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## Key success factors for social services organizations in Poland

### 1. Introduction

Contemporary organizations conduct their business activities in a world that has no rules set in stone, no universal management style, and - subsequently - no universal way to achieve success (Skrzypek 2007). The resources, competences and abilities of an organization that give it a competitive advantage on a given market in a given time are its key success factors, which decide about the possibility of achieving success in the future (Flores and Fadden 2000). They are dynamic; they change depending on the situation in which the enterprise is (Brotherton 1996). They influence the management's fields of activity (Mebodi 2010) and the carrying out of the organization's mission (Sirius and Mo'attar 2006).

The problem with the key success factors is well known in terms of theory and practice within the business sector, but it's not widely researched from the perspective of the determinants and rules of the public sector organizations. The few studies on public organizations are only discussed in academic literature, and pertain mostly to these organizations which provide social services. From the pragmatic point of view this topic seems a particularly important field of study, since it allows to rate the efficiency of the work

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of an organization whose statutory objective is to carry out the rules of social policy.

The goal of the following paper is the analysis of the discrepancies between the key success factors perceived by the managers of the social service organisations and the factual ones<sup>1</sup>.

## 2. The key success factors of an organization - definitions, traits, types

The term “success of an organization” is often defined in regard to the management theory. In this paper I am following the definition of P. Drucker, who describes success as the organization’s ability to develop in a broader time perspective (Drucker 2000). Such a definition forces the need to identify the factors within the organization that will be used in the formulation of the strategic goals and their achievement.

The table below presents the key definitions and critical success factors, since they are used in the literature interchangeably.

**Table 1. Key success factors of an organization - definitions**

Definition of key success factors	Author
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ factors insuring the success and competitive advantage of an organization;</li> </ul>	J. Rockart (Rockart 1979, p. 23)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ traits, terms and variables responsible for the success;</li> </ul>	J. Leidecker, A. Bruno (Leidecker, Bruno 1984, pp. 23-32)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ necessary elements of the organization’s management system;</li> <li>▪ unique traits of the organization;</li> <li>▪ heuristic tools for managers, allowing to clarify their thinking about the organization;</li> <li>▪ descriptions of the most important skills and sources necessary to achieve success on a given market;</li> <li>▪ organization’s skills that can be invested in</li> </ul>	K. Grunert, C. Ellegard (Grunert, Ellegard 1993, p. 245-274)

1 The discussion presented in this article is the result of the research project „Key success factors of social services organizations in the public sector funded by NCN (Contract no 2013/09/N/HS4/03861).

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ the key areas of activity for goal achievement and fulfilling the organization's mission;</li> </ul>	R. Caralli (Caralli 2004)
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▪ cases to be carried out by the organization, criteria it should fulfil or effectiveness ratios it should achieve, since it affects their key beneficiaries, thus constituting the foundation of its prosperity and perseverance.</li> </ul>	G. Johnson and K. Scholes (Johnson, Scholes 2002, p. 111)

**Source:** own work

The differences between the private and public sectors greatly affect the identification and prioritizing the key success factors of the organization. Scientific literature indicates multiple correlations between such factors for the private sector, but for the public sector organizations it seems to be an area open for exploration.

When identifying key success factors one needs to keep in mind that (Gierszewska, Romanowska 2009):

- there should be a limited amount of them,
- they shouldn't pertain to one aspect of the organization's functioning,
- they need to enable the realisation of the vision and strategic goals of the organization,
- they are not goals or ratios,
- they should allow to distinguish the organisation from its competitors,
- they should be clearly defined,
- a ratio should be ascribed a ratio,
- the pertaining goals should be set at an appropriately high level so that their organizational vision and strategic goals can be fulfilled.

Identifying key success factors fulfils two important practical goals. The first one - the diagnostic one- allows the explanation of the causes for different development pace in different organizations. Thanks to the normative goal it is possible to show to the management a way and direction of rational action (Sirus, Mo'attar 2007, p. 23). There are four possible sources of success factors (Bartes, Strzednicki 2003, p. 57):

1. Own, specific conditions determined by the area of business activity.
2. Organization's position within the given sector.
3. Organization's environment, client's preferences, economic and political factors in the country.
4. Current organizational factors, whose importance is dependent on the arising situation.

Sirius and Moghaddam point out a fifth source of key success factors - the style of management in the organization (Sirius, Mo'attar 2007, p. 67).

J. Rockart and A. Crescenz (Rockart 1983, p. 45) have divided the key success factors into two groups using time as a criterion:

- current - changing in relation to the actual problems which the organization is facing,
- planned - usually being the organization's development plans,

The number of these factors in each of the groups is determined by the organization's size, time and the number of managers.

J. Rockart (1979) defined five types of critical success factors, which reflect the way in which these factors contribute to fulfilling the organization's mission:

- the structure of the given sector of the market/branch (sector/industry key success factors),
- competitive strategy, position of sector in the market, geographical position (strategic key success factors, "peer success factors" according to Carelli,
- macro environment (environmental key success factors, researched in detail in the later conceptions),
- problems and challenges the organization faces (temporary key success factors),
- a look from the managing staff's point of view (administrational key success factors, which can also be understood as lack of effectiveness in action or changed to targets).

The organization's key success factors can include all or none of the abovementioned types of factors. A full understanding of the types of critical success factors helps the organization to know whether these factors are common or characteristic for a given sector or for it as an entity and whether they will change or remain the same over time. A very important division by K. Grunert and C. Ellegard (1993, pp. 245-274) is the classification of key success factors into perceived and factual ones. Perceived key success factors reflect to what degree according to the organization's management or other employees the given factor influences the success of the organization. Factual key success factors reflect to what degree the given factors really occur in an organization.

The authors comment on the fact that knowledge about the discrepancies between the perceived and expected key success factors yields practical benefits, such as a more effective designing and introducing organizational strategy and better communication within the organization.

It's worth mentioning that the knowledge about under what circumstances and within what spectrum can the managers predict the key success factors

could enable the scientists to conduct research in order to learn about the motors of the organizations - the success factors.

Identifying the key success factors has a wide range of benefits (Zarepur 2001, p. 89):

- diminishing the negative influence of success factors on the organization,
- minimizing financial risk,
- increasing quality control,
- increasing the ability to cooperate with groups which can adversely influence an organization,
- warrant fulfilling financial goals.

Thanks to the critical success factors the organization can also distinguish itself from their competitors, thus building positive, strong and stable relations with the environment it operates in (Dirks, Wijn 2002, pp. 407-427). One of the benefits of identifying key success factors for the organization is also increasing the ability of the organization to cope with the groups within its environment which could impact it in a negative way (Rad 2005, pp. 12-34). The most important traits of the key success factors are: the hierarchy of critical success factors, uniqueness and stability over time.

In the case of key success factor's hierarchy, it's worth considering D. Daniel's proposition, in which the key success factors are described on sector level and are common for all companies in a given sector. The author concentrated on the repeatable factors of success (the success factors which have an impact on a company in the given sector). A. Anthony (1972) and other have furthered D. Daniel's conception by suggesting that key success factors can differ between companies and management boards and introduce the concept of critical success factors on the management and organizational level as a whole.

The levels of management are characterized by different kinds of operating environment - this means different levels of critical key success factors. C. Bullen and J. Rockart (1981) widely discuss the hierarchical nature of the critical success factors and distinguish four levels of critical success factors: *sector/industrial, organizational, departmental and individual*. R. Caralli (2004) introduced the concept of critical success factors at the level of a given segment in an organization, these factors concentrate on the actions a given unit undertakes to help reach its goals and fulfil its mission. He stressed the similarities between the hierarchy of critical success factors and planning hierarchy, pointing out the similarity of how these two hierarchies are independent<sup>2</sup>.

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2 R. Caralli, *Critical Success Factor Method: Establishing a Foundation for Enterprise Security Management*, The (CMU/SEI-2004-TR-010). Pittsburgh, PA: Software Engineering Institute, Carnegie Mellon University, <http://www.sei.cmu.edu/library/abstracts/reports/04tr010.cfm>

As for the uniqueness, R. Caralli (2004) stresses the importance of understanding the critical success factors; characteristic, unique for a given sector, organization or management. Nevertheless, the factors do not necessarily have to be unique for a given organization, sectors, operating sectors or a person. J. Rockart (1983) in turn focuses on the critical success factors at both management level and sector/organizational level as a whole, considering their importance at a branch/industrial level. He also points out that key success factors do not have to be unique, characteristic (meaning they can be common for a given branch) and can be connected in certain ways to external and internal sources, not necessarily a branch (Bullen, Rockart 1970, p. 34).

The stability in time is made visible by the fact that even though key success factor can stay at least relatively stable in time, at least in the understanding of strategic planning, this could change, though, "with the change of the environment in a given branch, a change in the company's position on the market or the appearance of a new problem or a new possibility" (Bullen, Rockart 1979, p. 34). It is stressed that the key success factors are not standard measures which can be used at any level in an organization. Nonetheless, the gap between the critical success factors and certain goals, especially when the key success factor reflects a current problem the company is facing. The lack of effectiveness in a given operational area can cause the critical success factor to change into a goal. This relation works both ways, thus a goal that has been achieved can become a critical success factor if kept up.

### **3. The analysis of the discrepancies between the perceived and factual key success factors - study results**

A quantitative research based on a survey has been conducted in 524 social service organisations . The total number of social service organisations in Poland equals 2433<sup>3</sup>, thus the 500 sample totalled 22% of the whole. The number of organisations has been chosen to represent a criterion: the amount of that type of organisation in each voivodship. The quantitative study was conducted between August and October 2014.

The table below depicts the list of identified key success factors of the researched entities in terms of their importance on the road to success. These factors were distinguished on the basis of literature and conducted 20 interviews with the

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3 GUS data, 29.04.2013.

management of social services organisations and experts in the field of social policy.

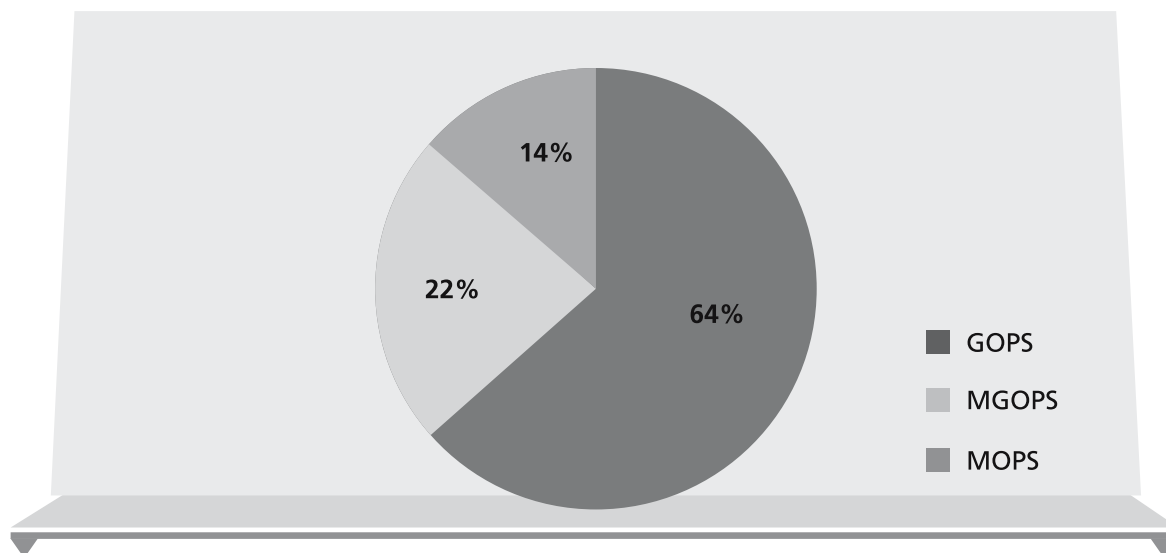


Figure 1. Structure of the survey by centre type

Source: own work

Table 2. Descriptive statistics - the perceived success factors

Success factors	Average	Median	Dominant	Standard deviation
1. Leadership <sup>4</sup>	5.30	6	6	1,01
2. Teamwork <sup>5</sup>	5,79	6	6	1,03
3. Commitment of the management and employees <sup>6</sup>	5,89	6	6	1,03

<sup>4</sup> R. Ireland, M. Hitt, *Achieving and maintaining strategic competitiveness in the 21st century: The role of strategic leadership*, Academy of Management Executive, No 13(1), 1999, p. 79.

<sup>5</sup> C.O Longenecker'a oraz J.A. Scazzero, *The ongoing challenge of total quality management*, „The TQM Magazine”, Vol. 8 No. 2, 1996, pp. 55-60.

<sup>6</sup> K. Fryer, J. Antony, A. Douglas, *Critical success factors of continuous improvement in the public sector. A literature review and some key findings*, „The TQM Magazine”, vol. 19, No. 5, 2007, pp. 497-501.



4. The motivation of the employees to deliver social services <sup>7</sup>	5,61	5	6	1,16
5. The abilities of the management and employees <sup>8</sup>	6,00	6	6	0,82
6. Professional management <sup>9</sup>	5,84	6	6	1,05
7. Relations with the beneficiaries, aiding the completion of the organization's goals <sup>10</sup>	5,59	6	6	0,91
8. Partnership in action <sup>11</sup>	5,58	6	6	1,07
9. Participation of the employees in management <sup>12</sup>	5,41	5	6	1,05
10. An effective communication system	5,60	5	6	1,10
11. Flexible organizational structure <sup>13</sup>	5,35	5	6	1,05
12. Organizational culture facilitating the achievement of goals <sup>14</sup>	5,64	6	6	0,95
13. A positive image of the organization <sup>15</sup>	5,54	6	6	1,05
14. A motivational system, increasing the employees' commitment to their work <sup>16</sup>	5,27	5	5	1.35

7 J.L. Perry, L. R. Wise (1990) *The Motivational Bases of Public Service*. „Public Administration Review” (May/June), 1990, pp. 367-373.

8 M. Owlia, E. Aspinwall, TQM in higher education - a review, „International Journal of Quality & Reliability Management”, Vol. 14 Iss: 5, 1997, pp.527 - 543.

9 Wynik przeprowadzonych wywiadów z zarządzającymi ośrodkami pomocy społecznej oraz ekspertami z zakresu pomocy społecznej.

10 K. Rosacker, D. Olson, *Public sector information system critical success factors*, „Transforming Government: People, Process and Policy”, Vol. 2 Iss: 1, pp.60 - 70, 2008.

11 The result of the interviews with the managers of social services organisations and experts in the field of social policy.

12 Wynik przeprowadzonych wywiadów z zarządzającymi ośrodkami pomocy społecznej oraz ekspertami z zakresu pomocy społecznej.

13 K. Fryer, J. Antony, A. Douglas, *Critical success factors of continuous improvement in the public sector. A literature review and some key findings*, „The TQM Magazine”, vol. 19, No. 5, 2007, pp. 497-501.

14 The result of the interviews with the managers of social services organisations and experts in the field of social policy.

15 G. Gierszewska, M. Romanowska, *Analiza strategiczna przedsiębiorstwa*, PWE, Warszawa 1999

16 The result of the interviews with the managers of social services organisations and experts in the field of social policy.



15. Proper work organization <sup>17</sup>	5,74	5	5	1,17
17. Financial resources	5,39	5	6	1.35
18. Knowledge and the ability to identify and obtain financial resources	5,53	5	5	1,04
19. The knowledge and ability to effectively utilize financial resources	5,70	6	6	0,96
20. Workstation equipment <sup>18</sup>	5,64	6	6	1,10
21. Premise conditions <sup>19</sup>	5,34	5	6	1.29

Source: own work

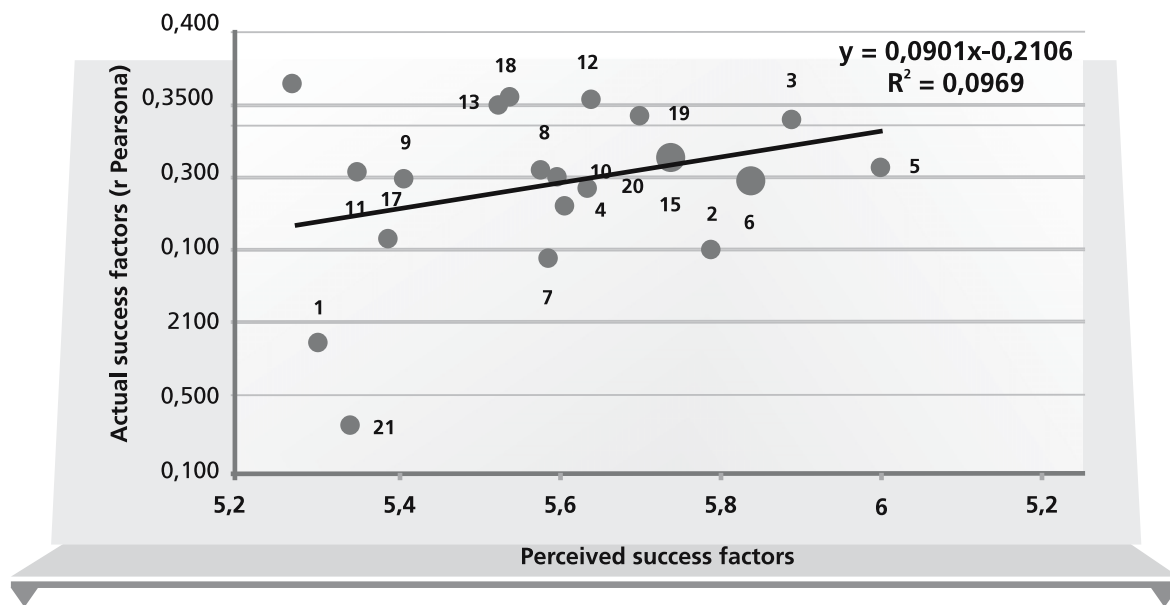
The research points to the fact that the respondents had a problem to distinguish the perceived key success factors, and on the average they considered each of the above to be important. The statistics show that the discrepancies between the medium level values for the analysed factors are small. The small standard variation also points to a similar conclusion. All the averages of the answers pertaining to perceived success factors are between 5,25-6; the medians for the answers in seventeen cases were equal 6 and in the rest - 5. The medium range of the average answer was 2,5, the range median also equals 2.

The analysis of the research points to the conclusion that the managers of social service organisations have a serious issue with distinguishing the perceived success factors for these organizations. Moreover, they do not possess the knowledge about the factual factors which lead to success in social service organisations. A proof for that are the significant differences in the rankings of the factual and perceived success factors. The results obtained enrich the knowledge of the key success factors of social services organisations. So far, the study mainly *has* dealt with the key success factors of private enterprises. These

<sup>17</sup> The result of the interviews with the managers of social services organisations and experts in the field of social policy.

<sup>18</sup> The result of the interviews with the managers of social services organisations and experts in the field of social policy.

<sup>19</sup> , K. Rahbek G. Pedersen, M. Huniche, *Determinants of lean success and failure in the Danish public sector: A negotiated order perspective*, „International Journal of Public Sector Management”, Vol. 24 Iss: 5, pp. 403- 420, 2011.



**Figure 2. The link between the measures identifying the perceived and factual success factors based on Pearson's linear correlation coefficient**

Source: own work

studies, often of a qualitative nature which included either a small sample or a larger, but heterogeneous one. Other topics, connected with Polish reality, have not as yet been the subject of empirical research.

#### 4. Summary

The innovative action of the social services and social welfare organizations - at the moment - requires a change in the organization of expenses and procedures, a goal-oriented attitude, including effectiveness and efficiency, also for the services offered (Kieżun 2000). The identification of the key success factors responsible for the success of public services sector should be one of the main tasks of their management board. These factors are the most important in determining where to locate the central strategic decisions of the public services entities, which sectors, procedures or processes need to be improved (Munro and Wheeler 1980). It is particularly important in the cases of social welfare organizations, which now face similar problems in terms of effectiveness. The key success factors and the strategies based on them have a significant potential for the social services organizations in terms of reaching an effective and

efficient action (Grewiński, Karawcki 2009). Identifying these factors is a chance for successfully utilizing the potential of the institutional and social sphere in order to create social order.

Moreover, they do not possess the knowledge about the factual factors which lead to success in social service organisations. This signifies the need to equip the management of the social services organisations with a theoretical background and practical knowledge which will allow them to manage with the expected results.

## Summary

### **Key success factors for social services organisations in Poland**

The basic goal behind any action undertaken in an organization management is the will to achieve success. Key (or critical) success factors are the organization's resources, competence and qualification that create its competitive advantage on a particular market at a given time, and are able to determine its possible future success. The aim of this article is the analysis of the discrepancies between the factual and perceived key success factors of the social service organizations. The results point to the management of social services organisations not possessing enough knowledge about the factors responsible for the success of the entities they manage. This signifies the need to equip the management of the social services organisations with a theoretical background and practical knowledge which will allow them to manage with the expected results.

**Key words:** *key success factors, social services, social service organisation, organizational success*

## Streszczenie

### **Kluczowe czynniki sukcesu ośrodków pomocy społecznej w Polsce**

W zarządzaniu każdą organizacją podstawowym celem podejmowanych działań jest chęć osiągnięcia sukcesu. Kluczowe, czy też krytyczne czynniki sukcesu to te zasoby, kompetencje i umiejętności organizacji, które tworzą jej przewagę konkurencyjną na danym rynku w określonym czasie i mogą zdecydować o możliwości osiągnięcia przez nią sukcesu w przyszłości. Celem

artykułu jest analiza rozbieżności pomiędzy postrzeganymi a rzeczywistymi kluczowymi czynnikami sukcesu ośrodków pomocy społecznej. Wyniki badań wskazują, że menedżerowie ośrodków pomocy społecznej nie posiadają wiedzy na temat czynników, które są odpowiedzialne za osiągnięcie sukcesu przez podmioty, którymi zarządzają. Świadczy to o konieczności wzbogacenia zarządzających instytucjami pomocy społecznej w rzetelny background teoretyczny z zakresu zarządzania strategicznego, który pozwoli im na zarządzanie, które przyniesie oczekiwane rezultaty.

### Słowa

**kluczowe:** *kluczowe czynniki sukcesu, ośrodki pomocy społecznej, sukces organizacji*

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