

EXPRESSION OF STRATEGIC COMPETENCIES OF LEADERS IN CIVIL SERVICE: THE CASE OF MUNICIPALITIES IN LITHUANIA

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Abstract

Civil service of every country is oriented towards efficient and professional satisfaction of public interest. Strategic management in modern dynamic world is one of the ways that help to adapt to constantly changing environment and increasing needs of citizens – it warrants expedience and efficiency of institution's activity because it is a legally regulated and formalized tool that helps to foresee directions of development and to distribute limited resources rationally. The proper use of this tool is possible only with professional and qualified public officials. Special attention should be given to education of competencies of managers in civil service. The information about leaders of local self-government institutions in Lithuania and their strategic competencies will be gathered by applying an inquiry method. The main idea is that civil official as a leader should be a very good strategist. Civil official as a leader can make very big and positive influence on state and local government strategic management in invoking leadership competency and in making more flexible and result-oriented decisions.

Keywords: strategic management, strategic competencies, civil service, leadership, competence model.

Classification JEL: M12 – Personnel Management.

1. Introduction

In modern global society a competitiveness of every institution of public sector depends on its flexibility and ability to react to environmental changes by taking strategically right decisions. It is important for the institution that takes strategic decisions not only to be not passive in point of view of environment, but also to take active role by finding an optimal variant between capability of the institution and environment where it works. In modern world competitive institutions or organizations consider their main advantages as knowledge and abilities of their employees. In this case an important role is being played by institution's leaders and level of their competences.

Society raises higher requirements to civil officers and quality of their services. Results of public sector activity mostly depend on professionalism of leaders and their strategic competencies, abilities to rally and motivate employees to strive for goals.

Competency is understood as knowledge, skills and abilities required to perform a successful work in a particular position. It is especially important to form competencies required for leaders' positions. In order to react efficiently to the changes that are taking place, it is important to rally the leaders that would be able to identify and tackle the problems arising in the institutions creatively and innovatively, would possess competencies of leadership, management of changes, strategic thinking and other. Especially strategic competencies are emphasized in the scientific works. Strategic leadership has been defined as "the ability to anticipate, envision, maintain flexibility, think innovatively, and work with others to initiate changes to create a viable future," (*Levesque, 2007*).

By reacting into social and economic changes, determining directions of country's development and implementing political priorities of state management in Lithuania documents of long-term state management development are being prepared consistently. With reference to Lithuanian present long-term strategic documents a statement is possible that the main goal of strategies related to state modernization is more efficient, oriented towards public needs activity of state officers that is open to society, and competitive, motivated,

flexible, responsible and able to think strategically civil officers. One of the most important reforms of civil service modernizations is an implementation of competence model. This reform strives for creation of modern, flexible and efficient civil service. Competence model is a system that includes important competencies of state officials (knowledge, skills, abilities that are required to perform particular functions).

The aim of the paper is to reveal expression of strategic competencies of leaders in civil service. The tasks of the paper are: 1) to analyze strategic competencies of leaders in civil service; 2) to identify the main strategic competencies of leaders in the local self-government institutions of Lithuania.

In 2007 according to the Leonardo da Vinci pilot project '*Development of strategic individual competencies in the context of European integration*', the research was done to define strategically relevant individual competences where 879 respondents from 8 European countries took part. This research pointed out the main strategic competences and their expressions, and the Catalogue of Strategic Individual Competences was formed. The respondents were chosen from the business sector. This article is aimed at adapting the above mentioned research methodology in the civil service in order to find out whether strategic competencies and their expression are relevant and specific to the leaders in civil service.

2. Importance of strategic management in civil sector

In XXI century civil sector faced a dynamic environment where changes are constant phenomenon. Municipality as institution of civil service is an institution closest to citizens and has to be able to warranty the main human rights and needs most quickly. Municipality in striving to conform needs of citizens, expectations of central power and be competitive between other municipalities must plan its activity. In constantly changing environment such institution of public administration is able to act more efficiently when its activity is oriented towards long-term perspective and prepared programs of actions and means are striving for implementation of foreseen goals and means, control of strategy implementation. These aspects are covered by institution's strategic management.

In striving to understand properly importance of strategic competencies, first, it is needed to understand the essence of the strategic management itself. Strategic management is often described as a constant, dynamic and consistent process on which basis an organization adapts in time to the changes of external environment and uses resources more efficiently (*Arimavičiūtė, 2005, p. 15*). Essence of strategic management is management of changes that is more oriented not towards a process inside organization but to external circumstances that influence organization's activity (*Jucevičius, 1998, p. 32*).

Scientific literature is dominated by different attitudes towards conception of strategic management (Table 1).

According to descriptions and practice a strategic management is a wide conception. *Koteen (1997)* emphasized a constant process of decision making and actions in strategic management that are oriented towards tackling of problems and striving for possibilities. *Simerson (2011)* explained a content of strategic management more widely. It covers cooperation with other persons in striving to influence all organization positively, also it helps to take actions while considering and evaluating present situation and determining strong and weak sides of municipality. Cooperation with colleagues gives directions and support when there it is a need for successful movement towards the goal. Due to strategic management reasonable conclusions are done and reliable decisions are presented that help to reach harmonious development when they are reconciled to organization's values and vision (*Rothaermel, 2012*).

Table 1: Analysis of conception of strategic management (own study)

Authors	Conception of strategic management
Koteen, 1997	Strategic management covers full set of management decisions and actions that are determining long-term results in organization
Toft, 1998	Strategic management is an advanced and consistent form of strategic thinking that helps expanding of strategic vision in all subdivisions of organization including every system of administration.
Dess, et. al. 2005	Strategic management consists of analysis, decisions and actions that are taken by organization in striving to create and maintain advantage.
Simerson, 2011	Strategic management gives a possibility to act methodically and purposefully by controlling processes in order all organization would be influenced, presents direction and support to the person responsible.
Rothaermel, 2012	Strategic management is a method by help of which leaders understand and implement a strategy that can lead to advantages of stable development during a long period.

Strategic management helps to overcome different challenges that modern institutions of civil sector are facing today:

- Increased uncertainty and inter-connections require more rapid response and reaction of public organizations;
- Need for analytical abilities, knowledge, creative thinking and development of strategic thinking;
- Lack of time, financial resources;
- Persons who are making decisions are not open to innovations, often they are adversely minded yet;
- Uneven distribution of responsibilities, roles, activities.

Due to the mentioned challenges that public institutions are facing, especially important become competencies of leaders in state service, their abilities for strategic thinking, directional action, teamwork, conflict management, and being inspiring leaders and so on.

3. Competency conception and types

The conception of *competency* is used nowadays widely in talking about human resources in public sector. The working results depend upon individual knowledge and capabilities, i.e. competency. The competency can be described as altogether knowledge, capabilities, skills and attitudes which are necessary for individual in rapidly changing environment. This can be: business competency, social competency and conceptual competency. Business competency is related with special knowledge and capabilities in working field, social competency – with ability to communicate and work with people, and conceptual competency – with systematic thinking, clear understanding about ongoing processes, and ability to model situations. Four groups of leaders' competencies of strategic importance there are formulated according to the changes in public management approach (e.g. from ruling to leadership, from avoidance of risk to risk management, from information management to knowledge management, from delegation to empowerment, from individual to team, etc.). The first one is leadership which includes inspirational motivation, initiative, empathy, and self-presentation. The leadership in the practice means not only implementation of management functions but also ability to find necessary means which allow revealing civil servants possibilities in assuming responsibility. The second group is strategic thinking which includes having vision, openness to the changes, innovation and decision-making process. The dynamics and unpredictability of environment determine the need to define strategic

thinking competencies. The third group is purposefulness, which includes targeting, proceeding competency, learning, perfection, and knowledge management. The fourth group is cooperation which includes team work, communication, and conflicts management. Ability to cooperate in pursuance of common aims, in providing help for each other, in communicating efficient, team working skills – are necessary requirements for leaders. According to these strategic competencies' groups the questionnaire will be prepared. The information about leaders of local self-government institutions in Lithuania and their strategic competencies will be gathered in applying inquiry method. The main idea is that civil servant as a leader should be a very good strategist. Civil servant as a leader can make very big and positive influence on state and local government strategic management in invoking leadership competency and in making more flexible and good result-oriented decisions.

In opinion of Diskienė & Marčinskas (2007) five groups of competencies should be extinguished: strategic, social, functional, managerial and professional which allow analyzing the archetypal abilities of leaders widely enough.

According to Juralevičienė (2003), competency of civil officials is one of the main guarantees of efficient state government. Therefore it is especially important that modern institution during organization of own activity would implement model of competence that would allow more efficient use of potential of civil officers.

4. Project of competencies of civil officials in Lithuania

Benefit of implementation of model of competence in civil service is undoubted. Model of competence helps institutions to form one attitude towards management of human resources in civil service that includes tackling of strategic tasks, striving for results, quality warranting and so on. It is related to efficient system of officials' selection and career, transparency of institution's activity, increase of quality of officials' activity and implementation of elements of human resources' management in the institutions.

Implementation of competence model in Lithuanian civil service is being related to improvement of system of civil service by orienting a system of public sector towards activity results, professionalism and innovation.

A need for competence model in Lithuanian civil service was named in '*Concept of development of civil service*' (2010). The then Government, which initiated a reform of civil service, was striving for civil officers would work more efficiently, evaluation of their activity would become more transparent and objective and would depend on activity results. Other document regulating model of competence is a Program of development of public management in 2012–2020. This program was prepared in order to foresee the main changes of public management that are necessary in striving for efficiency of public management and better satisfaction of society's needs. Competence model is also being regulated in the main document of state planning Lithuanian advance strategy '*Lithuania 2030*'. It is a long-term document that is being followed by taking strategic decisions and preparing state plans or programs.

In 2012 there were approved two alternatives of guidelines of Civil officers' competence model and methodology of its application according to which now there are being prepared two alternative models of Civil officers' competence and projects of their methodology application. There are three groups of competences proposed in Lithuanian civil service – common, managerial and specific competencies (Figure 1).

Common competencies are related to abilities required to perform functions in any activity area, specific competencies are related to abilities required to civil officer for performance of functions that warranty internal administration of every institution; managerial competencies are related to abilities needed to perform functions of institution's

(subdivision's) leader (deputy) with reference to acquired knowledge, skills, totality of valuable attitudes.

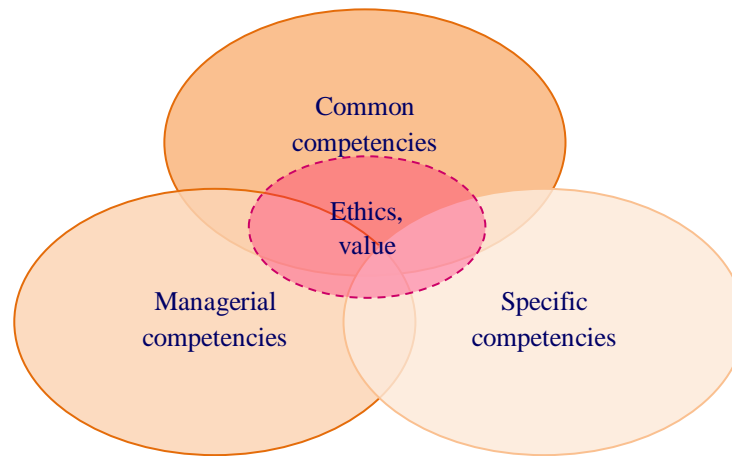


Figure 1: Groups of competencies proposed to be applied in Lithuanian civil service (LR Civil service department, 2012)

According to the first proposed model of competence there have to be created a list of civil officers' common and managerial competencies (regulated by corresponding legislation) and methodology of competence application. Required common and managerial competencies are being determined for leaders and deputies of institutions and subdivisions, meanwhile for specialists there are determined required common competencies and it is indicated that specialists need necessary and specific (special) competencies as well (Figure 2).

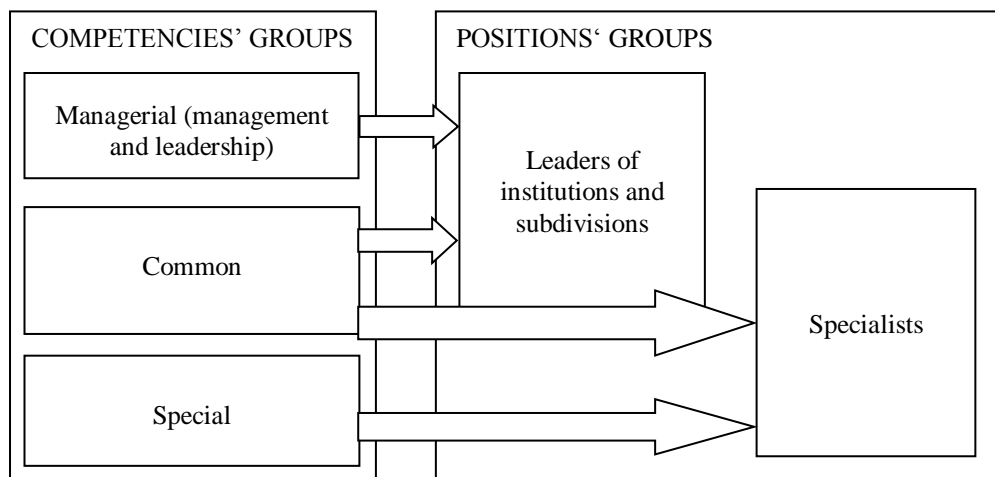


Figure 2: First alternative of competence model (LR Civil service department, 2012)

The second proposed competence model is similar to the first one but difference is that leaders and deputies of institutions and subdivisions are determined to have not only common and managerial competencies but special competence as well. Special competencies have to be determined and described by the institution itself according to the methodology of competence application. Also, special competencies are recommended to be determined for leaders and deputies not higher than level of departments that are composing the institution

because determining of these competencies for the leaders of institution would limit their mobility. In case of specialists, as in the first model, there are determined required common and specific competencies (Figure 3).

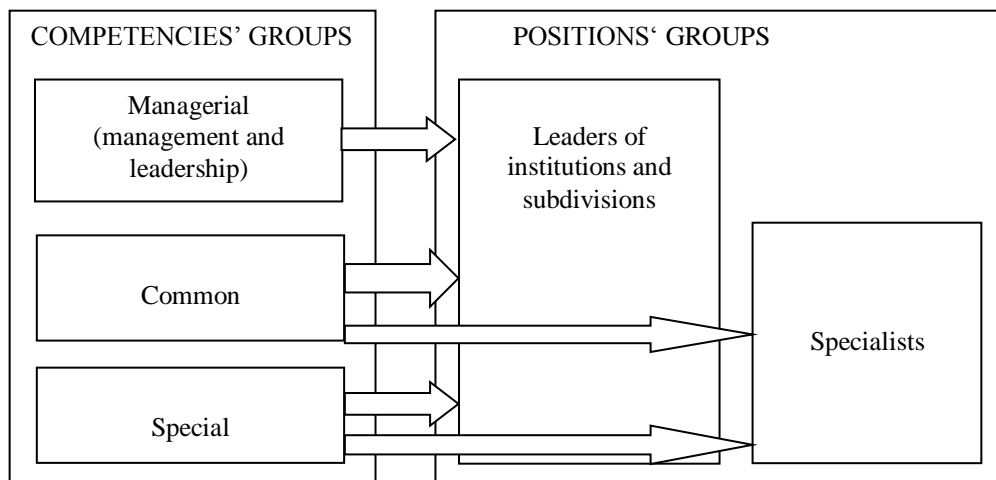


Figure 3: Second alternative of competence model (LR Civil service department, 2012)

Comparing these two alternatives of competence models we can state that substantially they are very similar, structured, all state officers are being determined equal competencies. Difference is that first alternative of competence model clearly distinguishes competencies of leaders and specialists, meanwhile second alternative of the model includes into the list of leaders' competencies not only common and managerial competencies but special competencies as well.

There is a proposal to apply the following list of competencies in Lithuanian civil service (LR Civil service department, 2012): I. Common competencies – creation of value to society (or orientation towards a citizen and society), self-discipline, reliability and responsibility, analytical thinking, orientation towards results, initiative, activity and time planning, flexibility, cooperation and so on; II. Managerial and leadership competencies – strategic thinking, planning, organization and coordination, control, delegation, leadership (that includes management of changes, employees' motivating, education, team formation, influence and impact, creation of communication net); III. Specific (special) competencies – management of information, projects management, orientation towards client, negotiations (management of negotiations), inter-cultural communication, management of finances, professional competence (ability to perform particular functions of professional activity and (or) position) and so on.

Also the report presents competence model with competence levels. There are five levels of competence: the first level means basics, the second means satisfactory level, the third means moderate level, the fourth means high level and the fifth means very high level. Principles of competence level determination require the level of common competence for leaders should be higher than that of specialists. Also the higher is level of specialists the higher are levels of special competence. While determining levels of specific competences for leaders the higher level of leaders means higher level of specific competencies, also the higher the level of leaders the lower the level of professional competence. It should be noted that special competencies are not being determined for leaders of institutions.

5. Methodology of the survey

As was mentioned above, competencies of leaders in civil service and their expression was being researched by using methodology of the pilot research of Leonardo da Vinci project performed in 2007. There were distinguished four main groups of strategic competencies (leadership, strategic thinking, singleness and cooperation) that were lately operationalized into particular competence features of every group of strategic competencies (Table 2).

Table 2: Research instrument (own study)

Groups of strategic competencies	Competence	Feature
Leadership	Inspiring motivation	Creates vision of possible achievements, presents goals attractively
		Persuades others in success, enthuses and inspires
		Stands as example inspiringly striving for settled goals
		Enables others by giving freedom of actions
	Incentive	Takes for new actions actively
		Tells own opinion, ideas
		Raises high and ambitious goals for himself/herself and others
		Strives for settled goals hard
	Empathy	Recognizes and understands emotions of other people
		Regards emotional state, needs of other people
		Properly expresses emotions
	Self-presentation	Trusts himself/herself
		Objectively evaluates own possibilities in particular situation
Creates strong positive impression		
Good speaker		
Possession of vision	Strategic management	Has clear vision of future
		Clearly conveys a vision to others
		Clearly describes the main goals
		Follows ethical and moral principles
	Openness to changes	Open to innovations
		Understands need for changes
		Initiates and implements changes
	Innovativeness	Adapts to new conditions
		Shrewd and creative
		Generates and presents new ideas
	Decision making	Experiments, applies new methods of activity
		Identifies and describes problems
		Argues and grounds own decision
Presents logical, reasoned, constructive notes		
Striving for goal	Envisages alternatives of decision making	
	Evaluates results and risk of decisions	
	Is oriented towards long-term goals	
Single-mindedness	Striving for goal	Consistently, single-mindedly strives for goals
		Strongly strives for the goal till its implementation
		Determines priorities
	Procedural competence	Plans a course of actions, distributes tasks and resources

		Follows processes and makes required changes	
		Identifies possible problematic areas and foresees possibilities of decision	
	Learning, development	Notices ideas of others, develops them	
		Constantly educates own knowledge and abilities	
		Constantly develops own personal characteristics	
		Strives to know more than it is required by present situation	
	Knowledge management	Intercepts information, knowledge and experience	
		Shares own information, knowledge and experience with others	
		Teaches, advises and supports others, helps to reveal their abilities	
	Cooperation	Team work	Help team members
			Observes, objectively evaluates and manages processes inside team
			Distributes tasks to team members according to their knowledge, skills, characteristics
Is able to combine common and individual goals			
Summarizes opinion of different team members (moderates)			
Communication		Clearly expresses own minds, ideas	
		Presents feedback	
		Hears others, respects their attitudes and opinions, customs	
Conflict management		Impartially, objectively behaves in conflict situations	
		Mediates while tackling a conflict	
		Is able to communicate with conflict people	
		Finds a decision acceptable to conflicting sides (compromise)	
		Is able to control himself/herself in stress situations	

Lithuanian integration into European Union and processes of globalization change priorities of organizations' activity. Even high level of knowledge cannot ensure simple survival of organization in competitive environment for long period. Requirements to employees' competence are constantly increasing and rapidly changing. Tackling of every new problem requires for appropriate competence of employees. In conditions of modern rapid dynamic changes organizations striving to maintain competitiveness more often are facing a need for flexibility of human resources, i.e. ability to use not only internal but also external sources of competence. Most often organizations by using ordered consulting services are expecting to decrease fixed costs for personnel and herewith warranty a possibility to react effectively and rapidly to market changes. That in turn raises specific requirements to consultants' competence and its constant education.

Concept of competence in scientific literature is analyzed wide enough despite it has not very deep tradition. Pioneers of this problem research are considered Boyatzis (1982), Spencer & Spencer (1993), Collin (1997), Achreman (1998). Its concept describes a combination of knowledge and skills and ability to adapt them in particular circumstances. In Lithuania different aspects of competence were analyzed by Jovaiša (1995), Laužackas (1999), Lepaitė (2000). Meanwhile problem of competence education in systemic point of view is not researched enough neither in scientific nor practical aspects. Competence is not being acquired as traditional qualification by getting diploma; it has to be educated constantly. Therefore organizations in striving to correspond to constantly changing requirements have to be oriented towards employees' strategic competencies, to create teaching systems which would be consistently oriented towards education of employees' competencies.

During the last years in scientific literature on human resources management much attention is given to competence management and education. This term is related to evaluation of work places, hiring and selection of employees, internal and external

mobility of employees, career management, qualification refreshment and teaching, assessment of employees' activity, salary organization and so on. This also determines two essential aspects of competence topicality. The first is related to position of every employee – competence is an important factor for an individual implementing a successful career. On the other side it is important to organization as well – employees' competence and its education allow to organization implementation of own goals and adapting to changing circumstances.

Both in scientific literature and practice competence education is treated as part of whole human resource strategy. Such human resource systems as selections, management of compensation activity, career management programs and teaching and education efforts have to be consistent and related to strategic goals of the enterprise. Recently there is popular opinion that there is a need to integrate systems of human resources in order to increase efficiency of their activity. Schein (1978) presented a model of human resources management and development system which demonstrates how actions of individuals and organization could be combined. This also could be adapted as integrated system to implementation of competence education during creation of career planning and teaching of employees. Till now this model haven't lost its topicality both in theory and practice.

There were determined by the researches that organizations use teaching systems that are not oriented towards education of employees competence because enterprises are not determining any requirements to employees' future work place, assessment of employees' competence is not sufficient, teaching goals are not being formulated and teaching programs for future perspectives are not being prepared, short-term and long-term plans for satisfaction of future needs are not being created, applied teaching methods are not efficient enough and other.

With reference to specifics of enterprises, teaching systems limitations, employees' needed and lacking competencies there should be applied employees' teaching system oriented towards competence education.

Respondents' profile

The research of leaders' strategic competence evaluation was participated by 225 civil officers of Lithuanian municipalities, 203 of them filled all questions of their questionnaires properly. Questionnaire surveillance was performed through the internet by sending an inquiry to fill the questionnaire and its link by e-mail to civil officers of Lithuanian municipalities' administrations. Links were sent to three municipalities of every county by random selection. Territorial position was distributed as follows: in Kaunas county there were 15% of respondents, in Panevėžys, Telšiai, Vilnius, Utena, Alytus, Klaipėda and Tauragė counties – from 13% to 10% of respondents, the rest respondents were in Šiauliai and Marijampolė counties (Figure 4).

The biggest part of respondents (73.8%) consisted of women. Age groups of respondents were: 25–35 years – 15.6%, 36–45 years – 18.7%, 46–55 years – 27.1%. Even 91.1% of respondents have university education and only small part of respondents have further education – 3.6%, unfinished higher education – 0.9% and higher non-university education – 3.1% of respondents. Thus, with reference to special requirements to employees' positions, the survey was participated by employees of high qualification. The biggest part of respondents (63.1%) are civil officers (specialists), 34.7% of respondents are taking leader's position, and the rest 2.2% of respondents are working under a contract of employment.



Figure 4: Distribution of respondents participating the survey according to counties

Empirical data was processed by conventional methods of mathematical statistics (using SPSS 12). In order to compare the averages of answers of managers, officials and experts the relative sizes of comparison were applied.

Results of the survey

Evaluating the importance of leader's strategic competencies and distinguishing four main groups: *cooperation*, *singleness*, *strategic thinking* and *leadership*, average of evaluations of all criteria in these groups was 3 points, i.e. respondents assessed all presented criteria of competence evaluation as more or less important. None of the presented competencies according to 58 criteria was assessed as "absolutely unimportant".

Average of evaluations of leaders' strategic competencies according to their importance (1 – absolutely unimportant, 4 – very important) and frequency of use (1 – never, 4 – constantly) is presented in Figure 1. According to the statements of respondents, five the most important categories of leaders' strategic competencies (starting from the most important) are distributed as follows: *self/presentation* (3.51 points), *conflict management* (3.45 points), *striving for goal* (3.43 points), *decision making* (3.43 points) and *knowledge management* (3.42 points).

However, the least attention was given by respondents to these leader's competencies (starting from the least important): *inspiring motivation* (3.07 points), *innovation* (3.07 points), *empathy* (3.1 points), *learning and development* (3.15 points), *possession of vision* (3.17 points), *teamwork* (3.17 points), *initiative* (3.18 points), *procedural competence* (3.19 points), *communication* (3.19 points) and *openness to changes* (3.2 points).

According to the research data, **during formation of leaders' strategic competencies the following aspects need to be assessed mostly:** if leader trusts himself/herself, if tells own opinion and ideas, how the leader is able to control himself/herself in stress situations, if creates strong positive impression, if leader strives for goal till its implementation strongly, if intercepts information, knowledge and experience, if leader clearly expresses his/her minds

and ideas, if leader determines priorities, if presents logical, reasoned, constructive notes, and finally if assesses results and risk of decisions.

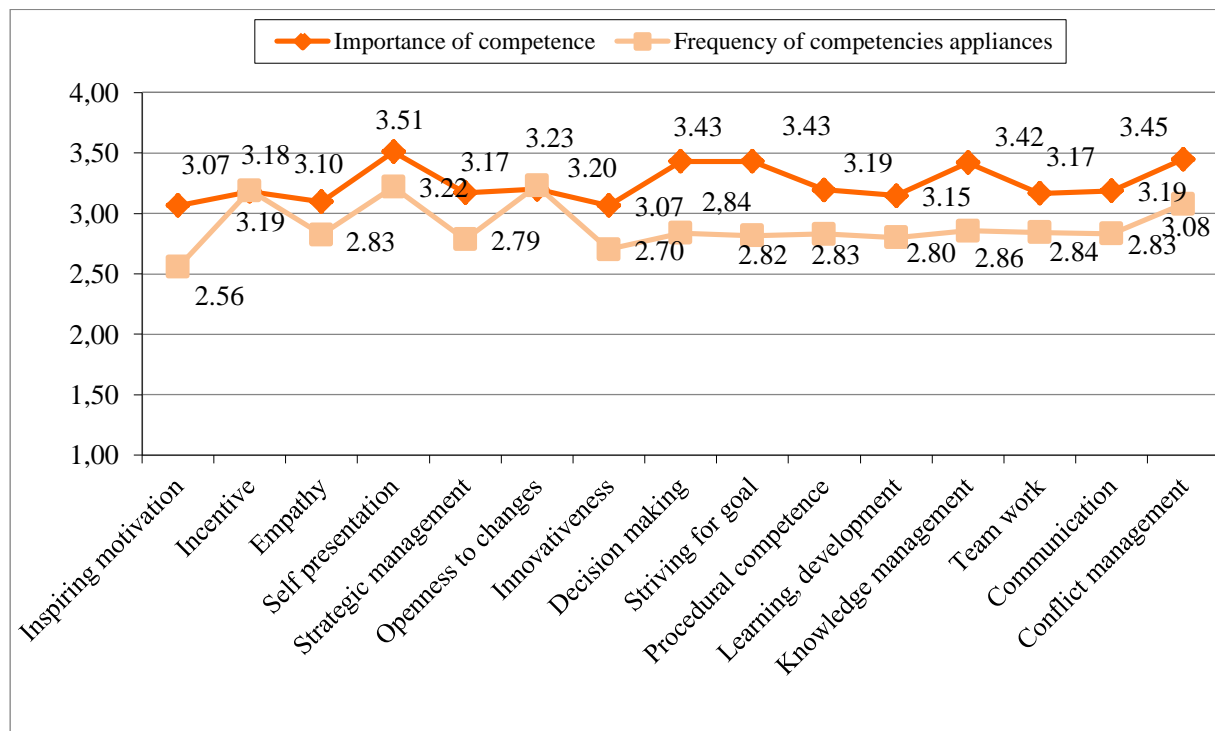


Figure 5: Assessment of leaders' strategic competencies according to importance (1- absolutely unimportant, 4 – very important) and frequency of use (1 – never, 4 – constantly), in average points

Average of assessment of leaders' competence according to importance (1 – absolutely unimportant, 4 – very important) and frequency of use (1 – never, 4 – constantly) by distinguishing evaluations of leaders and employees is presented in Figure 6.

Analyzing assessment of strategic competencies of leaders and employees (specialists) who participated in the survey (Figure 6), only small difference between opinions can be noticed: the respondents who are taking leading positions think that innovativeness and decision making are more important competencies than, for example, conflict management, despite according to the statements of specialists ability to manage conflict situations is very important while forming leaders' strategic competencies.

Analyzing the biggest gaps between assessment of respondents' competence importance and frequency of use, following conclusions could be done:

- 1) **Very important and frequently used competencies:** in the field of self-presentation (self-trust); in the field of initiative (tells own opinion and ideas); in the field of self-presentation (makes strong positive impression);
- 2) **Important enough but still rarely used competencies:** in the field of conflict management (is able to control himself/herself in stress situations), in the field of striving for goal (strives for goal till its implementation strongly), in the field of knowledge management (intercepts information, knowledge and experience), in the field of decision making (presents logical, reasoned, constructive notes and evaluates results and risk of decisions);
- 3) **Used frequently enough but not important competencies:** in the field of openness to changes (adapts to new conditions, understands need for changes), in the field of

conflict management (is able to communicate with conflict people), in the field of vision possession (follows ethical and moral principles).

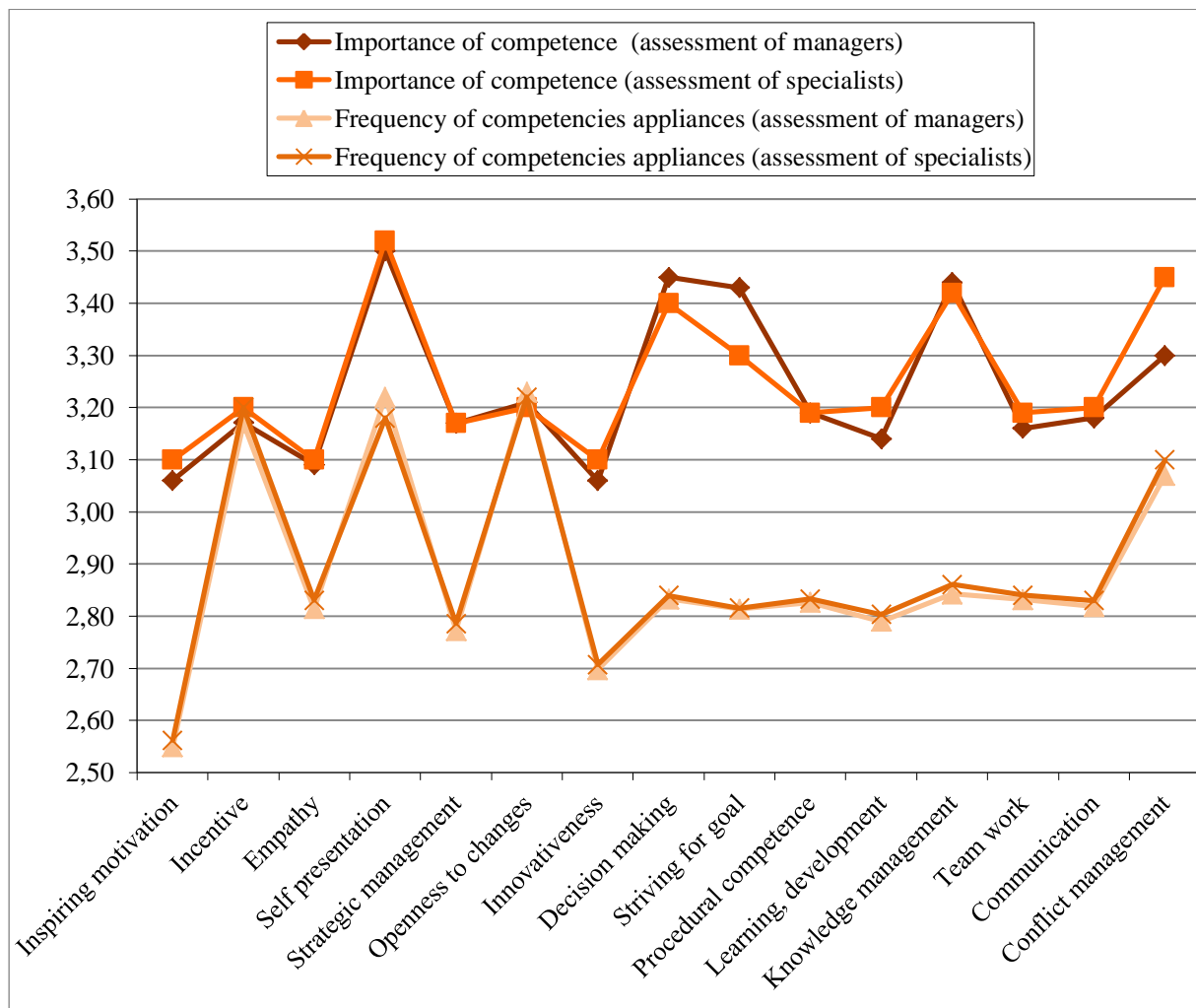


Figure 6: Assessment of leaders' competencies according to importance (1 – absolutely unimportant, 4 – very important) and frequency of use (1 – never, 4 – constantly), in average points

7. Conclusions

Contemporary changes in public sector are very rapid, therefore, it is essential to be oriented not only towards present day requirements for leaders' competence but also it should be foreseen what competencies would determine success in the future that is to say strategic competencies. Great attention is paid to development and management of competencies in the scientific literature. The competency can be described as altogether knowledge, capabilities, skills and attitudes which are necessary for leader in the rapidly changing environment.

There was found out that all criteria of competencies groups (cooperation, purposefulness, strategic thinking and leadership) were assessed by the respondents as important.

There was identified that the leaders and specialists assess strategic competencies nearly similarly: respondents from managerial positions think that innovativeness and decision-making process are more important competencies than conflict management. Although,

ability to manage conflict situations according to specialists is very important in formation of strategic competencies of leaders.

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