
Measuring Change Orientation as a Key Competence: A Proposed Framework

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Abstract:

Purpose: The article presents the concept of an Integrated Competency Model (ICM) as a basis for examining a group of 756 employees in terms of their readiness to change.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The modern market is constantly changing. Scope and pace of the changes put enormous pressure on employees to be ready for the one. As a result, Change Orientation has become a key competence of a modern employee. Employee's approach to changes determines the effectiveness of its implementation throughout the organization and, as a result, determine if organization is successful or not. The methodology used in the article is based on qualitative questionnaire research aimed at recognizing the respondents' perception of the researched issue.

Findings: The results were discussed in light of both: the basic components of (ICM) – abilities and attitudes, and the components supporting employee development – knowledge, understanding, values and convictions. The results obtained in the study allowed to illustrate the author's concept of measuring the level of employee competence on the example of Change Orientation.

Practical Implications: The considerations presented in the article are based on a critical analysis of literature sources and questionnaire research. As a result, the method of measurement proposed in the article may provide support for the managers in their decisions regarding the support of employee development.

Originality/Value: It can also be the basis for tracking long-term trends in the development of the discussed competence and, as a result, assessing the effectiveness of the implemented development activities to support the one.

Keywords: Change, integrated model of competency, components of competency.

JEL codes: M12, M53, M54,

Paper type: Research article.

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1. Introduction

The popularity of changes that take place in the world of modern organizations makes the issue of their management very current and important. In most approaches to this issue, researchers focus on the manager's perspective – looking for answers on how to manage changes. An interesting and less explored perspective is the issue of how employees' function in a situation of change. How do they approach and deal with changes? A good basis for seeking an answer to this question is the perspective of employee competences, as on the one hand, it give a good picture of the state of competence, and on the other hand, it allow to formulate practical recommendations on how to develop the one.

2. Literature Review

The literature research in the article is presented against the background of the views presented in the literature by selected authors on the perception of understanding employee competencies and the determinants of organizational change processes. The competency model presented in the article was based in particular on the works of Flanagan (1954), White (1959), McClelland (1973), McLagan (1989), Klemp (1980) and Spencer and Spencer (1993). The basis for this approach to the functioning of employees in a situation of change was the research of two American researchers Kriegel and Brandt (1997). The article uses the method of critical analysis and synthesis of other authors' opinions and deductive reasoning.

3. Research Methodology

The article is based on a critical literature review and a questionnaire survey. A research questionnaire² based on the concept of R. Kriegel and D. Brandt was used to identify the manifestation of the levels of the components of analyzed competences.

In the questionnaire respondents declared how much they agreed with statements using a six-point scale, where "6" meant complete agreement with a given statement, and "1" total disagreement with one. To ensure comparability and homogeneous interpretation of the results, the components for which the expected level required a negative answer (I do not agree with the statement) the scales were inverted. This concerned the following components: in relation to skills – risk taking (boldness) and adaptability, and in relation to attitudes – optimism and tolerance to uncertainty.

²The published questionnaire can be found in: E. Brzezińska, and other, 2000. An example of use of the questionnaire can be found in A. Paszkowska-Rogacz, 2004 and A. Stefański and other, 2016.

A group of 756 employees was included in the study³. Researched employees represented organizations located in: Inowroclaw, Katowice, Kielce, Koło, Krakow, Lodz, Poznan, Sopot, Stargard Szczecinski, Warsaw, Wloclawek and Wroclaw. The results were illustrated using the author's integrated competency model.

4. Research Results and Discussion

4.1 The Contemporary Context of Organization Change

Changes have become an inseparable aspect of all activities undertaken in the organization. The one who finds itself better in the new market and economy conditions wins (Masłyk-Musiał, 2003), becoming more competitive, able to maintain and develop his competences, thanks to which organization stands out in their environment (Nizard, 1998). In this perspective, the universality of changes in the functioning of the organization becomes an indisputable fact.

In general, a change occurs when based on the New Dictionary of the Polish Language (2002) we make modifications that change the nature or essence of something, as a result of which it transforms. We can also talk about a change when there is a replacement, substitution of something for something (of the same type), replacement of something or someone with something or whom.

With regard to changes taking place in the organization, the one are transformations occurring between points defined in time, changing the characteristics (properties) and the way the organization operates, regardless of their scope, form, causes and effects (Czermiński *et al.*, 1993). Therefore, a change in the organization can be considered when actions are taken to (Biernok *et al.*, 1984):

- Elimination of unnecessary elements of the organization – functions, activities, job positions, materials, equipment
- Replacing, adapting or modifying the existing solution for better achievement of goal or adaptation to the current needs and conditions – these activities may concern the structure of contractors, materials used, sequence of activities, place of it realization, division of tasks, team structure, equipment used, etc.
- Merging of what has been too fragmented and scattered in the current operation – e.g. combining related tasks, positions, departments and organizational units
- Simplification of too complicated and complex methods of formal communication, through the reconstruction of procedures, document circulation, forms, etc.
- Creating new components of the organization or new relations between the already existing elements.

³A detailed description of the study with an in-depth analysis and additional cross-sections can be found in T. Czaplą, 2020.

From the individual point of view there are few aspects that enforcing need for change. The one is a lifelong learning imperative. It comes from rapid technological and marketplace change that shrinks the useful lifespan of any given skill set, workers will need to shift from acquiring specific skills and credentials to pursuing enduring and essential skills for lifelong learning. The other aspect is concerning the need for shaping own *career path*.

Historically, a career was defined as a relatively stable, predictable set of capabilities that aligned with the needs of an organization and an industry. The last aspect is need for pursuing employee own passion. With any disruptive transition, employee tend to experience fear and stress, generating an impulse to hold on to what has driven success in the past.

But to face the change employee should, instead of just viewing a job as a means to a paycheck, find a way to pursue work that will be truly passionate about. Tapping into kind of passion can shift people from the fear of change to excitement about the opportunity to learn something new and to have a greater impact (Hagel *et al.*, 2017).

4.2 Integrated Competency Model

A commonly accepted formula for defining competencies is to combine three components: knowledge, skills and attitudes. However from a practical point of view – by analyzing how competencies are used in organizations it is possible to divide those components into two general groups – one that can be called “effects” and the second that can be named “sources”.

The practice of using competence shows that only two (out of three) element are directly applied in describing (defining) and assessing competences. These are: abilities (employees skills) and attitudes represented by (in job) their behaviors. These two elements creates the area of effects of the employee competence.

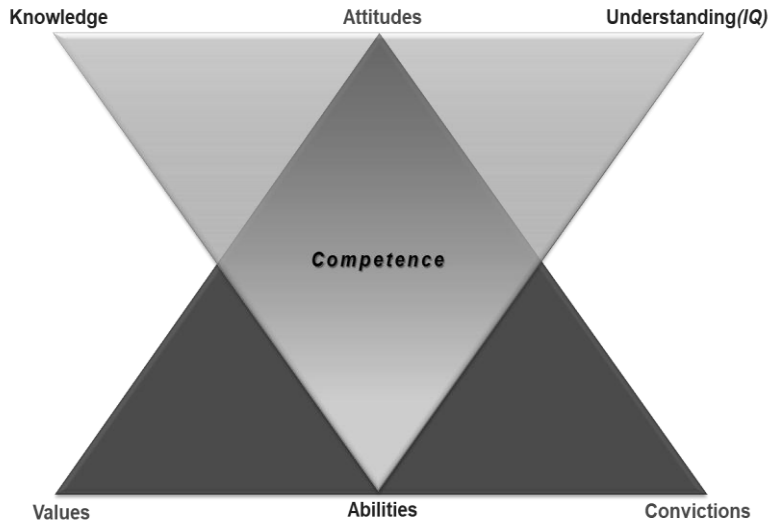
The other important features as employee knowledge, understanding (resulting from professional experience) professed values and convictions creates the area of sources of the competence. This limitation of the basic components (the effect one) to two simplifies the day-to-day application of competencies. At the same time, the superimposition of effects and source elements allows to call this an integrated approach. Such perception of competence is presented in Figure 1.

The Integrated Competency Model is composed of two “triangles”. The first one – that can be called rational – represents abilities, for which sources are: employee’ knowledge and experience. The second – emotional triangle represents attitudes and their sources which they are: values and convictions.

Combination of these two triangles shows a potential scope of the employee

competence. The real competence is being limited by the real “execution” in the daily functioning of employees at work.

Figure 1. Integrated Competency Model – simplified version⁴



Source: Based on Czapla (2011).

4.3 Change Orientation – as an Integrated Competence

The impact of changes on both the organization and the individual is a complex process and multi-faceted. Therefore, from the perspective of an individual, the response to changes takes place in many aspects and levels. To reflect this response it is necessary to use complex models that cover several aspects of the process. The basis for this approach to the functioning of employees in a situation of change may be the research of two American researchers Kriegel and Brandt (1997).

They dealt with the multifaceted analysis of the effectiveness of organizational changes, with particular emphasis on the analysis of the level of readiness (change orientation) of individuals (employees) to change. A research questionnaire consisting of a set of thirty-five statements was developed to identify the levels of individual variables.

According to the logic of the Integrated Competency Model, in order to determine its level, one should focus on two basic variables: the expected abilities to be used in a situation of coping with changes and the expected attitudes that the employee should present in such a situation.

⁴The overall Integrated Competency Model is described in: (Czapla, 211). In the presented model for the needs of competency measurement, dynamic elements and organizational culture (as an environment for the manifestation of competences) were omitted.

Treating functioning in a situation of change as a competence, it is possible to distinguish both key components of abilities and attitudes in it. Based on the concept of Kriegel and Brandt, the abilities include: taking risk (boldness), ingenuity and adaptability, and attitudes – drive (passion), optimism, self-confidence and tolerance to uncertainty.

In particular, these variables concerned, in terms of:

- *Taking risks (boldness)* – is openness to challenges, bold approach to new tasks, breaking routine and stagnation. Work is treated as an adventure full of opportunities to be creative and innovative.
- *Ingenuity* – is the orientation to take advantage of every chance and even a non-obvious possibility, striving to do "something out of nothing". It is the belief that missing resources can always be found and any problem can be solved. It is the belief that there are always many ways to get there.
- *Adaptability* – is situational flexibility, allowing for easy adaptation to changing situations. There are many plans and many variants of action scenarios. At the same time, it is persistence in overcoming failures and treating failures as a learning opportunity.
- *Drive (passion)* – is a type of energy that drives you to act, counteracts fatigue and the feeling of fatigue. It is persistence and enthusiasm and a constant need for action.
- *Optimism* – is the belief in the success of changes and the effectiveness of the actions taken. It is seeing the future as an opportunity for something new, for new opportunities and opportunities that are available and attainable.
- *Self-confidence* – is trust in your own abilities and possibilities. It is a sense of self-esteem, the belief that you are in control of tasks and your functioning in them. It is the strength to look for opportunities and possibilities.
- *Tolerance to uncertainty* – is the acceptance that in the implementation of each plan, new and surprising elements may appear, and that there are not always simple answers. It is patience in carrying out tasks and looking for solutions, it is also prudence in making assessments and making judgments.

The remaining "peaks" of the Integrated Competency Model that provide development guidelines – most often as areas of improvement and elimination of the competency gap, are related to:

- *Knowledge* – knowledge of the rules and logs of the course of change processes. Tools for diagnosing a change situation. Stages and specifics of the functioning of units in a situation of change. The causes of the resistance and ways to deal with it. Risk assessment and its minimizing tools.
- *Understanding* – ability to adapt actions to the situation - correctly

identified stage of change, the nature of a difficult situation, individual (individual) specificity of reacting to changes. Drawing conclusions and formulating logical recommendations.

- *Values* – treating change as an opportunity creating opportunities, as a natural (permanent) element of both the functioning and development of the organization and the functioning and development of an individual. Openness to difference and diversity. Believing that it is better to act than wait for what will bring.
- *Convictions* – an approach that reflects the approach that change is made by the right people, in the right place and at the right time, both for oneself and for other employees and the entire organization. The feeling that better is the enemy of good, and trials and stumbles are opportunities for development and learning.

5. Results of the Research on Employees' Change Orientation Competence

For the entire study population, the average value of the competency components 3,68 – which places it just above the middle of the adopted scale. Only the drive (4,49) ingenuity (4,47) and self-confidence (4,33) visibly exceeded this limit. Close to the middle of the scale was optimism (3,75) and adaptability (3,47).

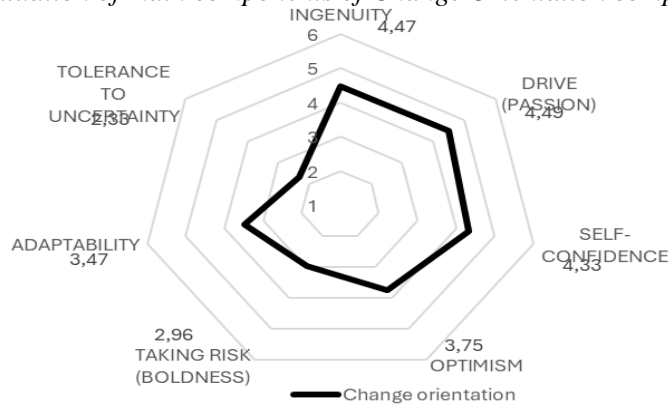
The remaining two components were noticeably below this limit – taking risk (boldness) (2,69) and tolerance to uncertainty that was rated the lowest in the entire study (2,33). The results obtained for the entire sample are presented in Figure 2.

Taking into account the results of the researched variables, the two main components of competences were assessed as follows, abilities (3,63) versus attitudes (3,72). It can be assumed that they were assessed at a similar level.

Although the overall result of the assessment of the components of the researched competence is hardly satisfactory, the fact of such a balance in the assessment of abilities and attitudes can be considered as a good starting position for building the development of this competence.

Overall, the obtained results contradict two stereotypes of how Poles perceive themselves. The first one is the Polish 'hussar' fantasy, to which in the study corresponds the variable: taking risk (boldness). It was assessed significantly below the middle of the scale and below other variables.

The second stereotype is "Polish openness and tolerance to dissimilarity" – the variable representing it in the study was adaptivity (which includes these aspect) that was again assessed visibly below the middle of the scale.

Figure 2. Evaluation of main components of Change Orientation competence

Source: Prepared by the author.

According to the logic of the adopted Integrated Competency Model, the main components – abilities and attitudes allow to assess the level of a given competency. In particular, when the identified competency level is unsatisfactory, the remaining “peaks” from the competency model should be analyzed as a potential source of these discrepancies (understood as the gap between recognized versus expected level). In relation to abilities, such sources of leveling effectiveness are: knowledge and understanding and in relation to attitudes they are: values and convictions.

The analysis of the level of these variables allows to understand the reasons (sources) of the observed levels of basic variables – abilities and attitudes, and as a result to find ways to develop them to eliminate the identified gaps.

In the study of competences: Change orientation, an experts panel was used in order to provide an in-depth analysis of the sources of the identified levels of basic components of researched competence. The panel was composed of professionals who work as business coaches and consultants dealing on a daily basis with people operating in situations of various changes.

Experts were asked to evaluate a number of variables that make up the above-mentioned areas of sources of competence – knowledge, understanding, values and convictions.

When assessing individual issues, the experts used a scale from 6 – which meant a “very high” level of evaluation, to 1 – which meant a “very low” level of evaluation of a given issue. They could also choose the “hard to say” – those answers weren’t included in results. In particular, experts assessed the level of employees related to those shown below.

In terms of knowledge, the assessment concerned: Knowledge of the principles and logic of the course of change processes; Tools for diagnosing a change situation;

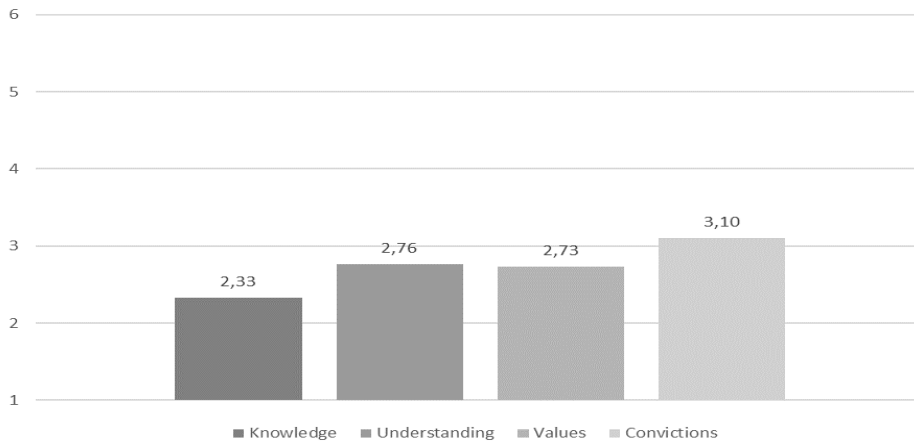
Stages and specificity of the functioning of units in the situation of change; Reasons for change resistance and how to deal with it; Risk assessment and minimization tools of the one.

In terms of understanding, the assessment concerned: Correct recognition of the stage of change; Correct recognition of the nature of a difficult situation; Individual specificity of reacting to changes by other people; Drawing conclusions and formulating logical recommendations.

In terms of values, the assessment concerned: Treating change as an chance that creates opportunities; Treating change as a natural (permanent) element of the functioning and development of the organization; Treating change as a natural (permanent) element of one's own development; Openness to variety and diversity; Faith that action is better than waiting for what will bring fate.

In terms of convictions, the assessment concerned: That change is made by the right people, in the right place, at the right time (for oneself); That change is made by the right people, in the right place, at the right time (for other employees and associates); That change is made by the right people, in the right place, at the right time (for the entire organization as an institution); That openness to differences and diversity is essential; That the better is the enemy of the good; That trials and stumbles are opportunities for development and learning. The results of evaluation presents Figure 3.

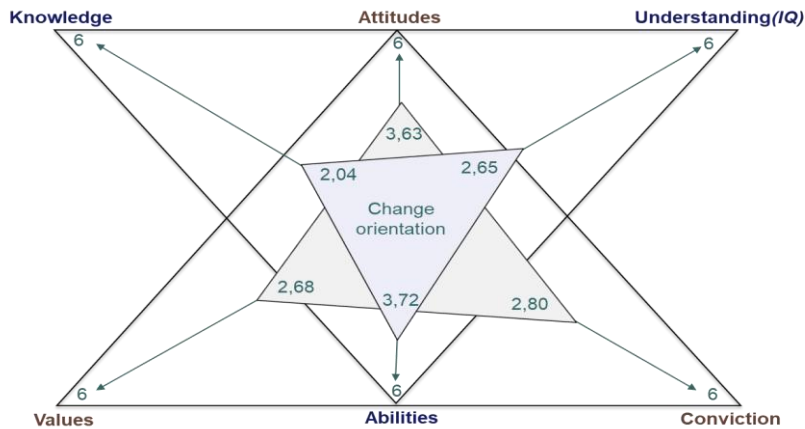
Figure 3. Evaluation of secondary components of researched competence



Source: Prepared by the author.

Combining both aspects of the examined competency – the results and (their) sources, it is possible to obtain a comprehensive – integrated – image of the employees' orientation towards changes. Such visualization shows Figure 4.

Figure 4. Integrated model of competence Change Orientation – empirical verification.



Source: Prepared by the author.

As it is seen, the researched competence has a large development potential, that camming from the gap between expected (potential) level of the components (that is “6” in scope of used scale) and recognized one. The results obtained in the research in light of the challenges faced by organizations toward the contemporary market challenges cannot be regarded as satisfactory.

Such a level of Change Orientation among employees, also creates a huge challenge for people managing changes in the organization. Those who are supposed to implement changes are clearly not eager to do so. The open attitude to changes awaited in the contemporary world is not reflected in the research results, which should be considered disturbing.

6. Conclusions, Proposals, Recommendations

Comparing both studies (dedicated to “effects” and “results” components), it can be notice the convergence of the critical assessment made by experts with the low level of the evaluation of two main components of examined competency (abilities and attitudes). The analysis of results allows to formulate a supposition that the surveyed employees approach their functioning in change in a largely intuitive manner and (as indicated by experts in particular in their comments) more and more often show fatigue with changes.

As a result, all components intended to support the shaping of the expected abilities and attitudes of employees in their functioning in the situation of changes require strengthening. In order to develop this competence within employees, organizations should not only undertake activities aimed at the development of basic components – abilities and attitudes, but also take care to strengthen the developmental components.

This will allow to build a specific “infrastructure” supporting the functioning of employees. Such an approach will also allow to move away from the "crisis" perception of employees as an element of change – manifested in the attitude: I will take care of the employee when I recognize resistance to change on his part. In the long perspective, such an approach may shape the proper treatment of changes – as a permanent element of the everyday functioning of employees, guaranteeing high efficiency of operations, regardless of what and how many changes they are dealing with.

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