

## KEY COMPETENCES OF SLOVENIAN SPORT MANAGERS

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### ABSTRACT

*The paper presents the results of research that examined the key competences in the management field in Slovenian sports. The success rate of sport organisations and sportsmen is based on the creative, innovative and quality expert work of employees or/and volunteers. Their work is planned, organised, managed and supervised by a sport manager who possesses knowledge as well as managerial, technical, social, creative and other competences. The purpose of the presented research, which involved successful Slovenian sport managers, was to establish which competences are the most important for successful work in the field of sport management. The paper also presents the technical framework for the selected determination of sport management terminology and competences as well as a competence structure model, prepared by the authors. We have found that the human resources management competence most significantly contributes to the success of Slovenian sport managers in the field of general competences. Respondents evaluated the competence of developing a positive working environment as the most important specific competence that supplements general competences.*

**Key words:** sport management, competence structure, key competences

## KLJUČNE KOMPETENCE SLOVENSKEGA ŠPORTNEGA MENEDŽERJA

### IZVLEČEK

*V prispevku predstavljamo rezultate raziskave, s katero smo proučevali ključne kompetence za področje menedžmenta v slovenskem športu. Uspešnost športnih organizacij in športnikov temelji na ustvarjalnem, inovativnem in kakovostnem strokovnem delu zaposlenih ali/in prostovoljcev. Njihovo delo načrtuje, organizira, vodi in nadzoruje športni menedžer, ki ima poleg znanja tudi vodstvene, tehnične, socialne, ustvarjalne in druge kompetence. Namen predstavljene raziskave, v kateri so sodelovali uspešni slovenski športni menedžerji, je bil ugotoviti, katere kompetence so najpomembnejše za uspešno delo na področju športnega menedžmenta. V prispevku je poleg ugotovitev predstavljen teoretični okvir izbrane opredelitve pojmov športnega menedžmenta in kompetenc ter avtorsko oblikovan model strukture kompetenc. Ugotovili smo, da na področju splošnih kompetenc k uspešnosti slovenskih športnih menedžerjev najbolj prispeva kompetenca sposobnosti ravnanja z ljudmi. Kot najpomembnejšo specifično kompetenco, ki dopolnjuje splošne kompetence, so anketiranci ocenili kompetenco razvijanja pozitivnega delovnega okolja.*

**Ključne besede:** športni menedžment, struktura kompetenc, ključne kompetence

## INTRODUCTION

In the past decade, the situation in the sport labour market has been, as it has been elsewhere, rapidly and profoundly changing. On the one hand, in the case of global competition, employers strive to acquire top qualified experts who know how to appropriately predict market trends and how quickly they can react and, together with their teams, to change the demands, needs and expectations of buyers. On the other hand, employees want to improve their work performance competences and, consequently, to improve their employability and job position as well as their economic and social status. Studying sport organisations shows that organisations make up a relatively sensitive system, since they require qualified sport managers to achieve success in overall management. A modern sport organisation requires a sport manager that is able to respond rapidly, adapt and be flexible and who has developed the most important competences for fulfilling the expectations and demands of sport services users (employed in sport organisations) and the interests of owners. Since the key competences for successful sport management still remain a professional issue, a founded necessity for scientific consideration of competencies exists, since it could explain the competence structure for successful work in the field of sport management. There is no general definition that would clearly define the term management in sports. Therefore, we

summarised a definition from various sources (Chelladurai, 1994; Bednarik, Kolenc, Petrović, Simoneti, & Šugman, 1998; Šugman, Bednarik, & Kolarič, 2002; Tušak & Tušak, 2001; Retar, 2006; Jurak, 2006; Kolar, Jurak, Bednarik, & Kolenc, 2007; Svetlik & Zupan, 2009, Verle & Markič, 2012): *“Management in sports is a process of key resources management and cooperation with important stakeholders, and which enables efficient realisation of business and sports goals of an organisation and/or sportsman in all management functions.”*

There are several competence determinations that play an important role in the management of today's organisations. Competences have become a modern tool that assists in efficient human resources management. Individuals can only be successful at work if they possess knowledge as well as skills to use the aforementioned knowledge as well as acquired experience, motivation, beliefs, habits and values, in one word: competences. Lipičnik (1998) states that “man's success depends on their skills, knowledge and motivation”, Muršak (1999) defines competences as the “consequence of an individual's concrete practical experience, which is proven when the acquired theoretical or practical knowledge can be used in practice”, Vukasovič-Zontar and Korade Purg (2008) state that “desired knowledge and management are the skills and abilities of an individual, thus conditioning the successful performance of work and tasks within the scope of a job in a concrete business environment”. Along with general competences, in today's society knowledge must be accompanied by new special competences in connection with human resources management on all organisation levels. Therefore, a new aspect of management is being formed – management as the collection of competences that present values, knowledge and skills and which have to be proven through successful managerial cooperation (Verle & Markič, 2012). For the purposes of our research, we have summarised the term competence as *the ability to apply knowledge, skills, personal characteristics, experience and motivation in order to uniquely and efficiently perform an expected type of work or task*. According to Kodolja (2005), the essence of a competence is not the key question today, but rather, which competences are essential. The competence-based approach has both advantages and weaknesses. Training merely in the field of key competences can result in the reduced professional and work autonomy of a sport manager, who will only be qualified for certain tasks and will not possess the required range of knowledge for fast adaptation to the sport labour market (Retar & Plevnik, 2012).

Jurak (2006) and Bednarik, Kolenc, Petrović, Simoneti and Šugman (1998) emphasise the fact that generally, volunteers with an inappropriate amount of professional knowledge are the ones dealing with sport organisation management highlighting it as the main problem of Slovenian sport management. More than one third of volunteer workers in sports do not have the appropriate professional education. An average Slovenian sport manager harmonises the work of various people, and this is mostly done on a voluntary basis (Jurak, 2006). This type of work is mostly conducted by presidents (67.4 %), followed by secretaries (20 %) and others (12.6 %), including coaches, assistant secretaries and treasurers. Kolar, Bednarik, Jurak and Kolenc (2007) have found that the structure of managerial staff in sport organisations is quite heterogeneous ac-

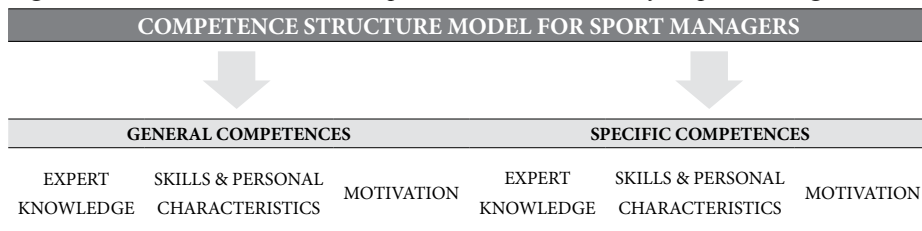
cording to their roles in organisations (companies) as well as according to their education and experience, and also the development of competences.

Based on a study of various works, (Pfeffer, Hatano, & Santalainen, 1995; Oeij & Weizer, 2002; Laval 2005; Juceviciene & Lepaite, 2005; Šubic Kovač & Istenič Starčič, 2006; Istenič Starčič & Vonta, 2010; Kolar, Jurak, Bednarik, & Kolenc, 2007; Hozjan 2009; Retar & Plevnik, 2012; Verle & Markič, 2012) we have formed a theoretical competence structure model for a sport manager. Based on the literature we can summarise that the general knowledge, motivation, values and standing points of sport managers support their competences for sport organisation management. The sport managers competences can be divided into general and specific competences that determine the expert knowledge as well as the abilities and personal characteristics in three important fields of work: sport, management, as well as research and development.

We started by applying the findings of authors Verle and Markič (2012) who have found that a new and modern insight into successful management as a range of competences is possible. They confirm that we can form a tool that enables insight into successful management based on the appropriate range of competences. The first goal of our study was to form a range of relevant competences, variables, and to compare them with similar models. In the formation of a range of competences, we relied on reference research in the field of sport management study (Kolar, Jurak, Bednarik, & Kolenc, 2007; Verle & Markič, 2012; Retar & Plevnik 2012; Šubic Kovač & Istenič Starčič, 2006; Istenič Starčič & Vonta, 2006; Pfeffer, Hatano, & Santalainen, 1995; Laval, 2005). We also considered the NASPE-NASSM American independent accreditation organisation's model, which set the standards for assessing education programmes in sport management.

Based on the most general definition of the term "competences" (i.e. that they embody the knowledge, skills, personal characteristics and motivation of an individual to efficiently perform a certain task) we used the presented competence model to determine the required expert knowledge, skills and personal characteristics that enable work in sport management (Figure 1).

*Figure 1: The basic theoretical competence structure model for sport managers*



Then we distributed them according to the set connected with sports, management and research. We decided to implement this division on the basis of certain authors (Kolar, Jurak, Bednarik, & Kolenc, 2007; Slack, 1997) who state that a wide structure

of various types of knowledge in the field of sport management as well as in the field of social and economic role and sport organisation is required for successful and efficient work in the field of sport management. According to both practice and literature, competences were divided in two groups: general and specific competences; this distribution was formed into a theoretical competence structure model of a Slovenian sport manager (Table 1).

Table 1: The theoretical competence structure model of a Slovenian sport manager

			AREAS		
			SPORT	MANAGEMENT	RESEARCH & DEVELOPMENT
COMPETENCES	GENERAL COMPETENCES	EXPERT KNOWLEDGE	Basic knowledge in sport profession.	Basic knowledge about management.	Knowledge of IT basic. Foreign language.
		SKILLS & PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS	Ability to apply knowledge in practice.	Ability to cooperate with people.	Ability to conduct research. Oral and written communication in mother tongue. Ability to cooperate in an interdisciplinary group. Ability to create new ideas. Criticism and self-criticism.
		MOTIVATION			Motivation for lifelong learning.
	SPECIFIC COMPETENCES	EXPERT KNOWLEDGE	Sustainable planning and implementing business processes of producing sport services.	Understanding marketing and brand management in sports. Sport infrastructure management. Financial resources management and the knowledge to resolve financial problems. Mastering project management. Analysing work processes, jobs, designing work and tasks. Organising work and delegating tasks. Introduction to work. Understanding ethical and expert obligations.	
		SKILLS & PERSONAL CHARACTERISTICS	Recognising talented sportsmen and adaptation to their specialties. Understanding and realising business goals. Representing professional and moral authority. Establishing partner relationships. Readiness for changes needed for improvement of operations.	Designing appropriate strategy for conflict management and stress situation management. Employing and selecting candidates for jobs. Public relations, communication with the media and key stakeholders. Developing a positive working environment. Stimulating for work, supervision, awarding and forming success rate indicators. Taking responsibility for co-workers, the environment, the society with regards to the results of their work.	
		MOTIVATION		Striving to operate on the basis of good business relations.	Cooperation in research projects.

## METHODS

We designed a survey for research purposes and thus interviewed sport managers, used descriptive statistics to establish the general socio-economic characteristics of respondents (gender, age, education level, period of employment and work post) and eliminated the most important competences according to their opinions. The data was processed using SPSS software.

### Sample of respondents

The criteria for sample selection were determined on the basis of research results, performed by Jurak (2007). The research sample included sport managers who professionally perform the work and tasks of a sport manager or work related to sport management in an organisation for at least one year. The following condition for the inclusion in the survey was that the sport organisation had 100,000 EUR of annual income and at least one employee.

The sample of the interviewed sport managers did not show any deviation from the stereotype deviation that sport is managed by men. The sample only included 8.2 % females. The age structure of the respondents showed that the average age of an interviewed Slovenian sport manager is 45 years and 4 months, whereas the youngest respondent was 28 years and the oldest was 65 years old. Only 5.9 % of the respondents were older than 60 years. The majority of the respondents, 68 %, fell in the age range from 30 to 50, which explains the fact that Slovenian sport managers are middle-aged. The survey included respondents from 27 Slovenian places. As expected, the majority, 36, were from Ljubljana, which presents 42.4 % of all the respondents, since the largest sport organisations are located in Ljubljana. They were followed by the respondents from Koper (11.8 %), Nova Gorica (7.1 %), Maribor (4.2 %) and Kranj (4.2 %) as well as other places with two or one respondent.

### Data collection

The data was collected with a survey questionnaire in electronic form, which was sent to official electronic addresses of 150 selected sport managers, and after numerous requests we were able to acquire 85 managers who agreed to cooperate. It proved that the anticipated problem in the research realised, i.e. that there would be limitations in collecting important information such as the relevance of personal work competences, since managers do not want or may not reveal sensitive data. The reliability of the questionnaire was calculated with a reliability test that showed, considering the questionnaire structure that was based on the study of standpoints, relatively high values for general (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.790) as well as specific competence (Cronbach's Alpha = 0.790). The importance of competence was evaluated by the respondents by

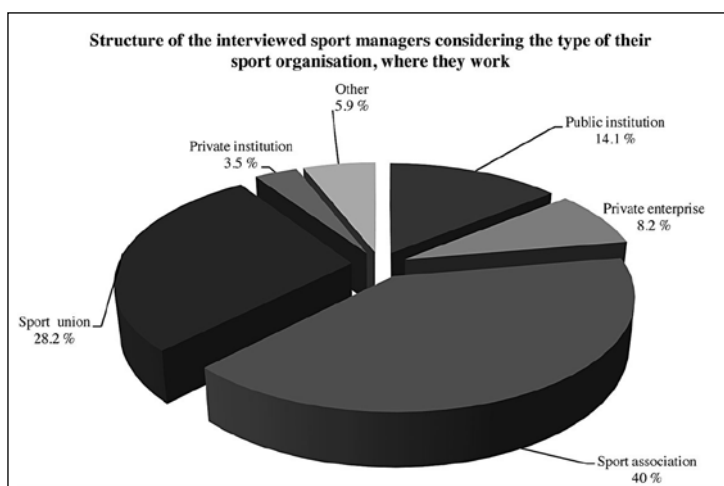
using a 6-grade assessment scale, with values ranging from 1 (not important) to 6 (very important). By selecting the 6-grade scale the authors tried to avoid the possibility of the respondents to choose medium and socially acceptable grades.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research was conducted in order to establish some features of Slovenian sport managers structure and to establish the model of general and specific competence for successful work in the field of sport management, as determined by the Slovenian managers.

The question regarding the length of the respondents' employment at their sport organisation was answered by 16.5 % of the respondents that they had been working at the organisation for 3 years; the second largest group, i.e. 10.2 % of the respondents answered that they had been working for 20 years. The data show that 17.6 % of the respondents were employed as presidents of sport organisations, 16.5 % of the respondents stated that they worked as sport directors, 16.5 % of the respondents performed the work and tasks of a secretary or a treasurer of a sport organisation, 9.4 % of them worked as sport managers, 12.9 % of them worked as coaches and managers at the same time, which shows that the work of a Slovenian sport manager is very heterogeneous considering the diverse work posts, where the respondents worked and implemented management functions.

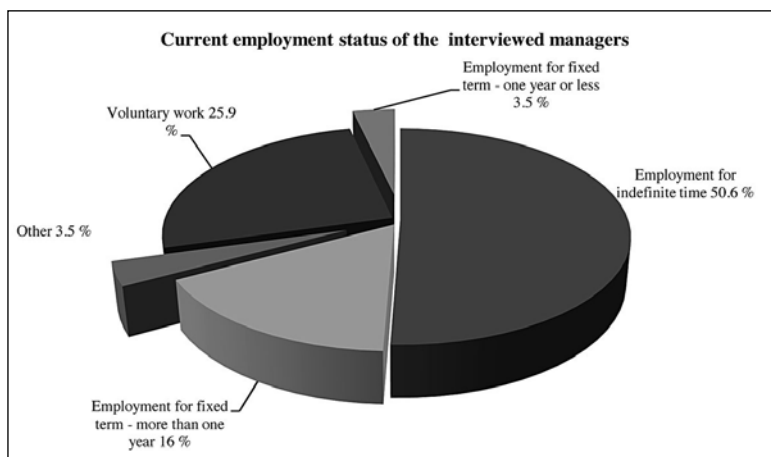
Therefore, we can conclude that 82.3 % of the respondents were employed in the public sector and civil society, while the remaining employees worked in private sector, which is the typical type of organisation in Slovenian sport that is based on sport associations (Graph 1).



*Graph 1: The structure of the interviewed sport managers considering the type of sport organisation, where they work.*



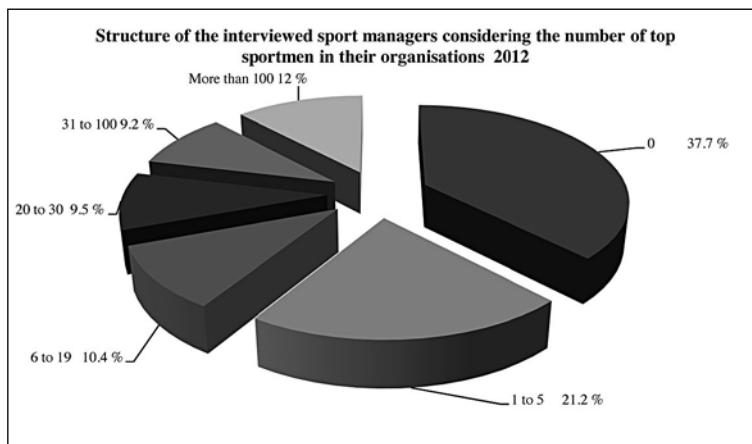
Most respondents had university education. Only 21.2 % of them had high school education; 43.5 % of the respondents achieved higher or university level; 5.9 % of them were Doctors of Science; 8.2 % of the respondents were Masters of Science; 8.2 % of them had high/professional education and 12.9 % higher formal education. 50.6 % of the respondents were employed for indefinite time, therefore, we can assume that there is a need for regular and permanent employment of sport managers in sport organisations (Graph 2). It is also evident that 25.9 % of the sport managers in Slovenia perform work on a voluntary basis.



*Graph 2: The current employment status of the interviewed managers.*

More than half, 52.9 % of the respondents answered the question about the total income of their organisation in 2012 that the total annual income of the organisation amounted to between 100,000 EUR and 300,000 EUR. The data show that slightly more than a half of the respondents were employed in organisations with relatively moderate annual budgets. Only 7.1 % of the respondents replied that their organisation's income ranged between 300,000 EUR and 500,000 EUR; 16.5 % of the respondents replied that the income of their organisation was between 500,000 EUR and 1,000,000 EUR. 23.5 % of respondents replied that their sports organisation had more than 1,000,000 EUR of annual income in 2012. We can conclude that the sport managers from moderate as well as financially better-off Slovenian sport organisations cooperated in the survey.

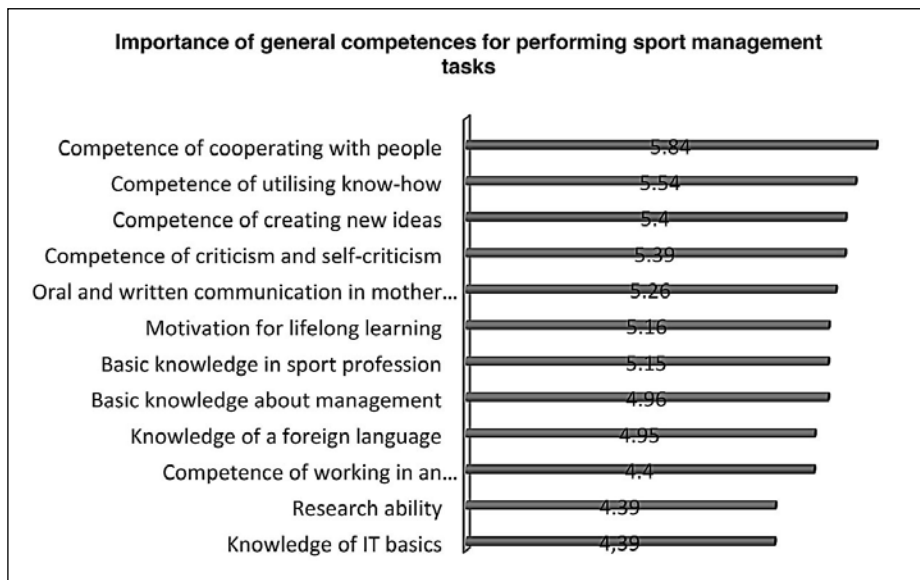
Only 37.7 % of the respondents replied to the question about the number of top sportsmen categorised on the basis of the Slovenian Olympic Committee's categorisation in 2012, i.e. that no such sportsmen were categorised in their sport organisations (Graph 3).



*Graph 3: The structure of the interviewed sport managers considering the number of top sportmen in their organisations in 2012 (categorised on the basis of Slovenian Olympic Committee's categorisation).*

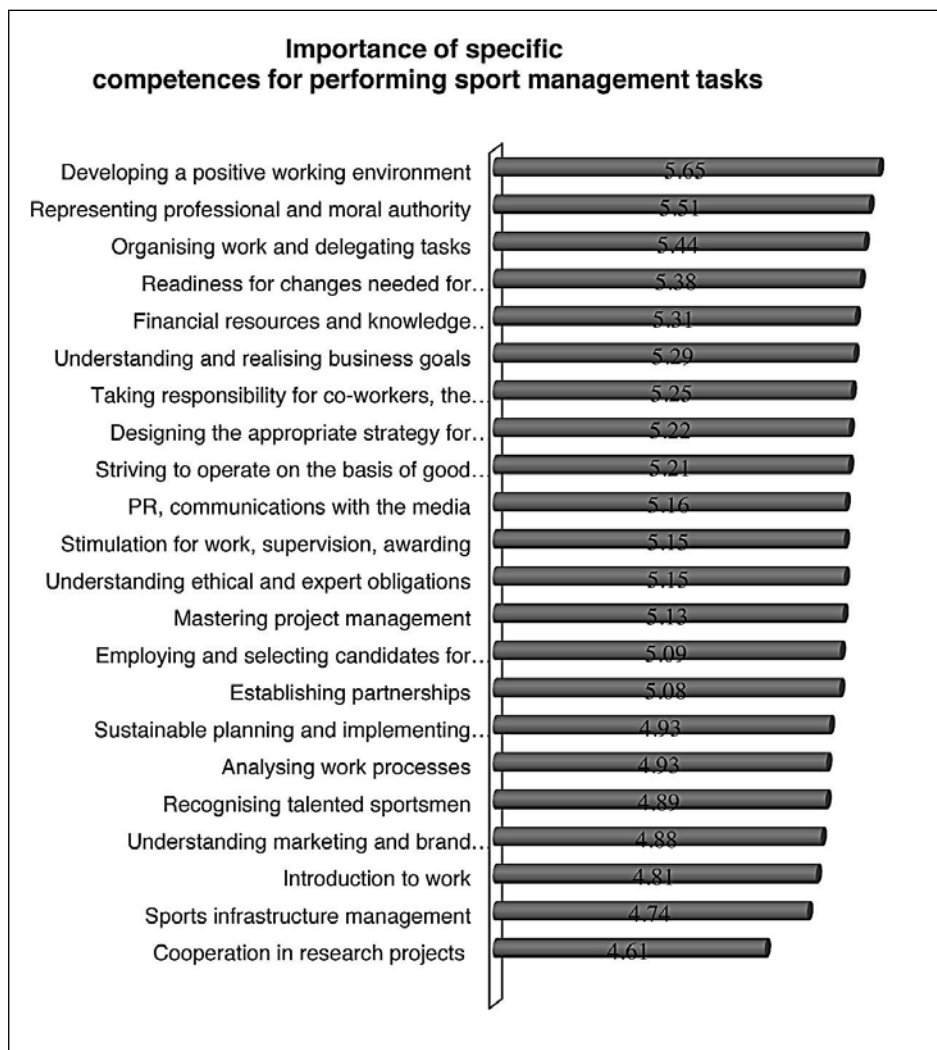
The survey also contained a theoretical model of competence structure, therefore, we asked the respondents to evaluate with grades from 1 (not important) to 6 (very important) the general and later also the specific competences that are typical for performing the tasks of a sport manager. The respondents emphasised that the most important competence was human resources management ability (grade 5.84). The structure of importance of general competences is presented in Table 2.

*Table 2: The evaluation of the most important general competences for performing the tasks of a sport manager as assessed by the interviewed Slovenian sport managers.*



We also asked them to evaluate specific competences for performing the tasks of a sport manager (Table 3). The respondents believe that the most important specific competence is the competence of developing a positive working environment (grade 5.65).

*Table 3: The evaluation of the most important specific work competences for performing the tasks of a sport manager as assessed by the interviewed Slovenian sport managers.*



## CONCLUSION

The current world crisis is also the crisis of management. More than ever before, management and managers are being tested, since the old recipes for achieving success do not work anymore. Managers face many new challenges like sustainable development, exceptional competition, demanding buyers, aware and competent human resources, technological progress, thus demanding from them to acquire new compe-

tences through lifelong learning. The classic role of a sport manager, who must organise and supervise, is replaced by innovation and efficient human resources management.

Since competences are important for explaining individual's managerial success and because of the emergence of importance of individual differences for work efficiency, the modern successful managers are refocusing to the recognition and development of the most important competences for successful management in sport, thus strengthening the competitiveness of the organisations they manage. The acquired empirical findings show that the **development of a positive working environment, working and acting as a professional and moral authority as well as appropriate organisation and delegation of tasks** are of key importance for Slovenian sport managers. The competences involving the **ability to cooperate with people and use the acquired knowledge in practice as well as the ability to create new ideas** are also very important.

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