COMPETENCE DEVELOPMENT: IN SEARCHING FOR THE SUCCESSFUL ENVIRONMENT

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Abstract
In the article the importance of empowering environment in the process of successful competence development is analysed. This particular environment fosters individual’s positive approach to lifelong learning. The literature study was carried out. In the first part of the article the notion of competence, competence development and models are analysed. In the second part of the article main understandings of empowering environment are described and relation of this particular environment with competence development is revealed. Main conclusion that competence development in empowering environment is successful was stated.

KEY WORDS: competence, competence development, learning environment, empowerment

Introduction
What competence is required from individual today, in knowledge society? Every individual incorporates knowledge. A good professional was always one who did not only master his field intellectually, but linked his professionalism to values and attitudes. If competence in the future is as much as matter of changing attitudes as it is of acquiring new factual knowledge, the nature of demands on the individual are certainly changing. Moreover, nature of demands changes if organisation changes its goals. Thus, if the organisation has changed its goals. Therefore, a more comprehensive view of literature reveals that the empowerment has been approached mainly from an end-state perspective or has focused on a single dimension. This may limit one’s understanding of the environmental influences, organisational factors, or social, cultural and political contexts. Moreover, analysis of the influence of empowering environment on competence development is seldom in scientific literature. As organisations have striven to become more competitive, many have overlooked a critical element – the overall framework that could turn empowerment from a nice concept to a competitive advantage. Therefore, a more comprehensive approach is required to implement empowerment successfully. The object of this article is environment for successful competence development. The aim of this article is to reveal the environment in which successful competence development occurs.
For fulfilling the task, the literature study was carried out.

In the first part of the article, the notion of competence and competence development is analysed. Main understandings of this concept that were discovered in literature are presented and structured. Then the main understandings of empowering environment are described in the second part and the importance of it for successful competence development is highlighted.

1. The concept of competence and competence development

Today most adults spend considerable time acquiring information and learning new skills. The rapidity of change, the continuous creation of knowledge and everwidening access to information make such acquisitions necessary if individual strives to survive in such a turbulent, changing environment. Thus, the individual is faced with new demands of competence. Some of these are of the same principal dignity as the changing demands of any era, i.e. simply demands of mastering new contents of knowledge. How the concept of competence is defined in literature? Several approaches of understanding of this particular conception were found in literature.

1.1. Competence as knowledge and skills

As literature study shows, there is a common agreement (Bjurklo, Kardemark, 1999; Usher, Bryant, Johnston, 1997; Noon, Blyton, 1997 and others), that competence is all the forms of knowledge possessed by the staff as well as their skills. With the changes in products, services and working practices has come a reconstruction of the workplace (today workplace is seen as site of learning) and the social definition of skills. From this point of view, according to Usher, Bryant, Johnston (1997), skills become as competencies in contemporary world of organisations. Where skill resides? Is it part of the person, the job or the setting? According to Noon, Blyton (1997) opinion, all three aspects need to be taken into account. There is the skill that resides in the individual himself, accumulated over the time, each new experience adding something to a total. In this approach, skill generally is considered a possession of the individual. It can take numerous forms – knowledge, dexterity, judgement, linguistic ability – but the assumption is that individual accrues it as a product of accumulated education, training and experience by the individual. Then, there is the skill demanded by the job. This aspect of skill usually is embedded in understanding of qualification required by the job, which may or may not match the skill in the worker.

Noon, Blyton (1997) suggest two different aspects of skill: complexity and discretion. Authors argue that it is reasonable to suppose that the more complex the tasks required by the job, then the more skilled the job. Discretion, according to Noon, Blyton (1997), is about choosing between alternative courses of action. The greater the amount of decisions required by an activity, then the greater the skill level. So the more an employee can exercise his or her judgement, and then the more skilled a task is supposed to be. The common theme that links the two notions of skill as complexity or discretion is that both approaches emphasise skill as being principally about the requirements of the job.

Pippan quotes L. Hirschhorn’s (1981) discuss about worker competence. He says that a worker skill is not the skill of executing but the skill of problem solving and the ability to learn. Thus it is important not only what the workers does, but also rather how prepared he is to do what he might have to do. This readiness to act in new situations, as a responsibility, constitutes a competence that is very important for learning and organisational performance (Pipan, 1989, p. 175).

The level of person’s readiness to act depends on his abilities. Taking into consideration this, person’s abilities in competent work performance are also important. Moreover, some writers agree that competence is not only knowledge that has individuals, but their personal abilities as well.

1.2. Competence as abilities

Bowden (1997) discuss the concept of the competence as the ability of individual to put skills and knowledge into action. Slenning quotes Leion (1992) who writes: ‘Competence is a concept difficult to catch. It could be defined as the ability to cope with the different demands of a certain situation or in a certain enterprise (Slenning, 1999, p. 73). Petersson (1992) defines competence in working life as person’s ability to reach the certain results. These results often relate to parameters like economy, quality, productivity, efficiency, absence, etc. When results of a certain performance (individual or group) coincide with goals that have been set forth the competence is evaluated as high. Deviation in alternative directions lowers competence. Competence is defined by the organisation in terms of parameters and keys, for better or worse. Further, Leion sees competence not just a constant, personal quality, but as something manifested in operation: ‘the presence of competence can be stated when the work is efficiently and correctly carried out’. Leion defines ‘production competence’ as the ability to create an increased value in one’s work through raising the quality. He also focuses on the ability to handle ‘unusual situations’, such as occurring problems in the organisation, or rapid changes in it (Slenning, 1999, p. 74). According to Thomasson (1999), competence is the ability to cope with different situations at work and to use knowledge and other qualities one has to achieve something in these situations. According to Bjurklo, Kardemark (1999), Slennig (1999), Pipan (1998) and others, new competence is not only the managing of certain factual components or new information, but also an ability to adapt to changing values, changing circumstances, and the ability to learn and re-learn.

So, most of the writers agree that concept of competence is connected to individual behaviour (success, career), in other words, his abilities to use all forms of knowledge and skills for job performance. The study of
literature shows that competence focuses on the individual as well as on qualification required for work.

According to Bjurklo, Kardemark (1999) competence change is the result of competence development. How the process of competence development is determined in literature and how it occurs? Competence development means giving staff the opportunity and motivation to acquire, retain and develop the skills required to meet varying situations and solve their tasks in the best possible way (Thomasson, 1999). Miller (1996) claims that changing the competence occurs through staff training (Bjurklo, Kardemark, 1999, p. 69). Thus, worker’s learning can be a condition for competence development. It involves analysing and planning the long-term competence requirements of the unit, of the team and of the individual.

According to Bjurklo, Kardemark (1999), this process should be led by control (fig. 1).

The starting point in this model is the competence requirements of the unit in relation to the tasks it has to perform. The need to improve competence must be matched with the qualities of the individual and their desire to raise their level of competence. Next, the competence goals form part of phase 1, where overall competence requirements of the unit are determined and analysed.

In phase 2 an inventory is drawn up to provide a picture of the present level of competence and then in phases 3 the competence goals are compared with the actual capabilities of the staff. The purpose of phase 2 – inventory of existing competence – is to provide a picture of the existing and potential competence in the unit, in all teams and of each individual. Work with one team at a time and map the team’s total competence by noting the competence of each individual. A comparison between the outcome of the need analysis (phase 1) and the inventory of existing and potential competence (phase 2) reveals a gap that a need to raise the level of competence within the unit. This occurs in phase 3.

The career development discussion in all phases of the model except for phase 1 has the fundamental role in this process. Engquist (1994) used the term career development discussion and defines it as ‘a prepared, regularly occurring discussion between a manager and a member of their staff with the purpose of developing the individual and the business, which takes place in an atmosphere of reciprocity’ (Thomasson, 1999, p. 97). One of the objectives of a career development discussion is to determine the individual’s view of his own competence but this should be complemented with the experiences and observations of the unit manager. Based on the career development discussions, the unit manager can consider possible changes in the composition of the teams together with his staff (Thomasson, 1999). Therefore, during the course of discussion the two parties should examine current situations and try to reach a joint assessment of the capacity of the employee to handle them.

Fig. 1. Schematic model of the control over measures to develop competence
(Bjurklo, Kardemark, 1999, p. 70)

The reason for controlling the development of competence is to ensure that it is carried out in an economically manner. In order to control the development of competence, it is necessary to determine where there are deficiencies in the existing competence. In order to identify deficiencies in the competence of the staff, it is necessary to determine what kind of competence is required for the work, i.e. what qualification is needed, and what competence the staff in fact has.

The importance of the determining of deficiencies in existing competency and qualification needed for job performance in the process of competence development is emphasised in some of Thompson’s (1999) works. Author created model for competence development in the frame of organisation, which consists of several phases (fig. 2).

The starting point in this model is the competence requirements of the unit in relation to the tasks it has to perform. Phase 1 – the needs analysis – begins with a survey of the overall competence requirements of the unit both at present and in a longer perspective. Of course, it is individual who possesses competence and development potential but the needs analysis must begin at the level of the unit. After that, the needs of the teams are considered. During the process, according to Thompssón’s (1999) opinion, it is essential to search for possible new constellations within and between the teams in order to make the best use of the competence. The need to improve competence must be matched with the qualities of the individual and their desire to raise their level of competence. Next, the competence goals form part of phase 1, where overall competence requirements of the unit are determined and analysed.

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In phase 4 development plans can be designed. Here the career development discussions are of particular significance. As Thomasson (1999) suggests, the needs of the unit should always steer skills improvement but these needs in many cases may coincide with the wishes of the individual provided time is taken to make comparisons and adjustments between units, teams and individuals. Development plans express what needs to be altered.

The fifth phase involves determining when and how the development plans will be concretised and implemented. Development plans are timeless in that they have no end. They do not always have a clear beginning either, since some form of development is always in progress. Both the employee and the manager may have thought about development for some time (Thomasson, 1999).

Taking into consideration all discussed above, two viewpoints of competence becomes explicit. First, competence can be determined as knowledge and skills that can be seen in two ways: as possession of individual and as requirements of the job. Second, it can be considered as persons abilities to use the knowledge and skills. Moreover, bearing in mind the dynamic of information as well as knowledge, the dynamic of competence becomes of crucial importance – it should change according to changed requirements of environment, in other words, it should be developed continuously.

If competence is all forms of knowledge and skills that lead to person’s ability to do something, so competence development should be aimed to increasing of this ability to do things better. Is it so? What conditions foster this increase? In other words, what conditions foster competence development? One of such condition, as I see it, can be empowerment or empowering environment. What is the role and importance of empowerment in competence development? This will be analysed and discussed in the next part of this article.

2. Competence development in the empowering environment

Learning environment, in which learning and competence development occurs, is of great importance. Such environment should empower every learner. Empowerment in the workplace has received increased attention among scholars and practitioners and belief in the advantage of empowering workers appears to be shared by the workers as well as managers. Through empowerment an organisation wants to maximise the possibility that everyone can get work done. Managers in an entrepreneurial organisation realise that they cannot be successful unless their subordinates are motivated and successful themselves. What do we mean by the concept of empowerment?

According to Conger (1989), empowerment is the process of having power given from the traditionally powerful managers in an organisation and instilled in everyone. Power is the ability to get tasks done (Cornwall, Perlman, 1990).

When talking about empowerment, we are talking about everyone having the freedom and opportunity to get the job done, to explore how the job could be done differently and better, and to move well beyond a job description to assist the organisation. This means that everyone must have some means of obtaining resources (material, human resources, informational, knowledge), opportunities, support, and information. Wall (1986) says, that ‘people need to be on their own but not alone’ (Cornwall, Perlman, 1990, p. 86).

Obviously, the importance of external conditions is emphasised in the notion of empowerment as well.

In recent years, empowerment has been noted as an important feature of successful management. Ripley and his colleagues (1992) have observed that empowerment is the key to successful total quality management, to business competitiveness and success. Kotter (1995) claimed that the major step in transforming an organisation in to empower employees to act on the vision. The benefits that can be derived from empowerment include employee commitment, quality products and services, efficiency, responsiveness, synergy (Lashley, 1995). Carr (1994) emphasises the importance of becoming a learning organisation and the empowerment’s role in this process. “Organisations must be successful at what they do, and they must learn lessons from their actions in order to stay successful. In other words, organisations must be learning organisations as well as empowered organisations (Carr, 1994, p. 43). Becoming learning organisation and the changes concerning this process requires empowering workers and teams of workers. A learning organisation needs a clear view of its mission and a high level of trust among its members.

This relates to competence development very tightly. According to Jucevičienė and Lipinskienė (2001), empowering environment gives a learner learning power. In such environment learner’s autonomy and responsibility for the results of his activity allows to control his learning process; the toleration of failure, emphasizing of reflection, self-control and self-evaluation gives a possibility to learn from mistakes, fosters the belief in his power and keeps up the motivation of qualitative learning. Thus, empowering environment has influence on success of every learner’s competence development.

Jucevičienė and Lipinskienė (2001) examined the functioning of empowering environment in university. The aim of research was to prove if empowering environment that was theoretically validated works while studying modules of different scientific fields. Following that aim the influence of conditions of empowering environment on students’ motivation and approach on learning was evaluated. Seven student groups from four different scientific fields (humanities (groups E1 and C1), physical (groups E2 and C2), technological (groups E3 and C3) and social (group E4)) participated in the experiment. Changes in students’ motivation and approach to learning were diagnosed in all groups under the research. The results of empowering environment’s influence on students’ motivation are presented in figure 3.
While analyzing the results, the increase of motivation in experimental groups and its decrease in control groups was observed. This result allows claiming that empowering environment has influence on individual’s motivation.

Moreover, the study of literature allows distinguish following advantages of empowering environment that emphasize the importance of this particular environment in competence development. First, it increases total amount of power in organisation. Giving people more autonomy, participation in decisions and access to resources increases, rather than decreases, the total amount of power in an organisation. It is not productive to control employees and mobilise them to action if they, themselves, are helpless to accomplish anything. Absolute power (power at the top) makes everyone else powerless. In this case competence development can freeze. Empowerment decreases domination and increases the capacity for effective, entrepreneurial action (Cornwall, Perlman, 1990). The basic belief underlying the process of empowerment is that power, if it is shared, can breed more power.

Second, the opportunity to exert own opinion, to make decisions and the encouragement of creativity by rewarding receptiveness to new ideas even they lead to failure fosters innovation and the discovery of new ideas flourish (Juceviciene, Lipinskiene, 2000). Third, as people begin to get skilled and used to having opportunities and acting on them, their confidence and competence grow. (Cornwall, Perlman, 1990). Thus, the belief in self-efficacy enhances. To the employees in the organisations which Cornwall, Perlman (1990) studied, being empowered meant that they had the ability to be effective, and believed in their sense of effectiveness. Thus, competence development becomes more successful.

An organisation becomes capable to respond to new requirements of changing environment. Empowerment is important in creating or maintaining an entrepreneurial organisation capable of responding to new market demands and changing technologies. As such, empowerment serves to stimulate and support innovation, enterprise, and people’s initiatives (Cornwall, Perlman, 1990). This relates with competence development tightly.

Environment presented in the model of Bjurklo and Kardeman (fig. 1) is supposed to be empowering because of the specificity of career development discussions, for instance, mutual evaluation, assessment of current situation in respect of competence relevance to requirement of workplace, it is possible to conclude that here empowerment takes important place. Thus, one of the elements of empowering environment, as I see it, is stage “career development discussion”, which was discussed above.

Thus, in such a way the combined models form new model which highlights the interplay of empowering environment and competence development.

Conclusions

1. Two viewpoints of competence become explicit. First, competence can be determined as knowledge and skills that can be seen in two ways: as possession of individual and as requirements of the job. Second, it can be considered as persons abilities to use the knowledge and skills. Moreover, bearing in mind the dynamic of information as well as knowledge, the dynamic of competence becomes of crucial importance – it should change according to changed requirements of environment, in other words, it should be developed continuously.

2. The core of the concept of empowerment could be seen as the matter of conditions in working environment, which include the level of responsibility, delegation, and autonomy as well as a set of various cognitions shaped by environment. If these conditions are created in organization the empowering environment in which competence development is supposed to be successful is established.

3. The most important advantage of empowering environment is that in empowered organizations, people at all levels, including leaders, are actively engaged in managing themselves. As people begin to get skilled and used to having opportunities and acting on them, their confidence and competence grow. Thus, the belief in self-efficacy enhances. So, it is very important for successful competence development.

References

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KOMPETENCIJAI KAUPTI PALANKI APLINKA

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San tra uka

Kadangi aplinka siandien nuolat keitiasi, organizacijoms būtina vis nauja kompetencija. Savo nuožulius jos reikalaus iš savo darbuotojų. Akivaizdu, kad kiekvieno individo gebėjimas reaguoti į kintančius reikalavimus priklauso nuo jo išgūžų, mokėjimų, žinių, vertibų, požiūrių, o jo aktyvumas ir iniciatyva išnaudoti savo potenciala – nuo organizacijos, kurioje dirba, sandaros, darbo sąlygų, vadovavimo stiliaus ir kt. Kitaip tariant, darbuotojo noras siekti šiandien būtinos kompetencijos priklauso nuo organizacijos aplinkos, nuo to, ar ji skatina tai iniciatyvą.

Nors kompetencijos ir jos kaupimo problemas nagrinėjamos įvairių užsienio šalių autorų darbuose, vis dėlto pasigendama kompetencijos kaupimui įtakos turinčios aplinkos analizės.


Kita grupė mokslininkų kompetenciją apibrėžia kaip įvairius gebėjimus: gebėjimas žinių ir išgūžų pritaikyti į veikloje, gebėjimas pasiekti rezultatų. Pastarasis galé būti veiklos kokybės, produktyvumas, efektyvumas. Šiuo požiūriu augsto lygio kompetenciją rodo konkrečios veiklos rezultatų ir iškeltų tikslų atitikimas. Kuri kurie mokslininkai apibrėždami kompetencijos sąvoką, išski- riai gebėjimą mokytis, veikti nematytose situacijoje ir panaudoti turimas žinius bei kitu, taip pat gebėjimą pri- sitaikyti prie kintančių vertių ir aplinkos.

Akivaizdu, kad kompetenciją kaupiant išgyvint naujų žinių, išgūžų ir gebėjimų. Tai reikšia, kad darbuotojus reikia skatinti įgūdy, įslyginti ir kaupinti būtini išgūžus. Kitaip tariant, reikia kurti tam palanką organizacijos aplinką.

Antrojoje straipsnio dalyje siekiama atsakyti į klausimą, kokia aplinka sudaro šių mokslininkų skatinamosios aplinkos. Tai galetų būti padidinimo skatinimo aplinko aplinką. Taigi šioje straipsnio dalyje atskleidžiama kompetencijos kaupimo skatinimo aplinkoje esmė, akcentuojant šios aplinkos reikšmę.

Moksliškė literatūroje nurodoma, kad skatinamosios aplinkos kūrimas yra svarbus sėkmingo valdymo bruo- žas. Kai kurie mokslininkai teigia, kad skatinimo aplinka yra visuotinės kokybės vadybos, verslo konkurenc- cingumo ir sėkmės raktas. Pagrindinis argumentas, leidžiantis tvirtinti, kad skatinimo aplinka leima sėkmingą kompetencijos kaupimą, yra tas, jog minėta aplinka skatina darbuotojų išspareigotimą, efektyvumą, sinergiją bei suteikia laisvės primidant sprendimus, susijusius su
atliekama veikla, leidžia eksperimentuoti ir ieškoti naujų darbo atlikimo būdų, siekiant geresnių rezultatų. Kartu skatinamojoje aplinkoje žmogus nepaliekamas „vie- nas“, be pagalbos. Čia didžiulė dėmesys skiriamas būtinens įstekliams (materialiniams, informaciniams, žmogiškiesiems), galimybėms ir paramai. Kitas argumentas: tyrimais įrodyta, jog skatinamojo aplinka turi įtakos sėkmingam mokymuisi, vadinasi, ir kompetencijos kaupimui. Remiantis šių tyrimų rezultatais galima teigti, kad skatinamoji aplinka keičia individo požiūrį į mokymąsi ir didina mokymosi motyvaciją.

Skatinamoji aplinka suteikia mokymosi galios, t. y. sukuria sąlygas autonomijai ir atsakomybei už mokymosi būklę, sudaro galimybę kontroluoti savo mokymosi procesą, toleruoti klaidas, akcentuodama jas kaip pamokas ir galimybę iš jų pasimokyti.

Kitas minėtos aplinkos privalumas – jis teikia individo požiūrį į mokymąsi autonomijai, bet ir didina organizacijos „galia“. Nuolat kontroluojami darbuotojai jaučiasi bejegišiai, bijo reikšti savo nuomonę ir taip padaryti klaidų, todėl kompetencijos kaupimas tarsi nevyksta.

