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EMPLOYEES COMPETENCES – THE SUCCESS FACTOR OF COMMERCE ENTERPRISES

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Abstract

Researches done in different areas of economic field have revealed that behind the performance of enterprises we find people. This truth is also valid for the commercial area. The commerce enterprise has some characteristic features among which there are: lack of common tools of other types of organisation for measurement of managerial performances, less degree of mechanisation and automation of activities, discontinuity of activities in work program caused by clients absence, the increased personnel expenses as part of the total expenses, significant seasonality impact, which can be manifested either in the activity period (the open season for example), or in consuming, or as a consequence of production seasonality, relatively increased number of clients to whom they address – very much in case of retail enterprises and quite much of those of wholesaling -, selling of a great number of products – the commerce firms who sell one or a few articles being exceptionally cases etc. All of these raise the problem of competences, abilities and necessary knowledge for a proper performance of commerce enterprise activities with the goal to reach their profitability. Therefore, as a succession of an exploratory research I have defined a commercial specialist profile, based on a few general and specific competences. Starting from these competences, curricula of preparing institutions can be designed with the goal of adapting these to business area requirements.

Keywords: competence, ability, knowledge, learning, preparation

JEL Classification: I 23, M 53, O 15

Introduction

One relatively little explored enterprise perspective and usually treated in the end of an organisation presentation is that of learning and growing. Learning and

growing, as perspectives of organisation, are the capacity of this to continuously improving and becoming more and more performing. For this goal to become real people have to have capacities that harmonize with enterprise internal processes requirements, because the perspectives of learning and growing are linked with acquiring competences that are necessary for people.

Learning and growing rely on a stable and high qualified labour force, having as objectives acquiring, developing and possessing strategic competences. These objectives can be quantified through the availability degree of some specialized competences and the stability level of employees who have key positions in the organisation. A motivated and well trained labour force is based on strategic competences – functional excellence, leadership abilities, integrating vision etc. -, strategic technologies – processes improving – and climate for action – personnel concordance, growth etc.

If the learning and growing perspective is accordingly organised, then the enterprise has great chances to develop. Based on this perspective, effective internal processes will be achieved, resulting products that will lead to a better consumer satisfaction. Thus, the enterprise will carry on more commercial transactions with clients, which will represent the premise for good financial results satisfying shareholders.

1. Relation between employees competences and enterprise institutional objectives

In order for the organisation's activity to improve it has to permit of its human resources to learn and to grow. Human resources can be approached from several perspectives, among which can be mentioned: people competences, their leadership abilities, contribution to creating a proper organisational culture, concordance between people and enterprise strategies, information dissemination – especially of strategic ones.

Human resources are a social-cultural construction mode of enterprise human dimension through valorisation and capitalization of real and potential people capabilities and their converting in competences. The respective valorisation of capabilities means their positive or negative assessment, with the aim to make a selection for making their hierarchy in a structured system. However, competences capitalization refers to their promotion with the aim to produce human resources construction.

Theories concerning human resources competences have been evolving from ideas regarding their assignation by managers and necessity to be possessed by employees (when people were just passive elements into an organisation), toward

the approach of management focusing on human being. Put differently, it has been passed from human being aptness on job toward job aptness on human being.

Competences do not confound with human capabilities, nor with job requirements. They appear as result of a collation between two organisation **components**, **institutional component** – represented by management and formalised through different documents: organisational structure, structure representation, organisational and functional rule, internal discipline rule etc. – and **social component** – represented by employees.

Manager asks from employees to assume a set of responsibilities in change of some reward. Institutional concern is represented by organisational effectiveness – its capacity to achieve its objectives.

Employee undertakes a group of responsibilities – that isn't often the same with those asked for by manager – for which some rewards are asked for. Social concern is personal happiness and individuals' welfare.

Therefore, between two parties there is a collation process as a negotiation form, which has as limits a lack of agreement between manager and subordinate, which can lead to antagonisms and total agreement between the two, which lead to synergy appearance. This collation determines 4 possible situations, shown in the figure below (figure 1).

Institutional concerns

++	Impose (1)	Convergence (2)
+		
-	Unconsciousness (3)	Hedonism (4)
--		
	-- - + ++	Social concerns

**Figure 1 Situations that appear from collation
between employee concerns and those of manager**

From the collation of the two groups of concerns and from their intensity (-- being very low, - low, + powerful and ++ very powerful) result 4 cases, which will be further briefly presented. From the concerns intensity of two parties appear as well several situations for employee namely on vertical: minimalist, interested, collaborative and engaged and respectively, on horizontal :conciliator, resistant, opposite and non-conciliator.

Case no 1 – “impose”, reveals the rejection situation from the employee side for organization requirements (example: increased responsibility, creativity, autonomy etc.), for potential competences (see X and Y Douglas McGregor’s theories), which would lead to a substantial modification of organizational structure. In accordance with the leadership style tacked by manager can succeed in a negotiation in which the ratio of forces between participants to incline strongly towards this, and therefore, the solution is imposed to employee. Such a situation can lead to non complete engaging of employee in organization activities, being just ready to leave it when he finds another enterprise that would better satisfy his interests. Just on the line, when employee hasn’t any interests of his own and entirely accepts manager requirements it can reach the level of fanaticism. This is also the case of very devoted employees.

Case no 2 – “convergence”, is considered to be optimum, because all that the employee offers and pretends is in accordance with what organization requires and offers, the negotiation being easy, with very great chances to reach an agreement.

Case no 3 – “unconsciousness”, it can refer to valuable aspects, but non-valORIZED because of unsound socio-cultural models, not being desired either by employees, or managers. In this case are the passive employees as well as the irresolute ones.

Case no 4 – “hedonism”, reveals a situation in which manager either doesn’t need some types of activities which employee desires to achieve, or disagrees with his rewarding desires. Flexible organizations, directed by managers with participative leadership style, adjust their structure to employees’ desires. In these situations, as a result of negotiation, the employee can persuade the manager to accept some activities which he proposes to him. In this case we can find opposite employees.

The relationship between maturity and motivation of employee is also important. Maturity is either professional – collaborator knows to do what he is asked, namely he has competence -, or psychological – collaborator wants to do what he is asked, namely he has motivation. The combination between collaborator competence and

motivation establishes his maturity or his autonomy. Both of those advance in time, but they are not identical in any domain. In this way, competences appear through collation between enterprise performance objectives and employees personal objectives manifested in work context. Enterprise administration pretends of employees to take on a group of responsibilities motivating them through different rewards. In reply, the employee develops certain behaviour in accordance with these rewards.

In this way, the enterprise has the possibility to develop on the strategic opportunities related to offering a complete training and development for human resources, to improve its internal climate, through an open communication, based on feed-back, phenomenon which leads employees to be recognized and rewarded for achieved activities.

1. Competences of specialists in commercial area

Within a CNCSIS project – “Adaptation of professional training in commercial area to new conditions for doing business, in European integration and new economy context”, developed in 2004-2006 period, in which the author was involved, an extensive research was achieved in Bucharest business area with the goal to identify the main features of specialists in the commercial domain as they are seen by this area. Starting from the fact that opinions expressed by business men and commercial specialists in mass-media have revealed some discontents regarding competences, abilities and knowledge of the people who have just got their B. A. degrees, it was considered opportune to perform a research which was to identify the main competences necessary for commercial specialists. Research methodology has developed specific stages shortly further presented.

Research has aimed to distinguish the main competences of commercial specialists imposed in present socio-economic context. Thus, the research goal has been the identification of the most significant mutations susceptible to require new sets of knowledge and abilities necessary to commercial studies graduates. We have considered our step to be imperative taking into account the deficiencies that emphasizes the commercial activity from our country.

The objectives of research were the following: knowing the opinions of area business representatives regarding general and specific competences necessary for a commercial specialist; identification for continuous training opportunity of commercial studies bachelors; emphasising the pertinence of acquired knowledge, in a long term perspective. The hypothesis from which the research started were the following: existence of a certain degree of discontent manifested in business area regarding competences and abilities acquired, as well as regarding knowledge assimilated by Faculty of Commerce's bachelors; existence of some non-

functionalities regarding communication between economic university areas and those of business.

Information was obtained from primary sources, respectively business men.

Data were collected within a questionnaire, which included 18 general competences and 30 specific competences, as well as 12 identification questions.

Period for collecting data was May, 1st - 31st, 2005, the firm (enterprise) being the examined unit. Interview unit was represented by business men. For questionnaire application in business area there was made a non representative sample chosen on direct relationship with concerned persons.

Data processing and analyses were achieved in next period after questionnaire application by working in that group in which the author was included. The questionnaire for business area had 2 parts: the first included competences for commercial area, in their round grouped in two sets, respective general and specific competences and the second part referred to some general information about enterprise. The questionnaire was applied to 183 persons with different positions that are working in enterprises from different areas.

The questionnaire includes 18 questions concerning general competences and 30 questions concerning specific competences of a commercial specialist, each of them recouped on three directions, respectively the importance of competence set for tasks achieving today, in 5 years, as well as education supplementary need for getting these competences. All competences were recouped in those 3 directions and were evaluated with a 6 steps scale, with the following significations: 0 – *non important*; 1 – *rather non important*; 2 – *neither non important/ nor important*; 3 – *rather important*; 4 – *important*; 5 – *very important*.

It was opted for a 6 steps scale for the purpose to avoid answers' concentration towards a central value that would be easily identified in odd scale case.

General average scores order (got through scores arithmetic averaging) on those 3 directions was for general competences the following: competences carrying out in 5 years – 3,98, education supplementary need – 3,65 and competences carrying out today – 3,50. Average scores indicate that respondents consider as *important* general competences mentioned in the questionnaire on those 3 approached directions. For specific competences there were obtained the following average scores order, too: competences carrying out in 5 years – 3,52, education supplementary need – 3,30 and competences carrying out today – 2,94. These average scores indicate that respondents consider specific competences mentioned in questionnaire as *rather important* on those 3 investigated directions.

General competences included in questionnaire were in the following order: Q 1 creativity, Q 2 interpersonal communication abilities, Q 3 multicultural abilities, Q 4 capacity for team working, Q 5 motivation, Q 6 foreign languages knowledge, Q 7 leadership, Q 8 capacity for new situation adaptation, Q 9 practical knowledge, Q

10 time management abilities, Q 11 capacity for practical knowledge carrying out, Q 12 ability for international context working, Q 13 ability for independent working, Q 14 ability to make and to lead projects, Q 15 entrepreneurial spirit, Q 16 ethical behaviour, Q 17 preoccupation for quality, Q 18 abilities in information technology using.

Specific competences included in questionnaire were in the following order: Q1 marketing & sales, Q 2 e-commerce, Q 3 procurement and contracts management, Q 4 costs designing and administration, Q 5 own brand promotion, Q 6 finance & accountability, Q 7 innovation management, Q 8 changing management, Q 9 informational changing management, Q 10 benchmarking/performance indicators, Q 11 statistical analyses, Q 12 informational systems designing and implementation, Q 13 strategic planning, Q 14 aspects regarding wealth, environment and security, Q 15 legal aspects and intellectual property rights, Q 16 product development, in general, Q 17 business area knowledge at micro and macro level, Q 18 product development simulation, Q 19 consumer behaviour knowledge, Q 20 practice in enterprise, Q 21 processing technology, Q 22 material flow, Q 23 fabrication systems, Q 24 production simulation, Q 25 enterprise forming operation, Q 26 project management, Q 27 logistics and supply chain management, Q 28 business administration simulation, Q 29 business life cycle end simulation, Q 30 quality management.

Through data processing there was made a hierarchy of general and specific competences, as it can be noticed from the tables below (table 1.1 and table 1.2).

Therefore, the most assessed *general competences* are: quality preoccupation, knowledge of foreign languages, abilities in informatics systems using, capacity for team working and the capacity to carry out practical knowledge, and the less assessed are: multicultural abilities, entrepreneurial spirit, ability to do independent work, ability to work in international context and the ability to designing and leading projects.

The most assessed *specific competences* are: quality management, marketing & sales, own brands promotion, business area knowledge and consumer behaviour knowledge, and the less assessed are production simulation, enterprise forming operation, material flow knowledge, simulation in product development and processing technology knowledge.

Even non-answers were registered regarding assessing general and specific competences we noticed that respondents were generally consistent with their answers, aspect confirmed through near average scores received by some linked competences, such as, the following: creativity, adaptation capacity to new situations and capacity to carry out practical knowledge; ability to do independent work and entrepreneurial spirit; interpersonal communication abilities, capacity to

work in teams and leadership abilities; analysis and synthesis abilities and ability to design and lead projects etc.

The obtained results have permitted us to reach the objectives which we have followed in this research, respectively knowledge on the opinions of business area representatives regarding general and specific competences necessary for commercial specialists through made tops, opportunity identifying for continuous preparing for commercial studies bachelors through obtained average scores, that indicate an assessing as *important* for supplementary training necessity for getting of general competences and as *farther important* for supplementary training need for specific competences getting and emphasising pertinence for assimilated knowledge for a long term perspective, because general and specific competences carrying out in 5 years have received biggest average scores.

Decreasing order for general competences points per total

Table 1

General competences	Today	In 5 years	Supple-mentary need	Total
Q 17	745	829	747	2321
Q 18	669	787	742	2198
Q 6	670	779	749	2198
Q 4	719	779	686	2184
Q 11	719	771	673	2163
Q 8	697	762	680	2139
Q 16	694	765	646	2105
Q 5	684	769	631	2084
Q 10	658	727	699	2084
Q 1	632	748	674	2054
Q 2	662	725	645	2032
Q 9	619	700	661	1980
Q 7	603	701	669	1973
Q 14	607	698	664	1969
Q 12	532	695	693	1920
Q 13	576	629	584	1789
Q 15	550	629	604	1783
Q 3	492	630	586	1708

Decreasing order for specific competences points per total

Table 2

Specific competences	Today	In 5 years	Supple-mentary need	Total
Q 30	680	789	733	2202
Q 1	687	787	719	2193
Q 5	639	731	673	2043
Q 17	615	733	658	2006
Q 19	623	719	648	1990
Q 3	602	694	639	1935
Q 16	586	692	630	1908
Q 14	577	687	640	1904
Q 4	577	680	647	1904
Q 13	571	676	637	1884
Q 10	537	678	649	1864
Q 9	550	665	644	1859
Q 6	577	662	619	1858
Q 7	537	660	630	1827
Q 8	556	642	611	1809
Q 27	548	667	592	1807
Q 20	567	647	592	1806
Q 15	531	607	595	1733
Q 26	507	627	589	1723
Q 2	438	624	613	1675
Q 12	483	595	583	1661
Q 28	474	593	569	1636
Q 11	479	569	552	1600
Q 23	476	567	537	1580
Q 29	467	576	534	1577
Q 21	492	561	522	1575
Q 18	453	567	545	1565
Q 22	485	553	519	1557
Q 25	435	544	508	1487
Q 24	419	516	494	1429

Regarding the assumed hypothesis in research designing we note that the first was not confirmed, because the best assessed general and specific competences have a significant place in the Faculty of Commerce's curricula through a number of disciplines and classes allocated for their acquiring, while the second has been partially confirmed, because the business area is not prepared properly for our country's integration in the European Union, when some general and specific

competences which have received small scores will have a great importance in the new competitive context, prevailed by the presence of some big European firms in Romania.

3. Profile outlining of commercial specialist

Relying on obtained data through used questionnaire in research regarding general and specific competences previously mentioned a profile for commercial specialist can be made; the commercial specialist would be a person who has the following main characteristics:

- quality preoccupation;
- foreign languages knowledge;
- abilities for informatics systems usage;
- team working abilities
- quality management knowledge;
- prepared in marketing and sales area;
- abilities for own brands promotion;
- consumer behaviour knowledge;
- business area knowledge that the firm operates in

This profile has been obtained based on total scores received for each competence from respondents' side. To the 3 approached directions, today competence using, competence using in 5 years and supplementary training need for competence getting, easy modifications of competences order appear, but we find them in each of top positions.

In the opposite side, the less assessed competences to interviewed persons have been the following: multicultural abilities, entrepreneurial spirit, independent working ability, production simulation, enterprise forming operate, material flow knowledge and product development simulation. The first 3 are general competences and the last 4 are specific competences.

If regarding the best assessed competences by respondents there appears a concordance with sent enterprises messages, when they address to labour market for hiring – press announcements in which foreign languages knowledge, PC operation knowledge, team working capacity are very presented, as regarding commercial area posts, most of these being undertaken from foreign firms which operate in our country – it pay to discuss about the less assessed competences. The less assessed general competences will become very important in context of our country's integration in the European Union. Therefore, it appears a difference between respondents' thinking and sole European market reality. This situation

also reflects organizational cultures that aren't based on fundamental values focused on fellow's place, role and importance into enterprise. It confirms the belief that patrons (shareholders group) should directly practice leadership and impose their conceptions, the employees having only the role to execute all the team management "thinking", as a result human resource from Romanian enterprises being a passive compound.

We must remark that the less assessed specific competences assume, in great measure, computer using, meaning a certain paradox against the widely shared opinion by respondents that a commercial specialist has to possess abilities for informatics systems using. In fact, this situation consciously shows computer importance (opinion widely accepted by respondents), but it doesn't know the all range of usages for this technology in enterprise activity. With other words, it doesn't the question computer role, but it doesn't know the different application for this. This top of specific competences can be too a fragmentary image that is present in many Romanian enterprises, which have as characteristic the big specialisation of personnel and lack of cooperation between persons who operate in different departments.

From this situation and from assessing the presented competences in the first part of the paper we can conclude that in the investigated enterprises there does not exist a culture based on values that turn account the creating potential of employees, their thinking, acting and supplementary responsibilities assuming capacity. Also there is no culture based on motivation and on efficient communication between principal and employees (in all directions and with active presence of feed-back).

Conclusions

We consider that commercial enterprise management particularities are conferred by necessary competences for employees who work in this area. This way we reached the conclusion that the facility for learning and growing perspective in commercial enterprises permit managers to improve employees' performances. If managers find an equilibrium situation between commercial enterprise effectiveness and individual warfare of its employees then they can resolve a problem that determines firms' success.

We note that in Faculty of Commerce's curricula all competences which outline commercial specialist profile have a significant place, but this fact is not the same regarding engagement of these specialists into the enterprises where they work. As a result, we consider that it is necessary for managers to emphasize these competences when hiring people in commercial areas and to be preoccupied about

their continuous training, because these can permanently adapt to business area changes.

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