

Sociological Diagnostics in Staff Competency Assessments: Evidence from Russian Museums

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Abstract: This paper presents the sociological diagnostics analysis that aims to the assessment of staff's competencies in the Russian museum complex. The current research was carried out in 2014 in Russia (St. Petersburg). The methodology is a structured observation and "Mystery shopper" method. Monitoring of staff competencies was conducted according to the competence model that specified criteria and indicators of observation in assessment cards. Results indicated the level of professional and communicative competence and revealed that the communication with museum visitors is the least developed competence.

Key words: Sociological diagnostics, Staff competency assessment, Museum management.

1. Introduction

Organization is a complex system. Its parts are working together to provide the stable and effective operating. However, the most popular methods of staff competency assessment in Russia are hardly applying to analyze some staff's traits and to make a competence model. Moreover, the efficiency of the company depends on skills of employees; therefore, the policy of Human Resource Management (HRM) should be based on the results of staff competency research.

The research is based on view on an organization as a system, composed of tasks, technology, structure and people (Leavitt, 1965:1146). People are one of the basic elements of organization. The condition of staff, the level of its effectiveness and problem areas have a significant impact on the whole system. According to Parsons (1951, 1968), there are four subsystems in each social system. These subsystems have to perform four functions to provide survival of the system: adaptation to the environment (A), goal attainment (G), integration of parts (I) and maintenance its latent pattern (L). Moreover, there

are parts in each subsystem that also should function in AGIL paradigm. Each competence of people could be focused on the AGIL functions. Staff's skills and behaviour attitudes should provide stability to an organization. The construction of competency models allows to find out which staff's skills are required to provide adaptation, goal attainment, integration or maintenance of latent pattern. Therefore, each competence in profile should maintain stability and survival of the system.

The competence-based approach is a key way to harmonize HRM policy with the strategy and the main tasks of companies. The model of competencies is widely used in various directions of HRM: hiring, training, job rotation, employee motivation, organization culture etc. (see e.g. Cameron, 1999). It allows not only to identify the most skilful, professional, psychologically mature and the most competent staff, but also to predict the productivity of their work in this particular organization with a certain structure, the type of leadership, norms and organizational culture (see e.g. Caldas and Brandao Soares de Carvalho, 2008; Pavenkov, 2015). This approach gives the opportunity to apply common

schemes and to develop unique models based on features of the environment and organizational structure in museums (Kimchang, 2011; Haldma and Laats, 2012; Dedova, 2013).

Sociological diagnosis as a method is described in sufficient detail (Deviatko, 1993; Prigogin, 2003; Glazov, 2004; Pavlenkova, 2014; Pakhlova, 2015; Rubtcova *et al.*, 2015). Usually sociological diagnostics used as a social technology that aims to the developing decisions about social issues and the elements of the organization. It consists of three stages:

1. Description of the current situation;
2. Assignment of the standard norm, the required state of the organization;
3. Comparative analysis of the actual state of the object with the required.

The studied museum complex (“The Cathedral” and “The Savior”) in 2010 formulated new strategic goals. They are concentrated on the development of the competitive capacity of the museums through the expansion of the scope of services, the increased flow of visitors, the improvement of image and they led to the need to amend the human resources of the museums. In 2010 the new system evaluation and subsequent development of the personnel began to operate.

Our research explores features and possible application of sociological diagnostics in analyzing of employees’ competencies.

Research question is the following:

Is there the accordance between requirements to the staff competency and actual competencies of museum employees?

2. Data and Methodology

Assessment of competencies in the studied museum made in accordance with the follow scheme. First of all, it was specified a competency model that set a standard (required) level of staff’s skills. Secondly, using structured observation the researchers collected information about the current state of employee’s competencies. Finally, deviations in staff’s behavior were analyzed.

The method is a structured observation of the staff daily work in two specific museums. Monitoring of staff competencies was conducted according to the competence model that specified criteria and

indicators of observation in assessment cards. In the current research communicative and professional competencies of museum employees were evaluated.

The study was performed in several phases. Firstly, the researchers examined the literature and recent surveys of organizations, its structure, staff assessment, competencies and HRM. Secondly, the museum complex was chosen as the object of study, where it would be possible to apply methods of sociological diagnostics of competencies. Then it was conducted the observation of staff in two divisions of this museum - in “The Cathedral” and in “The Savior”. As a conclusion, we analyzed the data and developed recommendations to the HR department of this museum.

One of the researchers was involved in the service process as a mystery visitor. The staff daily work of whole technological chain of the museum was observed: cashiers, ticket inspectors, administrators, tour guides and sellers. This method allowed creating natural conditions of everyday service, to regard the actual skills and behavior patterns of employees and to make valid conclusions about their competencies. All employees who worked in the museums in the research dates were involved.

The study was conducted according to the Professional Ethical Code of Sociologists by the Russian Society of Sociologists. This means that according to requirements of anonymity, signed Participant Consent Agreement cannot be asked for.

The researchers informed the head of HR department about purpose of the survey and guaranteed saving anonymity and using data in a generalized form. The researchers have changed the names of museums.

3. Results

Quality of service and competence of the employees is measured using assessment cards. As a result, 26% of discrepancies to the dress code (accepted in the Code of corporate ethics) were revealed in 2010. Despite the fact that employees adhere to a classical (business) official style, these deviations from the Standard have been associated primarily with non-compliance with the corporate symbolic include corporate symbols and badges. The number of inconsistencies appearance standards decreased to 23% after the adoption the new Code of corporate ethics and carrying out systematic monitoring of the quality of service.

Implementation of the service quality monitoring has reduced the number of deviations, however, some problems still remain. For the more detailed study of the emerging organizational pathologies in the period from 17 February to March 4, 2014 year staff competency assessment has been made in two sites of the museum complex – the «Savior» and the «Cathedral». One of the researchers as a «mystery visitors» has analyzed the communicative skills, professional competence and actual behavior of cashiers, ticket inspectors, administrators, tour guides and sellers.

During the observation the researcher completed 127 assessment cards: 63 in “The Savior” and 64 in “The Cathedral” (see Table 1.)

Table 1. The number of the completed assessment cards.

Position	The Cathedral	The Savior
cashiers	15	14
administrators	10	11
ticket inspectors	13	12
tour guides	13	12
sellers	13	14
total	64	63

As a result, 49 deviations of professional competence were detected. They are following:

- 5 ticket cashiers (10% of the total);
- 16 administrators (33% of the total);
- 5 ticket inspectors(10% of the total);
- 17 tour guides (35% of the total);
- 6 sellers (14%) (see Figure 1)

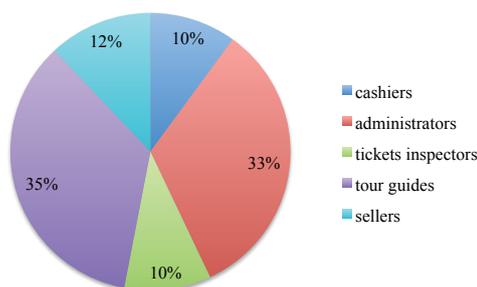


Figure 1. Proportion of deviations of museum employees, 2014.

It is important to specify the observations, in which there were no deviations, and observations that recorded at least one. Cashiers have the ratio 86.2% and 13.8% respectively; administrators – 57.1% and 42.9%; ticket inspectors – 84% and 16%; tour guides – 48% and 52%; sellers – 85.2% and 14.8%. As we can see, administrators and tour guides have

the greatest number of deviations and the smallest gap between them.

The researchers found out that in both departments of the museum complex tour guides and administrators more frequently deviated standards than other museum employees (see Figure 1). The greatest number of administrators` deviations linked to their absence from the workplace, while their job responsibilities include the work with visitors that pass through the turnstiles. In addition, they should regulate the flow of visitors and help them in a case of difficulties.

Tour guides have deviations connected with refusal the methodology and the plan of excursion (shortening trips, ignoring the key stop, etc.). Cashiers show their professional incompetence in 10% of cases. Despite the correctness of the execution of monetary transactions policy during the ticket sales, they do not clarify the ticket types and possibilities of discount. Professional deviations of ticket inspectors dealt with the provision of information on travel services (10.0%). Finally, group, demonstrating a completely professionally competent, are sellers: there was no case of deviation from instructions or standards during the observation period.

Then there was the assessment of communicative competence of the personnel of two museums. As a result, it was found that administrators more frequently deviated communicative standards than other museum employees did (75% deviation of communications standards). A major disruption in communication is the following: 67% cases-non-final communication phrases; 25% – no greeting visitors; 8% – absence of polite forms during interactions (authoritative speech, without the polite words “thank you”, “please”, “can I be of any assistance”, “can I help you”, etc.)

However, during our observation, we found that when there is a large flow of visitors the museum staff could not perform the communication acts according to Corporative speech standards. Corporative speech standards constitute a common set of rules for all divisions of the museums and the prescribed phrase to complete the interaction can be considered as “illogical” for some divisions.

The smallest number of communicative deviations is fixed with guides – 25%. During the diagnosis, only two violations were observed. Communicative competence of tour guides is most developed. If we take into account that these employees, as a rule, have the longest contact with visitors, such indicators are a good achievement for the effective functioning of museums.

However, tour guides have 56.3% deviation of dress code, as a rule they don't use the corporate symbols, namely uniform scarf. Such deviations from the prescribed standards were reported in almost every third card. Visual self-presentation employee, his/her association with the Museum is important to create a certain visitor's impression.

The level of communicative deviations in 2010-2014 decreased. In 2010 the biggest problem was communication with visitors – 52% of deviations (see Figure 2). In 2014 the number of deviations reduced to 13,5%. However deviations in professional behavior decreased only from 17% in 2014 to 15,5% in 2014.

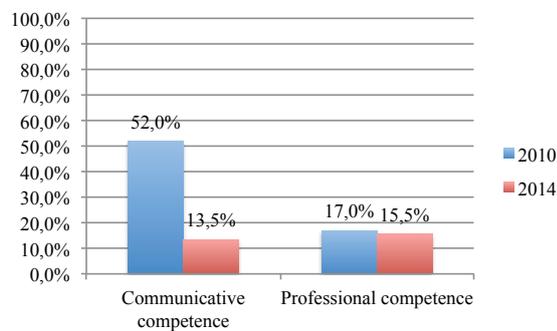


Figure 2. Amount of communicative and professional deviations, 2010-2014.

Despite the fact that communicative competencies were developed, they still remained as a weakness of this organization (see Figure 3).

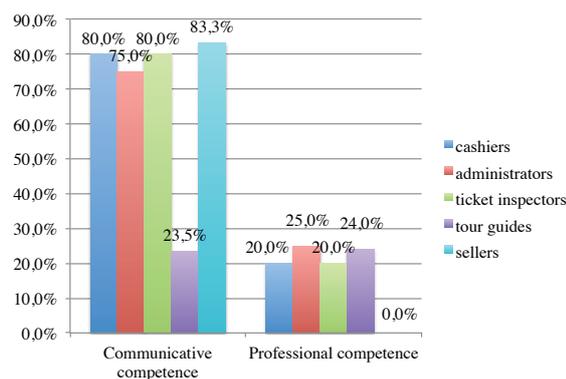


Figure 3. Communicative and Professional deviations of museum staff, 2014.

The most common deviations were lack of politeness and noncompliance of dress-code. However, it should be said that the analysis revealed that speech standards were not adapted to the specifics of the ticket inspectors and administrators that is why there were registered a lot of false deviations and poor development of communicative competence.

It was also discovered an incomplete awareness among employees about the evaluation criteria, which reduced their loyalty to the organization and confidence in the monitoring.

The criteria for assessment of professional competence were job descriptions, so the deviations were related to the fact that employees do not perform their duties (for example, the administrators were absent, guides reduced the duration of the tour etc.).

4. Discussion and conclusion

To sum up it should be said that relevant training system and regular staff assessment (diagnostics of employee's competencies) in the state museums increased competitiveness of this organization and improved staff competence (Pavlenkova & Petropavlovskaya, 2013). Nevertheless, the researcher made the following recommendations to this museum that were based on the survey. It is necessary to upgrade speech standards, according to specifics of service in each stage of technological chain. Employees should enlighten about the criteria of competence assessment. Organizational identity and commitment to the corporate culture should be developed in order to ensure that staff is loyal to the museum and strives to improve their business efficiency. Instructions and training of professional duties should be made to reduce the deviations in this field.

In conclusion, it should be emphasized that our results are consistent with ideas expressed by V. Sherbina (1993, 2004). According to his opinion, sociological diagnostics is a very effective way to analyze and assessment of problems in the organization, therefore it should be used to solve practical problems and in order to make management decisions.

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