COMPETENCES OF PROFESSIONAL VOLLEYBALL TEAM COACHES IN THE OPINION OF EXPERTS

Tomasz Seweryniak [a], *Aneta Stosik* [b], *Aleksandra Leśniewska* [c], *Gabriel Łasiński* [d]

[a,b,c,d] University School of Physical Education
in Wroclaw, Wrocław, Poland

[a] e-mail: tomasz.seweryniak@awf.wroc.pl
[b] e-mail: aneta.stosik@awf.wroc.pl
[c] e-mail: aleksandra.lesniewska@awf.wroc.pl
[d] e-mail: gabriel.lasinski@awf.wroc.pl

Abstract

Purpose: The paper presents a theoretical model of vocational competencies of professional team-sports coaches. The model is a theoretical background for a wider research project of which the main aim is to improve standards of professional competences for volleyball coaches in Poland. Therefore, the purpose of this paper is to identify vocational competences through reviewing opinions of experts.

Methodology: Theoretical model of vocational competencies of professional team-sports coaches was built and verified on the ground of the literature review method and afterwards compared and verified with four expert opinions gained through individual in-depth interviews.

Findings: The model consists of three components: knowledge, skills and behaviour, as well as three levels of competencies: basic, complementary and leadership. It has been stated that there is no advantage for any of three levels of competences in a group of the most successful volleyball coaches in Poland, and that a relatively strong impact of behaviour among other competencies' components was observed. Therefore, all significant conclusions of the theoretical model and research outcomes are discussed.

Keywords: professional competences, sport coaches, experts, volleyball coaches, competency model governance

Paper type: Research paper

1. Introduction

Professional sport is a part of reality that draws attention of many viewers. Globally, the team games are the most popular group of sports. Volleyball is the second most popular sport in Poland, right after soccer. Volleyball competitions – men's and women's – receive a lot of attention: on television, new media and on

Tomasz Seweryniak
Aneta Stosik
Gabriel Łasiński

courts. The volleyball games themselves are efficiently prepared events with every detail carefully planned. Although the visual side is refined, the most important aspect is the performance level of the teams and professional athletes who are led by the best coaches and their staff (assistants, analysts, conditioning coaches, physiotherapists, masseurs, medical staff, team managers, and other professionals). Aiming to achieve the best results requires players, coaches, and supporting staff – all with the highest competencies, and all are acquired both from national and international job market. This is true for players, coaches, and staff, which has been evident for a couple of years now in professional volleyball leagues in Poland: almost 40% of head coaches (7/14 men's league, 4/14 women's league) are foreigners. Such a large number of foreign head coaches in professional Polish leagues raises a question about reasons for this state of affairs. One of the reasons could be the competencies of those coaches, allegedly different for the Polish and the foreign groups of coaches.

Head coaches are specialists who have the biggest influence on activities of the players and the rest of the team's staff. In high level teams those coaches direct the work of professional, often experienced players and their coworkers possessing unique and high expertise; this in turn creates very specific requirements for the competencies of a head coach. Despite many individual differences between the way of working of various coaches, it seems valid to define a set of competencies specific for the most effective head coaches. Defining such a set is necessary to build a model of competencies that will be a point of reference in a diagnosis of expertise possessed by Polish head coaches who lead high-level volleyball teams, or by coaches who want to take such a role. Nowadays, the work of coaches in team sports consists of many planes and dimensions, and their activities have many scales, just as activities of many middle-level managers. This similarity is a result of an altered nature of a modern coach's role – they lead the athletes, coach them, lead the staff of specialists who support training, rather than focus on motor skills, tactics and physical fitness. It seems that this alteration entitles the authors to refer further in this article to managers' competencies model, as a point of reference for the original models created by the authors.

1.1. The "competencies" term – definition and structural approach

The issue of competencies is nowadays an object of interest for several fields of knowledge, e.g. praxeology, management, sociology, psychology. It has been a leading topic of many science papers and researches since several decades in Poland and in the world (e.g. McClelland, 1971; Boyatzis 1982; 2008, Woodruffe 2003, Armstrong 2005, Rostkowski 2003, Pocztowski 2016; Filipowicz 2002, 2014; Oleksyn 2001, 2010; Sidor-Rządkowska, 2011).

In ancient Rome, the word competentia meant "adequacy", "compatibility", "readiness". This term referred to experts who passed judgments in certain matters

COMPETENCES
OF PROFESSIONAL
VOLLEYBALL TEAM

Tomasz Seweryniak
Aneta Stosik
Gabriel Łasiński

or were considered experienced in certain activities. Therefore, a competent person was someone who was considered ready (entitled) to conduct certain activities or make decisions (Filipowicz, 2014). The source literature (and the organizational practice) gives many definitions of the term "competencies". It is often linked to varied and sometimes inconsistent ontological categories, such as: knowledge, skill, ability, potential, value, personal traits, lifestyle, motivation, or attitudes and behavior. The authors of this paper see a definition by Filipowicz as the closest one to their perception: "competencies are dispositions in knowledge, skills and behavior, which allow to fulfill professional tasks at a certain level". This definition underlines the aspect of activity targeted at fulfilling organizational tasks and goals, and also two-component set of core elements of every competence (knowledge and skill), which should be manifested in behavior.

A key aspect in thinking about competencies is their specific characteristic (Zbiegień-Maciąg, 2006):

- complexity (being compounded; they require linking of various competencies' components into one targeted activity),
- operability and goal-orientation (competencies should be targeted at a specific activity, and this activity – at a specific goal),
- being situational (the activities should be effective in a changing environment),
- changeability (the competencies can be developed and adjusted to the needs of an organization),
- measurability (the competencies as a qualitative and performance category can be measured).

The competencies are often treated as a term broader than qualification; they are more closely related to targeted activities. However, this term should be viewed in a contextual way, relative to specificity of tasks and duties fulfilled in a work, and also relative to strategy, culture, requirements and goals set forth by an organization, clients or coworkers – then we can talk about professional competencies. Relativity of this category of competencies is even stronger for managerial competencies – it would be a mistake to think about universal competencies, or about so called "perfect managers" (Fernández-Aráoz et al., 2012).

The term "competencies" is complex and ambiguous, which results in a large number of divisional typologies in the source literature. In a structural approach, we can divide this term into: professional competencies (general), position-related (specific), or corporate (shared across entire organization) (Armstrong, 2002). Gonczi and Hager (2010) claim that models of competencies can be: functional (fulfilling tasks), attribution-related (a set of desirable personal traits and attributes), or integrated – a mix of those two. There are typologies which divide competences into basic (key competences) and complementary (Zenger

et al., 2011). One popular division of competencies names: company, business, managerial, cognitive, social, and personal competencies (Filipowicz, 2014). Amongst many models and typologies, a systemic model of competencies (Łasiński et al., 2014; Łasiński, 2014) deserves a closer look, and will be discussed in this paper. It will set a theoretical basis for a research model used by the authors.

Tomasz Seweryniak
Aneta Stosik
Gabriel Łasiński

1.2. Competence management in modern organizations

According to Sidor-Rządkowska (2011), properly designed and introduced system of competence management enables organizations to integrate particular domains of human resource management into a whole. This creates a possibility to support all HR policy decisions with a set of clearly defined rules – those are contained in a competence model that the organization adopts (Zakrzewska, 2014).

Competence management can be described with a set of activities aimed at increasing the human capital and organization's efficiency (Jamka, 2010; Miś, 2008; Górski, 2009; Barabasz, 2008). This increasing is achieved by obtaining and retaining the most suitable (competent) workers, which translates into securing an optimal set of competencies needed to fulfill strategic and operational goals of a company. Competence management also involves: defining competence standards, planning and organizing activities aimed at shaping and developing competencies in an organization; inspiring and motivating people to professional development and taking on new or extended roles in an organization; controlling processes related to competencies' development (Oleksyn, 2001; Cieśliński et al., 2010; Avery, 2009). Therefore, building and extending company's competence portfolio begins with defining a strategy for an organization, its goals and structure, and ends with HR decisions related to development, role progression and succession. Take in Figure 1.

Figure 1. Competence management in HR processes in an organization.

Source: Own elaboration.

COMPETENCES
OF PROFESSIONAL
VOLLEYBALL TEAM

Tomasz Seweryniak
Aneta Stosik
Gabriel Łasiński

Identifying "core" competencies seems to be an important aspect of competence management. Those "core" competencies constitute a competitive advantage of a company, and its efficiency, through setting value to specific items in a company's competence portfolio, as well as through defining competence gaps that limit efficient operation (this is especially important for an organization's managerial staff). As mentioned before, because of their specificity, competencies can be measured, therefore a primary activity of every organization should be to design appropriate, adequate and relevant criteria and methods of competence evaluation (gradation/levels of competencies) (Filipowicz, 2002).

The behavior of leaders/managers and an effectiveness of their management style depends on a very wide set of variables, e.g. organization's structure, culture, level of decisiveness, the type of control they possess, task structure, interpersonal relations, personal experiences, personal traits, group's specificity, or personal preferences of the leader (Griffin, 2010). Therefore linking the coaching practice in professional sports to managerial practice in business seems to be valid because of significant alteration of parity – methodology competences are replaced by leadership competences in the coaches' work (similar to managerial shift). The sport and business realities show that teams (athletes/workers) that are highly qualified, mature and conscious of their competencies, require an approach aimed at supporting, leading, creating, inspiring and delegating, rather than an autocratic approach based on instructions and reproduced methods of work (Blanchard et al., 1993). Below, the authors present a model of vocational competencies for coaches leading professional sports teams. This model has been adopted from the business world and based on a systemic approach.

### 1.3. System approach in a development of managerial competencies

A system approach explores separate events (social, physical, environmental) in terms of their structure (elements that the event consists of) and relations between those elements. A system is a set of elements with a specific level of complexity; those elements are related to each other so that they create a whole or one, and therefore show new properties. Properties of systemic thinking:
- holism – the entirety of an event is something different than its parts,
- being aimed at a specific target,
- being multileveled (systems, subsystems, metasystems),
- system context and its influence on the system (environment, limitations),
- feedback loops – causal links between the elements of the system.

The aim of the system thinking is to discover and utilize the so called organizational effect, that appears when various elements are joined into a whole (additional value – synergy). Senge (2004) describes the system-approach thinking as a key indicator of a learning organization. Garvin, in turn, when he analyses an evolution of a leadership, points to a holistic view as being necessary in looking at

a company and stimulating cross-functional cooperation inside it (Garvin, 2014). A starting point in understanding the essence of competence and its development strategy could be the systemic model of structural arrangement.

Presented model allowed the authors to build a concept of managerial competencies development. Take in Figure 2.
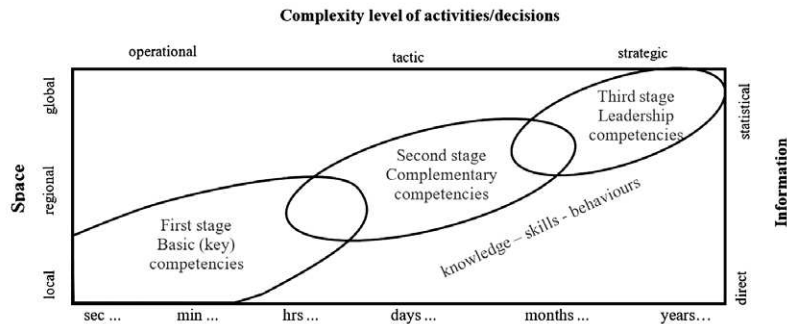
This model assumes three levels in competence structure, with competencies as components: key competencies (Ist stage), complementary competencies (IInd stage), and leadership competencies (IIIrd stage); knowledge, skills and behavior being their indicators. The authors, utilizing the praxeological theory (which describes a targeted activity as a driving force of perpetration), assume that in the context of competencies, behavior should be emphasized and treated as crucial. The structural arrangement model agrees with following rules regarding multileveled structures: compatibility of scales (each structure level is described by a set of compatible scales), correlation between levels (all subsystems are correlated and influence each other – systemic effect), autonomy (each hierarchy level has a certain amount of independence).

The development of basic competencies is the fastest, which results from the specificity of those competencies, and their place in the model's structure in the area of information, territory (scale and scope), and complexity of decisions and activities. It is true that developing the leadership-related behaviors, which are key determinants of IIIrd stage competencies (managerial), is more difficult. Below, the authors present a profile of managerial competencies development on particular stages of development. This profile is in line with assumed theoretical model.

Managerial competencies development (Łasiński et al., 2014): First stage [basic/key competencies]:
- the goal of this stage is to acquire professional knowledge and skills, industry knowledge, and social skills,
- developing these competencies is necessary to fulfil basic managerial functions and activities aimed at processes of managing an organization,

Tomasz Seweryniak
Aneta Stosik
Gabriel Łasiński

- acquiring these competencies is crucial for lower and middle level managers.

Second stage [complementary competencies]:

- the goal of this stage is to acquire exceptional skills through developing the strengths of the managerial staff,
- the development in this phase is lateral (non-linear) because it is aimed at acquiring complementary knowledge and skills, not at neutralizing the competence deficits from the Ist stage,
- the key determinants in the development of complementary competencies should be: a high involvement and interest of an individual that focus on a company's growth and its interests,
- the development of complementary competencies is supported by e.g.: characterological dispositions of an individual, personal skills, social skills, being focused on goals, being result-oriented (Zenger et al., 2011).

Third stage [leadership competencies]:

- the goal of this stage is to develop a specific type of behavior oriented on leadership, not on management,
- the leadership is described as: an ability to deal with dynamic and sudden changes in an organization; an ability to introduce desired and developmental changes; dealing with turbulent and complex environment; ability to direct activities; motivating, inspiring, and gathering people to work for a common goal (Kotter, 2012),
- leadership competencies are developed on the basis of competencies from the Ist and II stages, but also – according to some authors – on the basis of professional determination, courage and modesty (Kotter, 2012), and emotional intelligence that is an indicator of social maturity, which consists of: self-consciousness, empathy, self-control, high motivation, and interpersonal skills (Goleman, 1997),
- is the most difficult stage considering the specificity of developed competencies and their value for an organization.

Mastering the leadership, according to Collins (2012), translates into acquiring the maximum of managerial competencies that allow an individual to achieve long-term successes for an organization, which means, according to Kotter (2012), that leadership skills are learnable, developable and identifiable on every level of an organization.

2. Research Methodology

This paper's aim is to identify vocational competencies of professional team-sports coaches, based on opinions of experts. The authors aimed at defining the structure of such competencies, and identifying the degree in which a model defined by experts covers the theoretical model.

Tomasz Seweryniak
Aneta Stosik
Gabriel Łasiński

2.1. Method

Several research methods were used in the study in order to implement a triangulation approach and to ensure higher quality of research and reduce measurement errors. The method of a diagnostic survey was applied with the use of in-depth, categorized interview technique. Another method – one of the heuristic methods – the Delphi technique (also called the expert method) was implemented as well. Both methods were conducted in a qualitative approach. In addition, critical analysis of the literature and documents were made.

2.2. Procedure

The research process was divided into a couple of stages. The first stage concentrated on building a theoretical model for coaches' competencies. This model has been based on the source literature and panel discussions of the research team. In result, an MT model of competencies was created, consisting of 52 specific competencies from: the basic level, the complementary level, the leadership level, areas of knowledge, skill, and behavior. Take in Table 1. As a next stage, a set of questions for a diagnostic survey-interview was prepared. The data required to build and verify the research model has been obtained from experts. In-depth interviews were conducted directly with experts, and supplemented with phone calls.

No.	Specific competence	LoC
KNOWLEDGE		
1.	Knowledge regarding the rules of the game, the game's specificity, regulations, sports law, tendencies in a discipline	B
2.	Knowledge regarding the process of learning sport-related activities by the players and the team, and regarding an evaluation of those activities	B
3.	Knowledge regarding the theory of training, sport physiology, and sport psychology	B
4.	Knowledge regarding anatomy, physiology, biomechanics, sport medicine, physiotherapy	C
5.	Knowledge regarding psychology, sociology, philosophy, management, law, history of sport	C
6.	Knowledge regarding other sport disciplines, statistics, tools and means of supporting the training	C
7.	Basic competence in handling simple measuring tools and programs for game observation	B
SKILLS		
8.	Basic competence in handling audiovisual devices, communication programs and office applications	C
9.	Advanced competence in handling devices measuring physiological and biochemical parameters	C

Table 1.
Theoretical model of competencies (MT)

Source: Own elaboration.

Legend:
LoC [level of competence]:
B – basic/key level competence;
C – complementary level competence;
L – leadership level competence.

Tomasz Seweryniak
Aneta Stosik
Gabriel Łasiński

No.	Specific competence	LoC
SKILLS		
10.	Advanced competence in handling programs for game observation and preparation of audiovisual materials for the players	B
11.	Ability to create team's cohesion and an atmosphere of being set for achieving good results	B
12.	Communication skills, relationship building skills and empathy	B
13.	Ability to constructively utilize conflict	B
14.	Ability to plan for a team: training cycles, physical load, and events schedule	B
15.	Ability to plan personal training plans, work of the supporting staff, and development plans for subordinates	B
16.	Ability to create and communicate a vision of gameplay model adjusted to the team and the players	B
17.	Ability to motivate subordinates and coworkers	B
18.	Ability to select players and staff that fit the vision of the team; assigning roles, functions, and tasks	B
19.	Ability to coordinate the work of the players and the staff	B
20.	Ability to control activities of the players and the staff	B
21.	Ability to efficiently manage change	L
22.	Ability to think creatively about the sport, and ability to predict changes in it	L
23.	Ability to analyze the situation and important aspects that affect team's activities; ability to draw conclusions	C
24.	Ability to analyze team's close and further environment and to predict events	C/L
25.	Ability to think holistically and systemically about the sport and the work of the team	L
26.	Competence in methodology coaching, involving utilization of general means, directed means, and specialized means	B
27.	Ability to build original training plans and ability to modify them according to the team's needs	B
28.	Ability to regulate the player's emotions	B
29.	Ability to make decisions during trainings and competitions	B
30.	Ability to make personnel decisions	B
31.	Ability to make decisions regarding the team in middle-term and long-term perspective	L
BEHAVIOUR		
32.	Ability to make rational decisions in difficult and stressful situations	B/C
33.	Ability to cope with work-related stress	C
34.	Time management skills	C
35.	Relationship management skills	C
36.	Ability to actively observe own activities and rivals' activities	B

Table 1.
continued

Legend:
LoC [level of competence]:
B – basic/key level competence;
C – complementary level competence;
L – leadership level competence.

No.	Specific competence	LoC
	BEHAVIOUR	
37.	Ability to actively observe the tendencies in a sport	B
38.	Fulfilling processes crucial in the work of a coach	C
39.	Creating situations that support goals accomplishment	C
40.	Reacting quickly and adequately to arising situations	B
41.	Elasticity, repetitiveness, effectiveness, and concreteness of behavior	C
42.	Reliability and strong dedication	B
43.	Opinion independence	C
44.	Representing the team	B
45.	Ability to take responsibility for a team and its results, and consistency of actions	B
46.	Assertiveness	C
47.	Ability to show respect; treating the subordinates and coworkers in a people-oriented way	B
48.	Ability to show maturity and emotional stability	C
49.	Being open to views and opinions of other people	C
50.	Supporting the players and the team on the field and outside it	B/C
51.	Ability to create an appropriate mix of closeness and distance in relationship with the staff, the team, and the supervisors.	C
52.	Reacting to the process of change	L

COMPETENCES
OF PROFESSIONAL
VOLLEYBALL TEAM

Tomasz Seweryniak
Aneta Stosik
Gabriel Łasiński

Table 1.
continued

Legend:
LoC [level of competence]:
B – basic/key level competence;
C – complementary level competence;
L – leadership level competence.

The team of experts consisted of four coaches with extensive experience in coaching at the highest level, including professional league and national teams (men's and women's). Take in Table 2. Opinions of the experts were used as indicators of those competencies from the theoretical model that are especially important in a work of national teams' coaches. The questions were formulated to include competencies from the MT model, while leaving the experts a lot of freedom in their answers. Before the interview, the researchers conducted a short introduction to describe the term "competence" and explain the role of an expert in this research.

Age	Top achievements	Teams coached
1. (71)	Two European Championships won (w) in 2003 and 2005, Polish team; 6th place on IO in 1984, RFN team (w); Polish Championship won (w); six German Championships won (w); four Turkish Championships won (w); podium claimed eight times during European playoffs (w); two German Championships won (m)	National teams: Polish, German; High-class teams in playoffs in: Poland, Germany, and Turkey

Table 2.
Profiles of the experts

Source: Own elaboration.

COMPETENCES
OF PROFESSIONAL
VOLLEYBALL TEAM

Tomasz Seweryniak
Aneta Stosik
Gabriel Łasiński

Age	Top achievements	Teams coached
2. (49)	2013–15 Second place in Polish Championships 2005 (w); Polish Championship won in 2005 (w); 4th place in professional league in Poland 2013 (m); CEV Challenge Cup – 3rd place 2013 (m); 3rd place in European Championships, Polish team (w), as an assistant coach; head coach of Polish team (w) 2013–2015	Polish national team (w); high-class teams in Polish playoffs (w, m)
3. (65)	European Championship 2003 won, Polish team (w), as an assistant coach; Second place in World Championship 2006, Polish team (m), as an assistant coach; Polish Championship 2005 won (w); Head coach of Polish team (w) 2011–2012	Polish national team (w, m); high-class playoff team (w)
4. (46)	Three Polish Championships won 2012, 2013, 2015 (m); Two second places in Polish Championships 2014, 2016 (m); CEV Championship finale 2012 (m); Champions League 2015 finale; 3rd place in European League (m), Polish team	Polish national team B; high-class playoff team (m)

Table 2.
continued

In the research, authors used a questionnaire containing 17 open questions related with different aspects of work of sport coaches and required competences.

The interview was conducted with diligence. The most important aspects of the experts' answers were noted; the conversation was recorded on a dictaphone. Supplementary, specifying questions were used, as well as paraphrasing and answer mirroring. When the material was collected, a transcript of audio recordings was conducted. As a next stage, taking into account the opinions of experts expressed in interviews, the MT model was verified, resulting in the ME1 expert model. The result of the interview with the given expert was again sent to each of the experts for verification. Verified results were averaged, therefore verified expert model (ME2) was developed.
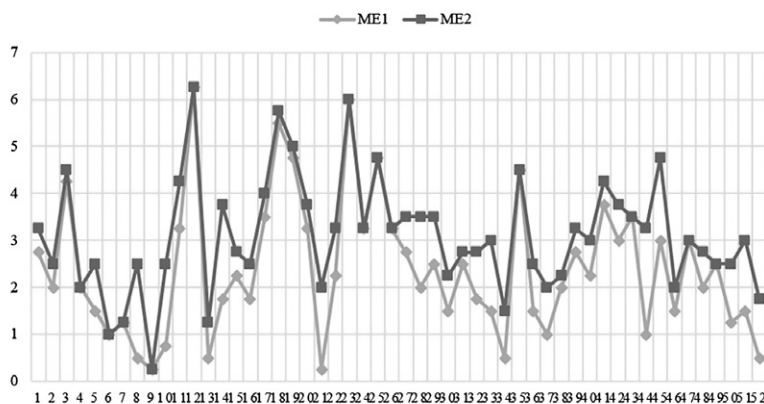
4. Results and discussion

After collecting the experts' opinions and building the ME1 model, it is evident that the specific competencies are identified by the experts as relevant with varying average frequency, exemplified by the ME1 curve. Take in Figure 3.

After the ME1 model has been verified by the experts, an ME2 competence model has been created. Specific competencies showed slightly different averages when compared to the ME1 model. Competencies with an average indication frequency equal to or higher than 4 seem to be the most interesting, because they can be viewed as crucial in the experts' opinion, whereas competencies with an average indication to or lower than 2 are considered not important. Take in Table 3.
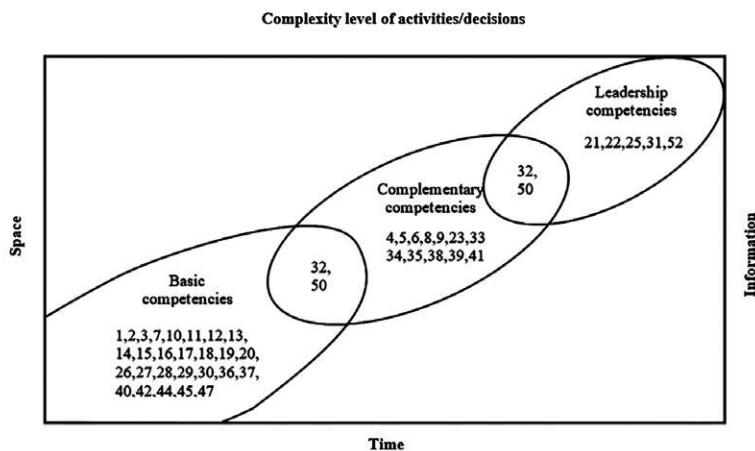
An interesting image was created when the specific competencies of the MT model (ME1 and ME2 consequently) were assigned to the competencies levels described by Łasiński et al. (2014). It is evident, that the biggest group of

COMPETENCES
OF PROFESSIONAL
VOLLEYBALL TEAM

Tomasz Seweryniak
Aneta Stosik
Gabriel Łasiński

competencies consists of basic level competencies, and the leadership level has the lowest count of competencies. Competencies on the complementary level are in the middle. Take in Figure 4.

Competencies with a complex nature are also present here, which resulted in qualifying them to areas common for distinct levels. A model including basic, complementary, and leadership competencies seems to show a distribution of particular competencies from basic to complementary, while indicating their importance in particular categories.

COMPETENCES
OF PROFESSIONAL
VOLLEYBALL TEAM

Tomasz Seweryniak
Aneta Stosik
Gabriel Łasiński

No.	Competences	Area
HIGH VALUE COMPETENCES		
3.	Knowledge regarding the theory of training, physiology of sport, psychology of sport (B)	K
11.	Ability to create team's cohesion and an atmosphere of being set for achieving good results (B)	S
12.	Communication skills, relationship building skills and empathy (B)	S
17.	Ability to motivate subordinates and coworkers (B)	S
18.	Ability to select players and staff that fit the vision of the team; assigning roles, functions, and tasks (B)	S
19.	Ability to coordinate the work of the players and the staff (B)	S
23.	Ability to analyze the situation and important aspects that affect team's activities; ability to draw conclusions (C)	S
25.	Ability to think holistically and systemically about the sport and the work of the team (L)	S
35.	Relationship management skills (C)	S
41.	Elasticity, repetitiveness, effectiveness, and concreteness of behavior (C)	B
45.	Ability to take responsibility for a team and its results, and consistency of action (B)	B
LOW VALUE COMPETENCES		
4.	Knowledge regarding anatomy, physiology, biomechanics, sport medicine, physiotherapy (C)	K
6.	Knowledge of other sport disciplines, statistics, tools and means of supporting the training (C)	K
7.	Basic competence in handling simple measuring tools and programs for game observation (B)	
9.	Advanced competence in handling devices measuring physiological and biochemical parameters (C)	S
13.	Ability to constructively utilize conflict (B)	S
21.	Ability to efficiently manage change (L)	S
34.	Time management skills (C)	S
37.	Ability to actively observe the tendencies in a sport (B)	B
46.	Assertiveness (C)	B
52.	Reacting to the process of change(L)	B

Table 3.
Competencies preferred and rejected by the experts

Source: Own elaboration based on the study.

Legend:
Level of competence:
B – basic;
C – complementary;
L – leadership;

Area:
K – knowledge,
S – skills,
B – behavior.

5. Conclusion

The obtained results are interesting and bring a number of new elements to the knowledge regarding vocational competencies of professional volleyball teams' coaches. The models created in this paper can be viewed as a necessary step in answering a question of competencies of mentioned coaches, and people aspiring to take such a role. A very interesting finding is high importance of behaviors

Tomasz Seweryniak
Aneta Stosik
Gabriel Łasiński

indicated by the experts as a significant element of effective work, as well as indication that the complementary competencies have high, although not crucial, significance. Synthetically, it can be therefore concluded, that:

- The experts taking part in the research do not dismiss any area of competence (knowledge, skill, behavior) described by the theoretical MT model.
- The distinguished areas of competence were indicated by the experts with varied, although similar, frequency. Skills were indicated the most frequently, followed by behavior, with knowledge at the end of the frequency spectrum.
- Specific competencies were indicated by the experts with varied frequency, which might suggest their varying value in a work of the coaches.
- In the ME2 model, the basic level competencies created the largest group; complementary level competencies – middle-sized group; leadership level competencies – the smallest group.
- Based on the experts' opinions, in the ME2 model, it is possible to distinguish two groups of specific competencies: rarely indicated, and often indicated. Those groups have similar competence count (10 and 11 competencies).

The ME2 competencies model will be a basis for further work involving building tools for measuring competencies, and diagnosing them in a wide group of coaches. Fulfilling these goals will set grounds for defining activities aimed at developing competencies of active coaches, and better preparation of teams of young coaches.

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COMPETENCES
OF PROFESSIONAL
VOLLEYBALL TEAM

Tomasz Seweryniak
Aneta Stosik
Gabriel Łasiński

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Tomasz Seweryniak
Aneta Stosik
Gabriel Łasiński