

Original Paper

A Set of Criteria for Assessing the Competencies of Managerial Staff in Industrial Zone Enterprises in Vietnam in the Context of Digital Transformation

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Received: March 12, 2025

Accepted: March 31, 2025

Online Published: April 15, 2025

doi:10.22158/rem.v10n2p23

URL: <http://dx.doi.org/10.22158/rem.v10n2p23>

Abstract

Managerial staff play a vital role in the success and sustainable development of enterprises operating within industrial zones in Vietnam. In the context of rapid digital transformation driven by the Fourth Industrial Revolution, enhancing the capacity and effectiveness of this workforce has become a strategic priority. This paper proposes a comprehensive set of criteria for assessing the competencies of managerial staff in industrial zone enterprises. These criteria are divided into two main groups: (1) criteria for evaluating individual competencies - including knowledge, skills, and personal qualities/attitudes; and (2) criteria for assessing collective work performance, including departmental effectiveness and overall business outcomes. The proposed framework is built upon both theoretical foundations and empirical insights from previous research, serving as a useful tool for organizations, policymakers, and HR professionals in developing, managing, and improving the capacity of their managerial teams to meet the evolving demands of the digital era.

Keywords

Competency assessment, Managerial capacity, Industrial zone enterprises, Performance evaluation, Digital transformation, Vietnam

1. Introduction

In recent years, the rapid advancement of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (Industry 4.0) has significantly accelerated the digital transformation process across many countries worldwide. In Vietnam, digital transformation has also become an inevitable trend, implemented across nearly all sectors of economic, political, cultural, and social life. The Prime Minister has approved the National Digital Transformation

Program toward 2025, with an orientation to 2030. This program sets forth ambitious goals, including the development of a digital government, a digital economy to enhance national competitiveness, and a digital society to narrow the digital divide.

According to the Ministry of Planning and Investment, as of March 2025, Vietnam had 620 active industrial zones (IZs). Alongside the attraction of substantial domestic and foreign investment and the creation of millions of jobs, industrial zones continue to play a vital role in the country's economic development. They act as key drivers in the restructuring of the economy and contribute significantly to Vietnam's industrialization and modernization efforts.

One of the essential contributors to the success of these industrial zones is the team of managerial staff within enterprises operating in these zones. To sustain and enhance the achievements gained thus far, particularly in the context of digital transformation, there is a pressing need to continuously improve the capacity and competencies of this managerial workforce.

Within the scope of this paper, the author focuses on clarifying the criteria for assessing the competencies of managers in industrial zone enterprises. These criteria serve as the foundation for future initiatives aimed at developing and strengthening this workforce to meet the demands of the digital era.

2. Theoretical Framework on Managerial Competencies in Enterprises

2.1 Management

According to Koontz and Weihrich (1990), management is the process of designing and maintaining an environment within an organization where individuals working in groups can perform efficiently to achieve both group and organizational goals. In this sense, management is viewed as the art of achieving high performance by creating a suitable environment for formal groups within the organization.

Supporting this perspective, Follett (2013) defined management as the art of accomplishing goals through other people. Similarly, Ramasamy (2014) described management as the art of getting things done through a group of people by effectively utilizing available resources.

In general terms, management can be understood as a process in which the manager – the subject of management – performs fundamental managerial functions (including planning, organizing, leading, and controlling) to influence the managed objects in order to exploit and utilize available resources effectively to achieve predetermined objectives.

2.2 Managerial Staff in Enterprises

According to Lê Quân (2009), the managerial staff of an enterprise includes all individuals who perform management functions and are part of the enterprise's management structure.

Trần Anh Tài (2013) further elaborates that the managerial team consists of individuals who have the authority to direct and supervise others, while also bearing responsibility for the performance of those under their supervision (i.e., employees or direct subordinates).

In other words, the managerial staff in enterprises are those who carry out the core managerial functions in business operations, aiming to effectively achieve both organizational goals and the objectives of

relevant individuals, units, or departments. They play a critical role in the functioning of enterprises and are a decisive factor in determining the success or failure of an organization - especially in today's context of fierce global competition and rapid technological advancement.

2.3 Competencies of Managerial Staff in Enterprises

According to Bass (1990), the competencies of managerial staff in enterprises can be understood as the combination of knowledge, skills, and attitudes possessed by managers in the process of managing themselves, their subordinates, and the enterprise as a whole, with the aim of achieving specific business objectives in each given period.

Campbell and Dardis (2004) defined managerial competencies as the integration of knowledge, personal attributes, and actions that managers must possess in order to perform effectively in their managerial roles within an organization.

In summary, the competencies of managerial staff refer to the comprehensive set of knowledge, skills, qualities, and attitudes that are demonstrated or utilized by managers in the performance of their assigned tasks, with the goal of achieving optimal results aligned with the enterprise's objectives.

3. Proposed Criteria for Assessing the Competencies of Managerial Staff in Industrial Zone Enterprises

Building upon and further developing the findings of previous research, the author proposes a set of criteria for assessing the competencies of managerial staff in enterprises located within industrial zones. This proposed framework consists of two main groups of criteria:

- (1) A set of criteria for evaluating the individual competencies of managers in industrial zone enterprises;
- (2) A set of criteria for evaluating the collective work performance outcomes of managerial teams in these enterprises.

Table 1. Proposed Competency Assessment Criteria for Managerial Staff in Industrial Zone Enterprises

No	Criterion Group	Assessment Criteria	References
I. Individual Competency Criteria of Managerial Staff in Industrial Zone Enterprises			
1.	<i>Criteria for Assessing Core Components of Managerial Competency</i>		
1.1	Knowledge	- Specialized knowledge related to job responsibilities	(Campbell & Dardis, 2004; Tran Thi Van Hoa, 2009; Le Quan &
		- Knowledge of the enterprise, business environment, and industry	Nguyen Quoc Khanh, 2012; Dang Ngoc Su, 2012; Do Anh
		- Knowledge of business administration	Duc, 2015; Author's proposal)

No	Criterion Group	Assessment Criteria	References
1.2	Skills	- Cultural and social knowledge	
		- Legal knowledge	
		- Foreign language proficiency	
		- Technological literacy	
		- Knowledge of international integration	
		- Management and leadership skills	
		- Team-building skills	(Bass, 1990; Tran Thi Van Hoa,
		- Business administration skills	2009; Le Quan & Nguyen Quoc
		- Time management skills	Khanh, 2012; Do Vu Phuong Anh,
		- Communication skills	2017; Pham Thi Dieu Anh, 2020;
		- Conflict management and negotiation skills	Author's proposal)
		- Meeting facilitation skills	
		- Innovative and creative thinking	(Kouzes & Posner, 1993; Thun,
		- Sense of responsibility	2009; Tran Kieu Trang, 2012;
1.3	Qualities/Attitudes	- Professional ethics	Tran Thi Phuong Hien, 2014;
		- Visionary thinking	Luong Thu Ha, 2015; Le Thi
		- Confidence and decisiveness	Phuong Thao, 2016; Pham Thi
		- Flexibility and sensitivity	Dieu Anh, 2020; Author's
		- Eagerness to learn	proposal)
		- Patience	
		2. Criteria for Assessing Individual Work Performance	
	- Individual workload		
	- Quality of individual work		
	- Timeliness of individual task completion	Author's proposal	
	- Trust from superiors		
	- Respect and trust from subordinates		

No	Criterion Group	Assessment Criteria	References
		- Satisfaction of internal customers	
		- Career advancement	
II. Criteria for Assessing Collective Work Performance of Managerial Staff in Industrial Zone Enterprises			
1. Criteria for Assessing Unit/Department Performance			
		- Unit/department workload	
		- Quality of work completed by unit/department	Author's proposal
		- Timeliness of task completion	
		- Team cohesion within the unit	
		- Employee engagement within the unit	
2. Criteria for Assessing Business Performance			
		- Revenue/volume of products manufactured	Author's proposal
		- Revenue/volume of products sold	

Source: Compiled and proposed by the author

3.1 Criteria for Assessing Individual Competencies of Managerial Staff in Industrial Zone Enterprises

a) Criteria for Assessing Core Components of Individual Competency

(1) Knowledge-Related Competency Criteria

- **Job-specific professional knowledge**

Managerial staff in industrial zone enterprises occupy diverse roles and positions across various departments and areas of specialization. To perform their duties effectively, each manager must possess professional knowledge relevant to their specific job function. For example, HR Directors or Managers must have expertise in human resource management; Finance and Accounting Managers must be well-versed in financial and accounting principles; and Factory or Plant Managers must have in-depth knowledge of operations in their respective production sectors.

- **Knowledge of the enterprise, industry, and business environment**

In addition to job-specific expertise, managerial staff must also understand the enterprise's industry, operational environment, and sectoral characteristics. This foundational knowledge enables managers to carry out their responsibilities in a more scientific and effective manner. For instance, an HR manager at a company specializing in electronic components not only needs HR expertise but also a working

knowledge of the electronics manufacturing industry to manage human capital effectively within that context.

- **Knowledge of business administration**

Understanding the fundamentals of business management - including strategic management, human resource management, financial and accounting control, production and operations management, and technology management - is essential for anyone in a managerial role. Regardless of their level (executive, middle, or frontline), managers are always engaged in management functions to some extent. For example, HR, Finance, Sales, or Production managers not only handle their core professional tasks but also manage staff, oversee unit budgets, allocate compensation, and contribute to planning and strategy development.

- **Cultural and social awareness**

As enterprises in industrial zones operate in various sectors, managers must possess a certain level of cultural and social understanding to make appropriate decisions and advise senior leadership. This is particularly important in foreign-invested enterprises or those with culturally diverse workforces. In such settings, differences in cultural norms between managers and workers may exist. Thus, managerial staff must serve as cultural bridges, ensuring cohesive team functioning and effective communication.

- **Legal knowledge**

All enterprises, regardless of industry or market, must comply with relevant legal frameworks. As decision-makers who execute business operations and negotiate with stakeholders, managerial staff must have a solid grasp of applicable laws, including labor law, finance and accounting regulations, investment policies, production guidelines, and distribution-related legal requirements.

- **Foreign language proficiency**

Given the globalized nature of modern business, foreign language skills are increasingly seen as essential. Enterprises today frequently engage with international investors, suppliers, partners, and customers. They also participate in cross-border technology transfer. As such, managers must be equipped with foreign language competencies to communicate effectively and perform their tasks successfully in international contexts.

- **Technological literacy**

With technological advancements occurring at an unprecedented pace, managers must remain updated on relevant technologies. Their ability to understand and assess technological developments allows them to make timely and informed decisions regarding technology adoption, integration, and innovation within their enterprises.

- **Knowledge of international integration**

Global integration has become a defining trend for nations and businesses alike. For enterprises, international integration offers numerous opportunities - such as market expansion, access to skilled labor, and cost advantages - but also presents challenges like increased competition and quality demands. To succeed in this environment, managerial staff must continuously update their understanding of global

integration dynamics. This knowledge empowers them to leverage competitive strengths and mitigate organizational weaknesses in a globalized market.

(2) Skills-Based Competency Criteria for Managerial Staff in Industrial Zone Enterprises

- **Management and leadership skills**

Mastery of management and leadership skills is considered a fundamental requirement for managerial staff in industrial zone enterprises, as managing and leading people and processes is their core responsibility. In today's rapidly changing society - driven by the advances of the Fourth Industrial Revolution - managers are expected to possess a diverse set of leadership and management capabilities and to apply them flexibly in professional contexts. Rather than simply making traditional, one-dimensional decisions, modern managers act as decision-makers who synthesize multi-dimensional data, often with the support of advanced technology, information systems, and the Internet.

- **Team-building skills**

The process of task execution by managerial staff in industrial zone enterprises involves collaboration with individuals and departments across the organization. Therefore, to maximize the effectiveness of their teams, managers must possess the ability to build, lead, and develop working groups. This includes creating high-performing teams based on an understanding of their subordinates' abilities, personalities, habits, preferences, and working conditions - ensuring the scientific and effective allocation of tasks.

- **Business management skills**

Performing business management activities is a key function of managerial staff. Accordingly, in addition to having foundational knowledge, they must also be proficient in applying business management practices in real-world settings. These include, depending on the manager's position, skills in strategic management, financial and accounting management, human resource management, operations and production management, marketing, and supply chain management. For instance, HR managers should be skilled in workforce planning and financial budgeting, while factory directors need competence in production, human resource, and cost management.

- **Time management skills**

Time management is essential not only for a manager's personal efficiency but also for improving the productivity of their subordinates. Effective time allocation and oversight enhance both individual and departmental performance, thereby contributing significantly to the overall success of the enterprise.

- **Communication skills**

In executing managerial tasks, industrial zone managers must communicate and coordinate with a wide range of internal and external stakeholders. As such, strong communication skills are necessary for facilitating understanding, building relationships, and ensuring the smooth flow of information across the organization.

- **Conflict management and negotiation skills**

Conflicts in views, methods, or interests are inevitable during the execution of tasks. In their role as coordinators, managers must act as intermediaries who foster consensus and team cohesion to achieve

collective objectives. Therefore, the ability to manage conflict and negotiate effectively is essential for maintaining organizational harmony and driving unit performance.

- **Meeting facilitation skills**

Meetings are a regular and necessary function in business operations. Managers in industrial zone enterprises are often responsible for organizing and conducting meetings within their areas of authority. To ensure that meetings achieve their intended outcomes - whether routine or strategic - managers must be skilled in planning, leading, and documenting meeting processes.

(3) Criteria for Assessing Personal Qualities and Attitudes of Managerial Staff

- **Innovative and creative thinking**

This quality is demonstrated through a fresh, non-traditional approach to thinking and problem-solving. Managerial staff in industrial zone enterprises are expected to go beyond conventional methods and accumulated experience to generate new, valuable ideas and practices that benefit not only themselves but also their teams, departments, organizations, and even the broader community. Innovative managers are proactive in initiating and implementing changes, while simultaneously managing risks and encouraging subordinates to propose creative solutions aligned with the enterprise's overall goals.

- **Sense of responsibility**

A strong sense of responsibility is reflected in a manager's willingness to be accountable for their own actions as well as for the performance of their subordinates or units under their leadership. This includes accepting responsibility for mistakes or shortcomings and taking ownership of the outcomes of decisions made. More importantly, managers must be accountable not only to their organization but also to society and employees for the results of their unit's business activities.

- **Professional ethics**

Professional ethics encompass the values and moral standards that guide managerial behavior and attitudes, particularly in relation to stakeholders -superiors, colleagues, subordinates, and the wider community. These ethical qualities may include impartiality, empathy, honesty, integrity, and compassion, which are demonstrated through interactions and task execution. Managers with strong ethics help foster trust and credibility within and beyond their organizations.

- **Visionary thinking**

Possessing a long-term vision is a vital trait for any manager. It allows them to formulate realistic strategies, make well-grounded decisions, and design appropriate action plans. In today's dynamic business environment, visionary managers help ensure that both individual and organizational goals are met effectively, and that the enterprise remains competitive and adaptable amid constant change.

- **Confidence and decisiveness**

Managers must have confidence in their knowledge and capabilities to make timely, well-reasoned decisions. These qualities are essential for building trust among superiors and subordinates alike. Confidence and decisiveness are not innate but are cultivated over time through continuous learning, practical experience, and the acquisition of necessary knowledge and skills.

- **Flexibility and sensitivity**

In today's unpredictable and fast-changing business environment, flexibility and sensitivity are crucial managerial traits. These qualities allow managers to recognize emerging challenges or changes in real time and to make prompt, appropriate adjustments to their strategies and decisions. Flexibility is shaped by a deep pool of knowledge and practical experience, while sensitivity often stems from innate perceptiveness - together forming a vital skill set for modern leadership.

- **Willingness to learn**

A desire for continuous learning is an essential quality for any professional, including managerial staff. Lifelong learning enables managers to continually update their knowledge, improve their competencies, and adapt to evolving demands. A learning-oriented attitude contributes directly to effective decision-making and performance at both individual and organizational levels, ensuring long-term success and sustainability.

- **Patience**

Management is both a science and an art, and it often entails navigating complex and unpredictable challenges. Managers must coordinate and collaborate with individuals from diverse backgrounds, personalities, and work styles. These tasks can be overwhelming and emotionally taxing. Therefore, patience is a necessary quality that must be developed through experience and self-discipline. Rather than giving up in the face of difficulties, patient managers persist, troubleshoot problems step-by-step, and remain committed to achieving their goals.

b) Criteria for Assessing Individual Work Performance of Managerial Staff

The individual work performance of managerial staff in industrial zone enterprises is primarily reflected in the **quantity**, **quality**, and **timeliness** of task completion. These three criteria serve as tangible, measurable indicators of a manager's competency. For example, a department or unit head may be assessed based on how effectively they execute their assigned tasks - such as developing implementation plans, recruiting personnel, or overseeing the installation and operation of new production equipment - in terms of whether the tasks are completed in sufficient quantity, at the expected level of quality, and within the designated timeframe.

In addition to these quantitative metrics, qualitative methods can also be employed to evaluate individual performance. These may include in-depth interviews, surveys, and feedback assessments that measure the level of **trust** and **satisfaction** from superiors, subordinates, and internal clients regarding the manager's performance.

Career advancement is another relevant indicator of individual performance and managerial capability. In most organizations, promotions are typically granted to individuals who consistently demonstrate high performance, meet or exceed expectations, and possess the qualifications and competencies aligned with the enterprise's evolving demands. Therefore, upward mobility in one's career can be a strong reflection of both professional effectiveness and long-term potential.

3.2 Criteria for Assessing Collective Work Performance of Middle Management in Industrial Zone Enterprises

The collective work performance of middle management in industrial zone enterprises can be evaluated based on two dimensions:

- (i) the performance outcomes of the unit or department under their supervision, and
- (ii) the overall business performance of the enterprise.

a) Criteria for Assessing the Performance of Units/Departments

The performance of each unit or department within an industrial zone enterprise can be assessed through three core indicators: work volume, work quality, and work timeliness. These indicators reflect the overall effectiveness of the unit's operations, in which the role of the managerial staff - especially in assigning tasks and coordinating operations-is essential.

Naturally, the specific criteria for evaluating these three dimensions will vary depending on the function of each department. For instance, in direct production units, performance indicators are often closely linked to output, sales volume, and revenue. In contrast, indirect or support departments - such as human resources, finance, accounting, or planning - require more diverse performance indicators. Examples include:

- Human Resources Department: number of new hires, recruitment costs, employee turnover rate, ratio of payroll costs to total revenue.
- Finance and Accounting Department: cost of capital utilization, return on capital employed, or profitability ratios.

In addition to these quantitative indicators, it is important to consider qualitative aspects of unit performance. These may include:

- the level of cohesion and unity in executing departmental activities;
- the engagement and commitment of team members to their work and to the enterprise as a whole.

Such qualitative factors reflect the organizational climate within departments and contribute significantly to the long-term sustainability and performance of the enterprise.

b) Criteria for Assessing the Business Performance of Industrial Zone Enterprises

Each industrial zone enterprise sets its own business objectives, which may vary depending on the enterprise's specific context and the developmental stage it is in. Accordingly, the criteria used to assess business performance are not uniform across enterprises. For example, if an enterprise's primary goal is to expand its market share, business performance may be measured by the rate of market expansion or market share growth. Conversely, during periods of crisis - such as the recent COVID-19 pandemic - many industrial zone enterprises shifted their focus toward maintaining minimal operational continuity, emphasizing cost control and resource conservation over growth.

In general, the author proposes two key criteria that can be applied to assess the business performance of industrial zone enterprises:

- **Revenue and/or volume of goods/products manufactured**

This criterion reflects the enterprise's production capacity and its ability to convert inputs into market-ready outputs over a defined period.

- **Revenue and/or volume of goods/products sold**

This indicator captures the effectiveness of the enterprise's market penetration, customer outreach, and overall commercial performance.

These criteria serve as fundamental benchmarks that provide a measurable overview of enterprise efficiency, scalability, and market adaptability, regardless of the specific business goals in any given period.

4. Discussion, Limitations, and Future Research

This study proposes a comprehensive framework for assessing the competencies of managerial staff in industrial zone enterprises, with a focus on both individual attributes and collective performance outcomes. In the context of Vietnam's rapid digital transformation, such a competency framework is timely and critical. It emphasizes that managerial effectiveness is not solely based on technical knowledge, but also depends on leadership behavior, soft skills, and attitudes such as ethical conduct, creativity, flexibility, and the ability to navigate change.

The proposed framework integrates both quantitative and qualitative criteria, capturing a more holistic picture of managerial capacity. By including criteria such as trust from subordinates, satisfaction of internal stakeholders, and team cohesion, the framework moves beyond traditional performance metrics and acknowledges the social dynamics of management in practice. It also allows for contextual flexibility, recognizing that enterprises may prioritize different performance indicators based on their goals and stage of development - for example, expansion, consolidation, or crisis recovery.

From a practical standpoint, this model offers value for enterprises, human resource practitioners, policymakers, and educational institutions in identifying training needs, designing leadership development programs, and aligning management practices with strategic objectives.

However, several limitations should be noted. First, the study remains conceptual and lacks empirical testing. While grounded in literature and practical observation, the proposed framework has not been validated through field data. Future research should prioritize empirical validation, potentially through surveys, structured interviews, or case studies across multiple industrial zones and sectors.

Second, the framework may not fully account for contextual variations among enterprises in terms of size, ownership (e.g., foreign-invested vs. domestic), or industry focus. These factors may influence the relevance or weighting of specific competency criteria. Tailored studies are needed to adapt the model to diverse organizational environments.

Third, while this paper focuses on middle and senior management, competencies required for junior managers or those on leadership development tracks are not fully addressed. Further studies should expand the framework downward to support more comprehensive human capital planning.

Lastly, the assessment of soft skills and personal traits - though crucial - is often subjective and difficult to measure consistently. Future work should explore the development of practical tools and behavioral indicators to support more objective performance evaluation in these areas.

In summary, this study contributes an adaptable and relevant model for assessing managerial competencies in the era of digital transformation. To realize its full potential, the framework must be tested and refined through continued research that bridges theory with organizational realities.

5. Conclusion

In the context of ongoing digital transformation, enhancing the competencies of managerial staff in industrial zone enterprises has become both a necessity and a strategic imperative. Through a comprehensive literature review and synthesis of practical observations, this paper has proposed a structured set of criteria to assess the individual and collective performance of managerial personnel.

The proposed competency assessment framework includes not only technical knowledge and practical skills but also emphasizes the importance of personal attributes and leadership behaviors such as innovation, responsibility, ethics, and vision. Furthermore, the inclusion of both quantitative and qualitative performance indicators offers a multidimensional approach to evaluating managerial effectiveness.

These criteria serve as a valuable foundation for enterprises in measuring current competency levels, identifying training needs, and designing capacity-building programs. They also provide policymakers and educational institutions with a basis for curriculum development and leadership training aligned with the real-world demands of the industrial and digital economy. Ultimately, strengthening managerial capacity is a key driver for improving enterprise performance and ensuring long-term competitiveness in Vietnam's rapidly evolving industrial landscape.

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