the level of competences constituted the main barrier in practical ex-ante utilisation of that concept (Lewis, 1997, pp. 163-176).

Competences of the organisation are often defined in connection with competences of employees. Among the supporters of such approach is for example A. Drejer, who defines competences of the organisation as culturally conditioned systemic and organised utilisation of people and technology, leading to the company's competitive advantage (Drejer, 2001, p. 136), or T. Rostkowski, who claims that at present competences are understood very broadly as “any features of employees which, when used and developed at work, lead to results compliant with strategic assumption of the enterprise” (Rostkowski, 2004, p. 40).

Such multidimensional approach to competences is the reason why it is necessary to indicate the elements comprising the approach. G. Capece and P. Bazzica claim that competences consist of four general elements, which include (18 Capece and Bazzica, 2013, pp. 42-42):

- technology, quite often the most visible part of competences, because it constitutes the tools used by people to pursue business activity. Technologies must be treated as physical systems or tools, regarding them to a limited extent as part of skills and knowledge of humans; technology (in the hard meaning) constitutes machines, tools, equipment, programs, databases, etc.,
- humans are the most obvious holistic component of competences. If people do not use technology, nothing will happen, therefore people are the central point of competence development and management,
- organisation refers to formal organisational structures and system management structures, in which people function. These are for example systems of planning and control, rewarding and compensating, communication channels, structure of duties and responsibilities and other formal organisational procedures which influence people and their activities to a large extent,
- organisational culture refers to informal functioning of organisational units, at which competences are expressed. Organisational culture influences people and shapes their understanding and activity via common values, beliefs and norms which influence i.a. their activities.

Therefore it may be observed that competences of the organisation are created through combination of many elements: individual competences, hard organisational factors e.g. equipment, and soft, immaterial factors, e.g. culture of an enterprise (Lévy-Leboyer, 1997, p. 119). Among the components of competences of the organisation we may mention unique, specific knowledge, experience and skills

of the organisation, which have been shaped together by the organisation and thanks to which it is possible to gain competitive advantage (20 Sitko-Lutek, 2007, p. 114). In most cases a close relationship between the competences and the circumstances of activities are emphasized.

Summing up the above considerations, it may be concluded that competences of the organisation:

- constitute a peculiar combination of unique, specific knowledge, experience and skills, which have been shaped together at the organisation and thanks to which it is possible to enjoy competitive advantage,
- are of dynamic nature - they are expressed in the ability to behave in a manner adequate to a given situation, they include the ability to react to the dynamics of the changing environment of the organisation and its internal processes,
- enable to undertake coordinated activities directed at using the owned resources in the manner enabling to achieve the company's goals,
- are relative nature - their assessment should be performed with regard to the assumed standards,
- are connected with the executor, which may be the organisation, project team or unit, are supported by structures within the scope of which the organisation's activity may be performed,
- include the sum of competence potentials of individual employees - their knowledge and skills (so-called hard competences) as well as personal traits, predispositions, motivation and social roles (so-called soft competences),
- are deeply grounded in organisational culture.

4. EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT VS. COMPETENCES OF THE ORGANISATION IN LIGHT OF EMPIRICAL STUDY

Appropriate level of organisational competences, with particular emphasis placed on employees' knowledge and skills, constitutes one of the key success factors determining achievement of competitive advantage by modern enterprises. An important challenge faced by managers is shaping relevant competence profiles of enterprises through i.a. employee development. The aim of the performed empirical study was to identify competences of innovative enterprises as well as implications for such competences.

4.1. Methodology of research

The study was performed in the form of a survey based on specially prepared questionnaire. The respondents answered the questions included in the questionnaire by means of a 5-degree Likert scale, where 5 stands for definitely positive, and 1 for definitely negative response.

The study covered 281 innovative enterprises hiring at least 10 employees, located in 5 countries:

- Poland - 161 enterprises,
- Thailand - 40 enterprises,
- Ukraine - 36 enterprises,
- U.S. - 17 enterprises,
- Austria - 27 enterprises.

The obtained results of empirical studies were subject to statistical analysis with application of descriptive statistics in the form of an average and weighed average value; also the links between the analysed variables were assessed thanks to the use of the Likert scale; the analysis was performed with the use of Spearman's Rho or non-parametric rank correlation coefficient, used for determining non-parametric measurement of links between variables, whereas detailed analysis was performed with regard to links at the bilateral significance level $p < 0.01$ (41). The analysis was performed with regard to survey samples from individual countries.

4.2. Activities undertaken in the scope of employee development

The level of competences of the enterprise as well as its innovativeness are determined to a great extent by the scope and intensity of activities undertaken with regard to acquisition and development

of employees. Such activities should be reflected in the realised strategy in the scope of human resource management by emphasizing acquisition of talented employees, their development and increase of engagement of the employees. In the analysed enterprises those issues have been taken into account quite to a large extent, the largest in Austria (4.36), and the least in the US (3.65). It should be stated that if it comes to activities aiming at employee development, the greatest emphasis is placed on strategy (cf. table 1).

The realised strategy should translate into activities undertaken in the scope of broadly understood training policy, expressed in regularly performed analysis of training needs at all levels of management, directing the trainings realised at the enterprise to a large extent at the development of competences needed for the organisation as well as satisfying the training needs of most employees. Emphasis on implementation of the training policy is significantly lower than declaration of strategic approach to those issues. The training policy is implemented to the largest extent in Austria (4.07), and to the least extent in Thailand (3.42). A crucial aspect of ensuring employment of valuable employees is undertaking activities connected with talent management, which may be expressed in application of practices identifying talented employees within the organisation, effective utilisation of talents for the purpose of innovative development as well as creating favourable conditions for development of talented employees. Emphasis on talent management is diverse; it ranges from placing great importance in Austria (4.22) to little importance in the US (3.37) and Thailand (3.38).

An average importance is placed in the analysed enterprises on ensuring improvement of employee creativity by possessing the ability to attract, develop and keep valuable employees in the organisation, supporting employee creativity and implementation of knowledge management programs. Such tendency is visible to the largest extent in Austria (4.14), and to the least extent in Ukraine (3.50). Significantly greater diversity among the analysed countries is visible in personal engagement of employees in their own development, expressed in dedicating also their private time for education or external trainings, the conviction among the employees of the enterprise that they should ensure their own professional development, willingly dedicating their private time, and the possibility of making joint decisions regarding their own path of development in the organisation. The level of engagement of employees in their own development is the highest in Austria (4.20), and very low in Ukraine (2.89). The attitude in that area translates into effectiveness of employee development and individualisation of the approach to employee development, expressed in ensuring in an informed manner the possibility of employees undertaking activities aiming at development at the work establishment, common application of individual methods of training and development of employees, such as coaching and mentoring, as well as using the methods of training and development utilizing IT tools (e-learning/educational platforms). In that area also a significant diversification is observed among the countries - ranging from high level of individualisation of the approach to employee development in Austria (4.22) to very low level in Ukraine (2.97). Detailed presentation of results is provided in table 1.

Table 1: Activities undertaken in the scope of employee development in the analysed countries

County	Poland	Thailand	Ukraine	U.S	Austria
Size of the sample N	161	40	36	17	27
HRM strategy	4,10	3,85	3,97	3,65	4,36
Training policy	3,65	3,42	3,69	3,49	4,07
Talent management	3,67	3,38	3,75	3,37	4,22
Ensuring improvement of employee creativity	3,96	3,65	3,50	3,75	4,14
Employee engagement in own development	3,38	3,62	2,89	3,16	4,20
Individualisation of the approach to employee development	3,12	3,55	2,97	3,53	4,22
Average	3,65	3,58	3,46	3,49	4,20

Source: own study

Intensity of activities connected with employee development is diverse in the analysed countries. It is of highest importance in Austria (4.20 on average), and of least importance in Ukraine (3.46). Also diversification among the analysed countries in perception of importance of individual activities is visible. Consideration of the implemented strategy of activities connected with human resource management is regarded as the most important (except for the US), while the least important in

Poland is the individualisation of the approach to employee development, in Thailand - talent management, Austria - implementation of training policy, whereas in Ukraine and the US - engagement of the employees in their own development.

4.3. The level of competencies of the surveyed enterprises

Competencies of the surveyed enterprises in the individual areas were assessed by the respondents as average and high. The score is different in different countries. The average level of competencies in the surveyed enterprises in the USA was assessed the highest, and the most high-level competences were assessed in Austria. The level of competencies of enterprises in Thailand and in the Ukraine was assessed most critically.

In the enterprises in Poland, the level of competencies in the area of the relationship with the environment was assessed as high (4.05). What is worrying is a relatively low scoring related to the level of competencies of the surveyed enterprises in the area of development (3.76), especially that the subject of the study were innovative enterprises. According to the managers, the lowest score was given to competencies in the area of servicing/after-sales servicing (3.76) and the use of IT (3.64). The other competencies were assessed similarly, at an average level.

The surveyed U.S. enterprises have very high competencies of the organisation in the area of management (4.56) and the use of technology (4.56), while the lowest competencies, assessed at an average level, are competencies the areas of finance (3.88), as well as servicing (3.88).

The level of competencies of the enterprises surveyed in Thailand has been assessed generally as average and low, whereby these enterprises have the highest level of competencies in the area of servicing (3.75), and the lowest in the area of development (3.4), logistics (3.2) and supply (3.15).

The level of competencies of enterprises in Austria is the highest in the area of personnel policy (4.44) and supply (4.44); the lowest – in the area of logistics (3.78).

The level of competencies of enterprises in the Ukraine was assessed as average and low. The enterprises have the highest competencies of the organisation in the area of management (4.00) and marketing activity (4.00), and the competencies in supply (3.58), servicing (3.58) and finance (3.42) were considered the lowest.

A general summary the obtained results relating to the competencies of the surveyed enterprises is shown in Table 2.

Table 2: The level of competencies of the surveyed enterprises in the selected countries

Area of competence	Country				
	Poland	USA	Thailand	Austria	Ukraine
Management	3,98	4,56	3,60	4,11	4,00
Finance	3,95	3,88	3,50	4,22	3,42
Personnel policy	3,90	4,31	3,50	4,44	3,75
The use of IT	3,64	4,19	3,55	4,33	3,83
The use of technology	3,85	4,56	3,65	4,00	3,75
Marketing activity	3,80	4,31	3,65	4,00	4,00
Development	3,76	4,31	3,40	4,22	3,75
Logistics	3,89	4,31	3,20	3,78	3,83
Supply	3,88	4,13	3,15	4,44	3,58
Servicing [after-sales servicing]	3,76	3,88	3,75	4,00	3,58
Relationships with the environment	4,05	4,06	3,65	4,00	3,75
Average	3,86	4,24	3,50	4,16	3,75

Source: own compilation based on the results of study

4.4. Employee development vs. competences of the organisation

Analysis of links between activities connected with employee development and the level of competences in individual functional areas was performed with the use of Spearman's Rho or non-parametric rank correlation coefficient, whereas detailed analysis was performed with regard to links at the bilateral significance level $p < 0.01$.

As a result of analysis of study results it may be concluded that the relationships are diversified in terms of types of activities undertaken, functional area and country. The implemented strategy in the scope of human resource management has the lowest impact on competences of the organisation. Negative significant correlation with competences in the scope of marketing activities was observed in the US (-0.680) and positive correlation with competences in the scope of service activity (0.671) and public relations (0.566) was noted in Thailand.

The greatest impact on competence level in practically all studied areas has the fact of ensuring improvement of employee creativity, expressed in the ability to attract, develop and keep valuable employees in the organisation, support of employee creativity and implementation of knowledge management programs. Therefore, it may be concluded that ensuring employment of employees with relevant potential influences the level of competence of the organisation to a large extent.

The analysis of links depending on competence area is quite interesting. In the area of management, in all analysed countries, a significant and even substantial (Austria: 0.713) link with ensuring improvement of employee creativity is visible. In the area of personal policy, in most analysed countries (except for Austria), a link with talent management is noticeable - ranging from weak in Poland (0.280) to strong in the US (0.780). A similar situation may be observed in case of competences in the area of innovation, however most often there are links with activities in the scope of individualisation of approach to employee development - ranging from low dependency in Poland (0.257) to high in the US (0.780).

5. CONCLUSIONS

Analysis of the results of the study performed indicates that links between activities connected with employee development and level of competences in individual functional areas are diversified depending on the type of activities undertaken in the scope of employee development, functional area as well as country.

The respondents' answers showed that the closest links are between ensuring an appropriate level of creativity of employees and the competences in all functional areas. They also stressed a great importance of activities in the scope of employee development in the area of management (first of all ensuring increase of employee creativity), personnel policy (talent management) and innovation (individualisation of the approach to employee development).

To sum up, it may be concluded that ensuring employee development is linked to a large extent with competences of the organisation, therefore placing a greater stress on those activities may have a positive impact on the development of the analysed enterprises as well as on maintaining stable competitive advantage.

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