

Essential exporting competences for manufacturing Firms in Michoacan, Mexico

Competencias esenciales para la exportación: Sector manufacturero del Estado de Michoacán, México

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Abstract

Human capital constitutes itself in the essential source of a country's wealth, which has a positive impact on a region competitiveness. Given the need to increase Michoacan's competitiveness to improve its exporting performance this paper analyzes which business competencies are most used by exporting firms executives. Our findings suggest that such executives have an advanced level of exporting competence, determined by three essential competencies in the following order: leadership, negotiation and communicative competence.

Resumen

La fuente esencial de la riqueza de un país es el capital humano, el cual, al ser más competente, incide positivamente en la competitividad de las regiones. Dada la necesidad de incrementar la competitividad de Michoacán para alcanzar un mejor desempeño en su actividad exportadora, se analizaron las competencias de negocios que emplea el capital humano de las empresas manufactureras en dicho Estado mexicano. Los hallazgos obtenidos en esta investigación permiten afirmar que los directivos de las empresas manufactureras exportadoras alcanzan un nivel de competencia exportadora avanzado, el cual está determinado por tres competencias esenciales: competencia en liderazgo, en negociación y en comunicación.

Competencies, Business Competencies, Exporting Competence

Competencias, Competencias de Negocios, Competencia Exportadora

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Introduction

The process of globalization in which current economies participate has meant both challenges and competitive opportunities for industries in all countries. The management strategy focused on controlling and raising the quality of production has been left behind, gaining relevance the competencies with which human resources can contribute to the competitiveness of a firm. In this context, Mexico has considered the need to review and debate the most appropriate mechanisms for the formation of human capital. However, for companies to respond in the short term and face the pressure to obtain positive results, they must make changes in the way of adapting and directing the organization to achieve the expansion of their economic activity.

In this sense, although Mexico does not qualify as a developed or highly competitive nation, in the country you can find people and companies that are competitive worldwide, being many examples of national companies that export products, knowledge and best practices. What these world-class companies have in common is that they have accumulated human capital at levels comparable to those seen in developed countries. Thanks to this, they manage to transcend the obstacles imposed by material and institutional backwardness.

From this perspective, human capital is not just one of the factors that contribute to the growth of countries: it is the essential source of wealth. This paper presents the construct of export competition, developed from the review of the state of the art presented in the theoretical framework, which allows to identify which business competences put into practice the human capital of the manufacturing companies in the State of Michoacán to achieve a better performance in its export activity.

The competitiveness of Mexico and the State of Michoacán

In terms of international trade, Mexico has focused on the diversification of markets for its products and services, through the signing of multiple trade agreements with other economies in the Americas, Asia and Europe. Thanks to this, the country is positioned as a gateway to a market that represents more than 60% of world GDP, with more than one billion potential consumers. (ProMéxico, 2018a).

According to the Ministry of Economy (ProMéxico, 2018a), Mexico is one of the countries most open to international trade, having twelve Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) that grant preferential access to the markets of 46 countries, in addition to nine Limited Scope Agreements within the framework of the Latin American Integration Association (ALADI), thirty-two Reciprocal Promotion and Protection of Investments Agreements with 33 countries, and be a member of the Trans-Pacific Integral and Progressive Association Treaty (CPTTP).

According to the Global Competitiveness Report 2017-2018 of the World Economic Forum, Mexico stands for the second consecutive year in position 51 of 137 economies evaluated. In Latin America, it ranks fourth in competitiveness, only behind the economies of Chile, Costa Rica and Panama (World Economic Forum, 2017).

This advance in the international competitiveness indexes is the result of the fact that, in recent years, Mexico has improved its business environment, mainly by maintaining political and macroeconomic stability, in addition to improving the efficiency of financial markets, business sophistication and the drive for innovation (ProMéxico, 2018b).

The results show that the structural reforms of the last sexennium, undertaken with the support of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), have borne fruit, however the challenges persist.

At the national level, the Mexican Institute for Competitiveness (IMCO) publishes the State Competitiveness Index (ICE) every two years. In the ICE 2016 edition, the IMCO reports that the State of Michoacán fell to 29th place, from the 27th position it occupied in 2014. Michoacán reached 39.6 points of the 100 possible, below the national average of 49.5.

Theoretical bases

Emergence and evolution of the concept of competence

The notion of competition broke into the development of contemporary culture as a strong attempt to draw bridges between knowledge and its application, between theory and practice, between the underlying capacities and the exercise (Niño, 2012).

Since the last third of the twentieth century there have been numerous authors and researchers who have addressed the study of skills, especially, but not exclusively, from the field of business, for the selection and organization of human resources, and from disciplines such as industrial, labor and organizational psychology, and work sociology. More recently, the concept has had a greater diffusion from the educational and social spheres (Martínez & Carmona, 2009).

Although the study of competences shows a conceptual and disciplinary diversity, difficult to define, with very varied arguments for and against, this has not prevented the rapid extension of this approach at the international level.

The term and the idea of competence are due to the linguist Noam Chomsky, who in 1965 was the first to establish that there was a clear difference between linguistic competence and the performance of an individual, so in the 1970s, linguists, in a clear reaction to Chomsky, they began to focus their attention on communicative competence, a much broader and more dynamic concept than linguistic competence (Morel, 2007, citado por Jonnaert et al., 2007).

In the field of occupational psychology, what McClelland (1973) called "competence", has evolved to the "human resource approach by competencies", better known as "competency approach", which has been replacing, since the beginning of the eighties of the last century, to the traditional "personnel orientation" for a "human resource-based orientation".

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Although initially ergonomics and occupational psychology used the concept of competence to analyze the performance of operators in their work stations, workers are now conceived as a competitive resource of the company that must be improved.

From this new approach, we move from confrontation to collaborative relationships, extending a link between the social and the economic, considering employees as the human capital of the company (Martínez & Carmona, 2009) and that may even be sources of competitive advantage for the same (Daniels, Radebaugh & Sullivan, 2010). According to this idea, Agustín Ibarra (2000) refers that in the current "transformation of production processes", to increase productivity does not require only equipment and cutting edge technology, but also "new forms of management, organization, training and development of workers, which promote the rational and efficient use of resources and stimulate the creative and intellectual potential of all members of the organization" (Ibarra, 2000, p.97). In agreement with it, Tejada and Navío (2005) add that "the development of the added value of competences allows the subject to be competent beyond the basic requirements of a job" (Tejada y Navío, 2005, p. 2).

In 2005, the OECD presented the results of the Project Definition and Selection of Key Competences (DeSeCo), in order to provide a useful conceptual framework as a source of information for the identification of key competences and the strengthening of international surveys that measure the level of competence of young people and adults. The OECD concludes that "a competence is more than knowledge and skills. Involves the ability to face complex demands, relying on and mobilizing psychosocial resources (including skills and attitudes) in a particular context" (OECD, 2005, p. 4).

In parallel work, the Council of Europe published in 2001 the Common European Framework of Reference for Languages (CEFR), making clear and aligning the relationship between educational and labor policies that govern the Council and implementing a policy of competences in languages and in labor issue to favor mobility between countries (Council of Europe, 2002).

In Mexico, the Center for Research and Development, A.C. (CIDAC) has conceptualized competences more broadly, based on the definition of the OECD. According to CIDAC, competencies are defined as those skills and abilities acquired through a deliberate and systematic effort to carry out complex activities.

It is the ability that is achieved by combining knowledge, skills, attitudes and motivations and by applying them in a specific context: in education, work or personal development. A competence is not limited to cognitive elements (use of theories, concepts or implicit knowledge), but it covers both technical skills and interpersonal attributes. (CIDAC, 2014).

It is possible to affirm then that the concept of competence focuses on what is expected that an individual can achieve beyond the learning process; expresses the ability to transfer and apply skills and knowledge to new situations and environments, considering all aspects of performance and not just specific task skills. Thus, each individual, in equal capacities, faces the same task in a different way; This depends on the strategies used, how he uses his skills in practice to carry out the task or solve the problem and the disposition or attitude with which it is performed. This last element is the fundamental contribution of the competency-based approach. As expected, the concept has been evolving to facilitate its understanding, but it is always possible to identify the central concept identified by Niño (2012), which is to establish the relationship between knowledge and its application or performance.

Labor competences

Job skills, typically developed at the end of school age or at the beginning of productive life, have been the subject of their own study and categorization. Among the factors that contribute to a good job performance, Tejada and Navío (2005) highlight the importance of individual, relational, social and participatory skills.

Martínez and Carmona (2009) carried out a very complete analysis of different authors and of the different classifications of labor competencies proposed and they make two major classifications based on their bibliographical review: generic (those that can be present in all the works of an organization and that can be transferred more easily from one profession to another) and specific (specific to a specific profession or performance levels within an organization, very particular, hence, it is not possible to transfer from one profession to another).

On the other hand, Mora, García-Aracil and Vila (2006), review the competences of human capital, understood as those talents, skills, abilities, attitudes and values of graduates that contribute to raising productivity. These are perceived as the essential element in the path towards sustainable economic growth and the development of communities in an increasingly globalized economic environment, so that agents (students, educators, graduates, businessmen and decision-makers) are increasingly aware of its relevance.

In the national context and in an effort to identify the most needed competences among university students or among professionals in general, CIDAC (2014) conducted the National Survey of Professional Competencies. Although the group of researchers responsible for this project recognizes all the previous work that international organizations have done on "competences for the 21st century", they established their own categorization of competences considering that many of those identified in previous exercises are too vague or general. That is, many of these competences can and should be broken down into more specific competences (CIDAC, 2014).

Central competences of companies

From the point of view of human resources management (HRM), the competencies belong to the area of human talent management, which in turn constitutes the engine of socioeconomic development. The ARH refers to the activities that a company performs to staff its organization, while the management of human talent is part of the search for sustainable and sustainable socio-economic development with the ecological environment, a notion included in the definition of current competitiveness.

Thus, the quality of life and well-being of the individual, their environment and their country are sought in collaborative work, based on the realization of each person. According to Daniels et al. (2010), research confirms that superior human resources result in high productivity, competitive advantage and value creation. The same author reports that superior HR practices correlate positively with the company's financial performance and are one of the main indicators of increasing shareholder value (Watson Wyatt Worldwide, 2007, cited by Daniels et al., 2010).

In a way analogous to how people develop their skills, companies also develop core competencies, defined as the exclusive skills or knowledge that distinguish a company from its competitors.

Technically, a central competence is a perspective, skill, capacity or special technology that creates unique value for the company by generating a recognized flow that circulates through all the company's value activities, therefore, core competencies are essential for competitiveness and the profitability of the company (Daniels et al., 2010).

A core competence can arise from several areas, such as: product development, employee productivity, manufacturing skills, marketing imagination or executive leadership. You can also consider internal strengths of a company to effectively implement the strategies that allow them to develop capabilities and competitive advantages.

In recent years, many successful companies have developed core competencies based on one of the three basic strategies: operational excellence, product leadership and customer intimacy (Ferrell & Hartline, 2006). Daniels et al. (2010) explain that when companies have effective value chains (frameworks for dividing activities that create value in different processes) they can focus on developing their core competencies.

The export competition

Reiljan and Tamm (2006) show how four essential aspects for the competitiveness of a company (area, scope, location and management) are integrated in a single factor that potentiates the international competitiveness of the company and conclude that, in turn, global competitiveness it depends on: 1) the possibilities and means accessible to the company; 2) a favorable business environment; 3) a positive management of the economic concept of the company itself; and 4) the international competitiveness of the company.

Analogously, Knight and Kim (2009) developed an intangible construct called "international business competition" (*International Business Competence, IBC*), concordando con Reiljan y Tamm (2006).

In the opinion of these authors, the competence to conduct international business represents an intangible resource of the company that generates an international performance superior to the interior of the companies. In this way, the positional advantage to compete in international markets depends on the following factors: 1) international orientation; 2) orientation to international markets; 3) international marketing skills; 4) international innovation; and 5) business skills within the firm, which give originality to the company, value and difficulty to be imitated.

This paper recognizes the existence of various contextual factors that affect the process for an export company to seek the expansion of its exports; However, the objective of the research carried out was focused on the study of the factors within the company itself, specifically the competences of the human resource. For the construction of the export competition construct, the leadership, communication and negotiation business competencies were selected, which have a direct impact on the company's work environment, the management of its relationships, its organizational processes and the productivity of the same company. (Figure 1).

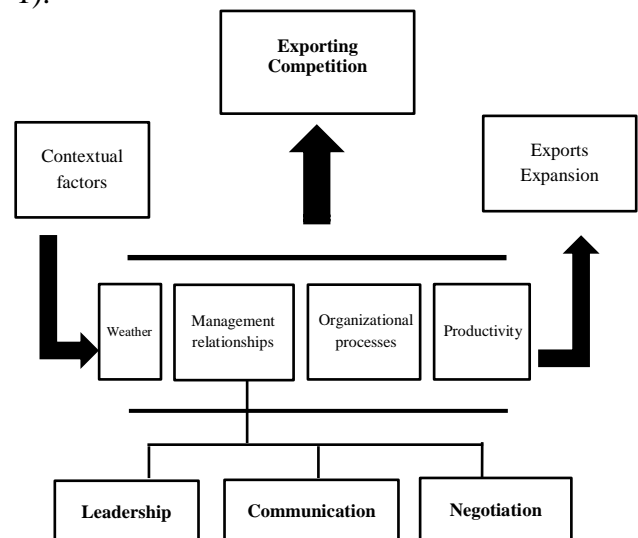


Figure 1 Components of export competition

Source: Authors

The export competition was determined through the measurement of the three independent variables communicative competence, leadership competence and negotiation competence, whose conceptual definitions are shown in Table 1.

Dependent variable	Independent variable	Conceptual definition
Export Competition The entrepreneur or manager's ability to develop specific export capacities that allow them to identify and respond successfully and promptly to market opportunities.	Leadership Competence	Process of influence between leaders and followers to achieve organizational objectives through change (Lussier & Achua, 2011).
	Communication Competence	Representations and knowledge structures that are used both to transmit and to understand intentions (Council of Europe, 2002).
	Negotiation Competence	Process in which two or more parties come into conflict and try to reach an agreement (Lussier & Achua, 2011).

Table 1 Conceptualization of the variables

Source: Authors

Therefore, the hypothesis is that competition in leadership, competition in communication and competition in negotiation determine the export competition of managers of manufacturing exporting companies of the State of Michoacán.

Methodology

The research carried out is characterized as a mixed approach, of a non-experimental type, with a transversal design and an explanatory scope.

The measurement of the level of export competition demonstrated by the executives who participated in this study was carried out through the business competencies that effectively put into practice, particularly the competition in leadership, communication competence and negotiation competence.

To express the level of competence, a scale of five ranks was established: limited, basic, sufficient, advanced and expert.

The data collection instrument consisted of a survey (structured both in a printed version and in a digital version) consisting of two parts: the first integrated by questions to collect the demographic information of the respondent, and the second, consisting of 32 items that they measure various aspects of export competition using a Likert scale of five options with positive items, as well as a categorization item (item 20).

Given that the universe of export manufacturing companies located in the State of Michoacán is only fifty, a census of the total population of companies was carried out. Of the companies contacted, two responded that they no longer export due to changes in the market and seven expressly refused to participate in the investigation, citing safety reasons. After sending three dispersions of the survey by email, responses were obtained from 21 managers of manufacturing companies, which were automatically registered in a database hosted in the Google Drive service. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with 12 managers who expressed their willingness to participate in the study.

Discussion and results

The measurement of the reliability of the data collection instrument yielded a value of Cronbach's Alpha of 76.7%, so that the data fall within the accepted reliability ranges.

The correlation analysis using the Pearson coefficient (r), revealed a strong positive association between export competition and leadership competition, with a value of 0.84, as well as a considerable positive correlation between export competition and competition in negotiation, of 0.71. and an average positive correlation between export competition and communicative competence, of 0.58.

When calculating the coefficient of determination (r^2) it was found that the competition in negotiation is determined, firstly, by the competition in leadership in a 70.95%; in second, by the competition in negotiation in a 50.75%; and finally, to a lesser degree, by communicative competence with 33.45%.

Export Competition		
	r	r ²
Leadership Competence	0.8423	0.7095
Communication competence	0.5784	0.3345
Competition in Negotiation	0.7124	0.5075

Table 2 Results for the Pearson correlation coefficient (r) and the determination coefficient (r²)

Source: Authors

The results obtained for the export competition of the manufacturing companies surveyed, in terms of their measures of central tendency, are shown in Table 3.

Number of surveys:	21
Half	130.143
Typical error	2.031
Median	129.000
Fashion	135
Standard deviation	9.307
Variance	86.629
Rank	37
Minimum	110
Maximum	147
Sum	2733

Table 3 Measures of central tendency of export competition

Source: Authors

All responses to the research instrument were grouped into the two highest levels of competence (advanced and expert), with a minimum value of 110 points and a maximum of 147, so no response was recorded in the three lower levels (limited, basic and sufficient), as you appreciate in Table 4.

Level of competition	Frequency	Percentage
Expert	9	42.86
Advanced	12	57.14
Enough	0	0.0
Basic	0	0.0
Limited	0	0.0

Table 4 Frequency distribution of export competition

Source: Authors

The statistical analysis shows an average of 130.14 points, which located on the respective scale show a generalized opinion that the level of export competition of the Michoacán manufacturers is advanced. Fashion is 135 points, which corresponds to an expert level of competence.

Folio	Export Competition Score	Folio	Export Competition Score
01	138	12	139
02	128	13	143
03	135	14	132
04	124	15	127
05	147	16	123
06	120	17	137
07	123	18	110
08	142	19	129
09	125	20	135
10	119	21	122
11	135		
Average value:			130.14

Table 5 Export competition score of the 21 companies interviewed

Source: Authors

Table 6 shows the general ranking for the items that make up the research instrument, according to the individual average score recorded for each of them. The average of the scores per item is 4.08, with a standard deviation of 0.34. In the ranking item 20 is omitted, since it measures the number of languages handled by managers by means of a scale other than Likert.

Position	No. Item	Description	Punctuation	Position	No. Item	Description	Punctuation
1	25	Upward communication	4.81	11	30	Strategic alliances	4.10
2	4	Knowledge of the export process	4.71	12	28	Negotiation techniques	4.00
3	9	Evaluation of alternatives	4.62	13	2	Identification of objectives	3.95
4	10	Timely decision making	4.43	13	12	Adaptation to changes	3.95
4	33	Personal image	4.43	13	21	R.P. To the exterior	3.95
5	8	Authority	4.38	14	13	Networks of work	3.86
6	11	Problem resolution	4.33	14	26	Form of negotiation	3.86
7	3	Product update	4.29	14	31	Political savvy	3.86
8	6	Knowledge of the market	4.24	15	7	Goal evaluation	3.81
8	24	Media	4.24	15	17	Foreign language oral domain	3.81
8	32	Understanding other cultures	4.24	16	5	Ways market to	3.80
9	27	Bargaining power	4.19	16	29	CRM	3.80
10	1	Mission and vision	4.14	17	15	Staff training	3.76
10	23	Downward communication	4.14	17	16	Organizational structure	3.76
11	14	Time management	4.10	17	18	Foreign language written domain	3.76
11	22	R.P. inside	4.10	18	19	Foreign language certification	3.10

Table 6 Overall ranking for the 32 items of the survey

Source: Authors

As shown in Table 6, items 25, 4, 9, 10 and 33 are those that recorded the highest average scores (above the mean plus one standard deviation). In contrast, the lowest average scores correspond to items 19, 15, 16 and 18 with scores below the mean minus one standard deviation.

Item 25, which refers to effective communication with employees, customers and suppliers, recorded the highest average score of the total number of items in the survey, of 4.81 points. In this, 80.95% of the managers always said to listen and process the information when it establishes communications with an actor related to the export process.

The second highest average score was obtained in item 4, referring to the knowledge of the process to export the products, with 4.71 points. This item also obtained the highest frequency of responses at the highest level of the measurement scale. In this way, 18 managers, equivalent to 85.71% of the interviewees, said they knew the process of exporting their products properly.

In the third position by average score was placed item 9, which measures the ability of managers to quantitatively assess the various decision alternatives, with 4.62 points. Here, most of the executives interviewed (66.67%) always claimed to apply a quantitative analysis on the export alternatives before deciding on any of them. In addition to the above, item 10, making relevant and timely decisions related to the export process, obtained an average score of 4.43. These last results coincide with what has been reported by several authors that one of the behaviors and competencies most demanded from leaders is their decision-making capacity, as well as their ability to identify alternatives and consequences of their actions (Daft & Marcic, 2010; Daniels et al., 2010; Lussier & Achua, 2011), in addition that these decisions must be effective and contribute to the achievement of the objectives.

Item 33 reported a value of 4.43, sharing the fourth position with item 10, also being the highest score within the variable of competition in negotiation. In this case, almost 60% of managers said they pay attention to their behavior and personal grooming are always consistent with the image that the company wants to project.

Regarding the lowest average scores, item 19, which refers to certification in the domain of a foreign language, recorded the lowest score of the total number of items that make up the survey, reaching only 3.10 points. Eleven executives in charge of the export process, equivalent to just over half of the interviewees (52.8%), have some certification in the use of a second language, while the remaining 47.62% do not. In this way, the certification of the foreign language represents an important area of opportunity to increase communicative competence. These results acquire greater importance considering that English and French are the languages of the two main export destinations of Michoacan manufacturing companies: United States and Canada.

In the same order of ideas, item 18, relative to the written domain of the target market language, ranked in the penultimate position of the ranking, reaching an average score of 3.76. Similar situation was presented with item 17, which measures the oral domain of the target market language, which ranked 15 out of 18 possible, with 3.81 points. All managers, except one, equate their level of written language proficiency to their level of oral proficiency. The distributions of answers are almost identical for the written domain and the oral domain of the language, with more than 70% of the opinions grouped in the levels of intermediate domain.

Less than a quarter (23.81%) of the managers of the export manufacturing companies refers to having an advanced level in the handling of a foreign language, despite the importance that this skill involves for the general learning of an individual, since this one The latter must be able to develop their linguistic, sociolinguistic and pragmatic skills to communicate effectively when proposing, solving and interpreting problems in various areas, skills that are considered essential for managers in charge of the export process. Similarly, the development of communicative competence improves the ability of an individual to acquire new knowledge and develop new specialized skills (Council of Europe, 2002). The fact that more than 70% of managers manifest an intermediate command of English seems to confirm that the learning of this language has ceased to be seen as an independent discipline and is part of the integral education of an individual (Graddol, 2006).

There are several authors who agree that communication is an essential competence for managers and managers, integrating it within the soft skills that have long been preferred over hard (or technical) when hiring, since companies (particularly exporters) need adaptable and flexible managers who are able to communicate adequately and interact with a wide range of people, trained to learn and manage the constant change in organizations (AACSB, 2018, Mora et al., 2006, Mulholland, 2003 ; Shuayto, 2013), however this is not reflected in the managerial reality of Michoacan exporting companies.

Finally, items 15 and 16, belonging to the leadership variable, were also placed in the penultimate place of the average scores, both with a score of 3.76. The foregoing indicates that the managers of the exporting manufacturers must invest a greater effort in the training of the personnel who carry out the export process or, if they subcontract this service, make sure that the employees have the required expertise, in order that the functions and delegated activities are carried out effectively. Likewise, companies must make adjustments in the design of their organizational structure, seeking that it responds and adapts more efficiently to the enormous challenges involved in marketing its products beyond national borders.

Conclusions

The findings obtained in this investigation allow to affirm that the executives of the export manufacturing companies of the State of Michoacán have an average level of advanced export competition, reaching 130.14 out of a possible 160 points, which is determined in the first place, by the competition in leadership, at 70.95%; in second, by the competition in negotiation, in 50.75%; and finally, by communicative competence, at 33.45%.

For the three business competences analyzed as independent variables, advanced average levels of competence were obtained, with the leadership competition being the best qualified, achieving 82.44% of the total possible score, followed by the competition in negotiation, which reached 80.73%, and finally the communicative competence, which obtained 79.78% of the total score.

This could explain why in a state as complicated and uncompetitive as Michoacán, there are companies that are capable of facing adverse conditions in key aspects of the business environment, such as security, rule of law and political stability..

Given that the managers of the export manufacturing companies have an advanced level of leadership, they have been able to carry out these companies, managing to take the step of only subsisting to seek sustained growth. However, most of the leaders who participated in this research must still make explicit their export objectives in the mission and vision of their companies to make them visible to all members of their organizations. This finding is related to the ability to communicate to staff and stakeholders what is desired for the company. The communicative competence is the one that represents a greater area of opportunity to increase the development of the export competition of the managers, registering the lowest average score.

On the other hand, when comparing the scores obtained by the total of managers for the export competition, against the size of the companies, it was possible to identify that more than half of the executives who reached the expert level of competence, are in front of the export process of large companies, also corresponding to managers of large companies the highest scores recorded. Similarly, about half of the executives who obtained a level of expert export competence work in companies that have been exporting for more than 20 years.

However, the level of export competition is not related to the size of the company's structure, nor with the years it has been carrying out the export activity, so it can be concluded, first, that the level of export competition reached depends on the personal effort of the manager and the resources he invests in his own training, seeking the realization of his goals together with the development of the company.

Second, managers with a high level of competence seek to work in large international companies, possibly with the long-term goal of developing a career within them and grow to achieve better management positions, while developing their level of competence exporter.

Likewise, it was discovered that there is a significant relationship between the level of export competition of the exporting manufacturers and the number of countries to which they export their products. Derived from these results, it can be asserted that, as Michoacan manufacturing companies increase their export competition, the number of export destinations can be increased, without necessarily having to increase the size of their structure, or require a certain number of years of experience in export.

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