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Development of Competency Models for Human Resources Management as a Competitive Business Advantage

Based on research and practice in Europe and the Middle East

Doctor Thesis

of

PEPINA MITEVA

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis to my mother who inspired me to continuously learn, develop and reach new horizons. I miss you, Mum, but I did what I promised to you!

I also dedicate this work to my daughter, to show her that it is never late to develop and learn, and to follow your dreams, even at a later stage of your life.

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I would like to express my special thanks of gratitude to my husband and daughter for their never lasting support, encouragement and love, and that in times of difficulties and desperation during my researches and work on the thesis, they stood by me and didn't allow me to give up.

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ABBREVIATIONS

Abbreviation	Description
CBHRM	Competency-based Human Resources Management
HR	Human Resources
HRM	Human Resources Management
BAC	Bahrain Airport Company
BAI	Bahrain International Airport
AMP	Airport Modernization Program
ORAT	Operational Readiness and Airport Transfer
BAPM	Bulgarian Association for People Management
ACI	Airport Council International (representing 500 airports from 46 European countries – data for 2020)
ACI Europe Leadership & HR Forum	Association of Human Resources managers of airports in Europe as a part of ACI Europe
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
BHS	Baggage handling system
CAA	Civil Aviation Authority
EASA	Europe Agency for Safety in Aviation
ICAO	International Civil Aviation Organization
EC	European Commission

PREAMBLE

Since almost 20 years I have been making researches in the Competency modelling and I have been continuously developing different tools for improving the efficiency of the HR management through enhancing competencies. Facing the COVID-19 global crisis this year, and discussing in a number of forums how to save the businesses (especially in aviation) and how to improve the efficiency of the processes, I have once again realized the value of the competency-based HR environment for the on-time and fast restructuring of the business, and coping with the crisis in a more effective and organized way.

This made me re-do a part of my thesis (although it was completed in March, 2020), and change some of the focuses in it.

In the very beginning of my practice in the HR field, as a Training manager in a big international bank, I faced a lot of training projects and tasks which were approved by the management of the company based on proposals from different training providers rather than linked to the real training needs of the employees. As the budget was always limited, I have never had the chance to create and implement a fully beneficial and effective training program. Many times, I asked myself **why and if** we need a specific training, which I had to organize and conduct, as it was obvious for me as a professional that the trainings are neither connected to the specific needs of the company, nor targeted to the right people or provided at the right time. The company has just stepped in the market and aimed to take 7% share of the banking business in Bulgaria by providing innovative products and excellent customer service. But instead of planning and financing training to teach the employees to understand and know the products of the company better and to provide an outstanding customer service, as well as to improve their negotiation and sales skills, the company spent most of the training budget for English language training (although 95% of the company's clients were Bulgarians). In some other cases, the people invited to the training were not selected based on their needs but on preferences of their superiors, while at the same time, other employees, whose job was really connected with the training topic, were not selected. Or the training was coming too late to support the people and help them improve and cope with their professional challenges.

Analysing the training results, I realized that the training activities did not correspond to the real gaps we had in the performance of the people and respectively – did not support the achieving of the company goals.

It took me one year more to convince the management that we need to structure our training activities based on the principle - **"right knowledge - to the right people - at the right time".**

I started investigating, collecting, analysing and summarizing information in order to make a better use of the training budget, planning the training activities based on a precise training needs analysis and trying to cover the knowledge and behaviour gaps of the people at individual level.

One year later I had already established a competency-based training for all the 1400 employees of the bank, but although I felt happy about the visible change in the performance of the employees as a result of the provided trainings, I knew that it is only a piece of the puzzle, as there was no link to the other HR activities, which were managed traditionally, without a common objective and transparent base.

Changing my job few years later and taking over the role of a HR manager of two airports with a responsibility for almost 2000 people in the peak season, my professional curiosity made me continue my investigations and dive deeper in the competency-modelling field, researching from different perspectives and trying to cover all aspects of the topic and all HR activities, making researches in Bulgaria and abroad, discussing in different forums, testing and validating my theory and approach.

Based on my research and analytical work, I could develop a methodology for building a **compact Competency-based HR management model (CBHRM model)**, taking the best of the existing knowledge and developing new approaches and tools in the time, till I reached the model which I present in the current thesis and which has proved in practice to bring visible behaviour and performance changes, improvements and benefits both for the business and for the employees.

The developed model was successfully implemented in Fraport-Bulgaria and Bahrain Airport Company (Bahrain International Airport) – Bahrain, and shared with a number of companies in Europe, Asia, South America and Africa.

The full description of the methodology and the results of its implementation are shared in this thesis.

CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

In today's competitive and ever-changing business environment, it is increasingly important to build competitive and highly efficient business activities. Companies need to be more flexible and ready for change in order to be competitive and grow. The changing business challenges - globalization, dynamic regulatory mechanisms, increased shareholder sensitivity of return on capital, emerging technologies, unstable markets and unpredictable global turning points, and changes in the labour market, are just some of the factors that need to be addressed and to which development and profit-seeking companies must align. These changes require alterations in management structures, in the organization of work, in operational processes and this inevitably leads to the need for changes in the skills and behaviour of employees in order to achieve higher results.

In the heart of every successful activity lies a certain knowledge and skillset. Any innovative and successful business strategy can be effectively implemented only through a competent workforce. Organizations which understand the critical role of the so-called “Human resources”, begin to increasingly value the people as an important asset (capital) and invest in their development. This is where the topic for establishing of strong Human Resources management models emerges. Models through which every employee is most effective for the organization, meets the specific requirements of the business, and brings added value not only with the results from his work, but also with the behaviour and the culture he demonstrates in his workplace. Models which not only increase the efficiency of the business internally, but also make the organization more competitive in the business market.

The question is how to meet at one point and harmonize *goals, high standards, emerging new technologies, diversity in workflows and changing requirements for job roles.* The answer of this question lies in building a **compact system cantered on the person** with his personal knowledge, skills and behaviour. In connection with this combination of necessary requirements for the people in a certain business, modern science introduces the concept of “competencies”, and the business immediately starts speaking of “competency management” and models in which those competencies are managed in a way that creates a direct link between the performance of the employees of the company and its financial results.

In this thesis, I explain these relationships in details, and present a methodology for building of in-house Competency models, based on my long-term researches for improvement of the efficiency of the HR activities and achievement of better performance of the people. Furthermore, I provide proves that the development of customized Competency models, meeting the specific needs of the organization, create a strong competitive advantage of the business.

1.1. Relevance of the topic

The relevance of the topic is related to the modern businesses' ever-increasing need for maximum return on investment and high efficiency of the business processes, including in relation to the human resources. Despite the high potential for practical application and results, due to its theoretical complexity, the competency modelling is highly neglected. In the conducted survey (among 240 companies in Bulgaria and Europe), *36 % of the respondents don't have an integrated competency model in their business, and 48 % of them don't plan to implement any in the future, too.* Therefore, in this thesis I want to direct the attention to the topic and to inspire and help forward the HR professionals to develop and integrate competency models and use them as a strong human resources management tool.

1.2. Thesis research

The main research of this thesis is focused on proving that **Competency models can be a strong competitive advantage of the business**, **when designed and implemented in a systematic and consistent way, following a methodology which reflects the specific business needs.**

The research is based on the following hypotheses:

- Integrating Competency models in the HR management systems ensures that employees' knowledge, skills and behaviour are aligned with organization's strategy, goals, culture and values, leading to higher efficiency of the workforce and higher business results.
- Competency models ensure higher efficiency of the investments in the human resources through competency-focused recruitment, performance appraisal, training, career development and succession planning, which improves the business results.
- Setting up all HR processes at one common foundation (competencies), leads to higher objectiveness and transparency of the HR processes and to better understanding of the

business goals, which brings higher motivation, satisfaction, engagement and performance of the employees, and improves the image and the Employer's brand of the organization.

- All aforementioned presumable outcomes bring a strong competitive advantage of the business.

1.3. Purpose and tasks of the thesis

The purpose of the thesis is to propose a **methodology for building of in-house Competency-based HR management models (CBHRM models)** the implementation of which will bring competitive advantage of the business. The proposed methodology aims also to give a way to follow to the HR professionals and thus decrease their efforts in searching information and developing their own approaches for building competency models for their organizations.

This purpose requires the following tasks to be accomplished:

- To come up with a clear definition of the competency as a concept and its characteristics.
- To follow the process of planning, building and putting into operation the competency model in the organization.
- To identify sources of information and methods for analysing and evaluating competencies in the process of building of the model.
- To establish clear objective link of all HR management processes to the competency model in place.
- To analyse the possible risks.

1.4. Scientific contribution

There are a lot of existing publications, books and researches in competency modelling. My scientific contribution with this thesis is in my long-term research of how the HR processes can bring more value and competitive advantage to the business through a systematic and properly focused human resources management. Based on this research, I developed and propose in this work a methodology for building of customized Competency-based HR management models **with a strong focus on the business and the business results, but also with a strong focus on the people.** The methodology is valuable as it provides practical guidelines and innovative approaches in competency modelling which can be a strong supportive tool for the HR practitioners. I have also developed a wide range of data collection and competency assessment tools which make the process more precise and focused

on the specific needs of the organizations. The value of the presented methodology comes also from the fact that it has been successfully implemented and tested in practice, in two similar as business but different as structure, environment and culture companies, situated in different countries and continents, proving that the methodology is successful and efficient regardless the specific business characteristics. In both projects, the Competency model has been recognized as a strong management tool which brings competitive advantage to the organizations.

1.5. Methodology of the thesis research

My research methodology and tools are based on expert-analytical methods, empirical researches, and my 20 years' experience in the field of human resources management and development.

I have carried out analysis of existing practices and literature on the topic and researched the existing experience in implementing such models worldwide, incl. publications, reports, materials, presentations. I have conducted a survey among companies in Bulgaria (among the members of the Bulgarian Association of People Management), as well as among airports in Europe (within ACI EUROPE Leadership & HR Forum) to explore the experience, the need of and the attitude to the competency modelling of the business.

I have analysed the global experience in leadership competencies based on collected information in the discussions, workshops and brainstorming sessions during the ACI Europe Leadership & Change Management conference in London in 2012, as a delegate of the conference.

As a partner in KAAT (Knowledge Alliance in Aviation Transport) project (UNESCO) I have investigated and presented the most important competencies needed in the airport business, which can be taught as a part of the official training programs in the Aviation universities in Europe (Brussels, 2015).

As a lecturer in ACI Africa conferences (Tunisia 2015 and Zambia 2017), I have presented the methodology for development of CBHRM models and their integration into the different HR processes, as recruitment, training, performance appraisal, succession planning and career development, which was acknowledged by the African airports *as „a highly innovative approach which raises significantly the importance of the HR management for the development and the success of the business". (Pascal Komla, President of ACI Africa, 2015)*

I have also presented the methodology as a panel discussion participant in the 12th ACI EUROPE Regional Airports Conference & Exhibition in Kraków, 2019.

As an evidentiary part of my thesis I present two projects for development and implementation of a CBHRM model:

- in Fraport-Bulgaria (as a HR manager of the company) – a model developed and implemented at two airports, for about 2000 permanent and seasonal employees and more than 150 job positions, and linked to recruitment, training, performance appraisal, career development and succession planning processes in the company.
- in Bahrain Airport Company (BAC) - as a HR consultant in an ORAT project (Operational Readiness Airport Transfer – transfer of the existing airport to a new modern airport), run by Fraport-Bahrain (2017-2020) – a model developed in a specific environment and culture, established as a methodology, and link to recruitment and training.

In the process of building the two models, I have used different analytical and psychological approaches for analysis of behaviour and attitude, surveys, investigation of the working processes, interviews, case studies, etc.

Furthermore, in my role of ORAT Training manager (BAC, 2019-2020) I have implemented the methodology for competency-based training in the ORAT training of **more than 12 000** people, in order to prepare them for operating the new modern Bahrain international airport, which was recognized by BAC Management as „*one of the key success factors for the successful transition of all employees and stakeholders from the old to the new airport "*. *(Mohamed Yousif Al-Binfalah - BAC CEO)*

All the presented **forms** (provided in the Appendix part of the thesis) are entirely developed by me and implemented in all the projects which I have developed till now.

And last but not least, I have presented the main differences in the implementation of the methodology in Bulgaria and Bahrain, *proving that despite of the different business environment and the different attitude and mentality of the people, the described methodology can be successfully implemented and can bring competitive advantage to the business.*

1.6. Limitation in the thesis research

The limitations of the research were related to the need of deeper investigation of the business processes in order to develop relevant and reliable job competency profiles and to create an overall competency model. During the study, gaps and imperfections in company management were identified, process inaccuracies, problems in the satisfaction and motivation of employees, which cannot be corrected solely by the introduction of a competency model for HR management.

Building a CBHRM model requires the organization to devote considerable *time, efforts, and resources* to planning, communicating, collecting data, analysing, and putting into action the model itself, as well as specific *discipline and dedication* at all levels in implementing the model, which was a challenge in the project in Bahrain.

1.7. Thesis survey

For the purpose of the thesis research, I have conducted a survey among **120 Bulgarian companies**, members of the Bulgarian Association for People Management (BAPM) and **120 airports** from 45 European countries, members of ACI Europe Leadership & HR Forum. The survey consists of 9 questions, which define the attitude of the business to the topic for competency modelling, the experience of the organizations in building and integrating such models in the HR management systems, and the main observed benefits from their implementation. The survey questionnaire is presented in **Appendix 1.**

The overall respond rate of the survey is **62%** based on responds of **85 companies** in Bulgaria and **63 airports** from 28 European countries.

The detailed results from the survey are presented in **Appendix 14 (1)** and **Appendix 14 (2).** However, extracts from the survey results are separately presented in some of the chapters for reference to the relevant topic.

1.8. Structure of the document

The current thesis consists of seven chapters.

Each chapter starts with a short review of the information in the chapter, followed by detailed presentation of the subject, divided into subchapters and points.

All the figures and tables are numbered in sequential order, and the source of the information is indicated under each of them. Complete lists of the figures and the tables are provided in the beginning of the document.

All quotes and references to external sources are indicated immediately after them. A complete list of the researched literature and sources is provided at the end of the thesis ("References").

With **bold** and *italic* font and with underlying, I highlight more important statements and single words, to refer the attention of the reader.

In some of the chapters, in separate windows I provide examples from my practice, as additional information and demonstration on the discussed matter ("My Practice").

The 14 Appendices in the "Appendices" part are showing templates and examples from my practice in the development of competency models and from my project work in Bahrain.

Last but not least, in the "Photo Gallery" I show some pictures from my participations as a speaker in different forums in Europe, Africa and Bulgaria, presenting the competency-modelling methodology and the impact of the CBHRM models on the business.

CHAPTER TWO

Framework for building CBHRM models

In this chapter I present the basis of my research, my understanding about the different theoretical formulations, facts which I accept as foundation of my work, main terms and a historical background of the competency-modelling.

Going through various literary sources and facing different case studies in my practice highlighted the importance of the competencies for the successful development of the people and their performance. My interest in the topic was provoked and guided by questions like:

- What role do competencies play in managing people and in the achieved results?
- What should be the scope of application of one competency model in the various HRM activities?
- What are the challenges facing HR professionals in creating and implementing a competence-based HR management strategy?

Usually the companies try to define what is needed to execute a particular job. And stop here. But there is much more than that as for example, what **specific knowledge and skills** are needed for **effective execution** of the job, what **behaviour and attitude** is expected from the respective role in the company, are the expectations from the job linked to the **culture and the strategy** of the organization, etc.

These questions incited my curiosity, especially when I observed cases when people hired with the same requirements and the same knowledge and skills have different performance - from excellence to underperformance, when employees with equal opportunities have a different progress in their work, performance and career; when clients show visible preference to some sales persons and avoid others…

As described by McClelland and his successors (McClelland, DC , 1973), the observation of the people who have **the highest results** and are **most effective** in a certain position, shows that the difference in the performance is based on the **different level of proficiency in the different competencies** demonstrated during the working process. Therefore, identifying the competencies needed to perform well, and striving to hire or build them through effective selection and training,

are a key factor for raising up the performance level of the employees and achieving better business results. So, the competencies can be *a reliable framework, a linking thread and an objective basis* for building of HR processes to support the business in achieving of its business goals. (Fig.1)

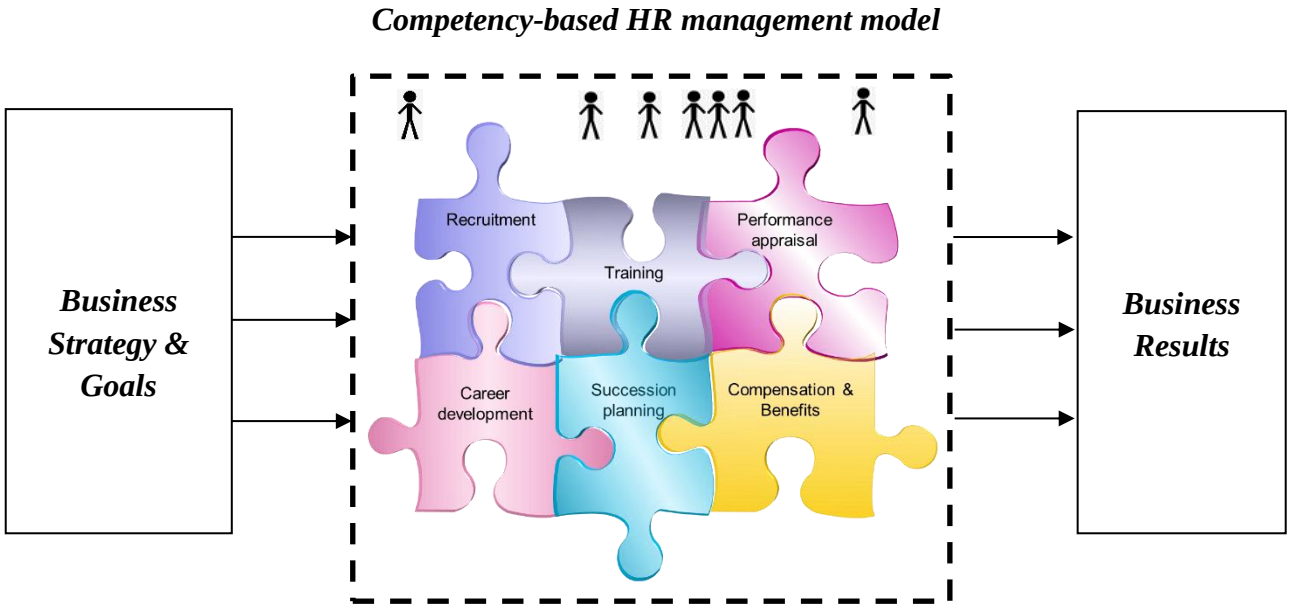


Figure 1: Framework for development of CBHRM Model (by the Author of the thesis)

As shown on Fig.1, the main purpose of each organization is to realize in practice the planned business goals. The accomplishment of these goals requires specific knowledge and skills, behaviour and attitude (competencies), so **it's imperative** the people, who are hired to execute the business processes, to possess and demonstrate these competencies at the required level.

Therefore, by clearly defining the needed competencies for each job position in the frame of the requirements of the business, the organization can increase the likelihood of putting **the right people at the right places** (through selection process based on the specific competencies needed for the respective job position). By identifying the gaps in the competencies, in comparison to the required levels, the employees can get exactly the training they need in order to cover and upgrade these gaps and perform better. When the employees are assessed based on the required competencies for their job, they will be more motivated to learn, to improve and perform better. The people appointed for future successors in some jobs, can be trained exactly in those competencies, which are required for the positions they are planned to take over. The employees with outstanding performance can be identified easier and can be developed further for taking higher positions in the future, etc.

So, as a basic understanding, the **competency model** is a list of competencies needed to effectively perform each of the job positions in one organization, and to ensure that when all the jobs are executed at the required level, the planned business goals will be achieved.

Competency models are a reliable business instrument for defining the competencies required to meet the various needs of the organization, not only in the present but also in the future. Consistently, the organization can adjust the selection criteria to reflect the evolving needs of one role. It can also determine the future training needs of the employees so that they are prepared for the forthcoming changes and challenges.

And last but not least, competency models can be an effective and comprehensive way of communicating the corporate strategy, vision, goals, values and culture to the employees, so that they know what is expected by them and why.

As a conclusion of this part, I will quote Rothwell and Lindholm, who write in their work "Competency identification, modelling and assessment in the USA" that "*over the past 25 years, competency modelling has evolved from a theory of personal performance to an approach focused on improving organizational performance*." (Rothwell & Lindholm, 1999)

In addition, according to the American Society for Development and Training (ASDT), the world's largest talent development association, "*now more than ever, the success of public and private organizations depends on the knowledge and skills of their employees. There is a direct link between human capital and the success of an organization, since the lack of certain competencies is a threat to the short-term and the long-term success of organizations. Organizations will always face some skills mismatch, but if there is an infrastructure in place to promote innovation and lifelong learning through which employees can complete and update their knowledge and skills, they will be able to meet the needs of the rapidly changing environment".* (American Society for Development and Training, 2006)

In summary, there is a strong belief in the link between the competencies and the organizational performance.

A number of benefits from the implementation of competency model HR approach, can be listed, both for the business and the employees. This list is growing over time with the practice and the increasing experience of the organizations in the field.

Some of the benefits which will be discussed in this thesis later, summarized from my practice in developing and implementing competency models, are listed below. The Competency model:

- Defines clearly the specifics of the job and the expected level of performance
- Gives common understanding of what is expected to be done by the employees and how
- Provides standards of the desired behaviour which makes communicating these standards to the employees easier and encourages them to go above the expectations
- Creates a transparency in all HR processes which leads to better understanding and higher motivation of the employees
- Gives possibility to correctly evaluate the competency deficiencies and to take measures to cover the gaps
- Supports hiring the right people for the position and ensures objectivity in evaluating the candidates
- Maximizes employee productivity at a given position
- Improves objectivity in performance appraisal
- Aligns employees' behaviour with organizational strategies and values
- Eases the adaptation to the job
- Gives the ability to grow the employee's talent
- Improves the adaptation to change

"Thanks to the competency model which we implemented in 2019, we can now face the global crisis with less concern. Through the model we could create a strong workforce, we increased the motivation of our employees, we reduced the training budget based on the precise competency assessment, and the efficiency of our staff visibly increased based on the factors mentioned above". (Ivan Damjanovic, HR Director, Zagreb Airport, ACI Europe Leadership & HR Forum meeting, June 2020)

2.1. Historical review of the competency movement

To understand better the concept of the competency modelling, I will first go back to the beginning of the so-called "**Competency movement**", which for the first time turns the glance from the job by itself, to those qualities and skills that lead to its perfect execution.

The movement has started more than 50 years ago. Key authors of the movement are John Flanagan, Robert White, David McClelland, Richard Boyatzis, Daniel Goleman, Patricia McLagan, Lyle and Signe Spencer, David Ulrich, David Berlew, John Lindholm, William Rothwell and more. (*please see the "References" part at the end of the thesis)*

In 1953, **David McClelland,** a Professor in Psychology in the Harvard University, has recognized for the first time a human trait which he called "competency". His article *"Testing for Competence Rather than Intelligence"*, published in American Psychologist in 1973 (McClelland, DC , 1973), in which he presents his revelation that the "*traditional achievement and intelligence scores may not be able to predict job success, and what is required is to profile the exact competencies required to perform a given job effectively and measure them using a variety of tests"*, has become a **turning point** for the competency movement.

Later, McBer, a consulting company founded by David McClelland and his associate David Berlew has specialized in mapping the competencies of entrepreneurs and managers across the world. They even have developed a new and yet simple methodology called **Behaviour Event Interviewing (BEI)** to map the competencies. McBer and Company (now part of Hay Group) have carried out the first competency study in 1973 and have created the first competency-based program for defining of competencies, needed for exclusive performance (by isolating these competencies which are demonstrated by the highly successful managers in comparison to those who are not so successful in the same job).

In 1954, another psychologist, John Flanagan, has conducted a research within the **Aviation Psychology Program** (Flanagan, J.C., 1954), focused on the differences between success and failure in one job. His technique of **"Critical incidents"** (CIT – Critical Incident Technique) is described as "*a set of procedures for collecting direct observations of people's behaviour in a way that facilitates their potential usefulness in solving practical problems.*"

"By an incident is meant any observable human activity that is sufficiently complete in itself to permit inferences and predictions to be made about the person performing the act. To be critical, an incident must occur in a situation where the purpose or intent of the act seems fairly clear to the observer and where its consequences are sufficiently definite to leave little doubt concerning its effects." (Flanagan, J.C., 1954)

CIT offers a clearly defined, systematic and sequential research process which ensures correct and objective behaviour observation, description and assessment. As envisaged by John Flanagan it consists of five steps as follows (*described in more details in Chapter 3*):

(1) General aims
(2) Plans and specifications
(3) Collecting the data
(4) Analysing the data
(5) Interpreting and reporting

His work has received a modern interpretation and development by William Rothwell and John Lindholm (Rothwell & Lindholm, 1999), serving as the basis for the idea of creating *key competencies models* to observe the **behaviour**, which shows the difference in the performance of *typical people* performing a job, compared to *highly successful people* on the same position.

Subsequently, these ideas have become key factors in the development of competency models.

If we go much more back in time, we will find out that in the traditional Chinese Kung-Fu schools the students had been taught not only in specific martial skills, but also in some soft skills like *being self-confident, taking decisions, leading, supporting the others*, and much more. They had been taught to *discipline, specific culture and behaviour* (which nowadays we call "competencies") which together with the specific martial style of the school had been one of the main distinctive marks of each of the schools. This teaching culture is still the leading line in the education in China, both in schools and business academies (Shifu Shu, Tianmeng Shaolin Kung-Fu Academy, Training, 2019).

2.2. Introduction to the term "competency" and its characteristics

Before moving on to the topic for developing of Competency models and the research done in relation with it, I will make an introduction to the concept of "competency".

If we look at the interpretation in Wikipedia, there the competency is described as "*a combination of practical and theoretical knowledge, cognitive skills, behaviour and values used to improve performance"*.

In the Bulgarian encyclopedia (https://bg.wiktionary.org/wiki) the term "competency" is described as "*a successful combination of knowledge, skills, attitudes and behaviours of employees to achieve results (desired levels of performance) in a given professional role and in a particular organization"*.

A more detailed definition of "competency" is defined by several hundred participants in a conference in Johannesburg in 1995, namely: *"Competency is a cluster of related knowledge, skills and attitude that affects significantly the respective role or responsibility in the organization, and co-relates with the performance, which can be measured against well-accepted standards and can be improved via training and development"*. (Sanghi, Seema, 2007)

Another popular definition is that competency is "*a descriptive tool that identifies the skills, knowledge, personal characteristics, and behaviours that are necessary to effectively perform a role in an organization and help the business meet its strategic goals"*. (Lucia & Lespinger, 1999).

One of the most common descriptions of competencies is that they can be "*motives, gifts, concepts of self, attitudes, values, knowledge, cognitive or behavioural skills - any individual characteristics that can be measured reliably and can clearly distinguish high from average performance, or effective from ineffective"*. (Spencer & Spencer, 1993)

According to Robert Guion, "*competencies emphasize people's characteristics and show their ways of behaving or thinking in certain situations for a significantly long period of time*." (Robert M. Guion , 1991)

In their book "Competency-Based Human Resource Development Strategy" the authors Fleishman and more, give a simple description of competency as "*a set of knowledge, skills, abilities, motivation, beliefs, values and interests"*. (Fleishman, Wetrogen, Uhlman, Marshall-Mies, 1995)

In all definitions we can find keywords that give the appearance of the concept of "competency" **- knowledge, skills, personal characteristics, attitudes and behaviour**.

For a better understanding of the overall concept below I present these terms in details.

Knowledge is a theoretical or practical understanding of a subject (Wikipedia). It is usually tangible and measurable (such as knowledge of a foreign language, knowledge of specific legislation or the characteristics of a product, etc.) or a much more complex factor, such as knowledge of the functioning of the Stock exchange or computer knowledge, etc.

Skill is the ability to perform an action (Wikipedia). It can also vary in a wide range from e.g. the ability to operate a machine or to write a report, to the ability to think strategically, to make presentations, solve problems and make decisions, etc.

Of all the components, **personal characteristics** are the most complex and difficult to measure. They are related to the personal value system, and to the inner talents of a person (mathematical, logical, analytical, communicative, memory, etc.). Thus, for example if a person has a talent for working with technics, he will be much better at performing technical tasks than at dealing with foreign languages, which would be much easier for a person with a gift for language learning. They can also describe characteristics that demonstrate a certain way of reacting to the external environment (self-confidence, emotional stability, assertiveness, etc.).

Attitude is a psychological state of a person's predisposition to a certain activity in certain situations (Wikipedia). The attitude is one of the Jung's 57 definitions in Chapter XI of *Psychological Types* (1921) (translated in English in 1971). He defines the attitude as "*the person's willingness to act or react in a certain way*" (Carl Jung, 1971).

Motives are the cause that moves people to induce a certain action (Wikipedia). They are factor which makes a person act in a certain way. They provoke, direct or choose the behaviour in relation to certain goals or activities.

There are disputes over the extent to which motives and attitudes are part of the competencies.

According to Kenneth Carlton Cooper (Kenneth Carlton Cooper, 2000), the motives and attitudes should not be confused with the competencies needed for performing a task. If the employee is willing to perform a task and has the necessary knowledge and skills, i.e. "can" (Fig.2), he is able to

perform the work in the best way (Performance). If the employee is willing to perform a task, but "cannot" (is not capable), he can be trained so that he can cope with the task (*in most cases, but not always, which I will comment further by indicating competencies which are more difficult to develop*). If a person "can" but "does not want to" complete a task, it is a matter of motivation, and if he "does not want to" and "cannot" perform the task, it is a serious problem from a management point of view, which has to be handled by taking dedicated measures.

	Cannot	***Can***
Wants	**Training**	**Performance**
Doesn't want	**Danger**	**Motivation**

Figure 2: Kenneth Carlton Cooper Matrix

Going deeper into the terminology, there should be also a proper understanding of the difference between **Motives and Motivation**, although they are complementary.

Motive, by itself, provokes action. **Motivation**, on the other hand, is the force that drives a person to take the said action.

Having a motive and a reason to do isn't enough. There is a need of internal strength to put things in motion, which is the role of the motivation. In other words, motivation is the psychological process that refers to general behaviour. Motive, on the other hand, is the concrete cause of said behaviour. Thus, motivation is the process itself and the motive is the concrete reason for taking action. The motives leading to different motivation are described by the American psychologist Abraham Maslow (1943) in his „Theory of Human Motivation" (Landon Smith, 2017).

For the purpose of the competency modelling, it is not necessary to go more into the details of all these terms, but it is important to know that there are **a number of factors which determine the behaviour of one person**, and although categories like motives, motivation and attitude cannot be trained, we have to take into consideration that they *affect significantly the final result of the performance of the individual.*

Going back to the definition of „competency “,

I accept that all these factors - innate talents, in combination with motives and attitudes (personal characteristics), together with the acquired and developed through a dedicated training knowledge and skills, form the behaviour of the person in a certain situation. By themselves these elements exist in each person, but **only in combination** with each other lead to a measurable result.

Therefore, competencies are not just knowledge and skills possessed by someone, but **appropriate behaviours** demonstrated in specific work situations.

Thus, the manifested in the real-life behaviour is the most reliable proof of the possession of a certain competency.

The figure below (Fig.3) provides a summary and visualization of the inter-relation between the different components of one competency.

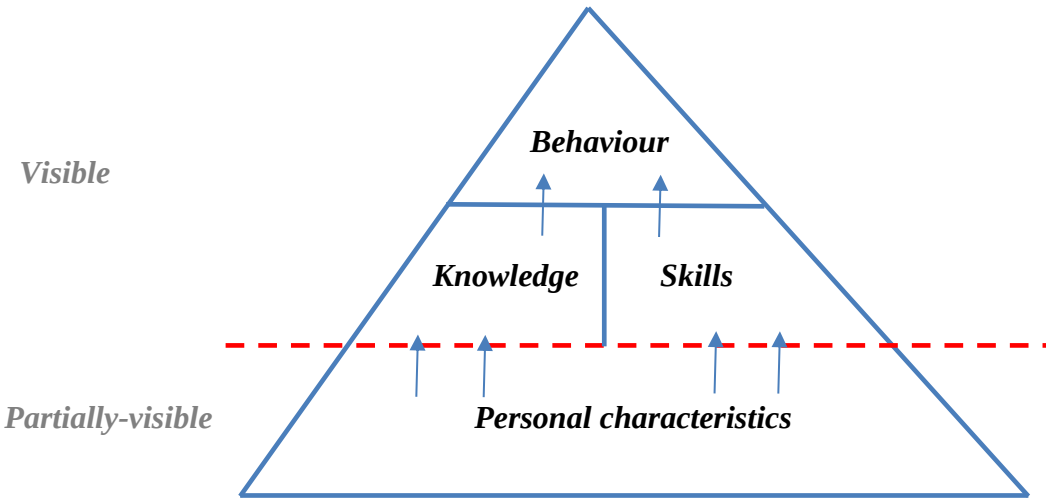


Figure 3: Inter-relation between the different components of one competency (by the Author of the thesis)

The base of the pyramid are the characteristics which a person has by birth and which he has built as a result of his experience in his life (family, social environment, etc.) – such as attitudes, motivation, value system and more (the so called „personal characteristics). On the basis of the personal characteristics the person builds knowledge and skills. The more they are related to individual talents and personal characteristics, the easier they can be built. All together they define the behaviour in a given role and situation.

In summary, the competency consists of a "*visible"* part (knowledge, skills and behaviour) and a "*partially-visible"* part (personal characteristics, incl. values, attitudes, motives, talents). The "*partially-visible*" part, which is very difficult to recognize, assess and develop, very often is neglected in the competency analysis, although it impacts very strongly the behaviour of the person, which is the most visible part of his performance.

In 1999 Athey & Orth (Athley & Orth, 1999) share their research for defining the **different factors influencing people's performance.** Some of the highlights and my attitude to them:

- The best way to understand performance is to observe what people actually do to be successful (competencies), rather than relying on assumptions about traits or qualities.

  I accept this statement, as the observation of how the successful people do the job and achieve high performance results is the best way to understand what is needed (which competencies) to achieve better performance at a certain job. The traits and the qualities influence the individual performance but are quite difficult to be measured precisely.

- The best way to measure and predict performance is to make people perform key aspects of the competencies we want to measure, rather than doing tests to measure traits and qualities.

  I agree with this statement, as no test or other assessment tool can measure one's competencies better than observation of their demonstration in real practice. As mentioned above, traits and qualities are difficult to be measured and their assessment often is not precise enough and therefore can be misleading.

- Competencies can be learned and developed over time, as opposed to traits and qualities that are considered innate and unchanging.

  I agree that it is quite difficult or even impossible to change the personality of a person. However, nowadays some features like confidence, self-esteem, attitudes, etc. can be trained upon willingness of the person to change. On the other hand, not all competencies can be successfully trained, which will be presented later in the thesis.

- Competencies must be visible and accessible to people so that they understand and develop the required level of performance.

The best way to make people understand what is expected by them at a certain job role, is to explain what knowledge, skills and behaviour is expected by them, so they can strive to improve them through training both on corporate or individual basis.

- Competencies should be related to meaningful life outcomes that describe the way people should present themselves in the real world, and not to unrealistic dimensions that only psychologists can understand.

  The language of the description of the competency should be the language of the people – simple, comprehensive, with examples.

  One example: a competency like "team work" can be simply described as*: supporting the other team members in case of need, avoid conflicts, respecting the others, etc.* It is not necessary to use a description like the one in Wikipedia: *"Teamwork is the collaborative effort of a group to achieve a common goal or to complete a task in the most effective and efficient way"* which can bring different interpretations to the employees.

In designing the methodology for building of competency models and in developing different tools for assessment of competencies, presented in this thesis, I have incorporated these complex inter-relations between the different components of a competency, and the upper listed factors.

"Competency" vs. "Competence"

A question also arises about if there is a difference between "competency" and "competence". Very often in the analysis the difference is neglected, but for the preciseness of the thesis, I present the two terms.

If we have a look at the Oxford dictionary the "**competence**" is described as a **noun** – the *ability to do something successfully or efficiently.* It is seen as a measurable ability of a person to act qualitatively and effectively to deal with specific problems, events or tasks that arise in a particular situation and area (learning, work, sports, etc.). It is a certain knowledge in a certain field.

Contrariwise, a "**competency**" (Oxford dictionary) is usually described as an **action** – *as use of specific behaviour, skill or knowledge.* Competencies reflect the dynamics of the environment and cannot be achieved completely and forever. When situations, events and results change, the same happens with competency descriptions.

While the **competence** in a specific field can be transferred from company to company and from position to position (regardless of the specific environment), the **competency** has a specific description and vary for different positions and companies. For example, if a Sales Director is supposed to have a competency for “excellent communication”, then this competency will have a different behavioural description from the "excellent communication" competency for the position of "Seller" in the same company. As well as the competencies for the position "Seller" in a supermarket and in a bank will have a different description. Last but not least, in the same company, two managerial positions may involve completely different challenges and require different competencies.

Therefore, in order the Competence model to make sense and to be as useful as possible for the respective company, it must be developed according to the **particular specifics of the business, the environment and the culture of the organization.**

“Job description” vs. “Competency profile”

For the proper understanding of the logics of the competency model, there should be a clear understanding of the difference between the role of the **job description** and the **competency profile** for the same job position.

In traditional human resource management, job analysis is the basis for selection, hiring, training, compensation and development. The focus is on the **position**, not on the **people** who perform it. Job descriptions are created to describe the position by itself, but *not the connection with the expected contribution of this job to the success of the organization*. This is quite often the reason why job descriptions fall behind the development of the respective position, or are even a real obstacle to organizational changes.

*“**Traditional job descriptions** are written to identify activities and may not clearly describe outputs needed for organizational success, also, traditional job descriptions become quickly outdated in today's rapidly changing, dynamic environment”* (Byham & Moyer, 2005).

„Job descriptions may become disregarded before they are written and thus become hindrance to organizational change”. (Dubois & Rothwell , 2004).

While the **set of competencies (Competency profile)** gives a clear description of the expected behaviour and results of the execution of the job position, helping people to clearly understand what level of performance to strive for and how they can achieve it.

The job description shows the elements of the job position and defines the work as a cycle of tasks and duties, needed for the execution of the job. The competency studies the people, who do their job successfully and defines the job from the perspective of the characteristics and the behaviour of the respective people.

So, the job description answers the question "**What**", while the competency profile answers the question "**How**".

The competency profile does not replace the job description. The two documents complete each other and provide full understanding of the respective job position.

One example: „Information service officer"

Description of the responsibilities of the position (acc. to the Job description) – **"What":**

- To welcome the customer at the counter
- To provide the requested information
- To guide the customer to the proper direction or employee, etc.

Description of the needed competencies (acc. to the Competency profile) – **"How":**

- Has excellent communication skills (listens actively to the customer, asks questions to understand better the situation, speaks with clear and calm voice)
- Speaks English very well (at upper-intermediate level)
- Has good knowledge of the company's organization and processes
- Is capable to manage any conflicts with customers (stays calm and patient in any cases, knows how to react in different situations with different customers, etc.)

„Competency behaviour" and „Competency standards"

As it can be seen in the example above, an important basis for building a Competency model is the description of the competencies in **behaviour** that can be measured against the required levels, so called "**standards**".

The description in behaviour makes it possible to monitor the presence and the level of proficiency of a certain competency, and **the standard** is practically the tool for this measurement. The standard clearly defines what needs to be achieved in the details of the behaviour expected from the employee executing the position, as well as the behavioural markers when evaluating the performance.

In Table 1 below I have presented an example with a description of some competencies for the job position of „Aviation specialist". I have chosen different types of competencies to demonstrate that each competency can be described in behaviour.

Competency	Behaviour description	Standard (1-min. to 5-max.)
Excellent communication	Is able to convey messages clearly and accurately in a way/language understandable to customers. Listens actively to the clients and shows patience and positivism in all situations. Answers calmly and completely the questions asked and is of maximum service to the client.	5
Effective team work	Is able to maintain a balance between the ability to work independently and as a part of a team. Is always ready to assist and help his colleagues if necessary. Treats other team members with respect. Shares the necessary resources and information with the team.	4
Integrity and high ethical standards	Has an honest and ethical behaviour at work and outside work. Protects the name of the company with his behaviour in every situation.	4
Cultural sense	Shows respect to all clients and colleagues, regardless of their different cultures (ethnics, religion, sex, nationality, etc.) Adapts and deals effectively with situations related to cultural differences. Identifies possible problems related to cultural differences and finds ways to prevent and solve them.	5

Table 1: Examples of competency behaviour descriptions and competency standards (by the Author of the thesis)

The competency standards, as already mentioned, are one of the most important instruments for assessment of the performance of the people who execute a certain job position, but also, they are very important for the precise defining of the future training needs of each employee, for more objective performance appraisal and recognizing internal talents to be further developed.

The competency standard shows the required minimum level of demonstration of the competency by the employee. If the performance of the employee is less than the standard, there should be a decision for further training or other measures (manager's support, mentoring, coaching, etc.). In case the performance is higher than required by the standard, the employee can be used as a trainer in this competency for the others, as a role model, as a high potential, to become a part of career development programs or succession planning programs, and should get a higher evaluation grade for this competency during the performance assessment (if it is based on competency assessment).

The easiest way to demonstrate the meaning of the competency standards is the *language knowledge*. Usually in this case there are specific pre-determined levels as: elementary, pre-intermediate, intermediate, upper-intermediate, advanced and professional, or A1, A2, B1, B2, C1, C2. If for a specific job position it is required level B1 for English knowledge as a standard, every assessment under this level should be discussed and supported further. In case of demonstration of better knowledge than required, the employee can get new responsibilities, tasks or even promotions.

2.3. Types of competencies

For the purposes of building of Competency models, it is important to have knowledge about the different types of competencies, too. The competencies are grouped in three main groups, presented in the so called "**Competency pyramid**". (Fig.4)

Core competencies

In the foundation of the pyramid are the core competencies. These are the competencies which are critical for the development and the performance of the company in regards with the strategic vision, goals and values and any areas where the organization seeks to build competitive advantage. The core competencies are applied to and required by all the employees.

Example for core competencies: *Customer focus, Team work, Innovative thinking, etc.*

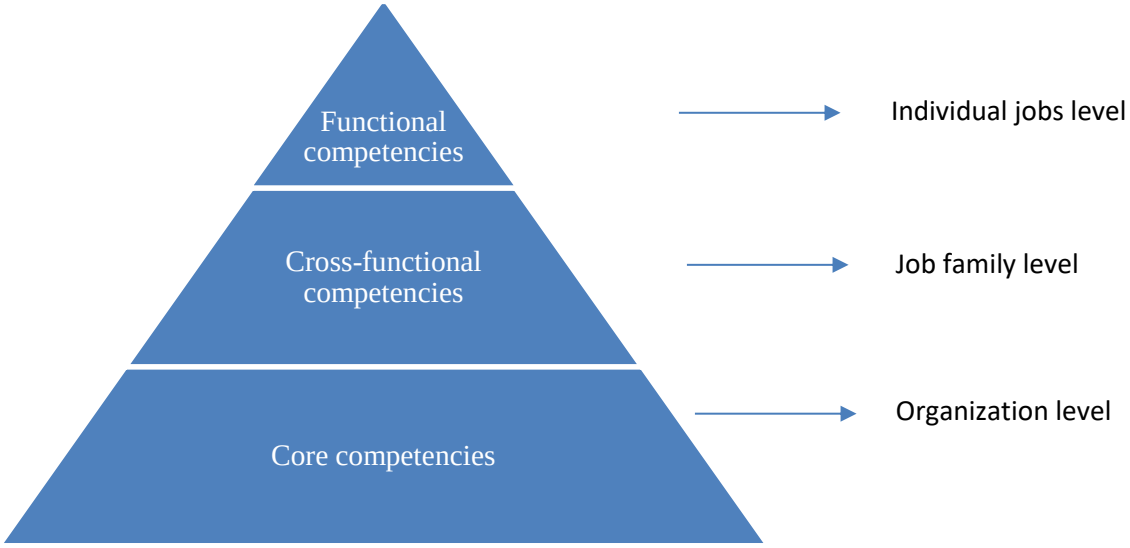


Figure 4: Competency Pyramid (Source: Internet)

Cross-functional (Job family) competencies

Job family competencies are competencies that can apply to different jobs across different departments or functions, grouped in one job family, or specific organizational levels.

Example for job family competencies: *Customer focus (for all front office job positions), Project management (for jobs involved in projects), Cost cautiousness (for any accounting or financial job position, any budget responsible or management position), etc.*

Example for leadership core competencies: *Change management, Conflict management, Result orientation, Strategic thinking, etc.*

Functional competencies (specific for the job)

Functional competencies are the unique competencies needed for each position within the company.

They require a very deep assessment of the job role in the organization in relation to the specific tasks and goals of the position, the specific working environment and the relationships with other parties inside and outside the company.

The Functional competencies can be: ***Technical & Behavioural (Personal) Competencies***

Technical and behavioural competencies are not an "either/or" proposition. Every organization and every job position require some combination of both technical and behavioural competencies in order to thrive.

Behavioural (personal) competencies describe the combination of specific behaviour required to perform effectively a specific job (achieved through learning, training, life experience, personal motivation, personal traits, etc.). Examples of personal competencies - *team work, communication, assertiveness, decision making, problem solving, strategic thinking, etc.*

Technical competencies describe the application of knowledge and skills needed to perform effectively a specific job within the organization. These types of competencies are closely aligned with the "know-how" needed for successful performance. Examples*: language knowledge, driving license, knowledge in specific legislation, computer literacy, etc.*

Some competencies can be a part of the two groups of competencies above – like *presentation skills*, which require technical knowledge of how to structure a presentation and how to use Power Point, for example, and, at the same time, proper behaviour in conducting the presentation.

Nowadays, there are also some social and psychological demands, which create an additional specific group of competencies - ***Socio-psychological competencies***.

Social competencies are expressed in interpersonal relations and are represented by such employee's features as: *emotional intelligence, communication, team working and cooperation*.

Psychological competencies refer to the internal functioning of the individual as *self-awareness, self-esteem, self-control, resistance to stress, logic thinking, creativity, decision making, etc.*

Socio-psychological competencies are recently accepted as the most important group of professional competencies but the process of shaping them is strongly determined by personality features and starts much earlier than employee joins the organization.

Every job profile needs a combination of different competencies in order to capture the complete picture of the ideal performance.

It is mandatory to have also the knowledge about the level to which the competencies can be trained and developed (Table 2).

Difficult to develop	Relatively difficult to develop	Subject to development
Creativity	Decision making	Any knowledge-based competency
Assertiveness	Negotiating	Organization
Strategic thinking	Taking a risk	Planning
Adaptability	Initiative	Time management
Analytical skills	Leadership	Verbal communication
Dynamics at work	Change management	Written communication
Emotional intelligence	Listening skills	Customer orientation
Empathy, etc.	Teamwork	Goal setting
	Team building	Delegation
	Coping with stress	Management by goals
	Dealing with conflicts, etc.	Conducting meetings

Table 2: Grouping of competencies based on the level of difficulty of their development (Heat Development Solutions)

Difficult to develop - the competencies from this group are extremely difficult to develop. They are related to personal characteristics and are often a consequence of values, upbringing, established paradigms in childhood, the influence of the social environment and more. Some of them can be trained with dedicated efforts, individual training, coaching and for a relatively long time.

Relatively difficult to develop - it takes time and effort to master these competencies. Over time and with the accumulation of experience, they can be developed.

Subject to development - can be learned through appropriate training and targeted development of relevant skills.

2.4. Competency models

There are different definitions of what a Competency model is.

For some authors and researchers, the competency model is "*a set of competencies that includes the key behaviours required for excellent performance in a particular role".* (Lucian Cernusca & Cristina Dima, 2007)

"The competency model is a descriptive tool that identifies the competencies needed to operate in a specific role within a(n) job, occupation, organization, or industry. Simply stated, a competency model is a behavioural job description that must be defined by each occupational function and each job." (Dorothy Fogg, 2004)

Another popular definition is that the competency model *is "a guideline by Human Resources department that sets out the specific skills, knowledge and behavioural requirements that enable an employee to perform their job successfully*." (Valamis, 2020)

According to Talentfit (a platform for training and learning), competency modelling is *"a framework for defining the skills, knowledge and behaviour requirements of a job".* (Talentlift, 2020)

All the definitions lead to a common understanding that the **Competency model is a framework providing a list and detailed description of the required competencies for each job position in one organization, which competencies jointly define the successful and efficient performance of the company.**

2.5. Interaction factors

Another clarification that I would like to make before presenting the methodology for competency modelling and its impact on the business, is that the competencies of the employees are not the only factor for the success and the development of the organization. Materials, raw materials, equipment, technologies, processes, production and management methods used, etc., different for different types of business, are resources that are extremely important for the final results. But it is the demonstration of certain competencies by the people who handle these resources, that predetermines the more efficient use of these resources, which leads to higher productivity, efficiency and performance.

CHAPTER THREE

Development of Competency-based Human Resources Management Model

In this chapter I present the existing approaches for creating of competency models and the methodology for building of in-house CBHRM models, which I have developed as a subject of this thesis. I have also provided a detailed description of the data collection methods and instruments, which are a part of my contribution to the subject.

Based on my detailed research, in the development of the methodology for building of competency-based HRM models, I generally step on some theoretical foundations and knowledge:

1. I accept the McClelland theory (pls see "*3.1. Historical review of the competency movement")*, that the best prediction for the performance of one person is the assessment of his competencies (required for execution of the respective job position).

   In my practice I have had a lot of cases when people with more than one master degrees, speaking a number of languages, etc. – i.e. people with outstanding profile, fail in executing a certain job, because they lack some of the specific competencies (in most of the cases personal competencies and the right attitude), required for the job.

2. I accept the CIT (Critical Incident Technique) approach, introduced by John Flanagan, as a basic approach in my methodology for observing, describing and assessment of behaviours, which represent the required competencies for a certain job.

   I use this approach in the methodology for building of competency models, as it provides an easy to understand, well-structured, consistent and logical way to conduct the study and create a customized competency model, with some additions from myside which make the process more comprehensive and adequate for the current business reality.

3. I accept the following definition of Job competency profile based on a combination of different available definitions: *Job competency profile is a framework that defines the excellent performance in one job position. This framework consists of a number of competencies, which can be generically applied to all employees executing the same job position within the organization. Each of these competencies is defined using language that is clear enough to ensure that everyone has a common understanding of what "excellent" job*

behaviour looks like within the overall context. This common understanding becomes the benchmark (standard) against which the performance of an individual can be measured.

4. I accept the following definition of Competency model provided by Dubois and Rothwell in their book "Competency-based Human Resources Management" (David D. Dubois William J. Rothwell, 2004): "*Competency model is the form through which the specific combination of competencies - knowledge, skills, characteristics and behaviour, needed for the effective performance of a specific role in a specific organization, is described, and which is used as an instrument in the organization's management of the Human resources (as recruitment, training and development, performance appraisal, career promotion, succession planning, compensation and rewarding), assuring a clear, transparent and objective HR Management. It contains a list of competencies and behaviour indicators, which give "life" to the competencies in the context of the respective organization*".

3.1. Approaches in development of competency models

There are different possible approaches for identification of competencies and development of competency models, described in the available sources of information in the field.

All of them focus on determining what leads to superior performance and identifying the top performers and finding out what they do. The final outcome of them all is essentially the same – **identification of behaviours required to successfully perform a given role**. The difference is how they get there.

There are competency models which identify the core competencies that are relevant and necessary to all members of an organization, no matter what their level and role. Other models define the competencies required for efficiency in a given unit or job position. Such competency models take into account the specific external and internal environment in which the person operates, and any other job-specific factors that could require a special set of competencies for effective performance.

On the other side, there is always an option of "adopting" an existing model (designed by a consultant or other company) in order to save costs and time.

In Table 3 are presented some of the most popular approaches for development of Competency models, based on analysis and summary of the available information.

Approach	Short description	Advantages/Pros	Disadvantages/Cons
Applying a validated competency model	Taking a ready-made model and implementing it without any customization	Saving time on data collection, interviews, observations and analysis	Not reflecting the specificity of the business, the culture and goals and the real need of skills and knowledge in the organization
Adapting an existing competency model	Taking a ready-made model and customizing it	Time saving and less efforts	Needs efforts to change the model acc. to the business requirements and specific environment (sometimes ends to more time and efforts than creating the model from scratch)
Using a limited pre-defined list of competencies	Choosing competencies from a pre-defined list	No need of research and less time for development of the model	The behaviour description of the competencies in the list cannot reflect fully the specific competency needs of the company and can lead to wrong competency goals and behaviour
Internal development from scratch	Development of an in-house, self-made model	The model will reflect all the specificities of the business and will guarantee a successful change	Needs time, resources and dedicated efforts
Development by a consultant from scratch	HR consulting company develops the model based on their methodology and understanding	External expertise Expected less time	High cost and, at the same time, engagement of the HR team as a support to the consultant (sometimes it needs more time and efforts than in case of internal development). It is possible that the applied methodology is not appropriate for the respective culture and environment.

Table 3: Different approaches for building of competency models (by the Author oft the thesis)

Analysing all the Pros and Cons for each approach, it is obvious that the best results in competency modelling can be achieved by **applying a mixture of different approaches and methods.**

In all cases**,** the modelling should be based on *deep analysis of the job positions in the company, creating a unique set of competencies for each position, and precise description of the specific behaviour expected within each competency.*

With the conducted research among 120 Bulgarian companies (2019) and 120 European airports (2020) I aimed to measure the level of knowledge and utilization of Competency models by the business.

85 companies from Bulgaria and 63 airports from 28 European countries responded to the survey.

From all the 148 respondents, 64% have implemented Competency models in their organizations – 65 % in Bulgaria (BG) and 63% among the airports (ACI).

25% (ACI) and 49% (BG) have developed the models internally. 75% (ACI) and 42% (BG) has used an external consultancy, and 0% (ACI) and 9% (BG) has adapted an existing competency model.

As it can be seen from the survey results, only 49 % (BG) and 25% (ACI) have developed their own Competency models. The reasons for this low percentage can be different – lack of confidence in the internal HR potential, willingness to save time and efforts or to accelerate the process, available planned budget, etc. At the same time, as described in Table 3, most of the advantages of using external support, are in fact delusive, as in all cases the HR team, the management and at least some key employees are involved in the process.

The higher percentage in Bulgaria of internally developed competency models can be explained with the culture in the country – on one side, the Bulgarian companies (76% of the respondents in Bulgaria are Bulgarian companies) prefer using their internal potential and doing as much as possible internally (or to copy-pasting) in order to save money; on the other side – the HR consulting in Bulgaria is not developed well enough yet and there is no high trust in the quality of the offered services. Another possible reason is that most of the companies which replied to the survey in Bulgaria (64%) have staff number between 100 and 500, which makes the process of building and implementing a Competency model internally quite easier, compared to the ACI respondents, 68% of which have staff number more than 1000.

The high percentage (75%) of airports (ACI respondents) which have used external services for developing the model, can be also explained with the different culture – the consulting services are

better developed in many European countries and many companies prefer to use competent consultancy instead of wasting time for training internal staff and waiting for the final product.

In all cases, the fact that about 36% of the companies have not implemented any competency model till the time of the survey (and especially when we interpolate the results for a larger number of organizations) gives an indication that the topic is worth investigating and spending efforts for its analyses, development and popularization.

Therefore, I decided to invest time to research and create a methodology which in combining the most of the advantages of the existing models, to facilitate, enhance and encourage the process of building of internal corporate Competency models.

The methodology presented in the following chapters is created as a result of deep analysis of the accumulated information, knowledge and experience in the last 20 years:

- Available information in competency models theory and practice related books, professional magazines, Internet,
- HR Regional and World conferences,
- ACI Europe Leadership & HR Forum discussions, meetings and working groups,
- Conferences, meetings and discussions within the Bulgarian Association for People Management and Job Tiger association in Bulgaria,
- My experience as a HR auditor and consultant in different international projects,
- 20 years professional experience in the HR Management and training field,
- My practice as a trainer observing and analysing the effect of the training process on the post-training performance of the trainees.

The methodology aims to provide **a complete and detailed approach** for creating of in-house, specific and unique Competency models, which:

- **is applicable for different companies, operating in different business and different cultural environment and**
- **is easy to be understood, followed and implemented by the HR professionals and senior management.**

3.2. Process of building of CBHRM models

As mentioned in the historical review in part 2.1. of the thesis, in his Critical Incident Technique (CIT), the psychologist John Flanagan had developed a 5-steps procedure for defining and assessment of people's behaviours (Flanagan, J.C., 1954). This procedure provides a very comprehensive and logical way of data collection and analysis, which made me base my methodology for building of competency models on it, with some interpretations and additions. The 5 steps in CIT:

(1) **General aims -** the general goals of the research are discussed and defined
(2) **Plans and specifications** – the research is planned in details, and all the specifications of observers, groups to be observed, and observations to be made are defined
(3) **Collecting the data** – all the planned activities for data collecting are conducted
(4) **Analysing the data** – all the collected data are summarized and described in an efficient manner so that they can be effectively used for practical purposes
(5) **Interpreting and reporting -** all the data are analysed and presented in an appropriate form; a very important step, as in case the collected data are not interpreted properly, the whole research fails.

Going into depth in Flanagan's theory, I have conducted a study of the methodology used by him, testing it for collecting data for 5 job positions in Fraport-Bulgaria. In this process I have found out that the literal application of his methodology does not correspond fully to the present business environments and employees' attitude and expectations.

My observations:

- The main method of data collection, proposed by Flanagan is conducting of interviews. My observation during the conducted 10 interviews show that some of the people didn't like the direct contact with the interviewer, most of the interviewees were under stress and had doubts about the goal of the interview, some of them refused to answer some of the questions.
- Group interviews is the second proposed by Flanagan method for data collection. I did one group interview as a test, which showed me that this method is not applicable in its pure form, as it was difficult to focus the attention of the participants to the topic, they were talking a lot, complaining, arguing, etc. which did not bring the expected outcome for collecting of the needed information.

My conclusions:

- Using only interviews and group interviews for data collecting is not enough for the precise evaluation of the job position on all its sides.
- Application of other data collection methods, relevant to the present business environment and the present employees' attitude and expectations (especially for the young people) is mandatory for the success of the process.
- A comprehensive communication before the start of the process is mandatory, so the people who are engaged in the process to be able to understand the purpose of the research and their role in advance.
- For higher objectivity of the research – data collection and data analysis, it should be conducted by more than one person.
- For higher efficiency of the process, the senior (line) managers should be involved to provide a more helicopter and objective perspective on the job position under study.
- For creating the most relevant description of the job position, it should be tested in practice before officially approved.

Taking into consideration all the observations, conclusions and cogitations, but still based on Flanagan's theory, I have developed a 5-steps process for creating of job competency profiles, which are the foundation of the Competency models (Fig.5).

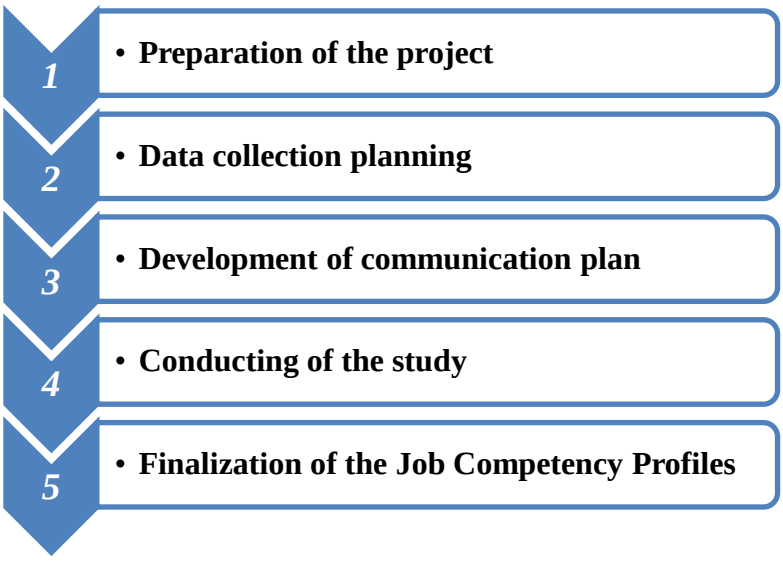


Figure 5: Process for building of Competency model (by the Author of the thesis)

Stages like defining of budget, timelines and action plans are not a subject of this thesis, as they are specific in each case.

STEP 1: Preparation of the project

Similar to Flanagan's approach, and logically, every project starts with setting of the project goals. In addition, at this step I also recommend choosing the project team which will conduct the studies, make the analysis and design the final model. If the project team is selected and joins the project in the very beginning, the people in the team will know the project in details, will be able to follow the progress, to analyse and decide about any changes, and will have time to know each other well before the real start of the project.

Setting of project goals

The most important step in establishing a new project is the setting of the **right goals**.

In the case of the Competency modelling, it is very important to define **"Why"** this project is needed for the business and **"What"** are the expected benefits from it.

As the development of a CBHRM model is **time and resource consuming**, there should be a meaningful reason to start its development and implementation. Therefore, to base the Competency model on a stable foundation, it is important to define:

1. What is the need of the business for competency model? – examples:

   - ✓ *Long-term business goals*
   - ✓ *Change in the organization structure and/or other expected important changes*
   - ✓ *Improvement of the performance*
   - ✓ *Increasing of the productivity*
   - ✓ *Ensuring of readiness for the future business environment (as a strategic strength)*
   - ✓ *Improvement of the HR processes (or some of them as: improvement and higher efficiency of the selection process, more efficient training process, creating of a pool of high-potential)*
   - ✓ *Attracting and/or retaining top talents*
   - ✓ *Launch of new corporate culture and/or values*
   - ✓ *As a part of a Sustainable development project/program, etc.*

Clearly defined business needs will ensure ongoing support and will focus the efforts of all to the model development and implementation.

2. Which are the job positions/units which will be in the focus of the model?
3. Which are the HR processes to be incorporated in the model (recruitment, training, career development, performance appraisal, etc.)

In each case the goals could be different but as a general rule they have to be *specific, understandable, easy to be measured, consistent with available resources and realistic.*

As a guideline for the setting of the project goals, the well-known SMART approach (Fig.6) can be used:

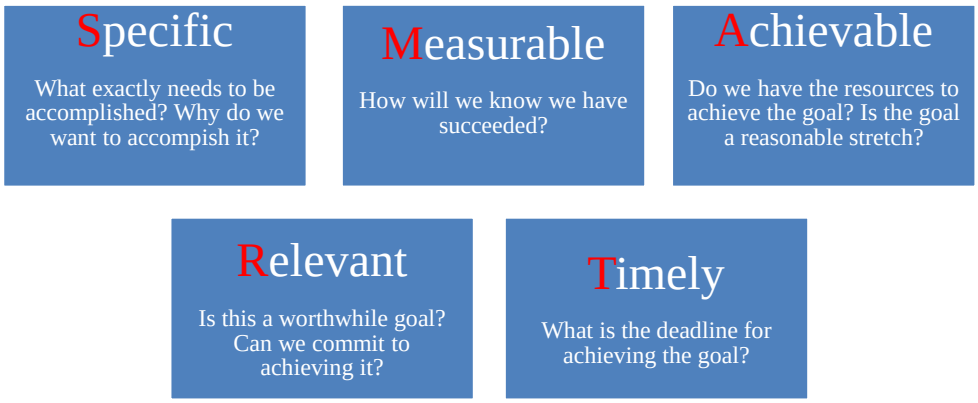


Figure 6: SMART Goals (Source: Internet)

Selection of a project team

One of the main success factors for the development of an efficient Competency model is the selection of the people in the project team.

It is advisable that experts from the HR team are involved and responsible for the project. Other employees could be also invited for the project, but it should be clarified in advance that the project is a **long-term engagement and needs dedication of time and efforts.**

It is also important to ensure that the people selected for the project team are motivated to participate, feel confident to conduct interviews and analysis, and understand and support the project.

Some basic requirements for the members of the project team:

- ✓ *Willingness to participate in the project*
- ✓ *Good verbal and written communication skills*
- ✓ *Good listening skills*
- ✓ *Good analytical skills*
- ✓ *Good knowledge of the company's organization*
- ✓ *Good image and trust among the employees*
- ✓ *High objectiveness*
- ✓ *Ability to control the interview discussions*
- ✓ *Attention to the detail*
- ✓ *Confidentiality*

STEP 2: Data Collection planning

The purpose of the data collection is to learn about **critical factors** that affect the performance in the job position which is an object of the study. Based on my practice, this is the most important step in the development of the Competency model.

In the CIT approach Flanagan presents the second step of the technique as "Plans and specifications". As a second step in my methodology I recommend:

- ✓ a precise planning and selection of the sources and the methods for data collection, based on the *specificity of the company, the environment, the culture and the mentality of the people, their attitudes and experience in such projects and all other internal and external factors which might influence the final results*
- ✓ precise selection of the people who will be approached to contribute to the data collection process (employees and managers), and
- ✓ preparation in advance of all the needed forms, survey and interview questions, etc. before the start of the study

Defining sources and methods for data collection

In addition to the traditional methods used in CIT (interview and group interview) (Flanagan, J.C., 1954), I would recommend using of **a variety of data collection methods**, which will bring more objectivity and preciseness of the process. In order to facilitate the data collection process, I present

some of the methods which I have successfully used in my practice and among which a selection can be made from any project team, according to the specificity of the company and the set project goals.

In all cases, the main guideline for the data collection process is that during this process the **full information** about the job position should be collected, including **functions and tasks**, **knowledge and skills** needed for executing of these tasks and functions, **interactions** with other jobs, external parties, clients, hierarchy levels, etc., **personal skills and behaviours** needed to manage these interactions and the overall mission of the job position.

There are different sources and methods for data collection. As advised above, they should be selected according to the company culture, the position level, the specifics of the working place and the profile of the participants in the process.

Generic/Individual job description

The best approach in the beginning of the job research is to start with a detailed review of the job description. The job description gives a chance to the project team to learn and know better the job position and its role and importance in the organizational structure of the company. It provides the general view of the position – level at the company, positioning within the department, possible career paths. It answers the questions about the main goal of the job, main functions and tasks, main requirements, main risks, leadership obligations, subordination, etc.

Regulatory or other compliance issues

There are many job positions which are a subject of national and/or international regulations. For other positions, the knowledge of specific legal acts or different certificates, specific IT or language knowledge skills, etc. is a key requirement. All this have to be investigated before the start of the analyses of the position.

Structured interviews

Although the interviews are the best method known for data collection, many companies avoid using them, as they need time for preparation, organization, conducting and analysing. On contrary, my experience shows that the structured interviews are one of the best methods for data collection as they are based on direct contact with the people executing the job which is analysed. I always recommend the interviews to be performed at the working place of the interviewee (when possible) in order to

have the opportunity to observe and assess the real working environment and factors which influence the job performance.

The reason that I recommend not just "interview" but "**structured interview**" is that the structured interview provides more organized and objective process of interviewing. The questions are prepared in advance and asked in the same way to all the interviewees, which minimizes the risk of missing something during the process of interviewing, and makes the process of summarizing and analysing of the collected information easier.

Some recommendations, based on my project experience: In order to achieve higher efficiency and focus in the process, the interview should not last for more than 45 minutes up to one hour, having in mind that the duration depends also on the job and the culture of the interviewees (for example, in Bahrain the interviews sometimes lasted for almost two hours, as the people like talking about their families and asking us about our families first, and then answering our questions - which is a part of their culture).

In order to achieve higher objectiveness, the interviews should be conducted by at least two interviewers. A possible approach could be that one person leads the interview and directs the dialogue while the second person records the interviewee's comments and observes.

It is also advisable to conduct the interview with one interviewee at a time, to ensure confidential environment and make the person more calm, open and honest in his/her answers.

Structured interview advantages: An experienced interviewer can establish good relationship with the interviewee and encourage an honest and full discussion. Interviewees usually are more open in an individual dialogue than in groups, and thus may provide a more accurate and comprehensive perspective of the job.

Structured interview disadvantages: The interviewers should be experienced and well prepared in advance in order to guarantee effective interviews. The accuracy of the information provided during the interview can never be guaranteed, as first, it is a subjective perspective, and second, there is a possibility for considerable bias in the way the questions are asked, how they are heard and answered by the interviewees, and how the interviewer understands and documents the responses. Some interviewees are uncomfortable in an individual face-to-face setting, and will provide less information than they would through a more anonymous method such as a survey. Analysis of the data obtained

in interviews is labour-intensive and difficult, especially when the different interviewees present conflicting perspectives. Individual interviews are very time-consuming and expensive to conduct.

My Practice

The interviews are of extreme importance for the research process. My impression in both projects is that the direct contact with the employees, showing interest in their job, giving them a possibility to talk about their experience, their problems, their feelings, showing respect to their role brings a great benefit to the company by itself.

Key success factors in collecting data through structured interviews:

- ✓ The interviewer has to establish a comfortable, positive and open atmosphere
- ✓ He/she has to be prepared well in advance, to have an agenda and stick to it
- ✓ In order to collect as much information as possible, he/she has to ask more open-ended questions and let the interviewee speak most of the time
- ✓ In principle people like telling stories and providing examples, which is a good chance for the interviewer to collect more information
- ✓ The interviewer should avoid leading or directing the interviewee as it can corrupt the quality of the collected information

In case there is **only one person executing the job**, the face-to-face interview is the only assessment method to be used.

Surveys

As interviews can be conducted with limited number of people, the best way to collect information from more people is to prepare and distribute a survey with the same questions which are asked during the structured interview. In this way a considerable information can be gathered for a short time from a number of people, even if they are located in different places.

Survey advantages: The information can be collected and processed electronically, which makes the process easier and saves time. The process is quicker and less expensive. The respondents can decide when and where to complete the survey which is quite more convenient for the participants in the

process. The surveys can be anonymous, which encourages people to respond (*however, in the survey prepared by me, I give an option for the name of the employees, in case they want to identify themselves*). It is a very good method for data collection from people who are not communicative, don't like direct contact, introverts or just shy.

Survey disadvantages: As in the case of the interview, the provided information is subjective. In addition, there is no visual contact and possibility to ask additional questions and to clarify the given answer.

Main success factors: In order to get the best results from the surveys, the questionnaires have to be very well-structured, the questions have to be very clearly and precisely asked, the answers (if any) have to be unambiguous, and the instructions for completing the survey should be very comprehensive. (**Appendix 2**)

Direct observations

In the interviews and the surveys people present the requested information through the prism of their subjective point of view, their experience, relationships, and the level of satisfaction from their job, their manager and their company. Sometimes they under- or over- present their job, their tasks or some other factors which are of high importance for the study.

In all these cases, the direct observation can provide an objective check against the information gathered during the interviews and the surveys. The project team visits high-performing employees, observes their work and asks questions to get the details and to precise the collected information.

Direct observation advantages: The full perspective of the job can be viewed, including work interactions with managers, team members, clients and other partners. The required competencies for execution of the job can be easily identified as there is a direct observation of the required behaviour in different situations and cases. The method provides an excellent perspective of the job.

Direct observation disadvantages: The biggest disadvantage of this method is that it is time consuming. It takes time the process to be organized, the employees to be selected and informed in advance, it needs the observers to go to the specific working place. For more complex jobs the observation has to be repeated with more people or shifts (if any). And the fact that the presence of an observer always changes the performance of the observed person also has to be considered.

Main success factors:

- ✓ The observation should take place during a typical working day
- ✓ The observer should be objective in what he sees and witnesses
- ✓ The observer should be invisible as much as possible and should not disturb the work of the observed employee
- ✓ At least two observers should make the observation at the same time in order to ensure higher objectiveness of the process

Focus-groups

The focus-group method is a brainstorming method which gives a possibility for collection of much information and ideas in a relatively short time. It is advisable to use this method when there are many people executing the same job and when a lot of interviews and surveys have to be conducted in order to get a reasonable amount of information. The participants can discuss their points of view, share ideas, brainstorm, and give different perspectives of the job.

The focus-group method is an alternative of the "group interviews" proposed by Flanagan, but as it is based on a well-designed agenda of the session, timing, rules (e.g. how much time each of the participant can speak), limited duration, etc., it is quite more effective.

Focus-group advantages: collection of a lot of information and ideas for a short time (time and cost saving).

Focus-group disadvantages: involvement of a lot of people; there is a risk of chaos during the discussions if the moderator is not trained and experienced; if there is a negative attitude to the project it can easily spread in the group and create a difficult to overcome situation.

Main success factors:

- ✓ Well-trained and experienced moderator
- ✓ The number of the participants should be well-considered (not less than 5, in order to have different perspectives and ideas, and not more than 10, in order the group and the discussions to be manageable, according to my experience)
- ✓ Structured agenda and strict rules

- ✓ The participants to be informed in advance about the goals of the focus-group
- ✓ Discipline and commitment of all participants

Discussion with the line manager (superiors to the job position)

Line managers should not attend the interviews and/or control the survey results as this might provoke different behaviour and answers, which can compromise the research results.

But at the end of the data collection process among the employees executing the respective job, it is good to discuss the position with the responsible line manager, too. The discussion can be conducted in the same way as with the employees – via structured interview, written survey or just an open discussion.

The line manager can provide a helicopter view of the job under research, can give information about the job from different perspectives, including the connection and the interrelation with the other jobs in the department or other internal/external for the company parties, and can present a more objective and less emotional opinion.

Discussion with HR department

In some cases, when there is some confusion about the job or some contradictory information, HR department team can contribute to the data collection based on their experience and knowledge.

Expected changes

Sometimes when the competency profiles are finalized it turns out that there are planned changes for the near future which will affect the competencies needed for the respective positions. In this case the study should be conducted again. It is waste of time and efforts of the project team.

Therefore, it is always good the project team to discuss with the management in advance the forthcoming changes which can affect the project, like merging or separating of some processes and/or positions, implementing of new technologies, software, insourcing or outsourcing, significant changes in the strategic goals of the company, etc.

Assumptions for the future development of the position/business

During the meeting with the management, the project team can also collect information about any expected changes in the business sector and/or market, globally or locally. Based on this information, they can anticipate some specific competencies and can incorporate them in the model, which can prepare the company for the forthcoming challenges.

One example: If the company has a plan for a new construction project (new factory facilities, new shops, new terminal, etc.) it may lead to a need of specific engineering and technical knowledge. If the project team has this information in advance, before starting the design of the competency model, it can analyse, discuss and eventually add a requirement for some technical competencies to some positions in the company, in order to ensure the smooth execution of the construction project in the future.

At this step, it is important the project team to decide about the data collection methods which are **most appropriate** for the different positions/departments/levels in the company, having in mind the specifics of the job and the people who execute it. It is a common mistake to use the same data collection methods for all job positions in the company. For example:

- ✓ in case there is nobody who executes a definite job with a superior performance, a focus-group will be more appropriate than individual interviews or surveys
- ✓ if the only person executing the job is not communicative, it is better to propose a survey instead of interview
- ✓ if there are too contradictory opinions in the surveys, more face-to-face interviews have to be conducted to clarify the picture, etc.

The decision about the study approach has to be made also in line with:

- ✓ the business environment
- ✓ the business cultures
- ✓ and - at international level – the specific culture and mentality of the people, too.

My Practice

Fraport-Bulgaria

During my research for development of a Competency HR management model for Fraport-Bulgaria (Bulgaria), I selected the following data collection methods:

- ✓ *Job descriptions*
- ✓ *Structured interviews - with people executing the job*
- ✓ *Surveys - filled-in by some other people executing the same job (the number depends on the total staff number at this position)*
- ✓ *Focus groups - in case that many people execute the same job*
- ✓ *Workshops*
- ✓ *Interviews with the line managers - for discussion of the jobs under their supervision and any expected changes and prediction for the future*

as the people in the company have the culture to participate in projects, workshops and to be part of the corporate decisions. The Bulgarian culture implies open communication and sharing of own opinions and ideas. So, the employees willingly supported the process of competency modelling and participated in all project initiatives.

BAC, Bahrain

At Bahrain Airport Company, Bahrain (BAC) I conducted the research based on:

- ✓ *Generic job descriptions*
- ✓ *Direct observations*
- ✓ *Face-to-face interviews with limited number of people*
- ✓ *Surveys among limited number of people*
- ✓ *Discussion with the line managers*

as for the employees of the company it was the first project in which they were asked for support, and as in their culture it is expected to accept management's decisions rather than to contribute to them.

On first place, it is recommended to select people with superior performance in the job, in order to identify these competencies which can bring the person to the highest level of performance. In some cases, as a project manager, I have made compromises with this rule in order to collect more opinions and information, and then we had to re-do the research for the respective job positions, as during the testing period we realized that the designed job competency profiles are not able to ensure the best performance of the job.

The number of the participants in the research is also very critical. If the job position is executed by 5 people (for example) with high performance, all of them can be involved in the process with interviews and surveys. But if the number is 15-20, then a selection should be made and no more than 10 people (in case of surveys or focus-group) should be involved in the process. It should be considered that at the next step of the methodology, all the collected data have to be processed and analysed and if there is too much information, the process with be slowed down and hindered.

The next consideration about the quality of the pool is to ensure a diversified sample of people as gender, age, experience, etc. which will bring a more realistic picture during the research.

And last but not least, it would be a big advantage if information can be collected also from people who are connected with the position, other than the direct executors of the job – clients, partners, managers, people from other company units, who are connected with the job in some way, since they can provide a useful perspective on the competencies needed for the job.

Preparation for the study

There are also a number of documents to be prepared in advance in order to ensure a smooth research process. Below I am providing the list of documents required for the presented in the thesis methodology, to ensure documenting the whole process in a more organized and systematic way:

- ✓ Development of Job Competency Profile (JCP) Survey/Structured interview questionnaire (**Appendix 2**)
- ✓ Development of focus-groups workshops (topics, participants, place, time/)
- ✓ Development of JCP – Observers summary form (**Appendix 3**)
- ✓ Development of JCP form (**Appendix 4**)
- ✓ Preparation of information/letters/emails about the project
- ✓ Scheduling of the focus-groups workshops

- ✓ Scheduling of the interviews
- ✓ Information to the line managers
- ✓ Sending invitations to the participants in the process

STEP 3: Development of communication plan

I strongly believe that a key element for the success of any competency project is convincing those who are supposed to contribute to its development, or will be affected by its implementation, of its value, as the commitment and the support of all concerned employees, managers, even business partners is critical for the final success.

For this reason, I added this step in the methodology for building of competency models.

My Practice

In several projects for competency modelling, the Management of the companies neglected my advice for informing the people in the company in advance about the forthcoming project and their specific role and expected contribution.

In all these cases, the project teams faced **resistance to the project and refusal for support** from some employees even at higher positions, based on wrong understanding of the goals of the project and fear (in many cases the staff believed that the project aims to cut their role or reduce the staff numbers).

If the information about the project and its goals is communicated in advance, it is more likely the employees to understand it better and support it.

Therefore, it is advisable in the very beginning of the project work, the project team to identify those people and groups who **will benefit, be negatively impacted, be inconvenient, or affected** in any way by the competency study, and inform them about the start of the project, the goals, the expected benefits, the procedure, the timeline and the expected cooperation and contribution.

The communication plan should include both initial and ongoing communication about the progress of the project till its final completion.

In order to cover all the concerned parties, the following information (as a minimum) should be prepared and distributed:

- Information to the **whole staff** about the goal of the project and the expected benefits.
- Information to all **line managers** (and respective directors) about the goals and the expected benefits for the company and for them as managers, about the assessment methods which will be used, the schedule of the meetings with them and their team members and the list of the involved people.
- Information to all **employees** who are selected to be interviewed, surveyed or involved in any other way. It should be clearly explained to the people that **the study is about the job, not about the people.**
- **In case of interviews:** Invitations for the interview (by e-mail) should be sent at least few days in advance, explaining the goal of the meeting and the expected duration and contribution.
- **In case of surveys:** An e-mail should be sent to the selected people at least few days in advance, explaining the goal of the survey and the expected contribution. The surveys can be sent by e-mail or distributed on paper (based on the specificity of the job) with a defined deadline for filling in and sending back to the project team.
- **In case of observations:** as the observations are conducted at the working place of the job under study, both the employees and their line managers have to be informed in advance.
- **In case of focus-groups:** The focus group members have to be informed in advance about the goal of the meeting, the starting time and the duration. The duration of one focus-group session should be no more than 90 minutes.

STEP 4: Conducting the study

Although the described methodology is quite straightforward, ensuring accuracy and complete usefulness of the collected information is very challenging. The processes of **data collection and data analysis** are intertwined. While the members of the project team are conducting the data collection, they are also formulating and testing assumptions and ideas about the key factors required for success in the role. The challenge is to maintain a balance between the two activities and allow

each to drive the other in equal measure. The collected information about the specific job should be processed and analysed right after the finalizing of the data collection process, while the memories are still fresh, as it is not only the information on paper, but also the personal impressions and observations which altogether can provide a more realistic and complete description of the job.

Process of conducting the study

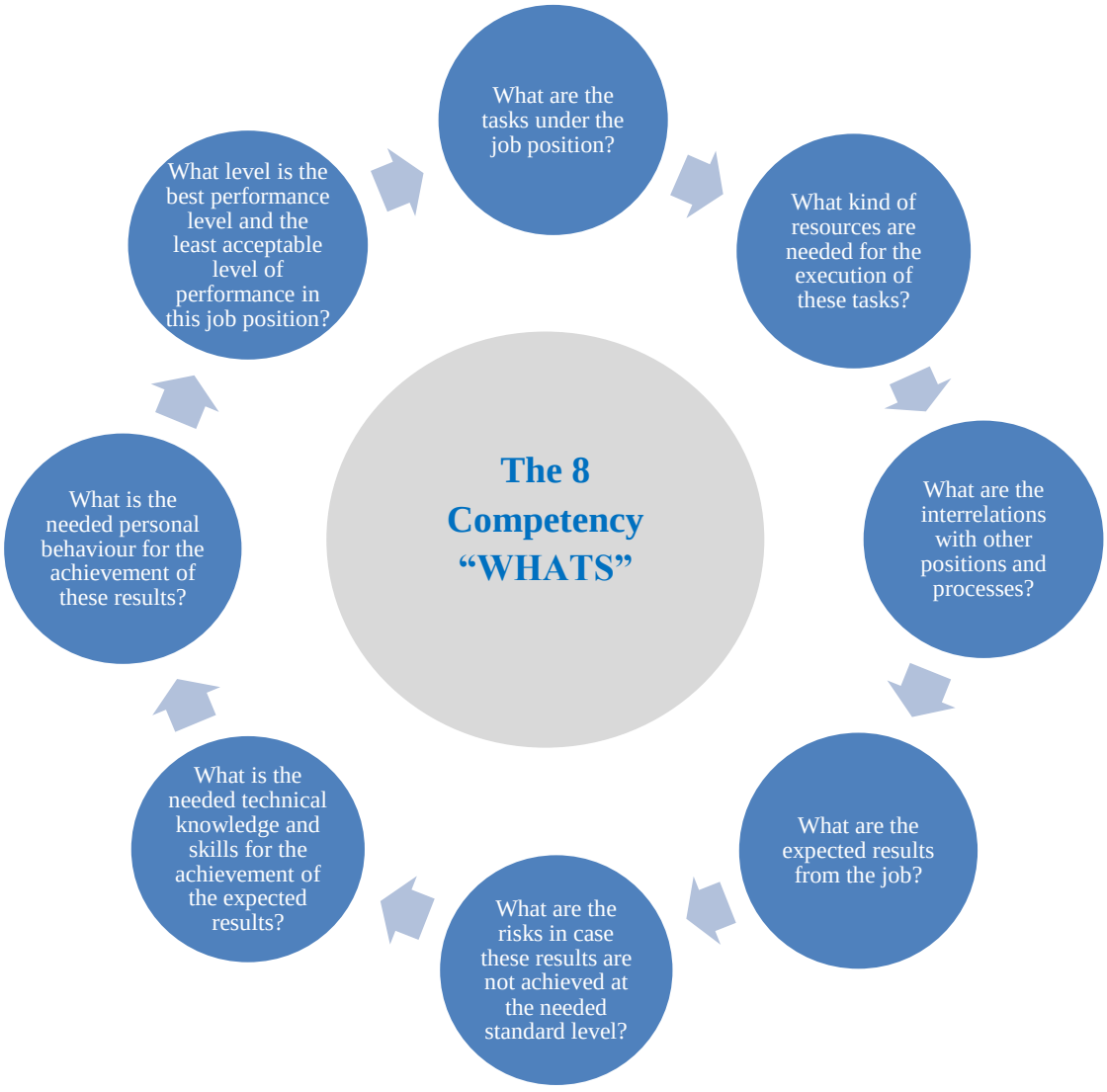


Figure 7: The 8 Competency „Whats" (designed by the Author of the thesis)

In order to ensure a more systematic and logical way for collecting information about the jobs, and to facilitate the process of defining the most important competencies for each of them, I have developed a list of 8 questions to be followed and answered during the data collection process.

Whatever methods for data collection are chosen and used by the project team, at the end of the research process, there should be an answer to these 8 questions for each of the job positions under study. I call this list **"The 8 Competency "Whats"** (Fig. 7)

These questions cover the different perspectives of the job and their answers can help for the complete understanding of the job and for easier designing of the specific job competency profile.

Development of competency profiles

Once the information is collected, there are few steps to follow in order to develop the **Job Competency Profile (JCP**) for the position under study.

1. All the collected data, observations and findings are summarized and discussed by the project team.
2. **5 to 7** relevant and most important preliminary competencies are selected for each position.
   - ✓ minimum 5, as based on my observations, a smaller number of competencies do not describe fully the competency and do not differentiate it well from the same competency in a different company/environment
   - ✓ maximum 7, as the competencies are supposed to be used in different HR processes and the number has to be manageable and able to be followed up
3. Each of the selected competencies is described **in behaviour** – <u>this is the most difficult and responsible task</u> - as the behaviour description is the basis for recruitment, assessment, training and other HR processes:
   - ✓ only the behaviour can differentiate the **exceptional** from the **standard** performers,
   - ✓ it is the best tool to explain to the people what are the expectations from their performance and what they have to focus on, and improve, and
   - ✓ the behaviour descriptions make the competency model **unique** compared to any other job position and/or organization.

4. A **standard** for each competency is defined, so that the performance can be measured in a precise way. The different possible **levels of proficiency** in comparison to the standard, are described with a scale, which has to be decided in advance at project team and management level (Fig.8)

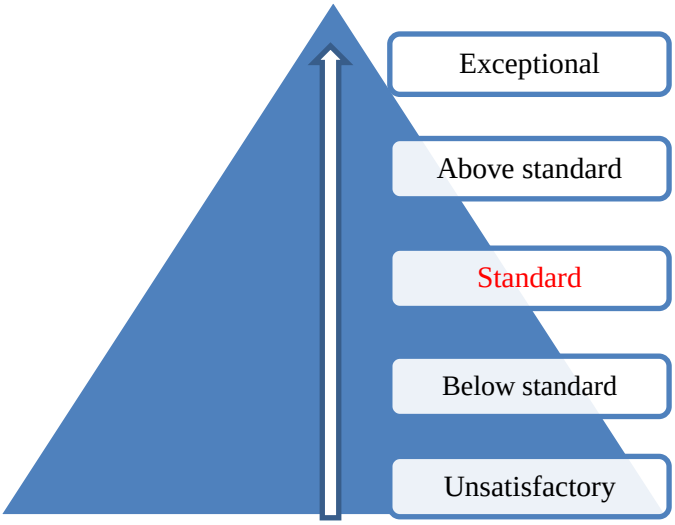


Figure 8: Competency behaviour scale (example by the Author of the thesis)

It is recommendable the scale to be *simpl*e and *linked to other evaluation systems*, well known in the specific environment.

My Practice

The scale which I have selected for the project in **Bulgaria** is from **2** (poor) to **6** (excellent) which is the same scale as the school evaluation system.

But if the same system is applied in **Germany**, it will create confusion, as in the German education system "**1**" is the highest evaluation mark.

5. A **JCP-Observers summary form** (Appendix 3) is filled in by the project team for each job position, with a summary of their observations, the line manager's comments, HR opinion (optional) and a proposal for a Job competency profile (first draft).

Based on my observations and lessons-learned during my practice in competency modelling, I have summarized and present below some **main guidelines** to be followed in preparing the competency profiles:

- **The competencies should be always described in behaviour.** It makes it much easier for every future user of the model to understand what specific performance is expected behind each competency.

- **The competencies descriptions should include a sequence of different possible behaviour reactions, ranked in a scale from most acceptable to non-acceptable.**

  For example: Competency "Customer focus"- the scale can be from "behaves rude to the customers and neglects their needs" which is unacceptable to "communicates with respect with the customers and tries to satisfy their specific needs" which is excellent performance of this competency.

- **The descriptions of the competencies should be short, clear and unambiguous,** so that every person who reads it even without knowing the job position, is able to understand the competency in the right way.

- **The competency description should clearly differentiate the effective from the ineffective performance.** The competency assessors should not have doubts in recognizing which behaviour is matching to the company's expectations and standards.

- **The behaviour description should reflect the job role, the hierarchy level, the specific environment and the specific corporate culture.**

  For example, the competency "Good communication skills" should have a different behaviour description for the job positions "Sales officer" and "Sales director", as there are different expectations about the behaviour of the two roles.

STEP 5: Finalization of the Job Competency Profiles

After the development of the first draft of the JCP, starts the process of validation and verification of the profile.

This process aims amendment of changes in the profile **before going "live"** and thus prevents from wrong competency selection and prioritization, wrong behaviour description or wrong standard definition.

Validation

At this stage the already designed JCPs are discussed with the respective line manager (superior manager of the job position) for a **final validation** of the competency list and the competency behaviour descriptions. This is very important in order to have the support of the line managers in the implementation of the model and its integration in the HR management system of the organization.

A good approach is the JCPs to be circulated also to the people who have participated in the study and ask them for their final confirmation. This can be a guarantee that the project team has captured the key elements and the critical success factors of the job.

Verification

The verification is **testing** the designed and validated JCPs in practice, in real life. This process provides a final confirmation of the validity of the study and the relevance of the profile. In case of need, some changes in the profile are proposed and discussed in the team and with the respective managers.

The verification is achieved through **direct observation** of the working process at the respective working place. Members from the project team observe closely the working process and the execution of the job tasks **and compares the performance to the JCP.**

It is also very important to choose **the most appropriate time** for the verification, which depends on the specificity of the business.

My Practice

In the project in Bulgaria we chose to verify the JCPs of the operational staff during the peak summer season, as one of our goals in building and implementing the Competency model was to ensure high performance of the staff in the peak season (*the two airports – Varna and Burgas - are highly seasonal airports with a high peak in summer and limited business in winter time*). For the administrative staff we worked on the model mainly in the winter time, as the administration work was comparatively the same throughout the whole year

In Bahrain we verified the JCPs following the principle "first JCP first", meaning that we verified the profiles right after their validation by the line managers. The work for data collection, designing of the profiles, validation and verification was done consistently in a short time for each job position, as the time for the project was very limited.

Very often the HR specialists, don't perform any check of the created JCPs, as it needs additional time and efforts. But going through the information sources and the experience of other people around the world, I was convinced to try and see if it is worth spending time on it. (Antoinette D. Lucia, Richard Lepsinger, 1999)

My personal impression is that the verification is a very important process. It is the **fine-tuning** step**.** As a result of this final analysis of the job position, sometimes important changes have to be implemented especially in re-ordering of the competencies as a level of importance, or changes in the behaviour description, or sometimes even last-minute changes in the list of the competencies. These changes can occur in case (of):

- Changes in the scope of the activity during the time of the design of the JCP and the verification
- Changes in the working environment, equipment, technology, legislation, etc. till the time of the verification
- The process of JCP development is not followed precisely
- The collected information for the job is not precise (not presented objectively by the interviewed employees or not analysed correctly by the project team, etc.)

- Human mistakes (such as distraction during the process, lower motivation, overloading – a high number of interviews per day, the analysis is prepared a long time after the data collection is completed, etc.)

Therefore, I recommend a verification of the JCPs to be always executed at the end of the process.

For even better results, the verification should be conducted by a project team member who has not been involved in the initial evaluation of the same job position, so he/she could evaluate the adequacy, the relevance and the application of the job profile more objectively.

Finalization

After the validation and verification stages, the project team has to prepare the **final JCP** (**Appendix 9 (1)** and **Appendix 9 (2)**). The form is filled in the following way:

- *Position description*: short description of the main responsibilities and duties of the job
- *Main risks:* description of the main external factors which influence the job and bring some risk to it: stress, weather conditions, life threat, sickness factors, etc.
- *List of the selected Key Personal Competencies* and description in **behaviour** of each of them
- *List of the selected Key Technical Competencies* (knowledge & skills – such as language knowledge, driving license, specific legislation knowledge, process knowledge, etc.)
- *Defining of:*
  - ✓ *Required level of the competency* - the required **standard** for the competency (the minimum required level of competency proficiency). The levels in the proposed form are from 1 to 5 (*1-unsatisfactory, 2-below standard, 3-required standard, 4-above standard, 5 – advanced level of proficiency or exceptional*).
  - ✓ *Level of importance of the competency* - assessment of the importance of the competency for the job from 1 to 5 (*1- least important, 2 – not very important, 3- important, 4- very important, 5 – most important)*
- *Requirements for the position* (description of the minimum requirements for the position, such as specific education, work experience, etc.)

In summary

The process of building of Competency models requires strong commitment of all participants in the process, high support of the management, patience, consistency and passion of the project team to bring it to the successful end.

The described methodology of creating in-house CBHRM models is a result of a long-time research, a series of discussions with HR professionals, psychologists and consultants in the field, feedback from the implementation of the methodology partially or fully by some companies, and my personal experience in its implementation, trials, missteps and lessons-learned.

My conclusion is that if the methodology is followed precisely and all the steps are completed fully, the created model will provide a realistic competency framework, which will support the organization in achievement of its business goals.

CHAPTER FOUR

Integrating the CBHRM model in the HR Management system

In this chapter I present the main benefits which can be achieved in integrating the CBHRM model in the different HR processes. I explain in details the process of integration of the model in the recruitment, training, performance appraisal, career development and succession planning and the benefits observed in both projects, presented in the thesis. I also present the most popular selection tools and the way they can be transformed for assessment of specific competencies. I provide a lot of examples from my experience to show how the methodology works in practice.

As described on *Figure 1 (Chapter 2)* the competency framework can be an objective basis for establishment and development of all HR related business processes and can provide a logical and reliable link between them. Once the Competency model is designed and completed (all the JCPs are finalized), it can be integrated in any HR management process in the organization - *selection, training, performance appraisal, career development, succession planning, compensation and benefits.*

Having the JCP for each position, the organization can implement a quite more objective recruitment process, as all the candidates for a specific job position will be assessed against the same competencies and the same standards. Once hired, the employees can receive a better-focused training, based on assessment of their competency gaps in comparison to the JCP for their job position. The process of performance appraisal can be more comprehensive and motivating for the people if it is related to the specific competencies required for the execution of their jobs. Based on how well they demonstrate these competencies, the employees can receive appropriate competency training, can get a chance for career development or can take actions by themselves to improve their performance in the future.

In the integration process **the consistency is critical**. To use one set of competencies for the selection process and another for performance management creates confusion and dilutes the effectiveness of the Competency model.

In addition, the Competency model will be most effective when **everyone** understands which competencies the company considers critical for the successful job performance. When consistently used, the language of the Competency model will become a part of the corporate culture and will help for the improvement of the image of the organization and its Employer's brand.

4.1. *Benefits from integrating the CBHRM model in the HRM processes*

In the table below I present the possible benefits from integrating the Competency model in the main HR management processes in the company.

HRM process	Benefits
Selection/Recruitment	• Provides a complete picture of the job requirements • Ensures higher objectiveness of the selection process • Ensures consistency in the recruitment process • Provides clear feedback to the candidates • Increases the possibility of hiring people who will succeed in the job • Minimizes the investment (both time and money) in people who may not meet the company's expectations
Training & Development	• Ensures the training to be more focused on the skills, knowledge and the behaviour which are crucial for the business • Makes the most effective use of the training time and budget • Ensures better quality of the training process • Provides focus on the personal progression of the trainees • Facilitates the on-the-job training of the employees • Provides a framework for ongoing training
Performance appraisal	• Provides a common understanding of the expectations from the individual performance • Gives a clear picture of "what" and "how" will be assessed during the assessment process • Increased efficiency of the process as the appraisal is strictly related to what needs to be done in the job • Identifies easily the gaps in the knowledge, skills and the behaviour of each of the employees • Provides a clear picture of the potential of the human capital of the company • Improves the employees' motivation based on the transparent and clear framework for the performance appraisal
Career development & Succession planning	• Clarifies the skills, knowledge and behaviour required for the job position • Provides the employees with the information and the means to develop valued competencies • Provides a method to assess a candidate's readiness for the respective role • Focuses training and development plans to address missing competencies • Improves the employees' motivation based on the transparent and clear framework for the performance appraisal • Increased sustainability of the company

Table 4: HR processes and link to the organization's Competency model – expected benefits (by the Author of the thesis)

Although the continuity that competency models can bring to HRM systems would certainly benefit an organization, many companies prefer to introduce the model into their systems **gradually.**

Enhancing or modifying a selection or training and development processes based on the results of a competency model study, may meet easier approval by the management, than attempting to apply the model to performance appraisal and succession planning. Factors such as organization culture, the business need that is being addressed, and the commitment of key decision makers may help to determine where to begin using the designed CBHRM model in the HRM system.

Based on the conducted research, all ACI respondents which have developed a CBHRM model have integrated it in their recruitment/selection and training processes.

In Bulgaria - 82% of the companies have linked their recruitment and 69% their training to the Competency model.

80% of the airports (ACI) have linked the performance appraisal and 45% - the career development and the succession planning to their Competency model, while 64% of the Bulgarian companies have linked it to their performance appraisal system, 55% - to the career development process and 27% - to the succession planning.

As it can be seen from the survey results, most of the companies have integrated the Competency model with priority in their recruitment/selection and training processes.

The integration in the internal compensation and benefits systems is least popular as it is a complicated and very sensitive process. It requires deep and precise analysis and decisions, sometimes even significant changes in the existing payroll systems.

4.2. Competency-based Recruitment process

When implementing competency models, it is highly recommended to start with Recruitment, because the results and the benefits can be easily seen and can motivate the employees and the management for further implementation of the model in the other HR processes.

In this part of the thesis I will present how the recruitment process (in its part of assessment and selection of new staff for the organization), can be transformed to Competency-based recruitment.

My personal contribution *in this process is in the deep analysis of the existing selection tools, and their further development for competency assessment, testing them in the practice and proving their efficiency and accuracy in the assessment of specific competencies.*

I also discuss my tenet and conviction that for higher objectivity of the selection process, each of the required competencies has to be assessed ***with more than one tool****. For this reason, I also present the idea about creating a Selection matrix for each job position in the company, to ensure better organization, consistency and transparency of the selection process, and make the process easy to understand and follow even for new and not so experienced HR recruiters.*

To implement a Competency-based recruitment process, the organization needs the following:

- Validated JCPs
- A set of competency-based selection tools that helps the recruiters determine the level of proficiency of the candidate in the required competencies, and the potential to develop them
- Well-trained and experienced HR recruiters
- Forms to record results and help assess and compare candidates

Competency-based selection tools

There are different tools for assessment of the levels of competencies of the candidates.

The following selection tools are well-known, but as mentioned above, I have further developed them with a special focus to competency assessment. I have selected to present the ones which I have implemented in different projects and businesses in my practice, and which have proved to be reliable competency assessment tools bringing realistic assessment results.

- **Competency-based behavioural interview** (*for assessment of a wide range of competencies*)
- **Technical competencies tests** (*for measurement of technical competencies such as language knowledge, legislation knowledge, computer literacy, etc*.)
- **Job knowledge tests** (*for evaluation of specific professional knowledge and experience*)
- **Practical tests** (*for competencies such as driving, work with specific equipment, machines)*
- **Practical tasks** (*calculating, development of a budget frame, development of a project plan, accounting tasks, etc.)*
- **Writing skills tests** (writing *a report, writing an email, writing a business letter, etc.)*
- **Emotional Intelligence tests (EQ**) (*for evaluation of self-emotional control, influencing the others, empathy, self-motivation, etc*.)
- **In-Basket tests** (*an activity for assessment of how applicant can perform job-related tasks within a certain time - for evaluation of competencies such as multitasking, work under pressure, time management, setting of priorities, etc*.)
- **Psychometric personality tests (PPT)** (*for evaluating of how candidates interact with others, how they approach problems, how they deal with work pressure, their behavioural style as a team member or team leader, etc*.)
- **Case studies and scenarios** (*for evaluation of competencies such as problem solving, decision making, strategic thinking, analytical skills, etc.)*
- **Presentations** (*for assessment of presentation skills, communication skills, assertiveness, self-confidence, stress-resistance, etc*.)
- **Role plays** (*for demonstrating of different behaviours like leadership, coordination skills, multitasking, quick decision making, etc*.)
- **Video Stories** (*usually combined with role plays – they improve the experience of the situation in reality and give more precise information about the expected behaviour of the applicants in a similar real situation*)
- **S.W.O.T. analysis** (*for evaluation of analytical thinking, preparing of analysis, preparing of reports, deep knowledge of the business or in some specific area, etc*.)
- **Assessment centres** (*for assessment of a mix of competencies with a combination of different selection tools*)

I will present in details some the most complex assessment tools, in support to the HR practitioners.

Competency-based interview (CBI)

The CBI is a structured behavioural interview that involves the use of behavioural questions to help the interviewer assess the candidate based on the key competencies that have already been identified and described in the JCP.

The CBI, like all other structured interviews, consists of a list of pre-defined key questions which help the interviewer assess the interviewees.

In the conventional job interviews, the main question to be answered at the end of the interview is: *Is the candidate able to do the job? Can he/she do it?*

In the case of the CBI, the selected questions have to determine how good the candidates are in specific competency areas. At the end of the interview the interviewer has to be able to answer also the following questions: *Will the candidate do the job? How well will he/she do the job?*

Very often the candidates possess the desired background (knowledge, skills and experience) but they don't have the right *commitment, discipline, social skills, interpersonal behaviour, loyalty, communication, culture, etc.* In the last years, such competencies become much more important for the business than the acquired knowledge, skills and experience, as knowledge and skills can be more easily trained and learned, than the soft competencies.

Some examples:

The employee may have the highest education but if he/she is not motivated, not engaged, if he/she is slow or just not dedicated enough to the job, it may lead to lower efficiency, performance and results. Even the most educated and experienced candidates could have difficulties working with the others or poor communication skills that continually get them into problems or conflicts, or could even ruin a well-structured and performing team.

Another example is the corporate culture. Rarely in the recruiting process the HR specialists assess the level to which the candidate will accept, follow and match the established corporate culture. In my practice I have experienced a number of cases when a perfect match to a job position fails because of neglecting the corporate culture and values in the organization. In a competency-based selection

process, this can be assessed during the competency-based interview with specific behavioural questions.

The deficiency in such competencies usually appears in the time, after the candidate joins the organization. And if this deficiency is not "envisioned" and estimated during the initial selection process, after the employee is on-boarded, it is much more difficult to change this behaviour.

In conclusion, the Competency-based behavioural interview has the goal to evaluate not only the technical competencies of the candidates (such as knowledge and skills) but also their soft competencies**, in the very beginning of the recruitment process,** and thus to avoid entering of new employees who lack important for the corporate culture and performance behaviour.

The steps for development of a competency-based (behavioural) interviewing process are as shown on Fig.9.

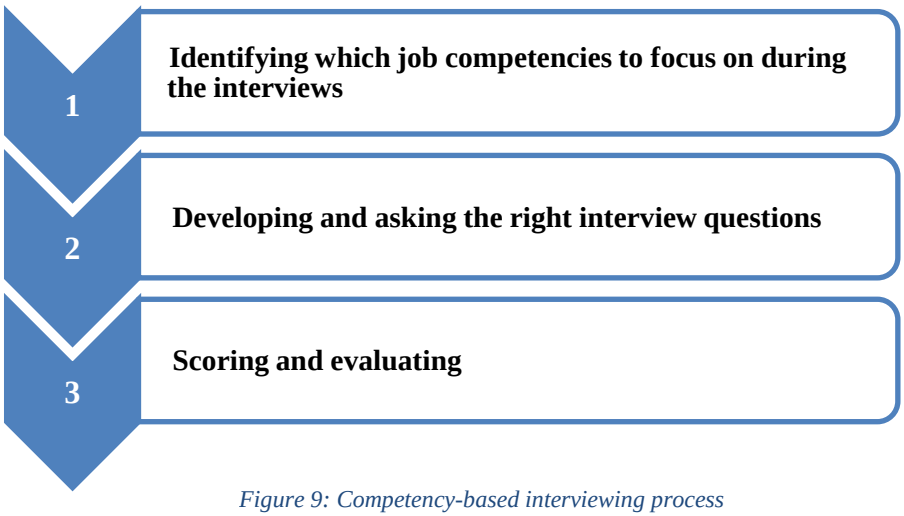


Figure 9: Competency-based interviewing process

Step 1: Identifying the competencies to focus on during the interview

There are two basic guidelines to follow in identifying which competencies to focus on in the CBI:

- Identifying a reasonable number of competencies from the respective JCP to focus on, and the number of questions to use for each competency. Experienced interviewers find that asking two or three questions for each job competency, along with probing follow-up questions, is absolutely enough to adequately assess an applicant's strengths in that competency area. It is

better to conduct an in-depth interview on several competencies than to attempt conducting an interview on all of them.

- Choosing the job competencies which are of the highest importance for the job (JCP – level of importance) and those which are most difficult to develop (see Table 2). Some competencies reflect characteristics that are inherent in one's personality and are very hard to change. Others reflect characteristics that are learned later in life and can be more easily developed through training and other work/life experience. Hiring someone who naturally works well under pressure, for example, is likely to be more successful than developing this behaviour through training in the future.

Step 2: Developing and asking the right interview questions

During a CBI, the interviewers ask the applicants competency-based questions, designed to get detailed information about how the applicant has demonstrated the specific competency in the past and what would be his behaviour if such a situation appears in the future.

One of the most popular methods of questioning in order to evaluate behaviour is the **STAR method**. It is based on the **Behavioural Event Interviewing (BEI)** method, invented by David McClelland and his associate David Berlew (pls see „*2.1. Historical review of the competency movement* ").

It is a technique which consists of a sequence of questions to investigate in depth the behaviour of the person in situations which require specific competencies. The candidates are asked to describe a situation or an experience they had in a previous job. In such way, the interviewer collects valuable information from experiential responses because usually past performance predicts future performance. The most important advantage of STAR is that the responses cannot be "polished" as in the traditional type of questions because they cannot be learned in advance.

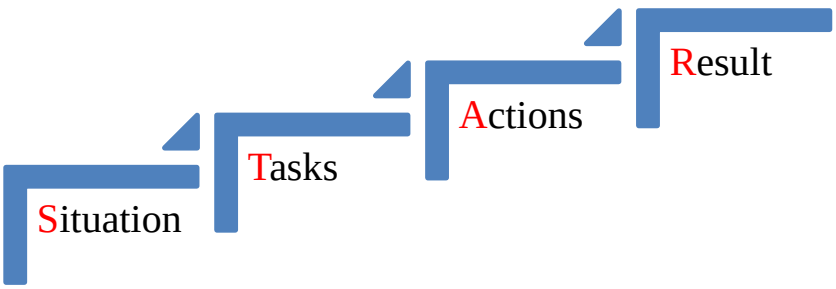


Figure 10: STAR method for competency-based interview (Source: Internet)

As shown on Fig.10, the technique consists of 4 main components, as follows:

- **Situation**: This is the initial step in the inquiry. The candidate is asked to describe a situation in his/her life in relation with the behaviour (competency) which has to be evaluated. Each applicant is asked this question in the same way.
- **Task, Action** and **Result**: These are follow-up and exploring questions. They have to be asked in an appropriate way in the context of each applicant's answer. So, these questions may be quite different from one applicant to another.

    - ✓ **Task:** The candidate is asked about the goal/task he had to achieve and his responsibilities in the described situation.
    - ✓ **Action:** The candidate is asked about the steps he had taken in order to achieve the defined goal/task.
    - ✓ **Result:** The candidate is asked about the outcomes from his actions.

One example: STAR approach for evaluating of "***Dealing with angry customers***" competency:

- Can you tell me about a specific situation where a client became angry with you because you were unable to provide what he or she wanted? Where and when did it happen? Who was involved (colleagues, other customers, your line manager)?
- What was your goal in this situation?
- What did you do? How did you handle the situation? What specific steps did you follow? Who was involved in your actions?
- How did the situation turn out? What were the consequences? What was the final result of your actions?

The interviewer can continue to explore the details that provide insight into how the candidate handles difficult customer service interactions.

As a general rule, the questions which are asked during the CBI should be **linked to the expected behaviour** described in the JCP of the respective position.

One example: ***"Integrity"*** competency

Behavioural description in the JCP: "*gains the trust of the others through appropriate ethical behaviour, treats others with dignity and respect, is able to consider objectively and without prejudice other people's opinions*"

Possible questions for start of the STAR technique:

- Tell me about a time at work when you had to consider others' ideas, even when they conflicted with your own. What did you do? How did you feel?
- We do not always work with people who are ethical or honest. Can you give us an example when you witnessed another employee or subordinate do something which you thought was inappropriate? What did you do? What happened?

The CBI is intended to measure *typical, rather than maximal* performance. It is based on the belief that **the best predictor of future behaviour is the past behaviour.**

Some examples of CBI questions for some competencies are provided in Table 5.

Competency: Adaptability	
Can you describe your last significant change at work you had to adapt to?	
Possible follow up questions:	▪ What was your initial reaction to the change? ▪ What was your overall response? ▪ How did it all work out?
Competency: Communication (depends on what communication competency has to be assessed – listening, confidence, respect, empathy, non-verbal communication, feedback, positive attitude, etc.)	
One example for evaluating the possible strengths and weaknesses in the communication style of the candidate: Can you describe a situation when you realized that you had chosen a wrong approach to the person you communicate with?	
Possible follow up questions:	▪ What was your mistake? ▪ What did you do when you realized that it is a wrong approach? ▪ How did you solve this situation? ▪ Which of your qualities helped you solve this situation?

Competency: Collaboration	
Have you ever had a situation when you needed to form an ongoing working relationship or partnership with someone from another organization/department to achieve a mutual goal?	
Possible follow up questions:	▪ What did you do to make the relationship work? ▪ How has it worked out?
Competency: Leadership (depends on what leadership competency has to be assessed – taking responsibility, decision making, problem solving, delegation, staff motivation, etc.)	
One example: Can you tell us about a situation when you solved a problem for your employees?	
Possible follow up questions:	▪ What did you do? ▪ What was the outcome?
Competency: Problem solving	
Can you describe a situation where you had to solve a problem at work?	
Possible follow up questions:	▪ What did you do? ▪ What was the result? ▪ What might you have done in a different way?
Competency: Decision Making	
Can you tell us about a really difficult decision you had to make at work?	
Possible follow up questions:	▪ How did you go about making the decision? ▪ What alternatives did you consider? ▪ How did it turn out?
Competency: Work under stress	
Can you recall a particularly stressful situation you have had at work?	
Possible follow up questions:	▪ What happened? ▪ What was your role in the situation? ▪ How did it all work out?

Table 5: Examples of competency-based interview questions for assessment of specific competencies (by the Author of the thesis)

Other examples of behaviour questions:

- Describe a situation in which your workload was too heavy. How did you handle it? – *for assessment of stress resistance, organizational skills, team work, etc.*
- Tell us about time when you were trying to accomplish something and did not have access to the necessary resources. How did you get them? – *for assessment of problem solving, team work, etc.*
- Describe a situation in which you had to deal with more than one task. How did you sort them out? Which did you tackle first and why? – *for assessment of organizational skills, setting priorities, multitasking, etc.*
- How do you typically organize your time? – *for assessment of organizational skills and time management*
- Give us an example of a time when you were unable to meet your goals. What did you do? – *for assessment of goal-orientation, delegation skills, coordination skills, self-critics, analytical skills, etc.*
- I see that you had a group of six people reporting to you when you were in XYZ company. Tell me something about how you helped them to succeed? – *for assessment of leadership skills, staff development skills, etc.*
- Working in ABC project in GB sounds interesting. What were the most difficult situations that you encountered there? – *for assessment of project management skills, attitude to work, etc.*

Most of the behaviour questions are based on negative experiences as practice shows that many factors contribute to success, ***but failure can be caused by deficiency in even a single competency.***

Step 3: Scoring and evaluation

One of the key factors for achieving objectiveness and effectiveness of the competency-based interview is the proper selection and definition of the assessment scale (showing the level of candidate's proficiency in each competency), so that all interviewers can understand and apply the scale in the same way.

The scale should be aligned and commensurable with the scale used in the JCPs structure.

One example (Table 6) for a scale for assessment of competencies (based on the scale from Fig.8):

Competency	Unsatisfactory	Below standard	Standard	Above standard	Exceptional
Communication	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐
Decision making	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐
Collaboration	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐
Adaptability	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐
Leadership	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐
Problem solving	1 ☐	2 ☐	3 ☐	4 ☐	5 ☐

Table 6: Competency assessment form – extract from a contest for „Head of Marketing department" (by the Author of the thesis)

Advantages of the competency-based interview:

- ✓ When properly conducted, it provides in-depth information about the applicant's actions, motives and behaviours because the interviewer has an opportunity to ask follow-up questions and to gain a better understanding of how the candidate handles work situations.
- ✓ It requires the candidates to provide answers to questions based on their real experience.
- ✓ It provides a more objective basis for assessment of the candidates and reduces the chance for bias due to personal characteristics.
- ✓ It is difficult for the candidates to "guess the right answer" because they have to provide details in response to probing questions.
- ✓ The quality of the candidate assessment is close to that gained through an assessment centre process, but quite less expensive.

Possible risks:

- ✓ Impression based on only one strong competency (the so called "Halo" effect)
- ✓ Candidates interviewed after very weak ones, to be considered as very strong
- ✓ Score based on the first impression, not the whole assessment process

To avoid these risks the number of interviewers should be always **more than one.**

An example of a competency-based questionnaire, designed by me, is provided in **Appendix 5.**

Psychometric Personality Tests (PPT)

The term “psychometric” comes from the Greek words for “psycho” (mental) and “metric” (measurement). There are few main areas that this kind of tests can assess:

- Attitude and motivation for work
- Personal and Management/Leadership profiles
- Competencies such as communication, leadership, decision making, taking responsibilities, making analysis, etc.
- Resistance to stress
- Whether the personality of the candidate fits in the vision and the culture of the team, department, organization

Some of the most popular PPT used for competency assessment are:

- ✓ THOMAS test
- ✓ CATTELL (16 Personality Factor Model)
- ✓ BELBIN (for assessment of the informal role of the candidate in a team)
- ✓ D.I.S.C. profiles test

Emotional intelligence (EQ) tests

The emotional state of the people is considered highly influential on their behaviour and performance in the workplace. In the last 10 to 15 years, HR recruitment teams have begun to pay more and more attention to the influence of this factor on the overall performance of the employees, and have started to measure it in order to better understand the emotional profile of the job candidates.

During my research, my attention to the emotional intelligence was attracted by the fact that while the intelligence (IQ) determines mostly the general mental ability of the people to learn and apply knowledge to deal with certain environment and challenges and to measure objective criteria, the emotional intelligence (EQ) determines the ability and capacity of the person to perceive, assess and manage his self-emotions and those of the others. While intelligence is mostly something which the person is born with, the emotional intelligence can be developed over time. Therefore, the EQ is better

predictor of the future performance of the individual that his level of intelligence. (Daniel Golemen, 1995)

The EQ tests cover different categories of behaviours; therefore, they are a valuable tool in the competency-based recruitment process.

There is a variety of EQ tests, but as a general approach, these tests can assess five groups of behaviours (competencies):

- **Self-awareness -** the ability to recognize one's self-emotional status. Self-awareness is related to the following competencies:

  - ✓ Emotional awareness - the ability to recognize one's self-emotions and their effects in a certain situation
  - ✓ Self-confidence – confidence in one's own abilities

- **Self-regulation –** the ability to have control over one's own emotions. Self-regulation is related to the following competencies:

  - ✓ Self-control, managing your anger and spontaneous reactions
  - ✓ Integrity
  - ✓ Conscientiousness
  - ✓ Taking responsibility for one's own performance and behaviour
  - ✓ Adaptability to change

- **Motivation –** the ability to motivate one's own self for any achievement. Motivation is related to the following competencies:

  - ✓ Goal-orientation
  - ✓ Striving for excellence
  - ✓ Commitment
  - ✓ Initiative

- **Empathy -** the ability to recognize the emotional status of the people in one's own environment. Empathy is related to the following competencies:

  - ✓ Customer service orientation (anticipating, recognizing and meeting customers' needs)

- ✓ Understanding others
- ✓ Developing others
- ✓ Acceptance of diversity

- **Social skills –** the ability of development of good interpersonal skills in order to better understand, collaborate, communicate or negotiate with others. Social skills can be:

  - ✓ Communication
  - ✓ Leadership
  - ✓ Collaboration and cooperation
  - ✓ Conflict management
  - ✓ Work in team
  - ✓ Reaction to change

In-Basket exercises

The In-basket technique is a tool for evaluating the capability of the candidates to cope with the complexities of their future job by simulating real life situations and problems which they might find in the "in-basket" at the working place. It is one of the best exercises for evaluating of competencies, as a separate tool or as a part of Assessment centres. The candidate faces "real" work list of tasks and problems and has to simultaneously deal with them for a specified time.

It is a very good instrument for assessment of different competencies, some of which are:

- ✓ Organizational skills, time management and setting of priorities
- ✓ Analytical skills, problem solving and decision making
- ✓ Capability and accuracy in managing and organizing information
- ✓ Self-management, stress management and initiative

The In-Basket technique is often underestimated as a competency assessment tool, mainly because it needs time to be prepared. It needs good knowledge of the specificity of the job, the job tasks, the work interrelations, the specific documentation, etc.

An example of In-Basket exercise, designed by me, is presented in **Appendix 6.**

S.W.O.T. analysis

S.W.O.T analysis is a strategic method for evaluation of **S**trengths, **W**eaknesses, **O**pportunities, and **T**hreats involved in a project or in a business.

But the S.W.O.T. analysis can be also a very effective tool for assessment of some specific competencies of the candidates for the job, as for example, *knowledge of the business, strategic thinking capacity, self-development capacity, analytical skills, etc.*

Usually the task needs **more time,** so it can be used in Assessment centres, or as a separate task to be prepared in advance and presented during the contest.

My Practice

Some examples of S.W.O.T. analysis tasks from my practice:

- **Internal contest for Airport director (Bulgaria, 2008):** as a part of the contest, the candidates had to prepare S.W.O.T. analysis of the airport from their own perspective. The task aimed to assess the airport knowledge of the candidates and the knowledge about the recent trends in the aviation market in Bulgaria, but also other competencies such as *analytical, strategic and critical thinking, etc.*
- **Contest for Head of Airport operational center (Bulgaria, 2012):** as a part of the contest the candidates had to prepare S.W.O.T. analysis of the functioning of the operational center, including equipment, human resources, shift management, etc.
  The task aimed to assess the knowledge of the candidates of the functioning of the operational center, as well as competencies such as *analytical thinking, group-oriented leadership and result-orientation.*
- **External contest for Terminal officer (Bahrain, 2018):** as a part of the contest the candidates had to prepare S.W.O.T. analysis of their experience as passengers at the existing terminal of the airport. The task aimed to assess competencies such as *attention to the detail, critical thinking, tactical behavior and customer-orientation.*

Assessment centres

The Assessment centre is one of the best tools for competency-based selection. But because of its complexity, and time and resource needs, it is usually organized only **for key and management positions.**

In the Assessment centre a group of assessors (selection committee) assess all the candidates based on a variety of competency-based selection/assessment tools, designed to enable job candidates **demonstrate** the competencies that are most essential for the contest.

One example for a combination of tools in one Assessment centre could be:

- ✓ *Competency-based structured interview (CBI)*
- ✓ *Tests*
- ✓ *Case study*
- ✓ *Presentation*
- ✓ *Role play*
- ✓ *Group challenge*

The **Group challenge** (not discussed as a separate tool) is a type of Assessment centre exercise where a number of applicants meet as a group to discuss a real job-related problem. The behaviour of the candidates is observed by the assessors to evaluate *how they interact and what leadership, team work, communications skills and assertiveness* each person demonstrates.

The biggest advantage of the Assessment centre is the **objectiveness** of the assessment process – each competency is tested with more than one tool and each candidate is assessed by more than one person at the same time. Another important advantage is that **several competencies** can be evaluated at the same time.

Main disadvantage of the Assessment centre is the involvement of many people in the process, and the cost and time required.

An example of Competency-based Assessment centre, developed by me, is presented in **Appendix 7**.

Competency-based Selection matrix

One of the most useful tools in help of the HR specialists in the competency-based selection process, is the Competency-based Selection matrix.

The Selection matrix ensures a **well-structured, well-organized and objective selection process.** It visualizes the assessment tools which are selected for assessment of each of the competencies in the JCP, and provides **cross-checking of the results** (as mentioned before, a basic rule in the competency-based selection process is each competency to be assessed with more than one tool).

It also provides a detailed **behaviour description** of each of the competencies which has to be scored during the assessment process (copied from the JCP). On one hand, this creates a common understanding of the competency which has to be evaluated and, on the other hand, guarantees to a high extend that all the assessors will measure the performance of the job candidate based on the same criteria.

Thus, the pre-defined Selection matrix provides **transparency and objectiveness** of the selection process.

In the example in Table 7, I have selected to use four assessment tools for the evaluation of the defined competencies, as follows:

- Structured behavioural interview (CBI)
- Written case study
- Presentation

The **Structured behavioural interview** is designed in a way to assess all four competencies:

- ✓ *Communication*
- ✓ *Leadership*
- ✓ *Organizational skills*
- ✓ *Presentation skills*

The **Written case study** is designed in a way to assess:

- ✓ *Communication*

- ✓ *Leadership*
- ✓ *Organizational skills*

During the **Presentation** (of the case study) the assessors will be able to evaluate:

- ✓ *Communication*
- ✓ *Organizational skills*
- ✓ *Presentation skills*

Competency	Behavioural description	Assessment tool		
		Structured behaviour interview	**Written case study**	**Presentation**
Communication	Has good verbal and written expression and proper body language; shows confidence and ability to influence the communication; inspires listeners	✓	✓	✓
Leadership	Has clear understanding of leadership; has a positive leadership experience; is able to influence the others; is able to make decisions and take responsibility; has good interpersonal skills; is self-confident	✓	✓	
Organizational skills	Prioritizes, plans and organizes his/her work in a way to guarantee his/her personal goals and those of the team; able to make proper choice of the priorities	✓	✓	✓
Presentation skills	Confident on the stage; very good non-verbal appearance /eye contact, smile, gestures, etc./, clear expression, good voice articulation; proper use of the visual aids	✓		✓

Table 7: Competency-based Selection matrix (based on JCP for the position of „Head of operational department", Varna airport)

My Practice

I have developed and implemented Selection matrices in my projects in Bulgaria - for 156 job positions, and in Bahrain - for 36 job positions (for demonstrating the methodology and knowledge transfer).

There was a very positive feedback from the end-users of this tool.

Some extracts from their feedback:

- *„The Selection matrix is an excellent tool for visualizing and understanding the logic of the selection process". (Galina Stoilova, HR Expert & Recruitment manager, Fraport-Bulgaria)*
- *„Thanks to the Selection matrices even a new recruiter can catch up the process in a very short time". (Dalal AlNajem, Recruitment expert, BAC, Bahrain)*

In summary

The competency-based recruitment process can ensure higher objectiveness and fairness in the selection by clearly defining the required competencies, and testing them in such a way that there is a limited chance for the recruiter to influence and discredit the process.

The competency-based recruitment process gives a unique possibility the candidates to be evaluated in depth and from different perspectives, both their technical knowledge and skills and their soft competencies, to anticipate their future attitude and behaviour in the working process and in different situations, their ability to adapt to the specific environment and to interact with the other team members, to follow the company culture and values, to learn and develop.

4.3. Competency-based Training process

As a trainer I have had the opportunity to observe and follow the changes in the corporate training approach in the last 20 years. As mentioned in the beginning of this thesis, there was time when the companies provided training just to demonstrate that they do something for their employees and make use of the planned training budget (even today such attitude can be still observed in some companies). But in the last years and even months the situation changed drastically with the fast-changing environment, on the double developing technologies and unexpected global changes, like the COVID-19 crisis. Therefore, the organizations have increasing new challenges which they have to cope with – new knowledge and skills, need of higher efficiency of their processes and people, higher ROI (Return-on-investment), etc.

All these factors lead to increasing the role and the importance of training, and changes the attitude of both managers and employees to it. Nowadays, the managers plan more dedicated corporate trainings to ensure that their employees have a better understanding of their work and are able to execute their duties in the most profitable for the company way. On the other side, the employees realize that in order to secure their job and to have more opportunities, better career and future, they need to learn and improve their competencies constantly.

Therefore, there is an increased need for precise **training needs analysis, planning, designing and monitoring** of the training process, based on comprehensive and measurable basis, which can ensure a well-prepared and capable workforce, more efficient use of the training budget and faster response to the changes in the environment and the business challenges.

This brings the idea for establishing a training process, based on the existing job competency profiles in the organization, as a **systematic approach in training**, where every component of the training process can be designed, adjusted and monitored in order to achieve the knowledge, skills and behaviour which will help the employees execute their tasks in the most efficient way and achieve the required performance and the expected results.

"I believe this Covid situation made us see things differently. New competencies are required in order to help organizations to thrive not only to survive during this challenging and uncertain period we are living in. Competencies like adapting to change, leadership and agility become our core competencies and we have to train them. Training is essential now." (Natasa Iakovides, HR director HERMES airports, Cyprus)

Traditional vs. Competency-based training

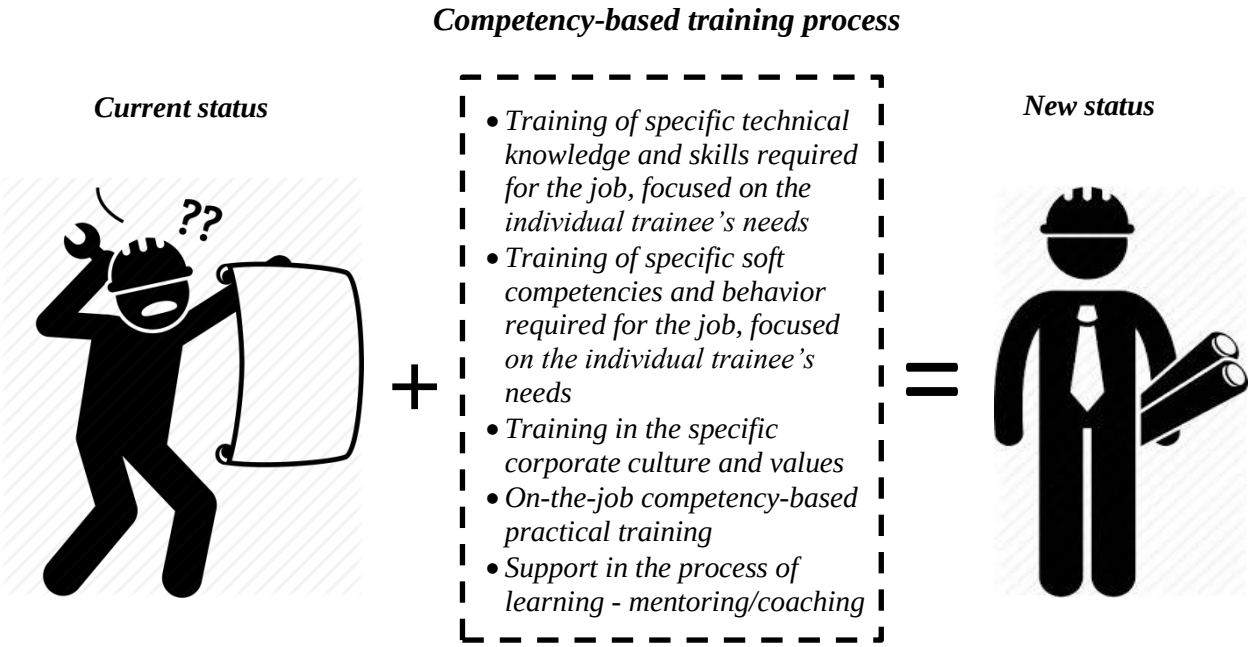


Figure 11: Competency-based training (by the Author of the thesis)

To provide a better understanding of the characteristics of the competency-based training, I will start with a comparison to the traditional training approach.

On Fig.11 I have visualized the main characteristics of the Competency-based training. Attention should be paid on the wording: "specific", "required for the job" and "focused on the individual training needs".

„Specific" and „required for the job" – meaning that the training is expected to teach specific knowledge, skills and behaviour, which are required for the correct and most effective performance of the specific job position

„Focused on the individual training needs" – meaning that the training monitors the progress of each trainee and provides support where needed

The second important note in the figure above is the ***scope of the training***, which covers not only the needed technical knowledge and skills, but also soft skills, behaviour, corporate culture and values, applying the knowledge in practice and ongoing support.

In Table 8, I have summarized the main and most tangible differences between the traditional and the competency-based training approach.

Area of comparison	Traditional training	Competency-based training
Focus	On contents	On trainees
Goal	Trainees to learn the content	Trainees to be prepared for their job role
Contents	Defined by the trainer	Defined by the company based on their specific needs
Training methodology	Lecturing more than practicing	Balance between theory and practice, interactive training
Approach to trainees	The same training contents for all participants	Training based on the specific needs of the individual

Table 8: Traditional vs. Competency-based training (by the Author of the thesis)

In the traditional training, all trainees get the same level of knowledge, being more focused on the contents than on the trainees and their learning needs and progress. The competency-based training program is more focused on the trainees, it allows flexibility in the learning process and each trainee can get as much as he/she needs to improve his/her knowledge, skills and behaviour. The focus is on ***what has to be learnt*** and ***what is learnt*** and ***practiced*** back on the working place.

"Competency-based training is like a thermostat of an air-conditioner – if you know what temperature you need in the room, you set the thermostat at this level, and it constantly monitors the temperature and turns on and off the air-conditioner to maintain the desired setting.

Without a thermostat (traditional training approach) the air conditioner would continue to cool or warm up the room as long as the switch is on, regardless of how cool/hot the room becomes." (William Blank, Handbook for Developing Competency-based training programs) (William Blank, 1982)

Advantages and possible benefits from implementing a competency-based training approach:

- **Mastering –** the training is focused on mastering the topic which is learned, not just teaching the planned training material
- **Right focus** – provides the right training to the right people at the right time

- **Flexibility -** the competency-based training can react and adapt to the individual trainee' needs and interests. In this way, each trainee can learn as much as he/she needs to reach the required competency level.
- **Role-modelling -** in the process of developing a CBHRM model and JCPs, as described, it is a basic rule to select and describe competencies which ensure the outstanding performance of the employees in the execution of the specific role. So, the development of the model is based on the experience and the observation of the best in the job employees. Following this, a competency-based training will bring knowledge and role-modelling from the best in the profession people.
- **Job-efficiency** – the trained competencies are expected to be applied in the job right after the return from the training, which if followed and observed, increases both the efficiency of the training process and the job efficiency
- **Cost-efficiency -** the training activities in the competency-based approach are goal-oriented, the company doesn't waste money or time on training the 'wrong' areas (i.e. areas in which employees are already capable) or the wrong people (people who are already capable in this area).
- **Workforce flexibility** – the competency-based training facilitates the employees' development and promotion within the company, and gives them the opportunity to learn more competencies beyond their roles, which ensures higher flexibility and resilience to change of the organizations.

Competency-based training roadmap

In order to provide a more systematic approach for developing of sustainable competency-based training, and based on the accumulated knowledge and experience, I have designed a **roadmap** which can facilitate the HR experts in designing and establishing a competency-based training process. This roadmap consists of **7 core steps**, ordered in a logical sequence, to ensure better understanding for both HR specialists and employees, and higher efficiency of the training process (Fig.12).

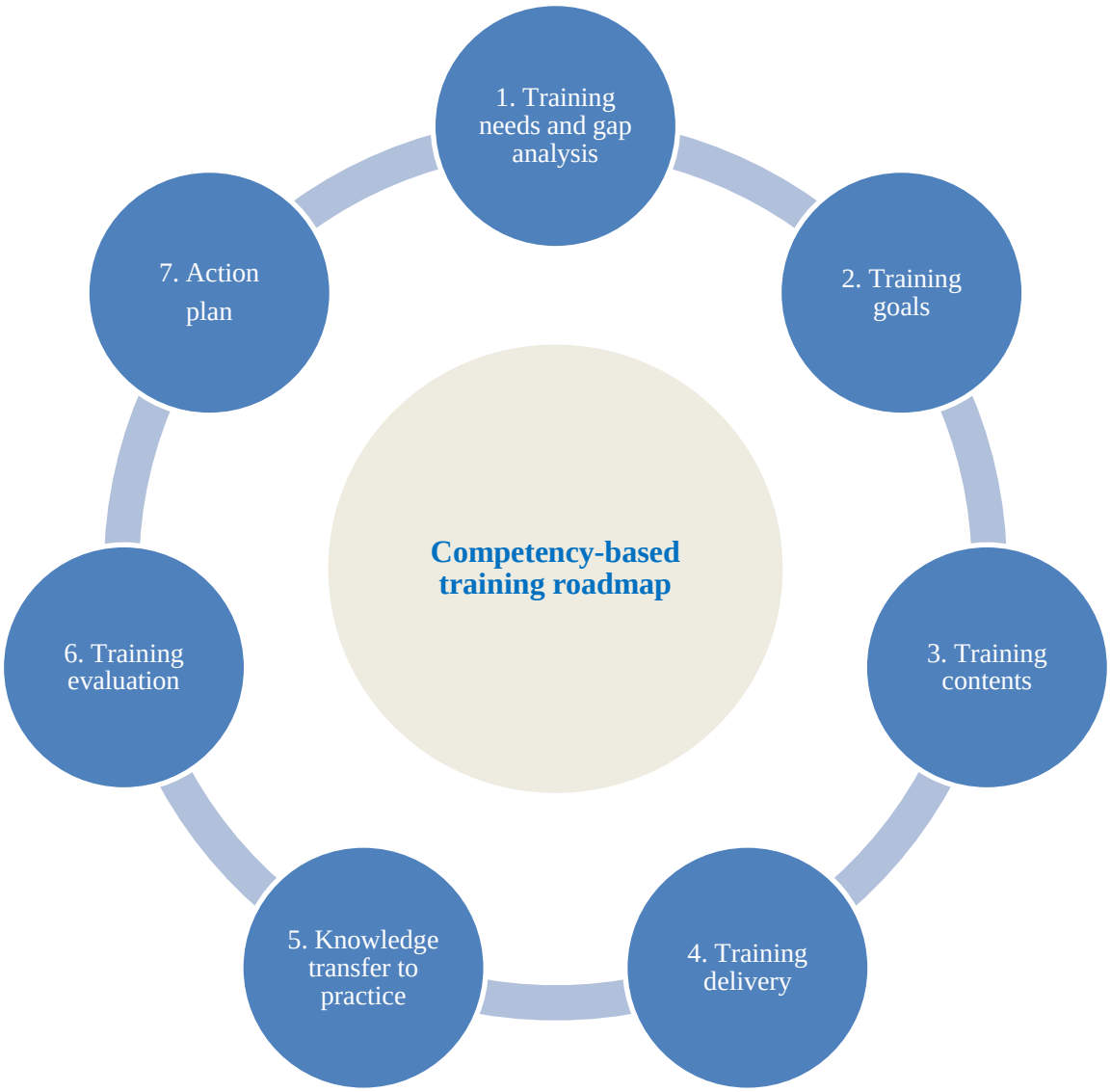


Figure 12: Competency-based training roadmap (by the Author of the thesis)

Step 1: Training needs and gap analysis

The first step in the competency-based training process is the assessment of the **needs for training** of the employees and the identification of the **competency gaps** which have to be covered by training.

The needs for training could be identified through a diagnosis of present and future challenges and through a gap analysis between the employee's actual performance and the required standard, based on the designed JCPs.

The training needs and gap analysis can be studied from three perspectives:

- *organization*
- *team*
- *individual*

I have summarized and provided below a complete list of possible information sources, which can be accessed and analysed. Most of them I have personally used in my practice in training needs analysis.

For each organization the sources can be different. It is important that the responsible team/person defines the information sources and creates a plan for the analysis *before the start of the process.*

At organization level:

- ✓ Top and senior management
  - *organization's short-term and long-term goals*
  - *expected changes (strategy, outsourcing, insourcing, merging of activities, change of organization processes, etc.)*
  - *possible changes (changes in the market, environment, competitors, etc.)*
  - *new programs & projects, which require specific competencies*
  - *corporate culture issues*
- ✓ Employee knowledge deficiency as a result of:
  - *technical advancements*
  - *cultural changes*
  - *new systems*
  - *new focus on specific competencies (ex. outstanding customer service, change management, leadership, corporate culture, etc.)*
- ✓ External and legal constraints
- ✓ Employee turnover, absenteeism, work accidents
- ✓ Performance deficiency at corporate level

At team level:

- ✓ New projects and tasks
- ✓ New roles
- ✓ Changes in the job descriptions
- ✓ New technology/systems/software/equipment
- ✓ Change in the working methods
- ✓ Lack of specific competencies in the team
- ✓ Working atmosphere problems
- ✓ High absenteeism
- ✓ Work accidents
- ✓ Quality problems
- ✓ Customer complaints
- ✓ Decreased motivation
- ✓ Performance deficiency at team level
- ✓ Human factor

At individual level:

- ✓ New roles
- ✓ New employees
- ✓ Transfer to new position or promotion
- ✓ Job competency gaps (*Job Competency Profile based*)
- ✓ Performance appraisal
- ✓ Career promotions
- ✓ Succession planning
- ✓ Interpersonal relationship problems

At this level, the assessment can be conducted in three different ways: **Self-assessment, Line managers assessment and HR assessment**

Self-assessment

If the employees know in advance what is expected from them in terms of knowledge, skills and behaviour (JCP for their job position) they will be able to self-assess their current competency performance. The company (HR) can support this process with ensuring of free access to some assessment tools.

For example:

- ✓ Professional tests (for technical and professional competencies)
- ✓ Psychometric tests (for assessment of behaviour/soft skills competencies)
- ✓ Case studies
- ✓ Tasks, etc.

My Practice

In Fraport-Bulgaria the Security staff used to have a very low success rate at the security certification exams of CAA (20 to 30% from the Security staff were successful from the first time). In 2015 we have implemented an online self-testing and motivated the Security staff to make the tests in the process of preparation for the forthcoming exams. Based on the results from the self-testing, we introduced additional competency trainings, which led to success rate **of 70%** at both Varna and Burgas airports.

Line managers assessment

The line managers (head of departments, supervisors, senior officers, managers, directors, etc.) usually make an assessment of the competencies of their subordinates (based on the JCPs) on annual basis (annual performance appraisal process) or other period, approved by the company.

In this case, the line managers *should be trained* to understand very well the CBHRM Model and to apply it strictly in the process of assessment.

They can use the competency assessment instruments, developed by the recruitment experts (Competency-based Selection Matrix) or other appropriate assessment methods. They have also the privilege to work closely with their subordinated and observe their daily performance, so they can easily observe and define the competencies deficiencies in their teams and team members.

HR assessment

HR department can initiate an assessment of the competencies at group and/or individual level, in case of specific problems and needs, and/or for departments and positions, which are a subject of assessment for some reason (critical at the respective moment) in regards to training and development.

Some examples:

- Introduction of any new equipment and technologies will require new technical competencies of the staff who will utilize and maintain them
- An employee transferred to a new job position with new responsibilities will need a training in the required new competencies
- If the company starts a new initiative (such as door-to-door sales, for example), it should provide a purposeful training for teaching the required new competencies (in this case – the sales team)

My Practice

The process of training needs and gaps analysis requires dedication, time and efforts from the HR /Training teams and in many cases I have faced a resistance to this process. The best approach in such cases is to communicate in details the possible benefits, to show by examples and to train the responsible people so they get higher confidence in the process.

In all cases it is recommendable to establish a competency-based training **after** the competency-based recruitment, so that all the developed competency assessment tools (for the purposes of the selection process) to be directly applied for assessment of the employees' training needs.

Step 2: Training goals

Whatever approach is applied for the competency training needs and gap analysis, at the end of the process the training experts have to prepare two important documents:

- *List of the training goals (competencies to be trained and level of proficiency to be achieved)*
- *List of the employees to be trained*

The **training goals** should describe:

- ✓ *What the trainee should be able to **know-can-do** after the training? and*
- ✓ *How the achievement of the training goals will be measured?*

One of the best tools for visualization of the training planning process is the "**Matrix of competencies"**.

In this Matrix each competency (acc. to the JCP) of each employee, executing the respective job position, is compared to the required level of proficiency.

Competency level required – Current competency level = Competency gap

Filling in the Matrix for all employees and for all required competencies for the respective job, it can be very easy for the HR team to define *what is the current status, what training is needed for each of the employees* and *what is the targeted competency level to be achieved* after the training.

Based on this Matrix the training experts can easily **group people for one training and design the training contents according to the very specific needs of the trainees**. The decision who should be trained in a specific competency, depends also on the level of importance of the competency for the position (see JCP description).

An example of a Matrix of competencies for the position "Group leader Aircraft operations" (BAC) is provided in Table 9.

Competency	Required level	Employee A	Employee B	Employee C
Leadership skills	2/5	3/5	1/5	4/5
Communication skills	4/5	4/5	4/5	5/5
Organizational skills	4/5	4/5	1/5	4/5
Assertiveness	3/5	2/5	2/5	4/5
Project management skills	2/5	1/5	1/5	3/5
Presentation skills	2/5	2/5	2/5	4/5
Work with documents	5/5	4/5	2/5	3/5
English knowledge	3/5	2/5	4/5	5/5

Table 9: Matrix of competencies (example by the Author of the thesis)

The design of the Matrix can be different, according to the specific needs and visualization preferences. In the example above I have chosen to use different colours for better visualization and easier orientation of all users of the information (*pink – no need of training; blue – training upon line manager's decision; red – compulsory training; green – expert (can be appointed for internal trainer or mentor).*

Another specific of the Matrix of competencies is that it is a **live document**. If all the changes in the competency proficiency over time are registered in it, the progress of the employees can be easily followed and measured.

My Practice

Both in Fraport-Bulgaria and Bahrain Airport Company the project teams adopted and followed the **Matrix of competencies** method for visualizing the competency status at team and job position level. They enjoyed the process of designing the matrices, choosing colors or other symbols for visualization, etc.

In Bulgaria, the matrices were introduced also to the employees, some of the managers even put them on the information boards of the teams. That was a very good approach as the employees could observe their current status, were motivated to improve, and enjoyed very much when the status was changed for better over time.

Step 3: Training contents

One of the most challenging steps in the competency-based training process is **the designing** of the training program. The development of the training contents needs specific expertise and depends on the internal training force of the organization. Many companies prefer to use external training providers instead of developing an internal training team. This decision also depends on the number of employees in the company, the variety of activities, the staff turnover, etc. In all cases, the HR team, responsible for the training activities, has to follow and control the contents of the training in order to guarantee that it **will meet the defined training needs and will cover the diagnosed competency gaps.**

The most important thing in designing the contents of a competency-based training is to put in focus the **specific needs of the company**. As the competencies are related to desired behaviour, the best way to help the trainees learn, is to base the training on relevant examples from their daily work life and use case studies close to their reality.

As a frame of the competency-based training, the **training program should answer the following questions:**

- *What are the goals of the training? Which competencies should be trained? What should be the outcome of the training? What should the trainees know and be able to do after the training?*
- *Who are the trainees? What is their current proficiency level of the competencies in focus and what level they should achieve?*
- *What training methods are to be used to achieve these results? etc.*

The role of the responsible HR/Training team is to ensure that the contents of the training provided by internal or external trainers correspond to the defined training needs and gaps and will lead to achievement of the set training objectives.

In summary, the main requirement to the competency-based training **is the program to be designed in a way to ensure a very strong link of the trained knowledge/skills/behaviour (competencies) to the future practice of the trainees.**

In order to achieve this, I have summarized and presented below a set of recommendations for designing of competency-based training programs:

- The training contents should have *direct relation* to the work/life reality of the trainees. They are more involved and interested in the learning process if they can see this relation and can envision how the acquired knowledge/skills/behaviour will be used after the training. Therefore, in the very beginning of the training it is advisable the trainees to be informed about the goals of the training, the competencies which will be trained and what are the expectations about the performance after the training.
- Following the first recommendation - the best approach is the training to be structured around *real cases, scenarios and experiences* that the trainees might encounter. This will make the application of the new knowledge, skills and behaviour in the practice easier.
- The training should provide a *good balance between theoretical and practical part*. The adult trainees like interactive and dynamic training methods which bring not only knowledge but also positive emotions to them. Learning by doing has proved to be the most efficient approach in training. At the same time, it is advisable the competencies which are planned to be trained to be tested during the training, so the progress to be registered not only by the trainer but also by the participants.
- The training program should be *self-directed* so that the trainees can chose what and how much to learn and know, under the control of the trainer. When the training program is customized and flexible, people are more engaged and apply willingly the acquired knowledge and skills on-the-job after the training. Therefore, it is very important to let the trainees know what they have to be able to do and are expected to know more after the training, so that they can assess their current level and estimate how much more they need to improve. An initial test in the beginning of the training will ensure, from one side, the trainees to know where they start from, from the other side – the results are a good base for measuring the progress at the end of the training.
- All participants in the training have to be *fully engaged and involved actively* in the training activities - discussions, group work, training games, etc. This is one of the most important roles of the trainer during the learning process.

In competency-based training **the format** of the training is also very important in order to ensure the desired level of competencies. As mentioned before, there are different groups of competencies – some of them can be trained easier, other are more difficult to be learned. Therefore, the format must

ensure the proper duration, methods and learning environment, in relation to the competencies in focus. Some examples:

Based on the duration of the training program:

- Short-term training programs (a single training on the subject) – for competencies like: *time management, conducting of meetings, preparing reports, etc.*
- Middle-term training programs (training in modules) – for competencies like: *leadership, communication skills, customer orientation, team work, change management, negotiation skills, project management, presentation skills, etc.*
- Long-term training programs – for competencies like: *strategic thinking, executive management, assertiveness, foreign languages, etc.*

A new trend in the training is the so-called **micro-learning.** It is based on studies, showing that there is a limit to how much information the brain can absorb and retain during training. Micro-learning is a method of training in short units, usually via digital media. In a competency-based learning environment, the micro-learning can be also a good approach, splitting the training contents into manageable pieces of information, exercises, tasks, case studies, etc. so the trainees can acquire and assimilate the required competency gradually.

Based on the training method:

- On-the-job training – for acquiring of technical competencies like *driving, using specific equipment, machines, procedures or some soft competencies like customer service, etc.*
- Off-the -job training

Based on knowledge alliances (creating a specific learning environment which provides mutual support and enhances the learning process and the knowledge transfer to the working place) - *for competencies like leadership, management, customer excellence, etc.*

- Knowledge clubs
- Knowledge workshops
- Knowledge forums

An example of a Competency-based training program is provided in **Appendix 8.**

Step 4: Training delivery

As already discussed, in the competency-based training, the training process should be more "**learning**" than "**teaching**" (W. Blank) (William Blank, 1982). In order to ensure a real improvement of the knowledge, skills and behaviour of the trainees, they have to be engaged fully in the training process, to participate actively, to interact, to practice, and their progress in learning to be visible and accurately observed.

Therefore, in the competency-based trainings **the experience and the confidence of the trainer** is critical. It is not just following the initially planned training program. The trainer should be able to change flexibly the training approaches and even the contents, according to the group dynamics and the individual knowledge progress.

Step 5: Knowledge transfer to practice

This is one of the most important and difficult stages of the process, as even if the training has been organized, developed and delivered in the best way, if the trainees do not apply the learnt competencies at their working places, all the training efforts will be in vain.

My Practice

My experience and observations show that the success of the training depends on the ability of the training team and the line-mangers to facilitate the transfer of knowledge to practice.

It is not the amount of money spent on training, but the amount of attention given to knowledge transfer which will determine a long-term success of the training.

It is not an easy task to ensure transfer of the acquired knowledge, skills and especially behaviour to the working place. To a very high extend the willingness for change depends on the personal motivation of the employees. For example, if the trainee needs the trained competency for taking a higher position in the company or he/she is a part of a succession planning program, which requires this specific competency, or in case he/she aims higher score in the performance appraisal process, etc. then he/she will put more efforts in the training process and will apply the learned in practice.

Based on the **Maslow's Hierarchy of needs** (Abraham Maslow, 2013), the motivation of the person can vary depending on his personal needs. Therefore, the employee is motivated as much as the trained knowledge matches to his/her level of needs (ex. if the new competencies will secure the working place of the employee (level 2) or will lead to new achievements (level 5), etc.).

Generally, the organization cannot respond to the personal needs and motivation of each individual, but it can create a **learning culture and environment** in the company and implement measures and approached which can enhance the knowledge transfer, such as:

- to discuss the personal training goals of the employees (e.g. during the performance appraisal) and try to link the corporate competency trainings to them
- to develop a strong training evaluation process (please see the next step in the process)
- the line managers to meet the trainees before the training and explain the training goals and the reason they are selected for the training ("what" and "why")
- the line managers to meet the trainees after the training and discuss the outcome by the training and their future expectation in applying the new knowledge on the job
- the line managers to check the on-the-job performance of the trainees after the training
- to ask the participants in the training to pass the knowledge from the training to their colleagues in the team (thus the acquired knowledge will be repeated and affirmed)
- meetings or workshops to be organized with the trainees after a certain time (the so called "cold feedback"), in order to discuss again the training contents and the expected performance

It should be also kept in mind that sometimes training in not the best solution for covering the discovered competency gaps. Some other methods could be more appropriate as ***coaching, mentoring, acquaintance with some procedures, rules, legislation, reading of specific documents, more practice, etc.***

There can be also a decision for changing the position of the employee in case of a big gap in some highly important for the position, but difficult for training and development competencies.

Step 6: Training evaluation

Although there are different methodologies for analysing and evaluating the results of training and educational programs, one of the most popular and probably the best known and proved in the practice model is the **Kirkpatrick's Four-Level Training Evaluation Model.** It has been used for over 50 years by many different types of companies as a major system for training evaluations.

I adopted this model in my practice about 15 years ago, and I have developed and used it for the purposes of competency training evaluation since almost 8 years.

This model has been developed by Dr. Donald Kirkpatrick in the 1950s. The model is very flexible and designed in a way that can be applied to *any type of training*.

I am presenting below a short description of the model in relation with the Competency-based learning.

As shown in Fig.13, Kirkpatrick's Model consists of four levels of evaluation of the training effectiveness (James D. Kirkpatrick and Wendy Kayser Kirkpatrick, 2016)**:**

- **Reaction** - what the trainees think and feel about the training
- **Learning** - resulting increase in knowledge or capability
- **Behaviour** - extent of behaviour and capability improvement and implementation/application
- **Results** - effects on the business or environment resulting from the trainee's performance

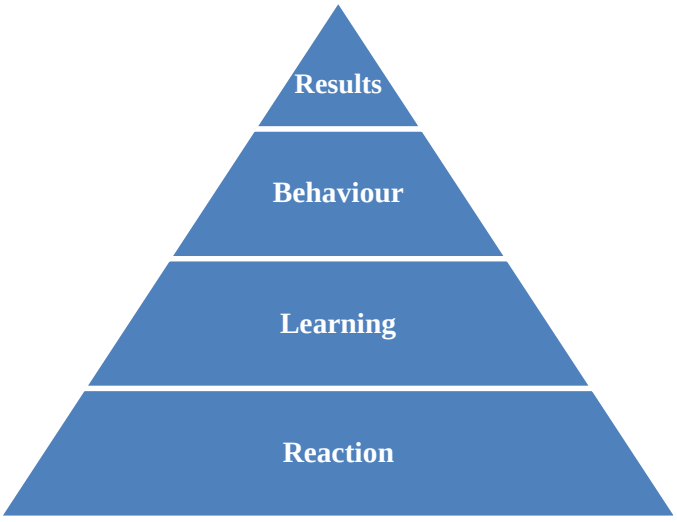


Figure 13: Kirkpatricks's Training evaluation model (Source: Internet)

Level 1: Reaction –This level measures how the trainees reacted to the training.

There are two main instruments for evaluation of the training effectiveness at this level:

- ✓ training assessment feedback forms
- ✓ direct discussion with the trainees about their impressions from the training, in which areas they feel they have improved their knowledge/skills, what they need more, was the training contents appropriate for them, etc.

My Practice

It is difficult to measure the progress in the competencies at this level. But I always recommend in the training feedback forms and during the discussion at the end of the training, the trainees to be asked about their self-assessment about their progress in the trained competencies – are they more confident, for example, to make presentations, or to solve conflicts, or to negotiate with external parties, etc. (depending on the set training competency goals).

Level 2: Learning – At this level it is measured what the trainees have learned in reality.

In his theory Kirkpatrick advises at the end of the training the trainees to make a **post-training test**, in order to measure the progress in the competencies which are the subject of the training.

The well-designed test can measure the difference in the competencies of the trainees, especially when tests are conducted before the training and after it, so the improvement can be estimated.

There are different types of test which can be used at this level.

Knowledge-based tests are the most popular, as they can easily assess the achieved progress in the acquired knowledge (*language tests, professional knowledge tests, procedural tests, etc*.)

In order to check the acquired practical skills, some **practical tests** can be conducted. (*for work with specific equipment and machines, for example).*

Although the behaviour is measured mainly at the next level, as it is not easy to be assessed through tests, there are also methods which can measure the behaviour change at the end of the training – as **simulation games, case studies, role plays** and others *(for assessment of the improvement in*

competencies like customer care, decision making, conflict management, time management, communication, etc.)

My Practice

In my practice both as a trainer and as a consultant, I use different types of tests at this level.

The most important and challenging thing is the design of the tests, so they can really assess the competencies, not only the overall impression and happiness of the trainees.

In some cases, I have faced resistance - from one side from the trainees – as they were not happy to be assessed, and from another side - from external training providers who were not confident of the progress of their trainees.

Personally, I never miss the opportunity to measure the progress in the competencies which are targeted to be learned during the training. Usually I measure the progress several times during the training with different tasks, exercises, tests, role plays, etc. to be sure in the improvement of the trainees' results.

A good example is the training for conducting effective presentations (*including behaviors like self-confidence, assertiveness, stress management, presence at the stage, etc*.). During this training I always ask the trainees to prepare and present different short presentations at the different stages of the training, so that I can observe their progress, problems and need of further improvements. At the end of the training, the trainees have time to prepare a real presentation and present it in front of a real audience, showing in practice what they have learned and achieved during the training.

Level 3: Behaviour - At this level, it is measured how far the trainees have changed their **behaviour**, based on the training they have received.

In fact, at this level it is measured to what extend the trainees transfer their knowledge into the practice. The knowledge transfer takes time, it can take weeks or months for employees to build confidence or have the opportunity to apply what they have learned. Therefore, the evaluation is made after the trainees are back to their working places, sometime after few weeks or even months.

The effective measurement of behaviour is challenging. *Observation of the working process, interviews, assigning projects, workshops, action plan reports,* etc. can measure the behaviour change over time (in the frames of the JCP requirements).

My Practice

It is important to know that the lack of desired behavior change **doesn't always mean** that the training has been ineffective. I have observed cases when the line managers did not support the change, which is trained during the training, and suppress the willingness of the trainees to implement the learnt in their practice. Another reason can be that the existing corporate environment, culture, processes, etc., are not aligned and adequate to the trained behaviour and attitude.

Therefore, building an environment which encourages learning and positive change is an important pre-requisite for achieving and applying the required behaviour.

Level 4: Results - At this level, the final results of the training are analysed and the real outcome/benefit for the company is measured.

This is the stage where it is evaluated how the behavioural changes impacted the business and whether the training investment resulted in a good ROI (Return-on-investment). Of all the levels, measuring the final results of the training is likely to be the most time consuming and costly. The biggest challenges are in identifying which outcomes, benefits, or final results are most closely linked to the training, and coming up with an effective way to measure these outcomes over time.

Here are some outcomes to consider, depending on the objectives of the training programs and the competencies which are a subject of the training:

- Increased customer satisfaction
- Increased productivity
- Higher quality of work
- Improved management
- Higher employees' engagement
- Increased employee retention, etc.

In order to be able to measure the results from the training effectively, it is of high importance the HR responsible people to identify the outcomes and the metrics of success which are targeted with the training **before the training**, so that the respective trainers can design the training contents accordingly.

My Practice

Although **only 8%** of the companies in Bulgaria measure the training results as a real impact on the business (*BAPM conference, May 2019*), my experience in Fraport-Bulgaria shows that when the training is linked to specific measurements, defined in advance, the achieved results are more visible and more motivating for all the participants in the training process – trainees, line managers, HR, management.

One example for measured results after the implementation of a competency-based training in Fraport-Bulgaria: after a dedicated training program in Customer service (2-years program) provided to all employees at customer service-related job positions – about 700, in the period from 2013 to 2015, the Customer satisfaction rate increased from 3,84 to 4.37 in Varna and from 3.53 to 3.96 in Burgas (*scale from 5 to 1,"5" is the best*).

Below is the extract from the Customer satisfaction report (2015).

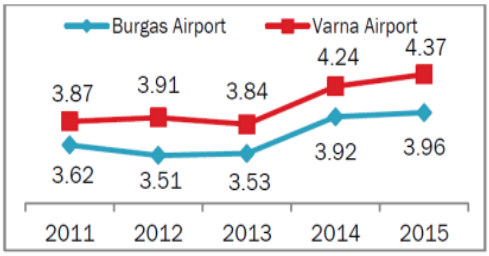


FIGURE 4 AVERAGE GRADES FOR COURTESY AND HELPFULNESS OF THE INSPECTION STAFF FOR BURGAS AIRPORT AND VARNA AIRPORT. 2011-2015.

Although the Kirkpatrick's Evaluation Model had been developed few decades ago, it is still one of the most common training evaluation methods today.

The training is much more effective when there is a measurement of its effectiveness and success. It disciplines all the participants in the training process to take the training seriously and to strive for achieving better results.

Step 7: Action plan

The last step in the competency-based training roadmap is analysing the training results measured in Step 6, and preparing an Action plan for further training activities, changes, new training goals, new programs, etc. The Action plan triggers the training process again from the beginning.

In summary

The competency-based training process ensures a systematic approach to training and creates a sustainable **"learning culture"** in the organization over time. It is a means for supporting the employees to align their knowledge, skills and behaviour to the competency needs and expectation of the company. It ensures the training activities to be more focused on the real training needs of the company and thus improves the training cost efficiency. It can also increase the motivation of the people in the company, providing support for better coping with their daily challenges and for improvement of their professional and personal competencies and creating better opportunities for career development in the future.

4.4. Competency-based Performance appraisal

Back in 1997, Umit S Bititci, Allan S Carrie and Liam McDevitt define "**performance management**" as "*the process by which companies, in line with their functional and corporate strategies and objectives, manage its performance".* (Umit S Bititci, Allan S Carrie and Liam McDevitt, 1997)

In the same year, in his "Competency Development Guide" Edward Cripe, President of Workitect and Principal of McBer & Company/Hay Group, defines the "**performance appraisal**" as "*a systematic process for improving and sustaining human performance throughout an organization.*" (Edward J. Cripe, 2012)

These two simple definitions clearly define the main objective of the performance management systems – to support the achievement of the business goals through assigning goals and tasks to the organizational units and each individual, and measuring their achievement (performance) through time.

The performance management is an integrative part of the HR management aiming to:

- Ensure that the organization works as a complete integral system, where all the individual goals and results are aligned with the company's business goals
- Define and set individual goals
- Review the employees' performance and provide feedback
- Improve both individual and organizational performance
- Improve internal communication
- Define adequate training for performance improvement
- Assess the human resource potential of the organization and promote the internal talents
- Encourage and motivate the employees for better performance in the future

The performance management aims to create a **high-performance business environment and culture** in which management and employees work together and take jointly the responsibility for the achievement of the set business goals and to ensure that the employees are doing **the right things at the right time.**

Shortcomings of the traditional performance management systems

In the last years, both HR professionals and managers share their concern about the effectiveness and the outcomes of the performance management process. Therefore, the topic is more and more in focus and a subject for discussions in different business forums, in order to exchange ideas of how to improve the process and achieve best results out of it.

In some of the forums which I attended and in which the topic was discussed actively - *ACI Leadership & Change management Forum, London 2012, 57th ACI Africa Regional Conference & Exhibition, Livingstone 2017, 11th ACI Leadership & HR Forum meeting, Bulgaria 2018* – the delegates shared a common observation that the employees get increasingly **dissatisfied** from the performance appraisal process and **lose trust** in it.

The reasons are different and sometimes very specific for the business. But based on the forums' discussions I have summarized the three most important common reasons for the negative trends in the performance appraisal process, as follows:

- The performance appraisal process is **formal and ineffective,** it doesn't lead to meaningful changes for the individual and the company.
- The performance appraisal process is **irrelevant** as people are assessed based on common criteria which most of the time they don't understand.
- The performance appraisal process is too **subjective**.

Some thoughts on these statements:

Formal and ineffective

Many companies use the same performance appraisal system for years without adapting it to the changes in the business environment, in the staff expectations, in the corporate culture, values, goals, etc. When using it for a long time in the same way it becomes very formal and people (both employees and managers) start accepting it as a boring engagement once a year, without putting much efforts to make it more effective and useful. The change in the generations should also be taken into consideration. Working with young people for many years, I have realized that when they see meaning in what they are asked to do, they put efforts and do it in the best possible way. In addition, there are still managers who find the assessment process as a task, rather than an opportunity, and turn it to a formal and boring obligation.

Irrelevant

In many cases the assessment process is based on common criteria, which are not linked to the specifics of the jobs. As mentioned before, there are criteria which can be applied for all the job positions in the organization, but there are also criteria which cannot be relevant to all of them, like quantity of work, communication skills, innovation, etc. Usually when people don't see the link to their personal job, they lose trust and interest in the process.

If the assessment is based on irrelevant criteria, the employees cannot be fairly evaluated for their efforts and accomplishments, which leads to the next problem – subjectivity.

Subjective

This topic will be always under discussion as it is a human feature to be unsatisfied especially when one feels underestimated in comparison to other team members. But from a general perspective, in the traditional performance appraisal there are a lot of prerequisites for more subjective assessment especially when the system is based on irrelevant criteria.

When the Performance appraisal is not as effective as expected, the impact on the business can be quite negative. Instead of motivating and encouraging, the performance appraisal process can bring distrust, de-motivation and discouragement. Instead of enhancing initiative and team work, it can create competitiveness and disinterest about the company's results, etc.

Competency-based Performance management process

During the 11th ACI Leadership & HR Forum meeting in 2018, in a brainstorming session "*How to improve the HR processes and make them more objective, better understood and more efficient*", the participants in the panel (28 people from 21 countries) pointed out the "**assessment by competencies"** as the best approach in performance appraisal to ensure higher objectiveness and trust in the process.

This conclusion corresponds to my overall research and personal tenet, that the competency-based performance management is one step forward for improvement of the outcome from the performance management systems.

Competency-based performance management process acknowledges the competencies as **an objective base for performance evaluation** and as a **key performance driver** (Edward J. Cripe, 2012), which provides an integrated approach to performance observation and appraisal.

It focuses the attention of both appraisers and appraisees on the essential for the efficient execution of the job role competencies, and provides a logical explanation of how they can lead *to successful execution of the job and to achievement of the individual and company's goals.*

It is a **transparent and comprehensive way** to explain to the employees:

- ✓ what their role in the company is,
- ✓ what the expectations to them are,
- ✓ what they have to achieve and how they can achieve it, and
- ✓ what the measures for their performance are.

As already discussed, the most important difference in the competency-based approach is that it provides a clear understanding of „what "has to be accomplished and „how". Respectively, the same approach is transferred to the competency-based performance appraisal – the feedback to the employees is not only on "**what**" they have accomplished (performance goals), but also "**how**" the work was performed, so it is clearly defined where the employee stands at present and what knowledge, skills and behaviours he/she needs to develop for future improvements and success, through training or other type of support.

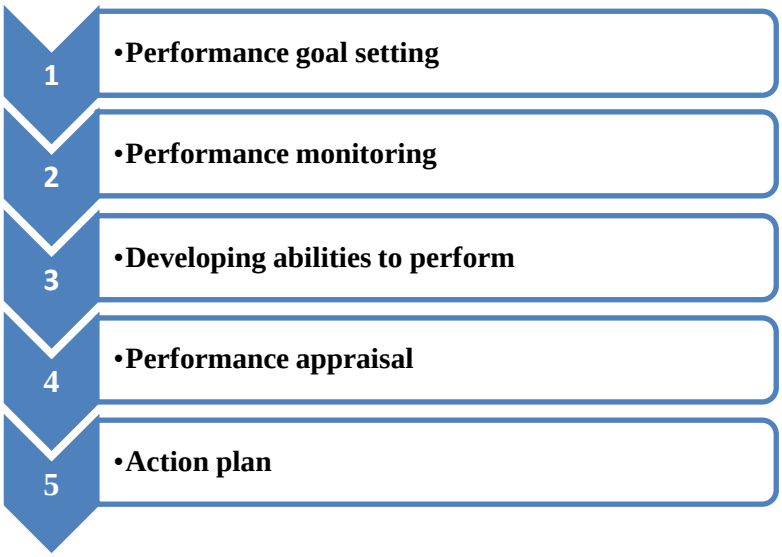


Figure 14: Competency-based Performance management process (designed by the Author of the thesis)

As shown on Fig.14, the **Competency-based performance management process** consists of five main steps, as follows:

Step 1: Performance goal setting - Explaining in details what is expected by the job role – what are the performance goals and what specific competencies (knowledge, skills, behaviours) are needed to achieve them (based on the respective JCP)

Step 2: Performance monitoring - Regular and timely observations and feedback

Step 3: Developing abilities to perform - Providing of on-time support when needed – competency training, coaching, mentoring, etc.

Step 4: Performance appraisal - Objective performance assessment based on the respective job competencies (using competency-based assessment tools)

Step 5: Action plan - Planning of future competency trainings, promotions, succession planning, rewarding, etc. based on the individual assessment results

Following the sequence of actions as described, provides a systematic approach from the setting of the performance goals to the assessment of the final results, based on one objective base and following one sustainable line through the process – **the specific job competencies.**

Many companies skip steps 2 and 3, sometimes even 5, which is one of the reasons the process to be less effective and the employees to be less satisfied.

As a practitioner, I strongly believe that the employees' performance has to be monitored not only once per year, but during the whole period of time, defined for achieving of the set goals (Step 2), which will give a chance a relevant support to be provided on-time (through training, coaching, mentoring, etc.) (Step 3). The whole process makes sense only if there is an adequate Action plan for further changes, measures, training, career development, etc. This will significantly increase the effectiveness of the process and the employees' trust and motivation.

Another important point is the **design of the competency-based assessment system**.

In order the assessment to be most objective and easy to use, each of the assessment criteria have to be described in a comprehensive way, linked to examples from the real work environment.

This is, for me, the most difficult part of the process. The more precisely the criteria are described, the better preciseness and objectivity in the assessment will be achieved.

One example: "***Customer orientation competency***"

Assessment level	Description
2	Knows what services must be provided to the customers; executes his/her duties to a minimum level; fails to assess customer needs and demands; makes promises to customers that cannot be delivered; ignores customer feedback.
3	Knows his/her duties; has an attitude showing that customers are important; makes assumptions rather than finding out the customer's needs; does not provide support in case of problems.
4	Responds to the customers' requirements promptly and in an informed, and knowledgeable way; shows positive attitude to the customers; provides a level of service, complying with the company standards, but without any additional efforts.
5	Communicates with the customers with confidence, in a polite and trustful manner; directs customers to the appropriate persons or sources to have their problems resolved and follows the final outcome; is dynamic and motivated to execute his/her job in the best way.
6	Proactively engages with the customers (asks questions to determine if there is anything which disturbs the customer regarding his airport experience and trip); addresses conflicts or difficulties with customers before they arise; identifies how services can be changed or improved in order to exceed the customer's expectations; works with enthusiasm and high motivation, with dedicated efforts to reach highest levels of service.

Table 10: Example of description of competency criteria for performance evaluation (by the Author of the thesis)

The assessment scale is also very important. The best approach is to link it with the JCP (level of proficiency) and a well-known and comprehensive evaluation system, like, for example, the school system. The example in Table 10, is an extract from the Competency-based performance appraisal system of Fraport-Bulgaria, for assessment of Customer service officer (Check-in agent). The scale is based on the school system in Bulgaria – 2 is the worst score, 6 is the best.

In summary

Although to build an effective Competency-based performance appraisal process is not an easy undertaking, as it needs time and dedicated efforts from the HR team and the line managers (to design the system, to explain it to the employees in details, and to apply it objectively and with a sense of high responsibility), implementing such a system is a strategic initiative, which can reduce the negative attitude towards this HR process of both employees and managers, and can bring a lot of benefits to the organization, some of which are:

- **Higher objectiveness of the process** – as the assessment is based on objective basis (the JCPs) and on clear and more understandable for both employees and managers criteria
- **Higher relevance of the process** – as the assessment criteria are linked to the specifics of the job and the employees can easily see the relation to their real work experience
- **Higher motivation of the employees** – as the process is more transparent and more comprehensive for them; they can understand better what is expected by them and why (the importance of their job role), and the reasons for their lower or higher scores.
- **Higher effectiveness of the process** – as it provides a detailed picture of the workforce current status and potential, and what *training, career development and succession* activities have to be planned for the future.

My Practice

In 2003 for the first time I encountered the topic for performance management and appraisal. At that time, I was appointed as a project manager for the implementation of the first performance appraisal system in the bank, I worked for. The decision of the management to assign this project to me was based to the fact that as a Training manager, I could use the results of the performance appraisal for planning the future training activities. Although at that time in Bulgaria the term „competency" was not popular yet, the management strongly believed that the two processes are linked and should go hand-in-hand.

In 2007, establishing the HR activities in Fraport-Bulgaria, and having already the knowledge and the experience from the bank, I created the first performance appraisal system in the company. It was fully tailor-made, based on three-months research, a lot of observations and discussions with the employees at different levels and different job positions. The system was approved and implemented, although there was a resistance to this change by some of the line managers, pretending that it will lead to more work and engagement for them, and from the employees, who were not happy to be observed and assessed.

The research I made, at that time, in order to design and create a job-based performance appraisal system, in fact, was the beginning of my competency research in the company.

In 2011, one year after the competency model was approved and launched officially in the company, I re-designed the performance appraisal system and linked it to the JCPs.

This change gave and still gives a meaning of the whole competency model to the employees, as they can see the link to their individual job role, they can understand better the performance expectations of the company and they can see their personal contribution to the organization's results. It also creates a sense of importance and pride in the employees, especially when the company has remarkable progress and annual results.

4.5. Competency-based Career development and Succession planning

According to the **Work Institute Retention report 2020** (Work Institute, 2020), the top reason for people leaving their companies in 2019 is the lack of Career opportunities (Fig.15). According to the research, 20 out of 100 employees are quitting for career development reason. The more worrying fact is that career development has been the reason number one for leaving not only in 2019 but in the last 10 years, increasing by 17% since 2013. (Work Institute, 2020)

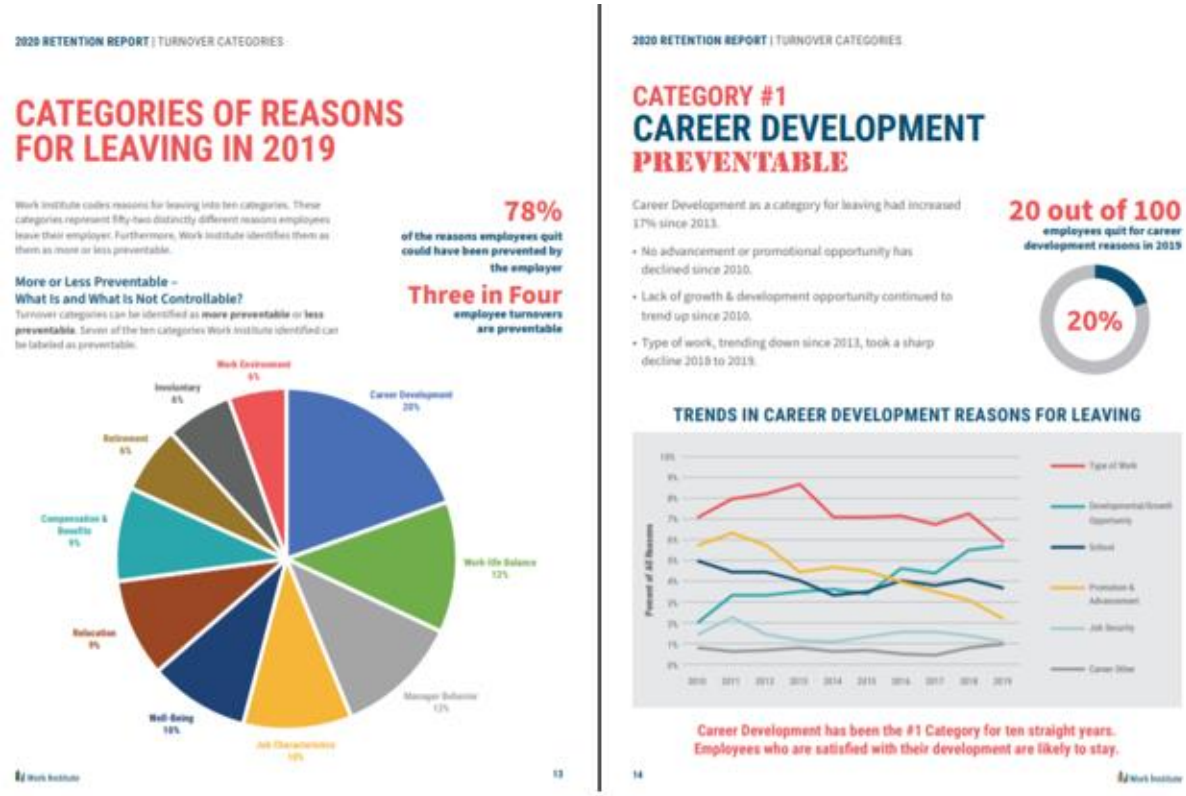


Figure 15:Work Institute Retention Report 2020 (extract)

So, the Career development is increasingly becoming a mandatory element of the HR pallet of activities, especially for those companies which aim to attract, develop and retain good professionals and talents.

But it is not only a question of building career programs, but also of ensuring that these programs meet the needs of the business effectively and lead to achievement of the set goals - employees development, satisfaction and retention. And here the competency modelling come.

In this sub-chapter I will discuss both Career development and Succession planning processes, as although they are different in goals and activities, in the aspect of competency modelling, they are not only connected but also complement to each other.

Definitions

First, I would like to define what **succession planning** and **career development** is and what differs them from **training**.

There are many available definitions for the three categories, but for the purposes of the competency modelling, I find the definitions in the Cambridge dictionary as the most appropriate and understandable to define the difference between the three HR activities.

According to Cambridge dictionary:

- **Training** is the process of learning the skills you need to do a particular job or activity.
- **Career development** is the process of learning and improving your skills so that you can do your job better and progress to better jobs.
- **Succession planning** is the process of finding suitable people and preparing them to replace important executives in an organization when these executives leave or retire.

Based on these definitions, I can resume that the training activities are dedicated to improvement of the individual performance *at the current job position*, the career development activities are focused on developing the individuals for *future career opportunities*, and the succession planning activities are dedicated to preparing individuals for *specific pre-determined new job roles* in order to replace key staff when needed.

While career development activities are focused on the employees with their talents and potential, the succession planning is fully focused on the specifics of the job. In the first case, the employees are developed as a pool of high potentials to meet the company needs over time (and the jobs have to fit to the developed abilities and potential of the employees). In the second case, the employees are developed in a way to fit the requirements of the job positions, which are in the plan for future replacement (succession).
To resume, in the practice the three HR activities **accompany the employees during their entire experience in the organization, helping them to do their jobs better and to have better career opportunities through time.**

Competency-based Career development and Succession planning processes

Discussing about retention of the *best* employees, the *talents* and the *high potentials* of the organization, it is mandatory to establish an **objective base** for defining of these staff categories.

For me, the only objective base for comparison of the employees can be their knowledge, skills, attitude and behaviour, summarized as a competency profile of each individual. (*I include also the „attitude" which is a part of the personal characteristics (Fig. 3), as speaking about talents and high potentials I believe that these people have to have something more on top of their visible knowledge, skills and behaviour - appropriate personal characteristics and mostly, appropriate attitude to their job, their personal performance, their company, their managers, their colleagues and more.)*

Therefore, the succession planning and the career development processes should be based on objective assessment of the competencies of the employees, comparison to the required or desired ones, and adequate training for bridging the gaps or for development of new competencies to meet the expected business changes and challenges in the future.

This logically leads to the conclusion, that competency-based career development and succession planning can be established only in case the organization has already established a competency-based environment and the main HR activities – *selection, training and performance appraisal* - are already linked to the validated JCPs.

On the figures below I have visualized the competency-based succession planning (Fig.16) and career development (Fig. 17) processes.

Succession planning

The process is initialized by the organizations' management or HR. In case there are no suitable candidates in-house, an external recruitment process can be organized. The potential successors are assessed against the JCP of the position planned for replacement and an adequate training is ensured in order to bridge all the diagnosed gaps. The process does not stop with the selection of the successor, it can continue with *shadowing, mentoring or coaching* to ensure that the selected person is fully prepared to take over when the time comes.

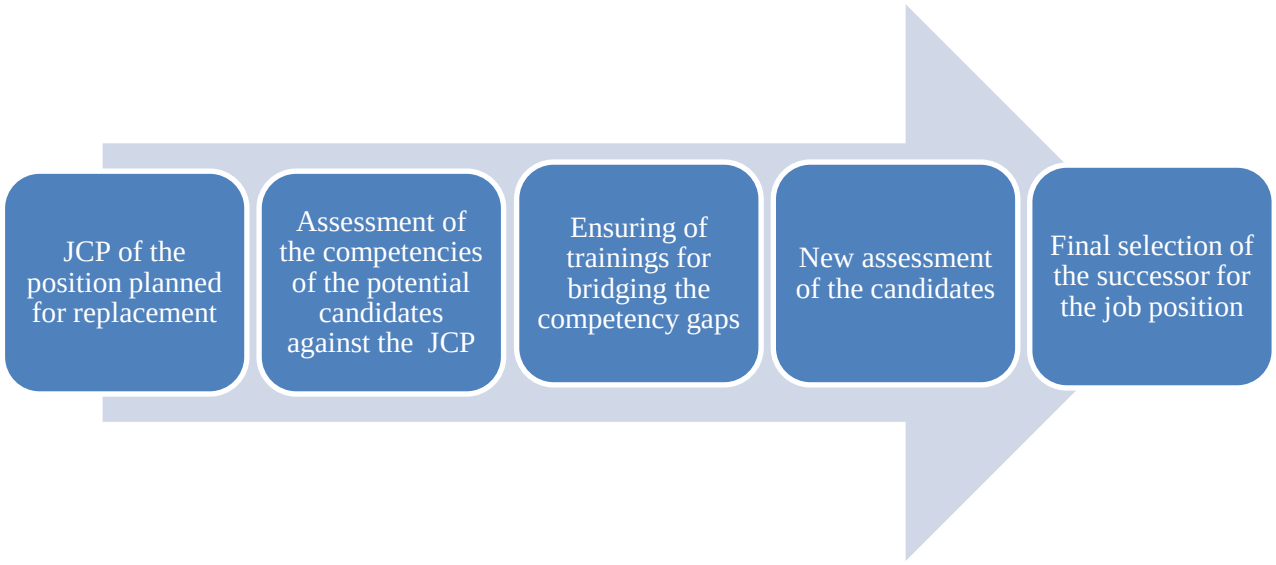


Figure 16: Competency-based succession planning (by the Author of the thesis)

Career development

The process is initialized by the employee, the line manager or HR department without a specific job position in mind. However, usually the company has a strategy for career development based on:

- expected changes in the organizational structure
- expected new job positions in the future
- expected re-design of the business processes
- need for developing of some specific competencies

After the candidates are approved for career development, based on their competency profile, they receive dedicated trainings for development of new competencies or improvement of the existing ones. At the end of the process, a pool of high-potentials is created and in case of need, the employee with the most suitable profile can be withdrawn from the pool and placed to a new/senior position (providing better career opportunity for the employee). This process is fully internal and aims to provide opportunities for the existing staff.

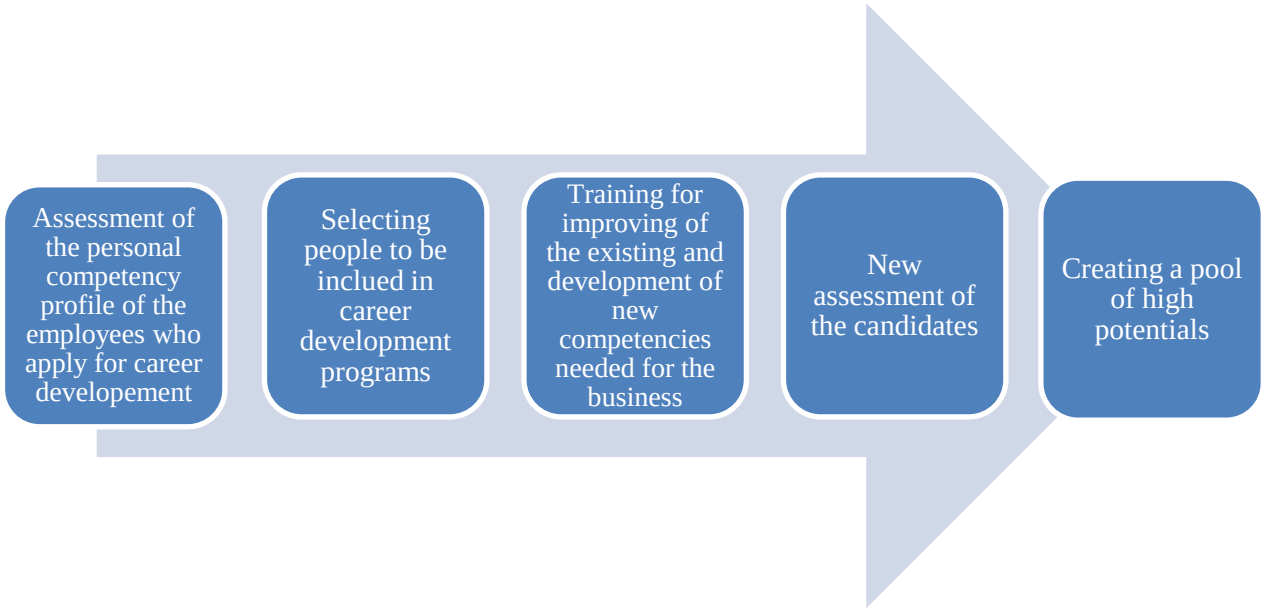


Figure 17: Competency-based career development (by the Author of the thesis)

In summary

The competency-based Career development and Succession planning ensure that **the right people** will be prepared for **the right places** to take over **at the right time**, which:

- ✓ guarantees an effective continuity of the business by keeping and transferring the specific „know-how" and
- ✓ creates a sense of security for the future of the organization by making it more resistant to external changes and unexpected events.

My Practice

In 2013 we have created the first competency-based Career development program in Fraport-Bulgaria. The two-years program was based on club activities aiming to develop different competencies for different purposes, through *club activities, brainstorming, discussions, simulation games, project work and mutual support.* The three clubs were as follows:

- **Club „Young specialist"** – the main goal of the club was to develop **specific professional and personal competencies** in a group of high-potential young employees and prepare them for higher responsibilities and senior positions in the future.

- **Club „Future manager**" – the main goal of this club was to prepare a pool of people to take over leadership positions in the future; the club activities were fully dedicated to development of **leadership and management competencies** and creating a personal leadership style **aligned with the corporate culture and values.**
- **Club „Expert" –** the main goal of this club was to transfer their specific know-how to the young people in the company through training, mentoring and coaching. The participants in this group were employees with a long-term airport experience, outstanding professionals, respected by both the management and their colleagues.

The outcome of the program: **64%** of the participants in the program got career opportunities and changed their positions within 2 years after the completion of the program.

In 2015 this Career development program was recognised and awarded as the best Career program in Bulgaria by Euroguidance and Erasmus +.

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In 2015 as a speaker in the 24th ACI Africa Regional Conference & Exhibition in Tunisia, I presented my experience in **competency modelling and the importance of development of dedicated succession planning programs at the airports**.

I was approached with the request to present practical guidelines on the topic, so that the airports understand the process and start developing it by themselves.

At the end of the presentation I had a lot of positive comments and within one year I got 5 requests for sharing of my knowledge (in details) for creating of competency models, succession planning programs and career development initiatives. I sent all my documents, handbooks and forms to my HR colleagues at these airports and the knowledge transfer was successfully done.

In 2017 during another ACI Africa event, the HR director of Seychelles International Airport shared with me that they had used the recommended methodology and had developed JCPs for the senior positions in the company. Then they based the recruitment process for these positions on the competency profiles, and developed a succession program again for these job positions. They had also created a talent pool in the company and were currently providing trainings to it.

The development of Career development and Succession planning processes based on competencies completes the Competency model of the organization and transforms it into an **Integral Competency Model.** (*HR activities like compensation and benefits, and rewarding can be also linked to the Model but they are very specific for each organization and often depend on the local labour regulations and on the specific culture of the company.)*

The Integral Competency Model ensures that people who have the required knowledge, skills and behaviour are hired, their abilities are enhanced, and their potential is developed further through learning experience, coaching and other support, in order to get better career opportunities during their work life.

Linking all HR processes to the Competency model of the organization, guarantees a clear, objective, comprehensive and unambiguous understanding of what the company and the HR team are doing and why, which leads to higher motivation, engagement and performance of the people and, respectively, to higher performance of the company.

CHAPTER FIVE

Maintenance and future development of the CBHRM Model

Very often, once developed and implemented, the competency model is „forgotten". It becomes a part of the daily routine and no one observes it further.

Actually, the organizations which want to be „on the crest of the wave" in the business, need to always keep an eye on the changes and use the competency model as a tool to manage their workforce accordingly.

The competency model is a **live instrument** which can be a very strong and valuable support for the business when constantly observed and continuously developed, and when both the list of competencies and the competency assessment toolset are revised following the changes in the:

- organizational strategies
- business environment
- organizational structure, processes and procedures
- legislation/regulations
- change of company's goals, culture or values, which can lead to new competencies needs
- any other key factor for the business

In addition, the validity and the "shelf life" of the **individual competencies** also varies with the job and the pace of change. For example, technical competencies usually become outdated long before personal effectiveness or leadership competencies require revision. Therefore, a separate review of the job competency profiles is critical in the following cases:

- changes in the position duties and/or requirements
- need of new knowledge and skills and/or behaviour change (implementation of new technologies, equipment, change in legal acts, etc.)
- merging or separating positions/departments/processes, etc.

In all cases, the company should keep at least one HR person responsible for the model with the obligation to observe it and take appropriate actions for updating, changing or any further needed development.

CHAPTER SIX

Main risks and success factors in development and implementation of CBHRM Models

In the table below, I present the main risks, difficulties and mistakes the HR teams can face during the process of building of a competency model, and some advices of how they can overcome them to reach a successful completion of the process and higher benefits of it.

Main risks	Success factors
Resistance to the competency modelling process – refusal of assistance in the interviewing, analysing and verification processes	**On-time and ongoing communication at all levels:** ✓ as early as possible (before the start of the project), ✓ as often as possible (for tracking the progress), ✓ well-targeted to the different groups of employees (directly involved in the project, users, people who could be concerned in any way) **Full involvement and support by the management**
Irrelevance of the implemented model to the specific work environment and culture of the organization**,** which can possibly lead to the following risks: ✓ the HR activities to be based on incorrect foundation (recruitment, training, etc.) ✓ wrong HR and management decisions (about ***what and how*** to be developed and implemented, and for ***whom***	**High preciseness and cautiousness of the project team** regarding what can be directly applied, adapted or should be changed in order to respond to the specific needs of the organization, especially in „adopting" ready-made competency models (which can be not relevant to the specifics of the business) or using „library" competencies (a pre-determined list of competencies).

Main risks	Success factors
Weak alignment of the model with the business goals of the organization – as a result, the designed model may not respond fully to the organization's needs, and the achieved results from the implementation of the model may not meet the initial expectations	**Good preparation of the project** and discussions of the project goals and the desired benefits with the management in advance. **Engagement and involvement of the management** in the project from the very start
Lack of management support – when competency modelling project is treated as an HR process, rather than business culture (which leads to de-motivation of the project team and lack of support by the other staff members)	**Ongoing support by the management** to the project by: ✓ showing involvement in the process, ✓ preparing periodical overviews and circulation letters, ✓ using every occasion to „sell" the idea and to convince the company staff in the advantages and the benefits of the competency model
Lack of consistency in the process of building the competency model (not following the methodology and the interview protocols, underestimating the procedures, skipping stages as verification and validation, etc.) which can lead to impossibility the collected information to be compared, summarized and analysed in the best way and the designed competency model not to respond fully to the organization's needs	**Following strictly the methodology** for building of competency models **Following strictly the interview protocols** for all incumbents
Mistakes in the process ✓ Analysis based on only one person's feedback – accepting one opinion as representative for all the people executing the respective job, can provide a fully wrong job analysis	**Responsibility, commitment, motivation and dedication** of the project team members **Following strictly the methodology** for all positions under study in the same way

Main risks	Success factors
✓ Relying only on the employees' perspective - self-assessment can be misleading (purposely or not) ✓ Too many competencies in one JCP – which can hinder and burden the HR processes linked to the model	**Adequate number** of interviews and surveys for each position **Proper selection** of the participants in the process **Informed decision** about the number of competencies in one JCP
Subjectivity in the process – seeing what you want to see, personal biases and assumptions	**Objectiveness and impartiality** in the whole process **Focus on the job, not the employee** **Minimum two observers** to attend the meetings together **Minimum two methods of data collection and assessment** to be used for each position
The model is too theoretical and complex, and the users cannot understand it, which can lead to misuse, neglecting and demotivation	**The model to be linked** to the real work environment and experience of the employees (in order to be more comprehensive and easier to implement) **The model to be communicated and explained in details** to the employees and the line managers before implemented

Table 11: Main risks and success factors (by the Author of the thesis)

One of the most important success factors, from my perspective, is the high motivation, dedication, enthusiasm and positive attitude of the project team members to the project. I strongly believe that if they show confidence in the process, their sincere belief in the meaning and the success of the project, and if they maintain an ongoing positive atmosphere during their contacts and work with the people, they will achieve higher support and engagement of the employees, and higher final success of the project.

CHAPTER SEVEN

Practice in building of CBHRM models and results

In this chapter I am presenting my practical experience in the implementation of the presented methodology for building of customized Competency models in two projects – one in Europe and one in the Middle East.

The project in Fraport-Bulgaria (Bulgaria, Europe) is presented in brief, mostly for the purposes of describing how the methodology works in a well-organized and quite predictable business environment and as a basis for comparison to the process of building of such competency model in a more unknown and specific cultural environment.

My main accent in the thesis is my experience in the development and the implementation of a Competency model in Bahrain Airport Company (Bahrain, Middle East), ***showing that even in a quite challenging environment the methodology can be efficient and can bring significant benefits and competitive advantages to the business.***

At the end of the chapter, I present a comparison between the two projects, ***proving that the methodology works successfully in different environment, culture, company organization and human factor.***

7.1. Fraport-Bulgaria

In this Chapter I describe the process of building a customised Competency model for Fraport-Bulgaria, the process of development and establishment of competency-based recruitment, training, performance appraisal, career development and succession planning.

Introduction to the project

Fraport Twin Star Airport Management AD is a German-Bulgarian company, concessionaire of Varna and Burgas airports. The main stakeholder of the company is Fraport AG (Germany) – 60%. The company manages about 750 permanent and 1200 temporary employees (data: 2019).

In the very beginning of the establishment of the company in 2006, as a HR Manager I had to make a full analysis of the processes and the activities related to staff management and development.

The analysis showed that the two airports (as two independent state-owned companies before the concession), worked in a radically different way. There was no unified and objective system for selection, training and development, and these processes were done at the sole discretion of the line managers, without a clarity about the sought effects and with an unlimited budget. There was no concept for performance appraisal, talent management and career development in the company. There were no succession planning programs or any other initiatives for preservation of the specific know-how of the airports. The compensation & benefits system was not structured, there was no objective basis for the monthly bonus distribution (provided by the state at that time).

All these findings made me look for a tool, where I could put all activities related to the HR management on a clear, understandable and objective basis.

The first step I took was the development and implementation of a new organizational structure in the company. For this purpose, together with a consultant from Fraport AG we defined all the processes of the company, distinguished all activities in each process (the so-called process map), divided the activities in individual actions, the execution of which had to lead to the completion of the processes. We grouped the individual actions by **meaning, similarity, connection and place of performance**, thus creating the individual job positions. From the description of each position, we discussed and defined what **skills, knowledge and experience** a person must have to perform the relevant job, which led to the writing of the relevant job descriptions.

My second step was to create a reliable **Selection system** based on clear, objective criteria, followed by **Annual Performance Appraisal system**, which would clearly define the criteria by which people in the respective positions would be evaluated. Both projects required diving into the specifics of each position and searching for these criteria, which would allow a **fair assessment** of the candidates for a certain position, and of the performance of the employees during the annual appraisal process.

The work done for the development of the new organizational structure was a good basis for the construction of the two projects, but not enough for their overall development.

As mentioned before, at that time I have already encountered the information about the existence of Competency models and have started my research in the field. So, I continued my investigations, learning in the process, making tests, correcting and moving forward.

In the process of exploring the theory on the topic and examining the experience of other companies, I found out that in order to create a working competency model I need to focus not on the description of "what" (as in the approach which we used for the development of the job descriptions), but to concentrate on the question “how”. I realized that the traditional job description analyses the elements of the position and defines the work as a sequence of tasks necessary to perform the position, while the Competence model studies the people who do a job successfully and defines the work through characteristics and behaviours of these people.

On my road of ongoing research, discussions with a number of people from different businesses, from different countries and with different perspectives to the topic, a number of trials and mistakes, always searching for feedback and applying different corrections in the approaches I was using, I could finally create **a methodology which combined all collected knowledge and experience.** The process was long and not easy, and only my patience, persistence and professional curiosity help me finalize my work.

The development of a complete competency model needs good professional knowledge but also appropriate approach and tools, which can guarantee the efficiency of the process. The hardest work which I had to do was to select and develop the tools for **data collection and competency-based selection,** presented in the thesis in details.

After the development of the methodology for analysis and assessment of the job competencies, in a period of almost 3 years together with one colleague from the HR team, we developed JCPs and Competency-based recruitment process (assessment tools and selection matrices) for **156 job positions**.

The JCPs were gradually implemented as a main HR and management tool in the other HR processes, too - as a part of the toolset for defining the individual training plan of the employees, as a frame of the annual performance appraisal process and as main guidelines for the work of the internal Career development centre.

In the next years, the Competency model was linked to the succession planning and to the youth programs of the company – Summer Students Internship program and Fraport Summer school (aiming to develop the most important **core competencies** in the young people expected to join the company in the future).

Project highlights

Preparation of the project

Right after the approval of the project by the company management, we organized an informative workshop with the management of the two airports and all responsible department heads. In this workshop we presented the scope and the goals of the project, and the support we need for building a good, workable and effective competency model. Together we discussed and elaborated a communication plan to cover all staff members, including seasonal employees and Head office staff.

After the workshop, we prepared all the forms, interview questions, surveys and copies of all the job descriptions, in order to ensure the base for the start of the project.
Later in the process we decided also to use focus groups and brainstorming sessions for some specific job positions, which we prepared also accurately and well in advance.

Project communication strategy

As discussed in the initial workshop, our first goal in the threshold of the project was to inform all the employees and to prepare them for the expected support. Therefore, we (the project team) prepared a detailed communication plan, and the Public relations department took the responsibility to follow it and to initiate additional on-going information in the whole duration of the project.

- A letter (email) was sent by the CEO to all the employees informing them about the start of the project, the project goals, the expected benefits from the implementation of a Competency model and the expected contribution from their side
- Emails were sent by the project team to all the employees who were selected to be interviewed or to fill in the questionnaires, with the plan of the meetings (with a copy to the respective line managers)
- During the whole process of data collection and JCPs development, we issued **periodical bulletins, published articles in the internal newspaper and announced the progress of the project at every staff meeting**.

Data collection and development of JCPs

The data collection process in the project in Bulgaria was very dynamic and interactive. We started with a dedicated meeting with the Management Board of the company to discuss about the expected and planned changes – plans for enlarging the business in the future, plans for outsourcing of some

activities, expected changes in the market, challenges, changes in the organizational structure, etc. Their contribution was very critical and important, as the company was just established and there were a lot of planned by the concessionaire changes in the ground handling processes, plans for new ground service equipment and outsourcing of some of the existing activities.

Few weeks later, we organized a workshop with the executive directors and the airport management for defining the core competencies which were critical for the successful development of the company.

The same workshops were conducted at the two airports with managers at different levels – head of departments, shift leaders and supervisors.

As a result, we had a **list of key competencies** as a base of our following research.

For the precise job analysis, we conducted more than **350 interviews** and processed more than **600 questionnaires.** The interviews were conducted mainly at the working places of the interviewees, in order to observe the working process, and, at the same time, to make the employees feel more comfortable and relaxed.

We organized **7 workshops** and **4 focus groups** at the two airports for defining the required competencies for some job positions as Check-in agents and X-Ray operators (Security staff), as these positions were occupied by a big number of people – between 100 and 200 in the peak season at each of the two airports.

And last but not least, we conducted individual meetings with **all head of departments** (**35**) to get their perspective about the job positions under study.

Based on the collected information and the following analysis, we have developed JCPs for all the existing job positions in the company at that time (**156**).

The data collection process in Fraport-Bulgaria was challenging, as in the beginning despite of the huge communication campaign, the employees still had some doubts about the purpose of the project. But as a result of the ongoing communication, and as this project was not the first HR project in the company requesting employees' contribution (they had some previous experience), the data collection and JCPs design process was successfully completed.

The process of verification and validation of the JCPs was moving in parallel to the data collection for the different positions, as there were different priorities and timing for the different units.

Competency-based selection/recruitment process

While the process of development of the JCPs was executed, my next immediate step was to start designing selection tools for the assessment of the competencies in the already validated JCPs.

It was a hard process, as each of the competencies, based on its behaviour description had to be assessed with appropriate tools in order to achieve the *most objective and reliable evaluation*, compare to the *standard of the competency*, and define precisely the *level of proficiency* of the candidates.

In addition, each of the competencies had to be assessed with more than one tool, in order to achieve more objective result.

And last but not least, the difficulty also came from the fact that one and the same competency (as a title) had a different description in behaviour for the different job positions, so the process of analysing, researching and designing the selection toolbox was a very challenging and time-consuming.

As mentioned before, there were a lot of job positions in the company at the time of the project, so we had to plan the timeline, prioritize and start with the most critical jobs (airport operations) and step-by-step to base the entire recruitment process on the JCPs.

Meanwhile, different assessment tools were developed and tested in the practice in order to create the most suitable selection toolbox for the company. In Bulgaria all the listed assessment tools in sub-chapter "*4.2. Competency selection toolbox"* are fully utilized in the recruitment process.

It took more than one year to finalize this process and to create **customized competency-based selection contests for all existing job positions** in the company at that time.

The positive side in the competency modelling is that once the competencies assessment tools are developed, they can be applied **for checking the competency proficiency of the employees for**

different purposes and at any time– in the performance appraisal process, for measuring the progress in the competency training, for succession planning, career development programs, etc.

Therefore, although it is one of the longest processes in the Competency modelling, the development of the link of the selection process to the competency model is one of the *most responsible and important tasks* in the project, as once finalized it facilitates and supports all the other HR processes in the company.

The benefits from the implementation of the competency-based recruitment are shared in "Project outcome" part below.

Competency-based training process

In Fraport-Bulgaria, the competency-based training process was implemented right after the establishment of an internal Training centre (licensed by CAA).

The foundation of the process was established by the Training manager of the company who created a detailed database to cover all the job positions in the company and to define all the trainings needed for each of them (the so called "training cards"). This database became the basis for planning the training activities and budget in the company in the following years and still the training process is functioning in this way.

In addition, every year after the annual performance appraisal, the Training manager, together with the line managers, prepares a **Matrix of competencies** for each department, which is the base for the individual training program of each employee for the forthcoming year.

The benefits from the implementation of the competency-based training are shared in "Project outcome" part below.

Competency-based performance appraisal process

Although it looks much easier to incorporate the JCPs into the performance appraisal system, it needs dedicated efforts to design it in order to provide a *realistic, objective and accurate* performance appraisal.

The Annual Performance Appraisal system (APAS) which we developed together with the HR team of the company, consists of two parts – Competency assessment (based on the JCP) and Annual goals completion.

The main challenges in designing the Competency-based APAS were:

- to link both competencies and goals completion evaluation to the same assessment scale
- to use the same assessment scale which is in the JCPs (level of proficiency)
- to provide a clear description of all the score levels in an understandable and easy to use way for each of the competencies in the JCP (*please see Table 10*)
- to train the managers to use the system in a correct way
- to convince the employees about the advantages and benefits of the competency-based system and motivate them participate actively and positively in the assessment process

We structured the performance appraisal process as a meeting and dialogue between the employee and his/her line manager, aiming open discussion about the performance during the year, the strengths and the areas for improvement, gaps and needs of training, execution of the set goals and planning the future.

Our (HR and Management) observations were that after the implementation of the new competency-based appraisal system, the appraisal process was better understood by the employees, as it was linked to their individual job positions and the JCPs which they already knew well, and there were quite less complaints about subjectivity of the process.

The feedback from the managers was also very positive, although in the beginning they pretended that the new system requires more efforts from their side. At the end, they confirmed that the process was quite easier as everything is described in details, they have no doubts about what score to put for each employee for each of the competencies. As the assessment process was based on objective criteria, the meeting with the employees was easier, rarely there were conflicts about the score, and the employees were more willing to share their points of view, ideas and concerns.

In 2011, the appraisal system was linked to the bonus system of the company, so based on the assessment results, the company distributed additional rewards to the employees.

Competency-based career development and succession planning process

These two HR processes were linked to the competency model after we had observed how the model worked in the main three areas described above.

What inspired me personally as HR Manager of the company to insist on integrating the career development and succession planning to the Competency model, too, was my research that about 30% of the high and middle management roles were expected to retire in a period of 2 to 5 years. At the same time the average age in the company was 45 years.

Based on these two facts, I realized that the specific know-how of the company can be easily lost if we didn't take measures to keep it and transfer it to younger employees. But we also needed to attract younger people to join the company and make them stay with us.

Therefore, I initialized few programs which were approved by the Management, developed and implemented.

- **Competency-based Summer Internship Program** – the internship program was launched in 2007 and had a very good image among the universities in Bulgaria and abroad, as it provided not only work experience but also purposeful training for the students.

  In 2011 it was linked to the Competency model in order to develop some specific for the business core competencies in the young people, and at the same time to attract them as future replenishment.

  About **30% of the trainees** in the program join the company every year. Joining the company, the new employees are already acquainted with the corporate culture and values, and are already trained in some of the most important company competencies.

- **Competency-based Career development centre –** the second career development program in the Career centre of the company (2013-2015), was fully based on competencies. The three clubs created within the Career centre (*the full description is provided in 4.5.)* had the goal to cover the determined competency gaps at individual level in the people who were appointed as „high potentials" and were supposed to create a strong pool of talents to take over the leadership and the key functions of the company in the future. The succession planning

program was also a part of the Career development centre, training mainly management and leadership competencies.

The benefits from the implementation of the competency-based career development are shared in "Project outcome" part below.

Project outcome

As a summary, below I provide a list of the main and most sustainable improvements, observed after the implementation of the Competency model in Bulgaria:

- Double decreased time for recruitment
  - ✓ from 1 month to **2 weeks**
- Higher efficiency in recruitment
  - ✓ **100%** of the new recruited permanent staff approved after the probation period
  - ✓ **98%** - stayed longer that 1 year in the company
- Higher objectiveness in the HR processes and activities, leading to higher trust in HR activities and the company approaches to the people
  - ✓ the employees started to support more the HR team and the following HR projects
- Increased training value for price and increased ROI for some trainings, as a result of better targeting of the training needs, based on gaps of competencies
  - ✓ increased customer service satisfaction customer satisfaction rate increased from **3,84 to 4.37** in Varna and from **3.53 to 3.96** in Burgas (*scale from 5 to 1,"5" is the best*) in two years' time, after the implementation of dedicated Customer service training program (*described in more details in 4.3., Training evaluation part*),
  - ✓ the success rate in the Security certification increased to **70%** as a result of dedicated competency-based training
  - ✓ the company could reduce the training budget by **40%** in implementing a competency-based gap analysis and training planning
- A constant improvement of the knowledge, skills and the behaviour of the employees is observed, and in some cases – a remarkable progress, as a result of dedicated competency-

based trainings – observed by the line managers and during the Career development centre activities

- After the implementation of a competency-based performance appraisal approach, there was only one complaint (among 750 assessed employees) for subjective attitude by the line manager.
- More effective career development and succession planning – **64%** of the participants in the Career development centre of the company were promoted during and after the program
- **98%** of the participants in the Career development program have improved their competencies at the end of the program (KETTEL test made before the start of the program and at the end)

After Fraport Career development centre was awarded as **the best Career development program in Bulgaria in 2015 by Euroguidance and Erasmus +** *(described in 4.5.),* the rating of the company as a good employer significantly increased, and although the company didn't win the title **"Best Employer"** of the year, it was nominated in the list of the 5 competing for the title, among 150 companies in Bulgaria.

In 2015 the HR practices of Fraport-Bulgaria were awarded among **the 5 best practices in Bulgaria by FORBES**, which was a high recognition of our overall efforts in building a modern and sustainable human resources management in the company.

7.2. Bahrain Airport Company, Bahrain

In 2017, I was invited by Fraport-Bahrain to join the ORAT project for the new passengers' terminal of Bahrain International Airport (Airport Modernization Program) as an HR expert and ORAT Training manager.

I was involved in all the three Packages of the project as follows:

- **Package 1**: In the role of HR auditor and expert I had to assess the HR activities of Bahrain Airport Company (BAC) and give my recommendations for changes and future development.
- **Package 3** (*it was delivered before Package 2, but with number „three" as it was additionally requested by BAC*): Based on my recommendations in Package 1, I had to develop a new organizational structure of BAC, to design and implement a Competency-based HRM model, to establish competency-based recruitment and training in the company, to develop a concept for BAC Training Academy, and to transfer my knowledge to BAC HR department.
- **Package 2**: As an ORAT Training manger I had to ensure all necessary trainings for preparing of all stakeholders' employees to take over the activities in the new terminal.

In this Chapter I describe the process of building a tailor-made Competency model for BAC, the process of development and establishment of competency-based recruitment and training processes, and ensuring a competency-based training for all stakeholders' employees in the last phase of the project.

Description of the project

Bahrain International Airport (BIA) is one of the most important strategic sites in Bahrain, critical for supplying the country with foodstuffs and providing access to the island and the country for tourists from all over the world.

The new passenger terminal building of BIA is a part of the Airport Modernization Program (AMP) of Bahrain. It is 4 times bigger than the existing one, planned for 14 million passengers a year (2018 – 9 mln.), and equipped with new, state-of-the-art technology to improve the passenger experience, the safety and the security of the airport.

The project is financed by Abu Dhabi Fund for Development (ADFD) to the total amount of $1.1bn.

In the AMP project, Fraport-Bahrain had a strategic role as a consultant. Its main role was to support BAC in managing a comprehensive ORAT (Operational Readiness and Airport Transfer) program, to ensure the operational readiness of the new airport infrastructure project, collaborate and communicate with all partners involved in the project, to organize timely information-sharing and an effective decision-making process. It had also to ensure that the tools, the staff competencies and the documentation are in place to successfully operate, maintain and manage the new terminal building, as well as to suggest best practices for airport operations and deliver a seamless transition of airport operations to the new passenger terminal building for a successful opening.

The three core pillars of the project were:

Training – all stakeholder's employees to be trained in a way to ensure smooth working process and customer service from the very beginning of the new terminal operations.

Trials – test of the new terminal building (equipment, processes and people) to prove its operational readiness and to guarantee the effective and stable operations after its opening.

Transfer – practical transfer of all the processes from the old to the new terminal, incl. offices, equipment, people.

Key achievements in the HR part of the project

Package 1: An extensive HR Report has been developed analysing the structure and the procedures within BAC HR department and deriving recommendations to support BAC in establishing a state-of-the-art HR environment.

Package 3: All recommendations in Package 1 were developed further and implemented in BAC as follows:

- Development of Competency-based HR Management Model
- Recruitment model based on competencies
- Training model based on competencies
- Training Academy concept & action plan for implementation
- New organizational structure for all BAC departments
- Options for a new BAC demand modelled shift rostering

- Framework for systematization of BAC job positions and job descriptions

Package 2: ORAT Training, ensuring specific competencies training for **12 681 people** in three different training categories:

- Contractor training and internal roll-out to end-users – training in all new systems and technology (5,054 people trained)
- Familiarization training – training for acquaintance of all the users of the new terminal with the new passengers' and staff flows and routes, new procedures, new processes, interrelations, new working places and areas, emergency plans, etc. (4,605 people trained)
- SOP Training – training in the new standard operational procedures (1,787 people trained)

Additionally, an On-the-job training program (KAR initiative, described in details later) was developed and implemented in order to test in practice the competencies' proficiency and prove the operational readiness of the staff. (1,235 people trained)

Helping and Hindering factors

The environment and the culture in Bahrain are quite different compared to any other part of the world. As a part of the Persian Gulf countries, it has similar traditions regarding religion and culture, but quite more acceptance, tolerance and openness to people from other countries.

The population of Bahrain is about 1 700 000 people (data: 2020), almost half of them are expatriates working (temporarily or permanently) in the country. The main economics of Bahrain is the petroleum and on the second place, the tourism. It is also a host of Formula one every year. Only 1% of the land is arable.

For the successful work in Bahrain it is critical to know their culture and stick to their traditions. For example, the Bahrainis like talking about their families and kids and always ask about other's health and family. They like shaking hands and hugging people around even in a business environment, to show their friendliness and gratitude. The young people are very well educated, many of them in prestigious universities all over the world, all speaking fluently English and open, positive and friendly to the foreigners.

Most of the factors, described above, were supportive for the project, but there were also a lot of challenges and factors which were hindering the smooth work and on-time project delivery.

The project was the most important project for Bahrain, with a high investment budget, financed by the ADFD, personally observed by the Crown Prince and under the guidance of the Ministry of Transportation and Telecommunication. Therefore, it was very challenging, with a lot of *pressure, changes and adjustments* to new requirements and situations.

The employees involved in the project were positive and enthusiastic to be a part of this big project, but also inconsistent in their support, usually when they realized that the project would require long-term support and dedicated efforts.

In addition, we had to get used to the specificity of their behaviour and culture, for example:

- often postponing important tasks, events and deadlines,
- not coming to work, because of the legal possibility to stay at home for one day,
- praying few times, a day, which from project perspective was a problem, as people were missing from important meetings and events,
- working only 6 hours a day during Ramadan time, so key people were often absent from the project committees.

The weather conditions were also an important factor, as from April to October the temperatures raised up to 45-48 degrees, with humidity of about 95%

And last but not least, we were hit by the COVID-19 crisis in a critical project phase, which made the things even more complicated and challenging, leading to full re-organization and re-planning of the project, including all project activities and deliverables. It affected the ORAT training activities significantly, first stopping them fully and then conducting them with a limited number of trainees and mainly virtually.

Development of BAC Competency-based HR management model

Despite the difficulties and the particularities, which I faced in the process of the project development, I could successfully finalize it in all project phases (Packages) and below I will describe my actions and results in details.

As a result of the detailed assessment of the HR activities in the company in Package 1, I was convinced that BAC **did not have any objective, precise, transparent and reliable HR foundation** in support to the business in order to:

- assess the human resources capacity against the capacity needed to achieve the vision, mission and the business goals of the company
- improve the management of the human capital in the company
- achieve better ROEI (Return on Employees Investment)
- have one common base for all HR processes – recruitment/selection, training, performance appraisal, career development, succession planning

Discussed and agreed with BAC Management was that implementing the methodology for building of CBHRM models and developing a specific customized model for BAC would possibly lead to:

- identification of the competencies needed for the future development of the company
- clear definition of the expectations of the company from the employees
- selection and recruitment of employees with specific and unique competencies needed for each job position
- training process concentrated on the individual competency gaps (higher cost-efficiency of the training process)
- higher performance and motivation of the employees based on the ongoing support in the deficiency of their knowledge and skills
- increase of internal employee mobility
- outlining the employees with high-potential and unique talent in the company
- establishment of a framework for constructive feedback

As an overall benefit, our intention was to make the CBHRM model a powerful instrument for improvement *of the focus, the cost-efficiency and the outcome of the BAC HR processes*.

After discussing and setting the goals for development and implementation of a CBHRM model with BAC Management, following the methodology as described in the previous chapters, one HR specialist from BAC HR department and me (composing the project team) established the basis of the model. For less than 2 months we had to develop the initial competency model and to establish the link to the recruitment and the training process in the company. My role was mainly to teach BAC HR how the methodology works and to demonstrate it in practice for certain BAC job positions.

Preparation of the project

The project started with a detailed discussion with BAC Management and dedicated HR team (future users of the model) of the project goals, the future plans for development of the company, ORAT project specific requirements, the scope of the project - which departments and job positions to be assessed first (as it was not possible to develop all JCPs in the period of two months), timeline and deliverables, expectations from the project team.

As presented in *Chapter 2, „Step 2: Data collection planning"*, a critical part of the preparation of the project was the selection of suitable and comfortable for the BAC staff methods for data collection.

For me as responsible for the project, it was very important to understand the cultural differences between the people in Europe and the Gulf countries, the different mentality, perceptions and expectations, the expected reaction and attitude to involving the people from the airport in a project like this (the first project in the company in which the employees were invited to contribute).

Based on these discussions, a list of data collection methods was worked out and approved, as follows:

- ✓ *Analysis of the existing generic job descriptions*
- ✓ *Direct observations of the working processes at the respective working places*
- ✓ *Face-to-face interviews with **limited number** of people*
- ✓ *Written surveys for **limited number** of people*
- ✓ *Discussion with the line managers*

As a second step I conducted a workshop with the entire BAC HR team to present the project and to have their support for the future development of the project, followed by individual meetings with the Heads of the departments to determine the employees who will participate in the interviews and the surveys.

All needed forms were reviewed and prepared on BAC templates – structured interview questionnaire, JCP Survey, JCP Observer summary form, JCP form **(Appendix 1 to 4).**

The communication strategy was also discussed and approved by the BAC management (*another cultural distinction in BAC is that the CEO is personally involved and approves the details of any project in place*). As a result, a circulation email was sent by VP HR (Vice president HR) to all the employees to introduce the project. In addition, an informative email was sent by the project team to all concerned employees to prepare them for the following steps in the project.

Conducting of the study

During the data collection process, we conducted **74 interviews** (with 62 employees and 12 senior/line managers) and processed **80 questionnaires** (154 out of 636 employees contributed for the data collection), in order to analyse **36 job positions** (out of 75 job positions in the company at the time of the project) in details - all activities, duties, priorities and challenges.

In some cases, it was a big challenge to conduct the interviews with the employees especially in the beginning of the process. Although we explained in details the purpose of the project and why we need their support, conducting the interviews both in English and Arabic for their convenience, we could feel the lack of trust and some fear about the consequences from the implementation of the project. We had to answer questions like: "*Are you going to reduce the staff number?*", "*Why are you interviewing exactly me? "*, "*Are you going to cut my position?*", etc. It took a long time to calm down their worries and to make them understand why we need their support and what are the benefits for them, in order to "take them on board" for the project.

On the other side, there was another group of people who were very happy to provide information about their jobs and their experience, and did not hesitate to give us advices about the project and the competencies we wanted to assess and describe. They were impressed and touched that someone is interested in their job position and them personally.

With the time, the information about our visits and discussions spread among the airport staff (*from mouth to mouth, which in Bahrain is the most powerful tool for creating trust*) and people started to accept us friendly and feel more comfortable during the interviewing process. We even had volunteering people to be interviewed and to participate in the project. (*something which I never experienced in the projects in Europe).*

In all cases the interviews took more time than expected and the process of data collection was slowed down.

Development of JCPs

The development of the JCPs was a learning process both for my colleague from the project team and me, as the expectations from the project were very high, and at the same time the data collection process was not easy. We also had to analyse and reflect *the company's strategic goals, specific environment, and unique culture and values* in the model (as already discussed in the theoretical part of the thesis) in order to meet the set project goals.

As a result of the process, we have developed **36 JCPs**, with 5 to 7 main competencies for each of them, described in a specific and unique for the position expected behaviour. (two examples of BAC JCPs are provided in **Appendix 9 (1)** and **Appendix 9 (2)**)

In addition, having in mind that BAC was in a process of strategic re-organization, adapting to new facilities, new technologies, new working environment, new organization of work, withing the ORAT project, I defined the following **core competencies** (which were approved by the BAC Management):

- at company's level (for all employees)*: innovation, adaptability, effective communication and customer focus*
- at senior management level (Heads of departments)*: strategic thinking, accountability and coaching*
- at middle management level (Supervisors and group leaders): *coordination and decision making*

Development of competency-based recruitment/selection process

As already described in the theoretical formulation, the competency-based recruitment provides a chance to the employer to identify job applicants who possess the characteristics to carry out the job in terms of education, knowledge and experience, but also demonstrate attitudes and behaviours that indicate how well they will use their knowledge and skills to do the job, and how well they will fit in the company culture.

The biggest challenge at this stage of the BAC project was the development of **competency assessment tools** designed in a way to ensure precise and objective detection of the level of proficiency of the desired competencies, and at the same time to be appropriate for the Bahraini culture and environment. The tools had to be designed also in a way to be easily learnt and effectively used by the BAC recruitment specialists.

As a result, for the short project time, we could **develop fully**:

- **17 Selection Matrices** (an example is provided in **Appendix 10**)
- **17 Competency-based contests** (an example is provided in **Appendix 11**)

In order to demonstrate the link between the JCPs and the respective selection process:

- ✓ *in **Appendix 10**, I present the Selection matrix for the position "Head of Information & Monitoring", the JCP of which is presented in **Appendix 9 (2).***
- ✓ *in **Appendix 11**, I present the full Competency-based contest for the position "Officer Resource Allocation management", the JCP of which is presented in **Appendix 9 (1).***

As an additional support, I also introduced to the BAC Recruitment manager (who was my project team colleague) the **whole set of selection tools**, described in Chapter 4: „*4.2. Competency-based recruitment process"*, and trained her how to use them.

I have also attended one **Structured competency-based interview** with candidates for the job position for "Airport Marshaller" in order to demonstrate in practice how a competency-based interview should be conducted, and how the results should be registered and analysed.

On my return to Bulgaria, I continued my support for BAC, so that we could create Selection Matrices and full contests for all the remaining job positions based on the created and validated 36 JCPs.

The shared benefits 1,5 years after the introduction of the competency-based recruitment process in BAC (by the Recruitment manager and my support in the project - Dalal AlNajem):

- *More consistent recruitment process*, as the same methodology and selection instruments are used every time a job position has to be filled – this makes the interviewing process easier, saves time and ensures an objective assessment of the candidates against each other
- *Higher reliability* of the recruitment process, as every assessor in the selection process have to stick to the same evaluation standards and rules
- *Higher trust in the recruitment process* both from the internal and the external job candidates, as the contest can be explained in details to the candidates and they can get a clear feedback about their performance, based on the detailed competency behaviour description and assessment

Development of competency-based training process

The training process in BAC at the time of my audit, was very chaotic and unstructured. Although BAC used to dedicate a high budget for training, there was no consistency in the process – who, why, what to be trained.

The big advantage was that the BAC Training team was very positive, willing to learn and ready to change, although the process had to be fully re-structured.

To make it easier for them, I created a less complicated process, compared to the one, presented at Fig.12 (*Competency-based training roadmap*), in order to motivate them start the change. The team was also acquainted with the full methodology, as they could possibly try to implement it fully at a later stage.

I recommended the following few steps for establishing of training process based on the defined JCPs in the framework of the BAC competency model (Fig.19):

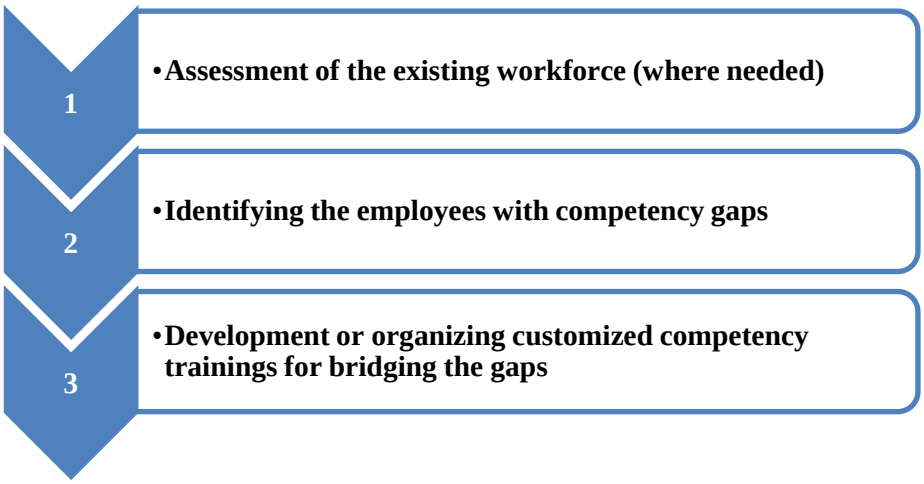


Figure 19: Competency-based training process in BAC

The first step, recommended to BAC is to use the assessment tools which are already developed for the selection process and to assess the current competencies proficiency (for the job positions which they want to study).

The second step requires that they fill in the Matrix of competencies, presented in Table 9, in order to define the competency gaps and the need for training at individual level.

The last step is about developing relevant training contents to ensure that the trainees receive exactly the knowledge and behaviour which is required for their job, in order to have an improvement in the daily work and to cope better with the challenges in their profession.

Traditionally, BAC requests training from external providers. I was the first one to introduce to them the concept for **internal trainers pool,** which can increase the efficiency of the competency-based trainings (*as the internal people best know the environment and the culture of the company and can provide examples from the real work life and experience which will increase the value of the training and the willingness of the trainees to implement the learnt in their practice*).

I also introduced to them the concept of **in-department trainings**, so that the employees who are experts in a certain competency can train the ones who have gaps in this competency. Thus, the

required competencies can be transferred directly from the outstanding performers and spread among the other employees, which is the main concept of the Competency modelling (*see Chapter 2).*

In support of BAC, I have developed a full description of the methodology with examples for different types of competency-based training programs and the link between the competency gap analysis and the training process. (**Appendix 13**)

In addition to the scope of the project, I developed a **Concept for creating of BAC Training Academy** which can create a culture for life-long learning in the company and can bring a number of benefits such as:

- higher cost efficiency of the training activities (internal trainings instead of external will save money)
- improved diagnostics of the training needs (centralized)
- increased control on the training process in the company
- increased control on the training content both for internal and external trainings
- more flexibility regarding timing, trainers, specific training needs, etc.
- more systematic recognition, evaluation and facilitation of potential leaders and specialists (the internal trainers can follow the training performance and the progress of the employees closely), which will lead to more efficient talent management/ career development/ succession planning in the company
- employees know that there are opportunities to learn, if they want to, which increases their motivation

ORAT Training

In 2019, I was invited to join the last stage of the project as an ORAT Training manager and to ensure the operational readiness of all stakeholders' employees for the new terminal.

As already described, I had to discuss and analyse the specific training needs of the different stakeholders, to organize individual meetings and a number of workshops in order to develop an adequate, comprehensive, realistic ORAT Training program.

For each of the job positions which has to operate in the new terminal there was a specific training program in the three groups described in the part "*Key achievements in the HR part of the project"*

of this Chapter and on the Fig. 20 below: Contractor training for all the new systems, equipment and technologies, SOP training for all the new procedures and Familiarization training for all future inhabitants of the new terminal building.

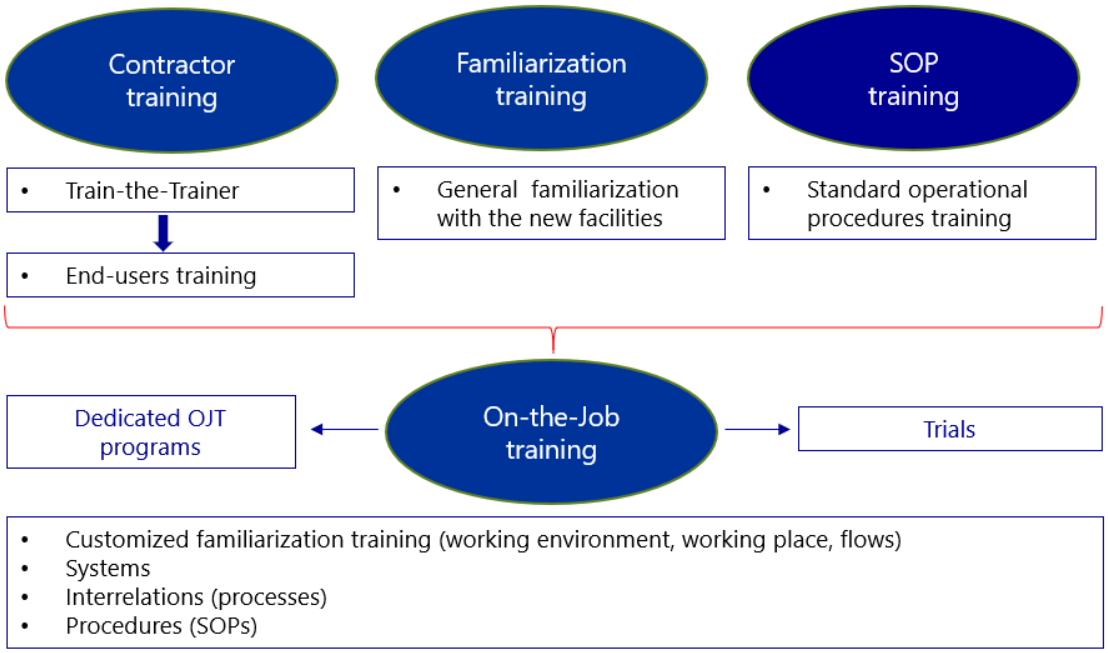


Figure 20: ORAT Training process (by the Author of the thesis)

In support of the training needs analysis I have developed (together with the Heads of departments) Training matrices (Matrix of competencies) by departments and at individual level, so for each new system/equipment/technology/machine, etc. we have trained those employees who really had the need of the respective knowledge and skills.

The number of trained people for a period of 7 months – 12 681 – is an impressive number, but it is not the most important thing in this project.

Even the most innovative and expensive equipment and technology is worth the investment **only if** the people who are supposed to work with it are well trained and know how to utilize it and take care of it. That's why, a *dedicated competency-based training* is the only guarantee for acquiring exactly the knowledge, skills, attitude and behaviour needed.

<u>One example:</u>

In the scope of the ORAT project, BAC purchased a fully new Baggage handling system (BHS) for the new terminal. The old terminal did not have any baggage system, so there were no people prepared

to execute this job in Bahrain. Therefore, a fully new team had to be recruited to operate and maintain the new BHS. So, we needed to go through the whole competency development process - to analyse the new jobs, to create JCPs, selection matrices and to decide about competency trainings to teach the new people how to do their new jobs from scratch. *This task was also a very good demonstration for the HR team of how the model works and links the different HR processes.*

At the end of the ORAT training process (after all the needed trainings were completed), I developed and implemented a special program for **verification** of the acquired competencies, which I called „**KAR initiative** "(**K**nowledge and **A**bility **R**einforcement program).

The initiative provided a program for **on-the-job training** in which every employee had to work at his/her new working place (at the new terminal) and experience the normal working process, working with the new equipment/machines/technologies, moving in the terminal following the designed new routes, checking the interconnections with other staff, other BAC departments or stakeholders. The performance of each employee was observed by the respective line manager, who had to report any gaps in the competencies of the employees and finally verify their capability to operate at the new terminal.

As a result of the implementation of the competency-based training approach, the **observed benefits** for BAC as of the end of my consulting in Bahrain, were as follows:

- Higher confidence of the employees in their capability to execute their duties at the new terminal
- Higher satisfaction of the employees from the received training - first, as they know what exactly is expected from them to know and be able to do after the training, and second, because of the accent on the practical knowledge.
- Higher efficiency of the training process and better use of the training budget – more training in the areas where the need of specific competency/ies was higher (ex.: training in the new Baggage handling system, training in the new Fire alarm system, training in the new Car park management system, etc.), and less training in other areas (ex.: XRay operators, IT team, based on their good professional knowledge before the start of the project)
- Observation of the line-managers: it takes less time of the employees to become competent in the required area
- Observation of BAC HR and management: the training process is more flexible and tailor-made at individual level, which increases the level of the acquired knowledge and skills

We have established together with the BAC HR Training team the frame for evaluation of ratios like ROI (Return-on-Investment) and BCR (Benefit-Cost ratio) but the calculations will start at least one year after the implementation of the model.

My recommendation for creating a learning platform for the BAC employees for self-assessment and self-learning is still in development.

In addition, I have created a soft training library with the training documents, manuals and presentations for all the trainings in the scope of the ORAT project, which can be accessed by the employees and give them a chance to further learn and upgrade their knowledge.

In support of BAC HR, I developed a **CBHRM Model Handbook**, which provides a detailed description of the full methodology, templates of documents, and practical examples.

I also did a knowledge transfer to BAC HR, so that they are capable to further develop and maintain the model.

Project outcome

In addition to the list of the observed and shared by BAC benefits from the implementation of competency approach in the HR activities of the company, which are highlighted above, my observation is that the project in Bahrain brought some **additional benefits** which I did not plan and expect despite of my long-term experience in competency modelling.

During the job observations, interviews, surveys and discussions, we found out hidden problems and gaps in the processes, organization of work, duplicated processes and/or roles, unnecessary or not so important for the business processes and/or roles, etc. which were considered with high attention by BAC management and followed in the time.

Conducting meetings with the employees and talking with them about their role and job, was a new approach for BAC, and first experience of their employees in such a project. My impression is that the people were pleased with the attention to their activities, and the fact that their opinion is taken into consideration. I believe that this will lead to their support in other projects in the future, too.

Another important observation of mine is that 1,5 years after the development of BAC Competency model, the BAC people were talking about „competencies" in different meetings and workshops with high confidence and demonstrating good knowledge in the field.

When I started my work for the ORAT training, I realized that the employees of BAC who were already acquainted with the competency approach in training could understand the logics of the ORAT training program and „*why-who-what*" has to be trained, **quite better and easier** compared to the employees of the other stakeholders, who did not have experience in a competency environment.

And last but not least, my personal impression is that the process of development of BAC Competency model was a cultural change for the company and I believe that this change of attitude to such projects will help strongly the company in the future.

The project in Bahrain was a very challenging project, but at the same time - teaching all of us in some new competencies, among which – patience, flexibility, quick adapting to constantly changing environment, habituation to different nationalities, cultures, mentalities, and many more.

*"We would like to extend our congratulations to the team great job done on this major milestone, and for all the positive contribution towards the operational readiness of our new terminal over the past few years. Furthermore, our appreciation of the dedication, openness and clarity of communication of the ORAT Training Manager during this handover phase must be expressed as it represented an integral part of this project's continuity within the organization, we have been working with ORAT continuously during the past period and have received the required information in an efficient manner. Thank you!" (**Abdulla AlMajet – BAC Training & Development Manager**)*

7.3. The two projects at a glance

In order to facilitate the readers of the thesis, who are not interested in the details of the two projects, I created this sub-chapter to present them in brief – scope of the performed work and main observed benefits.

Fraport-Bulgaria project at a glance

Scope of the performed work

- more than 350 interviews conducted
- more than 600 questionnaires processed
- 7 workshops and 4 focus groups organized for data collection
- Individual meetings with all head of departments (35) organized
- 156 job positions fully analysed
- 156 JCPs designed
- 156 Selection matrices designed
- 156 Competency-based contests designed
- Training matrices (Matrix of competencies) designed for all departments and job positions, and at individual level
- Developed Annual performance appraisal system based on competencies
- Developed Career development programs based on competencies (incl. Succession program)
- Developed Youth programs based on competency training

Main observed benefits

- Double decreased time for recruitment
  - ✓ from 1 month to 2 weeks
- Higher efficiency in recruitment
  - ✓ 100% of the new recruited permanent staff approved after the probation period
  - ✓ 98% - stayed longer that 1 year in the company
- Higher objectiveness in the HR processes and activities, leading to higher trust in HR activities and the company approaches to the people
  - ✓ the employees started to support more the HR team and the following HR projects

- Increased training value for price and increased ROI for some trainings, as a result of better targeting of the training needs, based on gaps of competencies
  - ✓ increased customer service satisfaction (customer satisfaction rate increased from 3,84 to 4.37 in Varna and from 3.53 to 3.96 in Burgas (*scale from 5 to 1,"5" is the best*) in two years' time, after the implementation of dedicated Customer service training program
  - ✓ the success rate in the Security certification increased to 70% as a result of dedicated competency-based training
  - ✓ the company could reduce the training budget by 40% in implementing a competency-based gap analysis and training planning
- Improved competencies at team and individual level as a result of dedicated competency-based trainings – observed by the line managers and during the Career development centre activities
- More effective career development and succession planning – 64% of the participants in the Career development centre of the company were promoted during and after the program
- 98% of the participants in the Career development program have improved their competencies at the end of the program (KETTEL test made before the start of the program and at the end)
- Fraport Career centre - awarded as the **best Career development program** in Bulgaria in 2015 by Euroguidance and Erasmus +
- The rating of the company as a good employer significantly increased, and although the company didn't win the title **"Best Employer"** of the year, it was nominated in the list of the 5 competing for the title, among 150 companies in Bulgaria
- The HR practices of Fraport-Bulgaria nominated among **the 5 best HR practices** in Bulgaria by FORBES in 2015

"The competency Model is a unique system which can be usefully implemented in almost all HR processes.

With a well developed and implemented Competency Model you can reduce staff turnover, recruitment costs and training costs. There are plenty advantages for the company and for HR experts and specialists also. You can identify the capabilities that the organization needs for the future and identify capability surpluses that can be utilized in other parts of the organization. The Competency model provides transparency to the employees about the opportunities for

advancement within the company and ensures greater appreciation of the achievements of other colleagues.

But after all, it should be clear that the development, implementation and use of the Competency Model are a complex effort. To be successful, the project must be carefully planned, supported and very important regularly updated. If the competency profiles are not actualized according the present obligations of the employee it cannot be used in practice.

The value of a Competency Model lies in its application. The value is maximized if it is applied in as much as possible aspects of human resource management. The Competency Model is used to select, develop, manage, reward and in much more ways.

The Model has wide application. Starting from the Recruitment and Selection of external candidates, Assessment centre, Performance appraisal and performance management, Training and Development, Career management / Talent management (Recruitment and selection of internal employees) and reach Salary management and Employees retention.

And at the end, but not at last it is important to examine and develop the model constantly."

*(**Elitsa Dimitrova, Expert international projects and programs & Project manager, Fraport-Bulgaria**)*

Bahrain (BAC) project at a glance

Scope of the performed work

- 74 interviews conducted
- 80 questionnaires processed
- 154 out of 636 employees involved in the project
- 36 out of 75 job positions analysed
- 36 JCPs developed
- Core competencies defined for all management levels (company level, senior management level and middle management level)
- 36 Selection matrices developed
- 36 Competency-based selection contests developed
- 1 Structured competency-based interview attended (for demonstration of the methodology)
- 12 681 people trained in the frame of BAC ORAT project (training fully based on competencies)
- Developed Training matrices (Matrix of competencies) for all BAC departments at team and individual level
- Developed Competency-based HR Management Model for BAC
- Developed Competency-based Recruitment process
- Developed Competency-based Training process
- Developed Concept for internal Training Academy concept
- Developed Competency-based ORAT Training program
- Introduction of the concept for internal trainers' pool and internal departments trainings to BAC
- Developed „KAR initiative "(Knowledge and Ability Reinforcement program) – for on-the-job competency training
- Developed CBHRM Model Handbook – with full description of the methodology, all forms, tools, etc.

Main observed benefits

- More consistent recruitment process, as the same methodology and selection instruments are used every time a job position has to be filled – this makes the interviewing process easier, saves time and ensures an objective assessment of the candidates against each other

- Higher reliability of the recruitment process, as every assessor in the selection process have to stick to the same evaluation standards and rules
- Higher trust in the recruitment process both from the internal and the external job candidates, as the contest can be explained in details to the candidates and they can get a clear feedback about their performance, based on the detailed competency behaviour description and assessment
- Higher confidence of the employees in their capability to execute their duties at the new terminal
- Higher satisfaction of the employees from the received training - first, as they know what exactly is expected from them to know and be able to do after the training, and second, because of the accent on the practical knowledge.
- Higher efficiency of the training process and better use of the training budget – more training in the areas where the need of specific competency/ies was higher (ex.: training in the new Baggage handling system, training in the new Fire alarm system, training in the new Car park management system, etc.), and less training in other areas (ex.: XRay operators, IT team, based on their good professional knowledge before the start of the project)
- Observation of the line-managers: it takes less time of the employees to become competent in the required area
- Observation of BAC HR and management: the training process is more flexible and tailor-made at individual level, which increases the level of the acquired knowledge and skills

"The Competency Model and Methodology you thought me was very enriching it highlighted all aspect of HR (Recruitment, Training, Succession Planning, Performance management, etc.)

There was a gain for both myself as an HR professional and BAC employee as I get to learn the details of BAC Jobs and structure while the employees had a platform to discuss their work and achievements which led to their engagements.

It's a very much useful tool we can't wait to finish the project and roll out the Model for practice.

Thank you very much for sharing your knowledge."

(Dalal AlNajem, Recruitment manager & member of the project team)

7.4. Comparison of the two models

Although the two models were developed and implemented in the same business field – aviation, at similar as size and activities airport companies, the competency framework from Bulgaria could not be copy-pasted and implemented directly in the project in Bahrain.

As discussed in the thesis, one of the goals of the competency modelling is to reflect the specifics of the business and thus provide the best competency framework to ensure high efficiency and visible benefits for the business.

Therefore, the two competency models were based on the same methodology but with different approaches and tools corresponding to the different business environment and culture, and the different and specific workforce mentality and attitude.

Similarities

- **Resistance to change** (even from managers at higher levels) - it is a human feature to resist the changes, no matter how beneficial they are, because people tend to do the things that make them feel good, secure and comfortable. It is also a question of inertia – which is the tendency to do nothing new and remain unchanged. Usually resistance comes from some doubts, unclarities or fears.
- **Unwillingness for support** (from some employees and managers) – the difference from resistance to change is that in this case, the person does not have any specific reason for resistance, it is just that he doesn't want to be involved, he doesn't care or as a result of his personality. The unwillingness for support can be also as a result of low motivation and dissatisfaction.

In both cases - resistance to change and unwillingness to support – it is good to research the reasons for this behaviour. It could be lack of awareness of why the change has to be made, expected impact on the current job role, fear of job loss, lack of visible support from the management, or organization's past experience with change, problem with the staff motivation, etc.

In both projects in Bulgaria and in Bahrain my approach to resistance to change and unwillingness to support was – **communication**. I always used different information channels to promote the change, to explain in details the process and the benefits, to work at individual level with some of the managers and the employees.

An example in Bahrain was the refusal of one Head of department (expatriate) to discuss and approve the JCPs for the positions in his department. He neither answered to my emails nor accepted my meeting invites. Finally, I could reach him in his office, and asked for 10-minutes meeting. The meeting lasted for more than one hour, as he was so much impressed by the project and especially the tools for competency assessment, that he wanted to know as much as possible. At the end, he was one of the people who supported fully the project in all its stages.

- **Lack of dedicated support by the management –** in both cases, the management looked at the project as a "HR project", not as a strategic management tool. Therefore, after the approval, they abdicated from the project and did not provide any further support. In Bahrain at a later stage and because of the ORAT project, the attitude changed, which will be explained in the part "Differences".

My approach towards the management support has always been to inform them about the progress of the project periodically in presentations, emails, any occasional meeting, in order to show them that the work goes on effectively and to ask for support in case of need.

- **Lack of trust about the goals of the project –** it is normal to have doubts about any initiated and implemented change. Usually it is based on previous negative experience or lack of trust in the management decisions and the officially communicated information, or lack of trust in the people who are in the project team.

My impression is that it is a question of time to make people create trust. As mentioned, if the first workshops, meetings, interviews start successfully, the information spreads among the other employees and they are more open to contribute to the project and help the project team. Therefore, I always put special efforts in the first steps of the project in order to create a positive and supportive environment and atmosphere.

- **People are not always honest** in the interviews and the questionnaires, they prone to exaggerate or underestimate their jobs and roles which is a risk factor in the research process – this risk which the project team has to take in mind in the process of data collection and analysis. That's why, I always recommend - for each position more than one incumbent to be approached, more than one interviewer and observers to be present, more than one method for data collection to be used, the line managers to be involved in the validation process and a test (verification) of the profile to be conducted before its official implementation.

Differences

- Different culture, religion and mentality of the people (discussed in details in the thesis)
- Different working environment:

  - ✓ working habits (in Bahrain - coming very early to the office and leaving early, skipping meeting without explanations, leaving very early on Thursday – as Friday and Saturday are weekend there, etc.; in Bulgaria – more discipline and control, but people are usually not much concentrated on Mondays and Fridays)
  - ✓ weather conditions (in Bahrain more than 45 degrees in summer which was a reason people not to come to the meetings, organized in other buildings of the company, etc.)
  - ✓ traditions (in Bahrain - during Ramadan time people are working only 6 hours a day, there are a lot of national holidays, etc.)

- Different decision-making process and levels

  - ✓ in Bahrain – Crown Prince and Ministry of transport and telecommunication, which slows down the process
  - ✓ in Bulgaria – the Management Board of the company, which is comparatively easy to access

- Different attitude of the people and different level of engagement

  - ✓ in Bulgaria – a small number of people supported the project development, but they were consistent in their support
  - ✓ in Bahrain – people were enthusiastic and willing to support, but when realizing the importance and the long-term engagement, they started to find excuses or just didn't come to the meetings anymore

- Different communication rules

  - ✓ in Bahrain the hierarchy levels are very strictly followed which limits the open communication
  - ✓ in Bulgaria it is common to approach directly the person you need

- Different speed of understanding and implementation

- Different level of involvement and support by the management – as mentioned, at some stage the BAC management started to provide more support to the process of competency modelling, as it was a part of the ORAT project, which was strictly observed, controlled and reported.

7.5. Common benefits from the implementation of the model in both projects

The listed benefits below are provided by the users of the models from the two companies:

- *Elitsa Dimitrova – Expert international projects and programs, Fraport-Bulgaria (a member of the project team and responsible for the maintenance of the model)*
- *Galina Stoilova – HR expert and Recruitment manager of Fraport-Bulgaria*
- *Krasimira Karadzhova – Deputy HR manager and Training manager of Fraport-Bulgaria*
- *Dalal AlNajem – Recruitment manager BAC (a member of the project team and responsible for the maintenance of the model)*
- *Abdulla AlMajet – Manager Training & Development, BAC*

Main observed benefits:

- ✓ Proud to have a professional recruitment process, quite better structured and established on a stable foundation
- ✓ Much higher objectiveness in the recruitment process as the selection criteria are fixed, clear and transparent and it is difficult the process to be influenced from external factors
- ✓ We can provide a structured feedback to the job applicants about their performance so they can understand the reasons for their selection and what they have to improve in the future, or why they are not selected for a specific position
- ✓ The selection tools for each contest and competency assessment are prepared only once – and can be implemented in every next contest for the same position without extra efforts – we only change the case studies or some practical tasks – it is time saving
- ✓ The performance standards – still we have to explain to the employees, but as a whole they create a better understanding of the whole experience of the person in the company (Bahrain); they create a higher understanding of what is measured and why (Bulgaria)

- ✓ Higher trust in HR selection process (comments from the employees and some line managers that the selection process is quite better organized, easier to follow and time-saving)
- ✓ Training is focused more to learning than to teaching
- ✓ More control on the external training providers (Bahrain)
- ✓ For the trainees the training process is more pleasant as it is more interactive and learning by doing more than lecturing, and more effective – as it is more practical than theoretical
- ✓ The training results are evaluated more precisely (making tests in the beginning and at the end, calculating some ratios, etc.)
- ✓ There is a clear training path for each employee which the training manager can follow easier (Bulgaria)

Regardless the big differences between the two companies in some areas, the described in the thesis methodology for building of Competency models, was ***successfully*** *implemented at both organizations.*

The two competency models were developed and implemented with different speed and success, but currently function and bring benefits to the HR and the business both in Bulgaria and in Bahrain.

CONCLUSION

This thesis focuses on the high responsibility of the HR processes for the business results of the organizations. As the employees are one of the most important means for achieving of the desired business goals, the more they are treated as capital the higher benefits they can bring to the business.

Treating the employees as capital is investing in them, in their improvement and development and thus increasing their value over time. Increasing the value of the manpower brings better performance, better results, higher satisfaction, higher motivation and engagement, higher confidence and feeling of pride, which brings both material and immaterial benefits to the business, thus *creating a strong competitive advantage for it, which is the first and most important focus in the thesis.*

The competency modelling methodology described in the thesis provides one effective tool for increasing the value of the people in the organization, through creating an environment in which they are selected, trained, assessed, developed and paid based on one objective, understandable, stable and reliable foundation – the critical for the business success knowledge, skills, attitude, behaviour, and personal characteristics, the so called "competencies".

Determining the important for the business competencies, assessing potential employees' existing skillsets, and ensuring their future development is a key success factor in this relationship, as any new technologies, products, facilities, positive customer testimonials, etc. would yield positive results on their initial investments, as well as added value – on the condition that those who utilize them have the proper knowledge, skills, behavior, and attitude.

The second focus in the thesis is on the HR practices. The competency modelling has a huge set of benefits for the HR processes, providing a thread which links them all, so they can easily follow each other and "speak the same language". The competency-based selection will select the best match to the job, but will also assess the competency gaps to be covered by training. The training will increase the proficiency of the employees and they will be able to perform better for the company.

Introducing a detailed description of the methodology and presenting the two "live" projects, as well as the big number of examples provided at each step of the competency modelling, aim to enable HR teams to conduct their own internal studies and experiments, focusing on the main specific needs of the organization and create a tool which will integrate all HR processes in one model, at one base and one-way understanding from all concerned parties.

In the conducted survey the feedback from the implementation of CBHRM models is quite positive and encouraging.

Based on the conducted research, 100% of the ACI respondents find the selection process more effective and the objectiveness of the HR activities higher, after the implementation of CBHRM model. 87% of them observe improvement in the individual competencies and the performance of the employees. 75% note more effective training process and higher trust in the HR management activities in the organization.

90% of the Bulgarian respondents report higher effectiveness of the selection process and 87% - improved individual competencies and performance of the employees. 85% find the HR activities more objective, 75% observe higher effectiveness of the training process. And 60% think that their employees have increased their trust in the HR activities in the company.

The third and the last main focus in the thesis are the people. The competency-based environment provides also a chance for the employees in the company to have the certainty that they know what is expected from them, to strive to increase their proficiency and to get better career opportunities. They can manage their career progression easier and can navigate their chosen paths quite more efficiently. The continuous learning culture, created through competency-based training provides an assistive process for them to keep them abreast with the changing market scenarios, job requirements, technology breakdowns, etc.

According to the survey results, 62% of the employees find the competency model useful (53% in Bulgaria and 70% of the ACI airports. The rest 38% - answered “no observation”.

Although there were some limitations in the study, this work has a *practical implementation as well and important practical implications.* It provides an easy to understand and follow step-by-step instructions and all the necessary tools (a variety to choose from) in order to build the process

independently. And the closer to the specifics of the business is the model, the greater will be the effect of its application.

The results from the research can be also used for *competency-based curriculum design* for various academic programs. The study and the methodology have been found useful not only by the two companies in Bulgaria and Bahrain, but also by the members of ACI Leadership & HR Forum, the members of BAPM, and colleagues from various businesses and organizations, including universities.

I strongly believe that the Competency-based HR management is releasing value through people. It ensures that employees are doing the right things in the right way and with the right behavior, which brings different tangible and intangible benefits to the business. But it is not just a management tool for better management and leadership of the people in the organization, it is a culture, which is a valuable asset of the business.

Despite the difficulties in designing the methodology and its implementation in the two projects, I fully enjoyed the process of investigation, preparation, reading, writing, discussing, arguing and re-writing.

All this gives me the confidence to continue my work in the area of Competency modelling, looking for new applications, developing new instruments and sharing my knowledge with everyone who wants to learn and benefit from it.

"I am always on the lookout for talent – it's not easy to find energetic and enthusiastic people with the right attitude. We look for people who can grow into their work, and respond with excitement when we give them greater responsibility. Jobs, after all, can be learned."
Sir Richard Branson, Entrepreneur

APPENDICIES

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PHOTO GALLERY



24th ACI Africa Regional Conference & Exhibition – Tunisia 2015

Topic: "Succession planning in the Aviation business" (presenting the methodology for competency modelling and how it can improve the succession planning process at the airports)



Workshop "Better partnership for better skills and employability" (KAAT Project) – Brussels, 2015

Topic "How to bridge the gap between the business and the education" (how the education can support the business in training the most important for the Aviation competencies by integrating them in the university programs)



ACI Europe Leadership & HR Forum – Romania 2019

Topic: "How to achieve better employees' engagement through implementing Competency-based HR management "



ACI Europe Leadership & HR Forum meeting – Bulgaria 2018

Topic: "HR Excellence through management by competencies by the example of Fraport-Bulgaria "



12th ACI Europe Regional airports Conference & Exhibition – Krakow 2019

Topic: "Cooperation with the airport stakeholders" panel discussion (presenting the competency approach in training and career development and its impact on the image of the airports in the society)



57th ACI Africa Regional Conference & Exhibition, Zambia 2017

Topic:" Bridge to Success - How the investments in staff competencies enhance the business development of the airports "



Lecture in Politechnico di Bucharest – Bucharest 2018

Topic: "Modern HR practices in aviation" (presenting the competency modelling as one of the strongest management tools for HR excellence)



Fraport-Bulgaria Career development center – award for the best career program in Bulgaria in 2015 (by Euroguidance and Erasmus +) - the first competency-based career program in the country



ORAT Project, Bahrain (July, 2018) – HR deliverables for Package 3 – BAC Competency model, Competency-based recruitment and training, BAC Training Academy concept – delivered to BAC HR Vice president



ORAT Project, Bahrain (April, 2020) – HR deliverables for Package 2 – ORAT Training – delivering of the training documentation to BAC HR Training manager after the completion of the project



ORAT Project, Bahrain – ORAT Training team and total number of trained people (12 681)



ORAT Training process (as ORAT Training manager, Bahrain 2019-2020)

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