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## ON ACTIVITIES AND COMPETENCES THAT DETERMINE HIGH LEVEL OF PRODUCTIVITY

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**Summary:** Productivity-what does it mean? Is it interesting and also an important issue? Economists can answer these questions rationally, can describe or even calculate high quality performance rate. Psychologists have in this case a lot of difficulties, as they note many considerations that determine effectiveness of people performing different roles and tasks, trying to achieve various goals. Assuming that productivity has positive connotation, not only from economic, but also social and psychological point of view, we can consider what competences characterize a productive individual.

The aim of this article is to describe functions of selected competences important for development and maintenance of competences conducive to productivity. Initially we can assume that productive individual it is a person who through her or his own activity achieves goals and maintains high level of performance at low cost (financial, psychosocial, emotional).

**Key words:** competences and productivity, self-reflection about abilities to act in certain situation

### Introduction

From the economic point of view productivity (Donarski 1999, 25) is defined as the relationship between output and input labor. It can be measured by gross national product according to purchasing-power parity for one citizen in a given year. Labor productivity is most often measured by the Economic Value Added per one hour worked. Another important measure is constant capital productivity (fixed assets of a company) measured by sale (or EVA) per 1 zł of constant capital. In practice, depending on the needs of company's management, there are calculated many productivity rates similar to the above mentioned (Donarski 1999, 17). For the economist a productive person is an individual who achieves good results, who is effective and efficient. The higher productivity, the more goods and services can be produced with the use of the given production costs. Work efficiency is calculated as a ratio of the volume of production to the number of workers and multiplied by the number of hours worked. From the psychological

point of view, productivity issue appears in the specialist literature when<sup>1</sup> (1) there are mentioned work effects understood as effective realization of assumed goals; (2) there are analyzed psychosocial considerations of work environment conducive to effective and efficient functioning of people performing certain roles and tasks; (3) issues of human resources management are raised in order to improve and make better use of human resources; (4) there is analyzed facilitating and inhibiting influence of stress on individual's functioning (including functioning of an individual in organization); (5) people's attitudes, sentiments, beliefs and motivations to act are researched.

There is an opinion that productivity should not be precisely defined because this concept is very broad (Donarski 1999). Nonetheless, in 1959 in Rome Productivity Committee of the European Productivity Agency took the view that productivity is above all an attitude of mind which is characterized by (1) striving to constant improvement of existing state of affairs; (2) conviction that it is possible to work today better than yesterday and tomorrow better than today; (3) making constant efforts, adapting business activity to changing conditions and applying new theories and methods; (4) belief in mankind's progress<sup>2</sup>. The main subject of productivity is human, his or her creative potential to constant improvement of everything, to constant innovation of a product or service, production process, organization and culture of work. Methods of achieving these goals are: organizing a whole team to creative work and motivating each member of a team to learn through the lifetime.

The aim of this article is to describe functions of selected competences important for development and maintenance of broadly understood productivity. Initially we can assume that productive individual is a person who through her or his own activity achieves goals and maintains high level of performance at low financial, psychosocial and emotional costs.

### **On competences and productivity**

A productive individual has number of psychological competences which cause and determine his or her high effectiveness, where a positive conviction about his or her own working potential is a foundation for these competences. Psychologists confirm the opinion (e.g. Skarzynska, 2007) that convictions are more important than facts in creating one's image, e.g. an image of a competent and productive person or on the contrary – an image of a lazy and ineffective individual. Tracking current research reports allows to formulate several practical and theoretical conclusions on effective activating people's productivity and enterprise.

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<sup>1</sup> Data base EBSCO February 2008, term: productivity and psychology

<sup>2</sup> The Productivity Challenge, Japan Productivity Center for Socio-Economic Development, 1994

The key to this type of educational actions are among other things competences and subjective conviction about these competences. In society based on knowledge demand for competences increases. The term competence means a combination of knowledge, abilities and attitudes suitable for a given situation. As early as in 2005 the European Parliament formulated certain recommendations about the key competences in lifetime learning. The aim of these recommendations is to support individual's development and high quality of education, and also to give adults possibility to develop and revise achieved key competences by using comprehensive and coherent teaching offer.

Key competences – strengthen personal self-realization, social integration, active public spirit and possibility of employment, therefore, they should be developed, maintained and revised during lifetime learning. To understand key competences in lifetime learning, reference ranges were formulated. Within these ranges eight key competences were established:

1. Communicating in mother tongue.
2. Communicating in foreign languages.
3. Mathematical competences and basic scientific/technical competences.
4. IT competences.
5. Learning ability.
6. Interpersonal, intercultural, social and civil competences.
7. Enterprise.
8. Cultural expression.

Ranges of many competences partly overlap and are connected with each other, i.e. aspects indispensable in one domain support competences in the other. For instance learning ability favors other educational activities. Some competences, e.g. critical thinking, creativity, undertaking initiative, problem solving, risk evaluation and constructive emotion managing are significant for all eight key competences. People should have and form key competences to the degree preparing them for adulthood. Competence deficits result in passivity, lack of resourcefulness, fear of undertaking any action, whereas, competence progress and positive attitude towards its development through a lifetime result in effectiveness of action in the spirit of productivity. The group of psychological competences that determine high level of performance shall also include the way we perceive and experience ourselves (Skarzynska, 2007, Bandura, 2007, 1997).

A fact, whether people perceive themselves as effective individuals is decisive for the specificity of their functioning, also in the context of their – broadly understood – productivity. The way we perceive and experience ourselves is of great significance for our entire functioning (Pervin, 2005). It is assumed that there usually exists a one's self-concept, knowledge about oneself (Grzelak, Jarymowicz, 2000, Laguna, 2005b, Crittenden et al. 2007). It is very important what image of her or his own predispositions and competences an individual builds through self-reflection and what judgements people make about their abilities to act in certain situation. At a level of generated self-description there appears

a conviction that one is able to act in a certain way, that is achieve expected results (Łaguna, 2005a). Analyzing meaning of convictions about one's own effectiveness, Bandura (2007, 1997) clearly states, that level of motivation, emotional state and action are more based on what people believe in than on what is an objective truth. Individuals with a strong conviction about their effectiveness expect that they achieve satisfactory results through good action. On the other hand, individuals with lower level of those convictions exclude from the analysis many possibilities, they do not even analyze costs and benefits. Perception of one's own effectiveness allows to determine what people know, what they will do with knowledge and abilities they possess. Convictions about one's own effectiveness have also influence on whether people pay attention to the possibilities or difficulties they may encounter and how serious these difficulties may seem.

Albert Bandura (2007, 1997) as above mentioned researchers, argues within the framework of his socio-cognitive theory about the sense of effectiveness, that individuals with high effectiveness focus on possibilities worth realizing, and they perceive obstacles as possible to overcome. Individuals haunted by self-doubts focus on adversities which they perceive as obstacles beyond their control and they easily convince themselves about futility of their efforts. The latter achieve limited success in action, even in circumstances which give them many opportunities (Kruger, Dickson, 1994, Łaguna 2006) and in situation when they possess other indispensable competences.

Conviction of having deficit of ability to undertake a productive action is connected with perception of having deficit of power to meet the challenge, deficit of endurance to bear hardships resulting from undertaking action, deficit of faith in one's own effectiveness and finally deficit of competences determining productive action. According to the theory of sense of one's own effectiveness (Bandura, 1997) undertaking or non-undertaking certain activities depends on whether we consider that we can deal with them in behavioral and cognitive sense. That is why organization's activities, such as creating many opportunities for its employees to behaviorally and cognitively deal with encountered difficulties are so important. In this way employees practice and shape their dealing competences. For instance organization should propose specific behavioral procedures of action and make sure that employee knows when, where and with whom he or she may discuss a problem, what does he or she have to do to be communicative and well prepared to this kind of consultation. The sense of effectiveness may be an antidote to individual's passivity in social functioning and guarantee for individual's high level of performance. People with the sense of effectiveness are active, they not only manage their actions but also test its functioning. They reflect on their effectiveness. Apart from behavioral and cognitive strategies for dealing with problems, another important competence concerns abilities to establish and implement goals.

Contemporary self-regulation theories (Brandstatter, et al., 2003, Gollwitzer, 1999) emphasize the fact, that establishing a goal (e.g. I'm going to take a part in vocational training) is just the one of initial conditions for its effective realization.

The key assumption of self-regulation theory according to Julius Kuhl (2002) is that an individual may believe in his or her effectiveness, may be highly motivated, but despite that he or she will be still unable to implement his or her intentions and achieve established goal such as active, radical change introduction in the context of vocational retraining.

An alternative for this problem may be model of action phases of Heckhausen and Gollwitzer (Heckhausen, Gollwitzer, 1987). This model refers to functional aspect of four successive action phases – from arising of wishes and desires of an individual and transforming them into goals, through self-regulative process necessary for effective initiation of action, course of action, and finally to the evaluation of the achieved outcomes. In the phase analysis of effective action appear individual differences.

Researchers (Gollwitzer, Heckhausen, Steller, 1990) distinguish two types of individual cognitive action orientation, that is deliberative mindset versus implemental mindset. Differentiated two cognitive orientations regulate the effectiveness of implementation intentions, that is influence the perception of a desired goal in a specific way. It is illustrated by empirical studies.

For instance, in the research conducted by Taylor and Gollwitzer (1995) the participants were asked to report their thoughts concerning decision that have not yet been made and to which they were inwardly obliged. Participants with deliberative mind-sets listed equally pros and cons of implementation intention, which appeared to be the source of dilemmas and effective inhibitor for implementation intentions. Whereas, participants with implemental mind-sets enumerate much more benefits than losses in relation to chosen intention, which was effective motivator and initiated transition from predecisional phase to successive actional phase.

It is said (Brandstatter et al. 2003) that forming intention and its effective implementation causes significant change in individual's cognitive orientation, that is change from deliberative mind-set to implemental mind-set. It is an important guideline for supervisory workers, managers, whose aim is to activate selected group of workers by strengthening certain competences and arranging for them experience of effective action. Activation of workers to make them more productive and effective is possible, by initiating and monitoring actions in particular phases serving implementation of a goal. The idea is to create so called implementation orientation. When an individual has knowledge and abilities enabling him or her to specify when, where and how to do something, he or she becomes effective in natural way. Active and productive action (especially in the circumstances of radical change) requires phase analysis of intention (e.g. intention of continuing education in respect to improvement of selected competences), supporting it in behavioural and cognitive potential of individual's action. In this way managers-educators may contribute to creating so called cognitive implementation orientation, which is a peculiar guarantee of individual and at the same time organizational success within the area of implementing tasks, goals and priorities.

It is particularly significant when increase of organization's productivity is feasible through the acquisition of knowledge and competences by its employees.

It is appropriate, to the extent possible, to conduct parallel training in theoretical and practical knowledge in the light of “learning by doing,” applied in Western countries. This type of strategy in practice will support development of not only effectiveness but also enterprise. Enterprise (according to the European Union definition of key competences) means ability of an individual to put an idea into action. It includes creativity, innovativeness, risk taking and the ability to plan and carry out a venture in order to achieve established goals. It constitutes support for everyone in everyday private and social life, and it helps workers to gain awareness of the context of their work and the ability to make use of every chance. It is a basis for more concrete abilities and knowledge necessary for those people who undertake ventures of social or commercial character.

In the psychological literature most of the authors who are interested in enterprise issue (cf. Laguna 2005) declare for the definition proposed by Shane and Venkataraman (2000, p. 218) that enterprise it is a process through which possibilities of producing future goods and services are discovered, evaluated and used. If we deal with people less enterprising, who cannot be effective and productive in action, we should arrange such system, so that they could improve a number of competences, supporting their activeness. To this type of competences we can include: planning, decision making, behavioural and cognitive aspects of formulating goals, creating intention and strategy of implementing goal intention, techniques of coping with negative thoughts, ability of objective risk evaluation, creative problem solving, correcting and improving current solutions.

### Conclusions

It is assumed that productive individual has a number of competences which enable him or her to live active, dynamic and high standard life and to gain not only welfare (in economic sense) but also well-being (in psychological sense). In the light of psychological research there are grounds to state that productivity can be learned, that productivity (in a life-stance sense) can be shaped the same as people’s conviction about themselves and the world can be shaped.

We can assume that productive individual it is a person who through her or his own activity achieves goals and maintains high level of performance at low financial, psychosocial and emotional costs. It has to be remembered, that the main subject of productivity is human, his or her creative potential for constant improving and innovating a good (or service), production process, organization and culture of work. Improvements in productivity are possible only when workers and managers share deep conviction that productivity is feasible, that they can work actively and productively in their company, that they possess a number of competences which create conditions for communication in the atmosphere of mutual respect.

There is hope, that in Poland understanding the purpose of productivity improvement will increase and embrace broad circle of managers, trade unions leaders,

management boards members and rank employees – convinced about their own feasible effectiveness, determining, in the sphere of values, attitudes and action, idea of productive life not only in economic but also in psychological sense.

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## O ČINNOSTECH A DOVEDNOSTECH URČUJÍCÍCH VYSOKOU ÚROVEŇ PRODUKTIVITY

Produktivita – co to znamená? Jedná se o zajímavé a také významné téma? Ekonomové dokáží tuto otázku zodpovědět racionálně, umí popsat nebo dokonce spočítat míru vysoce kvalitního výkonu. Psychologové se v tomto případě setkávají s mnohými těžkostmi, neboť si uvědomují řadu faktorů ovlivňujících účinnost, se kterou se lidé zhošťují různých rolí a úkolů ve snaze dospět k rozličným cílům. Předpokládáme-li, že produktivita má pozitivní konotaci, a to nejen z ekonomického, ale i ze společenského a psychologického hlediska, můžeme zvažovat, jaké dovednosti charakterizují produktivního jedince.

Cílem tohoto článku je popsat úlohu vybraných dovedností, které jsou podstatné pro vývoj a udržení kompetencí vedoucích k produktivitě. Na úvod lze předpokládat, že produktivní jedinec je člověk, který svými činnostmi dosahuje cílů a udržuje si vysokou úroveň výkonu při současném vynaložení malých investic (finančních, psychosociálních, emočních).

**Klíčová slova:** dovednosti a produktivita, sebereflexe z hlediska schopnosti jednat v jistých situacích