

MODEL OF DEVELOPING COMPETENCES OF THE SHOW CAVE GUIDES AND A SYSTEM OF PERMANENT MENTORSHIP (THE POSTOJNA CAVE, SLOVENIA)

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Abstract: At the Postojna Cave there are approximately 25 permanent cave guides, whereas during the main season (from May until the end of October) 70 of them are temporarily employed. Most of them are students. While tourism is a highly labour-intensive sector, a high level of competence development is one of the key success factors. A very important component part of the competence model is the skills management and guide training, which has been implemented in the company through a system of permanent mentorship in the guide service, where there is a large number of seasonal workers.

Keywords: show cave, guide training, mentorship, competence model

1. CHARACTERISTICS OF THE COMPANY TURIZEM KRAS D.D.

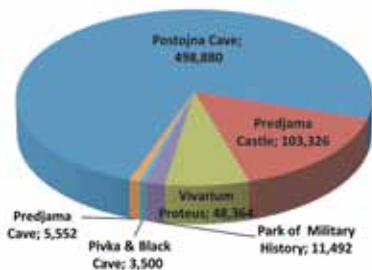
In this chapter, we present the characteristics that are connected to the field of human resource development.

1.1. A hard-working company

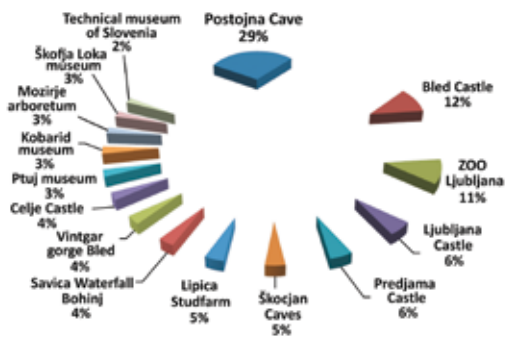
Turizem KRAS d.d. is a tourism company, with a 192-year tradition of managing the Postojna Cave, where the main activity is offering services. Our company manages the Postojna cave system and the Predjama cave system, as well as the Predjama Castle; we organize and conduct tourist tours of the attractions mentioned. The company was granted a 20-year concession by the

state for the management of the two cave systems. In addition to these main activities, the company is also developing activities of a restaurant, organization of events, accommodation and souvenir shops. In 2009, the tourist attractions which were managed by the company Turizem Kras, d.d. were visited by 671,114 visitors, which is 6 % less than in 2008, when there were 711,116 visitors (Picture 1). The percentage in 15 of the most visited Slovenian tourist attractions in 2008 amounted to 35 % (Picture 2).

Another important feature of the tourism business is the great seasonal fluctuation,



Picture 1: Structure of visits to tourist attractions in 2009. Source: S. Paternost: Annual report of the company Turizem KRAS for 2009 and 2008



Picture 2: Market percentage in Slovenia in 2008. Source: S. Paternost: Annual report of the company Turizem KRAS for 2009 and 2008

which is tied to the seasonal oscillation of visitors. This is why during the high season, which lasts from April to October, the number of employees greatly grows from approximately 125 to 160 employees during the season (Picture 3).

Due to such high fluctuation of employees, it is extremely important to train them in order to ensure the necessary quality. Only the employees that are sufficiently trained can contribute to achieving the strategies set by the company and, in addition to the natural values and cultural heritage, are a fundamental competitive advantage of the company. Therefore, two of the models that we have developed are of particular importance: the model of the competence of job positions and the permanent system of mentorship of new co-workers.

1.2. Guide service

The job position of a cave guide / if the number in the company is at its greatest, seeing that the employed guides perform their job in the central activity. We have developed a system of career development for the guides and have anticipated the process of their progress through several stages.

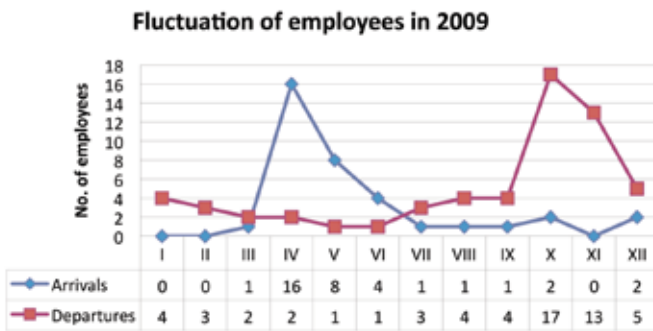
- The initial level is the guard, who does not guide the guests, but begins with his training by accompanying the groups.
- The next stage is the assistant guide I, who is gradually included into guiding the Slovenian-speaking groups, and possibly combines guiding with driving the cave's train.

- The following stage is the assistant guide II who, in addition to the Slovenian group, guides in at least one foreign language.
- A first stage guide is a guide in at least one of the attractions, in Slovenian and two foreign languages.
- A second stage guide is a guide in all of the attractions, and alternates as necessary.
- A third stage guide also conducts more demanding adventure programs in the non-tourist parts, and conducts protocol and study visits.
- A fourth stage guide is a destination guide, having a license to be a regional guide (the Regional Institute for Tourism) and a national license from the Slovenian Chamber of Commerce. In our company, there are 13 guides with a national license.
- The highest stage is a mentor guide, who has ten years of experience and well-defined pedagogical skills.

In addition to this, experienced guides perform the job of an organizer or the so called on-duty guide, who is responsible for the daily schedule and leading the work; if necessary, he stands in for the head of the guide service.

We have defined the criteria for being promoted to the level of each title on the basis of the identified competences that are characteristic for a guide who knows how to create an experience. Yet, in practice, transition between different levels is also possible as the competences of guides are different.

The number of trained guides for a definite and indefinite time, required for the smooth conducting of tourist visits during the season, amounts to around 70 employees. Slightly less than a third of them are permanent employed, the rest of them are included according to the season's needs. All the guides refresh and perfect their skills annually. In addition to the guides, the job of guiding and driv-



Picture 3: Annual fluctuation of employees in the company Turizem KRAS in 2009. Source: Annual report by Tourism KRAS d. d. for 2009

ing is carried out by 6 – 8 drivers of the cave train, also carry out technical maintenance work in the cave who during the low season. In the following, we present a competence model of the guide service, which mainly serves for the selection and employment of new personnel, and for planning their education and training.

2. COMPETENCE MODEL

Competence signifies the strong characteristic of an employee who is strongly oriented to achieving excellent results at work. These characteristics may include motives, personality traits, values, attitudes, self-esteem, their own method of performing certain jobs, extensive expertise and various skills. This concerns the optimal combination of an individual's knowledge, skills, personality traits and motives. Competences directly determine behavioural patterns – how the best employees usually work and how they achieve the best results. The behavioural patterns of all employees in the organization determine the financial position or performance of the organization as a whole. This is the main reason why companies opt to discover the competences and their implementation in practice.

In the company Turizem KRAS d.d., it was necessary for us to design our own model of the required competences and the levels of development; therefore, what are the skills, knowledge and skills they need in an enterprise, and to what degree they need to be developed in order for them to be able to perform certain tasks, achieve goals and live with a vision.

2.1. The process of developing competences

When determining the required competences for the entire company and individual posts we have taken into consideration:

a. The vision, mission, strategy, values. The company's mission reflects a sustainable orientation: *“By tradition and knowledge, we are creating a unique experience of the Karst sights and attractions. We are preserving the natural and cultural heritage for our descendants.”*

- b. The characteristics of the line of business and individual organizational units.
- c. As the third fundamental starting point for designing the model of competences, we have emerged from the business goals set by the company.

In accordance to this, we then developed the appropriate competences which will help to realise this. The company Racio Razvoj assisted us in doing this. The first step was to train the staff on the significance and developing of competences.

The competences were then developed by the employees all together, at joint workshops, where a selected group of leaders and representatives of employees from various circles of work created a list of competences. At first, we the representatives of various organizational units developed **general competences** – the ones that concern all of those employed in the organization and mean the fundamental directing of operations. We determined the general competences according to the previously presented starting points and they apply to everyone employed in the organization. Within the individual organizational units, the only stage that changes is the one which is at the desired level of competence. It is adjusted according to the requirements of the work process and the difficulty of the job position.



Picture 4: General competences. Source: Manual for using competences (2008). Racio Razvoj & Turizem Kras d.d.: Postojna

The general competences are presented in Picture 4 and consist of: attitude towards the guest, entrepreneurial spirit, attitude towards work and colleagues, communication skills, ethics and values and respect for natural and cultural heritage, and functional knowledge and technical skills.

Through the joint workshop, in groups of job positions, we then developed **generic competences** for similar job positions or each organizational unit: catering activities, an investment and maintenance service, HRM, marketing and purchasing, R&D, finance and accounting, tourist attractions, where one guide service (Picture 5), accommodation, commercial activities



Picture 5: Generic competences of tourist attractions
Source: Manual for using competences. (2008). Racio Razvoj & Turizem Kras d.d.: Postojna

and generic competences for managers. We took the specificities resulting from the work process, key customer service and professional profiles for certain work performed into account.

Each competence that we have chosen has its own description of competence, behavioural style and recommended way of how to determine its competence. It is determined and defined in the Catalogue List (CL), which includes a dictionary of the competences.

The CL are primarily intended for leaders who assess the competence of individuals, and all of the employees should be familiar

with what is involved in a job position of the competences identified. The document is available for insight to everyone in the company. Employees were asked to complete the model during the process of its development; we presented it at the regular annual interviews and encouraged them to thoroughly check the catalogue of competences for their area of work. On the basis of evaluations of how developed the competences of individuals are, at the regular annual discussions we formed personal business goals for individuals in the field of work, in the field of education, in the field of formal education and in the field of professional training.

2.2. The analysis results of the level of development in competences

The development level of competences was assessed in three studies: an analysis of the leaders, surveying the visitors and mystery shopping.

2.2.1. Analysis of the leaders

On the basis of the existing model, we carried out an analysis of the development level of competences for 23 employees in tourist attractions, namely the professional staff, **guides and assistant guides** and found that they are already very close to the expected level of development. The evaluation of competences is subjective. In order to ease the effect of subjectivity as much as possible, we included the head of the guide service, the head of one of the organizational units and the professional leader who have been most directly connected to the employees. The evaluation scale ranged from 1 to 5 (with 5 being the highest). We evaluated all the job positions in the tourist attractions, yet in this case, we will only present the results for the cave guides.

2.2.2. Surveying visitors on the development of competences

This was of course only one aspect of the evaluation of development level of competences – from the leaders' point of view, in which subjectivity is lacking. We wanted to also check this with our visitors, so we sent them a questionnaire.

Chart 1: Deviations from the desired levels of development in the wires and extra wires:

Competence	Deviation	Comment
Attitude towards guests	-0.8	Given the fact that the desired level of development is 5, the state of development seems to be good, but it can still be improved with training.
Entrepreneurship	-0.5	The deviation is not high, but it is urgent to continue training.
Attitudes towards work and co-workers	-0.2	Through the evaluation process we found that it would be better for the competence to be divided into two: the attitude towards work and, separately, the attitude towards co-workers. We evaluate that the attitude towards co-workers is a much better developed competence than the attitude towards work.
Communication skills	No deviations	On average at the desired level.
Functional knowledge and technical skills	-0.2	Low tolerance points to the fact that, during the off-season, guides also take on other job positions and, for the most part, are good at more jobs.
Ethics and values, respect for natural and cultural heritage	+0.2	On average, this concerns even exceeding the desired level of development; we mainly evaluated the relationship of natural and cultural heritage
Concern for safety	-0.1	No deviations.
Knowledge of foreign languages	-1.0	This is one of the greatest deviations, simply also because there are big differences between the skills of individual employees - from university to high school education, so education in this area is urgent.
Presentational and persuasive skills	-1.0	By this competence the deviation is also the largest; here we evaluated that it is necessary to provide employees with knowledge, particularly as far as interpretation is concerned.
General awareness	+0.7	Deviation in a positive sense. Yet it is true that the desired level of development is 3.
Resourcefulness	-0.1	On average, there are almost no variations - yet there are considerable differences between individuals.
Guiding and directing visitors	-0.8	This competence is very similar to the competence of presentational and persuasive skills - it is our proposal to merge them. Even tolerance is similar. Above all, there is a need for this to develop competence in the interpretation of natural and cultural heritage.
Managing machinery	+0.6	The positive deviation is a reflection of the fact that many guides also drive the train; however, this does not involve an unequal evaluation of girls and boys - because girls do not drive the train. We therefore suggest that, in the future, this competence should be combined with the competence of functional knowledge and technical skills.
Resolving conflicts	+0.9	The deviation is very positive.

- How do you evaluate the actual development level of competences in the guide who took you on the tour of the tourist attraction?
- What level of competence development (as a guest) do you expect from a guide?

The survey was conducted in July and August of 2008 among the visitors in the Postojna cave and in Predjama. There were 127 respondents.

The results show that, for certain competences, our model anticipates a higher level

Chart 2. Deviations from the model – evaluation and expectations from guests

The guide's competence	Expected level of development by model	Guest's evaluation of current level of development	Guest's evaluation of expected level of development
Functional knowledge and technical skills	Good	High	High
Resolving conflicts	Good	Good	High
Concern for safety	High	High	High
Knowledge of foreign languages and intercultural communication	Excellent	High	High
Presentational and persuasive skills	Excellent	Good / High	High
General awareness	Good	High	High
Resourcefulness	High	High	High
Guiding and directing visitors	Excellent	High	High
Attitude towards guests	Excellent	High/Excellent	High
Entrepreneurship	High	Good	Good
Attitudes towards work / co-workers	High	High	High
Communication skills	High	Excellent	High
Ethics and values, respect for natural and cultural heritage	High	High	High
Offering assistance and solutions	High	High	High

Source: Internal data from Tourism Karst d.d., Postojna 2009

of development than is expected by a guest; such an example is that of the knowledge of foreign languages, presentational and persuasive skills and entrepreneurship. We believe that this also a reflection of the goals which the company has built into the model. The guides are expected to encourage the guests to take advantage of as many different services (tours, souvenirs) as possible, as they are in direct contact with them. This may be disturbing to the guest if he feels that he is being pushed into doing something. It is also interesting to note that an excellent knowledge of foreign languages is not so important

to a guest – the guide's attitude towards the guest seems to be more important to them.

Communicative competence and attitude towards a guest are even better developed than actually expected by the guest.

The solving of conflicts, the level of development in functional knowledge and technical skills and general knowledge in our model is anticipated to be lower than expected by the guest. Yet it is interesting that the latter two are already evaluated to be more developed than in the anticipated model. It is difficult for a guest to evaluate the general awareness of a guide during just one tour, if

he does not come into personal contact with him, and it is also difficult for him to evaluate the guide's ability of resolving conflicts, if one does not occur.

The disadvantage of this analysis is that the visitors did not have the opportunity to examine the catalogue of competences – therefore, everyone might have different perceptions of individual competence

2.2.3. Mystery Shopping

In 2008, we conducted a **third form of research** which is known as Mystery Shopping. In this survey, the results of the level of competence development for each guide were obtained by asking random guests for their point of view. This was only carried out as a test – reference survey. In the future, it would be urgent to perform this regularly, since this is the only way to objectively evaluate the development level of competences for each guide and included them into the system of remuneration.

One of the aims of evaluating the level of development in competences is also for the employees, in which we noticed the highest level of development in competences, to be included into the system of mentorship for new employees who are employed seasonally. The mentorship program was developed according to the needs of individual processes through years of experience and feedback from employees who were included into the mentoring process.

3. MENTORSHIP IN THE COMPANY TURIZEM KRAS D.D.

Mentorship is one of the processes of continuous training in the company Turizem KRAS d.d. Two-thirds of the employees in the guide service are employees who are only with us over the season. These are mainly students who remain with us for 3 – 5 years. As each season begins, around 15 new guides begin with their training in the spring time. Before the training, a selection process to choose the staff is carried out by testing their functional knowledge, their use of foreign languages and their public performance skills.

3.1. The selection process

The developed competences (knowledge, skills and behaviour) are the starting point for creating training programs for cave guides. Cave guides should have at least a secondary education, actively speak at least two global foreign languages and have a good knowledge of the Postojna Karst and Cave, Karst and the Karst Caves across the world. It is necessary for guides to have a good knowledge of the characteristics of the cave's environment in order to be able to walk about the partially ordered or unordered parts. They should know how to provide visitors at each visit with adequate information on the rules of behaviour in the cave and on the use of arrangements in the cave, which are not arranged according to standards in the field of construction. The steps for selection are as follows:

- Step 1: Public tender
- Step 2: The first informational interview with all the candidates in order to get an impression and check if everyone meets all of the tendered conditions. Everyone gets a book – a manual for guides, in which there are basic instructions for guiding. These are the standards on environmental protection, the guides' codex, the Rules concerning safety, the internal standards on guiding and basic information – so called texts and stories about individual attractions in the Slovenian, Italian, German, English, Spanish, French and Croatian language.
- Step 3: Testing the knowledge of foreign languages. Professors of the individual foreign languages and experienced guides take part in the evaluation.
- Step 4: A workshop for public performing. Candidates test themselves in public performing, they have a one-day workshop, in which they try to overcome their shortcomings and make a final performance.

3.2. The mentorship process

The preliminary selection process is usually passed by a third of the candidates. It is carried out during the mentorship process. We determine the content, trainers, methods and forms of work, and the forms of

evaluation. The process lasts from 8 to 10 days within the period of one month. First, there is the group mentoring part:

- Step 1: Becoming acquainted with the company, those in charge, the organization, the internal standards, a visit to the individual departments.
- Step 2: A technical visit to the Postojna Cave, where they learn about the train's traffic regime and the course of guiding, learning about the signalization that goes along with a visit, and the basic instructions in the field of safety. The person leading the visit is one of the caretakers of the cave – a mentor.
- Step 3: Becoming acquainted with the content of the Notranjska-Karst region, and the Postojna and Predjama cave system. Watching the film about the formation of the caves, the geomorphologic characteristics of the Karst region and the emergence of life in it.
- Step 4: A workshop on the theme of the Attitude towards guests. This is led by one of the experienced guides, a mentor.
- Step 5: The culinary aspect of Karst&a presentation of the typical cuisine from the Notranjska-Karst region, which is available in our central restaurant facility – Jamski dvorec (Cave Hall). The presentation is carried out by the head of the Jamski dvorec kitchen.
- Step 6: The social aspects of Karst – a presentation of the most important characteristics that visitors encounter. Everything visitors can see while travelling across Slovenia, what they are interested in and what they often ask.
- Step 7: A tour of all the attractions that the company manages. This is led by those in charge of the individual attractions.
- Step 8: A workshop concerning safety at work (in a group) and passing a test.
- Step 9: A workshop concerning the protection of the radiation.
- Step 10: A medical examination.

By this, the group part of mentorship is completed. Individual coaching follows.

- Step 1: Each candidate receives a personal mentor, with whom they work individual-

ly. Each mentor has also previously completed a training course for mentorship. They arrange with the apprentices when to begin with the training. The procedure proceeds in such a way that the apprentice first monitors and watches the mentor, later taking over the guiding of individual parts of the tour, until he is able to guide the entire tour independently. Once the supervisor assesses that the apprentice is ready, he takes a test, in which both the mentor and the head of the guide service are present and he can then begin guiding independently. Usually, up to 10 visits are necessary. We recommend that the apprentices also join in the guiding of the other guides in order for them to create a better picture of what is expected of them and to develop their method of guiding.

- Step 2: The mentor prepares a report regarding the mentorship (the course of events, the number of hours completed, the tours, opinion about the candidate).
- Step 3: The apprentices are invited to complete a survey on the course of mentorship, where we get feedback on the mentor's work and any necessary improvements.
- Step 4: After the season, an evaluative workshop follows, where the apprentices are invited to so as to suggest possible improvements on the basis of their experiences and observations. Because they are not "poisoned" by the routine yet, they can sometimes be more insightful and observe with more sense, and their suggestions are often very qualitative.

3.3. Challenges for the future

Through experiences, certain shortcomings have of course shown up. It is necessary to pay more attention to the mentor alone. Currently, their remuneration is stimulated in terms of quantity and not quality. It is urgent for the quality of the mentors to be better rewarded, and to provide extra training to those who have poorer results. In short, as the manager, we have to be more consistent in our actions.

The second area is the introduction of written examinations of knowledge about

Karstology. This is urgent for the apprentices, and I think that it would also be welcome for the mentors and permanent guides – in conjunction with the annual refreshing Karstological workshops.

Third is the area of interpretation. Tourism is nowadays much more of an interdisciplinary line of business than it was in the past and that is why the tasks of tourism are also greater. In addition to the development, supply, marketing and sale of tourist destination services, tourism performs the task of preserving the natural and cultural heritage, preserving the identity of the area, preserving biodiversity, education and concern for personal growth. Interpretation can therefore greatly contribute to a higher added value of products for tourists and thus to the economic efficiency of tourism (Carter, J.: 2010).

The contemporary guide will nowadays have to become an interpreter for the natural and cultural heritage, a cave guide and an interpreter for the caves. We are forced into this by contemporary tourist trends and guests' demands. Tilden, who is known as the founder of interpretation (1957) described interpretation as *"...a form of service, which awakes a revelation of beauty for the visitor, it evokes admiration, inspiration and the spiritual meaning which hides behind the object of interpretation, and which the visitor can detect with his senses."* According to Tilden, interpreting is not only telling people what is important, yet trying to convince them of nature's value and encouraging them to preserve it as well. *"From experiencing to understanding, from understanding to respecting, from respecting to preserving!"*

Four communication activities, which need to be carefully planned, carried out, evaluated and improved as necessary, are important for the quality of a visitor's experience: informing, presentation, animation and interpretation. All four of these activities have their place in the planning of experiences and in tourism – and each has its own objectives and tasks. In practice, they are often intertwined. But absolutely none of the first three can replace interpretation (Keršič Svetel, 2010).

This is why it is vital for both the permanent and the seasonal guides to receive regular seasonal training which, in addition to the language refreshing, Karstology and attitude towards guests, also include training in the field of interpretation, which is installed into the model of competences.

CONCLUSION

In the implementation of the competences, we were only partly successful, yet considering the short period, we can be satisfied. The advantage of this type of model lies in the fact that individual employees may be more motivated for work where they have the opportunity to be involved in additional activities, for which they may also be rewarded. The model proved to be very successful in the process of selecting seasonal staff and in staff development. In the area of staff development, we introduced a systematic procedure of mentorship. The model of competences was welcome to us in the planning of trainings. At the regular annual discussions, we agreed, on the basis of deviations from the desired development of competences, what kind of training we can use to fill the gap.

Of course, the introduction of competences requires complete consistency inside the company, good preparation and perseverance. The motivation of employees can deteriorate rapidly if we are inconsistent. And the implementation of the model of competences will not achieve its purpose if it is installed into the system of remuneration in an appropriate way. Thus, the greatest challenge for the future integration is to include the model of competences into the system of performance evaluation. It is also necessary to fill the gap between the actual realization of personal work goals and the criteria for the evaluation of performance. The profiles of the competences have not yet been determined to the extent that they can already be used as a basis for the variable component of remuneration. This requires a thorough evaluation system and the implementation of evaluation – Mystery Shopping is one of the recommended methods.

I evaluate that some of the levels of development for competences in the model have been set too high and that it is unrealistic to expect the highest level of development in all of the competences. This has been proved by the visitors' expectations. In certain areas, the expectations of the guests and the manager differ – e.g. in the acceleration of sales or the guides' entrepreneurial spirit.

It turned out that the model of competences is alive; we immediately discovered that certain changes are necessary, it is necessary to continually upgrade it, depending on the guests' needs and the manager's expectations. The different expectations of both the guests and the manager can be met with the proper upgrading of competences, which will include more interpretational techniques and tools. This concerns the use of effective means of communication, in which all of the senses take part. These can greatly attract the attention and curiosity of a guest,

and they relate to the personal experiences of individuals in everyday life, revealing a wider sense and new realisations about things already known and, above all, they cause an emotional reaction and experience.

Interpretation has been widely adopted in the protected areas and I think that it's time for us to also start implementing it in the show caves! Next year, a tender by the Environmental Agency of the Republic of Slovenia, at the Ministry of the Environment and Spatial Planning, for a national provider of training for cave guides is anticipated in Slovenia. As manager of the Postojna Cave, we are one of the most serious candidates. We believe that our experience, knowledge and skills – in one word, competence, which is based on our nearly 200-year-old tourist tradition, are a good basis for the development of an international centre for training cave guides.

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