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Managing Personal Competencies

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PART I

Introduction

Module 1 Introduction to Personal Competencies
Module 1

Introduction to Personal Competencies

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Learning Objectives

After completing this module you should be able to:

• understand what is meant by management competencies;
• describe how the concept of competency developed in management thought;
• recognise the differences between work-based and person-based competency statements;
• understand the concept of a hierarchy of managerial competencies;
• appreciate the idea of meta-competency;
• understand the EBS definition of personal managerial competency;
• understand the learning process model for competencies development that is employed in the course.

1.1 Introduction: Aim of the Course

The primary aim of the course Managing Personal Competencies is to ensure that the student acquires (i) a range of underlying generic competencies relating to personal effectiveness and managing people (termed here ‘meta-competencies’) and (ii) a set of specific competencies relating to the key HR functions of acquiring, maintaining and developing staff.
Specifically, the generic competencies regarding personal effectiveness and managing people are the following.

**Generic (meta-) competencies:**
- self-awareness and reflection
- self-management
- communication competencies
- leadership and influencing
- managing the performance of others

The specific competencies regarding HR functions are as follows.

**Competencies for people management:**
- change management competencies
- teamworking competencies

**Competencies relating to acquiring staff:**
- employee-resourcing competencies (comprising human resource planning, recruitment and selection, and induction)

**Competencies relating to maintaining and developing staff:**
- learning and development competencies
- employee relations competencies (comprising competencies for negotiation, bargaining, discipline, grievance and dispute resolution)

### 1.2 The Need for Competencies: A Case Study. Acme Engineering

Acme Engineering plc was founded in 1924 by Bill Hoyle, a pioneering electrical and electronic engineer, and in the second half of the 20th century was something of an icon of British high technology. For the period since the end of the Second World War to the end of the Cold War (1945 to 1989) the company had been highly dependent on UK government defence contracts. Until the mid-1980s these large defence projects were carried out on a ‘cost-plus’ basis, where the firm charged the UK Ministry of Defence the total cost of the project and then added an acceptable profit margin. This allowed the firm to pursue engineering excellence to produce the best possible defence products. One of its major achievements was the development of world-beating sea radar for UK fighter aircraft such as the Sea Harrier Jump Jet, which the US Navy declared to be ‘twenty years ahead of any thing we have’. Much of the firm’s work in that period remains classified, for security reasons. The firm had a reputation for attracting and retaining some of the very best engineering and science graduates in the UK, who were attracted by the technical challenges of its defence work.

The large government contracts and the ‘cost-plus’ basis of contracting insulated the firm from the commercial realities of a competitive global market, and the firm’s
reputation for management never quite equalled that for its technology. In the mid-
1980s the UK government, keen to inject more efficiency into the defence industry, 
stopped the practice of ‘cost-plus’ contracting, and the market for defence contracts 
became much more competitive. Acme found it difficult to compete. Its technologi-
cal competencies were as impressive as ever, but increasingly it seemed to observers 
that the firm was lacking managerial, marketing and strategic skills if it was to 
compete successfully in the new markets it now faced. This impression was con-
firmed when an American partner who had been brought into sharpen up Acme’s 
business skills was found to have embezzled over $100 million from the company. 
The partner went to jail, and the firm went into bankruptcy.

It was bought by the Universal Electric Company (UEC), the biggest UK engi-
neering conglomerate, which already had a considerable presence in the defence 
industry. UEC had been created and was still managed by the formidable Lord 
Portis, who practised a particularly stringent type of financial control that included, 
among other practices, his telephoning every divisional managing director every 
month and asking for personal explanations for all discrepancies between perfor-
man ce and budget. Personal accountability at all levels is the keynote of the UEC 
managerial culture.

Acme has been rationalised by its new owners (or ‘ruthlessly asset-stripped’, 
according to some company insiders), but UEC values its core competencies which 
have been retained in a new division called Acme Defence Solutions (ADS). After a 
full review of ADS’s physical and human resources, UEC has concluded that its new 
acquisition contains significant managerial potential in its engineering project 
managers that could benefit UEC as a whole but the company also recognised that 
it needed a new approach to marketing if it was to compete successfully in the new 
markets.

Six months after the takeover, Bill Smith, a project engineer who worked for over 
10 years for Acme before it was acquired by UEC, had been identified as a potential 
sales engineer who could help take the company forward. He had agreed to under-
take some staff development and had now been in his new role for some three 
months, a role that saw him visiting clients to help solve their engineering problems 
as well as offering companies ‘off-the-shelf’ engineering products and processes that 
had been developed by ADS. He managed a team of six, some, like himself, were 
former project engineers while others were more ‘pure’ sales people or administra-
tors, although with an engineering background. Bill liked the new skills he had 
acquired and enjoyed being ‘on the road’ where he could work with clients on either 
the bespoke engineering solutions they needed or the more standard products 
offered by ADS. However, he was less happy with the team-management and ‘back-
office’ functions he had to oversee as part of his role. Some of these difficulties had 
recently been brought to light during his first performance appraisal with his boss 
Gerry White who came over from UEC to head Bill’s department among several 
others.

Bill had soon found that Gerry’s way of working was very different from the old 
Acme way. Gerry’s view was ‘If you are sales head then we will give you all the 
resources you need – and then keep out of your way and give you room to use your
expertise and talent.’ Bill liked the freedom this gave, but he found he was expected to deal with a lot of managerial tasks and ‘people problems’ that he had never had to bother with before. For instance, he personally had to interview and select his team members. In his old engineering role at Acme he would work out what skills were needed to get the job done and request that the human resource unit contacted various departments to second people with these skills to the project for the duration.

Bill realised that everyone was under pressure after the takeover, but many of his team members seemed much less cooperative than they used to be in the team he lead in his former role as project engineer. Bill, who is a highly qualified and experienced electronic engineer, was used to applying his knowledge and skills to problems, getting the answers, and then telling people what to do to put the solutions into practice. Now his team often questioned his instructions and suggested alternatives. Bill wasn’t against that, but he found it difficult to deal with such questions and discussions face to face when he wasn’t prepared. He once asked his team to put all questions or suggestions to him by email so that he could think about the issues and have time to respond. He was rather surprised that the questioning just dried up. However, he was aware that the team was not happy with that, so he scrapped the suggestion about emailing him and reluctantly went back to taking face-to-face questions. The team still seemed rather inhibited, however, and Bill realised that he hadn’t handled that well, but was at a loss as to what he might have done.

Bill had another serious ‘people problem’ with one of his team, Jack Brown. Jack had also been with Acme for a number of years before the takeover, and had reached the position of senior engineer before, like Bill, undergoing a period of staff development and being redesignated a sales engineer. Bill knew and respected Jack’s ability as an engineer, but for some reason Jack didn’t like working in Bill’s team, and Bill thought he performed very poorly almost from the start. Bill spoke to him a couple of times about his motivation, which Jack seemed to resent. These ‘pep talks’ had no effect, so Bill went to human resources and asked for Jack to be transferred. Bill was surprised to be told that Jack would be staying in his team and that it was his (Bill’s) responsibility to manage Jack’s performance. Jack learnt that Bill had tried to have him removed from the team, and now the two were barely on speaking terms. Again, Bill was aware that he had not handled the situation with Jack well, but couldn’t think what else he could or should have done.

1.2.1 The Performance Appraisal

Gerry began the interview by asking Bill to recap progress over the past three months since his new team had been formed and how the new team had ‘settled in’.

Bill said that the team had secured some good sales and had the potential for more success but admitted there had been problems, and told Gerry honestly about the difficulty he had in dealing with team members’ questions and in motivating Jack.

Bill said, ‘I never had to deal with people issues at Acme. We worked in a matrix structure with departments of technical specialists who were seconded to projects
under people like me. Projects typically lasted for years. If someone didn’t match up or fit in I just got a replacement the next day. The performance on the project was everything and my job was to make the project succeed physically – get the radar or the rocket guidance systems or whatever to work. I’ve shown over the years that I can run state-of-the-art engineering projects if people just do what I tell them. I’ve never had to do this human resource stuff before. I don’t know how, and I worry that I’m no good at it. I am an engineering project manager at heart and can use my engineering skills when I meet clients, which I enjoy. However, I am finding the people and team-management aspects of my new role really difficult.’

Activity 1

Think about Bill’s situation and the consequences for himself, his team and UEC. What can be done?

1.3 Definitions of Skills and Competencies

The Concise Oxford English Dictionary defines ‘skill’ as ‘the ability to do something well; expertise or dexterity’, deriving from the Old English scele meaning ‘knowledge’ and the Old Norse skil, for ‘discernment’ or ‘knowledge’. The same source defines ‘competency’ as ‘the quality or extent of being competent’, which in turn is described as ‘having the necessary ability or knowledge to do something successfully’, from the Latin competere in the sense of ‘being fit and proper’. It is interesting that there is the root meaning of ‘knowledge’ for both terms.

Although previous usage of the term ‘skill’ in management literature often covered what we would now define as ‘competence’, the latter term is often favoured now. Statements of competence tend to be both fuller in detail and broader in scope than most descriptions of skills, and therefore give more precise meaning. They are also usually more explicitly focused on the achievement of acceptable performance in the job, rather than on mere possession of the capability to perform properly. So, for example, while a skilled bricklayer will possess the knowledge and ability required to do his or her job properly, in any particular case he or she may not actually work well, for whatever reason, but a competent bricklayer not only has the knowledge and ability needed, but in fact performs proficiently. This use of the terms ‘skill’ and ‘competency’ may seem to be the converse of normal usage: ‘skilled’ normally suggests a high level of capability whereas ‘competent’ can imply ‘mere competence’, that is, the ability to achieve a minimum acceptable standard; but it reflects the managerial imperative for people actually to achieve effective performance and not just to possess the capability to do so.

The Canon Working Party Report into management education training and development in the UK (1994) gave a general description of the notion of management competency in the following way.

‘The term competency is taken to mean the ability to perform effectively functions associated with management in a work-related situation.’
1.3.1 **Specific Definitions of Competencies in the Management Literature**

The term ‘competency’ first came to widespread managerial attention in the USA following the work of Richard Boyatzis’ study *The Competent Manager* (1982), which followed earlier work by Klemp (1980). Mangham and Silver (1986), explicitly citing Boyatzis, introduced the term to the UK debate on management development, reporting that many UK organisations and managers at that time lacked even the vocabulary to describe or define properly what they meant by ‘competent managerial performance’. At around the same time vocational education in the UK was undergoing a revolution in which traditional examinations and tests of work skills were transformed into ‘competence-based’ awards. This brings us immediately to a key point in our definitions of competence.

Boyatzis described competency as the ‘capacity that exists in a person that leads to behaviour that meets the job demands within the parameters of the organisation environment and that in turn brings results’. The UK Training Agency defined competence as ‘actions, behaviour or outcome that the person should be able to demonstrate’. These subtly different definitions actually show that there are two distinct models of competence. The first, following Boyatzis’ definition, is what can be termed an ‘input model’. That is, it is mainly concerned with defining and describing what a competent person brings to the task or job, for example knowledge or skill, such as the ability to read a balance sheet, or some other attribute such as a personality or character trait, like empathy or hardiness, and so forth. This model is sometimes referred to as ‘person related’. The second, exemplified by the UK Training Agency definition, is an ‘output model’ and is predominantly concerned with actual performance, for example undertaking the task of totting up a balance sheet correctly, thus demonstrating that the task can be competently done. This is also described as a ‘work-related’ model.

In practice the distinction is not always clear-cut, and descriptions of output-based competencies may include, for example, some specified knowledge requirements in addition to the observable behaviours that lead to effective demonstration of the stated tasks.

1.3.2 **Competency-Related Human Resource Management**

Armstrong (2001) defined ‘competency-related human resource management’ as being ‘about using the concept of competency and the results of competency analysis to inform and improve the processes of recruitment and selection, employee development and employee reward’ (p. 299). As he noted, the language of competency has dominated much of HR thinking and practice in recent years, largely because it is essentially about individual performance and consequently organisational effectiveness.

Although there is often confusion between individual and organisational competencies these are linked, and another reason for the interest in individual competencies is undoubtedly the importance attached to organisational ‘core competencies’ (Hamel and Prahalad, 1994). Given that these are usually dependent
on the organisation attracting, retaining and motivating key personnel, the HR profession can perhaps be forgiven for jumping on this particular bandwagon.

1.3.3 Competency Frameworks

A ‘competency framework’ is essentially a structured collection of competencies used by an organisation to frame and underpin managerial activities, or, in the case of a professional body, to show the requirements for its qualified practitioners. The use of competency frameworks has become an increasingly accepted part of modern HR practice. Rankin (2004) reported that 76% of responding UK companies when surveyed used competency frameworks or were about to introduce them. The use of competency frameworks has also extended to senior levels of the organisation (top and middle management) in addition to clerical and administrative and non-office roles.

It has been found empirically that employers’ competency frameworks typically contain between 10 and 20 basic competencies, which relate to a spectrum of roles across the organisation (IDS, 2001). In addition, some organisations have developed role-specific or technical competencies to address the problem of the basic competencies being inadequate for particular roles or jobs. More recently some organisations have established organisational-cultural competencies that seek to reflect the ethos of the company itself, and these are concerned with ensuring that employees work in a way that is consistent with company culture.

Competency frameworks are now widely used to help select, appraise, train and develop staff (CIPD, 2005). For example, in the recruitment process, competencies can contribute to the content of job or role profiles, any written or practical tests, and the job interview itself. Banks of potential interview questions can be developed that are directly linked to a role’s competencies. Competencies, together with personal objectives or targets, can form the basis of the appraisal systems used by organisations. In this way, employers can measure how staff carry out their work through assessing their performance against personal objectives and the role’s required competencies.

1.3.4 Definition of Personal Managerial Competencies

Bearing in mind the description of managerial competency given by the Canon Working Party cited above, for the purposes of the present course we define ‘personal managerial competencies’ as:

The competencies that must be mastered by the individual manager rather than being shared within a group or team.

They include both purely self-related competencies, such as time management, and competencies that deal with working with and managing other people, such as teambuilding. They do not include those competencies that are shared among managers and other staff, which constitute ‘organisational competencies’ or ‘core competencies’ in the sense used by Hamel and Prahalad (1994). Unlike ‘core competencies’ these personal competencies are very largely independent of the
organisation or professional grouping to which the manager belongs: all effective managers should possess them.

1.4 A Hierarchy of Management Competencies

There is a logical hierarchy of competencies, in that complex management tasks such as negotiating, or managing large projects or planning strategy, require the application of a combination of less complex competencies. Underlying all management activities there is a small set of what we term here ‘meta-competencies’, which we identify in this course as self-awareness and reflection, self-management, communication, leadership and influencing, and managing the performance of others (see Table 1.1). There are also competencies, which we term ‘intermediate competencies’, that lie between the meta-competencies and the competencies exercised in complex management tasks, and these include, for example, managing teams, and managing unit or department budgets. We can loosely define ‘intermediate’ competencies as relating to managerial activities at the level of the team or immediate work unit, and ‘complex’ competencies as relating to activities with strategic implications for the whole organisation or strategic business unit.

We should note, however, that the meta-competencies in themselves are not necessarily simpler in terms of content or ease of application than ‘complex’ or intermediate ones. For example, we suggest that leadership, one of the most difficult and important management activities, is actually a meta-competency. Leadership is not simpler than, for example, managing a budget or managing a large project or handling collective bargaining.

Table 1.1 lists the meta-competencies.

<table>
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<td>Self-management</td>
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<td>Communication competencies</td>
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The concept of a hierarchy implies that relevant competencies at a ‘lower’ level in the hierarchy should be acquired before ‘higher’ ones can be mastered. So, for instance, it might be possible for managers to learn something about how to negotiate with trade unions or to manage large projects without having mastered leadership competencies, but not only would they certainly be less effective all-round managers without leadership competencies, they would also be much less successful at these particular management tasks. A hierarchy of intermediate and complex managerial competencies is shown in Table 1.2.

<table>
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<th>Intermediate management competencies (examples)</th>
<th>Complex management competencies (examples)</th>
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<td>Teamleading/motivating</td>
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<tr>
<td>Self-management</td>
<td>Managing unit/department budgets</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication competencies</td>
<td>Managing unit/department projects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership and influencing</td>
<td>Handling local discipline issues</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Managing the performance of others</td>
<td>Handling (local) grievances</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Recruitment and selection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Coaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mentoring</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Training</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Collective bargaining</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negotiating</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dispute resolution</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Managing large-scale projects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning and implementing strategy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Management development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The entries under the headings of ‘intermediate’ and ‘complex’ management competencies are illustrative rather than exhaustive. Not all of these intermediate and complex management competencies are covered in this course, although the set of HR competencies that we deal with contains competencies at both these levels, as indicated in Table 1.3.
### Table 1.3 Examples of HR competencies at intermediate and complex levels

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>HR competencies</th>
<th>Level of competency</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Change management</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td>Complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team formation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment and selection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee relations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual grievance and discipline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change management</td>
<td>Complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamwork</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Team formation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruitment and selection</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual learning</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee relations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual grievance and discipline</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### 1.5 Reflection and Competencies

The conventional view of professional practice held that professionals operate by applying formally learnt specialist or technical knowledge. This was challenged by influential work by Schön (1983, 1987). He argued that this was not actually the way that professionals usually solved problems. Rather, they used a form of tacit knowledge linked to specific activities that he termed ‘knowledge in action’. They also developed what he called ‘repertoires’ of solutions, and learnt how to reinterpret difficult problems so that they were more easily solved by the use of these repertoires. Schön argued that for initial development, for day-to-day practice and for continuous improvement, ‘reflection’ was the crucial competence. He distinguished between two types of reflection: ‘reflection in action’, which took place during the event; and ‘reflection about action’, which took place after the activity. Schön’s work has been highly influential, and has led directly to the concept of the ‘reflective practitioner’ or ‘reflective professional’, which has become central to the continuing development programmes of many professional bodies, including management ones (the CIPD, for example). The EBS model of personal competencies fully incorporates the idea of the reflective manager.

### 1.6 Organising the Learning Process for Competency Development

Whetten and Cameron (1994) developed an approach to teaching management skills based on social learning theory (Bandura, 1977; Davis and Luthans, 1980) that combined conceptual knowledge with opportunities to practise and apply behaviour. Their original learning model consisted of four steps:

1. the presentation of behavioural principles or action guidelines, generally using traditional instruction methods;
2. demonstration of the principles by means of cases, films, scripts or incidents;
3. opportunities to practise the principles through role plays or exercises;
4. feedback on performance from peers, instructors or experts.
The authors later added a fifth, pre-assessment stage to the model, since they found from experience that in order to benefit from the model individuals must be aware of their current levels of proficiency in a specific competency, and be motivated to improve on that level. The resulting five-stage learning model was adopted by Quinn et al. (2015) in their text Becoming a Master Manager: A Competency Framework, and termed by these authors the ‘ALAPA’ model from the acronym for the five stages: assessment, learning, analysis, practice and application. These authors have continued to employ this model (e.g. Whetten and Cameron, 2005).

The framework for teaching management skills devised by Fandt (1994), which in many respects independently echoes the Cameron and Whetten learning architecture, was also influential in our approach in the present text.

The EBS MBA elective courses on Negotiation and on Influence, authored by Professor Gavin Kennedy, demonstrate that managerial competencies can be taught successfully by the EBS approach to distance learning.

We have built on the work of the authors noted above in operationalising skills teaching for distance learning, and have added a significant development by incorporating a final reflective stage to encourage and enable future self-development in the competency concerned. This represents a crucial development of the learning model that is not present in either the Cameron and Whetten or the Fandt models. The learning process exhibited in this course follows a five-stage model, as shown in Table 1.4.

| Table 1.4 The learning process for managing personal competencies |
|---------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Learning stage                  | Means of achieving learning                                |
| 1. Assessment of existing competence level | Via self-assessment test                                   |
| 2. Understanding the competency | Via study of the theory underlying the competency         |
| 3. Applying the competency      | By analysing case studies and illustrations                |
| 4. Feedback on performance      | By comparing performance with the supplied answer guidance |
| 5. Reflection and further development | Keeping a diary/log                                        |
1.7 The Relationship between the Meta-competencies and the HR Competencies Covered in this Course

Table 1.5 shows how the meta-competencies that we have identified relate to the HR competencies that are covered in the course. We can see that self-awareness and reflection, self-management and communication are concerned with all of the HR competencies. In fact we can say that these particular meta-competencies are vital in the effective application of virtually all managerial activities, not just those concerned with human resources.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Meta-competencies</th>
<th>People management competencies</th>
<th>Competencies for acquiring staff</th>
<th>Competencies for maintaining and developing staff</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Complex</td>
<td>Intermediate</td>
<td>Complex</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Change management</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teamworking</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee resourcing</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning and development</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employee relations</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1.8 Agile Thinking, Marketing and the Competing Values Approach

In addition to the meta-competencies and HR competencies covered in this course, the topic of ‘agile thinking’ in relation to the function of marketing has recently generated interest. Agile thinking has its origin in the argument that the accelerated rate of change in an organisation’s markets or operating context in the foreseeable future (e.g. 1–3 years) requires that more agility should be fostered within the organisation if appropriate responses are to be made. Agility resides in two key organisational competencies:

1. **hyperawareness.** Ability to sense what is going on throughout the enterprise, among its competitors, and in the marketplace; and,
2. **informed decision making.** Using data and analytics to empower the workforce, resulting in better decisions at every level of the organisation.

In achieving this agile mindset, it is important to see the link between organisational learning and organisational change: an organisation’s ability to scan the
environment and adapt itself both externally and internally as required. As Pettigrew and Whipp argued some time ago:

‘If, in the wake of globalisation, financial and manufacturing techniques become ever more capable of imitation, then their competitive advantage is correspondingly diminished … in this sort of world the ability to learn faster than competitors may be the only source of competitive advantage.’

(Pettigrew and Whipp, 1991)

So what do organisations need to learn if they are to remain competitive? They need to improve the way they learn about their competitors, about the market, about how to improve their processes, products, systems and decision making. Based on this knowledge, agility is marked by a ready ability to move with quick, easy grace and by having a resourceful and adaptable character.

In terms of marketing, it is about being creative, flexible, innovative and responsive to the customer and focused on providing value and doing things fast. It is an approach that enables the organisation to respond immediately to the needs of customers and recognises that organisations need to be more responsive and adaptive in the face of an accelerating pace of change. Agile thinking enables companies to deliver products and services faster while involving customers and staff in improvement cycles. While in normal projects cost, functionality and time are controlled, an agile approach principally focuses on time. It recognises that ‘great is the enemy of good’. In other words, you can wait for perfection, or you can get something done and learn along the way. Delivering faster results through agility is about getting something done, then learning and adapting more quickly than the competition. Ultimately, the agile methodology enables teams to deliver on customer needs and expectations quickly, iteratively, and efficiently. Facilitating this customer focus ultimately enables faster times to market. It prioritises the creation and delivery of value to customers through improving learning capability, efficiency, integration, and adaptability to maximise the value created for customers. The highest priority is to satisfy the customer through increasing the speed and responsiveness of marketing and is marked by the early and continuous delivery of marketing that solves problems and delivers value. Overall, from a marketing perspective, the goals are to improve the speed, predictability, transparency, and adaptability to change of the marketing function.

If the focus of agile thinking at the outset is the customer and their needs, delivering solutions to those needs quickly requires knowledge of the organisation’s ability to deliver the type of product or service required. This ‘wider organisational mindset’ enables the marketer to see if realistic solutions can be delivered as well as conceptualised. It is in this context that the ‘competing values approach’ (Quinn et al., 2015) can be of value to the marketer. In what follows we shall outline the essence of the competing values approach and then return to how the insights it provides can be of help in developing the agile thinking skills of the marketer.

The competing values approach combines both a theoretical review of the development of management taught over the last 100 years together with empirical research into the managerial competencies said by practising managers to be critical
to their effectiveness. This theoretical and practical review enables the authors to develop a comprehensive framework for understanding the often contradictory and paradoxical nature of management.

The authors suggest that over the period 1900–1925 two models dominated thinking about the nature of management:
1. the rational goal model with its emphasis on goal direction, productivity and profit; and,
2. the internal process model with its emphasis on routinisation, measurement, documentation and control.

Later management thinking saw a reaction against the impersonal and overly bureaucratic nature of these approaches and over the 1925–1950 period we saw the development of the human relations model with its emphasis on human aspects of management: commitment, cohesion, morale and participation. Post-war expansion and globalisation between 1951 and 1975 gave rise to the open systems model of management with its emphasis on the need for organisational flexibility, adaptability and responsiveness. In the period since the mid-1970s we had an emphasis on how to manage in a world characterised by volatility, ambiguity and paradox and where nothing is stable. Each of the four models of management are relevant today and help us understand aspects of the managerial challenges facing organisations as a result of the increasingly rapid pace of change and continued globalisation. However, they are based on differing values, values which may be regarded as in conflict with each other. This gives rise to paradox and ambiguity as they suggest ‘competing’ rationales to address the organisational challenges of internal and external adaptability in response to changes in the organisational environment. In such a complex and fast changing world, none of the four models of management offers a sufficient answer to this challenge and there is a need to move from ‘either-or’ thinking to ‘both-and’ thinking when we consider the four models. Thus, the authors argue, the four models need to be seen as elements of a larger model of management, elements that are closely related and interwoven and which represent sub-domains of a larger construct: organisational effectiveness. In the increasingly turbulent post-2000 world, the challenge for management is: how to manage in a world where nothing is stable and in the new global economy where nothing seems predictable? In this world, the following dynamic terms become ever more prevalent and put pressure on managers:

- innovation
- organisational learning
- flexibility
- speed to market
- empowerment
- positive urgency
- reengineering
- vision
- quality
- benchmarking
• rightsizing
• process improvement
• paradigm change

In order to address these challenges, the four models need to be seen in a single framework, as part of a larger model and one that reflects the paradoxes and competing values that characterise contemporary organisations and management. Facing a rapidly changing world and a variety of demanding situations, managers need to appreciate the values and strategies of all four models and apply them as necessary to increase choice and effectiveness. To accomplish this, managers must meet three challenges:

1. appreciate both the values and the weaknesses of each of the four models;
2. acquire and use the competencies that the authors argue are associated with each model and possess a further core competency: thinking critically; and,
3. dynamically integrate the competencies from each of the models with the managerial situations that we encounter.

Between them, the four models combine coverage of two sets of continua that concern all organisations. Firstly, the internal–external focus reminds us that organisations must consider both the external context within which they operate but must also be mindful of the internal characteristics and workings of the organisation. Secondly, organisations need to pay attention to the control–flexible dimension of their operations, that is maintain a focus on stability and the prudent control of resources while at the same time being flexible enough to respond quickly to developments in their markets and other aspects of the world they face.

The four models address these competing claims. Thus,

1. the rational goal model, with its emphasis on goal direction, productivity and profit has an external and controlling focus that puts an emphasis on how the organisation comes to compete effectively in the marketplace; the symbol representing this model is the dollar indicating profit;
2. the internal process model, with its emphasis on routinisation, measurement, documentation and control has an internal and (again) controlling focus that puts an emphasis on control and prudent use of the organisation’s resources; the symbol representing this model is the pyramid indicating hierarchy;
3. the human relations model, with its emphasis on human aspects of management: commitment, cohesion, morale and participation, again has an internal but also flexible focus and emphasises how the human resources of the organisation need to collaborate if it is to respond effectively to the challenges and opportunities facing the organisation; the symbol representing this model is the circle, the ancient symbol for harmony;
4. finally, the open systems model of management with its emphasis on the need for organisational flexibility, adaptability and responsiveness has an external and flexible-focused character that will enable the organisation to create and be innovative as it responds to the changing needs of the marketplace and the opportunities this provides; the symbol representing this model is the adaptable amoeba.
We can appreciate from the above the competing values of the four models. Thus the ‘create’ pull of the open systems model contrasts with the ‘control’ pull of the internal process model while the ‘compete’ pull of the rational goal model contrasts with the ‘collaborate’ pull of the human relations model.

The competing values approach suggests then that elements of the four models need to be used in addressing the organisational challenges posed by a rapidly changing world. None of the models on their own will provide a solution. (For a full account of the competing values approach see Quinn et al., 2015.)

Returning to the topic of agile thinking and a marketing context, the competing values approach would support agile thinking if it was associated with the following characteristics:

- being creative and innovative in the development of new/different products or services that the market needs and thus utilising the open systems model;
- ensuring that the new product or service provided a competitive and appropriate return and thus utilising the rational goal model;
- making effective and efficient use of resources and organisational systems for the production and sale of the product or service and thus utilising the internal process model; and finally,
- engaging employees in a rewarding and motivating way to ensure the product or service was produced to a high quality and reached the customer at the right time and thus utilising the human relations model.

The marketer needs to use agile thinking to respond quickly and with differentiated, innovative products or services that the market wants and that derive from the ‘create’ quadrant or model. But the marketer should also use agile thinking to ensure there is a ‘supply chain’ from within the organisation that will deliver the product or service on a sustained basis and that will satisfy the ‘returns’ expected by the other internal stakeholders whose potential to contribute and whose interests may be seen as residing in the other quadrants or models of management.

1.9 The Acme Case Study Revisited: Developing Engineers into General Managers

Once they recognised the problem of the deficiencies in the competencies among the former Acme project engineers, UEC management addressed it by setting up a management development programme for those concerned. First the Human Resources Department drew up a competency framework that the company required of their general managers. Profiles of individual project managers were then mapped onto this to identify where there were gaps.

Activity 2
As an exercise, using the information in Table 1.2 and Table 1.3, identify which competencies Bill needs to acquire.
1.9.1 **What the Company Did**

A group of 20 project managers was selected as a pilot. A tripartite agreement between the company (represented by UEC’s training director), a local university business school and an FE college was established.

Each of the 20 managers in the pilot group was assisted in drawing up a personal portfolio of his or her managerial skills and experience. Gaps in development were filled by a mixture of planned experience in the company, taught theoretical courses at the business school, and skills workshops provided by the FE college. For example, most of the managers had no direct experience in recruitment and selection of staff, so these managers were invited to sit in on relevant MBA classes in HRM at the business school as non-examinable participants; the FE college put on a weekend in interviewing skills; and the company arranged for the managers to participate in selection interviews across the company. The project managers’ progress in developing their competency profiles was factored into their performance management reviews and appraisals.

**Learning Summary**

1. The main objective of the course *Managing Personal Competencies* is to ensure that the student acquires both a range of underlying generic competencies relating to personal effectiveness and managing people (‘meta-competencies’) and a set of specific competencies relating to the key HR functions of acquiring, maintaining and developing staff.

2. The generic (meta-) competencies comprise: self-awareness and reflection; self-management; communication; leadership and influencing; and managing the performance of others.

   The specific competencies regarding HR functions are:
   
   (i) competencies for people management: change management competencies; and teamworking competencies;

   (ii) competencies relating to acquiring staff: employee resourcing competencies (comprising human resource planning, recruitment and selection, and induction);

   (iii) competencies relating to maintaining and developing staff: learning and development competencies; employee relations competencies (comprising competencies for negotiation, bargaining, discipline, grievance and dispute resolution).

3. There are two separate models of managerial competence. The ‘input model’ follows Boyatzis’ definition of competence, and defines and describes what a competent person brings to the task or job, e.g. knowledge or skill, or some attribute such as a personality or character trait. This model is also referred to as ‘person related’. The ‘output model’ or ‘work related’ model is concerned with specifying actual performance in the job. In practice the distinction is not always clear-cut.

4. For the purposes of the present course we define ‘personal competencies’ as: ‘The competencies that must be mastered by the individual manager rather than being shared within a group or team’.
5. A ‘competency framework’ is a structured collection of competencies used by an organisation to frame and underpin managerial activities, or, in the case of a professional body, to show the requirements for its qualified practitioners. A comprehensive framework of managerial competencies allows an organisation to identify gaps in managers’ portfolios of skills and experience, and provides a ‘road map’ for future management development.

6. There is a logical hierarchy of competencies, in that complex management tasks require the application of a combination of less complex competencies. However, meta-competencies are not necessarily simpler in terms of content or ease of application than ‘complex’ or ‘intermediate’ ones. For example, leadership is one of the most difficult and important of all management activities.

7. Both ‘reflection in action’ and ‘reflection on action’ are vital to the effective development of professional managers.

8. The learning process for the Managing Personal Competencies course is a five-stage model comprising: (i) assessment of existing competency level; (ii) understanding the competency; (iii) applying the competency; (iv) feedback on performance; and (v) reflection and further development.

Review Questions

1.1 Define what we mean by ‘skill’ and ‘competence’.

1.2 Define what we mean by ‘personal managerial competencies’.

1.3 Give an example of (i) a meta-competency; (ii) an intermediate management competency; and (iii) a complex management competency.

1.4 Give an example of (i) a competency for people management; (ii) a competency relating to acquiring staff; and (iii) a competency relating to maintaining and developing staff.

1.5 Outline the learning process for competency development followed in this course.

References


