

## Capturing Competencies and Behavioural Indicators of Diplomats for a Multiple-Jobs Competency Model

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### Abstract

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Research into the validation of competency models in the field of diplomacy is lacking, and empirical data are needed in order to determine what competencies have to be taken into account in order to develop a sound model aimed at closing this gap. Until now, no single competency model has been developed to cater the specific needs of diplomats. Like in many other countries, Egyptian and Bahraini Ministries of Foreign Affairs lacks such a competency model. This research paper aims at extending the work that was published earlier by the International Journal of Business and Social Science; entitled "A Framework for Developing a Multiple-Jobs Competency Model for Diplomats". In this research, Behavioural Event Interviews were employed to capture competencies and behavioural indicators of best performers among Egyptian and Bahraini diplomats (in all distinguished career levels) for the purpose of building a Multiple-Jobs Competency Model for Diplomats that is aimed at enhancing the success of Ministries of Foreign Affairs (MFAs) in selecting, preparing, allocating, and training their diplomats. Findings of this research have yielded a total of 62 competencies that are believed to be crucial for the professional conduct of diplomats. Moreover, empirical support for 297 Behavioural Indicators was reported.

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**Keywords:** Competency Model, Diplomats, Behavioural Event Interviews, Thematic Analysis, Behavioural Indicators

### 1. Introduction

The complexity of conducting foreign policy has grown immensely (Larsson, 2006).

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Accelerating globalization, IT revolutions and new international threats and possibilities, have all changed the prerequisites for conducting foreign policy and indeed also many of its tools, especially diplomacy. The conduct of diplomacy, in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century faces unacceptable performance gaps between its outdated practices and the requirements of the new age of information. These performance gaps can be described by comparing the conduct of diplomacy to its promise. It will be no surprise to practitioners and observers that there are numerous gaps between promise and practice.

These gaps include diplomatic priorities, professional standards, leadership, infrastructure, resources, telecommunications, media deployment, and relations with the media, business, and NGO communities (Haynal, 2005; CSIS, 1998). Moreover, a survey of the recruitment and training carried out by Ambassador Ronaldo Stein, Director General of the Chilean Diplomatic Academy (DiploFoundation, 2006), in which 80 countries responded to his questionnaire, showed that 66% of the selection processes favour personality traits over academic credentials, with certain behavioural principles respected within the international community, despite societal and cultural differences.

As such, foreign ministries around the world are actively engaged in a complex process of change and adaptation in response to an international environment that is volatile and unpredictable (Rana, 2005b). They have to sustain and redefine out their competence among competing government officials, as well as the multiple non-state stakeholders that have carved out their legitimate roles.

This research contributes to the knowledge of two literature streams (Megahed, et al, 2012). While competencies have become a leading construct in human resource practices, still, however, empirical research on competencies lagged behind resulting in a gap between practice and science. Moreover, while several competency models and dictionaries have been developed in the literature, none of them has been developed to cater the specific needs of the professional field of diplomacy.

Conversely, this research contributes to the field of diplomacy. While the salience of MFAs and diplomatic services worldwide is self-evident, detailed studies on these institutions have not been carried out in many countries (Rana, 2005b).

This is perhaps owing to difficulties that researchers face in obtaining information, and a relative scarcity of analytical or thematic writing by diplomacy practitioners, even after their retirement. In the absence of published material, one information source is interviews with practitioners (i.e. diplomats) for the sake of providing a better understanding of the context and the nature of the diplomatic code of conduct, as well as the challenges facing the diplomacy as a profession and leading most foreign ministries around the world to undertake transformational processes.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1 The Evolution of Competency Modelling**

The social scientific study of competency began in the early 1970s. The first competency model was developed in the early 1970s by the eminent psychologist David McClelland and others at a fledgling consulting firm called McBer and Company (McClelland, 1973 and 1976). The U.S. Department of State was concerned about the selection of junior Foreign Service Information Officers (i.e. young diplomats who represent the United States in various countries).

The traditional selection criteria, tests of academic aptitude and knowledge, did not predict effectiveness of a Foreign Service Officer, and were screening out too many minority candidates. When asked to develop alternative methods of selection, McClelland (1976) and his colleagues decided that they needed to find out what characteristics differentiated outstanding performance in the position. They first identified contrasting samples of outstanding performers and average performers, by using nominations and ratings from bosses, peers, and clients. Next, the research team developed a method called the Behavioural Event Interview, in which interviewees were asked to provide detailed stories of how they approached several critical work situations, both successful and unsuccessful.

To analyse the data from the interviews, the researchers developed a sophisticated method of content analysis, which they named thematic analysis (McClelland, 1976), in order to identify themes differentiating the outstanding performers from the average performers. The themes were organized into a small set of "competencies," which the researchers hypothesized were the determinants of superior performance in the job.

Hence, the accumulation of a cumulative body of empirically supported competency literature has only started 23 years ago. Throughout the past 23 years, many researchers have contributed to the extensive literature concerned with competency modelling and reporting by studying a variety of job fields, such as engineering, management, scientific researching, as well as technical jobs (see for instance Barrett and Depinet, 1991; Bowen, Ledford, and Nathan, 1991; Dubois, 1993; Spencer and Spencer, 1993; Barrett, 1994; Lawler, 1994; Frazee, 1996; Mansfield, 1996; Marrelli, 1998; Catano, Cronshaw, Wiesner, Hackett and Methot, 1997; Cooper, 2000; Gatewood and Feild, 2000; Shippmann et al., 2000; Markus, Cooper-Thomas and Allpress, 2005; Jackson, 2009; Tripathi and Ranjan, 2009; Xiong and Lee, 2011).

There is still, however, confusion and debate concerning the concept of 'competence' or 'competency' that it is impossible to identify a coherent theory or to arrive at a definition capable of accommodating and reconciling all the different ways that the term is used (Heinsman, De Hoogh, Koopman, and Van Muijen, 2007; Le Deist and Winterton, 2005). In semantic terms, competence is seen as a work-related concept (the tasks at which a person must be competent), while competency is a person-related concept defining the behaviours underlying competent performance (Woodruffe, 1991). In spite of that, many authors consistently treat the two as synonymous (Brown, 1993) resulting in lots of different definitions. Problems emerge, however, at the level of definition, depending on whether one was a psychologist, management theorist, HR manager, or politician; it took on different emphases (Ruth, 2006).

## 2.2 Competency as a Predictor for Performance

In the traditional approach, the job-analytic data provides the basis for a number of human resource functions (Frazee, 1996). Competency-based data has the potential for application to these same human resource functions (Competencies drive, 1996) including; recruitment and selection (Mitrani et al., 1992; Rowe, 1995), career planning (McCharen, 1996; Spencer and Spencer 1993; Lucia and Lepsinger, 1999), employee performance assessment (Sokol and Oresick, 1986; Spencer and Spencer 1993), training (Albanese, 1988; Cobb and Gibbs, 1990; Phillips and Wallis, 1994), career development and succession planning (Dubois, 1993; Frazee, 1996; Wilson, 1995; Spencer and Spencer 1993).

Levenson et al. (2006) also acknowledged the limited evidence confirming the use of competency systems for improving organizational performance, due to the influence of contextual variables, perceived as the leadership competencies for different work sites.

Similarly, Grzeda (2005) claimed that competency modelling for accurately predicting enhanced performance is less suited to more complex, senior managerial roles, while more likely to satisfy the assumptions of identifiable outputs which underpin competency frameworks in the case of junior management positions. Recently, Jackson (2009) indicated that one way to support the vital move of the purpose and benefit of competence modelling beyond the causal relationship between competency and performance, is that competency profiling must also account for controlling factors such as employer motivations for recruiting graduates, organizational strategy and sector type.

Jackson also advocated the need for future researches to identify associated behaviours with each industry-required competency in a range of organizational environments. Identifying behaviours will also assure homogenous interpretation of the meaning of individual competencies and their application in the workplace. Empirical research should aim to identify accepted levels of behaviour for each competency through critical incident analysis of recent performance.

### 2.3 Competencies of the 21<sup>st</sup> Century Diplomats

The entry post in the diplomatic career, in many countries, is called Diplomatic Attaché. The subsequent posts are respectively; Third Secretary, Second Secretary, First Secretary, Counsellor, Plenipotentiary Minister, and Ambassador. The diplomat has two principal action arenas: the receiving country (i.e. the country of assignment), and to a slightly lesser extent, the sending country (i.e. the home country).

Diplomatic services need remodelling to address the needs of the future. This requires a new skills profile (Wilton Park, 2005). Besides knowledge of local languages, personal communication skills and leadership skills are in greater demand than ever before (Wilton Park, 2005; Diplofoundation, 2006; Haynal, 2005; and Rana, 2005a).

A high competency in management and leadership skills is also required to make sophisticated networked structures work (Rana, 2005a). Moreover, and beyond the mastery of traditional matters, success in the new economy requires skills such as the ability to think critically, communicate well, and work effectively in teams (Lindstrom, 2002).

Entrepreneurial function is as applicable in public affairs as it is to business. However, unlike business entrepreneurs, public one is not autonomous; in this respect, they resemble a multinational corporation chief executive officer heading a country subsidiary, who enjoys considerable latitude of action, but remains answerable to headquarter management (Rana, 2005a). Promotion of home country obligations also require salesmanship. In small missions, other core competencies include ability to adapt, tackling different tasks as they arise, and effective crisis management.

### **3. Conceptual Approach for Capturing Competencies and Behavioural Indicators**

Identifying competencies and/or behavioural indicators via traditional interviewing methods proved to be ineffective (Spencer and Spencer, 1993) for two reasons: 1) most people do not know what their competencies are; 2) People may not reveal their real motives and abilities. The basic principal of the competency approach is that what people think or say about their skills or motives is not credible. Only what they actually do, in the most critical incidents they have faced, is to be believed.

In their famous book "The Art and Science of Competency Models", which was released in 1999, Lucia and Lepsinger argued that expressing competencies in behavioural terms is important for two reasons. First; for a competency model to be useful as a human resource tool, it must not only define the competencies necessary for effective performance but provide examples to illustrate when a particular competency is being demonstrated in a job. Second, although personal characteristics and traits are built in a person, still their behaviours can be modified and taught. Therefore, data collection process, for developing the competency model in this research, focuses on capturing concrete, specific behaviours of outstanding performers that can be taught or altered through training, coaching and other developmental approaches.

According to Spencer & Spencer (1993), six data collection methods are used to develop classic competency models: (a) behavioural event interviews, (b) expert panels, (c) surveys, (d) competency-based expert system, (e) job task/function analysis, and (f) direct observation. Behavioural Event Interview (BEI), yet, encourages interviewees to elicit “short stories” about what they do, and how they do it (Spencer & Spencer, 1993; Lucia & Lepsinger, 1999).

The quality of data analysis and the overall success of the competency model building process, however, depend on the accurate reflection of the interviewee's behavioural indicators. Thus, it is critical to capture the interviewee's phrases completely and in his or her own words. There are three options for recording the information that will increase the likelihood of accurately collecting the interviewee's feedback and their meaning and intent (Lucia and Lepsinger, 1999): taping the interviews, using two interviewers (one asks and one to record answers), and extensive note taking by one interviewer.

### 3.1 Identify Criterion Sample

Ideally, each job study sample should include at least 20 subjects (twelve superior and eight average performers) to permit simple statistical tests (Lucia and Lepsinger, 1999). Smaller non-probability samples, however, of 9 subjects (e.g. six superior and three average performers) can provide valuable qualitative data on the expression of competencies in a given organization (Spencer & Spencer, 1993 p. 97).

A competency model based on superior performers should be backed by solid criteria on which these people were selected. Ideal criteria are tangible outcome measures; such as profits for business managers, or patents for scientists. If tangible criteria aren't available, Spencer & Spencer (1993) claimed that nominations or ratings by bosses, peers and/or subordinates can be used. In this research, criterion non-probability sample was first identified to include 70 diplomats who were nominated as superior performers (ten from each of the seven job levels; out of which 35 were Egyptian diplomats, and 35 were Bahraini diplomats). Sample respondents were selected based on a triangulation between solid criteria (i.e. annual performance reports) as well as judgmental nominations made by top management in each of the two foreign ministries (Megahed et al, 2012).

### 3.2 Data Collection: Conducting Behavioural Event Interviews

In this research, Behavioural Event Interviews (BEIs) were conducted using a protocol and guidelines suggested by Spencer and Spencer (1993, P.119). Spencer & Spencer highlighted five steps for conducting BEI (see Appendix 2 for the interview protocol used in this research). These steps are:

1. Introduction. Briefly introducing the researcher and explaining the interview's purpose and format.
2. Job Responsibilities. Getting the interviewee to describe his or her most important job tasks and responsibilities.
3. Behavioural Events. Asking the interviewee to describe, in detail, the five or six most important situations he or she has experienced in the job (two or three major successes, and two or three key failures).
4. Characteristics Needed to Do the Job. Asking the interviewee to describe what he or she thinks it takes for someone to do the job effectively.
5. Conclusion and Summary. Thanking the interviewee and summarizing key incidents and findings from the interview.

In order to achieve a high degree of accuracy and completeness, taping is the best option. The willingness of interviewees to be taped is another consideration. During the data collection of this third phase, the researcher aimed at tapping as many interviews as possible, while assuring all respondents that all raw data will be dealt with confidentially. Nearly, 80% of the conducted behavioural event interviews (each of which has lasted for an average of sixty-ninety minutes) were taped. In the remaining 20%, the researcher used extensive note taking, while asking interviewees frequently to repeat certain sentences in order to make sure that the exact wording was properly captured.

### 3.3 Thematic Analysis: Capturing Competencies and Behavioural Indicators

Raw data from behavioural event interview transcripts were then subject to the so-called "Thematic Analysis" technique (Spencer and Spencer, 1993) to identify competencies and behavioural indicators describing those competencies in action.



Despite the fact that all the 70 BEIs were conducted by the main researcher (i.e. author of this manuscript), thematic analysis of interview transcripts was conducted by two human coders (one of whom was the author of this manuscript) to permit the assessment of achieved reliability and validity.

As such, Thematic Analysis was done in two ways; first, coding interview transcripts for known competencies and/or behavioural indicators, using generic competency dictionaries<sup>2</sup>. Second, competency and/or behavioural indicator themes not in any of the generic competency dictionaries were then thematically conceptualized. Identifying new competency and/or behavioural indicator themes in BEI transcript was the most difficult and creative step in the analysis process.

To minimize analyst bias yet ensures a variety of analyst perspectives, analysis of transcripts was conducted independently. As such, each analyst have read each transcript, identified, and underlined each behavioural indicator/competency themes. Analysts were using the exact words/phrases of the interviewees most of the time; however, they occasionally used their own wording for themes of behavioural indicator/competency that are not in any of the generic competency dictionaries. As suggested by Spencer & Spencer (1993), an incident, action, or sentence may be coded for more than one competency. Behavioural indicator/competency themes were then summarized on an excel sheet, and tick marks were used to note how often the theme is expressed.

The two members of the analysis team then met for 9 daylong sessions to discuss and document competency and/or behavioural indicator themes identified by individual analysis of the transcripts. During the group work, then, the behavioural indicator/competency themes identified by individual analysis of the transcripts were either confirmed (both researchers identify the same competency/behavioural indicator and have additional evidence), shaped (the beginning idea is fundamentally the same, but the emphasis or name of the competency changes; for instance adaptability becomes flexibility), or eliminated (there is not enough supporting evidence). Unique competencies (those for which there is a lack of knowledge to show that they exist in a generic/domain unspecific competency dictionary at the time this research was conducted) were also discussed before being added as possible new competencies.

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<sup>2</sup> Georgia State Government, 2005; Harvard Competency Dictionary, 2008; Hay Group, 2004; New York State Department, 2002; The British Council, 2006; Wilkes University, n.d; Workitect, 2006.

Competencies and behavioural indicators were also coded for frequency of occurrence in the interview scripts (Boyatzis, 2008). McClelland (1998) argues that when BEI transcripts are used in the fashion just described, they have an exploratory purpose for constructing competency models.

#### **4. Findings of the Research**

This article goes into the outcomes of the third phase of the competency model building process (Appendix 1 visualizes all research phases of the proposed competency model building framework). Outcomes of the first and second phases were published earlier by the International Journal of Business and Social Science in the research paper entitled "A Framework for Developing a Multiple-Jobs Competency Model for Diplomats". The outcomes of the fourth (and the final) phase will be thoroughly reported in future publications.

##### **4.1 Inductive Derivation of Diplomats' Competencies**

The tables which follow provide the diplomats' competencies which were derived from the analysis of the 70 BEIs that were conducted.

**Table 1: Inductive Derivation of Diplomats' Competencies: Generic Competencies**

No	Competency	Source	Frequency		
			Egyptian Diplomats (n=35)	Bahraini Diplomats (n=35)	Total Sample (n=70)
1	Accountability	(New York State Department, 2002; Wilkes University, n.d.)	7	1	8
2	Adaptability	(Harvard Competency Dictionary, 2008; Hay Group, 2004)	22	3	25
3	Analytical Thinking	(The British Council, 2006; Workitect, 2006; New York State Department, 2002)	9	3	12
4	Attention to Details and Quality	(Harvard Competency Dictionary, 2008; Wilkes University, n.d.; Hay Group, 2004)	14	6	20
5	Building Relationships /Networking	(Workitect, 2006; Hay Group, 2004)	32	9	41
6	Building Trust	(Harvard Competency Dictionary, 2008; New York State Department, 2002)	-	4	4
7	Career Specific Knowledge	(Georgia State Government, 2005 )	3	12	15
8	Coaching Others	(Wilkes University, n.d.; Harvard Competency Dictionary, 2008; New York State Department, 2002)	8	-	8
9	Computer Competence	(Wilkes University, n.d.)	5	2	7
10	Conflict Resolution	(Georgia State Government, 2005; Harvard Competency Dictionary, 2008; New York State Department, 2002)	4	2	6
11	Credibility	(Workitect, 2006)	3	1	4
12	Decision Making	(Harvard Competency Dictionary, 2008; New York State Department, 2002)	7	2	9
13	Delegation	(Harvard Competency Dictionary, 2008; New York State Department, 2002; Wilkes University, n.d.)	6	-	6
14	Diversity Management	(Georgia State Government, 2005)	2	-	2
15	Effective Leadership	(The British Council, 2006)	4	1	5
16	Flexibility	(Wilkes University, n.d.; Georgia State Government, 2005; Hay Group, 2004; New York State Department, 2002)	9	3	12

17	Initiating Action	(New York State Department, 2002; Wilkes University, n.d.; Harvard Competency Dictionary, 2008; Hay Group, 2004)	7	3	10
18	Innovative Thinking	(Harvard Competency Dictionary, 2008; Wilkes University, n.d.)	1	2	3
19	Integrity	(Georgia State Government, 2005; Wilkes University, n.d.)	19	6	25
20	Interpersonal Communications	(Georgia State Government, 2005; Hay Group, 2004; Wilkes University, n.d.)	25	5	30
21	Management Excellence	(Georgia State Government, 2005; Harvard Competency Dictionary, 2008)	8	3	11
22	Negotiation	(Georgia State Government, 2005; Harvard Competency Dictionary, 2008; New York State Department, 2002)	7	1	8
23	Oral Communication	(Georgia State Government, 2005; Workitect, 2006; New York State Department, 2002)	26	4	30
24	Organizational Understanding	(Hay Group, 2004; Georgia State Government, 2005; Wilkes University, n.d.)	3	2	5
25	Planning and Organizing	(Wilkes University, n.d.; Harvard Competency Dictionary, 2008)	2	2	4
26	Power and Influence	(Workitect, 2006; Hay Group, 2004)	6	2	8
27	Problem Solving	(Georgia State Government, 2005; Wilkes University, n.d.; New York State Department, 2002)	15	4	19
28	Reliability	(Wilkes University, n.d.)	18	11	29
29	Seeking Information	(Hay Group, 2004)	3	5	8
30	Self-Confidence	(Workitect, 2006; Hay Group, 2004)	4	7	11
31	Self-Control	(Hay Group, 2004; New York State Department, 2002)	26	6	32
32	Stress Tolerance	(Harvard Competency Dictionary, 2008)	24	13	37
33	Team Building	(Harvard Competency Dictionary, 2008; Georgia State Government, 2005)	5	2	7
34	Teamwork/ Cooperation	(Georgia State Government, 2005; Hay Group, 2004; Harvard Competency Dictionary, 2008)	1	4	5
35	Written Communication	(Georgia State Government, 2005; Workitect, 2006; New York State Department, 2002)	21	7	28

**Table 2: Inductive Derivation of Diplomats' Competencies: Possible New Competencies**

No.	Possible New Competency	Frequency		
		Egyptian Diplomats (n=35)	Bahraini Diplomats (n=35)	Total Sample (n=70)
1	Alertness	6	1	7
2	Building National Image	21	4	25
3	Code of Ethics	12	7	19
4	Consular Service	10	7	17
5	Mind-set of Cross-Cultural Openness	13	5	18
6	Cultural Identity	8	3	11
7	Dealing with the Media	12	2	14
8	Devotion to Work	11	3	14
9	Effective Feedback	14	6	20
10	Encyclopaedic Knowledge	34	5	39
11	Functional Expertise	9	-	7
12	Generalist-Specialist Hybrid	17	-	17
13	Global Vision	2	8	10
14	Good Looks and Manners	7	18	25
15	Language Excellence	25	14	39
16	Organized Pattern of Thinking	8	-	8
17	Patriotism	30	12	42
18	Physical and Mental Health	14	2	16
19	Political Sense/Judgment	3	-	3
20	Promotion of Home Country	17	5	22
21	Public Service Entrepreneurship	4	1	5
22	Relationships Management	18	6	24
23	Secrecy	2	3	5
24	Self-Development	9	5	14
25	Sustainability of Mobility/Loneliness	5	1	6
26	Tact	2	-	2
27	Willingness to Learn	8	11	19

A total of 62 competencies were identified, of which 35 competencies were located in one or more of the seven generic competency dictionaries<sup>3</sup> studied (Table 1 illustrates the list of these 35 competencies as well as the citation of the competency dictionaries in which they were rooted), and 27 competencies were marked as possible new competencies (Table 2 illustrates the list of these competencies).

4.2 Thematic Coding of Diplomats’ Behavioural Indicators

Throughout the process of thematic coding of the diplomats’ behavioural indicators, analysts were again using the exact words/phrases of the interviewees (as much as possible), especially for those which were marked as possible new indicators. They occasionally, however, used their own wording for those competency themes which were genuinely identified by interviewed respondents. As such, the author was somehow sceptic in utilizing the expertise of a native-English speaking editor in order to assure that the coded behavioural indicators were expressed properly. Table 3 illustrates an exemplary thematic analysis of a raw BEI incident from the interviews’ scripts.

**Table 3: Thematic Analysis (Coding) of a BEI Transcript: An Exemplary Incident**

<b>Raw BEI Incident</b>	<b>Extracted Behavioural Indicators</b>
<p>I was attending certain negotiation round regarding Human Rights issues, and we were supposed to come-up with a resolution text. The representatives of some European and African countries wanted to add a paragraph in reference to a certain bad habit (against girls) that was common in Egyptian rural areas. <u>I managed to maintain my composure while raising my objection as I was attacked</u> by many of them, to the extent that certain African lady came to me and asked me bluntly: “why Egypt is not approving this phrase?” <u>They all put me under pressure, and I did not want to offend anyone.</u> So, I started to explain why this paragraph would not be accepted by Egypt, and <u>I gave them logical reasons, then I started to give them proposals for alternative phrases.</u> They finally accepted my point of view and changed the text.</p>	<p>Maintains composure and shows no reaction when faced with opposition or personal attacks.</p> <p>Able to absorb difficult situations/people patiently.</p> <p>View conflict objectively and present balanced opinions and alternative solutions.</p>

A total of 298 behavioural indicators were coded, of which 81 were located in one or more of the seven generic competency dictionaries studied, and 217 were marked as possible new behavioural indicators. Thematically coded behavioural indicators were then mapped under the inductively derived competencies using three-phased Delphi approach to develop the final model, which was then validated quantitatively using non-parametric statistical tests. This fourth (and last) phase of model building process shall be reported in future publication.

#### **4. Discussion of Findings**

##### **4.1 Inductive Derivation of Diplomats' Competencies: Generic Competencies**

Table 1 illustrates generic competencies reported by respondents, on the top of which came "Building Relationships" (n=41), which was given another alias name, that is "Networking", by few respondents (n=7). Diplomacy literature provides further support for some of those generic competencies that were reported, by interviewees. Examples of such competencies includes: interpersonal communication skills (Wilton Park, 2005; Haynal, 2005; and Rana, 2005a); adaptability, credibility, initiating action, innovative thinking, management and leadership skills (Rana, 2005a); negotiation, computer literacy and teamwork (Lindstrom, 2002); team building and coaching (Hannah, 2007).

##### **Culture-Specific Generic Competencies**

The frequency of competencies shown in Table 1 for Egyptian and Bahraini criterion samples separately, indicate few cases of cultural differences between Egyptian and Bahraini diplomats. Three competencies, namely; "Coaching Others", "Delegation", and "Diversity Management" were reported by only Egyptian diplomats (n=8, 6 and 2 respectively).

A remarkable consideration was identified here that was considered the main reason behind the absence of any incidence of those three competencies amongst the Bahraini diplomats. Re-visiting the background of the two ministries of foreign affairs, one can conclude that the Egyptian MFA is considered as one of the oldest MFAs in the region.

As such, one would expect that Egyptian MFA would be much more mature in terms of organisational structure and internal administrative cycles. This consideration was further supported by quite a high number of Bahraini interviewees (n=19), who indicated that “decision making in the Bahraini MFA is highly centralized”, thus explaining the lack of “Delegation” and “Coaching Others” competencies. As for the “Diversity Management” competency, it was concluded by Bahraini ambassadors that the number of Bahraini embassies/missions abroad are relatively limited in terms of human resources, moreover, they rarely recruit non-Bahraini staff. As such, there is relatively “no chance for the head of mission to manage a diverse workforce”.

#### 4.2 Inductive Derivation of Diplomats’ Competencies: Possible New Competencies

Table 2 illustrates inductively driven competencies for which there is a lack of knowledge to show that they exist in a generic and/or domain-unspecific competency dictionary (at the time this research was conducted). Discussion of findings interpretation follow.

**Patriotic.** The highest frequency (n=42) was reported for the “Patriotic” competency. Most respondents indicated that such a personal trait is unquestionable for a diplomat. In fact, interviewees consistently cited “native-belonging” as playing important role in proper selection of diplomats at the entry level of the Foreign Service career, and thus placing “patriotism” on the top of the “must-have” competencies for any diplomat.

**Language Excellence and Encyclopaedic Knowledge.** The second highest frequency was reported for the “Language Excellence” and “Encyclopaedic Knowledge” competencies equally. As such, both competencies deserve a special attention. Rana (2005a) argues that without a comprehensive language of the country of assignment, a diplomat has virtually no access to the print media, nor can he follow speeches at the many public functions that s/he is required to attend. This was further supported by diplomacy literature sources, such as; Haynal (2005), Wilton Park (2005), and Diplofoundation (2006).

Another important pre-requisite for diplomats at all job levels identified by respondents is “Encyclopaedic Knowledge”.



Diplomacy literature provides further support for this finding, such as that asserted in 2005 by both Haynal and Rana, who summarized professional skills required for a diplomat into four sets, on the top of which was the diplomat's breadth of knowledge. Moreover, Rana (2005a) argued that a diplomat should also have a native curiosity to inquire into new subjects. As such, most respondents (n=39) indicated that "a diplomat should know one thing about merely everything in this world". It must be also noted that the name of the competency, being "Encyclopaedic Knowledge", was suggested by eight of the respondents.

Building National Image and Good Looks and Manners. The third highest frequency was reported for the "Building National Image", and "Good Looks and Manners" competencies (n=25), along with "Relationships Management" which fell only one point shorter than the other two (n=24). As for the "Good Looks and Manners" competency, respondents indicated that it tackles two different, yet complementary personal traits. Firstly, is the dress code and the general appearance of a diplomat which reflects a positive image about diplomats' home country. Secondly, are all the manners exhibited by a diplomat to reflect his/her full awareness of "diplomatic etiquette and protocol". Perceived as inseparable, "Building National Image" and "Relationship Management" were combined together by most of the respondents (n=24).

Promotion of Home Country and Effective Feedback. Equally important, was the "Promotion of Home Country" competency (n=22). This is because, as supported by Rana (2005a), "the diplomat is his country's first salesman, thus requires salesmanship". Moreover, respondents claimed that a diplomat promotes his/her country, not only on the political level, but on the economic, cultural and technological levels as well. Another, yet important, competency was the "Effective Feedback", which was considered by many respondents (n=20) a "core function" for the diplomat once become posted to the country of assignment abroad. Respondents have indicated two facets for this competency. Firstly, is the ability of the diplomat to observe closely and accurately what is happening in the country of assignment, and secondly, is the ability to provide beneficial feedback in the proper time-frame.

Code of Ethics. Diplomats' ethics were defined by most of the respondents (n=19) as being a "unique set of ethics" which constitute (in their total) the "code of conduct" of the diplomatic profession.

Respondents indicated clearly that diplomatic ethics are fairly different from business ethics as they touch the base with two personal traits, namely; Patriotism and Secrecy. As such, a diplomat should strive to preserve the values and ethics of his home country's government. Another important aspect that distinguishes diplomatic ethics from business ethics is the inherent "legal implications of actions" of which the diplomat should be fully aware.

Mind-set of Cross-Cultural Openness. Having its name captured from Rana's famous book *The 21<sup>st</sup> Century Ambassador* (2005a, p.171), while it was defined by respondents (n=18) in the same context that was cited by Rana, would put this competency amongst the ones dominating the diplomatic profession. Respondents defined this competency as "diplomat's ability to approach, respect and interact with others' cultures and societies". Such a definition copes with Rana's perception who claimed that "a diplomat should master an interest in the dynamics of societal change".

Generalist-Specialist Hybrid. This competency was cited only by Egyptian diplomats (n=17), with its name being suggested by Rana (2005a). Diplomacy literature yet provides further support for this competency. As such, Haynal (2005) and Rana (2005b) claimed that MFAs need officials with skills that are both generalist and specialist; each official needs to be rooted in geographical area knowledge, plus some functional specialties in areas such as, for instance, disarmament, human trafficking, international law, or terrorism.

Consular Service. This competency was considered by respondents (n=17) as another "core function" for the diplomat once become posted to the country of assignment abroad. Consular service is about "protecting, supporting, and facilitating interests of the home country's citizens at the country of assignment", as defined by respondents.

Dealing with the Media. Another, yet important, competency which was considered by respondents (n=15) as an "important talent" for any diplomat. Two important remarks were made by respondents in this regard. Firstly, is that this competency is considered to be a "must-have" ability only for "mid-career" and "senior" diplomats. The rationale behind that, as indicated by respondents, is that "dealing with the media" is built by the time through practicing.

Diplomacy literature also supports this consideration by referring to this competency as "Managing the Media", thus classifying it amongst the competencies needed for "mid-career" and "senior" diplomats (Haynal, 2005; Wilton Park, 2005).

Exercising such a competency, however, by "junior" diplomats is considered to be an "extra edge". Junior diplomats are being defined by respondents as those occupying the "diplomatic attaché" and "third secretary" job levels. Secondly, respondents also indicated that such a competency reflects, not only the ability of the diplomat to deal with the different media channels (including newspapers, TV channels, etc.) during press conferences or interviews, but most importantly, however, is his/her ability to use the media as a strategic tool for positioning key strategic messages.

Other important competencies that were perceived by this research as possibly new to the literature includes "Devotion to Work" and "Self Development" (n=14). Both competencies were considered by respondents as personal traits that are "born with" and not "acquired". Another unique competency, yet not highly cited by respondents (n=11), was the ability of the diplomat to reflect the "Cultural Identity" of his/her country of origin. Respondents claimed that a diplomat, upon his/her entry to the Foreign Service, should possess an in-depth knowledge of his home country's history, and culture. Moreover, s/he should reflect that identity in all formal, as well as social gatherings.

"Physical and Mental Health" was perceived as "first of its kind" that was cited more by Egyptian diplomats (n=16). The reason behind such a notation is that, not only the competency name (as suggested by respondents) was unrelated to any of the generic competency dictionaries reviewed, but also the fact that being a physical characteristic of a human being would set it far enough from the definition of a typical competency. Respondents indicated, however, that a diplomat's job "requires working for long hours while maintaining consistently high levels of performance and productivity", thus entailing the diplomat to be healthy (both physically and mentally).

Having its name suggested by the respondents (n=10), "Global Vision" competency is yet another addition to the list of possible new competencies identified by this research. The main theme that was derived by respondents is the necessity, for any diplomat, to keep the "big picture" in mind when evaluating situations or assessing the consequences/implications of policies.

Another dimension that emerged during the discussions with the respondents is the ability to understand and deal with all aspects of globalization.

“Public Service Entrepreneurship” was defined by few respondents (n=5) as the “ability of a diplomat to promote his/her home country abroad on the economic/commercial levels, and to open channels for business/investment between his/her home country and the country of assignment”. As such, respondents were mainly focusing on anticipating and identifying “national/public opportunities”, rather than “business opportunities”. However, unlike business entrepreneurs, public one is not autonomous; in this respect, they resemble a multinational corporation chief executive officer heading a country subsidiary, who enjoys considerable latitude of action, but remains answerable to headquarter management (Rana, 2005a).

Three more competencies were perceived by respondents as important personal traits that distinguish between superior and average performers. “Alertness” was defined by respondents (n=7) as “having a sharp memorizing and observing ability for persons as well as events”. The second competency cited by respondents (n=6) is “Sustainability of Mobility and Loneliness”. This competency was perceived by respondents as “a one that impacts a diplomat personal life, rather than professional life”. As such, respondents believed that a diplomatic career should only be approached by those who are willing to tolerate the “mobile nature of life” while moving from one country to another, as well as to “cope with loneliness when abroad without one’s own family”. The third competency; “Secrecy”, though being perceived by few respondents (n=5), was believed to be “very crucial” for any diplomat due to the nature of the job as being “information-secretive” most of the time.

#### Culture-Specific New Competencies

A difference emerged between Egyptian and Bahraini diplomacy and was articulated through the identification of four competencies by Egyptian respondents only. These are: “Organized Pattern of Thinking” (n=8), “Functional Expertise” (n=7), “Political Sense/Judgment” (n=3), and “Tact” (n=2). As for the “Functional Expertise”, respondents agreed on the main idea that a diplomat should have a specific area/field of specialization in which s/he excels.

They differed, however, in the nature of that area/field, having named a diversity of fields including, for instance, political diplomacy, economic diplomacy, public diplomacy, disarmament, nuclear/biochemical weapons, and international law.

## 5. Conclusion

The net conclusion is that today's diplomat is a hybrid; a kind of 'generalist-specialist' possessing a broad-spectrum skills that cover most professional subjects, but also rooted in his/her individual base of language and functional expertise. The diplomat's expertise is a broad compendium of knowledge, craft and skills, none of which are hard to access, but it is this complete collection that makes the profession's unique hallmark.

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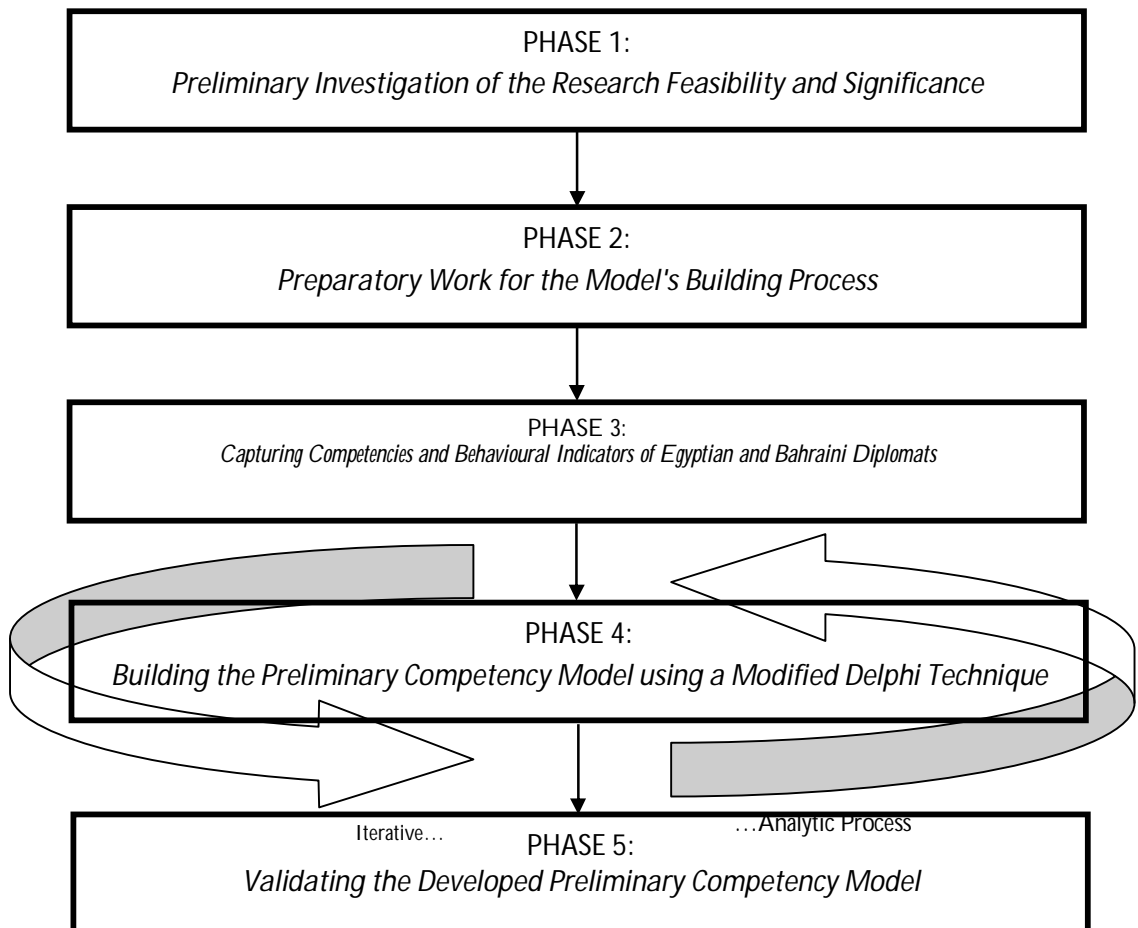
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## Appendix 1

### Competency Model Building Framework (Megahed et al, 2012)





## Appendix 2

### Behavioural Event Interview Protocol

Subject Matter Expert Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Job Level/Title: \_\_\_\_\_

Interview Data & Venue: \_\_\_\_\_

#### A. Identifying the Job Responsibilities

(The objective of this section is to know what the person actually does and with whom on his or her current job).

Q1: What are your major tasks or responsibilities? What do you actually do?

Possible probing questions to help interviewee answer the question:

- What do you do in a given day, week or month?
- Can you think of a particularly tough decision you had to make, and tell me about it?

#### B. Identifying Behavioral Indicators

(This section aims at getting at least 4 - 6 stories of critical incidents in details).

Q2: Can you think of specific time or situation which went particular well for you or you felt particular effective? When?

Q3: Can you think of incidence in which you feel that you were not as effective as you could be? When?

Possible probing questions to help interviewee describe the story:

- What was the situation? Who was involved?
- What did you think, feel, or want to do in the situation?
- What was going through your mind when you did that?
- What did you actually do or say? What happened?
- What was the outcome? What will you do next time?
- How did you know to do that?
- How did you reach that conclusion?

#### C. Identifying Characteristics needed to do the Job

(This section aims at getting additional incidents in areas that may have been overlooked).

Q4: What are the characteristics, knowledge, skills or abilities you think are needed to do your job?

Possible probing questions to help interviewee answer the question:

- What do you think it takes to do this job?
- What skills do you have, that enable you to do the job well?