

A study on leadership competencies

Diana Florina ROBESCU

Politehnica University of Timisoara, Romania
diana.robescu@student.upt.ro

Dana FATOL

Politehnica University of Timisoara, Romania
dana.fatol@student.upt.ro

Dan PASCU

Politehnica University of Timisoara, Romania
dan.pascu@retim.ro

Anca DRAGHICI

Politehnica University of Timisoara, Romania
anca.draghici@upt.ro

Abstract. *Leadership competencies (LDC) are key factors for any company that aims for a competitive advantage in a fast-changing business environment. The recent acceleration in digitalisation and the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on all organisations raised the awareness of having strong leaders to overcome any possible crisis. A leadership driven model was used to assess the development needs of the management team in a medium size Romanian company in the waste management sector, and to understand how to remain an engaged leader and drive performance. In this context, we conducted a research using the 360-feedback model on a group of 23 managers, assessing fifteen competencies within three wide categories related to job, personal and interpersonal areas. As the 360-feedback model is based on the perception of LDC, an important aspect of the study was the assessment of the differences between self-assessment and stakeholders' assessment.*

Keywords: leadership competencies, competencies development, 360-feedback, waste management

Introduction

In the fast-changing business environment currently driven by the Covid-19 pandemic context, most of working routines were changed, and human contact, as we used to know it, was affected in a such a dramatic way that outdated practices used by the companies cause the loss of value-oriented talent. Based on scientific literature we identified a gap related to the studies on how to create an innovative role of human resources management, to support the achievement of results at the macro level, rather than just having a passive role at the micro and medium level of the businesses (Andriukaitienė et al., 2017; Shet et al., 2017; Dirani et al., 2020). Many recent studies have spotted effective leadership as a critical factor for a successful and competitive organization.

Furthermore, to sustain a competitive advantage, corporate human resources need to transform job roles, to train the employees for implementing value-added strategies. (Sparrow & Makram, 2015) Therefore, human resources managers are now

challenged by business leaders to think differently about recruiting, selecting, developing, and empowering employees (Dirani et al., 2020).

According to the study of Claus (2019), corporate leadership can support the creation of new roles within the talent value chain and contribute to positive organisational outcomes. Several leadership theories have been created in the last century, most of which have argued that leadership styles are influenced by different circumstances (Müller & Turner, 2007).

The role of leaders and the way they manage is now undeniable since the source of competitive advantage in the knowledge-based economy is focused on human capital. In the scientific literature there are examples of leadership styles that influence employee engagement, performance, or work-related attitude (Shamim et al., 2019). Knowledge is also a key factor for obtaining competitive advantage and a conceptual knowledge sharing model will be able to support the performance of any organization, by implementing an extensive learning curriculum. (Robescu et al., 2020)

In this context, the paper presents a leadership driven model that was used to assess the development needs of the management team in the case of a medium size company (a representative Romanian company in the waste management sector) and to understand how to remain an engaged leader and drive performance. Furthermore, the results of a conducted research using the 360-feedback model will be presented (the research was developed on a group of 23 managers, assessing fifteen competencies within three wide categories related to job, personal and interpersonal areas). As the 360-feedback model is based on the perception of LDC, an important aspect of the present study was the assessment of the differences between self-assessment and stakeholders' assessment. There have been identified that the proposed research approach can be further extended in two other directions: (1) redesigning the company's leadership model to include the characteristics of the waste management sector, aiming for a transformational leadership model, and (2) introducing a quantitative method to support the assessment of competencies and their development.

Literature review

"Leadership is the art of mobilising others to struggle for the shared aspirations" (Kouzes & Posner, 2010). Leadership competencies framework was in the field of interest since 1960s, when McClelland's work was questioning what made up an effective manager. Later, American Management Association's push in the 1980s to differentiate between efficient and inefficient managerial behaviours for sustaining performance. Efforts to identify and measure leadership competencies are still a significant part of a broader trend towards a competency management culture.

One of the first LDC model developed by Boyatzis (1982) includes 19 competencies, showed the following five clusters: goal and action management, leadership, human resource management, focus on others, and directing subordinates.

In 1997, Sparrow studied and defined management competencies and behavioural competencies of effective managers. These two conceptualised models point out competencies at the individual level, still Sparrow (1997) introduced the organisational competency or strategic competency, with a focus on practices that lead to innovation. Because of the globalisation and fast technological changes, LDC needs to be dynamic to capture the new paradigm.

In 2018, Fowler, Zigarmi, Roberts & Shuck have developed a new LDC model based on self-determination theory, showing that that leaders that allow autonomy are less likely to respond or use pressure. When they promote relationships, they show

subordinates they care about their contribution to the team and support the connection; they make employees feel competent, encouraging them to show their skills and allowing them to develop and perform. Giving positive feedback on tasks serves to increase people's motivation.

Today's LDC models appreciate the complexity of organisational life and how both situational and individual differences factors can attenuate or increase the effectiveness of leadership competencies.

Recent models also consider multiple levels and utilise science-based evidence for design and conceptualisation. Developed in 2007 by Mumford, Campion and Morgeson, the LDC strataplex is a multi-level model and includes layered (strata) and segmented (plex) skill requirements. The model comprises the following leadership skills requirements: cognitive skills - ability to communicate well both verbally and in writing, and the ability to learn and adapt, interpersonal skills - ability to influence others and convey effective social interactions, business skills - ability to perform operations analyses and manage resources - and strategic skills - ability to solve organisational problems, referred to as solution appraisal and objective evaluation skills.

Sparrow (1997) defined LD organisational competency as a characteristic based from employee's behaviours, referring to it as an organisational level competency rather than an individual competency. Thus, context also plays an important role in determining which competencies are the most important.

The most recently emerged leadership competency school, synthesises all previous schools, considering traits, behaviour, and emotional intelligence as competencies and suggesting that competency profiling is appropriate in different situations and competency.

ARZESH Competency Model (2018), defines competency as a set of knowledge, abilities, skills, experiences, and behaviours, which lead to the effective performance. Thus, in the current research, we refer to leadership competency as the ability to act as a role model for the team, being reliable and have the capacity solves problems and takes important decisions.

Many organisations have developed LDC models to support human resources selection and recruiting processes, employee engagement evaluations, training, and development plans. For the purpose of the present research, there have been designed the LDC model for a medium size company from Romania (named using the acronym RTM) to understand the impact of people's behaviours, identify the development needs of the management team, and define individual development plans.

The employee perception of the management team is extremely important, as adapting appropriate leadership behaviour can achieve desired work attitude (House, 1971). Therefore, 360-feedback model is considered a powerful tool to assess leadership competencies having couple. Some benefits of the tool results are increasing self-awareness, clarifying behaviours, identifying opportunities for promotion, accountability, and responsibility.

The research methodology

For this paper we conducted research on how leadership is perceived among employees. The purpose was to identify the competencies' gaps and the development needs of the management team in the company RTM. The assessment used was based on 360-feedback model (Nickels & Ford, 2017; Fleenor, 2019), using a questionnaire developed by us to assess 15 competencies, grouped in three main categories: job

related competencies, personal, and interpersonal competencies (Figure no. 1). These recommendations are organized around a model of 360-feedback characteristics similar with the approach presented by Fleenor, 2019.

“The model focuses on the quality and nature of 360-feedback provided to feedback recipients and to their organizations” (Fleenor, 2019). Currently, the proposed approach consists of: (a) establishment of the competencies to be assessed; (b) awareness of the feedback (e.g., opinions and perceptions of the respondents); (c) acceptance of the feedback (debate on research results); and (d) accountability for acting on the feedback (conclusions).



Figure no. 1. Leadership competencies

Source: Authors' own development

The tool was adapted from Management Effectiveness Profile System (MEPS presented in (Nickels & Ford, 2017)), each competency being defined for this project according to RTM company's needs (Table no. 1). The questions were established to reflect the expected behaviour for each competency assessed. Tool ran as self-assessment, direct reports assessment, and peers and superior's assessment to provide managers with confidential and in-depth feedback, promoting self-awareness.

Table no 1. Types and definitions of the assessed competencies

Competency	Definition
1. Job related competencies	
Problem solving	Ability to anticipate and overcome obstacles or difficulties encountered in current work, by correctly identifying problems, formulating appropriate solutions to solve them from the perspective of the entire organisation and taking responsibility for actions and decisions, both individually and as staff manager subordinated.
Time management	The ability to effectively use one's own working time to achieve set goals, to set aside time for team management and good relationships with superiors, subordinates, and peers in the organisation, as well as with other business partners.

Planning	Planning the coordinated activity and projects considering the long-term perspective of the organisation; building clear, logical, and coherent work plans for the subordinate team / teams and their convincing presentation to those involved.
Objectives settings and prioritisation	Setting SMART work objectives for subordinate staff and prioritising teamwork / teams. Allocate the necessary time for the activities that contribute the most to the achievement of the company's strategic objectives and guide the coordinated team / teams to proceed in a similar way.
Performant leadership	Possession of good, specialised knowledge and management skills; the ability to define and track specific performance parameters to ensure the constant achievement of objectives and the permanent improvement of performance at the level of the coordinated team / teams. Ability to identify risks associated with actions and find ways to reduce or eliminate them. Supporting a collaborative work environment at cross-departmental level.
Organization	Balanced and equitable distribution of tasks among the members of the led team and allocation to them of work tasks appropriate to the training and experience of each. The organisation of the team emphasising the talent and ability of each member, creating a vision of progress among employees.
<i>2. Interpersonal competencies</i>	
Team development	Motivating, encouraging and constantly supporting subordinate employees so that they develop the skills necessary to achieve high professional performance; knowing the aspirations of the members of the coordinated team, supporting their career progress, ensuring an environment conducive to development and a confident attitude in their capacity for development; recognition of merits and cultivation of employee performance; willingness to provide support through coaching and mentoring to achieve positive results for the team and the organisation. Creating and sustaining a culture-based on continuous improvement and development at the company level, learning from past experiences, conflicts, and divergent opinions.
Delegation	Ability and concern to delegate tasks correctly to team members / led teams. Delegation of both routine tasks and complex decisions or tasks, preparing all the conditions for the delegates to successfully carry them out. Tracking and supporting the execution of delegated tasks. Taking responsibility for delegated tasks.
Contribution	Manifestation of an open, positive, and proactive attitude towards colleagues, towards work and progress in general. Involvement and support through personal example, current activities and projects of the organisation to achieve the strategic objectives of the organisation. Identify and support innovations and change initiatives at the organisational level to improve results.
Feedback	Allocate the necessary time to discuss the tasks, projects, or behaviours of subordinate employees to extract relevant lessons from them and improve performance. Providing regular positive and constructive feedback to led team members, based on concrete facts and results, in an honest and balanced way. Sincere recognition of the merits of subordinates, celebration of team achievements and public appreciation of special merits. Providing constructive feedback particularly and maintaining confidentiality on the issues discussed. Requesting feedback about one's own activity, results and behaviour from others and using the feedback obtained for professional and personal development.
Respect for team / employees / company	Manifestation of respect in all interpersonal relationships, with all types of people, in any situation. In debates or conflicts, the ability to understand and consider adverse points of view, to counter-argue without attacking the person, showing good self-control. Promoting an inclusive culture, recognising, and valuing diversity of any kind. Promoting among the employees the awareness of the company's mission and the responsibility that each one has towards the clients, the health of the community and the protection of nature.
<i>3. Personal competencies</i>	
Stress management	The ability to cope with the demands of the job without excessive consumption of emotional energy, without affecting one's own health and the work environment of others. In tense, crisis or conflict situations, the ability to have good self-control, to remain calm and inner balance that allows good management of those situations.

	Recognising your own level of stress and the ability to get out of high stress quickly. Able to create a climate that supports the well-being of colleagues, monitoring their emotional state and helping them to overcome difficult circumstances.
Integrity	Constant behaviour that gains the trust of others. Responsible and professional approach of all activities, in line with the values, strategy and mission of the organisation. Compliance with applicable legislation, rules, working procedures and standards of the organisation. Promoting and supporting an organisational culture that sanctions unethical, illegal or abusive behaviours.
Communication	Ability and courage to express opinions pertinently, to say things by name, to manage conflicts effectively and to overcome obstacles in communication, creating an environment in which open debate and sincere dialogue are encouraged. Ability to support clear, concise, and compelling communications for multiple audiences, both written and oral. The ability to actively listen to the interlocutors to identify common points in case of divergence of opinion or to identify optimal solutions to problems encountered.
Personal engagement	The ability to generate enthusiasm and commitment among others to achieve the strategic objectives of the organisation. The ability to inspire confidence in coordinated team members for the future, their ongoing motivation, and the cultivation of team performance.

Source: Authors' own development

The questionnaire consists of 60 items describing behaviours of the assessed competencies and the scale use for quantifying each answer was Likert with 5 levels (Table no. 2).

Table no 2. Likert scale used to capitalize respondents' opinions/perceptions

0	1	2	3	4
not enough data to evaluate	totally disagree	partially agree	partially agree	totally agree

Source: Authors' own development

23 managers, from three organisational levels were included in the research sample (in the assessment process), and a number of 435 questionnaires were distributed, but finally there were processed only 398 complete questionnaires. All questions had the option of open answers, but for those questions related to interpersonal competencies a detailed descriptive answer was mandatory. The research tool was designed as such because there have been considered that for this stage of the team development, interpersonal competencies are the most important in the RTM company.

Research results and discussions

Responses were recorded for all subjects evaluated. By comparing the number of completed surveys to the total number of those launched, there have been achieved a good participation rate of 91.6%.

Results were analysed at the individual and team level to identify strengths and development needs. As presented in Figure no. 2, highest score was registered for integrity, which is a personal competency showing an adequate behaviour aligned with rules and regulations and compliance with applicable legislation. The lowest score of 3.32 is corresponding to feedback and communication, both part of the same process of organisational communication. The next lowest score, and strongly linked to the previous one, is 3.35 for delegation and personal engagement. It offers us a good overview on the less developed competencies that need to be addressed as top priority.

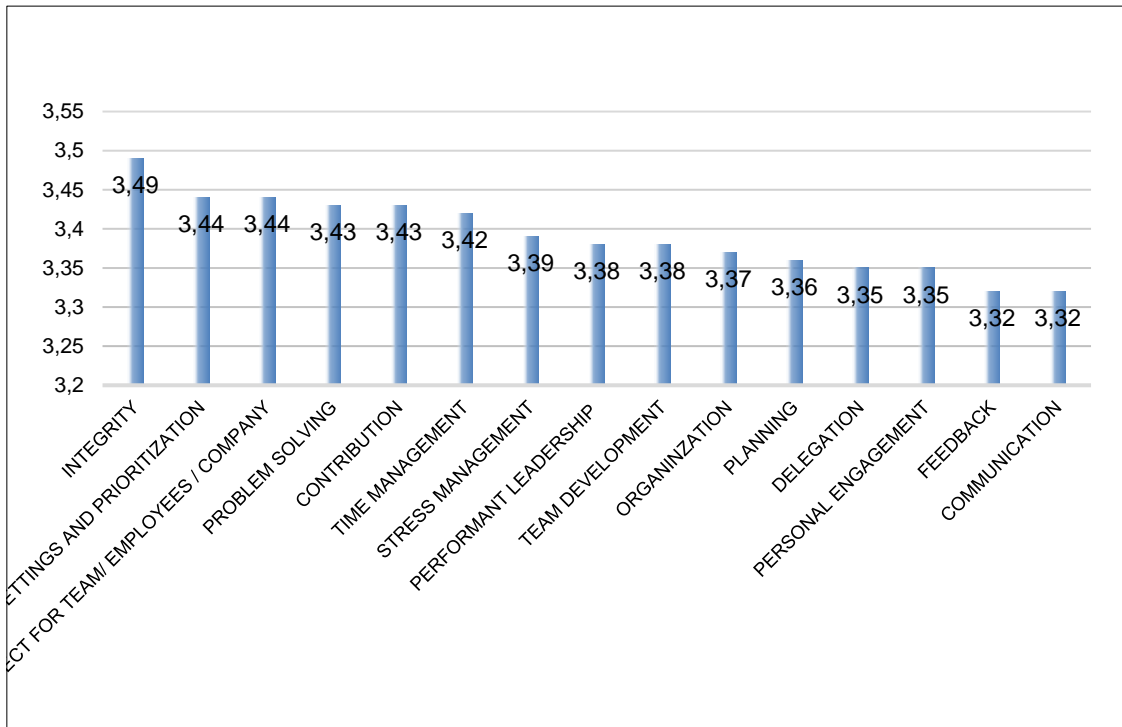


Figure no. 2. Team profile – results per each competency
Source: Authors' own development



Figure no. 3. Employee Profile 1 – competencies chart
Source: Authors' own development

Table no 3. Employee Profile 1 – score range between 1.89 and 2.77

Competencies	Group Average	Score
Feedback	3.32	1.89
Contribution	3.43	2.01
Communication	3.32	2.12
Organization	3.37	2.12
Team development	3.38	2.18
Objectives setting and prioritization	3.44	2.18
Respect for team/employee/ company	3.44	2.21
Planning	3.36	2.26
Integrity	3.49	2.27
Engagement	3.35	2.32
Performant leadership	3.38	2.32
Delegation	3.35	2.36
Problem solving	3.43	2.42
Stess management	3.39	2.60
Time management	3.42	2.77

Source: Authors' own research

As can be observed in Figure 2, between delegation and personal engagement there is a strong correlation. Delegation is an efficient managerial method used by leaders to support the employee's professional growth. It shows the company's managers confidence for their collaborators (people in the same managerial team) and increases the employee's ownership, supporting them to take on tasks and be more careful with results. Peer-to-peer activities might be one of the next steps to support development needs of these two competencies, being known that activities such as are valuing creativity, unlock participants potential and give employees a sense of being valued. Integrity and respect for the team achieved high scores and offers a good background for the future development of other competencies. Looking at the individual level, have been identified top three profiles in terms of highest scores, and those with the most significant competencies gaps, as seen in Figure 3 and Table 3.

Table no 4. Employee Profile 2 – score range between 2.36 and 2.85

Competencies	Group Average	Score
Stess management	3.39	2.36
Engagement	3.35	2.37
Feedback	3.32	2.38
Respect for team/employee/ company	3.44	2.41
Contribution	3.43	2.42
Organization	3.37	2.47
Delegation	3.35	2.51
Team development	3.38	2.53
Objectives setting and prioritization	3.44	2.67
Communication	3.32	2.67
Problem solving	3.43	2.71
Planning	3.36	2.76
Integrity	3.49	2.78
Performant leadership	3.38	2.84
Time management	3.42	2.85

Source: Authors' own research

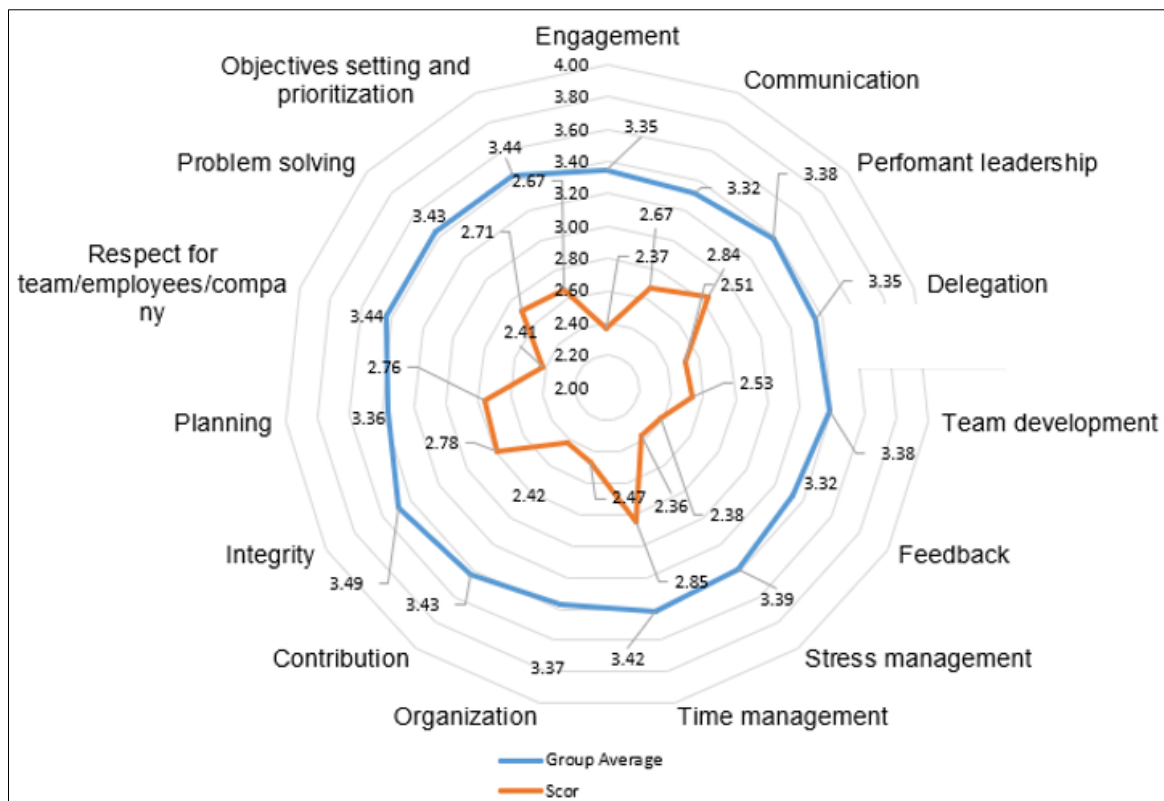


Figure no. 4. Employee Profile 2 – competencies chart

Source: Authors' own development

Table no 5. Employee Profile 3 – score range between 2.81 and 3.32

Competencies	Group Average	Score
Problem solving	3.43	2.81
Organization	3.37	2.83
Performant leadership	3.38	3.00
Delegation	3.35	3.01
Time management	3.42	3.08
Feedback	3.32	3.08
Respect for team/employee/ company	3.44	3.13
Team development	3.38	3.14
Contribution	3.43	3.15
Planning	3.36	3.16
Integrity	3.49	3.16
Stess management	3.39	3.18
Communication	3.32	3.19
Engagement	3.35	3.20
Objectives setting and prioritization	3.44	3.32

Source: Authors' own research

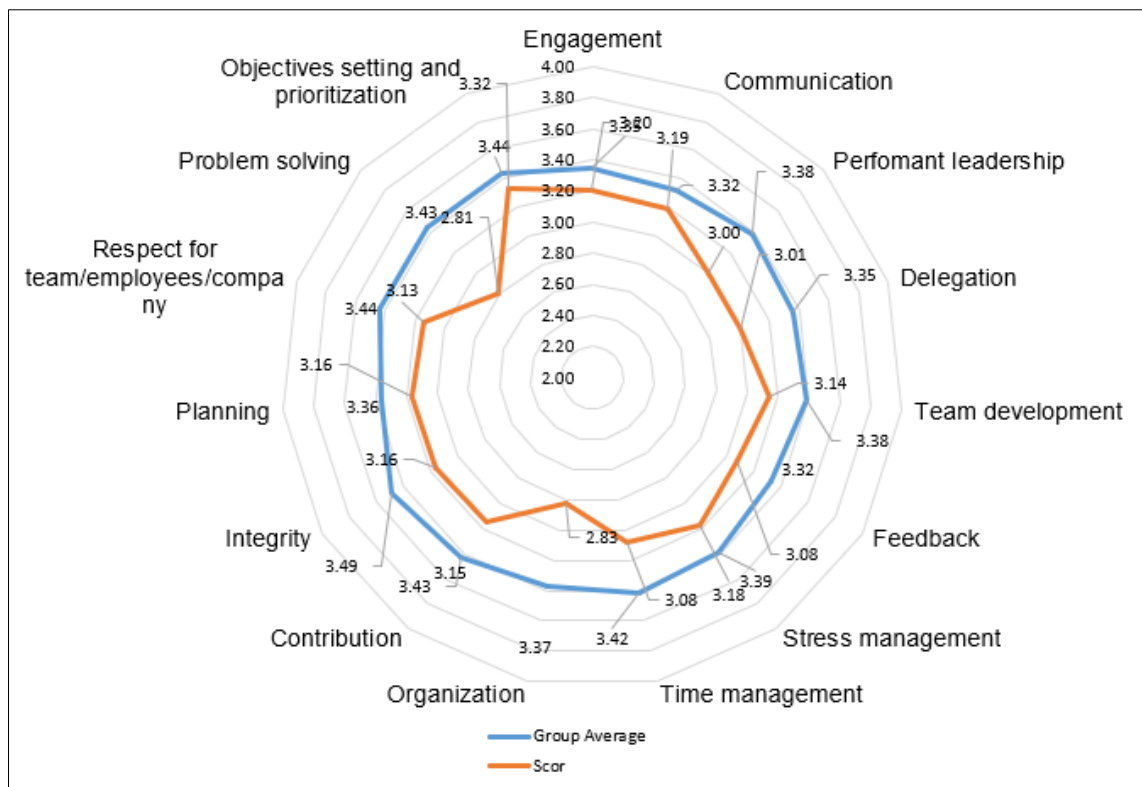


Figure no. 5. Employee Profile 3 – competencies chart
 Source: Authors' own development

Another interesting result of the assessment was the difference between self-assessment and the other respondents' assessment, showing for some employees' significant differences up to 48%. For RTM company's leaders, personal values are as important as the capability of managing people and business, therefore "lead by example" and self-leadership will have an important place in the individual development programs.

All research data will need to be analysed in the actual context of the organisation, knowing that a correct self-assessment is done when individuals are aware of their strengths and weaknesses, and understanding how he or she is perceived.

Once the gaps are identified, we can think further on how to develop the competencies with the lowest scores and prepare the leaders for the future. Lifelong learning has never been more needed as a core skill. During this pandemic crisis, the classroom trainings have moved to virtual environments and many consultancy companies and well-known learning platforms deliver remote workshops and programs that can address any competency development. Digitisation of classes and Personal Learning Cloud (PLC) is shaping the future of learning and development. The concept behind PLC offer the employees the experience they need on long term, by facilitating to gain the training packages that are meaningful for them, anytime and anywhere (Harvard Business Review, 2019). Other option that became very popular in the last two decades is the professional coaching that is focusing on the individual gaps through personalised dialogs. The leaders are challenged by a personal coach to find their own path for development, starting from any professional and personal assessment.

An intriguing topic for future research will answer the question on how the differences between the self-assessment and stakeholders' assessment will be combined in a way to contribute to the management team performance development and same time to meet the stakeholders' expectations.

Conclusions and future work

Competencies management is the basis for any learning strategy, approach, and investment. According to our research, even though at the team level, most of the results met the expected level, we could identify development needs for some specific employees with very low score in the perception of the respondents. We can see that the development plans need to take in considerations both individual and group actions, to use different tools and approaches to develop the entire team.

One of the world's most popular job board websites, Indeed, revealed at the end of 2020 the eight most demanding leadership skills: integrity, self-discipline, communication, trustworthiness, teamwork, conflict management, problem-solving and initiative. All of them are of great importance for a leader to inspire and drive teams to success. (Indeed, 2020) According to the results of our research, RTM company should initiate immediate action to overcome the communication and feedback competence gap of the leadership team. Both should be addressed in a common development plan. As communication needs a fast and decisive reaction, establishing a common leadership language could be the start of the development plan.

We were looking to identify studies about the leadership competencies in the waste management sector, starting from the assumption that there are characteristics of the area that should be properly addressed when balancing an LDC model. The lack of documented research was encouraging us to take a step further in our work. However, there is one study performed in 2017 by University of Nebraska showing that after various leadership styles analysis "transformational leadership can be used to instil a higher customer satisfaction in MSW management". The transformational leader encourages people to complete the tasks and same time supporting their professional growth (Creeger, 2017) Considering this transformational leader concept and thinking of the further LDC model development, we can conclude that the research can be extended in two directions: redesigning the RTM leadership model to include the characteristics of the waste management sector, aiming for a transformational leadership model, and same time introducing a quantitative method to support the assessment of competencies and their development.

References

Andriukaitienė, R., Voronkova, V., Kyvliuk, O., Maksimenyuk, M., & Sakun, A. (2017). Theoretical insights into expression of leadership competencies in the process of management. *Problems and Perspectives in Management*, 15(1), 220-226.

Creeger, A. (2017). "Public Perception of Leadership in the Municipal Solid Waste Sector". *Environmental Studies Undergraduate Student Theses*. 202. [http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/envstudtheses/202%0A This](http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/envstudtheses/202%0A%20This)

Harvard Business Review. (2019). *The Future of Leadership Development*. Harvard Business Review.

Indeed. (2020). *8 Key Leadership Competencies | Indeed.com*.

Kouzes, J. M., & Posner, B. Z. (2010). *The Leadership Challenge Activities Book*. 671.

Müller, R., & Turner, J. R. (2007). Matching the project manager's leadership style to project type. *International Journal of Project Management*, 25(1), 21–32.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijproman.2006.04.003>

Sparrow, P. R., & Makram, H. (2015). What is the value of talent management? Building value-driven processes within a talent management architecture. *Human Resource Management Review*, 25(3), 249–263.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2015.04.002>