

# THE ASSESSMENT OF MANAGERIAL COMPETENCIES IN A PUBLIC ORGANISATION – THE EXAMPLE OF CUSTOMS SERVICE

*Maria Jabłońska-Wołoszyn\**

## Abstract

**Background.** The article delineates competency requirements which have to be faced by contemporary managers in business and their application in a public organisation through the example of the Customs Service.

**Research aim.** The presentation of the process of changes' implementation in the scope of management within the Customs Service based on the change of criteria used for the assessment of managerial staff competencies.

**Methodology.** Field work and participant observation of the assessment process of the core managerial staff of the Customs Service by Assessment Centre method.

**Key findings.** Public organisations can apply criteria and methods of assessment normally used in business to administer the managerial staff.

**Keywords:** public organisations, manager in a public organisation, managerial competencies, Assessment Centre, competencies management.

## INTRODUCTION

One of the symptoms of change taking place in public organisations is the transposition of business management rules onto the work of public servants. A good example is the concept of New Public Management (Kozuch, 2011), which puts emphasis on work rationalisation, transparency of procedures as well as the subjection of public organisation's activities to the expectations of clients. It highlights the change of the management concept from the 'white-collar' to the 'client-oriented' one as well as the change of the perception of the managerial staff

---

\* National Defence University. E-mail: maria.woloszyn@wp.pl

which, similarly to the business world, is assessed on the basis of goal achievement.

The aim of this article is to present the practical implementation of the concept of a contemporary manager in a public organisation via a competency audit, in accordance with the above requirements. The author begins with the presentation of the chosen competency criteria which have been defined for managers as the vital ones from the perspective of the stakeholders of business organisations. Secondly, the author presents the challenges pertaining to the implementation of the new strategy into the Customs Service and the transposition of the strategy onto the profile of managerial competencies. Next, the author shows the results of the managerial competency audit as well as the conclusions stemming from it in the form of recommendations for further development of managers.

## **MANAGER IN A PUBLIC ORGANISATION – NEW CHALLENGES**

According to the concept of New Public Management, a director in a public organisation is a manager responsible for the realisation of managerial functions. Thus, he/she should be equipped with the ability to plan, make decisions, motivate the staff, and control the available resources and the achieved results (Penc, 2007).

Looking for the benchmark to define the requirements set for the managers in public organisations, out of numerous practical and theoretical recommendations it was decided to choose the one which most of all takes into consideration the expectations of stakeholders of the contemporary organisation. Gołębiowska, pointing to the research into business organisations which applied a systemic approach to the assessment and the development of the competencies of their managers, presents the following factors determining the effectiveness of a contemporary manager, which are important for the stakeholders (Gołębiowska, 2013):

1. Personal skills: development and perfection of self-awareness; management of one's own time; emotions' control in difficult and stressful situations, innovative and creative approach to problems and their solving, observing moral and ethical rules, development of new personal skills, creative usage of expert

- knowledge, innovativeness, providing and sharing the acquired knowledge and experience, presenting oneself as an authority figure and the creation of a personal image.
2. Interpersonal skills: good communication and interpersonal contacts; enlistment of employees and placing them into the organisation's structure as well as the implementation of effective personnel changes; fashioning of a proper report with the subordinates and partners; organising team work and making group decisions; passing information and effective motivation of the subordinates to work efficiently and effectively; acquiring knowledge, experience and influence at managerial work; delegation of managerial eligibility; development of the assessment of employees; control; ability to listen; early conflict detection and its management.
  3. Professional skills: creation of a vision and strategy as well as its realisation; focus on a balanced organisation's development, experience in teams' management; formal education and continual self-study; discerning and accepting of risk; ability to make decisions and business orientation; venturesome thinking and acting; social conscience/empathy; leadership; focus on changes, and change management.

The above-presented criteria are reflected in a training material of the Chancellery of the Prime Minister about management in public organisations under the title: *Nowoczesne przywództwo w organizacji publicznej na rzecz zmian – rola wyższych stanowisk w służbie cywilnej*, realised on training for the managerial staff in the civil service. There is a special emphasis put on the challenges that the civil managers must face in connection with change management in an administrative, macro-social perspective as well as in the scope of team building and motivation.

## **THE LATEST REQUIREMENTS LAID DOWN FOR MANAGERS IN THE CUSTOMS SERVICE**

The Customs Service is a good example of the change of perception of the role of a manager where the key factor which contributed to the change of expectations concerning managers was Poland's accession to the European Union. Except the changes in the scope of the allocation

of authorisation, competencies as well as the internal structure, the following areas of strategic goals have been determined: effectiveness and efficiency of the organisation's functioning, competencies and engagement of customs officers and employees, cooperation with the external environment (Regulation of the Ministry of Finance, 2010). As it stems from the document presenting the strategy of Customs Service functioning for the years 2010–2015, the Balanced Scorecard (BSC) was chosen as the methodology to determine the goals and ways of their achievement. This is one of the latest concepts of management in public organisations (Kozuch, 2011), which supports the process of management in the scope of planning, implementation, monitoring, and control of the strategy realisation (Kaplan & Norton, 2001). The objectives and indicators of particular BSC perspectives within the Customs Service were directly interrelated with the following questions: How should we be perceived by the clients to realise our vision? Which internal processes should be perfected for the clients to be satisfied? How to preserve the ability of change and the improvement of effectiveness to realise our vision?

The above changes exerted a significant influence on the expectations concerning the managerial staff both in the scope of new tasks' realisation as well as managerial skills. A manager in the Customs Service had to face the realisation of goals which definitely alluded to the contemporary business challenges (Regulation of the Ministry of Finance, 2010):

- the improvement of the efficiency and the effectiveness of the organisation's functioning e.g. implementation of business process orientation including improvement, optimisation, and standardisation of processes; improvement of internal communication and cooperation;
- the perfection of competencies and the engagement of customs officers and employees e.g. improvement of customs officers' and employee's competencies, perfection of anticorruption programme;
- cooperation with the external environment e.g. improvement of cooperation with the business world, Eastern neighbours, services of other countries.

A strategic initiative, stemming from the best practice concerning the integration of personnel function with the above organisational goals, was to implement a competence model which allows for designing

HR management tools providing for the core qualities of employees and the organisation (Sienkiewicz, 2013).

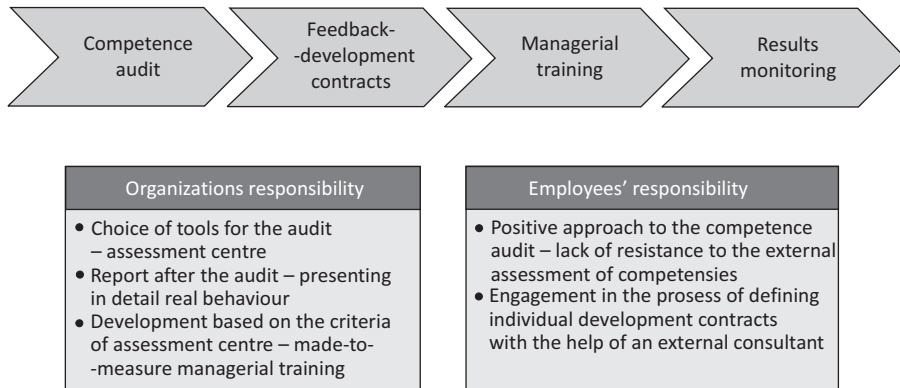
The preparation of the competence model in the Customs Service was carried out in accordance with the approach oriented on the employee (Regulation of the Ministry of Finance, 2010), which recommends defining the qualities of a unit which constitute the basis for effective performance and behaviour at work. Competencies within the Customs Service were defined as: “measurable personal characteristics of an employee entailing: knowledge, abilities, attitudes, a social role, predisposition, values, and motives” (Internal documents of the Ministry of Finance, 2014). In the process of their creation the following instruments were used: the examination of Customs Service organisational culture; the analysis of organisational documents: the Strategy of Customs Service operation for the years 2010–2015+, 3I Customs Service from modernisation to innovation, the Code of Customs Service officers’ ethics, Polish Customs Service anticorruption programme for the years 2010–2013+, the Act on Customs Service; publication of strategic interviews with the chief of the Customs Service as well as with chosen representatives of the managerial staff of the Customs Service; expert panels with the superiors and subordinates calibrating the scope of particular competencies and the level of their achievement. The competency model (Table 1) attained as a result of the above activities included the following competencies required at posts connected with managerial subordination.

As it is envisaged above, the competencies are mostly interrelated with the requirements set for managers in public organisations. The competence criteria were presented to exert influence on the effectiveness of managers through information about the ways of behaviour which contribute to the achievement of goals set by the Customs Service. The implementation of behavioural indicators to the assessment of managers aimed at the evening of criteria used to assess the results of work based on the legalism of decision making by activities which confirm readiness to meet the challenges awaiting the Customs Service. In order to implement the competence model, the business process perspective was adopted based on a reliable assessment of competence gaps of the core managers, designing a made-to-measure development programme as well as the assessment of the results of development activities after one year (Figure 1).

**Table 1.** Managerial competencies in the Customs Service

Competence name	Definition
Motivation	Ability to engage the employees in the realisation of the organisation's goals, assessment of attitudes, behaviour and the level of task achievement, as well as encouraging subordinates to work better and more effectively and constant improvement of knowledge and skills with the use of proper tools.
Delegation of tasks	Giving employees certain tasks with a possibility of transferring liabilities which belong to the scope of the superior's activity; the ability of making subordinates do the given task as expected. This is also the ability to give orders aiming at the realisation of tasks in line with the accepted standards through the eligibility connected with the occupied post, under the condition that it is used properly and for the sake of the realisation of the organisation's goals.
Managerial bravery	Firm and consistent activity, responsibility for the made decisions, not succumbing to pressure, in case of faulty decisions this is a way to correct the direction of activities, ability to admit to mistakes as well as reasoning to any decisions made; it also means the implementation of changes even if they are not popular.
Leadership and team building	Activity focused on team building for the sake of effective tasks realisation, based on the atmosphere of trust, safety and bounds within the team through friendly and open communication, tolerance of differences in opinion.
Effective communication	Ability to communicate and present one's arguments orally and in writing in a clear way as well as the ability to listen actively and to understand the utterances of other people. This is also the ability of auto-presentation in public presentations.
Resistance to stress	Effective operation in stressful circumstances, such as overwork, time pressure, obstacles or risk; ability to keep emotions under control and forbearing from negative reactions in difficult situations – in face of e.g. provocation, resistance, hostility of others, or in case of working under stress even for a long time.
Strategic thinking (only for higher managerial staff)	Ability to set long-term, real goals, modelling the organisation on the basis of future requirements; apt analysis of the presence, ability to predict the future situations and their influence on the functioning of the organisation as well as looking for solutions in case of such events; constructive approach to the presently used procedures and courage to suggest changes.

Source: Internal material of the Department of the Customs Service, *Model kompetencji Służby Celnej*, duplicated typescript, 2014.



**Figure 1.** Business process approach to the development of managers on the basis of the competence model in the Customs Service

Source: own work.

Business process approach to the development of managers was one of the stages of the realisation of strategic initiative in the Customs Service in the form of the implementation of an integrated system of human resources management (Regulation of the Ministry of Finance, 2010). The role of the competence model in the Customs Service was to support the recruitment process, assessment, training, and development which is definitely highlighted by business practice, which recommends to integrate the personnel function on the basis of competence criteria (Jamka, 2011). This solution brings benefit to the organisation in the form of combining the key characteristics of the employees and the organisation from the perspective of behavioural results – forms of behaviour supporting the realisation of goals.

## THE RESULTS OF A MANAGERIAL COMPETENCE AUDIT IN THE CUSTOMS SERVICE

The starting point for the development of the managerial staff in the Customs Service was the assessment of the real level of the possessed competencies in the context of the anticipated profile.

There were 40 Directors of Customs Chambers and Heads of Customs Offices – 7 women and 33 men chosen for the competencies check-up. It was decided that it was a representative group for the level of management being responsible for the realisation of the organisation's

strategic goals, since 39 of the people subject to the research had work experience at a managerial post of 5-8 years and one of them of over 20 years. The assessment was carried out in August and September of 2014.

The following managerial competencies were chosen for the assessment: orientation of the organisation's goals achievement, motivation, leadership and team building, and managerial bravery. The assessment reflected the level of competencies acquisition in the Customs Service according to the following scale:

1. Is aware of the competencies.
2. Has the necessary knowledge for a self-reliant task realisation.
3. Has an extensive level of knowledge and abilities due to the possessed experience.
4. Is a mentor in the scope of a given competence.

The competence audit was carried out through Assessment Centre, a method with a standardised procedure, which guaranteed high quality assessment (Fryczyńska & Jabłońska-Wołoszyn, 2008). The decision to apply the method for the assessment of competencies was fully grounded since the procedure is the result of extensive research and analysis with a full acceptance of the professional environment and scientists as far as competencies assessment is concerned (Guidelines and Ethical Considerations for Assessment Center Operations, 2009). According to all the standards, the Assessment Centre (Thornton, 2011) provides for: the analysis of the work post through the competencies model which determines the dimension or variables, many techniques of assessment are used in order to acquire reliable information about the person subject to the research, the techniques of assessment entail simulations of professional situations and the assessment is done by a few assessors who are well-prepared for the task. In accordance with the above, competencies assessment of managers in the Customs Service was carried out by independent and objective assessors (an external company chosen through a competition) with the use of the following assessment techniques:

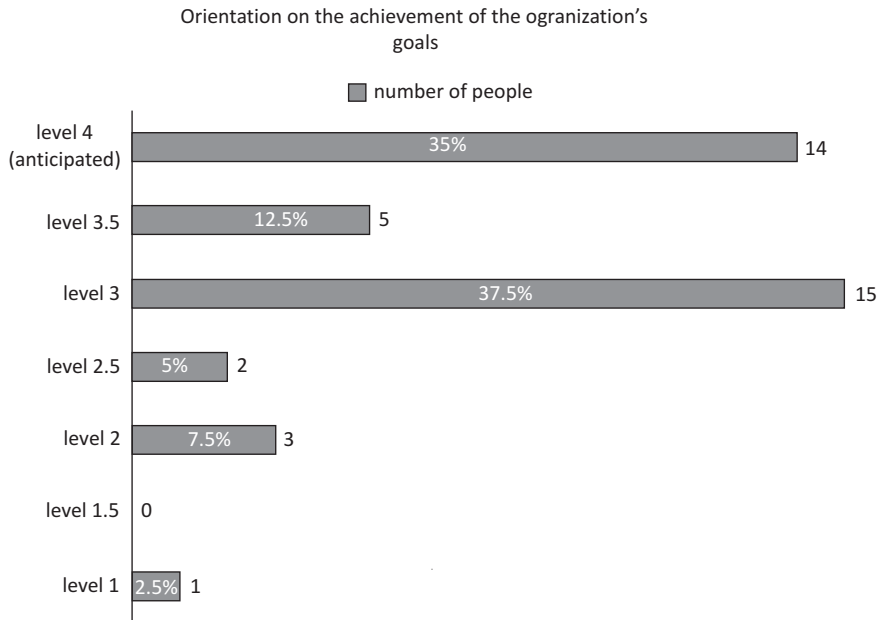
- group tasks – group discussion;
- individual tasks – in-basket with a presentation;
- individual task – meeting with subordinates;
- interview based on competencies.

Reference to a business perspective was achieved by the preparation of tasks for the assessment in such a way, so as they referred on the



one hand to the real managerial environment and on the other hand they took into consideration the possible cooperation with market entities and reflected the organisation on the border of the business world and a public organisation.

Below, there is a presentation of the results of Customs Service managers' assessment.



**Chart 1.** Competence assessment – Orientation on the achievement of the organisation's goals

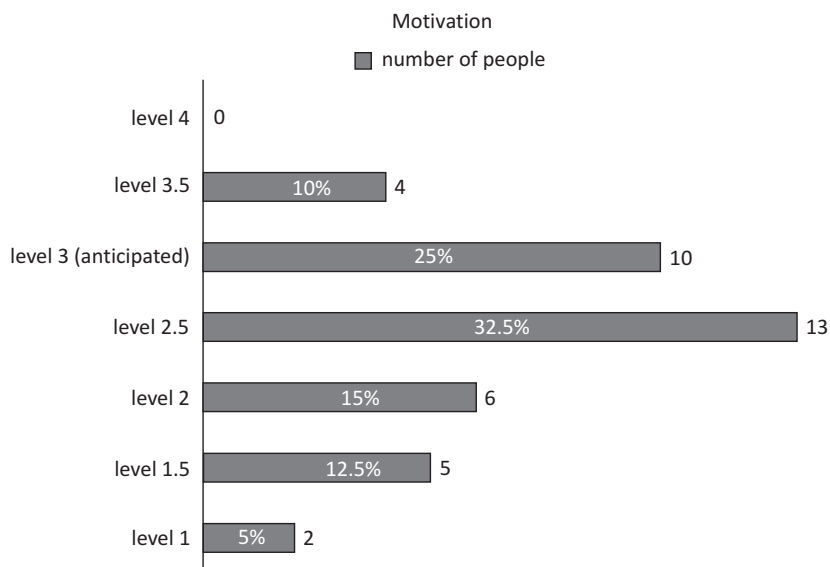
Source: Internal material of the Department of Customs Service, Results of the Competence Audit, duplicated typescript, 2014 .

The distribution of results shows (chart 1) that over 1/3 of participants (35%) is located on the expected level of competence (level 4). Over half of the participants (51%) attained level 3 or 3.5 and only 14% of the participants achieved a level below level three.

The assessment revealed that the goals set for the participants were understood correctly. Some of the participants found with ease such information as: financial results, optimisation of costs, high standards of client attendance which proves commercial awareness, evinced in a public organisation. A great majority of the participants felt responsible for the goals set for realisation and determined the ways of their

achievement. The people subject to the assessment presented ways of operational activity to achieve the final effect which is a positive phenomenon for further modelling heading for business awareness.

Some of the participants, who achieved lower results, failed to present advanced solutions, leaving them on the general level of future operations. During group discussion they showed a limited activity in the realisation of goals. Sometimes, they presented closed attitudes, being conservative as observers. The presented solutions, as operations plans, were not at the expected level of detailedness. They lacked alternative solutions, which would take into consideration e.g. the level of using the possessed resources, time, and knowledge.



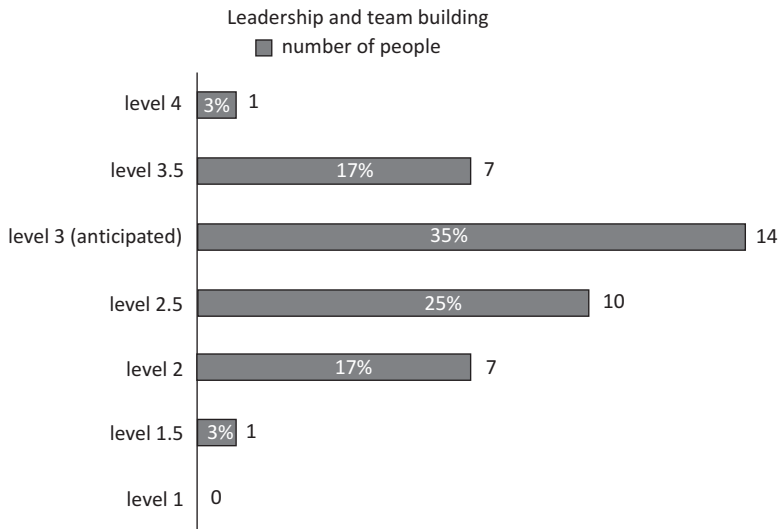
**Chart 2.** Competence assessment – Motivation

Source: Internal material of the Department of Customs Service, Results of the Competence Audit, duplicated typescript, 2014.

As it is shown in the chart 2, most participants (65%) attained results below the expected level, it is worth to emphasise that it also includes 17% of people who revealed serious competence deficits in the scope of motivation (results below level 2).

Participants, who achieved the expected results, showed skills connected with motivation mostly presenting knowledge concerning the available motivation tools and the ability of their adequate application.

People with results below the expected level of competence mostly revealed difficulties in the search for new, more individualised motivation tools, more adjusted to the situation of the organisation. The participants also remotely used such factors as the atmosphere of mutual trust and security, rewarding and praising for the achievements and good results, encouragement to act and the increase of the subordinates' belief that they can achieve better results as the elements increasing motivation. One can notice here gaps in the ability of effective communication as well as a lack of openness for the arguments of the opposition. Some of the participants also had difficulty in providing a specific, constructive feedback aiming at the correctness of behaviour and activity. The people also failed to undertake activities in order to recognise the employees' needs and to adjust motivation tools to the needs. The examination of motivation competency revealed the imperfection in the ability to listen openly and accept constructive argumentation.



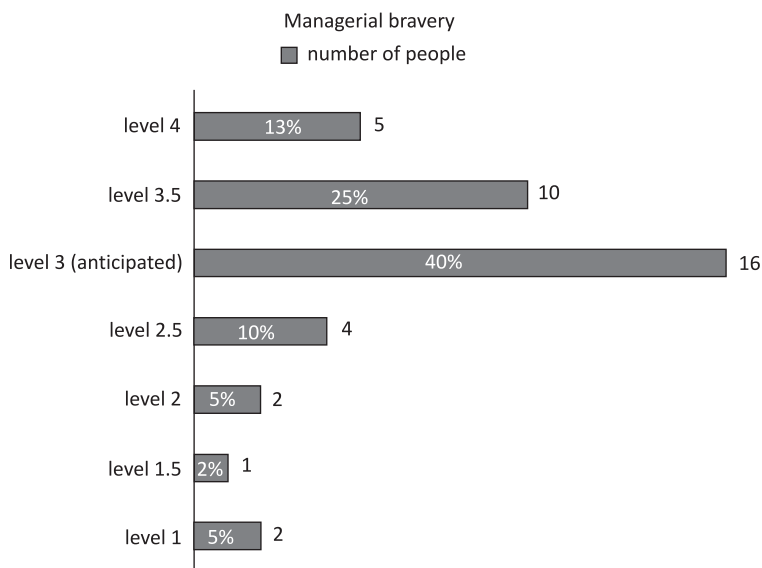
**Chart 3.** Competence assessment – Leadership and team building

Source: Internal material of the Department of Customs Service, Results of the Competence Audit, duplicated typescript, 2014.

As the above graph indicates (chart 3), almost half of the participants (45%) achieved results below the expected level. It is worth to emphasise that it includes 20% of people who revealed a significant competence deficit in the scope of leadership and team building (results below

level 2). Within this competence, the participants who presented skills exceeding the anticipated level, focused mainly on support gaining and the engagement of the managerial staff in the realisation of the suggested activities. It was effective due to building of the authority of a manager stemming from a clear description of the goals, chances, and threats, as well as making firm decisions.

While the participants, whose assessment was below the anticipated level, had difficulties mostly with the adjustment of the management style to the situation and the people. They lacked some skills pertaining to setting goals, criteria of activities, and the diagnosis of the potential of people/ team to set certain roles and tasks. In this group it was possible to spot the tendency to be an administrator of the team and the transmitter of decisions rather than a leader taking care of the team and its efficiency. It is obvious that the foregoing model of management adopted in a public organisation resulted in a serious deficit.



**Chart 4.** Competence assessment – Managerial bravery

Source: Internal material of the Department of Customs Service, Results of the Competence Audit, duplicated typescript, 2014.

The distribution of results shows (chart 4) that a huge part of the participants (40%) achieved the expected level of competence (level 3) or revealed an even higher level (38%). A slight number of participants

(12%) presented a significant deficit in the scope of managerial bravery (results below level 2).

In the process of assessment it was possible to notice that most participants did not have difficulty with decision making, based on the available data and information – although sometimes they remained on some level of generalisation. Most people presented a balance between the analysis and activity, which means that they devoted enough time for the analysis of the available information and decision making in the adequate time. People who achieved higher results than the expected ones were very determined to implement difficult changes, taking full responsibility for their actions, clearly presented to their subordinates both the benefits and difficulties stemming from the changes as well as engaged the subordinate team in constructive operations. While among people whose results fell slightly below the anticipated level, one could notice a deficit mostly in the scope of taking full responsibility for the made decisions (hiding behind top-down decisions) as well as in the area of clear and firm communication of decisions. The people had a problem with keeping a balance between the analysis and operation – there were individuals who spent too much time doing a fingertip analysis, which made it impossible to take all the necessary decisions in the limited time. Such forms of behaviour reveal a lack of operational experience, or they might stem from individual traits of character.

## CONCLUSION

Taking into consideration the requirements set for contemporary managers in business organisations, a group of 40 managers of the Customs Service appears to have a fair potential and simultaneously significant development needs. The approach of the participants themselves to the research showed a positive attitude to the application of novel tools for the assessment of employees' competence potential – during the research positive reactions were noticed. The participants linked their participation in the research and the results' usage with the involvement and engagement in the duties performed on an everyday basis and changes within the organisation.

The average calculated from the competencies for the whole group leads to a conclusion that the strongest competencies, namely those which correspond with the expected level, entail: managerial bravery

as well as leadership, and team building. The poorest results were achieved in the scope of motivation – within this competency the smallest number of people presented skills at the expected level.

Probably, this is the result of the specific character of public organisations which on an everyday basis put emphasis on the achievement of the set goals, as well as making effective, but often very difficult decisions both concerning the merits as well as personnel ones. In the specific nature of the Customs Service, the usage of soft managerial tools is not given proper priority, it can even prove a weaknesses of some managers.

The above example illustrates the limitations in the use of the best business practice in managerial competencies in the scope of: exerting influence on employees by methods recommended for knowledge-based organisations, the analysis of employees individual preferences and the adjustment of methods for enhancing engagement through motivation stemming from the employee – superior relations.

## REFERENCES

- Fryczyńska, M. & Jabłońska-Wołoszyn, M. (2008). *Praktyczny przewodnik rozwoju zawodowego pracowników*. Warszawa: Placet, 68–75.
- Gołębiewska, E. (2013). Rola kadry menedżerskiej w kształtowaniu zrównoważonego rozwoju organizacji jutra. *Przedsiębiorczość i Zarządzanie*, XIV(12), 35–37.
- Guidelines and Ethical Considerations for Assessment Center Operations (2009). *International Journal of Selection and Assessment*, 17(3), 243–254, <http://www.assessmentcenters.org/Assessmentcenters/media/2002/2009EthicalGuidelines.pdf> (access: 4.02.2011).
- Internal material of the Department of Customs Service (of 21.05.2010). Strategia działania Służby Celnej na lata 2010–2015, Attachment to the Regulation of the Ministry of Finance, 9, 10.
- Internal material of the Department of the Customs Service (2014). Model kompetencji Służby Celnej, duplicated manuscript.
- Jamka, B. (2011). *Czynnik ludzki we współczesnym przedsiębiorstwie: zasób czy kapitał?* Warszawa: Oficyna Wolters Kluwers.
- Kaplan, R. & Norton, D. (2011). *Strategiczna karta wyników. Jak przełożyć strategię na działanie*. Warszawa: Wydawnictwo Naukowe PWN.
- Koźuch, B. & Koźuch, A. (eds.) (2011). Usługi publiczne, organizacja i zarządzanie. *Monografie i Studia Instytutu Spraw Publicznych Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego*, 130.

- Kozuch, B. (2011). Skuteczne współdziałanie organizacji publicznych i pozarządowych, *Monografie i Studia Instytutu Spraw Publicznych Uniwersytetu Jagiellońskiego*, 32.
- KPRM. *Nowoczesne przywództwo w organizacji publicznej na rzecz zmian – rola wyższych stanowisk w służbie cywilnej* [https://dsc.kprm.gov.pl/sites/default/files/skrypt-\\_gamma.pdf](https://dsc.kprm.gov.pl/sites/default/files/skrypt-_gamma.pdf) (access: 20.04.2016).
- Penc, J. (2007). Pojęcie i zadania menedżera. In: E. Jędrych (ed.), *Zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi dla menedżerów średniego szczebla*. Warszawa: Oficyna Wolters Kluwer.
- Sienkiewicz, Ł. (eds.) (2013). *Zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi w oparciu o kompetencje. Perspektywa uczenia się przez całe życie*. Warszawa: Instytut Badań Edukacyjnych.
- Thornton, G. (2011). Fifty years on: The ongoing reciprocal impact of science and practice on the assessment center method. In: N. Povah, G. Thornton (eds.), *Assessment Centres and Global Talent Management*. Burlington: Gower Publishing Company.

## OCENA KOMPETENCJI MENEDŻERSKICH W ORGANIZACJI PUBLICZNEJ – PRZYKŁAD SŁUŻBY CELNEJ

### Abstrakt

**Tło badań.** Artykuł przedstawia wymagania kompetencyjne stawiane współczesnym menedżerom w biznesie i ich zastosowanie w organizacji publicznej na przykładzie służby celnej.

**Cel badań.** Zaprezentowanie praktycznego wdrożenia zmian w zarządzaniu w służbie celnej, których podstawą była zmiana kryteriów oceny kompetencji kadry menedżerskiej.

**Metodologia.** Badania terenowe i obserwacja uczestnicząca procesu oceny kluczowej kadry menedżerskiej w służbie celnej metodą Assessment Center.

**Kluczowe wnioski.** Organizacje publiczne mogą stosować kryteria i metody oceny stosowane w biznesie do zarządzania kadrami menedżerską.

**Słowa kluczowe:** organizacje publiczne, menedżer w organizacji publicznej, kompetencje menedżerskie, Assessment Center, zarządzanie kompetencjami.