

# Priority of Management Tools Utilization among Managers: International Comparison



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## INTRODUCTION

The contemporary business environment has become more and more demanding as well as problems in organizations are becoming more complex (Morgan & Wang, 2010; Camelo-Ordaz et al., 2012; Choudhary et al., 2013). These circumstances require from organizations' managers a comprehensive range of knowledge, skills and expertise to successfully manage and lead an organization. Besides knowledge, skills and expertise, managers in contemporary business environment also intensively use many management ideas that enable them to better engage with severe economic conditions and processes in the organization and solve everyday problems in organizations faster and efficiently (Ferratt et al., 2005; Armstrong, 2006; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013).

Organizations defined several appearance forms of ideas ranging from concept, methodologies, methods, techniques, instruments to tools, for their working (Kannan & Tan, 2005; Armstrong, 2006; Potocan et al., 2012; Mullins, 2013). In that framework, management tools present the most detailed appearance forms of ideas which can assure additional knowledge and operational support for managers' working (Rigby, 2001; Rigby & Bilodeau, 2009; Rigby, 2011; Dabic et al., 2013). We followed previous studies with development of methodological and content consideration of management tools' frequency, patterns and drivers.

Despite the relevance of the management tools phenomenon, there are limited research evidences about methodological and content consideration of management tools' frequency, patterns and drivers (Rigby, 2001; Rigby & Bilodeau, 2009; Rigby, 2011; Dabic et al., 2013). The management literature mainly reported about consideration of single and commonly emphasized management tools, like strategic planning, customer relationship management, mission statements, knowledge management, six sigma, etc. (Daft, 2000; Thun, 2010; Kumar et al., 2011; Mullins, 2013).

Less investigated is preference concerning the tool utilization among organizations' managers, when researchers consider the majority of the commonly used management tools (Rigby, 2001; Armstrong, 2006; Dabic et al., 2013; Jarzabkowski et al., 2013). Besides that, the existing literature does not offer clear evidence about priority of different management tools utilization by managers at different positions levels in the organization – i.e. by the first line, middle and top managers, and by managers with different demographic and personal characteristics.

In this paper, we aim to close the gap in the management literature regarding the empirical evidences about priority of different management tools utilization among managers at different positions levels in Slovenian organizations. We will outline the hierarchy of 25 most used management tools among

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employees in selected worldwide area – namely North America, Latin America, Asia, Europe (West and East) and in Slovenia, differences in utilization of the 25 most used management tools and structure of utilization of the top 5 used tools among managers at a considered position in Slovenian organizations. At the end the paper provides several practical implications, recommendations for practice and possible future research directions.

## **BACKGROUND**

In the global competitive environment, organizations can only survive in the long term by permanently improving their business, especially with innovations of their management ideas (Jennings, 2005; Hartley, 2007; Martin, 2009; Mullins, 2013). Management idea is a generic term and subject to many interpretations (Chandler, 1996; Wren, 2004; Mullins, 2006). In the modern theory and practice of management, the number and diversity of management ideas grow constantly. More about the general methodological and contents framework of management ideas see in Chandler (1996); Crainer (2004); Mullins (2006), etc.

For each idea authors also define its adequate (and specific) methodology (as an entity made of methods, rules and discipline's postulates – e.g., management concepts), methods (as ordered types of procedure, especially regular and systemic ways of accomplishing the given goal), techniques (as the manner in which technical details are treated), and necessary tools for implementation (Cooper & Argyris, 1998; Crainer, 2004; Armstrong, 2006; Mullins, 2006; Potocan et al., 2012).

In management science authors use the term management tool, when they wish to expose the viewpoint of implementing and using of an idea in managers' work. In our research, we determine the term management tools for an entity of management solutions that enables the necessary support for managers' and other organizational stakeholders' work (Crainer, 2004; Armstrong, 2006; Hitt et al., 2008; Nedelko et al., 2015).

Great numbers of different management tools open dilemmas about needs for, sense-making of, and users' benefits of, different management tools, and especially the question about the possibility of their comparison from various viewpoints (Chandler, 1996; Wren, 2004; Hitt et al., 2008; Nedelko et al., 2015).

In that framework several authors reported about the basic obstacles against a holistic comparison of the management tools (Cooper & Argyris, 1998; Rigby, 2001; Mullins, 2013). The most often mentioned obstacles tackle differences in the considered starting-points and bases for the development of tools – i.e., level of knowledge, development of the environment, and the level of communication and information technology. Some authors reported about differences in contextual and methodological characteristics between single tools – i.e. their intention, aim of orientation, and considered factors, etc. Additionally, the authors also emphasize differences in the demands and conditions for the possible use of the tools – i.e. the results of the use of the same tools in various conditions that can support the business.

At the same time, managers of organizations face a continual dilemma, whether or not their decision about their choice and use of the management tools for business is based on suitable objectives, professional starting-points and bases (Wren, 2004; Hitt et al., 2008; Nedelko et al., 2015).

The new cognitions from the contingent and post-modernistic discussion over the past 20 years state that more approaches have been developed, which try to research the management tools on the basis of their use (Crainer, 2004; Armstrong, 2006; Hartley, 2007; Dabic et al., 2013; Nedelko et al., 2015). The use of this approach for the discussion enables better cognitions of the state of the tools in business and provides a possible starting point for a detailed study of the reasons for their use. Thus, one can improve the starting points for the decision-making of the managers about the management tools on the basis of

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