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MANAGERIAL COMPETENCIES OF MUNICIPAL AUTHORITIES

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Purpose: Key managerial competencies required for effective municipal governance remain insufficiently explored in the literature. The aim of this paper is to develop a practical profile of the managerial competencies of local government authorities at the municipal level.
Design/methodology/approach: To achieve the research objective, data were collected from secondary sources (desk research), primary sources (field research), and the authors' own empirical studies, including surveys, observations, and interviews. The study involved 15 municipal mayors (wójtowie) and 216 councillors representing 15 rural municipalities located in the Małopolska Province, Poland.
Findings: Based on self-assessment, the respondents identified a set of key managerial competencies essential for exercising authority and managing municipal affairs effectively. The findings indicate the existence of both theoretical and empirical gaps within the field of management and quality sciences concerning the development of a comprehensive competency model for local government authorities.
Research limitations/implications: The research process was constrained by a limited understanding of, and reluctance to participate in, scientific studies among some mayors and councillors. Future research should therefore emphasize direct contact with respondents and provide clear explanations regarding the purpose, reliability, and importance of the research process in order to increase participation and data quality.
Practical implications: The identification of key managerial competencies among local government authorities may contribute to: (1) increasing awareness of competency requirements among candidates seeking municipal leadership positions; (2) establishing competency standards for local government authorities; and (3) facilitating competency assessment, including the identification of competency gaps and surpluses.
Social implications: The issue of managerial competencies among local government authorities has received relatively limited attention in management and quality sciences. Nevertheless, these competencies exert a substantial influence on society, residents' quality of life, social attitudes, local development, and public policy. Consequently, the managerial competencies of municipal authorities should be continuously identified, assessed, and developed to ensure their effective and efficient application in local governance.
Originality/value: The principal contribution of this study lies in the development of a catalogue of key managerial competencies for local government authorities, providing a valuable addition to the existing body of knowledge in the field.
Keywords: competencies, managerial competencies, public manager.
Category of the paper: Research paper.

1. Introduction

Today's organizations, both business and public, need professional managers who are able not only to properly understand the processes taking place within them, but also to manage them efficiently and effectively. Over the years, municipal governance has also changed. Heads of the commune and councillors have moved from administration to management, which requires them to be competent managers. Unfortunately, the current electoral mechanism ensures an inflow of people, not all of whom are professionals. Very often, too many amateurs can be found among those exercising authority in municipal self-government. This affects the quality of management, which is characterized by numerous inconsistencies and superficial actions, while wrong decisions bring not only economic consequences, but also social ones, which are strategic in nature.

2. The Concept, Dimensions and Structure of Competencies

Managing a modern organization is a difficult and complex process. It requires a professional management staff responsible for planning, organizing, motivating, and controlling human, material, financial, and information resources. As research indicates, the development of an organization depends to a significant extent on the quality of managerial functions performed by those in charge. In turn, the quality of managers' actions is determined by many factors, among which competencies are key (Torfing, Bentzen, Winsvold, 2022).

The issue of competencies has become the subject of interest for various research streams and scientific disciplines. The interdisciplinary nature of competencies significantly hinders their methodological and systematic definition and understanding, which is why, despite the passage of years, there is still no consensus as to what competencies actually are. Initially, competencies meant possessing formal powers, duties, and responsibilities resulting from the employee's position in an organization. In Poland, competencies gained popularity in the field of people management with the advent of the new millennium. However, the origins of the concept date back to the 1970s, when D. McClelland (McClelland, 1998) sought the causes of employees' success in organizations and the principles that should be followed in order to conduct recruitment properly. An important contribution to defining competencies was also made by T.W. Schultz (Schultz, 1971), who studied traits, referring to them as competencies rather than personality characteristics. M. Armstrong (Armstrong, 2004) argued that competence implies the ability to transfer what people understand and know into different contexts, that is, into various aspects of life and work. Since that time, various views on competencies have emerged, focusing on how to conceptualize the characteristic features of

employees necessary for the proper performance of professional activities and the achievement of success.

In the 1980s, particular interest in competencies was observed in the field of management sciences. This was influenced by the growing complexity of the functioning of entities on the market, the increasing multifunctionality of employees, the need for professional reorientation, and employee polyvalence (Muringa, Shava, 2024). It was then established that competencies relating to a person are employee attributes such as knowledge, skills, attitudes, values, and other characteristics that allow for increased efficiency and effectiveness in task performance. Competencies defined in this way may refer both to a job position, a performed function, a fulfilled role, and to the person carrying out work in that position, performing a particular function, or fulfilling a given role.

In order to systematize the structure of the concept of competencies and analyze its components, it was necessary to classify the category under discussion on the basis of the available literature. Of the 53 analyzed definitions of competencies presented by Polish and foreign authors, almost 68% include knowledge as a component of competencies, nearly 70% include skills, and 38% include attitudes and values. Experience is considered less important by authors, as it is indicated in about 21% of definitions, as is personality (23% of definitions). Meanwhile, 80% of the concepts of competence mention other attributes important from the perspective of individual authors (Hałat, 2024). The following dimensions of competencies may therefore be distinguished:

- theoretical (knowledge): what a given person knows and what education they have,
- practical (skills): what and how a given person is able to do,
- behavioral/social (attitudes, values): how a given person behaves at work, how they communicate with others, and what approach they have to cooperation.

There are multiple approaches to competencies and various ways of classifying them. In organizational management, managerial competencies are of the greatest importance, being identified with the key characteristics of a manager who performs their work very well. Many authors seek answers to the question of what competencies managers should possess. Taking into account the most frequently distinguished components (knowledge, skills, attitudes and values), an analysis of the subject literature was carried out and, from among 28 definitions of managerial competencies, several universal components of managerial competencies most frequently mentioned by authors were identified, including: teamwork skills (25/28 authors), communication skills (21/28 authors), managerial skills (18/28 authors), leadership skills (18/29 authors), results orientation (16/28 authors), decision-making skills (12/28 authors), problem-solving skills (9/28 authors), professional and specialist knowledge (7/28 authors), propensity to take risks (6/28 authors), and a sense of responsibility (4/28 authors). What emerges, therefore, is the image of a manager possessing leadership skills and abilities, the ability to subordinate others to themselves, energy and the will to act, constructiveness and dynamism, perceived as the ability to act against existing rules and entrenched views, as well

as the ability and courage to take risks. The key issue is the attitude of managers that promotes the search for and discovery of non-standard, unconventional ways of performing tasks and achieving goals (Hałat, 2024).

Competency requirements for managers differ depending on the culture or country in which the manager operates. Another key factor determining the managerial competencies necessary for efficient and effective management is the type of organization managed by the managers (Jeruszka, Wolan-Nowakowska, 2020). Domestic and foreign literature presents catalogues of the most important competencies of professional managers managing business organizations. By contrast, only a few studies address the competency requirements imposed on those managing public organizations, including municipalities.

3. Characteristics and Role of the Public Manager in Municipal Governance

In the subject literature, one may observe disputes as to whether public organizations are managed or merely administered. W. Kieżun (Kieżun, 2011) adopted the thesis that the state is a macro-organization, which means that it may be considered from the point of view of the criteria of efficient and effective functioning developed within organization and management theory. Therefore, in this context, it is fully justified to use the term "management" with reference to public organizations, including municipalities, and to call those who manage them public managers.

An analysis of the literature leads to the conclusion that the understanding of the term "public organization manager" is ambiguous. This is associated with the existence of different models of public service in particular countries, as well as with the varying degree of advancement in the implementation of public management (Jäntti, Lajunen, Haveri, Airaksinen, 2026). Taking municipal self-government into account, it is worth noting that, since the 1980s, principles aimed at improving municipal management have begun to be introduced. In many countries, the position of manager has come into operation. In Polish municipal self-government, the public manager is primarily the municipal secretary (employed through a competition) and the municipal treasurer (appointed to office). B. Kożuch (Kożuch, 2023) believes that public managers also include managers at various levels whose primary task is the economical and efficient management of organizations providing all kinds of high-quality public services. The author emphasizes that what distinguishes managers in public organizations from managers operating in business is their value system and the related orientation toward cooperation. B. Kożuch (Kożuch, 2010) proposed the following definition: public managers are managers at various levels in public organizations whose basic duty is the efficient and effective management of those organizations providing high-quality public services.

In the subject literature, attention is focused mainly on public managers, understood in the case of municipalities as municipal secretaries, treasurers, deputy heads of the commune /mayors/city presidents, heads of municipal organizational units, department directors, heads of divisions, heads of sections, as well as managers employed on the basis of contracts (Heinelt, Magnier, Cabria, Reynaert, 2018). However, public managers are above all the persons exercising authority, namely heads of the commune, town mayors, city presidents, and councillors, who manage municipalities and determine the directions of their development. They supervise the activities carried out by secretaries, treasurers, and managers, and they are their superiors. Unfortunately, such control is usually rather illusory in nature, because the activities of public managers are characterized by a high degree of professionalization, as these persons are competent, meet the requirements imposed on them by the legislator, possess higher education required for managerial civil service positions, have experience, and constantly improve their skills. By contrast, politicians serving as heads of the commune and councillors very often do not possess adequate preparation, education, or the necessary skills, which does not allow them to properly supervise the work of secretaries, treasurers, heads of units, and so on (Sabchev, 2022).

In municipal management, persons exercising authority perform tasks imposed by applicable legal provisions and also make key current and strategic decisions, while at the same time performing the basic functions of management, which requires them to possess an appropriate level of managerial competencies (Hałat-Majka, 2018). However, under the applicable legal provisions, a candidate seeking a position enabling the exercise of authority in a municipality must meet requirements relating to age, citizenship, place of residence, criminal record, and the exercise of full public rights, as specified in the Electoral Code. These expectations are not stringent and do not refer to the necessity for candidates seeking the position of head of the commune, town mayor, or councillor to possess specific managerial competencies, which in no way guarantees their professionalism. They do not concern education, which means that persons exercising authority in local government do not need to have appropriate knowledge. There are no specified requirements regarding candidates' experience. Entry into office takes place from one day to the next, without preparation, immediately after the oath is taken (Kjaer, 2015). We often encounter situations in which offices of authority are assumed by people who know very little about the functioning of local government and who, despite having the opportunity, are not interested in improving their competencies. They also very rarely take part in training courses or other forms of development ensuring the growth of managerial competencies. They are not subject to any evaluation during the performance of their functions. The only form of evaluation consists in subsequent elections, during which residents may determine how they assess the work of persons exercising authority during the previous term of office and whether they will vote for them again. In the case of those governing municipal self-governments, there are no promotion rules or motivational systems. Remuneration for persons serving as bodies of authority is limited by

legal provisions. Resolutions determining the amount of remuneration both for the head of the commune and for councillors themselves are adopted by the municipal council. These decisions are not the result of an assessment of work results, but are discretionary and limited by legal regulations.

The above-mentioned factors result in the fact that in some municipalities in Poland, mainly rural ones, there are no adequately qualified persons serving as bodies of authority who would govern efficiently and effectively and be ready to introduce changes and innovations. In 2023, research was conducted (in-depth individual interviews and surveys) concerning the assessment of managerial competencies of 15 heads of the commune and 216 councillors in 15 of the smallest municipalities of the Małopolskie Voivodeship: Bolesław, Gręboszów, Kozłów, Mędrzechów, Moszczenica, Mucharz, Pałecznica, Polanka Wielka, Racławice, Radziemice, Rytro, Sękowa, Słaboszów, Spytkowice, Wietrzychowice. In terms of education, the structure of the research sample (heads of the commune and councillors) is presented in Table 1.

Table 1.
Characteristics of heads of the commune and councillors by education

Characteristics of respondents		N	Structure of respondents (%)
education of councillors	Primary	9	4,2
	Vocational	69	31,9
	Secondary	90	41,7
	Higher	48	22,2
education of head of the commune	Secondary	3	20
	Higher	12	80

Source: Author's own elaboration based on empirical research.

Taking into account the education of the surveyed councillors, it can be observed that only 21.8% have higher education (of which the largest group, 4.2%, completed pedagogical studies). The respondents mostly have secondary education (41.7%) as well as vocational and primary education (36.15%). Analyzing the education of the surveyed heads of the commune, it can be stated that 80% have higher education (of whom 25% completed studies in agriculture, 16.7% in finance and accounting, 16.7% in geodesy, while the others graduated in history, animal science, construction, physical education, and economics). The remaining heads of the commune have secondary education (20%).

The professionalism of managerial staff is a key condition for efficient and effective management in organizations, including public ones (including municipalities), in which awareness of the importance of improving the key competencies of managers emerged much later than in private organizations.

4. Characteristics of the Most Important Managerial Competencies of Municipal Authorities

Within management and quality sciences, there is a very limited theoretical, methodological, and empirical body of work concerning the competencies of persons exercising authority in a municipality, and it refers exclusively to heads of the commune (Walkowiak, 2006; Niewiadomski, Sterna, 2009). With regard to the competencies of councillors, this issue has never been addressed before. However, research cannot be narrowed solely to the head of the commune, because without the support of councillors, the head of the commune is merely an administrator. Heads of the commune have limited agency—they are less flexible than councillors because their actions are strictly regulated by legal provisions. Therefore, it is so important that when analyzing the bodies of authority in a municipality, they are treated comprehensively.

As part of the research conducted in 15 municipalities, taking into account the most important behaviors of municipal authorities, a catalogue of desired and expected competencies was created, which affect the quality of municipal self-government management. The presented competency profile of municipal authorities (Table 2) was developed on the basis of an analysis of domestic and foreign literature as well as expert knowledge.

Table 2.
Competency profile of municipal authorities

KNOWLEDGE	
K1	Professional knowledge (general in nature)
K2	Specialist knowledge
SKILLS (PRACTICAL AND SPECIALIST)	
S1	Leadership skills
S2	Managerial skills
S3	Ability to analyze social phenomena and processes
S4	Results orientation
S5	Decision-making ability (individual and group)
S6	Negotiation skills
S7	Conflict resolution skills
S8	Information delivery and communication skills
S9	Ability to keep documentation and create procedures
S10	Ability to assess situations and generate solutions
S11	Knowledge of the principles of diplomatic protocol
S12	Team-building skills
S13	Ability to apply knowledge in action
S14	Ability to budget in the munipicity
S15	Capacity and readiness for development and improvement
ATTITUDES AND VALUES	
AV1	Personal culture
AV2	Independence
AV 3	Flexibility
AV 4	Creativity, innovation and entrepreneurship
AV 5	Integrity, honesty and truthfulness
AV 6	Sense of responsibility

Cont. table 2.

AV 7	Diagnostic-analytical and strategic-systemic thinking
AV 8	Assertivrness
AV 9	Self-discipline and self-control
AV 10	Conscientiousness
AV 11	Resistance to stress
AV 12	Propensity to take risks
AV 13	Building positive relationships and trust in the enviroment
AV 14	Self-confidence
AV 15	Customer orientation

Source: Author's own elaboration based on empirical research.

During the conducted research, 32 managerial competencies of municipal authorities were identified. The structure of the managerial competency profile of municipal authorities consists of three key components of competence: knowledge (professional and specialist), skills (15 skills), and attitudes and values (15 attitudes and values). The catalogue of competencies constituted the foundation for constructing the managerial competency profile of municipal authorities in practice.

As part of the conducted empirical research, the actual and desired level of managerial competencies of municipal authorities was examined. Respondents (15 heads of the commune and 216 councillors) were asked to indicate the assessment scale of competencies according to the following criteria: 0 – not useful, 1 – useful to a slight extent, 2 – of little use, 3 – moderately useful, 4 – useful, 5 – very useful, 6 – indispensable. The obtained results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3.
Summary of the results concerning the competencies expected of persons exercising authority in municipal self-government and the self-assessment of heads of the commune and councillors

Competency	Competency		Difference between expected and actual competencies (difference in means)
	expected (mean)	actual (mean)	
K1 K	3,70	3,75	-0,05
K2	4,50	3,27	1,22
S1	4,91	3,65	1,26
S2	4,78	3,61	1,18
S3	4,80	3,79	1,01
S4	4,35	3,73	0,62
S5	4,86	4,01	0,85
S6	4,55	3,87	0,68
S7	4,76	3,95	0,81
S8	4,58	3,92	0,66
S9	3,69	2,94	0,75
S10	4,38	3,73	0,65
S11	3,42	2,63	0,80
S12	4,45	3,63	0,83
S13	4,38	3,72	0,66
S14	4,37	2,74	1,63

S15	4,66	3,81	0,85
AV1	5,35	4,61	0,74
AV2	4,90	4,20	0,71
AV3	4,46	4,06	0,40
AV4	4,72	3,78	0,94
AV5	5,39	4,98	0,40
AV6	5,32	4,74	0,58
AV7	4,80	3,86	0,94
AV8	4,49	3,68	0,81
AV9	4,75	4,12	0,63
AV10	5,00	4,38	0,61
AV11	4,97	4,16	0,82
AV12	4,29	3,98	0,32
AV13	5,18	4,52	0,66
AV14	4,89	4,32	0,57
AV15	5,04	4,40	0,64

Source: Author's own elaboration based on empirical research.

In the respondents' opinion, the highest-rated expected competencies indispensable for exercising authority in a municipality are: (PW5) integrity, honesty, and truthfulness (mean 5.39), (PW1) personal culture (mean 5.35), (PW6) sense of responsibility (mean 5.32), (PW13) building positive relationships and trust in the environment (mean 5.18), (PW15) resident orientation (mean 5.04), (PW10) conscientiousness (mean 5.00), (PW11) resistance to stress (mean 4.97), (U1) leadership skills (mean 4.91), (PW2) independence, (PW14) self-confidence (mean 4.89), (U5) decision-making ability (mean 4.86), the ability to analyze social phenomena and processes (mean 4.80), (PW7) diagnostic-analytical and strategic-systemic thinking (mean 4.80), (U2) managerial skills (mean 4.78), (U7) conflict resolution skills (mean 4.76), (PW9) self-discipline and self-control (4.75), (PW4) creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship (mean 4.72), (U15) capacity and readiness for development (mean 4.66), (U8) information delivery and communication skills (4.58), and (W2) specialist knowledge (mean 4.50). In the respondents' opinion, the lowest means were obtained by: (U11) knowledge of the principles of diplomatic protocol (mean 3.42), (U9) the ability to keep documentation and create procedures (mean 3.69), and (W1) professional knowledge (mean 3.70).

In the case of self-assessment results, respondents assessed their level of competencies as significantly lower than the level expected of persons exercising authority and candidates seeking the position of head of the commune or councillor. The only exception is (W1) professional knowledge, the current level of which (mean 3.75), according to the respondents, is higher than the expected level (mean 3.70). In the respondents' opinion, professional knowledge should be at an average/above-average level, and they believe they possess such knowledge. The surveyed heads of the commune and councillors assessed the following competencies as being at a low level: (U14) ability to budget in the municipality (mean 2.63), (U11) knowledge of the principles of diplomatic protocol (mean 2.63), and (U9) ability to keep documentation and create procedures (mean 2.94). The highest-rated competencies possessed

by heads of the commune and councillors were: (PW5) integrity, honesty, and truthfulness (mean 4.98), (PW6) sense of responsibility (mean 4.74), (PW1) personal culture (mean 4.61), and (PW13) building positive relationships and trust in the environment (mean 4.52). As a result of self-assessment, the surveyed heads of the commune and councillors indicated a high level of attitudes and values, and a low level of knowledge and skills. In the case of the remaining competencies, respondents assessed their own competencies as average/above average. Taking into account the level of expected competencies (4.5 in the case of knowledge, and 4.55 in the case of skills and attitudes), a practical profile of the managerial competencies of municipal authorities was created (Table 4).

Table 4.
Practical profile of the managerial competencies of municipal authorities

No.	COMPETENCIES
	KNOWLEDGE
1	Specialist knowledge
	SKILLS (PRACTICAL AND SPECIALIST)
2	Leadership skills
3	Managerial skills
4	Ability to analyze social phenomena and processes
5	Decision-making ability (individual and group)
6	Conflict resolution skills
7	Information delivery and communication skills
8	Capacity and readiness for development and improvement
	ATTITUDES AND VALUES
9	Personal culture
10	Independence
11	Creativity, innovation, and entrepreneurship
12	Integrity, honesty, and truthfulness
13	Sense of responsibility
14	Diagnostic-analytical and strategic-systemic thinking
15	Self-discipline and self-control
16	Conscientiousness
17	Resistance to stress
18	Building positive relationships and trust in the environment
19	Self-confidence
20	Customer orientation

Source: Author's own elaboration based on empirical research.

The practical profile of the managerial competencies of municipal authorities includes 20 key managerial competencies of heads of the commune /councillors. Based on the results of the empirical research, a catalogue of the managerial competencies of heads of the commune /councillors was developed that affects the efficiency and effectiveness of municipal management, which constitutes the added value of the article.

5. Conclusions

Modern municipal management requires specialist knowledge, appropriate skills, attitudes, and ethical-moral values. In practice, the selection of persons exercising authority is often determined not by qualifications and professionalism, but by irrational factors such as a sense of distinctiveness, events experienced together with voters, solidarity, preferences, and identity of accepted norms. In addition, with regard to managing public managers—persons exercising authority in a municipality—it is not possible, due to the specific nature of their functioning, to use all the measures applied in human capital management. They constitute only a model framework that must be modified and adapted to the specific nature and multidimensionality of the roles played by persons exercising authority. The presented results of the empirical research and theoretical considerations certainly do not exhaust the subject of managerial competencies of municipal authorities, due to its complexity and significant cognitive importance. Taking into account the significance and timeliness of the issue addressed, the author sought to inspire and provide a contribution to further in-depth scientific research into the managerial competencies of persons exercising authority at both local government and central government levels.

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