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RESEARCH OF THE NEED TO INCREASE THE LEVEL OF
PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT OFFICIALS IN
UKRAINE TO INCREASE THE EFFECTIVENESS OF THEIR ACTIVITIES

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The initiated reform of decentralization in Ukraine has also led to significant changes in the tasks and functions of local governments, especially in those that were formed as a result of the unification of territorial communities. Due to the speed of these changes, it is advisable to conduct a separate study to increase the level of professional competence of local government officials and deputies of local councils as a basis for improving the effectiveness of their activities. The success of changes will depend on the speed of training / retraining of employees, their ability to perform new powers. The basis for this study were the results of a telephone sociological online survey of local government representatives (united territorial communities (UTC) are singled out) on the quality of public services, as well as the need to improve their professional competence in 2018 – 2020 [1].

Representatives of united territorial communities, interviewed by telephone online survey, were asked to assess the competence (professional level) of local government officials on a scale from 0 to 5, where 5 – the highest score, as well as to express their views on whether officials have a level of knowledge, skills and abilities sufficient for the effective performance of their duties. Answering this question, the respondents expressed their vision of a competent local government official. Thus, in their opinion, the following competencies are critical for elected officials of local self-government: leadership; professionalism; creativity. According to some respondents, before

submitting documents to the election commission, candidates for elected positions in local self-government should submit a document confirming their qualifications, or that they have some idea of what public administration, local self-government is. According to the respondents, a competent local government official (who is appointed to the position) should have the following competencies: leadership; communicativeness; ability to interact with different stakeholders; project management; spatial planning; knowledge of all tools; take responsibility for the team and the entrusted scope of authority; one who works on himself and develops (motivated, came to develop the community). In addition, such a person must be a professional in their field, have an appropriate degree and experience in government. In addition, almost all respondents noted that local government officials need constant improvement of their professional level depending on changes in legislation, social development in general, the development of innovative methods and technologies. At the same time, there is a direct relationship between the efficiency of local governments and the competence of officials. Slightly more than half of the respondents (50,3 %) admit that the problems in the activities of the self-government body are caused by the insufficient level of knowledge of employees , but 16,1 % of them are completely convinced of this (Fig. 1).

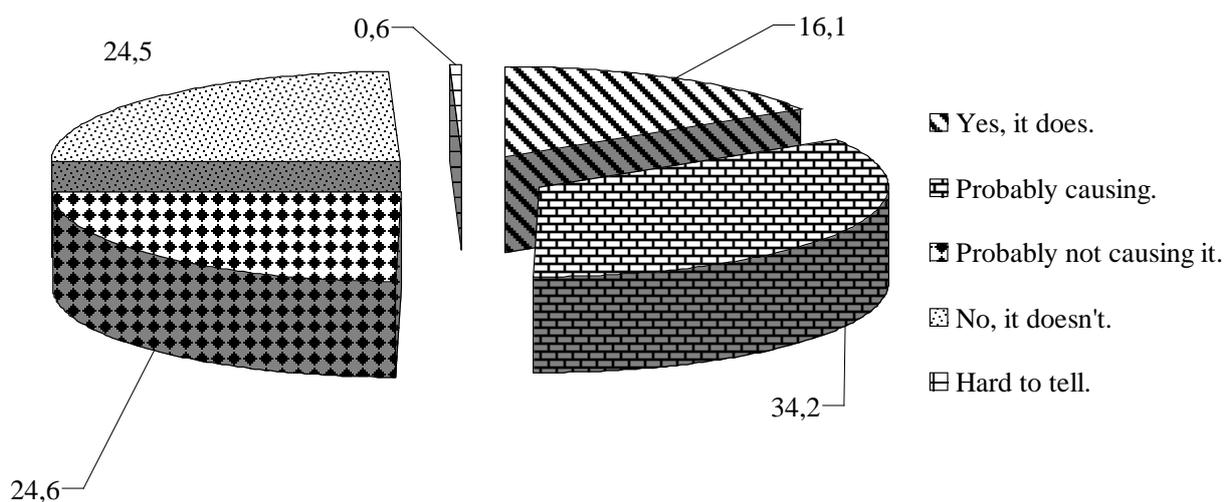


Fig. 1. The results of the analysis of respondents' responses to their assessment of the impact of insufficient knowledge of employees on problems in the activities of local governments (% among all respondents)

It should also be noted that almost half of the respondents indicated the need for additional skills and qualifications to implement the new powers / services provided under the decentralization reform. In general, the respondents of this study noted a significant expansion of their functions in the context of local self-government in UTC. Relatively less often, respondents indicated the expansion of powers in the field of public safety (32 % of them indicated an increase in powers in this area), the organization of passenger traffic in the community (28 %) and the operation of boarding schools (21 %). At the same time, almost all respondents indicated the need for new powers in the areas of general secondary education (61 %), organization and development of administrative service centers (60,4 %), development of local infrastructure (58 %), organization of cultural and educational institutions (58 %), provision of preschool education (57 %), maintenance of streets and roads on the territory of UTC (55 %). Respondents also noted that the most additional qualifications are needed in the following areas: organization and development of administrative service centers (38,9 %), public safety (37,8 %), primary care (34,9 %).

Of particular interest are also indicators that determine the dynamics of the quality of service delivery to community residents and evaluation of the work of the executive body of the UTC (Table 1).

Table 1

Assessment of the dynamics of changes in the quality of service provision to community residents and assessment of the work of the executive body of the UTC for 2018 – 2020 (among the total number of respondents, %)

Scope of services	Indexes			
	improvement	deterioration	remained unchanged	I do not own information
Availability of educational services	60,5	35,0	1,8	2,7
Availability of social services	54,5	39,3	3,3	2,9
Availability of medical services	38,8	48,8	10,5	1,9
Security and public order	36,8	43,0	13,8	6,4
Living conditions availability of work	36,8	48,8	13,0	1,4
The level of services in general	84,8	12,3	1,5	1,4

As a result of the changes, the training needs of local self-government bodies have significantly changed. Among the most urgent needs in the development of "solid" competencies, without which it is impossible to ensure the implementation of the powers of local governments: strategic planning of local economic development; project management; administrative services; HR; tools for interaction with various stakeholders; legal literacy; financial management; communal property management; energy efficiency and energy management; organization of housing and communal services; attracting investments and other alternative sources of funding for local development; application of e-government and e-democracy in management; health management; management in education; culture management. The need of local government employees for the development of "soft" competencies, which do not have an unambiguous link to a specific profession, but are to some extent cross-cutting, has significantly increased: leadership; change management; team work; communication; ethics; self improvement; stress resistance.

Representatives of UTC – respondents to this study – believe that the top priorities for professional development of local governments should be areas of local economic development (48,9 %), project management (40,8 %), the provision of quality administrative services (40,1 %), personnel management (30,5 %), accounting (25,1 %), agriculture (21,7 %), planning and implementation of infrastructure projects (21,3 %). For the respondents themselves, the top topics are local economic development (46,0 %), project management (32,1 %), provision of quality administrative services (30,8 %), financial resources management (28,0 %), planning and implementation. infrastructure projects (23,4 %).

It should be noted that the above areas where it is necessary to increase the competence of local government officials can be considered key or strategic, as they have a direct impact on the effectiveness of local government. It is the lack of the above competencies in local government officials that leads to a low level (or reduction in the level) of performance of powers / tasks of local governments.

At the same time, it should be noted that officials do not always feel the relationship between lack of competencies and efficiency. Therefore, the potential reserves of

professional development of officials should include the formation of competencies in those areas where there are difficulties in performing official tasks. Therefore, it is necessary to increase the level of professional competence of local government officials, which will improve the efficiency of local government and have a positive impact on the development of the local community as a whole. Only if local government officials are professional and competent will the territorial community develop successfully.

To this end, it is useful to identify the current practice of determining the training needs of employees in local governments in Ukraine, how they collect and / or receive information about the needs of employees, how formalized such analysis is and how regularly this analysis is carried out. According to an online telephone survey, some local governments do not use any formalized tools to study the training needs of employees. The vast majority of respondents stated that their local governments do not specifically study training needs, but determine who to send for training, depending on the subject of training activities and the range of job responsibilities. It is a common practice to identify those who need to improve their skills in order to comply with the mandatory requirements for the periodicity of professional development established by law. Thus, the direction of training of officials in these local governments is not in view of the real need to increase the level of professional competence, but as a reaction to the proposal of the subject of training activities. In such a situation, there is a risk that the subject of training does not meet the real training needs, as well as the direction of training of employees who do not really need such training. In general, this leads to a decrease in the effectiveness of vocational training and the efficiency of the use of funds spent on training. Only in some cases, research has shown, do local governments use more formalized tools to study the training needs of their employees. Among such tools, in particular brainstorming, questionnaires: small meetings are held, the method of brainstorming reveals the most in-demand training needs of government officials.

Respondents during the online telephone survey were asked which types of professional development are most popular among officials and deputies of local councils: trainings, seminars, exchange of experience, others; why these types of

advanced training are preferred. In general, all respondents interviewed by the method of in-depth interviews are almost unanimous in the opinion that it is necessary to combine different types of professional development depending on the subject of training and the types of competencies that are expected to be developed.

According to the respondents, in general, local government officials have a desire to participate in various training events. But the demands on training increase. Now many people do not want to listen to theoretical lectures, everyone wants to gain skills in solving specific problems. Therefore, among these types of training are the most popular training and exchange of experience.

If we consider trainings and exchange of experience, then among these types of professional development trainings are more popular because they involve the acquisition of practical skills. Local government officials need to learn something new very quickly, and nothing better is perceived as practical coverage – a really effective tool that is tested, used and gives the appropriate result – ways and tools to implement powers, solve situations, tasks. Employees of local governments want to see concrete solutions to certain problems, they are interested in ready-made algorithms that can be adapted and used in themselves. Trainings provide interactive types of knowledge acquisition. And the activity of participants in such events is much greater.

In addition, respondents also noted the growing role of distance learning in the process of improving the professional competence of government officials. However, according to some respondents, the disadvantage of distance learning courses is that not all providers of such training control the quality of knowledge and do not issue a document on the outcome of the distance learning course, at least a generated electronic certificate.

In order to quickly cover the need to acquire new knowledge in the community, internal training can be organized, which is conducted by their own employees. For example, in the Merefya City Council of the Kharkiv Region, internal training was conducted by the legal department. Internal training was organized according to the following scenario: a new rule of law enters into force, lawyers deal with these rules, determine the structural units / officials who will be directly in contact with these rules of law, and conduct appropriate training or clarification.

According to the results of an online telephone survey, the main criterion for deciding to participate in training is the confidence that the teacher or trainer is competent (for 54,7 % of respondents this criterion is № 1 or № 2 in importance). The most important criteria are also the compliance of the training topic with the powers and tasks performed (41,4 %), interest in the training topic (39,1 %), trust in the training organizer (32,7 %).

During the online telephone survey, respondents were also asked what the results of the training were in local government, whether participation in the training resulted in increased efficiency of local government, what are the most visible results (effects) (does this mean, for example, an increase in quality of services provided). The study also established the interdependence of increasing the level of competence of local government officials and increasing the level of citizen services.

While noting the positive link between training and improving the efficiency of local government, it should also be borne in mind that such effects may not be immediate. In this regard, it is advisable to introduce a system of monitoring the results of professional training of officials in local governments in order to identify the most effective areas of training and better identify training needs. Therefore, a system of control over the results of professional training of government personnel needs to be introduced.

Thus, the study of the need to increase the level of professional competence of local government officials in Ukraine, in particular, the united territorial communities showed that increasing the level of professional competence of local government employees is a factor in improving their efficiency. Among the most urgent needs in the development of professional competencies, without which it is impossible to ensure the implementation of the powers of local governments, should be noted: strategic planning of local economic development; project management (project approach to all management processes); administrative services; HR. Almost all respondents to the online telephone survey noted that the result of vocational training should be an increase in the level of efficiency of local government. To this end, a number of preconditions should be created in the activities of local self-government bodies: firstly, to study the real needs of staff in vocational training; secondly, to develop vocational training programs that would meet these needs; thirdly, to involve professional trainers; fourth,

enable staff to apply the acquired knowledge and skills in the workplace. That is, there is a closed chain, starting from the study of needs and ending with the direct performance of professional duties of local government staff. The study also found that increasing the efficiency of local government is observed in the process of staff participation in training / vocational training. The positive impact of vocational training on the effectiveness of local government also depends on the presence of a practical component in the curriculum (active use of training, exchange of experience between government officials). Also, the study revealed the interdependence of increasing the level of competence of local government officials and increasing the level of citizen services.

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