

# Information Note



## Developing Behavioural Competencies

“Competency is now generally defined as the behaviour that employees must have or must acquire, to input into a situation in order to achieve high levels of performance,” CIPD, 2005

The use of competencies has become increasingly common across all sectors since they emerged in the early 1980s as a result of the work of the US academic Richard Boyatzis.

This Information Note reports on work undertaken as result of discussion at EPN4 (2002) which attempted to articulate generic managerial competencies for HR and Programme Managers working for relief NGOs from Europe, and more recently a major piece of work conducted by People in Aid on “Behaviours which lead to effective performance in humanitarian response” (2007).

Competencies frameworks are used by employers to signal organisational expectations regarding behaviours that will be valued and recognised, and acceptable levels of performance. Not only that, they offer a language for discussions on what constitutes high performance and how to attain it which is focused on the specific needs, values and culture of the organisation.

This document pulls together common competencies from a wide range of NGOs from the UK, France, Belgium, Spain, Italy and Norway, including:

<http://www.accioncontraelhambre.org/alai.php?p=1>

(Spain)

[www.acted.org](http://www.acted.org) (France)

[www.alisei.org](http://www.alisei.org) (Italy)

[www.btctcb.org](http://www.btctcb.org) (Belgium)

[www.catholicrelief.org](http://www.catholicrelief.org)

[www.cesvi.org](http://www.cesvi.org) (Italy)

[www.christian-aid.org.uk](http://www.christian-aid.org.uk)

[www.healthnetinternational.org](http://www.healthnetinternational.org) (Netherlands)

[www.merlin.org.uk](http://www.merlin.org.uk)

[www.movimondo.org](http://www.movimondo.org) (Italy)

[www.npaid.org](http://www.npaid.org) (Norway)

[www.psfci.org](http://www.psfci.org) (Pharmaciens sans Frontières France)

[www.oxfam.org.uk](http://www.oxfam.org.uk)

[www.redcross.org.uk](http://www.redcross.org.uk)

[www.RedR.org.uk](http://www.RedR.org.uk)

[www.savethechildren.org.uk](http://www.savethechildren.org.uk)

[www.warchild.org.uk](http://www.warchild.org.uk)

## Human Resources Manager Competencies (2002)

*Experience:* All NGOs demanded HR qualifications or high levels of experience and a detailed knowledge of: current employment law; models of good employment practice; equal opportunities; health and safety legislation; employee relations often including experience of working in a unionised environment; budget and financial processes; and an understanding of humanitarian HR issues.

### Core HR competencies

- 1 Highly developed **communication** skills both written and oral to establish effective relationships with a wide variety of internal and external audiences, including at a geographical distance and cultural & language diversity. Write policies and procedures providing complex information to staff. Ability to research, compile info and produce management reports.
- 2 Highly developed **inter-personal** skills. Ability to work with people with tact and diplomacy, setting a good example and being a good listener. Stature, personal credibility and integrity, including the ability to work collaboratively with personnel and management colleagues, using well

developed influencing and persuasion skills.  
Process oriented.

- 3 Underpinning knowledge of **HR practice** and approaches to good practice people including employment law appropriate to area of activity. Formal accreditation and training often required as well as experience.
- 4 Display considerable **initiative** and independence and shoulder considerable responsibility.
- 5 Highly **flexible** in style with the ability to produce creative and pragmatic solutions to complex HR problems. Resourceful and creative with the capacity to lead, implement and respond to change. Solution focussed with the ability to work quickly and flexibly in changing circumstances.
- 6 Understanding of the organisation and it's business

### HR Management competencies

- 7 Strong **management** skills including: analytical skills, judgement and decision making, influencing skills; project management; resource management and managing multiple priorities is essential. Be able to provide leadership and direction on all HR issues.
- 8 Capability to think **strategically**, to act as business partner and agent for organisational change and development, to identify and champion the HR implications of the organisation's plans and to respond with an integrated HR approach. Ability to spot trends and issues, propose strategic solutions and deliver practical results.
- 9 **Drive** and determination to ensure that the HR perspective is considered at all levels and across the organisation

### Programme Manager Competencies (2002)

**Experience:** wide experience of programme implementation; logistics, food distributions and accountability; security management and insecure environments; knowledge of basic human rights

issues in a humanitarian context; and familiarity with the rules and regulations guiding humanitarian work. Specific subject knowledge was also often essential or experience of working in particular locations.

The competencies listed are divided into management competencies and core competencies. The EPN report argued that such a range of competencies can rarely be found within a single individual yet equal weight is given in job descriptions.

In reality, however, if competencies are to be a useful management tool and anything more than a mere recruitment wish list, a good understanding of the demands of the particular job and its context is required by recruiters and line managers so that the 3 or 4 critical competencies required to be successful are identified and form the basis of selection and performance management criteria. This might mean placing greater weight on managerial or specialist competencies if this is what is key to delivering success in the role.

### Management Competencies - General

- 1 **Management of staff** - Strong leadership and management skills. These include: capacity building of all staff – local and expatriate; communication skills; team builder; able to manage, coordinate, organise, live and work closely within a large team under extremely volatile circumstances; diplomacy; negotiation skills as well as experience of representation and advocacy. Ability to deal with difficult or sensitive issues requiring tact and firm handling.
- 2 **Management of resources** and the programme - This includes using a range of management skills to ensure effective running of the programme, problem solving skills in day-to-day and crisis situations, ability to manage multiple project sites. Ability to think and plan strategically and experience of strategy development.
- 3 **Management of self** - Ability to work effectively in a relatively isolated setting and challenging physical and psychological climate, often with challenging deadlines. Requires maturity, high levels of emotional intelligence and self awareness as well as personal resilience.

- 4 Networking, negotiating and **managing relationships** with beneficiaries, local partners, community leaders, authorities and donors, including knowledge of donor reporting requirements. The ability to relate to and influence government, donors and other organisations and advocacy experience.
- 5 **Financial and administrative** skills, including strong analytical, proposal and report writing skills, a high level of numeracy and an aptitude for analysis and synthesis. Accurate financial budgetary control and maintenance of financial systems.

## Core Competencies

- 6 A high level of **interpersonal skill** – flexibility and tolerance. Good listener, empathetic, creative, highly motivated and willing to work on own initiative. Willing to adapt and learn, good coach and mentor. Team working and relationship-building skills. Calm under pressure.
- 7 **Sensitive and respectful to cultural diversity** and difference, and the ability to work in a wide variety of cultural contexts. Not jarring with the environment in which they work or with organisation's values. Ability to take a consultative team approach to decision-making and the ability to work together and be a part of a cross-cultural team.

## Humanitarian Competencies (2007)

### “Behaviours which lead to effective performance in humanitarian response” (2007)

People in Aid undertook a major piece of research in 2007 to review the use and effectiveness of competency frameworks in the humanitarian sector. The key findings from the report are outlined below:

Competency models or similar behavioural frameworks are in existence in many Humanitarian organisations. However, their usage beyond HQ and HR remains patchy.

The work of emergency workers these days is much more visible and requires them to demonstrate high levels of self-awareness and self-regulation.

Personal competencies are the underpinning behaviours required by humanitarian staff to carry out their role effectively. Key competencies in current frameworks are:

- Operational decision making
- Building and maintaining relations in changing teams
- Pressure tolerance
- Drive to achieve results/initiating action
- Self awareness
- Organisational awareness
- Managing performance for success
- Communicating with impact

There is impatience within the participating organisations that competency frameworks and tools and many other performance related tools have not so far introduced adequate rigour into human resource processes and procedures in humanitarian response.

Competency frameworks are not stand-alone initiatives. They need to form part of an overall organisational capacity building strategy and underpin existing HR processes. They provide a common language to link the processes of recruitment, performance management and career development.

There is a tendency to search for ‘super’ programme managers to run emergency programmes to deliver quality programmes within pressured contexts. These experienced people are in short supply.

Part of the ‘extra skills’ these emergency staff require is a high level of emotional intelligence, to be more participative with communities and to cope with less secure situations. Competency models help define such behaviours and make it easier to pick up on poor performance and show where additional proactive support can have greatest impact.

Using competencies enables recruiting managers to apply a more structured approach to selection and to think through the behaviours that such jobs entail. Recruitment questions that test out competencies can help probe how a person has worked in such contexts before. Interviewee answers give insight to predict future job performance.

Competencies need to link into existing management and leadership models and training programmes.

Competencies should be translated into tools and usable forms which national staff and managers will then work with.

More work is currently being done for humanitarian programme managers to define minimum levels of knowledge and skills that they require across the range of subjects they now have responsibility for.

The Emergency Capacity Building project ([www.ecbproject.org](http://www.ecbproject.org)) devised a shortlist of competencies for humanitarian workers that can be used for telephone recruitments for temporary assignments.

This was later prioritized and developed into three competencies core competencies. Behavioural indicators for these competencies were tested with emergency programme managers for robustness and relevance.

#### **Competency: Pressure tolerance**

Maintaining effective performance under pressure or adversity; handling stress in a manner that is consistent with the organisation's values. In the majority of emergency situations all staff have to:

- Demonstrate the ability to be calm and steady in the face of stress and unfamiliar situations; not personalise negative responses from others; ability to defuse stress in others with caring responses and active listening;
- Adjust to rush situations and multiple conflicting priorities by synthesising information quickly and turning it into actions; connect people and ideas effectively; exercise self discipline so that the most important tasks are done; keep track of and communicate decisions;
- Keep track of and keep commitments on agreed actions; keep written documentation of these and give feedback as actions proceed;
- Not personalise frustrations as if they are done "to" you; but understand, accept and work with constraints and frustrations; demonstrate ability to analyse why things are not moving as quickly as desired and to find solutions; ability to disaggregate complicated problems into components to solve one at a time;

- Develop support systems with colleagues that serve both them and yourself.

#### **Competency: Building and maintaining relationships within changing emergency teams**

Using a flexible interpersonal style to help build a cohesive team; facilitating completion of team goals. Behavioural Indicators (These statements were seen as necessary behaviours by all staff, but managers have a greater responsibility to display them).

- Initiate contact and build relationships with new people, including those who have different experiences, perceptions and values to yourself; not to be fearful of difference, but to maintain openness to it with interest;
- Take responsibility for own work and assist team members to undertake required roles and responsibilities;
- Actively listen and work to understand the different perspectives of all staff specifically to build shared understanding;
- Face up to difficult decisions and constructively challenge inappropriate behaviours by focussing on specific actions or attitudes behind the problem, not personalising them;
- Understand the influence that personal behaviour has on overall security; behave appropriately to local context and reduce vulnerability by acting in accordance with security guidelines.

#### **Competency: Operational decision-making in emergency situations**

Taking decisive action to achieve goals in times of uncertainty or in fluid contexts.

Behavioural Indicators

(Programme Managers are expected to operate at a different level particularly for those statements in italics).

- Recognise own scope of authority and when to refer up through the line;
- Consciously follow through on a course of action within a reasonable time;
- Demonstrate confidence in own judgment and abilities, but still listen to others to be prepared to expand own judgment;
- Make discretionary decisions in new situations where specific guidelines, policy and accepted practices do not dictate specific action; explore the facts of the situation and determine possible options; make decisions and act on them and communicate to relevant people;

- Feel confident to influence people that you have no direct authority over by providing key practical inputs to them;
- *Clarify roles within a response;*
- *Digest multiple pieces of information to make important decisions and be able to explain why the decision was made at that time;*
- *Have the ability to get the job done quickly without compromising organisational values and standards;*
- *Delegate with shared accountability.*

How do the competencies and behavioural indicators above match with those that you use in your organisation?

If these are priority competencies for most emergency appointments, how well do you question people about their skills in these areas at the time of recruitment?

The 2007 report on competencies can be downloaded at:

<http://www.peopleinaid.org/pool/files/publications/competencies-report---final.pdf>

Disclaimer: People In Aid does not recommend specific websites, publications or organisations offering services or support. Every reasonable effort has been made to ensure the accuracy of the material offered, however, we cannot be held responsible for any adverse outcome of using it or engaging the services external agencies. All contact details are correct as of June 2007.