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## COMPETENCIES OF POLISH ARMY OFFICERS IN THE LABOR MARKET AFTER COMPLETING MILITARY SERVICE

## KOMPETENCJE OFICERÓW WOJSKA POLSKIEGO NA RYNKU PRACY PO ZAKOŃCZENIU SŁUŻBY WOJSKOWEJ

## ABSTRACT

The issue of professional competence is dealt with by many scientific fields, hence the need to review the definition and classification of the concept and to indicate, based on the literature, the current state of research. It is undoubtedly an interdisciplinary concept, having its connotations in many scientific fields. As a result, the concept of competence is not clearly perceived in the literature. The terms that often accompany *competence* in theoretical considerations are qualifications and skills. However, qualifications and skills have a narrower context than competencies, which are the result of having both a wide variety of skills and qualifications. The main objective of this paper was to identify the research gap in the area of the usefulness of competencies acquired during military service by Polish Army officers in their current workplace after military service. The following research methods were used to write the paper: literature analysis and criticism, heuristic method and comparative method. The quantitative method was significantly applied in the work. A survey questionnaire was used, aimed at retired officers of the Polish Army regarding the use of their competencies after leaving the service. Most respondents found employment in a state institution and a uniformed organization. Retired officers pointed mainly to knowledge, experience, skills and personality traits. The personality traits that distinguish officers of the Polish Army are very valuable, as is their specialized knowledge. They will certainly be a great asset to a retired officer's future employer.

**KEYWORDS:** *professional competences, officer, shaping, retirement, labor market*

## STRESZCZENIE

Zagadnieniem kompetencji zawodowych zajmuje się wiele dziedzin naukowych, stąd potrzeba dokonania przeglądu definicji i klasyfikacji pojęcia oraz wskazanie na podstawie literatury przedmiotu obecnego stanu badań. Jest to niewątpliwie pojęcie interdyscyplinarne, mające swoje konotacje w wielu dziedzinach nauki. W związku z tym, w literaturze przedmiotu pojęcie kompetencji nie jest jednoznacznie postrzegane. Pojęcia, które często towarzyszą *kompetencjom* w rozważaniach teoretycznych to kwalifikacje i umiejętności. Jednakże kwalifikacje i umiejętności mają węższy kontekst niż kompetencje, które są rezultatem posiadania zarówno wielu różnych umiejętności, jak i kwalifikacji. Główny cel niniejszej publikacji dotyczył zidentyfikowania luki badawczej w obszarze przydatności kompetencji nabytych podczas pełnienia służby wojskowej przez oficerów Wojska Polskiego w obecnym miejscu

pracy po zakończeniu służby wojskowej. Do napisania pracy wykorzystane zostały następujące metody badawcze: analizy i krytyki piśmiennictwa, metoda heurystyczną oraz komparatystyczna. Istotne zastosowanie w pracy miała metoda ilościowa. Został zastosowany kwestionariusz ankiety, skierowany do emerytowanych oficerów Wojska Polskiego w zakresie wykorzystania ich kompetencji po zakończeniu służby. Najwięcej respondentów znalazło zatrudnienie w instytucji państwowej i organizacji mundurowej. Emerytowani oficerowie wskazywali głównie na wiedzę, doświadczenie, umiejętności oraz na cechy osobowości. Cechy osobowości wyróżniające oficerów Wojska Polskiego są bardzo cenne, podobnie jak ich specjalistyczna wiedza. Na pewno będzie dużym atutem dla przyszłego pracodawcy emerytowanego oficera.

**SŁOWA KLUCZOWE:** *kompetencje zawodowe, oficer, kształtowanie, emerytura, rynek pracy*

## INTRODUCTION

Nowadays you can often hear about the competence of an employee. Mainly, this concept comes up when hiring, or doing a particular job. It is competence that is an important criterion when looking for a job. Competence is not only knowledge, skills, but also a person's personality, his attitude. Acquired competencies can help you achieve success, such as career advancement. Before this happens you need to keep in mind their development, which should also be important for the employee as well as the organization in question. It is advisable that it is also not initiated by the employer, and the employee himself should try to develop himself, to develop personal capital. Investing in one's capital will enable one to function more efficiently and effectively in one's professional life, which can also affect each employee's personal challenges.

The main purpose of this publication is to identify the research gap in the area of the usefulness of competencies acquired during military service by officers of the Polish Army in the current workplace of retirement. Against this background, on the basis of literature studies and available research, as well as logical deduction and inference, conclusions and recommendations are derived, which are presented in the final section of the article. This knowledge should contribute to supplementing the theory in the field of personnel management functions in the organization, and in practical terms, make

recommendations on the directions of change in the process of using the competence of military personnel in the civilian labor market.

## PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE (LABOR) – CONCEPTUAL GENESIS

In the literature, competence is often equated with knowledge. However, M. Armstrong pointed out that there are two terms related to the concept of competence. In the broader view focused on man as an individual, he considered that he is competent when he has the right predisposition to behave, act skillfully. He goes on to present competence in the sense of the requirements necessary to perform tasks in particular fields of work (Armstrong, 2007).

The classic approach according to R.L. Katz identifies three main competencies: specialized (technical), conceptual, as well as interpersonal. This classic take is the basis for other competency classifications found in the literature (Sniadecki, Nogalski, 1998), who identified organizational, conceptual, administrative, technical and also interpersonal competencies.

Nowadays, work competencies are a *bargaining chip* in finding employment (Matysiak, 2018). Among many researchers, there is a view that professional competence should be considered in relation to the employee's personality. Thus, in the British and Scandinavian models, the prevailing conviction is that the professional competence of employees should be considered independently of the permanent structures of their personality. In these schools, there are no elements in this set of competencies such as mental predispositions or personality traits. Slightly different in this arrangement is proposed by the American school, where the dominant approach has become person-oriented (e.g., behavioral event interviews). The relationship between a trait and performance on the job is examined, and the assessment is made by the employee and his supervisor. Competencies in this view include skills, personal qualities and behaviors (Kupczyk, Stor, 2017). On professional grounds, skills that *can be developed, educated and improved* are important (Matwiejczuk, 2009).

Some researchers, such as A. Poczowski, distinguish between threshold and differentiating competencies. The former relate to the job at hand, i.e.: skills

and knowledge, in the case of a manager, these are the ability to communicate, solve problems, use advisors, expertise. On the other hand, the qualities that distinguish an effective employee from others include: values, attitudes, motives, and in the case of a manager: future orientation, awareness of values, empathy, leadership, tolerance, readiness to learn (Pocztowski, 2003). And it seems pointless to make further classifications. What is most significant about the various approaches to competencies is that they can be categorized into these two groups mentioned above. Because having the right set of core and distinctive competencies determines an employee's success on the labor market in the 4.0 economy, and from the organization's point of view – allows it to acquire core competencies.

Competencies characterize what an organization excels at, in all the businesses it conducts. Skills, on the other hand, encompass what an organization *does well* within a certain limited scope that includes specific activities, such as in the value-added chain.

Thus, M. Armstrong made a division into:

- general competencies – required of people in a specific occupation or of employees in similar positions,
- specific competencies – distinguish a particular job position or defined organizational role from others,
- threshold competencies – necessary to meet the minimum requirements for a given job position,
- differentiating competencies – characterize the behavioral traits noticeable in high-performing employees and their absence in those who perform less well (Armstrong, 2007).

We can also find an interesting division in Filipowicz's publication, which divided professional competence into two main groups, among which he distinguished:

– core competencies, under which he lists:

- cognitive competence (flexibility of thinking, broad horizons, readiness to learn, creativity),
- social (relations with superiors and colleagues),
- personal (commitment, perseverance),

– executive competencies, namely:

- business – business orientation, diagnosing customer needs, sales techniques,
- corporate – identification with the company, customer focus, openness to change, ethics and values, foreign languages, organizational agility and professional knowledge,
- managerial – team building, caring for subordinates, delegating, motivating, managerial courage, leading, organizing, planning, process and project management, strategic thinking and change management (Filipowicz, 2016).

A slightly different approach, focused on the company's organizational culture, was presented by C. Prahalad and G. Hamel (Prahalad, Hamel, 1990), who defined the concept of organizational core competencies (core competence). According to them, they are formed in the process of organizational learning, while their consolidation is enabled by technological innovation.

Today, organizations are beginning to rely more and more on the skills of their employees. Jobs have changed faster in the past three years than in the previous three decades, and the pace of change will only accelerate. This is due to a shortage of workers, changing employee expectations and the adoption of revolutionary new technologies. This is causing the types of positions that organizations need to staff to change, as well as the skills needed to fill them (*From Jobs To Skills: What The Future Of Work Will Look Like*).

It is worth quoting the results of a May 2023 World Economic Forum report, which outlines five dominant skills. These will be important in the coming years (<https://www.lll.tum.de/five-important-future-skills-in-2023/>):

- a. analytical thinking,
- b. creative thinking,
- c. resilience, flexibility and agility,
- d. motivation and self-awareness,
- e. curiosity and lifelong learning”

What's important is that the report connects current developments, such as the development of artificial intelligence and moves toward sustainability, with future-oriented skills in the professions by 2027.

In contrast, according to the 2020 Future of Jobs Report (World Economic Forum), the most important skills in 2025 are expected to be [Kozakiewicz]:

- a. analytical thinking and innovation,
- b. active learning and learning strategies,
- c. complex problems-solving,
- d. critical thinking and analysis,
- e. creativity, originality and initiative,
- f. leadership and social influence,
- g. technology use, monitoring and control,
- h. technology design and programming,
- i. resilience, stress tolerance, flexibility,
- j. reasoning, problem-solving and ideation.

Definitions of concepts are numerous and are certainly an extremely important aspect of consideration. They should meet a number of criteria that at the same time determine the characteristics desired by the organization – depending on the market position and industry they characterize. The concept of competence is an interdisciplinary concept with connotations in many fields of science, viewed by researchers in a broad aspect.

## **SHAPING THE PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCIES OF POLISH ARMY OFFICERS AT THE MILITARY ACADEMY AND DURING THEIR PROFESSIONAL SERVICE**

Competency management means a practical activity oriented toward achieving the organization's stated goals. It must be carried out rationally, using the rules of economics, effort and ethics (Moczydlowska 2008). Competency management is a set of activities leading to an increase in the value of human capital and efficiency of the organization. It requires a certain interdisciplinary knowledge, resources of necessary information and good communication

within the organization. It can be said that competence management is a set of activities leading to an increase in the value of human capital and the efficiency of the organization. It is increasingly stated that *the basis for the success of the organization is becoming the acquisition of competent employees with high professional qualifications and at the same time creative, mobile and entrepreneurial* (Strzelczyk-Lucka, Dewalska-Opitek, 2019).

As researchers note, *the profession of a soldier requires specific knowledge, specific skills and appropriate personality predispositions. The more important the function performed in the armed forces, the greater the knowledge and skills must be* (Szulc, Mazurek, 2011). In terms of the research problems under consideration, it seems necessary to clarify the concepts of vocational training and professional qualifications. Vocational education is described in the literature as *specialized preparation of people, properly educated in general, to perform their chosen profession, which is carried out by higher, lower and secondary vocational schools and (...) vocational courses organized and conducted also outside of education by workplaces* (Huzarski, Wolejszo 2014).

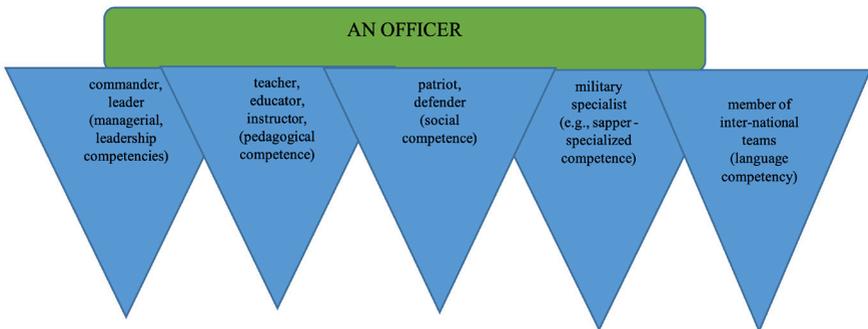
An officer as a commander and leader, and at the same time an educator, should be a professional in his profession. Under peacetime conditions, he should be prepared to professionally train his subordinates and successively improve them in the military *craft*. In addition, he should continually shape pro-state and pro-defense activities among the public, especially its younger part. In conditions of threat to sovereignty – he should demonstrate the above-mentioned qualities, but, in addition, the speed of response to even extreme situations, which require from him an excellent *organizational sense*, imagination, as well as intuition. And in times of war (or any other type of conflict) – he should combine the above qualities, since making any mistake in commanding a team, may result in the loss of health or life of him and his subordinates. Undoubtedly, therefore, both in the professional and social areas, he should distinguish himself with the qualities of a leader. For most people, the image of an exemplary leader has always been a military commander.

The management of the process of forming officers' competencies while studying at a military academy includes a wide range of teaching and educational activities aimed at the student's acquisition of skills and abilities in the following areas:

- a. command and leadership – as part of the ability to manage (command) a team in day-to-day activities and command in combat;
- b. teaching and training of subordinates while conducting training in a military unit , preparing subordinates to perform tasks on the modern battlefield;
- c. interaction with the environment (society) in activities related to the elimination of the effects of natural disasters and preventive actions, preventing the occurrence of similar phenomena;
- d. so-called *military craftsmanship* within the framework of the military specialty possessed – each soldier has his own specialty, i.e., for example, a tank gunner, sapper or artilleryman; and e) functioning in multi-unit structures.
- e. functioning in multinational structures during exercises, training, combat operations in the allied system (NATO) or bilateral or multilateral agreements outside the allied system.

The model indicated above for the formation of the personal silhouette of the future commander and leader in military universities, based on the acquisition of certain professional qualifications and competencies, is shown in Figure No. 1.

**Figure 1.** *Components of the personality silhouette of an officer.*



**Source:** *own study based on surveys conducted.*

Another area related to improving professional skills and competencies is their acquisition and improvement during professional military service. This is done through the following forms of education and training:

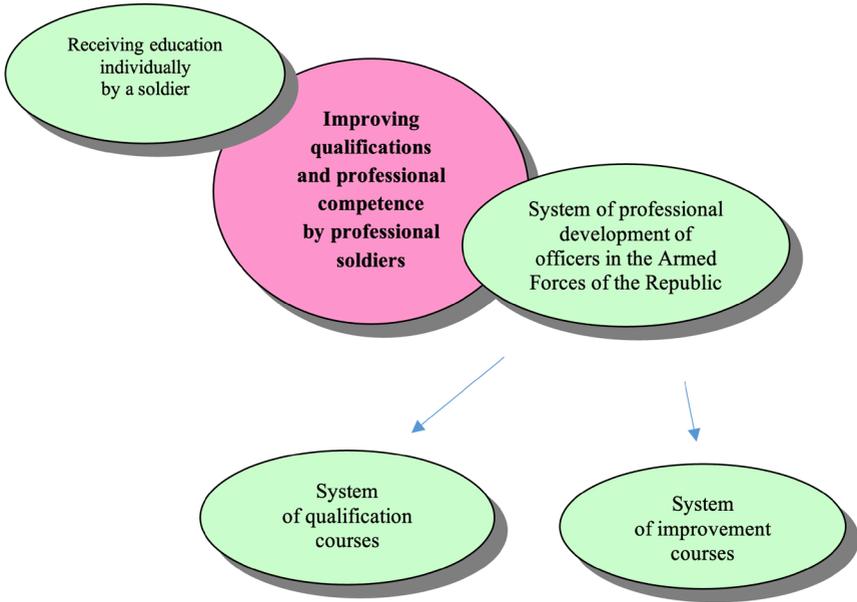
- a. to receive education at an academic or educational center of his choice – individual mode;
- b. an organized system of professional development of officers in the armed forces of the Republic of Poland – system mode;
- c. gaining professional experience while serving in successive duty positions – individual mode.

The system mode was introduced by Decision No. 420/MON of the Minister of Defense on September 12, 2008, and operates in two areas:

- a. improving the professional competence of officers scheduled for appointment to a higher official position – based on a system of qualification courses – then the focus is on equipping the officer with selected professional competencies required for the target official position (e.g., leadership, pedagogical, specialized competencies);
- b. improvement of professional competencies of officers interested in developing competencies within the occupied official position – based on the system of improvement courses – then the focus is on equipping the officer with selected professional competencies supporting the occupied official position (e.g., competencies, pedagogical, social, specialized, language).

The above-indicated system of improving officers' professional skills and competencies is shown in Figure No. 2.

**Figure 2.** *Forms of education and training related to improving the officer's professional skills and competencies.*



**Source:** *own study.*

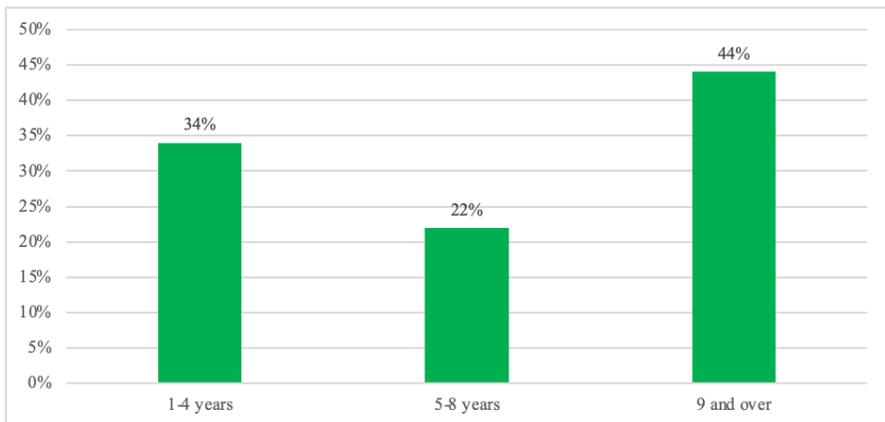
The last area related to improving the skills and professional competence of military personnel involves gaining professional experience while serving in successive service positions, as is the case with another employee developing his or her competence within a specific group of positions held in the organization. In the opinions of many experts, competencies gained or consolidated in this way have the greatest impact on an employee's competency development in terms of professional growth.

## COMPETENCIES OF POLISH ARMY OFFICERS IN THE LABOR MARKET AFTER COMPLETING THE SERVICE – RESEARCH RESULTS

The study conducted for the purpose of writing a doctoral dissertation on the topic: *The development of the competence potential of Polish Army officers in the context of employment at retirement age* (Rzepecka, 2021), involved 179 former officers of the Land Forces. The study was conducted between 2019 and 2021.

The figure below shows the time between leaving military service and completing the questionnaire. The largest group of respondents were those who had already been retired 9 or more years (44%). The next largest group of respondents was 1-4 years (34%). On the other hand, 22% of respondents had been receiving a pension benefit for 5-8 years.

**Figure 3.** Number of years of drawing pension benefits from the Ministry of Defense.

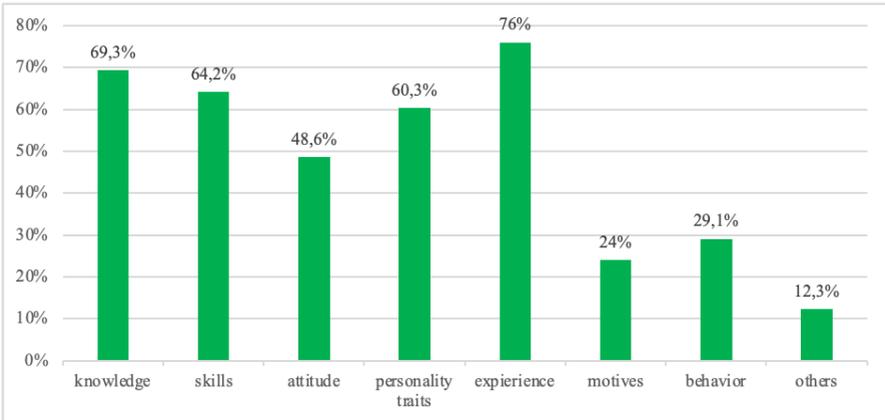


**Source:** own study based on own research.

One of the questions answered by the respondents was the usefulness of the competencies they acquired, during their service, in their current workplace. It should be noted that retired officers could mark more than one answer. Publications were used to develop the response options: *Self-assessment*

*of competence potential by men and women on the example of employees of innovative enterprises – research results* (Rakowska, 2018, p. 134) and *Development of professional competence of officers, Entrepreneurship and management* (Balcerzyk D., Balcerzyk R., 2017, p. 433).

**Figure 4.** Usefulness of competencies acquired during military service in current retirement workplace.



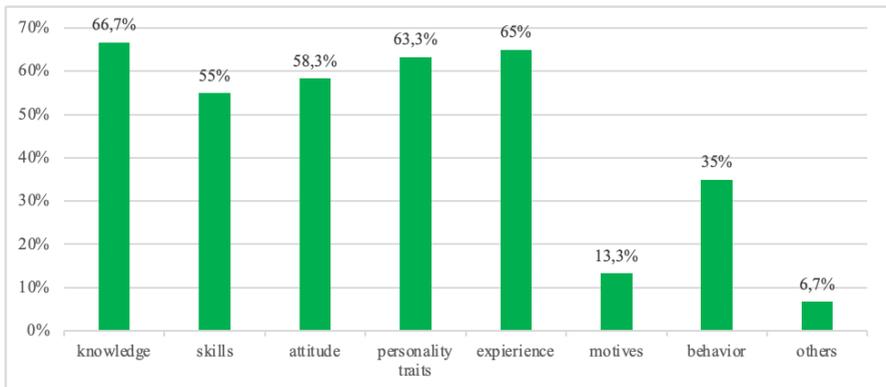
**Source:** own study based on own research.

The largest number of respondents indicated experience (76%), knowledge (69,3%), skills (64,2%) and personality traits (60,3%). Responses such as motives (24%) and behavior (29,1%) received the least number. In the case of other answers, the following were indicated: discipline, punctuality, communication skills, reliability, willingness to act, loyalty, independence in action and at the same time the ability to work with people, commitment to duty, the ability to make decisions in a limited time, habits of conscientious work with qualities of high patriotism for the Fatherland, and responsibility and at the same time awareness of the need to improve one's knowledge and skills. The experience supplemented by the knowledge acquired during service makes it possible to do the job in retirement. The experience of a retired officer is also, or perhaps it should be noted that primarily – the ability to manage and direct employees. These qualities are useful to a manager – a manager in a civilian

organization. This is especially important in situations characterized by uncertainty and the ever-changing environment in which any organization operates.

The question was also carried forward for another independent variable, this time years of retirement. Retired officers with 1-4 years of retirement indicated mainly knowledge (66,7%). This was followed by such competencies as experience (65%), personality traits (63,3%) and attitude (58,3%). The fewest people marked motives, behavior and others – here they cited: determination to achieve a goal, ability to work with people, dutifulness, punctuality, performance of assigned tasks and commitment to service.

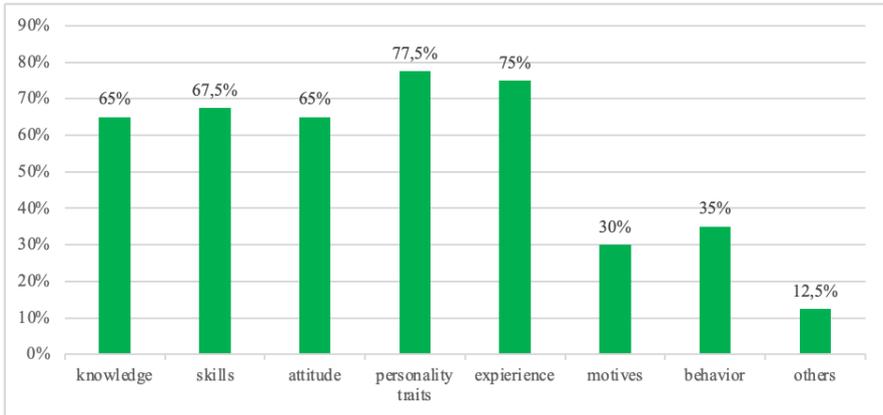
**Figure 5.** Usefulness of competencies acquired during military service in current retirement workplace according to retired officers who have been retired 1-4 years.



**Source:** own study based on own research.

Surprisingly, the largest number of retired officers who have been retired 5-8 years (see Figure 6) indicated personality traits (77,5%). Next, respondents selected experience (75%) and skills (67,5%). Meanwhile, 65% of respondents marked knowledge and attitude. The fewest respondents selected behavior (35%) and motives (30%). In response to other, retired officers also gave such answers as availability, habits of conscientious work with qualities of high patriotism for the Fatherland, self-discipline, loyalty, commitment and will to act.

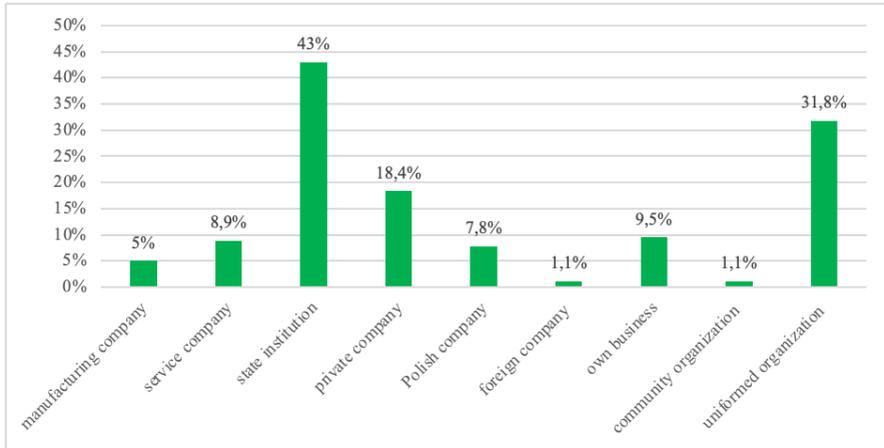
**Figure 6.** Usefulness of competencies acquired during military service in current retirement workplace according to retired officers who have been retired 5-8 years.



**Source:** own study based on own research.

In the group of respondents who have been retired the longest (9 or more years), the predominance of three competencies could be seen. The largest number indicated experience (83,5%). This was followed by knowledge (72,2%), skills (70,9%). Attitude was indicated by only 31,6%, while experience qualities were indicated by 48,1% of respondents. The fewest respondents chose motives for action, behavior. Responses for other included personal activity, discipline, availability, responsibility, communication skills, writing letters to offices, reliability, punctuality, self-reliance in action, awareness of the need to improve one's knowledge and skills, punctuality, reliability, loyalty, ability to make decisions in a limited time.

The next question answered by the respondents was about their current place of work (see Figure 7). It should be noted that retired officers could mark more than one answer in this question. This is related to the fact that, for example, one's own business could be a service company, or someone could work for a private or foreign company. The response options are based on the content of the publication *Contemporary Determinants of Organizations. Selected problems – case studies* (Z. Knecht, M. Tarczewska, 2014, p. 33) and *Fundamentals of Management. Theory and exercises* (Adamik, A., Matejun M., 2018, p. 52).

**Figure 7.** *Current workplace of retired officers.*

**Source:** *own study based on own research.*

Most respondents found employment in a state institution (43%) and a uniformed organization (almost 32%). It is worth mentioning that there were people who indicated these two answers, that is, for example, they worked in a uniformed organization, which is also a state institution. The fewest people indicated foreign companies and social organizations (1,1% each).

Retired officers most often find employment in state institutions, i.e. where their potential can be used the most. This is referenced in statutory provisions, where, for example, in the Law on Military Service of Professional Soldiers, one could find a provision stating that *a soldier dismissed from professional military service for the reason referred to in Article 111 (...) points 3, 8, 9(b) and 10 and Article 112 paragraph (...) 1 points 3-5, who performed professional military service for at least ten years, shall, due to the special nature of their education, military experience and expertise, enjoy priority in employment in positions related to national defense in public administration.* Retired officers have been and are eagerly employed in state institutions, especially uniformed ones, because they are familiar with the specific culture that prevails in the army, understand its functioning, and know the rules and regulations that apply there.

## CONCLUSIONS

Employee competencies are of crucial importance to employers, as they have a fundamental impact on the tasks performed by superiors and, consequently, on the functioning of the entire organization. When hiring an employee, it is competence that mainly determines whether or not he or she is accepted to a position. The same is true for the promotion of an employee. The concept of social competence – in the case of former officers – deserves to be emphasized. A close connection can be found here with such skills as social, adaptive, cognitive, empathy and emotion control skills. These are developed in military schools, important in creating the authority of a leader. The profession of an officer in the military or an officer in other services is determined by the fulfillment of tasks and needs for the benefit of society, the state. In this context, social competence becomes one of the essentials among soldiers.

Every soldier who has the opportunity to be promoted, according to the rules. The professional development of officers plays an important role. It is related to the possibility of participating in, for example, postgraduate studies or courses. This is intended to develop their knowledge and skills. It will also help prepare officers for the individual way of solving problems that arise during the implementation of decision-making processes at individual duty posts.

The survey showed that the largest number of respondents found employment in a state institution and a uniformed organization. The fewest indicated foreign companies and social organizations. Retired officers who had been retired 1-4 years indicated mainly knowledge, followed by experience, personality traits and attitude as key values acquired during service. In the group of respondents who had been retired the longest, a predominance of three competencies was identified: experience, knowledge and skills. In contrast, the largest number of retired officers who have been retired 5-8 years identified personality traits, experience and skills. At the same time, the place of work where they use their competencies, knowledge and skills acquired in service are state institutions and uniformed organizations, in which civilian personnel constitute a significant part of employment. Drawing conclusions, it should be noted that employers looking for personnel in such organizations, have opportunities to attract experienced and trained personnel from among

former soldiers. In order to do this, the authors suggest directing employers' efforts to attract qualified personnel in state and local government institutions to cooperate with vocational activation centers, operating regionally at the Ministry of National Defense, and in this way attract employees, especially for positions related to the requirements that former officers and officers meet.

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