



## **PSYCHOLOGICAL ASPECTS OF THE COMPETENCY-BASED APPROACH**

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### **Abstract**

This article analyzes the theoretical and practical foundations of the competency-based approach in personnel management. The transition from the traditional job analysis method to the concept of competency modeling is described. The content of the concepts of competence and competency, their differences, and interpretations within different scientific schools (British, American, and Russian approaches) are examined. Competency models are considered based on individual, group, and universal approaches, and their advantages and disadvantages are compared. In addition, the universal model proposed by A. V. Ovchinnikov and the “Great Eight” competency model developed by SHL are described. The article reveals organizational and methodological aspects of developing, implementing, and assessing competency models. The research findings substantiate the importance of the competency-based approach in personnel selection, evaluation, and development processes.

**Keywords:** Competence, competency, competency-based approach, competency model, competency profile, personnel management, job analysis, professional qualities, managerial competencies, Great Eight model, universal model, HR technologies.

### **Introduction**

At present, many efforts are being made around the world to shift from analyzing the work performed by individuals to studying competencies. Job analysis can be considered a source of requirements for employees. In labor psychology (or industrial psychology, as it is referred to in Western scientific and practical literature), job analysis is regarded as the main research method and a tool that enables a practicing psychologist to assess job requirements and the demands that a workplace places on



its performer. For this purpose, the workplace and work process are thoroughly analyzed, and a list of professionally important qualities, as well as indicators of absolute and relative professional unsuitability, are identified. Such an approach dominated for a considerable period and proved effective until recently.

One of the methods for identifying job requirements for an individual is a set of tasks aimed at determining and describing the most evident differences in performance between highly effective and poorly performing employees. Such an approach gradually led to the emergence of a new concept - the concept of competency modeling.

The analysis of job requirements focuses on the most important factors that ensure high or low employee performance, such as the speed of hand movements or the ability to quickly switch from one operation to another. In this way, psychologists gradually shifted from job analysis methods aimed at selecting the best employees to methods focused on adapting jobs to human capabilities. It is noteworthy that one of the specific approaches that stimulated early interest in competency modeling was the Hay-McBer approach, which, in essence, represents an adapted and expanded version of the job analysis method [6;128].

In recent years, the competency-based approach has confidently replaced job analysis. The practical application of the competency-based approach in the work of personnel management services within organizations is becoming increasingly relevant, since the effectiveness of an organization largely depends on how well employees' competencies correspond to the requirements of their positions. However, there is still no single answer to the question of what competencies are and how they can be measured and assessed. Many authors provide definitions that are similar in meaning but still differ, and they describe various methods and techniques for assessing competencies.

## **Literature Review**

In the education system of Uzbekistan, issues such as competence, competency, their types, competency-based approach, and competency models have been discussed in the works of E.G.Goziev, O.E.Khaitov, Sh.Kh.Abdullayeva, G.Sh.Salomova, E.N.Sattarov, N.A.Muslimov, and M.T.Khamdamova. In addition, the theoretical and practical aspects of professional training of customs specialists, improving the personal qualities of customs service employees, and developing their professional



competence have been studied by Sh.A.Akramova, G.A.Asilova, I.N.Aslonov and others.

To understand the competency-based approach, it is necessary to clarify the concepts of competence and competency. It should be noted that there are two approaches to understanding competence. According to the British approach, it would be appropriate to refer to the assessment criteria model as the competency model, while the model of tasks performed by a specialist is referred to as the competence model. In the American approach, however, the assessment criteria model is called the competence model. In this approach, little attention is given to the model of specialist tasks; instead, the widely used concept is the competence model.

According to the approach developed by Russian scholars (T.Yu. Bazarov and others), the competency model is understood as a set of criteria and qualities evaluated in a specialist, whereas the competence model refers to the model of tasks that a specialist solves in the course of their professional activity [2;147].

Today, the term competence is used to describe characteristics of behavior that lead to expected results or outcomes within a job role or organizational structure. Competencies are defined in such a way that it becomes clear what exactly an employee does and how their actions can be observed. At the same time, competencies represent the ability to apply knowledge, skills, abilities, behavioral patterns, and personal characteristics necessary for successfully performing complex job tasks, specific functions, or working effectively in a particular role or position. In general, these are fundamental characteristics that reflect patterns of behavior or thinking, which generalize situations across a wide range and remain stable over a long period of time.

Today, the term “competence” is interpreted differently and depends on the definition used by a particular group of specialists. Below are examples of attempts by various authors to define the term competence, based on survey results:

- “Knowledge, skills, and attributes that distinguish high performers from average performers.”
- “Competencies do not significantly differ from the traditionally defined KSAO (knowledge, skills, abilities, and other characteristics).”
- “A construct that helps determine the level of knowledge and skills.”
- “Observable behavioral capabilities that are important for performing key tasks, roles, or jobs.”



- “A combination of knowledge, skills, abilities, and job performance requirements.”

The most frequently cited definitions from the literature are as follows:

- A combination of knowledge, skills, abilities, motivation, beliefs, values, and interests.

- Characteristics related to knowledge, abilities, or productivity.

- A mixture of motives, personality traits, self-esteem, attitudes or values, subject-matter knowledge, or cognitive behavioral skills; any individual characteristic that can be reliably measured or counted and that distinguishes high performers from average ones.

- A written description of measurable work habits and personal skills used to achieve job objectives.

It is evident that, even among groups of experts who are relatively similar in their perspectives, there is considerable diversity in defining the term, making it difficult to establish a clear and standardized definition.

The roots of the terms “competence” and “competency” come from the Latin word *competō*, which means “I achieve; I fit; I correspond” [5;130]. Sometimes these terms are used as complete synonyms, but most researchers still distinguish between them. The term “competence” refers to the functions and duties associated with a specific job position or role. In this context, it is important to note that a job position may remain vacant for a certain period, and therefore the term “competence” relates more to an organizational design product or a model of job functions of an abstract employee. In this sense, “competence” emphasizes the expected final results an employee should achieve, as well as the normative methods and processes for achieving them.

The term “competency” refers to the degree of suitability of a specific individual (a job candidate or a practicing specialist) for performing activities in a given job position. A competent employee is assumed to possess the necessary knowledge, skills, and individual personal qualities that ensure the high-quality and timely completion of assigned professional tasks.

It is also acknowledged that a person may be professionally competent while still exhibiting antisocial tendencies and potentially engaging in harmful, criminal, or other undesirable behavior. In this interpretation, when speaking about competence, emphasis is placed on the final results that must be achieved in work, as well as on possible or acceptable forms of professional behavior. When speaking about



competency, attention is directed toward the individual's internal resources, abilities, psychological characteristics, and experience that determine the effectiveness of their professional performance.

For this reason, in psychology it is more common to use the term “competency” rather than “competence.”

In the English literature on performance models, such as in the book “Competencies at Work” [4;74], numerous examples demonstrate a methodology for assessing candidates and predicting their future job performance. The main issue is that in English, the word “competence” has two meanings: first, it refers to the abilities and skills required for a specific job; second, in legal practice, it refers to authority or jurisdiction.

## **Analysis and Results**

A competency profile is a set of competencies that an employee must possess in order to correspond to a specific job position. This list of competencies includes the required level of development for each competency for every position.

Three main approaches to building a competency model can be distinguished:

1. “Single job position model” approach
2. “Multiple job positions model” (job group model) approach
3. “Universal model” approach

The “**single job position model**” is developed through the following steps:

**Step 1.** Data collection is carried out, usually from employees and/or their supervisors, using focus groups, interviews with employees, interviews with clients, direct reports, questionnaires for additional staff, and direct observation of employees in the workplace.

**Step 2.** The most important 10–20 traits or skills are integrated into a competency model.

**Step 3.** The competency model is evaluated by experts and used for organizational purposes.

The second approach, the “**multiple job positions model**” (**job group model**), includes the following steps:

**Step 1.** Defining the target group for which the model is intended, for example, middle-level managers.



**Step 2.** Instead of collecting new data, the team responsible for developing competencies typically uses existing competency models, as well as books and articles on leadership, business, organizational development, and human resource development concepts.

**Step 3.** A single set of competencies is defined for a broad range of jobs (for example, all managerial positions).

The third approach - the **“universal model”** - is based on the idea that an organization needs to develop competency models in several variations. For example, an organization may require competency models for 25 professional and managerial positions, as well as consistent programs and tools for performance management, professional development, and selection for these positions based on competency models. The result of this approach is the development of several models depending on job functions and levels.

For instance, the managerial model is divided into competencies for first-level managers (line or operational management), middle-level managers, top management, and talent reserve positions. In this case, it does not matter whether the manager is responsible for sales, HR, or marketing [4;87]. The advantages and disadvantages of each model are compared in Table 1.

**Table 1 Comparison of the advantages and disadvantages of the three approaches**

Comparison	Individual Approach	“One size fits all” Approach	Multi-functional Approach
<b>Advantages</b>	Ensures precise selection of candidates for a specific job; especially important in positions critical to organizational success	Provides a simple structure that unifies all HR programs for a group of job positions, e.g., management	A) Facilitates comparison of competency models and employee profiles with multiple job functions B) Considered the most cost-effective approach
<b>Disadvantages</b>	Considered the least efficient approach	Usually requires approval from top management or agreement among several independent HR teams	The most complex of the three approaches to implement



In the universal professional competency model proposed by A.V.Ovchinnikov [3;28], five clusters of competencies are distinguished: personal, social, technical, organizational, and administrative. In this proposed cluster system, the models are arranged in a specific order. Ovchinnikov was the first to introduce the assumption of the evolutionary development of competencies and implemented the idea that competencies undergo cyclical qualitative changes throughout a person's life within the proposed model.

Recently, the "SHL model" consisting of 8 competencies has become widely used. This model, known as SHL's "Great Eight" Competencies (developed by Saville and Holdsworth Limited, SHL), includes eight key competencies. It has gained significant popularity and is currently applied in modern companies. The main advantage of this model is the completeness of its managerial competencies. However, in our opinion, it lacks a logical basis for classifying the listed competencies-they are presented as an unstructured and unsystematic "blind list." The characteristics of these competencies are presented in Table 2.

**Table 2. Description of SHL's "Great Eight" Competency Model ("The Great Eight")**

<b>Competency</b>	<b>Description</b>
Leading and Deciding	Provides leadership and supervision. Directs others' actions, gives direction, and takes responsibility.
Supporting and Cooperating	Supports others and shows respect and positive attitudes in social situations. Works effectively with individuals, teams, clients, and staff, prioritizing people's interests. Behaves consistently with personal values that complement organizational values.
Interacting and Presenting	Engages in effective communication. Successfully persuades and influences others. Interacts with confidence and calmness.
Analyzing and Interpreting	Demonstrates clear analytical thinking. Understands complex problems and questions. Applies expertise effectively. Quickly learns new technologies. Communicates well in written form.
Creating and Conceptualizing	Open to new ideas and experiences. Seeks opportunities for learning and development. Solves problems with innovation and creativity. Thinks broadly and strategically. Supports and encourages organizational change.
Organizing and Executing	Plans ahead and works in a structured and organized manner. Follows instructions and rules. Focuses on customer needs and delivers quality services or products in line with agreed standards.
Adapting and Coping	Adapts well and responds positively to change. Manages pressure effectively and handles setbacks successfully.
Enterprising and Performing	Focused on results and achieving personal goals. Performs best when results are closely linked to personal effort. Demonstrates understanding of business, commerce, and finance. Seeks opportunities for self-development and career growth.



## Conclusion

Thus, in recent years, the competency-based approach has taken an important place in personnel training and assessment, since the effectiveness of an organization largely depends on how well employees' competencies match the requirements of their positions. However, there is still no unified understanding of what competencies are, or how they should be measured and evaluated, as approaches differ across countries and types of organizations.

The competency-based approach has replaced the outdated "job analysis" approach. The difference between these approaches is that job analysis focuses on what an employee should know and do, whereas competency modeling focuses on how an employee achieves goals and what personal resources they use to accomplish them. The term competence is used to describe behavioral characteristics that lead to desired outcomes or results within a job role or organizational structure. Competence is defined in such a way that it becomes clear what exactly an employee does and how this can be observed.

Competencies represent the ability to apply and utilize knowledge, skills, abilities, behaviors, and personal characteristics, which enable the successful completion of complex tasks, specific functions, or effective performance in a given role or position. In general, these are fundamental characteristics of a person's behavior or thinking style that are generalizable across a wide range of situations and remain stable over long periods of time.

Competencies are also understood as the requirements for successful performance expressed in terms of the integral qualities of an individual or collective subject. These qualities typically combine the knowledge required for successful performance in a specific profession, position, or organization, professional skills, and individual, typical, or organizational-cultural characteristics.

In some cases, competencies can be described as models of professional behavior required to achieve high performance results.

A **competency model** is a clearly organized structure of observable and measurable knowledge, skills, and characteristics (typically consisting of 7–9 complete competencies). Competencies are expressed through behaviors that lead to high performance in a specific job context.

Accordingly, a competency model includes the key behavioral characteristics required to achieve excellent performance in a particular professional role.



Descriptions of competency-related activities and behaviors are often adapted to the organization; they define what is required for effective performance in a specific job, a group of jobs (for example, mixed job groups), or within an organization that follows a particular development strategy.

The model should be structured in such a way that it enables people within an organization or profession to understand each other, discuss requirements in a common language, and jointly define the competencies needed for high efficiency and productivity.

Competency models are used for recruitment, training, performance evaluation, promotion, career development, human resource information management, and selection for talent pools.

In the development and application of competency models, the following steps should be carried out:

- a) Analyze information about competencies and determine the model to be developed, taking into account the organizational context, as well as the organization's goals and objectives.
- b) Select structural tools for the model and methods for describing competencies.
- c) Use competency-related information for organizational purposes.
- d) Apply information technologies to improve the usability and accessibility of competency models.
- e) Regularly review competency values in the context of new environmental conditions and changes in the company's strategy.
- f) Ensure that competency assessment tests are checked for legal compliance, including confidentiality requirements, as well as adherence to standards of objectivity and validity.

In different countries, management competency models are developed based on standardized regulations. For example, in the United Kingdom, the national standard of managerial competencies serves as an official regulatory framework. In the United States, the developed "SHL model" includes eight managerial competencies and has become widely adopted in many countries.

In Russia, the development of competency models for human resource management services currently takes into account professional activity standards and human capital assessment standards.



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