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Development of a Competency Model for School Counsellors

In Slovenia, we do not yet have a developed competency model for counselling professionals, so in our article, for the purpose of research, we used the competency model for educators according to Staničič (2001, as cited in Ledič et al., 2013), which is used in Croatia and will serve as the basis for our research. We were interested in the importance that counsellors attach to the individual bundles of competencies that are part of the previously mentioned competency model for educators and what suggestions they have for its expansion. On the basis of the opinions gathered from the counsellors, we will prepare proposals for the creation of the first competency model of this kind in the Republic of Slovenia.

Competency model for educators – counsellors: A competency model is a document that clearly defines the descriptions of competencies required for the successful performance of a particular job, workgroup, department, or organisation. It is important that it is designed to be easy to use and that the descriptions in it are clear, objective, and accurately define the key competencies. The appearance of the competency model is adapted to the needs of the company or institution. With its help, it is possible to evaluate more clearly and objectively the expression of a particular competency of a person and, if necessary, to plan improvements, which also helps the person to improve his/her knowledge.

Staničič (2001, as cited in Ledič et al., 2013) conducted a study in which he examined the competencies of the ‘perfect’ educator. Based on the results, he defined the most important competencies and divided them into five broad groups or domains: personal competencies, developmental competencies, professional competencies, interpersonal competencies, and action competencies. Based on the study and analysis of the literature, these areas were divided further into 34 competencies. To these basic areas, the authors of the Ledič et al. (2013) study added an area called (vi) ‘Competencies of the European dimension of education’, which is divided further into seven competencies. The White Paper (2011) states that, despite the perception of the skilled worker in the national context, it is becoming increasingly necessary to place him/her clearly in the European context (e.g., knowledge of languages, history, multiculturalism, mobility, etc.).

The presented educators’ competency model was also used in the present research, in which we reviewed the importance that counsellors attach to each competency for performing the work of the counselling service, and how they evaluate the appropriateness of the model for the purpose of self-assessment of and self-reflection on their own work.

Research problem, purpose, and objectives: Based on the highlighted starting points, in the research we aimed to explore the views of counselling professionals on the competency model for educators according to Staničič (2001, 2013) and, based on the obtained research results, to develop proposals for the creation of the first such competency model to be applied to counselling professionals in the Republic of Slovenia. Considering the problem under study, we have prefaced the research with the following research hypotheses:

- H1: There are statistically significant differences between counselling professionals in their assessment of the importance of individual competency packages for the work of the counselling service, depending on the years of professional experience and the type of educational institution in which they are employed.
- H2: The majority of counsellors believe that the use of the competency model is effective for the purpose of self-evaluation of and self-reflection on their own work.

In the research, we used the descriptive and causal-non-experimental method of empirical pedagogical research. Counsellors in the Republic of Slovenia were included in the study. Of the 187 completed questionnaires, 114 were appropriate, and 73 were inappropriate. The questionnaire consists of two parts and includes 11 questions. The first part consists of seven questions of a demographic nature, followed by questions about the competency model for educators, which we summarised according to Staničič (2001, as cited in Ledič et al., 2013). Respondents rated the importance of competencies on a scale from 1 to 5, where 1 was ‘very unimportant’, and 5 was ‘very important’. Open and closed questions followed.

We sent the questionnaire to all counsellors in the Republic of Slovenia. The data were then processed using the computer program SPSS (IBM SPSS Statistics 22). The following statistical methods were used to analyse the questionnaire: Frequency distribution ($f, f\%$) – measure of mean, measure of dispersion; inferential statistics: Kruskal-Wallis H test.

Results with discussion: The hypothesis was tested using the Kruskal-Wallis H test.

Based on years of employment, the average overall ratings of the importance that counsellors attribute to each personal competency for working in counselling services are very high ($\bar{x} \geq 4.58$), from which we can conclude that personal competencies are very important for the quality of work performance in counselling services. Depending on the years of employment, individual interpersonal competencies were also rated as important to job performance by the counsellors, as they received an average total score in the range of 3.81 to 4.82. Individual developmental, professional, and action competencies were rated slightly lower by counsellors, with the average total scores of developmental competencies ranging from 3.74 to 4.43, of professional competencies ranging from 3.37 to 4.88, and of action competencies ranging from 3.70 to 4.64. Despite the lower scores, we can assume that all of these groups of competencies are important to the work of a counselling service. The importance of each of the competencies in the European education dimension was rated lower than the other sets of competencies by counsellors as a function of years of employment, with an average overall rating between 2.95 and 4.08.

Differences in importance ratings attributed by counsellors to each competency package depending on the educational institution in which they are employed: The average overall importance ratings that counsellors ascribe to each personal competency depending on the educational institution in which they are employed are very high ($\bar{x} \geq 4.58$), similar to counsellors' importance ratings depending on years of employment, indicating a high importance of personal competencies for the quality of a counselling service's work. Depending on the educational institution in which they are employed, individual interpersonal competencies were also rated by counsellors as important for performing the work of a counselling service, as they were assigned average total scores ranging from 3.73 to 4.80. Developmental competencies, professional competencies, and action competencies were rated slightly lower, with average total scores of developmental competencies ranging from 3.70 to 4.35; of professional competencies ranging from 3.35 to 4.87; and of action competencies ranging from 3.57 to 4.60. However, we can assume that all of these groups of competencies are important for performing the work of a counselling service. Depending on the educational institution in which they are employed, the counsellors, on average, attributed the least importance to each of the competencies of the European dimension of education, with scores ranging from 2.86 to 4.06. From these results, we can conclude that, according to the assessment of the surveyed counsellors, the competencies of the European dimension of education are somewhat less important for the performance of the work of a counselling service than the competencies of the other domains.

Effectiveness of using the competency model for the purpose of self-assessment and self-reflection: The results show that almost half (43.9%) of the counsellors consider the use of the competency model for the purpose of self-assessment and self-reflection to be effective. This was followed by counsellors who rated the use of the competency model for the purpose of self-assessment and self-reflection as neither ineffective nor effective (24.6%). Nine counsellors (7.9%) rated the use as very effective, three (2.6%) rated the use of the competency model for the stated purpose as ineffective, and one counsellor (0.9%) rated the use of the competency model for the stated purpose as very ineffective.

We assume that the counsellors rate the use of the competency model for the purpose of self-assessment and self-reflection as effective because 43.9% of the counsellors answered that they consider its use to be effective, and almost 8% of the counsellors rated its use as very effective. This indicates that, overall, more than half consider the use of the competency model for the purpose of self-assessment of and self-reflection on their own work to be effective.



It is clear from the respondents' answers that the counsellors are in favour of using the competency model because they value it as an effective tool for self-evaluation/self-assessment. Many counsellors emphasise the importance of self-assessment and self-reflection, but some are sceptical because they believe that this assessment is too subjective and that such an assessment should also be followed by an objective evaluation in the form of a psychological test. As has already been stated in the answers about the possibilities of upgrading the relevant competency model, we can also see in these answers that some counsellors point out the lack of competencies linked to the level in question, which, in their opinion, is very important for the quality performance of the counselling service's work.