Research on the Competency of Sergeant Cadet Backbones from the Perspective of Qualification

Yaning Shi [a], Ke Yao, Peiqi Wang and Yu Wen

School of Information and Communication, National University of Defense Technology, Xi'an 710106, China.

[a]syn573@163.com

Keywords: Sergeant cadet backbone at the company(platoon)-sized, Management ability, Qualifications, Competency.

Abstract: Through questionnaires and personal interviews, the paper grooms the performance actuality of sergeant backbones at the company(platoon)-sized in their management work. The paper analyzes and compares the tendency choices of backbone ability, the backbone competence evaluations, and outstanding problems of management ability from the three aspects of cadet team commanders, backbones and sergeant cadets. According to the management responsibilities of sergeant cadet backbones and the reasons for these problems, we discuss their management role orientations. Using behavioral event interview method, we extract the key behavior and result requirements of sergeant backbones in the management practice, and describe the qualifications. Based on this, this paper builds the competency model of backbones at the company(platoon)-sized from three aspects of knowledge, skills/abilities and professional qualities. The research result has certain enlightenment to the selection and training of sergeant backbones.

1. Introduction

Sergeant cadet backbones in military academies are the main force involved in the daily administrative management and overall construction of sergeant cadet teams, which mainly include deputy squad leaders and the managers at all levels above. They are not the specialized managers, but they have certain management responsibilities. It should be pointed out that subject in this study is mainly the backbone at the company(platoon)-sized. Because this group has a wider range of management and a heavier workload. In many cases, they are the deputies of cadet team commanders. In addition, they have no direct relationships of administrative subordination with other sergeant cadets, but are required to assume more responsibilities and to have stronger command and leadership abilities. The research shows that if the backbone wants to effectively implement management, they should not only rely on mandatory orders and passive obedience from other cadets, but also rely more on management competence.

2. Investigation of Performance

2.1 Basic Consideration

To analyze the post qualifications of sergeant cadet backbones, which can also be said to be the qualifications for taking up posts, it is necessary to survey on the performance actuality from various perspectives. In this paper, personal interviews and questionnaires are used. The former method mainly focuses on sergeant backbones (at the level of company and platoon), aiming at understanding the reflection and harvest of them on their own management work. The latter method takes cadet team commanders, sergeant cadet backbones and sergeant cadets as study objects. The basic consideration: at the commander level, the questionnaire focuses on the selection, use and evaluation of backbones; at the backbone level, the questionnaire focuses on the understanding of

their own positions and the self-perception of their management competence; at the cadet level, the questionnaire focuses on the selection and evaluation of management work of backbones.

2.2 Survey Design and Statistics

The questionnaires were distributed as follow: 30 cadet team commanders, 90 cadet backbones (the level of company and platoon) and 300 sergeant cadets. All questionnaires were collected and valid.

There are seven questions in commander questionnaires, which involve seven aspects, namely, the tendency choice of conditions for backbone selection , the satisfaction degree of backbone team compared with cadet team construction, the degree of authorization of commanders, the appraisal cycle of backbones, the evaluation of their problems, the expectations for improving backbone abilities, and the ways to improve their abilities. There are nine questions in the backbone questionnaires, including the reasons for being the backbone, the evaluation of other backbones, the preference selection of backbone ability, the evaluation of their existing problems, the evaluation of problem-solving methods and the judgment of self-improvement. There are six questions in cadet questionnaires, including the selection of working mode of backbones, the evaluation of backbones competence, the judgment of their problems, the willingness of backbone candidates, the judgment of responsibility attribution between backbones, and the style of backbones.

2.3 Analysis and Comparison of Results

Table 1. Comparisons of the tendency choices of backbone ability

Ability choices	Cadet team commanders	Sergeant cadet backbones
Responsibility	27(90%)	90(100%)
Organizational Management	24(80%)	81(90%)
Physical quality	15(50%)	18(20%)
Academic performance	12(40%)	18(20%)
Communication and coordination	12(40%)	72(80%)
Strain ability	12(40%)	30(33%)
Ideological basis	15(50%)	36(40%)
Demonstration role	15(50%)	81(90%)
Self-discipline	9(30%)	48(53%)

As shown in Table 1, in the questions of "When selecting the backbone, which conditions do you consider more?", and "In your opinion, which of the following abilities are more important to be a backbone?", three choices of "responsibility", "organizational management" ,"demonstration role" have a higher proportion of choices. The next two option to choose, at the commander level, are "physical quality", "ideological basis", and at the sergeant backbone level, are "communication and coordination" and "self-discipline".

The results show that: first, as the subordinate organization of daily management of the cadet team, the requirements of responsibility and leading role for the sergeant backbones of the company(platoon)-sized are the most important. This reflects that having strong organizational management ability is an important indicator requirement to be competent for backbone posts. In addition, this ability must also be based on responsibility and leadership. Second, commanders and backbones are not consistent on the choice of ability. In the questionnaires, commanders pay more attention to "physical quality" and "academic performance", while the proportion of the two options are both only 20% in backbone questionnaires. Similarly, 40% and 3% of commanders think that "communication and coordination" and "self-discipline" are necessary for backbones to carry out their work, but these two items reach 80% and 53% respectively in the backbone's questionnaires.

Table 2. Comparisons of the backbone competence evaluations

Competence Evaluation	Perfectly competent	Basically competent	Incompetent	Not clear
Sergeant cadet	36（40%）	54（60%）	0	0
Sergeant cadets	141（47%）	156（52%）	6（2%）	0

As shown in Table 2, in the survey of "Do you think sergeant cadet backbones can play a good backbone role in the work?", the selection degrees of backbones and cadets are comparatively similar, the selection of "basically can" is more than half, "completely can " accounts for 40%.It shows that both the backbones and the cadets can maintain a more rational evaluation.

Table 3. Comparisons of outstanding problems of backbones

Outstanding problems	Cadet team commanders	Sergeant cadet backbones	Sergeant cadets
Hide the truth	6(20%)	18(20%)	6(2%)
Double standards	3(10%)	18(20%)	75(25%)
Lack of communication	15(50%)	51(57%)	126(42%)
Giving crudely orders	0	21(23%)	66(22%)
Weak sense of responsibility	6(20%)	27(30%)	36(12%)
Demonstration role sometimes good, sometimes bad	15(50%)	42(47%)	120(40%)
Satisfy personal wishes	3(10%)	12(13%)	69(23%)
Backbone disagreements	6(20%)	12(13%)	36(12%)

As shown in Table 3, this is a survey on "outstanding problems in backbones work", which is designed in all three types of questionnaires. Firstly, by contrast, "lack of communication", "demonstration role sometimes good, sometimes bad" are the two options with a high proportion of choices, which indicates that the respondents have a high degree of consistency in their cognition of this problem. Secondly, according to the selection ratio, the next three options sorted from high to low, are "hide the truth", "weak sense of responsibility", "backbone disagreements" at the commander level; "weak sense of responsibility", "giving crudely orders", "hide the truth" and "double standards" at the backbone level; "double standard", "satisfying personal wishes", "giving crudely order" at the sergeant cadet level. Then, statistics show that there is a big difference between cadet team commanders and backbones when it comes to the issue about "to work more relies on giving crudely order". It illustrates that commanders usually naturally believe that cadets should obey and it is not a problem to manage them by taking simple and crude administrative order. But backbones and cadets have different views on this problem. In fact, they have come to realize that giving crudely order do not help the backbones to achieve their management goals, but will create more problems such as resistance. Finally, survey data also reflect that commanders are more concerned about "the loyalty of backbones" and "the differences and contradictions among backbones". For commanders, it is obviously a breach of duty for backbones to hide behind the scenes, even to talk in a way and act in another. But for cadets, they don't care whether the backbones are loyal to their superiors or whether there are some conflicts between them. For the backbones, they also don't see these as problems.

Table 4. Comparisons of the choice of ways to improve backbone abilities

Ways to improve	Centralized training	Experience exchange	Incentives and guidance	Foster environment
Cadet team	15(50%)	21(70%)	30(100%)	12(40%)
Sergeant cadet	51(57%)	60(67%)	51(57%)	45(50%)

As shown in Table 4, commanders and sergeant backbones have different answers to the question "Which ways can better help backbones to improve their management abilities". For commanders, they believe that incentives and guidance are more effective, followed by experience exchange. From the training practice of backbones, strengthening organizational incentives and building communication platform are indeed the main ways to select and cultivate. As for backbones, there is little difference in the selection of the four modes, that is to say, there is a need for all.

3. Problems and Reasons of Management Ability

In order to explore the determinants of management abilities and working qualifications of the sergeant cadet backbone positions, it is necessary to further analyze the problems and causes of backbone management ability by interviews, questionnaires, relevant materials and regulations of military academies.

First, there is plenty of enthusiasm, not enough perseverance [1]. In cadet team, management working is not only trivial, but also involves a wide range of areas. And it must be grasped regularly and repeatedly. These will lead to the high working conditions and standards of some backbones when the commanders grasp the team work tightly, while when they don't grasp the work tightly, some backbones will slacken and decline.

Second, there is plenty of courage, not enough leadership. Generally, backbones are not short of the courage and a fierce style. However, cadet team is different from grass-roots company, and its characteristic of peer management is obvious. Some backbones only rely on majesty, while communication and explanation are not in place. Some backbones have low self-requirements and treat others with double standards. And others like to strive for their own benefits. These phenomena reflect that backbones have not established a correct view of job identity. Although it is generally felt that taking the lead is an important competency indicator for backbone posts, it is still not enough in practice.

Third, management skill is superfluous and ability of controlling situation is insufficient. Most of backbones have certain methods to deal with some specific problems, and can handle them independently and properly without relying on cadet team commanders. But at the same time, backbones are not foresighted to plan work, and lack of ability to analyze the deep-seated problems through superficial phenomena. In backbone questionnaires, on the choices of question "When dealing with problems, do you tend to ① never mix personal matters with work? ②consider from the interests of sergeant cadets? ③consider from the perspective of commander? ④ consider from the perspective of work results?" Among those choices, the proportion respectively is 73%, 13%, 3% and 23%. In fact, it's a test of how backbone thinks about the problem. As the backbones, they should have the consciousness of observing the overall situation and thinking about the internal and external relations. That is to say, they should have the conceptual skills of management and be able to control the situation of cadet team from the perspective of commanders.

4. Responsibilities and Roles of Management

4.1 As the Manager

The Executive of Management. According to the requirements of overall construction of cadet teams in military academies, backbones should participate in formulating and revising the cadet team's work plans, the schedules and objectives of major activities at each stage. After the deployments of cadet team commanders, backbones should do a good job in the distribution, supervision, inspection, and should control of the follow-up tasks, as well as the safety work in various management activities.

The Work Planner. As the cadet leader of the company(platoon)-sized, the backbone is a planner. The responsibilities are embodied in taking into account in advance and appropriately, the necessary or possible work contents, methods and procedures, including environment, conditions, personnel, time and needs, in accordance with work plans or arrangements of cadet team; determining working standards and directions; breaking down the responsibilities of squad leaders and the cadets according to the actual situation; improving working method or process, etc.

4.2 As the Ideological Backbone

In the grass-roots units, the complementary characteristic of management and education determines that backbones must be good at giving ideological education and correct guidance while fulfilling their management responsibilities. In terms of responsibilities [2], the first is to lead all cadets to resolutely comply with the requirements of cadet team and conscientiously complete all the work. The second is to pay attention to the persuasion education and ideological transformation of individuals. The third is find out inclined problems in sergeant cadet team in time, grasp the situation comprehensively, and report truthfully to superiors.

4.3 As the Cadet Leader

The Communicator. On the one hand, backbones should actively understand and listen to the opinions and suggestions from others, and actively channel dissatisfaction and resolve conflicts. On the other hand, they should try their best to correctly convey the intention and requirement of team commanders and mobilize the initiative of cadets in action. In a word, backbones at the company(platoon)-sized should maintain good relationships with other backbones and cadets, listen more and communicate more. So that other backbones and cadets can better understand current situation, their own needs or effort directions and reduce the obstacles caused by the differences, misunderstandings and untimely communication.

The Team Leader. People often refer to their superiors as "leaders". But in fact, leader is not a concept of position, but a way of behavior. Although backbone job is not a position, the behavior needed to complete backbone work is very close to the leadership. For the group, backbones should unite all the cadets into a fighting team through such organizational behaviors as solidarity, guidance, mobilization and demonstration, etc. For individuals, a backbone should improve internal relations and deal with contradictions by means of motivation, help, attention and care, to become a team leader who can be trusted and voluntarily obeyed by cadets.

The Performance Partner. The backbone (the size of company and platoon) should not be "a high-ranking official" who assigns work to cadets to wait for results, but should establish a performance partnership with the them. For example, to lead the team to complete temporary tasks efficiently and achieve good results in major group activities or competitions. This means that backbones and cadets are performance community, and they depend on each other, influence each other. Since the backbone is a partner, it is a relationship of equality and consultation, rather than a commanding relationship. Backbones should work with everyone through equal dialogue, good communication and efficient incentives, rather than keeping themselves out of the problem by blaming and criticizing. Since the backbone is a partner, it is necessary to consider the possible ideological and psychological fluctuations of cadets from the perspective of overall situation of the cadet team, and do a good job in explaining and guiding.

5. Analysis of Qualifications and Competence

5.1 Relationship between Them

In organizational management, the competence refers to a series of comprehensive qualities that drive people to achieve outstanding performance [3]. It is the quality set of knowledge, skills/abilities, professional qualities, self-awareness, characteristics and motivations that people show through different ways. Qualifications refer to the requirements of knowledge, skills, abilities and personalities that a person must possess in order to ensure the realization of his or her work objectives. They can also be understood as proof of the ability for a person to perform his or her duties when he or she is engaged in a job.

In terms of connection, in addition to considering competence quality, qualifications focus more on the design of job requirements, or say, the competence characteristics of a post determine what kind of personnel this post is suitable for. In this sense, competence is only a part of qualifications [4]. In terms of distinction, job qualifications are based on work practice and focus on key behaviors that can sustainably produce high performance. Competence quality is based on general behavior and focuses on the evaluation of development ability [5].

5.2 Qualifications for Backbone Posts

Qualifications are necessary conditions for backbones to hold the corresponding posts. To further clarify their qualifications is an important step in selection and cultivation of talents for cadet teams. As mentioned earlier, qualifications are based on work practice. For this reason, this paper conducts a research on qualifications by means of questionnaire survey, personnel interview and observation of backbone behaviors. The design process of qualification conditions is shown in Fig.1.
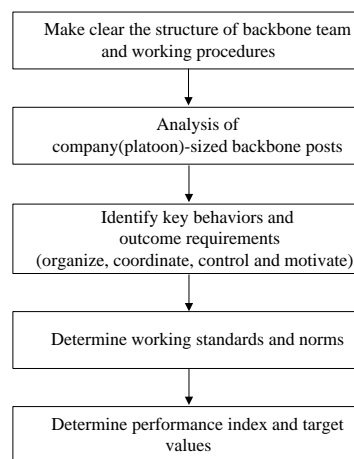

Fig.1 The design process of backbone qualification conditions

Through post analysis, backbones have the following responsibilities:
(1) Plan and arrange daily affairs;
(2) Implement the instructions of cadet team commander
(3) Check and supervise cadets to implement instructions and requirements
(4) Organize cadets to complete military physical fitness and skills training
(5) Daily management of cadets
(6) Grasp cadets' ideological and psychological conditions
(7) Play a bridge role between commanders and cadets.

Based on the post responsibilities analysis, key behavior and outcome requirements are extracted, and then working standards and norms are determined. Performance index and target values are the normative requirements for key behaviors and outcome requirements, which can be assessed in both qualitative and quantitative forms [6]. The qualifications of backbones, as shown in Table 5.

Table 5. The qualifications of backbones at the company(platoon)-sized

Key behavior and outcome requirements		Working standards and norms	Performance index and target values
Implementation ability, Ability to discover and solve problems	Control	Urge and implement internal affairs inspection and comments	Number of people whose internal affairs are criticized once a week
Implementation ability, Team Leadership	Control	Supervise and maintain discipline(Classes, self-study, meetings, etc)	Number of people criticized at a time
Implementation ability,Coordinating ability,Analysis & Judgment Ability	Control Coordinate	Prevention and treatment of serious disciplinary violations(fighting, drinking, truancy, etc.)	Number of occurrences during the term of office
Team Leadership	Organize, Motivate	Create and maintain the study atmosphere	Number of studies per month
Implementation ability, Coordinating ability	Organize, Control	Arrangement, organization and follow-up of physical	Satisfaction rate of organizing physical
Coordinating ability, Team Leadership	Motivate,Organize,Control	Effect of major activity	Satisfaction rate of organizing and ensuring major activity____%

5.3 Construction Process of Competence Model

First, we should clarify construction task of cadet team and the backbone responsibilities. Among them, responsibilities are as described above. Central tasks of cadet team include: to do a good job in teaching management; to strengthen the study style construction; and to carry out the second classroom activities. Second, we should compare the excellent backbones with the general backbones. It should analyze the process or fragments of their key behaviors and ideological characteristics in practical work, and summary the different reactions and actions of the two types backbones in dealing with similar events, and then identifies the qualities that lead to significant differences in key behaviors or outcomes. Third, after finding out these competences, it should classify them into different levels. Because in actual work, it is not that the backbone does not have a certain competence, but that the competence degree is different, and this difference has a deeper and greater impact on their work effectiveness. The specific construction process is shown in Fig.2.
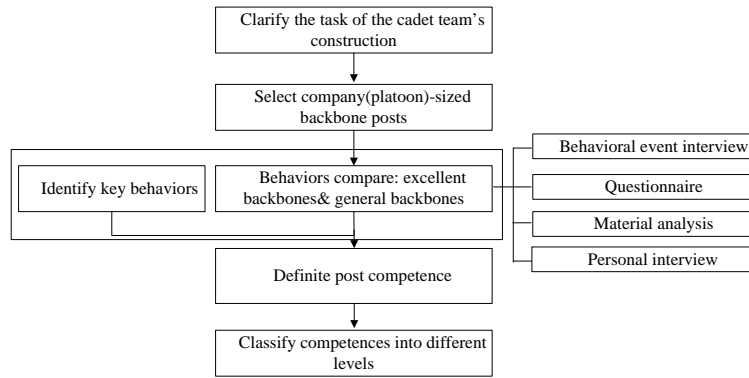
Fig.2 The construction Process of backbone competence model

5.4 Competence Model and Behavior Classification

According to above construction process, the competence model of backbones at the company(platoon)-sized is built from three aspects of knowledge, skills/abilities and professional qualities, as shown in Fig. 3.
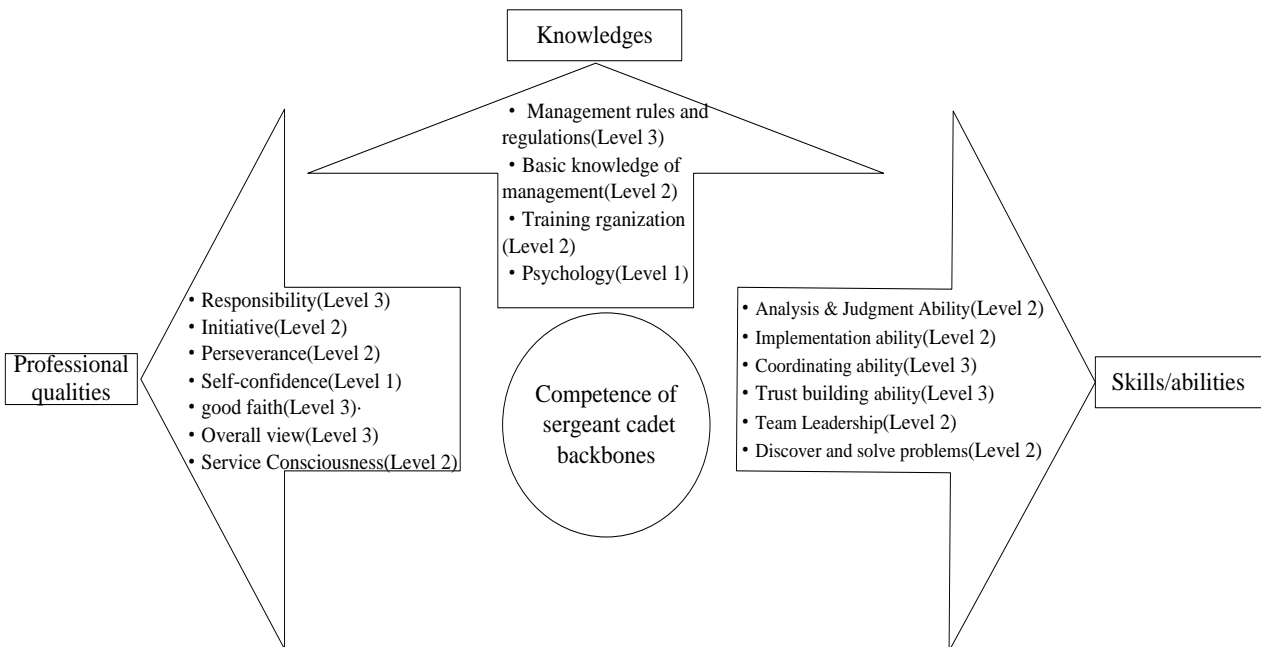

Fig. 3 Competence Model of sergeant cadet backbones (the size of company and platoon)

Knowledge classification, as shown in Table 6:

Table 6. Knowledge classification and behavior performance of backbones

Classification	Behavior performance
Level 1	Generally understand management, psychology, training organization, cadet team management rules and regulations (referred to as the four types of knowledge).Basically applying.
Level 2	Better understand the four types of knowledge(or one of them). Achieving certain results.
Level 3	Skillfully understand the four types of knowledge(or one of them). Achieving good results.

Professional qualities classification, to take responsibility as an example, as shown in Table 7:

Table 7. Responsibility classification and behavior performance

Classification	Behavior performance
Level 1	Fear of taking responsibility at work
Level 2	Bear part responsibility, but not dare to bear greater responsibility
Level 3	Brave to assume full responsibility

Skills/abilities classification, to take coordination ability as an example, as shown in Table 8:

Table 8. Coordination ability classification and behavior performance

Classification	Behavior performance
Level 1	①Have a clear understanding of cadets′ inconsistencies in action and thought; ②Have a certain understanding of disharmonious factors that may arise inside and outside the cadets
Level 2	①Have a certain adjustment ability to the disharmonious factor, and eliminate contradictions in the bud as far as possible; ②Get the support of most cadets in the process of dealing with contradictions
Level 3	① Balance the internal and external relationships of the cadets; ②Share skills and experiences with others in the process of relationship coordination; ③ Identify hidden problems or contradictions in the cadet relationships

6. Summary

The existing literatures on the cadet's backbone in military academies mostly discuss the issue of management ability training. However, there is very little research on the management ability of sergeant backbones at the company(platoon)-sized. Therefore, we do not know from the viewpoint of cadet team commanders, sergeant cadet backbones and sergeant cadets, what are the outstanding problems of backbones, nor do we know what abilities they tend to choose. In addition, we know little about the role orientations, key behaviors and management ability levels of backbones. Therefore, this paper studies these aspects.

This paper studies the actuality of duty performance of sergeant's backbones (the size of company and platoon), the selection tendency and differences of management competencies, and the outstanding problems and reasons of them. The subjects of this study are 30 commanders, 90 backbones and 300 sergeant cadets from a military academy. The results of the survey show that responsibility and leadership are highly valued when selecting a backbone. But at the same time, cadres and backbones have great differences in their choice of ability orientation and management style. Among them, the most different choice of ability orientation is "communication", while the most different choice of management style is "giving crudely order".

We know that in an organization, the role orientations of managers have a certain impact on the management effect. In sergeant cadet team, there are no significant differences in military experience, military age, years and educational background, so that they are peer-level management relations. In order to effectively manage them, backbones at the rank of company(platoon)should possess certain leadership abilities rather than rely solely on the administrative authorization from commanders. Future research should further explore the meaning and influencing factors of the leadership of sergeant cadet backbones on the basis of current research.

References

[1] Wang Lunwu, Yu Youguang, Huang Yan. The perplexity that becomes good cadet backbone to face and a few Suggestions. Military Electronics Education. Vol. 42 (2013) No. 12, p.9-11.

[2] Cheng Qiwei, Gao Yan. Qualities and abilities that should be possessed by cadet team backbones. Communication Sergeant Magazine. Vol. 14 (2013) No. 7, p.94-95.

[3] Yang Xue. A Complete set of Employee Competency Models and Qualifications. People's Posts &Telecommunications Publishing House,2014, p.95-99.

[4] Feng Ming, Yin Mingxin. Summary of Competency Model Construction Methods. Science and Technology Management Research.2007. No. 9, p.229-233.

[5] Liu Hongmin, Yang Ronghua. The Role of Competency Model in the Cultivation of Enterprise Production Backbone. Human Resource Management.2014. No. 12, p.39-40.