



A Study on the Middle Manager Managerial Core Competencies and Training Requirements in Local Government

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ABSTRACT

The “Chief” of local government is a middle manager within the organization. This role is responsible for the communications and implementation of various policies of the county and city governments externally. Internally, the role is responsible for team building and giving work directions. If it is possible to cultivate the person to become a “knowledge worker” through trainings, this can strengthen one’s job competency and effectively enhance the agency’s administration performance. Public service with better quality can be provided. This study adopts the “survey techniques.” The survey is based on the “managerial core competency items of the mid and high-level management positions in the agencies under the Executive Yuan.” There are 6 items of core competency aspects (problem analysis, project management, performance management, information management, communications and coordination, and team building) established and there are 16 items as basic competencies. Testing is applied to the middle manager, the director and deputy director and chief of staff of the service units of the K City government based on the survey highlights. It is hoped to discuss the managerial core competencies and their training requirements for the middle manager of the local government. The purpose is to enhance the competency at the job in order to strengthen the managerial core competency of the middle manager of the City government. Thank you to K City government for authorizing the use of the original data of the above survey. Based on the research results, it has been confirmed that the Junior rank civil service middle manager established by the Executive Yuan, its managerial core competency items are applicable to local government. Under training resource constraints for the agencies, the trainings for the middle managers of the local government shall be prioritized and strengthened based on the needs: They are competencies in “performance expression and communications” and “job motivation” and continue to maintain the 7 core competency items in “problem identification,” “program planning,” “communication expression,” “conflict management,” “job instruction,” “team management” and “knowledge management.”

INTRODUCTION

The local government is the first line of public service sought after by the members of the public; As people often say “local father-mother officials” (literal translation from Mandarin “fu-mu-

guan”), which means a local government official is like a parent who shall perceive the people like their children providing care and assistance to the local residents; as for the various policies and laws formed by the central government, without the execution and promotion by every local government, the government will not be able to provide proper public service to the people in an effective and instant manner. It can be said “the local government is also a pillar of public service.” Hence, the effectiveness of the local government will determine the level of satisfactory public service obtained by members of the public[1].

Peter Drucker, the management academic, once said that “people” is the most important asset within an organization. In other words, human resource is the largest influential factor on good organization effectiveness. Therefore, if a local government wants to enhance the effectiveness of local governance, strengthening the human resource capacity shall become an important indicator task[2]. However, there is a gap between the local government in Taiwan and the Central government and municipal government in terms of organization structure and number of staff allocated or grading of positions and configurations. Such a situation has already cast a huge impact to the local governance service capacity or staff retention.

In view of this, the Examination Yuan has in May 2018 passed the “Proposal by Executive Yuan suggesting to adjust the important position ranks of civil servants of County (City) governments and their first level agencies, and the corresponding ranks of police officers.” The meeting has considered the County (City) governments and their first level agencies’ Deputy Minister, Deputy Director and the Chief as important positions in driving local governance businesses, the burden of their jobs is not any lesser than relevant positions of municipal government. Hence, it is important, necessary and urgent to make adjustments to such job grading. Since July 16th of the same year, the Deputy Director position for county (city) governments has been adjusted from “Junior Rank (Grade 9)” to “Junior Rank (Grade 9) to Senior Rank (Grade 10).” The job ranking for Chief has been adjusted from “Junior Rank Grade 8” to “Junior Rank Grade 8 to 9” [3]. The “Chief” position of local government and every unit of its agencies is a middle manager within the organization. Externally, this role is responsible for the communications and implementation of various policies of the county and city governments. Internally, this person plays an important role responsible for team building and giving job instructions. Hence, aside from adjusting the position to a higher level in formality, the person’s job competency is also strengthened through trainings to cultivate him/her to become a “knowledge worker.” This can enhance the agency’s administration efficiency. It can be expected to provide public service of better quality satisfying the expectations of the public for good governance. The best is demonstrated through triple wins for the local government, middle manager and the public[4]. Therefore, this study discusses the managerial core competency of the middle manager of the local government and training requirements to enhance the job competency. The discussion is based on strengthening the managerial core competency of the middle manager of the City government with the purpose to enhance the local governance effectiveness.

PURPOSE OF RESEARCH

This research first confirms the suitability for local government of the managerial core competency items established by the Executive Yuan for the junior rank middle managers. Followed by exploring the gaps between the core competency items that the junior rank middle

managers of the local governments should possess and have already possessed. Finally, it confirms the personnel training gaps and find out the priorities for the educational trainings.

Confirms the completeness of the application of the managerial core competency items for middle managers established by the Executive Yuan on the local governments

Aside from the differences on the organization responsibilities and authorities, and the function positioning between the central and local government agencies in Taiwan, there exists significant differences in the nature of the businesses in control. The differences in the scale of the business or level will impact the method and level of business performance exhibited. Therefore, there will also be clear differences on the core competency needs for different performance behaviors[5].

The current “Managerial core competency Items for Middle Managers in Agencies of the Executive Yuan” and “Managerial core competency Items for Junior Rank Officials in Agencies of the Executive Yuan and Local Agencies” in Taiwan are formulated by the Directorate-General of Personnel Administration (DGPA), authorized by the Executive Yuan. Except that the DGPA is also a central agency, the question of whether the core competency generated by performance behaviors can be applied to the local government completely remains to be confirmed.

Exploring the gaps between the job competencies that the personnel should possess and have already possessed; Conforming the training gaps and identifying the priorities of the educational trainings

As analyzed and confirmed by the research results, the “Managerial core competency items of middle managers in agencies of Executive Yuan and local government agencies” and “Managerial core competency items of junior rank management positions in agencies of Executive Yuan and local government agencies” are applicable to the local governments as a whole. The survey questionnaire is prepared further based on the connotations of the core competency items to explore the gaps between the job competencies that the middle manager of local government should possess and already possessed. Finally, confirms the training gaps, and identifies the priorities in educational trainings.

Current Training System for the Middle Managers in the Public Sector in Taiwan - Discussions Based on the “Core Competencies” Perspectives

Definition of Core Competencies

The “competency” perspective proposed by Spencer & Spencer[6] refers to “the characteristics possess by an individual that is deep and enduring. These characteristics and the high performance established for certain work or scenarios, possess correlations with causal predictions.” The “iceberg model” is also constructed which includes 5 competency types. There are 2 types, namely, knowledge and skill which belong to explicit capabilities (can be seen). There are 3 types of capability belong to implicit ability (cannot be seen), namely, motive, trait and self-concept. Darrell & Ellen[7] further divide competencies into 4 types, namely, core competency, functional competency, role competency, and work competency. Among which the core competency refers to the competency that members of the organization should have and it is often related to organization culture.

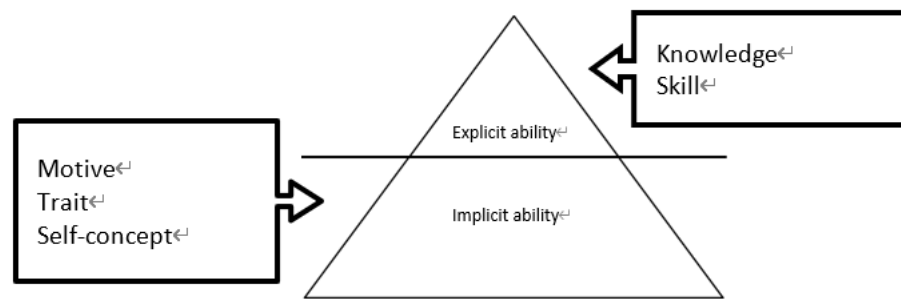


Figure 1. Competency iceberg model
Data source: Spencer and Spencer (1993)

In Taiwan, “competency” is translated into various terms such as competency, ability, proficiency and capability[8]. Article 3, Point 2 of the “Essential Competencies Promoted in Competency Development and Application”[9] of the Ministry of Labor defines “competency” as the knowledge, skills, attitude or other traits competencies combination that one should possess to complete certain tasks or for improving current and future performance of individual and organization. In summary of the above, competency not only emphasizes “ability” but also “behavior”[10].

Definition of Core Competencies of the Middle Managers in the Public Sector in Taiwan

Article 3 of the “Enforcement Rules of Civil Service Training and Education Act” stipulates that the “training” means the process by which various agencies (organizations) or schools actively offer specialized knowledge and skills in order to upgrade the work performance of the employed civil servants[11]. The Executive Yuan has in January 2004 revised the “Civil Servant Lifelong Learning Promotion Plan” which defines “management” and “professionalism” as the core competencies of civil servants. This shows that the term “core competency” that is used in Taiwan for the competency that the civil servant should possess refers to “the abilities, knowledge, techniques, judgement, attitude, values and personality that one should possess to succeed in a position or a job role.” The “core competencies” are divided into “managerial core competency” and “professional core competency” based on the organization ranking and the nature of the division of work in the public sector. Among which, the “core competency” refers to the competency that are necessary to have in order to achieve effective management targets for those in the management positions. For most of them, they gain the competencies through the gradual accumulation of experiences over the long term within the organization through repeated practice processes. They are of value, completeness, tough, rareness, inimitability and cumulative [8]. The “professional core competency” is, on the other hand, the professional knowledge or technique that one must possess for working on specific professional job or specified work, to succeed at the job generating performance.

The newly revised “Managerial core competency items of mid and high-level management positions in agencies of Executive Yuan” by the Executive Yuan in 2014 was referenced for improving the management competencies of the mid and high-level management positions of various agencies and in the agency’s labor force utilization planning. In regards to the middle managers, the managerial core competency items that are to be possessed have been re-

defined. They are the suggested 6 core competencies, namely, “problem analysis,” “project management,” “performance management,” “information management,” “communications and coordination” and “team building.”

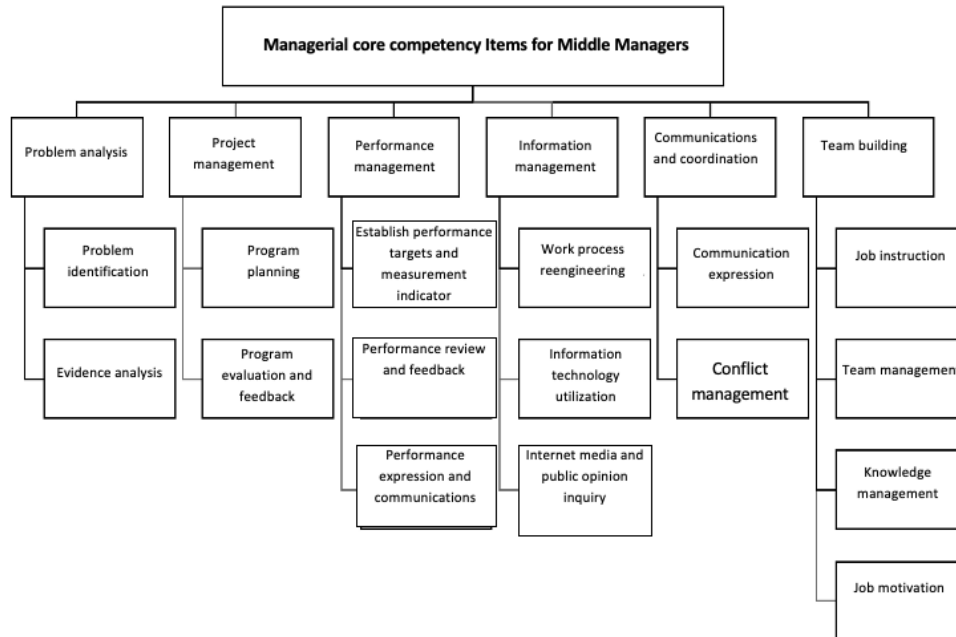


Figure 2. Managerial core competency items of middle managers in agencies of the Executive Yuan and local government agencies

Data source: Attachment of September 29th, 2014 letter of Executive Yuan Shou-ren-zong-zi no. 1030048045

To create a civil servant learning map that is systematic and comprehensive, the Executive Yuan has in 2016 established the “Civil Servant Learning Map of the Agencies of Executive Yuan and Local Agencies” combining the core competency items and training courses with the aim to cultivate key talents based on plans. Based on the description of the learning map: “The junior rank officials and personnel must possess strategic-oriented competency of forward-looking plan, interpersonal interaction and execution capability.” The middle manager managerial core competency items in the aforementioned 2014 revision categorized the 4 junior rank managerial core competency items as problem analysis, performance management, communications and coordination, and team building.

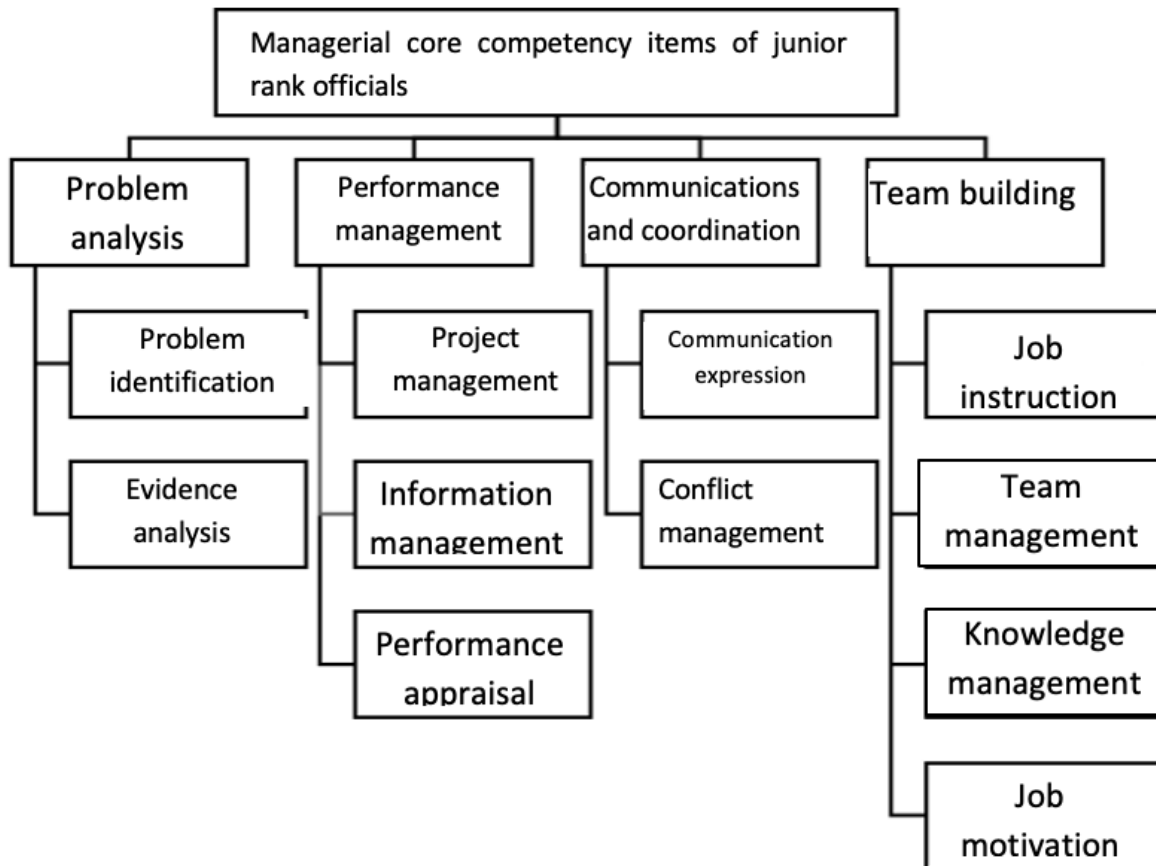


Figure 3. Managerial core competency items of junior rank officials in agencies of Executive Yuan and local government agencies

Data source: Attachment of January 26th, 2016 letter of Executive Yuan Shou-ren-pei-zi no. 1050031518

In summary, “Managerial Core Competency Items for Middle Managers in Agencies of the Executive Yuan” and “Managerial Core Competency Items for Junior Rank Officials in Agencies of the Executive Yuan and Local Agencies” can be viewed as the standard the Executive Yuan has established for the junior rank and so on middle manager of its agencies and local agencies on the “competency” items and its evaluation. It is known that “competency” has already become the foundation of human resource management in public and private sector, enhancing the ultimate goal of human resource management for individual and organization performance providing specific outcomes[12]. It is thus clear that if the public sector can plan suitable training courses according to the middle manager competency items and provide the planned trainings, aside from strengthening knowledge competency of the personnel, it can also improve the agency’s governance effectiveness.

Current Training Situations for Middle Managers in the Central and Local Agencies Held By the Central Competent Authorities in Taiwan

Middle managers are the managerial personnel closest to the junior level staffs and also to the customers (service subjects). Hence, the Civil Service Development Institute, Directorate-General of Personnel Administration, Executive Yuan has since 2017 commenced the organization of the “Chief Management Competency Specialized Course” for managers of Junior

Rank Grade 9, such as: Chief, Director and Team Leader, as the training subjects and has divided the courses into application course and advance course taking into consideration of the seniority of the managers. There are 4 types of courses offered in consideration of the differences in the job nature of the Chief positions in central and local government agencies, namely, "Central Agency Chief Management Competency Application Course," "Local Agency Chief Management Competency Application Course," "Central Agency Chief Management Competency Advance Course" and "Local Agency Chief Management Competency Advance Course." This is to strengthen the managerial core competencies of the Chief level managerial personnel in the Executive Yuan and its central and local agencies[13].

The Executive Yuan has already specified the managerial core competency for the middle manager and made gradual adjustments and revisions according to the changes and practical needs on a yearly basis. However, there are clear differences on the governance environment, business scope, organization culture and level of responsibilities between the central agencies and local agencies. Thus, it is known of the common core competencies that the middle manager should possess for the central and local agencies are such as: performance management, team building and communications and coordination competencies. However, the managerial core competencies of middle manager of local agencies should be closer to the nature of the business and environment of the local agencies to fulfil the needs of management and organizational leadership for local conditions[14].

Table 1. 2020 middle managers on-the-job training courses and highlights

Course	Training subject	Course highlight
Central Agency Chief Management Competency Application Course	Junior Rank Grade 9, seniority at less than 3 years (includes Chief, Director, Team Leader)	➤ Cultivate management competency is power ➤ Management techniques that can be applied immediately by newly-appointed Chief: Business planning, performance management, communications and coordination, team building.
Local Agency Chief Management Competency Application Course	Junior Rank Grade 8 to 9, seniority at less than 3 years (includes Chief, Director, Team Leader)	
Central Agency Chief Management Competency Advance Course	Junior Rank Grade 9, seniority over 3 years (includes Chief, Director, Team Leader)	➤ Cultivate future senior level personnel. ➤ Aside from the basic management competency of a Chief, provides important management competencies that are required to prepare for development for up till senior rank: Vision and team leadership, subordinates cultivation and development, cross-disciplinary coordination and collaboration, policy communications and marketing, risk evaluation and management, information and communication innovative application.
Local Agency Chief Management Competency Advance Course	Junior Rank Grade 9, seniority over 3 years (includes Chief, Director, Team Leader)	

Data source: Civil Service Development Institute, DGPA, Executive Yuan, 2020. 2020 General Annual Report on Training Outcomes

RESEARCH DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

Research Subjects

This research utilizes the training needs survey questionnaire of the “Chief Managerial Core Competency Training Course” organized by K City government. The survey questionnaire adopts the “survey techniques” and the survey questionnaire is distributed by the census method. The survey is conducted in anonymous with the Chief, Section Chief (hereinafter referred to as the middle manager of K City government) of the various units of the K City government, its agencies (organizations) and various district offices and the Director, Deputy Director and Chief of Staff of the service units (hereinafter referred to as the head of agency) based on the survey highlights. A total of 139 middle manager of K City government and 50 persons of head of agency were surveyed.

Research Instruments

The survey is based on the “managerial core competency items of the mid and high-level management positions in the agencies under the Executive Yuan.” There are 6 items of core competency aspects (problem analysis, project management, performance management, information management, communications and coordination and team building) established and there are 16 items as basic competencies. Two survey questionnaires were designed based on the type of business of the government.

- Self-evaluation questionnaire by middle managers on the competencies they already possessed

The purpose of the investigation is to understand the level of the management core competency already possessed by the middle manager of K City government through self-evaluation of various positions. The survey questionnaire is prepared based on the Likert Scale (Strongly agree - 5 points, Agree - 4 points, Neutral - 3 points, Disagree - 2 points, Strongly disagree - 1 point).

- The head of the agency is to evaluate on the must-have competencies survey.

The purpose of the investigation is to confirm the level of importance for the must-have management core competencies by a middle manager of K City government as thought by the head of the agency.

Table 2. “Managerial core competency items and overview of the behavioral aspects of mid and high-level management positions in the agencies of the Executive Yuan.

Core competency aspects	Connotation description
Problem analysis	1. Problem identification 2. Evidence analysis
Project management	3. Program planning 4. Program evaluation and feedback
Performance management	5. Establish performance targets and measurement indicator 6. Performance review and feedback 7. Performance expression and communications
Information management	8. Work process reengineering 9. Information technology utilization 10. Internet media and public opinion inquiry
Communications and coordination	11. Communication expression 12. Conflict management
Team building	13. Job instruction 14. Team management 15. Knowledge management 16. Job motivation

Data source: Managerial core competency items of middle managers in agencies of the Executive Yuan and local government agencies.

RESEARCH IMPLEMENTATION

Questionnaire Distribution Method

This research survey questionnaire was distributed through the K City government on February 8, 2022 in the form of an official letter with reference number K-City-Ren-Kao-Er-Zi No. 1110205793 to a total of 31 units (agencies) of the K City government. They are the K City's Fire Department, Public Health Bureau, Cultural Affairs Bureau, Environmental Protection Bureau, Local Tax Bureau, Bus Service Administration, District Offices of Districts A to G, Land Office and so on. The letter with the survey questionnaire was re-directed to the units' Chief, Section Head and its Director, Deputy Director (including Chief of Staff) to fill out. The survey questionnaires were then returned to the K City government's Department of Personnel (Appraisal and Training Section) for collection before February 18th, 2022.

Questionnaire Response Situation

- Self-evaluation questionnaire by middle manager on the competencies they already possessed: There are 139 copies of the survey questionnaires distributed with 127 copies returned, the return rate is 91.37%.
- The head of the agency is to evaluate on the must-have competencies survey: there are 50 copies of the survey questionnaires distributed with 47 copies returned, the return rate is 94.00%.

Research Method

Thank you to the K City government for agreeing to authorize the use of original data of the survey questionnaire results. The researchers used the Importance Performance Analysis (IPA)

to analyze the distribution situation for the managerial core competency of middle managers that are “already possessed” and “are of importance.” This is to find out and discuss the gaps in the competence at work to confirm the corresponding training gaps, and to identify the priorities in educational training.

DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS

According to the survey compilation results, the average value is 4.04 for the management core competency that the K City government’s middle managers have already possessed, it is set as the Y-axis; the average value is 4.52 for the management core competency that the K City government’s middle managers should possess, it is set as the X-axis. The intersection of these 2 points is the midpoint. The X and Y-axis are divided into 4 corresponding areas namely A, B, C and D. The average values of the various questions on management core competency for its importance and level possessed are labelled in the corresponding positions in the 4 areas:

- Area A: The level of “already possessed” and “of importance” are higher, which represent that the core competencies in this area are most critical and should be given trainings on a continuous basis to keep it going.
- Area B: The level of “already possessed” is high and the “of importance” is lower, which represent that the core competencies in this area do not belong to critical competency items. Currently, related trainings might have a situation of an oversupply.
- Area C: The level of “already possessed” and “of importance” are lower, which represent that the core competencies in this area are not critical competency items. If under the situation of limited training resources, it has a lower priority in the offering of the training.
- Area D: The level of “already possessed” is low but the level “of importance” is high, which represent that the core competencies in this area are important critical competency items. They should be given first priority in the offering of the training items in order to strengthen the professional capability.

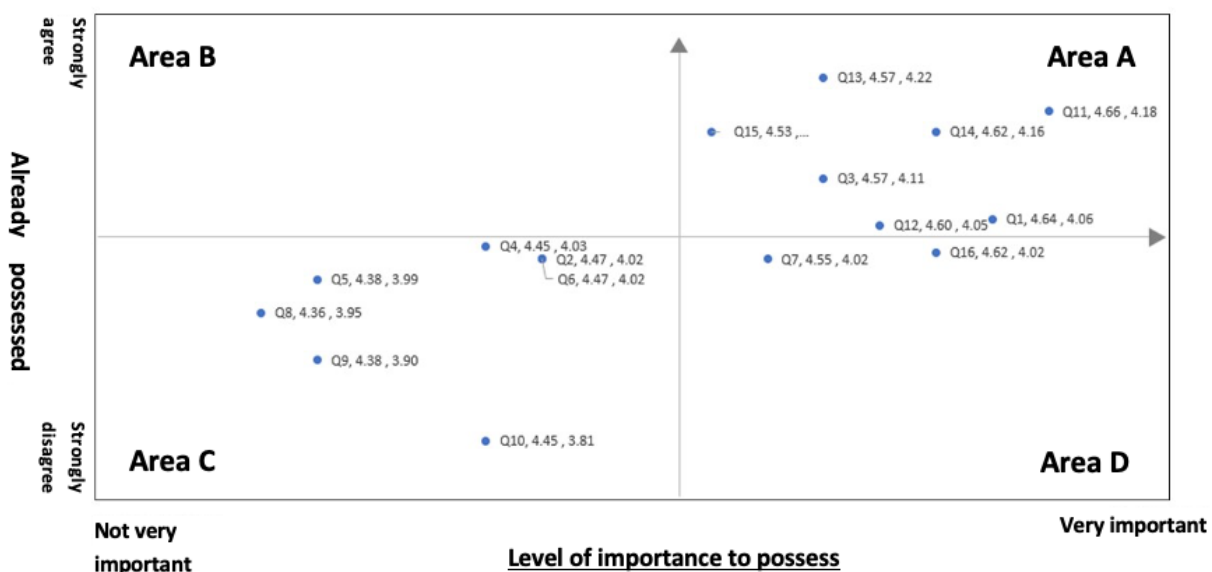


Figure 4. Analysis chart for the core competencies of the middle manager of K city government for level of “already possessed” and “of importance”

Table 3. Analysis table for the core competencies of the middle manager of K city government for level of “already possessed” and “of importance”

Core competency aspects	Behavioral aspects	Area A Continue to maintain	Area B Over supply	Area C Low priority	Area D Improvement highlight
Problem analysis	Q1. Problem identification	◎			
	Q2. Evidence analysis			◎	
Project management	Q3. Program planning	◎			
	Q4. Program evaluation and feedback			◎	
Performance management	Q5. Establish performance targets and measurement indicator			◎	
	Q6. Performance review and feedback			◎	
	Q7. Performance expression and communications				◎
Information management	Q8. Work process re-engineering			◎	
	Q9. Information technology utilization			◎	
	Q10. Internet media and public opinion inquiry			◎	
Communications and coordination	Q11. Communication expression	◎			
	Q12. Conflict management	◎			
Team building	Q13. Job instructions	◎			
	Q14. Team management	◎			
	Q15. Knowledge management	◎			
	Q16. Job motivation				◎

RESEARCH CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTIONS

Research Conclusion

It has been confirmed that the Middle Manager Managerial Core Competency Items established by the Executive Yuan can be used as the standard for the middle manager managerial core competency local government evaluation

According to the research analysis results, out of the 6 major core competencies and 16 items for behavioral aspects of the middle managers managerial core competency items established by the Executive Yuan, there are 9 items of the competence behavior aspects that are perceived as “of high importance” by the head of agency, which put the overall items at 56.25%; there are 5 items of the core competencies aspects which stand the overall items at 83.33%. This shows that although there are differences in organization functions and nature of business between the central agencies and local governments, through this research it is known that most of the heads of local governments express acknowledgment that the junior rank middle manager managerial core competency items established by the central competent authority for training are the important competencies that the middle manager of local governments should possess. In other words, the central and local governments can utilize the same competency items to conduct assessment on the core competencies of their middle manager.

Under limited training resources of the local governments, the “performance expression and communications” and “job motivation” are the managerial core competencies of the middle manager of the local governments that should be strengthened in priority

The research results found that the important competency items that the middle manager should possess are of lower level in the self-evaluation. Therefore, these 2 types of competencies should be listed as the first in priority for trainings. On the division of power for the governance of public affairs by the government in Taiwan, the local government is mainly responsible in promoting the policies formulated by the central government. The highlight of the execution by middle manager is to lead the members in the fundamental work in the first line of service work for the members of the public. Therefore, the policy implementation outcomes directly reflects on the level of satisfaction by the local residents towards the policy implementation by the local government. If the local government can arrange the middle manager in accepting related topic trainings, it is expected that it can raise the policy execution performance promotion effects, stimulating the public to understand better the execution performance of public affairs. This can also lead to effective communications in the policy promotion process, increase the business execution benefits; internally, it can boost the team’s motivation which encourages the members’ morale and team cohesiveness, achieving the policy goals.

The local government maintains the training for the middle manager on the core competencies in “problem identification,” “program planning,” “communications expressions,” “conflict management,” “job instruction,” “team management” and “knowledge management”

The head of the agency assesses the 7 behavioral items of core competencies in “problem identification,” “Program planning,” “communications expressions,” “conflict management,” “job instruction,” “team management” and “knowledge management” as the important items to be possessed by the middle manager. Even though the self-evaluation by middle manager show that they have already possessed them, the research results show that these 7 items of core competencies are the most critical items which should be kept with regular training.

Research Suggestions

The local government can make arrangements for related topic courses in the annual training plan according to the prioritization of the managerial core competency trainings

Currently, the middle manager for Taiwan's local government are mostly recommended to participate in the middle managers managerial core competency training courses organized by the Central Agency (such as: the National Academy of Civil Service and Directorate-General of Personnel Administration, Executive Yuan). However, the training venue is not close by to the service agencies and the training period lasts for 5 to 8 days. Hence, under the consideration of business promotion factor, every local government has only a few middle managers participating in the training activities. Since the middle manager shoulders the important role in policy communications and implementation, team building and giving job instructions, suggests the local government to prioritize the managerial core competency training based on the results of this research within the scope of the training resources. There can be gradual arrangements of related topic courses in the internal annual training plan of the organization and set up related courses by themselves. This method can increase the convenience for the personnel participating in the trainings and it enables the organization to instantly understand the responses of the training participants and the training outcomes. This arrangement is closer to the middle manager training requirements of the local government.

The local government can extend the middle manager managerial core competency training to middle manager trainee. It is expected to expedite job execution capability after taking office

Through the conclusion of this research, it has been confirmed that the "Middle Manager Managerial Core Competency Items" established by the Executive Yuan can be used as the standard for the middle manager managerial core competency local government evaluation and for prioritizing the training items. Thus, if every unit (agency) can recommend outstanding middle manager trainee and list them as joint training subjects, this can strengthen the managerial core competency of the middle manager ahead. They can also understand better the connotations and characteristics of middle manager tasks through interactions with middle manager during the training process. Each of the recommending unit (agency) can evaluate the suitability of the trainee to take on the middle manager through the training outcome.

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