

ASSESSMENT OF THE LEVEL OF MANAGERIAL COMPETENCIES OF MIDDLE MANAGERS IN RUSSIAN ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

Nowadays the importance of middle managers' work is increasing. Companies spend significant resources on paying employees occupying these positions, which actualizes the issue of evaluating their labor productivity. In turn, one of the methods of evaluating managers' productivity is an assessment of their competencies development.

The study is aimed at assessing the development of managerial competencies of middle managers in Russian companies. The information base of the study was the data of a questionnaire survey of middle managers in Russian organizations. The survey included 55 statements, based on which middle managers were asked to assess the degree of development of their managerial competencies. The statements were evaluated in points on the Likert scale, after which the number of points for each of the competencies was calculated. Based on the sum of the points, one of the three levels of competence development was determined – initial level, level of development, or level of experience.

It was found that the majority of Russian middle managers have all the studied competencies at the level of development. This indicates the manifestation of competencies only in simple or familiar situations. The areas for development of middle managers are creativity, complex multi-level problem solving, and negotiation skills.

Key words: middle managers, managerial competences, management development, Russia

JEL Code: M12, M53

Introduction

In modern organizations, the importance of the work of middle managers is increasing. Occupying an intermediate position between top management and ordinary performers, they must ensure that the staff fulfills the task set by the company's management. Often,

management decisions and innovations are stalled and blocked at this level of the organizational structure.

Companies spend significant amount of resources on the remuneration of employees who occupy the positions of middle managers, which actualizes the need to assess their labor productivity. In turn, the assessment of managers' labor productivity can be carried out based on both the development of their competencies in general and managerial competencies, in particular.

1 Literature review

Traditionally, in the literature, managerial competencies are considered as one of the groups of competencies along with professional and corporate ones. Managerial competencies are described in the works of Boyatzis (Boyatzis, 1982), Bradley (Bradley, 1991), Raven (Raven, 1984), Jubb and Robotham (Jubb and Robotham, 1997), Furnham (Furnham, 2003), Widdet and Holliford (Whiddett and Hollyford, 2006) and many others.

In the structure of managerial competencies, there are three components: vision, organization, and working with people. So, on this basis, the authors Robinson, Sparrow, Clegg and Birdi distinguish six clusters of managerial competencies. They include personal qualities, project management, cognitive strategies, cognitive abilities, technical abilities, and communication (Robinson et al., 2005).

Nowadays there is an approach that consists in assessing how the competencies of managers affect the success of the business and personal effectiveness. For example, the work of Laguna, Wiechetek, and Talik analyzes how the managerial competencies of a manager (including leadership and organizational skills) relate to the business success of small and medium-sized enterprises (Laguna, Wiechetek and Talik, 2012). Based on a survey of 264 managers from 5 European countries, they found that there is a moderate statistically significant relationship between business success and the managerial competencies of the organization's managers.

Data from Russian studies conducted by the Higher School of Economics and the World Bank demonstrate a shortage of soft skills for managers, and it is noted that this problem is particularly acute in innovative companies (Gimpelson, 2004). According to the obtained results, the innovative development of Russia requires skills related to communication, interaction, teamwork (social and behavioral skills), ability to solve problems and think outside the box (high-order cognitive skills).

Consequently, continual competences development needs to be incorporated in the human resource development policy in order for business organizations to face the challenge of business change successfully (Dingle, 1995; Bergenhenegouwen, 1996).

2 Research methodology

The purpose of this study is to assess the degree of development of managerial competencies of middle managers in Russian companies.

The information base of the study was the data of a questionnaire survey of middle managers working in Russian organizations. As a research tool, we used a questionnaire developed by the SOFT SKILLS Competence Laboratory, which is a joint project of the Southern Federal University and the Career Center of the Southern Federal University (Rostov-on-Don, Russian Federation).

During the survey, middle managers were asked to assess the degree of development of their managerial competencies based on 55 statements. There were evaluated a total of 11 managerial competencies:

1. complex multi-level problem solving,
2. critical thinking,
3. creativity,
4. personnel management,
5. collaboration skills,
6. emotional intelligence,
7. judgment and decision-making,
8. customer focus,
9. negotiation skills,
10. cognitive flexibility,
11. effective job search.

All the statements presented in the questionnaire were evaluated in points on the Likert scale, after which there was calculated the number of points for each of the competencies.

Further, on the basis of the received sum of points, there was determined one of the three levels of middle managers' competence development: the initial level, the level of development or the level of experience.

Each level of competence development has its own characteristics:

1. The initial level (under 15 points) indicates that the employee does not possess the competence. Behavioral manifestations of competence are rarely or not demonstrated at all. At the same time, negative behavioral patterns may be observed.
2. The level of development (15-22 points) characterizes the limited employee's competence possession. In this case, behavioral manifestations of competence are recorded only in situations that are common for an employee and are absent in unfamiliar and stressful situations.
3. The level of experience (over 22 points) indicates that the employee successfully uses the competence in solving standard professional tasks. The employee consciously monitors the behavioral manifestations of competence both in himself and in other employees and also does not demonstrate negative behavioral patterns. At the same time, in new and non-standard situations, competence can still manifest itself irregularly and unstable, only in the form of separate fragments.

The study was conducted in the period from December 2020 to February 2021, the number of middle managers surveyed was 900 people (middle managers of Russian companies operating in different industries and regions).

3 Research results

Let us consider the main results.

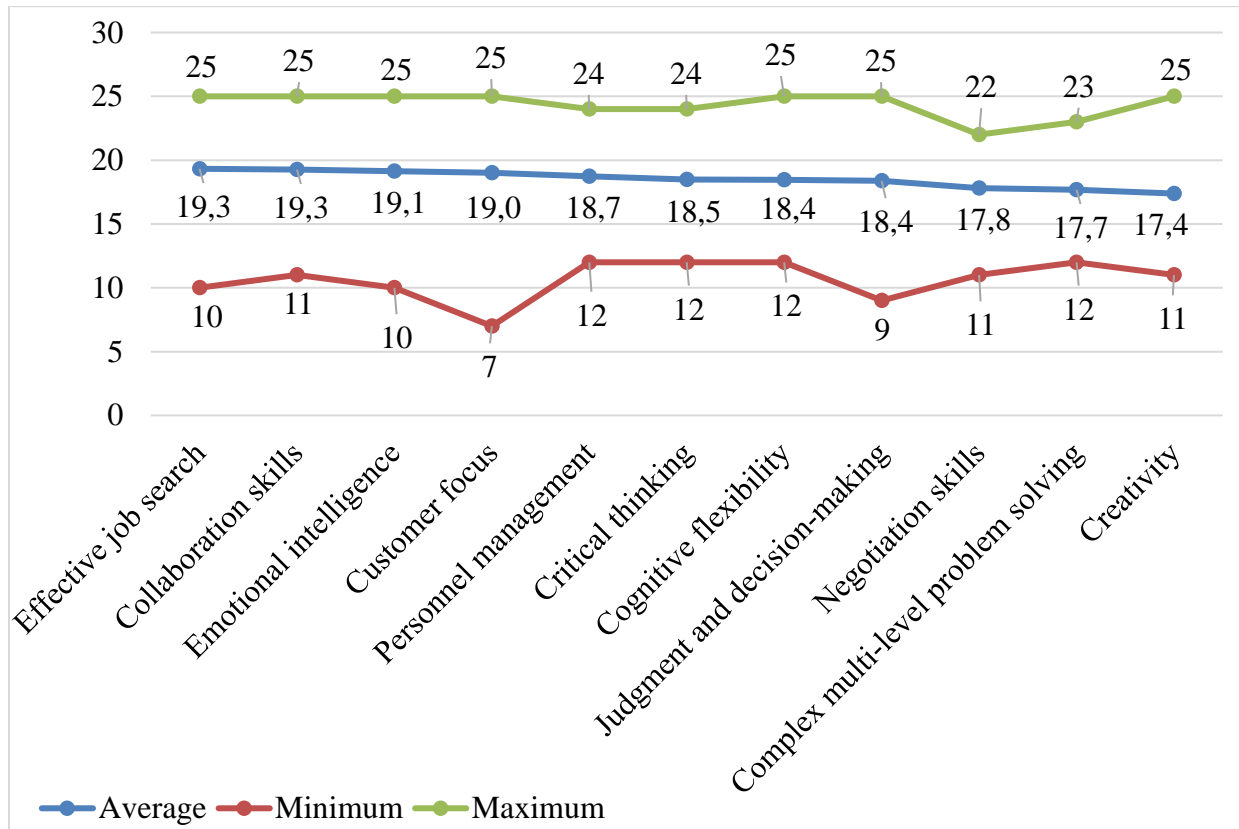
Figure 1 shows the results of self-assessment of the middle managers' managerial competencies - the minimum, average and maximum values obtained for each competence. The obtained data show that all eleven of the studied competencies of Russian middle managers are currently at the level of development (the obtained average values vary in the range from 17.4 to 19.3 points).

Middle managers scored high on the level of development of such competencies as:

- effective job search (active use of various methods in job search to optimally combine the needs of employers, trends in the development of the professional sphere and their own skills and goals) – 19.3 points,
- collaboration skills (building interaction with people at various levels from the exchange of information to the exchange of meanings, creating a common field of activity for solving problems) – 19.3 points,
- emotional intelligence (recognizing emotions and understanding the intentions of other people) – 19.1 points,

- customer focus (interacting with others and solving people's problems based on understanding their values and needs) – 19.0 points.

Fig. 1: Assessment of the managerial competencies development, points



Source: authors

On the other hand, the lowest average ratings were given by middle managers to such competencies as:

- creativity (non-standard approach in thinking and behavior to everything) – 17.4 points,
- complex multi-level problem solving (independent identification of the problem and its causes and sources) – 17.7 points,
- negotiation skills (communication from the perspective of the negotiation process aimed at long-term cooperation) – 17.8 points.

Next, we analyzed the distribution of middle managers by the level of their managerial competencies development (Table 1). The data in the table confirms that the majority of the surveyed managers are at the level of competence development (from 68.7% to 92.2% of managers for different competencies).

Tab. 1: Distribution of middle managers by level of competence development, %

Managerial competencies	Initial level (under 15 points)	Level of development (15-22 points)	Level of experience (over 22 points)
Effective job search	8.7	68.7	22.6
Collaboration skills	6.1	79.1	14.8
Emotional intelligence	7.0	80.0	13.0
Customer focus	7.0	75.7	17.4
Personnel management	5.2	87.8	7.0
Critical thinking	7.8	84.3	7.8
Cognitive flexibility	8.7	83.5	7.8
Judgment and decision-making	2.6	92.2	5.2
Negotiation skills	7.8	92.2	0.0
Complex multi-level problem solving	6.1	90.4	3.5
Creativity	20.9	72.2	7.0

Source: authors

It should be noted that every fifth manager (20.9%) believes that his creativity is at the initial stage of development. It is also interesting that none of the 900 middle managers who took part in the survey rated all 11 competencies at the level of experience.

Conclusion

The obtained results are consistent with the results of studies of middle managers' managerial competencies, conducted both on foreign and Russian data. The results of research coincide with those received by the Higher School of Economics and the World Bank, which demonstrate a shortage of soft skills for managers.

The conducted research allowed us to conclude that the managerial competencies of middle-level managers of Russian companies are at the level of development. This indicates that managers possess certain elements of managerial competencies. Middle managers demonstrate the studied competencies only in common professional situations.

The lowest scores were given to such competencies as creativity, complex and multi-level problem solving, and negotiation skills. But it is these competencies that are key for middle managers and allow them to balance the strategic goals of top management and the day-to-day activities of ordinary employees. An insufficient level of development of these competencies can lead to loss of working time, which, in turn, has an impact on reducing the productivity of managers.

The identified areas of competence development (creativity, complex and multi-level problem solving, negotiation skills) are the reserves for increasing the productivity of middle managers of Russian companies.

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