

Abstract

Topic: “Assessment in civil service: Current situation and transferring to competency-based assessment model”

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The paper presents the summarized results of investigation of assessment of the civil service recruitment system in the Republic of Azerbaijan and transition to the competency-based model. The transition to a competency-based model in the civil service has been part of the development activities in the framework of “The strategy for Civil Service Development in the Republic of Azerbaijan for the years of 2019–2025”. The strategy has been enforced within the Republic of Azerbaijan since 2018. To enhance the professionalism and efficiency of civil servants, a competency model should be applied in civil service based on international experience. The model to be applied should identify not only formal requirements for civil service tasks but also the skills required to hold those positions, their measurement and evaluation mechanisms. The application of the competency model should be accompanied by the grouping of civil service positions by their field of activity and the creation of job profiles within groups. According to the strategy the competency model should cover all civil service tasks and be open to the public. The competency model should be used as a key criterion in civil service recruitment and evaluation of civil servants' performance. For implementing it, a set of tests, practical tasks, interviews and other assessment tools should be developed to assess the required competencies of citizens in the civil service.

In this research, the main challenges and gaps in the current recruitment system, the advantages of the competency-based model and the role in the assessment process will be determined.

Keywords: Competency-based civil service model, civil service recruitment, assessment in recruitment

Introduction

On 23rd of November, 2018 “Civil Service Development Strategy for 2019-2025” is adopted by Decree of the President of the Republic of Azerbaijan. One of the main goals within the strategy is applying of the competency-based model in civil service recruitment in Azerbaijan. Competency model was accepted as a valuable tool to define skill and knowledge requirements of specific jobs, to assess competencies and performances, and help to set effective Human Resources Management (HRM) strategy in the organization. Several tools used in competency model provide an opportunity to assess a candidate's skills required for any position. The competency model is a combination of practical and theoretical knowledge, mental abilities, values and attitudes. Application of this model should also contribute to developing other functional issues in the civil service system as

performance appraisal, professional development and training, as well as the motivation of civil servants.

The strategy has taken into account the strengths and weaknesses of civil service, factors that create opportunities for its development, some real threats in the current situation. If to analyze the current system of civil service, it is clear to see the main weaknesses of the civil service since some unregulated issues in the civil service legislation remain. There also exists a lack of correlation between the results of the assessment of the civil service recruitment process and a low level of professionalism in public service and human resources management in state bodies. Taking into account public sector itself is not fast-growing space according to its bureaucratic basement in general in many countries, although frequent development in private sector requires sometimes requires fast decision-making in developing countries to overlap and stay up to date. This directly addresses issues of human resources selection and management in state agencies. It is also related to old-style recruitment in the hiring process. At the same time by modernizing the recruitment system, civil service chances to overcome obstacles can open the new doors such as availability of experience, achievements and professionalism in implementing civil service reforms. The availability of mechanisms for the implementation of international civil service projects and their outcomes in the civil service system of the country will serve to good governance and transparency. Also, the extension of civil servants' perspectives as a management tool as a result of the integration of other agencies into information systems could lead to smart rotation of human capital.

Statement of the problem

At present, the civil service selection process of Azerbaijan is implemented through a centralized process run by the State Examination Center (SEC) for the candidates applying to vacant administrative positions available in state organizations. This centralized process consists of a competitive objective exam and selective interview. Test exam is organized according to the classification of civil service positions which are included in two groups as group A (administrative-leading positions) and group B (administrative executive positions). During test exams, knowledge of candidates is assessed within 4 fields: native language, legislation, logical thinking and ICT. Candidates who passed the test exam successfully are given the proper certificate and this certificate provide an opportunity for the candidate to participate in the interview stage. Such a certification embedded by the local legislation provides candidates with a right to apply for as many vacant positions as possible and go through the interview stage of the selection process, while the SEC has makes every necessary arrangement to accommodate candidates' needs. The interview stage is delivered by the interview commission. Interview commission established by state organization which the vacant position belongs to and commission consists of 3 members. Members of the interview commission are representative of state organization, representative of SEC and for providing transparency during interview process SEC involves independent experts as a member. During the interview, process candidate is assessed on 4 criteria as theoretical legislation knowledge level, practical knowledge,

worldview and personal skills (analytical thinking, decision making, communication skill, emotional stability etc.).

General situation (till 2019)

Number of applications received	People who passed the test	Candidates who successfully proceeded to interview	Number of appointed as civil servants
114051	26297	11816	9219

Comparison of 2015 and 2018

Stages of recruitment process	2015	2018
Number of requests	11712	9224
People who passed the test	3233	3199
Candidates who successfully proceeded to interview	1103	2135
Number of appointed as civil servants	776	1353

Civil service in numbers

Number of existing civil servants	Numbers of State bodies	Number of positions including vacant
10710	126	15965 (5255-vacant)
19774	216	27149 (7375-vacant)

Civil servants according to the level of education

Bachelor	Master	With foreign diplomas
17608	2166	65

As described above the current recruitment system in Azerbaijan can provide a basic evaluation of knowledge and skills in any proper position. However, the application of the competency-based model will influence to make core changes in civil service recruitment and also increase the effectiveness in human resources management in the civil service of Azerbaijan.

The purpose was to find out the advantages of the transition to the competency-based model and what factual measures need to be taken. The results of the survey showed that central executive state bodies will be actively involved in the personnel recruitment and training processes through implementing the Civil Service Competency Model and the organizations will be undergoing structural changes aiming at human resources management improvement. The following directions of the institutional process improvement were suggested by the study: to create a competency-based model involving a group of experts and to find out an optimal model for implementation among the best world practices.

Research methodology

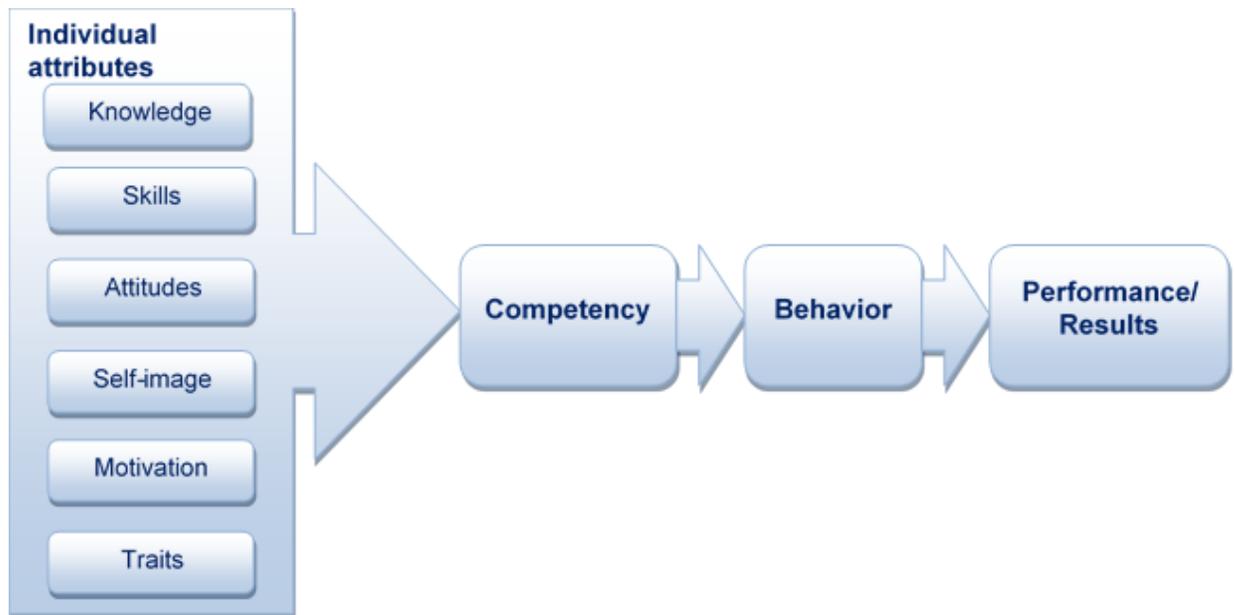
The scientific literature was utilized in order to: 1) to sum up the academic insights on the assuring advantages for public service in local and state organizations; 2) to mitigate the risks of wide applicability of the competency-based model with respect to the central level; 3) foresee the pilot experience of the competency-based model process in Azerbaijan and forecast its aimed sustainability at the institutional level. The reasoning of legal acts was investigated for interpreting the following: 1) institutional opportunities to apply the competency-based model and institutional liability (national legislation); Example of Lithuanian case for the document investigation was due to the facts that a) this country post-Soviet country and b) its implementation of CSCM was new and have been assessed as well-functioning in the recent years, by the external evaluators. Kazakhstan case of implementing of the competency-based model was reviewed since it is pioneer country that is implementing newly competency based model and it is considered to be as useful benchmark and feedback. “Practical guide for competency based personnel selection and performance appraisal” was taken into account as the document carries out recommendations within the project of “Support to further reforms in civil service system of the Republic of Azerbaijan”.

The concept of competency

According to the literature, competency is the detectable set of behavioral motifs of an employee that lead to effective and superior work performance. Peculiarities such as knowledge, skills, attitudes and other personal characteristics (motivation, traits, self-image, etc.) underlie competencies (Boyatzis, 1982, 2008, Spencer&Spencer, 1993, McClelland, 1973,1998, Vacola et al., 2007, Tobin a.o, 2008, Colman, 2009, Chouhan&Srivastava, 2014) (see Tab 1):

- Knowledge – anything that is known. The three major classes of knowledge are declarative knowledge (knowing that), procedural knowledge (knowing how), and acquaintanceship knowledge (knowing people, places, and things).
 - Skill – expertise or accomplishment in any field; specifically, any complex, organized pattern of behavior acquired through training and practice, including cognitive skills, perceptual skills, motor skills, and social skills.
 - Attitude – an enduring pattern of evaluative responses towards a person, object, or issue.
- Taking into consideration analysis of European literature, existing competency models and the best practices competencies could be adjusted into three main categories:

1. General/core competencies that are relevant to all staff upon all functional areas and levels. Some consists “Organization”, “Analysis”, “Communication”, “Emotional stability”, “Responsibility”, etc. Core competencies reflect a mission and values of civil service and are applicable for different organizations.
2. Managerial competencies - competencies that are related to leading an organization and people. Some examples include “Strategic planning”, “Decision making”, etc.
3. Professional competencies are job-specific competencies required to perform a particular job role or profession. Some examples include “HR management”, “IT management”, and “Project management”, etc.



Tab 1. Concept of Competency

Competency based Civil Service Models

When looking at the competency-based model in developed countries, it enables to view that competency management can: help to create a common language that strengthens consistency across the public service; ensure continuity in monitoring the careers of public servants; provide a future-oriented perspective on personnel management⁴ and support a culture of continuous self-development/ OECD countries have introduced competency management for different reasons⁶ for instance, to create flexibility (Australia and Belgium); increase efficiency and effectiveness of people management (Australia and Canada); provide clarity over employee`s development priorities (Denmark); overcome the classic bureaucratic model (France); strengthen government competitiveness (Korea); create a flexible and highly professional civil service that easily adapts to the challenges confronting government (the Netherlands); serve as a vehicle for organizational and cultural change (Belgium and the UK).

As the reason determining the success of competency management is the need for a broader cultural and organizational reform. Competency management can support reform endeavors and hence provide leverage for change.

While reviewing Lithuanian model, it demonstrates that the model has a part of centralized application in personnel selection, and transparent selection is referred to practices of EU states and civil service. The Model actualizes the competences required by the challenges of the 21st century, which motivates young and promising employees to apply for work in the public sector, as well as activates qualitative changes in the organizational public management. Three years have passed applying the Competency-Based Civil Service Model (CSCM) in Lithuania. The tests that assess a person’s general skills and the knowledge of laws are not good enough to fully identify the candidate’s suitability for an office manager’s position. Although the widening of CSCM in Lithuania still requires improvement of the training of employees and its linkage to the Competency Model directly. Also, the quality of the activities would be better, and training funds would be used more efficiently, it would enable to plan both horizontal and vertical career of an employee (Valstybės tarnybos aktualijos, 2015); Summarizing the analysis of the scientific literature, we can conclude that the implementation of change in public management, i.e., the CSCM implementation through centralized selection of staff to work in the civil service, organizing staff training in terms of the change management perspective, is currently in the phase of actualization and result evaluation (Hayes, 2010). The wider use of the Model, taking into account the development of human resources management system in an individual organization, is likely to be still at the planning stage.

In case of how Kazakhstan is transforming to CSCM, it presents applying its Common Competency Framework (CCF) for recruitment and promotion. That is a joint by the agency of the Republic of Kazakhstan for Civil Service affairs and Anti-Corruption, inter-ministerial working groups and add an external consulting firm. This represents a significant change of the current system. There are qualification requirements for each category and level of civil servants, mainly related to education and work experience.

Competencies		Classification of positions in the civil service														
		D					C			B			A			
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15
Differential	Systematic management															
	Change management															
	Strategic thinking															
	Leadership															
	Decision making															
	Activity management															
	Collaboration and interaction															
	Efficiency															
	Self-assured (development)															
Basic	Integrity															
	Citizen satisfaction and awareness															
	Responsibility															
	Entrepreneurship															
	Stress resistance															

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Tab 2. CSCM in Kazakhstan.

Implementation

“Practical Guide for Competency-Based Personnel Selection and Performance Appraisal” is recommendation guideline of European Union following the project of “Support to further reforms in civil service system of the Republic of Azerbaijan”. It proposes to stand in improving the capacity, tools and efficiency of the State Examination Centre, developing and implementing the new classification of occupations and linking it to the recruitment, performance appraisal and remuneration systems.

Through the projects the classification system of Civil Service positions, the remuneration system was modernized under the new classification of Civil Service positions. The purpose of the project was to contribute to the further development of a professional and sustainable Civil Service system in Azerbaijan in accordance following the best European practices. The purpose of the manual was to improve civil service HRM practices in the Republic of Azerbaijan providing modern tools for personnel selection and performance appraisal. In accordance, the new remuneration system of civil servants` was accepted in 2019. This milestone also supports new approach in recruitment procedure of future civil servants’.

The creation of competency based civil service model will primarily improve with the following factors: 1. It can increase the level of interest to become civil servants while the level of interest to become a civil servant among highly skilled jobseekers remain low as current statistics is in favor of they choose getting employed in the private sector. 2. The model itself can be a reason of developing the experience in different department, such as strategic management, work quality management, e-management development, and others. European community of researchers and scientists is mature and growing, constantly analyzing the civil service improvement issues and actively discussing them with politicians and society. After reviewing the works of the scientists who wrote about the progress of the civil service competency models and their implementation with the purpose of better human resource management in the organizations, it can be concluded that these insights emphasize the benefits to both the state and an individual organization.

Implementing the Competency based Model in Civil Service:

- can raise the attractiveness of civil service in the labor market helping the transition to a higher career flexibility, due to cultural changes within institutions;
- Able to extend productivity and efficiency (Rekašienė, Sudnickas, 2014), visible to the public;
- the continuous application of the competence model makes the civil service more transparent, lucid and qualified (Valstybės tarnybos aktualijos, 2015);

Legal analyses

If the clause ¹8.4.5 of the Action plan of the strategy will come to force, there might be some contradictory issues that will oppose one another. Once the creation of positional profiles and families will be created, the question of setting a competency model will be under doubt.

¹ The action plan of “The strategy for Civil Service Development in the Republic of Azerbaijan for the years of 2019–2025 which demands to propose alternation of profiles of position in the civil service.

While the investigation of the different competency-based civil service model, it was difficult to meet the classification of position based families and profiles since in the test stage it was not required to take specific type of field test. Recently the profile for each position families was created and there were defined 5 types fields and included 27 positional profiles. The other issues of staff management remain under the jurisdiction of the organization.

Conclusion

Results of this study prove that we can start talking about the implementation of competency-based civil service model in Azerbaijan highlighting the successes and mitigating the risks of the purposefulness among best practices. The competency-based civil service selection model has sophisticated experience in several European and overseas politicians, civil servants and the academic community, and it has fulfilled the aims meant in the phase of its creation: 1. The Model is used in the selection of employees; it is used while planning and optimizing the demand of office positions, and assessing the competencies of the employees who wish to stay in the occupied position; it is also used in planning the training centrally. National documents and statistics serve as evidence of the going on process. 2. The academic community joined the Model implementation in the initial phase and has been actively engaged in the public administration theme since the very start. 3. Having enabled the state and local authorities to plan the necessary training, the initiative of Municipalities increased emphasizing the municipal involvement in the improvement of competencies needed to manage modern processes. 4. The institutions adjust their human resource management systems following the recommendations of the CSCM. The survey results point out the problems of the CSCM implementation; on the other hand, they show the improvement opportunities and purposefulness of the Model on the institutional level. The organizational competency model defines those competencies which are necessary for successful performance in a certain position – it should be focused on them accordingly when planning learning and development. It is crucial to consider performance goals set for the next years as achieving them may require strengthening certain competencies.

Challenges

It is likely that the current lack of resources and qualification to carry out deeper research of the personnel needs, to carry out the staff competency assessment and the results-oriented activities assessment periodically. For the more profound analysis of this assessment, research should be performed with the group of experts that are specialized to set learning and training) planning. If positional families are included in the competency-based model, there would be less need for the competency-based model to be enforced.

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