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ORGANIZATIONAL COMPETENCIES AND THE SCOPE OF CONTRACTING OUT IN OUTSOURCING IMPLEMENTATION ON THE EXAMPLE OF A BUDGET HOUSING MANAGEMENT ENTITY

Summary

The purpose of this article is to analyze the problem of core competencies in determining the scope of elimination in outsourcing implementation in a budget housing entity. In this case, the protection of core competencies is not strategically important because of specificity of the housing resources and its social and intervention nature, intended to meet the housing needs of families with low or very low income. The budget housing entity does not need to maintain competitiveness in all its business areas and some of them may be transferred to external suppliers.

1. Introduction

The aim of the article is to analyze key and other organizational competencies in the context of the scope of contracting out in outsourcing implementation in a budget housing management entity, located in the Śląskie Province. As a public utility it serves satisfaction of social needs, and, according to article 4, section 2 of the Act of 21st June 2001 on Tenants Protection, Housing Resources of the Commune and Changes to the Civil Code (Journal of Law. 2001, No 71, position 733) it provides social and substitute lodgings and satisfies the housing needs of low income households. The financial situation of tenants influences their inability to search for competitive lodgings, and this accounts for lack of emphasis on achieving competitiveness of the entity on the housing market, directly affecting the effectiveness of its operations. The analyzed entity, however, assuming that not all organizational competencies – key and other ones – must be achieved by it, attempts to streamline its functioning through transferring a selected area of its activity outside.

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2. Key competencies in theory and practice

An economic entity may possess a large number of skills and competencies, but only some of them may be classified as key ones. Among them are those which differentiate the economic entity from its competitors (Power, Desouza, Bonifazi, 2006, p. 43), such as unique strategic resources allowing it to implement its strategic intentions (Bratnicki, 2000, p. 18): innovative knowledge, specialist skills, applied technologies, information flow and unique operational methods (Greaver, 1999, p. 87). Obłój claims that we should determine what makes particular resources strategically essential (Obłój, 1997, p. 80), while Greaver, Prahalad and Hamel point out that when particular skills or competencies do not create products or services considered unique by customers – they are probably not the key ones (Greaver, 1999, p. 87; Prahalad, Hamel, 1990, p. 82; Hamel, Prahalad, 1994). The conclusion drawn from it is that these entities compete for customers, profit and market share with products and services, trying to meet the expectations of buyers. As a result – as the theory of resources indicates – market survival depends on accumulation of rare and precious resources, impossible to be replaced with substitutes or to be copied (Grant, 1991, pp. 114-135; Barney, 2001, pp. 643-650). The above definitions confirm that key competencies:

- are to be sought in the main driving forces of an economic entity, especially in the spheres of core values, core and auxiliary activities, competitive edge factors,
- are identified in the processes and products (tangible aspect) and complex knowledge of the organization (intangible aspect),
- concentrate on the necessity of shaping or strongly influencing the value for clients,
- are not regarded as a single element, but as a set of features accounting for organization's competitive edge.

Specialist literature also emphasizes the difficulties in recognizing key competencies (Boguslauskas, Kvedaraviciene, 2009, pp. 75-81; Heikkilä, Cordon, 2002, pp. 183-193). It is particularly complicated when the definition of outstanding or market competencies is introduced, which are difficult to distinguish from key competencies (Hitt, Ireland, 1995, pp. 273-293), as the former are often associated with features distinguishing an economic entity, and the latter with possessed knowledge and market experience. Authors assume though, that competencies which do not position products or services of an economic entity in client's mind higher than those of competitors may not be the key ones.

The criteria qualifying competencies as the key ones on the basis of evaluation of the shaping force or the influence on value for customer are correct, as the determination of the scope of contracting out in outsourcing implementation concerns an economic entity functioning in a competitive environment. The scope would then actually cover the areas of activities which do not generate significant benefits for the end-user. In case when the activity of an entity is not directed at using the winning market strategy, the above-mentioned criteria may not be practically applicable, while pointing out key competencies will only be of distinctive and declarative type.

3. Outsourcing key competencies

The movement from entrusting an external provider with realization of tactical scope of activities to strategic or transformational one, may be treated as a natural consequence of evolution in outsourcing. This turn is visible more in theory than in practice, as executives still believe that only the activities which are not the key ones may be contracted out in the outsourcing process. In theory, especially in Trocki's work, we can find opinions that the less the contracted out activities are connected with key competencies, the higher the proneness to contract them out (Trocki, 2001, p. 67). The fundamental problem here seems to be not the issue of contracting out areas connected with key competencies, but recognizing them. Mistakes made at this stage may block the optimal use of unique skills, deterring or even preventing successful implementation of outsourcing.

Scientists do not exclude though contracting out the scope covering key competencies both in main and side areas. As Obłój claims, with the increasing significance of knowledge, it is becoming harder to develop and control the most essential competencies (Obłój, 1997, p. 80). Power, Desouza and Bonifazi claim that outsourcing key competencies is possible, but requires the highest degree of trust in external provider, the highest precision in drawing an outsourcing contract, precisely defined standards as well as costs and operational conditions (Power, Desouza, Bonifazi, 2006, p. 71). On the other hand, Pierścionek suggests that an economic entity should first of all strive at recognizing what key competencies will be vital in the future shape of the sector and then start developing them (Pierścionek, 2006, p. 230), which seems to be an argument for and against outsourcing this type of competencies.

4. The scope of contracting out in outsourcing implementation – theoretical approach

One of the biggest challenges in taking outsourcing decisions is to determine the scope of contracted out area (Brown, Wilson, 2006, s. 55). According to Nalepka, this process should be started with the analysis of the scope of activities performed by an economic entity, which requires focusing on two areas: the content scope and the function scope, where the content scope is determined by a package of products or services offered by an entity in particular markets, while the function scope is determined by the type and number of realized preparatory, manufacturing and auxiliary and servicing processes (Nalepka, 1999, pp. 51-53). Power, Desouza and Bonifazi propose to characterize the scope of activity according to its process ties, and the result of the analysis will give us a list of functions which can be contracted out only separately or in a group in case of processes which cannot be separated. Authors try to convince us that if there is a possibility of separating the above-mentioned processes, this will facilitate the decision to contract them out, as the opposite situation would definitely complicate it (Power, Desouza, Bonifazi, 2006, p. 72). The key aspect in determining the scope of contracting out is the diagnosis of activities through the analysis of functions. Scientists distinguish core (operational), managerial (regulatory) and auxiliary functions (Trocki, 2001, p. 17). Core functions are those which directly concern the realization of the end target of an economic entity. Regulatory (managerial) functions consist in determining and maintaining the direction in which an entity functions, and are vital for the efficiency of its operations. The features that distinguish managerial functions from others are long-term predicting and conceptual type. Auxiliary functions, like all other functions, do not directly realize external objectives and do not contribute to the regulation of the whole entity. However, they considerably influence the possibility of realizing core functions (Zieleniewski, 1979, pp. 399-401, 480). It seems that special importance of managerial functions rules out the possibility of contracting them out. As Nalepka writes, the effect of the division of functions realized by an economic entity may indicate those functions which can be realized at lower costs by external units with no negative effect on the effectiveness and quality of activities; it may also point at insufficient use of the potential of organizational units which can be rationally utilized, or even indicate some gaps in using certain functions in realizing current core tasks of an entity (Nalepka, 1999, p. 50). It should be added that the determination of the scope of contracting out on the basis of functional division seems to be easier in case of economic entities with complex, but transparent organizational structure, with work posts, sections and organizational units and assigned job

responsibilities. The entity functioning in a freely constructed organizational structure could determine the scope of contracting out using the criteria of purpose, depth, speed of expected results and required control level. Such characteristics is presented in Table 1 below.

5. The scope of contracting out in outsourcing implementation – practical approach

The housing management entity has a transparent organizational structure. Both work posts, organizational sections and units have various functions and sub-functions assigned to them, which constitute organizational competencies – key ones and the others. As we have noticed earlier, the entity does not compete in the housing market, therefore the decision to transfer the scope containing the above competencies, especially the key ones, is not caused by the desire to protect them from competitors. The main reason is the unsolvable economic conflict between the entity and tenants.

Table 1. Determining the scope of contracting out in outsourcing implementation

Criteria determining the scope of contracting out	Area	Expected result after contracting out	Suggested scope of contracting out
Objective	Costs	Minimization. Optimization.	The widest scope, generating the highest fixed costs.
	Key competencies	Strengthening.	Experimentally, narrow scope.
	Outstanding competencies	Acquiring.	Experimentally, narrow scope.
	Market competencies	Access.	The scope served by poorly qualified and inexperienced staff.
	Technologies	Access.	Wide scope if the entity competes relying on innovative technologies.
	Working time	Effectiveness.	Time-ineffective scope, excess full-time employment.
	Production	Flexibility.	Scope does not require a long chain of deliveries. Scope requires shortening lengthy chain of deliveries.
	Changes	Time to market.	Wide scope. Decentralization of activities.

Criteria determining the scope of contracting out	Area	Expected result after contracting out	Suggested scope of contracting out
Depth	Auxiliary functions	Quantity minimization.	No complicated functions, not requiring high qualifications.
	Core functions	Quantity minimization.	Complex functions, but not too complicated, requiring specialist knowledge and qualifications. Complex functions with very complicated structure, requiring involvement and combining resources of the principal and the external provider.
Speed of results	Auxiliary functions	Minimization of processing time	Scope with short time to observe effects, for example noticeable change in quality level or speed of reaction to customer's needs.
	Core functions	Minimization of processing time.	Scope with long time of waiting for measurable effects, for example safety quality, number of critical events, use of emergency procedures.
Level of control	Auxiliary functions	Safety maximization	Scope covered by current, day-to-day control.
	Core functions	Safety maximization	Scope covered with periodical control due to its size and complexity.

Source: own elaboration.

The conflict of interests results from the expectations of tenants, who are interested in bearing the lowest possible maintenance costs of their premises, which in practice translates into pressure on lowering the rates of rent. The housing management entity, on the other hand, realizing its statutory obligations, must strive at exploiting housing resources in a proper way, in line with existing financial and social constraints. In practice, though, the scope of outsourcing could cover a greater number of organizational competencies, and yet it focuses mainly on functions and sub-functions using the competencies the realization of which will bring savings satisfying both parties. Table 2 presents the core functions and sub-functions realized in the analyzed housing management entity. For example, the analysis of the scope of outsourcing has shown that only in the Residential Buildings Maintenance and Administration Departments it is allowed to transfer the performance of tasks

to external providers (none is connected with key organizational competencies). In most cases the scope of tasks referred to modernization, exploitation and maintenance work, covering also repairs of roof on buildings constituting housing resources, repairs of flues, renovation of elevation on residential and service buildings, insulating external walls and painting the elevation of buildings, liquid waste disposal, as well as clearing the areas managed by the housing management entity of trees and bushes. In typically administrative departments tasks belonging to organizational competencies are realized by entity employees. The scope of outsourcing could easily cover most tasks, due to their small influence on the safety of using premises by tenants and on their level of satisfaction from rented flats. The verification of cost estimates for repair and modernization work performed at the expense of tenants was assumed to be connected with key organizational competencies, however with an option of outsourcing them. In the department dealing with administration of residential buildings most tasks were classified as using key organizational competencies, due to their significance in lowering maintenance costs (vital for tenants). The tasks transferred outside comprises only keeping cleanliness and order in the premises, conducting technical reviews and flat reviews, leak proof tests of gas installation, measurements of electrical and lightning systems and small maintenance work.

In light of the results obtained in the analysis, it would be advisable to consider the issue of creating value for the customer – tenant. The knowledge of key and other organizational competencies is vital to indicate those which can help create value for the customer. If an economic entity cannot create it itself, that is if it does not realize competencies in an effective way, it should contract this function out to a specialist entity. The analyzed housing management entity does not create such value. It does not either take up the fight for its market position, probably due to material situation of its tenants. Most tenants in the communal housing resource are poorer than other tenants who occupy other housing resources – cooperative housing or accommodation provided by their employers, and the rent in communal resources has not reached the level which would cover the maintenance costs and necessary expenditure for repairs. In practice, the housing management entity has limited financial, technical and technological base and it focuses its efforts mainly on maintaining proper standard of housing resources. Therefore, creating value for the customer – tenant, does not consist in offering him or her additional benefits from renting the premises, but translates into efforts to slow down the process of de-capitalization of resources and maintaining the quality of dwelling. The current scope of outsourcing implemented in the entity, covering key and other organizational competencies, brings satisfactory effects, especially as far as reduction of financial costs is concerned. Therefore it seems that encouraged

by positive economic results from outsourcing implementation, the housing management entity should not block the possibility of transferring outside other organizational competencies, especially if they were to create value for inhabitants.

6. Conclusions

The state-owned entity managing the communal housing resources is a public utility, whose main goal is to satisfy the needs of the local community. The tasks which constitute management of housing resources are for example: administration of residential and utility buildings, technical care and management of premises – proper exploitation, development and supervision of commissioned maintenance, repairs and renovation system, as well as signing and terminating the rental contract for their premises.

Table 2. The scope of outsourcing in the analyzed housing management entity

Department	Core function	Sub-function of the core function	Real scope of outsourcing			Suggested scope of outsourcing
			Key organizational competencies	Other organizational competencies	Competencies transferred outside	
Department of Residential Premises	Renting residential premises	Keeping records of tenants.		•		•
		Preparing contracts for residential premises rental.	•			
		Cooperating with tenants in rights and obligations resulting from the contract for residential premises rental.		•		•
		Collecting rental receivables and payments independent of the owner.		•		•
		Dealing with matters related to execution of court rulings.		•		
		Keeping records of free premises		•		•
		Keeping records of applicants for residential premises tenancy.			•	•
		Providing information on principles of renting free utility premises			•	•
		Announcing and organizing tenders for renting free utility premises.			•	
		Offering inspection of free utility premises by subjects interested in renting them				•
Department of Utility Premises and Debt Collection	Renting utility premises intended for economic activity	Issuing approvals for repair and renovation work in utility premises carried out by tenants,	•			

Department	Core function	Sub-function of the core function	Real scope of outsourcing			Suggested scope of outsourcing
			Key organizational competencies	Other organizational competencies	Competencies transferred outside	Competencies that could be transferred outside
Department of Utility Premises and Debt Collection	Renting utility premises intended for economic activity	<p>Verifying cost estimates for repair and renovation work performed at the expense of tenants</p> <p>Collecting debts</p> <p>Signing and terminating contracts for utility premises rental and contracts for making communal property available for placing advertising and information content.</p>	•			•
				•		•
Department of Accounting	Finance and accounting	Supervising all matters related to records of property, cash management, settling financial obligations, settlements with insurers and records and depositing on bank accounts the amount being security for proper performance of construction work.	•			
		Preparing materials for the tender for insuring the Housing Management Entity property	•			
		Budget reporting.		•		•
		Preparing materials for financial plans and their verification.		•		
		Drawing up a tax return for real estate tax		•		•
Dealing with all matters related to accounting record of repairs and investments.			•		•	

Department	Core function	Sub-function of the core function	Real scope of outsourcing			Suggested scope of outsourcing
			Key organizational competencies	Other organizational competencies	Competencies transferred outside	
Department of Accounting	Finance and accounting	Settling sales and purchases for the VAT declaration. Drawing up VAT declaration Keeping synthetic and analytic records of fixed assets and intangible assets. Monthly calculation of amortization and depreciation. Keeping register of contracts made with subcontractors as regards exploitation and repair costs. Keeping synthetic and analytic records of other fixed assets. Day-to-day recording all bills and VAT invoices, keeping VAT register. Dealing with matters concerning recording and keeping on bank accounts the amounts being the security for proper performance of construction work and bid securities.		•		•
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Department of Personnel and Administration	Personnel, Payroll, Administration.	Managing the payroll. Making settlements with National Insurance Agency and Tax Office. Employment policy (selection of staff, rational management of posts, work discipline, trainings).	•			
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Department	Core function	Sub-function of the core function	Real scope of outsourcing			Suggested scope of outsourcing		
			Key organizational competencies	Other organizational competencies	Competencies transferred outside	Competencies that could be transferred outside		
Department of Personnel and Administration	Personnel, Payroll, Administration.	<p>Preparing and conducting periodical reviews of staff and employee evaluation.</p> <p>Cooperation with District Employment Agency in employing trainees, graduates, emergency workers</p> <p>Cooperation with Municipal Social Welfare Center in organizing socially-useful work.</p> <p>Cooperation with District Court, III Criminal Law Department in organizing socially useful work ruled instead of uncollectible fines.</p> <p>Dealing with social matters of employees.</p> <p>Running the Correspondence Register and correspondence dispatch.</p> <p>Keeping the records of office equipment and supplies.</p> <p>Procurement of office equipment and supplies and other materials – in line with the Act on Public Procurement.</p> <p>Supervising the Housing Management Entity archives.</p>	•			•		
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Department	Core function	Sub-function of the core function	Real scope of outsourcing			Suggested scope of outsourcing
			Key organizational competencies	Other organizational competencies	Competencies transferred outside	
Department of Exploitation	Exploitation	<p>Keeping records of managed real property for statistical and tax purposes</p> <p>Dealing with matters concerning ownership of real estate.</p> <p>Dealing with matters concerning garage rental and land lease.</p> <p>Signing contracts for garage rental, land lease.</p> <p>Collection of rent receivables.</p> <p>Organizing and supervising maintenance of managed real estate as regards sanitation and cleanliness.</p> <p>Dealing with matters concerning the change in the way residential premises, utilities and other premises are used.</p> <p>Providing information on procedure of purchasing residential premises and expressing opinion concerning applications for purchase of premises.</p> <p>Making settlements with owners or co-owners of real estate.</p> <p>Dealing with matters connected with accepting and transferring real estate management.</p>	•		•	
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Department	Core function	Sub-function of the core function	Real scope of outsourcing			Suggested scope of outsourcing
			Key organizational competencies	Other organizational competencies	Competencies transferred outside	Competencies that could be transferred outside
Department of Exploitation	Exploitation	<p>Signing contracts on services related to exploitation of managed buildings and areas.</p> <p>Signing contracts on servicing chimneys, boilers, hydrophores and hoists.</p> <p>Performing indoor and outdoor general construction repair and investment work.</p> <p>Day-to-day maintenance of objects and appliances constituting housing resources.</p> <p>Performing commissioned construction and painting work in buildings.</p> <p>Maintenance painting work in buildings and outside (gates, playground equipment, etc.)</p> <p>Maintenance painting work in buildings and outside (gates, playground equipment, etc.)</p> <p>Keeping organizational documentation of housing management entity and a register of internal normative acts.</p> <p>Collecting normative acts, such as Journal of Law, Polish monitor, other official journals, Resolutions of Town Council, Regulations of the Mayor, rulings of the Supreme Court, etc..</p>	•			
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Organizational and Legal Department	Organizational and legal.			•		•
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Department	Core function	Sub-function of the core function	Real scope of outsourcing			Suggested scope of outsourcing
			Key organizational competencies	Other organizational competencies	Competencies transferred outside	Competencies that could be transferred outside
Department of Exploitation	Organizational and legal.	<p>Preparing and storing correspondence issued by the Head to the authorities of Bielsko-Biała (City Council, Council Commission, President) and to other organs.</p> <p>Keeping register of questions asked by City Council members, motions of the Council Commission, statements made by members of parliament, as well as a register of complaints and interventions submitted to the housing management entity.</p> <p>Keeping contact with the press in matters related to statutory activity of the housing management entity.</p> <p>Coordinating matters related to personal data protection in the entity.</p> <p>Dealing with matters concerning health and safety at work.</p> <p>Legal servicing for the housing management entity.</p> <p>Running the secretary's office at the housing management entity.</p> <p>Dealing with matters related to monitoring the building in the premises of the entity.</p>	•	•		•
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Department	Core function	Sub-function of the core function	Real scope of outsourcing			Suggested scope of outsourcing
			Key organizational competencies	Other organizational competencies	Competencies transferred outside	Competencies that could be transferred outside
IT Department	IT services	Computer software and hardware servicing.	•		•	•
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Department of Residential Buildings Administration	Administration of residential buildings.	<p>Conducting technical reviews annually and every 5 years, inspections of flats, leak proof tests of gas installation, measurements of electric and lightning installations.</p> <p>Preparing schedules of maintenance and prevention repairs. Applying for general repairs and renovation of buildings.</p> <p>Organizing tenders, technical supervision of work and financial settlement of performed work</p> <p>Keeping the managed areas clean and in order.</p> <p>Issuing opinions concerning applications of inhabitants as regards changes to heating systems, changes to internal installations and reconstruction of the residential premises.</p> <p>Signing contracts for general and current repairs of residential premises at the cost of a future tenant.</p> <p>Cooperation with companies providing services of solid and liquid waste disposal.</p> <p>Maintaining buildings, small architecture objects and the surroundings in proper technical state.</p>	•			
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Department	Core function	Sub-function of the core function	Real scope of outsourcing			Suggested scope of outsourcing
			Key organizational competencies	Other organizational competencies	Competencies transferred outside	Competencies that could be transferred outside
Department of Residential Buildings Administration	Administration of residential buildings.	Controlling expenses connected with electric energy supply for lighting common areas of the real estate and analyzing water consumption in particular buildings.	•			
		Classifying residential buildings for general and current renovation at the expense of a future tenant.	•			
		Signing contracts for leasing house gardens.	•			
		Providing maintenance services, small repairs, renovations and eliminating faults in construction and roof areas			•	
		Construction and reconstruction of stoves				•

Source: own elaboration on the basis of research conducted in a housing management entity.

The law-makers allowed state-owned entities to provide services connected with management of real estate belonging to Treasury, economic units and individual persons, on commission of their owners. They can also provide renovation and construction services as long as such activity does not result in constraints or quality deterioration and it positively influences economic effects of their activities. The realization of tasks is commissioned to external providers under the outsourcing implementation scheme, which is undoubtedly a positive consequence of institutional and legal changes introduced in communes, aiming at improving rationality of managing their own resources. In the analyzed case we can clearly see that the outsourced scope covers mostly other organizational competencies and accounts for a small share of all tasks realized in management of the communal housing resources, which can probably be attributed to an autarchic culture and organizational structure of commune budget entities. Further studies should include a profitability analysis of transferring outside suggested key and other organizational competencies.

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