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## Importance of Professional Competence in the Rescue in Opinions of Young People

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## **IMPORTANCE OF PROFESSIONAL COMPETENCE IN THE RESCUE IN OPINIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE**

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### **ABSTRACT**

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Specific competences of employees are important for rescue services. This means that workers who have a certain set of competences including knowledge, abilities, experience, attitudes and the worker's readiness to act in conditions of high stress and risk will be searched for.

The goal of the paper is to study opinions of young generation who are not associated with rescue services and who do not see their career in the area about the importance of competences necessary to perform the work of a "rescue worker".

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There are public benefit organisations operating in our surroundings, for which the major goal of activity is to provide help to others, in other words, to save life in life-threatening situations. Considerable flexibility is demanded from these types of organisations (rescue services, e.g. Ambulance Services, Fire Brigades, etc.), while starting activities perceived as fast reaction time in the situation of the necessity to help an injured person.

It is undeniable that flexibility of their operations depends on efficient and effective work of their personnel – the rescue workers. Generally speaking it depends on their competence.

The goal of the paper is to analyse the opinions of young generation that is not associated with rescue work and does not see their future there, on the subject of importance of having necessary skills that are crucial to perform the work of a „rescue worker”.

#### THE IMPORTANCE OF COMPETENCES

The issues of identification and shaping competences are complex and multidimensional. A vast number of definitions of the notion of „competence” can be found in the literature on this subject.

Initially, competences<sup>1</sup> were approached as a formal right to deal with particular matters and make decisions within a determined scope, on behalf of a particular organisation. On the other hand, the ability to work effectively and efficiently was usually associated with qualifications<sup>2</sup>. In the 1980s, competence started to be more extensively perceived as the scope of rights, obligations and responsibilities of an employee, attributed to a particular workplace<sup>3</sup>. Currently, competences are defined as a range of powers and rights, the scope of activity of the public authority of an organisational unit, and as the scope of one’s knowledge, responsibilities and skills<sup>4</sup>.

Apart from quoted interpretations of the notion of „competence”, two trends in defining the discussed notion are observed in the literature on the subject.

The first trend defines competences directly related to man. They are the so-called personal competences, defined as broadly understood scope of knowledge, skills, responsibilities or the rights to take actions<sup>5</sup>, while identifying them with a collection of behaviours that some people will mas-

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<sup>1</sup> The notion of competences was first used by D. McClelland (American social psychologist) in 1973 who proposed a study of features that he called competences, rather than a study of personality features.

<sup>2</sup> T. Oleksyn, *Zarządzanie kompetencjami*, Teoria i praktyka Oficyna Ekonomiczna, Kraków 2006, p. 39.

<sup>3</sup> M. Armstrong, *Zarządzanie zasobami ludzkimi*, Oficyna Ekonomiczna, Kraków 2002, p. 241.

<sup>4</sup> *Słownik języka polskiego*, Wydawnictwo PWN, Warszawa 2005.

<sup>5</sup> T. Oleksyn, *Zarządzanie kompetencjami*, Teoria i praktyka Oficyna Ekonomiczna, Kraków 2006, p. 40.

ter better than others, which makes them work more efficiently in a particular situation<sup>6</sup>, and also with capabilities, interests and personality features, as example parameters that make individuals different from one another<sup>7</sup>.

The second trend defines competences while referring them to performed work or occupied position. They are the co-called working competences that are defined as a group of qualities of a particular person that are typical of the person and that include such elements as motivation, personality features, skills and self-assessment, associated with functioning in the group, as well as knowledge that the person has acquired and has been using<sup>8</sup>; they are also qualities in the sphere of knowledge, skills and attitudes that allow for implementation of occupational assignments on appropriate level<sup>9</sup>.

In the context of general considerations presented before, the notion of competences can be approached as:

- the capability to use and apply knowledge in occupational situations,
- a collection of capabilities that enable effective use of labour, attainment of goals and observance of operational standards,
- a collection of knowledge, skills and qualities that allow for efficient performance of tasks and effective achievement of goals in a particular position in the context of adopted goals of the organisation.

Competences defined in this way can be referred both to the position at work and to the person performing the work in this position.

#### COMPONENTS OF COMPETENCES

Competences approached generally, represent the worker's capability to act in the way that leads to achievement of assumed goals in particular conditions, by means of specified measures. In the developed version, competences are the total of knowledge, skills, experiences, attitudes and worker's readiness to operate in specific conditions, and therefore also the ability to adapt to these changing conditions<sup>10</sup>.

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<sup>6</sup> M. Sidor-Rządkowska, *Kształtowanie nowoczesnych ocen pracowniczych*, OE, Kraków 2006, p. 23.

<sup>7</sup> C. Levy-Leboyer, *Kierowanie kompetencjami. Bilanse doświadczeń zawodowych*, Poltext 1997, p. 15.

<sup>8</sup> S. Whiddett, S. Hollyfirde, *Modele kompetencyjne w zarządzaniu zasobami ludzkimi*, Oficyna Ekonomiczna, Kraków 2003, p. 209.

<sup>9</sup> G. Filipowicz, *Zarządzanie kompetencjami zawodowymi*, PWE, Warszawa 2004, p. 19.

<sup>10</sup> M. Egegan, *przedmowa do polskiego wydania D. Thierry, Ch. Sauret, N. Monod, Zatrudnienie i kompetencje w przedsiębiorstwach w procesach zmian*, Poltext, Warszawa 1994, p. 6.

Regardless of what definition is applied, it should be assumed that knowledge analysed on the following three levels is the basis of competence: 1. knowledge in the common meaning (declarative knowledge – *I know what*), 2. capabilities (procedural knowledge – *I know how and I am capable of*), 3. attitudes (*I want and I am ready to use my knowledge*)<sup>11</sup>.

FIGURE 1 PRESENTS THE COMPONENTS OF COMPETENCES.

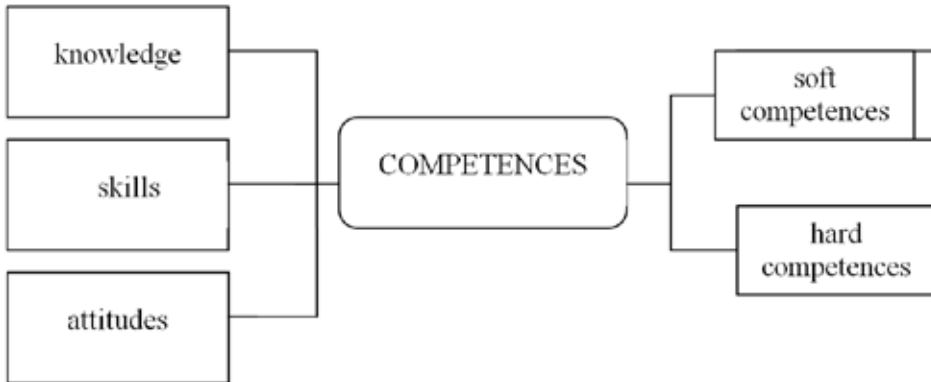


Fig. 1: Components of competence

Source: own case study

Knowledge (general, theoretical and specialist) concerns the awareness of issues acquired in the process of education (schools, university studies), and within self-education, that are confirmed in the form of certificates and diplomas. Knowledge approached in this way is associated with the notion of qualifications.

Skills (technical, technological and professional) represent the knowledge of particular issues and fluency in completing tasks associated with them. They concern what the worker can really do and are often identified with experiences or capabilities to act.

Personality features are dispositions to behave in an adequate way. They are qualities that determine the choice of goals and programs of activities and the ways people respond to the world (reasons, attitudes, needs and convictions, etc.)<sup>12</sup>.

<sup>11</sup> M. Sidor-Rządkowska, *Zarządzanie kompetencjami – teoria i praktyka. cz.1*, „Biuletyn POU- Zarządzanie zmianami”, 2010, no 5.

<sup>12</sup> *Encyklopedia*, PWN, Warszawa 2003.

Competences are also composed of soft competences and hard competences. The first refer to personal skills, personality features, what we are like, how we perceive the surroundings and how we act. The others, hard competences, are our particular capabilities that we can call technical, i.e. knowledge of languages, ability to operate a particular device and knowledge about management processes.

#### **KEY COMPETENCES IN RESCUE SERVICES**

Key competences of workers are of the key importance for emergency services. They are perceived as a group of these hard skills and worker's qualities that enable them to perform the work of a rescue worker effectively. However, competences are not permanent qualities but they are subject to changes in the course of learning, occupational and life experiences. The result of this changeability is the fact that the key competences for a very similar position in various emergency services may seem slightly different, particularly if we take into consideration soft competences (practical skills and personality features). This leads to the conclusion that there is no single specific group of skills for a particular profession. They most often emerge on the basis of empirical studies conducted in actually functioning organisations. They are created by experts from the world of science and practice, and they can also occur as models derived from particular enterprises.

Taking into consideration individual components of competences, fig. 2 shows a general model of competences with reference to rescue work. A detailed collection of competences that refer to actually or potentially possessed competences is presented in a simplified way<sup>13</sup>.

#### **STUDY OF THE IMPORTANCE/SIGNIFICANCE OF COMPETENCES IN EMERGENCY WORK**

Pilot studies that aimed at obtaining opinions of young generation about perceiving rescue services and competences associated with them were conducted in Katedra Logistyki Społecznej Uniwersytetu Ekonomicznego w Katowicach [*Department of Social Logistic of the University of Economics in Katowice*]. The study included a group of 152 students of full-time and part-time studies, not associated with broadly approached emergency

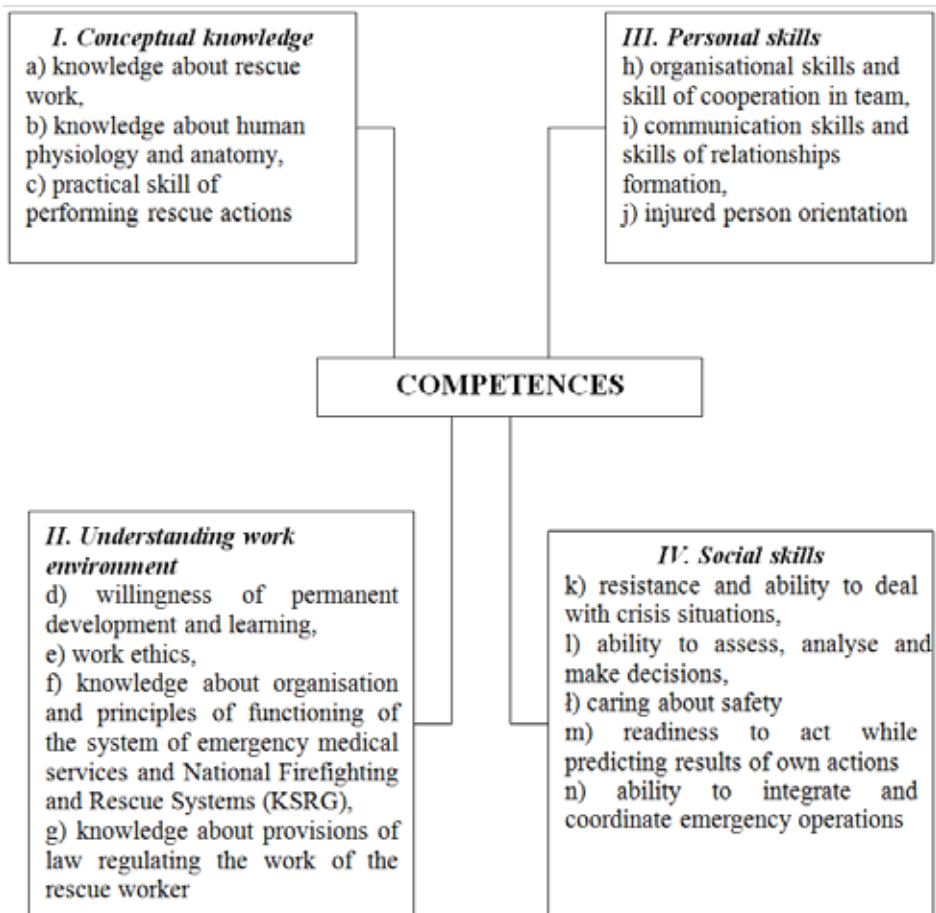
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<sup>13</sup> actual competences are competences really possessed by particular people, potential competences are these that a particular person can acquire in the future.

services. The study applied Likert scale where 1 represents no importance and 5 represents crucial importance.

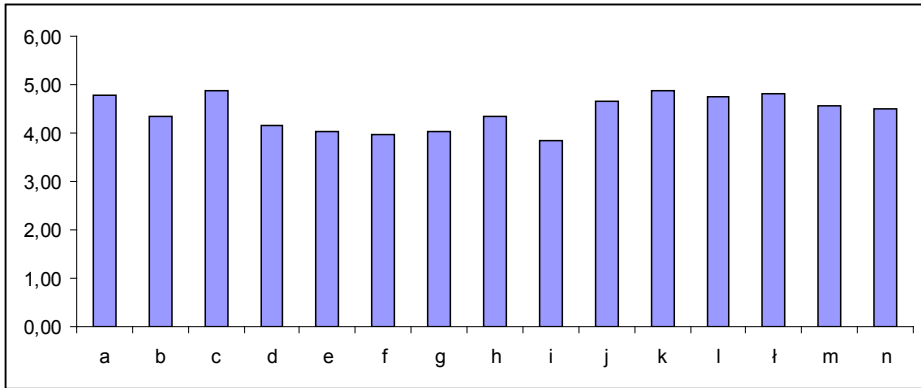
There are no doubts (even without the research) that competences are of great significance in performance of all types of emergency services. The respondents emphasise the importance of studied competences (graph 1) which definitely confirms our statement.

FIG.2: SIMPLIFIED MODEL OF COMPETENCES IN EMERGENCY SERVICES



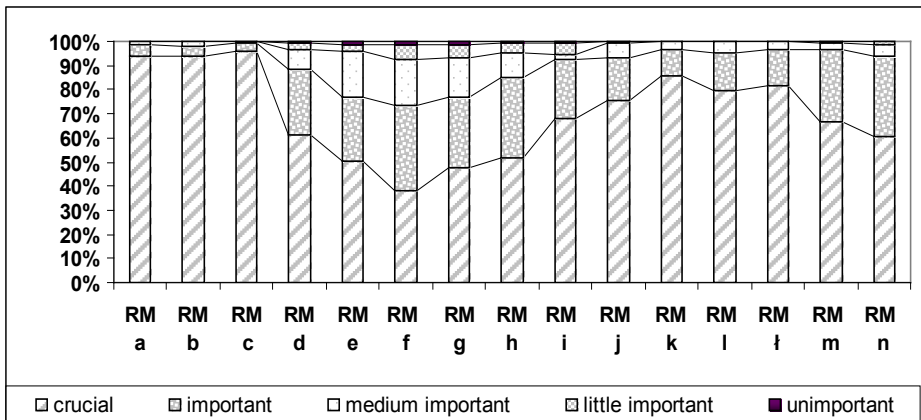
Source: own case study on the basis M. Kapler, *Zarwóid; ratownik medyczny*, „Na ratunek” 2012, no. 4.

GRAPH 1. IMPORTANCE OF BASIC COMPETENCES IN EMERGENCY SERVICES<sup>14</sup>



Source: own case study

GRAPH 2: STRUCTURE OF IMPORTANCE OF COMPETENCES IN MEDICAL RESCUE SERVICES



Source: own case study

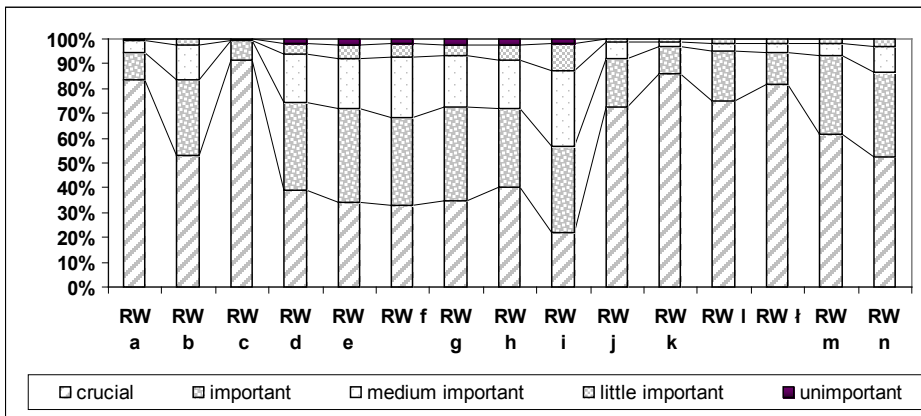
<sup>14</sup> For further studies symbols of competences (a-n) from figure 2 were adopted.



While conducting a detailed analysis, we look for the answer to the question if in all types of emergency services (medical rescue [RM], water rescue [RW], mountain rescue [RG], firefighting [SP]) the assessment of importance of competences is identical.

In medical rescue services all competences are defined as significant and crucial (75–99% respondents). In respondents' view, competences d-i (d – readiness to constant development and learning, i – communication skills and skills of relationships formation) are little important or in a small rate even unimportant (1% respondents).

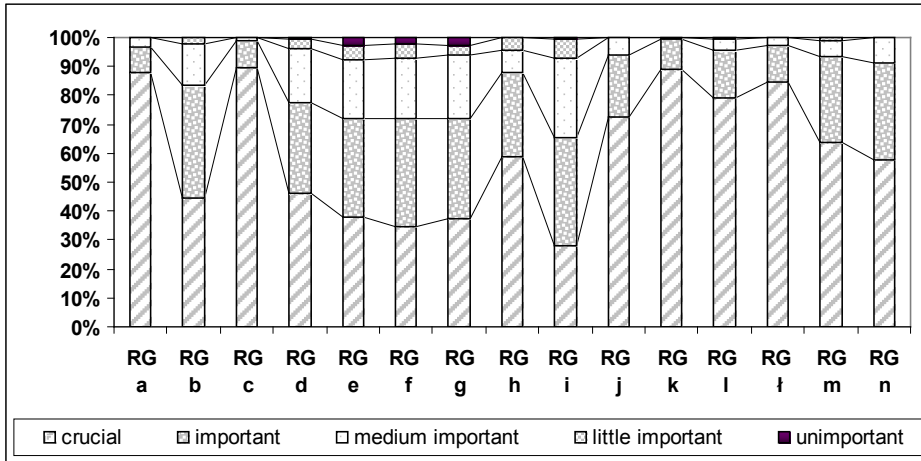
GRAPH 3: STRUCTURE OF IMPORTANCE OF COMPETENCES IN WATER RESCUE SERVICES



Source: own case study

In the assessment of young generation, the importance of competences in water rescue services is more diversified. According to 70% respondents, d-h competences are important or crucial and 20% claim they are medium important. There are opinions claiming little importance of competences (competences b and d-n).

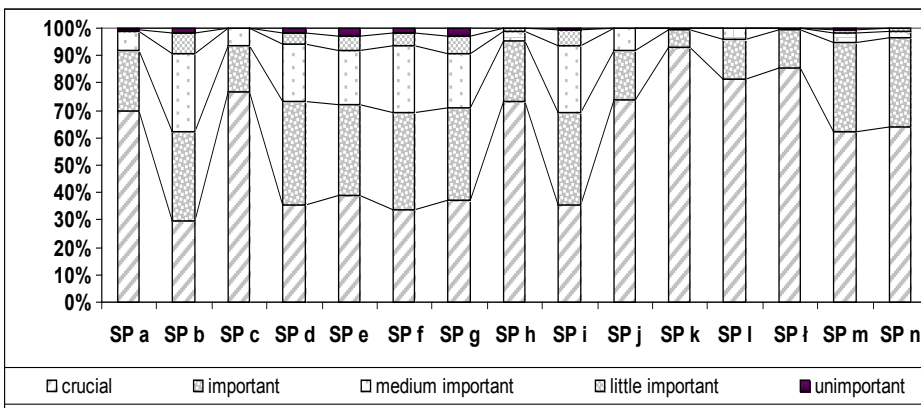
GRAPH 4: STRUCTURE OF IMPORTANCE OF COMPETENCES IN MOUNTAIN RESCUE SERVICES



Source: own case study

The assessment of importance of competences in mountain rescue services is similar to the assessment of competences in water rescue services. Probably specific character of this type of rescue services and its seasonal nature can be the reason for such an assessment.

GRAPH 5: STRUCTURE OF IMPORTANCE OF COMPETENCES IN FIREFIGHTING SERVICES

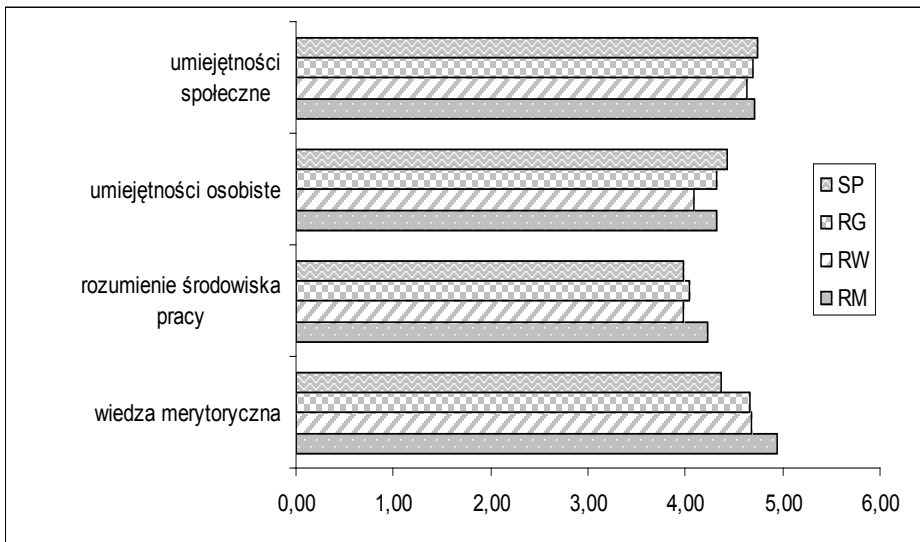


Source: own case study

In majority, the assessment of importance of competences in firefighting services is similar to previous results. In the case of competence b (knowledge about human physiology and anatomy), a decline in the assessment of importance is observed (60% of respondents perceive this competence as important and crucial in comparison with 80% in the case of water and mountain rescue services).

Referring to figure 2 the question can be asked of what group of competences has a crucial importance. The results are presented in graph 6.

**GRAPH 6: IMPORTANCE OF BASIC GROUPS OF COMPETENCES IN „RESCUE WORKER” PROFESSION**



Source: own case study

In all studied types of rescue services, social skills associated with the necessity to cope with stress in crisis situations and the ability to integrate and coordinate actions, are considered the most important competences. Because of the major goal of actions of medical rescue activities (protection of human life) competences in the sphere of substantive knowledge i.e. knowledge about medical rescue work, human physiology and anatomy, and the skills of rescue activities are crucial competences. In other types of rescue services, competences in the sphere of substantive knowledge are less important (significantly). Personal skills associated with capabilities

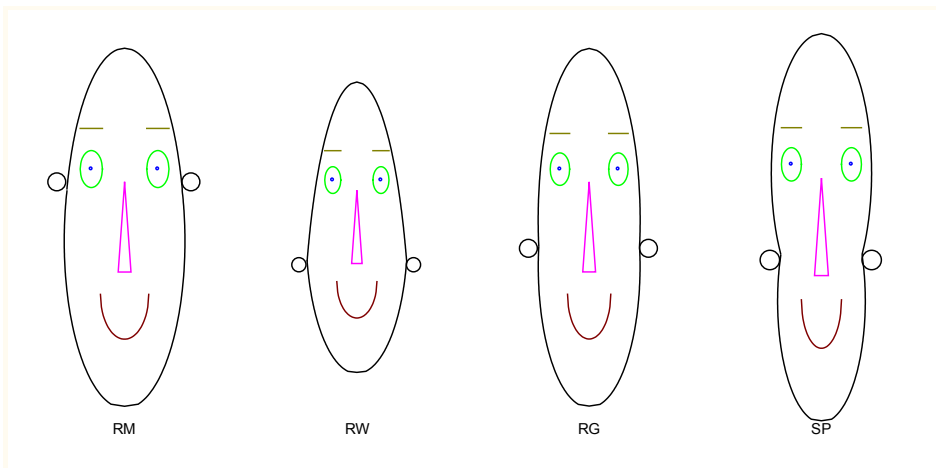
of teamwork (rescue teams) and oriented at the injured person, are located on the third level of importance. The fourth level of importance includes competences in the sphere of understanding the work environment, associated with work ethics, readiness to constant development and improvement of qualifications, or knowledge about provisions of law.

## CONCLUSIONS

There are no doubts that while selecting workers for rescue services, it is a necessary condition for the candidates to have specific competences. So what is the opinion of young people who do not see their career in rescue professions on the subject of the type of rescue services in which the aforementioned groups of competences have crucial importance. While answering the question, a picture diagram (graph 7) was applied, where each face represents the type of rescue services (RM, RW, RG, SP).

- face/wide =substantive knowledge – ears/level = understanding the work environment
- face/height =personal skills – upper half of the face = social skills

GRAPH 7: PICTURE DIAGRAM OF THE IMPORTANCE OF COMPETENCES



Source: own case study

Face width describes substantive knowledge, the level of ears refers to understanding of work environment, face height defines personal skills, and upper height of face represents social skills. It results from graph 7 that

the most of crucial and essential competences are attributed to medical rescue services. In medical rescue services substantive knowledge (competences a-c) and understanding of work environment (competences d-f) have critical importance. The most important competences in the sphere of personal skills (competences h-j), and social skills (k-n) are perceived as most important in firefighting services, and as least important in water rescue.

Nevertheless in all types of rescue services, it is observed that it is necessary to have competences that are essential in performance of this rewarding but really difficult job (saving human life), that is stressful and highly risky.

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